

Sustainable Set Design & Installation Art

Compiled by Maria Feuereisen, August 2021

My journey of creating sets with upcycled garbage began when I first studied Visual Arts in Chile. Culture has a social responsibility to the environmental challenges that our planet is confronted with everyday. I realized that I wanted to help audiences understand the endless possibilities of recycling and the value behind what some would consider garbage. From cardboard, I moved into working with other domestic recyclable materials such as plastics, aluminum, and bags. I cleaned streets and beaches to locate and organize materials, transforming garbage into urban landscapes and mythological creatures.

I moved to New York City five years ago to study a Masters in Set Design at the NYU Tisch School of the Arts. My first project as a Masters student was to create a set made from recycled bags for a collaboration with the Dance Department. I gathered plastic bags through the school and began weaving them into a giant fishing net, bringing my overall vision to life. This experience taught me that the challenge of repurposing garbage to create a detailed set would require focused effort, clever resourcefulness, and curious experimentation. I saved money on expenses, such as wood and plastic, and took risks to find the perfect, recycled material.



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When the theatre industry first shutdown in March 2020, I found time to give back to my community. The six to nine year-old children in my neighborhood became my audience, so I collected some cardboard boxes from outside of my building and brainstormed an idea for how to repurpose them. My goal was to continue telling stories and creating characters, so I created a puppet show using a popular Latin tradition called Lambe-Lambe. Lambe-Lambe is a style of puppetry that occurs inside a confined, but easily transportable space, such as a box. The most important lesson from this experience was the process. I remembered the importance of creating an open space, filled with playful learning and entertainment. Storytelling is required to fuel imagination, and I realized that repurposed garbage is the best resource to teach children that creativity has no boundaries.

When I first moved to New York City, I arrived with the purpose of expanding my professional skill set. Along the way, I gained a new passion for storytelling and became a set designer. I also learned that by adding a recycled medium to create sets, designers can inspire audiences to become more conscious of the planet. My goal, as a set designer, is to encourage audiences to stop having a disposable relationship with their material world. I hope to, instead, motivate audiences to see the endless possibilities of recycled materials.



Sustainable Puppet Show by Maria Feuereisen