

Trash, junk...or is it???

What we may typically toss into the garbage could possibly have another life in store! As part of our recycling *lifestyle* (which many of us environmentalists have adopted in an effort to keep stuff OUT of the landfill!) we may start thinking twice about what we are throwing away...both into the trash and even into our recycling bins!

trash *n.*

1.

- a. Worthless or discarded material or objects; refuse or rubbish.
- b. Something broken off or removed to be discarded, especially plant trimmings.

“One man’s trash is another man’s treasure” ~American Proverb

Everyday, as humans, we are presented with opportunities to make conscious choices about what we use and consume. At times, the sustainable choice is not the attractive, shiny, new item that we are conditioned to want to buy...because the reality is, we live in a world with limited resources. The more we can practice the R's: Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Reinvent, Restore... we can work with nature and what we already have, free of additional expenditure, and re-use it. By reusing what is already in existence, as artists, we not only foster sustainability for the planet, but our creativity and artistic expression can have a rippling effect on our surrounding communities. By creating beautiful art pieces, or transforming trash into new usable objects, we create harmony and balance in our finite world while changing the way we look at things, and perhaps even what we value.

School teachers were perhaps the first avid Recycled Art initiators. Driven by limited funds, teachers throughout time have often requested for students to bring in everyday items: toilet paper rolls, magazines, newspapers, empty egg cartons, shoe boxes, and any other items that may typically end up in a “junk drawer” or the trash or recycling bin. Paper Mache', collages, dioramas...all start with: RECYCLING & creative imagining!

In Region 10, our annual Environmental Art Contest and Exhibition inspires some outstanding student work! One of our Art Categories is Recycled Art. Each year, students come up with brilliant ways to recycle stuff into extraordinary art pieces. This year, 2011, we had a tie for the winner of best group collaboration category, and both these submissions also happened to be Recycled Art. The Mario Brothers (Mario and Luigi) were created by a group of students in the ASES program at Westside School in Thermal. What a great, creative way to keep plastic bottle caps out of the landfill! The I LOVE EARTH TOWER, is a mixed media recycled sculpture by Skyla McKinney and Marshall Sharp from Raymond Cree Middle School in Palm Springs. These projects are excellent examples of teamwork!!! A couple other submissions that did not win prizes, but still touched our hearts, were inspired by plant-based waste including tree bark, leaves and flower petals, and orange peels: Nature's Gift by Martha Nunez & Slice of Life by Catherine Ferraro.



Assemblage

Assemblage is an interesting artistic style created by putting found objects together into a three-dimensional artistic composition. Quite a few local desert artists walk out in the open desert, enjoying nature, AND scavenging for art supplies. These artists find interesting objects that have been abandoned, sometimes long ago. Many of these found objects have changed from their original form by the weathering and aging process of being exposed to the elements. Sometimes just seeing an abandoned object is enough to spark creative artistry, and *voila!* An unlikely masterpiece has started being formed in the field, even before getting it home, or to the art studio!



Marie Long is an artist and desert naturalist who currently resides in Tucson, Arizona. The objects she works with are organic and recycled materials discarded in the desert. Marie is deeply connected to the desert landscape and has been influenced by her world travels. Often her work resembles ancient images from past cultures. Marie shared that "there is an aspect about collecting and arranging materials that is like meditation and the process of gathering material, creating sheets of paper and the design process are just as important to me as the completed piece. I weave together a combination of natural elements and man-made materials into an assemblage." Creating assemblage is an expression of self and emotion. The role of color, texture and layers are an important component and she hopes viewers are drawn into her work and will identify with the materials, colors and textures of each piece. To learn more about Marie and view her portfolio, go to: <http://www.marielongart.com> .

"Rodeo" 36" X 36" (Glass, Rope & Found Objects)



Michelle O. Hedgecock is a Coachella Valley recycled artist inspired by junking in the desert, nature, people, oddities, and perhaps some other, questionable things. She uses humor and whimsy in her work to creatively express her love of the natural world, our environment, and people and culture—transforming pieces of scrap metal and junked materials into unique assemblage and sculpture. She loves leaving her art (anonymously) in public places and on trails for others to find as a participant in artist Rosa Murillo's *Found Art Tuesday* project.

As an artist, Michelle often pulls from her experiences in her natural science career, including her education background in anthropology and botany. Currently she is a full time artist who loves to help fellow creatives in their personal journey toward expanding all boundaries of their creativity through her guidance as a creativity coach. You can find Michelle exploring out in the desert or online at <http://www.mousehouseart.blogspot.com> where you can see some of her work; or why not participate in her nature inspired creativity group, *Let Nature Be Your Muse*, at <http://www.meetup.com/let-nature-be-your-muse/>

"Kachina" 7" X 15" (Hub cap, saw blade, metal & glass beads, scrap wire, metal trivets, 2 five-loaf baking pans from junk store, found metal)

"Cricket" 4" long (faucet handle, scrap metal ring, wire, glass beads, metal beads)

"Tortoise Medicine" 12" diameter (found bike wheel, tortoises made of found auto parts & baked clay, found toaster oven knob, scrap wire, can lids, stone beads, quartz crystal)



And fun, creative, large-scale recycled art projects...teaching sustainability?



Computer casings~ dismantled and screwed together to create backdrop of stage, And base of stage made from broken filing cabinets~ Because computer casings and filing cabinets are ceramic powder coated (rust resistant) these materials are great for outdoor repurposing!

LA-based eco-activists Christine Spehar and Robin Banks work together as pioneers in their own local, artist community in which they live and work, and also across the nation. As part of the modern day recycling movement, and aligned with the principles of Permaculture, Christine and Robin are making huge strides in community education. Through Ruckus Roots, originally founded by Christine, and its program TRASHformation, this innovative duo provides the inspiration, tools, and materials to successfully teach students how to turn waste into art and other useful items. "TRASHformation aims to raise awareness about excessive resource use, consumption, and waste production." Using e-waste and other items found in abundance, much of the form of the junk's "newly given life" is inspired by what waste they find in abundance in a chosen community. Often, waste from a particular industry will literally provide up to a ton of material to be recycled. With keen vision, and intuitive earth wisdom, these modern day inventor artisans are creating useful and beautiful pieces. This team also leads bicycle workshops, educating students how to fix old bikes, and create cycle-powered cell phone chargers, amongst other creations. Talk about empowering our youth to take charge and become self-sufficient! Super inspiring work!



Closeup of flowers made from scrap metal, palm tree leaves made out of PCI slots from computers, & palm trunk made from old trash cans
All at TRASHformation, University of Wisconsin at Osh Kosh, April 2010

"RuckusRoots is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that unites art and activism to form ARTivism, giving young adults a creative voice in the eco-activism community through interactive art and music installations.

TRASHformation is an interactive, improvisational art experience that turns campus-generated waste, recycling and/or surplus items into a sustainably built, aesthetically stunning and functional sculpture, soon to be implemented at college and University campuses nationwide." **Check out their website!**

<http://www.ruckusroots.org/> and contact Robin directly at artcustoms.com

So, if you ever find yourself wondering what you or your kids can do to unleash the creative artist inside, before you go to the art supply store and spend money on new items, look around your house, your yard, or even the junk yard, or any other open space in nature that other folks may have dumped their junk... and see if you can turn some otherwise trash into a newly created treasure!

Happy Scavenging! You just may find, and create, some priceless surprises...

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