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## Creative Consumption

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# Creative Consumption

## **Abstract**

"Valuing the process of art making and creative consumption helps encourage the mindful development of God's creation."

Posting about stewardship in the art world from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/creative-consumption/>

## **Keywords**

In All Things, economic consumption, material accountability, culture, community

## **Disciplines**

Art and Design | Christianity

## **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

# Creative Consumption

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▫ [inallthings.org/creative-consumption/](http://inallthings.org/creative-consumption/)

Sara Alsum-Wassenaar

## **Take less, give more**

All artists face the inevitable question: “But how will I make money?” I have attempted to answer this question in a variety of ways over the years. More recently, however, I have thought about the underlying concern of this question as that of subsistence. This shifts the focus away from acquisition of money to sustaining an adequate lifestyle. In this way a pursuit of creativity and the arts becomes feasible and biblically rooted. One thing I have found through my various interactions with artists is that we are masters at doing more with less. When your focus is more on giving than taking, you are more open to focusing on your community and being stewards of what God has given us.

## **Consumption and wholeness**

Consumerism is driven by a mentality that a product will satisfy a desire. For example, if you want to be beautiful, then you should use this facial moisturizer, or if you want to have lots of friends, then you should drink this beverage. Once you accumulate enough of these desires and the products that will satisfy them, you have a need to make a lot of money. Reformed authors Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen claim that the consumeristic worldview is extremely prolific in post-modern culture and is one of the main conflicting worldviews to a biblical worldview. In order to flourish in God’s creation, we must cast aside the need to have products to feel complete, and accept wholeness in God. Arts engage in creative consumption, a process of making new items from old or discarded items or making things from scratch. You can sustain a lifestyle as an artist if you creatively consume.

## **Make more, consume less**

The up-cycling and DIY movements are examples of creative consumption led by artists who enjoy creating with their hands. People now seek out old barn wood or used pallets to make shelving, garden boxes, bike racks, or compost bins. Reformed scholar Hans Rookmaaker argues that we do not need to justify art as to whether it has been put to some “good” use. I would add that art is valuable for the process in which it engages people. Thinking about the usability of discarded materials makes one constantly look for materials to re-use. This is a way of acknowledging that the world is more than a place to exploit for maximum profit and maximum consumption — it was given to us so that we could help creation flourish. Consuming the least amounts of “natural resources” like wood or oil allows for non-human aspects of creation to flourish.

## **Less material, more community**

Using a discarded item in a new way instead of harvesting additional resources is a way to get what one needs and helps to preserve a history. Using discarded materials tends to make things looked patched together and unfinished, which leaves room for interaction and addition. When people see something unfinished, they can imagine participation in its completion. These attributes of re-use leave room for and encourage community. I recently met with a local craftsman and while listening to him talk about the wood he had collected for over 30 years, it became clear that his impulses were about being a steward of resources while having an aesthetic appreciation for the material and a strong interest in the created narrative. Each piece of wood had a story: where it came from, what type of wood it was, and what that

meant to his story.

*“Creativity applied in a moment of weakness and vulnerability can turn failure into enduring conversation, opening new vistas of interaction and incarnation.” -Makoto Fujimura*

### **Progress and the discarded**

Valuing the process of art making and creative consumption helps encourage the mindful development of God’s creation. My students and I read an article about Robert Hanlon, a Christian craftsman who makes tables. He stresses the importance of selecting materials for his tables that convey a sense of history and of using designs that facilitate community and conversation. The students were very inspired by the poetic way this craftsman described the importance of material and design in making an object for people to commune around. The students immediately connected these ideas to a large live-edged wooden table on the campus of Dordt College. This table was created from a historic ash tree that was removed to make way for the new science building in which the table is now located. This artwork eloquently calls the campus community to make decisions around tables that ask one to consider what is getting torn down for the sake of progress.

*“Effective stewardship leads to generative work and a generative culture. We turn wheat to bread and bread into community.” -Makoto Fujimura*