The book *Invisible Cities*, by Italo Calvino, is an imaginary tale of the explorer Marco Polo returning to the empire to describe to Kublai Khan all the cities he has traveled. The fantastic cities he describe include Octavia--a spider web city; Esmerelda--a city built on water; Beersheba--a jewel city; and Laudomia--a city of the dead. All of these invented cities ultimately describe one real city--the city of Venice.

Imagine describing New York to a stranger, but describing it not as the New York we know from the movies, but as an imagined place. Could we, like Italo Calvino describing Venice, describe New York as a city of jewels? Do the lights along the bridges at night appear like strings of diamonds? Or what about something decaying, or left neglected? Might you describe parts of New York as a City of Broken Glass?
Artist Inspirations:

The Beijing-based sculptor Zhan Wang's *Urban Landscape* is an example of an artist creating an imagined city out of household objects. In this work he uses stainless steel cooking ware to create a model of Beijing--creating rows of uniform objects to resemble uniform blocks of housing, and building into towers made out of circular serving bowls, with “streets” lined with cutlery. The artist said that the stainless steel offered questions about traditional versus contemporary Chinese life. You can read more about the project at: Zhanwangart.com

http://www.zhanwangart.com/en/works/33

The sculptor Sarah Sze also makes city-like sculptures out of everyday objects. Her early sculptures used objects like cue-tips and candy-wrappers to create map-like descriptions of urban places. She often includes items from her studio--like clamplights and ladders--as part of the architectural descriptions. You can see examples of her work at sarahsze.com. You can also see her work via Gagosian gallery.

https://gagosian.com/artists/sarah-sze/
Imagine describing New York to a stranger, but describing it not as the New York we know from the movies, but as an imagined place. Could we, like Italo Calvino describing Venice, describe New York as a city of jewels? Do the lights along the bridges at night appear like strings of diamonds?
EXERCISE:

Create a sculpture out of found objects that reflects city-life in New York. What would it say to create a city out of jewelry--is it a reference to desire, to economy, or both? What about making a city out of discarded packaging from delivery sites--would that speak to consumption, waste, upcycling?

Before beginning, think of aspects of city-life that you would like to highlight in a work of art. It could be related to politics, culture, history, desire, memory. In a notebook, make a list of topics that captivate your interest, and try to be specific. For example:

1. The disparity between wealth and poverty in downtown Brooklyn.
2. The importance of trees (and oxygen) to our lives, and the need for parks
3. Are desire and consumption intertwined in city life, like on billboards in the subway?
4. How has gentrification affected my neighborhood?

After making a list, choose one of these topics around which to build your sculpture.
After you have selected your topic, now make a list of different objects that might represent your issue. For example, if you chose #3, *Are desire and consumption intertwined in city life?* You might make a list like this:

**Objects of desire:**

1. Jewelry
2. Fine chocolates
3. Flowers
4. Designer clothing
5. The latest technology/gadgetry for personal use

For your city, you could use all of these objects and more, or you could focus on one--say a city made entirely of chocolate.

Here is an example of an illustration of objects of desire, arranged almost like a cityscape.
For this project, consider using upcycled materials as part of your sculpture. The responsible use of materials can be integrated into your art practice by making a habit of collecting items you see on the street, or saving cardboard from boxes or consumer packaging, rather than discarding them in the trash.
As an example, I used discarded foam-core pieces from an art installation as materials for a series of projects.

The foam-core is useful for splicing and turning into architecture maquettes.

Cardboard can also be used this way.

To glue the items together, you can use scenic glue, or a hot-glue gun (with caution).
Here is an example of how I used the foam-core, along with cut-up pieces of former drawings, to create a “hotel” city.

I used a disposable plastic food container that I painted with teal acrylic paint (on the outside) as the “pool.” I then filled it with water.

I used a pillowcase as a strange landscape form, to represent dreaming.
Your final work of art does not have to be the sculpture. It could be a photograph of your sculpture. In this example, I placed part of the foam-core sculpture on-top of books, as a photo sketch of how books might appear as architecture. You could create an entire city out of books in your room, and photograph them, using the photo as your final artwork.
You could also choose to make a painting or drawing instead of a sculpture, especially if you are having trouble finding materials, or cannot find space to store them. In this example, I used “Assorted Licorice” candy as architecture for an invented Candyland drawing/painting.
After you have made your sculpture, photograph, or drawing, you might consider presenting it to a group of friends or family, and ask them to describe the sculpture to you, before telling them what it is. Without telling them what you wrote in your notebook, see if they can begin to find the meaning you had intended. This does not necessarily indicate whether your sculpture is a success or failure, but you might find that they offer new and interesting insight!

Afterwards, you can take time to consider the following questions.

**REFLECTIONS:**

1. Through the process of making your sculpture, did you incorporate materials that you did not think of when you were beginning? Did you find your imagination growing even greater as you were working?

2. Do you think your sculpture represents New York, or do you feel you created a completely new city?

3. How do you think viewers might connect to the materials you used? Do you think they may connect to the meaning behind why you used the chosen materials?