Found Object Artworks
Reflecting in Raw Wood

Overview: After completing this lesson, students will be better able to design furniture that reflects historical and personal meaning.

Age Group/Grade: 14-17 years, grades 9-12

Subject Area: Visual Arts, Language Arts

Duration: approximately 60 min.

Background
Daniel Mack calls himself an artisan and refers to his work as “rustic.” He traces the rustic furniture movement back to the American Romantics who (very much like himself) saw Nature as a healing force. Like parts of Mack’s Eel Gig Chair, furniture from this time was often made of unrefined tree limbs from nearby groves—often with bark included—in an effort to bring the outside indoors.

Mack’s work blends the Romantic notion that natural materials have healing properties with the idea that furniture can also bear witness to our lives. By incorporating eel gigs (trident-like spears that fishermen used to stab snake-like eels) and other found objects, he alludes to the things that his furniture’s constituent parts have “seen” as part of their owner’s life story.

Activity
Have students plan a maquette of a chair by following the approach Mack uses to help his students create furniture in the rustic style:

- select a traditional style of chair that interests them;
- inspect each section of the chair carefully, and try to find a counterpart in a pile of twigs, looking for knots and bends that mimic the features of their selected chair’s style;
- use small hand tools to cut sections of twig to match each section of the chair;
- consider the use of the chair, as well as its shape, scale, and style to select a material for that chair’s seat.

Challenge students to revisit their design, considering the story that the chair seems to tell. Have them visually reinforce the story by incorporating found objects. Encourage them to remember that the chair should be both functional and intriguing. Finally, have them assemble the maquette using hot glue.

Open discussion by asking:
- What story does your chair tell?
- How did the incorporation of found objects add to or detract from the story your chair tells?
- What does your chair reveal about your personality?

For a full-size image of Daniel Mack’s Eel Gig Chair, visit: https://ids.si.edu/ids/deliveryService?id=SAAM-1999.33_1