

## Ideas to Inspire and Invigorate the Art Classroom

### Making Monsters



Kick start your students' creativity with new ideas, approaches, and materials designed to challenge participants and take their work to a new level. Each art activity provides detailed instructions and connections to works of art at the MFAH as well as a list of accessible, affordable supplies and where you can purchase them.

This fun idea is geared for elementary instructors wanting to reuse and recycle materials to create a found-object sculpture inspired by Argentine artist Antonio Berni.

---

#### Connection to the MFAH Collection

Born in Rosario, Argentina, Antonio Berni is a central figure in 20th-century Argentinean art. Berni studied drawing in Rosario in 1916 while apprenticing in a stained-glass workshop.

In 1925, he earned a scholarship to study painting in Europe. Settling in Paris for five years, he was deeply influenced by the Surrealist movement. Returning to Argentina in 1930, Berni exhibited his own Surrealist paintings, which were poorly received by critics. Soon after, his paintings, including murals, shifted to a more realistic style and focused on social reform.

In the 1950s, Berni abandoned his Social Realism style, although he continued to create art with social and political themes. In 1958, he began a series of prints, collages, and assemblages incorporating garbage and found objects based on two characters he invented, Juanito Laguna, a street urchin, and Ramona Montiel, a prostitute. Berni created the prints using an innovative technique that used impressions left on paper by trash arranged as pictures.

The theme of the *assemblage* sculpture above, titled *La Sordidez (Sordidness)*, is conveyed by both the materials used and the subject matter itself. Berni chose man-made materials and natural refuse marked by age and deterioration. In this sculpture, he assembled and arranged these found objects into the shape of a monster.

---

#### A Few Discussion Questions to Start Conversations

1. The artist assembled a hodgepodge of elements like industrial garbage, scraps from a sewing basket, and domestic objects from everyday life to create this sculpture. Can you identify any specific materials that were used?
2. This sculpture is more than five feet long. What would the sculpture's impact be if it was small enough to sit on a desk or bookcase?
3. This sculpture is part of the series *Cosmic Monsters*, which Berni produced in response to the economic conditions and disparities in Argentinean society. Knowing that, how does it add to or change the way you see this sculpture?

---

#### Gather These Art Materials

- Aluminum foil
- Tape
- Permanent marker
- Glue gun and glue sticks
- Cardboard scraps
- Paper scraps
- Scissors
- Found objects from around your classroom (paper clips, nails, bobby pins, straws, buttons, screws, wire, yarn, thread, etc.)

---

#### Instructions for Project Setup

1. Take a large sheet of aluminum foil and crumple and press it together to create the body of your monster. Remember not to press the foil together too hard, as the air pockets in the foil will be helpful when adding materials.
2. Add the different found objects to the monster's body. This can be done by sticking items directly into the foil, clipping materials to parts of the foil, or adhering them to the foil with a glue gun.
3. Ask an adult for help using the glue gun, as it can get hot.
4. Use markers to add color or definition to the sculpture.
5. Once finished, set aside. Continue adding objects as you find more materials.

*(Continued)*

---

## Project Ideas and Example Images



---

## Additional Information and Resources

To view a hi-res image of Berni's work, visit the [MFAH Collection online database](#).

To download the Learning Through Art lesson plan, visit <http://lta.mfah.org/LessonPlans/LessonPlan/LessonPlanDetails/3304>.

Front: Antonio Berni, *La sordidez* (*Sordidness*), c. 1964, polymateric construction composed of wood, cardboard, plastic, roots, nails, enamel, and metals including steel, iron, and aluminum bottle caps, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Museum purchase funded by the Caroline Wiess Law Foundation, 2004.1536. © José Antonio Berni, Argentina

Learning and Interpretation programs receive generous funding from the Jerold B. Katz Foundation; Institute of Museum and Library Services; H-E-B; MD Anderson Cancer Center; Sharon G. Dies; Sterling-Turner Foundation; Houston Junior Woman's Club; Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo; The Brown Foundation, Inc.; Susan Vaughan Foundation; and additional generous donors.