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# HANDMADE MEMORY

*Annā Showers-  
Cruser*

What mark do we leave on our surroundings?  
What possibility do we hold in our hands?

We all have a connection with making things, and many of us with our hands. This resource is an invitation to students, families, and educators to reflect on their personal histories, homes, and imagination in order to play with materials and to engage with two works in the MCA collection.

MUSEUM OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART  
CHICAGO

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*Examine two artworks from the MCA Collection and try some activities to help you look closer at their details.*

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ARTIST INFO: Annette Messenger

## DISCUSSION TOPIC

*Have conversation with friends, classmates, or family members on some themes in the artworks.*

## PROJECT: FAMILY HAND IMPRESSIONS

*Create some handmade artworks your own. Use some simple recipes and processes to make meaningful sculptures.*

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## RELEVANT LEARNING STANDARDS

Illinois Early Learning and Development Standard 31

Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.

Grades K-3

31.A: Develop positive relationships with peers and adults.

31.B: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

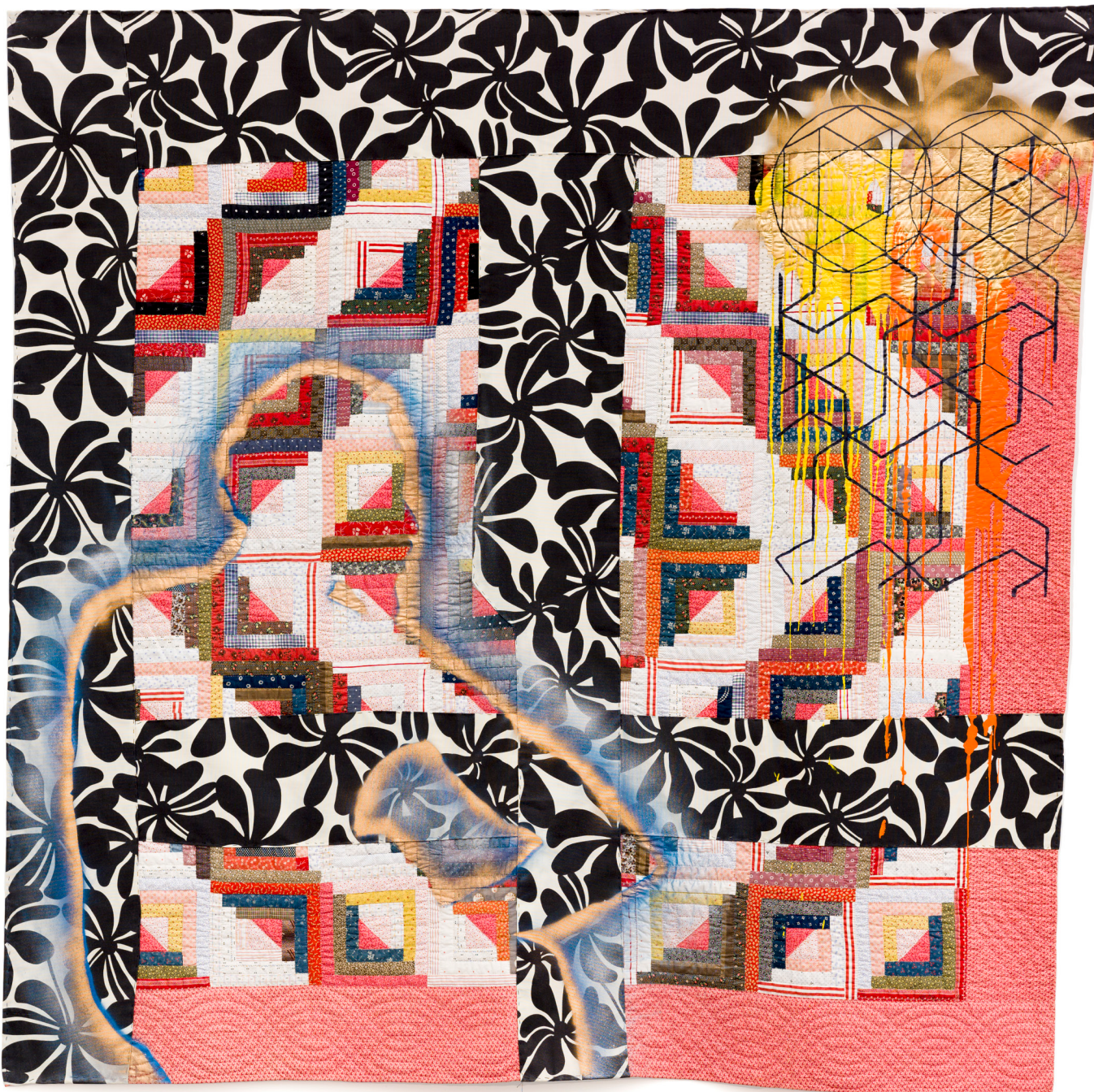
Fine Arts Anchor Standard 10:

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

# ACTIVITIES FOR CLOSE LOOKING

Even though we are looking at two images on a digital screen, can we use our imagination and learn a little bit more about these artworks?





Take a look at Quilt 24. Do you see any sewn shapes in Sanford Biggers' quilt? How might that feel? Now, as fast as you can, look around your home and find the coziest blanket or clothing you can find! Take a minute to close your eyes, and pretend you are a little slug as you slowly run your fingers over the seams. Do you think this quilt would feel differently?

Sanford Biggers, American, b. 1970  
 Quilt 24, 2013  
 Antique quilt, assorted textiles, acrylic, and spray paint  
 77 x 79 in. (195.6 x 200.7 cm)  
 Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of Mary and Earle Ludgin by exchange, 2013.24  
 Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



Now, what happens when you think of “Mes Trophées” by Annette Messager as a map of her favorite things. What kind of objects has she collected? What makes an object special to you?

Imagine hearing what the artist has written on the artwork. Can you read it? If not, what do you think it might say? The writing is in French. What languages do you speak?

Annette Messenger, French, b. 1943  
 Mes Trophées (My Trophies), 1986-88  
 Acrylic, and charcoal and pastel on gelatin silver print  
 Framed: 46 15/16 x 28 3/4 in. (119.2 x 73 cm)  
 Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift from The  
 Howard and Donna Stone Collection, 2002.47  
 Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

# ARTIST INFO: Sanford Biggers

Sanford Biggers (b. 1970) was raised in Los Angeles and currently lives and works in New York City. Sanford Biggers' work is an interplay of narrative, perspective and history that speaks to current social, political and economic happenings while also examining the contexts that bore them. His diverse practice positions him as a collaborator with the past through explorations of often overlooked cultural and political narratives from American history. Working with antique quilts that echo rumors of their use as signposts on the Underground Railroad, he engages these legends and contributes to this narrative by drawing and painting directly onto them. As creative director and keyboardist, he fronts Moon Medicin, a multimedia concept band that straddles visual art and music with performances staged against a backdrop of curated sound effects and video.

[source: Sanford Biggers' [website](#)]

"History itself is a material that is constantly evolving."

"My experience tells me that symbols are, in fact, not universal, but our primordial impulses, needs, and desires are."

"I was confronted with words that existed in one language and didn't necessarily exist in the other."

[source: [Bomb Magazine](#)]

# ARTIST INFO: Annette Messenger

Annette Messenger was born in Berck-sur-Mer, France, in 1943. As a child, she was encouraged to pursue art by her father, an amateur painter, who took Messenger and her brother to nearby churches to see stained-glass windows and altarpieces. Since the 1960s, Messenger has worked in a wide range of materials including photography, sculpture, drawing, text, and even created many installations featuring sewn illustrations of body parts and stuffed animals. As noted on the Guggenheim Museum's website, her "...exploration of the human body continued in the series My Trophies (1986–88), in which she created her own "maps" of the body by painting over photographs of body parts, printed at varying scales." The artist is featured in museum collections around the globe. She now lives outside Paris and still works in a variety of media.

[source: [Guggenheim Museum](#)]

"A collection is always more and more beautiful, bigger and bigger, always incomplete..."

"I draw in the lines of your foot. I paint in the lines of your mouth. I make watercolors in your hand. I sew images in your ear. I draw a map in your navel..."

"I like bric-a-brac, tinkering around, making different genres collide..."

[source: [Bomb Magazine](#)]

# DISCUSSION TOPIC

- Take a moment to grab a cup of tea or your favorite drink and sit down with a friend or a family member. Find a comfy spot and together, spend time looking at each other's hands, noticing the similarities and differences between the lines on your palms.
- Use any pencil or pen handy and a piece of paper or cardboard to trace each other's hands, if you like. What do our hands tell us? Are there stories we can learn? Perhaps you have been busy playing in the park building with sticks and sand, and you have some dirt under your nails. Maybe your grown-up has been making dinner and their hands smell like spices - or maybe you both have painted your nails together! Share with each other your favorite thing you have made with your hands recently.
- Bonus: Find a favorite object of yours in your home. Sometimes the most comforting things in our home are as simple as Sanford Biggers' quilt. Maybe your object is a small stuffed animal, a special quilt that you were given by your grandparent, or a picture of a place you've visited. What does the object mean to you? Use all of your senses (touch, smell, sight, sound, and maybe even taste if it's safe) and tell your friend or grown-up a story about it!



# PROJECT: FAMILY HAND IMPRESSIONS

HANDMADE

SCULPTURE

TRADITION

HOMEMADE

STORYTELLING

MEMORY

TEXTURE

CAST

IMPRINTS

First, make some handmade play-dough together and talk about recipes and preparing ingredients by hand. This recipe requires just three ingredients you may already have in your kitchen. It holds its shape well and you can squish it, roll it, and create small sculptures just like store-bought stuff.

Then, share make simple squeeze sculptures with your hands, and think together about all of the caring, loving work that hands do.

# MAKING PLAY-DOUGH

[ Adapted from [Verywell Family](#) ]

## Basic Play Dough Recipe

(yields apx 2 Cups of dough or enough for 3-4 people)

1 cup baking soda

½ cup corn starch

¾ cup water

Optional: food coloring

Safety Tip: make sure you have a grown-up to help you make your dough!

1. Collect your ingredients and talk about the project with your grown-up.
2. Mix the first three ingredients with a fork until smooth.
3. With a grown-up: Boil over medium heat until thick (about 5 mins).
4. Carefully spoon onto a plate or wax paper and allow it to cool to the touch before adding a couple drops of coloring and mixing by kneading the clay with your hands. (Option to wear rubber gloves.)
5. When you made a shape you like, set it to dry in a safe spot out of reach of pets or little siblings.

The play dough is best used within about 30 minutes. If you want to save it, make sure to keep your dough wrapped tightly in some plastic wrap until you're ready to let it dry!



# MAKING IMPRESSIONS

1. Follow the [play dough recipe](#) and let it cool until it's easy to handle.
2. Give yourself a ball you can fit in your hand and give your grown-up a ball to fit in their hand.
3. Squeeze the dough until it squishes in between your fingers! How does it feel?
4. Hold still and count to three.
5. Slowly open your hand and carefully set the dough down on a plate, paper plate, aluminum foil, or wax paper to dry. You made a cast of your palm!
6. Notice the similarities and differences between your cast and your grown-ups. Can you see the lines? Do the casts remind you of anything, maybe bones, animals, or mountains?

While you wait for it to dry, look again at Sanford Biggers' and Annette Messenger's artworks. Where can you see how they used their hands in their art? Why would an artist want to take the time to make something by hand?

To make your art last longer, try coating your dough with some watered down glue! (Two parts Elmer's glue to one part water.) Make sure you do this after your art has had time to fully dry (4-6 hours).

BONUS 1! What happens when you try using the dough using your non-dominant hand (the one that feels funky when you try to write with it)?

BONUS 2! Try a (very gentle) cast of your pet's paw! Only try this if you ask your grown-ups to help and if your pet is comfortable having their paw handled. (Thank them for their help with some healthy treats.)



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