

LOOK CLOSELY

Betye Saar, *The Fragility of Illusion*, 1981, scarf collage. © Betye Saar. Courtesy of the artist and Roberts Projects, Los Angeles, California. The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens.



Betye Saar created this artwork, *The Fragility of Illusion* (1981), by collecting objects. She collects clippings from books, old magazines, and materials from her family to make her art. This artwork is an example of assemblage. Assemblage is a form of art made of everyday found objects, arranged in ways that suggest new meanings.

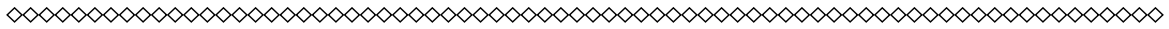
WHAT DO YOU SEE?

What colors and shapes can you find? Can you find a fish? Can you find tiny spoons and knives? Can you find a magician? How many squares can you find? What more do you see? What do you think this artwork would feel like if you could touch it?

RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 4 AND UP

The Fragility of Illusion is made from a piece of fabric: it's a handkerchief from Saar's great-aunt Hattie. A handkerchief is a piece of fabric that you can keep in your pocket and use like a tissue. For Saar, handkerchiefs represent the women in her family. In her words, they represent "a lot of things about crying, about weeping" because many of the men in her family passed away. Making art with materials she found in Hattie's trunk allowed Saar to create art pieces connected to her family history.

If you were making an artwork connected to your own family, what objects would you gather together to make your art? Why?



INSTRUCTIONS:

Go for a collections walk inside or outside (with an adult) and gather materials that you like. These could be objects found around your home or wherever you are that remind you of your family. You can cut up old magazines or newspapers and look for leaves, flowers, buttons, or other objects. Ask an adult first before you use your scissors to cut material to make art.

Create your own background from the box lid.

Use the paper pieces in this box to create a background. If you need help with scissors, ask an adult to help you cut the paper. Arrange your paper cutouts and the other objects you've found in your box.

Think about your artwork before you glue it down. What objects look good to you when they are beside each other? Or on top of one another? Or upside down? In the center of the box? Or in the corner of the box? Take some time to move objects around in your box and see what you like best. If you don't want to glue them down, you can keep your objects in this box and rearrange them later to make a completely different creation. You can also use crayons to color and draw on the box just the way you like it.

Show and tell. Give your artwork a name and show it to your family and friends. Tell them about the choices you made as an artist to create your box, and what it means to you.

Supplies:

scissors, glue, paper, crayons, box with a lid, objects, leaves, or magazine clippings from home that you like

PIECES OF YOU

Betye Saar, *Fragments*, 1976. Color lithograph from an aluminum plate. UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Hammer Museum. Gift of Linda Levi and Barbara Leif. © 1976 Betye Saar



Betye Saar is very interested in cosmology, or the study of the universe. The sun depicted in the upper right-hand corner of *Fragments* is an image that appears frequently in her work and speaks to her interest in this subject. Her personal history is another recurring theme in her work. The torn photographs here are believed to be of members of Betye Saar's family. Saar incorporated a lot of American history into her work, including aspects of the Black American experience like the civil rights movement and the Great Migration. The fact that the photographs are in pieces is a reminder of how many Black families have been separated in America due to racism and oppression.

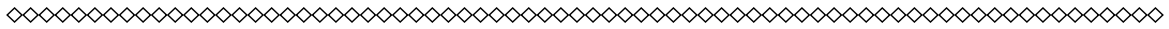
WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Which objects can you identify?

What do you think those objects tell us about this part of the artist's identity?

RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 7 AND UP

In *Fragments* (1976) the artist Betye Saar creates a visual representation of Black womanhood by arranging materials owned or collected by her great-aunt. For this project, you will create an image using objects that represent your identity.



INSTRUCTIONS:

Think about how Betye Saar represented parts of her identity through her work. What is an area of your identity that is important to you? Are you a sibling, a dancer, or a scientist? Gather at least six objects that represent one part of your identity. These could be tools you use as you're doing a task like writing or singing or beloved objects like pictures or toys that represent someone meaningful in your life.

Supplies:

scissors, glue stick, a smartphone or tablet and Google Snapseed or another photo-editing app (adult guidance may be needed)

Place the objects on a flat surface. Think about how to arrange them: do you want to cover the surface evenly or keep the objects on one side? Look back at the artist's work. Do you notice a mix of shapes? How would you describe how she arranged the different objects? Try to mirror the way that she mixes objects of different shapes and sizes.

Take a photo of your assembled objects. Then use the Google Snapseed app or another photo editing app to add a filter to the image.

Rearrange your objects to create a different composition. What if you took one object out and then rearranged the ones that remain? What if half the objects were upside down? You can use scissors and a glue stick to change the objects themselves, similar to how Betye Saar cut the photographs in her work. Each time you rearrange them, take a photo with a different filter.

Select your favorite image and share it with your loved ones. Why is it your favorite? What artistic choices did you make?

ART AND ACTIVISM

Betye Saar (born 1926), *Blow Top Blues: The Fire Next Time*, 1998, lithograph, Autry Museum of the American West, 2018.45.1



Betye Saar uses her art to confront and challenge the racism and discrimination experienced by Black Americans. In this lithograph, Aunt Jemima, a character who embodies a racist stereotype based on the practice of enslaving Black women to work as maids and nannies, peers at the visitor from the lower right corner, wearing a bandana featuring the word LIBERATION as bright flames shoot out across the rest of the artwork. In this artwork, Betye Saar frees Aunt Jemima; she is no longer a stereotypical figure. Instead, she is a free and powerful woman with a voice that demands to be heard and respected.

Activism is taking action to create change in one's community.

Activism can happen anywhere and can take many forms; some people organize, others donate money to important causes, some people volunteer their time, and others protest through marches or strikes. For Betye Saar, making art is how she takes action against racism and discrimination. **In this project, you will identify and develop your own activism plan.**

RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 12 AND UP

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1. Think about a time** when you, a family member, a friend, or one of your communities experienced discrimination. Explain what happened on a separate piece of paper.
- 2. Now think about which type of activism** you would like to participate in to take action against the discrimination you described. Describe this type of activism in the space below or on a separate piece of paper.
- 3. Plan how you will participate in this type of activism.** Create your plan by writing the answers to the questions below on a separate piece of paper.
 - When will you do this activity? Choose the date(s) and time(s).
 - Where will you do this activity? Choose the location(s).
 - What supplies will you need for this activity?
 - Will you need other people's help for this activity?
If so, whom can you ask for help?
 - How much time (hours, days, weeks, months, etc.) will you need to complete this activity?
 - What else do you need to complete this activity?
- 4. After you have taken action,** reflect on your experience by writing the answers to the questions below on a separate piece of paper.
 - What did you learn by taking action?
 - What did you like the most about taking action?
 - What did you like the least about taking action?
 - What would you do the same way if you were to take action again?
 - What would you do differently if you were to take action again?
 - Would you like to take action again? Why or why not?
- 5. Share your experience with others and help them take action!**

CONFRONTING RACISM

Betye Saar (United States, born 1926, active Los Angeles), *I'll Bend But I Will Not Break*, 1998. Mixed media including vintage ironing board, flat iron, chain, white bedsheet, wood clothespins, and rope. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of Lynda and Stewart Resnick through the 2018 Collectors Committee (M.2018.76.1-5). © Betye Saar



“My purpose in creating these works is to remind us about the struggle of African Americans and to reclaim the humiliating images of how these workers were once portrayed. I feel that, however painful, there is honor in re-presenting the past. Racism should neither be ignored nor satirized, as it is a form of bondage for everyone, regardless of color. Racism cannot be conquered until it is confronted.”

—Betye Saar, in conversation with Carol S. Eliel
at the artist’s studio, Los Angeles, March 19, 2018.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

In *I'll Bend But I Will Not Break*, how does Saar use objects and images to evoke thoughts and emotions about African American workers and racism?

What do you think is the meaning of the title of this work of art?

RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 14 AND UP

For this project, you will select objects that represent work and add images to them to express your thoughts and feelings about racism.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Spend several minutes looking closely at the work of art *I'll Bend But I Will Not Break*. Make notes on the feelings you experience as you look. Write down words and phrases that you think of as you look.
2. Look around your house. Saar made works of art out of everyday objects like an ironing board — and the ironing board lends meaning to the art. Find an everyday object that is used for work. Look at its surfaces, its structure; try to see it as sculpture rather than a tool. What kind of work is it used for? How are its shape and form determined by the work it is used for?
3. Do a little research. Ask family and friends about their experiences of work and racism. Look up images of work and race. Consider the phrases you wrote while looking at Saar's work of art to help in your search. Think about who in our society does what work and the tools they use. What are some ways work and race are related in America?
4. You can do this project in several ways:
 - Use actual physical objects, and add images to the object's surfaces by gluing them down (if possible and if the object will no longer be used as a tool).
 - Sketch the object on a piece of paper and add your image(s) to the drawing.
 - Photograph an object and digitally edit images onto it.
5. Once you have decided what image will go on which surface of your objects, clip or print an existing image, or sketch your images and add them to your object. How did adding an image(s) change the feeling and meaning of the object?
6. Try adding a different image(s) to your object. How does the meaning change?
7. Try pairing your object with another object, and add images to both.

Supplies:

paper, glue, pencil, a household object of your choice, a digital camera and photo-editing software (optional)

YOUR MOJO SECRETS

Betye Saar, *Nine Mojo Secrets*, 1971. Mixed media assemblage, 49.75" x 23.5" x 1.75".
California African American Museum. Purchased by Foundation from Olga Addlerly in 1989

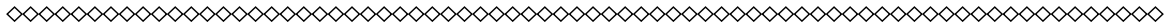


In *Nine Mojo Secrets* (1971), the artist Betye Saar used found objects to explore ancestral veneration, rituals, and symbolism from various traditional spiritual practices. Saar was inspired specifically by African art, utilizing various iconographic images and objects that represent power, healing, and magic. She combined personal symbols such as the lion that represents the artist's astrological sign (Leo) with references to Africa such as a magazine photograph of a traditional religious ceremony, as well as images with broad cultural significance like the all-seeing eye, the moon, and stars.

How might creating your own version of *Nine Mojo Secrets* help you learn more about yourself and your family lineage?

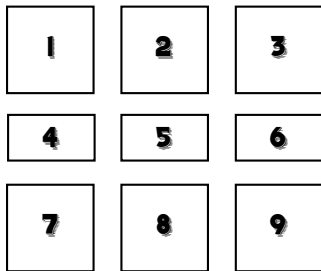
RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 8 AND UP

For this project, you will create an assemblage, which is a form of art made of everyday found objects, arranged in ways that suggest new meanings.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Find a shoebox or another cardboard box. If using a cardboard box, cut off the flaps so you have a box with four sides and a bottom.
2. Gather materials you would like to include in the assemblage. For example, you may wish to include your favorite pictures, shapes, or forms.
3. Draw squares and rectangles in your box like the diagram below.



4. Trace your hand in the middle of box #5. Color your hand using your favorite color.
5. Apply images cut from a magazine of your choice and add them to boxes #4 and #6.
6. Find out what your astrological sign is by asking a grown-up or searching the internet. Draw your astrological sign in box #8.
7. Use glue to add found objects to boxes #7 and #9.
8. Draw 3 or 4 moons and/or stars using colored pencils or crayons in boxes #1–#3.
9. Using tape, attach a personal amulet—which is an ornament or small piece of jewelry thought to give protection against evil, danger, or disease—to the bottom of the box.

Supplies:

crayons, scissors, glue stick, colored pencils, found objects (things you like at home), family photos, old magazines that you can cut into, tape

REFLECTION

Invite your friends and family at home to view your piece and to discuss the ways in which your work is similar to Saar's. Be sure to discuss how the assemblage reflects your astrological sign and your amulet of protection.