

Activities & Projects

The Urge to Embellish

Illinois State Museum



Memory Ware

This object falls under the classification of “memory ware” or “memory vessels.” Its technique is related to mosaics and created by adhering found objects to a support with compositional putty. The finished piece is sometimes painted a solid color, primarily gold. The supporting objects vary and include stoneware jugs, coffee pots, vases, and other assorted wares.

There are two theories about the history of memory ware. Some believe it began as a Victorian craft. Others believe its origin comes from an African-American practice of making and placing these objects on graves to ease the passing of loved ones. In

either case, the objects embedded in the putty usually have personal significance, either things important to the maker or mementos of a family member or friend.

Although the maker of the memory jug exhibited here is unknown, close examination of the embedded objects helps provide insight about the maker or the ware’s intended honoree. Decorating the surface of this jug are 96 objects (one missing), including multiple pieces of jewelry, buttons, fasteners and buckles, nails and screws, glass perfume stoppers, thimble, glass medicine vial, scissors, keys, bisque dolls and doll parts, whistle, clay pipe head, beads, shell, pen nib, children’s flatware, and a metal glue spreader, among other things.



Special points of interest:

- Memory Ware
- Memory Crafts Today
- Tools & Materials
- Procedure
- Memory Crafts
- Learning Standards

Memory Craft Today

A similar craft activity today that incorporates memories is the art of scrap booking, in which the creator adheres cards, images, buttons, and trinkets to their pages to commemorate family activities, celebrations, people, and excursions.

Although many scrapbooks buy commercial images and trinkets, it is most effective to use family collections, heirlooms, photos, and papers on the pages to evoke memories.

Objects associated with an event or theme (e.g. political convention,

World Series) are effective. Found objects, beads, and shards can be used, too.

The base for a memory jug could be a picture frame, vase, plate, mirror frame, or other item that sits on a table for display.

How to Make a Memory Jug

Tools & Materials

A ceramic vessel or object with matte surface (mug, bottle, vase)

Putty (ask your hardware salesperson for a low-odor putty that dries hard.
Putty knife

Trinkets
Gold paint (optional)

Table-protecting cover
Cleanup water
Paper towels

- Collect and layout all your trinkets to be adhered.
- Gather all your tools and supplies.
- Cover your work surface with a protective paper or plastic.
- Make sure the ceramic vessel or base is cleaned and dried so the putty will adhere.
- Apply the putty to an area of the vessel with a putty knife. Thickness should be about ¼ inch and evenly spread.
- Choose and apply your trinkets to the putty by pressing them firmly into place without horizontal sliding. If you change your mind and want to remove a piece, repair the putty layer there.
- Continue working putting and applying trinkets all around the vessel.
- If putty gets on the surface of trinkets as you work, use a damp paper towel to wipe off the excess. The putty does need to surround each trinket closely to keep it from popping off when dry. (You can scratch a signature, date, or commemorative message into the putty if you wish.)
- Dry the vessel overnight or until the putty is all dry.
- Optionally paint the putty, and even the trinkets, with gold paint in the Victorian style.

Other Types of Memory Crafts

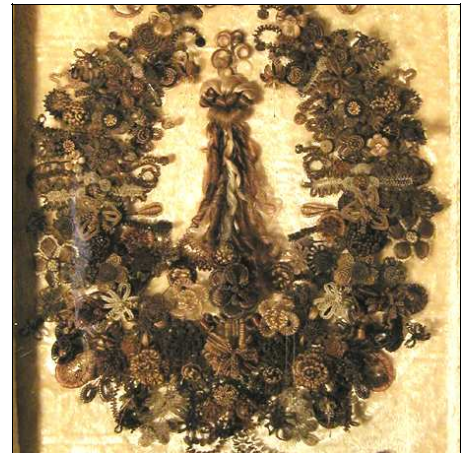
Hair Wreaths

Saving mementos to commemorate a special moment in the lives of loved ones or to honor their passing is an age-old tradition. In Victorian households, it was an obsession shaped into embellished objects proudly displayed in parlors. Hair wreaths were a common manifestation, with their extremely intricate flowers, leaves, and tendrils constructed from the hair of departed family members. Eunice Rodgers, the maker of this example, instead formed her unusually large, elaborate wreath by wrapping hundreds of fine wires with the locks and tresses of students whom she taught at Talbott School near Bradfordton, Illinois.

Find out more about hair work at the Museum's *Heartfelt, Handmade* online exhibit at:

http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/hh_heart.html#

Click on the hair wreath link to see another wreath, and then on hair work to find out about the craft.



Eunice L. Rodgers
(?–1930)
**Hair Wreath, c.
1900**

human hair on
plush fabric,
shadow box

Gift of Mr. & Mrs.
William A. Steiger



Memory Crafts, cont'd.

Painted Portraits

Before the invention and spread of photography, people hired artists to paint family portraits, or attempted to paint portraits themselves. This baby portrait of his sister was done by student-artist Edward Richardson in 1839. She died three years later, so this is also a memory of her for her family



Cemetery Urns

This two-piece pottery cemetery urn was made for Nathaniel Kirkpatrick, a brother of Cornwall Kirkpatrick and Wallace Kirkpatrick, founders and owners of the Anna Pottery. The inscription reads "Nathaniel M. Kirkpatrick died Jan. 7th 1893 Age 80 years." A tree trunk theme was regularly used in the design of cemetery markers in the nineteenth century. Stonemasons carved limestone cemetery stones in the shape of tree trunks during the War Between the States for the graves of soldiers killed in battle. This theme for grave markers was also popular in the western states among pioneers.

Find out more about this craft at: the Museum's Heartfelt, Handmade online exhibit : http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/hh_heart.html#

Click on the link under the image of the urn and click on the Anna Pottery text link.



Anna Pottery
Cemetery urn, 1893
hand-thrown and
constructed
stoneware, white-slip
decoration,
hand-applied
decoration
43 3/8 inches high by
17 1/23 inches
diameter
Illinois State Museum
collection
Gift of Mrs. Margaret
Kirkpatrick, Anna,
Illinois

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Learning Standards for Teachers

National Arts Standards: Grades 9-12

Content Standard 4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Achievement Standard:

Proficient:

- Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art
- Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times, and places
- Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making

Advanced:

- Students analyze and interpret artworks for relationships among form, context, purposes, and critical models, showing understanding of the work of critics, historians, aestheticians, and artists
- Students analyze common characteristics of visual arts evident across time and among cultural/ethnic groups to formulate analyses, evaluations, and interpretations of meaning.

Illinois Standards

STATE GOAL 25: Know the language of the arts.

B. Understand the similarities, distinctions and connections in and among the arts.

Early High School: 25.B.4:

Analyze and evaluate similar and distinctive characteristics of works in two or more of the arts that share the same historical period or societal context.

STATE GOAL 26: Through creating and performing, understand how works of art are produced.

B. Apply skills and knowledge

necessary to create and perform in one or more of the arts.

Early High School: 26.B.4d:

Demonstrate knowledge and skills that communicate clear and focused ideas based on planning, research and problem solving.

STATE GOAL 27: Understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

B. Understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society and everyday life.

Early High School: 27.B.4b:

Understand how the arts change in response to changes in society.

