

Boxes Like Bontecou's

Employing readily available materials, this project gives sculpture a lift

American artist Lee Bontecou is considered an art pioneer for a number of reasons.

In the mid 1950s and 1960s, Bontecou was part of a generation of artists that looked beyond traditional fine art materials and transformed everyday objects in their work. She employed leftover items from industry and war: steel bars, parachute material, airplane parts, mailbags, conveyor belts, and more.

Bontecou was also known as the artist who took sculpture off the ground. "I just got tired of sculpture as a big thing in the middle of a room," she said of her large, steel-framed, canvas-covered reliefs that hung on the wall. A recurring theme was a mysterious, gaping black hole that receded into the depths of the pieces she created. Viewers couldn't help but peer into its seemingly bottomless depths.

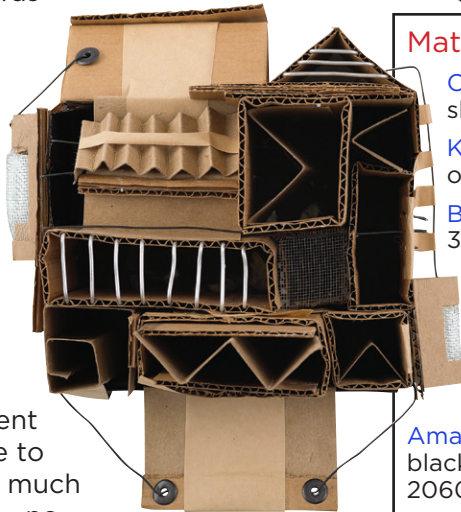
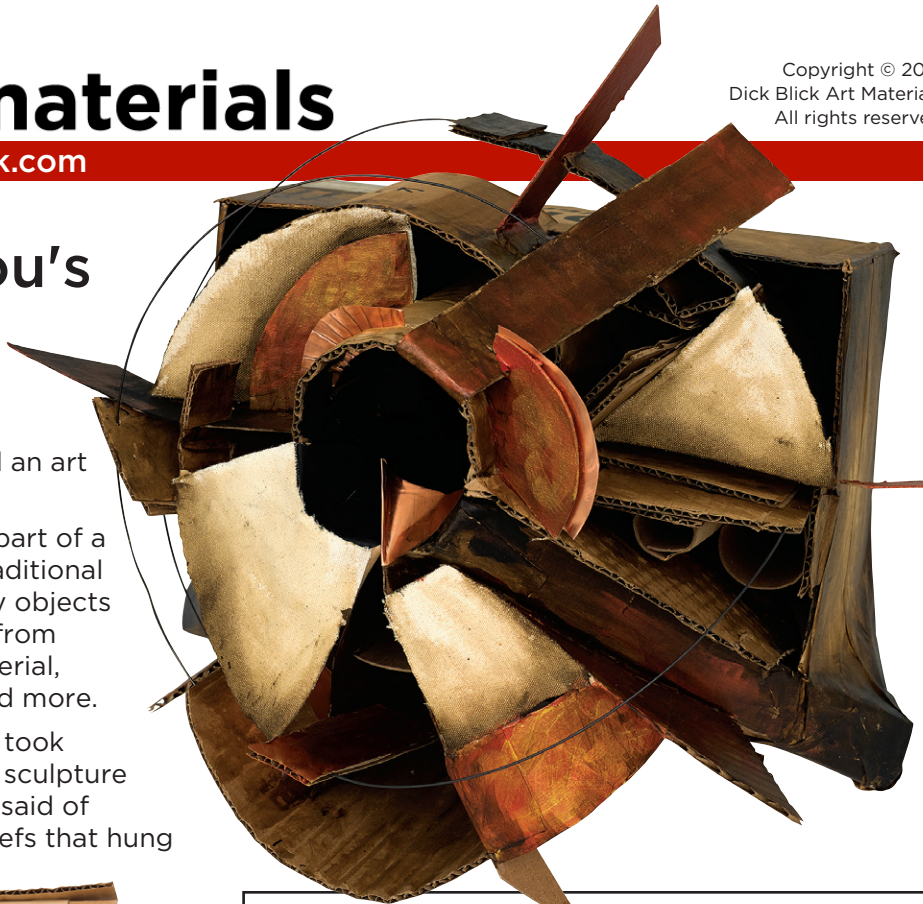
Lee Bontecou opened a doorway for torch-wielding women in the male-dominated art world of New York in that era, but she is also known for leaving that world so that her art could evolve on its own, without outside influence. A recent retrospective sums up her desire to create art that encompasses "as much of life as possible — no barriers — no boundaries — all freedom in every sense."

Living in an area of New York where discarded industrial items were readily available helped Bontecou to reimagine and reuse these wasted items as sculpture. One of the most readily available materials today is cardboard. In this lesson, students begin with a box and create "off the floor" sculpture to hang on the wall or from the ceiling as a mobile. Along with cardboard, incorporate materials such as wire, screen, staples, and packing tape to bring an industrial, steampunk quality to boxes like Bontecou's.

GRADES 5-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. View examples of sculpture by Lee Bontecou, particularly from the 1950s and 1960s, as well as her recent, mobile-like constructions. Where Bontecou's early work took sculpture off the floor, her recent work makes it fly!



Materials (required)

Chipboard, 14-ply, 22" x 28" (13115-2222); share one sheet among four students

Kraft Paper Tape, 3" x 600 ft (24118-1003); share one roll across class

Blick Armature and Sculpture Wire, 12 gauge x 350 ft coil (33401-1014); share one coil across class

Dark Annealed Wire, 18 gauge x 50 ft coil (33403-1050); share one coil across class

Amaco Wireform Mesh, Crafter's Woven Mesh, pkg of three 16" x 20" sheets (33408-1170); share one across class

Amaco ArtEmboss Soft Metal Sheets, medium weight, black/aluminum, 9.25" x 12", pkg of 12 sheets (60518-2060); share one package across class

Blick Matte Acrylic, Black, 8 oz bottle (00727-2025); share one across class

Aleene's Fast Grab Tacky Glue, 4 oz (23884-1304)

Optional Materials:

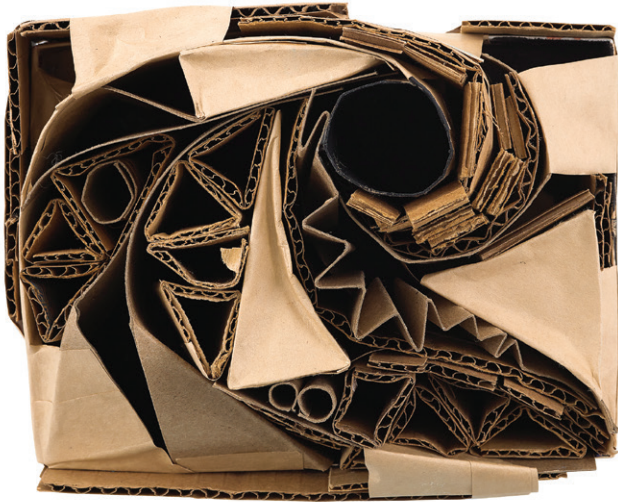
We R Memory Keepers Eyelets, pkg of 40, Cool Metal Assortment (63292-1140)

Blick Matte Acrylics, assorted metallic colors (00727-)

K&S Metal Sizes and Shapes, 1 lb (33719-7070)

Blick Unprimed Cotton Canvas, lightweight, medium texture, 72" x 1 yd (07377-0172)





Preparation, continued

2. Gather corrugated boxes and sheets, unprinted cardboard in sheets or tubes, chipboard, etc. Each student will need to begin with one small box.

Process

1. With matte black acrylic paint, cover the entire inside of the box and allow a few minutes for it to dry.
2. Keeping in mind that this will be an “off the ground” sculpture, begin filling the box and extending beyond its walls with cardboard and chipboard pieces. Pieces may be cut, rolled, folded, bent, layered and attached to each other or the box by gluing, taping, stapling, or wiring. As the design is constructed, think about repeating shapes, line movement, negative space, and varying levels of depth for the most interesting design.
3. Along with cardboard and chipboard, consider other materials that could be used to make the sculpture compelling:
 - Wires
 - Mesh
 - Foils
 - Eyelets or grommets
 - Canvas, burlap, or khaki pieces
 - Kraft paper
4. When the design is completed, attach a means of hanging the piece to the back side, and display.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.



Step 1: Paint the inside of the box matte black.



Step 2: Create a design using cardboard, chipboard, wires, mesh, etc.



Step 3: Attach a wire to the back of the piece, and hang.