



## Ontario Artist Uses Landfill as Inspiration

[Megan Greenwalt](#)

Tue, 2016-07-19 03:55

A joint venture between a town in Ontario, a college and the local landfill has area artists seeking waste materials to create their next masterpiece while exploring the impact of landfills on the environment.

Kicking off last year, the Haliburton School of Art and Design, a part of Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, began its Reclaim Artist in Residence program. It is designed as an opportunity for established artists to work for a six to eight week period between June and August, developing work that uses the local landfill as subject matter or material inspiration. The artwork they create should share their knowledge, respect and understanding of recycling and waste management, [according to the college's website](#).

Valerie Ashton, a mixed media artist and graduate of the college's Studio Process Advancement Program, has been named the 2016 Reclaim Artist in Residence. She lives in Stouffville, Ontario, and has created a studio at the college to utilize during her residency.

Ashton recently sat down with *Waste360* to discuss the program and share some of her work.

### ***Waste360: What is the process for applying and how long is the HSAD residency?***

**Valerie Ashton:** HSAD put out a call to artists to apply for the residency. Each artist needed to submit a proposal explaining their ideas for the residency, a resume, as well as pictures of related work. A committee reviewed each proposal and selected the one they thought most matched their ideas of what the residency was about.

The selected resident had a choice of either six or eight weeks for the residency. I have chosen to work here for eight weeks. I felt I would need the time to work on my projects, and I am very glad I did. I do not believe six weeks would have been enough time for me. As part of the residency I need to make a piece of art that will be on display in the town of Haliburton for several weeks and then will permanently stay with the school and a piece that will be in the school's annual art auction, which raises money for an art scholarship.

### ***Waste360: What have you gained from the residency?***

**Valerie Ashton:** I am really enjoying my time here considering I am spending a very hot summer hanging out in a landfill. It seems a strange place to get inspiration but I am always seeing new things— sometimes too many ideas. I can see where I will continue working with these types of objects. I am already thinking of ideas for Styrofoam. Unfortunately I don't have time right now but maybe my next project. Once I am done this residency I am hoping to take the art I am making here and arrange a public gallery show.

### ***Waste360: What landfill do you visit for inspiration and materials?***

**Valerie Ashton:** The landfill that I visit is right here in the town of Haliburton, actually only about five minutes down the road from the school. I am in a timber frame building on the school grounds that I use for my studio. It is quite convenient for me considering I am at the landfill every day it is open during the week— Tuesday, Thursday

and Friday. I work in the studio from Monday to Friday, although I set my own hours. If I want to be here seven days a week I can. I will come in occasionally on weekends if I feel I need to work.

***Waste360: What type of medium and landfill materials do you utilize for your art?***

**Valerie Ashton:** As part of my proposal I said that I would be asking people to give me objects that they would have thrown into the landfill and I would use it in my art. I want them to look at my art and say, 'if she can make art out of that, maybe I should think twice before I throw this into the landfill'. So far I have two cupboard doors; one and a half plastic balls that I think are balls that hamsters go in, and a spoon. While at the landfill one man told me he wished I could do something with the plastic bottles that people were throwing into the landfill instead of recycling. That started me collecting the bottles. One day in 10 minutes I had picked up 21 bottles. Yesterday in one hour I ended up with 56 bottles. I will be using these bottles and the cupboard doors to create the sculpture for the town.

***Waste360: Are there any materials that are off limits for your artwork?***

**Valerie Ashton:** I also have been picking up pieces that I can use in collage— a photo album, filters from a humidifier, pieces of a lamp shade, newspaper, and paper money from a game. All of these come from the landfill. I take nothing from the recycling bins. Nothing is off limits to me, but I have made myself a rule that I will not take anything from recycling—only directly from the landfill site.

***Waste360: How do you get the community involved?***

**Valerie Ashton:** Each time I go to the landfill, I talk to the people dropping off their waste. They have been very receptive to what I am doing and often tell me stories of things they have found. I have begun to keep a journal with their stories and my experiences— like running into a bear. Fortunately, I scared him as much as he scared me.

While at the landfill I also do monoprints. I take my acrylic, my paper and a PVC pipe that I found at the landfill and roll on the paper on the ground. The images that come out are often quite beautiful, considering I am rolling on buried garbage.

**Source URL:** <http://waste360.com/operations/ontario-artist-uses-landfill-inspiration>