Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art

CAMH

TEACHERS’S GUIDE
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Mission

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is a non-collecting institution dedicated to presenting the best and most exciting international, national, and regional art. Through dynamic exhibitions accompanied by scholarly publications and accessible educational programs, the Museum reaches out to local, regional, national, and international audiences of various ages.

The Teacher’s guide is a collection of art interpretation and art making activities related to exhibitions and programming at the CAMH. These lessons are designed to help students understand the connections between contemporary art and their everyday lives. This is done by revealing the contexts of the works, but also visual culture operates in our society at large.


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The Museum’s operations and programs are made possible through the generosity of the Museum’s trustees, patrons, members and donors. The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston receives partial operating support from the Houston Endowment, the City of Houston through the Houston Museum District Association, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Texas Commission on the Arts, and The Wortham Foundation, Inc. CAMH also thanks its artist benefactors for their support including Anonymous, Leonardo Drew, Tim Gardner, Oliver Herring, Jim Hodges, Michael Joo, Kurt Kauper, Jon Kessler, Terence Koh, Marilyn Minter, Ernest Neto and Roxy Paine.
Where is the museum located?
The museum is located in Houston’s Museum District at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, Houston, Texas 77006.

When is the museum open for tours?
The museum is open Tuesday through Friday from 10am to 7pm. On Saturdays the museum is open from 10am to 6pm, and on Sundays from 12pm to 6pm.

Can I schedule a docent tour?
Schools and other groups may schedule a tour of any exhibition, free of charge, with a specially trained Museum guide. Please call 713-284-8274 at least 10 days in advance of your visit.

How much is admission to the Museum?
Admission to the Museum is always free.

What should I do to prepare my students?
Please discuss with your students proper museum conduct and manner, such as: no touching of artworks, no loud talking or shouting, and no running. A very entertaining video on Museum manners produced by the Milwaukee Museum of Art can be found at the web address below.
http://mam.org/learn/podcasts.php

What if I need to cancel or reschedule a tour?
If you need to cancel or reschedule a tour please contact Jamal Cyrus at 713-284-8274, or at jcyrus@camh.org.

Can school buses park on site?
Buses can drop off students on Bissonnet in front of the Museum, but will have to find parking elsewhere in the Museum District.

Can our class eat on-site?
School groups can eat lunch on the Museum’s front yard.
Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art
November 17-February 15

Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art examines the practices of performance in the work of three generations of black artists. Traditionally, black performance has been largely understood through the lenses of popular culture and the dramatic arts. However, black visual artists have long utilized performance as a stand-alone practice to address such themes as the fluidity of identity, the limitations of the body, and the interaction between viewer and performer. This exhibition approaches the material from the perspective of the visual arts, beginning with the “happenings” of the early 1960s and into the contemporary practices of a new generation of artists.

Given the nature of performance as an experiential medium, this exhibition features a variety of performance documentation in the form of photography and video. In other instances, artists have performed directly for the camera, and thus the records of these events are both art and document. The exhibition also includes objects used in performance or performance relics, installations and constructions that serve as the remains of these performances. In addition to the works on view here, live performances are scheduled throughout the duration of the exhibition. This exhibition was organized by Senior Curator Valerie Cassel Oliver.
David Hammons, Untitled, 1968. Pencil and Watercolor. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of George and Judith Sunga. Photo:

**Ice breakers**

1. Show this artwork to your group and ask them do they know what this hand sign means. Now ask them when do they think the hand sign was first used. Initially the hand sign used by English Prime Minister Winston Churchill as a sign for “victory” during World War 2, but during the 1960’s was widely used by the youth movement as a symbol for peace. Share with your group some information about the U.S. during the 1960’s and why 1968, the year the work was made, is considered to be such an important year.

2. Spoken and written words are not the only means of communication. Some people use sign
language to communicate with others. Sign language involves the coordination of hand shape, body movement, and facial expression to communicate thoughts and emotions. Ask your group do they know any words in sign language, or have any family members or friends who use sign language. Ask how would they feel about using this as their means of communication. What are the benefits of sign language, what are its disadvantages, can it be personalized like speech?

Step Into The Studio

**Signs of the Times**

Though sign language is often experienced as language that is performed, there are also ways of putting the language in written form. This project is designed for students to consider the idea of writing with their bodies. Depending upon the age of your class this project could be approached from different angles. Students could write their initials, names, or other words which are meaningful to them.

**Primary Objectives**

- Learn about alternative ways of communicating
- Learn about alternative ways of writing
- Develop a personal statement using sign language hand diagrams
- Utilize different 2 dimensional mediums in the same artwork
- Utilize the visual elements of line, color, shape, etc. in representation and personal expression

**Materials / Tools**

- Vaseline
- Powdered Tempura
- Markers
- Pencils
- Crayons
- Paint brushes

**The Lesson**

1. Have students figure out their statements before putting them onto paper. This could be simply figuring out the appropriate hand signs to make their initials, or brainstorming about a word that is special for them.
2. Have students also consider what their additions to the body print will be, and what medium they will make them in. This may consist of their favorite color, or may be something that reinforces the meaning of the chosen word.
**Process**

1. Mix tempura powder with Vaseline in small cup.

2. Wipe this mixture onto the hand and arm up to the wrist.

3. Have the student press her arm onto the construction paper. Due to “inking” of the hand and the arm this rubbing should produce an image of the hand and the arm.

4. If the tone of the image is too light, then add more of the vaseline mixture. If the tone of the image is too dark and smudgy, then wipe off some of the vaseline mixture.

5. Once students have achieved a good print, then have them add in the other mediums. Remember, it is best if the added medium reinforces the main idea of the work. This will be done through the students consideration and manipulation of the visual elements and principles (see useful resources for more info).

6. If time permits have the student make a small edition of their work. Remember to sign and number!

**Useful References**

http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis.html

http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis2.html
Step Into The Museum


Ice breakers

1. Discuss the notion of an alter ego (defined as a second self or an opposite side of a personality) and a persona (defined as a character in a fictional presentation)

2. How would you use these terms to describe Rammellzee’s Barshaw Gangstarr? (Rammellzee made full-body costumes that were representations of 22 cosmic characters he created)

3. Discuss other well known alter egos (for example: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde; Clark Kent and Superman; Bruce Wayne and Batman; Rapper Eminem and Slim Shady) and personas (Lady Gaga as Jo Calderone; Beyonce as Sasha Fierce)
Who is your Barshaw Gangstarr?

**Primary Objectives**
- Develop characterization, either by drawing or by writing representations of your alter ego or persona
- Imagine and clearly describe characters, their relationships, and their surroundings
- Illustrate ideas from direct observation, imagination, and personal experience

**Materials / Tools**
- Lesson plan handout
- Art materials and/or creative writing tools

**The Lesson**
- Students will be required to be creative and think inwardly about themselves
- They will have to think about who they wish they could be or what they could do as someone else

**Process**
1. Students will write a character description about their own Barshaw Gangstarf
2. Description should include some, or all, of the following points:
   - Name
   - Age
   - General physical description
   - Special friends or enemies
   - Favorite pastimes and hobbies
   - Dress style
   - Personality traits
   - Philosophy of life
   - Most important thing to know about this character
   - Is this character agreeable or disagreeable?
3. This can be a work of fiction or based on reality, and students should be encouraged to discuss if they already have an alter ego or persona and when this identity was formed.

**Ice breakers**

1. Dread Scott’s *I Am Not a Man* was inspired by a historical image. Do you recall the original photograph this artist is referencing? If students do not recall the original image, have them search: Ernest C. Withers, Memphis Sanitation Strike.

2. What differences do you see between the original photograph and the one created by Scott?

3. Why do you think Scott changed the sign’s original text?

4. What do you feel the artist is trying to highlight through this artwork?
Step Into The Studio

History (Scene 1 /Take 2)

Primary Objectives
• Research a political/social movement prior to the 1990s
• Locate an example of promotional material for the chosen movement (ex: poster, protest sign, button, bumper sticker, etc.)
• Redesign that piece of promotional material to talk about a current national or international political/social movement

Materials / Tools
• Reproduction of I Am Not A Man by Dred Scott
• Lesson plan handout
• Online resources:
  http://collections.museumca.org/?q=category/2011-schema/history/political-posters
  http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/browse/ListSome.php?category=Women%27s%20History
• Art materials (to be decided by student)

The Lesson
In this project students will research a political/social movement prior to the 1990s and the historical documentation created to represent that movement (ex: poster, protest sign, button, bumper sticker, etc.). Students will then consider how to reinterpret these ideas and messages for the current moment by redesigning one of the pieces of promotional material.

Process
1. Students will choose a pre-1990s political/social movement that they will reinterpret to represent a current political/social movement of their choice.
2. Students will provide a history of the historical movement, its reason for being, key personalities, and the movement’s effect on society.
3. Students will locate an example of promotional material used to represent their chosen movement (ex: poster, protest sign, button, bumper sticker, etc.)
4. Students will redesign the example of promotional material to address contemporary society. Elements to consider in this component of the assignment are: color, typeface, language/terminology, and form. The student will determine the medium in which the final work is created.
Extension
• Students can locate an area inside their school where they can exhibit their works and share their research with fellow students.
• Students can make multiples of these works and hand out to friends, family, or people in their community.

Assessment
Students will be assessed on the thoroughness and accuracy of their historical descriptions. Students will be assessed on how well they connect this movement to current social needs. Students will be assessed on their political memorabilia design, its effectiveness of its translation.

Useful References
http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis.html
http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis2.html