

Iowa Master Artists in the Twenty-first Century: Online Lesson

Goals: To introduce contemporary Iowa artists
To explore themes, ideas, topics, and media

Title: Group Sculptural Installation: Ordinary Made Significant

Artists: James Shrosbree, Richard Tuttle, and Jessica Stockholder

Concept: What does the material an artist chooses say about his or her subject? How does the medium speak about concepts or symbolize ideas? Can an art object be about the art making process?

Breaking with a long tradition of “appropriate” art media, contemporary artists Richard Tuttle and Jessica Stockholder, celebrate the creative process and materials culled from ordinary, everyday surroundings, whether the hardware store or a desk drawer. Rather than creating works about particular subjects, they construct abstract artworks from common materials like fabric, plastic containers, rope, wire, and scraps of wood, singling out these ordinary materials from the crowded visual landscape of today’s culture and celebrating them for their color, form, and even crudeness. Jim Shrosbree also works in this manner, focusing as much on the creative process as on the product. His small non-objective sculptural forms defy definition, yet forcefully occupy space, communicate polarities and challenge our perceptions.

Level: Grades 9 – 12

Themes: Materials, Space, Light, Polarities, and Perception

NATIONAL STANDARDS:

1. Media, techniques & processes
2. Knowledge of structure and functions
3. Choosing and evaluating subject matter, symbols & ideas
4. Understanding visual arts in relation to history & cultures
5. Making connections between visual arts & other disciplines

IOWA STANDARDS:

1. Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
2. Using knowledge of structures (art elements, principles of design) and functions
3. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
4. Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
5. Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and work of others
6. Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Objectives

- Students will look at the art of specific artists to explore the relationships between materials, form, space, and perception.

- Students will use common materials to communicate meaning in visual art forms.
- Students will work collaboratively to create their own works of art that illustrate polarities held in creative tension.
- Students will look critically at their own images to describe, analyze, interpret and articulate the comparative eloquence of their finished works.

Materials and Resources:

Iowa Master Artists DVD (IPTV Web Site, AEAs)

Jim Shrosbree interview and clip - <http://www.iptv.org/video/detail.cfm/406>

Additional Web Sites

Richard Tuttle and Jessica Stockholder interviews and clips
<http://www.pbs.org/art21/education/naturalworld/lesson2.html>)

Classroom Materials

- A variety of found objects and common materials in a variety of shapes, colors, and sizes, and other materials like wire, string, fabric, rope, packing materials, and wrapping paper
- Studio construction tools and materials

Activities:

1} Making Ordinary Materials Significant

Watch the Iowa Master Artists video segment on Jim Shrosbree. How does he bring significance to ordinary objects? How does his use of simple materials change the way you think about his objects? Why does he choose certain materials as opposed to others? What is the significance of his choice in materials? Note that Shrosbree makes preliminary sketches and refers to them as he works. Point out how Tuttle installs his works, paying careful attention to how they relate to walls. Note also how Shrosbree emphasizes the effect of directional light on his works by “amping up” the cast shadows with paint. Have students explore work by Tuttle and Stockholder on the Art 21 website. Compare and contrast their work with Shrosbree’s.

Introducing the Concept of Polarities

Have available a pile of common, discarded or scrap materials. Choosing from the materials, show how one material may communicate the idea of weakness (say, light fabric) and another the idea of strength (like wood or wire). Discuss how two polarities might be explored in one sculptural installation. Perhaps students will want to make some thumbnail sketches as to how various common materials might be used to create an installation that illustrates the idea of “polarity”. Ask students to supplement the materials by bringing in a variety of found objects and common

materials in a variety of shapes, colors, and sizes, and other materials like wire, string, fabric, rope, packing materials, and wrapping paper.

(Time: One 45-minute session)

2) Create an Installation about Polarities

After reviewing Shrosbree's work and the concept of polarities, allow the class to choose a polarity as a focus for a sculptural installation. As a class or in smaller groups depending on the availability of space, choose a meaningful polarity, like strength vs. weakness, tension vs. release, reductive vs. expansive, or freedom vs. repression to serve as the basis for a collaborative abstract installation that illustrates the polarity. Select an area(s) of your school or classroom as an installation space. If your class breaks into small groups, students should keep their idea a secret until the final day, when it can be revealed as the class visits each group's installation and interprets each work. If possible, explore the effect of directional lighting on the work and "amp up" the shadow by painting directly on the wall or background.

(Time: Two 45-minute sessions)

3) A Group Critique

Lead the students through a formal critical analysis of each installation, deferring judgment and gathering evidence as you proceed so that they are able to make sound "interpretations" and "judgments."

Description: Take inventory of what is immediately presented to the viewer. This is a simple account of "what is there." Make an inventory of the names of the things we see in the art object (this becomes more difficult with respect to "non-objective" art objects in which one has to describe what one sees in terms of the elements of art [line, shape, form, texture, space]).

Analysis: Analyze or "go behind" the descriptive inventory to discover how the things that have been named are constituted and organized. Focus on the "language of art" and the way the "elements of art" (line, shape, form, texture, color, space) and the "principles of design" (unity, variety, balance, proportion, scale, dominance, subordination, rhythm) have been organized. Describe the relationships among the elements and principles, moving beyond "description" to the way the art object is perceived and organized.

Interpretation: This is a process through which the "meaning" (i.e., content) of the art object is expressed. Through description and formal analysis of the art object you will come to "discover" its meanings. You may also state the relevance of these meanings to your own life or to the human situation in general. You begin an interpretation by forming a "hypothesis." A hypothesis is an idea or principle of organization that seems to relate the material of description and formal analysis meaningfully in order to arrive at the deeper level of "content" that the art object conveys. This step is an attempt to formulate a specific explanation and disclosure of meaning that will "fit" the evidence that was assembled through the first two steps. Is the intended meaning communicated?

Judgment: Evaluating an art object means giving it a rank in relationship to other works in its class. Evaluation is a way of deciding on the degree of artistic and

aesthetic merit of the art object and moves beyond the simple “I like” or “I don’t like” statements.

Compare the art object with other works.

Determine the relevance of “originality.” How does the art object conform to, or depart from, other art objects. Specifically, what is “original” and “compelling” about the art object?

Determine the relevance of technique. Since art is “making,” technical considerations are involved in evaluation. This involves determinations of the importance of craftsmanship, logic in the use of tools and materials, the proper use of tools, and the correspondence between the appearance and function of the art object. Here it is important to determine whether a particular technique supports or diminishes the overall impact and import of the art object.

(Time: One 45 minute session)

The above is paraphrased from *Varieties of Visual Experience: Art as Image and Idea*; E.B. Feldman; Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ; 1981.

Critical Questions:

Have students answer the following questions about the completed work(s):

How else could the chosen polarity have been illustrated?

Does using common materials communicate something that it would be impossible to express in a traditional art medium?

What do the objects we are surrounded by each day communicate to us? How can they become symbolic?

How does juxtaposing objects or elements create meaning?

Reflection and Evaluation:

- Have students demonstrated an understanding of how conceptions of meaning can be embedded in common, everyday materials?
- Have students successfully collaborated to create an installation using common materials that visually describes their ideas on polarities?
- Have students demonstrated the ability to critically analyze their own and other’s artworks??

Credits:

Much of the above is taken from PBS.org Art 21 Educational Materials
<http://www.pbs.org/art21/education/.html>)