

Found Object Artworks

Recycling Trash into Treasure

Overview: After completing this lesson, students will be better able to understand the roles choice of materials and the juxtaposition of objects play in the creative process. They will also develop or refine problem-solving skills.

Age Group/Grade: 11-13 years, grades 6-8

Subject Area: Visual Arts

Duration: approximately 60 min.

Background

A found object is a natural or man-made item that an artist or his/her associates identifies as having some aesthetic value. Artists may choose to change parts of found objects or may leave them whole before incorporating them into larger works.

Unlike some found object artists, Robert Ebendorf has studied art extensively. Today he works as a jeweler and metalsmith who is known for using nontraditional materials.

Discussion

Share Robert Ebendorf's necklace *Off the Street, On the Beach*. Explain that Ebendorf found these objects while walking with his daughter around the beach and on the way to school.

Consider asking the following questions:

- In literature, putting two words or concepts side-by-side, or juxtaposing them, draws people's attention to their similarities and differences. What similarities and differences do you notice when you compare the objects dangling from this necklace? How does their juxtaposition call your attention to details?
- Would you wear the necklace *Off the Street, On the Beach*? Why or why not?
- Zoom out to the whole necklace. What meaning might it have? What story do all of these objects tell together?
- How might the meaning of this artwork be different if it were made of reproductions instead of actual refuse?

Share *Necklace* (page 2) as a point of comparison. Explain that Ebendorf made this necklace out of more traditional materials: precious metals, as well as ebony and ivory.

- Does the second necklace seem to use juxtaposition of materials in the same way as the first? Why or why not?
- Does *Necklace* seem to have the same meaning as *Off the Street, On the Beach*? What role(s) does the choice of materials play in that meaning?



Robert Ebendorf, *Off the Street, On the Beach*, 1992, mixed media of found objects, mostly plastic, 1 1/2 x 14 1/2 in., Gift of Kenneth R. Trapp in honor of Robert Ebendorf, 2003.27.1.

Activity

Have students bring at least four found objects to class. Have them discuss where they found their objects, what else surrounded the object, and whether or not the object has any significance or meaning to the student.

As they consider their four objects, have each student develop a theme for an artwork incorporating their whole collection of objects. Have each student decide which traditional art materials, if any, they might incorporate into the artwork. Finally, have each student create a study, or plan, for their work.

Upon completing their artworks, have students discuss the following:

- How did the meaning of the individual found objects change as I arranged and rearranged them?
- For the viewer, what is the meaning conveyed by this artwork as a whole?
- How did the addition of traditional materials change or add to the meaning of your work, if at all?

For a full-size image of Robert Ebendorf's *Off the Street, On the Beach*, visit:

https://ids.si.edu/ids/deliveryService?id=SAAM-2003.27.1_1

For a full-size image of Robert Ebendorf's *Necklace*, visit:

https://ids.si.edu/ids/deliveryService?id=SAAM-1984.53_1



Robert Ebendorf, [Necklace](#), 1972, sterling silver, 14k gold, ivory, bone, copper, amber, and ebony, 32 5/8 x 2 1/8 in. diam., Museum purchase through the Renwick Acquisitions Fund, 1984.53.