

Projected Identities: A Contemporary Art Education Workshop

July 28 – August 1

9:00 am – 1:00 pm

Location: Kansas City Art Institute

“Projected Identities: A Contemporary Art Education Workshop” is an interdisciplinary graduate course for art educators who wish to explore ways of bringing together traditional art-making processes of drawing and painting with emerging medias of digital and projected imagery. In “Projected Identities,” learners fuse hand art-making processes with digital image manipulations and projected imagery in a series of exploratory artistic self-examinations. The purpose of this approach is to embed layers of autobiographical meaning and image by joining written reflections into a visual manifestation of personal memory and identity.

Projected Identity Unit Plan

I. Conceptual Framework

a. The Big Idea

- i. Self identity is a vital component of Ken Aptekar’s paintings; exploration of self will be the focus of this artmaking unit. Words, in particular, can trigger powerful emotions. In 1990, Aptekar began to explore “how language can stimulate memories and evoke empathy.” His 1994 painting *Was fur ein Name ist denn eigentlich Aptekar?* translates in English to “What kind of name is that, Aptekar?” Both this and his 1995 painting *Goldfinch. Used to be Foldfarb.* comment on “the cultural reality of name-changing to avoid ...anti-Semitism” and deal with his personal identity of Jewishness. *I watch him in the mirror*, 1995, is a memoir-like reminiscence of a neck tie knotting lesson from his father. Aptekar blends confessional autobiographical text with images appropriated from art history to comment upon his ethnicity, his identity as an artist, his self identity and memory of things said.

b. Key Concepts

- i. The words of others can trigger powerful personal and cultural emotions and leave lasting marks
 - ii. Language and images can blend to form deeply personal meaning in artmaking
 - iii. Autobiography can provoke meaningful examinations of self, of memory, and of one's place in the world
 - c. Essential Questions
 - i. What makes you who you are?
 - ii. How might things said to you have a profound effect on your life?
 - iii. How might ideas be "layered" to create dialogue with viewers?
 - iv. What is the role of the "viewer" in an artwork?
 - d. Key Artistic Concepts
 - i. Meaningful artmaking involves a constructed base of knowledge for artmakers
 - ii. Self portraiture requires an examination of self and a representation of identity
 - iii. Words and pictures may be aesthetically arranged to function on multiple levels of artistic encounter

II. Supportive Instructional Activities

- a. Key concepts about the Big Idea
 - i. Who am I?
 - 1. Create a chart with the following categories: people, things, experiences, and words. What makes you *you*? Under each, list as many entries as possible that go into the makeup of your identity.
 - ii. How powerful are words?
 - 1. Using pictures and word balloons, create a short cartoon strip with you as the narrator. Visually describe the single most important thing anyone has ever told you; describe the worst thing you've ever heard; the saddest thing anyone has ever said to you. In the last panel of your cartoon strip, describe how the words of others can make you feel about yourself.
 - iii. Redefining the viewer.
 - 1. In groups of four or five, describe the characteristics of a typical art "viewer."
 - 2. As a group, "create" a new art viewer. Decide what it means to redefine viewership. What might a different role for a viewer look like? What would have to change to make this change happen?
- b. Relevant artists and artworks
 - i. Similarities
 - 1. Ken Aptekar, Cindy Sherman, Keith Haring, and Barbara Kruger

- a. Read a short description of each artist's work (no visuals are attached). Each artist has a distinctive style, approach and interest in big ideas.
 - b. View a presentation of various works from each artmaker. Can you identify which artist created which works, based only upon written description of their ideas?
 - c. Describe the ways in which the body of works presented are similar. What are their common traits? Can you identify their "big ideas?"
- ii. Context
 - 1. Examine Pablo Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, and graphic designer Milton Glaser's album cover portrait of Bob Dylan.
 - 2. What, if any, meaning do you attribute to the portraits? Would the artworks' meaning still be relevant if painted today? How might each artist's work be constructed differently had they been created in our contemporary world?
- c. Relevant artistic ideas
 - i. Jan Van Eyck is credited with painting complex and nearly-photographically detailed oils, possibly with the assistance of a mechanical device called a *camera lucida*. Ken Aptekar paints using a classical approach to oil painting. However, he composes and arranges his artworks by using a computer, scanner, printer, and other digital media.
 - ii. Self-portraiture has been practiced by artmakers for centuries.
 - iii. Words have complemented visual art for centuries, dating back to illuminated manuscripts in the Middle Ages.
 - iv. Artworks have been embedded with meaning and symbolism for centuries. Often the meaning of symbolism can become lost or distorted with time; ideas, translations, contexts, and value systems can metamorphose.
 - v. Art medias are often a reflection of their age; especially in the Modern era, styles and media have undergone frequent examination and evaluation. Photography was for most of its history not considered to be an artform; it was considered a mechanical craft but was re-evaluated in the late 20th Century. Digital media, at first cautiously scrutinized, is now considered a valid form of art media.
 - vi. Layered meaning in the form of symbols, words, and implicit meaning have long been incorporated into works of art. Collage and photo montage, in the early 20th Century, began a trend toward greater layering of images and ideas. New art medias have made possible more complex visual ideas that allow symbols, metaphors, literal vision, and concept to merge into a single visual process.

- d. Building a body of knowledge
 - i. Compare and contrast
 - 1. Ken Aptekar and Rembrandt
 - a. Rembrandt painted more self-portraits than any of his contemporaries. Why do you think that was? Would you consider his self-portraits to be autobiographical in nature? Why or why not?
 - b. Ken Aptekar creates works that can be described as autobiographical. Would you need to know more about the artmaker to better understand his work? What kinds of things would you need to know to help you to better understand? How would you go about finding out such things?
 - c. Choose one thing you'd like to better understand about each artist. Research to see if these ideas are accessible. Ask yourself if the understanding you are seeking might also be applied to the *other* artist.

III. Artmaking Activities

- a. Exploring the Big Idea: "Projected Identities." Projected Identities is a series of artmaking explorations of self.
 - i. At some point in your life someone has told you something important, an idea that you find hard to forget. Phrases might be something like, "good job!" "that was really stupid," "I love you" or "what did you do to your hair?" Translate this verbal idea into a visual design by designing and hand-cutting the phrase into a linoleum block. Select a variety of natural papers and hand print your lettering.
 - ii. Select one of your prints to photograph with a digital camera. Don't shoot it "head on" – try various angles and compositions.
 - iii. Create a "projection" self-portrait. Create a tightly cropped full frontal self-portrait using a digital camera. Use a digital projector to project the image of the hand-lettered phrase over your face. Again, try various configurations to reach a pleasing arrangement. The idea is to project words that you consider to be of importance to yourself onto yourself.
 - iv. In your journal, create a short work of prose in which each of six lines begin with the phrase, "I am" ...for example: "I am an artist" or "I am a brother." Each statement should be important, meaningful, and truthful reflections of yourself.
 - v. Again using the digital camera, photograph your journal page of prose. Create your photograph as the page appears – leave scrawls or marks on the page unaltered.
 - vi. Using Photoshop, combine the digital images of self-portrait and journal into a photomontage. Select meaningful words from the two messages to be repeated throughout your montage. You may also choose to photograph additional objects that hold personal

meaning of *remembrance* for you; these may be included in your overall composition. As you overlay one message onto another, give consideration to how the two relate. How are they different? How do you feel after reading them together? Does the overlapping of messages change the meaning of your self-portrait? You may add words or phrases to your montage that reflect your re-appraisal of self.

- vii. Design or select a symbol that is meaningful to you and your montage. Include it in a transparent layer in a conspicuous place in your composition.
- viii. Print your montage as a poster.
- ix. Project your montage using the digital projector. Fill the artroom with the visual representation of you. Invite classmates to be a part of your identity, “to project your identity onto others.” Video tape their encounter with art as your montage is projected onto them.

IV. Assessment

- a. Understanding of the Big Idea – formal
 - i. Describe what makes a “big idea.”
 - ii. What makes a “big idea” difficult to work with?
 - iii. Describe a “big idea” that you’d like to work with on a future artmaking project.
 - iv. How might a “big idea” be helpful in considering other subject areas?
- b. Analysis of the essential questions – self reflections
 - i. What makes you who you are?
 1. Have your ideas changed since beginning the unit? In what ways?
 - ii. How might things said to you have a profound effect on your life?
 1. How did you represent these ideas visually? In what ways were you successful? How might you do things differently in the future?
 2. Have you considered how things *you* say might affect *others*?
 - iii. How might ideas be “layered” to create dialogue with viewers?
 1. How might you use this concept in a different work? Using a different “big idea?”
 - iv. What is the role of “viewer” in an artwork?
 1. What role did participants have? Were they viewers or participants? By becoming part of the projection, did viewers become part of the artwork? If so, were they also in some way, also artmakers? Explain.
- c. Synthesis of artistic concepts – observation
 - i. Did the learner understand basic concepts?
 - ii. Did the learner apply concepts to new situations?

- iii. Did the learner manipulate both forms of expression: text and image?
- iv. Did the learner find ways to add appropriate details or combine ideas?