Create a Braided Artwork

Combine paint, fabric, and braiding to create your own work of art

About Braiding

Braids can be a metaphor for the power of human connection and a pathway through a journey of escape, healing, or recovery. Braiding has been around for thousands of years and has appeared across cultures and societies. Apparently the oldest evidence of hair braiding dates back more than 30,000 years to the Venus of Willendorf, the small sculpture of a female, estimated to have been made around 28,000 – 25,000 BCE. The head of the female is carved to represent what is believed to be braids. Braiding has long been a social art. Throughout cultures and time periods, women came together to learn from one another, socialize, and bond across generations, weaving the past, present, and future together as they braided one another’s hair. Braiding can be a mindful, meditative practice that encourages being in the moment and uniting ideas with feelings. Braiding also creates strength that is greater than the single parts, so it is used for many functional materials, such as cables, cords, ropes, and reigns.

Materials

- Found fabrics, such as an old t-shirt or garment that you want to cut up and incorporate into your artwork
- Washable paints (or acrylic paints thinned with water)
- Paint brushes
- Scissors
- Rubber bands
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Instructions

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- Use washable paints or acrylic paints thinned with water in bright colors to paint t-shirt fabric, or use a fabric or garment that has meaning to you (and that you are comfortable cutting up to create your artwork). If there is an intention for the future, a feeling of the present, or a memory from the past you would like to weave into your artwork, feel free to paint words, shapes, and colors that capture these ideas on the fabric. Found objects with special meaning or history can also be incorporated into the braids.
- Cut the painted fabric into three equal-size strips lengthwise. Save any remaining fabrics to create smaller pieces for tying braids together.
- Roll each strip of fabric. Secure the three rolled strips together with a rubber band at one end.
- Find a partner to hold the rubber banded strips while you braid them together (see illustration below).
  - Braid the three strips together by holding the strip on the left and cross the strip on the right over the middle strip.
  - Then hold the new strip on the right and cross the left strip over the middle strip.
  - Repeat steps until the full length of the strips are braided together.
  - Place another rubber band at the end.
- Now help your partner so they can braid their strips of painted fabric.
- Use scraps of fabric to tie over the rubber bands to cover them.
- Make as many braids as you like. They can be any length.
- Hang the braids together in a display. Tie them to a branch, stick, or dowel with pieces of painted fabric. Or, arrange them on the floor to best convey your feelings and ideas.