

Old is New

Make a diminutive sculpture tied to the history of found objects as art

(art + history)

Marcel Duchamp is usually the first artist we think of who used a found object and elevated it to a work of art when he made a sculpture of a bicycle wheel on top of a kitchen stool in 1913. However, Pablo Picasso's "Still Life With Chair Caning" from 1912 is an even earlier example made when he glued a piece of woven chair backing onto a two-dimensional canvas. Even earlier, Degas put a real tutu on his "Little Dancer of Fourteen Years" (1881).

Early modern art was concerned mostly with representation. Artists were most interested in how to create the illusion of a real object on a two-dimensional surface. But in conjunction with purely representational art, the *objet trouvé* (an object found or picked up at random and considered aesthetically pleasing) was a way of working that slowly began to garner more and more attention. These "found" raw materials were being used in a way that called attention to their real material qualities and inherent aesthetic qualities.

Artist Rebecca Szeto, who currently works in California, says of her work and her process: "My works play with notions of beauty and value. The materials I use are often humble, mass-produced, or discarded domestic products like paintbrushes, dead bees, chewed gum, steel wool, or rust. These are drawn from my immediate surroundings and present circumstances ... With much of my work, the viewer initially recognizes one thing, but looking closer, realizes something is curiously awry. Most of my work is re-use oriented and about looking at old familiar things in a new way."

Szeto's latest edition of Paintbrush Portraits focuses on lost, obscure, and powerful stories of women across history and geography. These portraits are a playful strategy used to draw the viewer in. "When observing the ordinary, however small, the most profound things are discovered," she says.



Materials (required)

[Creative Paperclay®](#), 16 oz (33230-1006); share two packages across class

[7" Coping Saw](#), with 4 Assorted Blades (34933-1745); share one across class

[Aleene's® Quick Dry Tacky Glue](#), 4 oz (23884-1104); share one across class

[Blick Studio® Acrylic Sets](#), Set of 12 tubes (01637-0129) share one across class

[Blick® Scholastic Short Handle Golden Taklon](#), Round, Size 4 (05858-1004); one per student

[Sharpie® Twin-Tip Marker](#), Black (21373-2020); share six across class

Old paintbrush; need one or more per student

Optional Materials

[Loew-Cornell® Utility Brush Sets](#), Set of 3, White Nylon (05690-10390), Bristle (05656-1039), or Brown Nylon (05655-1039)





What is more plentiful in an art room than a well-used brush that may not have been fully cleaned every time it was used? Whether one large brush or many glued together, they can be used as the basis for an interesting mixed media portrait. After the brush handle is cut, paperclay makes the upper torso of the figure. Finish using small brushes, acrylic paints, and fine-tip markers.

GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. View historical examples of assemblage art by artists such as Duchamp, Picasso, Degas, Rauschenberg, Dubuffet, and others.
2. Use coping saw to remove paintbrush handles if students will not be assigned this step.

Process

1. Find an old paintbrush that can't be used or has been discarded. If used paintbrushes are small, they can be glued together. As an option, use an inexpensive new brush, or any other found object of the same scale such as an old wooden spoon. Think about how the object could be used as a body for a human figure.
2. Using a coping saw, cut the paintbrush handle off a few inches above the ferrule. If the brush has been used and has a lot of character, use it as is. If the brush is new, add patina and age by dipping the brush into paint without washing it off, soaking any metal areas in vinegar and salt overnight, or using sand paper to dull the surface.
3. Using Paperclay, form a head for the body. Incorporate the shape of a hairstyle, hat, or other accessory when the head is being formed. Place a dab of glue into the top, cut part of the handle, and press the head on. Smooth the clay down onto the handle of the brush, smooth any creases or wrinkles, and allow to dry thoroughly. NOTE: It's easier to paint facial features if the head is smooth. Therefore, the nose, chin, and ears can be painted in "trompe l'oeil" rather than trying to form protrusions with the clay.
4. Now, get out the paint! Customize the head of the figure by adding facial details, hair, and any accessories. Use a small brush and tools such as the tip of a pencil dipped in paint or a toothpick to add detail. When the paint has dried, add even more detail with a fine-tip permanent marker.



Step 1: Cut the handle off a recycled or new paint brush, or modify any other found object of similar scale.



Step 2: Anthropomorphize the piece by adding a head made of Paperclay. Apply a dab of glue to the cut part of the handle, smooth the head on, and allow it to dry.



Step 3: Use paints and fine-tip markers to add facial details, along with hair and accessories.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.