

Found Object Artworks

Reflecting in Raw Wood

Overview: After completing this lesson, students will be better able to design furniture that reflects historical and personal meaning.

Age Group/Grade: 14-17 years, grades 9-12

Subject Area: Visual Arts, Language Arts

Duration: approximately 60 min.

Background

Daniel Mack calls himself an artisan and refers to his work as “rustic.” He traces the rustic furniture movement back to the American Romantics who (very much like himself) saw Nature as a healing force. Like parts of Mack’s *Eel Gig Chair*, furniture from this time was often made of unrefined tree limbs from nearby groves—often with bark included—in an effort to bring the outside indoors.

Mack’s work blends the Romantic notion that natural materials have healing properties with the idea that furniture can also bear witness to our lives. By incorporating eel gigs (trident-like spears that fishermen used to stab snake-like eels) and other found objects, he alludes to the things that his furniture’s constituent parts have “seen” as part of their owner’s life story.

Discussion

Share *Eel Gig Chair* by Daniel Mack with students. Open discussion by explaining that Mack wants his works to be functional, as well as intriguing or beautiful.

- How has he ensured that this chair can do its job?
- What makes it intriguing?

Explain that Mack thinks “all chairs are for more than sitting. Chairs are part of the story of life. They witness events. They become part of memory and family history.”

- What story does *Eel Gig Chair* seem to tell?
- What role does Mack’s selection of found objects play in shaping that story?
- How does the arrangement of objects influence that story?

Explain that Mack believes that each rustic chair is a window into the mind of the maker. By thinking about the artist’s choice of materials, he believes we can better know the maker’s personality.

- How would you describe Mack’s personality, based on what you see?

For a full-size image of Daniel Mack’s *Eel Gig Chair*, visit:
http://americanart.si.edu/images/1999/1999.33_1a.jpg



Daniel Mack, *Eel Gig Chair*, 1992, joined and attached maple and found objects, 54 5/8 x 20 1/2 x 18 3/8 in., Gift of Frederick Wiedman, Jr., in memory of Richard Mack, 1999.33. © 1994, Daniel Mack

Activity

Have students plan a [maquette](#) of a chair by following the approach Mack uses to help his students create furniture in the rustic style:

- select a traditional style of chair that interests them;
- inspect each section of the chair carefully, and try to find a counterpart in a pile of twigs, looking for knots and bends that mimic the features of their selected chair’s style;
- use small hand tools to cut sections of twig to match each section of the chair;
- consider the use of the chair, as well as its shape, scale, and style to select a material for that chair’s seat.

Challenge students to revisit their design, considering the story that the chair seems to tell. Have them visually reinforce the story by incorporating found objects. Encourage them to remember that the chair should be both functional and intriguing. Finally, have them assemble the maquette using hot glue.

Open discussion by asking:

- What story does your chair tell?
- How did the incorporation of found objects add to or detract from the story your chair tells?
- What does your chair reveal about your personality?