

# Autobiographical Assemblage

LSRCSS · Visual Arts · Mr. Bamford

## autobiography

Pronunciation /ˌɑːdɒbiˈɑːɡrəfi/ /  
ˌɑːdɒbiˈɑːgrəfi/

NOUN

- i. An account of a person's life written by that person.
- ii. The autobiography as a literary genre.

## YOUR ASSIGNMENT:

Make an autobiographical assemblage or sculpture using a variety of materials (found objects, found images, photographs, drawings, etc.).

## assemblage

Pronunciation /əˈsɛmblɪj/ /əˈsɛmblɪdʒ/

NOUN

- i. A collection or gathering of things or people.
- ii. A machine or object made of pieces fitted together.
- iii. A work of art made by grouping found or unrelated objects.
- iv. The action of gathering or fitting things together.



Joseph Cornell, *Untitled*, 1948



Tony Cragg, *Self-Portrait*, 1981



Lucas Samaras, *Untitled*, 1963

## Developing and Selecting Ideas

Interesting autobiographies do not concentrate on every detail of a person's life, from their birth to the present day. Instead, autobiographies often concentrate on a personality trait, a significant relationship, an important accomplishment or pursuit, a defining or life-altering time, the importance of the author's family/cultural history. Consider using one of these ideas as the focus for your autobiographical box.

**In the boxes below, respond to the prompts with writing, lists, brainstorming and drawing to help get you thinking.**

<p>Who are your most important relationships with? What is important, unique or interesting about each of these relationships?</p>	<p>What is one of your biggest accomplishments, or what is an activity or pursuit you have devoted yourself to a for a long period of time?</p>	<p>What specific stories are important to you? What are they about? Are they yours? Your family's? Your culture's?</p>
<p>What would you identify as a significant time in your life, or even a transformative or life-altering event, positive or negative?</p>	<p>What tangible, physical materials or items are a part of your personal, cultural or family history?</p>	<p>What is something you think is important for people to know about you?</p>



# Materials

You can work with any materials you wish, but as a way of starting I suggest that you collect a lot of objects and images so that you have a broad range to choose from. It is hard to create from material that exists only in your head. Having materials on hand will help you get ideas and make decisions on an intuitive level. You can use found objects but remember that they might not be enough in themselves. The challenge is to go beyond literal illustration. Consider altering, combining, transforming or using your objects in a new way. You could paint and draw on the objects or materials you use, you might cut up and combine or creatively arrange the objects you use.

Things you might have at home that could be used as art making materials:

- yarn, thread , rope, or string
- needles, pins, tacks or nails
- masking, packing or painter's tape
- clean recyclables
- wire, electrical wire, chickenwire
- hot glue gun
- cardboard, scrap paper
- scraps of wood
- fabric
- house paint or spray paint
- plaster of Paris
- magazines or books
- etc.

Some examples of objects you may have at home that could be used in creating your Autobiographical Assemblage: photographs, post-cards, old clothing items, old sports equipment, toys, books, mementos, trophies, medals, and souvenirs, old board games, playing cards, etc.

British artist Andy Goldsworthy uses natural materials that he arranges and then photographs. If you have access to natural materials like stones, sand, tree branches, etc. they could be used in creating your assemblage.



**IMPORTANT:** Make sure you are working safely - i.e. only use chicken wire if you are wearing safety glasses the whole time you are working with it, and don't use power-tools unless you are being supervised by an adult.

**IMPORTANT:** Don't use anything that is valuable/ irreplaceable. The only existing photo of your great, great grandmother should not be glued into your Autobiographical Assemblage. A good rule is ask before you use it.

# Techniques and Processes

One of working from home during the school closure is access to art materials, but with a little work and imagination you might be able to use interesting artmaking techniques with items you already have at home. You could try paper mache, packing tape sculpture, embroidery, sewing or using cardboard in new ways.

Cardboard relief sculpture by British artist Giles Oldershaw



Artist Mark Jenkins creates humorous sculptures out of packing tape. Instructions for using this technique are available online.



Life-sized cardboard sculpture by artist Warren King



A variety of paper maché paste recipes are available online.

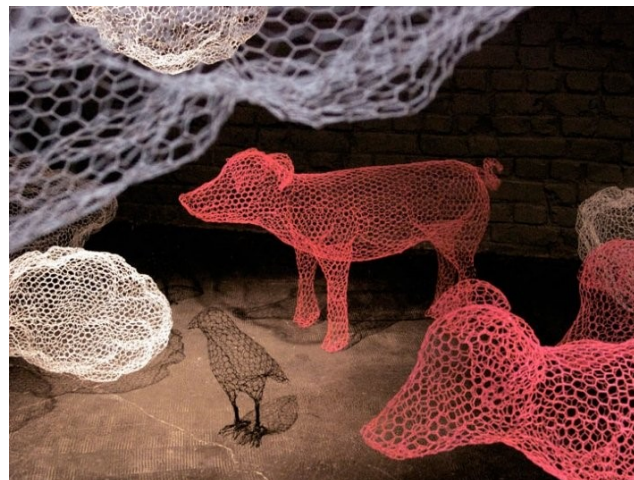
### No-Cook Paper Mache Paste

You will need:

Flour	Water	Whisk or Spoon	Bowl
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1. Mix 1 part flour, 2 parts water.
2. Stir until lumps are gone and mix is thin.
3. Add more flour or water if mix is too thick.
4. Store in the refrigerator.

London-based artist Benedetta Mori Ubaldini makes beautiful sculptures out of chicken wire.



## IMPORTANT

Make sure you are working safely:

- only use chicken wire if you are wearing safety glasses the whole time you are working with it
- don't use power tools unless you are being supervised by an adult
- don't use box cutters, x-acto knives, tin snips, hot glue guns or any similarly dangerous tool without parental permission

# Structure

The way you place materials and objects greatly affects the way those objects are interpreted. You may work with the overall structure of a box or some other sort of container, but if you do you must decide what the nature of this container should be. It might be a found object or it might a box, container or structure that you create. How will things be organized in or on the structure? How big or small will the piece be? Make carefully considered decisions.

The following pages contain a number of possibilities for structuring your Autobiographical Assemblage.



Joseph Cornell, *Untitled (To Marguerite Blachas)*, c.1939-1940

# Structure

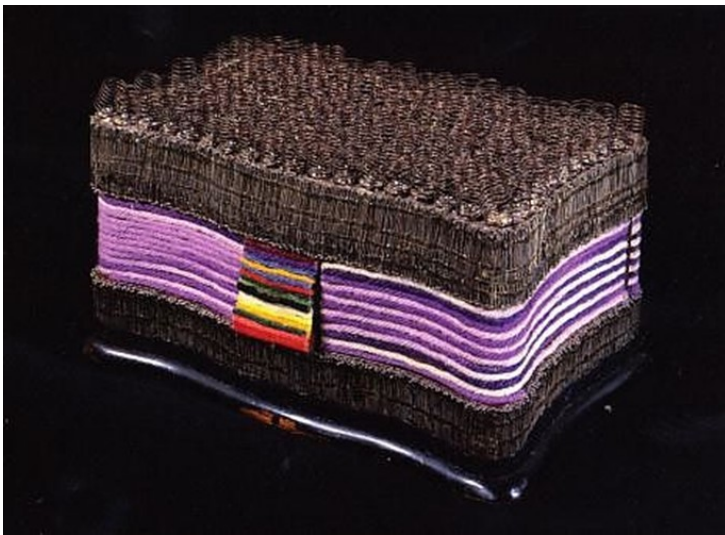
## Structure Possibility: A Box or Container

You could use a box or some other sort of container to hold and arrange the objects you are including in your assemblage. What kind of container could you put these things in and what does your choice say about you? You may wish to see the outside of the container as the exterior you present, and the inside as your inner self. You could find, make or visually transform a container that expresses something about you.

Some containers you could consider: an old picture frame, a jewelry box, a sewing kit, an instrument case, a tool box, a tackle box, a suitcase, a purse, a shadow box, plant pots, a basket, etc.

“The box, the cube, the container are just as important an art form as any other.”

Lucas Samaras



Lucas Samaras, *Box #10*, 1963



Louise Nevelson, *Dawn's Landscape XXXVIII*, 1975

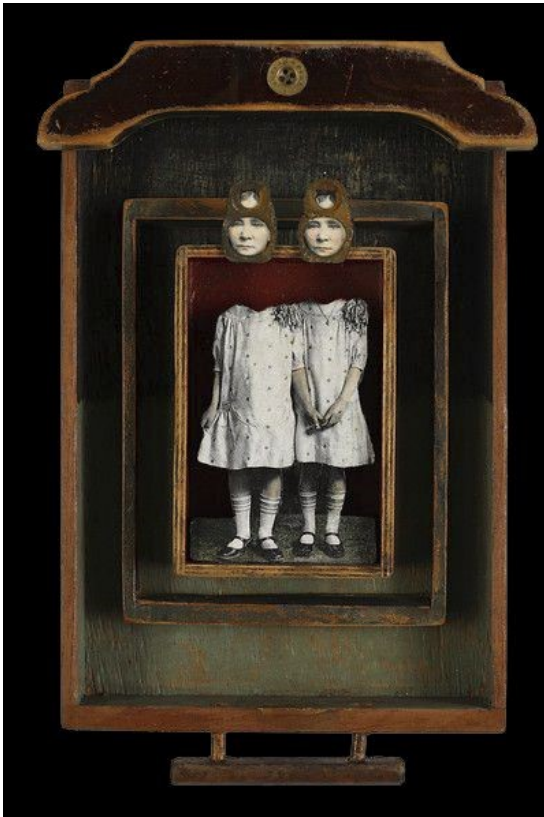


Joseph Cornell, *New Fairy Tales*, 1958

## Structure

### Structure Possibility: A Piece of Furniture

A broken, unused, unneeded or neglected piece of furniture could be used as the structure or container for your assemblage. Your assemblage could be created on the surface of an old chair or coffee table. An old night stand could be used, taking advantage of its exterior surfaces, and or the interior of its drawers.



Assemblage by Chicago artist Kass Copeland



Lucas Samaras, *Chair Transformations 25A and 10A*, 1969-1970



Antonio Pio Saracino, *Molecular Bench*, c. 2013



# Structure

## Structure Possibility: Relief Sculpture

Relief sculpture is like a two dimensional/three dimensional hybrid where elements project from a supporting background, usually a flat surface.

Your assemblage could be a collection of objects that are carefully arranged and attached to a flat surface like a piece of plywood.



Tony Cragg, *New Figuration*, 1985

## Structure Possibility: Layout

Your assemblage could be a collection of objects that are carefully laid out on the floor, or on a large table, or outside on the ground somewhere in an interesting and creative way and then photographed in place



Tony Cragg, *New Stones, Newton's Tones*, 1978

# Structure

## Structure Possibility: Free Standing or Free Form

Your assemblage could be a collection of objects that are free standing, piled, heaped or stacked on the ground or on a base.



Tim Noble and Sue Webster, *Nihilistic Optimistic*, 2012



Janine Antoni, *Moor*, 2001