

Well, hello there! So glad you found me.

Welcome to the Art World of Salvage.

This field guide will familiarize you with the elements of salvage art by offering practical guidelines on what, where, and how to salvage materials in the name of art. The first section of this guide explores the meaning and history behind *salvage*, the second section introduces artists who incorporate salvaged materials into their work, the third section presents a list of transmedia resources for those interested in artistic salvaging practices, and the final section presents an analysis of discussions and themes as relevant to salvage art in society.

Transforming discarded materials into works of art can have its challenges, nonetheless, salvage artists are dedicated to thinking resourcefully. Artists working in this vein choose to re-purpose materials for a variety of reasons – to save money on supplies, to embrace sustainability, to create works that are socially and environmentally conscious, or to simply inspire others to practice creative re-use. After all, one person's trash is another person's treasure. Just think of all the places a pile of junk and your imagination could take you!

Contemporary techniques in creative salvage engage the D.I.Y. (do it yourself) mentality of a global network of artists. From the hundreds of re-purposed object projects shared within the online communities of up-cycle fanatics on Pinterest, Etsy and Facebook to the resourceful endeavors of architectural salvage experts, artistic salvage takes on infinite forms. And let's not forget about the commercialized salvage of eco-friendly organizations such as Resource Revival, an Oregon-based product design company who works with reclaimed bicycle parts, and Ocean Sole, a recycling company in Kenya that transforms discarded flip-flops into colorful sculptures and functional works of art.

We make functional art
from recycled bike parts



As we take a journey into the art of salvage, the context within each section of this field guide will move from literal and local to conceptual and international. I encourage you to think about your own ideas for and experiences with salvage. You'd be surprised just how resourceful of an individual you can be! As you encounter "secret thresholds" within this guide, take a guess about what it is you think you see before lifting the key to reveal an image of the salvage art piece underneath...

I. Meaning and History: Allow us to become better acquainted with this art world by first considering the origin of the word *salvage*, a derivative of Latin's *salvare* meaning "to save". Etymologists agree this term was used in context as early as the mid-17th century when the French began offering monetary reimbursements, otherwise known as *salvage*, for saving a ship or its cargo (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). The more present usage of this term refers to the actual process of reclaiming discarded material. *Salvage*, in the context of an art world, still carries connotations of value and rescue. Artists who retrieve found-objects and scrap materials from junk yards, dumpsters and "free stuff" piles on the side of the road are quick to familiarize themselves with the following terms:

recycle (verb): to bring back, process, reuse, adapt

reclaim (verb): to obtain recover, rescue, restore, regain

re-purpose (verb): to change, use differently, give new meaning

scrap (noun): a fragment, detached piece(s), discarded material

found-object art (noun): works created with a variety of discarded items

up-cycle (verb): to transform everyday objects into aesthetically pleasing accoutrements

non-ferrous (adj): relating to or denoting a material other than iron or steel (scrap yard terminology)

dumpster-diver (noun): a starving artist who pillages through trash heaps in search of new ideas and materials

* The first four terms/definitions were adapted from Merriam-Webster's, while the rest are my own interpretations.



II. Salvage Artists: Building on the terminologies listed above, I'd now like to introduce you to two American artists who hold historical significance in the salvage art movement. One of the most well-known artists to first gain recognition for his use of salvaged materials was Marcel Duchamp. As early as 1913, Duchamp created his first *ready-made*, a sculpture constructed from ordinary pre-fabricated objects to which he claimed was elevated to the status of art by "the mere act of selection and designation" (MoMA Learning, moma.org). Duchamp incorporated unorthodox materials into his work to challenge the notion that art is something beautiful created only by a technically skilled artist. At the time these ready-made sculptures were constructed, his use of salvaged material created controversy in the art world and critics called them "immoral, vulgar, and even plagiaristic" (MoMA Learning, moma.org). Duchamp worked with other artists in the 1960's to open up discussion about the value of concept in the creation of art.

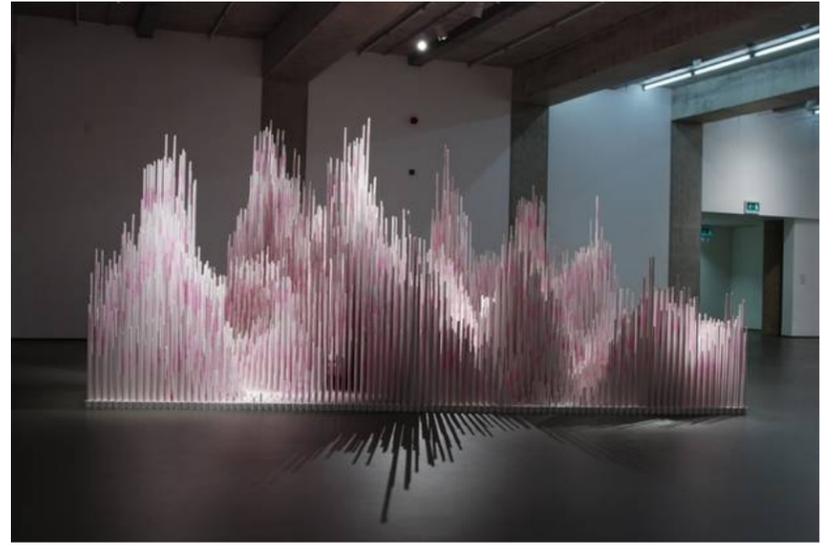
Inspired by the ready-made, American sculptor Louise Nevelson began incorporating found objects into her work as well. Nevelson called herself the "original recycler" as she pieced together wall-sized assemblages of wood collected from the streets of New York. At first she was shy about using reclaimed materials in her work and often painted the wood assemblages a single color to disguise their make-up. As her confidence grew, she began integrating industrial materials into her work such as plexiglass, aluminum and steel (Art Story Foundation, theartstory.org). Early on, these artists were brave in setting the stage for conversations about the choice of salvaged materials in art.

Artists today like to push boundaries even further; some salvage to the extreme by incorporating human skulls and deceased animal parts into their work such as contemporary artist Damien Hirst. One of his most famous works, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, suspends a formaldehyde preserved shark in a vitrine made of glass and steel. This sculptural piece in particular bridges the literal translation of salvage (to reclaim and re-purpose) with a conceptual metaphor of the term. When the work was exhibited in a gallery space at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, critics argued that the display advertised “the Met's intention to be a player of sorts in the feeding frenzy surrounding the new and the next - the shark, a symbol of the onset of this frenzy” (Smith, nytimes.com).



Additional contemporary artists from around the world who create works of art from salvaged materials include:

- ⌚ Jason Mecier @ www.jasonmecier.com – San-Francisco based artist who organizes scrap material (often donated by the subjects themselves!) and junk food into detailed mosaic portraits of celebrities. Mecier uses an acrylic sealant to help preserve the lifespan of his mosaic materials usually consisting of beans, noodles, candy, pretzels, chips, cookies, crackers and dog food.
- ⌚ Jill Townsley @ www.jilltownsley.com – London based contemporary artist who embraces process and repetition almost to the point of insanity in her large scale installations fashioned from reclaimed materials.
- ⌚ Vik Muniz @ www.vikmuniz.net – Brazilian artist with an extensive portfolio of works created from re-purposed materials including everything from dust particles to chocolate syrup.
- ⌚ Yong Ho Yi @ www.yonghoji.com – Korean artist who carves and reconstructs used rubber tires into life sized mutant human/animal sculptures.
- ⌚ Crackin Art Group @ www.crackingartgroup.com – A group of six international salvage artists who melt discarded plastic into giant molds of animals to which they then use for staged “interventions” around public locations in major cities



III. Resources: Are you feeling inspired yet?! Check out these local resources for salvage artists:



MECCA, the Materials Exchange Center for Community Arts – www.materials-exchange.org

What: A nonprofit community arts center with a donated goods storefront that hosts artist led workshops on creative re-use.

When: Tues – Wed 11 – 6pm, Thursday 11 – 9pm, Fri – Sat 11 – 5pm

Where: 449 Willamette Street, Eugene, OR (downtown next to the Amtrak Station)

Why: A great place to source low-cost materials for small scale salvage art projects.

Volunteers earn up to 8 “MECCA bucks” to spend in the store for every hour of time donated.

Materials salvaged:

TEXTILES – yarn, thread, fabric pieces and scrap, unmatched socks

PAPER – magazines, old greeting cards and post cards, outdated calendars, maps, posters, office paper

WOOD – plywood pieces (at least 1' by 1')

PLASTICS – colorful bottle caps, empty film canisters, CDs and vinyl records, empty plastic bottles with lids

METAL – metal bottle caps, metal tops from frozen juice containers, coffee cans, Altoid and other tins, old keys, wire, sheets of scrap metal, pieces of vintage jewelry

GLASS & CERAMICS – tile, dishes, mirrors, figurines, pottery, baby food jars, crushed glass, pebbles

ART SUPPLIES – paints, drawing paper, rulers, used canvas, scrap artist glass, matt board, crayons, markers, paint brushes, foam core,

BUSINESS WASTE – sticky vinyl leftovers from sign shops, fabric and wallpaper sample books, flooring samples (wood, vinyl, linoleum, tile), plexiglass numbers from gas station signs

MISCELLANEOUS – wine corks, leftover house paint (in good condition), candles, wax, refrigerator magnets, old wrist-watches,

musical instrument parts, buttons, beads, feathers, frames, burlap/rice sacks, projector slides, photographs, wallpaper, tubes, trinkets



BRING Recycling: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rethink – www.bringrecycling.org

What: A recycling center dedicated to planet improvement. BRING operates a used building materials store and offers hands-on conservation learning in the “Garden of Earthly Delights” and at the “Chapel of Second Chances”.

When: Mon – Sat 9 – 5pm, Sun 10 – 5pm

Where: 4446 Franklin Boulevard, Eugene, OR

Why: A great place to source architectural salvage supplies for large scale indoor/outdoor art projects. BRING is a great resource for people interested in DIY home and garden renovation,

Materials salvaged: sustainable building techniques and waste management/reduction.

HOME – kitchen cabinets and sinks, light fixtures, plumbing and accessories, door handles, doors (exterior/interior) cabinet doors, carpet, flooring, garage doors, shelves, sky lights, tile, windows

BATH – sinks (regular and utility), tubs, bathroom cabinets, mirrors, shower stalls, shower doors, ceramic toilets

GARDEN – patio furniture, new compost bins (made from recycled plastic), fiberglass patio roofing, flowerpots, garden supplies, lawn mowers, fencing

ELECTRIC – electrical boxes and fixtures, wire

WOOD – lumber, paneling, plywood, cedar shakes, bridge timbers

INSTALLATION – hardware, aluminum and galvanized sliding, gutters, roofing materials, piping (metal and PVC), screens, screen doors, solar panels

HOBBY – canning jars, bicycles, bike parts, tools, unusual antiques, weather stripping, paint (100% recycled latex)

MICELLANEOUS – fine art pieces, vintage chests, antique glass insulators, railroad spikes, RV canopies



NextStep Recycling – www.nextsteprecycling.org

What: A nonprofit technology recycling center dedicated to community service, increasing access to technology education and products, and teaching the public about the impact of technological waste on the environment.

When: Donation Center, Tues – Sat 10 – 5pm & ReUse Store, Mon – Fri 10 – 6pm, Sun 11 – 4pm

Where: Donation Center 2101 W. 10th Ave, Eugene, OR & ReUse Store 980 McKinley St., Eugene, OR

Why: A good place for artists to purchase refurbished electronics and technologies for work in digital mediums.

Materials salvaged:

laptops, televisions, computer monitors and mice, keyboards, adapter cords, sound and circuit boards, 35 mm camera body shells, headphones, audio equipment, digital cameras, scanners, Ink jet and laser printers, type writers, fax machines, drawing tablets, CD and DVD discs, radios, stereos, memory chips, etc.

On-line resources for salvage art ideas:

Facebook Groups: Repurposing 24/7, Recyclart, Upcycled, Upcycle That, Repurposed Recycled Reused Reclaimed Restored, Creative Reuse

Youtube Videos:

Refuse to Destroy - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSyxNedUG-g>

Green Living Video - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_P3K4ImWRI

Texas home made from salvaged materials - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdEreRmloSI>

Damage: No Longer Art, Salvage Art Institute - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lX9vW47sKs

IV. Analysis: There is one common thread in all works of salvage art – each one is a type of visual remix. As previously mentioned, Marcel Duchamp and Louise Nevelson were two of the first artists to challenge social norms of art in America. They did this by incorporating salvaged material into their work so that everyone would think differently about the context of materials. Contemporary artists salvage materials for numerous reasons: to make statements about consumer societies, to create work that speaks to their resourcefulness as an artist, and to add interest to their creations by incorporating materials that have a back story. Oregon sculpture artist Ben Dye shares his reason for using salvaged materials is this statement, “I salvage materials in my art because they all have a story behind them. 99% of my work has a science behind it. My favorite material to work with is stainless steel from old well tanks because it is ready to go and doesn't require preservation techniques, but I also like to work with plastic because this material presents the most challenging means of recycling, especially in the art world”. Transforming salvaged material into masterful works of art can be an ambitious undertaking, however, the rewards are far worth it! You can save money on supplies and help protect the environment. I challenge you to increase the life span of a discarded object through the re-envisioned aesthetics of salvage art.

Additional Works Cited:

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