

AT-HOME ART PROJECT: Assemblage INSTRUCTIONS



Photo by Guy Lowndes, courtesy Flaunt

INSPIRATION ARTIST:

Betye Irene Saar, born 1926, Los Angeles

Betye Irene Saar was born in Los Angeles, CA, on July 30, 1926, to Jefferson and Beatrice Brown. Saar grew up in Los Angeles and Pasadena, and studied design at the University of California, Los Angeles. From an early age, she made art with found objects she collected and is well known for her work in assemblage. Her assemblage work ranges in size from small boxes to room sized installations.

At first Saar was a printmaker, focusing especially on mysticism and the occult. Toward the end of the 1960s, however, she began to place her prints within already-existing window frames or specially made boxes, such as in *Black Girl's Window*. The use of boxes has been said to reflect the influence of Joseph Cornell. Gradually Saar introduced more and more elements of three-dimensional collage into essentially two-dimensional works until her constructions became predominantly three dimensional. For some of her room-

size installations Saar has invited the public to participate by contributing objects to the "altar" in imitation of the accumulation in traditional African artworks. Other contributions by viewers have taken the form of dances danced, music played, songs sung, and poetry read within the space of the installation.

Saar often turns to her family and their history as sources for her work. "Keep For Old Memiors" includes fragments of letters and photographs saved by the artist's great aunt Hattie, framed by a pair of women's gloves that suggest, among other things, the tactility of accessing a physical record of one's life.

Saar was a part of The Black Arts Movement and after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., her assemblages became increasingly radical. Saar has since repurposed washboards, jewelry boxes, and racist ephemera as a way of reclaiming images and artistic power. Although Saar's work has been featured in many women's exhibitions and some all-Black exhibitions, by the end of the 1980s she had become bored with that kind of segregation: "I want the art to be considered for itself. Midway through 1989 I made a decision ... not to become involved with shows that had 'woman' or 'black' in the title".

Saar received her B.A. in design from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1949 and pursued graduate studies at California State University at Long Beach (1958-1962), the University of Southern California (1962), California State University at Northridge (1966), the Pasadena School of Fine Arts Filmmaking (1970), and the American Film Institute (1972). She has taught at UCLA and at the Parsons-Otis Institute in Los Angeles. Since 1972 Betye Saar has had over forty solo shows.

LESSON PLAN



Keep for old Memoirs, 1976



Black Girl at the Window, 1969



The Destiny of Latitude and Longitude, 2010

MATERIALS NEEDED FROM HOME:

- Small cardboard box (any size; macaroni and cheese box, tea box, shipping box, small shoe box etc.)
- Found objects: photos, magazine cutouts, ribbon, construction paper, fabric, stickers etc.
- Glue Stick or Liquid Glue (optional: hot glue gun)
- Tape
- Scissors
- Markers, Colored Pencils or Crayons
- Scrap Paper (to cover your work surface)

ART PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Participants will create a 3-Dimensional assemblage inspired by their family using a small cardboard box and found objects.

VOCABULARY:

Assemblage: art that is made by assembling found objects scavenged by the artist or specially bought

Found Object: found objects can be anything. Once you take an object and change it to make it art, it is a found object

Composition: the arrangement of elements within a work of art

Texture: the way something feels

PROMPT QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever seen assemblage art? What questions do you have about it?
2. How do artists use objects to represent who they are?

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3. What found objects can you see in Saar's work?
4. Think about your family members, what objects do you have at hand that you can include in your artwork that represent your family?
5. Composition is the way the artist chooses to arrange the artwork. What do you notice about how Saar arranged her items in *Keep for Old Memoirs*? Are they straight in a row? Are some items placed on top of others? Which ones do you see on top of others? Which items look like they might feel smooth or rough or bumpy?

ART MAKING PROCESS:

Step 1:

Collect objects that you are thinking about adding to your family inspired assemblage art piece. These can be anything! Family photos, magazine cut outs, a drawing by a family member, ribbons, stickers, items from nature (**FIG. 1**). Make sure to get permission before using personal items or original photographs.

Step 2:

Cover your work surface with the scrap paper. Arrange your at home tools: scissors, glue and tape. Begin by taping your box shut with scotch tape if you have it (**FIG. 2**).

Step 3:

Decide how you would like the base of your assemblage to look. You can color the cardboard box with crayons or markers, or cover it with paper or fabric. You can also choose to leave it natural. If you are covering your box with fabric or paper, use your glue stick or liquid glue to adhere them (**FIG. 3**).

Step 4:

Once you have your base completed you are ready to add the found objects. Think about layering. As you are arranging items on the box, wait to add glue until you are happy with your composition. **TIP:** If you are using liquid glue, you will want to work on one side at a time to allow the objects to dry. Heavier objects like buttons and shells will require more time to dry. Photographs, paper and magazine cut outs are easily adhered using a glue stick (**FIG. 4-7**).

Step 5:

As you are working, you may decide to skip some of the items you collected, and you may be inspired to go find something new. Enjoy this artistic process! Betye Saar says "...you should never let your work become so precious that you couldn't change it."

Step 6 (optional):

When you have finished all the sides of your assemblage, including the top, you may choose to add legs to your piece (**FIG. 8**). Many items make great legs; corks, stones, large beads, even marbles! Display your piece somewhere that the whole family can enjoy it! (**FIG. 9**)

POST PROJECT PROMPT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did you choose the items you did?
2. Why do you like them? What do they mean to you?

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3. How does your assemblage represent your family?
4. Did you enjoy the assemblage process? Why or why not?

ART PROJECT STEP-BY-STEP EXAMPLES:

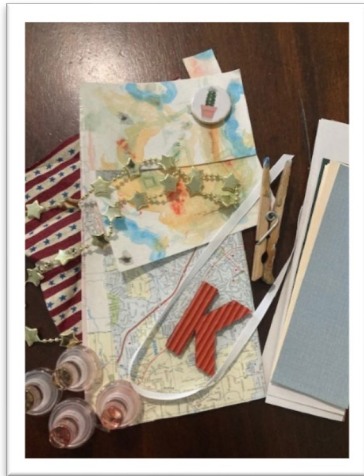


FIG. 1



FIG. 2



FIG. 3

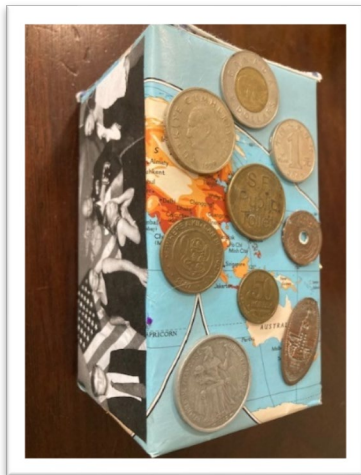


FIG. 4



FIG. 5



FIG. 6

LESSON PLAN



FIG. 7

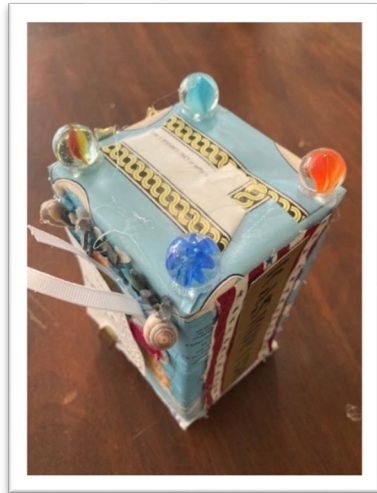


FIG. 8

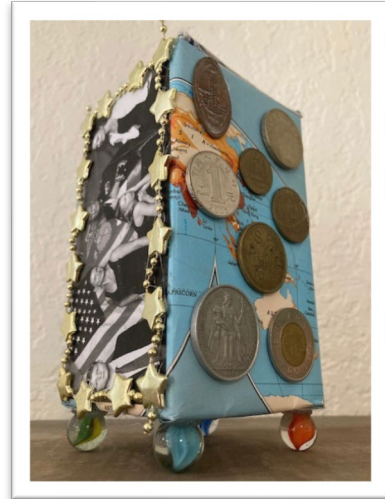


FIG. 9

OTHER ARTISTS FROM THIS ERA TO CONSIDER (Contemporary Era Artists 1976-2000):

- Pearl Fryar
- Jean-Michele Basquiat
- Kara Walker
- Kehinde Wiley
- Prince Twins Seven-Seven
- Fabiola Jean-Louis
- Bill Traylor
- Mark Bradford
- Delita Martin

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CITY OF CARLSBAD LIBRARY SOURCES:

Digital:

[Gale in Context: Biography](#)
[Gale in Context: High School](#)
[Gale in Context: U.S. History](#)
[Proquest Ebook Central](#)
[ProQuest eLibrary](#)
[New York Times.com](#)

ONLINE SOURCES:

1. Museum of Modern Art: <https://www.moma.org/artists/5102>
2. New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/arts/design/betye-saar.html>
3. Los Angeles Times: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-ca-cam-betye-saar-20160501-story.html>
4. YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7CFz9xzhIM>

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