

Wasteful Creations

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The Discarded

<https://www.pinterest.com/shilouh/contemporary-art-practices/>

Introduction

Modern society is obsessed with convenience and we need not look further than our personal trash to find evidence of our compulsion to waste. From parking lots and city streets to national parks and highways, human waste can be found littered everywhere. Water bottles, bottle caps, single-use containers, tires, lost objects, car parts, and kids' toys are just a few of the hundreds of thousands of items discarded every day. Many people have taken notice of our faults and, in an effort, to bring about social change, discarded materials have become aesthetic elements for the creative. The context of everyday reality has moved artist to find new meanings in the wasteful artifact's society has generated. Contemporary artists are using discarded items figuratively and literally to make metaphors about life and the state of the world. Plagued by excess, contemporary artists have found many ways to turn to our waste to make art with the discarded.

Descriptions

1. Greg Haberny, “America the Beautiful”



“America the Beautiful”, n.d., no size, mixed media

Greg Haberny is a contemporary artist who incorporates every day discarded objects as a commentary to consumerism, politics, pop culture, and social disorder (Zimmer, 2011).

Haberny’s piece “America the Beautiful” speaks to the role of the American economy and the overconsumption nature of American citizens. In this piece, he arranges trash, arrows, toys, popsicle sticks, and crayons into the shape of the United States and to further exaggerate the obscene nature of the image he frames the art in a gold frame and labels it America the beautiful.

Haberny’s works range in size from small wall pieces to large full room installations. His work is chaotic, yet the arrangement of objects is controlled and purposeful. The use of trash and random objects is poignant to both his aesthetic style and context of his art.

2. Judith Scott, “Untitled”



“Untitled” (2004), no size, a wrapped yarn sculpture

Judith Scott (1943-2005) is a fiber artist. She grew up “isolated from outside influences as a result of the impact of deafness and Down’s syndrome” (Fraenkel Gallery, n.d.). Scott was introduced to fiber art in 1987 while enrolled at the Creative Growth Art Centre in Oakland (TextileArtists.org, n.d.). This art became her voice and she produced a plethora of work until she passed away in 2005 at the age of 49. To make her sculptures, Scott used found and discarded objects as armatures and then methodically wrapped them in cloth or yarn. Sometimes the undying structures were left visible and sometimes they were concealed completely. “A sophisticated feeling for juxtapositions of color and material—bold dualities, distinct tonal schemes, and complex layering of monochrome palettes—became a hallmark of her work” (National Gallery of Art, n.d.).

3. Sayaka Ganz, “Light”



“Light” (n.d.) Mixed Media Wall Sculpture. Discarded objects

Sayaka Ganz uses reclaimed metals and plastic objects in her work. Ganz current focus is on sculptural animals in motion. She collects plastic objects, sorts and stores them by color, and then when she has enough of a color, she decides what to do with it (Gantz, 2019). Motion is a prominent feature of her current body of work. They range in motion from flying to running and from swimming to swirling. Ganz uses the discarded materials to establish a sense of motion and transforms them into something beautiful. The sculptures highlight our consumerism and attachment to convenience. On her website, Gantz says “I believe the best way for artists to help reduce waste is to show how beautiful these materials can be, and what can be done with these mundane objects and materials. When we think of these things as beautiful, we value them more” (Gantz, 2019).

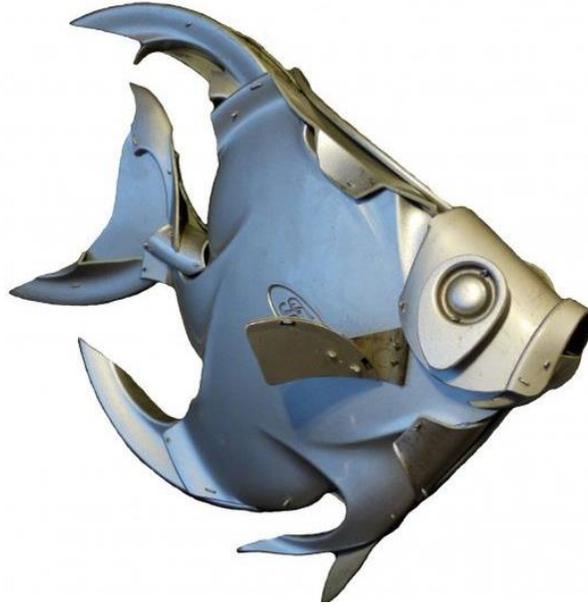
4. Mariah Reading, “El (Hub) Capitan”



“El (Hub) Capitan”, 2017, Acrylic on half hubcap

Mariah Reading is an artist who uses upcycled and found objects as her painting substrate. The objects that appear in her "Recycled Landscapes" have been found during her visits to various United States National Parks. Reading uses acrylic paint on these discarded objects and camouflages them into the existing landscapes they were left in. During an interview with High Country News, Reading said, “This project is about our footprint on the land and how we’re impacting natural landscapes” (Warren, 2018). Reading plays on the connections between humans, nature and man-made objects. The juxtaposition of painted objects with natural landscapes is visually compelling.

5. **Ptolemy Elrington, (title unknown)**



Title unknown, n.d., size unknown, found and recycled hubcaps

Ptolemy Elrington finds beauty and purpose in the discarded. His work focuses on found objects, repurposed materials, and recycled items. One of his favorite items to work with is hubcaps and they can be found on sides roads everywhere. Ptolemy says, “They’re automatically rubbish when on the side of the road, but with a little effort and imagination I transform them into something which gives people a great deal more pleasure” (Harness, 2012). Ptolemy transforms hubcaps into a variety of three-dimensional animals and sometimes people. In addition to hubcaps, Ptolemy also repurposes car trimmings, scrap metal, and shopping carts. He has received numerous commissions and has exhibited internationally.

6. Bordallo II, “Big Trash Animals” deer



From Big Trash Animals Series, n.d., end of life materials from streets and local businesses

Bordallo II is best known for his giant street and building installations made from discarded items. The materials he uses are at the end of their life and typically found in the streets and abandoned building locally. The process involves collecting materials, choosing an animal to depict, arranging the materials, and then painting them. The animals are typically rendered realistically in neutral colors, while the backgrounds are treated with brighter contrasting colors. On his website, Bordallo II says “trash animals is a series of artworks that aims to draw attention to a current problem that is likely to be forgotten, become trivial, or a necessary evil; the problem involves waste production, materials that are not reused, pollution and its effect on the planet” (Bordallo, n.d.).

7. El Anatsui, “Five Decades”



‘Five Decades’, 2016, installation view, Carriageworks, Sydney-in photo beginning right wall clockwise “Tiled Flower garden” (2012), Adinkra Sasa (2003), & “Gawa” (2001-04). Recycled materials.

El Anatsui was born in Ghana in 1944 and currently works between Ghana and Nigeria. He is known for transforming discarded objects into beautiful installations. Recycling has been an aesthetic feature of his work for over fifty years. Anatsui is “best known for his transformative approach to materials, repurposing bottle tops, milk tins, wood, aluminum printing plates, and tin boxes into sculptures, ceramics, tapestries, carvings and large-scale installations (Elderton, 2016). Anatsui’s work is very much about the memory involved in the life of the objects he uses. On his websites, Anatsui says "I have experimented with quite a few materials. I also work with materials that have witnessed and encountered a lot of touch and human use. . . and these kinds of materials and work have more charge than material/work that I had done with machines" (Anatsui, 2019).

8. Dianna Cohen, “Bridge”



“Bridge”, 2002, 11’ High x 25’ Wide, Plastic bags, handles, and thread

Dianna Cohen is the co-founder and CEO of the Plastic Pollution Coalition. “The Plastic Pollution Coalition is a growing global alliance of individuals, organizations, businesses, and policymakers working toward a world free of plastic pollution and its toxic impact on humans, animals, waterways and oceans, and the environment” (website--). Cohen has been using discarded plastic bags as the medium for her artworks for fifteen years. According to Cohen she chose plastic bags because they can be “Cut like paper, sewn like fabric, these constructions have then presented as flat art (framed or mounted) with crumpled and shiny surfaces that are dulled by dirt and time: un-useful pieces of their former selves” (Plastic Pollution Coalition, 2017).

9. Jane Perkins, “Sunflowers, after Van Gogh (VIII)”



“Sunflowers, after Van Gogh (VIII), 2011,
80cm x 63cm, plastic found objects

Jane Perkins is a UK based artist who has become well known for her plastic classics and portraits. Graduating with a degree in textiles, she found that she preferred working with discarded materials. Perkins says, “I enjoy using found materials which have a history, and love art with an element of fun and the unexpected” (Perkins, n.d., www.bluebowerbird.com). It wasn't until 2008 that she found her niche. Her portrait, “The Queen” (2010) was the first piece created in the style she is known for today. After making several portraits, Perkins began remaking popular classics. She has reinterpreted Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" sixteen times and has sold nearly every one of them. Perkins obtains her discarded materials through donations or boot sales. Boot sales are a form of market in which individuals sell household items from the boot (trunk) of their vehicles. Perkins' work must be viewed up close, to identify the objects, and from a distance, to see the whole picture.

10. Francisco de Pajaro, “Untitled-trash monsters”



“Untitled-Street Monsters”, (n.d.), paint and tape on trash

Francisco de Pajaro has become known for making art on trash. Taking the discarded remains of people's lives, he makes us laugh and delivers satirical punchlines in his work. In London, you may spot some of his little trash monsters while walking through the streets. A street artist, Pajaro works under the name “Art is Trash” (El Arte Es Basura). He “takes action when he sees a pile of rubbish and creates art with it, rearranging boxes, garbage bags, broken furniture, old mattresses, . . . and then paints it, sticks it with tape, leaves his trademark moniker and walks away” (Base Elements, n.d.). The nature of his pieces means they have a short life, however social media has given them a permanent place to exist. Pajaro says “Rubbish is the only legal place you can make art on the street” (Spector, 2013).

11. Chakaia Booker “Anonymous Doner Looms”



“Anonymous Doner Looms”, 2015, installation,
over 10’ tall, tires

Chakaia Booker was born 1953 in New Jersey and exhibits in group and solo exhibitions nationally and internationally. She began using discarded construction materials in her artwork in the 1990s. Primarily a sculptor her work “fuses ecological concerns with explorations of racial and economic differences, globalization, and gender by recycling discarded tires into complex assemblages” (NMWA, n.d.). The tires and other materials are cut shaped and arranged to create powerful assemblages that lure the viewer in and overwhelm them with their presence. In a review by Alicia Ault from the Smithsonian, she claims that the piece of tire smell like it may belong on a factory floor and the odor is both inviting and unpleasant (Ault, 2015).

12. Pascal Marthine Tayou “Plastic Tree C”



“Plastic Tree C”, 2015, installation, plastic bags, and tree branches

Pascal Marthine Tayou was born 1967 in Cameroon and is currently based in Ghent. “A socially conscious visual activist, Tayou emerged on the national and international scene with drawings, sculptures, and installations that focused attention on the AIDS crisis in collaboration with the Douala-based Doual'art Association” (Universes in Universe, n.d.). He began this career as an artist in the 1990’s and has since contributed to major international exhibitions and events around the world. His works are “in particular, hallmarked by the use of recycled materials, like colored plastic objects and bags, rags, old clothes, rejected objects, and wrecked cars: all of which are symptomatic of contemporary society” (<https://www.mudam>, n.d.). Tayou often uses plastic bags as a symbol for our global consumeristic society and other discarded materials as they relate to his experiences in his country versus the western world.

13. Robyn Woolston, “Field of Dreams”



“Field of Dreams”, 2102, 45,000 plastic bags

Robyn Woolston is a Liverpool based artist who works with waste and discarded materials. Her work has gained international acclaim and brings light to issues of consumerism. Woolston works across several sectors of visual art: installation, photography, moving image, and prints. "From socially engaged practice to site-specific responses her work seeks to harvest, uncover and re-appropriate what is 'left behind' from manufacturing by-products to historical narrative" (www.robtnwoolston.com, n.d.). Her installations deal with large quantities of single items, like 132,000 knives and forks, 32500 ice-cream containers, and tens of thousands of plastic waste pieces. Woolston says “passionate about people, relationships, and the way the world works, my practice reveals structures and raises questions concerning social, economic and ecological perspectives” (Woolston, 2019).

14. Tim Noble and Sue Webster, “Dirty White Trash (with Gulls)”



“Dirty White Trash (with Gulls)”, 1998, a pile of trash and light

Tim Noble (born 1966) and Sue Webster (born 1967) are British artists who work as a collaborative duo. They met in 1986 at Nottingham Trent University and soon after began working together, making their first light sculpture in 1996 (Noble & Webster, n.d.). They have been collaborating and collecting discarded items from the streets of London ever since. Noble and Webster “take ordinary things including rubbish, to make assemblages and then point light to create projected shadows which show a great likeness to something identifiable, including self-portraits. . . they play with the idea of how humans perceive abstract images and define them with meaning” (Noble and Webster, n.d.). The resulting anti-art works also illustrate the consumptuous nature of our society as we notice the trash only to overlook it to focus on the bigger picture.

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