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ALIEN

VS CITIZEN

TEACHER  
RESOURCE

MUSEUM OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART  
CHICAGO

Jul 17, 2020–Feb 21, 2021  
Sylvia Neil and Daniel Fischel Galleries  
Second Floor, North Side

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# INTERPRETIVE MATERIALS

Interpretation is how the story of an exhibition is told to the public. It's focused on how visitors experience an exhibition. Two key parts of an exhibition's interpretive materials are the "Intro Panel" and the "Section Panels." These are written by the curators and are meant to help visitors navigate the main themes.

ALIEN VS. CITIZEN is an exhibition that was curated primarily from the MCA's permanent collection based on a theme. For this kind of exhibition, the curator chooses a theme and looks for artwork that will expand and compliment that theme for the audience. Typically, the artists are not involved in the design of these exhibitions and they didn't necessarily create the art with the theme in mind. In this case, the exhibition is a creative work by the curator.

Often, exhibitions are so large that it's helpful to introduce another level of organizing. Everything in the exhibition was chosen because it fell under the main theme. Sections are like sub-themes or chapters in a larger story. They also correspond with the physical space of the museum, so as you enter new rooms or new areas you can explore more specific ideas.



# ALIEN VS CITIZEN

## HOW DO YOU KNOW YOUR WORTH?

Consider how you enter a space as someone who belongs—a "citizen." You hold privileges like freedom of movement and the right to safety and security. But what factors deem a person worthy of belonging?

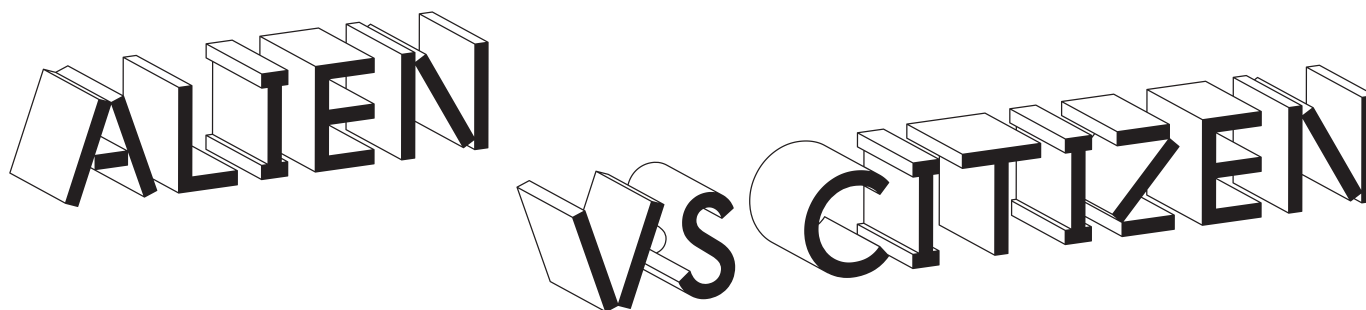
*Alien vs. Citizen* was inspired by a visa classification granted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services: "alien of extraordinary ability." This designation allocates permanent residency to a person recognized for outstanding career achievements. Primarily drawn from the MCA Collection, the artworks included in the exhibition explore the ways that a person may be valued, counted, and recognized in our world. The title's two words, "alien" and "citizen," are assigned profound meaning and influence in our world today. By looking at these words and the complex value systems that they encompass, the exhibition reveals how "worth" is given—and taken away.

The exhibition is organized by January Pankos Amatt, Interim Senior Curator, with Line Ajan, Barjeel Global Fellow.

Installation view, *Alien vs. Citizen*, MCA Chicago  
July 17, 2020 - February 21, 2021  
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



# INTRO PANEL



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# SECTION PANELS

## HOW DO WE DETERMINE WHO BELONGS?

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In the United States, our government welcomes potential members, or citizens, often based on their expected value to the nation. Artists in this section explore ideas of belonging, citizenship, and immigration within the context of the country's complex history of colonialism and migration. These works question how the US and other nations make decisions about who is worthy of citizenship, and the symbols of that citizenship.

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## WHAT KINDS OF WORK ARE ESSENTIAL?

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Work in the United States is an important part of self-value, but the ways we work vary widely. Is your job a passion or a profession, a vocation or a hobby? Are you paid for each hour you work, or do you earn through the labor of others? What if you can't work or don't get paid for your work? The artists in this section look at how a person works and how those contributions are valued in our world.

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## HOW DO WE LIVE TOGETHER?

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As the common aphorism goes, no one on their deathbed wishes they had spent more time working. The roles we play in our personal lives—as parent, sibling, lover, friend—determine how we assign value on an intimate scale, and yet are also affected by society's expectations and biases. The artists in this section consider the weight of our impact on one another, especially in family structures and intimate relationships.

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# INTERVIEW WITH THE CURATORS

**JEREMY KREUSCH, MCA MANAGER OF SCHOOL PROGRAMS:** I'm really excited to talk a little bit with you both about the exhibition *ALIEN VS CITIZEN*. January, maybe you can start off by introducing yourself and telling us what you do at the MCA.

**JANUARY PARKOS ARNALL:** Hi, Jeremy. I'm January Parkos Arnall, and I've been at the MCA about three and a half years. I'm right now the Interim Senior Curator in the Department of Performance and Public Practice. In that role, I think about the ways that we connect artists and audiences. We build performances. We build exhibitions with socially-engaged intent. We think about how artists are speaking directly with audiences and how audiences can give feedback to artists that help to further their work. We also do all of our public programming out of that department, and we hold relationships with partners across the city.

**JK:** Line, could you introduce yourself?

**LINE AJAN:** Yes. Hi, Jeremy. Hi, January. My name is Line Ajan. I have been at the MCA for a little less than a year. I am the Barjeel Global Fellow for the years 2019-2020. And as part of this fellowship, which aims at helping the museum expand the geographical boundaries of its collections and exhibitions, I was organizing a small, collection-based show. I was also supporting various colleagues from both our Visual Arts department and our Performance and Public Practice department. In that second role, I had the pleasure of working with January on this exhibition, *ALIEN VS CITIZEN*.

**JK:** January, could you tell us a little bit about some of the things you were thinking about to get this off the ground? What made you want to put on a show at the museum called "*ALIEN VS CITIZEN*"?

**JPA:** The name "*ALIEN VS CITIZEN*" came much later in the process. I was really thinking in

broad strokes about the way we value each other in our society. I found the visa categorization called "alien of extraordinary ability" so fascinating. The term "alien" came from that visa categorization. Throughout most of my career, I have been writing letters for artists from other countries who were working in the United States. I would write these letters that were all about why this person was so profoundly gifted in their work product that we *had* to allow them to work here in the United States, and that it was just incredibly important that their voice be a part of the artistic work of this city and this country.

Thinking over the current political administration, of course, I'm reminded of all of the conversations about who we want to be a part of our country and digging in on the ways that we find value in people. We started to really break that down, to think about citizenship as one of those ways that we value people, to think about labor or anticipated work value in our world as another way, and then thinking about the interpersonal relationships that we each hold as another way that we find value.

Our collection is a strong basis for this show, although we did also bring in a few works that we borrowed from other places in Chicago, and from outside of Chicago just to augment some of the stories.

**JK:** Line, you joined January working on this show after it had already been conceived. What are some of the ways that you contributed to the conversation about this show?

**LA:** Yes, I joined the MCA about a year ago, when January had already started conceptualizing and thinking about the show. I come from a very different background, and I am not a US citizen. I have never lived in the United States. So, you could say I'm an alien. The process of visas that January was talking about is actually something I'm quite familiar with.

One of the first conversations we've had was about how US-centric

some of the questions tackled in the show were. Actually, my initial reaction to hearing the title of the show led to confusion for me. The term “alien” doesn’t really have an equivalent in the other languages that I speak. We speak of a “foreigner” or a “stranger,” but not an “alien.” So, initially, I did not even understand the judiciary meaning of the term. With these questions in mind, the conversations evolved into thinking about not only how US-centric the show is, but if there could be other ways to expand on it.

We also talked a lot about the initial impetus behind the show, which was this idea of immigration. Even though that was not the central part of the show, or that’s not how it evolved, it was still one of the questions that really spoke to me, because this idea of immigration is something that I’m interested in. And so with that in mind, and because our conversations were compelling, and because January was extremely generous, I ended up creating a screening program that complements this US-centric base.

I think the idea of measuring individual value in relation to community was also something that intrigued me just because in Europe, in general, and in France, in particular, it is kind of looked at in a negative way, let’s say. So that was also another idea that I had a need to grapple with for a longer time.

**JK:** After anyone is done creating a work, they put it out into the world, and it takes on a life of its own. It’s often re-contextualized in different situations, one of those situations being that the present moment is always a different political, historical and cultural moment than the past, even the immediate past. Has this exhibition taken on a new life for any new resonances in this contemporary moment that you didn’t expect or that have changed since your original conception of the show several months ago?

**JPA:** Yeah, absolutely. I think some of the pieces in the show really took on new resonance with the uprisings after the murder of George Floyd, especially the artwork by Kerry James Marshall, called “Souvenir I,” which is a large painting, that, at its center, has a figure who is painted in a very flat, dark black color, in the form of an angel. At the top of the painting, we see faces, sort of roughly included, of various other figures. Those figures aren’t identified, but they are actually figures of people who were killed during the Civil Rights Movement. On the side wall of

the home, there are images of Martin Luther King Jr., of John F. Kennedy, and of Robert Kennedy. All of them were killed during that Civil Rights Movement. So, as we think about the people who are being killed now, whose bodies are not safe in our current environment, and look at that painting, and consider the longevity with which this has been an issue in our world, it really just takes on a whole new meaning for me now.

**JK:** Line, same question for you. What are some ways that the exhibition has taken on a new life since it’s been installed?

**LA:** In the exhibition, there is a whole section that we titled “What kinds of work are essential?,” which speaks about how we value individuals according to the work they put into the society. Some of the questions that January raised while thinking about that part of the show were: Is your job a vocation? Is it a passion? Is it a necessity?

One specific artwork that clearly speaks to that is a painting by Ramiro Gomez. It’s a large painting with a pink background. We also see a figure cleaning in front of the Paul Smith store in Los Angeles. With COVID-19, we have had to rethink about whose labor is essential. But that question also needs to be confronted with the question of whose labor is invisible. And I think that work really speaks to both.

**JK:** Thanks to you both, it was a pleasure.

# TV FOR ALIENS FACILITATION GUIDE

"What attracts me [to contemporary art] is a certain awesomeness and presence which relates to the spirit of our time--to the human condition: the ups, the downs, the disruption, the chaos, the ambivalence"

--Gerald S. Elliot, interviewed by Judith Neisser, 1987

TV FOR ALIENS can be viewed [here](#). Follow along or walk through these activities afterward.

In this exhibition, explore what it feels like to be welcome or unwelcome, and think about some of the structures and relationships in our world that make us feel that way.

The art in "Alien vs. Citizen" is contemporary art. Saying art is "contemporary" just means that it was made recently, in our time. Old historical art is special and important because through it we can learn about the past. But the art of our time is just as important, because it can help us see the present in new ways.

Approach art that way -- not by trying to dig into its history or the biography of the artists. Instead, look for ways the art can inspire us to engage with ourselves, one another, and the world we share.



# Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, *Assigned Identities (Part I)*, 1990

Take a look at Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's "Assigned Identities (Part I)." Each person is so unique and different, but everything else about these photographs is pretty much the same. What stands out to you about this artwork? Do the people remind you of anyone you know?

Each of these prints depicts an individual seeking amnesty from US Immigration and Naturalization Services. That means that these people came into the United States without official permission, and, at the time of these photos, they were asking the government to let them stay. They look like ID cards, but the space where all the information would normally go is blank.

## THINK

Why do you think that Iñigo left all the information out? Would you feel differently about this artwork--or these people--if you knew their names, genders, nations-of-origin, birthdays, height and weight?

## TALK

Have you ever had someone ask you if you were allowed to be somewhere? Maybe they didn't know you and were looking for your hall pass or a card like this. On the other hand, have you ever felt welcomed, without condition? Maybe you were expecting to be treated like a stranger, but instead someone treated you like a friend.

Take a moment and find a friend or a family member. Together, talk about interactions you've had with people in authority. Share the story from a time someone treated you like an intruder or stranger, and a time someone treated you like a guest or a friend.



Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, American, b. Spain, 1961  
 Assigned Identities (Part I), 1990 (detail)  
 Laminated chromogenic color prints  
 Eleven parts, each: 13 x 20 in. (33 x 50.8 cm)  
 Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of the Susan and Lewis Manilow Collec-  
 tion of Chicago Artists, 2003.24.a-k  
 Still from TV for Aliens



Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, American, b. Spain, 1961

Assigned Identities (Part I), 1990

Laminated chromogenic color prints

Eleven parts, each: 13 × 20 in. (33 × 50.8 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of the Susan and Lewis Manilow Collection of Chicago Artists, 2003.24.a-k

Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



These prints depict individuals seeking amnesty from US Immigration and Naturalization Services. Though the photographs resemble those found on green cards and other forms of government identification, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle chose to conceal other categorizing information like age or nationality. Manglano-Ovalle says of his work, "For me, art is a platform from which to speak, but not to tell you something. I give you a platform from which to think and debate." How do ID cards— and the governing bodies that issue them—work to categorize who we are and where we belong?

# Ramiro Gomez, *Paul Smith Store, Los Angeles*, 2015

Look at Ramiro Gomez' painting called "Paul Smith Store, Los Angeles." At a glance, this painting almost looks abstract, like a simple arrangement of shapes and colors instead of a recognizable street scene. Take a moment and try to appreciate the colors and the shapes before considering what this painting depicts.

Paul Smith is a luxury clothing brand. Its Los Angeles store is located in an expensive shopping district. It's the kind of place you might expect to see celebrities buying \$300 t-shirts.

In this painting, there are a couple notable things that interrupt the building's clean shapes and splashy color. The signature-style "Paul Smith" brand logo--which sort of looks like an artist's signature on a painting--and the worker with the leaf blower--who I can tell you is not Paul Smith himself.

There's an imbalance here, in this painting, that also exists in the world. We all rely on each other's work to live well, but all not all kinds of work are equally celebrated, respected, and valued.

## THINK

In a typical image of a storefront like this, you might expect to see the designer, maybe a model, or a flood of hip customers. Why do you think Ramiro Gomez decided to put a landscape worker right in the middle of this painting instead?

## MEDITATE

Pause for a moment to reflect on all of the labor that makes our lives possible. Wherever you are, find a stable position where you're comfortable. Take a few deep breaths. In deeply, and out slowly. Think for a moment, about all of the things that make our lives easier and more pleasurable than our great grandparents' lives.

Imagine all of the people who work to make those things possible. Instead of celebrities or brands, try to really see those who do the daily work of caring for our world. See the people in your life who do that work, and also the thousands and millions you may never know. In this moment, find gratitude for the things in your life, and offer that gratitude to those who work to make it possible. How else can we better value them?

Ramiro Gomez (Mexican-American, b. 1986)  
Paul Smith Store, Los Angeles, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas  
Collection of Charles James



The dark figure of a worker interrupts the Instagrammable pink wall of fashion retailer Paul Smith in Los Angeles, showcasing the unrecognized labor that maintains the idyllic aspects of American life. Ramiro Gomez began painting domestic laborers into images from luxury design magazines while working as a nanny in Los Angeles. In looking at the high-end homes featured, Gomez noted the lack of workers: "It was an erasure of us. So it became very clear what to add. It was this simple act. It was just inspired by saying, 'I'm here. We exist.'"



AUTHORIZED BY THE  
MIDAMERICAN COUNCIL FOR AUTHORIZATION (M.C.A.)

Mid-American Council for Authorization (M.C.A.)  
Logo by John Harness.



# MIDAMERICAN COUNCIL FOR AUTHORIZATION (by Marcela Torres)

## PART ONE: I AM SPECIAL

Get a piece of paper and a writing tool. Take a moment to be present with yourself. Think about who you are, where you've been the last few years, and what you've emerged through. How has your body changed and what does it feel like and communicate to you? Take a second to breathe in this space of body presence.

Using this moment of reflection write a list of all the things you're proud of yourself for. These might be moments you've overcome, or parts of your body, or family background etc.

## PART TWO: GRAMMAR IS CLOSE TO GODLINESS

Go back to your list and double check that they are complete sentences. Now itemize your list by which of these things are most important to least important. Yes, take your list of all your poignant memories and important personal challenges and number them from highest priority to lowest.

## PART THREE: PARTICIPATION IS ENGOURAGED, IN FACT, IT IS MANDATORY

Go through the list putting a star on the items that could help elevate your position in general. Take paper to an authorized individual for signature.

PHASE 2: Using the Measuring Stick, calculate the [illegible]. (See Note 2A.) Please scan and provide a wet (see Note 2B) signature, return in person. PHASE 3: (If you wrote "Yes" in FORM 3, skip this phase and phase 2.) Download the app Hot or Not(™) and post a picture of your documents, see how it rates. Note 2B: "Wet" is understood to include markers, pens, non-digital saliva, and hair product. (Due to COVID we are asking please to be tested 2 days prior to wet signature. Intone the Five Great Sayings. (Saying 4 not applicable in Zone G.) If you are unable to provide these statements (See Note 3F) please either: Calculate your network and your entire immediate families network including owned assess in Quickbooks file and send in a fax. Please call your local business chamber of commerce to write a letter of recommendation. PHASE 4A Get your Parents' signature. (See Exhumation Form 1.) PHASE 4B THE FORM IS HUNGRY. FEED THE FORM. ~~SUBMIT HOROSCOPE FORM 3B. This includes chart and~~ nodes reading What moon does your crystal recharge in?

# Eric Wesley, *DPS #9 (Pomegranate)*, 2014

Take a look at “DPS #9 (Pomegranate)” by Eric Wesley. Status reports like this are used to track someone’s work, hour by hour. Maybe you use something like this to stay organized or report back to your teacher or your manager. Whether fair or not, productivity and efficiency--how quickly we get things done-- are common ways to measure someone’s worth.

How do you feel about the splash of pomegranate that ruins an otherwise orderly page? I’m sure you’ve spilled something before on an important document. Does the messiness here drive you crazy or does it feel satisfying?

Leisure, playfulness, a little bit of chaos--all these can feel like they don’t belong in a society that values orderly work. The pressure to keep up and keep track can be a lot. Here, it looks like Eric did nothing today. Instead of checking boxes, he ate a pomegranate and made a mess. Deliberately doing such things is a great way to find yourself again if you ever get lost in the daily grind.

## THINK

Have you ever felt trapped by your responsibilities? Or like you were in a situation where you didn't have permission to play or escape?

## MAKE

Grab some paper. If you have any worksheets or important documents, great. Maybe consider some things that were destined for the waste bin. Then, make a beverage--cup of tea or coffee, or some messy fruit.

Once you have all these things together, play instead of working. Do it mindfully. Use the liquid to ring, drip, or draw. Whatever feels right. It doesn’t have to look like anything. Explore with the liquid like its paint, and intentionally ignore whatever someone told you that you’re supposed to be doing

Eric Wesley, American, b. 1973  
 DPS #9 (Pomegranate), 2014  
 Acrylic on aluminum on linen  
 48 ¼ x 37 3/16 x 2 11/16 in. (122.6 x 94.5 x 7.3 cm)  
 Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of Mary  
 and Earle Ludgin by exchange, 2015.6  
 Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

Eric Wesley's DPS #9 (Pomegranate) subverts a "daily progress status report." This report serves as an hourly to-do list with a box to tick once the task is done. None of these have been completed, as evidenced by the empty slots and the purple stain splashing across the page, which could be the smudge from a pomegranate, as the title suggests. Rather than providing an orderly account of efficiency, the artist playfully hints at a moment of unproductivity, neglectfulness, or leisure.

**DAILY PROGRESS STATUS REPORT**

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ REF#: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

---

|          | COMPLETED                | ASSIGNMENT | MATERIAL REQUEST         |
|----------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| 10:00 AM | <input type="checkbox"/> |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11:00 AM | <input type="checkbox"/> |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12:00 PM | <input type="checkbox"/> |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1:00 PM  | <input type="checkbox"/> |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2:00 PM  | <input type="checkbox"/> |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3:00 PM  | <input type="checkbox"/> |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4:00 PM  | <input type="checkbox"/> |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5:00 PM  | <input type="checkbox"/> |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6:00 PM  | <input type="checkbox"/> |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |

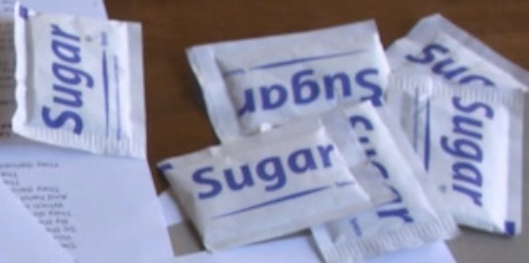


COMMITMENTS OF RESPECT

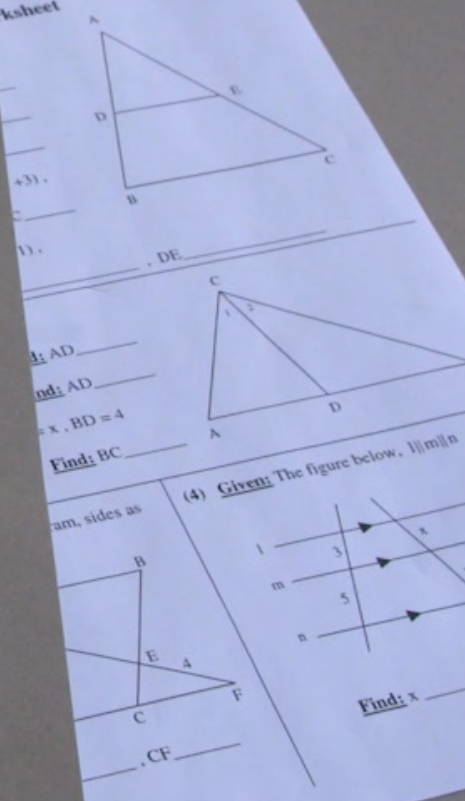
- Feedback about a person's performance rather than a person's personality
- Feedback about a person's performance rather than a person's personality
- Feedback about a person's performance rather than a person's personality

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT: Rules for working respectfully communication standards.

- Feedback about a person's performance rather than a person's personality
- Feedback about a person's performance rather than a person's personality



Geometry Review Worksheet



Still from TV for Aliens.



# Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled (Black Love)*, 1992

Take a look at “Untitled (Black Love)” by Carrie Mae Weems. A romantic story unfolds image by image: waiting, welcome, embrace. Love and affection are ways we express personal worth to each other. Their bodies tell the whole story. We matter to one another in ways that can transcend borders, politics, duties, and boundaries.

## THINK

Look closely at this first photograph. Have you ever waited for someone like this? Standing by the window or door?

## WRITE

Now, instead of continuing to imagine what she’s feeling in this moment, let’s try to relate to what led to this moment: the invitation. Grab a pen and a piece of paper. Think of someone who stirs this kind of passion for you. Write them a love letter to tell them all the reasons they belong with you. You don’t have to send it. But you could...



Carrie Mae Weems, American, b. 1953

Untitled (Black Love), 1992

Silver prints

Three parts, each framed: 28 5/16 x 28 5/16 in. (71.9 x 71.9 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of Jack and Sandra Guthman,

2016.57.a-c

Constructed as a triptych, Carrie Mae Weems's *Untitled (Black Love)* depicts a cycle of desire centered on two lovers' reunion, unfolding through a play of light and shade, longing and finding. The intimate moment begins with a feminine silhouette waiting in a darkened doorway, a cigarette between her fingers. It culminates in the second vignette, when a man comes to her with his face illuminated. Their tender embrace ends this almost cinematic story, which captures the immaterial but profound value of romantic relationships.

at all. Why  
ust we ever be apart?  
long for you! Love  
e today, tommorow,  
nd yesterday. Each  
ay you are dearer to me  
than th before.



# ACTIVITY + DISCUSSION GUIDE (ELEMENTARY)

by James Jankowiak

# Andres Serrano, *Nomads (Payne)*, 1990

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Serrano doesn't consider himself to personally be a "champion" of the homeless. He says the best part of the work he does is that it inspires others to step up to help. Serrano considers himself to be an outsider interested in learning about a wide variety of subjects that serve as his way to explore what he sums up as "humanity."

Titles in Serrano's work are very important. This is called "Payne." All of the "Nomads" photos' titles are the name of the sitter. All of these photos were taken on the street, which has been obstructed from view by a generic photographic backdrop.

If students are interested in seeing all of the "Nomads" photos, they can be seen at the artist's website [here](#).

[Here](#) is a 2.5 minute video of a more recent work, a public project called "Residents of New York", which features several photographs of homeless New Yorkers that were prominently displayed in NYC subway stations in 2015.

He also did a series of photos of homeless people in Brussels, called "Denizens of Brussels," which can be viewed [here](#).

## QUESTIONS FOR CLOSE LOOKING

Serrano takes a photographic backdrop with him so the viewer doesn't actually know where his subjects are photographed. Have you ever been photographed with a similar backdrop? What kind of pose is this? Where else have you seen people that looked like Payne? What can you clearly see in the photo? What is missing?

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The artist says he hopes to treat each person in his "Nomads" series as individuals. What does it mean to be treated as an individual? How does it feel? How does one NOT treat someone as an individual? Have you ever experienced something similar?

Serrano depends on rich art collectors to make a living. How do you feel about an extremely wealthy person buying a photograph of a homeless person?

Andres Serrano, American, b. 1950  
Nomads (Payne), 1990  
Silver dye-bleach print  
Sheet: 40 x 32 ½ in. (101.6 x 82.6 cm)  
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift from  
The Howard and Donna Stone Collection, 2002.60  
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

Andres Serrano photographed Payne, the subject of this portrait, as part of a series depicting New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Serrano used a classical style of portraiture despite producing the photographs in subway tunnels or on the street. The artist provided a standing backdrop but allowed the sitter to choose their own pose, resulting in a set of heroic individual portraits of people who are often overlooked.



# Christina Quarles, *Laid Down Beside Yew*, 2019

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

"Quarles's explorations of bodies began when she was studying drawing in high school. But it's only in the last few years that her practice has evolved into sumptuously colored acrylic paintings of wildly contorted, gender-defying figures. Her canvases often obscure the line between violence and intimacy, with human bodies embracing and merging as well as getting prodded, stretched, and smashed together, or bisected by patterned planes of color. In one piece, a bulbous figure bends another one over, pushing its smeary face against the ground. In another, disjointed limbs reach to the very edge of the frame as if trying to escape its confines." From [Interview Magazine](#).

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The artist describes "weight" as something she's interested in depicting. Can you identify areas that feel "lighter" or "heavier"? What kind of evidence can you provide from your perspective?

Have you ever felt light or heavy, not in a physical way, but in your mind? How does it feel to stretch? Sometimes people stretch to get loose- sometimes feeling "stretched" means they feel like they might break in some manner. Have you ever felt either way recently?

## CLOSE-LOOKING ACTIVITY

Make a list of everything you can recognize.

Make a list of everything you can see happening.

Make a list and try to describe things that confuse you.

## MOVEMENT ACTIVITY

Can you mimic the poses Christina Quarles uses in her figures, or get close to it?

Using your own body, pretend you're on the last step of a ladder. Contort and stretch your body, mimicking reaching and balancing. Make it even more challenging by standing on a brick, an old book, or one foot. Try to go without falling off the imaginary ladder.

Now lay on the floor and curl yourself into the tiniest ball imaginable and slowly open, stretching ever so slowly until you have stretched your arms and legs as far as they can go, lying on the floor the entire time. Try to stretch your neck so your head is further away from your shoulders.



Christina Quarles. *Laid Down Beside Yew*, 2019.  
Acrylic on canvas. 84 × 96 × 2 inches (213.4 ×  
243.8 × 5.1 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Regen Projects, Los Angeles,  
and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London

In this painting, two abstract figures intertwine their limbs as colorful forms intersect their bodies. While the figures' human shape appears familiar, they are shown without distinguishing traits that we might use to categorize or identify them, such as sex or race. Christina Quarles says of her work, "They aren't portraits of looking at a body—they're portraits of living within your own body. So much of my work is about moments of intimacy when you can actually exist in all your contradictions and complications."





# Doug Hall, *The United States Cut Into a Continuous Strip*, 1982

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Doug Hall is a performance, installation, and visual artist. Exploring American power structures that rely upon media consumption to thrive has been a central focus to his work since the early 1970s. This piece is an image of America, but he also makes images of other countries, such as [The Soviet Union Cut Into A Continuous Strip, 1982](#).

Hall says, “We are all forced, one way or another, to take a position in relation to these symbols since they form a significant part of the vocabulary which informs us about ourselves and the world we live in.”

## QUESTIONS FOR CLOSE LOOKING

Sometimes the outer line of a shape is called a perimeter. A perimeter is also called a border. What comes to mind when you think of a map of America and a perimeter, or border? Why do you think Hall cut and crumples the paper instead of trying to place it accurately?

## RESEARCH + MAKING ACTIVITY

Google “Red and Black Propaganda Posters” and look closely at the images that appear. What do all of these images have in common? Now google “Red White and Blue” propaganda. What’s the differences? Why do you think Hall chose red and black for his artwork instead of red, white, and blue?

Imagine the perfect country. What kind of picture would a poster of your perfect country have? What two or three colors would you use? Why would you pick those colors? Design your own perfect country propaganda poster limiting yourself to using only three colors maximum.





Doug Hall, American, b. 1944

*The United States Cut Into a Continuous Strip*, 1982

Oil stick on paper, mounted on oil stick on bristol board

Comp: 20 x 26 in. (50.8 x 66 cm.)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Awards in the Visual Arts Purchase Grant, 1983.51

Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



# Gabriel Kuri, *Carretilla II*, 1999

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Gabriel Kuri calls himself a selector. He mainly uses found materials and repurposes them. “Part of my work has to do with organizing material that can feel very heterogeneous, that came from different worlds and different sources,” he has explained. He is interested in exploring the life, function, and physical properties of the materials he uses, as well as their social, political, and economic resonances. Balance—both formal and physical—is important to Kuri, whose works appear simultaneously humorous, precarious, beautiful, and awkward.” (via <https://www.artsy.net/artist/gabriel-kuri>)

This wheelbarrow contains holiday ornaments. The MCA has another in its collection which contains popcorn called "[Carretilla I](#)".

## THINK

First, think about what you usually see in a wheelbarrow? Name those materials and imagine their purpose. If it's dirt, where did the dirt come from? If stones or bricks, what was their story? How do people dress when they use a wheelbarrow? Are they dressed for a chore, or a job?

Next, think about this wheelbarrow. How are the materials different? How might a person dress for the job of carting ornaments?

## MAKING ACTIVITY

Draw a picture of the things you think of when you think of a wheelbarrow, but don't draw the wheelbarrow. Try the same thing thinking about ornaments. Then popcorn. What do you notice about your drawings?

Gabriel Kuri, Mexican, b. 1970  
Carretilla II, 1999  
Wheelbarrow and glass  
Overall: 21 5/8 x 55 1/8 x 26 in. (55 x 140 x 66 cm)  
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Bernice and Kenneth Newberger Fund,  
2000.32  
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

Gabriel Kuri's *Carretilla II* playfully brings together contrasting value systems: undervalued manual labor alongside consumption and entertainment. Here, a cluster of brightly colored, sleek Christmas ornaments fills a rugged metal wheelbarrow, still marked by traces of white paint. Through these materials, the artist juxtaposed opposites, repurposing domestic and industrial objects. The association of unexpected things and materials—the shiny and the crude, the luxurious and the industrial, the exceptional and the mundane—is witty and critical at once.



# Jennifer Bornstein, *Family Pictures/ Intervention #1* (Griffith Park, Los Angeles), 1999

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

These photographs are part of a series. You can see another one [here](#).

The wall label for these two artworks reads:

These two photographs by Jennifer Bornstein feature the same young woman smiling and posing with two different, older men. The physical proximity between the subjects may lead the viewer to assume they are family members. Although they are seemingly earnest family portraits, these images are actually staged: the artist dressed as a teenager and asked strangers to pose as her relatives in front of a camera. This photographic experiment reveals how our familial relationships are performed and constructed.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

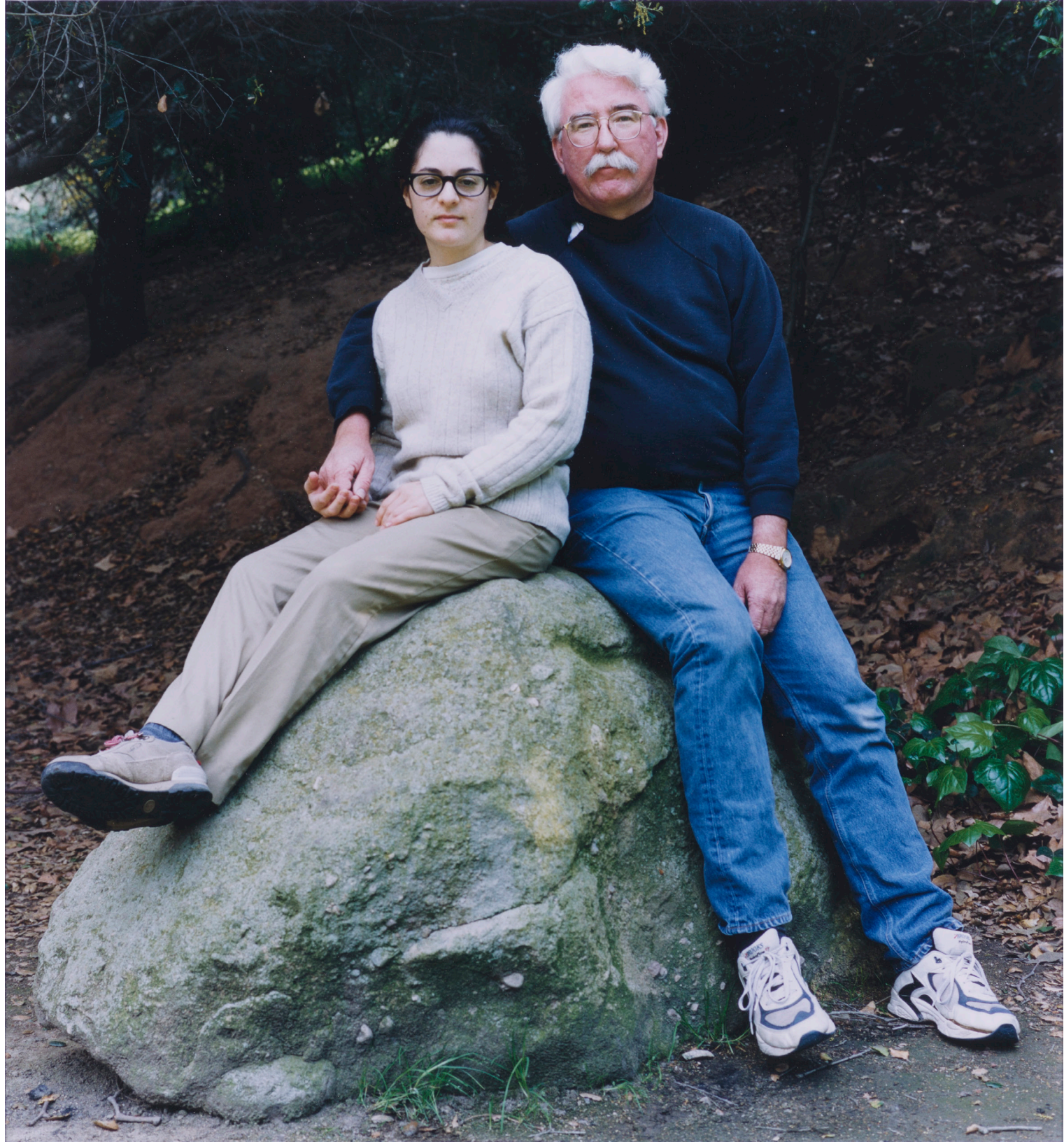
Bornstein is pretending to be related to the person in this photograph, but she's not. Do you see any clues in their body language that might tell you that they are actually strangers? Have you ever been in a situation where you pretended to be someone else? What about pretending to be friends with someone? Was it easy or difficult for you?

## MAKING ACTIVITY

Using a cell phone, can you photograph yourself in a situation you wouldn't normally ever be seen in? (You don't know how to cook, but now you are a chef. What would you look like?)



Jennifer Bornstein, American, b. 1970  
Family Pictures/Intervention #1 (Griffith Park,  
Los Angeles), 1999  
Chromogenic development print  
20 ¼ x 19 ½ in. (51.4 x 49.5 cm)  
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago,  
Gift of The Disaronno Originale Photography  
Collection, 2001.9  
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



# Kerry James Marshall, *Souvenir I*, 1997

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

In this painting, Kerry James Marshall memorializes Civil Rights Era victims of violence. One thing all of these people have in common is they all died for the cause of equality for all American citizens, specifically the rights of African Americans.

Very often, artists choose to depict real life experiences. The title “Souvenir I” refers to the wall hanging, which displays the images of Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, and Bobby Kennedy. When Marshall was a young man, he saw these three men in the news. All three worked to bring about justice and equality in America in the 1960s. All three died within five years of each other, which caused much of America to suffer through a difficult period of grieving. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, dime stores and street vendors sold textiles very similar to the one that Marshall depicted. They were common in African American households during that period of time.

For more info about this painting, check out the [Seattle Art Museum's interactive feature](#).

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Marshall recalls seeing similar souvenirs hanging on the walls in his house when he was younger. Some older folks still have them hanging in their home today. Do you have any objects that memorialize people? How do you remember people that don't get souvenirs made about them?





Kerry James Marshall, American, b. 1955

Souvenir I, 1997

Acrylic, and collage and glitter on canvas

108 x 157 in. (274.3 x 398.8 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Bernice and Kenneth Newberger Fund, 1997.73

Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

# Ramiro Gomez, *Paul Smith Store*, Los Angeles, 2015

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Ramiro Gomez is a Los Angeles based artist. Gomez is the child of immigrants from Mexico. His mother was a custodian and his father was a truck driver, and Gomez' art explores the immigrant experience in his city.

When Ramiro Gomez was in high school, one of his teachers introduced him to David Hockney, a British artist who lived in Los Angeles. Hockney documented his experiences with the uber wealthy art collectors who welcomed him to their home. Gomez noticed the exclusion of the people who worked at these properties. They were the laborers who made these homes look worthy to be included in high end fashion magazines, but they were missing from David Hockney's paintings and other depictions. Gomez compared how Hockney was treated in these spaces to how his parents were treated in similar ones--neither were "citizens" of the US, but Hockney profited and was held in high esteem for depicting these estates, while the laborers like Gomez' parents were held to a limited income, with little or no recognition of the support they offer to the ultra-wealthy.

(via <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/feb/16/deeper-splash-artist-painting-pool-cleaners-david-hockney-forgot>)

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

There only one person in the picture, why do you think the artist didn't include others? The building in the background is a fashion boutique that sells very expensive clothes to "trend setters" in Los Angeles. Is that an important job? What makes a job important? Do people treat "important" jobs equally? Should they?

## MAKING ACTIVITY

Early in Gomez' career he made [life size cutouts of workers](#) he felt were being made invisible in art. What kinds of tools do workers use? Are artists workers? What tools did Gomez use to make his cutouts? What tools do you have in your house?

Trace your hand and add a tool like you were a worker. What tool would you choose?





Ramiro Gomez (Mexican-American, b. 1986)  
Paul Smith Store, Los Angeles, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas  
Collection of Charles James

# EXTENDED LESSON PLAN (HIGH SCHOOL)

SCULPTURE

BELONGING

PATTERN

ASSEMBLAGE

INTUITIVE

HISTORY

INVENTORY

AESTHETIC

COLLECTION

CURATING

MATERIALITY

CULTURE

All materials have historical, political, and cultural associations. How can we consider materiality by analyzing and curating objects in our own lives?

This is a studio assemblage and sculpture making lesson plan inspired by two pieces of sculpture: "Number 68," by Leonardo Drew (1998), and "Alien Obsessives Mum, Dad and the Kids," by Yinka Shonibare (1998).

I wrote the lesson plans as if I was planning for a 1 hour class that met from 2:00-3:00 once a week. Feel free to change as it makes sense to you and your classroom needs.

by Olive Stefanski





Yinka Shonibare CBE (RA), British, b. 1962  
Alien Obsessives, Mum, Dad and the Kids, 1998  
Wax printed cotton, plastic, and polyester fiberfill on plastic and metal armatures  
Installed dimensions variable  
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Restricted gift of Howard and Donna Stone, 1999.54.a-h  
Photo: James Isberner, © MCA Chicago

Here we see the stuffed figures of two families of cliché, science-fiction aliens, each family in a different pattern of batik wax fabric, a material historically associated with Africa but that was primarily produced in the Netherlands. Yinka Shonibare CBE (RA) spent his formative years between Lagos, Nigeria, and London, United Kingdom. Here he used humor to consider cross-cultural relationships, the legacies of colonization, and literal alienation. What does it mean to be alien within the larger culture, and how do personal connections offer respite?



Yinka Shonibare CBE (RA), British, b. 1962

Alien Obsessives, Mum, Dad and the Kids, 1998 (detail)

Wax printed cotton, plastic, and polyester fiberfill on plastic and metal armatures

Installed dimensions variable

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Restricted gift of Howard and Donna Stone, 1999.54.a-h

Photo: James Isberner, © MCA Chicago







Leonardo Drew, American, b. 1961

Number 68, 1998 (detail)

Ceramic, fabric, paper, metal, and wood

Installed: 45 x 29 x 20 in. (114.3 x 73.7 x 50.8 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of the Cooper Family Foundation, 2003.6.a-b

Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago





Leonardo Drew, American, b. 1961  
Number 68, 1998 (detail)  
Ceramic, fabric, paper, metal, and wood  
Installed: 45 x 29 x 20 in. (114.3 x 73.7 x 50.8 cm)  
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of the Cooper Family  
Foundation, 2003.6.a-b  
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

# LESSON ONE

# MATERIALITY

## INTENTIONS:

Collectively explore the two artworks that anchor this project and some new concepts: assemblage and materiality.

## AGENDA:

2:00 – 2:05 Welcome

Students arrive. Project the two images on a screen in the classroom or to screen share in if virtual.

2:05 – 2:25 “IS/IS NOT”

Introduce the artworks as something that we are going to continue to return to over the next three weeks. Practice noticing qualities about the artwork and describing them with specific visual language.

2:25 – 2:45 Questions

Individually, make a list of questions you have about these artworks. Choose one to share back. What questions can we answer together from the knowledge that we may already have in this room?

2:45 – 2:55 Definitions

Define “assemblage” and “materiality.”

2:55 – 3:00 Homework

Share the prompt. Decide on a group chat platform that is capable of sharing images. Have everyone take some time to make an account together.



# SIDE BY SIDE



Yinka Shonibare CBE (RA), British, b. 1962  
Alien Obsessives, Mum, Dad and the Kids, 1998 (detail)  
Wax printed cotton, plastic, and polyester fiberfill on plastic and metal armatures  
Installed dimensions variable  
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Restricted gift of Howard and Donna Stone,  
1999.54.a-h  
Photo: James Isbener, © MCA Chicago



Leonardo Drew, American, b. 1961  
Number 68, 1998 (detail)  
Ceramic, fabric, paper, metal, and wood  
Installed: 45 x 29 x 20 in. (114.3 x 73.7 x 50.8 cm)  
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of the Cooper Family Foundation,  
2003.6.a-b  
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



# IS/IS NOT

## ROUND ONE: IS

Show “Alien Obsessives, Mum, Dad, and the Kids.” Go around a few times and invite everyone to say something that the sculpture IS in one word (adjective, noun or verb). Record what the students say.

Show “Number 68” and invite students to do the same.

## ROUND TWO: IS NOT

This time, show each artworks and invite students to say things that the sculptures are NOT. Think of it as playing opposites. Record these words as well.

## BONUS ROUND: COMBINED

Share the side-by-side images again. Invite students to find IS and IS NOT words that apply to both artworks.

Throughout this game, encourage the students to begin with what is obvious to them and then to progress to language that is more evocative, or moves towards the direction of interpreting what it feels like to encounter the sculpture. Try to push the exercise beyond what immediately pops into their consciousness into more daring territory. For example, it is one thing to say that the sculpture is brown but it is another to say that it is tense.

# DEFINITIONS

## Materiality:

What is an object made out of? How can meaning be composed from considering the materials that comprise the object?

When describing something's materiality, you can look at qualities of tactility, presence, aesthetics--all aspects of objects' being. Focusing on the materiality of an artwork requires us to look at art materials with a non-hierarchical consciousness. All materials can communicate something important. An artwork's materiality does not necessarily need to be beautiful or functional, but rather communicates meaning through what it is composed of.

Meaning, of course, is contingent on historical/political/cultural associations that materials have, their formal qualities and their symbolic or metaphorical associations, and the viewers' lived experiences that they interpret the artworks through.

If necessary, practice analyzing the materiality of an object that one of the students has with them in the classroom.

## Assemblage:

Gathering meaningful materials or objects and arranging them together in a physical form to create a sculptural art work. Assemblages can be multiples of the same kind of object or they can be a collection of dissimilar objects gathered together.



# HOMEWORK: INVENTORY

Go home and look at all of your possessions. (Yes, all of them!)

Draw or take photos of objects that are meaningful or interesting to you because of their materiality. Aim for 5 - 10 objects.

Compile your images into a document or mood board with text underneath each image about why you were attracted to it and what associations you have with the object.

Finally, choose one of those objects to share with the class.

# LESSON TWO

## HISTORY

### INTENTIONS:

Learn more about how Yinka Shonibare and Leonardo Drew curated their materials to create meaning in their pieces.

### AGENDA:

2:00 – 2:05 Welcome and Group Chat

Students arrive. Invite them to share the images from their homework in the group chat with a few words that explain why they chose them.

2:05 – 2:30 Review the biographical information about the artists and their particular materials: Yinka Shonibare and Batik fabric, Leonardo Drew and scrap metal.

DISCUSS: Each of these artists used their materials to connect to a deeper story. Shonibare chose Batik fabric because of its complex colonial history. Drew's pieces connect aesthetically to the conditions of slavery-- "menacingly confined" and weathered.

How has learning this context changed your opinion of these artworks? Off hand, do any materials in your life have such a complex history?

2:30 - 2:50 ACTIVITY: Afro-Futurist Alien Boxes

2:50 – 3:00 Share the homework.

# YINKA SHONIBARE

## BATIK FABRIC

### Who is Yinka Shonibare?

Yinka Shonibare is a British and Nigerian person and a disabled artist, who has lived between Lagos and London since childhood. Professionally, he presents himself as Yinka Shonibare, CBE (Commander of the British Empire), which is a ceremonial title he has been awarded (one notch below being a knight in the order.) Early in his career, Shonibare was critiqued for not making artwork that was ostensibly “African.”

### What is Batik fabric and why is it relevant?

The fabric that Shonibare uses in his work is an Indonesian-inspired fabric which was produced in a factory by the Dutch, and then traded in Africa. The fabrics have been adopted as a symbol of African identity and independence since the 1960s. Batik is also a fiber art technique where designs are created in a fabric by using melted wax to create a resist, dyeing the treated fabric, and then removing the wax post dye.

According to [an interview with Shonibare](#) in the New York Times,

In search of authentic African-ness Mr. Shonibare visited an African fabric shop in the Brixton market in South London, discovering, to his amazement, that the best African fabric was actually manufactured in the Netherlands and exported to Africa. Further, the Dutch wax prints, as they are known, were

originally inspired by Javanese batiks.

This idea, that a fabric connoting African identity was not really African, delighted the budding conceptual artist. “The material was the idea,” he said. From that point forward the African fabric was his medium and his message.

He used it first as his canvas stretching the prints, then painting on them and later to make his costumes, which are usually Victorian, the Victorian era being the period of British history when Africa was colonized, thus providing him not only with ruffles and bustles but also with what he called the “lovely irony” of contrasting fabric and style.

“My tutor wanted me to be pure African,” Mr. Shonibare said “I wanted to show I live in a world which is vast and take in other influences, in the way that any white artist has been able to do for centuries.”

Knowing this history, we begin with the presence that all objects inherently have meaning. That meaning is political because it is tied to the survival of groups of people and attest to political cultural and historical existence, joy, creation and struggle.





Fajar Pangestu. Finished fabrics of batik trusmi, and ready to sold.  
July, 19 2017.



# LEONARDO DREW

## SCRAP METAL

### Who is Leonardo Drew?

Leonardo Drew is a black male American artist who makes intensely crafted abstract sculptures out of a variety of materials (notably metal, wood, paint, porcelain).

### What is scrap metal and why is it relevant?

In this case, looks can be deceiving. What appears as weathered metal, perhaps collected from the street or an old construction site, is actually crafted deliberately. According to an [essay in the Boston Globe](#),

All of Drew's works delve into decay and find life there. He often works on a massive scale, accumulating tattered, rusting items until they coalesce into a monolith of corrosion and decomposition. Yet every bit, it turns out, he carefully handcrafts. He immerses objects in water to rust them.

"Number 43" (1994) features 160 handmade boxes in a grid against the wall. Some are empty, some have spare bits of rusty junk. In some, dirty fabric spills out like vomit. Dainty gingham delicately hangs in others. The decidedly decadent grid of "Number 43" invites bit-by-bit examination, but the overall effect is organic: Opening and closing, expanding and contracting, and slowly, inevitably going to seed.

Drew, who is African-American, makes references to slavery in pieces constructed largely of cotton, such as "Number 23" (1992), which looks like a giant cabinet made of tiny cotton drawers. The artist created it after a trip to Senegal, where he visited a former slave trading post and saw the menacingly confined conditions there. But most of Drew's pieces don't apply to particular subjects: They are about existence, how we struggle, how time ravages us, and how even in the wasting away there are glimmers gathering in the ashes.

# ACTIVITY

## AFRO-FUTURIST ALIEN BOXES

The Afro-futurist aliens, possessing the wisdom of extraterrestrial perspective, have arrived on our planet to facilitate a ritual to fix the brokenness, alienation, and supremacist violence that plagues this planet. They bring with them a box filled with important objects from another universe that will facilitate this spiritual transformation.

What's in their box?

### WARM-UP

Go around, the first person says something, the next person repeats what they said and then adds to it, the next person repeats what they both said and adds to it. Round ends when someone can no longer remember the entire list.

### THOUGHT EXERCISE

In pairs, choose one of these imagined objects. Invent a detailed history of this object. Use Yinka Shonibare's Batik fabric (with its multicultural origins) and Leonardo Drew's scrap metal (with its deceptive appearance) as inspiration. What kind of cultural/political history or unique process could further imbue the materiality of these objects with special significance?



# HOMEWORK: RESEARCH

Review some of the objects from your inventory. Use the Internet to do some basic research on the materials and designs used in the construction of these objects. See if you can discover the origins of the things you own:

- What is it made of?
- If its synthetic, what are all the raw materials needed to make it? How are they collected or extracted?
- If it's organic, where are the materials found? How are they collected or extracted?
- What processes happen to the materials to change them into your object? Who does that work? Where does it happen? How does it get to you?

Look over what you discover. Do any of these materials have curious, compelling, unexpected, or problematic origins?

# LESSON THREE

# ASSEMBLAGE

## INTENTIONS:

Explore some examples of assemblage sculptures from the MCA's collection while thinking about elements of composition and design. Begin to create the final pieces.

## AGENDA:

2:00 – 2:05 Welcome and Group Chat

Students arrive. Invite them to share the findings from their homework in the group chat.

2:05 - 2:30 DESIGN ELEMENTS: Assemblage Sculptures

Review the questions and elements of design. Go through the slideshow, MCA COLLECTION: Assemblage Sculptures. Which of these elements did the artist employ to greatest effect?

2:30 – 2:55 Sketching or Journaling time.

What methods might you use to assemble your sculpture? What themes do you wish to highlight? What associations do you have between your curated objects? Are there any forms beginning to emerge in your mind?

2:55 - 3:00 Share the homework: create a final sculpture.

# DESIGN ELEMENTS: ASSEMBLAGE SCULPTURES

Composition: How can you make a visually pleasing arrangement?

Levels: What vertical presence does your object have? Does the sculpture have varying heights? What is differently conveyed by a towering object versus something that is spread out or close to the ground?

Color: What associations do certain colors have on their own or together? What relationship does color theory play in your assembly choices? What do you already know about color and color relationships?

Material Likeness or Contrast: Is everything in your sculpture the same category of thing? Made of the same materials (i.e. all plastic of different colors)?

Surprise/Novel Placement: What sort of special sauce can you make with a decision of your sculpture's assembly? What is an unexpected choice you could make?

Balance: How is the weight distributed? Are there parts of the sculpture that depend on other parts of the sculpture to remain in space?

Weight/Appearance of Weight: Does the sculpture appear heavy, light, on the verge of collapse, suspended?

Multiplicity: collection of multiples of the same object (whether found, cast, modeled, etc)

Methods of assembly: How are elements of the sculpture connected to one another? In a box? Sewed? Balanced? Stacked?



# MCA COLLECTION: ASSEMBLAGES

Gabriel Kuri, Mexican, b. 1970

Carretilla II, 1999

Wheelbarrow and glass

Overall: 21 5/8 x 55 1/8 x 26 in. (55 x 140 x 66 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Bernice and Kenneth Newberger Fund, 2000.32

Vito Acconci, American, 1940–2017

House of Used Parts, 1985

Aluminum ladders, doors, windows, wood, canvas, and vinyl seat cushions

108 x 72 x 72 in. (274.3 x 182.9 x 182.9 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gerald S. Elliott Collection, 1995.23

Christo (Christo Javacheff), American, b. Bulgaria, 1935

Chicago Magazines, Wrapped, 1980, 1980

'Chicago' magazines, polyethylene, and twine

Frame: 12 ¼ x 9 ½ x 2 in. (31.1 x 24.1 x 5.1 cm.)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of the Men's Council, 1980.52

Jackie Ferrara, American, b. 1929

Stacked Pyramid, 1972

Cotton batting with glue on wood

24 x 52 x 13 in. (61 x 132.1 x 33 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of Lannan Foundation, 1997.34

Richard Long, British, b. 1945

Fire Rock Circle, 1987

Fire rock stones

Installed: 16 x 110 in. diameter (40.6 x 279.4 cm diameter)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gerald S. Elliott Collection, 1995.64

Arman, American, b. France, 1928 - 2005

Alarm Clocks (Reveils), 1960

Alarm clocks in painted wood box

23 ½ x 47 5/16 x 5 in. (59.7 x 120.2 x 12.7 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of Debra and Robert N. Mayer from the Robert B. Mayer Memorial Loan Collection, 1983.85

Annette Lemieux, American, b. 1957

Above and Below, 1988

Books and metal globe stand

16 x 13 x 9 in. (40.6 x 31.1 x 22.9 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Restricted gift of Angela and Rudolf Rossmann, 1992.106

Which design elements did the artists employ to the greatest effect?

# HOMEWORK: FINAL ASSEMBLAGES

We have gathered our objects with materiality. We've considered the history and significance of those objects materials. Now we must tend to the sculpture's final form.

Choose a few objects that feel somehow connected to you. This connection can be concrete, or simply intuitive. Assemble your objects into three different configurations and photograph or draw all of them. Pay attention to some principles of arranging the objects together. Note composition, height, color, material likeness or contrast, novel placement, elements of surprise, balance, levels...but don't hurt yourself trying to check boxes or fit categories. Just play with your objects and arrange them in a manner that adds to the conversation that your material choices have already begun. Approach each choice with curiosity and presence as you build and arrange.

Write a brief description to give context to these objects and the arrangement.

Upload this final work onto the group chat and comment on one another's work as it appears. Make one meaningful comment about the artwork of your peers that is not repeating something that has already been said.

# SUPPORT LETTERS

Ordinarily, our first guided tours of the year are for the classrooms of teachers enrolled in the MCA Teacher Institute. The MCA Teacher Institute is the museum's immersive professional development program for educators. This year-long program is designed to support classroom teachers in incubating and implementing contemporary curricula.

2020 is a different year, of course. So, we invited some of our teaching artists to write support letters to suggest artworks, inspiration, and activities based on the unique themes each of those classrooms were exploring together in the fall. Since many of those themes are broadly relevant, we're including some of them here for your inspiration as well.



# SUPPORT LETTER

Hi Niamh!

Just from reading your syllabus, I feel like I instantly vibe with the pedagogical ethos you're fostering in the class. I love the poignant place-based question you are asking: "what do 8th graders need to know in Chicago?" You are entrusting these young people to be able to decide and answer questions for themselves, questions that I certainly wish someone had asked of me at that age (and yet are still timely.)

In addition to work from ALIEN VS. CITIZEN, I am compelled to bring forth many other amazing artists and artworks that align with your inquiry. Chicago has some dope makers who are thinking deeply about what it means to participate in politics. Who gets to participate? Who is left out?

I instantly thought of the many projects (indeed, the whole body of work) of Chicago artist Aram Han Sifuentes. Her project [The Unofficial Voting Station for Those Who Can't Legally Vote](#) reminds me of the time in 2000 when my elementary school has us fifth graders vote for Gore or Bush. Let me tell you, even in Alabama (where I'm from), us young folks voted for Gore! Not to say that the binary of electoral politics is the \*only\* resource we have for moving things our way, but certainly, I think about the wisdom that young people have and which goes unsupported. I'd be intrigued to discover what criteria your students would use to make this difficult choice!

Also try looking at Aram Han Sifuentes' ["US Citizenship Test Sampler"](#) together with your class. Here's an activity you can do with them: have students think about 2-3 questions that they would ask if they were in charge of designing a "Chicago citizenship" test. Invite them to pick their favorite question and design a sampler inspired by the ones Sifuentes designed. They can use a dotted line to make it look

like they sewed it. Maybe they can add a simple image or symbol to illustrate it! Here is the twist: Instead of writing down one "correct" answer, what if there were many "correct" answers? Think about how you decide what counts as a correct answer to your question. The great thing about making art, is that it often starts with a question that leads to even more questions

In thinking about the information needed to answer your question about what 8th graders need to know, I recalled the work ["Cultr-Ops" \(2008/15\) by Jamal Cyrus](#). Just from a glance, the visual language of bureaucratic obstruction is evident. The source material is part of the FBI's redacted case files on Malcolm X. I wonder, not only how students find the information to make a decision, have they ever felt like there wasn't enough information or that they were blocked from it?

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention a recent project by [Jee Yeun Lee, "100 Miles in Chicagoland," \(2019\)](#). Her practice is profound. She researches the history of areas where she lives and then undertakes grand, poetic walks that are meant to disinter the history of those displaced, especially with regard to histories of colonial violence. I felt that this dovetailed nicely with the questions you're asking.

I hope these resources are helpful!  
May they be sites of fruitful inquiry :)

Solidarity,  
Lucia Calderon Arrieta

# SUPPORT LETTER

Hi Frank!

When I read through your survey responses my mind was blown. I had such a strong connection to the concepts you are addressing. For one, “flow” is near and dear to me! As someone whose learning needs align with the symptoms of ADHD, learning about this term from a TED Talk was hugely affirming. It’s not that I can’t pay attention, but rather, that so few things feel as exhilarating and compelling as the activities that create the conditions for “flow” state (in my case, that was art!). I am awed by the ambition of using this framework to make learning more fun for young students. That seemed like the last thing any of my teachers were concerned with!

The connections that you are exploring between play, practice, learning, and failure also seem to me like a huge boon to students. When I teach art, I frame it as “you know these things intuitively, I’m just helping you slow down and notice your experience and giving you the vocabulary to describe it better.” I feel like that’s exactly what you are doing here, too. Play is the prerogative of the learning mind--to take note of all the wisdom that comes from both the fun and frustrating parts of the play experience is...wow. Many things! The first step to mindfulness; the key to knowing that difficult situations rarely last forever; a way of respecting the wisdom that young people already have just through their lived experiences. I’m so glad that I got to think about these ideas, too, and develop some ideas based on them.

The [photograph "Ball Game \(1\)" \(2007\) by Gustavo Artigas](#) feels like a useful starting point for thinking about collaboration and team-

work. Thinking about the prevalence of digital play led me to think of another piece, ["Birth of a Star" \(1995\), by Mariko Mori](#).

To compliment the works in ALIEN VS. CITIZEN, [Arthur Jafa’s sculpture "LeRage" \(2017\)](#) is an object to start thinking about the difficult emotions that come out of play. Noticing that it’s easier to give someone else advice than to receive it, I thought it'd be interesting to have students give advice to the character, as if helping them through their experience. Try this activity: Invite students to take a few minutes to write a short, made-up story about what happened leading up to this character acting this way. Then, ask them to trade their stories with another person in their class. Ask them to write a letter to this character and share their advice.

I hope these resources are helpful!  
May they be sites of fruitful inquiry :)

Solidarity,  
Lucia Calderon Arrieta

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