

Introduction

The Everson Museum of Art presents *Some Assembly Required: Collage Culture in Post War America* (September 27th 2002 through January 26th 2003) and *Pio Galbis*. These exhibitions present a unique forum in which art and general classroom teachers can explore art identity, culture and expression. This packet seeks to facilitate discussion in such a way that concepts can be easily translated for various grade levels and curricular interests.

Our Objectives

The EMA provides this packet to help educators adapt these exhibition offerings to individual curriculum needs. In addition, this packet should enable each instructor to maximize the benefits of a guided tour of the exhibits. We hope that the benefits will be evident in your students' level of participation during and after their museum visit, as well as in your students' ability to transfer the information they learn from these exhibits to other projects.

Overview of Contents

This packet presents *Some Assembly Required: Collage Culture in Post War America* through a variety of projects that include writing, discussions, art making and exploration. Emphasis is placed on observation and discussion, along with suggestions for related projects that address New York State Learning Standards in the Visual and English Language Arts. A number of slides have been chosen for inclusion in this packet for your classroom use.

At the end of this packet is a one-page survey. Please take a minute to fill it out and add any additional comments you may have regarding the usefulness of this packet. We rely on your feedback to best serve your needs.

Visual Thinking Strategies

The EMA utilizes the inquiry based, student-centered Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) curriculum in many of its tours and school-museum collaborations. We encourage educators to use VTS in the classroom to enable students to discuss works of art on their own terms, based on what they see and what they decide is interesting and important. A more comprehensive explanation of VTS can be found at the Visual Understanding in Education website, which we encourage you to visit at www.VUE.org. VTS is a useful tool to use for several narrative works of art in *Some Assembly Required* and *Pio Galbis*. The role of the teacher as facilitator in this process is crucial to its success. If you would like to know more about VTS or are interested in receiving training, please call the Education Department at 474.6064.

GENERAL TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does “collage culture” mean?
- In what ways does the United States represent a collage?
- How do our identities resemble a collage? Our bodies?
- How do we experience collage in mass media?
- How do the materials we use for art-making affect the message of the final product?

WALLACE BERMAN

Slide: Wallace Berman, *Untitled*, 1967-68

“Which is more real: the world, or the way we know it through language and images?”

Wallace Berman was interested in “re-energizing” visual language through art using everyday experiences and ordinary objects, such as pencils, bottles, and keys. Such objects are often overlooked because we are so used to having them around. We take for granted the meanings we have attached to these objects in our own contemporary culture. Berman wanted his viewers to question the social meaning and symbolic value of the objects that surround us.

Berman created “visual poems” by placing everyday symbols in new relationships. His use of a grid system invites viewers to “read” his art as they might a poem, finding new associations as the work is read left to right, row by row. Berman photographed objects, then cut them out and combined them with other photographs of found objects. The collage was then copied using a *verifax*, a predecessor of our modern-day copier. Often, the collage process then continued through several more rounds of image-adding and copying.

In the untitled works shown in this exhibition, Berman placed the objects inside the speaker area of identical hand-held transistor radios—symbols of communication and the means by which message and meaning are transmitted to the world.

Topics for Discussion

- As a child, Wallace Berman drew pictures from his Flash Gordon comic books. How does the format of comic books relate to Berman’s grid composition?
- What does it mean to re-energize something? Why might re-energizing visual language be an artistic concern? A social concern?
- Describe how your eye travels through the work. What devices did the artist use to encourage his work to be viewed in a particular way?
- Why might Berman have chosen the hand holding a transistor radio as the “frame” for his objects?
- How would you make meaning of the objects if they were by themselves? How does the meaning change when you consider the objects as a group?
- Is Berman showing similarities or disparities between the images shown in the radios? What connections do you see?
- How often do you think about the objects you see and use everyday? Is it important to be aware of them? How did they end up in your possession?

Activities

Everyday Objects

Standards: English Language Arts #1, 2; Visual Arts #1, 2, 3

- Think about five objects, tools, or vehicles you have used today. Now imagine life without those five objects.
 - Write a one-page essay about how your life would be different.
- Now imagine that you have those five objects, but they are made out of totally different materials. Perhaps your hairbrush is now made out of porcupine quills, your sneakers are made out of glass, or your fork is made out of spaghetti.
 - Think about the new objects and answer the following questions: What are they made out of? Has their function changed? Are they more or less useful? Are they more or less attractive?
 - Write a one-page fictional story that includes at least two of the altered objects and tells how and why the objects have changed.
 - Choose one of the altered objects to illustrate in a collage. Any combination of media (drawing, photography, found images/objects, etc.) may be used. Think about the textures and colors of the new object, as well as its overall form.

Visual Poems of the Ordinary

Standards: Visual Arts # 1, 2, 4

- For one day collect everything you would normally throw away (scraps of paper, soda cans, etc.)
- Choose 9-12 objects from your collection.
- Digitally photograph the individual objects. Experiment with altering color, size, etc.
 - Note: Conventional or instant cameras can also be used.
- Select a “frame” in which the objects will be presented in your composition, thinking about its significance (Berman’s frame was a hand holding a transistor radio).
- Create a visually interesting grid-based arrangement, thinking about how the work will be “read.”

ROBERT HEINECKEN

Slide: Robert Heinecken, *Shiva Manifesting as a Single Mother*, 1989

“A photograph is not a picture of something, but an object about something.”

Robert Heinecken believes that photographs are not objective windows into reality, but cultural artifacts with their own meanings and stories. In his work, he examines our culture’s use of images and how these images are inextricable from the way we view and shape our sense of reality. He believes that what is pictured in mass media determines what is deemed valuable by society as a whole. Like many collage artists, Heinecken uses elements of mass media to comment on mass media. In this instance, he has used collage to create an image of Shiva, a Hindu goddess who possesses powers of deconstruction and reconstruction.

Topics for Discussion

- What is Heinecken using from mass media in *Shiva*? What do these objects have in common? How are they different? Where might we find these objects? What are they used for? Who are they made for?

- How do the objects held by Shiva relate to her powers of deconstruction and reconstruction? Is this Shiva deconstructing or reconstructing? What is she destroying or creating?
- Is this Shiva powerful? Why or why not?
- Imagine a man in the place of Shiva. How does the meaning or message of the work change if a man is holding these objects?
- How do we decide what is valuable? If magazines and television commercials did not exist, what would we value?

Activities

Found Object Tools

Standards: English Language Arts # 1, 2, 3; Visual Arts # 1, 2

- Collect a bag of found objects (both man-made and natural).
- Using these materials (and very limited studio materials, such as glue, tape, twine, etc.) create a tool that could be used by Shiva to either deconstruct or reconstruct. Think creatively and conceptually about deconstruction and reconstruction. For example, the tool might be a seed-dispenser to reconstruct a forest, a net that captures compliments to help a person rebuild self-confidence after a bad breakup, or a tool that dispenses messages that help deconstruct a stereotype.
 - **NOTE:** Do not make a hatchet or other potentially harmful tool!!!
- Write a short essay about your tool. Discuss who would use it, why it would need to be used, why the particular materials were chosen, etc.

Gods and Goddesses

Standards: Social Studies #2; Visual Arts #1, 2, 4

- Research gods and goddesses from a variety of cultures and choose one that represents an issue of personal significance to you (something you would like to change or do).
- Using actual objects, photographs, and/or magazine images, create a portrait of yourself as that god or goddess, resolving the issue. For example, your portrait could show you as Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty, throwing away make-up and hairspray.

BETYE SAAR AND MIRIAM SCHAPIRO

Slide: Betye Saar, *Lullaby*, 1999 and Miriam Schapiro, *Explode*, 1972.

Betye Saar's childhood was very much influenced by fabric. Her mother was a seamstress, and during the Depression, the only dolls and toys available were those made from scraps of fabric. Her art tells stories of personal lives, using fabric and other objects from those lives. As one critic wrote about Saar, "For this artist, fabric is never inert, but always alive with past lives. Saar gravitates toward fabric that has been worn, soiled, stained, cried upon, bled upon, sweated in, folded, torn, mended, and handed down. For this artist, as with all of us, cloth is the stuff of stories and memories."

The buying, sewing, and repairing of fabric have traditionally been considered "women's work." Many fabric-related activities (sewing, quilting, crocheting, etc.) have been seen as crafts, not art, and have therefore been overlooked in the fine art world. Miriam Schapiro's artwork deals directly with this issue. During the 1970's, she created a method of collage called "femmage" that utilized

objects from women’s lives and the traditionally-female skills of embroidery and quilting—skills that Schapiro believes have been devalued in the male-dominated art world. Her work comments on the social and artistic oppression of women. Schapiro once said, “I felt that by making a large canvas magnificent in color, design, and proportion, filling it with fabrics and quilt blocks, I could raise a housewife's lowered consciousness.”

Topics for Discussion

- Saar tells histories of people and families by using their actual objects. How is this different than creating a painting of these objects? How does the use of these objects influence the relationship between the viewer and the subject of a collage?
- Why are a painting and a quilt looked at so differently? Does one require more time or talent? Is one fundamentally more valuable or useful than the other? How have they traditionally been used?
- Why is it historically significant that Saar and Schapiro use fabric as a fine art material?
- What do you regularly discard that could be made into artwork?
- How do you choose the fabric/clothes in your life? Are any based on tradition/heritage, or more on current fashions? Is clothing just decoration to you, or are there items of clothing you have worn that have a deeper personal, social, or family significance?

Activities

“I Am” Poems

Standards: English Language Arts # 2, 4

- Choose five friends or family members and brainstorm different types of material that could best represent each person (Note: material does not have to be confined just to fabric!).
- Create a three-line “I Am” poem from the point of view of each person. In the first line, state what material the person is made of. In the second line, choose a few words that describe feel or appearance. In the third line, describe an action.
 - For example:

I am rusted metal	I am worn corduroy
Sharp around the edges,	Soft and warm,
Trying to stay strong.	Offering protection and comfort.
- Follow-up: Organize an “I Am Poem” poetry reading in your classroom.

Material-Based Self Portraits

Standards: English Language Arts # 1, 2; Visual Arts # 1, 2

Note: This activity was adapted from the UIC Spiral Art Education website. For more information, go to <http://www.uic.edu/classes/ad/ad382/>

Like many of the artists in this exhibition, both Betye Saar and Miriam Schapiro based much of their artwork on the significance of the materials used to create the work. This activity asks students to create a 2-dimensional plan for a sculpture (not an actual sculpture!), so that they are free to think creatively about the meaning and message of the materials used in art-making, and to challenge them to stretch beyond the limits of what could actually be created in 3-dimensions.

- Imagine that you are making a sculpture of yourself, but have no traditional art materials—no clay, metal, wood, or papier-mâché.
- Create a list of materials not typically used in sculpture. (One way to approach this is to ask students to compile a list of things found in a junkyard, a bedroom, a refrigerator, pants pockets, in a lake, at a factory, on a spaceship, on the moon, etc.)
- Choose a personally meaningful pose. Consider how the pose and the material choice will work together—will they create continuity of meaning or are they creating tension through unlikely juxtapositions?
- Take pictures of the students in their chosen poses. You can use a digital camera and download the images into the computer. If this is not an option, you can scan photographs. After the images have been input into the computer, knock out the background and use Postermaker (or a comparable program) to enlarge and print the images in life-size scale. You may have to tile the images. If so, you will have to show the students how to reconstruct the image.
 - **Note:** A simpler, less technologically based option is to use a silhouette tracing of the students. Use a strong light and project the student's shadow onto paper mounted on the wall. Trace.
- Have each student write two to three paragraphs about his or her fictional sculpture and the materials he or she plans to use in its construction. This will later be developed into an artist statement. Prompt the students with such questions as: What is it made of? How was it made? How large or small is it? Where is it sited? How do these facts create the meaning you intend to convey about yourself? Instead of an essay the students may write a poem.
 - A few examples of the students' material choices: "I am made of marshmallows and rocks." "I am made of airplane tickets and movie lights."
- If working with digitally produced images, students will probably need to reassemble and paste their images to a large sheet of paper. Students can now develop their photographic or traced images by adding actual materials, drawings, or Xeroxes of the chosen materials to the work. For example, if a student writes that he or she is made out of flames and clouds, these images could be drawn, or the student could find them in a magazine, Xerox them, and collage them onto the figure. Encourage students to incorporate various production methods, such as collage, painting, changing the photographic image with subtle shading, etc.

NOTE: For examples of finished projects, go to:

http://www.uic.edu/classes/ad/ad382/sites/Projects/P001/P001_first.html

NANCY SPERO

Slide: Nancy Spero, *Goddess and Centaur II*, 1988.

“Women have been present in history; it’s just that we’ve been written out and we must rewrite ourselves back into it.”

In Nancy Spero’s work, she examines the ways in which our view of Western history has been distorted by the people who have traditionally written this history—namely, privileged white men. Much of her artwork is an attempt to show the historical roles of women that male historians have, in her view, overlooked. While many of the artists in this exhibition use found objects and images

to create their collages, Spero creates collages out of her own drawings, as well as rubber stamps made from her own drawings.

Topics for Discussion

- What is the artist's role in recording and telling history?
- Which provides a more accurate record of history: words or images (or maybe neither)? Why?
- Is there ever a completely accurate telling of a historical event or situation? Why or why not?

Activities

How factual are facts?

Standards: Social Studies #2; English Language Arts # 1, 2

- Research a historical event, citing major facts, statistics, etc. Using these facts as a starting point, write a narrative about the event from two very different points of view (such as a slave and a slave owner, or a prohibitionist and a tavern owner).

Drawing Collages

Standards: Visual Arts 1, 2, 4

- Choose an issue or topic that you feel has been unjustly represented. The issue could be historic, or an issue from your everyday life, such as the representation of teenagers in the media (Teachers may want to lead the class in a brainstorming session about possible issues).
- Create a series of contour line drawings based on this theme. The drawings could be from the figure, from nature, from still-life, or from found images.
- Use these drawings (or Xeroxes of them) to create a collage, using whatever other art materials you feel would strengthen and unify composition and concept.

STARN TWINS

Slide: Mike and Doug Starn, *Blue Hands*, 1982-87.

The Starn twins (Mike and Doug Starn) are known for their torn and crumpled photographic images composed from multiple fragments of prints stuck together. The images are often photographed from reproductions of Old Master paintings or famous historical figures. Their work bears the scars of its making, with scotch tape, push pins, and glue left on the work as a testament to the creative process. For the Starn twins, the process of making the art is part of the subject matter they deal with in their work.

The Starn twins often use photographs to discuss the instability of memory and the ambiguity of history. We tend to think of photographs as representing the "truth." However, these artists alter and combine photographs, reminding us that all forms of art and media are a human creation, representing a particular point of view and open to interpretation.

Topics for Discussion

- There are many visual artists who show their creative process in drawing, painting, and sculpture by accentuating brushstroke, eraser marks, fingerprints, etc. How does it change the viewer's understanding of an image if the "marks of the maker" are evident? Is there a

difference between showing the creative process in a painting and showing it for a photograph? Why? What does this do to our sense of a photograph as a visual representation of reality?

- The Starn twins are also known for photographing paintings, then altering the photographs. How does this change our understanding of the painting? What is the difference between a painting and a photograph of a painting?

Activities

Truth in Memory

Standards: English Language Arts #1, 2, 3, 4

- Return to a moment, a memory, a day in your childhood. Picture is so clearly that you can touch it. Divide your paper in half. In the first column, write about this day, this image, from a nostalgic point of view—make the sun shine, pretend everything is pleasant. In the second column, expand your range. Include any foreboding, fears, shadows, doubts, or thoughts that make this image more complex and nuanced than the first version. Read them both. Look at them side by side and compare the two worlds. Which feels more true? Would blending the two describe the truth more accurately? (adapted from *Writing with Multiple Intelligences*, by Edna Kovacs)
- Or... Write about a specific event or day in your life when you were younger. Include as many details as possible (things like weather, your mood, how you were feeling that day, etc.). Now ask a friend or relative who was there with you to tell you what he or she remembers of that day, as detailed as possible (and you can't tell them your version first!). What are the major differences in the two versions of the story? The similarities? Which is more accurate?

Altered Image

Standards: Visual Arts # 1, 2, 3

- Find a reproduction of a well-known artwork. Use it as the base for a collage, altering it with found images and your own painting and drawing. You may want to consider creating a character or two (drawn or collaged) who interact with the original artwork; for example, a person selling the artwork in a peculiar setting, or two people discussing the work in a museum.

Maker's Mark

Standards: Visual Arts # 1, 2

- Create a drawing or a clay sculpture that focuses on showing the process by which you made the piece. Make the creative process one of the central subjects of the piece.

BARBARA KRUGER

Slide: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled [Who Speaks? Who is Silent]*, 1990.

Barbara Kruger uses popular media to critique popular media and our notions of power, gender and race. She wants her art to look like graphic design and to be seen in graphic design format (such as billboards, posters, magazine ads), then placed in public view in ways that people do not associate with “fine art.” Her art has appeared in bus depots, parks, city streets, and magazines, as well as on t-shirts, shopping bags, coffee mugs, and baseball caps.

Topics for Discussion

- Is Barbara Kruger's work art? Why or why not?
- Why does Barbara Kruger use advertising for art making?
- Should art have a social message? Does it have to have a message, or is it enough to just have aesthetic quality? Does it have to have aesthetic quality, or is it enough to just have a message?
- Is it necessary for art to take a certain amount of time or talent to create?
- Does the meaning of art change depending on where it is located? (in a museum, on the side of a bus, on a billboard, on television, in a magazine, etc.)

Activities

Altered Locations

Standards: English Language Arts # 1, 2; Visual Arts # 1, 2, 3, 4

- Choose a reproduction of a 2- or 3-dimensional artwork. Now find an image of an environment (indoor or outdoor) into which you can collage the artwork. The chosen environment should be a very unlikely place to find this art object.
- Write a narrative, either from the point of view of the art object, the point of view of a passerby, or the point of view of another person or animal relevant to your collaged environment. The narrative should explain why the artwork ended up there, and how the change has affected those involved.

Subversive Ads

Standards: English Language Arts # 1, 3, 4; Visual Arts # 1, 2, 3, 4

- Students will be divided into small groups. Each group will receive several magazines, each group focusing on a specific magazine genre (home & garden, women's interest, music, men's interest, parenting, etc.) Students will examine the magazines and, as a group, will answer the questions to help them think about the intended message and audience of the ads, such as: What is the purpose of this magazine? Who do you think reads this magazine? What types of products or services are represented in the ads? What are the characteristics of the people in the ads? (race, class, gender, age, etc.) Who do you think the ads are targeting?
- Each group will choose several ads to present to the class. They should discuss whether or not the images and text seem to relate to the product being advertised and whether or not the images seem to have a direct connection to the text, as well as their own perceptions of the ads.
- Using additional class time and/or homework time, students will choose the text from one ad and, using collage techniques (or a computer program such as Photoshop), will recreate the ad's imagery to subvert the original message.

Questions for students to think about as they recreate the ad:

- What is the ad **not** telling you about the product? (its other uses, its consequences, its cost, who else might use it, etc.)
- How else could the text be interpreted, independent of the ad?

Variation: For other subject areas, have students alter an ad to illustrate opposing points of view about a particular issue or event. For example, students could alter existing ads to promote the points of view of a Confederate soldier and a Union soldier, or to promote the points of view of an environmentalist and a logger.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

Slide: Robert Rauschenberg, *Booster*, 1967.

“Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made—I try to act in the gap between the two.”

Robert Rauschenberg is best-known for his “combine paintings” of the mid-1950s, in which he combined painting and assemblage techniques. Rauschenberg believed that there was no division between life and art. This belief prompted him to use a wide variety of non-traditional materials to make his work, including rubber tires, stuffed animals, images from newspapers, and many other found materials from everyday life. Rauschenberg’s work explores the relationship that is created between seemingly disparate objects and images when they are placed together. This idea of combining and noticing combinations of objects and images has always been central to Rauschenberg’s art. As with many collage and assemblage artists, Rauschenberg relied heavily on the element of chance in his work—objects or images found by chance, or emotional connections created by the chance combination of images.

Topics for Discussion

- Rauschenberg used many materials that are not generally considered art materials. Can a work be art if it is not made out of traditional art materials? How did certain materials become the “accepted” materials with which to make art?
- *Booster* is considered a type of self-portrait because it includes an X-ray of the artist. What makes a work of art a portrait? Does the subject have to be recognizable? Does the subject have to be present at all?
- What does it mean to incorporate elements of chance into a work of art? Does life involve many elements of chance? Why was the acknowledgement of chance so important to Rauschenberg?

Activities

Found Poem

Standards: English Language Arts # 1, 2, 4

- Go to a particular environment such as a grocery store, the cafeteria, a park, a shopping mall, etc. Walk around and make a list of sounds or write down things you overhear—conversations, bits of songs, loudspeaker announcements, etc. Write down only things that you actually hear—remember, you are working with chance!
- Work these notes into a poem suggesting the atmosphere of the place or your feelings about the place. (adapted from *Writing with Multiple Intelligences*, by Edna Kovacs)

Found Portraits

Standards: Visual Arts # 1, 2

Many of Robert Rauschenberg's works contain elements of self-portraiture, such as his astrological chart and other symbols from his life. *Booster* is a type of self-portrait because the central image is an X-ray of the artist.

- Working in pairs, create a self-portrait mask using plaster cloth strips. Don't forget to vaseline your skin and plastic wrap your hair!
- Choose a theme for your life mask. Using the combine technique of Rauschenberg, incorporate at least two found objects into the mask (again—rely on chance!).
- Paint, collage, or draw on the mask to finish it.

Or...

- Create a self-portrait without using any actual images of yourself. Rather, use only symbols of yourself (as Rauschenberg used his astrological chart and X-ray) to communicate who you are. Found objects, found images, and drawn or painted images may all be used.

ED KIENHOLZ

No slide

Ed Kienholz often painted with alternative tools, such as the broom used to paint *Untitled (Early Broom Painting)*, one of the works in the exhibition. The texture and boldness of the paint in this work give it a feeling of movement and spontaneity.

Topics for Discussion

- Why would the artist choose to paint with a broom? How does the painting method affect the message of the finished painting?
- What else could you use to apply paint to a surface?
- Would the painting look the same if a regular paintbrush had been used? Why or why not?

Activities

Brushing Up

Standards: Visual Arts # 1, 2

- Create a painting using only found objects to apply the paint.

Or,

- Create a paintbrush out of alternative materials and use it to create a painting.

JOSEPH CORNELL

No slide

Joseph Cornell was called the "Poet of the Scrap Heap" because of his interest in creating artwork from found objects. He is most famous for his shadow boxes, which consisted of found objects placed inside a found container, such as the untitled box construction in this exhibition. Cornell was interested in the symbolism of the objects and the associations created between the objects

when placed together in a box. He often imagined the histories of the images and objects that he found. Cornell was also fascinated by the criteria we use to determine what is precious and what is mundane in society.

General Discussion Topics

- How do we decide what is valuable? What shoes are worth more money? What books are worth reading? What is fashionable?
- How do we decide what to throw away? Is it possible that what one person thinks is garbage could be considered valuable by another person?
- What are the things you throw away the most every day? Could there be another use for any of those objects?

Activities

Imagined Histories

Standards: English Language Arts #1, 2, 3

- Find an object that has been discarded (at home, at school, on the street, etc.) Imagine a history of that object. What was its use before it was discarded? Was it part of a larger object? Did somebody own it and take care of it at one time? How did it end up where you found it?
- Write a narrative, either from the point of view of the object, the previous owner, or the finder.

Box Constructions

Standards: English Language Arts #1, 2; Visual Arts #1, 2

- Create a box construction using a found container (such as a shoebox) and a variety of found objects.
- What could the objects symbolize? Would the message change if an object was removed or added? Do the objects have a different meaning when seen together than they did when they were individual objects?
- Considering the new associations and meanings of the objects now that they are placed together, write a fictional narrative, using the box construction as a starting point. For example, the narrative might discuss who placed the objects together, why they are important to that person, how they are all associated, etc.

Sources

- <http://www.artsconnected.org/classroom/>
- *Writing with Multiple Intelligences*, by Edna Kovacs. Blue Heron Publishing, 1999.
- <http://www.uic.edu/classes/ad/ad382/>