Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Making Art from Found Materials

Dan Matthews · Wednesday, December 4th, 2019

Have you ever sat down and thought about what would happen if landfills finally overflowed? It seems that artists who are using found materials to create their masterpieces may have come across that thought. Making use of eco-friendly materials for art is nowhere near a new practice, but it is becoming more essential considering the rate at which natural resources are being depleted.

Using found materials can also be a way of recycling as it helps preserve non-renewable resources. Theoretically, this means that every artist who decides to use recycled paper in their artwork helps preserve a tree.

The creation and consumption of art is not likely to go out of fashion in the foreseeable future, so using found materials is a practice that should be encouraged and celebrated. Not only can the practice help the environment, but it can also spark greater levels of creativity and inspire more innovative forms of art.

A Way to Develop Your Skills

One of the most interesting things about artists is the unique ways in which they express themselves. Although there are no conventional rules that an artist must follow when creating their work, there are still core skills that can be developed in the process of art-making. One of them is the knowledge of art materials and their skillful use.

When using found materials to create art, it’s a way for you to develop your skills as you’re forced to learn about different materials and how they can be combined to meet your end goal. If, for instance, you’re utilizing wood scraps and repurposing old furniture, you’d need to know what you can and cannot stain over. In the process of trying to find the answer to this, you might discover that you can stain over painted wood, and this revelation could inspire ideas for how to further develop your artwork.

Furthermore, you may also learn about the versatility of upscaled or recycled materials and realize they can be cleverly mixed and matched. An artist who combines found materials flawlessly is Derek Gores who recycles magazines, labels, and found materials to create his work on canvases. Another great example is artist Jane Perkins. She has pieced together portraits using plastic toys, broken jewelry and a range of other small found objects. In addition to piecing together materials, you may also be inspired to combine art forms such as poetry and art like artist Lisa Segal does.

Can Help You Develop a Niche

Sometimes, it takes time for an artist to develop their niche. However, when you're using found materials for your art, it can help you find your niche quicker. Not only does this refer to developing a distinct look and feel, but it also refers to the overarching theme of your art and the message you're attempting to share.

If, for example, you have found that you're inclined to making coastal art, then the types of found materials you could focus on are old ship parts and shipwrecks. This is a way of helping you develop your work as a coastal artist and send a strong message out about the importance of preserving the ocean.

Lin Evola-Smidt is an artist who was able to successfully carve out her niche and use her art for activism in the process. This internationally renowned artist used melted down guns to create art that stood against gun violence. To mitigate the prevalent gun problem in Los Angeles during the early '90s, she convinced residents to give up their guns and melted them to create statues of angels. To discover other artists and the way they've been able to combine sustainability and art, consider attending festivals like Art With Me.

Teaches You More About Recycling

One of the ways that using found art can empower you is by making you an expert when it comes to recycling. If you truly are an advocate for a more environmentally-friendly world, then using found materials for your art is a way of doing your part to support the cause.

Believe it or not, not everyone is aware of materials that can and cannot be recycled. To refresh your memory, some items that can be recycled are cardboard, cartons, glass, plastic, steel, and aluminum. However, before they can be recycled there is a certain condition they often have to be in.

Some papers, for example, must be shredded before they can be recycled. In instances where they can't be used, you could use them for art instead. This way you have less paper being thrown into landfills and contributing to the mass problem of environmental degradation. In the same regard, instead of tossing out all of the junk accumulating at home, that junk could be used to create art, especially the items that are non-recyclable.

When an artist makes the conscious decision to use found materials to create their work, they're taking a stand and supporting environmental preservation. If every artist thought about ways that they could use found materials in their art, it could have a seismic effect on the preservation of the environment.

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