

## Miniature Treasure Keeper

Joseph Cornell's (1903-1972) most characteristic artworks were boxed assemblages created from found objects. These were simple boxes in which he arranged surprising collections of photographs or bric-a-brac in a way that combined the formalness of Constructivism with the lively fantasy of Surrealism. He was fascinated by fragments of once beautiful and precious objects he found on his frequent trips to the bookshops and thrift stores of New York. His boxes relied on the Surrealist technique of irrational juxtaposition and on the evocation of nostalgia for their appeal.

Cornell often made series of boxed assemblages that reflected his various interests. His captivation with birds resulted in an aviary series, in which colorful images of various birds were mounted on wood, cut out and set against harsh white backgrounds.

### Grade Levels K-12

*Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust them as needed.*

### Preparation

1. Have students gather pieces of nostalgia or objects that illustrate an interest they have in a particular subject. The objects should be small or should be taken apart so as not to exceed 1-2" in size. Good suggestions might include fossils, shells, bottle caps, toys or costume jewelry.
2. Gather small containers for glue and larger containers for mixing plaster.



### Process

1. Arrange at least three miniature canvases in a configuration that is pleasing to the eye. When the design is finalized, glue the canvases together with Weldbond®. Rubber bands can be used to hold them in place. Let the assemblage dry overnight.



### Materials

Blick® Studio Mini Canvas, package of five, assorted sizes (07147-); at least three canvases per student



Blick® Pottery Plaster, No. 1, 8-lb box (33536-1008); share among the class



Weldbond® Universal Adhesive, 12-oz (23819-1005); share among the class

Foam Brush, 1" (05114-1001); one per student

Blick® Artists' Acrylic, set of six (00624-1029); share one set among the class



Small mementos and/or found objects

#### OPTIONAL MATERIALS

Plastibands, box of 200, small (61411-1002)

Dura-Lar® Clear Adhesive-Backed Film, 20" x 25" sheet, .005" (55525-1021)

Sargent® Metallic Acrylics, assorted colors (00730-)



## Process, continued

2. Paint the entire back of each canvas with acrylic paint — white or another color of choice. Paint the tops and the sides of the wooden stretcher bars.
3. Gather the found objects or other elements to be used in the composition. Place them in the individual canvas backs to make sure they fit. Make a notation or a sketch to show where the items go.
4. Mix up a small amount of plaster for each student. A mixture of one cup water to 1-1/2 cups plaster is easily enough for two students. Always add the plaster to the water and mix it thoroughly. Setup time will vary based on the water temperature. The warmer the water, the faster the plaster will harden. With cold water, you should have 15 to 20 minutes before the plaster starts to set. Provide adequate ventilation.
5. Turn the assemblage of mini canvases to the back. Using a plastic spoon, fill each compartment about half full with plaster. Tap the piece gently on the table to help the plaster settle and to allow any air bubbles to rise to the surface.
6. Let the plaster harden just slightly and then place the objects into their respective boxes.
7. When the plaster is completely dry, paint the entire composition, or leave the items their natural colors.

## Options

1. Small, sturdy boxes such as jewelry boxes or candy boxes can be used instead of miniature canvases.
2. Small pieces of Dura-Lar<sup>®</sup> can be glued to the front of the frames to make the objects appear as if they are behind glass.
3. To unify the composition, paint the entire assemblage with a single color such as white, black, red or a metallic shade.



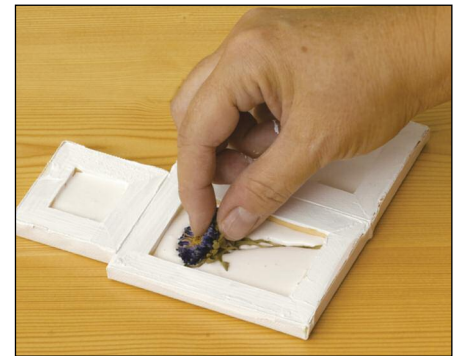
**Step 1:** Arrange a composition of miniature canvases and glue them together.



**Step 2:** Paint the canvases with acrylic color.



**Step 3:** Mix the plaster and fill the back of the canvases until they are half full.



**Step 4:** Place the objects in the plaster and allow it to completely harden.

## National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes.

**K-4** Students use different media, techniques and processes to communicate ideas, experiences and stories.

**5-8** Students select media, techniques and processes; analyze what makes them effective or not effective in communicating ideas; and reflect upon the effectiveness of their choices.

**9-12** Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques and processes they use.

Content Standard #3 Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas.

**K-4** Students select and use subject matter, symbols and ideas to communicate meaning.

**5-8** Students integrate visual, spatial and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks.

**9-12** Students apply subjects, symbols and ideas in their artworks and use the skills gained to solve problems in daily life.