LESSON 19: MEMORIALS AND TRANSCENDENCE

El Arbol de la Muerte, Mexico

Fig. 4.1
Lesson Summary and Objectives

Students use a work of art to explore an ongoing and tragic series of events in Juárez, Mexico. They research and write about the “maquiladora murders” and use the idiom of the Tree of Life to express their feelings about this and other community issues. Activities also center on students’ study of the Tree of Life and suggestions are given for their making of trees that reflect themes significant to the students themselves. Students will:

- Use the imagery on a tree of death by ceramicist Veronica Castillo as a means to explore the maquiladora murders in Juárez, Mexico.
- Research and write about the maquiladora murders and concerns in their own community.
- Study the Mexican tradition of the Tree of Life and create a work inspired by the tradition.

Background Information

The ceramic Tree of Life is a Mexican popular art tradition that embodies centuries of accumulated symbolism. Trees, sometimes with death imagery, may be placed on Day of the Dead altars to memorialize loved ones. In El Arbol de la Muerte: Maquilando Mujeres (Tree of Death: Factory Women) (Fig. 4.1), Veronica Castillo Hernández created a visual elegy for more than 400 young women and girls who have been brutally murdered since 1993 in the Mexican border town Ciudad Juárez near El Paso, Texas. Sadly, the U.S. and other foreign-owned border factories and the press have done little to investigate these crimes, and today the murders continue and remain unsolved. Castillo Hernández’s work is a poignant reminder of the violence that has devastated a community and a moving tribute to the innocent victims of these heinous crimes. It also demonstrates the power of popular art to expand beyond its traditional meanings and to bring public attention to a tragedy.

About the Artist

Veronica Castillo Hernández is a member of a well-known family of ceramicists from Izúcar de Matamoros, Mexico. The Castillo family is especially known for the diversity of their Tree of Life candelabras. As a young child Veronica joined in the family projects modeling small figurines for use in her parents’ art pieces. The work of the Castillo Hernández family has been increasingly recognized and appreciated, and so has the output of Veronica Castillo Hernández. She conceptualized the memorial altar shown here while an artist-in-residence at MujerArtes in San Antonio, Texas.
1. Coming to Terms with Tragedy

Over 400 women and girls who have been killed were employed as workers at the U.S. and other foreign-owned border factories around Ciudad Juárez. Little attention—local, national, or international—was paid to these murders until about 2001. Amnesty International, who called them “crimes against humanity,” increased public awareness and outrage, and recently the government of Mexico sent 300 federal agents to Juárez to bolster the local police force. In 2003 the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, in co-sponsorship with Amnesty International, hosted an international conference on the Juárez crimes. Scholars, activists, artists, journalists, students, and policy specialists from the U.S. and Mexico, as well as families of the victims, came together to discuss the crimes and their consequences in regard to U.S.-Mexico border policies.

Activity

Let students consider the groups affected by the events in Juárez. These may include the victims and their families, factory owners, the press, local police, other law enforcement, the educational system, transnational corporations, the government, and perhaps others. Students could debate the roles played and the interconnectedness of the individuals and groups involved. Besides the murderers, who else might bear responsibilities? What could have been done to prevent such continued atrocities? Who should play a part in ending and remediating the situation?

Certainly more information is necessary to better understand the issues. A search of the Internet (keywords: maquiladora murders) will lead to many sites. Some accounts of the situation include upsetting, and even grisly, details so teachers might want to monitor the sites they recommend for students’ research. Some points to note that are pertinent to the student discussions include: Since the signing of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) many multinational corporations for production-line assembly operations have built factories in Mexican cities, including Ciudad Juárez. NAFTA regulates some laws affecting the maquiladoras. In Juárez the factories employ mostly women in sweatshop conditions for long hours at very low pay. More maquiladora workers live in Juárez than in any other Mexican city. Many have been kidnapped while traveling to and from work. Sometimes last-minute changes in shift hours mean that women travel alone. Note also that the murders don’t happen on company property.
2. A Tree Grows in the Classroom—Ephemeral and Noteworthy

Activity

Students aware of world conditions will undoubtedly have opinions about many of them. They will surely agree on the magnitude of the horrific maquiladora murders. But what other situations in the world do they feel are calling for attention? Using Post-it notes and newspaper clippings, students will fill a tree with references and thoughts about situations calling today for individual and world attention. (Subjects may include Darfur, HIV-AIDS, homelessness, poverty, corruption, and international violence.)

Draw the outline of a large many-branched tree, either on the chalkboard or on sheets of paper attached to the wall. As students discuss, write about, and/or research current happenings in their community and beyond, let them name the situation on a Post-it that they will place on a tree branch. These can be augmented with relevant news clippings, artwork, and student stories or poetry. Many and varied approaches are possible. You could color-code the notes with those deemed primarily political, social, economic, religious, or ecological, or consider possibilities for grouping them as to students’ ability to bring about mediation. Students may also join with others to become more actively involved in issues of concern to them.

3. Traditional Trees of Life

The Tree of Life is an archetype that appears in art and literature throughout the world and has been a recurring motif in Mexican visual culture for centuries. Contemporary trees embody aspects of ancient indigenous traditions such as those of the Maya, Mixtec, and Aztec cultures and the traditions of European Catholicism, yet also reflect artists’ values and responses to changes brought on by tourism, global trade, and mass media. They remain powerful symbols of Mexico’s history as artists elaborate and enrich the ceramic candelabra-like trees with bright colors and patterns, foliage, human figures, and animals (Handout MEXICAN TREES OF LIFE).

Activity

A survey of Trees of Life would show the students the variety displayed in the genre. Subject matter, form, colors, embellishments, and themes are all rich avenues of study.
Activity (cont.)

A Tree of Life may be placed on an altar constructed in the memory of a loved one. Students can follow this tradition, either to honor someone’s memory or as a sign of respect for a living person. Although the traditional Tree of Life is made of clay, students can also construct one of papier mâché or of wood or found objects, or could draw or paint a two-dimensional tree. In the branches they should place mementos, photographs and/or references to the person being honored by the tree. It is important to share photographs of Mexican Trees of Life with the students before beginning this activity.

4. The Tree of Death—El Arbol de la Muerte

Activity

*El Arbol de la Muerte* is at once unlike, and yet closely related to the traditional Trees of Life discussed above. Elements in common are the many arched branches, bright colors on the outer tree limbs, flowers, skulls, and other skeletal imagery. Less typical, of course is the story told by the structure and the elements hanging from the tree. Students should look to see how the artist alluded to the many victims of the *maquiladora* murders.

Of note: the base (roots) of the tree portrays a factory and its trunk is a smoke-stack. The factory building bears the names of corporations who employ women in their Juárez-area factories or *maquiladores*: RCA, Sony, Phillips, GE, Hitachi, Acer, Toshiba, and others. Crosses commemorate *mujeres de Juárez* (women of Juárez) and *mujeres del mundo* (women of the world). Suspended from branches are coats, dresses, and shoes, referencing both the frequent products of the factories and the items taken from the victims and hastily strewn in the desert. Also hanging are body parts including hands, feet, and legs, testament to the mutilation of the victims. Some male figures are identified with the names of Dracula, el Diablo (the Devil), El Egipcio (the Egyptian), and Tolteco. Bloodied knives are seen in the hands of these villains.
LESSON 19: MEMORIALS AND TRANSCENDENCE

El Arbol de la Muerte, Mexico

Useful Readings

Dillon, Sam

Márguez, Letisia

Mulryan, Lenore Hoag

WOLA and Latin America Working Group

Photograph Captions

Handout MEXICAN TREES OF LIFE


D. Herón Martinez. Tree of Life. Acatlán, Mexico. 1972. Ceramic, paint, metal. H: 64.3 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. X97.44.54
LESSON 19: MEMORIALS AND TRANSCENDENCE
El Arbol de la Muerte, Mexico

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In this unit the topics and lessons are
Lesson 19: Memorials and Transcendence: El Arbol de la Muerte, Mexico
Lesson 20: Arts for Spiritual Intervention: To Seek Divine Assistance: Emas, Japan
Lesson 21: Arts for Spiritual Intervention: Honoring Patron Saints with Retablos, Mexico
Lesson 22: Tradition as Innovation: Apartheid’s Funeral, South Africa
Lesson 23: Tradition as Innovation: La Calavera don Quijote, Mexico
Handout: MEXICAN TREES OF LIFE

A

B

C

D

Fowler Museum at UCLA. Intersections Curriculum
LESSON 20: ARTS FOR SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION
To Seek Divine Assistance: *Emas*, Japan

Fig. 4.2
Lesson Summary and Objectives

Activities in this lesson provide opportunities for students to explore the importance of animal symbolism in Japanese art. Students interpret the meanings of selected images and engage in artmaking activities that focus on animals in art. Their study of emas extends to an exploration of a Japanese form of poetry known as a lune, which students use to express feelings of thanks or good wishes. Students will:

- Study and interpret the symbolism of animals in Japanese art through writing and artmaking.
- Create their own ema-like wish and engage in creative writing about their wishes and dreams.

Background Information

In Japan, people who are seeking divine assistance to overcome some difficulty in their lives may place a votive offering known as an ema in a Buddhist temple or Shinto shrine. The illustration on the ema reflects the petitioner’s problem. Petitioners may paint their own illustration, but as far back as the Edo Period (1600–1868) ema were also painted in studios and made available for sale to clients. The petitioner typically added an inscription, often including a personal name and date. Ema are also sometimes presented simply as an expression of thanks to the deities.

Today one can purchase an ema and decorate it with drawings and writings expressing wishes for good health, marriage, children, success in business, passing entrance exams, wealth, and so on. The ema is then left hanging at a designated spot at the shrine. Similar offerings are placed on private household shrines called kamidama set up to honor local protective gods.

About the Artist
Long ago professional artists painted much larger emas in response to commissions made by people of diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Today, the typical smaller emas are apt to be drawn by the unskilled petitioners themselves, or by people with little or no training who sell their small picture boards in stalls or on street corners.

Curriculum Connections
1. Encountering Six Emas
Early emas, pictures of horses, were replacements for the real horses that had been placed on shrines as offerings. Today there is a wide variety of imagery seen on emas. As students look over the selected emas, they can offer interpretations of the drawings.
Activity

Two of the emas feature human images and four show pictures of animals. What do the students think is portrayed in the first two emas (Handout JAPANESE EMAS)? How are the humans engaged? There is a relationship between these two emas. After students put forth their own hypotheses, tell them that one deals with a new marriage (fig. A), and one with a marital separation (fig. B).

Newlyweds offer this style of ema as an expression of hope for a long life together. They are called takasago, a name that recalls the couplet “you will live to 100, and I will live till 99.” Three auspicious symbols of longevity are included in the painting: a pine tree, plum blossoms, and bamboo leaves. What symbols might students include to denote a desired long-lasting relationship?

Longevity is here associated with these images, but these same plants are often shown heralding other desirable characteristics in a relationship: strength, fortitude and adaptability. Let students explain these attributes. (The pine is seen as a symbol of strength, since it is often planted in areas subject to severe weather conditions, yet it perseveres and remains green during winter. Plum blossoms denote fortitude since the plum is the first tree to blossom out, typically when snow is still on the ground. Bamboo sways and adjusts to change without breaking, becoming a symbol of adaptability.) Branches of all three plants often combine to form a typical home decoration and are also depicted in painted images as on the ema here. Can students find comparably appropriate plants or creatures to exemplify the same characteristics or ones similar to strength, courage, and adaptability?

The second ema with human figures bears writing—next to the man the inscription reads, “37 years old,” next to the woman it reads, “nuisance, 28 years old” (fig. B). Undoubtedly there is a story to be told here. Between the couple is a Chinese nettle tree, known to sever connections between people. It was an actual tree in Tokyo whose wood shavings were sought by people wishing to end a relationship with another person. The ema was offered with the same intent. Have students consider possible narratives around this ema.
LESSON 20: ARTS FOR SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION
To Seek Divine Assistance: *Emas*, Japan

### Activity

Animals are often the subjects of Japanese art, including the art of the *ema*. Four of the votive plaques here depict animals. Although they will be readily identifiable by students, their symbolism can only be guessed. Students could try to interpret meanings of the representations.

1. The horse is the most common depiction on *emas* (**fig. C**). In fact, the literal meaning of *ema* is “horse picture.” Long ago horses were sacrificed at shrines; gradually illustrations of the animals on *emas* substituted for the actual animals. Such *emas* date back to at least the medieval period (thirteenth through sixteenth centuries). In the *ema* here, the horse is tied, perhaps indicating that the petitioner was facing some obstacle. Often when the petitioner’s wish was granted, a second *ema* with an illustration of a freed and rejoicing horse was presented.

2. Snake *emas* like this one from 1917 (**fig. D**), are usually presented at temples dedicated to the goddess Benzaiten who administers music, speech, intelligence, happiness, and prosperity. Temples for the goddess are usually located near water, and snakes, also associated with water, are regarded as messengers of this deity. Snakes are believed to bring financial prosperity and also to cure sickness.

3. Centipedes (**fig. E**) are messengers for the Buddhist Guardian of the North, the direction from which came undesirable things including too much rain and snow. He is regarded as the deliverer of good fortune.

4. Monkeys (**fig. F**) often represent a founding god who became a sacred spirit in Shinto. One of the monkeys shown here wears a Shinto priest’s hat.

As we have seen also in the arts of African peoples and those of the Pacific Northwest Coast Indians, animals are significant and full of symbolism in Japanese art. Tigers typically represent bad luck, can chase away evil spirits, and are often associated with the ending of lives. The crane is considered the national bird of Japan symbolizing good luck and long life. The fox has special supernatural powers and is a clever trickster, the turtle signifies a faithful return, and the dragon is often associated with life’s origins in the mist and rough seas. These, and more, are subjects of literature and are sometimes painted on *emas* as petitions and thanks for favors granted. Before the *ema* is placed on the shrine, it is usually signed and dated (with the year—shown by one of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac: the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and wild boar.)
Students can, in the spirit of emas, paint a picture that signifies a wish that they hope will be fulfilled, or a picture that expresses thanks for a wish granted. These can be painted on small pieces of wood that are either rectangular or have a peaked roof shape as on a Shinto shrine. On the back each student should write his or her name and draw a pictorial animal representation of the year with the proper animal according to the Chinese zodiac (this information is readily available in books and on the Internet).

2. **A Lune for an Ema**

A variation on the Japanese haiku can be used to express the appropriate wish or thanks on the emas made by your students. The poetry form called lune employs three lines of verse but, unlike haiku, words—not syllables—are counted. The first and third lines contain three words, the middle line has five.

It may be a petition:

\[
\text{Whirling white flakes} \\
\text{Winter break one week away} \\
\text{New skis waiting.}
\]

Or a thank you for a wish that was granted:

\[
\text{My math test} \\
\text{Difficult, confusing, and so important} \\
\text{I passed it!}
\]
LESSON 20: ARTS FOR SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION
To Seek Divine Assistance: *Emas, Japan*

Useful Readings
Holtom, D. C.
1938  “Japanese Votive Pictures.”

Knecht, Peter
2003  “Tenjin Festival in Tokyo.”
     *Asian Folklore Studies* 30 (1): 147–153

Photograph Captions  
**Handout JAPANESE EMAS**


C. Votive plaque (*ema*). Japan. Late 19th–early 20th century. Wood, paint. W: 47.6 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Dr. Daniel C. Holtom. X89.872


LESSON 20: ARTS FOR SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION
To Seek Divine Assistance: *Emas*, Japan

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- **Lesson 23: Tradition as Innovation:** *La Calavera don Quijote*, Mexico
LESSON 21: ARTS FOR SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION
Honoring Patron Saints with Retablos, Mexico

Fig. 4.3
Students learn about the meanings of retablos and ex-votos in Mexico and discuss the significance of these to the individuals and families who use them in ritual practice. They create individual votive-inspired expressions of wishes and/or thanks. The lesson also includes a closer look at the representational imagery of Catholic saints and the impact such images may have in students’ lives. Students will

- “Read” and interpret retablos and ex-votos from Mexico through discussion and writing.
- Create retablo- and votive-like offerings.
- Discuss individuals’ beliefs about ancestors and family patron saints as intercessors with the divine.

Background Information

Small tin paintings known as retablos (literally, “behind the altar”) were often displayed in the homes of devout Catholics in Mexico to honor patron saints. Near the end of the nineteenth century, the increased availability of color lithographs and other inexpensive reproductions contributed to the decline of this tradition, but one form of retablo, the ex-voto, continues to be produced today by artists in a variety of media.

Ex-votos (from the Latin, meaning “according to a vow”) are offered to give thanks for an answered prayer. This testimonial, while a personal expression of gratitude, contributes to a public affirmation of belief since votive paintings are displayed in churches. There they testify to the efficacy of ritual as well as to the power of faith and the particular church or shrine. A dedication or description of the pictured event is typically written below the painting.
Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when demand for retablos was greatest, small factories were established where artists, both trained and untrained, worked to produce and reproduce the images. As some subjects were particularly desired, the artists turned out multiple copies of the same image or scene.
1. Petitions on View

Activity

Students will review images of four pieces from the Transforming Destiny section of the Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives exhibition. The students, working in pairs or small groups, should describe what they see on each retablo or ex-voto. All the paintings were offered as petitions or expressions of gratitude, and all incorporate elements of daily or religious life in Mexico. Students should take particular note of these elements. Students may use Handout MEXICAN RETABLOS (figures A-D) for this activity.

On the handout figure A shows two kneeling figures are praying to a black Christ. In the background four gunmen and an unarmed man and woman stand on a fairly modern street. What story do students think is being told here? Do they think that this ex-voto was painted as a prayer petition or to give thanks? They could present their interpretation orally or in written form. (The inscription on this ex-voto relates the story of a man accused of “making false statements in the company of others” and rescued from the firing squad by the prayers of his wife and parents and the divine intervention of Jesus Christ.)

Figure B on the handout shows the Virgin of Guadalupe, also known as Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico. People offer her devotion in recognition of her 1531 miraculous appearance to a converted Indian named Juan Diego on Tepeyac, the former site of a temple dedicated to the Aztec mother goddess Tonaatzin. Roses that stayed fresh and wet with dew were the sign of the miracle and invariably are painted with images of the Virgin. Could Catholic students share some of their church’s beliefs about saints? Are they aware of the patron saint of their community, city, or church? How are the patrons honored? Do they or their family seek help from saints, or do they recognize any saints for having performed a spiritual intervention of any kind?

San Geronimo, patron saint of philosophers and scholars, is the central image in figure C. Surrounding him are icons associated with him. Let students speculate on what parts of the painting represent these associated images. (On most representations of San Geronimo there appear a trumpet, cross, lion, rock, book, writing implement, and skull.) In a most frequently told story of the saint, he removes a thorn from a lion’s foot and in gratitude the lion serves as the saint’s
guardian thereafter. Call attention to the human-like face the retablo painter has given the lion. Some informants believe that the human-faced lion represents a Mexican folk animal called a nagual. Students can look up the traditions that have continued to surround this creature since pre-colonial times.

Another frequent image in Mexico is that of the devil, appearing in figure D near the end of the bed on which a patient lies. Notice that the figure of an angel is much larger. Can students offer possible reasons for the difference in sizes? They have encountered the same differences in hierarchal scale in other pieces in the exhibition. Further reading will inform students about devil images in Mexican art and masking traditions.

2. Learning More about Devotional Paintings
   
   Activity
   
   Many of your students may have devotional paintings in their homes and may wish to share the meanings these hold to their families. Students can read more about devotional paintings or you may give some of the following information to stimulate further research.

   Origins of the traditions
   
   The tradition of offering a votive object to a god or a holy personage in thanks or petition dates back, in Europe, at least to the ancient Greeks. The Spanish brought the tradition to the Americas. Similar practices have been common in other parts of the world as well. Retablos with their images of saints served the church’s desire to disseminate Christianity. Ex-voto paintings are said to have developed out of the need to express problems and concerns of the villagers or townspeople.

   Creativity among artists
   
   Retablos emphasized certain attributes of the saints and were typically copies of other saint images. The imagery of ex-votos, however, was created in response to the expressed desires of the person ordering the painting; style and subject varied greatly.
Economic connections
The traditions of hand-painted ex-votos and retablos are in decline. Mass-produced chromolithographs of the saints are readily available and artists creating ex-votos today often utilize newer elements such as photographs and small statues in their works.

Today not all churches display ex-votos, and those that do attract pilgrims and ordinary tourists to view the pieces, thus affecting the economic status of the communities.

Artists painting scenes for ex-votos would often set the cost according to the client’s ability to pay and would charge more as they added more details to the paintings. The same held true for inclusion of elaborate features of dress and theatrical settings.

Appreciation of the form in the wider art world was enhanced by the interest of important Mexican artists including Diego Rivera who collected ex-votos, and Frida Kahlo who sometimes incorporated the images in her own paintings.

3. Portable and Personal Activity
This art form is found throughout Latin America, though Mexico particularly is known for its use of tin as the painting surface. Well-known are the Peruvian retablos in the form of three-dimensional wooden boxes, typically with peaked roofs.

Students can create their own votive-like offerings. Have available a variety of materials including metal, wood, and canvas for the base and various collage materials to add to the painting. Using the Peruvian style retablo will lead students to shadow box structures with three-dimensional figures, perhaps made of clay. Whatever the style, have students begin with considerations of events that they are thankful for, or events that they hope to manage, and continue with the illustration of the event. Remember that ex-votos should have a narrative in the approximate bottom third of the piece. Expressions of wishes or thanks in poetic form would be appropriate. Perhaps incorporating a combination of English and Spanish in the narrative/poem is possible.
4. Sainted Views

On home altars, in the niches of small churches and ornate cathedrals, dangling from necklaces and automobile rear-view mirrors, in print, plaster, wood and metal, images of saints are ever-present. In many parts of Latin America a patron saint looks over each town and a specific day of the year is set aside for a celebration in his or her name. In Guatemala the celebration may last for a week, but on the saint’s day his or her figure is removed from the Catholic Church and paraded through the town. Like all saints, the Virgin of the Rosary (fig. A on Handout SANTOS FIGURES) shown in Art and Transformation, is called upon to answer prayers and to bestow good fortune. In another part of the world, the figure of San Jacinto (fig. B) held a place of honor in a colonial church in the Philippines.

Saintly representations in the United States are seen on two of the video presentations in Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives. In the introductory video Alicia Gaspar de Alba of UCLA’s Chicano/a Studies Department tells how individuals use the images as a way of connecting to their faith and summoning the spirits, and Ysamur Flores-Peña of Otis College of Art and Design talks about the nobility of altars with their representations of saints. He says that effective altars must strike a balance. They must not be uninspiring, nor “so aggressive as to instill fear. They must be powerful so as to instruct, and gentle so as to comfort.” In another Intersections video, entitled “Felix Lopez,” a santero carver, (carver of saint figures), speaks of revering saint figures as holy objects of devotion. To him, the act of carving a santo is like a form of prayer.

Activity

Many of your students will be very familiar with the saint as an icon and they will be able to share their experiences. Have they approached images to act as intercessors to make something happen? Have they prayed as a thank-you for an already-answered prayer, or as thanksgiving for a blessing received even though it was not requested? Do their families have patron saints, are there images in their churches after which the churches are named, or do they know of saints who look after their parents’ line of work and attend to their families’ needs?
Activity

If any students have altars in their home, they could tell about or share images from them. People of many backgrounds make use of amulets or talismans to bring good fortune, and some—regardless of faith—incorporate them in special boxes or displays, including altars. If suitable for your group, students can create a three-dimensional sculpture, *retablo* (as below), or altar incorporating items significant to their experiences and their aspirations.

LESSON 21: ARTS FOR SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION
Honoring Patron Saints with Retablos, Mexico

Useful Readings
Mulryan, Lenore Hoag
1996  Nagual in the Garden.
      Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Photograph Captions

**Handout MEXICAN RETABLOS**


C. Retablo. Mexico. Tin, paint. Date unknown. H: 36.4 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Anonymous Gift. X96.42.13, 14


**Handout SANTOS FIGURES**


B. San Jacinto. Philippines. 19th century. Wood, paint. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. Louis Resnick. X82.1541a,b
LESSON 21: ARTS FOR SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION
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Unit 4
Handout: MEXICAN RETABLOS

A

B

C

D

Fowler Museum at UCLA. Intersections Curriculum
LESSON 22: TRADITION AS INNOVATION

Apartheid’s Funeral, South Africa

Fig. 4.4
Lesson Summary and Objectives

Students explore the history of apartheid in South Africa and discover the important role of artists and the arts in the struggle for freedom and human rights for all. They will deconstruct the funeral of apartheid, as imagined by the artist, and their writing activities will focus on composing a news report of the event. Other curricular suggestions include a study of other art forms that brought attention to the injustices of apartheid, most notably South African music of resistance and anti-apartheid posters. Art and music making follow their study. Finally students have the opportunity to research world peace leaders and the impact their actions have had on global peace efforts. Students will

- Become “news reporters” and observe and discuss *Apartheid’s Funeral* and the consequences of change for different people.
- Be introduced to poster art from all over the world calling attention to the struggle against apartheid. They will create posters to address issues of concern in their own lives, inspired by anti-apartheid posters they study.
- Respond to multi-media arts addressing apartheid through discussion or creative writing activities.
- Discuss the role art can play in activism and relate their work of art to current global issues.

Background Information

Artist Masaego Johannes Segogela uses the metaphor of death to make a powerful statement about social and political transformation in South Africa with the dissolution of the apartheid regime. This particular sculptural installation was carved in anticipation of the elections held in 1994 that brought about the end of white minority rule in South Africa. Segogela’s work demonstrates the dynamism of the arts as artists make use of new styles and techniques—rooted in more traditional models—to reflect the ever-changing world artists encounter.

About the Artist

Masaego Johannes Segogela has been a full-time artist since the early 1980s. His previous careers included those of electrician, welder, and boilermaker. In 1980, Segogela began to create sculptures that emphasized his strong Christian values, at the same time as they dealt with the political and cultural issues that faced South Africans. First pieces were individual figures retaining the original finish of the wood with painted details; later works were combined into tableaux of figures with paint or varnish embellishing the carved wood. Born in rural Sekhukhuneland in 1936, he moved to urban Johannesburg where he first sold his art on the streets of the city’s...
shopping districts, and then in art galleries. His experiences growing up and becoming an adult under the oppression of South Africa’s apartheid system informed his early works as current events continue to shape his work today.

1. Art as Commentary

Activity

Introduce this multi-figure work and inform students of the title of Segogela’s piece: *Apartheid’s Funeral*, 1994. What is happening in the scene? Of course to understand the work the class must have some knowledge of South Africa’s history including the imposition of racial separation, the struggle of the African National Congress, and of Nelson Mandela’s role in and after the struggle.

Note that there are twenty-three figures prostrate, kneeling, and standing around a box containing a coffin. Begin with any one of the figures and have students tell all they can about it. Students will notice figures in clerical robes and business suits, ANC supporters with clenched fists, mourners lamenting the death of apartheid and others praising its demise. Ask students if they are able to identify any of these figures:

- Cleric in a red robe at podium with microphones, presumably conducting the service
- One man offering flowers
- In black suit with hands over ears
- In a red clerical robe with arms outstretched giving a blessing
- In black suit, hand over eyes
- In grey suit with sunglasses
- In grey clerical suit holding up a cross
- Grey haired man holding cane
- In black clerical robe, arms outstretched holding a Bible
- Kneeling man in red clerical robe
- Large man in black suit with hands on ears
- In brown clerical robe with hand on eyes, holding a Bible
- Kneeling man in green clerical robe
- In red clerical robe with outstretched arms holding a Bible
- In black suit with clenched fist
- In red suit with outstretched arm
- Kneeling man in yellow clerical robe
Artist Johannes Segogela identifies the Founder of Apartheid as the old man with a cane; the Chairman of Apartheid as the man with his hands on top of his head; the Secretary of Apartheid with his hands over ears; ANC supporters with clenched fists; and the books and documents of apartheid being buried in the coffin. Students should also notice the presence of a photographer. This is both a commentary on the prevalence of photographers at many events, but also an acknowledgment of the apartheid regime’s practice of surveillance in order to document and then arrest political protestors.

Have students offer their ideas as to who might be represented. Are they all proponents of apartheid lamenting its end? Are there any people present who helped end the practice and are here looking ahead to reconciliation? Note that the artist chose to use details of dress and gesture as clues to the identity and politics of the participants. The colors of the robes may refer to specific church affiliations and/or may also refer to the colors of the African National Congress Party. Are any women present at the funeral? How successful was Segogela in portraying loss transformed into hope? What messages do students draw from the art? Note that funerals themselves were expressions of solidarity by those who fought for the end of apartheid. How was this so?

Students can take the role of a reporter covering this momentous 1994 event and write a news report. Discuss beforehand the information that should be contained in the article. Students can begin with the “five W” stand-bys: What was happening, where, who was there, when did it occur (in relation to the events leading up to this date), and why? Another approach would have them writing as an editorial writer, expressing opinions, rather than as a reporter addressing only factual information.
2. Other Arts and Apartheid

Activity

Throughout the struggle and since, artists have used a variety of media as cultural and political weapons. Students should be introduced to the many examples of poster art that called attention to the South African struggle for freedom. By looking through printed collections (see bibliography) and viewing websites such as http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/r/314/whm.html (8/07) with over 300 examples, the class will appreciate the vibrancy and variety of the art produced. They will also become aware of international aspects of the anti-apartheid movement, with posters from Asia, Europe, other African countries, and the Americas, in addition to the majority of examples from South Africa. Students can then address political or social issues of their own time and place with posters they create. They may use paints, collage, or another medium of their choice.

Activity

In Segogela’s piece one figure is documenting the occasion with camera, several have books; if it were an audio-visual installation undoubtedly there would be music. Music was both a powerful vehicle of protest and a revolutionary voice of freedom. Well-known musicians sang of their country’s crises and helped spread their message throughout the world, and as in the case of the posters, music influenced world opinion to help bring about the end of apartheid. One of the most stirring and significant pieces of music is the national anthem, Nkosi sikelel’iAfrika. This official anthem is, in reality, two anthems merged into one. It is sung in four stanzas, the first in Xhosa or Zulu, the second in Sotho, the third in Afrikaans, and the last in English. You can hear it sung and read the lyrics on http://www.youtube.com/?v=NsWwz9UmjVk (8/07). Students may consider these two quotes on the South African struggle as they examine the essential roles of the arts in creating social and political change:

*Without this music, our struggle would have been a great deal longer, a great deal bloodier, and perhaps, not even successful.* —Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South Africa

* “When we sing our anthem, a religious invocation with our clenched fist upraised, it is... an affirmation that we sing when we struggle and struggle when we sing.” —Albie Sachs, one of the architects of the ANC’s constitutional guidelines.*
Activity
Visual arts, music, and certainly the written word documented and influenced the struggle for and acquisition of freedom. The written word was seen and heard in plays, novels, and poetry. Don Mattera (1983) told the story of his home, Sophiatown, a pre-apartheid multi-racial, multi-ethnic community where the arts flourished until police enforced an order of forced removal. Some residents were sent to Soweto and other areas, and Sophiatown was bulldozed and rebuilt into a working class suburb for white workers. Students can respond to this powerful work in many ways: share their reactions to the account, relate to the “taking apart in a few minutes all that had been built up over the years...,” make comparable contrasts to phrases such as “the power of destroying” and “the pain of being destroyed,” and of course compose a poem in response to any of the above.

A short discography is included here featuring South African artists involved in the freedom fight:

Ladysmith Black Mambazo.
Most famous isicathamiya or mbube group. From Zululand.

Makeba, Miriam
1994 The Click Song. Sonodisc 5564. Famous singer and political figure in South Africa, this disc features a song popular in the U.S. in the 1950s.

Mbuli, Mzwakhe.
2001 KwaZulu Natal. 2001. EMI.

Various artists
World Music Network 1020.

Various artists
1999 The Kings and Queens of Township Jive. Sterns Earthworks 20.
Includes such early stars as Mbazo, Mahotella Queens, Thomas Phale, and West Nkosi from South Africa.

Various artists

Various artists
Music from the liberation struggle in South Africa.
3. Strategies for Change—Artful and Other

As art played a role in the fight against apartheid, so has it been a vehicle for people all over the world in struggles against injustices and inequality. Consider some of these battles against racial discrimination such as the fight for civil rights in the United States, land right struggles of Australian Aborigines, the American Indian movement and others.

**Activity**

In addition to addressing the role that art may play in such situations, let students offer other strategies people might use to let governments know of their discontent. These may include letter writing; the circulation of petitions; composing or performing protest music; picketing; sponsoring email or regular mail campaigns; and participating in boycotts, strikes or sit-ins. They may add less acceptable ideas as rioting, bombing, hostage taking, etc., leading to a discussion as to whether such tactics are ever warranted. Particularly non-violent approaches could be stressed, certainly in regard to South Africa’s Nelson Mandela, but also Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, Burma’s Aung San Suu Kyi, Betty Williams, Mairead Corrigan from Northern Ireland, and others. Let students depict a scene appropriate to any of the above struggles, either in the style of Segogela with many figures, or in another medium.

**Activity**

As an alternative, rather than a work based on one of the civil or political injustices cited above, students may want to relate their work to other problems facing people today such as global warming or the AIDS epidemic. A good reference is the Keiskamma Art Project, also taking place in South Africa, where women in the village of Hamburg are using embroidery techniques to depict the tragedy of HIV and AIDS. Art, again, is serving as a catalyst for action and a vehicle of hope and transformation.
LESSON 22: TRADITION AS INNOVATION
Apartheid’s Funeral, South Africa

Useful Readings

Mattera, Don
1983 Azanian Love Song.
2003 Sophiatown.
Boston: Beacon Press.

The Posterbook Collective
Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Ross, Doran H.
1995 “Masaego Johannes Segogela (Portfolio).”
African Arts 28 (1): 74–79.

Williamson, Sue
1989 Resistance Art of South Africa.
New York: St. Martin’s Press

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 last section of the exhibition called Art and Transformation. In this gallery works are introduced that served to make things happen. See “Unit Four—Art and Transformation” 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.

Images of objects to be shown to students may be printed as handouts (from within each lesson), viewed online at the Intersections web link http://collections.fowler.ucla.edu, or downloaded from the curriculum page on our website.

In this unit the topics and lessons are

Lesson 19: Memorials and Transcendence: El Arbol de la Muerte, Mexico
Lesson 20: Arts for Spiritual Intervention: To Seek Divine Assistance: Emas, Japan
Lesson 21: Arts for Spiritual Intervention: Honoring Patron Saints with Retablos, Mexico
Lesson 22: Tradition as Innovation: Apartheid’s Funeral, South Africa
Lesson 23: Tradition as Innovation: La Calavera don Quijote, Mexico
LESSON 23: TRADITION AS INNOVATION

La Calavera don Quijote, Mexico

Fig. 4.5
Lesson Summary and Objectives

Students use the imagery of don Quixote to examine how literary themes can be reinterpreted across artistic disciplines. In working with the story of don Quixote they explore the notion of satire and parody, and use these literary devices in their writing. They also research the satirical poetry (calaveras) of José Guadalupe Posada (which inspired the featured work of art), experiment with elements of satire in their writing, and illustrate their own calaveras centering on issues of concern in their lives. Finally, activities extend to students’ exploration of the Mexican Days of the Dead, in which skeletal arts play a key role in beliefs and familial and community celebrations.

Students will

• Explore through discussion and writing the themes of the novel Don Quixote de la Mancha.
• Discuss the purpose and character of satire and develop these literary techniques in their writing.
• Create a satiric calavera poem about a current issue or person.

In the spirit of the hero don Quixote, students construct paper cutouts or papier-mâché images of their own heroes, or original interpretations of literary works.

Background Information

Traditions continue and traditions evolve. Felipe Linares created the sculpture here, La Calavera don Quijote, in 1980, but its origins can be traced to seventeenth-century Spain and Miguel de Cervantes’s Don Quixote de la Mancha. In the classic tale Cervantes ridiculed the contemporary issues of his time and place. Move ahead several centuries to when Mexico’s José Guadalupe Posada satirized the social and political scene of his time with cartoons of calaveras or skeletons—rich and poor alike reduced to bare bones. His sarcastic mass-produced printings appeared as widely circulated broadsheets, mocking members of the clergy, the military, the government, and the landowner. New approaches to tradition continued, but along the same themes, when Felipe Linares and his family called upon Day of the Dead imagery in their large papier-mâché sculptures. Today Linares family artists interpret calaveras in traditional or contemporary situations, still sarcastic, still poking fun.
Felipe Linares, born in 1936, is a member of the Linares family of Mexican artists who have been producing papier-mâché objects for more than 100 years. Early works were fiesta props—Judas figures and holiday piñatas—that were sold in local markets and on street corners. As more and more art patrons collected their work, members of the family became widely known and respected. Felipe Linares has worked with his father, Pedro, who died in 1996, his brothers, and his sons. Favorite subjects were fanciful creatures called *alebrijes* and the *calaveras* (skeletons) inspired by Mexico’s Day of the Dead observances. Today collectors and museums prize Linares works.

### Activity
If your students have read the work, let them discuss whether the Spanish knight deserves to be put in the company of real-world idealists or should be categorized as merely delusional. The theme of justice is an important one—as a sworn knight, don Quixote has promised to uphold justice, and yet he finds himself in a world (reality) where justice does not exist or where cruelty masquerades as justice. Embark on a consideration of justice in our world today.

### Activity
If appropriate to your class level, discuss the purposes and character of satire. Expository and critical writing may follow from the discussions. Some possible issues to address:

- A definition of satire.
- Why would a writer or artist use the genre of satire?
- Is all critical writing satirical?
- What is the difference between satire and parody?
2. Broadsides and Bare Bones

The skeleton-populated works of José Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913) were portraits of political and social satire. His mass-produced etchings and lithographs were printed on one side (hence the term “broadsides”) of brightly colored paper and sold on street corners by *corridistas*, musicians who sang the rhymed verses illustrated by the drawings. These were especially popular around the time of the annual Day of the Dead celebrations when skeletal imagery was the norm. Posada’s work was particularly potent at the beginning of the twentieth century, a time of inequalities and great unrest preceding the start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

Often *calaveras* took the form of false obituaries, particularly of heroes, politicians, the wealthy, and of bandits and bullfighters. Handout *THE CALAVERA OF DON QUIXOTE* shows the verbal and visual depiction of *The Calavera of don Quijote*, according to José Guadalupe Posada. Students may write their own calavera poem for Don Quixote to accompany Posada’s image.

*Calavera de Don Quijote*

*Esta es de Don Quijote la Primera,*
*La Sin Par, La Gigante Calavera*

*A confesarse al punto el que no quiera*
*En pecado volverse calavera.*
*Sin miedo y sin respeto ni a los reyes*
*Este esqueleto cumplirá sus leyes.*

*Aquí está de Don Quijote*
*la calavera valiente,*
*dispuesta a armar un mitote*
*al que se le ponga enfrente.*

*Ni curas ni literatos,*
*ní letrados ni doctores,*
*escaparán los señores*
*de que les dé malos ratos.*

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Fowler Museum at UCLA. *Intersections* Curriculum  Unit 4. Lesson 23. page 220
The Calavera of Don Quixote

The one and only, never to be forgotten
Larger than life calavera of don Quixote

Repent your sins if you wish to save
Your soul from the torments of the grave.
Uncowed and unawed even by royalty
This skeleton will administer their justice with loyalty.

Here rides the cadaver
Of Don Quixote the knight,
Ready to take on
Any adversary in sight.

Neither doctors nor lawyers
Nor priests nor men of letters
Will escape the havoc
He wreaks on his betters.

Activity
Students may try creating a calavera poem (about four to twelve lines) about a situation or person they deem worthy of satirizing, and then accompany the poem with an appropriate line drawing. Actions or policies of political leaders, actions or programs of the government, a problem in their community or larger society, or another issue about which the student has strong feelings—all would be appropriate and possibly rich with potential.

Activity
Posada’s drawings can be compared to political cartoons of today that still demonstrate the power of an image. This power is evidenced by controversies periodically encountered by artists and their publishers. Review the protests that followed recent Danish political cartoons about the prophet Muhammad. Debate the responsibilities of a cartoonist toward his readers—how can differences between free speech and respect for others be addressed?
3. Tradition Still on the Move

Activity
As noted above, there have been many approaches to expressing the adventures of Don Quixote in word, dance, and music. Let students brainstorm another literary work that might lend itself to original interpretation. If possible they could outline such a work, or even produce it. Of course, following in the tradition of Felipe Linares and his family, a papier-mâché representation would be appropriate.

Activity
In the time of Cervantes, romances of chivalry were very popular, in part because people could fantasize about heroes with extraordinary abilities who participated in fantastic adventures. What sorts of entertainments, which have these same characteristics, appeal to people nowadays? Again, students of the class might construct their selected heroes in papier-mâché and combine them in a class installation.

Activity
Skeletons multiply at the time of the Day of the Dead, though their history as an art form predates the arrival of the Europeans. Today in Mexico much of their representation is ephemeral—sugar skulls, piñatas, and the multiple tissue paper cutouts called papel picado. If your students make these paper cutouts, it will be easier to cut the layers of tissue if they sandwich them inside regular paper on which they can draw the designs. Be sure both the regular paper and tissue papers are folded down the middle and placed together like a book. In designing the image(s), try to draw some of the lines extending to the paper’s edge, making these cuts easy to cut with scissors. Internal lines will best be executed with a hobby knife. Handle the paper cuts carefully. Subject matter may be skeletons and the like, or students may make their own up-to-the-minute innovation.
LESSON 23: TRADITION AS INNOVATION

La Calavera don Quijote, Mexico

Useful Readings

Berdecio, Roberto, and Stanley Applebaum, eds.  
1972  Posada’s Popular Mexican Prints.  
New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Hodges, Margaret, (adaptation)  
1992  Don Quixote and Sancho Ponza.  
New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons *

Masuoka, Susan N.  
Los Angeles, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Palacios, Argentina  
1979  The Knight and the Squire.  
Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc. *

Patrick, Frank  
Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Raffel, Burton, translator Saavedra, Miguel de Cervantes  
1995  The History of That Ingenious Gentleman Don Quijote de la Mancha.  
New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Rothenstein, Julian, ed.  
1989  Posada: Messenger of Mortality.  
Mt. Kisco: Moyer Bell Limited.

Sánchez Aguilar, Augustín (adaption and notes of Miguel Cervantes)  
2004  Don Quijote. Barcelona: Papadopoulos Publishing. *

* Children’s books

Photograph Captions

Handout THE CALAVERA OF DON QUIJOTE

Esta es de don quijote la primera. From José Guadalupe Posada (Ilustrador de la Vida Mexicana). Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, 1963
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**Lesson 22: Tradition as Innovation:** *Apartheid’s Funeral*, South Africa

**Lesson 23: Tradition as Innovation:** *La Calavera don Quijote*, Mexico
ESTÁ ES DE DON QUIJOTE LA PRIMERA,
LA SIN PAR LA GIGANTE CALAVERA.

A confesarse al punto el que no quiera.
En pecado volverse calavera.

Sin miedo y sin respeto ni á los reyes
Este esqueleto cumplirá sus leyes.

Aquí está de Don Quijote
la calavera valiente,
dispuesta á armar un mitote
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Ni curas ni literatos,
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