

# Nurturing Through Nature: Eco-Art Therapy as Collective Healing

## Violeta Barba

### Natural and Upcycled Materials

1. **Found Object Sculpture** – Gather discarded or naturally found materials such as driftwood, scrap metal, bottle caps, or broken ceramics to assemble into sculptural artworks that tell a story of sustainability and reuse.
2. **Upcycled Fabric Collage Art** – Combine scraps of discarded fabric to create layered textile collages, blending textures, patterns, and colors into unique compositions.
3. **Fabric Weaving with Upcycled Textiles** – Repurpose old clothing or textile scraps into woven tapestries, rugs, or wall hangings, promoting sustainability through fiber art.
4. **Patchwork & Quilted Eco-Art** – Sew together fabric remnants into artistic quilts or patchwork tapestries, transforming waste into warmth and visual storytelling.
5. **Fabric Sculpture & Soft Assemblages** – Shape and stuff upcycled fabrics into three-dimensional sculptures, dolls, or abstract textile installations.
6. **Eco-Printed Textiles** – Press leaves, flowers, or rusty objects onto fabric using heat and moisture to naturally transfer patterns and pigments onto the material.
7. **Upcycled Fabric Bookbinding** – Use old fabric scraps to cover and bind handmade journals, combining sustainability with creative expression.
8. **Upcycled Cans for Aluminum Embossing** – Flatten and emboss aluminum from recycled cans to create intricate relief designs, decorative panels, or jewelry. Use tools like styluses or blunt pencils to press patterns into the metal.
9. **Popotillo Painting** – A traditional Mexican folk-art technique using dyed straw (popotillo) to create vibrant mosaic-like images. Arrange the colorful straw on an adhesive surface to form intricate nature-inspired or geometric designs.
10. **Wool Weaving and Other Fiber Arts** – Repurpose wool, cotton, or plant-based fibers to create woven art pieces, tapestries, or functional textiles. Experiment with natural dyes for an eco-conscious approach.
11. **Nature Leaf Painting** – Use leaves as natural canvases, painting delicate designs onto their surfaces or creating leaf print art by pressing painted leaves onto paper or fabric.
12. **Mandalas with Leaves, Sticks, and Flowers** – Arrange collected natural materials such as leaves, twigs, petals, and stones into intricate mandalas, celebrating impermanence and the cyclical nature of life. These can be ephemeral or preserved in resin or pressed onto paper.
13. **Clay Sculpting** – Use natural, preferably locally sourced clay to sculpt figures, vessels, or abstract forms. Air-dry clay or low-fire clay minimizes energy consumption compared to high-temperature kiln firing.
14. **Clay and Natural Pigment Painting** – Mix powdered clay with natural pigments like charcoal, turmeric, or ochre to create sustainable, earth-based paints for murals or pottery.
15. **Mud and Clay Wall reliefs** – Create textured reliefs using natural clay and mud, blending artistic expression with sustainable architecture and earth-based materials.
16. **Seed-Embedded Clay Sculptures** – Mix wildflower or herb seeds into clay to create biodegradable sculptures that can be planted after they dry, breaking down naturally and sprouting into greenery over time.
17. **Clay Impressions** – Use natural clay to create impressions of leaves, shells, or other organic textures. Air-dry clay can work well for ease and accessibility.

18. **Terracotta Bead and Jewelry Making** – Shape and fire natural clay into handmade beads or pendants, incorporating organic textures and earthy aesthetics into sustainable fashion.
19. **Paper Bead Jewelry** – Upcycle old magazines, newspapers, or scrap paper by rolling them into beads, sealing them with natural adhesives, and stringing them into unique necklaces, bracelets, or earrings.
20. **Softwood Carving** – Balsa wood and basswood are great for beginners as they are soft and easy to carve. These can be carved into shapes or simple sculptures, and painted with natural or eco-friendly pigments.
21. **Seed and Bean Mosaics** – Use dried seeds, beans, or grains to create colorful mosaics on recycled cardboard or wooden bases. This creates interesting textures and colors without the need for synthetic materials.
22. **Pressed Flower Art** – Press flowers and leaves, then arrange them into artworks on paper or glass, using them for layering and collage effects.
23. **Natural Dyeing** – Use natural dyes made from materials like turmeric, beetroot, onion skins, or tea to color fabrics, paper, or yarn. It's a great way to introduce participants to sustainable color-making.
24. **Driftwood Sculptures** – Use driftwood pieces to create simple structures, mobiles, or wall hangings. Driftwood has a unique aesthetic and can be assembled with minimal tools.
25. **Corn Husk or Leaf Dolls** – Traditional in many cultures, corn husks or large leaves can be woven and tied to create simple dolls or figures.
26. **Twig Weaving** – Use twigs as a frame for weaving with natural fibers, grasses, or yarn. This can create small woven pieces or miniature dreamcatchers.
27. **Sand Painting** – Inspired by Indigenous sand art traditions, use colored sands (or naturally sourced sands and earth) to create patterns on a flat surface or mixed into natural adhesives for permanence.
28. **Recycled Paper Pulp Sculptures** – Make paper pulp from recycled paper, which can then be molded into shapes or reliefs. This process is similar to papier-mâché but more sustainable.
29. **Herbal Scent Pouches or Sachets** – Fill small, hand-sewn pouches with herbs, dried flowers, and essential oils. Participants can decorate the pouches with natural dyes or simple stitched designs.
30. **Pinecone or Seed Pod Art** – Use pinecones, seed pods, or acorns to create sculptures or as bases for painting and embellishing.
31. **Mud Painting** – Create textures on paper or fabric using mud and natural pigments. It's a primitive but impactful way to work with natural resources.
32. **Charcoal and Water Wash Techniques** – Experiment with wet charcoal painting by dissolving charcoal in water to create fluid, ink-like washes with organic gradients and atmospheric effects.
33. **Rock Formation Sculptures** – Arrange found rocks or stones into sculptures. These can be ephemeral, reuse them or allow nature to reclaim them, or permanent, serving as mindful reflections of stability, resilience, and interconnectedness with the earth.
34. **Mosaic Art with Broken Glass and Stones** – Repurpose broken glass and natural stones into mosaic wall pieces, tabletops, or garden pathways, transforming waste into durable and colorful artwork.
35. **Pressed Leaf and Handmade Paper Fusion** – Embed pressed leaves into handmade paper to create textured, eco-friendly stationery or book covers with organic imprints.
36. **Leaf Stained Glass Effect** – Arrange pressed leaves between layers of translucent paper to mimic the look of stained glass, allowing light to illuminate their intricate vein patterns.
37. **Collagraph Printing with Recycled Cardboard** – Create textured printing plates using layered recycled cardboard, glue, and natural materials. Ink the surface and press onto paper or fabric for unique eco-friendly prints.

38. **Textured Nature-Inspired Collagraphs** – Cut and layer cardboard to mimic organic textures like tree bark, waves, or leaves, enhancing prints with dimensional effects.

### Art Directives and Metaphors

1. **Found Object Sculpture**

**Directive:** If your current situation were a sculpture made from found objects, what would it look like?

2. **Aluminum Cans Embossing**

**Directive:** The current presidential administration is discarding voices, identities, and struggles, labeling them as unimportant or dangerous. How can we reclaim and reshape what has been overlooked, giving it power and presence?

3. **Fabric Weaving**

**Directive:** The system tries to unravel us—silencing voices, separating families and fragmenting communities. But weaving is an act of resistance. Create a weave that represent resilience, struggle, and identity.

4. **Rock Formation Sculpture**

**Directive:** Oppression weighs on communities like heavy stones, yet resilience is found in how we stack, balance, and carry these burdens together. Arrange rocks to symbolize struggle and strength—some precariously balanced, others forming structures of support. What does your formation say about resistance, unity, or the weight you carry?

5. **Charcoal Painting**

6. **Directive:** Charcoal is created by fire, by destruction—yet it becomes a tool for expression and change. Use charcoal to depict a moment of political resistance, a personal struggle, or a vision of transformation. Let the smudges, bold strokes, and erasures reflect the complexities of fighting oppression and reclaiming your story.

7. **Clay Sculpture**

**Directive:** Systems of power mold us into rigid forms, but clay reminds us we are adaptable, shapeable, and strong. Shape a piece of clay into a representation of your identity, resilience, or resistance. What parts of yourself have been forced into molds, and what parts remain fluid and unbreakable?

8. **Paper Bead Stringing**

**Directive:** Each torn and rolled-up piece of paper carries a past—words, stories, and discarded knowledge reshaped into something new. Make paper beads using scraps of political articles, protest flyers, or personal writings. String them together to symbolize collective voices woven into a movement.

9. **Natural Leaf Painting**

**Directive:** Think of each leaf as a chapter of your story. What would each chapter look like? Depict key memories, stages of growth, or changes, with each leaf contributing to a larger story.

10. **Mandala with Leaves and Sticks**

**Directive:** Create a mandala that reflects the balance you're seeking or the patterns you see in your life. Create patterns symbolizing harmony, inner balance, or recurring cycles.

11. **Upcycled Fabric Story Quilt**

**Directive:** Fabric carries memory—worn clothes, curtains, blankets etc. Stitch together pieces of old fabric that hold significance, creating a textile that tells a story of resistance, migration, or collective healing.

12. **Charcoal Drawing**

**Directive:** Let the charcoal represent something raw or elemental in you. What shape does it take?

## Collective Art Making and Carrousels

### 1. Community Woven Tapestry

**Directive:** Weaving is a collective act—each thread represents a voice, a story, a presence in the fabric of the community. Each participant adds a section of yarn or fabric, choosing colors and textures that reflect their emotions, experiences, or hopes. The final tapestry becomes a visual representation of unity, resilience, and the interconnectedness of the group.

### 2. Story Stone Carousel

**Directive:** We create our narrative with shared voices. Begin with blank stones, adding images, words, or symbols before passing them on. Each participant contributes to the evolving narrative, creating a collective story that reflects the group's voice, connections, and shared experiences.

Each participant draws on a stone, then passes it on. The next person adds to or builds upon the previous contribution. Once all stones have been added to arrange them together as a group "story."

### 3. Nature Leave Impression Carrousel

**Directive:** Each leaf carries its own shape, texture, and history—just like each person in a community. Press leaves into a shared clay slab, layering impressions to create a collective imprint of nature's diversity. As the clay hardens, it preserves a tangible memory of the group's presence, symbolizing individuality within unity.

### 4. Collective Paper-Making

**Directive:** Healing and transformation come from what we let go of and what we build together. Each participant brings paper scraps or natural materials that hold personal meaning or qualities they bring to the group. These elements are blended into a communal pulp, symbolizing the merging of individual stories into something new. As each person contributes, they release the old and reshape it into a shared creation, reinforcing resilience, renewal, and interconnectedness. The final handmade paper becomes a tangible representation of collective strength and transformation.

### 5. Reclaimed Narratives: Found Object & Nature Sculpture

**Directive:** What has been discarded can be reclaimed—objects, stories, identities, communities. Just as nature renews itself, we too can transform what was overlooked into something meaningful. Each participant selects a found object that resonates with them—something forgotten, broken, or discarded. As a group, assemble these materials into a collective sculpture, weaving together remnants of the human-made and the natural world. This final piece embodies resilience, environmental stewardship, and the power of collective healing—reminding us that transformation is possible through creativity, and connection.

## Art Supply Exchange List by AnimaliaProject.org

### The Wasteshed

is a storefront in Chicago that sells reclaimed art supplies at low prices. They accept donations, too. Their inventory includes fabric, notions, yarn, paint, stamps, pens, pencils, markers, canvases and much more. There's a teacher corner with free supplies for teachers. Check out their workshops on mending clothes, making crafts and more. They accept donations, too. Check out their workshops on mending clothes, making crafts and more.

<http://www.thewasteshed.com/>

### Zero Landfill Chicago

provides surplus & outdated architectural and interior design samples for artists and arts educators at semi-annual exchanges in Chicago. Look for interesting fabric, wallpaper, tile, glass, metal, carpet, laminates and more. They also have binders, books, matboard and foamcore. More info: [www.zlfchicago.net](http://www.zlfchicago.net)

### Creative Chicago Reuse Exchange (CCRx)

accepts art supplies, office supplies and other materials, then donates them to Chicago teachers. In addition to office and art supplies, they share furniture, hardware, musical instruments and equipment. Check out their workshops, too.

<https://www.creativechirx.org/>

### Creative Pitch

provides free art supplies to art educators, art therapists and other professionals in need. They offer graphic design supplies including crayons, pens, paper, paint, brushes, canvas, glue, scissors, rulers, clay and more. Donations are accepted. To receive supplies, apply on their website.

[www.creativepitch.org](http://www.creativepitch.org)

### Upcycling Colors

collects used art, craft and school supplies and games (and suitcases!) that they clean, sort and distribute to schools and youth groups around the world. They have several drop off locations in Chicago. <https://upcyclingcolors.org/>

### Joe's Garage

is an occasional, pop-up art supply exchange for artists, craft-makers, teachers and anyone creating art. <http://animaliaProject.org/art-exchanges/>

### SCARCE

offers a wide range of supplies for schools, including art supplies, paper, furniture and books in Glen Ellyn, IL. Find out about making donations and getting materials for your school:

<http://www.scarcecoed.org/rescue-programs/>

Brushwood Art Supply Exchange / BASE

offers inexpensive art supplies, with discounts for educators and community partners, along with a tool library and open studio. They also accept donations. (Located in Riverwoods, IL in the Ryerson Woods Forest Preserve.

<https://www.brushwoodcenter.org/About/BASE.html>