

# ONE MAN'S TRASH...

FROM HUBCAPS TO METAL SCRAPS, FIVE ARTISTS  
FIND INSPIRATION IN SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS

BY **ELLIOT V. KOTEK**

**"S**ustainability." A beautiful buzz word that has been floating around arts and crafts communities for decades, it refers

to environmentally-conscious artwork created using material that, to the average observer, may just look like junk. Whether created with scrap metal, old furniture or discarded paint, sustainable art has environmental, economic and social implications—even if, for the artist in question, the choice of materials is more of a practical one than one driven by a spirit of environmental awareness.

Here, we chat with five artists whose work proves that one man's trash is another man's fine art treasure.

## **KEN MARQUIS**

Self-declared car buff Ken Marquis had a "Eureka!" moment when he picked

up a hubcap at a car show in August of 2008. The Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania-based artist saw in the old, rusty piece of metal "a great piece of junk to not only recycle, but to repurpose." From that revelation, the Landfillart Project ([www.landfillart.org](http://www.landfillart.org)) was born.

Marquis has taken his unusual "Artist Reclamation Project" to the people, engaging hundreds of artists from around the world—including Poland, India, France and the U.S.—to create works of art out of hubcaps. So far, the numbers come in at more than 1,000 hubcaps, manufactured by 20 different auto makers from the 1930s through the 1970s.

Marquis is currently on the lookout for more artists willing to tackle this unique "metal canvas" and plans to showcase the highlights of the project with both a traveling show and a book.

## **CASSANDRA TONDRO**

Santa Monica, California-based artist Cassandra Tondro ([www.tondro.com](http://www.tondro.com))

has always had an interest in creating sustainable art, and her experimentation with eco-friendly materials has directly impacted the evolution of her work.

The key ingredient in

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Tondro's paintings is recycled acrylic latex paint, commonly known as house paint, which she rescues from recycling centers and the "mistint" shelves at home improvement stores. Tondro has even developed a relationship with Santa Monica's Household Hazardous Waste Center, whose organizers let her know when any paint destined for the landfill comes their way.

Being limited—philosophically so, in a sense—to "found" paints "limits my color palette," Tondro admits. "But I enjoy the challenge of working with the colors that are available [to me] rather than colors of my choice. It has freed me to use colors that I would normally not choose and to explore color combinations that I never would have thought of otherwise."



A hubcap sculpture by Mark Needham, part of Ken Marquis' Landfillart Project



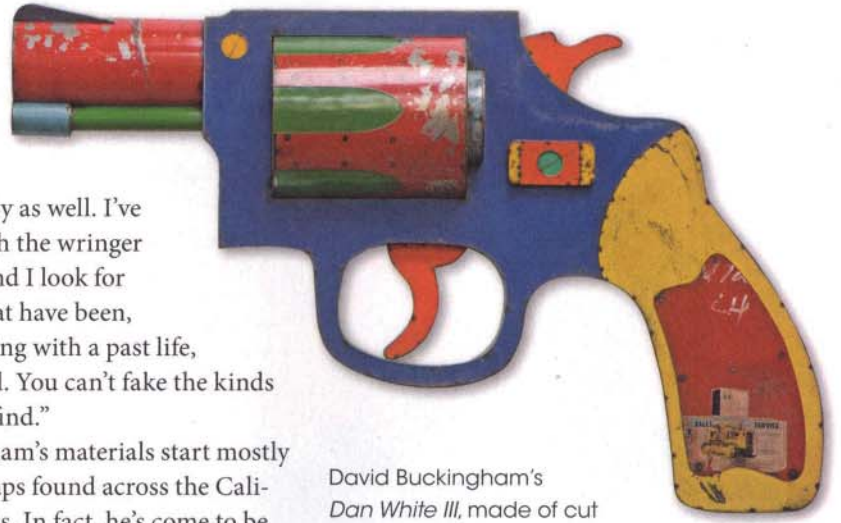
**DAVID BUCKINGHAM**

David Buckingham's art ([www.buckinghamstudio.com](http://www.buckinghamstudio.com)) bubbles with the provocative nature of pop culture's seminal moments. The artist's metal-work—in which he brings to life some of the most famous phrases from film and music history and provides his own interpretation of the weapons used by assassins—presents an undeniable vibrancy while simultaneously managing to speak volumes about our society.

By Buckingham's own admission, the sustainable elements of his work manifested as a result of practicality. "I never intended to work with found metal," he says. "It was a fluke. Driving around in the desert, seeing all this old battered metal; it just cried out for someone to do something with it. And

it suits [my] ideology as well. I've been through the wringer in my life, and I look for materials that have been, too; something with a past life, a story to tell. You can't fake the kinds of patinas I find."

Buckingham's materials start mostly as metal scraps found across the California deserts. In fact, he's come to be on a first-name basis with scrap yards throughout California and Arizona and



David Buckingham's *Dan White III*, made of cut and welded found metal

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Cassandra Tondro's *Tulips 1*, made of repurposed acrylic latex paint on canvas





Walt Hall's *Boy in Orange*

has begun expanding his reach to farther-flung areas as supply has dwindled. "I've started going to agriculture scrap yards, places with old derelict cotton pickers, hay balers and combines. I'm constantly sourcing metal," he says.

Though he's been exhibited widely and his desert scraps have found themselves hanging on the walls of the privileged, Buckingham himself has in a way been "sustained" by his recycled and repurposed work. "I never intended to become a sculptor. I just started screwing around with metal, found the colors of the desert, then realized that this is a viable way to express myself and impact the culture," he says. "I've been on it like stink on a monkey ever since."

**WALT HALL**

Los Angeles-based artist Walt Hall ([www.thesappystudio.com](http://www.thesappystudio.com)) has been hooking people on the endearing characters featured in his work for years, using the solid wood grain found on his canvas of choice to enhance his illustrative work. Hall was attracted to

sustainable art by the practical benefits of using materials easily available to him, anything from old kitchen cabinets or discarded ironing boards to wooden deck chairs and weather-beaten redwood fence posts. Fortuitously, Hall's choice of materials is both commercially viable and consistent with the Earth-friendly ethos with which he was raised.

The discarded wood Hall uses, which by now has become an inextricable part of his unmistakable style, also serves to enhance his approach to painting. "For me, materials and applications all create a piece of an environment and help establish an emotional tone," says Hall, who also creates art from old books donated to him by friends and collectors.

Hall's most memorable repurposing was a piece he painted on the face of a 1930s-era crib. "It was beat up, but it had some amazing hand-painted clouds," he says. "It was a beautiful piece to work on, and it really came out great."

**GORDON CHANDLER**

Gordon Chandler's juxtaposition of utilizing hard materials to express a softer artistic statement approaches the miraculous. The artist starts with found objects, ranging from steel drums to license plates, which he then fashions into the shapes of quilts and kimonos, objects

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more frequently associated with materialistic comforts than industrial metals.

Raised in Massachusetts, Chandler—who in the mid-1970s started a construction company that manufactured steel wood burning stoves—has had his art featured in galleries across the country, from the Gallery of Functional Art in Santa Monica, California to the Rymer Gallery in Nashville, Tennessee.

"I reference our cultural landscape by using materials that others have overlooked," says Chandler of his art. "We live in an increasingly disposable world with an increasing rate of consumption. Broken things are not fixed but rather thrown away. I resurrect these discarded elements and alloy them into sculptural forms... My purpose is to bring new value to these overlooked materials, to create a new form that is greater than just the sum of its parts." **ABN**



Gordon Chandler's *Yellow/Scripted*