

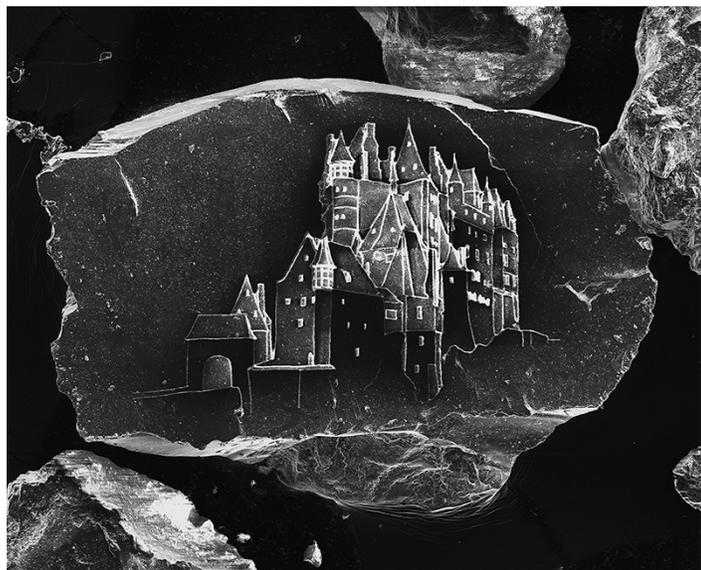
Untitled

Vik Muniz (São Paulo, Brazil)

“What I want to be able to do is to change the lives of people with the same materials they deal with everyday” – Vik Muniz

WHO MADE THIS ART INSTALLATION?

Vik Muniz’s work blends sculpture, drawing and painting with photography in unexpected ways, transforming materials and pushing expectations of photographic images. Layers of image appropriation are key to many of his works, often drawing from art history, pop culture, photojournalism or portraits of people, Muniz draws, paints, and reimagines these visual works with everyday materials and then photographs from above. Most are gigantic in scale, only possible to view from above, but recently he has also experimented with microscopic scale by engraving sandcastles on individual grains of sand. His materials have included dirt, diamonds, sugar, string, chocolate syrup, garbage, and scrap metal. Each photograph of his installations becomes an experience in double meaning—at first the viewer may think they recognize the art historical image or scene, but upon closer



look the surprise of the materials turns expectations upside down. His work is about the alchemy of transformation—the transformation of imagery, materials, and the lives of the people he works with.

Born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1961, he was a billboard designer before he was shot in the leg while trying to break up a fight. With the compensation money he received



for his injuries he was able to visit and ultimately move to New York city where he has lived since the early 1980s. There he was inspired by the pop art and large scale installations of artist Jeff Koons, and soon began to experiment and grow as a sculptor, eventually expanding towards drawing and photography as his practice and distinctive style evolved to what it is today.

Untitled**Vik Muniz (São Paulo, Brazil)**

Vik Muniz was the subject of the Academy Award nominated documentary film *Waste Land* (2010), which followed his work with a group of *catadores* – pickers of recyclable materials – in Jardim Gramacho, the world’s largest garbage dump located outside Rio de Janeiro. Using the waste materials of their work in the dump, Muniz created large scale portraits of the group, reinterpreting iconic neo-classical paintings like *The Death of Marat* by Jacques-Louis David. He wanted to create work from the material of their lives, using art to empower the *catadores* workers through the project and proceeds from the sales of the works, and also to raise awareness around urban poverty. Using materials that connect to the subject of his imagery is a strategy he has used in past projects too. For instance, his "Sugar Children" series in the mid 1990s consists of photographs of drawings he made in sugar of children whose parents and grandparents have worked on the sugar plantation on the island of Saint Kitts. Since then he has continued to explore ways of expressing these multiple layers of meaning through every day material, seemingly familiar imagery, and photography in his work. His solo show at MAM in Rio de Janeiro was second only to Picasso in attendance records; it was here that Vik first exhibited his "Pictures of Garbage Series" in Brazil. His work has been exhibited widely internationally and is included in many international public and private collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Tate Gallery, London; Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Brazil; and Fondation Cartier pour L'Art Contemporain, Paris. His original work for the Biennale marks his Canadian debut.

WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS ART INSTALLATION?

Vancouver and Squamish are communities where the urban and the natural co-exist together, which Muniz feels is rare for many cities today where nature has been erased or paved over. The forest and mountains inspired him while he was here, as it is such a unique landscape to Vancouver but also reminded him of the landscape of Rio de Janeiro. For Muniz, working with and learning from the Squamish First Nation was important, and the image of the wolf was chosen in consultation with chiefs from the community to symbolize collaboration and unity. Wolves are common in the region and have cultural significance. As this work was to be created with help from the community, Muniz it was fitting that the image be chosen by the community.



Untitled

Vik Muniz (São Paulo, Brazil)

HOW DOES THIS PIECE OF ART CONNECT TO THE ARTIST'S PREVIOUS WORK?

Muniz has created work with communities and for communities in the past, including the portrait series with recyclable waste pickers of the world's largest landfill, Jardim Gramacho in Rio de Janeiro which was the basis for the *Waste Land* documentary. At the United Nations Rio+20 Conference in 2012 he worked with 10,000 people each helping by placing 3-4 tons of bottles, cans and trash to collectively create a collage or assemblage work that captured the lush greens and deep blues of Guanabara Bay, with Sugarloaf Mountain rising above it all. And so in some ways this work is connected to previous works, with emphasis for this original work in Squamish on community participation and involvement. He wanted this work to inspire action, rather than solely a visual or contemplative experience for visitors. For Muniz, it is the social element that drives works like this, and as he has matured through his art practice of the last 20 years he has grown less interested in controlling every details of his works, and more conceptual in his practice—meaning that the work of art is based on an idea created and planned by the artist, and many people may help to make the idea come to life. Muniz is increasingly more interested in collaborating with the public to create truly public art.

HOW WAS THIS ART INSTALLATION MADE/INSTALLED?

The process to create this work was intentionally collective, inviting local residents to participate in the 20 meter x 30 meter installation. By giving up complete artistic control over the outcome, Muniz instead wanted the work to have a larger significance that came from a collective effort by hundreds of members of the Squamish community as they helped to make this work a reality. For Muniz, this is more interesting than creating the work alone. As with his other mosaic works the chosen image was projected from a tall scaffold, and he, his team, and local residents created the work together using natural materials that spoke to the history of lumber and logging that is part of the region, and are part of everyday life of the community. Using wood chips, rocks and scraps of wood the tones of the materials were arranged so as to create the image of a wolf.

Artist Website: <http://vikmuniz.net>

Photo Credits:

- [Colossal Website: The World's Smallest Sandcastle Built on Individual Grains of Sand by Vik Muniz and Marcelo Coelho](#)
- [New York Times: Where Art Meets Trash and Transforms Life, October 21, 2010](#)
- [Museum of Modern Arts Website: Valentine, The Fastest. From "The Sugar Children Series." 1996. Gelatin-silver print. 20 x 16". Courtesy Wooster Gardens, New York.](#)

Written by: Jessa Alston-O'Connor