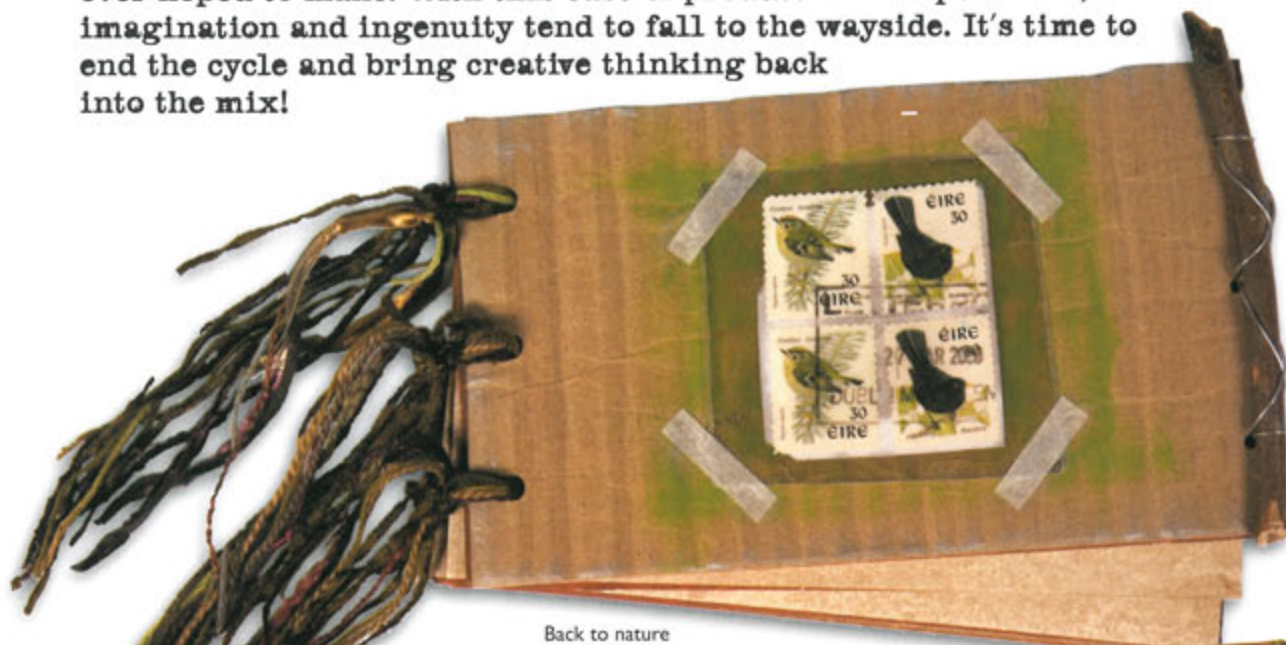


TRASHY TREASURES

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It's never been easier to be creative. We live in a time when art and craft materials can be purchased for no more than a few dollars. Today, anyone can buy a kit or some color-coordinated items and create a far funkier project than our mothers could've ever hoped to make. With this ease of production and purchase, imagination and ingenuity tend to fall to the wayside. It's time to end the cycle and bring creative thinking back into the mix!



Back to nature

The Pitfalls of Purchasing

Once was a time you'd have to search far and wide to find the right materials to bring a mental picture to life. These days, slick packaging and easily coordinated design elements do the work for us and are sold just about everywhere. If you're like me, your house could double for a craft shop in a pinch! Some artists readily admit that their ability to buy and collect supplies far surpasses their creative output.

It's easy to fall into the buy-and-make trap. Fortunately, with a bit of restraint and a slightly more developed eye, you can find everyday items to use in your projects that will not only save you a buck (or twenty), but will definitely result in more distinctive works of art.

What materials am I referring to? Why, found materials, of course! You can call them scraps, odds and ends, or even trash—it depends on your perspective.

Finders, Keepers

Despite the astonishing array of materials available today, the resulting projects often look way too similar. There are always



(inside)

going to be trends and, heck, if you really like vintage, then use it, even if thousands of others are using the same elements in their works. But this permission doesn't excuse you from finding your own look. Branching out and using fundamental materials forces you to find your own style rather than merely adopting that of the designer who created the elements you've purchased.

I've learned to keep an eye out for everyday things that interest me visually. I collect wrappers, empty candy boxes, and discarded tissue paper, provided something about them catches my eye. You don't need to have the most expensive or best quality elements—just the most interesting and appealing. Quite often that can be easily achieved with found materials.



•York City girl



(inside)

No Limits

Don't limit yourself to purchased pleasures—virtually anything can be incorporated into your work or serve as a foundation that can be enhanced with a few goodies from your stash. Found materials are free, unique, and easily stored. I've squirreled away mesh from produce bags, foil liners from vacuum-sealed canisters, and pieces of ribbon, waiting to use them on just the right project.

Consider my stack of business envelopes: One day, while looking for a way to make inexpensive journals for a class I was teaching, a stack of business envelopes caught my eye. You know the kind—you open them every day, extract the contents, and toss the envelopes. But these items that are usually regarded as trash became treasures when I viewed them from a creative perspective! I ended up turning these envelopes into the two projects shown here.

Pushing the Envelope

To make the New York City book, I applied black gesso to several used business envelopes, then printed a few black-and-white images on standard white printer paper instead of photo paper for a faded look. I colored some hole reinforcements silver, punched holes in the left side of each envelope, attached the reinforcements, then used silver-tone rings to hold the whole thing together. A silver gel pen was used for the lettering and journaling.

The nature journal is a work in progress. I used window envelopes for pages to display found items. First, I painted several envelopes brown (except for the windows), then cut pieces of watercolor paper to the same size as the envelopes and stained them with walnut ink using a paper towel for texture. I

tucked some leaves, feathers, and pressed petals into the envelope windows and sealed the windows to the items with Diamond Glaze. (I intend to fill the pages with journaling, sketching, and more natural elements.) The cover is made from corrugated cardboard pieces that I squished in my hands to soften and create an aged appearance. I sandwiched a cancelled postage stamp between two pieces of mica using Diamond Glaze, then dry brushed a bit of green acrylic paint around the edge for a frame. I wired twigs to the right edge of the two cover pieces using silver craft wire. The journal was bound by punching three holes and tying pretty fibers through the holes.

Bought vs. Found

I'm not suggesting that you *never* use purchased items—there's room for both bought and found materials in art. I just want to encourage you to open yourself up to using a broad array of supplies, no matter what their origins. Look close and you'll see that I used some purchased or prepared items in the journals shown here. The metal rings on the New York City book look suspiciously like those sold at office supply stores, because they are. And, since I live in a city and can't mine mica from my non-existent backyard, you aren't wrong to assume that I purchased it for the cover of the nature journal.

The sky's the limit! Use your imagination—you may find your artistic identity where you least expect it.

Melody is an artist and writer who lives in Southern California. She loves to travel, and keeps an eye out for unique art supplies whether she's at home or abroad! 🌍