

Weatherspoon Art Museum

Lesson Plan: Historic Form Meets Contemporary Ideas

Overview: The following lesson plan is based on sculptural works that are almost always on view when you bring your students to visit the Weatherspoon Art Museum. Figurative works can enhance the way your students think about working with the human form in the classroom.

Level: Grades 9-12

Content: Visual Art & Social Studies

Materials: Sketchbooks, flexible armature wire, plaster, tape, found objects appropriate to student's concepts, cardboard or wooden bases on which to build.

Resources: Images of Alison Saar's *Compton Nocturne* and Judith Shea's *Urban Francis*. Visit the Weatherspoon Museum of Art to view these works in person.



Alison Saar American (b. 1956)
Compton Nocturne, 1999

Wood, tin, bottles, paint and tar
Overall: 33 x 80 x 28 in.; 83.82 x 203.2 x 71.12 cm
Collection: Weatherspoon

Museum purchase with funds from the Benefactors Fund, 1999



Judith Shea American (b. 1948)
Urban Francis, 2000-2002
Cast bronze
76 x 41 x 32 in.
Collection: Weatherspoon

Museum purchase with a bequest from Leah Louise Tannenbaum and funds from the Tannenbaum-Sternberger Foundation given in her memory; additional funds provided by the Burlington Industries Endowment and the Weatherspoon Art Museum Acquisition Endowment, 2007

Curriculum Objectives:

Visual Art:

NC COMPETENCY GOAL 1: The learner will develop critical and creative thinking skills and perceptual awareness necessary for understanding and producing art.

NC COMPETENCY GOAL 5: The learner will understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures. (National Standard 4)

Social Studies Strands: Cultures and Diversity; Historic Perspectives

Essential question: How do artists infuse historic forms with ideas about contemporary life?

Vocabulary and historical references:

Recumbent

Italian Renaissance

St. Francis
Maquette

Activating/Warm up Strategies: Before beginning this lesson, it may be beneficial to ask students to recall statues and recumbent figures they may have previously seen. Most statues are created in a heroic mode, often raised high above the viewer's eye level. The recumbent figure is a traditional form in art, particularly associated with the Italian Renaissance. Showing students appropriate examples of these forms prior to viewing Shea's and Saar's works will help set the stage for their understanding of how these artists reference historic forms.

Strategy: First, look at Judith Shea's *Urban Francis*.

- How is this figure different from the figures that are usually immortalized as statues?
- How do you think of those figures as generally being depicted?
- How are figurative statues usually sited in the landscape?
- Are there ideas or issues that are prominent in our culture today that Judith Shea's *Urban Francis* makes you think about?

Here is a link to an interview with the artist about her work:

http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag05/March_05/shea/shea.shtml

Here is a link to the life of St. Francis: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_of_Assisi

Hear the artist talk about *Urban Francis* by calling (336) 201-0688. Press 15#

Now, look at Alison Saar's *Compton Nocturne*.

- In what context do you usually see the recumbent figure? Can you think of any examples from art history?
- What materials have been used in this sculpture?
- Are there ideas or issues that are important in contemporary life that this sculpture makes you consider?

Listen to an audio guide about Alison Saar's work: (336) 201-0688. Press 12#.

Practice: Shea and Saar bent established traditional forms to their own purposes. Ask students to brainstorm ideas about contemporary life (from politics to popular culture) that they would like to depict using one of these traditional forms—or another that they might come up with on their own. Ask them to make a series of sketches to share with the class or with peers in a small group setting.

Using sculptural materials like those listed above, ask each student to construct a maquette for one of their best ideas.

Summarizing strategy: Have students write a short artist's statement to accompany their finished maquette. The artist's statement should address the EQ, discussing the work in terms of both historic form and contemporary life.

Enrichment:

- Look at additional works by Judith Shea. For example, *The Other Monument* is an equestrian statue that addresses ideas about contemporary life. It can be viewed at:
http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag05/March_05/shea/shea.shtml
- View Monuments by the Korean artist Do Ho Suh for additional ideas about how contemporary artists address traditional notions of history and culture in the context of sculptural forms.

http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/projects/03/metrotech/metrospective_suh_s03.html

- Read about London's Fourth Plinth Project

<http://www.london.gov.uk/fourthplinth/plinth/gormley.jsp>

The images used in these lesson plans can be accessed on Weatherspoon's website and copied and printed for classroom use. Their locations are as follows:

Saar, Alison:

<http://weatherspoon.uncg.edu/searchmobius/detail.php?t=objects&type=all&f=&s=Saar&record=0>

Shea, Judith:

<http://weatherspoon.uncg.edu/searchmobius/detail.php?t=objects&type=all&f=&s=Shea&record=0>