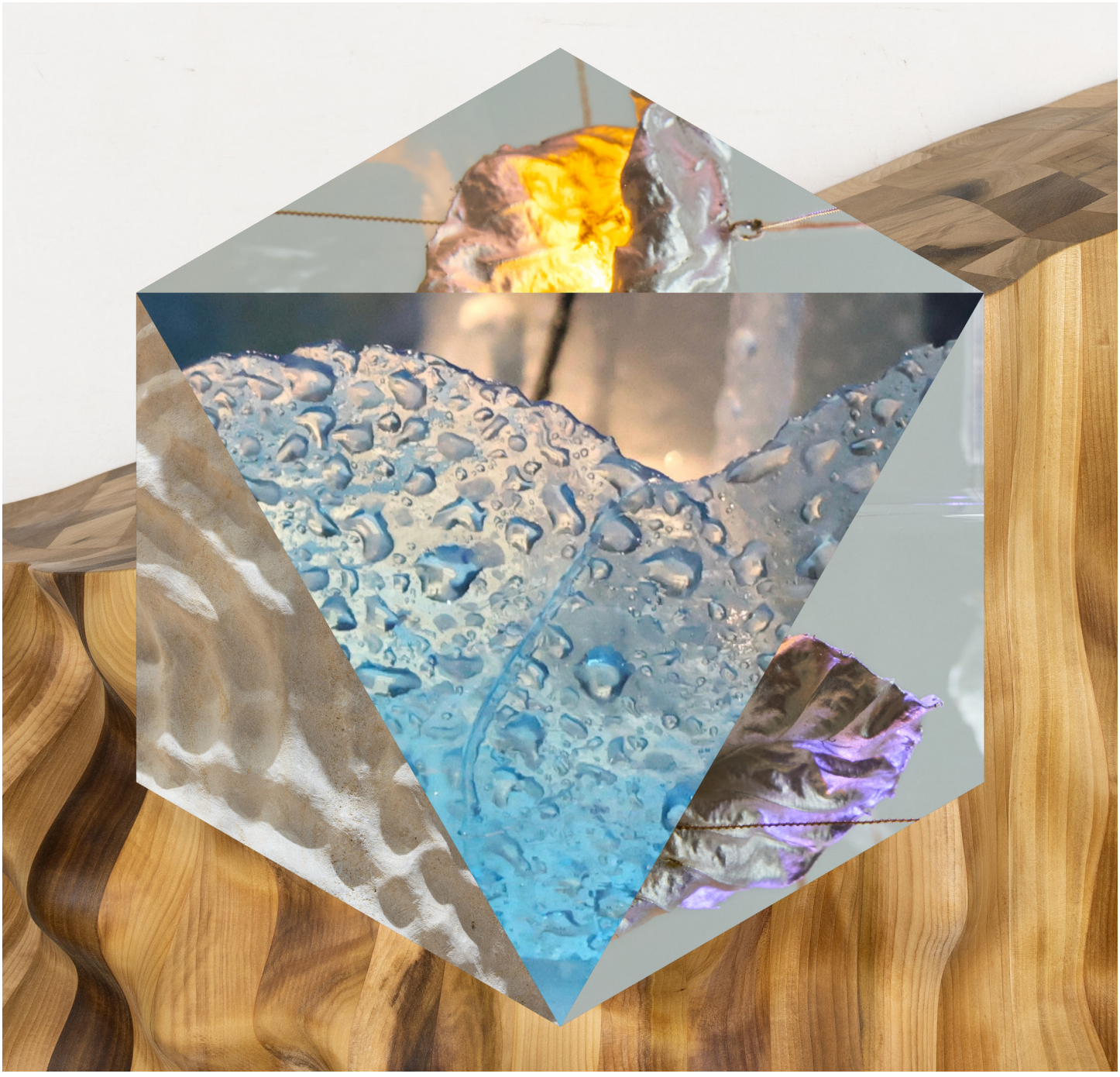
Walker Design Triennial

BEYOND MATERIALISM



Exhibition Guide for Teachers

October 17, 2026–February 14, 2027

Galleries 1, 2, 3, and D/Perlman

WALKER

Composite image (back and left): Courtesy Germane Barnes and Nina Johnson Gallery, Photo: Clare Britt; (top and right): Courtesy Maximilian Marchesani; (center): Courtesy Jonghoo Jeong

INTRODUCTION

Educators can explore *Walker Design Triennial: Beyond Materialism* with their students using this guide. Inside, you'll find contextual information and images of objects in the exhibition, along with helpful prompts for discussion. This guide is designed for K–12 teachers and students.

Teachers may request a free ticket to preview the exhibition by emailing tours@walkerart.org.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Since the industrial revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, the field of design has sought to harness mass production to make better things accessible to more people. Designers in Europe and the United States, for example, often saw themselves as bringing beauty, functionality, and efficiency to everyday life through the creation of objects, furniture, spaces, and more.

Today, a new generation of designers is questioning the faith in material abundance and mass consumption that drove this approach. They are directing their work to the needs of the mind, the psyche, and the spirit, in addition to the body. Many are drawn to existential questions: What makes a good life, and what is the place of objects within it?

Bringing together 26 designers and collectives from across the globe, the works in the exhibition suggest a new approach to material things—one that prioritizes craft over consumption, the unique over the hyper-available. From hand-crafted objects to large-scale installations, these projects highlight ways to reclaim meaning, agency, and togetherness in a fragmented world.

Beyond Materialism is the first Walker Design Triennial, marking the start of a long-term commitment and experiment. Every three years, the Walker will examine two key questions: Who is the designer? What is design today? The inaugural exhibition is guest curated by Joseph Grima, Milan-based architect and founder of Space Caviar.

Photography is encouraged.

In some galleries, there will be objects that can be touched. These will be labeled clearly. Touching can damage fragile objects. Please do not touch works of art.

CONTENT NOTE

The exhibition includes subjects related to identity, sexuality, and the human body, including abstract male body parts. These objects are positioned so that they may be bypassed on tours of the exhibition. Questions? Please ask a staff member.

SENSORY NOTE

Some materials in this exhibition may have an aroma or allergens, including feathers, wax, and flowers. In the last gallery, an artwork features overlapping sounds, including sirens, that change in volume, pitch, and tone.

GALLERY 1
DESIGN FOR THE SPIRIT: HISTORICAL NOTES



The exhibition starts with works that highlight key historical moments when designers approached objects and environments as more than tools of comfort or efficiency. The pieces gathered here assume a purpose beyond practical function—becoming a medium for spiritual inquiry, reflection, or ritual. They serve as vessels for meaning, conduits for ideology, or frameworks for collective transformation.

These projects chart the emergence of novel understandings within the professional design field of an object's value: one grounded not in accumulation but in significance. They offer vital insight into today's growing desire for objects that help us make sense of the world, not only physically but emotionally, spiritually, and communally.

ART IN FOCUS: *SIDE CHAIR*

Since the 18th century, the Shaker religious community has understood making as a spiritual act. The Shakers believed that dignified, everyday labor was a form of worship. They expressed values of honesty and simplicity in everything they did—including the making of beautiful, practical objects.

The Shaker chair stands as an icon of this ethos. Its simple form, strong lines, and harmonious proportions serve essential needs without ornament. Shaker objects were designed to be without pride, so their beauty would not distract from religious contemplation. Made some 200 years before many of the objects in this exhibition, the Shaker chair suggests a long history behind the search for spiritual meaning in design.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Grades K–5

- Have you made something useful before? What was it, and how did you feel when you were making it?
- Think about someone you care about. If you were going to make them a chair, what would you add to your design to show them you care about them?

Grades 6–8

- Does the intention behind the design of an object change how you value it?
- What details in the Shaker chair might show care, discipline, or attention? Do you think the process of making something is as important as the finished object?

Grades 9–12

- If you knew nothing about the history of this chair, what could you infer about the maker's values from the object's form, materials, and lack of ornament?
- Can usefulness be a form of beauty?

Above: The Shakers, *Side Chair*, circa 1820. Courtesy the Shaker Museum

GALLERY 2
A NEW POETICS: THE TECHNO-CRAFTSPEOPLE



For some designers, materials are not just the physical building blocks used to make an object. They are a means of telling stories, sharing heritage, evoking emotion, and engaging the senses. These practitioners fuse ancestral craft with industrial technology, transforming the act of making into a form of narrative and exploration.

The unique methods these designers have developed imbue familiar forms, such as household furniture, fountains, and architectural elements, with deep significance. The resulting objects—augmented by technology yet rooted in the hand—push at the boundaries of form and function, proposing new ways of relating to the world.

ART IN FOCUS: *GEMINI*

The Athens-based studio Astronauts was founded in 2023 by Danae Dasyra and Joe Bradford. Their practice embraces curiosity and experimentation, yielding sculptural objects—chairs, lamps, even a seesaw—that defy predetermined form. Their works incorporate a radical playfulness, blurring the line between alien and familiar.

The *Hydromorph* series is a case in point. Using an industrial process called hydroforming, metal tubes are inflated with pressurized hydraulic fluid. These tubes expand without a mold, creating unique forms shaped by their own internal growth. The designers then combine groups of metal pieces into functional objects. The resulting works mix futurism with mythological references.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Grades K–5

- Do you think this chair would be comfortable to sit in? Why do you think the designers made it this way?
- If you owned this chair, where would you put it?

Grades 6–8

- The chair appears to be inflated but is made of metal. Does knowing how the chair was made influence how you think about it?
- The piece is called *Gemini* (the twins). Why do you think the designers chose that name?

Grades 9–12

- When you first saw *Gemini*, did you think it was a sculpture or a chair? Can a functional object like a chair be art? Why or why not?
- Compare and contrast how the Shakers used materials and technology and how Astronauts do. What are the similarities and differences in the designers' processes?

Above: Astronauts, *Gemini*, 2025. Courtesy the artist. Photo: George Nalbadis

GALLERY 2
A NEW POETICS: THE TECHNO-CRAFTSPEOPLE



ART IN FOCUS: *OYGG VASE*

Across material research, art installations, and furniture and object design, WKND Lab explores the relationships between humans and the natural environment. Founded by designers Eunji Jun and Halin Lee in 2021, the studio creates projects grounded in a broad sense of sustainability. They consider social connections and the preservation of Korean cultural traditions alongside questions of ecological impact.

An important part of their work is the development of innovative new materials from discarded waste. They take eggshells thrown away by an ice cream shop near their studio, then grind these into a moldable paste used to shape the *Oygg* vases. Upcycled oyster shells, similarly processed, become robust pieces of furniture. WKND Lab's objects propose an environmentally and culturally conscious alternative to disposable production.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Grades K–5

- What do you think these vases are made out of? Are you surprised these vases were made out of eggshells?
- What can we do with things we usually throw away? If you could turn one kind of trash into something useful or beautiful, what would you make?

Grades 6–8

- What makes a material valuable?
- Can making waste "beautiful" help solve environmental problems? Could it create new challenges?

Grades 9–12

- What does this object suggest about the relationship between waste, design, and consumption?
- How can "sustainable design" be about more than reducing environmental impact? How can design help impact social connections and preservation of cultural traditions?

WKND Lab, *Oygg Vase*, 2023. Courtesy the artist. Photo: OA23

GALLERY 3
RECLAIMING DESIGN: CULTURE, ENVIRONMENT, POLITICS



As the pace of technological, environmental, and political change accelerates, designers are making interventions to help navigate the turbulence of the present. Some works offer strategies for living through crisis—gestures of adaptation and reimagining that treat design as a form of cultural resilience.

To confront the realities of ecological disruption and overconsumption, these designers turn to modes of care. Their practices foreground reflection on the systems that threaten to overwhelm us and emerge with a restorative view. From speculative futures to expressions of identity, these objects consider how design can help shape the spaces we inhabit.

Above: Maximilian Marchesani, *Carbon Cycles*, 2026. Courtesy the artist.

ART IN FOCUS: *CARBON CYCLES*

Maximilian Marchesani's work explores the interactions between humans and nature. In delicate lighting installations, he examines the consequences of human intervention and extraction and proposes possibilities for new relationships with other forms of life.

In *Carbon Cycles*, stacks of glass screens salvaged from discarded smartphones create translucent structures for suspended leaves. By repurposing electronic waste and creating hybrids of organic and technological materials, Marchesani points toward a new, human cycle of regeneration amid the ongoing climate crisis.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Grades K–5

- Is this object a lamp, a sculpture, or both? What makes you think so?
- How do you think the materials make the lamp feel? Does it seem strong, fragile, peaceful, strange, or something else?

Grades 6–8

- How does putting leaves and glass together change the way you think about each material and our relationship to nature as human beings?
- What makes something feel "alive" in an artwork?

Grades 9–12

- What might it mean to create a cycle that is "human," and is it possible for humans to live without continuing to extract from other forms of life?
- How does changing an object's context change its meaning? What meanings or associations do you bring to the lamp because you recognize where the glass came from?

CONTENT NOTE

Several works in this gallery include subjects related to identity, sexuality, and the human body, including abstract male body parts. These objects are positioned so they may be bypassed on tours of the exhibition. Questions? Please ask a staff member.

GALLERY D/PERLMAN
RITUAL AND SYMBOLISM: NEW MODELS OF COMMUNITY



Espace Aygo, *Amnion Limen*, 2025. Photo: Marco Menghi. Images courtesy Galleria Rosanna Orlandi.

Design both reflects who we are and actively shapes how we live together. The designers in this section explore how objects organize our relationships to each other and to the world around us. They incorporate collaboration and participation into their practices, seeking to foster shared experience and understanding.

Private and public, natural and constructed mingle together in furniture and large-scale installations. In these works, material experimentation becomes a way to reclaim meaning, power, and connection. The projects create space for knowledge and heritage, while pushing the boundaries of what design can be.

CONTENT NOTE
An object in this gallery contains an abstract depiction of male body parts.

ART IN FOCUS: *AMNION LIMEN*

Espace Aygo is a Brussels-based design collective comprising Salomé Sperling, Jaime le Bleu, Line Murken, and Sijmen Vellekoop. The collective describes its style as "a patchwork," the result of collage-like approaches to making furniture from discarded remains of buildings and objects.

In 2022 Espace Aygo transformed a derelict 19th-century townhouse into a residential home studio and artistic experiment. Their renovation prioritized their needs as a studio over conventional building design. Rather than filling the space with off-the-shelf products and components, they created self-designed, handcrafted works from secondhand materials. The sculptural pieces on view in the exhibition formerly occupied the bathroom of their space, blending function with their unique design approach.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Grades K–5

- If you could redesign a bathtub to fit exactly what you wanted, what would it look like, be made of, and do? What about a whole bathroom?
- If this bathtub were a character in a story, what kind of character would it be?

Grades 6–8

- What are some ways that off-the-shelf objects do not always fit an individual person's needs?
- Imagine you had never seen a bathtub before. What might you think this object was used for? What clues would you use to figure it out?

Grades 9–12

- The designers used existing materials to create something completely new and unique. How do you think designing with limitations might differ from designing with unlimited choices?
- How might assumptions and familiarity with common styles influence our choices? What else might influence how you choose to design something?

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: DESIGN A CHAIR

The Walker Design Triennial explores the possibilities of design to not only serve a practical purpose but also connect to the mind, which is influenced by identity, culture, and history. The following activity invites students to apply these concepts and explore the principles of design thinking by designing a chair.

Design thinking is a human-centered approach to design that involves five steps:

1. DISCOVER: Learn about the people you are designing for and empathize with their needs.
2. DEFINE: Identify a problem to solve.
3. DEVELOP: Brainstorm ideas before picking one to move forward with.
4. DESIGN: Create a small-scale, inexpensive model of your best idea.
5. DELIVER: Share your prototype with real users to gather feedback. Learn what works, adjust what fails, and refine your design.

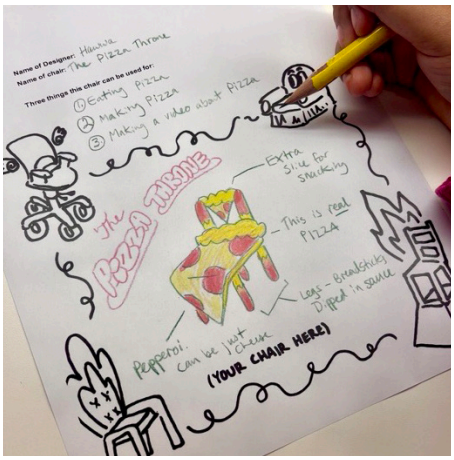
THINKING OUTSIDE THE CHAIR

Gather a variety of materials for students to choose from. We suggest options below, but in the spirit of thinking creatively about materials, brainstorming what to use for the design can be part of the activity. What can be found in your environment (or recycling bin) that can be used to create a model of a chair?

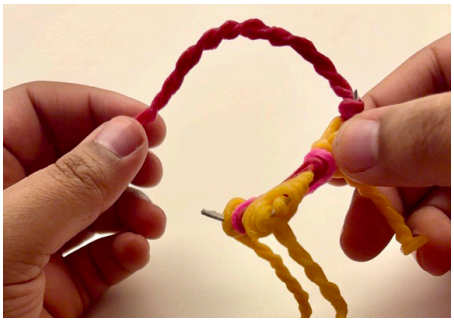
- A large handful of Wikki Stix of a variety of colors
- A large handful of precut wire shapes
- Yarn
- Fabric scraps
- Scissors
- Glue
- Paper
- Pencil or pen

① Tell students that they will be designing a chair. Ask students to think about who would use their chair, and what it would be used for. Give them time to research the audience they are designing their chair for, if needed.

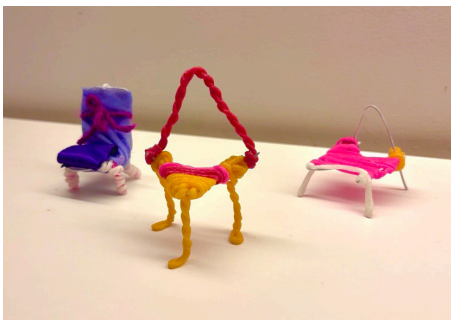
② Ask students to draw their chair. Prompt them to consider their design choices and how shape, materials, and other features will serve the intended user of the chair. Then, ask students to name their design and list three ways it can be used.



③ Next, students should spend at least 25 minutes creating a prototype or model of their chair, using various materials.



④ Students should share their designs with a partner and gather feedback on how they can continue to refine their design.



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Walker Design Triennial: Beyond Materialism, exhibition page with description of the show, images, and curatorial team, walkerart.org/whats-on/walker-design-triennial-beyond-materialism/.

FREE DIGITAL GUIDE

Scan this QR code to access the free digital guide for this exhibition on Bloomberg Connects:

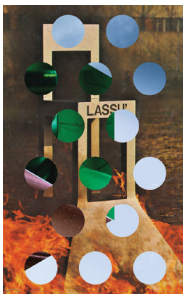
ABOUT THE DESIGNERS

- "Shaker Style" (2018), National Park Service, a description of Shaker style in furniture, craft, and religious belief, nps.gov/articles/shaker-style.htm.
- Nicholas Vincent, "Shaker Furniture" (2012), Met Museum, an overview of Shaker worldview, lifestyle, and craft tradition, metmuseum.org/essays/shaker-furniture.
- Mea Hoffmann, "The Shakers: A World in the Making" (2025), a conversation with two Shaker experts, Vitra Design Museum, vitra.com/en-as/magazine/details/the-shakers-a-world-in-the-making?.
- Website for Astronauts design studio, founded by Danae Dasyra and Joe Bradford, madebyastronauts.com/about.
- "The Dwell 24: Meet This Year's Best Emerging Designers" (2025), featuring Astronauts and WKND Lab, *Dwell Magazine*, dwell.com/article/the-dwell-24-worlds-best-emerging-designers-in-2025-c5e69053.
- Website for WKND Lab design studio, wknd-lab.com/about-v2/.
- Choi Yu-jin, "Sustainable Design that Considers Even What Remains after Abandonment" (2021), jungle.co.kr/magazine/202477. (This article is written in Korean. Use your browser to auto-translate the text.)
- Lee So-mi, "I Gathered Up Pretty Trash and Made a Covetable Item!" (2022), *Cosmopolitan*, cosmopolitan.co.kr/article/65519. (This article is written in Korean. Use your browser to auto-translate the text.)
- Website for designer Maximilian Marchesani, maximilianmarchesani.com/.
- "Ceiling lamp Carbon Cycles," description of lamps by Maximilian Marchesani, Nilufar Gallery, nilufar.com/product/ceiling-lamp-carbon-cycles-by-maximiliam-marchesani/.
- Nilufar Gallery, "Maximilian Marchesani Showcases Lighting Design Inspired by Nature at Nilufar Gallery" (2023), *STIRworld*, www.stirworld.com/stirpad/news/galleries/maximilian-marchesani-showcases-lighting-design-inspired-by-nature-at-nilufar-gallery/.
- Pia Diamandis, "Espace Aygo: Sustainably Preserving a Rundown 19th-Century Townhouse" (2024), Arts Help, artshelp.com/espace-aygo-sustainably-preserving-a-rundown-19th-century-townhouse/.
- Inside Espace Aygo | Architecture, Collective Living and Experimental Design, YouTube youtube.com/watch?v=AVhpmoZZIMM (video).

CURRICULUM RESOURCES

- IDEO Design Thinking for Educators Toolkit for download: page.ideo.com/design-thinking-edu-toolkit.
- Explore design thinking tools and prompts from the Stanford Design School, dschool.stanford.edu/innovate/tools. Find additional resources at Stanford's K12 Futures Library, dschool.stanford.edu/tools/k12-futures-library, featuring activities such as "Do a Duchamp: Redirect Your Thoughts to Reveal New Possibilities," dschool.stanford.edu/tools/do-a-duchamp.
- Design Thinking Educator Resources from the Henry Ford Learning Institute: learn.hfli.org/course/design-thinking-teacher-resources.
- "What Is Design Thinking?" Interaction Design Foundation (IxDF), ixdf.org/literature/topics/design-thinking.
- Elizabeth Crawford and Ben Pendarvis, "5 Ways to Use Design Thinking as a Solutionary Educator" (2023), Institute for Human Education, humaneeducation.org/five-ways-to-use-design-thinking-as-a-solutionary-educator/.

The exhibition catalogue *Walker Design Triennial: Beyond Materialism*, published by the Walker Art Center, is available in the Walker Shop or online at shop.walkerart.org.



Above: *Walker Design Triennial: Beyond Materialism* exhibition catalogue.

Walker Art Center
725 Vineland Place
Minneapolis, MN 55403
walkerart.org

This educator guide accompanies the exhibition *Walker Design Triennial: Beyond Materialism*, on view at the Walker Art Center October 17, 2026–February 14, 2027.

TOUR PROGRAMS
For more information about the Walker's school and tour programs or to book a tour of the exhibition, please visit walkerart.org/learn/schools-and-educators/.

TEACHER RESOURCES & LESSON PLANS
For additional resources for teachers and lesson plans, visit walkerart.org/learn/schools-and-educators/resources-for-learning/.

ABOUT THE WALKER ART CENTER
The Walker Art Center, located across from the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, is an interdisciplinary contemporary art center committed to supporting the creative expression of artists and the active engagement of audiences. The Public Engagement, Learning, and Impact team at the Walker supports learning for people of all ages, abilities, and familiarity with contemporary and modern art.

Walker Design Triennial: Beyond Materialism is organized by the Walker Art Center and made possible with lead support from Andrew Duff.

Major support is provided by Martha and Bruce Atwater, and the John Gabbert and the Room & Board Foundation Exhibition Fund.

Additional support is provided by the Edward R. Bazinet Charitable Foundation and the Whaley Foundation. The Walker's commission of VESSEL's *Learning to Build, Building to Learn* is supported by Lois and John Rogers.

The exhibition catalogue is supported by Lewis Baskerville and a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in support of Walker Art Center publications.

Lead support for the Walker's Learning and Public Programs is provided by the Pohlad Family Community Engagement Fund.

©2026 Walker Art Center