



AS IT IS

Ivory Coast Man Turns Old Flip-Flops into Artwork

August 19, 2021

A man from Ivory Coast has found a creative way to repurpose footwear that washes up on the **beach** -- he turns it into artwork.

Aristide Kouame is a 26-year-old artist. But he says no one would know this when they see him going around beach areas picking up **flip-flops** and other kinds of footwear. They probably think he is gathering the old objects to sell on the street.

But Kouame has recognized the real value of such waste. He has created works of art from the material that can sell for up to \$1,000. He cuts the rubber and plastic bottoms from the footwear into pieces and uses them to create large **collages**.

"This is the **rubbish** people have thrown into the sea and the sea brings it back to us because it doesn't want it," Kouame told Reuters news agency. He was collecting material from a beach in Abidjan, Ivory Coast's economic capital.

"I make art from used shoes...It's a way to give life to the objects that **litter** the beaches," the artist explained.

Sitting on the floor of a narrow street, Kouame creates shapes, letters and faces with the rubber pieces he picked up on the beach. He even makes his own paint by crushing the material into pieces to create a colored **pigment**.

His method is not costly and does not harm the environment.

Plastic and other waste -- including large amounts of lost flip-flops -- litter most city beaches in West Africa. The waste is thrown away in cities and carried out to sea. But a lot of it ends up on the beach later.

In just a few years, Kouame's methods have caught the attention of Ivory Coast's art establishment and his works have hung in **galleries** in Ivory Coast and in other countries.

His work has included large **portraits** of civil rights and political leaders such as Nelson Mandela. Other pieces were created to draw attention to world problems, including climate change, COVID-19 and economic inequality.

On a recent afternoon in a neighborhood in southern Abidjan, several of Kouame's works were shown in a gallery often visited by foreign art collectors.

The gallery's director joyfully led visitors to three large collages. Each contained about 140 small portraits that Kouame created from flip-flop waste.

The United Nations estimates that about 13 million tons of plastic waste is put into the world's oceans each year. Two of Africa's biggest waste producers, Ghana and Nigeria, share the same Atlantic coastal areas as the beach where Kouame searches for supplies.

For his part, Kouame says he plans to keep collecting and creating. "My goal is to get people to question the issue of their environment, in order to create a better life."

I'm Bryan Lynn.

Reuters reported this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report for VOA Learning English. Mario Ritter, Jr. was the editor.

We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments section, and [visit our Facebook page](#).

Words in This Story

beach *-n.* an area covered with sand and small rocks that is next to the ocean or a lake

flip-flop – *n.* a kind of open-toed shoe that is usually made of rubber

collage – *n.* a picture made by sticking small pieces of paper or other materials onto a surface

rubbish – *n.* things that are thrown because they are not useful anymore

litter – *n.* pieces of paper and other waste that are left in public places

pigment – *n.* a substance that give something color

gallery – *n.* a room or building that is used for showing paintings and other pieces of art to the public

portrait – *n.* a painting, drawing or photograph of a person
