

San Jose Museum of Art

Museum Visit Lesson Plan for Teachers

Exhibition: Is the Medium the Message?: Contemporary Art from the Permanent Collection

About the Exhibition:

More and more, artists today create work that not only pleases the senses, but also provokes a range of responses and emotions. Viewers are increasingly challenged by contemporary art that seems to ask more questions than it answers. Organized as a sequel to *Collecting Our Thoughts: The Community Responds to Art in the Permanent Collection*, this exhibition continues the dialogue begun in June of 2001. By bringing back a few key works from the previous exhibition and showing them again in a new context, we address some of the issues raised by our own visitors that are critical when considering contemporary art: beauty, identity, irony, the appearance of simplicity, and the use of found materials.

Objectives:

- o Students will learn that SJMA's permanent collection focuses on California contemporary artists.
- o Students will learn that in addition to painting, sculpture, and photography, artists use a wide range of other media for their artwork.
- o Students will learn about portraiture depicted in various media.
- o Students will learn about the process of assemblage.
- o Students will understand that contemporary art incorporates many different styles, such as realism, expressionism, and abstraction.
- o Students will learn about issues addressed in contemporary art such as beauty, identity, the appearance of simplicity, and the use of found materials.

Vocabulary:

Contemporary art - Contemporary art is defined by art historians as art made by artists who produced their first mature work after 1945.

Permanent collection - Artwork that is part of a museum's holdings, that is collected through purchase or donation.

Medium (pl. media) - The material and/or processes used in an artist's work.

Assemblage - A work of art that is assembled or made out of different objects or materials.

Interdisciplinary Connections:

Language Arts

Many contemporary artists make art out of found materials (things from everyday life). Walk around the gallery and write down five objects that you recognize as a found object. Write a sentence or two about each object. Where have you seen it before, is it something you have used yourself, or is it something you wish you had?

Science

One such found material is Ivory Soap, which is used by Carrie Ungerman in her work simply titled Ivory Soap. What are the chemical properties of soap? How is it made? Would you ever use soap in your artwork?

Social Studies

Through their art, many contemporary artists express their ideas and opinions about social and personal issues.

Part 1: Think about what you have seen or read in the news lately. What are some of the larger issues of our country, or our world? Do some research on an issue in current events and report back to your class. Why did you choose this topic?

Part 2: One of the sections in *Is the Medium the Message?* deals with the idea of identity. After completing Part 1, think about how your personal identity relates to the issue you chose. Make a list that starts with "I am...". e.g. I am a family member, I am an American, I am a student. What artwork would you make about it?