

EIGHTH GRADE CURRICULUM MATERIALS

LACMA's Permanent Collection

THESSE CURRICULUM MATERIALS EXAMINE A BROAD RANGE OF ARTWORKS, each one of which addresses political and social issues. The six objects highlighted here are all from the permanent collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). As students study these pieces, encourage them to consider the ways in which these artists make social comments or protest social conditions.

The artists discussed here were all born in the twentieth century and represent a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Although they use a wide range of materials in their work, each artist explores issues of identity, both individual and collective. The artists are also often aware of historical events or conditions, which are then juxtaposed with contemporary experiences. Students can discuss the political and social content of these works as well as the artists' choice of materials and display.

Each of these six objects is accompanied by a description of the object and background information about the artist who created the work. Suggested activities for looking, thinking, writing, and art-making are included to assist students as they explore the artworks and related historical materials. The curriculum was developed in alignment with Grade Eight California State Content Standards for Visual Arts and English Language Arts. It is designed for classroom use and intended to stimulate critical thinking, support creative expression, and promote meaningful experiences with works of art.

This curriculum was written by Jennifer Miller, edited by the LACMA Education Department, and designed by Jenifer Shell and Eunice Lee for *Art Programs with the Community: LACMA On-Site*.

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Untitled (You Substantiate Our Horror)

1985, BARBARA KRUGER

IN *UNTITLED (YOU SUBSTANTIATE OUR HORROR)*, Barbara Kruger uses the familiar forms of advertising and propaganda. Over ten feet high, this triptych provides the viewer with an extreme close-up of a black-and-white photograph of the head of a woman. The woman holds her hand up to her face, perhaps in an expression of grief. The monumental scale of the work emphasizes the woman's worn hand and the lines of her face as her brows draw together and her skin tightens with emotion. The enlarged photograph is headlined by the words "You substantiate our" in large white type on a black background. The word "horror" is spelled out with unevenly spaced letters in a heavy black type on a white background overlaying the lower portion of the image of the woman. Each of the three images is framed in a vivid red.

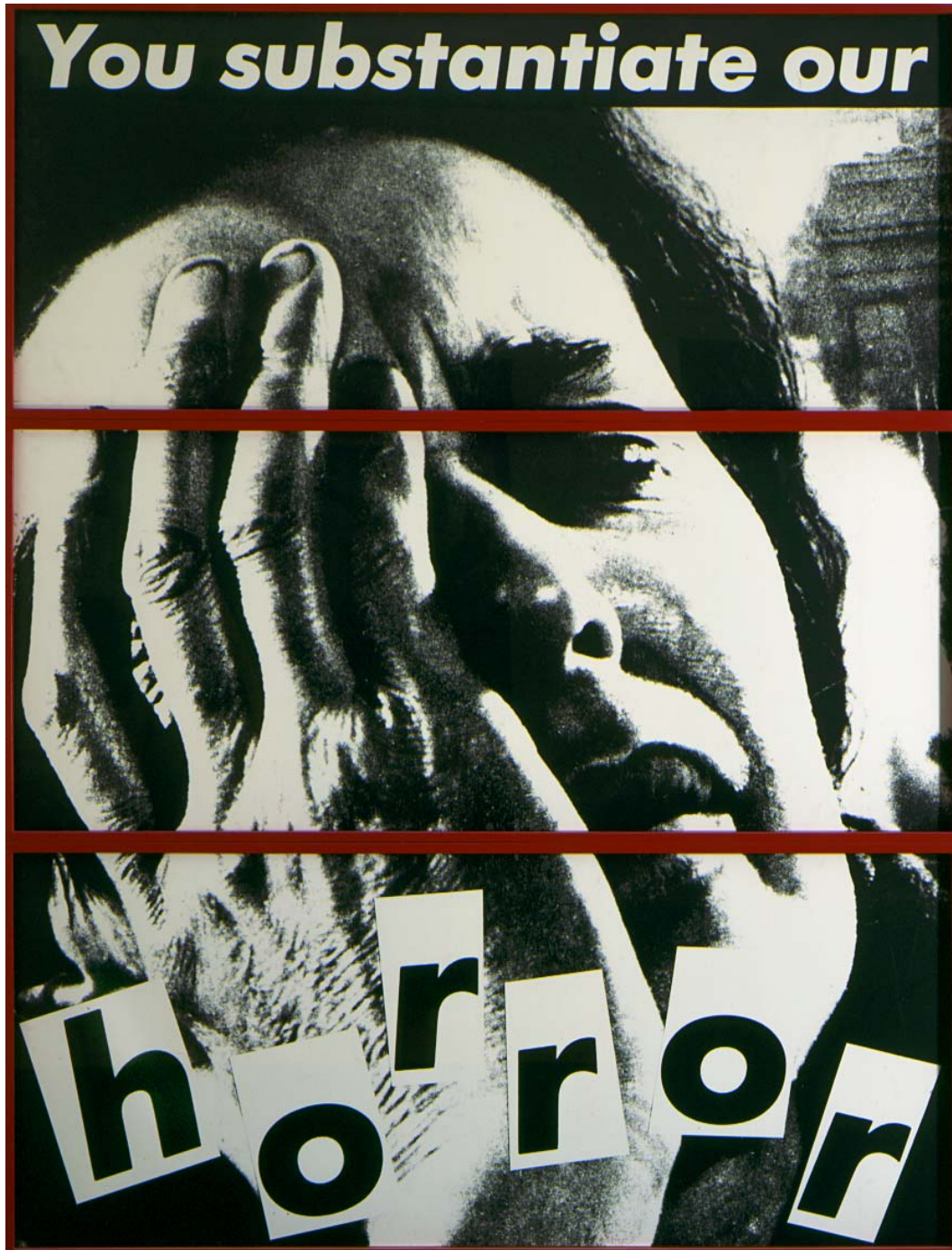
- *Discuss the combination of text and image. What is the impact of the text on the image? How does the artist's arrangement of the word horror against this image influence your interpretation of the work? What is the message of this work? To whom is it addressed?*

Kruger was born in Newark, New Jersey. She studied in New York at Syracuse University's School of Visual Arts and subsequently at Parson's School of Design. Successful in the commercial field at a young age, she worked for the fashion magazine *Mademoiselle*, where she was quickly made head designer. In her work as a fine artist, her graphic design experience characterizes her work. Using the techniques of production, visual format, typography, and exclamatory language of advertising, Kruger has created unique works of art. She also designs billboards, book covers, T-shirts, and posters, which are intended to carry her message to a large number of people. In addition to her work as an artist, Kruger communicates her ideas through her work as a teacher, writer, curator,

editor, and critic.. Kruger's use of the forms of mass communication, advertising and propaganda – which are usually associated with commercialism and the authority of the government – inverts many of these traditional associations. She employs the visual strategies of advertising and propaganda to capture the attention of the viewer and raise different questions. She often tries to expose gender inequities that underlie the messages of the commercial media, to demonstrate how deeply ingrained sexism is in our lives, and to display how much we are controlled by consumer values. Employing the techniques of a graphic designer, she lays out the image and pastes the text. The work is sent to a printer for enlargement and duplication. Small black-and-white photographs blown up to a grand scale take on new meanings in conjunction with the text. Red frames and red type often provide the only color in Kruger's images.

Kruger's work examines how words and pictures function in our society. Pronoun usage in her text is significant. In *Untitled (You Substantiate Our Horror)*, the "You" and the "Our" present ambiguous readings, while also implicating the viewer. How does the woman's grief connect with the text? What is the cause of the woman's horror? Using a visual language that is familiar to and easily understood by many people, Barbara Kruger challenges the viewer to examine the images we see everyday more critically – to be active observers.

- *Conduct your own critical examination of advertising in such popular media as magazines or billboards. Discuss how women are represented in different examples and contrast this with the representation of men. What are the differences? Find an advertising image (or images) and combine it with text to challenge a conventional reading of the image.*



BARBARA KRUGER
(UNITED STATES, B. 1945)

UNTITLED (*YOU SUBSTANTIATE OUR HORROR*), 1985

GELATIN-SILVER PRINT, 123 x 93 IN.

RALPH M. PARSONS FUND M.87.132A-C

© BARBARA KRUGER. PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

Gris Gris Guardian

1990–1993, BETYE SAAR

BETYE SAAR CREATED THIS FREESTANDING ALTAR-like sculpture made of two wooden boxes on four straight, square legs. The basic rectangular forms of the construction are adorned with a variety of objects contained by the boxes and the painted decoration. *Gris Gris Guardian* is painted with a fairly large and irregular dappled pattern in different metallic colors. This all-over pattern functions as a cohesive background for a diverse assembly of candles, bottles, stones, incense, straw, bones, and other objects. The upper shelf of the altar features a corn doll and is crowned with a fan-shaped pediment. A large white candle is situated in front of a dark figure in the center of the bottom, larger box. Two red columns are positioned on each side of the lower box, framing the objects inside and giving the work the architectural substance of a grand altar.

- *Examine the details of this work. What types of objects did the artist include? What places, peoples, and beliefs do you associate with these individual objects or fragments?*

Gris Gris Guardian was originally part of an installation called *The House of Gris Gris* (1990). Betye Saar and her daughter, the artist Alison Saar, created the installation at UCLA's Wight Art Gallery. In 1993 Betye Saar added to *Gris Gris Guardian* and transformed it into an independent work. The title has multiple meanings. The word *gris* is French for gray and is used in the French Caribbean for gray magic (as opposed to white or black magic), a conjuring magic. It is also a term for an amulet or incantation tradition used by black Africans. There is also a vodoun (voodoo) concept of gris-gris as a magic or a spiritual object. The objects and fragments assembled in this piece are from all over the world. Saar has stated that the corn doll on the upper shelf of the altar is Native American. The finials on the top edge of the upper box are from the Philippines. The incense is from India, the eyes of the lower figure are from Mexico, and the fan-shaped pediment at the top of the sculpture is from

Bali. The colored dots refer to Aboriginal painting motifs and to various skin colors. By combining objects from so many different cultures, the sculpture suggests a spirituality that is universal rather than specific to a single religion or culture.

- *Create an altar or three-dimensional sculpture using found objects. What different types of objects would you include? How does the combination of different objects create new meanings?*

A native of Los Angeles, Betye Saar is of African American, Irish, and Native American descent. She was educated in Los Angeles and established herself as an artist in the 1960s and 1970s. Saar practices assemblage, or works of art that are created through the assembly of objects or fragments of objects that were not initially intended to be used as materials for art-making.

Saar's work in this medium is inspired by a number of experiences and sources. As a child, she would visit her grandmother in Watts, just a few blocks away from the site where Simon Rodia was constructing the famous Watts Towers using broken dishes, pieces of glass, rocks, shells, and other objects to decorate the tall metal spires and masonry walls. As a technique, assemblage was particularly significant in California, flourishing in Los Angeles in the 1960s.

Saar uses found objects in combination with personal mementos to create works that are often both autobiographical and evocative of the outside world. By combining images from American popular culture, folk culture, and urban street culture with the symbolism of African and other non-Western cultures, the artist encourages her audience to think about issues of race, gender, culture in our history, and our contemporary society.

- *Discuss the different ways that we describe our identities — race, cultural heritage, gender, religion, residence, profession, activity, and so on. Are some affiliations more important to you than others? How do you negotiate and balance the various ideals and beliefs of different communities?*



BETYE SAAR

(UNITED STATES, B. 1926)

GRIS GRIS GUARDIAN, 1990–1993

MIXED MEDIA ASSEMBLAGE, 28 x 11 x 7½ IN.

PURCHASE WITH FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE RICHARD FLORSHEIM ART FUND
AND THE MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART COUNCIL AC1996.162.1

© BETYE SAAR. PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

Tales of the Conquest–Codex II

1992, ENRIQUE CHAGOYA

THE TEN PAGES OF ENRIQUE CHAGOYA'S *TALES OF the Conquest–Codex II* combine the familiar imagery of popular culture icons with icons of religion, European art, horror comics, and less familiar images from pre-Columbian books. Each page offers a pastiche of images and times. One page features an army tank being pelted by the arrows of the surrounding indigenous warriors of the past. On another, Super-man (who appears on many pages of the codex) bursts out of what appears to be a page from an ancient text with his red cape flying and the sun shining behind him. A grossly enlarged Mickey Mouse engages with cartoonlike ancient warriors. A floating, futuristic metallic head shoots metal bullets from its eyes at a pre-Columbian sculpture. In another image, Pablo Picasso's famous painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* and Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* overlap an image of a robed artist at work. Wonder Woman, the Virgin Mary, and other symbols of ancient cultures and contemporary media mingle in Chagoya's narrative.

- Identify the popular images and cultural icons that the artist uses in this codex. What do you think were the original contexts for these images? How does Chagoya's combination of images alter their meanings?

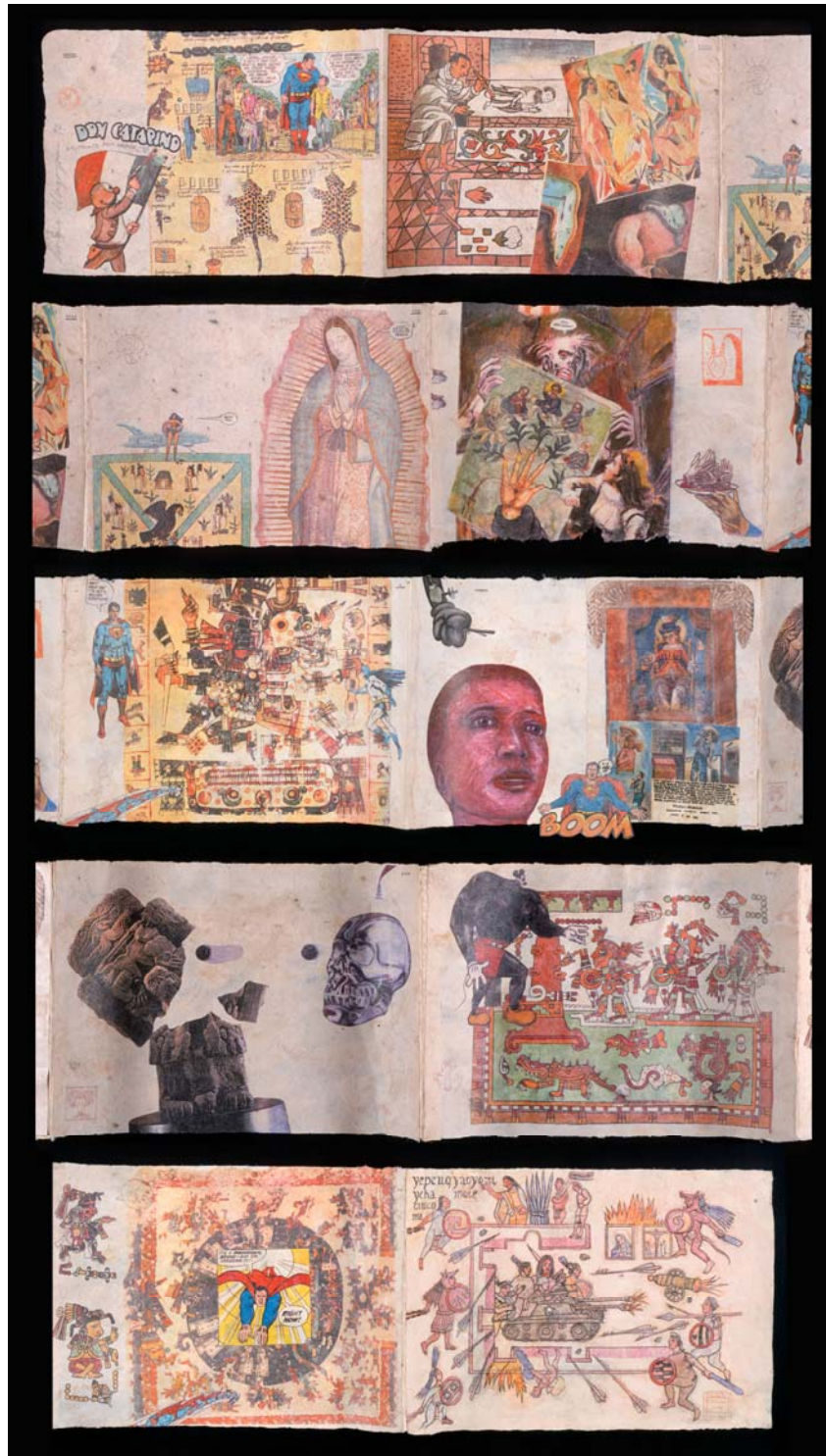
Enrique Chagoya was born and raised in Mexico City, and has worked in the United States for approximately thirty years. He credits the influence of his childhood nurse, a Nahuatl Indian, with his early interest in the indigenous peoples of Mexico and their history. As a teenager, Chagoya, like many college and high school students in Mexico in the 1960s, became politically active. The artist attended the National Autonomous University of Mexico where he studied art and economics. During this time, he also created political cartoons for union newsletters. He moved to Berkeley in 1977 and worked as a freelance graphic designer and illustrator. He received his formal art training at the San Francisco Art Institute in the early

1980s. Following that experience, Chagoya worked as the director of the Galeria de la Raza, helping to establish it as an important venue for Chicano art in San Francisco. Chagoya's early political activism has continued to find expression in his community involvement and his artistic production.

The artist's work can be situated in a history of Mexican and Mexican-American social and political satire. In an artist's statement, Chagoya has reiterated that history is written by those who win wars, and the history and culture of the conquered or oppressed often disappears or is transformed. Chagoya appropriates pre-Columbian, contemporary comic book, and Old Master images in his work to create his own narrative, one that is nonlinear and can be interpreted in many different ways. High and popular cultures interact, and popular icons often do battle with the images of cultures that have been oppressed and destroyed. Mickey Mouse and Superman appear frequently in his work. For Chagoya, these icons are the deceptively innocuous faces of an oppressive culture.

The artist's codices are modeled after the ancient books of the Aztecs and Mayans, which were on folded pages of Amate paper (a bark paper) and read from right to left. He uses Mesoamerican (Mayan, Olmec, and Aztec) glyphs, including pictograms and hieroglyphs. He incorporates a wide variety of images into his pictures, most notably comics and pre-Columbian art. In works like *Tales of the Conquest–Codex II*, Chagoya refers to the conquest of the Americas, which began in the late fifteenth century, and to the destruction of the written histories of ancient Mesoamerican cultures. He notes that only a small number of pre-Columbian books survived the destruction of the great Mesoamerican libraries. Combining images from surviving texts with those from the dominant culture, the artist challenges the conventional construction of history.

- Discuss the different ways you might interpret this codex. How should it be read? What stories do the various scenes tell? What message is conveyed? Do you think this is an effective medium for making a political or social statement? Why or why not?



ENRIQUE CHAGOYA

(MEXICO, ACTIVE UNITED STATES, B. 1953)

TALES OF THE CONQUEST — CODEX II, 1992

MIXED MEDIA ON HANDMADE PAPER, 16½ X 117¼ X 4¼ IN.

GIFT OF ANN AND AARON NISENSEN IN MEMORY OF MICHAEL NISENSEN AC1995.183.10A-E

© ENRIQUE CHAGOYA. PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

Atrabiliarios

1993, DORIS SALCEDO

ATRABILARIOS IS COMPRISED OF FIVE SHOES installed inside a gallery wall. The three sections of the work are covered with a thin membrane made from a cow's bladder that is stitched to the wall with black surgical thread. The membrane forms a hazy yellowish shroud for the empty shoes behind. The shoes, both solitary and in pairs, appear ghostly behind their translucent coverings.

The title of the work, *Atrabiliarios*, is a nineteenth-century Spanish word that is not in common usage. The closest English translation is *atrabilios*, which means given to or marked by melancholy, but Salcedo prefers that the title not be translated. Discussing her choice of objects, Salcedo states, "I use a shoe because whenever there is a death or people buried in a mass grave, there is always a shoe left lying around. . . . A shoe is a very personal object . . . it bears the marks, the story of the person who no longer wears it."

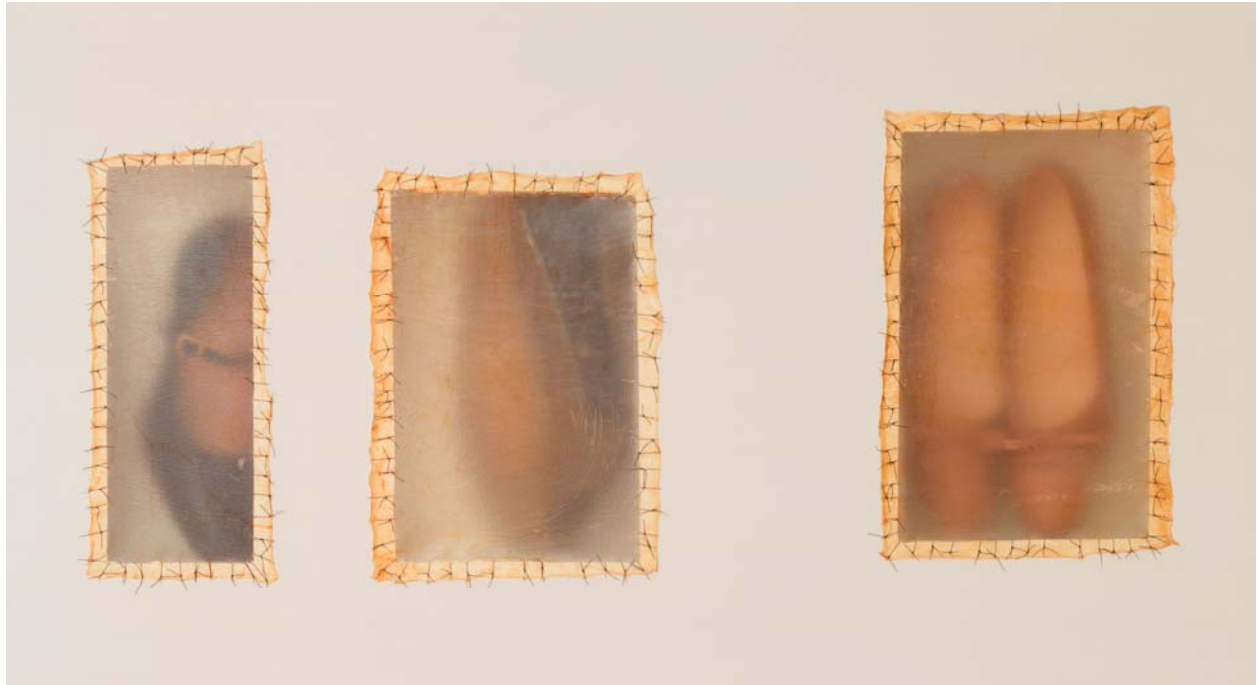
- *Does this work evoke any particular feeling or emotion? What feelings does it evoke? How do you think the artist achieves this response?*

Doris Salcedo is a Colombian artist. Born in Bogotá, she currently lives and works there. In 1984 the artist moved to New York to study sculpture at New York University, but she has remained committed to her country. Her art refers to the violence that plagues Colombia. Drug cartels, paramilitary organizations, guerrilla fighters, and the government all contribute to the country's ongoing violence. For many people in the United States, the death tolls in other nations are often reduced to statistics, understood only in the abstract.

Salcedo's work makes these distant statistics much more immediate and individual through her use of personal objects and materials. Her medium is assemblage. She uses everyday objects like clothing and furniture, as well as organic material from animals and humans, in her work. The artist travels to remote Colombian villages to speak with survivors of violence. Some of the objects she employs were once the possessions of the victims. Rather than directly representing the violence of her homeland or making an overt political statement, Salcedo's sculptures evoke a generalized sense of loss. Salcedo memorializes those who have disappeared; the tone of her work is funerary rather than violent.

Atrabiliarios was part of a larger installation at the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art in 1991. Dozens of worn shoes were set in the museum walls in cryptlike spaces covered by the cow bladders. The shoes invited the audience to wonder about their owners. By drawing the viewer's attention to the individuals who are victims of violence and generating a sense of empathy, Salcedo makes it difficult to forget the violence and its perpetrators. Through this work, Salcedo creates a collective experience of loss and an enduring memorial.

- *In the news media, we are bombarded with stories and images of death and violence in distant places, as well as in our own communities. Discuss examples of art and architecture that serve as memorials to past events or evoke a feeling of loss. What is the function of a memorial? Who does it serve?*



DORIS SALCEDO
(COLOMBIA, B. 1958)
ATRABILARIOS, 1993

PLYWOOD, FIVE SHOES, COW BLADDER, AND SURGICAL THREAD, 13 X 29 X 5 IN.
GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. BARRY SMOOKE AC1998.48.1
© DORIS SALCEDO. PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

Gate

2005, Do-Ho SUH

ALTHOUGH THIS LARGE SILK GATE IS SUSPENDED from the ceiling by steel tubes, it appears to float, weightless. Intricately fabricated to replicate the tiles of the roof and the details of the masonry, the low archway invites the viewer to pass through. Despite its seeming ephemerality, Suh's *Gate* retains a sense of architectural monumentality.

- *Compare Suh's fabric Gate to one or more photographs of gateways. How do you imagine your experience of Gate would differ from the experience of passing through a solid gate in an outdoor space? What idea or ideas might the artist be trying to communicate with this work?*

Do-Ho Suh was born and raised in Korea. He attended Seoul National University, where he received his degree in painting. Suh came to the United States in 1991 to finish his art training and received a bachelor's degree from Rhode Island School of Design in painting and a master's degree in sculpture from Yale University. The artist now commutes between Seoul and New York. Suh's work often explores issues of the identity of the individual in an increasingly global society and invites the viewer to question how they experience space.

During the 1950s and 1960s in Korea, many old buildings were destroyed in the haste to modernize. Suh's father, a well-known South Korean painter and poet, gathered wood from a demolished palace building and used it to create a traditional scholar's house. The silk *Gate* of 2005 (one of an edition of two) is a full-size rendering

of one of the gates to Suh's parents' house in Seoul. The original gate has a low arch, which was intended to make those who pass through bow when entering the complex. It was constructed in this way to engender an awareness of one's body and to instill humility.

Earlier in his career, Suh used his sculpture to explore the idea that clothing creates the most private of spaces. When he began to create fabric architecture in 1994, he expanded his examination of public and private space and how those spaces construct identity. The translucent silks and nylons he uses in his work suggest the paper screens used in traditional Japanese and Korean homes. The fragile, ghostly materials also evoke a feeling of homesickness. Suh has created fabric installations of his home in Korea as well as his apartments in New York. These homes can be removed from the gallery space, folded, packed, and transported to a new venue. With his fabric architecture, Suh has created a version of home that he can carry with him. This work calls attention to the sense of displacement that can result in an increasingly fluid, transnational society.

- *Advances in communication and transportation are creating an increasingly mobile world society. The place that we call home is often an important aspect of our individual identity. How do we define home and ourselves as our culture becomes increasingly porous? How might you represent your definition of home?*



DO-HO SUH

(KOREA, ACTIVE UNITED STATES, B. 1962)

GATE, 2005

SILK AND STAINLESS STEEL TUBE, 128½ X 83¼ X 39¼ IN.

PURCHASED WITH FUNDS PROVIDED BY CARLA AND FRED SANDS
THROUGH THE 2006 COLLECTORS COMMITTEE M.2006.104

© DO-HO SUH. PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

De Style

1993, KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

DE STYLE IS A LARGE PAINTING WITH COLLAGE elements portraying a group of men in a barbershop. The artwork includes many details of the interior, from a calendar and clock to advertisement posters and a potted plant. The natural setting of the space contrasts with the exaggerated color of the men's skin tone and the elaborate hair style of two of the men: one is topped with what seems to be a royal tiara, and the other resembles a traditional Yoruba beaded crown.

A striking aspect of *De Style*, and many other paintings by Marshall, is the emphatically black skin tone of his figures. Marshall says that this development in his work emerged from an investigation into the invisibility of blacks in America and the unnecessary negative connotations associated with darkness. The exaggerated color in his paintings is intended to challenge racial stereotypes, particularly those assigned to African Americans. *De Style* is also an expression of the artist's interest in collage, black folk art, and modern art. The title of the work refers to both the use of *de* instead of the *in* vernacular language and to the abstract modern art movement known as *de Stijl* (Dutch for "the Style"), which emphasized the organization of shapes and colors.

- *What are some of the ways in which people express their identity? Perhaps through music, literature, clothing, and homes? Consider the ways in which you express your identity or are defined by others. What aspects of your identity are easily noticed and which are hidden? To what extent is our identity determined by the society in which we grow up and live?*

Born in 1955 in Birmingham, Alabama, Marshall was eight years old when his family moved to Southern California, living in Watts and later South Central Los Angeles. At fourteen, Marshall began taking art classes at Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. He enrolled full-time at Otis after high school and graduated with a bachelor's degree in fine arts in 1978. He currently lives and works in Chicago.

While studying with the noted African American artist Charles White at Otis, Marshall gained strong representational drawing skills. Then, in the late 1970s, he began making abstract collages, exploring surface, color, and composition. History painting has also influenced his work; he is well-known for his large-scale paintings where groups of figures are placed within scenic backdrops. Throughout his career he has created series about public housing projects and the civil rights movement.

Marshall's work is naturally rooted in the geography of his upbringing, from the Birmingham church bombing in 1963 to the 1965 civil unrest in Watts. He says, "You can't be born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1955 and grow up in South Central [Los Angeles] near the Black Panthers headquarters, and not feel like you've got some kind of social responsibility. You can't move to Watts in 1963 and not speak about it. That determined a lot of where my work was going to go."

- *What events or issues have influenced your life? In what ways are these related to larger historical issues? How might you explore these events or issues in an artwork?*

As an elementary school student, Marshall visited the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on a school field trip, where he was enchanted with the large-scale paintings at the museum and the range of artworks he saw: African and Assyrian sculpture, Japanese and Chinese art, and contemporary work. LACMA purchased *De Style* in 1993: "One of my goals in life had been to get a work of mine into the museum among the work of artists that I went to the museum to admire. I realized that dream when the L.A. County Museum of Art, the first museum I had ever entered, bought *De Style*. For me, that was the ultimate success; it was everything I had set out to do as an artist: to get up on the museum wall alongside the artists who had schooled me."



KERRY JAMES MARSHALL
(UNITED STATES, BORN 1955)

De Style, 1993

ACRYLIC AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS, 104 X 122 IN.

PURCHASED WITH FUNDS PROVIDED BY RUTH AND JACOB BLOOM (AC1993.76.1)

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