

Art of the Philadelphia Dumpster Divers: Past, Present, and Future
September 20, 2026 to October 16, 2026
Cheltenham Center for the Arts
Cheltenham, PA



Exhibition Statement

Art of the Philadelphia Dumpster Divers: Past, Present, and Future is a celebration of imagination by a unique collective of unconventional artists from the Philadelphia region who share a love of transforming discarded and found objects into visionary works of art. Their artistic explorations are without bounds, from personal narratives, memories, and social commentaries to whimsical assemblages of vintage objects, natural materials, manmade things used in a manner other than their originally intended purpose, and more. What unites their work is a shared affinity for the “find,” the object that begs to be reclaimed and repurposed. The Divers even offer their finds to each other at their monthly meetings, thus further extending the life of the objects. To view their work as “trash art” or “environmentally conscious art” may be just the tip of the sustainability iceberg. In our consumer society of dwindling resources, the Philadelphia Dumpster Divers have found an alternative way of making art, one that challenges established norms with a trove of unlimited found materials, yet still draws on all the profound human connections and possibilities inherent in art.

The collective was conceived on April Fool’s Day, 1992, when a small group of found object artists and collectors met for lunch at Silk City Diner. They became the Philadelphia Dumpster Divers and blossomed into an eclectic group of over 50 artists who plan exhibits, social events, exchange found treasures, and share their creative wisdom, building a unique community of creatives in the process. More than three decades later, that community continues to evolve, welcoming new members who share the same curiosity, generosity, and passion for transforming the overlooked into the extraordinary. The group thrives on an exchange of ideas across generations, where artists just beginning their journeys find inspiration alongside members who have been creating for decades, ensuring that the spirit of the Philadelphia Dumpster Divers continues to grow into the future.

As one of their founders Neil Benson used to say: “Trash is simply a failure of imagination.”