



3D Characters and Assemblage

Workshop



2D > 3D

The practice of illustration can be far more expansive than its' suggested two-dimensional parameters. Three-dimensional characterisation and assemblage practices can be a creative springboard that expands narrative, texture, and emotion for the illustrator.

Traditionally, illustration has always been considered two-dimensional: ink, paint, print. But the boundary between illustration, sculpture, and design has blurred. Contemporary illustrators increasingly use constructed forms, whether physical (cardboard, clay, textiles) or digital (3D modelling, rendering) to breathe life into their characters.

What is 3D characterisation?

3D characterisation means developing a character's form, volume, and material presence in three-dimensional space. It's not only about sculpting or modelling, it's about thinking *dimensionally*: how weight, texture, and structure communicate personality.

A character's form can suggest mood and purpose and the chosen materials can reflect their identity in symbolic ways. Consider characters made from soft felt versus those made from sharp metal. How does their physicality change how we read them?

Assemblage

Assemblage comes from early 20th century artists like Pablo Picasso, Joseph Cornell and Rosalie Gascoine who combined found objects into new compositions.

In illustration, assemblage means constructing an image or character from multiple materials, textures, and fragments. It's both a visual and a conceptual process: each component carries its own story.

Still Life, 1914, Pablo Picasso





Still Life, 1914, Pablo Picasso

Picasso's relief constructions, which he began making in 1912–13, extended traditional still life painting into three-dimensional space. This composition is closely related to his paintings of the period: it appears to depict a tabletop or small sideboard, with a knife, a beer glass, two slices of sausage and a slice of cheese or pâté. This work, however, emphasises that the painting is an object in itself. The incorporation of found objects – in this case, the real upholstery fringe to represent a table - helped to establish a new freedom in the artist's choice of materials.

([tate.org](https://www.tate.org))

Joseph Cornell

Joseph Cornell (1903 - 1972) was an American visual artist and filmmaker, one of the pioneers and most celebrated exponents of assemblage. Influenced by the Surrealists, he was also an avant-garde experimental filmmaker. He was largely self-taught in his artistic efforts, and improvised his own original style incorporating cast-off and discarded artifacts.

([tate.org](https://www.tate.org))

[illegible]

A close-up photograph of a book's binding. A vertical wooden strip, possibly part of the spine or a cover reinforcement, runs down the center. It has a natural wood grain and a small metal clasp or rivet. To the right, a leather cover is visible, featuring a decorative floral or foliate pattern in gold and red. Above the leather, two small, round, light-colored objects, possibly buttons or decorative elements, are visible. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

A collection of various objects, possibly masks or sculptures, resting on a piece of aged, yellowed paper with printed text. The objects include a white bird-like sculpture with long neck and tail, a grey mask with two red buttons, a silver mask, a blue triangular object, a dark brown mask, and a colorful mask with a face. The background paper has faint, illegible printed text.

[illegible]



Rosalie Gascoine

Rosalie Gascoigne (1917 – 1999) is renowned for her sculptural assemblages of great clarity, simplicity and poetic power. Using natural or manufactured objects, sourced from collecting forays, that evoke the lyrical beauty of New South Wales. Her choice of materials, both manufactured or natural, always carried the imprint of their time in the land. She used wood, corrugated iron, wire, feathers, enamelware and old soft-drink crates.

Material emphasis was on form and line rather than colour developed using the principles of valuing immediate response, the experience of materials, process and experimenting with variations. Discarded materials, such as farm machinery parts, were used as suitable vessels for her arrangements. (artgallery.nsw.gov.au)



Meaning can be found in the materials

Narrative through material:

What a character is made from can tell us who they are.

Juxtaposition and play:

Combining unexpected elements invites audience curiosity.

Recycling and sustainability:

Reusing materials mirrors responsible reuse and cultural remixing.

Using recycled materials for assemblage characters

Using recycled materials for assemblage characters offers significant environmental, artistic, and educational benefits. It transforms discarded objects into meaningful artistic expressions, challenging traditional notions of art and illustration and also promotes a more sustainable lifestyle.

The outcomes can serve as a powerful visual tools for social commentary, highlighting issues of consumerism, waste, and environmental degradation, and can encourage all audiences to reconsider their own consumption habits.

The artistic and creative benefits

Unique Aesthetics and

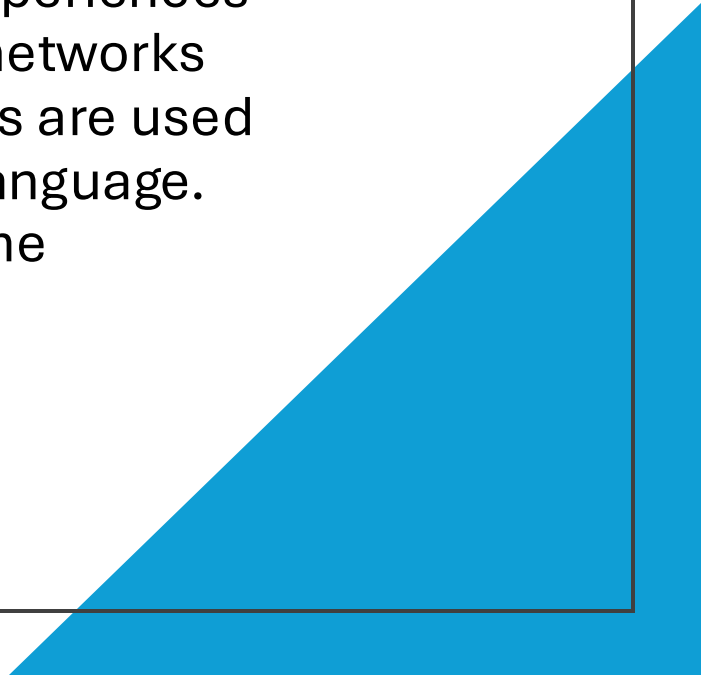
Textures Recycled materials come with their own histories, imperfections, and unique textures (rust, wear and tear, faded paint, etc.) that traditional new materials cannot truthfully replicate. This provides a rich and authentic aesthetic for assemblage characters.

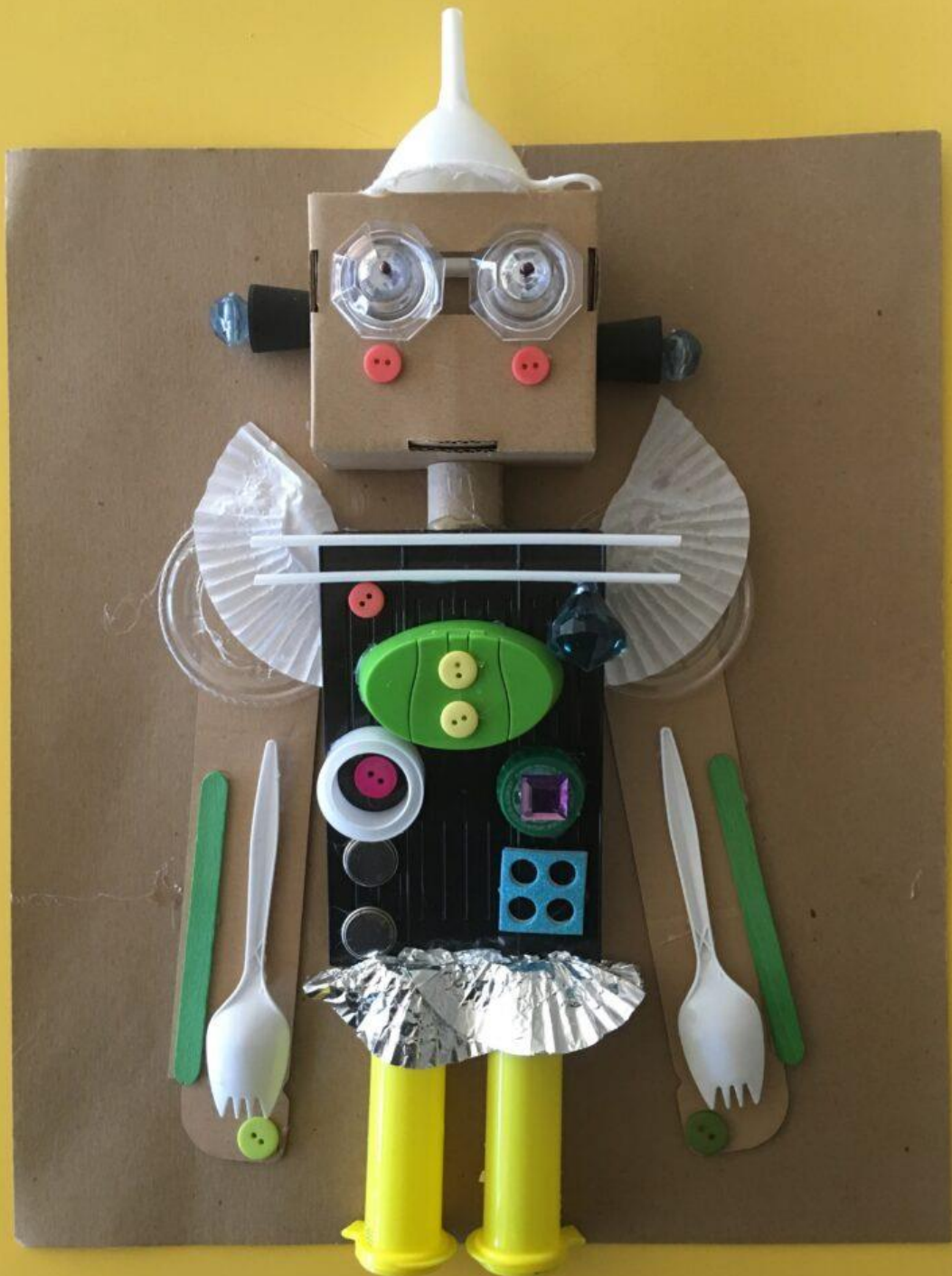
Meaning and Narrative

Found objects often carry a sense of history or personal memory, allowing illustrators to weave complex stories and cultural commentary into their characters. This adds layers of meaning to the artwork and fosters an emotional connection with the viewer.

The role of material in character identity

Materials speak before words do. We can refer to this as the embodied metaphor. This is the theory that our understanding of abstract concepts is rooted in our physical experiences and that the same neural networks involved in physical actions are used to process metaphorical language. The following provides some examples.



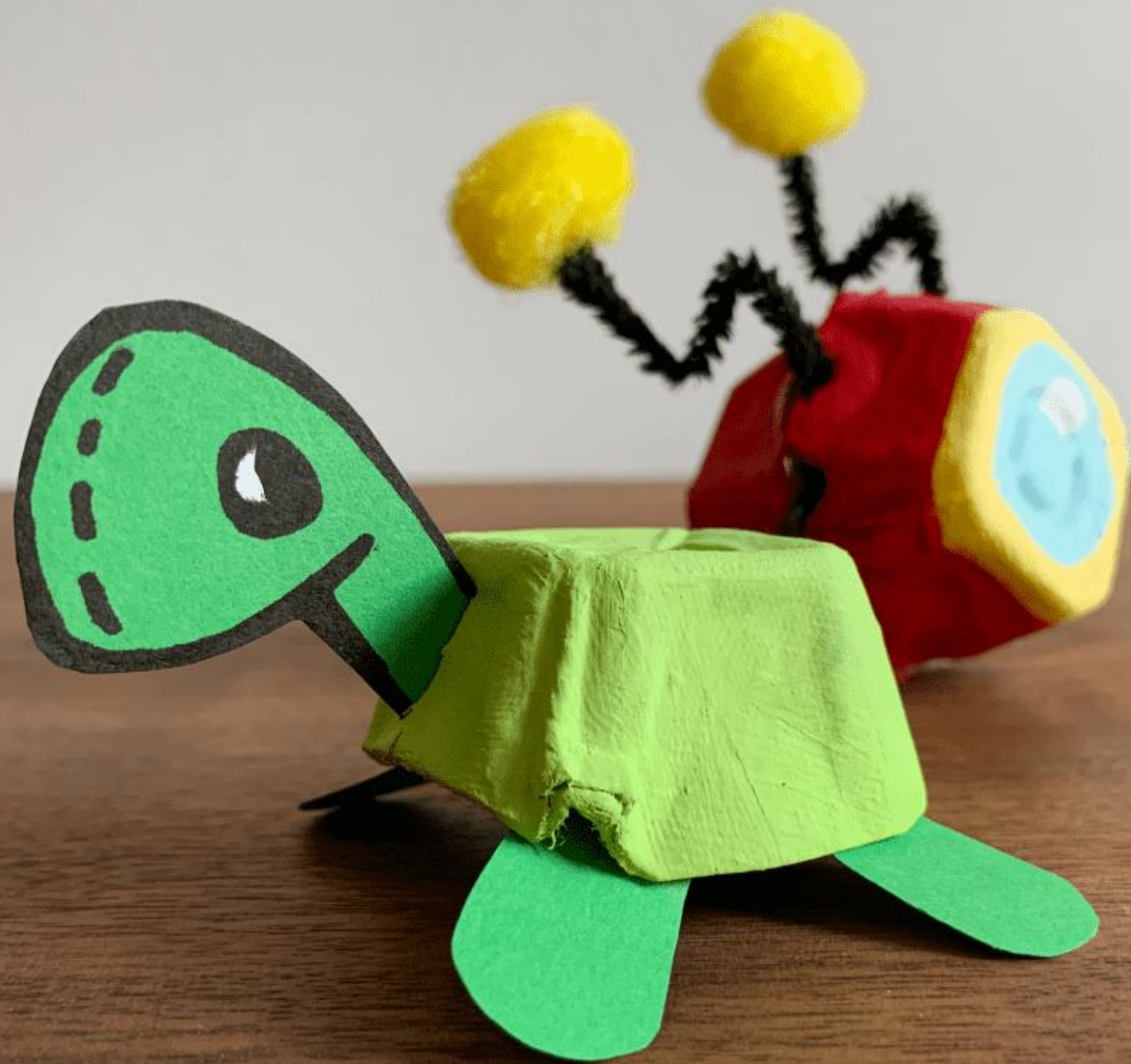




Recycled Art Assemblage
by redhardwick











D23.com

Forky as proof of concept

From the moment of his creation, Forky experiences an existential crisis as he tries to explain to Woody in *Toy Story 4*:

“I am not a toy! I was made for soup, salad ... and then the trash!”

Because unlike Bonnie’s other toys - Buzz Lightyear, Jessie, Rex and Hamm - Forky wasn’t manufactured. Bonnie crafted him during kindergarten orientation, and he instantly became her favourite toy - a fact not lost on Woody!

(From the *Official Disney Fan Club*)

Material	Possible Character Trait	Example
Wire & Metal	Mechanical, cold, precise	Robots, urban dwellers
Fabric & Felt	Soft, nurturing, whimsical	Children's book creatures
Paper Collage	Fragile, layered, expressive	Conceptual portraits
Clay	Earthy, tactile, human-like	Stop-motion characters
Digital Polygons	Smooth, infinite, abstract	Game/VR avatars

3D characterisation as a visual language

3D characterisation brings depth, emotion and physical presence to illustrated worlds

Assemblage allows experimentation with material, meaning and metaphor

Physical and digital 3D illustration share a conceptual link: both deal with embodied storytelling (the body as a medium to express emotion)

Hybrid approaches are redefining illustration's boundaries

3D assemblage can make illustrated characters more relatable or uncanny

All materials carry narrative meaning

Workshop
task:

Make your
own 3D
character with
assemblage
of recycled
materials

Create a 3D character using recycled materials.
Think about form, texture and symbolism.
Give your character a name and a backstory.

Think about:

- How does material choices affect emotional tone?
- What new narratives arise through its physical construction?
- Creating the character is often just the first step.
How would you present the character if you developed it further?
As a digital character, an digital animation, stop motion, as a series of photographs, as a series of drawings?

Next week: 13.10.25

Laser Cutting Workshop Groups

10:00 - 11:30

KATIE

MIA

JACK DUFFY

FFION

ASH

NELL

11:30 - 13:00

JACK JENKINS

DEMI

EDEN

PENNY

ROBIN

EVIE

14:00 - 15:30

GEORGIA

SHELBY

ANWEN

TELERI

YAHAN

J

ARI

You only need to attend your workshop session time. I will collect you from AD402.

Use the rest of your lecture time to research assemblage and significant artists creatives connected to this practice