

Frame x Frame: Re-imagining the Everyday

A LACMA PROGRAM FOR 6TH - 9TH GRADE STUDENTS

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

This guide is designed to help you prepare students for their visit to LACMA and extend learning upon returning to the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Artists find inspiration everywhere. By examining the things of day-to-day life, artists reflect on contemporary culture and explore connections between everyday objects and their own identities and/or values. At the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), students will discuss how artists have discovered and instilled new meanings in commonplace subjects and then made choices about which materials and formats best express their ideas.

In *Frame x Frame: Re-imagining the Everyday*, students will discover how artists use the tools and media available to them to re-interpret ordinary subject matter. In a 60-minute artist-led tour, students will observe and analyze four works of art in which artists have explored the properties or uses of common objects and gestures and then portrayed them with unexpected materials, in unusual contexts, or in unique ways.

Following the artist-led tour, students will participate in a 60-minute animation activity. They will have the opportunity to transform and activate their own drawings of everyday objects through the use of animation software. In doing so, they are utilizing contemporary tools to explore a theme that can be traced across art-works of many types of media created over the span of centuries.

Whether using video, Plexiglas, or oil paint, artists continually find innovative ways to articulate their vision. In today's world of ever-changing technologies, contemporary artists are constantly experimenting with new tools, often fluctuating back and forth between traditional and new media, and selecting the tool that will best express their idea. With the proliferation of accessible and affordable editing and animation software programs, today's students are increasingly able to create works of art using moving images – just as filmmakers have been doing since the early twentieth century and artists have been for decades.

The *Frame x Frame: Re-imagining the Everyday* program challenges students to analyze how artists have explored a common theme across genres and time periods and to think critically about how best to explore the same theme in their own way using contemporary tools.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Before the Museum Visit

Practice Animation Concepts by Creating Flip Books

During your visit to LACMA, students will create a video animation using AnimAction software. Prepare students for the activity by having them make flip books that depict simple movements. Distribute index cards (approximately 10 per student), hole punches, brads, and pencils, and then have students complete the following:

1. Punch a hole through the top of the stack of index cards.
2. Insert the brad through the hole.
3. Warm up by animating a bouncing ball. Starting on the last page of the stack of index cards, draw the ball using only the bottom third of the index card.
4. Each index card should depict the ball moving a little bit more from left to right. Don't forget to depict the flattened or squished part of the ball when it hits the ground.
5. Now try animating a simple action with a stick figure. Turn your flip book over so that you have blank pages. Choose an action to depict, such as swimming, jumping, or playing basketball.
6. After completing a first draft of the flip book, consider what additional drawings or details would make the animation more fluid. Add drawings on new index cards if necessary.

After students complete their flip books, lead a discussion about what students learned about the animation process. In what ways were they surprised or challenged by the process? What techniques did they discover that resulted in a more effective animation?

Write About an Ordinary Object in a New Way

At LACMA, students will discuss how artists have depicted ordinary objects in unexpected ways. Introduce students to this theme through writing exercises. Have students select an object that they use every day and then choose from any of the following writing prompts:

- Write about a day in the life of your chosen object from the perspective of the object. How do you think the object feels when you use it? What does it do when it's not being used?
- Imagine that the object was discovered on another planet, where no one would know the common uses of the object. Consider its properties, design, and material(s). Write a story about an alien who discovers the object and begins using it in a surprising way.
- Picture the object growing ten times larger or shrinking ten times smaller. Write about your encounter seeing the object at its new scale. How would you react to the difference in size? How would your relationship with the object change? What can you do with it now?

After the writing assignment, ask students to discuss how they see ordinary objects differently. What did they discover about an object's properties or potential functions that they had not noticed before?

Giant Pool Balls, 1967

CLAES OLDENBURG

Artist Claes Oldenburg critiques the language of mass culture with playfulness and humor. His 1967 sculptural installation *Giant Pool Balls* is characteristic of the artist's interest in exploring how everyday objects can be made fantastical, outlandish, or unexpected through transformations in scale, size, or material.

By recreating everyday objects in extraordinary ways, Oldenburg calls attention to an object's most essential properties. The pool balls, for example, are not duplications that have merely been enlarged; rather, Oldenburg retains their geometric forms and bold colors but omits the stripes and numbers.

Initially a painter of mostly abstract figures, Oldenburg turned to the representation of everyday objects when he found the work of his Abstract Expressionist contemporaries too academic. He felt this subject matter allowed him to relate to and communicate with a wider public. In his 1961 installation *The Store*, he created an environment of wrinkled, rough-hewn sculptures of clothing and food, each available to be sold. Oldenburg offers a hand-made alternative to mass-produced goods while also highlighting the idea of art as a product that is bought and sold by collectors and museums.

Due to Oldenburg's examination of mass production and use of everyday objects, his work became associated with Pop art, a movement that responded to the pervasiveness of reproductions – of billboards, advertising, and mass media – by using similar techniques of mass production to depict familiar subject matter. Essentially, Pop art is characterized by its blatant copying of copies.

In a 1961 exhibition catalogue, Oldenburg explains his position on using everyday objects in the art world, where high-end, luxury objects are celebrated:

I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic, if necessary, or violent, or whatever is necessary. I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips, and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself.

Whether the artist creates sculptures of a soft toilet or a gigantic cherry unrealistically balanced on an even larger spoon, Oldenburg asks viewers to examine the similarities and differences between a real-life object and his re-imagined version.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Look closely at the picture of the work of art. What words come to mind?
- How is the artwork similar to or different from an actual set of racked pool balls?
- What aspects of a pool ball's properties does the artist choose to highlight? Why might an artist be drawn to these properties?
- How does the scale of the objects affect your interpretation of the work of art?
- How does the placement of the balls within the rack (as opposed to dispersing the balls around the gallery) affect your interpretation?
- Read the above quote by Oldenburg on why he creates art inspired by everyday objects. In what ways is this approach to art different than other works of art you've discussed in class? What kind of art are you for?



GIGANT POOL BALLS, 1967

Claes Oldenburg (Sweden, Stockholm, born 1929)

© Claes Oldenburg

Sculpture, Fiberglass and metal, Each ball: 24 in. (60.96 cm)

Overall: 24 x 120 x 108 in. (60 x 304.8 x 274.32 cm)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Anonymous gift through the Contemporary Art Council (M.69.88a-q)

Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA

Actual Size, 1962

ED RUSCHA

Considered the foremost Los Angeles Pop artist, Ed Ruscha is most known for his paintings of seemingly ordinary words. As in his painting *Actual Size*, his works often include words that are pulled from popular culture or media and placed alongside or in front of images. *Actual Size* depicts both a can of Spam and the word “SPAM” in all caps in its familiar yellow font. Although the image of the can is a realistic rendering of a Spam can’s actual size, the portrayal of the can – painted with yellow trails like a comet plunging through space – is anything but realistic.

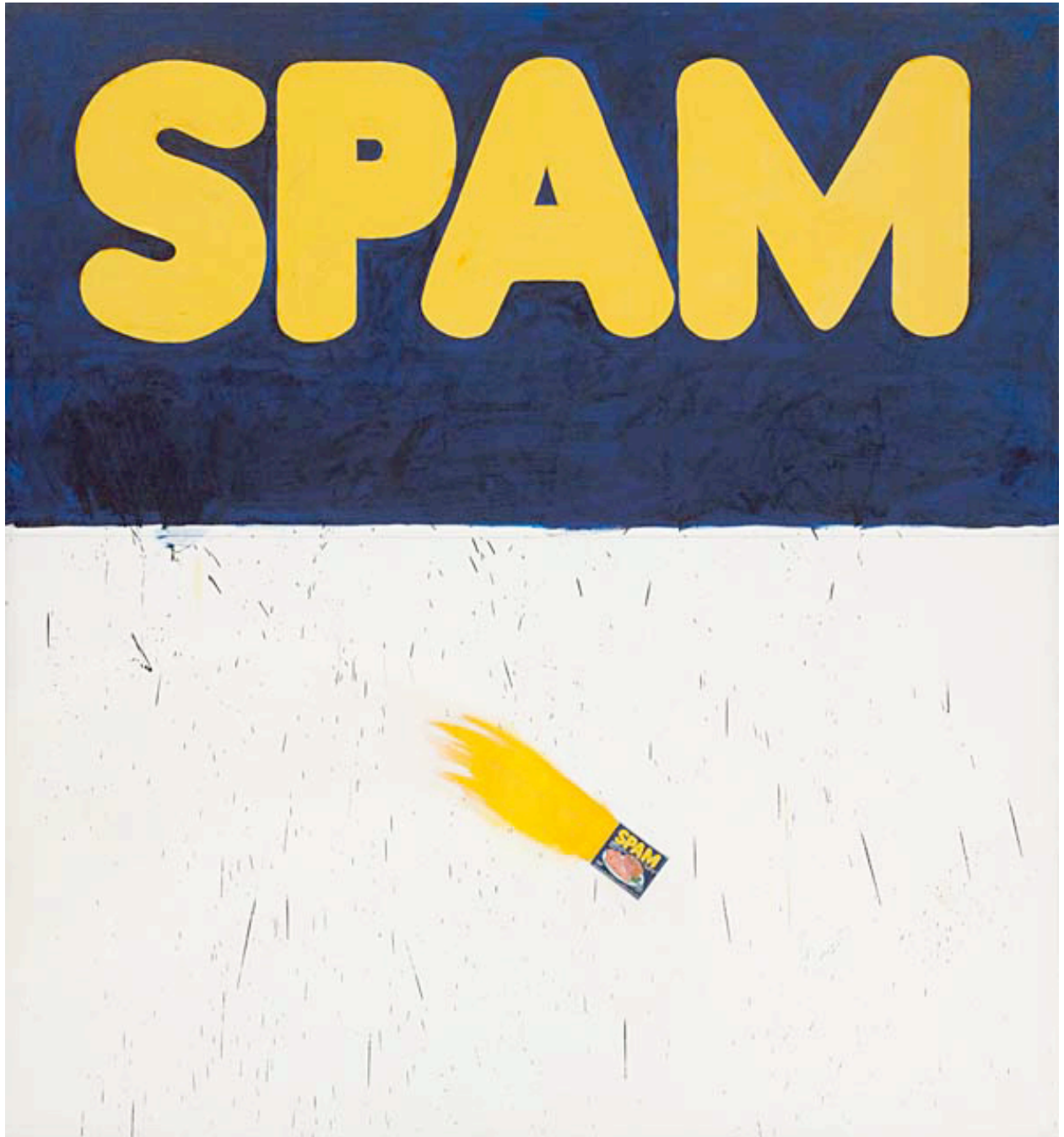
Ruscha came of age in post-World War II America, a time of unparalleled economic growth and cultural change. An expanding middle class experienced new forms of convenience such as pre-made foods purchased at large supermarkets. Massive billboards were erected to promote these products to consumers as they traveled along the country’s ever-growing roadways. Ruscha’s work focuses on a particular aspect of a mass-produced, media-rich world, thereby allowing viewers to see it in a new light, as a subject worthy of art. By isolating a word or phrase and placing it in new, often witty or surreal, contexts, he allows its significance in American culture to resonate.

The juxtaposition of the word “SPAM” next to an image of a Spam can reminds viewers that the visual treatment of letters and words can convey meaning and trigger associations. Words can function as art in and of themselves. Ruscha once said, *I always looked at a word like it was a horizontal bunch of abstract shapes, which is really what it is. And I always liked that horizontalness, and I think it gets into other aspects of my work, too.*

In addition to his attraction to the horizontal, Ruscha often employs a strong diagonal in his works, such as *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas* (1963), in which strong diagonal lines convey perspective and activate what might otherwise be an ordinary, dull gas station. Having received training in graphic design and having worked as a magazine layout designer, Ruscha is accustomed to the careful planning necessary to depict an orderly arrangement of shapes. Through his paintings, Ruscha exerts a sense of order in a world where a multiplicity of signs, development, gas stations, and products can create chaos.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Take the time to look closely at the picture of the painting *Actual Size*. What is your initial reaction? What did the artist do that could have elicited this reaction?
- What are your associations with the product Spam? How are these associations similar to or different from the two representations of Spam in the painting?
- Compare the two representations of Spam. How does scale affect your reaction to each representation? Which representation is more realistic?
- What is communicated by the image of the Spam can that is not communicated by the word “SPAM,” and vice versa? How would the painting change if either the word or the can were depicted on its own?
- How does the artist use color to direct your attention?
- Why do you think the artist chose to depict Spam in an oil painting? What might Spam convey about American culture?



ACTUAL SIZE, 1962

Ed Ruscha (United States, Nebraska, Omaha, born 1937)

© Edward J. Ruscha IV. All rights reserved.

Painting, Oil on canvas, 67¹/₁₆ x 72¹/₁₆ in. (170.2 x 182.9 cm)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Anonymous gift through the Contemporary Art Council (M.63.14)

Contemporary Art Department.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

After the Museum Visit

Create Animations in Collaborative Teams

After students create animations at LACMA, have them work in teams of four to produce a longer animation. All you need is a camcorder, a copy stand to hold the video camera, a computer, paper, pencils, colored pencils, and animation software (e.g., AnimAction). Here are a few activities to try:

- Choose a protagonist from among the everyday objects that students animated at LACMA. What problem could the character face and how did he/she/it solve the problem? Create a brief animated story with a beginning, middle, and end.
- Select an ordinary object that could be used as a symbol of an important issue facing youth today. Use the object in an animation that communicates your viewpoint on the issue.
- Choose an object that was featured in an artwork at LACMA. Consider all of the object's uses and properties. Animate the object in twelve different ways to surprise, puzzle, or delight viewers.

Have students choose one of the following roles:

1. Brainstorm an outline for the video
2. Create the storyboard
3. Create the drawings for the animation
4. Color the drawings and add a credit screen

Re-envision, Re-appropriate

Discuss how artists at LACMA use scale, transformation, personification, or juxtaposition to engage viewers with ordinary objects in unique ways, and then try any of these activities:

- Re-appropriate an object featured in a work of art that you viewed at LACMA. Select the medium of your choice to re-create the object in 2-D or 3-D and then transform the object so that it expresses something about your identity, values, or traditions. For example, how might you alter Nam Jun Paik's television sets so that they communicate an aspect of your identity?
- Consider how increased access to video editing software has given artists new tools to express ideas. Using video editing software, juxtapose found footage (without copyright restrictions) with text or narration to tell a new story or express a different viewpoint.
- Connect to a story or novel discussed in English class. Excerpt words from the text and use it as a basis to create art. Use scale, transformation, or juxtaposition to convey a major theme or issue the text explores.

ANIMATION AND MEDIA RESOURCES

Now that your students have a taste of making digital animations using drawing and computer software, you can lead art projects using other technology available to you. Below are just a few free options that can be used to create a variety of animation and video artworks in your classroom. These are accessible resources to pass along to your students for independent work outside of school as well.

Free Computer Software:

Frame Thief (for Mac)

Animator DV Simple Plus (for PC)

Apps for Phones and iPad:

Animation Express (free for iPad)

Stick Draw on Google Play

iMotion HD (free for iPhone)

A few video artworks from artists who use animation in their work follow. The videos are easily accessible to show in your classroom to inspire students in their art making processes or to relay to your students for out-of-school time projects:

Harry Smith – experimental animator and filmmaker, anthropologist and musician.

Video to watch: *No. 11 Mirror Animations*, 1956

Norman McClaren – pioneer animator, known for drawing on film, visual music, abstraction, and pixilation

Video to watch: *Dots*, 1940

William Kentridge – South African artist known for automatic writing animations

Video to watch: *Automatic Writing*, 2003

Amy Kravitz – independent filmmaker and teacher specializing in abstract animation

Video to watch: *River Lethe*, 1985

Jan Svankmeyer – Czech filmmaker and animator, known for his surrealist work

Video to watch: *Alice (Neco z Alenky)*, 1988

Stan Brakhage – American non-narrative filmmaker who explored techniques including handheld camerawork, painting on film, in-camera editing and collage film.

Video to watch: *Mothlight*, 1963

Jules Engels – American filmmaker, animator, painter and sculptor

Video to Watch: *Carnival*, 1963 and *Train Landscape*, 1974

LEARN MORE

As a class, discuss any of the following related works of art. Or, have students conduct independent research that describes how the artists re-interpreted ordinary subjects.

- *The Leg* (1958) by Alberto Giacometti
<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=159149;type=101>
- *Single Basin Sink* (1985) by Robert Gober
<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=64368;type=101>
- *The Treachery of Images (This is Not a Pipe)* (1929) by René Magritte
<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=34438;type=101>
- *9½ Hours to SaFe* (2003–2004) by Nic Nicosia
<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=154685;type=101>
- *Campbell's Soup Can* (1964) by Andy Warhol
<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=142238;type=101>

ABOUT THE MUSEUM

LACMA is the largest encyclopedic museum in the western United States with more than 100,000 works of art. Through its far-reaching collections, the museum is both a resource to and a reflection of the many cultural communities and heritages in Southern California. The collection includes artworks from various cultures from the pre-historic to the present.

This guide was written by Theresa Sotto and edited by Sarah Jesse in partnership with the LACMA Education Department.

Education programs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art are supported in part by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the William Randolph Hearst Endowment Fund for Arts Education, and Rx for Reading.