

LESSONS

LESSON ONE: Setting the Scene: Exploring Identity



IMAGE ONE: Grayson Perry (British, born 1960). *Map of an Englishman*. 2004. Etching, sheet: 44½ x 59½" (112.1 x 150 cm). Patricia P. Irgens Larsen Foundation Fund

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history it has been common practice to associate a work of art with the geographical origin of the artist. We often think of artists' work in relation to their national or cultural heritage, even when they leave their homelands and live in or travel to different places. Some artists leave their countries of birth and never return. Others go back and develop new relationships with them, re-examining the past and seeing their birth countries from fresh perspectives.

We live in an era of **globalization** characterized by mass migration, international **nomadism**, exile, and transition. Our world is continuously defined and redefined by contested territories and changing borders. Today artists everywhere are exposed to a diversity of conventions, religions, political outlooks, stereotypes, and attitudes from around the world, and this is reflected in their work.

This guide explores the problem of identifying works of art with their creators' country of origin or a local cultural history. Through a careful examination of work by contemporary artists, students will explore different **representations** of national **identity**, the relationship between historical artistic traditions and contemporary practice, and the effects of these issues on each artist's creative process.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore the varied meanings of "identity."
- Students will learn how irony and satire can function in a work of art.

- Students will discover how maps can be used to chart not only geography but also psychological, emotional, and intellectual states.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Divide your students into pairs to interview one another. Ask them to discuss the following questions: How do you describe yourself? What are the characteristics that make you who you are? Encourage students to discuss their family backgrounds. Where were they born? Where were their parents and grandparents born? Where do they live? How does the place where they live reflect their beliefs and values, if at all? Did they live someplace else before their current residence? How do all these things help define who they are? What other aspects of their lives impact their identities?
- After they have completed the individual interviews, ask your students to share the things they feel have had the deepest impact on creating their identities.

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- Ask your students to consider the traditional purpose of a map. How do they use maps?

Show your students *Map of an Englishman*, by Grayson Perry (Image One), and share the title with them.

- Divide your students into two groups and ask one group to study the left side of the map and the other to study the right side. What are the names of each region, denoted by the larger text? What are the characteristics of these regions? What kind of place has Perry depicted?
- Ask your students to imagine each section of the map as a neighborhood. How would they describe each one? If this were a map of a city, what kind of city would it be? What kinds of activities and places would a visitor find in it?

Tell your students that Perry, a British artist, based his map design on the two halves of the brain, with a right and a left side. Perry used the conventions of geographic maps: the area around the brainlike shape looks like water and the mass takes on the qualities of an island, similar to the island of Great Britain, the artist's homeland.

Before he drew the map, Perry and his wife made a long list of emotional states to be included on it. He said, "I don't think there is a particular rhyme or reason to how I did it. I tended to put the darker, more subconscious things on the bottom right, because that's where they are in the brain."¹ He called the bodies of water Psychopath and Delirium, and named landmarks Happiness, Peace, Spit, and Bad Manners, among other things.

Perry employs satire and irony to make works of art that critique accepted social and cultural norms. He challenges the human tendency to simplify identity by showing that it is complex, multifaceted, and sometimes humorous, depressing, and confusing. In this large **etching**, Perry reveals facets of life in the contemporary era, with all its emotions, phobias, and obsessions, adapting a traditional map into a depiction of the twenty-first-century human condition. The work posits a shared identity between artist and viewer—every viewer of the map will have wishes, ambition, anger, and many other of the common desires

1. Grayson Perry quoted in "Grayson Perry," by Charles Booth-Clibborn, in *Contemporary Art in Print*, ed. Etienne Lullin and Florian Oliver-Simm (London: Paragon Press, 2007), 326.

and emotions delineated on the map—and among Englishmen, but it is also full of personal, autobiographical references to the artist. “A lot of people think it’s generally like an Englishman,” he has said. “It is an Englishman. It is me.”²

- **Ask your students to look closely at how the words are written and what symbols Perry has used for the images on the map. Does the style he drew and lettered in remind you of a particular historical period?**

Perry studied old maps and drew on a wide range of visual and literary conventions to make the work appear as if it had been made long ago; for example, he used a lettering style from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A similar work, *Map of Tenderness* (1654), by Madeleine de Scudéry, influenced Perry in his work. Scudéry gave waters and villages names such as Indifference, Indiscretion, Negligence, and Mischief.

ACTIVITIES

Identity Maps

Ask your students to create maps of their own identities with colored pencils and paper. Their maps should encompass aspects of their outer, physical worlds and their inner worlds. Before they draw their maps, ask them to make lists of words according to categories they want to include. Encourage them to include their ambitions, fears, and character traits as well as geographic places of interest. Ask them to think about how to best visually represent these items and then incorporate this style into their maps.

Layers of Identity

Ask each student to write a simple description of him- or herself on a sheet of paper. Then have them each provide more detail on a separate piece of paper, including something they don’t think anybody else knows about. Collect everyone’s descriptions, shuffle them, then redistribute them. Ask students to try to match each description with a person.

Maps and the Passage of Time

Ask your students to research maps of England from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, noting similarities and differences between these maps and Grayson Perry’s *Map of an Englishman*. Have them find a contemporary map of England and report to the class how names of places and territorial boundaries have changed over time.

2. Ibid.

LESSON TWO: Mapping National and Geographic Identity

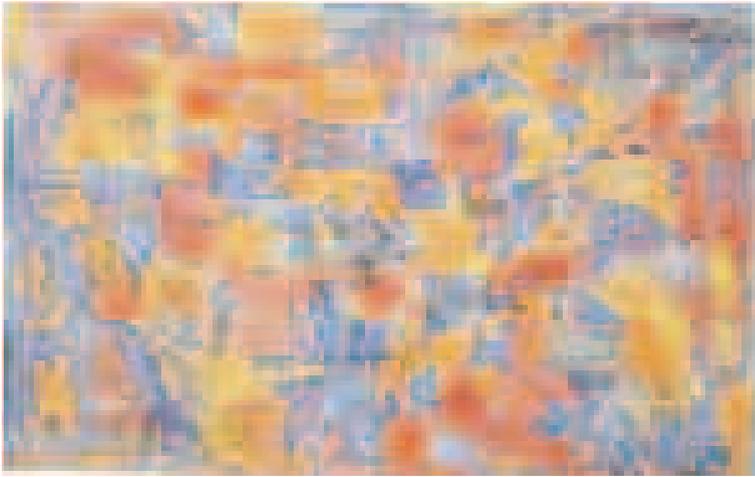


IMAGE TWO: Jasper Johns (American, born 1930). *Map*. 1961. Oil on canvas, 6' 6" x 10' 3 1/8" (198.2 x 314.7 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull. © 2009 Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York

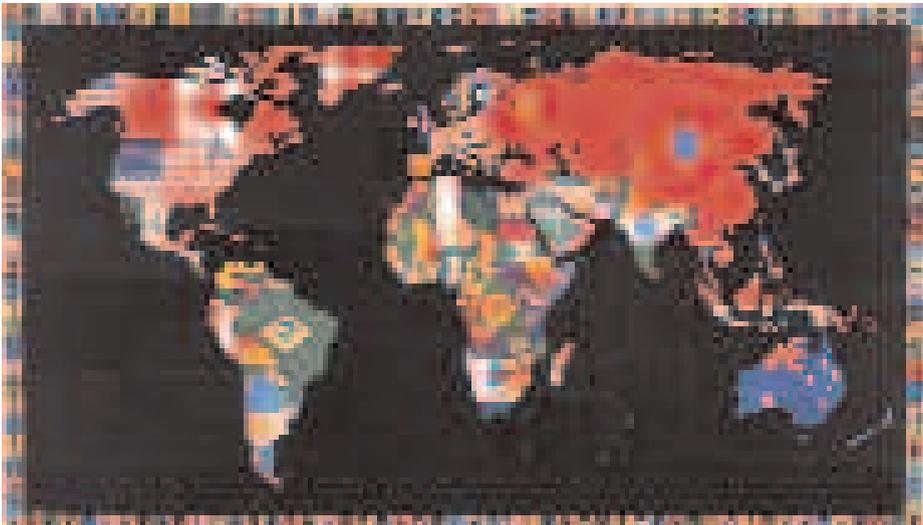


IMAGE THREE: Alighiero e Boetti (Italian, 1940–1994). *Map of the World*. 1989. Embroidery on fabric, 46 1/4" x 7' 3 3/4" x 2" (117.5 x 227.7 x 5.1 cm). Scott Burton Fund. © 2009 Estate of Alighiero e Boetti



IMAGES FOUR (ABOVE) THROUGH NINE: Mona Hatoum (British of Palestinian origin, born in Beirut, Lebanon, 1952). *Routes II*. 2002. Colored ink and gouache on printed maps; five, six, and eight: gouache on printed map; seven and nine: colored ink on printed map, five: 9¼ x 8" (24.8 x 20.3 cm), six: 11 x 16" (27.9 x 40.6 cm), seven: 10¾ x 15" (27.3 x 38.1 cm), eight: 10 ¼ x 8" (27.3 x 20.3 cm), nine: 11 x 8½" (27.9 x 21.6 cm). The Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection Gift. © 2009 Mona Hatoum



IMAGE FIVE



IMAGE SEVEN



IMAGE EIGHT



IMAGE SIX



IMAGE NINE

INTRODUCTION

Maps are **graphic** images that typically render a three-dimensional geographic or spatial area in two dimensions. According to historians and geographers, every human culture uses maps. The maps in this lesson range in **style** and address a variety of issues, including national identity and international relationships, **patterns** of migration, and the potential of artistic materials.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will analyze the symbols used in geographic maps.
- Students will consider the impact of cultural, historical, and political contexts on mapping.
- Students will compare and contrast maps in diverse **mediums** made by artists from different geographic and cultural backgrounds.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Ask your students what national identity is. How is national identity established? Who or what defines it? How might a country protect or preserve its identity?
- Does your family have a common identity? Does your town, city, or school have an identity? How would you describe the national identity of the United States? What is it based on?

Explain to your students that the borders and populations of countries are constantly in flux. Just as countries continuously reinforce or reshape their national and international images, so do artists, who struggle with their identities in an ever-changing world.

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- Show your students *Map*, by Jasper Johns (Image Two).
- Ask your students what they notice. How does this work differ from other maps of the United States they have seen? How are the contours of the states different in Johns's map?
- Johns used a **stencil**—an ordinary lettering tool—to indicate the names of states and oceans. Direct your students to the lower-left corner of the painting, where the Pacific Ocean is represented. Point out that the *P* in Pacific is missing. Ask your students to identify states that in name or shape are blurred, partial, or whole. Which states' names are missing?
- Ask your students what, if any, aspects of the work make it difficult to decipher. What effect does this have on their viewing of *Map*?

In *Map* Johns has preserved the general dimensions and shape of each state; however, as with the Pacific Ocean, he has taken great liberties interpreting the identities of territories. Direct your students' attention to where Johns drips his paint from one state into another, an imprecision that would defeat the purpose of most maps.

Inform your students that Johns is an American artist who has chosen subjects from everyday life—maps, flags, targets, numbers, and letters—because, he says, he prefers to work

with images “the mind already knows.”³ By depicting familiar subjects, he encourages viewers to look at them anew. In this case Johns has countered the expectation that a map is a faithful representation of geography and of state borders. His map suggests that borders within the United States are open and state identities are not fixed.

- Ask your students how they know they are crossing a border of a city, state, or country when they travel.
- Johns made *Map* in 1961. Ask your students if they know of any political or social events that occurred in the United States around that time. How might these events have influenced Johns?
- Tell your students about some of the events of 1961: John F. Kennedy became president of the United States, and the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War were both beginning. How might these events have affected how Americans looked at their country at that time? How might this have affected Johns's depiction of the United States?

Now show your students *Map of the World*, by Alighiero e Boetti (Image Three).

- Ask them to describe what they see. How is this map different from the world maps they are accustomed to seeing? Ask them if they can tell by looking at the image what materials the artist used. How did the artist represent each country?
- Now have your students compare and contrast this work with Johns's *Map*. Then ask them to consider how borders function differently between American states and between nations.

This is the last in a series of 150 maps Boetti made over a period of twenty years in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Peshawar, Pakistan. The Italian artist was interested in investigating how the boundaries between countries form and change over time; each map in the series is different from the others, visualizing national borders as they existed when the map was made. By fitting the colors and patterns of each country's flag within its borders, Boetti clearly visualizes the patterns of territorial ownership around the globe. His aim was to question global power imbalances and the validity of national identity.

- Ask your students to describe the patterns that emerge in the map. Where do motifs repeat? What is the significance of these recurrences?
- Ask your students to find the United Kingdom on the map. Where else do they see the flag of the United Kingdom?

Let your students know that the places covered by the British flag were its territories at the time Boetti made the map.

- Ask your students to identify Italy and Afghanistan in *Map of the World*.

Boetti traveled to Afghanistan for the first time in 1971 and ultimately made it his second home. He was attracted to the country's austerity and natural beauty and its traditions of Sufism and Buddhism. He commissioned Afghani women—famous for their traditional **embroidery**—to execute his map designs. Much of Boetti's work finds meaning in the collaboration and exchange of ideas with people from other cultures.

3. Jasper Johns quoted in “Saluting the Flags,” by David Sylvester, in *Jasper Johns Flags*, by Anthony d’Offay Gallery (London: Anthony d’Offay Gallery, 1996), 15.

Boetti acknowledged his cooperative effort with Afghani women in the text bordering the map—in Italian (top and bottom) and Farsi, a Persian language spoken in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the region (left and right). The Farsi poem extols the power of knowledge and a common humanity.

- Ask your students if they have ever traveled to a place they believe reflects their values and interests. What are the characteristics of that place? How do your students negotiate or integrate its culture with their own?

Inform your students that Alighiero e Boetti, which means “Alighiero and Boetti” in Italian, was originally named just Alighiero Boetti—he added the *e* to indicate his interest in dualities, or aspects of life that pair two contrasting characteristics, like east and west, order and disorder, the individual and society, and local and international relationships.

Now show your students *Routes II*, by Mona Hatoum (Image Four).

Inform your students that this work is composed of five color photocopies of maps taken from airline brochures depicting flight patterns and routes (Images Five through Nine). These maps show the United Kingdom and Ireland, Europe, the United States, and Spain—and Hatoum has drawn over them with ink and **gouache**.

- Ask your students to compare and contrast Hatoum’s work with Boetti’s *Map of the World*. How does Boetti use the map differently than Hatoum?

Hatoum drew colored lines on copies of maps published by airline companies, adding her own hand-drawn abstract patterns to the airlines’ existing web of routes. The airlines’ maps visualize the networks created by travel and chart the globe primarily according to movement rather than natural, national, or political boundaries.

- Ask your students to consider what impact Hatoum’s hand-drawn lines have on these maps.

Hatoum was born in Lebanon to Palestinian parents exiled from Haifa, Israel. Explain to your students that exile means self-imposed absence or forced removal from one’s home. In 1975, at the age of twenty-three, she moved to England to escape the war that was beginning in Lebanon. As an artist displaced by conflict, Hatoum has found inspiration in movement, travel, and the discovery of new cultures, people, and lands. “The nomadic existence suits me fine,” she says, “because I do not expect myself to identify completely with any one place.”⁴ Playing on words, she has said that she considers the paths she drew in *Routes II* to be “routes for the rootless.”⁵

- Ask your students to name some reasons people move around the world today.

In this work Hatoum has attempted to use **cartography** to diagram a kind of personal travel and movement that is often absent in conventional maps, such as the ones she utilized in this work. These maps depict only certain prescribed routes, and therefore cannot account for the travel paths of individuals like Hatoum, who consider no one place to be their home. Although they do not represent her own paths of travel, Hatoum’s hand-drawn marks assert her individuality within the preplanned and measured webs of commercial airline travel.

4. Mona Hatoum quoted in *Beyond East and West: Seven Transnational Artists*, by David O’Brien (Urbana-Champaign, Ill.: Krannert Art Museum, 2004), 44.

5. Mona Hatoum quoted in “Caught in Her Web,” by Hannah Duguid, *The Independent* (London), December 13, 2006, 2.

- Ask your students to compare and contrast the ways Hatoum and Johns address borders in their maps. How does each artist challenge the authority of borders?
- Ask your students to discuss the different mediums the artists in this lesson have used to make their maps. How does each medium help convey the work’s meaning?

ACTIVITIES

Mapping Your Day

Ask your students to make maps of their days using pencils and paper. Have them chart where they were before they came to school (point A), where they are now (point B), and the places they passed to get from point A to point B. When they are finished, ask them how they determined which elements to include and exclude in their maps. Have your students exchange maps. What are the similarities and differences?

Where in the World is . . . ?

If you have a world map in your classroom, provide students with thumbtacks or stickpins so that they can indicate where they or their ancestors are originally from. Be sure to note the cases in which students’ ancestors come from the same place in order to draw out any previously unknown shared histories among your students. Then ask them to mark their favorite places locally, nationally, or internationally.

The World Map: 1989 to Now

Have your students conduct research on the relationships between countries in Alighiero e Boetti’s *Map of the World* when it was made, in 1989, and today. Many countries and borders that exist today did not exist in 1989. Ask your students to identify at least ten flags on Boetti’s map. Then give them a current map and images of international flags and ask them to find differences between Boetti’s map of 1989 and today’s world map. Ask students to compare the relationship between two neighboring countries in 1989 and today. Have there been conflicts between those countries since then?

Divide the class into groups, and ask each one to focus its research on a different area of the map. For example, ask one group to look at Europe as depicted by Boetti. Then have the group research the establishment of the European Union in 1993 and how it has affected countries in Europe today.

Social Media/Social Mapping

Ask your students to create maps showing where some of their Facebook friends live. What does each student’s map look like? Do their friends live close by or far away?

Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell

As a follow-up research project, show your students Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell’s two screenprints *Air Routes of the World (Day and Night)* (2001) without telling them the title. (An image of the work is available in the Collection section of the Museum’s Web site. Visit http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=10055 or search the online collection for “Air Routes of the World.”) Ask them what they think is depicted in this work. What might the lines represent? Why might one image be black and the other white?

Tell your students the title of the work, and then ask them if they can identify specific cities on this map. Ask them to consider what this work might reveal about Langlands and Bell's view of human relationships. Does travel isolate us or connect us? Have your students examine the edges of each print. What happens to the lines? Langlands and Bell omit the borders and physical boundaries that are found on most maps, revealing that the world is a web of movement and interconnectivity. Ask your students if they think this is an appropriate way of mapping the world now. What about a century ago?

LESSON THREE: Translating Traditions



IMAGE TEN: Francis Alÿs (Belgian, born 1959). *Modern Procession*. 2003. Two-channel video (color, sound), 12 min. Gift of the Silverweed Foundation. Photo: Eric Weiss/Matt Suib/Dennis Cowley. © 2009 Francis Alÿs

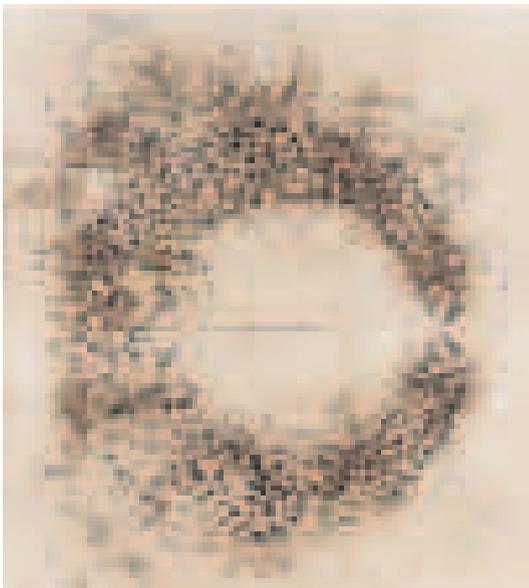


IMAGE ELEVEN: Cai Guo-Qiang (Chinese, born 1957). *Drawing for Transient Rainbow*. August 2003. Gunpowder on two sheets of paper, overall 14' 11" x 13' 4 1/2" (454.7 x 405.1 cm). Fractional and promised gift of Clarissa Alcock Bronfman. © 2009 Cai Guo-Qiang



IMAGE TWELVE: Yinka Shonibare (British, born 1962). *How Does a Girl Like You Get to Be a Girl Like You?* 1995. Installation of three costumes of wax-printed cotton textiles, tailored by Sian Lewis, 66" high (approx.). Gift of Agnes Gund. Photograph courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York. © 2009 Yinka Shonibare

INTRODUCTION

The works in this lesson address how artists around the world adopt creative processes and subject matter from their own and others' cultural traditions into their artmaking practices. Francis Alÿs was born in Belgium and now lives in Mexico, culling inspiration from Latin American street **processions** as well as those of his native country, while Cai Guo-Qiang, who was born in China, lived in Japan, and now resides in New York, uses ancient Chinese materials and rites together with new technologies in his large-scale projects. Both artists have combined their native or adopted cultural traditions with other elements to make artwork celebrating The Museum of Modern Art's move from Manhattan to Queens, New York, in 2002. Yinka Shonibare, a British artist who grew up in Nigeria, examines the economic and social relationships of the colonial era as well as European and African fashion design to comment on contemporary life and politics.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn how artists explore personal, cultural, and national identity through materials, process, and tradition.
- Students will see how contemporary artists have adapted historic, culturally specific artmaking practices to the present day.
- Students will begin to consider the role of politics and religion in contemporary art.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Ask your students what tradition means to them. What are some of the traditions—cultural, religious, or personal—that are part of their lives? How have some of these traditions changed or been updated over the years, if at all?
- Ask your students to name some ways in which objects, events, or people are honored. Ask them to share what they know about different celebratory traditions. What kinds of objects, or props, are sometimes used?
- What are some of the holidays your students celebrate that are derived from their cultural or national heritages?

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- Ask your students to describe what a procession is. On what occasions do processions take place? What do they celebrate or honor? Have they ever participated in one?
- Show your students *Modern Procession*, by Francis Alÿs (Image Ten), and ask them to describe what they see.
- Ask your students if they can guess what Alÿs is paying homage to in *Modern Procession*.
- How does this procession differ from the processions they are familiar with?

Inform your students that processions often pay tribute to a religious figure, a national or cultural hero or cause, an event in the natural world, a religious or secular holiday (such as the Thanksgiving and Christmas parades in New York City), or a funeral or wedding. In Mexico, where Alÿs lives, the Virgin of Guadalupe is a venerated religious figure. Members of processions in her honor carry palanquins—structures that support an icon, effigy, body, or statue—and may be accompanied by a band, horses, dogs, or showers of rose petals. Some such rituals are associated with hunting, the seasons, or agriculture, while others are dedicated to military, patriotic, or athletic events or heroes. Carrying objects or effigies over a long distance through various communities and sacred sites is a common feature of processions around the world.

Alÿs was asked to create an event to celebrate The Museum of Modern Art's temporary move from Manhattan to Long Island City, Queens, New York, in June 2002, when the Museum was undergoing a large-scale renovation. Alÿs asked various artists and craftspeople in Mexico to replicate works of art from MoMA's collection, and the copies were carried on platforms by volunteers through the streets of Manhattan and across the Queensboro Bridge to MoMA's temporary home.

Draw your students' attention to the **replica** in the picture of the tall, spindly statue *Standing Woman* (1948), by Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti. *Standing Woman* is a well-known work of art in MoMA's collection.

- Ask your students to describe the difference between an original and a replica. Where are originals of an object often found? What is the purpose of a copy? Ask your students to name some examples of original and replicated objects that are part of their everyday lives.

- For *Modern Procession* Alÿs commissioned Mexican artisans to make replicas of works of art originally made many years ago, such as Giacometti's sculpture from 1948. Why might he have used replicas instead of the actual artworks in his procession?

Inform your students that the original works of art are too valuable and fragile to be carried outside in a procession.

Now show your students *Drawing for Transient Rainbow*, by Cai Guo-Qiang (Image Eleven), without telling them the title.

- Ask your students to describe what they see. Can they tell what materials the artist has used to create this work of art?

Tell your students the title of the work.

- Ask them in what ways, if any, this image resembles a rainbow. Discuss the meaning of "transient." How are rainbows transient?

Like Alÿs, Cai created a work in honor of MoMA's move in 2002. He exploded fireworks across the section of the East River that runs between the boroughs of Manhattan and Queens and thus between MoMA's home and its new temporary residence. *Drawing for Transient Rainbow*, created in 2003, is a record of the fireworks explosion (called *Transient Rainbow*) over the East River.

Show your students the video recording of the fireworks in the 2002 Projects section of Cai's Web site, at www.caiguoqiang.com/project_video.php?id=50&iid=355.

- Ask your students to name some things they associate with fireworks. Where and when do they see fireworks? What are some characteristics of fireworks? Under what circumstances are they used today?

Tell your students that in China, where Cai was born and studied until 1986, when he emigrated to Japan (he moved to New York in 1995), every significant social occasion—weddings, funerals, a new home, an important speech—is marked by the explosion of fireworks. Gunpowder was discovered in the ninth century in China, during alchemical experiments to make medicine, and since then it has been used to make fireworks.

For *Transient Rainbow* Cai paired tradition with contemporary life, history with transience, and fragility with destruction. He used one thousand multicolored peony fireworks fitted with computer chips, combining an old material with new technology. Cai culled thousands of years of historical tradition for an event that lasted a fleeting fifteen seconds.

To make *Drawing for Transient Rainbow*, Cai used paper, another Chinese invention, for a support, contrasting the fragility of the medium with the destructive power of gunpowder.

- Based on what they can observe, how do your students think Cai made *Drawing for Transient Rainbow*?

To make the drawing Cai placed a large piece of paper on a fireproof floor. Then he laid piles of gunpowder on top of the paper and laid another piece of paper on top. Next, he weighted it down and lit a fuse, which soon triggered the gunpowder to explode. When the smoke cleared, the artist and his assistants removed the top piece of paper and put out the sparks. The resulting marks show where the paper burned. At the top they arch upward like a rainbow, and at the bottom they arch downward, just as the rainbow colors of the fireworks had been reflected in the East River in the earlier outdoor event.

Show your students the short video *Drawing with Gunpowder* on the PBS Art:21 Web site, at <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/cai/index.html#>.

Transient Rainbow was the first explosion project in New York since the attacks of September 11, 2001. Cai saw his public fireworks display as an opportunity to bring diverse traditions and people together. He acknowledges that, like gunpowder, fireworks have destructive power, but fireworks displays break down social barriers and create meaningful interactions between viewers.⁶

- Ask your students how both artists' works incorporate tradition in a nontraditional way.
- In what ways do the celebrations reflect the role of art in our culture?
- Ask your students to describe some of the ways they capture events in order to share them with people in the future.

These works by Alÿs and Cai were events. Next we will look at an artist whose work takes the form of **installations**.

Show your students *How Does a Girl Like You Get to Be a Girl Like You?* (Image Twelve), by Yinka Shonibare.

- Ask your students to describe the figures in the installation. What are they wearing? What time period do they appear to be from?
- Have your students focus on the colors and patterns of the fabrics as well as the style of the dresses. Can they tell by looking where these patterns come from? Where have they seen this style of dress before?

Shonibare presents three female mannequins wearing dresses with bustles (gathered skirts held above the women's buttocks with large coiled springs or even horsehair bags). This style was fashionable in the **Victorian** period in England (1837–1901). The design requires layers of expensive fabric, so only wealthy women wore them.

England began to establish colonies overseas in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and the Netherlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They took over territories in the Americas and Asia, then turned their attention to Africa.

Although printed fabrics like the ones on Shonibare's figures were not popular in Europe, the Dutch and the British began to manufacture them in the nineteenth century to chall-

6. Cai Guo-Qiang, "Interview: Octavio Zaya in Conversation with Cai Guo-Qiang" in *Cai Guo-Qiang*, by Cai Guo-Qiang, Dana Friis-Hansen, Octavio Zaya, and Serizawa Takashi (London: Phaidon, 2002), 14–16.

enge Indonesian **batik** production and sales to Africa. West Africa became the most profitable market for cloth from these European countries. Shonibare’s richly patterned costumes of **wax-print cotton** refer to the “Genuine Dutch Wax” or “Super Wax from Manchester” fabrics popular among West African women beginning in the nineteenth century.

- **What do your students think it means to use this cloth to make Victorian-style clothing?**

Today in West Africa women communicate their power, wealth, sex appeal, and political or social stances through the wax-print cotton dresses they wear. The colors and patterns communicate a code: some cloth signals authenticity, while other patterns comment on sexual, political, or social issues. Though the prints are associated with African aesthetics, the style is Victorian. Shonibare has dressed up African women to look like members of British aristocracy while acknowledging that he has invented a historically false role for them.

- **Ask your students how clothing can express an idea. What does clothing tell them about the wearer’s personality? How accurate is clothing in communicating its wearer’s character?**
- **What might Shonibare be trying to communicate by using mannequins with no heads?**

Inform your students that Shonibare has conceived of the headless figures in many ways. Incorporating humor into his work, he seeks to undermine stereotypes. He has said that he conceived of the headless figures as a joke related to the killing by guillotine of aristocrats in the French Revolution.⁷ By removing the heads, the artist also expresses how Africans and people of African descent have been objectified, like mannequins in a shop window. In addition, Shonibare shows that propriety, formality, and good behavior can be thrown off-balance—a person can look proper and then “lose his head” and become absurd.⁸ Humans construct and change their identities constantly. Through attitude, dress, cultural histories, and contemporary experience, they reveal themselves to be many things at once.

Inform your students that Shonibare is Yoruban, from one of the largest West African ethnic groups, predominately located in Nigeria. The artist was born in London and educated there, but he spent his childhood in Lagos, Nigeria. He resists identification as a “Nigerian artist,” and, like the other artists in this lesson, he creates work using elements from diverse aesthetic traditions. As art historian John Picton has noted, Shonibare attempts to make work about contemporary life in London, to challenge “stereotypes, most especially of black and African people in the so-called West.”⁹

7. Deborah Sontag, “Headless Bodies from a Bottomless Imagination,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2009.

8. National Gallery of Victoria, Australia, “Artists Interview: Yinka Shonibare,” Crossing Borders Online Education Resource (video), Yinka Shonibare, www.ngv.vic.gov.au/crossingborders/interview/yinka_interview.html (accessed June 6, 2009).

9. John Picton, “Understanding Ethnicity,” *African Arts*, Autumn 2001: 2.

ACTIVITIES

Fashion Plates

Ask your students to consider the clothes they are wearing. How do their outfits help define who they are? In what ways do their clothes fail to communicate or even contradict their personal identities?

Public Art

Divide your class into small groups and ask each one to conceive a public art project that acknowledges a significant occasion or holiday. Ask them to describe the occasion. How can they transform those characteristics into a memorable event? Where will it take place? Will they use traditional celebratory customs or invent new ones? How will these coexist?

Research an Artist

Ask your students to research Shahzia Sikander, a contemporary artist who combines **aesthetic** traditions with contemporary imagery. Have your students explore an interview with the artist featured on the homepage of Red Studio, MoMA’s site for teens, at www.moma.org/redstudio. Ask each student to choose a work of art by Sikander and describe the elements that represent tradition and those that address contemporary issues. Some elements might do both.

Cai Guo-Qiang designed the fireworks display for the opening ceremonies at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Show your students the video *Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Fireworks Rehearsal* on YouTube. Ask them to research how these fireworks are different from *Transient Rainbow*.

7. Deborah Sontag, “Headless Bodies from a Bottomless Imagination,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2009.

8. National Gallery of Victoria, Australia, “Artists Interview: Yinka Shonibare,” Crossing Borders Online Education Resource (video), Yinka Shonibare, www.ngv.vic.gov.au/crossingborders/interview/yinka_interview.html (accessed June 6, 2009).

9. John Picton, “Understanding Ethnicity,” *African Arts*, Autumn 2001: 2.

LESSON FOUR: Globalization and the Standardization of Identity



IMAGE THIRTEEN: Sze Tsung Leong (American and British, born Mexico 1970). *Nan Shi, Huangpu District, Shanghai*. 2004. Chromogenic color print, 31 7/8 x 40 1/2" (81 x 101.8 cm). Fund for the Twenty-First Century. © 2009 Sze Tsung Leong



IMAGE FOURTEEN: Sze Tsung Leong (American and British, born Mexico 1970). *Xizhimen, Haidian District, Beijing*. 2002. Chromogenic color print, 31 7/8 x 40 1/2" (81 x 101.8 cm). Fund for the Twenty-First Century. © 2009 Sze Tsung Leong



IMAGE FIFTEEN: Andreas Gursky (German, born 1955). *Sha Tin*. 1994. Chromogenic color print, 70 7/8 x 7' 8 1/2" (180 x 235 cm). Horace W. Goldsmith Fund through Robert B. Menschel. © 2009 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

INTRODUCTION

Over the last several decades people from disparate parts of the world have become more and more connected, through fast communication and global travel. We share and exchange ideas, desires, customs, and habits, sometimes blending or adapting traditional or local customs to suit contemporary life, at other times abandoning local ways of life altogether and adopting an international style of living. Increasingly, cultures and cities around the world are beginning to look alike, making it difficult to distinguish one from the next. The artists in this lesson address the changing identities of cities and populations.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will be introduced to works of art that address constructions of identity in a consumer society.
- Students will explore the roles memory plays in the creation and evolution of identity.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Ask your students to think about life in present-day cities. What concerns might people living in cities have that are different from those of people living in other kinds of places? Ask your students to consider a range of ideas, from transportation to housing to tourists visiting.
- Ask your students to name some food, clothing styles, and religious customs that have been modified to fit contemporary life. How have these things changed? In what ways are they better or worse than they were before?

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- Show your students *Nan Shi, Huangpu District, Shanghai*, by Sze Tsung Leong (Image Thirteen).
- Ask them to describe what they see, starting with the **background**, then moving forward to the **middle ground** and **foreground**. Have them describe the **landscape** in each section and the physical features of the buildings. How are they different? What is the relationship between them? Draw their attention to the foreground. What may have caused this part of the landscape to be so different from the background?

Inform your students that Leong was born in Mexico to British and Malaysian parents. He spent his childhood in Mexico, Britain, and the United States, visited China for the first time in 1994, and currently lives in New York. Since 2002 he has been photographing the dramatic transformations of China's urban centers.

- Ask your students to identify old and new elements in the photograph. What might this photograph communicate about attitudes toward history in China today?

Leong's photograph shows tall buildings in the background set behind a sprawl of low brown-roofed buildings rooted in dirt. Many of these low buildings' windows do not have glass in them. In the foreground, pieces of demolished buildings lie in rubble, including entire foundations of homes. According to Leong, in China "history has been defined by the successive erasures and rewritings of the past"¹⁰; the past continues to be something to rebel

10. Sze Tsung Leong, "A History of Erasure," in *Sze Tsung Leong: History Images*, by Norman Bryson, Stephen Shore, and Sze Leong (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl, 2006), 138.

against, defeat, and destroy in favor of a new, powerful identity in line with present-day needs and desires.

- **Ask your students how Leong has conveyed this idea in his photograph.**
- **Ask your students to imagine who might live in, work in, or visit the skyscrapers in the background. What kinds of activities might take place there? Why might these buildings have been constructed there? Ask your students to describe the inhabitants of the smaller structures in the middle of the photograph. What might their daily lives be like?**

Inform your class that the skyscrapers do not bear any resemblance to traditional Chinese architecture. They are a combination of housing, offices, and other retail spaces, built over an older landscape that is being wiped away by development. According to the artist, the skyscrapers were built to “generate and accommodate new wealth.”¹¹ As a result, most of the original townspeople have been forced to leave, as prices have risen. The old architectural traditions are disappearing and streets lacking any visual signs of local identity are taking their place. China’s urban centers now resemble those in Western cities, like New York, which is home to hundreds of sleek, geometric, modern skyscrapers.

- **Show your students *Xizhimen, Haidian District, Beijing*, also by Leong (Image Fourteen), without telling them the title. Ask them if they can tell where it is, based on what they see.**
- **Have them compare this photograph with *Nan Shi, Huangpu District, Shanghai*, naming similarities and differences between them.**

Inform your students that the second photograph depicts the Haidian District of Beijing, China, where the buildings appear to be identical.

- **Now show your students *Sha Tin*, by Andreas Gursky (Image Fifteen). Give your students color photocopies of the photograph, and ask them how the image is organized. Instruct your students to cut up their photocopies according to the picture’s distinct parts—foreground, middle ground, and background. Then, with the class, explore the differences and similarities between the fragments.**

Gursky’s large-scale digital photographs capture scenes of contemporary life, including landscape, architecture, and people. Through scale and repetition, individualism is often lost to the grandeur of the setting or the size of the crowd.

- **Ask your students what the crowd in *Sha Tin* is gathering to watch.**

Inform your students that horse racing is a popular pastime in Hong Kong, where this picture was taken, and crowds of spectators watch their favorite horses compete. Gursky photographed the fans from behind, transforming individuals into two anonymous groups distinguished only by the color of their clothes and by their postures. This photograph captures a phenomenon of urban contemporary life: individual identity is easily lost to collective identity.

- **Ask your students to describe the qualities of the spectators’ collective identity.**
- **Ask your students to name some ways people experience isolation in a crowded urban environment. Have they ever felt alone or disconnected from others in a crowd or on a city street? Ask them to describe the scenario.**

11. Ibid., 139.

ACTIVITIES

The Old and the New

Ask your students to take photographs that highlight the contrast between old and new buildings near their homes. What are some of the similarities and differences between the buildings? Which do they prefer, and why? Which of these buildings have been constructed during their lifetimes? Which ones have been around for generations? If your students don’t know the answers to these questions, encourage them to interview older relatives or other members of their communities to find out.

Show your students two photographs with a similar message to that of Sze Tsung Leong’s works: *Sac-Chich, Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico*, from the series *Two Sections of Time* (2003), by Eduardo del Valle and Mirta Gómez (an image of the work is available in the Collection section of the Museum’s Web site. Visit www.moma.org/collection and search for “Sac-Chich, Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico”), and *Untitled (L.A.)* (2004), by Carlos Garaicoa (visit www.moma.org/collection and search for “Untitled (L.A.)”). Ask them to conduct research on one of these artists and make a brief presentation to the class about how his or her work relates to the themes explored in this lesson.

Information Revolution

Ask your students to conduct a research project focusing on the so-called information revolution of the 1990s. How did the craze for global interconnectivity begin? How did our world get so interconnected? What were the first signs of cultural change in their communities? To get started, ask your students what their first memory of a computer is. Can they remember the first piece of information they sought out using the Internet? Ask your students to interview older friends or family members about what they remember about the beginning of the information revolution.

Facebook and Twitter

Ask your students how social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have shaped the ways in which they identify themselves. How do these sites foster individuality and interconnectivity?