
MATERIALS TRANSFORMATION

New Museum Kids Menu provides families with activities to learn about contemporary art and ideas at home.

For her work included in the **New Museum 2021 Triennial, “Soft Water Hard Stone,”** artist **Nickola Pottinger** (b. 1986, Kingston, Jamaica) used discarded materials like shredded mail and cardboard boxes to create paper pulp, which she molded into irregular shapes. Pottinger then layered pigment and oil pastels on the textured surface, creating abstract drawings, symbols, and images related to her childhood memories. While Pottinger’s handmade paper pulp is a new practice she developed while working from home during the pandemic, she has always incorporated discarded materials and embraced change and experimentation in her practice. The title of one of her pieces, *caan cut it off an thro it weh* (2021), is part of a Jamaican proverb that encourages holding onto family members, rather than disowning them, even if they get into trouble. In this artwork, the title can also refer to Pottinger’s process of giving discarded materials a new life or story.

“...I hate following the rules and want to challenge not only myself, but that comfort level. How do I break rituals and create new ones? It’s important to exercise different muscles to keep evolving your mind and how you make. It’s a big part of why and how I make work. I’m not used to doing the same thing over and over again. I want to know how you can transform and repurpose mundane materials in a new context, because I think everything has potential....”

— **Nickola Pottinger, “Soft Water Hard Stone” Exhibition Catalogue**

Learn more about Pottinger’s art-making process of incorporating discarded materials and painted surfaces in interview with [***Aylin Press***](#).

KEY WORDS

- **collage:** 1) artwork made by layering cut or torn paper, cardboard, and other materials onto a surface; 2) the act of creating a collage

- **discarded:** 1) an object no longer useful or desirable that has been tossed out; 2) the act of having removed or gotten rid of something no longer considered useful or desirable
- **abstract:** art that is comprised of shapes and colors without clearly representing objects, people, animals, or anything readily recognizable

START WITH ART: NICKOLA POTTINGER



- Does the shape of Pottinger's piece remind you of any familiar objects? Can you imagine it having a use or purpose?
- How would you describe the texture and surface of this artwork? It's made of used cardboard boxes and papers, like junk mail, that the artist made into a mushy pulp and then molded into this shape with her hands before letting it dry and harden. What do you think it would feel like if you touched it?
- Pottinger painted the surface of this artwork with raw pigments (colorful powders) and oil pastels. What do you think these abstract marks might convey?
- The title of this piece is *caan cut it off an thro it weh*. How do you think those words relate to what you see, or how Pottinger made this sculpture?

How can Pottinger's use of **discarded** materials and addition of color and texture using oil pastels inspire us to create a new life for discarded papers and

other materials found at home by making a **collage**?

MAKE ART

Let's create a collage to see how we can transform discarded mail, papers, magazines, cardboard, or newspapers.

Materials

- Paper or cardboard to serve as a surface
- Scissors
- Glue, tape, and/or a stapler
- Discarded papers: newspapers, mail, magazines, cardboard (Please ask an adult for permission first before using these!)
- Optional: oil pastels or other drawing or painting supplies to add color, shapes, abstract forms, and texture onto your collage

Making

1. Begin collecting paper and cardboard at home (that you have permission to use) such as discarded mail, newspapers, magazines, and other papers. Find colors and textures that interest you. Cut out shapes or images you like. Try changing the texture of flat smooth papers by folding, crumpling, or cutting them.
2. Choose a larger piece of paper or cardboard as a surface and arrange the smaller papers onto it. You could also arrange them on a three-dimensional object like a discarded container.
3. Begin taping, stapling, or gluing your papers into place.
4. Look at the overall surface and texture. Are there places you can add color and/ or build up the surface with other materials?
5. Using oil pastels or paint, add abstract patterns or marks.

Reflection

- What kinds of materials did you find and choose to incorporate into your art?
- What role did color and texture play in your selections? What did it feel like to draw or paint on the textures you created?
- How did these new combinations, shapes, textures, colors, and marks change the story and purpose of something headed to recycling or the

garbage?

- Did you discover a new way to make art with materials around you?
- The title of Pottinger's artwork tells us more about the meaning and thought process behind her work. Consider titling your work, and then sharing both the artwork and title with a family member or friend. What story do they think your art and title tell?

Did someone forward this email to you? If you would like to receive these art activities directly, sign up [here](#).



Image: Nickola Pottinger, *caan cut it off an thro it weh*, 2021. Raw pigments and oil pastel on paper pulp, 46 x 41 in (116.8 x 104.1 cm). Courtesy the artist

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