

Cheap art

5 masterpieces under \$50

By Candace Leigh

Now that you've traded milk crates for dresser drawers, cinder blocks for an entertainment center, and sporks for real utensils, you're almost grown up. It's time to release a few last souvenirs of dorm life. Pull the pushpins out of those concert posters and get ready for art. Here are five thrifty ways to look cultured:

■ FRAME YOUR ALBUMS

Show off your musical style and add a pop of color by showcasing favorite album covers. Urban Outfitters offers the perfect size frames for \$15 each, or two for \$19. While staying true to your tastes, pick album art with bold themes and vibrant shades. The bright and black graphic covers for '50s and '60s jazz work well, as do sharp art images like The Velvet Underground's "banana" record. If you don't have much vinyl, check out resale music shops and garage sales. Though some new imports may be pricey, most old-school finds are only a buck or two. Display your mix in square groups of four or nine for impact.

■ USE VINTAGE FABRICS

Get a retro vibe by using funky fabrics. Purchase a pre-stretched canvas from the craft store, preferably one with a staple-free edge. Small or large, up to 48 inches square, will work, as many yardages come in a 54-inch width. After ironing the material with a light starch, lay the canvas face down on top and cut away selvage, leaving a few inches of fabric border. Pull the fabric taut and use a staple gun to secure it to the frame. Make crisp hospital corners. Hang larger pieces grouped with smaller ones, which show off a detail of the pattern, or pick up a key color in a wild textured second fabric (faux fur, pleather, embroidered remnants).

■ IRON-ON PHOTOS

Instead of relegating your photos to the fridge, adapt them into wall art. If you don't have a digital camera, the photo lab can create a disk for you. Even low-tech graphics programs allow you to easily manipulate images. Burn out colors to make them more dramatic, or try sepia tones for a vintage feel. Crop and enlarge



GET THE SCOOP

interesting details. After experimenting, print on plain stock. When you're happy with the image, print it onto heat transfer paper. Look for an opaque version that will allow you to iron it onto any background color without showing through. (Several are available for \$12 to \$18 at Office Max.) Trim off excess, and iron the photo onto a stretched canvas. It will look cleaner if the image takes up the entire surface or wraps the sides. Use a pressing cloth or enclosed paper to avoid a sticky mess. Glide the iron over gently for about 90 seconds, paying close attention to edges, then press harder for another 90 secs. *Voilà!* Personalized pop art!

■ VISIT THE DISCOUNT STORE

For those of you with a wilder side, try a small installation project. To get the groovy look of Warhol's soup cans, visit a big-box discount store. Look for non-perishable products with kooky names and bright containers. While one bar of Sudzoo soap would look out of place on your mantel, 36 bars look like art. Grouping multiples of cheap consumer products on a simple shelf creates a big impact. Powdered laundry suds, cleansers with non-English names and instructions, and goofy animal cracker boxes work well. See which displays stop you with their repetition as you walk by, and experiment by stacking them in your cart before you buy them.

■ GIVE POSTERS DIMENSION

If you insist on keeping those concert and movie posters, at least make them substantial. Buy a sheet of 1/4-inch to 1/2-inch white foam board from the craft store, the size of your poster or larger. Using aerosol adhesive, carefully spray the back of the poster and smooth over the foam board. Press out wrinkles and air bubbles gently. Trim excess with a straightedge and a very sharp craft knife. It's easy!

Although there's no guarantee any of your artistic endeavors will appreciate in value, you'll stay out of trouble for an afternoon, and you'll jazz up the place in the process.

