

Cultural Daily

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To Artists: Junk Is Where the Revolution Starts

Dan Matthews · Wednesday, September 19th, 2018

Junk is piling up everywhere. There's a huge island of it in the Pacific called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. There's junk in the street, in your house, your garage, your trunk — you name it. Back when there was less junk, artists were content with still-life paintings of pieces of fruit, landscape paintings of rivers, lakes, and trees, as well as portraits, and all the other trappings of art that finds life as its subject. But now life is full of junk. People don't reuse things, they throw them away. There's a glut of stuff in the world.

Marcel Duchamp came along and realized there was another use for objects — they can be art. The readymade was Duchamp's way of re-contextualizing regular objects in such a way as to make the viewer think differently about them. A bicycle wheel on a stool (*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913) was Duchamp's first readymade. In light of the fact that Duchamp did this over 100 years ago, *Aesthetica Magazine* asks [whether the readymade is still revolutionary](#). The resounding answer is *yes*.

Author Niamh Coghlan points out that readymades “created a new language with which to speak. This language continues to challenge artists and audiences alike 100 years later.” Many modern artists who make readymade art use found objects to comment on their source. There is almost always political or social commentary you can derive from a found object.

Coghlan talks about a work by William Cordova, who took over 200 album covers from an Ivy League college and arranged them in a maze. In the exhibit, Cordova doesn't identify the college, but he reveals that the university has an equal number of Inca artefacts in its museum. The university refuses to return the artefacts to their owners; likewise, Cordova will not return the albums to the university. Cordova is making light of social injustice, of how people feel they can appropriate objects from other cultures, claim ownership, and display them as art.

Readymades aren't the only type of art that can rise out of found objects. Sharon Zigrossi, a Texas-based artist, takes hubcaps and turns them into gorgeous “[Blooming Hubcaps](#).”



Courtesy of Sharon Zigrossi

In an [interview with The Clunker Junker](#), Sharon said many of her works include other run-of-the-mill objects besides hubcaps, such as bottle caps, nails, and pistachio shells.



Courtesy of Sharon Zigrossi



Courtesy of Sharon Zigrossi

There's a way in which these are readymades, there's a way in which they're paintings, and there's a way in which they're mixed-medium sculptures. Zigrossi's Blooming Hubcaps are artworks that showcase how wrecking-yard fodder can become something aesthetically appealing and collectible.

Elsewhere, [Ann Smith](#) makes sculptures from discarded electronics and machine parts:



Courtesy of Ann Smith



Courtesy of Ann Smith



Courtesy of Ann Smith

The intricacy of Smith's work makes it hard to believe these materials could've ended up as junk sitting in a landfill somewhere.

[Sayaka Ganz](#) made these "Momentum" works from reclaimed plastic objects, aluminum, cable ties, and wire:



Courtesy of Sayaka Ganz

Ganz's work shows how objects with no aesthetic appeal can take on decidedly beautiful forms flying out of white space. If only all the plastic in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch could go towards this purpose.

For plenty more amazing examples of trash art, check out this [Jotform listicle](#).

Getting Your Work Out There

What's so revolutionary about readymade art, or junk art, or reclaimed art now? After all, Duchamp and plenty of others have already done this and it's a recognized medium in the art canon. You can find these works in museums and there's now nothing new about commenting on ownership or origin or art.

Before, when Duchamp did his work, he infiltrated an art world and presented his work in established exhibition venues. The internet creates another possibility: millions of people can view your work apart from the art establishment. You can even focus on your process in order to spread the word about how this stuff is done.

With a [free video editor](#), you can document your creation process and post it on YouTube, where millions of eyes can not only admire your work, but learn from you. If you do this stuff well, people will want to emulate you, and a lot more junk could become art. In this case, more art means less pollution. Plus, with enough followers on YouTube, you can make money, which means you could end doing art for a living.

With free web hosting, you can create a blog or website to further showcase your work. There are also free website building tools, which are helpful for those of us who don't know how to do it from scratch.

Do good work, present it to people online and in physical locations, and your junk will become someone else's treasure. The amount of joy people get from repurposed art is amazing. And we need it. The world is full of trash, and we need more than green tech and green energy to undo what we're doing to the Earth.

Featured image courtesy of Sharon Zigrossi, Blooming Hubcaps

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