

# Stella Waitzkin (1920 - 2003)



Stella Waitzkin was born in 1920 in New York to Austrian immigrant parents. Izzy, as her father was known, owned a successful lighting fixture company. He hoped his two daughters and one son would help continue the business, but Waitzkin, unlike her siblings, did not want to be a part of the business. She married her husband, Abe, who worked for the lighting company, in 1942, and divorced in 1959.

Waitzkin then traveled from Great Neck, New York, to New York City to study painting with Hans Hofmann and life drawing with Willem de Kooning. During the 1960s and '70s, Waitzkin expanded her work to include sculpture, performance art, and film. Waitzkin also experimented with plastics, a new material that allowed for innovative casting methods. In 1969, Waitzkin moved to an apartment on the fourth floor in the Hotel Chelsea in New York City, a place that would influence the rest of her life. In her apartment, Waitzkin cast old, leather-bound volumes in resin as colorful single objects and as elements of larger installations.

Residing for more than three decades at the Chelsea, Waitzkin filled the walls of her small fourth-floor apartment with a library of colorful, cast-resin books and other sculptural and **found objects** that she termed The Lost Library.

## Found Objects

Objects that are used as non-traditional art making tools or materials. Often, a found object is something that was discarded or no longer usable for its original purpose, or something from nature that can be collected, such as driftwood and rocks. Sometimes a found object is still functional for its original purpose, but is reimagined in an artwork. For example, buttons can become a texture that covers a sculpture.



Artist Overview



**John Michael  
Kohler Arts Center**

[jmkac.org/learn/education-resources](http://jmkac.org/learn/education-resources)

Stella Waitzkin. Family photograph courtesy of Fred Waitzkin, c. 1970.

Stella Waitzkin, untitled (individual library elements), c. 1969-2003; resin, paint, wood, and mixed media. John Michael Kohler Arts Center, gift of the Waitzkin Memorial Library Trust and



# *The Impact of Your Surroundings*

Stella Waitzkin's environment played an important role in her work. Elements of her environment, such as the people who surrounded her, where she lived and vacationed, the music she listened to, and her emotions, influenced her work.

Take a moment to reflect. How does your own environment and the current time period we are in influence you and your work?

Document your thoughts in a voice recording, a journal, or with images in a sketchbook or digital collage or have a conversation with a friend.

Interview a friend or family member who grew up in a different time period. What is different about the time period when they were a child versus the time period you experienced? How do you think your experiences make you similar or different?

## **Keep Exploring!**

Discuss or journal: Stella Waitzkin's later work includes reoccurring imagery such as fish, birds, and faces. Do you notice reoccurring imagery or ideas in your own work?

View more of Waitzkin's work at [artpreserve.org](http://artpreserve.org)

Research and look at the work of Waitzkin's professors and abstract expressionists Hans Hoffmann and Willem de Kooning.

## **For K-12 Educators**

Suggested National Standard Connection

Visual Arts Connecting 11.1

Anchor Standard

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Enduring Understanding

People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art

Essential Question: How does art help us understand the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures? How is art used to impact the views of a society? How does art preserve aspects of life?