

## Trash art

Trash art is finding new and inventive ways for recycling those things you normally throw away.

Where some people see trash, others see art. And, in some art, some people will only see a pile of meaningless trash. So, what's the difference? Maybe it's just in the eye of the beholder or artist. Maybe it's simply a matter of opening our minds to new and unique ways of doing and seeing things.

Trash art has been around for many years, and it seems to make a comeback from time to time. But it seems that only the more eccentric or popular artists are viewed as true artists when working with items normally discarded in the trash pile. Why can't the average person be considered an artist, when they pull the same items out and mold them into some form of personal art of their own creating? Maybe it's because we all have our own pre-set ideas of what art is, and isn't, or who artists are, or should be. After all, how would you feel if one of your neighbors or coworkers saw you prowling around in some dumpster or trash pile? Would they think less of you? Would you care?

If we but look at the world around us, we could see the potential in many of the items we carelessly discard each and every day.

In some so-called third world countries, people have long prowled their society's trash piles for anything of use or value. While it is true that some items might be taken home and serve a new purpose, some citizens have found ingenious ways to make a living from some of these former pieces of garbage.

In some tourist locations, take a closer look at some of the traditional craft bazaars or merchant areas. Maybe you can see the once discarded coffee cans in the shiny, well-crafted carrying case now for sale at one booth. Perhaps, in a neighboring booth, you will see structures or toys made from once discarded items. Why is it okay for people from other countries to pool

whatever resources are at hand, in order to find more functional uses for them, or in order to make a few tourist dollars? Is it any less noble for our own countrymen to work with the same types of articles and claim it art or deserving of hard-earned income?

Take metal cans, for instance, and imagine them in any number of uses, functional or purely as an art form. Can your eyes and mind see the potential metal case, bird feeder or other object in the simple cast off items? What about boxes or clothing? What might be done with these? Boxes can usually serve as new storage containers, and almost always serve as very imaginative forts for the kids, not to mention makeshift pet houses during colder weather. And clothing? Imagine taking old clothing and turning them into vests, hats, hanging organizers, or rag rugs. The only limit to using these items in other ways is one's individual creativity and daringness to try.

School children and their teachers have, for years, known the value of discards. I remember many an art project that started with some food container or other household item I had been instructed to bring to class that day. Why is it only children are "allowed" to be so creative and thought so cute for doing so? Why should we teach our children such creativity and ingenuity, only to stifle those same qualities in adulthood? It just isn't fair.

Professional artists are eager to take whatever medium they can find and turn different items into works of art. But even the occasional artist can benefit from reusing discarded things. Birdhouses arise out of empty plastic bottles, jewelry divined out of wire, old jewelry and beads. String, plastic, metal, almost anything goes. Even our grandmothers learned how to recycle old clothing into new clothes for the kids, or into the warm quilt you lovingly have across your bed.

All you have to do is look around you with a creative and non-judgmental eye. You might even want to visit a junkyard. And don't overlook the value of hanging out at thrift stores, flea markets and yard sales. Anything is possible, and you never know what jewel you may run across. If your community has a trash sorting facility, see if you can pay them a visit and

spend some time culling through the usable items. You want, of course, to take great care in choosing items that can be suitably cleaned and re-used.

Pick up an old set of shelves, even if they are falling apart. Add a few nails and several layers of new paint, and you have a brand new set of shelves. Even if the shelf can't be salvaged, use the pieces of wood as foundation for another art piece. Paint or decoupage the wood and turn it into something new and special.

You might even consider making your own paper, wrapping paper or cards. Recycle old cards, newspapers, or other discarded papers, and turn them into usable writing paper, or into new cards to use all over again. There are many books and other resources available to learn the art of paper making. There are also a whole array of resources available, from the library or bookstore, and even online, to learn many more lessons on the fine art of making art from garbage.

Some people have even made an art form out of decorating entire homes out of flea market finds and items retrieved from the local dump. You can create unusual and unique wall hangings out of string, wire and all kinds of discarded items, toys and other things. You can find very unusual items for new uses in your home. Use an old, rusted children's wagon as the base for your new coffee table. Turn broken dishes into a wonderful mosaic art piece. Use your imagination and let your creativity go free.

Make wind chimes from assorted discards, including glass pieces, tableware, toys, anything that will make the pleasing sounds you are looking for and that will create a one-of-a-kind visual piece. You can even use old toys and other items to create an unusual sculpture. Some school children have created grand sculptures that are displayed in their own communities. If you run into a wall when trying to think of things to use or what to do with discards, ask your children, nieces and nephews, or your neighbor's kids. They always seem eager to share their child-like nature with whoever seeks such enlightenment.

Whether you choose to recycle for fun, play, art or environmental preservation, there is plenty to be done with the rising piles of garbage our society throws out every single day. Just do a little research and digging, and let your inner child out to play. You might be very surprised at the real value in some of the items you run across. And, you might be fortunate enough to fashion some clever new household item or decoration out of yesterday's trash.

Use your imagination - that's your only limitation. Can you develop the mind of a child?