Assembling Art:
Works by Vin Giuliani

Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut
August 3 – September 15, 2019

GREENWICH, CT, July 26, 2019 – Opening Saturday, August 3, 2019, the Bruce Museum's newest exhibition, *Assembling Art: Works by Vin Giuliani,* will display the creations of Greenwich native Vincent "Vin" Giuliani, who transformed scrap wood, trinkets, and a colorful variety of found objects into artistic assemblages that represent everything from kitschy Americana to questions about the human psyche. Inspired by Pop Art's mockery of American consumerism, Giuliani combined everyday objects to illustrate economic, social, and political issues of the 1960s and 1970s.
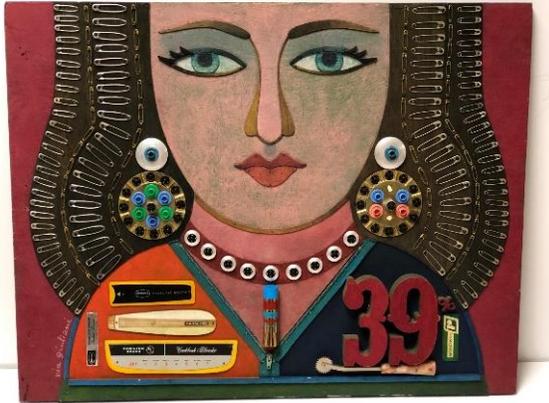
Vin Giuliani grew up in Greenwich, CT, with his brother John and his parents Amalia and Nicola. They lived at 353 Greenwich Avenue where his father ran a shoe repair shop.

Giuliani attended Greenwich High School, where he was an avid art student and contributor to the school's yearbook. After graduating in 1948, Giuliani studied art at the Pratt Institute in New York. He continued to live in Greenwich and worked as a graphic designer while developing his signature style of assemblage art.

Vin Giuliani (1930-1976), *Self Portrait with Magician Hat,* 1973. Multi-media painted wood assemblage, 18 x 11 in. Gift of the Giuliani Family. Bruce Museum 82.29.13.

The history of assemblage is thought to have begun with the cubist constructions of Pablo Picasso, circa 1912-14. In Paris in the 1920s, Alexander Calder, Picasso and others began making three-dimensional works from metal scraps, wire, and found objects. In the United States in the late 1930s, Louise Nevelson began creating sculptures and assemblages from found wood. The use of the term assemblage as an art form was first applied to a series of collages of butterfly wings created by Jean Dubuffet in 1954.

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Vin Giuliani (1930-1976), *39%,* 1970. Multi-media painted wood assemblage. 18 x 23 1/2 in. Gift of the Giuliani Family. Bruce Museum 82.29.21.

The intent of assemblage art changed in the late 1950s and 1960s. Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg created sculptures that were intentionally anti-aesthetic by combining degraded or non-traditional art objects. Other artists used materials that were temporary or disposable to create art that was deliberately impermanent. The Museum of Modern Art held *The Art of Assemblage* exhibition in 1961. The curator, William C. Seitz, described the assemblages as, "Being made up of preformed natural or manufactured materials, objects, or fragments not intended as art materials."

Giuliani's early artworks demonstrate a minimalist, one-dimensional quality. His later two-dimensional geometric works featured a grid pattern fashioned from hundreds of raised nails. It is probable that Giuliani's precise, tailored technique was inspired by watching his father craft fine leather footwear. It is evident, though, that he was influenced by the three-dimensional works produced by the Pop Artists of the mid to late 1950s.

In the latter part of Giuliani's short but productive life, he developed the three dimensionality of his assemblages with the construction of cabinets called "games for the eye." The cabinets were *trompe l'oeil* pictures that were assembled with fitted, flat, painted pieces of wood. He described creating his "wood paintings" with the knitting technique known as *intarsia,* a color work technique in which blocks of color are worked with separate balls of yarn or bobbins. A collection of these pieces was exhibited at the Rive Gauche Gallery in Darien in 1963.

Giuliani gained national fame in the mid-1960s as a participant in the traveling exhibition *Great Ideas of Western Man*. The Container Corporation of America commissioned noted artists to interpret the specific ideas of leaders of Western thought, from Plato to Einstein. The artists included Giuliani, René Magritte, Sister Mary Corita, Ben Shahn, A.M. Cassandre, and Antonio Frasconi. The media attention led to corporate commissions for annual report artwork, and a number of his assemblages were created specifically for magazine covers. The human head, often in profile, was a popular motif for Giuliani, and images featuring head assemblages appeared on the covers of *Life*, *Redbook*, and *Pensions* magazines.

One of Giuliani's most controversial works appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine's annual "Person of the Year," issue, published on January 5, 1970. "The Middle Americans," the honorees for 1969, were represented by interlocking wooden pieces depicting male and female profiles. Below the figures' heads were toy die-cast vehicles, a plastic platter of food, a miniature ashtray with stubbed-out cigarette butts, and a tiny crescent wrench atop folded dollar bills.

Press Release

The image was considered divisive. Beverly Merrill Kelley, author of *Reelpolitik Ideologies in American Political Film*, wrote, "It was a startling image – especially for a news magazine as conservative as *Time*. Not only did the editors dispense with the dignified oil portrait customarily employed to pay homage to *Time*'s 'Person of the Year,' but they also selected a highly controversial Pop Art 'assemblage' by artist Vin Giuliani to feature on the cover."

"There was certainly no love lost between artist and subject," Kelley wrote. "Middle Americans, as a whole, didn't have much use for such dubious art forms as the 'assemblage,' while Giuliani didn't do much to disguise his disdain for the altogether 'unhip' Mr. and Mrs. America."

Giuliani passed away in 1975 at the age of 45. In memory of his work and impact on the town, the Greenwich Scholarship Association created the Vin Giuliani Scholarship for Graphic Arts.

The works on view in the Bantle Lecture Gallery were donated to the Museum's permanent art collection by the Giuliani family and include a number of drawings on sketch paper. Precise renderings of elements that appear in his assemblages, the images appear more like blueprints than sketches. The drawings demonstrate how the design and revision process worked for Giuliani as well as his talent as a graphic artist.

This exhibition will also feature a family friendly art assembly zone. Using found objects provided by the Museum, participants of all ages are invited to create unique pieces inspired by Giuliani's work and by their own experiences and imaginations. Visitors will leave their assembled artwork for other participants to add to or to completely re-imagine.

The Bruce Museum is grateful for support of *Assembling Art: Works by Vin Giuliani* from the Charles M. and Deborah G. Royce Exhibition Fund and the Connecticut Office of the Arts.

About the Bruce Museum
The Bruce Museum is a community-based, world-class institution highlighting art and science in more than a dozen changing exhibitions annually. The permanent galleries feature the natural sciences that encompass regional to global perspectives. Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and voted the best museum in Fairfield County by area media in recent years, the Bruce plays an integral role in the cultural life of area residents and attracts approximately 70,000 visitors annually, including 24,000 schoolchildren, reaching out to families, seniors, students, and community organizations. Located in a park setting just off I-95, exit 3, at 1 Museum Drive in Greenwich, Connecticut, the Museum is also a 5-minute walk from the Metro-North Greenwich Station. The Bruce Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. For additional information, call the Bruce Museum at 203-869-0376 or visit brucemuseum.org.
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