

Recycled Art

Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University
August 26 - November 4, 2006

Teachers Guide

This guide is to help teachers prepare students for a field trip to the exhibition, *Recycled Art*; offer ways to lead their own tours; and propose ideas to reinforce the gallery experience and broaden curriculum concepts. Teachers, however, will need to consider the level and needs of their students in adapting these materials and lessons.

Goals

- To introduce students to the work of artists using recycled or found objects and materials
- To explore the various reasons and ways artists in the exhibition, *Recycled Art* use recycled or found objects and materials
- To explore the creative process of transforming a found object or recycled material into a work of art

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify recycled materials in a work of art
- Discuss how recycled materials or found objects contribute to the narrative, or storytelling, element in an individual work
- Discuss how recycled materials or found objects contribute to the formal elements of an individual work, i.e. shape, texture, color, etc.
- Discuss the social and environmental aspects of recycled art

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INTRODUCTION

by John Olbrantz, The Maribeth Collins Director, Hallie Ford Museum of Art

In this era of heightened awareness of our environment, artists are increasingly turning to junk stores, trash bins and surplus outlets to satisfy their urge to create while still caring for our planet. *Recycled Art* features the work of 36 contemporary regional artists from Oregon, Washington, and Montana who create artwork from recycled materials.

The premise of the exhibition is deeply rooted in history. The tradition of recycling dates back to the nineteenth century, when American pioneers used recycled items instead of discarding them. Crazy quilts, pieced quilts, weathervanes made from scrap wood, and rag rugs are a treasured legacy of America's tradition of recycling. Indeed, throughout our history, Americans have learned "to make do," saving rubber bands and tinfoil and recycling gift-wrap and other items.

For the past one hundred years, artists have seen creative possibilities in cast-offs. Pablo Picasso, one of the foremost artists of the twentieth century, fashioned a bull's head from a discarded bicycle handlebar and seat, while Marcel Duchamp, a founder of the **Dada** movement, asked viewers to see sculpture in a urinal and snow shovel. During the 1930s and 1940s, Alexander Calder made whimsical animals from coffee cans, while Joseph Cornell created intimate, surrealist tableaux from found objects.

In the 1950s, artist Louise Nevelson created poetic and evocative sculpture from scrap wood, while Robert Rauschenberg began to explore the creative possibilities of junk as an artistic medium. In the 1960s and 1970s, John Chamberlain used auto body parts—squashed fenders, broken doors, twisted bumpers, and dented hoods, to create dynamic and expressionistic works of art. With increased environmental concerns in recent years, the use of recycled materials in art has gained new credibility.

Recycled Art features 72 works in a variety of mediums, including painting, sculpture, basketry, clothing, jewelry, furniture, textiles, and glass, and each of the works in the exhibition makes a unique and eloquent statement. Some of the objects in the exhibition were made primarily for their aesthetic value and were intended as works of art, while others have a social or political twist. Some were intended for personal adornment, such as jewelry and clothing. Others have a practical function, serving as furniture, lighting, and wall coverings.

Similarly, the artists included in the exhibition come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are self-taught artists while others are university-trained in the visual arts. Some respond to the interesting form, color, or texture of a found object while others find symbolic meaning in the cast-off. However, each of the artists included in the exhibition has expressed a fascination for the found object and the challenges that come from creating a new object from trash, and each has a strong belief in the ordinary object and its ability to be transformed into an extraordinary work of art.

Recycled Art has been organized to demonstrate the creative use of recycled materials and found objects in contemporary regional art. The exhibition reminds the viewer that while recycling is necessary to sustain our planet's resources, it is equally valid as a creative and innovative material and subject matter in the visual arts.

BEFORE THE MUSEUM VISIT

- If possible, visit the exhibition on your own beforehand.
- Using the images and information in the teacher packet, create a pre-tour lesson plan for the classroom to support and complement the gallery experience.
- Create a tour:
 - build on the concepts students have discussed in the classroom
 - be selective – don't try to look at or talk about everything in the exhibition.
 - Include a simple task to keep students focused.
 - Plan transitions and closure for the tour.
- Make sure students are aware of gallery etiquette.

Suggested Discussion and Activities for the Classroom:

Where does it all come from?

Make a list of things students get rid of in a day, a month, or over several years. Divide the list into things that they throw away, things they put in the recycling bin, and things they give to charities or garage sales. As a class, brainstorm ways in which the materials can be re-used (they can be practical or whimsical suggestions).

Why do artists use recycled materials and found objects?

Discuss why artists today use recycled materials and found objects. Some artists use these materials because they are inexpensive and easy to acquire, although many continue to use them even after they can afford more expensive materials like paint and canvas. Others are excited by looking at ordinary objects in a new way, and transforming these common materials into works of art. Still others use these materials to make a variety of statements, whether a comment on environmental and social issues, a challenge to established artistic traditions, or even a personal expression.

How artists use recycled materials.

Using the three images and information provided below, discuss how artists use recycled materials and found objects. Are they inspired by the narrative or symbolic association of the material, by the material's formal qualities (shape, texture, color, etc.), or both? You may want to use the suggested questions listed below in **At The Museum** to generate discussion.

Meaning and Form: Three Works from the Exhibition

The artists featured in this exhibition use recycled and found objects in a variety of ways. Some choose materials for their history, obvious visual references or other associations. These materials can help the artist tell a story or convey an idea, or create new meanings when paired with other objects. Humor is often present in the form of visual puns and clever titles, and there is always delight for the viewer in the artist's creativity. In the **assemblage**, *Please Write*, Barbara Barnes Allen puts a twist on traditional storytelling. The obvious narrative component, the book, acts more as an architectural support to the temple-like structure that is a hallmark of her work. Indeed, the book's cover and pages have been obscured by miniature envelopes embellished with postage stamps, cutouts from a dictionary, and architectural stampings. The "postcards" stacked in the middle are created from the same materials, and postage stamps cover the rest of the structure. To this, Allen has added charms and other trinkets (envelopes, a globe, a reproduction Egyptian relief, clasped hands), and an airmail sticker. No matter the original subject of the book, the story could be about travel (leaving home to experience different cultures, languages, sights, etc.) and communication (our need to stay in touch, to share our experiences; to connect with others; and, as the artist states, "the lost art of letter writing.").

Other works in *Recycled Art* are more **abstract** or **non-objective** and emphasize the formal qualities of the recycled materials – color, texture, shape, etc – over the narrative. Still, there may be meaning in the choice of material, and upon deeper inspection, the material often contributes to the "story" of the piece. Artists like Kevin Burrus (image #2) use recycled materials that not only reveal themselves gradually, but also provide added layers of meaning. In Burrus's *Untitled* (from the series "Artifacts") the textured bands, with their subtle pastel striations, appear at first to be purely formal elements creating visual contrast to the smooth, dark organic form. On closer viewing, we see that the bands are really stacked magazines. We learn from the artist that they are issues of *National Geographic*, whose photos of ancient art and artifacts are the source of inspiration for many of the forms Burrus has created for his Artifact series.

Even if the material does not contribute to the meaning of the piece, or reflect the creation process as in Burrus's sculpture, it may have personal significance to the artist. In *Seven Up* (image #3), Dona Anderson wraps sewing pattern paper around the round reeds she uses to create her basket-like structures. The wrapping is not immediately recognizable as sewing pattern papers, nor are the usual associations with this recycled material (domesticity, women's work, etc.) the focus of the piece. Rather, it is the visual interest the material adds to the simple, elegant form: the color and texture of the delicate paper; and the way the patterns create little areas of black which are not legible as text or images, but act as abstract designs. Still, even though the material does not function as an obvious narrative component, it speaks to the artist. Anderson says, "Yes, my heart soars when I see those little black blips appear that add to the character of the piece, but I know they say 'Vogue' or 'cut here' and other instructions that I will never follow!"

Artists' Statements



#1

Barbara Barnes Allen

Please Write

2005

Mixed media

19" x 7 1/2" x 7 1/2"

Courtesy of the Artist, Seattle, Washington

Artist Statement: I have long had an interest in architectural structures and much of my work has been based on it. We have traveled a lot, so I began making small things that I could incorporate into books and it just got a life of its own. I wanted to keep using the architectural form so it then allowed me to create a sculptural piece that reflected the book itself. Also, it can be the title that gets me going. Sometimes people ask me for a specific theme: The Society for Arts and Crafts in Boston commissioned me to build a book on a Grimm's fairy tale. Last year we were in Paris for a few weeks and I made pieces about the Louvre, the Paris Metro, Claude Monet's garden and Versailles. Tickets, stamps, receipts – all the everyday things that people throw away are the stuff of my work. I think it was Baudelaire who said that the job of the artist was to distill the eternal from the ephemeral.

For *Please Write*, I was given a collection of vintage stamps and I wanted to make a piece as a sort of homage to the lost art of letter writing. Each of the book's pages is done on a small envelope. I wanted the book to have the look that it could fly away – air mail of course.



#2

Kevin Burrus

Untitled

2002

Wood, *National Geographic* magazines, paint

53" x 9" x 9"

Collection of the Artist, through the courtesy of PDX Contemporary Art, Portland, OR

Photography: Kevin Burrus

Artist Statement: Do the things we collect such as magazines, journals or even post consumer paper products become, or will they become "Artifacts"? This is where I start my process in creating my art. I am interested in making forms that combine materials that are collected by some or discarded by others. In this work I take wood as my material, both the post consumer or processed; paper in the form of magazines (*National Geographic*); and wood, either domestic or reclaimed. My current work is influenced by the observation of archaeology especially the art from the Andes and Mayan cultures. By looking at the meaning of artifact I found that "Artifacts" are contrasted to natural objects; they are products of human actions. Consequently it is necessary to have a maker or an author. It is the form and material that tell a story of a particular time of the land. By taking paper and combining it with wood I am mending the material into something sacred again. I want people to dwell on the calming nature of the form and the relationships of materials. My work is made up of many layers. One of the most important is that the magazines contain literature in which we cannot access. They tell stories and document the many cultures of our world. Some of the forms have come from looking through the magazine before it became the material for the piece.



#3

Dona Anderson

Seven Up

2003

Round reed, pattern paper, cotton thread

8" x 15" x 12"

Courtesy of the Artist, Seattle, WA

Photography: Jerry McCollum

Artist Statement: *Seven Up* is made with round reeds wrapped in pattern paper. Each reed is stitched with cotton thread to the preceding one until the desired shape is formed. My friends send me their old patterns. Just a couple of weeks ago a basket maker friend sent me her daughter's wedding dress pattern. When I run low I find more at thrift stores. They come in all different shades of tan, brown and even white. Consequently I've become picky, trying my best to keep them just right. I cut them in strips and roll them onto the reeds using matte medium (polymer) as an adhesive. It actually goes pretty fast. It's the sewing that takes time.

AT THE MUSEUM

- Review with students what is expected – their task and museum behavior.
- Focus on the works of art. Encourage students to look closely at each work of art and consider the following questions (it is not necessary to address all the questions, nor follow a certain order – sometimes one “speaks” to the viewer first):
 - Who created the work? Do you think he/she had some sort of formal art training? Why or why not?
 - Why did the artist create the work? Does the work of art serve a specific purpose or function?
 - What materials did the artist use (the object label next to the work can help)? Why do you think he/she chose these materials? Where do you think the artist found them?
 - What techniques did the artist use to create the object? Did he/she need any special training or skills to make the object?
 - What are the formal qualities of the work (lines, color, shape, form, texture, etc.) and how are they organized (repetition, contrast, balance, movement, scale, unity, visual rhythm)?
 - What is the subject matter of the work? Does the work (and/or the individual materials) reflect the artist’s ideas or beliefs, or tell a story? What, if any, objects or symbols has the artist included to add meaning?
 - Has the artist used humor? If so, how? Do you find it in the work itself (visual puns, text, humorous imagery), in the title, or even in the clever way the artist has transformed the everyday object to give it new meaning? Explain.
 - How does the work affect your own emotions? What associations do you bring to the recycled and found objects used? Do they affect how you interpret the work, or your enjoyment of the work? Explain.
- Tips for successful tours:
 - Balance telling about a work and letting students react to a work.
 - Use open-ended questions to guide students in looking and to focus their thinking on certain topics and concepts.
 - Slow down and give students a chance to process.
 - Respect all responses and deal with them.
 - Be aware of students’ interest spans (usually about 45 to 50 minutes) and comfort.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Art

Art History

Research and discuss the history of using found objects and recycled materials to create art in the United States. Look at examples of traditional quilts, and works by Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Cornell, Louise Nevelson, Alexander Calder, Robert Rauschenberg, and John Chamberlain.

American Quilts

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts/>
www.newarkmuseum.org/quiltmasterpieces/index.htm

Pablo Picasso

www.depauw.edu/library/vrc/galleries/fall03/arth142/pages/142_002.html

Marcel Duchamp

www.understandingduchamp.com/

Joseph Cornell

www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/cornell/
www.artchive.com/artchive/C/cornell.html

Louise Nevelson

www.albrightknox.org/ArtStart/sNevelson.html
www.artnet.com/Artists/ArtistHomePage.aspx?artist_id=12506&page_tab=Artworks_for_sale

Alexander Calder

www.phillipscollection.org/american_art/artwork/Calder-Only_Only_Bird+.htm

Robert Rauschenberg

www.metmuseum.org/special/Rauschenberg/images.asp

John Chamberlain

<http://hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/search.asp?Artist=Chamberlain+John&hasImage=1>
www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_work_md_29_1.html

Art Making

Have students create their own recycled art.

Prep:

Collect a wide array of found objects, junk, or garbage, such as movie stubs, bicycle parts, car parts, fabrics, food wrappers and containers, clothing such as shoes and neckties, etc. Consider sources of recyclables at your school such as the cafeteria, the janitorial areas, art and industrial arts rooms, etc. You might give students a week's advance notice to bring objects from home, including some from the list the class made in the pre-visit activity.

Create:

have students:

- make a list of recycled objects they saw in the exhibition.
- choose three or more objects from the collection of recycled and found objects to create a work of art. It can be a sculpture, painting, or assemblage – as long as the objects are incorporated in a thoughtful way.

Reflect:

have students:

- describe the features of the artwork – color, shape, pattern, etc.
- discuss the narrative elements. What is the subject matter? Does it tell a story? Represent an idea?
- explain why they chose the objects.
- describe their process. Did they have a goal for what they were making or did it unfold as they worked? Where did they get their ideas?
- refer to the list of recycled objects they found in the exhibition. Did they use any of the same objects or materials that the artists in the exhibition used to create their artworks? Did any of the works in the exhibition inspire them to look at these objects or materials in a new way?

Language Arts

Writing

1. Create a cinquain (pronounced sincane: a five-line stanza) inspired by one of the works in the exhibition (this can be used as a gallery activity at the Museum).

Structure your cinquain as follows:

Line 1: A noun (you may want to use the actual title of the artwork).

Line 2: Two adjectives which describe your noun.

Line 3: Three verbs which describe the noun.

Line 4: A short phrase about the noun.

Line 5: Repeat noun in Line 1.

Sample (using Dona Anderson's *Seven Up*)

Seven Up
Bamboo-like, patterned
Curves, slopes, falls
Asian patterned bamboo slide arching down to earth
Seven Up

2. Have students create “found” poetry – blank verse from words found in magazines and newspapers. A lesson plan can be found at www.teachervision.fen.com/poetry/lesson-plan/5461.html

Science/Social Science

Recycling and the Environment

Recycling as an environmental issue grew out of the increasing abundance and wastefulness that characterized post World War II society in the United States. Research the history of environmental awareness and activism in the United States to the present. What are some of the most important issues related to the environment that we face today? What can we do as individuals and as a community to address these issues?

GLOSSARY

Abstract Characteristic of art in which natural forms and objects are not rendered in a naturalistic or representational way, but are simplified or distorted to some extent, often in an attempt to convey the essence of the form or object.

Assemblage A three dimensional composition made of various materials such as found objects, paper, wood, and textiles.

Dada A movement in the visual, performing, and literary arts that flourished primarily in Zürich, Switzerland; New York City; Berlin, Cologne, and Hannover, Germany; and Paris in the early 20th century. Born out of the social and moral crisis that followed World War I, Dada was more a worldview than a style. Dada artists ridiculed contemporary culture and traditional art forms, creating unconventional works using unconventional materials and techniques. Their work is characterized as nihilistic and cynical, yet absurd and playful at the same time.

Nonobjective Having no recognizable subject matter, such as houses, trees, people, etc.

RESOURCES

Books available through the Chemeketa Cooperative Regional Library

Recycling and the Environment:

Blashfield, Jean F. and Wallace B. Black, *Recycling*. Children's Press, Chicago, 1991.
Discusses the advantages of recycling and how we can help protect the environment from further damage. Ages 9-12

Kalbacken, Joan and Emilie U. Lepthien, *Recycling*. Children's Press, Chicago, 1991.
Shows how the ever-growing tide of refuse threatens the environment and wastes resources, and how recycling helps in conservation efforts. Ages 4-8

Donald, Rhonda Lucas, *Recycling*. Children's Press, New York, 2001. Ages 4-8

Powell, Jillian, illustrated by Amanda Wood. *Recycled*. Picture Window Books, Minneapolis, 2003.
This is a Blue Level book in the Read-It! Readers series, for children who are just starting to read.

Activities:

Bracket, Karen and Rosie Manley, *Beautiful Junk II: More Creative Classroom Uses for Recyclable Materials*. Fearon Teacher Aids, Simon & Schuster Education Group, 1993.

Carlson, Laurie, illustrated by Loretta Trezzo Braren, *EcoArt: Earth-Friendly Art & Craft Experiences for 3- to 9-year-olds*. Williamson Publishing Co, Charlotte, VT, 1993.

Martin, Laura C., *Recycled Crafts Box*. Storey Publishing, North Adams, MS, 2003.

Petrash, Carol, illustrations by Donald Cook, *Earthways: Simple Environmental Activities for Young Children*. Gryphon House, Mt. Rainier, MD, 1992.

COMMON CURRICULUM GOALS

The suggested discussions and activities included in this packet can be used to support the following Common Curriculum Goals developed by the Oregon Department of Education. For specific benchmarks for your grade level check with your school district or the Oregon Public Education Network (O.P.E.N.)

www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=53

The Arts

Aesthetics and Criticism

- Use knowledge of technical, organizational and aesthetic elements to describe and analyze one's own art and the art of others.
- Respond to works of art, giving reasons for preferences.

Historical and Cultural Perspectives

- Identify both common and unique characteristics found in work of art from various time periods and cultures.
- Understand that the arts have a historical connection.
- Explain how a work of art reflects the artist's personal experience in a society or culture.
- Understand how the arts serve a variety of personal, professional, practical and cultural needs.

Create, Present, and Perform

- Apply artistic elements and technical skills to create, present and/or perform works of art for a variety of audiences and purposes.
- Communicate verbally and in writing, using knowledge of the arts to describe and/or evaluate one's own artwork.
- Express ideas, moods and feelings through various art forms.

Language Arts

Writing

- Use a variety of written forms (e.g. journals, essays, short stories, poems, research papers) to express ideas and multiple media to create projects, presentations and publications.

Speaking and Listening

- Communicate knowledge of the topic, including relevant examples, facts, anecdotes and details.
- Demonstrate effective listening strategies.

Media and Technology

- Acquire information from print, visual and electronic sources, including the Internet.

Social Sciences

Geography

- Understand how people and the environment are interrelated.

History

- Analyze cause and effect relationships, including multiple causalities.
- Interpret and reconstruct chronological relationships.
- Understand recognize, and interpret change and continuity over time.
- Understand relationships among events, issues and developments in different spheres of human activity (i.e. economic, political, social, cultural).

Social Science Analysis

- Define and clarify an issue so that its dimensions are well understood.
- Explain various perspectives on an event or issue and the reasoning behind them.

Science

Earth and Space Science

- Understand the properties and limited availability of the materials which make up the Earth





