TV for Spiritual Beings

GUIDE

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HOW TO USE THE EPISODE IN THE CLASSROOM

TV for Spiritual Beings is about 20 minutes long and is meant to be viewed all the way through. There are four artworks featured under the overall theme of the spiritual in contemporary art. For each of the first three artworks, there is a prompt students can return to once the video is complete. The fourth artwork is discussed by two apprentices from the MCA's Teen Creative Agency.

This guide is meant as a supplement to the episode. It expands on some of the ideas and artworks covered in the episode. While some of the sections could be shared directly with students for critical reading and discussion, they are meant to be additional research for teachers to incorporate the episode into their existing curriculum.

Teachers have used previous videos in a number of ways:

LIGHT - Assign the episode as homework and reflect on it as a bell ringer the following day.

MEDIUM - View the episode together in class. Break out into groups and invite each group to revisit a section of the video and complete the prompt.

HEAVY - On one day, view the episode together in class and complete the prompts in groups. On the following day, host an in-depth discussion or workshop based on one of the artworks or practices in the episode, developed on your own and aided with information from this guide.

For reference, full information about the artworks featured in the episode are collected below, along with big ideas, prompts, and links to full versions of the originals, where possible.

ARTWORK 1

Rhonda Wheatley
(American, b. 1972)
Energy grid for grounding into one's intuition and authentic self. Quells catastrophizing and perpetual fight-or-flight response. Soothes downward spiraling into self-doubt magnified by isolation. May induce fleeting glimpses into the eternal now. Activate re-calibrating energies by gazing into crystals and vessels. Must be 100% voluntary., 2020

Vintage TV antennas; vintage restaurant coffee pots; vintage glass decanter and metal stand; glass jar of vintage vacuum tubes and dried flower petals; glass vessels with resin and organic elements including cicadas, sea urchin shell, amber, mica flakes, quartz, snakeskin sheddings, dried plants, and more; vintage apothecary and perfume bottles with dried flowers; glass liquor bottle filled with dried peppers, sea sponge, snake vertebrae and dried flower petals; quartz crystal cluster; citrine crystal clusters; free-standing crystal points of smoky quartz and citrine; fossilized coral; preserved plants and flowers on the stems; artificial plants; preserved polypore mushroom pieces; and preserved moss

Episode timestamp: 2:05–4:48

Big idea: Breathing and looking are physiological actions, actions that are in our biology, but they can also be spiritual exercises, actions that are affected by and impact other beings and energies that are connected to us.

Prompt: Breathe while gazing into the crystals and vessels, allowing them to soothe or quell any catastrophizing or self-doubt you may be feeling. Talk with a friend or a family member. Share a practice or process you use to realign.

ARTWORK 2

Carolina Caycedo
(Colombian, b. 1978; lives and works in Los Angeles)
Spaniards Named Her Magdalena, But Natives Call Her Yuma, 2013
Two-channel HD video installation, concrete, metal, and water (color, sound)
27 minutes

Episode timestamp: 4:48–11:37

Big Idea: A spiritual worldview is a way of looking at the world. In this case, recognizing that humans aren't the only entities with the power to act. In a spiritual practice, we're called to act a certain way. In this case, we must build ongoing, caring relationships with trust and empathy.

Prompt: How do you come to feel spiritually connected to the natural world?

Link to full video.

ARTWORK 3

Nereida Patricia
(American, b. 1996)
Ms. Colombia, 2019
Glass beads, glass dust, glitter acrylic, paper clay, and wood

Episode timestamp: 11:37–14:07

Big Idea: Looking at art can be a way of being reminded of the presence of those spiritually capable of inspiring us to a better way.

Prompt: Think about someone whose life, deeds, philosophy, or memory can serve as a personal reminder of your aspirations. Invite them into your everyday life by creating or placing a likeness of them in a special place.

ARTWORK 4

Carolina Caycedo
(Colombian, b. 1978; lives and works in Los Angeles)
Apparitions, 2019
Collaboration with choreographer Marina de Magalhães and filmmaker David de Rozas, together with dancers Samad Guerra, Isis Avalos, Bianca Medina, Jose Richard Aviles, and Celeste Tavares
Single-channel HD video projection (color, sound)
9 minutes, 30 seconds

Episode timestamp: 14:07–20:15

Link to video excerpt.

INTRODUCTION

In this episode, *TV for Spiritual Beings*, we explore art throughout the museum that connects to the spiritual—in us, around us, in spite of us. We think about art beyond the visible, and beyond the rational, to connect with the spiritual.

Art can be considered "spiritual" for any number of reasons. When people connect meaningfully with works of art, they might consider it a spiritual experience in that it is revelatory. It causes them to grasp some deep truths about the world. On the other hand, some artworks are depictions of religion or objects once used for religious purposes. Many times, religions include spirituality, but spiritual things aren't necessarily specific to any one religion. The spiritual can be simply analogous to the feeling that we are all connected: you and me, as human beings, share a spiritual connection. In this episode, we approach the idea of the spiritual in art from three perspectives: spiritual beings, spiritual practices, and spiritual worldviews.

SPIRITUAL BEINGS

Spiritual traditions often have revered people whose life or practices are an example: gods, ancestors, mentors, saints. Discovering and communing with those spiritual beings is a way to honor them and guide yourself. For many cultures throughout history, this was a fundamental reason people made art objects: to depict and evoke the presence of spiritual beings. In *TV for Spiritual Beings*, we feature two artworks with connections to spiritual beings. In her artwork *Ms. Colombia*, Nereida Patricia

depicts the eponymous trans elder, also known as Alphonzo Gomez, who died mysteriously in Jackson Heights, Queens in 2019. Hisham and Vivian, our Teen Creative Agency Apprentices, discuss a video work by Carolina Caycedo called *Appartions*, in which dancers allude to the Yoruba deity Oshun. In this guide, you can find out more about Oshun.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

In a spiritual practice, we're called to act a certain way. Spiritual practices are behaviors, rituals, or attitudes that better connect us with ourselves, one another, and the world we share. In *TV for Spiritual Beings*, we feature an artwork and an artist with connections to spiritual practices. Rhonda Wheatley's assemblage encourages viewers to allow chrystals, plants, and vessels to cleanse their energies and ground them in the present and the self. Carolina Caycedo describes her way of working as "spiritual field work," which is the establishment of ongoing, caring relationships with communities and her collaborators built upon trust and empathy. In this guide, you can learn more about a more specific concept Carolina Caycedo references, "sentipensante" or "feel-thinking," and how you can adapt it for classroom use.

SPIRITUAL WORLDVIEWS

A spiritual worldview is a way of looking at the world, often endeavoring to see the interconnectedness of all things. In TV for Spiritual Beings, we present Carolina Caycedo's work as part of a spiritual worldview. For Caycedo, as well as many ancestral cultures, the natural world—including rivers, fish, and even rocks—are spiritual beings that possess

social and political agency. In this way, she doesn't make distinctions between human and non-human entities. Her work *Spaniards Named Her Magdelena, But The Natives Call Her Yuma*, illustrates this world view with whispered stories and juxtaposed images from the river. In this guide, you can look into the history of community activism to protect the Magdalena and surrounding cultures from destructive damming projects.

Can art help us change our way of being?

A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: CONTEMPLATIVE READING

"In an era of standardized education featuring an overload of information, we as teachers in K-16 need to re-vision how text and images can teach more than skills and content. More specifically, we need also to offer tools for developing personal meaning and significance in the lives of the students we teach."

-- Jane Dalton, "Introduction" in *The Whole Person: Embodying Teaching and Learning Through Lectio and Visio Divina* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), xiii.

To create her artwork, Carolina Caycedo does extensive research in communities affected by invasive privatization projects and working toward environmental justice. She refers to this research as "spiritual field work," which she defines as the establishment of ongoing, caring relationships with communities and her collaborators built upon trust and empathy. Beyond Caycedo's work, embodied, intuitive, and empathetic practices are central to anti-oppressive research and learning practices.

The Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda coined the term sentipensante, which translates to "feel-thinker," to describe such a person—one who conducts research in a participatory, subjective manner. Rather than coldly collecting data, "a body that feels is a thinking body and, therefore, a continuous, constant, and accessible source of knowledge."[1] While initially used in the context of anthropological research, the concept of sentipensante, "feel-thinkers," also has implications for classroom learning. Laura Rend ó n, an education theorist, activist, and researcher, developed the concept into a pedagogy "based on wholeness...respecting the harmonious rhythm between the outer experience of intellectualism and rational inquiry and the inner dimension of insight, emotion, and awareness."[2]

Rendón's sentipensante pedagogy has been influential in processes for reading and looking developed by educators interested in spiritual learning practices and contemplative approaches. One such practice is excerpted here from Elizabeth Hope Dorman of Fort Lewis College. She introduced this process to students verbally and with a handout, guiding them each round with clarification and support:

1. Lectio (Reading): Become aware of a particular phrase, sentence, or short passage from the text that jumps out at you in some way. Listen to your intuition and your body's wisdom to guide you. Don't overthink this. It may help to consider passages that you want to argue with, agree with, aspire to, or analyze the assumptions behind. Once you have selected the passage, write it down in a note catcher along with [the] page number. Then, read aloud your passage to the group. The group's role is to listen attentively, listen with their minds and hearts open.
2. Meditatio (Search for Meaning): Reread the passage you chose, and pay attention intuitively to responses in your body, mind, and heart. Reflect again on the passage, searching for meaning that you can connect with or that you want to discuss. Notice

any responses, thoughts, bodily reactions, emotions, connections that come to you. After engaging in this internal process of contemplative inquiry and reflection, please share your response with your group. The group's role is to listen attentively, listen with their minds and their hearts open.

3 Oratio (Response): Now, let your instincts/intuition guide you as you respond and connect yourself with the passage by creating a response. The response can be words, a short phrase, a drawing/sketch, a body movement or sound, etc.—whatever you feel most appropriately expresses your experience with the passage. After a few minutes, you will be invited to share your response with the group. The group's role is to listen attentively, listen with their minds and their hearts open.

4 Contemplatio (Insight and Wisdom): Now, return to the text to reread your selected passage. Simply allow yourself to let the words land on you, take them in, experience them. Stay present during this process, with your body and mind in the same place at the same time. Just notice what it feels like to let the words land on you again. This is an internal process of personal discovery to uncover hidden biases and/or strengthen convictions, not something shared aloud with peers.[3]

[1] Carla Acevedo-Yates, "Embodied Spiritual Fieldwork," in *Carolina Caycedo: From the Bottom of the River* (Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and Delmonico Books, New York, 2020), 15.

[2] Redon, L.I., *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2014), 2.

[3] Dorman includes these latin words because she sees sentipensante pedagogy in an a process called Lectio Divina, which originated in western monasticism. For more information on Lectio Divina, see Dalton, et al. *The Whole Person: Embodying Teaching and Learning Through Lectio and Visio Divina* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019) or check out the podcast "Harry Potter and the Sacred Text."

How can you learn as a whole person?

A SPIRITUAL WORLDVIEW: PROTECTING THE MAGDELENA

In Carolina Caycedo's video *Spaniards Named Her Magdalena, But Natives Call Her Yuma*, she alludes obliquely to a very real situation: the struggle of Colombian farming communities against privatization projects which co-opt natural resources for the benefit of multinational corporations. For Caycedo, as well as many ancestral cultures, the natural world—including rivers, fish, and even rocks—are spiritual beings that possess social and political agency. Throughout the artwork, she illustrates the conflicts between this worldview and a capitalist one, in which the natural world is a cache of resources to be extracted. Caycedo draws this out with an uncomfortable comparison, showing the power that western capitalists exert over the natural world as indistinct from the power they exert over people.

Caycedo's work as an artist is inextricable from her work as an activist. In a separate, more documentary-style video produced for *Creative Time Reports*, a publication that platforms the work of artists who are taking on some of the most challenging and pressing issues of our time, Caycedo and a collaborator, Entre Aguas, film those people whose way of life has been threatened. In the accompanying article, Caycedo and Aguas give a detailed history of the decades-long struggle to protect the Magdalena river.

In 1989, the Colombian government dammed the Magdalena river. This project flooded agricultural plains and displaced residents of the area. Since then, Colombia has privatized the entire river, initiating numerous other damming and fracking processes. More than 200,000 Colombians have been displaced by dams and resource-extraction projects, according to the Ríos Vivos movement's report at the 153rd session of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2014.[1]

In *Huila's Bleeding* Carolina Caycedo and Entre Aguas interview residents of the affected areas and document some of the protest actions taken by those residents. The video and article introduce some important concepts to discuss with students.

"The privatization of territory goes hand in hand with the militarization of everyday life."

Privatization is a process of converting a public resource into an owned property or business. In this case, the Colombian government hires corporations to extract energy from the river for profit. In doing so, they prevent communities from using the river and the land the way they have for centuries.

Militarization is a process for organizing and arming society for war. In addition to equipping people with combat armor and weapons, militarization also refers to practices of surveillance, escalation, and control.

In *Spaniards Named Her Magdalena, But Natives Call Her Yuma*, we see rivers stopped up by dams and people corralled by police barricades. In *Huila's Bleeding*, we see protestors engaging in direct actions like road blockades who are met

What connections do you see between the way we treat the natural world and the way we treat one another? How have you experienced privatization and militarization?

with police in riot gear. Caycedo presents these two kinds of violence (violence against humans and violence against the natural world) as deeply interrelated.

"[Our protest is] against the dispossession that the Colombian State is implementing."

Dispossession is the action of depriving someone of land, property, or other possessions. It's a practice that redistributes wealth into the hands of the few. (If the strategy is dispossession, one of the ways that happens is through privatization.)

In *Huila's Bleeding*, the residents are no longer able to depend on the Magdalena for resources, because the hydroelectric plants being built have disrupted fishing, farming, and leisure. All the while, the presence of a multinational corporation has driven away local jobs. So, instead of the communities benefiting from the river's resources, those who own the dams will.

"And that is the objective of the resistance, to create a Reserve Zone that would ensure our food sovereignty."

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to determine and produce their own food and agriculture systems. Food sovereignty is also tied to physical, cultural, and ecological health. It stands in contrast to corporate and global food regimes, who dominate systems and markets.

What are some examples of dispossession that have taken place throughout the history of this country? Have you, your family, or your community ever experienced dispossession?

What does food sovereignty mean for people who live in places where they do not grow their own food? How is food a part of your dignity?

In *Huila's Bleeding,* the residents discuss a major impact of the infrastructure projects on their overall wellbeing. Productive farmlands will be flooded by the dam, and instead of being self-reliant, those communities will need to depend on other food sources. Physically speaking, factory foods are less healthy. Culturally speaking, certain foods are integral to a community's identity and dignity. Ecologically speaking, once-productive land will be rendered inert, disrupting the balance of the area. They are advocating for a Reserve Zone to preserve and protect some of that farm land to ensure their food sovereignty.

[1] Carolina Caycedo and Entre Aguas, "'We Need the River to be Free': Activists Fight the Privatization of Colombia's Longest River," *Creative Time Reports*, 2015. Accessed April 1, 2021. https://creativetimereports.org/2015/03/17/activists-fight-privatization-colombias-magdalena-river/

A SPIRITUAL BEING: OSHUN

In her video, *Apparitions*, Carolina Caycedo costumes one of the dancers in a yellow net, and several others in yellow items of clothing. This costuming is a reference to the Yoruba deity Oshun, and her evocation can be read as an effort to cleanse classical spaces of their eurocentrism—spaces where queer and BIPOC individuals like those featured in Caycedo's video are often unrepresented and excluded.

In his book, *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions*, author Nathanial Samuel Murrell provides a thorough description of Oshun:

> Oshun (Osun), the wisdom of rivers, goddess of water, sensuality, and affection, is the mother deity of the Yoruba. She is regarded as the cooling ashe (force) of the orisha and a compliment to the hot-tempered power of Ogun. As patron of the river that bears her name, she cleanses the head as clean water purifies the body and is the cooling water of the divine. Oshun is the deity of fertility and medicine who makes her barren devotees conceive; pregnancy and a bountiful harvest are signs that she is actively at work in her children (devotees). Oshun's avatars claim that she succeeds where doctors fail and heals where modern medicine is ineffectual; she cures her children with cooling waters and feeds barren mothers with fertile honey. In Santeria, Oshun is associated with the Virgin Mary because of her grace, elegance, and gentleness. In Cuba and Cuban neighborhoods in the United States, Oshun is La Caridad del cobre, Cuba's patron saint,

> and the Virgin Mother of Charity. Since the November 1999 debacle of Elian Gonzalez's sea rescue, Oshun has become a cultural icon for religious unity among her children in the Cuban diaspora, as well as an object of artistic, festive, and religious expression. Through a female medium, Oshun makes her exciting appearance at the sacred ritual, whirling and dancing to drums and rhythms in grace and gentleness, and addresses her devotees as children who wear her favorite color yellow and feast on her choice foods—white hen, goat, sheep, and juicy fruits.[1]

In popular culture, Beyoncé has repeatedly and explicitly styled herself as the Yoruba goddess in works like *Lemonade*, and *Black is King*. Kamaria Roberts and Kenya Downs discuss these evocations with Dr. Amy Yeboah, associate professor of Africana studies at Howard University, for PBS:

> In "Hold Up," [Lemonade's] second single, Beyoncé appears as Oshun, a Yoruba water goddess of female sensuality, love and fertility. Oshun is often shown in yellow and surrounded by fresh water. Donning a flowing yellow Roberto Cavalli dress, gold jewelry and bare feet, Beyoncé channels the orisha, or goddess, by appearing in an underwater dreamlike state before emerging from two large golden doors with water rushing past her and down the stairs.
>
> There's two things: you have to watch to watch visually and then you have to watch to listen. The first time around, yes, there's the obvious conversation that people are having about her and her husband, just being a woman going through relationships," Yeboah said. "But it's also reflecting the power of women spiritually. She takes it deeper into African spirituality. We see this in the first

Have you seen Oshun or other spiritual beings referenced in pop culture?

of two baptisms and her emergence as an orisha.

Folktales of Oshun describe her malevolent temper and sinister smile when she has been wronged. In "Hold Up," a smiling, laughing and dancing Beyoncé smashes store windows, cars and cameras with a baseball bat nicknamed "Hot Sauce," letting fans know exactly what she means when she says "I got hot sauce in my bag."

In "Sorry," Beyoncé narrates a spoken-word poem written by Somali-Brit Warsan Shire. The poem asks what her cheating spouse would say at her funeral after killing her with a broken heart. From there, Beyoncé is joined by fellow women on a bus called "Boy Bye," their faces painted in Ori, a sacred Yoruba tradition.[2]

[1] Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 35.
[2] Kamaria Roberts and Kenya Downs, "What Beyoncé teaches us about the African diaspora in 'Lemonade,'" PBS NewsHour, 2016. Accessed April 1, 2021. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/what-beyonce-teaches-us-about-the-african-diaspora-in-lemonade

Which spiritual beings would you evoke to cleanse spaces?

ADDENDUM: TV AND MUSEUMS

In our TV episodes, TV stands for "tour video" and reflects the lo-fi television style we've adopted. Museums and television, or more specifically video and broadcast technology, have a bit of history together.

By the 1970s, the gap between the technological capabilities of artists and mass-media makers had collapsed. Video cameras had just become inexpensive enough to be affordable, and so there was a widespread sense that, all of a sudden, everyone could make video that could be broadcast to television sets across the country. That access was no longer just the purview of television studios financed by media barons.

In January 1974, the Museum of Modern Art in New York held a conference called "Open Circuits: An International Conference on the Future of Television." Artists, writers, critics, and media professionals all came together to dream about how this new, widely accessible broadcast medium would change how people experienced art. Artists like Nam June Paik and Joan Jonas talked about their early experiments with video. Theorists quoted philosophy to predict how the medium would change the next decades. Experts previewed how the technology might evolve. David Ross, who at the time was the director and curator of video art at Long Beach Museum of Art, talked about TV and museums.

In his section, Ross took "a speculative look at the application of video in the reformation of one of our culture's most anachronistic institutions, the art museum."[1] He shared several ways art museums of the time were taking advantage of video technology and television broadcast capabilities:

> At the Greenville County Museum, in South Carolina, they use a video-equipped bus (called Sam) to bring videotapes out into the community for viewing, and to produce tapes with children in various neighborhoods. [. . .] Coming closer to defining the traditional museum approach to television, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts has, since 1954, produced a wide variety of broadcast educational television programs based upon their own collection and general topics in art history.[2]

The purpose of these efforts was accessibility. At times, Ross's words feel as if they were speaking to this current moment and not to an audience decades ago. He speaks intentionally about the importance of museums making their collections and exhibitions available to the public, even if some are "unable to avail [themselves] of the museum's service by visiting the museum's building" or if the museum's educational services need to be accessed when the museum's building is shut down. That kind of accessibility, for Ross, is not just an opportunity. It's a mandate:

> The notion of museum interaction with television is primarily based upon a societal model which requires that institutions dealing with information have the responsibility and should have the capacity to make the results of their activity accessible to their entire community. For the artist, this relationship is inevitable: for the museum it is imperative.[3]

Given the kinds of media and communications technology available today, how could museums be more accessible to their public in the future?

[1] David Ross, "Video and the Future of the Museum," in The *New Television: A Public/Private Art*, edited by Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 114.
[2] Ross, 114–15.
[3] Ross, 115–16.

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