

Ground glass obtained by grinding waste bottles can be molded cold to obtain any shape, dimension, or form.

This is only a few of numerous art masterpieces created by Agostinho Rodrigues, famed Portuguese sculptor and inventor of the new process.



## ART MASTERPIECES FROM BROKEN BOTTLES

The short, stocky, gray-haired man with twinkling eyes pointed excitedly to his strange-looking machine. "Here's the machine that does the work," he said. "Watch." With that, he dropped an empty glass bottle in the top. There was a sudden, harsh, whirring noise as the gears grabbed the spinning bottle. In a matter of seconds the bottle was completely demolished, and pieces of it dropped out of the bottom of the machine onto a stack of trays with wire mesh bottoms.

Actually, this process is far more than just the grinding up of a bottle. The machine, with the aid of its owner, had just created a new material that is being used in the creation of fine pieces of sculpture.

The ground glass coming from the machine can be handled safely without any danger of scratches or cuts; there are no sharp edges. Agostinho Rodrigues, famed Portuguese sculp-

tor, takes this ground glass and, working with it cold, creates many types of art forms. The resulting piece is unbreakable, cannot rust or corrode, and can be made translucent.

Señor Rodrigues is tremendously excited with his new material, and for good reasons. He says it is an entirely new form of art. It can be molded so fine a fingerprint will show in perfect detail; it can also be made into a mural or a glass wall hundreds of feet long.

Born forty-nine years ago in Portugal's Madeira Islands, Rodrigues did not come into the world with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. In fact, his family was extremely poor and lived in a small hut with a dirt floor. He had inherited artistic talent from his mother, a designer of Madeira embroidery, but he was first forced to work as a newsboy. Even at the age of five he did his part to add his bit to the family's meager income.

by JACK B. KEMMERER  
PHOTOS FROM THE AUTHOR

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The few pennies gained daily in this manner were not enough, so tiny Rodrigues made some crude tools from an old broken umbrella and sculptured tiny clay figures that he sold to tourists—all this at the tender age of five.

One day Dr. Gunther Maul, a famous German scientist who had been sent to Madeira by the Portuguese government to reorganize Madeira's zoological exhibits, was walking down the street in Madeira. As Dr. Maul paused at a street crossing, he felt a tug on his coat-tails. Looking down, he saw ten-year-old Agostinho Rodrigues. All the boy wanted was to sell Dr. Maul a piece of his sculpture, but he ended up with a job at Madeira's Museum of Natural History.

Eight years later Rodrigues won a contest sponsored by the British Museum in London. During the years that followed he became more and more popular.

During his stay in London, Rodrigues also made portrait heads of many famous persons, and his sculptures can be found in private collections and museums of Portugal, Spain, Brazil, England, and the United States.

At the end of World War II Rodrigues was sent by the government of Portugal to the United States for advanced study at New York's famed Museum of Natural History. It was at this time that he decided that of all the places where he had lived and worked, the United States offered the most freedom and opportunities for artists.

Rodrigues has always worked extensively with children in both Europe and the United States. In fact, he says that he has been suc-

cessful because he is still a child. "You see," he says, "I am a child. I never want to grow up. If I grow up, I shall die. When I stop looking at things through the eyes of a child, I will be too old for art."

In his studios in Los Angeles, California, Rodrigues has searched constantly for new materials in which to present his creations. He worked with ground rocks, asbestos, and other materials until he stumbled upon the idea of using glass. "I kept looking for a material that would be very cheap and available everywhere," he recalls. It suddenly dawned upon him that perhaps old glass bottles would be the answer; they were everywhere and were of many beautiful colors. Nothing seems to be more useless than a bottle emptied of its contents.

Rodrigues knew he would have to work in the glass with his hands, so he developed a machine that would grind the bottles so that no sharp edges were exposed. After the development of this machine, he experimented for months, trying to find the right resin that would bind the powdery glass particles into a solid, durable substance.

Since beginning his experiments he has made many beautiful things from waste bottles. Today his creations are in demand by interior decorators all over the country. But he has not stopped dreaming. He hopes to introduce his process to persons all over the world. "Many poor persons in other countries could use this process at a very small cost and could make their dreams of beauty come true," he says.

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Mr. KEMMERER lives in Los Angeles, California.



The ground glass will set in approximately thirty minutes at a temperature of 75 degrees. It can then be removed carefully from the mold.



The art piece can be left in its natural color (the color of the bottles used) or a different type of finish can be applied. Here gold leaf was applied to give an antique finish.