

Recontextualization

What Is Recontextualization?

Artists are always exploring new ways to send messages. One strategy used by contemporary artists—artists working today—involves surprising the viewer. In the strategy referred to as **recontextualization**, the artist presents an object or idea in a new or surprising context.

A context is a kind of environment. Create a picture in your mind of a giraffe. Did you place the giraffe in a wild place—a landscape with a few bushes? Or did you see it in a zoo? We would expect to see a giraffe in either of these contexts. Now picture the giraffe in a school gymnasium. Or a restaurant. The giraffe is taken from one context and placed in a new or surprising context. This is what an artist does when using the strategy of recontextualization. Artists usually recontextualize when they want viewers to be surprised. More importantly, they want viewers to think about something in a new way.



1-31 In traditional depictions, Lady Justice is blindfolded and holds a balance and a sword.

1-32 This Lady Justice holds the same symbols, however, Yinka Shonibare replaced her head with a globe, dressed her in African textiles, and “tattooed” her arms with Javanese patterns. How has the artist used recontextualization?

Yinka Shonibare CBE, *Justice for All*, 2019.

Fiberglass sculpture, hand-painted with Dutch wax batik pattern, brass, hand-painted globe, and steel baseplate, overall: 115" x 81 1/8" x 27 1/2" (292 x 206 x 70 cm). Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo: Stephen White & Co. © Yinka Shonibare CBE. All Rights Reserved, DACS/ARS, NY 2022.

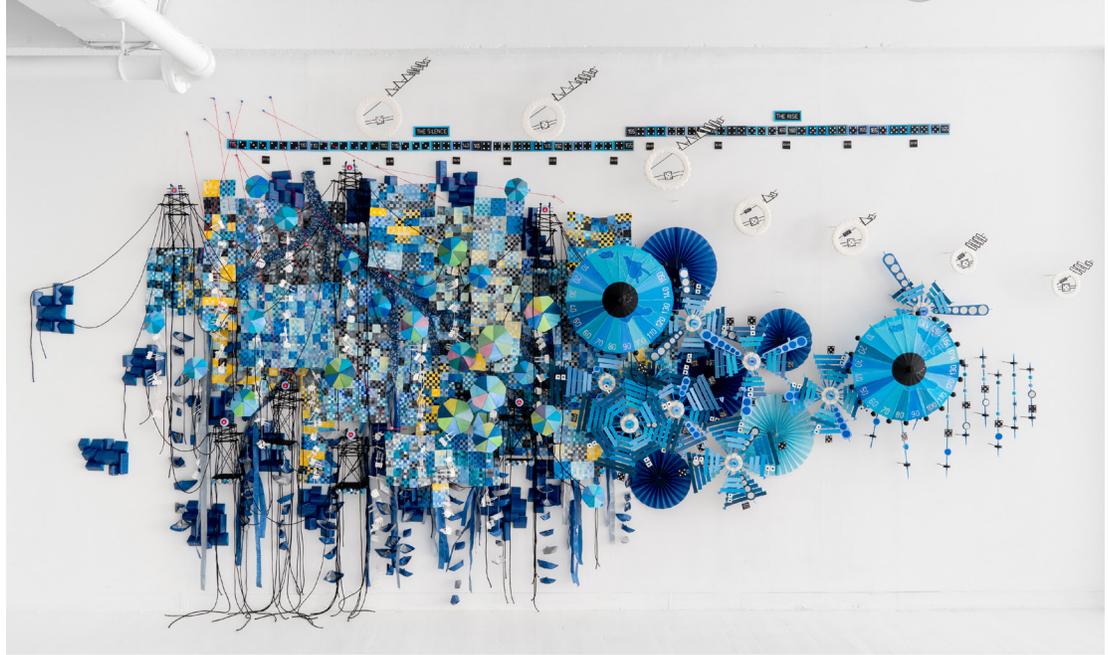
Yinka Shonibare and Recontextualization

Contemporary artist Yinka Shonibare is known for using the strategy of recontextualization. His artwork *Justice for All* (Fig. 1-32) features a copy of the sculpture, *Justice*, that stands on top of the Central Criminal Court in London, where the artist lives. Lady Justice is a familiar symbol of fair and equal treatment for all. Shonibare recontextualizes the British statue by placing its copy in Singapore’s Old Parliament House, a reminder that Singapore was once a British colony. Much of the artist’s work refers to colonial history—a time when Britain and other powerful countries went into territories around the globe and called them their own.



STEAM: Science and Technology

Nathalie Miebach: Weaving the Weather



1-62 *The Burden of Every Drop* combines weather data with snippets of information from news reports about Hurricane Maria.

Nathalie Miebach, *The Burden of Every Drop*, 2018.

Wood, paper, rope, data, 17' x 10' x 2' (5.2 x 3 x 0.6 m). Courtesy of the artist.

Nathalie Miebach's artworks help people better understand and visualize the impact of weather on our environment. The artist creates mixed-media sculptures using data visualization—a way of interpreting scientific information into an image or three-dimensional form. She collects weather-related data, like temperatures, wind speeds, and moon phases, from hurricanes and floods to weave colorful artworks out of rope, paper, and found objects. She says about her process, "I've always been a tactile learner and have had to make something in order to understand it; my hands are my main investigator of the world."



Nathalie Miebach

Her weaving *The Burden of Every Drop* focuses on Hurricane Maria, which struck Puerto Rico in 2017, causing widespread damage to homes and businesses and leaving 3,000 people dead.

The artwork (**Figs. 1-62** and **1-63**) visualizes the storm and its impact on the people of the island, who lived without electricity for months. Miebach is interested in floods and extreme weather because they are becoming more common and can uproot homes and disrupt lives.

When beginning an artwork, Miebach first collects data using simple tools like thermometers and rain gauges. She then goes online to find satellite images and data from offshore buoys and weather stations. The horizontal and vertical elements of her weaving represent different points of data on a grid. She also assigns data to colored beads, sticks, and strings and posts a legend (a visual representation of the symbols she used) next to each artwork to tell the viewer what each element signifies. Her weavings bend and change as the data points interact, making them three-dimensional rather than the traditional flat forms of diagrams and graphs.

Careers

Fashion Designer

Can a piece of clothing share an important message? Absolutely! A garment doesn't need to be a T-shirt printed with a message in order to express a statement about issues like environmentalism. Kourtney Morgan, a fashion designer for the brand Patagonia, combines her passions for fashion and environmentalism in her work. She directs the ReCrafted fashion line, which transforms scraps of used clothing into new items.

Fashion designers create wearable items that are not just aesthetically pleasing but are tailored to the human body and designed to respond to movement and environment. Designers need to consider factors such as the way a garment feels and moves, what occasion it may be worn, and who is its target audience. Beyond having an eye for style, a fashion designer needs an understanding of available materials and manufacturing processes for clothing production as well as how to market their designs.

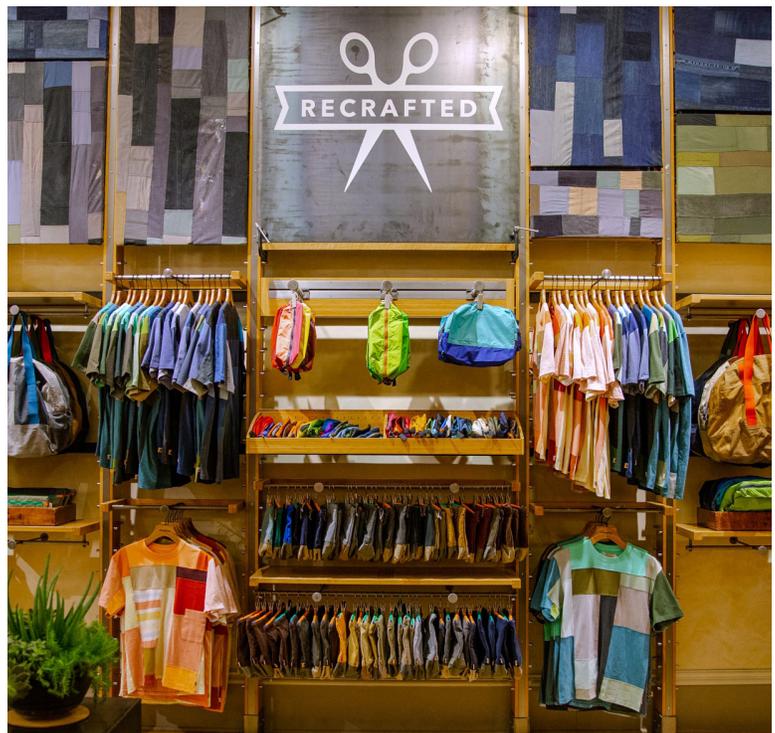


Fashion designer Kourtney Morgan believes that "clothes can have many lives. They don't ever need to end up in a landfill."



1-66 A one-of-a-kind shirt from the ReCrafted fashion line.

Courtesy of Patagonia.



1-67 Items on display from the ReCrafted clothing line.

Courtesy of Patagonia. Photo: Kern Ducote.