

## Educator Notes

# John Outterbridge: Rag Man

July 1–October 16, 2016



## About the artist

John Outterbridge was born in 1933 in Greenville, North Carolina, and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. He is a well-known figure in the local art scene, working as an artist, educator, and activist. He was the Founding Director of the Watts Towers Arts Center from 1975–1992, and his work is in the collections of the California African American Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art.

## About the exhibition

Raised in a family and community steeped in creativity as a part of everyday life and characterized by a strong ethos to save and recycle, artist John Outterbridge has been making sculpture for more than fifty years from found and discarded materials such as rags, rubber, and scrap metal.

The exhibition *John Outterbridge: Rag Man* was organized by the Hammer Museum and initially presented at Art + Practice—an organization cofounded by artist Mark Bradford, social activist Allan DiCastro, and philanthropist and collector Eileen Harris Norton in Leimert Park, Los Angeles. Art + Practice opened in 2015 to provide life-skills training to local foster youth and advocate the cultural importance of art within a larger context. In addition to being a significant artist, Outterbridge has also worked as a prominent activist and educator, shaping the local art scene since 1967 through such achievements as founding both the Communicative Arts Academy in Compton and the Watts Towers Arts Center.

Focusing on work made since 2000, this exhibition features sculptures and assemblages composed of materials such as tools, twigs, bone, and hair. By manipulating found materials, Outterbridge reexamines personal and cultural histories that are perhaps hidden, inviting us to engage more deeply with our surroundings.



*Déjà Vu-Do* (from *Ethnic Heritage Group* series), ca. 1979–92. Collection of Blake Byrne

## Questions for discussion

- 1 Do you recognize any of the objects or materials the artist uses? Where have you seen them before?
- 1 The artist believes that art can be used as a tool to create social change. What do you think his artworks might be able to change?
- 1 The artist has been using recycled materials to make art for more than fifty years. If you had to pick one type of material to create art with for fifty years, which would you choose and why?

## Suggested activities

### Rag Kids

Gather a mix of recycled materials, fabric scraps, rags, stuffing, string, scissors, glue (hot glue gun or tacky glue), paintbrushes, acrylic paints, and clear fishing line.

Begin by distributing a mix of fabrics, rags, stuffing, and recycled materials to students. Invite them to create three to four new shapes and forms with the supplies. Encourage students to create volume by stuffing materials inside rags and fabric. Fasten the pieces together using glue or tie the ends with string. Once students are satisfied with their creations, distribute brightly colored acrylic paints for them to cover the objects. Allow time for the paint and glue to dry.

Once the paint has dried, have students arrange their painted rag objects into a cluster. Attach the pieces using glue or by tying them together with string. Fasten a piece of fishing line to the top of the painted sculptures so they may hang on the wall. Encourage students to reflect on their artistic choices and the value of recycled materials with classmates, family, and friends.

For more information, please contact the Education Department at 970.925.8050 ext. 133 or email [education@aspenartmuseum.org](mailto:education@aspenartmuseum.org)

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*John Outterbridge: Rag Man* was organized by the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, for Art + Practice, and curated by Anne Ellegood, Senior Curator, with Jamillah James, Assistant Curator. The Aspen Art Museum's presentation was organized by Heidi Zuckerman, Nancy and Bob Magoon CEO and Director.

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