## UNIT ONE: ART and ACTION

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The works of art in the exhibition’s first gallery served to make things happen. As they inspired awe and imparted a sense of wonder, they also facilitated devotion, imparted wisdom, conferred prestige, carried out litigation, mediated with the spirit world, and/or defined social relationships.

While the objects here were not made solely as “art,” they nevertheless had to satisfy particular aesthetic criteria in order to be effective. The outward appearance, including the form and iconography of an object, contributes to its ability to work, that is, its capacity to act. The beliefs and concepts that give objects power and meaning in turn dictate their aesthetic appearance. In other words, how an object looks has everything to do with how it works: form and function are closely intertwined. We explore these concepts in Lessons 2 and 3.

This introductory unit considers these ideas in relation to the makers of the objects and in Lesson 1 the role of the artist is closely examined, demonstrating artists’ importance in their respective societies. As they pushed the boundaries of the knowable world through their creations, artists produced channels through which humans could mediate myriad relationships, both earthly and divine.

Throughout the exhibition and accompanying resource materials we call out objects that reflect cultural dynamism, transaction, interaction and change. A group of objects discussed in Lesson 4 lets us see how intersections foster an exchange of ideas and images, which in turn become reflected in the arts of a people.
In what ways can art be expressed?

What do we mean when we say an object is “active” in our lives?

What is meant by “efficacy?” How can that term be applied to an inanimate object? How can aesthetic considerations enhance the effectiveness of an object?

What qualities in an object define its appearance? What aspects define its use?

What are criteria for evaluating art beyond aesthetics?

How does art change in response to the encounters of diverse peoples?

Can you cite instances of new influences enriching the expression of art?

What might happen to an object as a result of these intersections?

   encounters of people of differing backgrounds
   an artist and the person commissioning a work
   a newly acquired object and the person using it

Whose perspective should we use in defining art?
Art, Action and You

Consider the roles that art plays in your life. Are you aware of the artistic qualities of objects in places other than museums, galleries, and books? Are there articles (of clothing, home, or environment) with aesthetic qualities that make you more aware of the article?

You have undoubtedly experienced works of art that “make things happen” in your own life. Think about objects that perform better for you because of their appearance. Is their appearance always positive in order for them to become more effective or might there be negative aspects that play in their effectiveness?

In your family or community do you see objects that display the result of encounters with people who have owned or used them in the past? Do some objects show some influence of other places in the world?
Teachers may use the introductory short video from the exhibition to begin their study of *Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives*. Open-ended discussions and questions around speakers’ comments invite students’ individual responses, and introduce the idea that

- People create personal meanings and associations with works of art,
- Objects play active roles in people’s lives, and
- Works of art and their performance contexts remind us of the local community from which they emerge and the broader global community which has shaped their multiple meanings.

Introduce the students to the exhibition with the introductory video (viewable on the *Intersections* website http://collections.fowler.ucla.edu/intersections.) The perspectives of artists, scholars, religious practitioners, and community leaders convey the idea that objects have lives and that people have deep and abiding relationships with objects. Viewers encounter works from the Americas, Asia, the Pacific, and Africa and may witness the contexts in which works of art appear. The video also serves as introduction to themes that are stressed throughout the exhibition.

Advise students that the video serves as an introduction to the exhibition *Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives* that they will see at the Fowler Museum, but offer little other comment. You may want them to watch the video a second time. After viewing, ask the students for reactions, questions, and general comments. Let ensuing discussions be without structure, addressing your students’ questions. Encourage dialogues through which students can make comparisons with their own lives.
You may wish to present, for special consideration, some of the following statements excerpted from the video narration. Students can put these excerpts into context and offer interpretations.

“It’s part of the life cycle. It’s living…. It’s not dead. It’s still constantly moving, changing, and wanting to go back to nature.”

“…it’s very precious because it’s about memory…. It’s a message and also always reminds me about what we have in the family, being together or being separate.”

“Just the act of threading beads is like a meditation, and it brings you really deep into yourself. And through the process of it, your hopes and your desires kind of take a physical form.”

“When he’s wearing this crown, he’s transformed. He’s no longer known by his first name. He can no longer be called Bob or Joe or anything. He’s revered like any other divinity.”

“And people use these images—I use these images—as a way of connecting to that divine source.”

“…an object has to serve many levels and many duties and be able to keep its essential quality.”

“…But at the end of the day, they’re objects. What do I do to meet these objects? What do I have to summon up through myself to begin to understand how they live in me?”

“These objects all intervened in people’s lives in some very particular manner. They are objects of artistic genius, but they weren’t made only for visual delight.”

“But it’s the combination of their outward form and beauty, and their inner power and efficacy that makes them work.”

“When you see an object, refocus your lens. Think about the people who made this object, and how they used it. And let your imagination also take you on a journey of other people of other lands. It’s the best education you can have.”

The narrators in the video are Hirokasu Kosaka, Shingon Buddhist priest; Diyah Larsati, Professor in Department of Dance, Institute of Arts, Indonesia; Rowland Abiodun, Professor of African Art History, Amherst College; Robert Farris Thompson, Professor of African Art History, Yale University; José Rodriguez, Brooklyn artist; Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Professor of Chicano/a Studies and English, UCLA; Ysamur Flores-Pena, Associate Professor, Otis College of Design; Robert Wisdom, actor; Mary Nooter Roberts, former Chief Curator, Fowler Museum at UCLA; John Latsko, Teacher, Manual Arts High School; and Cindi Alvitre, Director of Ti’At Society, Tongva Tribe.
LESSON 1: THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

Crown for Yoruba Initiation by José Rodriguez, U.S.

Fig. 1.1
Lesson Summary and Objectives

Through the study of one beaded crown students are introduced to the Yoruba concept of ase and the idea that power can be vested in certain individuals and works of art associated with them. Students analyze the multiple meanings and symbolic associations of beads (and their colors) in Yoruba arts and consider how the appearance of a work can affect its emotional presence. Students are introduced to the maker of this work, José Rodriguez, and consider how artists can be pioneers and explorers who push the boundaries of the knowable world through their creations. Students will

- Explore the multiple meanings of beaded arts among Yoruba peoples in Nigeria and the African diaspora.
- Use the metaphors of color and meanings associated with beads in Yoruba art in writing and artmaking.
- Consider and discuss the affective power of Yoruba arts.

Background Information

For Yoruba peoples of West Africa and practitioners elsewhere, ase—the power to bring things to pass—inheres within certain people and objects. Ase (pronounced ah-shay) is the divine life force that is present in the beaded crowns made for Yoruba kings in Africa to honor the orisa, or deities, and exists in ritual articles made and worn by followers of Yoruba religion in the Americas. The crown covers the outer head while imbuing the inner head with the revered ancestral authority of ase (see Beads, Body and Soul: Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe by Henry John Drewal and John Mason, 1998, for images).
This crown (fig. 1.1) is the work of New York artist José Rodriguez. A practitioner of Yoruba religion, Rodriguez honors the life-giving wisdom, calmness, and composure of the deity Obatala. Among Yoruba peoples residing in Nigeria, only a king may wear a crown as a sign of his divine capacities. For Yoruba priests in the Americas, however, the crown is a symbol of initiation into orisa worship and reflects the enduring legacy of African traditions, as it has been invested with new meanings and purposes.

**About the Artist**

José Rodriguez, son of Cuban and Puerto Rican parents, trained as a graphic artist at the Parsons School of Design in New York. In 1988 he was initiated into the Yoruba religion. Many of his works are inspired by Yoruba traditions, which he observed among practitioners in his travels throughout Cuba, Puerto Rico, and at home in New York. While designing beaded works for Yoruba rituals, Rodriguez worked as an arts teacher in New York area public schools.
1. A Crown for an Orisa

The crown was commissioned by the Fowler Museum from José Rodríguez. Using classic texts on Yoruba art, Rodríguez modeled this crown on Nigerian prototypes while adding his own stylistic details. The grand dome-shaped crown is fit for a king but has been designed with tubular blue beads specifically for a devotee of the orisa Obatala. In Nigeria, the crown for royalty is known as an adenla and is worn only by Yoruba kings and queens (oba) descended from Oduduwa, the first king of Ife (r. 1100 C.E.). Other chiefs wear different types of crowns as symbols of their office. In the Americas, the crowns worn by Yoruba priests and devotees are symbolic of the particular orisa into which individuals are initiated.

Activity

Several design elements typically appear on an adenla made for an oba (fig. 1.2)—each has particular significance for a Yoruba practitioner. Students will find these elements on the Rodríguez crown when at the Fowler Museum or as they view figure 1.1.

- **Elephant:** A symbol of longevity and power, the elephant holds a spray of red tail feathers from an African Grey Parrot, symbol of an initiated and protected head.

- **Birds:** A bird at the top surmounts the powerful medicines inserted in the crown’s summit. Other three-dimensional birds may be added on the crown body. Birds are references to powerful mothers who guard the heads of righteous and just rulers.

- **Faces:** Their representation is said to honor Oduduwa, who founded the Yoruba kingdom in 1100 C.E., the royal ancestors who are always watchful to protect the living representative of the royal line, and the sea divinity Olokun, who is patron of bead artists and source of beads used to create the crown.

- **Sixteen:** There may be sixteen faces or sixteen other motifs, all making reference to the sixteen sons of Oduduwa and the importance of the number in Ifa divination.
Activity (continued)

- **Interlaced design**: This never-ending design may be Islamic in origin and refers to the continuity and balance of Yoruba life. It is sometimes abstracted as two entwined snakes, suggesting the competing powers of the world and the otherworld.
- **Concentric circles**: Sometimes encircling the faces, they are references to the borders of divination trays and actual strands of beads.
- **Triangles**: These are divided into smaller triangles and diamond shapes, creating a patchwork surface said to “shine.”
- **Beaded veil**: It masks or moderates the penetrating gaze of the ruler, or “God’s deputy.” The ruler’s inner spiritual person is protected, shielded, and enclosed within the beaded fringe.
- **Beads**: The crown is completely beaded as a sign of royalty. The beads of some crowns are of many different colors in tribute to all the *oríṣa*.

If students have access to books on Yoruba art (see bibliography) they should look for the many examples of the above elements.

**Activity**

Students can create a crown, either in two dimensions on paper or by constructing cone-shaped hats of tagboard with their own interpretations of the elements described above. Keep in mind that, for the Yoruba, the shape and appearance are essential elements in the crown’s effectiveness.
LESSON 1: THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST
Crown for Yoruba Initiation by José Rodriguez, U.S.

Fig. 1.2
2. Beads, Apart and Part of A Strand

Beads bestow status, offer protection, serve as separation, signify affiliation, and display continuity. They have been likened to stars, to drops of water, and to precious children. The total abundance of beads in Yoruba regalia and other arts is noteworthy but each bead has importance even as it is combined with others.

As Yoruba scholar Henry Drewal wrote (1998, 17), “A bead—a colored and coloring form that reflects, transmits, and transforms light—also transforms the objects and persons it adorns....When threaded together, beads stand for unity, togetherness, and solidarity....Beads are signs of preciousness and auspiciousness: good fortune in terms of economic wealth and spiritual well-being.” He goes on to say that when a Yoruba “suddenly becomes rich, people ask the rhetorical question:...Has s/he discovered a great deposit of beads?”

The crowns illustrated here are completely covered with beads. In addition to the beaded designs on the base of a crown, many strands of beads cascade from its brim, forming a veil. Veils were intended to cover kings’ faces and obscure their eyes. By doing so, veils worked to block the power of the king’s gaze from those who saw him.

Activity

Either bring to class or have students bring an assortment of beads. Each student should select one and describe it in as much detail as possible, then liken the bead to something else familiar to him or her. Alternatively, combine some beads into a string, necklace, bracelet, etc. and use the combination as the basis for similes or metaphors. Collect sayings that incorporate the image to aid description, as in “beads of sweat,” “beads of dew,” and rain drops are “beads of wealth from the sky, ensuring fertility and continuity.” (Drewal 1998, 174)
Activity

The beaded veil functions to separate both the wearer and observer. Are there ways we set up separations, either by actions or actual physical means? Give examples of how a person’s body language can serve as an obstacle to closeness.

3. Colors and Emotions

The colors of beads are significant. José Rodriguez, a devotee of the orisa Obatala, added tubular blue beads to his almost completely white crown, because these are the colors of that deity. Color is an important aspect of Yoruba art and evokes temperature and temperament—mood or state of mind. Yoruba people classify colors into three groups: (1) funfun which include cold, white hues suggesting composure, old age, and wisdom; (2) pupa for hot, red colors, signifying anger; and (3) dudu, dark and generally cool colors such as black, blue, indigo, purple, and green as well as dark browns, red-brown, and dark grays, suggesting the restraint and tranquility of Yoruba divination and problem-solving.

Activity

Students have had experiences with the emotional content of color in symbolism, and in metaphoric speech and song. If they have not had an opportunity for writing based on O’Neill’s *Hailstones and Halibut Bones* (1961), this would be a good time to introduce the exercise (i.e., Orange is..., Red is..., etc.)
Activity
Students may also give expressions of emotion that use color names and the meanings they indicate. They will find that some are the same as Yoruba interpretation, and others different. We might describe ourselves when angry as seeing red, music described as red hot would certainly not be soft and slow. What color might be suggested by soft, slow music? A sad person is said to be feeling blue, what about a happy person, or an excited one? Give students opportunities to pair emotions with colors.

Activity
They could create a collage to reflect the significant groups of colors so important to the Yoruba. Cut or torn pieces of magazines can be glued to background paper, which may, in turn, inspire creative writing.

4. The Awe of an Royal Crown

Activity
The beauty of the crown helps it to work. Have students discuss how this might be so for the man or woman who is wearing the crown. How might it be true for the person who sees that man or woman? Upon viewing an oba wearing a crown do students think that they would have a sense of awe? How might this reaction compare to the feeling of awe that one would have upon viewing the nkisi in this section of the exhibition?

Also note the other examples of the richness of Yoruba arts in the Intersections exhibition: the egungun and gelede masks, a divination tray, and the palace doors by Nigerian artist Areogun (ca. 1880–1956).
Lesson 1: The Role of the Artist

Crown for Yoruba Initiation by José Rodriguez, U.S.

Useful Readings
Arnoldi, M. J., and Christine Mullen Kreamer
1995  
Crowning Achievements.
Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Avins, Lyn, and Betsy D. Quick
1998  
Beads, Body, and Soul: A Curriculum Resource Unit.
Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Drewal, Henry John
1995  
“Yoruba Beadwork: Beauty and Brightness” in Faces: The Magazine about People.*

Drewal, Henry John and John Mason
1998  
Beads, Body, and Soul: Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe.
Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

O’Neill, Mary
1961  
Hailstones and Halibut Bones.*
Garden City: Doubleday & Co.

*Childrens Book

Note to Teachers:
This lesson is part of the curricular materials developed to accompany the exhibition Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives. Although this and companion lessons are self-contained, each will be enhanced when used in conjunction with others in this resource. Addressing several lessons within each unit will facilitate the incorporation of the study of world arts and cultures into your curriculum.

The lesson is based on works in the first section of the exhibition called Art and Action. In this gallery works are introduced that served to make things happen. See “Unit One—Art and Action” for an introductory statement on the unit, along with some provocative “Questions for Thought,” and suggestions that will inspire the students to relate the unit to their own lives.

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In this unit the topics and lessons are

Lesson 1: The Role of the Artist: Crown for Yoruba Initiation by Jose Rodriguez, U.S.

Lesson 2: Efficacy and Action: Nkisi Nkondi: A Power Figure of Central Africa

Lesson 3: Beauty and Purpose: Capturing Beauty: Ikebana Baskets, Japan

Lesson 4: Encounters of Ideas, Time, and Place: Textiles of Southeast Asia
LESSON 2: EFFICACY AND ACTION

Nkisi Nkondi: A Power Figure of Central Africa

Fig. 1.3
Central African power figures are the subject of students’ inquiry in this lesson. Introductory activities focus on a figure’s appearance and invite students’ analysis of its form and affective presence. Subsequent activities allow students to examine how works of art can be instrumental in conflict resolutions and arbitrations and how the meanings of a variety of forms can embody a sense of power for an individual. Students are introduced to the idea that the outward appearance of a work of art can contribute to its ability to work, that is, to have an active, efficacious presence in people’s lives. Students will

- Carefully analyze a work of art, discuss its form and style, and then draw the work noting details of the objects added to it.
- Discuss the notion of amulets and then create a work that has personal significance for them.
- Engage in a discussion about arbitration and conflict resolution.

Among Yombe and other Kongo peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, many of life’s hardships can be negotiated through ownership of a power figure that serves as a defense against misfortune. Such works (figs. 1.3–1.5) are armatures for a vast array of articles that include manufactured products—often of metal—and objects from the natural world. These accumulations were added by a healer who alone knew the secret composition of medicinal herbs, roots, plants, and animal parts that give the figures their power.

Embodiments of judicial authority with the ability to heal, power figures such as this one derive their potency from the concept of nkisi, which enables them to cure, protect, or incriminate. Medicinal materials are packed in cavities often located in the figure’s stomach and head. The blades or nails pounded into the surface of the figure aid in awakening the spirit and attest to oaths sworn in legal proceedings.

An nkisi nkondi not only possesses attributes of power, it also reflects the “process” of artistic creativity. With every use, another blade or metal nail is inserted into the figure, thus adding a gradual layering and accumulation of meaning and memory. The figure is never “complete” in the usual sense of the word, for its surface and form change as its life history grows.
LESSON 2: EFFICACY AND ACTION

*Nkisi Nkondi*: A Power Figure of Central Africa

Fig. 1.4 (left)

Fig. 1.5 (right)

About the Artist

The identity of the artist who created this *nkisi* (fig 1.3) is not known. An *nkisi* may be made by the owner, or by someone commissioned by him. The artist’s task is to make a powerful-looking figure, but the *nkisi* is only complete when the nganga or ritual expert activates it. Even then the piece is not complete because the appearance of the *nkisi* changes with the addition of nails and blades to its surface.
LESSON 2: EFFICACY AND ACTION

*Nkisi Nkondi: A Power Figure of Central Africa*

Fig. 1.3
1. An *Nkisi*, Nails and Efficacy

As students look at the image of the *nkisi* (fig. 1.3) have them write down what they see. How do they describe the piece? What do they think the materials are? What size is it? What is their reaction to viewing the *nkisi*?

**Activity**

Tell them that an *nkisi* is often called a power figure and is made and used by peoples of Central Africa. It begins as a wooden carving. Have students make a sketch of what they envision as the unadorned wooden form of a power figure.

Further discussion about the purpose of the *nkisi* will call out its use as an affirmer of justice and arbitrator in conflicts, and its role in legal proceedings. In reality, it serves the well-being of a community as part of a system of justice. Does this knowledge change, in any way, their feelings about the figure?

Tell the students that the blades, spikes, and nails that are pounded into the surface of the figure aid in awakening the protective spirits and attest to oaths sworn in legal proceedings. Over time, the added metal and other substances transform the appearance of the *nkisi*.

Students can now interpret this process on their drawn figure, by sketching in the additions of nails, blades, and packets of medicines. Does their illustration now manifest more power?

The efficacy of the sculpture—how well it works—is demonstrated by the many additions to it. After students reiterate their first reaction to the piece, have them revisit their first impressions as they learn more about its function. What more would they want to know in order to better understand the figure? Students can do additional research on the Kongo peoples and *nkisi* in general.
2. Other *Minkisi*, Other Forms

*Minkisi* (plural for *nkisi*) are primarily containers. They can take many shapes, be fashioned of ceramic, fabric, or wood, or see use in the retained forms of gourds, animal horns, or shells. An *nkisi* can be any object that can contain spiritually charged medicines or other substances.

**Activity**

The *nkisi* on display is in the form of a powerful human-like figure, but others are zoomorphic in form. Ask students to make an animal or a non-figurative work that embodies notions of power. Students should recall that the appearance of the work is an important aspect of its power. Since its function is that of a container, students could use a box, bottle, or bowl as the base of their sculptures.

Diverse peoples throughout the world rely on various kinds of objects to insure their protection, prevent misfortune, and/or protect against an adversary, bad luck in general, or any negative force. Pieces of jewelry historically have served this purpose. Some Catholics carry images of saints, such as the St. Christopher medal, to insure safe traveling. In Thailand, people of all ages wear amulets of tiny Buddhas encased in gold frames around their necks. Students could design and create amulets for themselves. These may take the form of display pieces or amulets to wear.

3. Resolving Conflicts

In Kongo communities an *nkisi nkondi* may be used in conjunction with judicial proceedings. The parties involved and the specialist come before the figure, and together they investigate the problem at hand. When an agreement is made, representatives from both parties take an oath in front of the *nkisi nkondi*. Each sworn promise is recorded on the figure by the insertion of a sharp metal object or nail into its surface. How is this act similar to our tradition of signing an agreement or contract?

**Activity**

Have your students think of a conflict in the classroom that has not yet been resolved. They should discuss possible solutions to the problem and write a contract that seals an agreement between the arguing parties. What do they consider a probable result of breaking the contract?
LESSON 2: EFFICACY AND ACTION

_Nkisi Nkondi: A Power Figure of Central Africa_

Useful Readings


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**Lesson 3: Beauty and Purpose:** Capturing Beauty: Ikebana Baskets, Japan

**Lesson 4: Encounters of Ideas, Time, and Place:** Textiles of Southeast Asia
LESSON 3: BEAUTY AND PURPOSE
Capturing Beauty: Ikebana Baskets, Japan

Fig. 1.6
Students investigate a number of aspects related to ikebana baskets—the uses and meanings of bamboo, construction methodologies, and the elevated status given basket makers in Japan. This lesson introduces students to the important concept of beauty and purpose—that is, that the humblest of objects may be embellished and enhanced in ways that elevate everyday work and imbue it with special significance and value. Activities stress research, discussion, writing, and artmaking. Students will

- Explore the uses of bamboo by finding bamboo items in their own surroundings.
- Create their own basket after they study some of the formal principles of ikebana design.
- Express their understanding of the art of ikebana flower arrangement through painting, writing, and poetry writing.

Japanese basket makers capture the beauty of carefully selected natural materials in their constructions. These materials are intended to harmonize with the meticulously arranged formal floral compositions (ikebana) that will be placed within the finished baskets. Often the floral arrangements reflect seasonal changes. Sensitive to the changes, Japanese people bring the seasonal mood into their homes with displays of flowers that they often place within bamboo containers.

In traditional-style Japanese houses, these flower arrangements in baskets may be placed in a recessed alcove, called the tokonoma. This space evolved from what was originally an altar, the sacred center of the home. All of the items placed in the tokonoma are supposed to be in harmony with one another and are often selected and arranged to fit a particular occasion or seasonal event. The basket and floral arrangement are thus key elements in setting the emotional tone of the household.
Although none of the flower baskets (fig 1.6-1.8) from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shown here were signed or have been attributed to a specified artist, Japanese basket artists sometimes do sign their works. Since this is rarely observed in basketry traditions in other parts of the world, it suggests the high value placed on baskets and the art of basket making in Japan. Most recognized artists have had years of training, usually in a center associated with a lineage of artists that has made baskets for generations. Some bamboo artists have even been designated as Living National Treasures by the Japanese government.

Fig. 1.7 (left)

Fig. 1.8 (right)
1. The Material

A young bamboo –
how tall it has grown,
without the slightest help in the world.

Bamboo is considered a universally useful and readily available plant. In the West we are familiar with the use of bamboo for fishing equipment and we use it in the garden as fencing material, furniture, and rakes; and in our homes as tools, utensils, and a renewable resource for cabinets and flooring. Bamboo also has a long history in Asia, serving as the basis for traditional articles such as musical instruments (including the shakuhachi flute), ladders, fans, bows and arrows, paint brush handles, integral components of the tea ceremony (scoops, ladles, and the chasen tea whisk), and of course, baskets.

Bamboo is so connected to daily life in Asia that it is not surprising to find it an important component of traditional literature. As cited in Containing Beauty (1988, 13), “Once upon a time there lived an old bamboo cutter. Every day he would make his way into the fields and mountains to gather bamboo which he fashioned into all matter of things….One day he noticed a light at the root of a bamboo stalk and, thinking that this was very strange, went over to examine it. He saw that the light shone inside the hollow bamboo, where a most fetching little girl about three inches tall was sitting.” The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, written in the ninth or tenth century, is considered to be the oldest story in Japanese literature. The story continues with the childless bamboo cutter and his wife raising the child, and her eventual return to the Moon People, to whom she belonged. In another version before returning to the moon she writes a letter to the emperor who has fallen in love with her. He orders the letter burned at the top of the highest mountain in the land—from whose cone smoke magically continues to rise. The mountain is known as Mount Fuji, the immortal one.
Activity
Students can look in their own homes for bamboo items. They will probably find jewelry, eating and cooking utensils, toys, boxes, furniture, etc. List, draw, or bring them to class to display.

Activity
Students can embellish the excerpted legend quoted above with adventures the three-inch girl has until the time she reaches adulthood (does she remain small?) and then returns to her moon home.

2. The Process

"Don't break it!" he said
then he broke off and gave me
a branch of his plum.

A single person accomplishes almost every step in the production of a basket; only thus does an artist feel that he or she has done the best possible. It is necessary that bamboo be picked at an optimum time for flexibility and texture—usually the plant is three or four years old. Paying great respect to their material, artists clean the stalk and cut it into approximately three-foot lengths. They then split the bamboo—the width and length of the pieces determined by the designs. Polishing and weaving the strips follow. During the process the artist considers the integration of the natural beauty of the bamboo with the form, texture, and balance of the piece. He will often dye the basket or parts of it.

As there are three basic categories of flower arrangement—formal, semiformal, and informal—so baskets are classified in much the same way. Each has a number of rules, but artists will often deflect from these, retaining creative input. A famous basket maker, Roksansai (1890–1958), classified baskets as formal if they had a symmetrical form with precise, elaborate ‘weaves.’ The work of baskets in the middle range was more relaxed, although the form was still symmetrical. The third type utilized rough ‘weaves,’ and a variety of shapes. (McCallum 1988, 20)

Prior to World War II, bamboo baskets were the favored containers for ikebana. Now ceramic, metal, and glass vases predominate.
Activity
It would be difficult to emulate intricate Japanese flower baskets in the classroom, but you can find instructions for making baskets of wire, yarn, paper, and natural weeds and grasses in books and on the Internet. You can encourage experimentation and creativity as your students work with the materials.

Activity
Have your students compare the varied baskets (Handout IKEBANA BASKETS) on display in this gallery of Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives. They should begin by listing the elements for comparison that are apparent to them. Probable inclusions will be shape, size, color, handle details, method of construction, weave, balance or symmetry or lack of same, and formal/informal in their judgment or as enumerated above.

3. The Artist

The place where I was born:
All I come to—all I touch—
Blossoms of the thorn.

As noted above, most of today’s artists have had years of training. Some received this training from their fathers and continue in the family’s tradition. Others served as apprentices, sometimes spending much time in seemingly menial preparation for the task while absorbing important spiritual and moral aspects of basket making.

In 1954, concerned that many tradition-based arts and crafts were no longer being made and valued, the Japanese government introduced the designation of certain arts as “Important Intangible Cultural Properties.” The designation was to preserve both the traditions and the traditional techniques. Included along with bamboo working were pottery, puppetry, and doll making.

Soon the honor came not to the craft that was to be preserved, but to the related artists, the “holders of Intangible Cultural Properties.” Though not given an officially recognized designation, these artists were called “Living National Treasures,” and of course so gained elevated status and prestige. About one hundred fifty individuals and organizations today have this honor.
Activity

Awareness of the Japanese practice can lead to discussions among your students. Some questions that can arise are

• What are some reasons for the possible loss of traditional arts? (availability and desirability of commercial, mass-produced substitutes; fads and trends to have possessions like those of friends; always-present advertising to influence buying; artists not paid enough to practice their art.)

• How do students feel about recognizing the artist as opposed to recognizing the art?

• What honors are students aware of that go to artists of varying disciplines? (Kennedy Center Honors, Pulitzer Prize for Literature, MacArthur Fellowship)

4. The Use

*Oh, the wide world’s ways!*

*Cherry blossoms left unwatched*

*Even for three days.*

Traditionally ikebana arrangements are placed in the most formal place in a Japanese house, the *tokonoma*, an alcove serving as home altar. Before the alcove the family entertains guests and holds important family celebrations. Incense is burned here and a scroll hangs on the alcove wall, appropriate to the season and the occasion. Also appropriate to the season and occasion is the flower arrangement displayed in the *tokonoma*.

Ikebana remains a traditional art, still prized in this contemporary world. In his 2004 book on the subject, Shozo Sato discusses the history and characteristics of ikebana and describes some simple projects suitable for young people. He introduces the several styles of flower arrangements, and with diagrams and charts demonstrates the mathematical relationships among the floral components in several different styles. Most ikebana arrangements are based on three divisions differing by the height of the plants and the ratio of their heights to each other.
Activity
A long-term project would have students studying and practicing the art of ikebana.

Activity
Related projects of shorter duration could have students drawing or painting floral arrangements based on ikebana. Begin by giving students paper with a simple outline of a flower vase. Ask students to draw in a floral arrangement as they choose. Most will probably draw a variety of flowers, perhaps filling the vase. Follow this by drawing (either students or you) the same vase outline, but limiting the flowers to three in number (of different heights), adding three leaves, also differing in height. If you have access to the Sato book listed in the bibliography, or to Internet sites dealing with ikebana you can be more traditional in your drawings, and follow this with students comparing and contrasting the two approaches to flower arranging.

Activity
An art activity that simulates Japanese floral arrangements begins with a small blob of black or brown tempera paint near the bottom of a piece of white paper. With a straw the student blows on the liquid paint to create branches. (Caution students to not blow too hard or too long to be sure that they do not hyperventilate.) After the paint has dried add flowers, either painting with small sponges dipped in paint or gluing small pieces of colored tissue paper.

Activity
Haiku verses introduce each part of this lesson. Have your students write haiku based on their artwork.
LESSON 3: BEAUTY AND PURPOSE
Capturing Beauty: Ikebana Baskets, Japan

Useful Readings

Austin, Robert, and Koichiro Ueda
1973 Bamboo.
New York: John Weatherhill, Inc.

Henderson, Harold G.
1958 An Introduction to Haiku.
Garden City: Doubleday & Co.

McCallum, Toshiko M.
1998 Containing Beauty.
Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Sato, Shozo
Boston: Tuttle Publishing.

*Childrens Book

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In this unit the topics and lessons are

Lesson 1: The Role of the Artist: Crown for Yoruba Initiation by Jose Rodriguez, U.S.
Lesson 2: Efficacy and Action: Nkisi Nkondi: A Power Figure of Central Africa
Lesson 3: Beauty and Purpose: Capturing Beauty: Ikebana Baskets, Japan
Lesson 4: Encounters of Ideas, Time, and Place: Textiles of Southeast Asia
Fig. 1.9
Train for royal palanquin, Singaraja, north Bali, Indonesia. Late 19th or early 20th century. Silk, metallic-wrapped yarns. L: 546 cm.
Fowler Museum at UCLA. The Katharine Mershon Collection of Indonesian Art. X61.61.
A study of Southeast Asian textiles affords students opportunities to examine Pacific migration, the effects such movements have on family and community traditions, and the roles played by certain norms and beliefs. Activities encourage students’ exploration of simple weaving techniques and patterning and design options. This lesson introduces the notion that works of art themselves can reflect cultural dynamism, transaction, interaction, and change. Forms are constantly updated and reinvented to meet changing social circumstances, accommodate new media and technologies, and reflect the vitality of arts and cultures throughout the world. Students will

- Understand through discussion that works of art reflect a multitude of influences and encounters.
- Explore fabrics—both familiar and unfamiliar—and research the materials, their sources, and new uses for textiles in contemporary industrial or scientific contexts.
- Consider “objects of encounter” that reveal the interplay of external influences and tradition-based artistic practice.
- Analyze patterning in the material culture around them and experiment with creating patterns by simple weaving techniques.
- Weave with words in a word-search game.

Throughout Southeast Asia, handmade textiles constitute one of the most important forms of artistic expression. Almost always the work of women, cloth represents a primary marker of female skill and status.

Textiles appear at ceremonies in the form of special dress for the participants or as hangings, covers, or other items of display. The association between handmade textiles and ritual is so strong that textiles are often regarded as a part of customary law or “tradition” (known as adat in Indonesia). By dressing in such textiles, or displaying them in ceremonial contexts, Southeast Asians reinforce the culturally sanctioned practices and behaviors they inherited from their ancestors.

In royal contexts richly embellished textiles were just one element in a grand visual show with the raja at its center. The long silk train (fig 1.9) was one of two cloths attached to the litter of the raja, or king, of Buleleng, a realm in north Bali. They were held aloft by his attendants when he was carried in state processions. The exuberant use of colored silk and metallic thread added to the grandeur of the event.
The video shown in the Art and Action section of Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives (and featured on the Intersections website) introduces Sisilia Sii and her daughter Grasiana Wani, weavers on the Indonesian island of Flores. On that and other Southeast Asian islands (as is true of so many other parts of the world) women are the weavers. They pass their skills on to their daughters and they share patterns with other women in their matrilineal line.

1. Threads of Encounter

The area of Southeast Asia is made of two geographic regions: the Asian mainland—Cambodia, Laos, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and Vietnam—and island nations including, among others, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. A shared ancestry (the Austronesian-based language is a major indication of common origins) is evidenced in many facets of their lives, and can be particularly noted in textile traditions. Historically, weaving and decorating cloth has been the responsibility of women (fig. 1.10). In Indonesia, textiles symbolize the female (as metalwork represents the male) and the process of weaving represents creation as a whole, and human birth in particular.

For over a thousand years the wealth of the “Indies” drew many people to the islands. New religious influences—Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity—came with immigrants and other visitors. Trade was the impetus for the Chinese, Arabs, Portuguese, and Dutch. European colonialism and nationalism influenced lifestyles. In varying ways all affected the cultural groups of Indonesia and their arts. The consequences of this interaction resulted in a remarkable process of adaptation, assimilation, and rejection. According to Joseph Fischer (1980, 339) the traditional cultures of Indonesia still maintained their identity (fig 1.11) even with new influences. Foreign ideas and elements were incorporated in distinctive ways, and filtered by local traditions to create extraordinary cultural and aesthetic links across the barriers of language and geography.
Today Indonesian textiles, produced by a range of techniques, are well known throughout the world. Shoppers and collectors seek many examples: *ikat* cloth made by artists who tie and dye the thread before weaving, *batik* made by covering patterns with wax to resist subsequent dying, pieces handwoven of silver and gold threads, and intricately patterned silks and cottons (figs. 1.12 and 1.13). Changes today are brought about by new encounters, now with tourists and world markets. For these markets the producers of textiles adapt their traditional work for successful sales, and women are weaving to earn a living rather than to support ritual celebrations. “When the creation of cloth and cloth patterning becomes solely an aspect of a commercial transaction, much of the power of cloth diminishes” (Gittinger 2005, 17).

**Activity**

Individuals, like the cultural communities and nations to which they belong, are all products of many influences. Have students cooperatively brainstorm some possible influences in their own lives. Certainly their parents and other relatives will come to mind. So might friends, religion, school, television and movies, hobbies, travel experiences, etc. Let each construct a web with him- or herself at the center (name, photo, or simple stick figure) and threads radiating from that center, each labeled with an influence he/she recognizes as important. From each of those threads could come additional lines naming the results of those influencing factors (i.e., love of dancing, specific kinds of clothing, desire to pursue a certain career).

If your class is studying a specific place in the world or time in history, the same investigation could center about that, or they could embark on further study of those factors in Indonesia’s history. Consider changes that come with time and outside influences, and the impact they have on maintaining traditions.
Activity
Study fabrics familiar to the students (cotton, silk, rayon, linen, velvet, wool, etc.). Have students list products for which the named textiles are used (clothing, upholstery, rugs, bed coverings, works of art, towels and related household linens) and find examples for these textiles. Can they evaluate why one fiber is used instead of another? You may choose to explore the materials and their sources. News accounts today frequently address ecological implications of growing certain crops used for cloth production.

Activity
Encounters with university and museum researchers bring new influences. Some of these are enumerated by Roy W. Hamilton in the preface of his book Gift of the Cotton Maiden (1994, 12-13). Let students discuss potential positive and negative outcomes resulting from encounters with academia. As Hamilton writes, “Surely on the whole, the promulgation of knowledge is a good thing. The textile traditions...can be lifted from obscurity and made part of a broader human heritage of cultural and artistic achievement. Weavers can gain new options about how to pursue their art and their livelihood. Large numbers of textiles can enter museum collections, where they will be studied, preserved, and used as vehicles of public education. But there is undeniably a darker side to this process as well. Weavers may remain anonymous and often desperately poor, while large profits are made bringing their work to the outside world. The pressure to produce quickly for cash income may force compromises in quality. In extreme cases communities can be stripped of their own artistic heritage, interfering with their ability to carry on cherished cultural institutions.”

Activity
Today’s textiles, worldwide, are no longer just for the clothing, rugs, and furniture coverings with which we’re familiar. With research (particularly documented in Matilda McQuaid’s book Extreme Textiles: Designing for High Performance, 2005), students will find new uses for textiles in architecture, space exploration, medicine and more. They can investigate these and propose new, unnamed uses.
2. People Of The Adat
Even with changes brought about by the encounters discussed above, many Southeast Asians have retained basic philosophies that work to balance the cosmic forces, ancestors, spirits, and their lives today. Each community has its own adat that comprise the rules of village life with its own particular traditions. Adat spells out rules for living: for preserving the environment, observing the religious and legal practices of marriage, ritual, and political succession, and to guide the creative expressions of the arts. Textiles are an important element of adat. They help people control the conditions of their daily lives and their environment. They are typically the visual representation of group membership and status and are a component of important life events.

Activity
Although no one aspect such as adat plays in our lives, there are always many elements that influence us. Students can think about those important elements, how they affect lives, how they are changing, and how they may differ for different people. For instance, students should consider the laws or traditions that determine their practices toward the environment. How do these differ from those of friends or neighbors? Have they changed over time? Consider religious practices in the same way. How does our society accommodate different cultural values and traditions? Have students seen manifestations of conflicting traditions in their own world?
3. Dreaming the Cloth: Weaving and Patterns

When asked, “How did you feel when you finished making your first skirt?” Sisilia Sii responded, “You could be proud! ‘Aku tau mbae oro,’ in our local language. That was what we’d say to our friends. ‘I know how to do it! My mother taught me! I know how to weave! I know how to tie ikat patterns!’ Look at the result—I am wearing it!”

Sisilia Sii is a weaver on the island of Flores in Indonesia. In the video shown at the museum and on the Intersections website, she and a narrator describe her work at the loom and the long processes of tying cotton yarns for ikat patterns, dying the yarn, and weaving the three panels needed to make one skirt. Learning the most intricate patterns offered difficulties:

“My mother had died before I learned to make the nggaja or semba patterns. It was different then. In those days, women who didn’t have senior standing in the community couldn’t make those two patterns. My mother wouldn’t let me.

“One night I had a dream about my mother. A dream! Mama came and said, ‘Sii, make a semba pattern. The way to do it is like this, and this, and this….OK, now make a nggaja pattern, like this, and like this….You must complete one full pattern before you stop.’ That was the first time I tied those two patterns.

“The next day, aduh! My dear mother had come in a dream to teach me how to tie those patterns! ‘Mama, I don’t know how! How can I do it? ‘You do know,’ she said. ‘I will teach you. You have to know. Tomorrow arrange the threads on the warping frame, follow me as I do it. Memorize, this is how many groups of yarn you need for each part of the pattern.’ She taught me that night.

“I followed my mother. My dear mother! My tears were falling! My dear mother! My dear mother taught me in my sleep.”

Weaving skills and patterns are passed from mothers to daughters. Motifs on cloths tie women to their female ancestors. When a woman modifies a pattern the modification is regarded as an inheritance from that woman.

Traditional patterns persist even as weavers explore innovations. The variety is great—stylized, floral, abstract, striped, geometric, organic and inorganic, formal and informal, figurative and nonfigurative all coming into play. Some textiles feature a large main motif along with bands of smaller repeated patterns.
Activity
There are many ways for students to explore weaving techniques, from simple paper strip weaving (which itself can be more complex if they incorporate irregular widths of paper or add ribbons, yarns, feathers, etc. to the project) to weaving on simple looms (of chip board, Styrofoam meat trays, box lids or similar items to provide support for the warp threads), to having looms available in the classroom. For intriguing wefts provide and have students collect a variety of yarns, ribbons, raffia, sticks, strips of variously textured and patterned papers, grasses, dryer lint, folded fabric, pliable metals, etc. The library has many craft books with instructions and new approaches to weaving that are suitable for classrooms. The Internet offers additional resources.

Activity
Call students’ attention to patterns in their own clothing. (If time permits, a worthwhile introduction would have students looking for patterns in nature and in their homes and neighborhoods.) Can they make categories for these patterns? Add to the list of descriptors above (i.e., formal and informal) and then classify their patterns into those categories.

4. Surplus of Stripes and Bands
In some Southeast Asian communities bands and stripes of varied sorts predominate the cloth patterns. These may be wide and narrow bands of geometric shapes—intricate and complex or simple bands of simple dots and slashes—or they may consist of figurative and floral motifs. The latter demonstrate foreign influences, including trade cloths with stylized patterns from India and flower and scenic motifs from European missionary embroidery.
Activity

Begin some pattern exercises with lines. Have students draw on the board all the types of lines they can think of (i.e., thin, thick, straight, wavy, zigzag, spiraling, dotted). Let them build upon the lines, drawing combinations that they can then assemble into patterns. Perhaps they can, as part of the striped pattern or as a separate motif bordered by the pattern, add elements that represent an influence in their lives. (Possibilities include countries of their familial origins, a group or team they belong to, a hobby, an interest, a song, etc.) See figures 1.14–1.16 for images of textiles with banding and stripes.
5. Woven Words

The patterns in woven textiles become apparent as warp and weft threads intertwine. A weaver begins by threading the loom with the warp threads, which run the length of the cloth to be woven.

Activity

In the following activity (Handout WOVEN WORDS) students will weave together words, rather than threads. They should begin by using the words from the word bank in the left margin of the page to fill in the blanks of the sentences, then use the “warp words” to form the “warp” of the four vertical lines of the crossword diagram.

The other thread-words (the “weft words”) will intersect the warp at the shaded squares to form the weft of our weaving. Complete the “word weaving” with these weft words.

When the squares are all filled in, if done correctly, the letters in the shaded squares can be arranged to complete the line at the bottom of the worksheet, announcing the name of the exhibition where wonderful examples of weavings can be seen.

A selected glossary of textile terms (Handout LANGUAGE OF THE LOOM) is included in this lesson.

Useful Readings

Fischer, Joseph  

Gittinger, Mattiebelle  

Gittinger, Mattiebelle (ed.)  
LESSON 4: ENCOUNTERS OF IDEAS, TIME, AND PLACE
Textiles of Southeast Asia

Useful Readings (cont.)

Hamilton, Roy W., ed.
         Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

McQuaid, Matilda

Richter, Anne
1993     Arts and Crafts of Indonesia,
         London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

Summerfield, Anne, and John Summerfield
         Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

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