

REPURPOSING

Recycling has become a part of our daily lives, enforced by local authorities to help contain a trash problem inherent in a consumer culture with built-in obsolescence. Most of us separate our trash to help limit landfill overload, and new products made of reused materials appear frequently. Social consciousness demands an environmentally friendly approach to reuse.

Applied to the artworld, this concept becomes more complex, complicated by the value we place upon originality in a work of art. What happens when an artist, such as Andy Warhol, Sherrie Levine, or Jeff Koons, appropriates imagery from a variety of sources? Is it creative reuse or plagiarism? What about the revered process of copying the work of a master artist in order to learn new techniques, especially in Asian cultures? How do we reconcile these different approaches? Perplexing questions for a new generation of artists.

With the combination of social consciousness, the tradition of assemblage, and the explosion of mediums and materials, repurposing has gained traction. Artists mine their own work, reusing both content and forms, and they scavenge the world around them for useable things and images. From appropriation to recycling, artists seek new ways to make us look at both common and unusual things in new ways and to expand our ideas about both content and aesthetics. Marcel Duchamp, still a major influence, took found objects and designated them as works of art, and Andy Warhol pirated images from popular culture, further blurring the boundary between art and life. Later in life, Nancy Spero cannibalized her own work, using parts of old drawings and prints to collage new works, and Pedro Reyes collected guns, melted them down and made shovels to plant trees in distressed areas or created music-making machines from them.

How will history judge this technique of RE - reuse, recycling, repurpose, reinterpretation? – after centuries of insistence upon originality? The artists in this exhibition suggest several paths to investigate.

Vicky A Clark