

Teaching *Painting with Fabric*

Instructional Strategies (Video and discussion: one 45 minute class period)

Students will view the segments from the QUILTS episode featuring Victoria Findlay Wolfe and Michael A. Cummings while answering the questions on the Quilts Video Search worksheet. Students will research and sketch information and ideas in their sketchbooks from two Smithsonian Museum websites, and develop their own ideas for a paper patchwork quilt design. Finally, students will create patched paper quilts in their choice of altered patchwork pattern or portrait of a notable person.

Before Viewing

Introduce the scope of the lesson to students, sharing the key concepts, critical questions, and objectives. Share a bit about what they will see. This is a good time to introduce the idea that the quilts Findlay Wolfe and Cummings make are not used as blankets. Hand out the Quilts Video Search worksheet and go over the questions. Allow students to work in teams so they can cooperatively gather the information as the video plays. You may want to stop the video when each answer is stated, to help students locate the information and give them time to write their responses.

After Viewing

Begin a discussion of the video. What did students find interesting? Go through the questions on the Worksheet #1: *Quilts Video Search* and have students share their answers. Answers follow here:

Discussion

1. Victoria Findlay Wolfe states, "Every time I make a quilt...I want it to look different than the last thing."
2. She is working with the traditional quilt pattern called, "Double Wedding Ring."
3. She says, "Once the whole quilt top is complete...I could still cut it apart and turn it into something else."
4. Her grandmother, Elda Wolfe, inspired her. Elda Wolfe's brightly colored quilts were made from scraps of double knit fabrics (thick knitted fabric made from acrylic fiber) from clothes she sewed for the family.
5. Victoria Findlay Wolfe states, "I call quilting an extreme sport...I kind of get a physical rush when I'm creating something."

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6. One prominent theme in Victoria Findlay Wolfe's designs is taking inspiration from old quilt patterns and making them new by altering them. She says, "I'm keeping the bones of a traditional pattern but really just trying to tell another story."
7. Michael A. Cummings added African fabrics, Hawaiian fabrics, safety pins, and keys to his portrait quilt of President Obama.
8. He states, "I just visualize the images...I just... with chalk ... start drawing the forms with proportions I feel will work and then pin it down and sew."
9. Michael A. Cummings says that he is " ...trying to tell the story of African American history."
10. Since he was sickly, Cummings explains, "That led me to be by myself a lot, it kind of allowed my mind to drift into an imaginary sort of world where I could draw."
11. After watching: His theme is portraits, and more specifically, portraits of prominent African Americans. He says, "My theme changed to more narratives or historical connections with people and places and events."
12. Students may find connections on their own here: They are colorful; some paintings have similar themes, etc. Wolfe states she works on her design wall trying out patches of fabric "very much the way I would push paint around a canvas." Cummings says, "Like a palette of paint I have a palette of fabric..." After he made his first fabric collage he thought, "'This looks like something I would have painted."

Revisit the idea of how these quilts are used as artworks on a wall or as images that may honor or educate more than as blankets. This may provide a good discussion on the topic of functional objects.

After Discussion

Explain that students will have the opportunity to investigate ideas and processes related to the two quilt artists as they prepare to create their own quilt patterns. Hand out the *Studying the Art Quilts of Victoria Findlay Wolfe* worksheet, followed by the *Studying the Art Quilts of Michael A. Cummings* worksheet. Allow students to look at the websites for each and to sketch designs.

For the *Studying the Art Quilts of Victoria Findlay Wolfe* worksheet, first remind students that Victoria Findlay Wolfe was working with the traditional quilt design called, "Double Wedding Ring." Show students examples of this traditional pattern online. Help students identify the units of repeating blocks in the "Double Wedding Ring" examples. Suggest that they look for quilts at the Smithsonian Museum that feature geometric repeating quilt blocks such as those found in the "Double Wedding Ring" example.



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Studio Production (three to four 45 minute class periods)

After students have investigated the websites and have created some sketched ideas of quilt designs, have them choose a design to finalize as a paper-patched quilt. Provide a backing paper. A large sheet allows students room to work and can always be trimmed later if not filled. Demonstrate some ways of working. For example, paper can be torn or cut and formed into organic shapes. Or, rulers and stencils can be used to make clean-lined geometric shapes. Students can glue the pieces to the paper to form an overall design. After creating their paper collage quilt image, show students how to add hand stitching using needle and thread on paper. Or, they can make zigzag style lines to resemble Michael A. Cummings's zigzag stitching. Show students how to add small embellishments with stitching or glue if they choose.

Extensions

Extend this lesson by having students use fabric to make small-sized quilts, using their paper designs as patterns. Students also might work in collaborative groups to make a small quilt for which they each contribute a quilt square, again based on their earlier research and investigations. A six or eight inch square would be a reasonable size, expense and difficulty-wise. Materials needed include sewing needles, scissors, spools of thread, fabric for backing, flannel or quilt batting, and fabric for the patchwork top. Seeking donations of fabric scraps from faculty and parents can help defray expenses and provide plenty of variety.

Reflection

Have each student compose an artist's statement to accompany the display of the paper or fabric quilt designs. Suggest that they include their theme and their source of inspiration. Ask students to decide if their design would be better for a functional item or as an art quilt to be hung on a wall, and to note that on their statement.

Have students view their work as a class and choose themes that the different works seem to fit. They may choose groups by color, subject matter, style, etc. Encourage them to arrange the works and display them according to the themes they detect. Students may wish to include an introduction to the exhibition in which they describe the videos from Craft In America, the two artists who served as inspiration for their own work, and other aspects of their artistic process as a group.

Assessment

In discussions with the class and with individual students throughout the lesson; by examining the students' worksheets; and by witnessing the students' studio work, it should be evident that the student:



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- Sketched a traditional quilt design and altered it to make a new one.
- Created a paper and/or fabric quilt design that results from the investigation of the two artists.
- Organized their paper and/or fabric quilt designs in groups with similar themes.
- Answered whether their design would work better as a functional quilt (or other item) or as an art quilt.