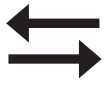


Walker ↻
Art □ Center
↔ Virtual
Field Trip X

Intro to Contemporary Art: 6–12 Making Meaning



Overview

In this guide, you'll find art-making activities and resources that will help you and your students reflect on your virtual field trip to the Walker and continue exploring contemporary artwork after your visit. The activities in this guide can be completed in one class period or can be spread out over a week.



Reflect on Your Visit

During your virtual tour, students found meaning in contemporary artworks through observation, discussion, and analysis. Students followed the steps Observe, Consider Context, and Evaluate each time they encountered a new artwork.

The Intro to Contemporary Art: 6–12 Making Meaning virtual tour featured three artworks from the Walker Art Center's permanent collection. Click on the links below to view each artwork:

- Kcho (Alexis Leyva Machado), [La soledad \(The Loneliness\)](#), 1999/2005
- Martha Rosler, [Semiotics of the Kitchen](#), 1975
- Kerry James Marshall, [Blind Ambition](#), 1990

Take a close look at the artworks you viewed on your tour and discuss the following questions as a class:

- What do you remember from your visit?
- Which artworks did you connect with most? Why?
- What questions do you still have about your tour?

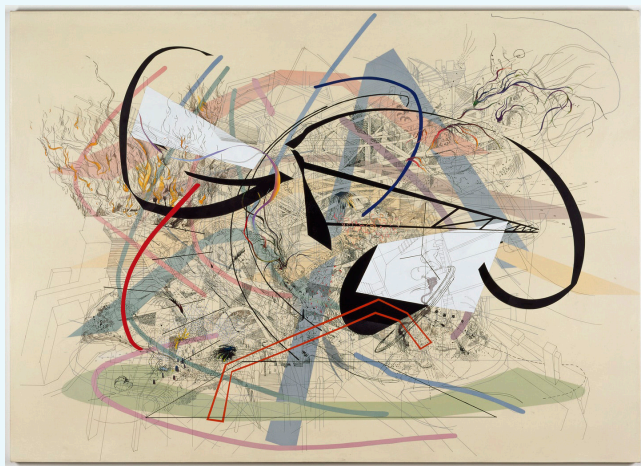
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Explore More Art at the Walker Art Center

Contemporary artists are often inspired by the world around them. Some artists, like Martha Rosler and Kerry James Marshall, are inspired by social issues. Other artists, like Kcho, are inspired by places they have lived. Artist Julie Mehretu is inspired by ways in which people migrate around the world. Let's learn a little bit more about Julie Mehretu and her artistic practice!



Julie Mehretu, *Babel Unleashed*, 2001; Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 2001.

Take a close look at the painting by Julie Mehretu and discuss the following questions as a class:

- What do you notice?
- What does this painting remind you of?
- What questions do you have about this artwork?

Julie Mehretu was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Mehretu and her family immigrated to Michigan when she was seven years old. Her family left Ethiopia to escape war and political violence. Mehretu currently works in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City and is known for her large-scale, abstract paintings that explore how and why people move around the world. Abstract artists rely on lines, shapes, colors, and textures to create their artwork. Abstract art might represent a person, place, thing, or idea but is not usually a realistic depiction of something. This means that the artwork can look like different things to each person who sees it!

“I come from two different worlds,” Mehretu says, “half from Ethiopia, half from Michigan. For me, making art is figuring out who I am in the world. I put in traces of many places, many experiences and memories.”

Mehretu creates her artwork by layering architectural drawings, maps, photographs, and marks that reference historical and current events. In the painting shown here, titled *Babel Unleashed*, she layered structures and shapes found in airport terminals and other transit systems. For Mehretu, transit means the movement of people. Places like airports and bus stations are “full of migrants in transit, people walking by, through, past, and with each other.”

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Now that you have more information about Julie Mehretu, ask students to think about the following questions, or discuss them as a class:

- Can you think of any reasons a person might immigrate or migrate somewhere?
 - We learned that Mehretu often includes architectural drawings in her artwork. What kinds of buildings or architectural elements do you see in this work?
 - Why do you think Mehretu layered all these elements together? How would the work be different if we were just looking at one of these layers, like the architectural drawings?
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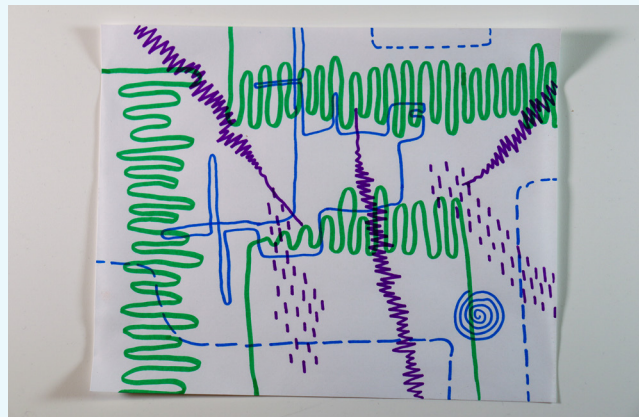
Connect Further

Now it's your turn to explore movement and place through a project inspired by the artwork of Julie Mehretu! This activity will take about 5 to 10 minutes and includes optional project extensions.

Start by handing out a blank sheet of paper and coloring materials to each student and explain that they will be drawing different marks based on different movements or gestures.

Invite students to think about how they move through different spaces. Ask: what kinds of movements do you make when you're at school? Have students choose a color that reminds them of school and ask them to draw lines and shapes that represent the ways they move through their school. For example, students might trace their paths through a hallway or think about specific movements, like opening a locker. Encourage students to draw their marks for at least 30 seconds.

Repeat the process of choosing a color and making marks for at least three more places. We suggest trying the following places: home, park, and grocery store. Encourage students to overlap their marks on their papers.



Connect Further

Julie Mehretu-inspired movement drawings

Project Extensions

- Ask students to write down different places on slips of paper. Then, collect the slips of paper and draw one from a container. Pass out a new sheet of paper and have students create marks based on how they might move through that place. Repeat this process a few more times on the same sheet of paper.
- Once the drawings are complete, ask students to share their work with a partner. Students should have their partner try to guess which marks they made for each location.

Now that students have created their own drawings, ask students to think about the following questions, or discuss them as a class:

- What do you notice?
- How did you change your movements and marks for each place?
- If you could give your drawing a title, what would you call it?

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Contemporary Time Capsule

Ready to continue exploring the world around us? The following pages include instructions for a teacher-guided art-making project. This project will take about 20 to 30 minutes and includes optional project extensions.

Project Setup

- Start by clearing off several large, flat work surfaces. Classroom tables will work just fine! Students can stay at the same tables the entire time.
- Set out the following materials at each table: scissors, glue, pencils, and coloring materials.

Materials

- Small cardboard boxes (approx. 6 × 3 × 3 in.)
- Scissors
- Glue
- Pencils
- Coloring materials
- Printer paper (8½ x 11 in.)

Optional Materials

- Colored pencils
- Camera
- Cardstock (5 × 7 in.)
- Collage materials (magazines, newspapers, etc.)
- Construction paper

Introduction

Students will continue to explore and respond to the world around them like contemporary artists by making their own time capsules. Ask students:

- Who remembers what “contemporary” means? (Explain that “contemporary” means something that has happened very recently or is currently happening. For example, contemporary art is art that was made very recently, within the last 50 years or so, and often addresses issues you might hear about in the news or on social media.)
- What is a time capsule? What can a time capsule communicate about a place, time, or group of people? (Explain that a time capsule is a container with a selection of objects inside. The objects typically represent the present day and what is happening in the world at the moment the time capsule is created. Time capsules are then buried or stored away to be opened at some point in the future.)

Share a few examples of time capsules with the class and discuss what each of those time capsules might say about the place, time, and people who created it. Share a few examples using the following links:

- [First look inside Boston time capsule from 1795](#) (Video)
- [Voyager Golden Record from 1977](#)
- [Andy Warhol's Time Capsule 21](#)

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Facilitation Tips

- The teacher can decide which of the following project options to include in the time capsule project. Some options may be more appropriate for younger students. We suggest choosing at least four of the options below.
- Have the entire class work on one component at a time and set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes per component. For younger students, pass out and collect materials between each component.
- For an extended project, focus on one component a day, and then add everything to the boxes at the end of the week.

Art-making Instructions

Start by handing out one cardboard box to each student. This will be the container for their time capsules. Tell students they will reflect on the times they are living in and create a few things to put inside their boxes. When students are done, they'll seal the boxes with tape and store them until they are ready to open them in the future.

Next, invite students to work on some of the following project options:



Option 1: Future Collage

Ask students to imagine what their futures might look like. Pass out one sheet of cardstock to each student and invite them to create a collage of what that future looks like to them.



Option 2: Newspaper Drawing

Discuss events happening in the world today. Invite each student to find a newspaper article they feel represents the moment we are living in. Students should include a printed version of the article they selected to place in their time capsule. For an extended project, invite students to create an abstract drawing on top of their article using colored pencils. Encourage them to create a drawing that represents the mood of the article.

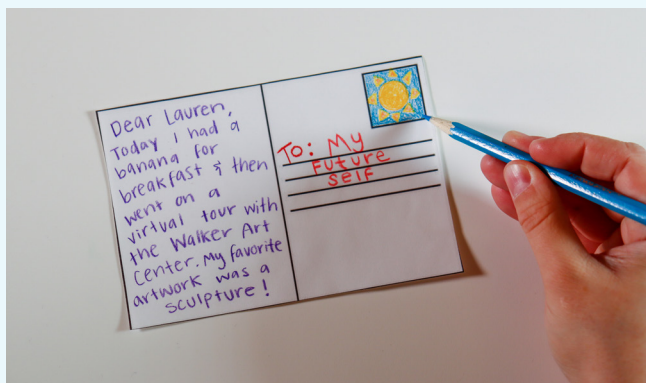
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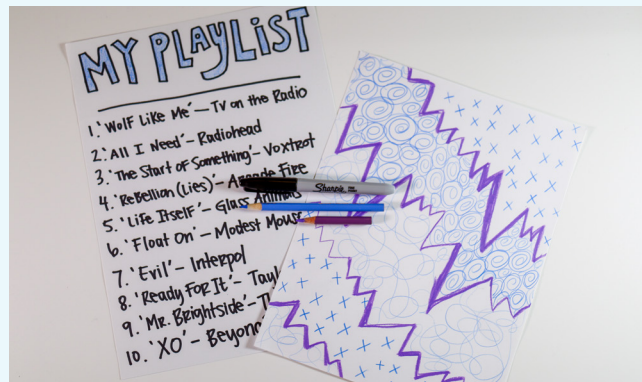
Option 3: Fashion Design

Give each student one sheet of paper with a printed outline of a figure in the center, or ask them to draw an outline of a figure on their paper. Then, encourage students to think about their favorite fashion trends this year. Invite them to design their ideal outfit by drawing clothes on the figure.



Option 4: Postcard

Hand out one postcard to each student and ask them to write a letter to their future selves. They can write about what they did today or are planning to do. For an extended project, ask students to create a design on the front of their postcards. Example prompts: What art did you see today? What are you doing after school? What changes do you want to see in the world?



Option 5: Playlist

Ask students to think about their favorite songs from the past year. Pass out pieces of paper and have students create a playlist of 10 to 15 songs by writing down the titles and musical artists. Then, have students select one song to listen to as a class. Ask them to choose a color and draw abstract lines on the back of their paper as they listen to that song. Then, have students choose another song with a different mood to listen to as a class. Repeat the listening and drawing activity using a different color for each song. Have students reflect on the differences among their marks.

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Option 6: Photobooth

Throughout the work time, call up one table at a time to have their photographs taken. Then, print out the photographs so students can decorate them and include them in their time capsules. If time and resources allow, have students create a prop they can use in their photograph, or take instant photographs of the students.



Sealing the Capsule

Ask students to put all of their components into their cardboard box. Then, close the lid and seal it with tape. Ask them to write their names and “Do not open until . . .” on the outside of the box. You can decide when you would like students to open their boxes. For example, students could open them at the end of the school year or five years from now! Students can then decorate their boxes.

Keep Exploring

Now that students have made their own time capsules, ask them to think about the following questions, or discuss them as a class:

- What do you think it will be like to open your box in the future?
- What stories or memories might the objects inside your box tell about the time we are living in now?
- If you could add one thing to your box, regardless of size, resources, or cost, that represents the moment we are living in, what would you add? Why?

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Resources

Interested in learning more? The following links contain more information about contemporary art and the artists discussed in the virtual tour package.

Kcho (Alexis Leyva Machado)

- [Art & Artists: Kcho \(Alexis Leyva Machado\)](#)
- [Artist's Instagram](#)
- [Galería de Arte Contemporáneo Cubano: Alexis Leyva Machado \(Kcho\)](#)
- [Adiós Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950 Presents 65 Years of Cuban Art](#)
- [Sightlines: The Farewell to Utopia in Revolutionary Cuban Art](#)

Martha Rosler

- [Art & Artists: Martha Rosler](#)
- [Artist's Website](#)
- [Another Gaze Journal: In Conversation with Martha Rosler \(Interview\) \(Video\)](#)
- [Tate: Martha Rosler](#)

Kerry James Marshall

- [Art & Artists: Kerry James Marshall](#)
- [Art21: Kerry James Marshall in "Identity"](#)
- [Jack Shainman Gallery: Kerry James Marshall](#)
- [MOCA: Kerry James Marshall: Mastry](#)

Julie Mehretu

- [Art & Artists: Julie Mehretu](#)
- [Julie Mehretu's Formative City \(Video\)](#)
- [Julie Mehretu Exhibition Guide for Teachers](#)
- [Opening-Day Talk: Julie Mehretu in Conversation with Glenn Ligon and Kemi Ilesanmi](#)
- [Julie Mehretu Audio Guide](#)
- [Art21: Julie Mehretu](#)



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Find more resources for learning on our website at www.walkerart.org/visit/education/resources-for-teachers/.

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