

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

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

**Title:** Documenting Memory, Identity and Stories

**Artists:** Margaret Stratton, Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, Claes Oldenburg, Jeff Koons

**Concept:** This lesson uses material culture objects as a means of exploring how the contents of a home can suggest or inspire the identity of its inhabitants, whether through metaphor or usefulness or decoration or simplicity. Students will look at artists who have focused on consumer culture and used the material possessions of families, the contents of a house, or random discarded objects to describe the histories, personalities, and aspirations of themselves and others. Iowa photographer Margaret Stratton has photographed over 100 objects from her parents' home, which reveal much about the time, place, and identity of the people who collected them. Students will photograph similar objects from their own homes and school. Students will compare and contrast their own work with that of Stratton and other artists to discover how meaning is embedded in and carried by these objects.

For older students, this lesson considers the boundaries between private and public in the visual documentation of personal stories. Because artists who incorporate the intimate stories and artifacts of other people in their work later exhibit them in a public arena like a gallery or museum, older students may discuss the ethical issues that are involved in placing personal, private material in the public eye.

(Source: PBS <http://www.pbs.org/art21/education.html>)

**Level:** Grades 5 – 12

**Themes:** Place, Time, Culture, Identity, and Private vs. Public Issues

### **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 explore how material culture objects in our homes and schools can reflect the identities of the people who live, work, study, and play there.
- Students will look at the art of an Iowa artist to explore the relationships between humans, their possessions, culture, time and place.
- Students will create a photo essay or video documentary incorporating the material culture objects and stories of friends and family.
- Students will consider the ethical issues surrounding the exposure of other people's personal stories through art.

### **Materials and Resources**

#### **Iowa Master Artists DVD (IPTV Web Site, AEAs)**

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

Website - <http://www.margaretstratton.com/>

#### **Art:21 Web Site**

- [Touch & Moor](#) —Janine Antoni clip & interview
- [German Brutality & Roman Sensuality: Picutres of Soldiers in the Landscape](#)—Collier Schorr interview & clip
- [Home Visits](#)— Pepon Osorio interview & clip
- [Stories](#)—introduction by John Waters & Charles Atlas
- [Loss & Desire](#) —introduction by Jane Alexander & Charles Atlas
- [Humor](#)—introduction by Margaret Cho & Charles Atlas
- [Time](#)—introduction by Merce Cunningham & Charles Atlas

**Prints and/or slides** of Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, Claes Oldenburg, Jeff Koons.

#### **Classroom Materials**

- Digital camera(s) and computer
- Black velvet drape/background
- Video Equipment (if available)

### **Activities**

#### **1) Material Culture Objects: Regarding the Personal**

Show students the Iowa Master Artist interview with Margaret Stratton emphasizing the section on “100 Items From My Mother’s House”. Initiate a discussion with your students that addresses how Stratton makes use of other people’s objects in this artwork. What stories do the objects tell? How do the subjects of the stories (her parents) contribute to the production of the artwork? How are the stories altered through

the artists' interpretation? How might they be altered through the viewer's interpretation? Can the stories be considered "true"? Are there circumstances that seem to cross the boundary between public and private?

Ask them to brainstorm a list of contemporary culture objects that are unique to their own families and friends. Discuss how the objects reflect time and place including music, fast food, clothing, technology, books, appliances, vehicles, etc. Show students some examples of mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century culture objects and works by a number of POP artists. Show selected video from the Art 21 web site. Discuss with the students the idea of era and in what culture these artworks and the objects in them were made. Discuss how these examples of personal stories are similar to or different from Stratton's work of art.

(Time: One to two 45-minute sessions)

## **2) The Personal Becomes Public: Creating with Personal Stories**

Ask students to gather personal artifacts (objects, photos) from friends and/or family. With younger students work as a class and select 100 objects **(as Stratton did)** for the project. Set up each object on a black velvet backdrop and capture the image with a digital camera. When all images have been captured, import them to a computer create a photo essay or video documentary, adding appropriate music as desired. If you have collected and photographed 100 objects, showing each image for 3 to 5 seconds and flipping, morphing or otherwise transitioning to the next image will produce a video clip of 4 to 8 minutes. Add titles and credits and burn your documentary to a disc and show it (looped) on a monitor in the school cafeteria or lobby, post it on the school website, or find other creative outlets for it.

For older students, working in pairs to create a "portrait" essay in objects of each other may be an option. Ask older students to consider how to keep the intimacy of the objects and stories while providing a wider context for a public audience. Again, the final work of art could take the form of collage, photo essay or video. Present your artwork to the class or create a school-wide display.

(Time: Three 45-minute sessions to long-term project)

### **GOING FURTHER:**

Collaborate with a language arts teacher add accompanying narrative that brings together the words and objects they have documented.

### **CRITICAL QUESTIONS:**

- How do people relate to their personal possessions on an emotional level? A physical level?
- How does the people who design them, the people who sell them, and the environment that, influence our choice of personal possessions surrounds us?
- In what ways do the objects in a home represent the identity of its inhabitants?

- How are people's personal philosophies revealed through the things they keep? Through the things they discard?
- What is the function of the objects we put inside our homes, i.e. the trinkets, furniture, and other belongings that make up the interior culture of our homes?
- What are the most desirable possessions of our own time, culture and place?
- Where do the parameters between the public and the private meet and where do they intersect?
- Under what conditions is it acceptable to use other people's personal possessions and stories in artwork? In literature? In journalism? Under what conditions is it unacceptable?
- When does the public have the "right to know?"
- When might someone want his or her objects displayed or story told?
- What is a voyeur? How might this term be applied to making and viewing art?
- What are examples of other public forums where private stories are shared or revealed?

### **Reflection and Evaluation:**

- Have students reflected on the relationships between humans, their possessions, culture, time and place?
- Have students demonstrated an understanding of how changing conceptions of desirability, function and aesthetics are embedded in visual art forms?
- Have students demonstrated a critical perspective about the ways that some artists have helped us think critically about the relationships between humans and their material possessions?
- Have students examined the ethical questions involved in creating art with other people's stories?
- Have students created their own artwork that narrates personal stories?

### **Credits:**

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

