

# Waste to Wealth: Art Production Formula in a Lockdown Situation

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**Abstract.** In life, there are negative occurrences capable of throwing humanity into lockdown conditions, like the recent global pandemic - Covid-19, which caused lockdowns to be declared at different places across the globe. This made for the restriction of movement, resulting in the unavailability of raw materials, which in turn halted the production of goods which are not food or medicine. Art was not left out, as its production was equally held in abeyance. This paper projects a formula for continuity in art production in such a situation. Its objectives are to expatiate the basic requirements for art production and propose a viable formula for it in a lockdown situation. The paper employed the internet, analog, and digital libraries to review related literature and works and a descriptive research approach. Findings reveal that the basic requirements for art production are artistic skill, artistic idea; art material(s); and tools/equipment where necessary. Also, the artist's main problem of unavailability of conventional materials during lockdown can be overcome by employing waste, freely available everywhere, for art production. The paper concludes that employing waste as material for art creation can keep the artist afloat in art production during the lockdown. It is recommended that artists not only employ waste for art creation in a lockdown condition but always for innovation and creativity in art praxis.

**Keywords:** *Art Material, Art Production, Covid-19, Lockdown, Waste*

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## 1 Introduction

Art generally is made up of processes and products. Art as a process refers to the process of art creation, while art as a product is the product of the process, which is the finished work. There cannot be art as a product without art as a process (Ukim, 2021). Beyond idea and the needed skill to produce art, the artist requires material to represent his idea in a visual form. Without material, there is no way his idea can become a visual product. It is material that the artist would use to give 'life' to his idea for it to become art as a product. Therefore, the material is a basic aspect of art creation, as collaborated by Lee (n.d.), who states that "one of the most fundamental and practical aspects of art is the materials used by the artist to express themselves. The materials that the artists use when they create a work of art influences (sic) both the form and content of the piece".

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There are some disastrous occurrences in life; both natural and man-made, that easily threaten the survival of humanity and, in some cases, cause them to be restricted to a particular location for some period of time; occurrences like a major earthquake, war, tsunami, pandemic, and the like. Some are short-timed, while others last long, like the recent global pandemic - Covid-19, which has lasted for over two years, wreaking havoc on humanity, leading to so many deaths and economic setbacks. At some point, a declaration of lockdown was the order of the day. Events were postponed and movements restricted, with only food and medicine transported in rear cases.

In situations like this, production processes experience setbacks because raw materials become scarce and difficult to come by. Conventional art materials are no exemption, thereby greatly slowing down art production, if not completely halting it. The shortage of art materials in such a situation, thus, becomes a problem. Therefore, a gap is created that needs to be filled. To proffer a solution to the problem, this paper projects a formula for continuity in art production to keep the process alive. Its objectives are to expatiate the basic requisites for art production and to propose a viable art production formula in a lockdown situation. The paper benefited from a review of related literature from the internet, analog and digital libraries, and also a descriptive research approach.

The theoretical foundation this paper is built upon is creativity, as articulated by Kerr (2021), who posits that creativity is the ability to produce something new, a new device, a new artistic creation or a new solution to a problem. This includes reordering, recycling, and combining existing works, objects, and ideas in different ways for new purposes. With creativity, useless discarded objects and items regarded as waste, junk, garbage, trash, or refuse can be exploited to create a new reality. This is very beneficial, especially during lockdowns, where conventional materials are scarce.

## **2 Basic Requisites for Art Creation**

For anything to be successfully created, factors relevant to such creation must be put in place. Art creation, on its part, has some basic factors that must be considered for any piece of art to be created. To know these basic factors of art production, it is pertinent to first look at what art is. Art, in this context, visual art, is a visual object deliberately produced through an expression of artistic skill (Britannica Encyclopedia, 2020). Danden (2016, p. 303), on his part, avouches that “art is a creative way of producing visual forms (in the relief or the round) for aesthetic or functional purposes.” These affirm that art can either refer to a process or a product. The former definition is taken from the angle of art as a product which refers to the finished work of art, while the latter authority views it from the perspective of art as a process which is the art-creating process. The artist is a unique creator whose creation is equally unique. He does not just create but does that within the confines of creativity and originality. His creation, meant to be original,

must be different, unique, and born out of creativity. This calls for the engagement of the mind creatively. As he engages his mind, the art process begins. While some factors of art production are physical in nature, some are not. Let us take a look at them one after the other.

**Artistic Skill:** To arrive at art as a product, there must be art as a process. That process involves artistic skill. Although skills are learned, by their very nature, artistry, however, is inborn. Through learning, a skill that is an art-making tool can be improved upon (Fassbender, 2013; Brittney, 2021). Artistic skill is a primary requirement for art creation. For any creation to be art, there must have been an aesthetic intention of it being art in its creator's mind - an intention influenced by the existence of artistic skill. This explains why it is not every object produced that is art, whether or not it possesses aesthetic and/or utilitarian value, in line with Zangwill (2007)'s position that although artworks are artifacts, however, exclude artifacts although they are appealing to the sense of sight and aesthetically appreciated, are not artworks - artifacts like industrial machines, surgical instruments, etc., because there was no aesthetic intention of these objects being art when they were created.

Going by this explanation, it would not be out of place to submit that any aesthetically appealing object, whose creator never had the aesthetic intention in mind when creating it, is devoid of artistic skill. Therefore, it is likely to be a mass-produced object or one created by chance; as such, it is not considered art. After all, good art can never be created by chance, by accident, or unintentionally. Art creation is intentionally done and not accidental; even works of art that have the appearance of accidental creation, like action paintings, are not created by accident else; they would not be considered art.

**Artistic Idea:** David Hume saw 'idea' as the faint images of all our sensations, passions, and emotions (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017). Given this assertion, the idea can be said to be a common possession of every sane human being, although it varies in quality from person to person. It is the mental picture, fact, and product of mental exercise based on environmental inputs. When it comes to an idea for art production, it is not just an ordinary idea that is required but one that is creative and artistic, given that the success of a good work of art begins with how creative and artistic the idea generated by the artist is. The idea is a fundamental aspect of art creation; that is why for Plato, "ideas" are the ultimate reality, that which exists in the "world of ideas." In his mimetic theory of art, Plato posits that an idea (the artist's mental picture of what to produce) is reality. The artist imitates (represents) the idea in a physical form to be appreciated visually (Barad, 2014). This, therefore, implies that before an artistic creation is brought into existence, it must have already existed in the artist's mind as an idea; without an artistic idea, no art creation process can be carried out.

**Material:** One basic fact about visual art is that it is visible. It is achieved through the manipulation of art materials using any of the numerous techniques of art creation. These materials form the medium or media that the art is produced in. Right from prehistoric times, art has been material oriented as objects like stone, shells, and bones were employed as artistic media (Willet, 1997, as cited in Seyi-Gbangbayau and Ajayi, 2019). Art materials could easily be enumerated as there were limited materials used in art creation. Today, the case is different. Orvick et al. (2006) avouch that in the past 100 years, the range of art media has expanded from the conventional materials of wood, stone, and bronze to steel, plastic, fabric, glass, laser beam, fluorescent and incandescent lighting, and so on.

Art praxis has indeed assumed a greater dimension with limitless materials. As the artist continuously explores his environment, he gets opened to new ideas and techniques which pave the way for the employment of even unconventional materials for art creation. According to Ukim (2019), there is hardly any physical thing that cannot be employed as material for art production. This agrees with Ken (2017)'s observation that in recent times, fugacious materials and other non-traditional materials have equally emerged as media of art creation. The emergence of petrochemicals and their by-products, including things that had existed with man but were not seen as art materials like smoke, meat, and ice, have also joined the league of art materials. This has been seen in the production of works like "Touching North" (1989) - an ice sculpture; "The Face of War" (2015) - a painting produced with bullet casings; and "Woman of Smoke" - an art created from smoke.



**Figure 1.** Touching North by Andy Goldsworthy  
(Source: [www.publicdelivery.org](http://www.publicdelivery.org))



**Figure 2.** The Face of War by Dariya Marchenko  
(Source: [www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com))



**Figure 3.** Woman of Smoke by Michal Jesensky  
(Source: [www.artpal.com](http://www.artpal.com))

**Tools/Equipment:** To produce art, the artist has to manipulate the material(s) he chose for his art creation. More often than not, he uses tools/equipment to get that done. Hardly is any artwork produced without the use of the tool(s) and/or equipment, whether crude or sophisticated. Even the Paleolithic man made use of tools for his art creations, as noted by Arbor (2012), that in creating his cave painting the Paleolithic man made use of hand-made brush from a twig, and blowpipes from bird bones, to apply and spray paint respectively onto the cave wall. Tool/equipment forms an indispensable factor of art production as it positively impacts art production. It also opens doors for innovations and the evolution of techniques in art production. Ukim (2019) expounds that given the pace of technological advancement in the world today, new

sophisticated tools and equipment are produced every other day. This creates room for techniques of art to be evolved, like the case of El Anatsui, who evolved the technique of creating burnt effects and hewn marks on the wooden panel using the angle grinder, chainsaw, and oxyacetylene welding equipment. Without the equipment, he would not have been able to come up with such an outstanding technique of wood sculpture.

Some tools/equipment used for art production is specifically designed for art production, like modeling spatula, while others are tools/equipment designed for general tasks like an angle grinder, welding machine, etc. Like materials for art production, any tool/equipment can be used by the artist to create art as far as it is suitable and meets the artist's expectations.

### **3 Waste as Material for Art Production in a Lockdown Situation**

Lockdown is a situation where an emergency protocol is implemented by the authorities, restricting people to a particular location forcefully due to specific risks that their free movements and/or interaction can cause themselves or others (Business Insider, 2020), like when most countries of the world, in response to Covid-19 pandemic, implemented lockdowns; restricting their population's movements, work, education, gathering and general activities in an attempt to flatten the curve of Covid-19 cases. Lockdown usually would leave people in a state of movement restriction, except for those on essential duties like health workers, journalists, and the like. The artist is not exempted, given that society has erroneously failed to classify artists as essential service providers regardless of the fact that art can serve a therapeutic function, as noted by the American Art Therapy Association cited in Mitchell (2013) that art therapy can be an effective mental health treatment for people who have experienced depression, trauma, social difficulties, and medical ailments. The failure to classify artists as essential service providers leave the artist in a confined condition during lockdown like any other non-essential service provider. However, the artist, left in this state, is not directly affected in terms of art production, but rather indirectly through running short of conventional materials to work with because of restriction of movement.

Much as the lockdown conditions the artist is left in can only cause him the problem of running short of conventional art materials over time and not blocking his ability to generate artistic ideas, he must devise ways and means of staying afloat by exploring other viable materials available within his immediate environment. Here waste comes to mind as it is freely available virtually everywhere and has the capacity to create ample resources for artists who are interested in recreating 'life' in discarded items. Waste, otherwise known as trash, refuse, or junk, refers to useless products in homes, offices, workshops, factories, and the environment (Seyi-Gbangbayau and Ajayi, 2019). Ndon (2013), citing Webster's New World Dictionary, affirms that trash is made up of what is discarded and thrown away. For something to be wasted, it must be useless and discarded. However, the issue of waste somehow fluctuated as something useless to a

particular person and discarded can possibly be useful to another person. This explains why there are scavengers flooding refuse dumps in our local environments in search of products that are valuable to them, within what another person considers as waste. However, there would still be much the scavengers consider not useful to them.

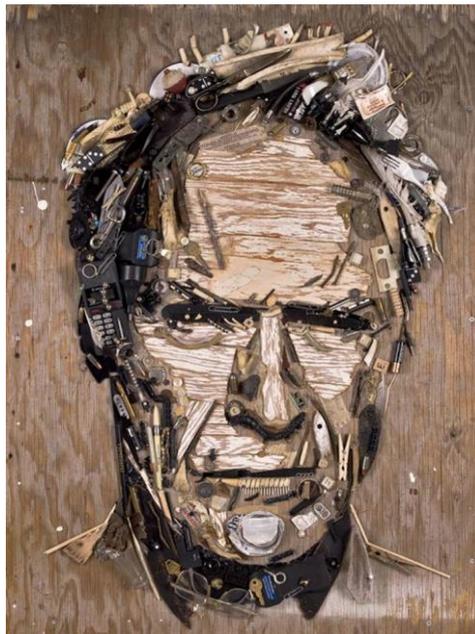
Waste is virtually everywhere and is inevitable in our world, especially in recent times. It is mostly generated from things we do and consume daily, especially consumer goods, which are mainly engineered by the ever-increasing global population. We must admit that we are in a waste age. As we keep consuming and using things produced both naturally and artificially, waste must surely abound. As the world goes technological and industrial in order to meet up with increased demand for goods and services, diverse products are manufactured on a daily basis. Although these products make life easier and the environment more conducive, they tend to generate waste from packaging and discarded items as a result of outliving their usefulness over time (Kayode, 2006). This waste automatically keeps increasing by the day as a result of an increment in people's income level and urbanization rate (Seyi-Gbangbayau and Ajayi, 2019).

It has been mentioned in this paper that there is no limit to what constitutes art materials. Anything visible can be employed as an art medium, including what is commonly considered waste. The question arises: is what is considered waste really useless in the actual sense? Alternatively, is it a case of "one man's trash is another man's treasure?" The latter should be a truism from the perspective of the artist, given the popular saying in the art that "nothing is a waste product until the artist throws it away." This implies that there is nothing that is a waste product to an artist because he has the capacity to employ any visible thing for art creation. The artist achieves this through recycling. Recycling is the process of transforming waste into useful objects; the recovering and reprocessing of waste products from what they were originally into valuable products (Emgin, 2012). For the artist, he does not just recycle waste into valuable objects but valuable objects with aesthetics and artistic messages in them. As such, he bears in mind aesthetic value while engaging in the recycling process.

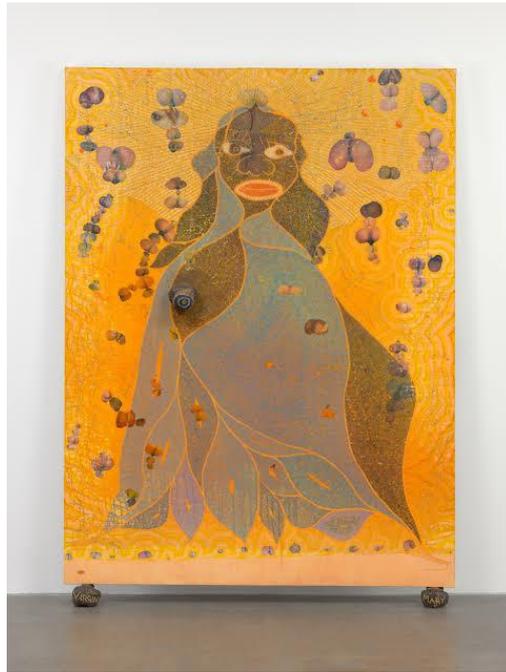
Artists have explored waste, both past, and present, with useful results. Numerous successful art forms have been produced from waste recycling. Pablo Picasso, for instance, created the sculpture "Bull's Head" using old bicycle parts in 1942 (Fig. 4), Jason Mecier, with the use of trash, produced "Portrait of Clint Eastwood" in 2012 (Fig. 5), Chris Ofili incorporated elephant dung in his painting "The Holy Virgin Mary" in 1996 (Fig. 6). Rosemary Akwasi, with the use of automobile junks, came up with "Survival of the Fittest" in 2019 (Fig. 7). In the same vein, Odudu Ekanem in 2021 created "Isolated Being" (Fig. 8) using automobile scraps as the medium. It is imperative to stress here that a work of art produced with waste does not in any way appear inferior to those produced with conventional materials, as evident in the above-mentioned works of art.



**Figure 4.** Bull's Head by Pablo Picasso  
(Source: [www.publicdelivery.org](http://www.publicdelivery.org))



**Figure 5.** Portrait of Clint Eastwood by Jason Mecier  
(Source: [www.ndigallery.com](http://www.ndigallery.com))



**Figure 6.** The Virgin Mary by Chris Ofili  
(Source: [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org))



**Figure 7.** Survival of the Fittest by Rosemary Akwasi  
(Source: Artist Collection)



**Figure 8.** Isolated Being by Odudu Ekanem  
(Source: Artist Collection)

The exploration of waste as art material has taken a greater dimension nowadays. Beyond artists just producing individual works from waste, various waste recycling art exhibitions and festivals have taken place around the globe in recent times, like Exhibition “O” Zero Point by Artist Deniz Sagdic at Istanbul Airport, which featured works created from Airport trash in 2022 (Miles, 2022). Festus Adeyemi put up a solo art exhibition at Martin Hall gallery, Loughborough University, the United Kingdom, in September 2021, featuring works produced from waste (Amadi, 2021). Since 2017, Team Krasnoyarsk has held a Recycled Arts Festival in Siberia. The festival showcases how art can be produced from “up-cycled” materials. Its maiden edition made use of waste donated by the locals to the over 2,500 artists who participated in that edition of the Recycle Art Festival (Ulanova et al., 2017). In April 2022, ArtMiabo hosted an International Art festival in Lagos, Nigeria, featuring only artworks produced with recycled waste products. It had works of the likes of Bruce Onabrakpeya and Adeola Balogun alongside 22 other prominent artists from Africa and Europe, with gallery representation from France and South Africa. The uniqueness of the festival lay in the fact that only artworks produced with recycled materials were featured, hence the organizer’s remarks, “Recycling, Repurposing, Up-cycling, call it what you want, is our new reality and it sends out a message that we can remake our environment with the disposable and renew our minds on how art plays a major role in that space” (Enyadike, 2022). All these points to the fact that waste, as an art medium, has been effectively explored by artists with useful results, especially in contemporary times.

Man, by taste, is given to the desire for something new and, by extension, something unique. This explains why many things in vogue would fade away with time. Akinbogun (2000), cited in

Kayode (2006:68), in agreement, reiterates that “man is never satisfied with any specific way of doing things, he is never glued to a style, he wants a new thing.” Recycling, therefore, is a necessity, taking something out of the previous context and manipulating it into something new, as always desired by man. Waste, having to pass through the recycling process, makes its scope as an art medium wider than conventional art materials; for instance, a piece of discarded plastic can be recycled through a trimming process, a cut-and-paste approach, a grinding process, or even a heat melting technique. The list is endless. In view of the limitless nature of waste as an art medium, the scope of art media, styles, and techniques is broadened. As an unconventional art medium, waste is significant in that it deletes the boundaries of conventional materials, presenting the materials as they are. If there is a limitation in media employed for art creation, the artists' creative ideas would be blocked or limited (Lee, n.d.).

In the process of creating art using conventional art material(s), the artist can make his design or sketch ahead of the acquisition of material(s). However, the case is different when the artist employs waste for his art creation, given that waste is made up of numerous useless and discarded products or items. The artist has to scavenge for materials first before making his sketch. If the reverse is the case, he would have to make adjustments in the sketch later because the artist's sketch or design must be tailored to suit his medium; even the technique to employ must equally agree with the materials he selects, as expounded by Infinite Dictionary (2017) that the medium employed by the artist to create an artwork influences both form and content of the work. Materials inject something special into the art-creating process and product and equally influence how the artist creates his work. Thus, each attempt by the artist to create a work of art with waste would spark up ideas in the artist's mind, thereby opening the door for studio experimentation, which can result in the possibility of creating innovative works with waste.

Although lockdown measures have been a “panacea” for the control of disastrous conditions like the pandemic, it also doubles up as a violent “poison” for economies (Zhang et al., 2021). For instance, the United Kingdom's economy suffered a loss of about 251 billion pounds in a year of the Covid-19 lockdown (Elliot, 2021) because wherever a lockdown is effected, production suffers greatly, thereby affecting the economy negatively. During such a period, acquiring raw materials for production at a cheaper rate becomes the desire of every producer. For the artist, this is the most suitable time to explore materials that are cheaper for him for his production, provided such would not affect the quality of his products. Waste as a material, therefore, becomes the delight and viable option for the artist as it is freely available virtually everywhere. The artist, however, must ensure that he exhibits a high sense of creativity while creating his works such that they do not appear inferior when compared with those produced with conventional materials.

#### 4 Conclusion

Lockdown, when implemented, is bound to cause a scarcity of materials to produce non-essential goods. The artist, whose production depends largely on the availability of materials, is likely to be hindered by the unavailability of regular conventional materials caused by the restriction of movement. Given that in contemporary art praxis, the range of art media has expanded to include every visible thing on earth. The artist can possibly employ any physical thing as material for his art creation. Therefore, the artist must make use of what material is readily and possibly freely available within his immediate environment; that is waste. Employing waste as a material for art creation in a lockdown situation would keep the artist afloat in art production.

#### 5 Recommendations

Waste, as a viable material for art creation in a lockdown situation, does not undermine the fact that it can be and should be employed by artists for art production at all times. Thus, it is recommended that waste should be explored at all times as it opens the door for greater creativity and innovation in art praxis.

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