



**Dead or Alive  
Teacher Resource Packet**



## museum of arts and design

Dear Educator,

We are delighted that you have scheduled a visit to *Dead or Alive*. When you and your students visit the Museum of Arts and Design, you will be given an informative tour of the exhibition with a museum educator, followed by an inspiring hands-on project, which students can then take home with them. To make your museum experience more enriching and meaningful, we strongly encourage you to use this packet as a resource, and work with your students in the classroom before and after your museum visit.

This packet includes topics for discussion and activities intended to introduce the key themes and concepts of the exhibition. Writing, storytelling and art projects have been suggested so that you can explore ideas from the exhibition in ways that relate directly to students' lives and experiences. Please feel free to adapt and build on these materials and to use this packet in any way that you wish.

We look forward to welcoming you and your students to the Museum of Arts and Design.

Sincerely,

Cathleen Lewis  
Manager of School, Youth  
And Family Programs  
cathleen.lewis@madmuseum.org

Molly MacFadden  
School Visit Coordinator  
molly.macfadden@madmuseum.org

Sonya Blesofsky, Kate Fauvell, Dess Kelley, Petra Pankow, Catherine Rosamond -- Artist Educators

Elayna Koevary -- Education Department Intern



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## museum of arts and design

The Museum of Arts and Design has been functioning as an international resource center for craft, arts and design since 1956. Through its collections, exhibitions, programs and publications, the Museum serves as a forum for critical debate concerning the nature of craftsmanship and the engagement with the process that links materials, techniques, forms, patterns and concepts in all creative work.

### **How does a museum work?**

**Administration:** The team led by the Director of the Museum determines the programs, plans and philosophy of the Museum. It also raises funds to realize the Museum's goals and works directly with the Board of Governors, which guides the Museum's functions.

**Curatorial:** This is the team, led by the Chief Curator, that works together to decide which exhibits will be shown, how they will look, what artwork is to be included, and how they are to be interpreted.

**Registration:** Led by the Registrar, this team arranges the safe handling of art to be placed in an exhibition and maintains the permanent collections acquired by a museum.

**Education:** This team provides the interactive interpretation of the objects on view through the educational programs designed for children, adults and families who visit the Museum.

**Facility Maintenance:** This is the team that allows the day-to-day operations of a museum to continue: from the lights being turned on, to the safety of all who enter the building.

**Security Guards:** This is the team most often seen in a museum, because its main task is to protect the artwork from harm so that in the future people will be able to see the same objects as seen in a museum today. They also are helpful to visitors who have a variety of questions.

Museums are places where we can learn about the past, present, and future of the world around us. The diversity of knowledge is endless when the habit of museum exploration is formed at an early age. We look forward to welcoming your group into our galleries.

### **Helpful Hints for your Museum Visit**



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*"I try, when I go to museums, to do two things. One, to appreciate what I'm looking at, just to see it, but then to isolate a few pieces that I really look at in detail. I study and I draw not with any purpose in mind. I mean, I don't go looking for specific things. I just try to be open-minded and keep my eyes open. It's interesting that every time I go back to the same place, I see something different." Arline M. Fisch (1931- ) Brooklyn, New York*

While visiting the exhibition try to use all your senses. Notice the way the pieces are displayed. *Are there any specific groupings of pieces you can distinguish? If you enjoy looking at one piece more than others can you explain why?*

Here are some questions and suggestions to think about as you move around the exhibition:

- I. *What can be objectively observed?*
  - a. *What is the physical description? Measurement, weight, materials used, articulation of materials...*
  - b. *What iconography, if any, is used? Designs, words, diagrams...*
  - c. *What are the object's formal design characteristics? Lines, shapes, forms, color, texture...*
  
- II. *What would it be like to interact with this piece of art? How would you handle, lift, display it?*
  - a. *How would the piece of art feel, move, and sound?*
  - b. *What does the piece do? Does the piece have a function? How would the figures move if they were alive?*
  - c. *What is our emotional response to this beaded figure? Fear, joy, indifference, curiosity, revulsion, excitement...*
  
- III. *What is in the mind of the artist? What are the viewers thinking and feeling? Use creative imagining and free association.*
  - a. Review all of the above information and consider what was going on in the world when the work was produced to develop possible interpretations of the piece. (Theories and hypotheses)
  - b. *Do the figures tell a story? Does the piece have underlying political or social meaning? (Understanding and visual thinking)*
  - c. Develop a program to investigate the questions posed by the material evidence. (Program of research)
  
- IV. Brainstorm about an event or situation that is happening in your life at the moment which you could animate into one scene which could be made into your very own figurative sculpture. (Design themes)



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***Dead or Alive***

**April 27 – October 24, 2010**



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### *Dead or Alive*

Since prehistoric times, things that were once alive have served the religious, shamanic, cultural, and artistic needs of humans. Charms, fetishes, and talismans made from flora and fauna connected human beings to the world of nature and spirit around them. Even things no longer alive were capable of capturing, preserving, and transmitting spiritual power. From Egyptian floral garlands and mummified animals that accompanied Egyptians into the afterlife, to the fragments of bones worshipped in medieval reliquaries, to the lucky rabbit's foot and a four-leafed clover pressed into a book, the power of once-living things objects reverberates even today.

*Dead or Alive* focuses on a select group of artists from around the world who have turned to once-living things for the raw material from which to make art. These hunters and gatherers resurrect lifeless things, breathing new life into inert matter by transforming the humble, worthless, and discarded detritus of life into "living" art. These works engage us through their forms, colors, and textures, but they may also be unsettling reminders of death and decay. These works are more than formal arrangements and assemblages; they communicate ideas, concepts, and multi-layered narratives.<sup>1</sup>

Through works made from organic materials, these artists choose to address social, political, emotional, and spiritual issues that are both timely and timeless. Because the raw materials are reminders of past life, not surprisingly many of the artists use them to address issues of mortality. These latter-day memento mori (from the Latin, "remember that you must die") take the form of skulls (Helen Altman, Fabián Peña), are assembled from desiccated bones (Jodie Carey, Alastair Mackie, Jennifer Trask), or use dead insects or taxidermied animals (Jan Fabre, Damien Hirst, Jochem Hendricks). Other artists confront environmental issues such as genetic modification of foodstuffs (Lucia Madriz), the food animal industries (Billie Grace Lynn, Keith Bentley), and the extinction of species (Christy Rupp).

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<sup>1</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 19.



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The natural landscape is another subject of exploration (Jorge Mayet, Levi van Veluw, Xu Bing). Other works consist of wearable performance pieces (Nick Cave, Sanford Biggers, Maria Fernanda Cardoso). Architectural interventions make use of both feathers and seeds (Susie MacMurray, Christiane Löhr, Kate MccGwire, Tanja Smeets). The unsettling world of hybrids and other mutant forms examine the darker underside of nature (Jim Rittimann, Claire Morgan, Shen Shaomin, Simen Johan, Tessa Farmer). Cultural, social, and art history is embedded in the works of others (Jennifer Angus, Tim Hawkinson, Julia Lohmann and Gero Grundmann, Tim Tate, Tracy Heneberger). Lastly, contemporary design is another area of interest for several of these artists (ANGO, studio DRIFT).<sup>2</sup>

The use of materials in the artwork in this exhibition is neither overtly ecclesiastical nor specifically ritualistic. However, the technical approaches to working these materials can involve repetitive, meditative, systemic, and obsessive processes that can be described as ritualistic. This expands the art process from mere concept to the realm of making. For both the predecessors in this realm—Beuys, Manzoni, Broodthaers, and Denes—and the artists in this exhibition, this impulse is global.

The work in *Dead or Alive* might challenge usual and habitual notions of beauty, but artists can extrude beauty from the most base and defiled materials. This is evident in the deployment of fugitive organic materials such as the flies in Claire Morgan's painstakingly exquisite tableaux, or the use of fetid materials to create marvelous effects as seen in the work of Tim Noble and Sue Webster. Their use of the shadow reflections of their conglomerations of "gook" create figural or architectural profiles, skylines that engage our sense of wonder as we are transported by the congruity of the material and its transcendent effects. Xu Bing works with chaotic assemblages of detritus to create backlit simulations of the conventions of Chinese scroll painting. In these examples, order is emitted from chaos, epitomizing the duality that is germane to dialogues in modern art criticism and theories.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.





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### ***Dead or Alive***

#### **Re-occurring themes**

Although the exhibition *Dead or Alive* is not displayed thematically the following themes appear in much of the art work in the exhibition:

##### **Repetition:**

Objects and details are repeated and often arranged in intricate patterns.

##### **Patterns:**

Many of the artists have arranged and ordered their materials into wonderfully beautiful and complex patterns, sometimes referencing patterns in nature and other times alluding to traditional manmade and ornamental patterns.

##### **Nature:**

Nature in many forms including landscape is the subject of many of the artwork. The works also touch on environmental issues, and our relationship to and with nature.

##### **Repurposing:**

Artists have used natural objects and repurposed them, transformed them into sculpture forms.

##### **Transformation:**

These artists “resurrect lifeless things, breathing new life into them by transforming... the detritus of life into ‘living’ art”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 19.



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## From the artists of *Dead or Alive...*<sup>5</sup>

“I gather, collate, re-use, layer, peel, burn, reveal, locate, question, duplicate, play and photograph. I’m seeking answers to questions about the nature of beauty.”

– **Kate MccGwire**

“In my work, I am trying to tap into the magic we experienced as children. I would like people to rediscover it when they see my work, and for a moment just stand there and say ‘Wow!’.”

– **Jennifer Angus**

“Working with organic material, I would describe my role in this process as one of “ordering.” I try to understand and take advantage of the logic of certain physical characteristics in the materials that I use”.

- **Christiane Löhr**

We are curious about the future, not only the new technologies that are changing design, but also the evolutionary developments in nature and human culture. We strive to find the perfect combination of knowledge and intuition, science fiction and nature, fantasy and interactivity.

- **studio DRIFT**

**Lonneke Gordijn and Ralph Nauta**

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 39-107.



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Levi van Veluw

*Landscape I*, from the Landscapes series, 2008

Lambdaprint on dibond, antireflex Perspex

47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in. (120 x 100 cm)

23 5/8 x 19 11/16 in. (60 x 50 cm)

Courtesy of Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam/Rotterdam

Photo: Levi van Veluw



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As mentioned, the natural landscape is a subject explored in the exhibition *Dead or Alive*, and is referenced overtly in the work of Levi van Veluw and Jorge Mayet.

Dutch performance artist Levi van Veluw layers natural materials on the human body in his elaborate self-portrait photographs and videos. In his *Landscape* series, Van Veluw adheres miniature plots of grass and clusters of trees onto the contours of his own face, overturning traditional concepts of landscape by placing the human body at its core.

Featured in *Dead or Alive* are three of Van Veluw's photographs and one \*video which become the sole documentation of the works. The original work of art is disposed of after documentation.<sup>6</sup>

### **Questions to consider when viewing the work:**

Go around the classroom and have everybody name and describe one of the components Levi van Veluw has used in the photograph.

- What type of objects and materials do you recognize?
- What are they normally used for?
- How has the artist used color and form?
- How do the objects interact with each other?
- What narrative does this photograph depict?
- How has Van Veluw used his body in this work?
- Which part of this work is organic, which is man-made?

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 21.



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“The images that I make consist of often un-logical combinations of materials, patterns, colors, forms, with my head as the only constant factor. Each element is consciously chosen so as to affect a pre-determined transformation. By playing with the value of the each material and by using them for a purpose that was not originally intended for them, I construct within the image, in a very small way, a different perspective on the world.”<sup>7</sup>

The building of landscapes relates to Van Veluw’s background as a painter. Speaking of an old fascination with cheap landscape painting, he states:

“the scenery is so predictable and boring, but in another way I really like the simplicity of the traditional landscapes. It’s nice and ugly at the same time.”<sup>8</sup>

- How does his work challenge that predictability that he aims to avoid?
- What about the work makes it challenge our perceptions of picturesque landscapes?
- Does Van Veluw use humor as a tool to upset these perceptions? How?

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<sup>7</sup> Levi Van Veluw, [www.levivanveluw.nl](http://www.levivanveluw.nl)



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“In most cases it is my head that is the carrier of these transformations and combinations. The expressionless, and almost universal face, allows the viewer to project himself onto the work. Because the works have really existed and have not been digitally manipulated, each image contains a short history of a performance.”<sup>9</sup>

Van Veluw goes on to state:

“My work amounts to small researches into the valuations we assign to the things around us and the associations they engender in this way. ... The image succeeds in shifting the viewer’s perception, be it in a very small way and about an unimportant subject.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Expanding the lesson:**

\*To view the video of *Landscapes* visit [www.levivanveluw.nl/work/landscapes](http://www.levivanveluw.nl/work/landscapes)

### **Questions:**

- Ask students if seeing multiple views of *Landscapes* alter their perception of the artist work? How?
- Ask students to consider how they could alter a mundane or picturesque image of a landscape, using their own bodies as performance and documentation or by transforming an image digitally.
- Have them choose a method to explore and produce a work of art for homework or in class assignment.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid



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Jorge Mayet

*Obatala*, 2010

Electrical cable, paper mache, feather, acrylics

64 9/16 x 39 3/8 in (164 x 100 x 100 cm)

Courtesy of Galería Horrach Moya, Palma de Mallorca, Spain



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“Cuban-born Jorge Mayet re-creates nature—specifically trees—in diminutive form, working with synthetic materials that include electrical wire, paper, fabric, and feathers. Mayet’s trees are suspended in midair, floating specimens that appear to have been ripped from the earth, often with the soil in which they may have flourished. The trees are reproduced at near-human size, establishing a rapport with our own bodies. These hyperrealistic bonsai specimens are at once convincingly natural in the details of bark, bare branches, and roots, and yet entirely unnatural in their materials and fabrication”.<sup>11</sup>

### **Questions to consider when viewing the work:**

- What is the artist representing with this artwork?
- What kinds of things seem to inspire Mayet? (nature, plant life, science, etc.)
- How is this artwork similar or different to a real tree?
- Can you tell how large or small this artwork is?

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<sup>11</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 29.





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“Mayet re-creates nature –specifically trees –in diminutive form...The trees are reproduced at near-human size, establishing a rapport with our own bodies.”<sup>12</sup>

- Why would Mayet re-create a tree that is smaller or larger than the real life tree?
- How would this artwork change if it were life-size? What if it were the size of your thumb?

Mayet’s re-creations of nature are made from synthetic materials such as electrical wire, paper, acrylic paint, and fabric.

- How does your knowledge of the artist’s materials change your perception of the artwork?
- Why would the artist use primarily man-made materials to show something from nature?
- How do you think the artist came to work with these materials?

The artist has said that while fixing a computer cable, he realized that the inner strands would take on the shapes he bent them into, thus he began working with electrical wire as well as other materials.<sup>13</sup>

- How has Mayet chosen to display the work?
- Why might the artist have chosen to show the work suspended in space?
- How does the fact that the piece is free-floating change the meaning of the work? Does it give the work an element of fantasy or a dream-like quality? How so?

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> “Saatchi ficha a Jorge Mayet en Mallorca - Cultura - Diario de Mallorca” Diario De Mallorca, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2009, <http://www.diariodemallorca.es/>



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Prior to creating sculptures, Mayet created paintings of nature and natural landscapes, and some have an element of fantasy or impossibility.

- How does this artwork relate to a traditional depiction of a landscape?
- Could this artwork have the same impact or meaning if it were created as a painting instead of a sculpture? Why or why not?

Chief Curator David McFadden further states in his essay *Hunters and Gatherers*, “the tension between nature and art is pushed farther into a surrealist aesthetic by virtue of a root system that sprouts feathers. The unlikely combination of roots and feathers, particularly when suspended in midair, creates an atmosphere of wistful memory.”

<sup>14</sup>

### **Expanding the lesson:**

Both artists Jorge Mayet and Levi van Veluw created paintings prior to making their current work.

Have students compare and contrast the artists’ work and traditional landscape paintings.

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<sup>14</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 29.



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Nick Cave  
*Soundsuit*, 2010  
Mixed media  
96 x 33 x 27 in. (243.8 x 83.8 x 55.8 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York  
Photo: James Prinz



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Similar to Levi van Veluw the body is also used as a platform for a constructed work of art in Nick Cave's sculptures/performance costumes from the *Soundsuit* series, which began well over a decade ago.

Kate Eilersten, curator of the Cave exhibition at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, notes, Cave's work "explores issues of ceremony, ritual, myth and identity. He does this through a layering of concepts, highly skilled techniques and varied traditions [and] materials."<sup>15</sup> Nick Cave's sculptural apparitions have also been compared to African masquerades.<sup>16</sup>

Begin by asking students to describe their perception of this image and what it might be about. – make notes on the board of their answers. Then pose these questions:

### Questions to consider when viewing the work

- Is this a sculpture? Is it a costume? What evidence do you see that makes you think so?
- What is it made of? Is it heavy or weightless? What makes you say so?
- How do you think Nick Cave might have assembled this work?
- What do you think is its purpose?

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<sup>15</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive*(New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 116.

<sup>16</sup> Pamela McClusky, ". . . And To Think That We Saw It On East Marginal Way," in Dan Cameron, Pamela McClusky, and Nick Cave, *Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth*, exh.cat., introduction by Kate Eilersten (San Francisco: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 2009), 27–28.



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- Do you think that someone is wearing this costume?
- What makes you say so? (look at the bottom of the image for evidence)
- What is the pattern on the socks? Does it enhance the suit or distract? Why?
- What is a costume and what is its use?
- Do you think this performance suit is easy to move in? What makes you believe so?

Do you think it makes sound when the performer moves? What evidence makes you say so? If you had a hand full of twigs on a string how would it sound with movement, do you think this suit would make a similar sound, would the sound be more amplified? Why?

Nick Cave has a background in both Modern Dance (he was trained at Alvin Ailey) as well as a background in Fiber Arts (he graduated from Cranbrook Academy of Arts in Michigan).

How does he use his background in dance and fiber arts as a resource in making the *Soundsuit* Series?

### **Expanding the lesson:**

Nick Cave in Motion

As a homework or in class assignment have students view the link below of Yerbe Buena Center for the Arts:

<http://www.ybca.org/tickets/production/view.aspx?id=8191>



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Have students answer the following questions:

- How did Nick Cave come upon making his first sound suit?
- How was the element of sound introduced?
- What other cultural elements have an influence on Nick Cave sound suits.
- Why has Nick Cave's *Soundsuits* been compared to African masquerades, or to the extravagant performances of Mardi gras dancers?

“As reminiscent of African and religious ceremonial costumes as they are of haute couture, Cave's work explores issues of ceremony, ritual, myth and identity. He does this through a layering of concepts, highly-skilled techniques and varied traditions, using materials such as fabrics, beads, sequins, old bottle caps, rusted iron, sticks, twigs, leaves and hair. Mad, humorous, elaborate, grotesque, glamorous and unexpected, the *Soundsuits* are created from scavenged ordinary materials—detritus from both nature and culture—that Cave re-contextualizes into visionary masterpieces”.<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Cave has been quoted as saying:

“When I was inside a suit, you couldn't tell if I was a woman or man; if I was black, red, green or orange; from Haiti or South Africa,” he said. “I was no longer Nick. I was a shaman of sorts.”<sup>18</sup>

Ask students to respond to this statement.

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<sup>17</sup> Quote from Yerbe Buena Center for the arts, 2009, featured exhibition of 40 Soundsuits. <http://www.ybca.org/tickets/production/view.aspx?id=8191>

<sup>18</sup> Finkel, Jori. "I Dream The Clothing Electric", *New York Times*, March 31, 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/05/arts/design/05fink.html>



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Sanford Biggers  
*Ghetto Bird Tunic*, 2006  
Bubble jacket, exotic feathers, 61 x 31 in. (154.9 x 78.7 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist; Michael Klein Arts, New York  
Photo: Joshua White  
Collection of Artists' Legacy Foundation, Oakland



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There is an inescapable relationship between the way both Nice Cave and Sanford Biggers make cultural connections to the flamboyant and outrageous in African American Culture and the power of the masquerade.

In *Dead or Alive*, Sanford Biggers' *Ghettobird Tunic*, 2006, takes its title from street slang for the helicopters that police Los Angeles. The slang term, "ghetto bird" is used to describe police aircraft which patrol low income and minority neighborhoods in urban regions, often in Los Angeles.<sup>19</sup>

It defiantly references hip-hop fashion in the grandeur of its floor-length sweep popular in hip-hop fashion. Bedecked with exotic feathers, it simultaneously references African masquerades.

Part camouflage, part costume, and part cultural signifier, this work allows us to imagine that any wearer would achieve mythic status as an unexpected apparition in the midst of urban turmoil, one who could skirt imposed curfews in embattled times in minority communities.<sup>20</sup>

Conceptually if the wearer of this coat does a specific dance while under the surveillance of the predatory ghettobird, this camouflage renders him invisible.

Have students go around the classroom and catalogue their observations.

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<sup>19</sup> "What is a Ghetto Bird" <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-ghetto-bird.htm>





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### Questions to consider when viewing the work:

- What is this object, sculpture, costume?
- What is a costume used for?
- Can someone hide or be camouflaged by wearing one?

The primary material that this object is made of is feathers.

Ask students to describe some of the characteristics of birds.

- What have been some of the symbols and signifiers of birds?
- What have been some of the cultural uses of feathers?

Feathers are a product which comes from birds. Birds have been a symbol of peace as in the dove, a symbol of power and war as in the eagle.

Biggers also used a bubble jacket to make this object. The artists used this commercial bought article of clothing and transformed it with feathers. Part of the title *Ghettobird Tunic* also represents a transformation in language. The title is a neologism defined as the invention of a new word, phrase, expression, or usage.

Now that you know this, what do think this object is about?

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<sup>20</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 113.



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Curator Lowery Stoke Simms writes about Bigger's work in her essay *Dead or Alive: Material, Surface, Residue, and Pattern*, "part camouflage, part costume, and part cultural signifier, this work allows us to imagine that any wearer would achieve mythic status as an unexpected apparition in the midst of urban turmoil, one who could skirt imposed curfews in embattled times in minority communities" <sup>21</sup>

What might the *Ghettobird tunic* be used for?

- After looking closely at the image do you think the artist is wearing this object while in performance?
- If this object is used for performance, what might be the moves that the artist might make while wearing this object?

### **Extension:**

Ask students if they see any resemblances between the practices of Nick Cave and Sanford Biggers. Ask them to elaborate on the similarities and differences.

- Is one work more politically based than the other? How?
- What are some of the other strategies employed by both artists?

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid



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Maria Fernanda Cardoso,  
*Emu Flag + Cloak (Fluro Orange)*, 2006–8  
Nylon netting, emu feathers, glue, fiberglass rod, metal, lambda print  
47 x 55 x 23 in. (119.3 x 139.7 x 58.4 cm) (cloak)  
Courtesy of the artist; Sicardi Gallery, Houston  
Photo: © Maria Fernanda Cardoso  
Collection of Artists' Legacy Foundation, Oakland  
Photography by Michael Tropea, Chicago



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The often problematic relationships that exist between humans and the natural environment have been perennial areas of exploration and commentary for Maria Fernanda Cardoso.

Have students go around the classroom and catalogue their observations, pay close examination to every detail from the tope of the head to the toes.

### **Questions to consider while viewing the art work:**

- What do you notice this work?
- Is it a costume?
- Is it an article of clothing?
- What do you think it is used for?
- What materials are used and what connotations are evoked when you look at this image.

These feathers are Emu feathers. The Emu is a bird native to Australia, over 6 ft tall, and weighs over 100 pounds making them the tallest bird inhabiting Australia, although they have feathers they cannot fly because their wings are too small, the feathers are brown in color.<sup>22</sup> Emu birds are farmed for their lean meat, oil and leather products for human consumption.

The Emu features prominently in Australian Aboriginal mythology.

- What type of stories would the Emu tell?

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<sup>22</sup> Australia Zoo “Amazing Animals Fact Sheet”, <http://www.australiazoo.com.au/our-animals/amazing-animals/birds/?bird=ratites&animal=emu>



## museum of arts and design

Taking inspiration from her knowledge that native bird feathers were used in ceremonial clothing in the South Pacific and in South America, she fashioned Emu feathers into wearable sculptures—robes and capes that surround and disguise the wearer. The wearer animates the costumes and, in essence, brings the bird back to life.

- What are some characteristics of a custom?
- When looking at this image, do you think this custom is part of a performance?
- If you were to imagine movement with this image, what type of movement, would it be? Be specific, describe speed, weight, flow; would it move like a bird? How does a bird move? Does it have grace? How?

Importantly, the shapes of the capes and coverings are not intended to mimic the actual appearance of the Emu; these are not moving taxidermy specimens. The forms and even the ground color of the fabric follow human conventions of dress while gently mocking the ornamental use of nature. <sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 29.



## museum of arts and design

### **Extending the Lesson**

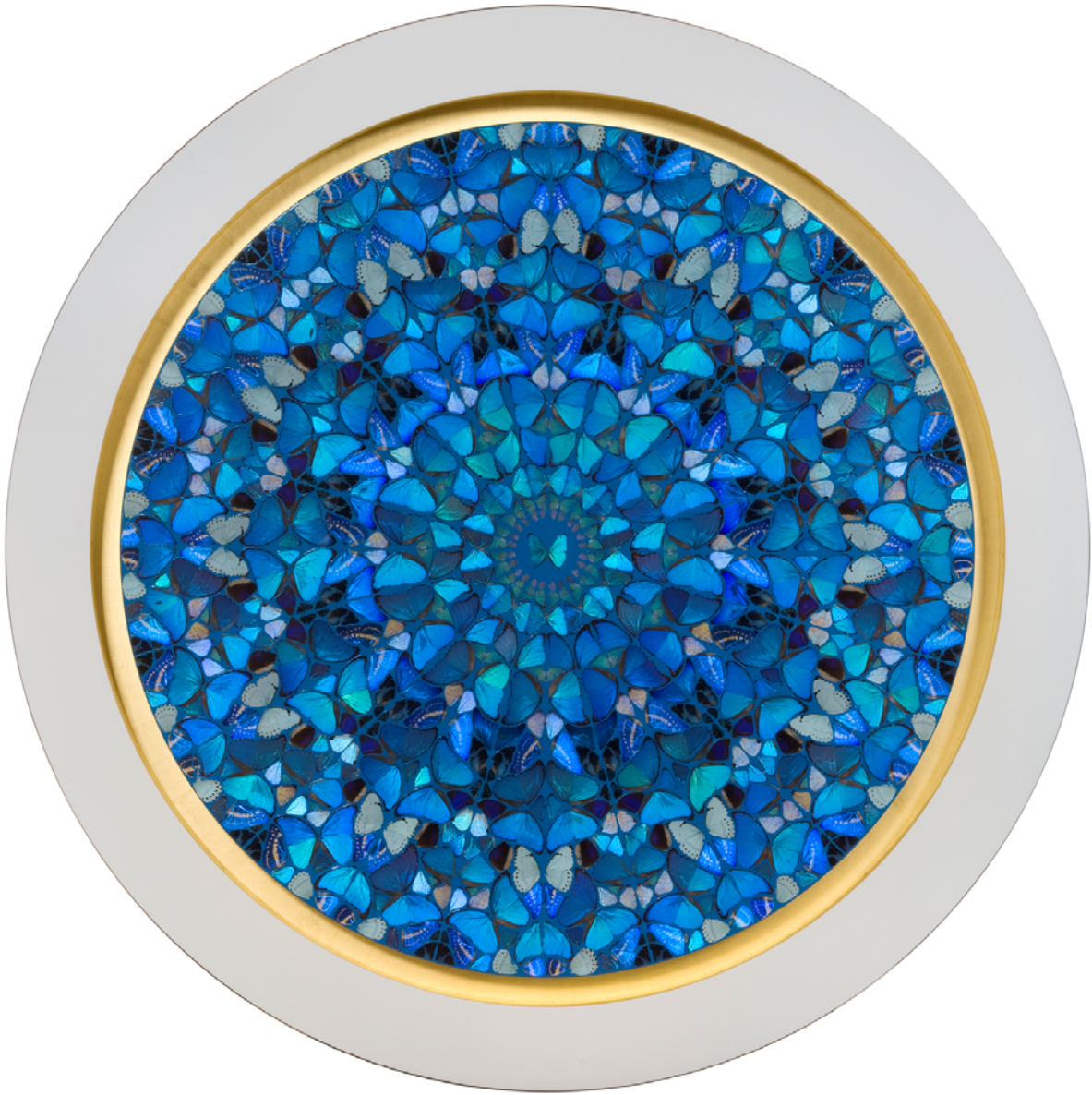
Have students discuss the performative aspects of the work of the last three artists, Nick Cave, Sanford Biggers and Maria Fernanda Cardoso.

Discuss the similarities and differences.

- How does the work of Biggers and Cardoso intersect?
- Both artists are addressing social, political or environmental concerns, what are they?



museum of arts and design



Damien Hirst  
*Prophecy*, 2008  
Butterflies, household gloss on canvas  
Diameter: 60 in. (152.4 cm)  
Collection of Claudine and Stephen Bronfman  
Photo: Brian Merrett, Montreal



## museum of arts and design

Few animals can rival the rich symbolism of the butterfly—it has represented the ephemeral nature of life, the mystery of metamorphosis, freedom, souls of the departed, and resurrection. *Prophecy* (2008), which is included in *Dead or Alive*, is part of an extended series of works in which butterfly wings are arranged in radially or bilaterally symmetrical patterns to evoke the jewellike quality of stained-glass windows. The work combines the lush sensual beauty and intense tonality of the colors of the fragile wings in a mandala for meditation on life, death, and eternity.<sup>24</sup>

'I love color. I feel it inside me. It gives me a buzz.'<sup>25</sup>

- Damien Hirst

### Questions to consider when viewing the work:

Initial Observations:

- What is the first thing you notice about this work?
- What materials did he use to make this artwork?
- What types of insects do you think they came from?
- Which part of the insect did Hirst use?
- What characteristic of this insect do you think he was after?

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>25</sup> Art Quotes, "Damien Hirst Quotes" [www.artquotes.net/masters/hirst/damien-hirst-quotes.htm](http://www.artquotes.net/masters/hirst/damien-hirst-quotes.htm)





## museum of arts and design

### **Noticing the color and scale:**

- What does Hirst mean by the statement above?
- How important is color in this artwork?
- Why do you think Hirst chose these colors?
- Is there a relationship between the material and color?
- Does the monochromatic (shades of one color) nature of the artwork evoke a particular emotion?
- What type of mood does his choice of colors create?
- How does the scale impact the way we view the artwork?

Throughout his artistic career, Damien Hirst has sought to challenge the boundaries of art, science and popular culture by focusing his attention on the cycles of life and death and exploring what is at the core of human experience; love and hate, loyalty and betrayal, and reason and faith.

### **Connecting to the art:**

- Is there anything in your experience that this artwork reminds you of (e.g. Mandalas, stained glass windows, tie-dye clothing, kaleidoscope)?
- Does the title give any clues to the artist's intentions?
- Do you see movement in this artwork? If so, where?

Hirst seems to be challenging our perception of beauty, inherent fragility of life and decay.

- What emotions does he want us to experience when we view this artwork?



## museum of arts and design

In Renaissance paintings of the 16th century the butterfly was a traditional symbol of resurrection. It is also a symbol associated with love, fortune, freedom, spirituality and death.

- Has Hirst used the butterflies as a metaphor for mortality? Why/ why not?
- Does this artwork evoke a sense of delicacy?

### **Extending your thinking**

Comparing other artwork in the exhibition. Damien Hirst and Jennifer Angus have both used insects in their artwork. 'This ... grouping of butterflies echoes the Victorian obsessive trend for collecting natural history, and also the escapist but visually electrifying experiences associated with the 1960's psychedelic era.'<sup>26</sup>

Can you apply this statement to both of the artworks? Explain your answer.

- How do they differ in their approach to using the material?
- What are some similarities and differences between them?

Hirst has not publicly disclosed where he got the butterflies from to produce the artwork. Do you think he should? Why/ why not?

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<sup>26</sup> "Butterfly Wallpaper, Damien Hirst"  
[https://www.othercriteria.com/browse/all/all/butterfly\\_wallpaper/](https://www.othercriteria.com/browse/all/all/butterfly_wallpaper/)



## museum of arts and design



Jennifer Angus

*A Terrible Beauty, Chapter III: To Have and to Hold*, 2007 (installation at Musée d'art de Joliette, Quebec, Canada)

Handprinted wallpaper, *Heteropteryx dilatata*, *Phyllium giganteum*, *Sanaea intermedia*, *Pompoina imperatorial*, *Tropidacris Dux*, pins, *Angamiana floridula*, *Ayuthia spectabilis*, *Tosena Albata*, frames, curio boxes, various items from the permanent collection of the Musée d'art de Joliette

37 ft. x 31 ft. 6 in. x 11 ft.

Photo: Denis Farley



## museum of arts and design

A background as a textile designer informs much of Jennifer Angus's installations, in which thousands of dried insects—giant cicadas, Malaysian leaf insects, brightly colored beetles of many varieties, and grasshoppers—are affixed to walls or other surfaces in precise, repetitive ornamental patterns.<sup>27</sup>

“For the past nine years, I have been creating installations composed of insects pinned directly to a wall in repeating patterns that reference both textiles and wallpaper. When viewers enter one of my installations, they are greeted with something they think they know, that is, a patterned wallpaper that could be in anyone's home.”<sup>28</sup>

### Questions to consider while viewing the art work:

- On close inspection, what materials do you think the artist used to create this artwork?
- What evidence do you see to make you say so?
- What kind of patterns and textures are revealed in this artwork?

“A tension is created by the beauty one observes in the pattern and the apprehension over insects. My work explores ideas of home and comfort. It alludes to the unseen world of dust mites, germs, and bacteria, both friendly and not.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



## museum of arts and design

'Western culture in particular has a certain hysteria when it comes to insects. They are symbols of dirtiness, disease and decay. In other cultures, insects hold religious significance or at least a measure of respect, be they food, medicine, embellishment or pets.'<sup>30</sup>

- What do you think she is expressing in her artwork by using these materials?

Jennifer Angus subverts familiar forms with her site-specific architectural installations. Built to mimic interiors furnished with traditional wallpaper and textiles, the works are actually ornamented with thousands of dried insects pinned directly to the wall. These installations blur the distinction between decoration and expression and between domestic comforts and disturbance.

In this installation the viewer is not invited into the room but peer into the space through peepholes.

- Why does Angus want the viewer to see the work from this perspective?
- How does this affect the way the artwork is viewed?
- Does it create distance between the work and the viewer? How?

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<sup>30</sup> Jennifer Angus, "Artists Statement" [www.jenniferangus.com/Bio/statement.htm](http://www.jenniferangus.com/Bio/statement.htm)



## museum of arts and design

### Telling a story, setting a mood:

“Ultimately, I am attempting to create a multilayered work in which pattern is the vehicle. My work is dependent upon the supposition that there is a cultural understanding of pattern which provides a framework or potential for a narrative.”<sup>31</sup>

- What time period does the ‘wallpaper’ and furnishings suggest about the room?
- If the pattern and furnishings represents a time period what cultural understanding is Angus referencing?

Jennifer Angus carefully constructs narratives for her work, often taking the form of biographies or autobiographies of the fictitious characters for which these domestic interiors were created.

- What kind of person would live in this room?
- Is there evidence of gender, age or even race?
- What would they be like?

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<sup>31</sup>David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 77.



## museum of arts and design

### **Extending the lesson:**

“My recent installations take inspiration from the Victorian era, from the excitement of travel, exploration, scientific discovery, and the dawning of photography... For the insatiable Victorian collector, nothing was sacrosanct.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Research projects:**

1. Just how insatiable were the Victorians when it came to discovery and exploration?

Sarah Baartman and Ota Bega are examples of the exhibition and display of humans and human body parts in the Musée du Louvre, and the Bronx zoo during the Victorian era’s fascination with exploration, travel, and scientific discovery.

Sarah Baartman aka, The Hottentot Venus

[http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1883142\\_1883129\\_1882999,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1883142_1883129_1882999,00.html)

Ota Benga, A Congolese pygmy who was put on display in the Bronx Zoo.

<http://www.rae.org/otabenga.html>



## museum of arts and design

2. Research the Victorian era to discover how natural materials were displayed and used in museums.

- Were there any scientific theories developed at this time? If so, what were they?
- How did they influence the way the Victorians thought of nature and race?

### Further Discussions:

“While I may allude to threatened species, I do not use endangered insects in my work. The insects I use are farmed or collected by local indigenous peoples who earn a living this way... It is ecologically sound, and the insects are a renewable resource.”<sup>33</sup>

- What does Angus mean by this statement?
- What parts of the world do you think she gets her insects from?

“Since most of the species I choose come from a rain forest environment, the people collecting are less likely to destroy the jungle that provides their livelihood.”<sup>34</sup>

Ask students if they agree with the above statement by Angus, ask them to support their arguments.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid





museum of arts and design



Christy Rupp  
*Great Auk, Iceland, 2007*  
Fast-food chicken bones, mixed media  
29 x 17 x 20 in. (73.7 x 43.2 x 50.8 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist; Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York  
Photo: Nick Ghiz



## museum of arts and design

*"The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it"*

--Henry David Thoreau

Materials from the realm of vertebrates is closer to our own species than any other medium chosen by artists. With such proximity, issues of social responsibility and our relationship with the natural world become more pronounced. Many of these artists use animal parts, especially bones, to address these issues and to offer often political commentary.<sup>35</sup>

This artwork by Christy Rupp is from the series, *Extinct Birds Previously Consumed by Humans (From the Brink of Extinction to the Supermarket)*.

Ask students to describe the work in detail.

### **Questions to consider while viewing the art work:**

- Have you seen something similar to this piece? (In a museum, biology class, a textbook etc.)
- Examining very closely, does this skeleton look like other skeletons you have seen before? How is it similar or different?

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<sup>35</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 30.



## museum of arts and design

Rupp's artwork is a life-size skeletal reconstruction of a Great Auk, created from mixed media, and chicken bones collected from fast food meals.

- How do you think the artist created this artwork?
- What kinds of reference materials or tools might she have needed to complete the work?

Now extinct, The Great Auk was a bird in the penguin family. The Great Auk was hunted for food and down feathers, which led to its extinction. Rupp has created this bird's skeleton primarily with chicken bones from fast food meals.

- Why do you think the artist chose to use chicken bones to make this reconstruction of a Great Auk skeleton?
- Does a chicken raised for consumption in a fast food restaurant have anything in common with a Great Auk?
- What is the significance of using chicken bones collected from fast food meals? Would the meaning change if she used chicken bones from supermarket chickens? What if the bones were from chickens that died of natural causes?

"This work is less about endangered species, and more concerned with how we treat animals that already exist."<sup>36</sup>

- How is Rupp raising questions about how we treat the animals we eat?

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<sup>36</sup> Rupp, Christy, PDF Guide to Extinct Birds sculpture, 2008  
<http://christyrupp.powweb.com/new2.html>



## museum of arts and design

“This work ponders diversity and how we have come to accept living in a time of great extinction. ...Environmental systems are much more easily destroyed than replaced.”<sup>37</sup>

- Can you name any species or environmental systems that are endangered today?
- Do you agree with the artist that “environmental systems are much more easily destroyed than replaced.”?

Rupp further explains her work by stating,

“Although observed from actual bird prototypes, the works embody absurdity, as they are a creation of human hands. They reflect the preposterous notion that humans can put things back together, implying that merely by good intentions nature could be retrofitted for the better and placate our guilt.”<sup>38</sup>

- In what way is this artwork absurd or humorous?
- What are some ways we can protect the environment and other living things in a way that affects change?

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Ibid



museum of arts and design



Billie Grace Lynn

*Mad Cow Motorcycle*, 2008

Cow bones, bicycle frame, electric motor

96 x 24 x 36 in. (243.8 x 61 x 91.4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist; Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, Florida

Photo: Billie Grace Lynn



## **museum of arts and design**

Billie Grace Lynn has worked with a variety of materials to create interactive and kinetic sculptures. Lynn's work aims to inspire the senses and make viewers aware of their bodies and the world they inhabit. More recently, Lynn explores these ideas using animal bones as her primary medium, addressing the destructive practices conducted by the meat industry, and its relation to agribusiness, oil industry, the decimation of the environment, and human health.

### **Questions to consider while viewing the art work:**

- Can you identify the different elements the artist combined to create this work of art?
- How do you think Lynn put the piece together?
- This artwork is life-size –how would it feel to sit upon it?
- Do you think Lynn intended for a person to ride this artwork? Why or why not?
- What kind of sound might this piece make if you were to ride it?

This work of art can actually function as a motorcycle. After its completion, the artist rode the bike through the streets of Miami, and also made a purchase at a McDonalds' drivethru.

- Does the artist's use of the final piece change the meaning of the artwork? How?
- What reaction do you think observers had as she rode up and made a purchase at McDonalds?



## museum of arts and design

The title of this artwork is *Mad Cow Motorcycle*.

- Why do you think the artist gave it this title?
- Is Lynn referencing anything in particular with this title?
- How do you think the artist feels about the beef industry or the slaughtering of cows for meat? Why?

Lynn has stated that this work focuses “on the meat industry and its impact on the environment and our health.”<sup>39</sup>

- Can you think of any of the ways the meat industry affects our environment?

The curator David McFadden wrote that this artwork mixes “humor and horror in equal amounts...”<sup>40</sup>

- Do you agree --how is this artwork humorous? In what way is it horrific?
- How has your understanding of the piece changed from your first reaction to the work?

View a video of the artist riding Mad Cow Motorcycle at:

<http://www.hotride.ca/forums/showthread.php?t=30280>

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<sup>39</sup> Billie Grace Lynn Website: [http://billiegracelynn.com/index\\_flash.html](http://billiegracelynn.com/index_flash.html)

<sup>40</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 31.



museum of arts and design



Lonneke Gordijn and Ralph Nauta  
*Fragile Future.3*, 2009  
Phosphorus bronze, dandelion puffs  
Dimensions variable  
Photo: Courtesy of DRIFT, Amsterdam; Jesse Howard





## museum of arts and design

Lonneke Gordijn (b. 1980) and Ralph Nauta (b. 1978) are young artists/designers that founded the award-winning, Dutch design studio, DRIFT in 2006. According to the artists, “The firm [DRIFT] creates lighting, furniture, and other products for the home, with a focus on advanced production techniques. DRIFT combines intuition and knowledge, nature and science fiction and fantasy and interaction in their products.”<sup>41</sup>

### Questions to consider while viewing the art work:

Instruct students to take a moment looking at the image of *Fragile Future*, try describing this object to the group (your classmates) as if they have never seen this work before. Start off by saying, “It looks like a...”

- What kind of materials do you think are used?
- How do you describe the shape of the object? (Is it geometric? organic? symmetrical? 3-dimensional?)
- Can you come up with some “things” (manmade or natural) that you are familiar with that resemble this artwork? (i.e. a lamp, inside of a machine, circuitry, tree, skyline)
- Besides sight, which other senses do you think the artists intend for the viewer.

In *Fragile Future.3*, Gordijn and Nauta create a lighting installation that is made of conductive metal framework that holds LED lights and

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<sup>41</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 26.



## museum of arts and design

light up clusters of dandelion seeds.<sup>42</sup> By doing so, they amalgamate the realm of design and art, join nature (dandelion seeds) and technology (electronics), as well as combine “intuition and knowledge.”<sup>43</sup>

This work has also an interactive aspect: “Photo sensors in the structure automatically dim the small lights when approached too closely, paralleling the self-defensive strategy of living organisms such as *Mimosa pudica* plants (commonly known as Sensitive Plants), which are able to close their leaf fronds when touched. These designs connote the metaphysical qualities of everyday experiences, particularly the experience of light.”<sup>44</sup>

- Would you consider this more of a design product or an artwork? How so? Support or your answer.
- Does functionality (light) of the object make it a less serious work of art?
- How about the aspect of the work being “interactive” (dimming of lights when a person approaches the work)? How does this affect your reaction to the work? Did it surprise you? Is it interesting that it reacts to your proximity to it? Why?

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 23.



## museum of arts and design

Compare this artwork to an aesthetically-pleasing designer light that could be sold in museum stores.

- What are some similarities and differences that you find between a work of art and “pretty” designer objects?

The artists describe their work to be a combination of nature and science fiction.

- What aspect of it is from nature, and what parts do you observe could be considered “science fiction”-like?

This work can be said to have formalist qualities. Formalism, according to one definition is a concept that claims that a “work’s artistic value is entirely determined by form – the way it is made, its purely visual aspects and its medium.”<sup>45</sup> In formalism, everything that is necessary is contained within the work through its shape, composition, material and texture.

While this work embraces certain qualities of formalism, the artists are interested in another element as well.

- Have students list the formal elements in the work and the more cultural elements that are equally important to the artists.
- Does the title add to your understanding and appreciation of the work? How?

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<sup>45</sup> Art and Popular Culture Encyclopedia  
[http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Formalism\\_\(art\)](http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Formalism_(art))



## museum of arts and design

“In this time of information overload and exaggerated senses, the work of Ralph and Lonneke emphasizes a strong focus on the metaphysical quality of human sensations. In their designs they try to find a balance in the contradictions of daily life and to [prove] the alternative possibilities by expressing immaterial values. For this reason, light is one of their favourite mediums to work with. It expresses emotions [in] a direct way.

The light installation *Fragile Future.3* expresses a poignant longing for the past, but also a curiosity about what the future might bring..”<sup>46</sup>

- What aspects, if any, do you find are “fragile” about this artwork?
- How do you interpret the title, *Fragile Future.3*?
- What elements (the materials, composition, or other) of the work convey the meaning that the future is a delicate one as the artists claim?
- What are some social issues that come to mind when studying this object?
- How do the artists view “the future” through this work? (i.e. Optimistically? Fretfully? Cautiously?) What aspects of the work support your response?
- Consider light as part of the work’s “material.” What are some meanings that you feel that are conveyed through light?
- What does the above statement mean “In their designs they try to find a balance in the contradictions of daily life and to [prove] the alternative possibilities by expressing immaterial values”?

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<sup>46</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 47.



## museum of arts and design

The artists state that they find a way to balance the contradictions in their lives through design.

- Based on the discussion so far, what do you suppose some of those contradictions might be?
- Why do you think it is important for the artists to point out these contradictions to the viewer?
- What are some contradictions in your daily life, and do you have a way to balance them?



museum of arts and design



Christiane Löhr

*Giant Seed Cloud*, 2010

Thistle seeds, hair net

Approx. 9 ft. 10 in. x 9 ft. x 10 in. x 9 ft. 10 in. (300 x 300 x 300 cm)

Courtesy of the artist



## museum of arts and design

Christiane Löhr's sculptures and installations are all made of organic materials, always employing elements that once belonged to the natural world. The artist picks the materials on her own in cities and in the countryside, often selecting materials based on their geometrical shapes, inner structure or "...compositional potential."<sup>47</sup>

### Questions to consider while viewing the art work:

- Describe the object that is hanging from the ceiling by its physical properties (color, size, texture, location, etc.)
- Does the sculpture remind you of anything that you've seen before?
- What materials could this installation work be made of? Is it a combination of organic and man-made elements? If so, which parts are man-made, which are organic?
- How would it feel to touch this work? Describe by using some descriptive adjectives.
- How heavy or light do you think this sculpture is? If it fell on the floor, how fast/slowly would it fall and what kind of noise would it make?
- Consider the color and shape of the artwork. What in nature does it remind you of? What does it remind you of from the man-made world?

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<sup>47</sup> PIAC Galleria, "Christian Löhr: *Sculture* May 20- July 20, 2006"  
[http://www.piacgalleria.it/english/artists/christiane\\_loehr/press\\_release\\_loehr.html](http://www.piacgalleria.it/english/artists/christiane_loehr/press_release_loehr.html)



## museum of arts and design

“... Löhr’s *Giant Seed Cloud 2010* investigates the visual “weight” of virtually weightless materials—in this instance, a mass of thistle down. Löhr has used a variety of organic materials over the years, including various seeds and grasses, blossoms, and even horsehair. She often takes her inspiration from architecture, juxtaposing the mass and weight of architectural construction and materials with the delicacy and lightness...”<sup>48</sup>

According to David McFadden in the above passage, Löhr is often inspired by architecture.

- Do you find elements of architecture in this work? If so, where?
- How does the artist play with the ideas of weight and mass?
- Do you personally feel lightness or more density when viewing the image of this installation?
- Looking at the way the art works within the architecture which supports it describe the contradictions of lightness and heaviness in the installation.
- Describe how the color of the thistle and the color of the room help shape the formal qualities and aesthesis of the work.
- Can you think of other things in our world that is constructed of a series of light or tiny elements, but look dense and strong when clustered together? (examples could be nature and man-made objects such as a school of fish or microchips in computers)

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<sup>48</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 22.





## museum of arts and design

Compare and contrast Löhr's work *Giant Seed Cloud* to work by the design firm, DRIFT (Gordijn and Nauta's *Fragile Future 3* discussed in previously, p. 47).

Löhr's objects exemplify formalist qualities. Formalism, according to one definition, is a concept that claims that a "work's artistic value is entirely determined by form – the way it is made, its purely visual aspects and its medium."<sup>49</sup> In formalism, everything that is necessary is contained within the work through its shape, composition, material and texture.

- Do you think that the artist, Löhr is interested in making a statement about the world we live in, environmental or cultural through this artwork, or do you think this work is strictly about the art itself? Support your answer.
- Consider the title of the work, *Giant Seed Cloud* – Does it add to the meaning or interpretation of this work? What if it were called, *Untitled*?

The artist uses thistle seeds in this work, do research on what thistle seeds are shaped like, where they are found, how they move through space, and what kinds of animals might feed on them to further understand the main material for this work.

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<sup>49</sup> Art and Popular Culture Encyclopedia  
[http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Formalism\\_\(art\)](http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Formalism_(art))



## museum of arts and design

MAD's chief curator David McFadden writes in his essay, "In Löhr's work, the down of various seeds often veers toward the immaterial and invisible world of materials."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, another MAD curator, Lowery Stokes Sims, also mentions the ephemeral quality of Löhr's work in her writing, "Löhr's poofs of seeds are as fugitive and fragile... they look as if they will 'come apart at the first puff of wind,' writes Ida Panicelli<sup>51</sup>. But fear not, 'despite its precious balance and delicate fragility,' Löhr's work is 'scrupulously constructed' and 'densely compact.'"<sup>52</sup>

- Do you see this installation as a fragile or strong/solid work overall? Why or why not?
- What could possibly be the meaning behind, if any, of a pile of thistle seeds suspended in the air?
- What are some social or political issues that come to mind when artists work with elements from nature?
- What do you think McFadden means when he writes that the "...seeds often veers<sup>53</sup> toward the immaterial and invisible world of materials"? How can a material become immaterial or invisible?
- What are the qualities that make an object seem ephemeral, fragile or fleeting? What kind of analogies can you come up with (or connections can you make) when you view artworks that have these qualities?

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<sup>50</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 22.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Veer: : To direct to a different course; To change direction or course (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>)



museum of arts and design



Kate McGwire  
*Discharge*, 2010  
Pigeon feathers, mixed media  
Photo: Courtesy of MAD



## museum of arts and design

For MAD's exhibition, *Dead or Alive*, Kate MccGwire has created a large-scale installation work that is made from thousands of feathers that cascades from the gallery ceiling. The work seems to pour out from the cut out glass ceiling portion of the museum.

### Questions to consider while viewing the art work:

- At first glance, what does this sculpture remind you of?
- Describe what you see in the installation. (Describe its color, shape, location, material, scale, etc.)
- What is the main material used in this work? Be specific (What kind of feather do you think? How do you think the feathers are attached to each other?)
- Is there an element of this work that makes the viewer want to touch it?
- Do you see movement? If so, describe the speed of the movement and the direction it is moving towards, what element in nature does the direction and implied speed remind you of?

“Birds have been used as symbols in virtually every culture around the world for millennia, from the dove of peace, to an eagle representing power and war, and the peacock emblematic of vanity, to name a few. Not surprisingly, the bird's ability to transcend gravity by way of feathers led to it becoming a symbol of the soul, occupying a middle ground between terrestrial and celestial realms.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 27.



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Furthermore, in discussing the specific kind of bird (pigeons) and its feathers that are incorporated in this work, curator McFadden writes, “ This emotional reaction to the material is challenged by the artist’s ability to transform the feathers into a water spout ... MccGwire strikes a balance between the sculptural form of her waterfall and the subtle painterly quality of the feathers that resemble individual brushstrokes on an apparently insubstantial form.”<sup>55</sup>

- Do you think this sculpture is strongly tied to birds because of the material, or does the form take a completely different life of its own? Support your answer by addressing the role of material and form in this work.
- Why do you think MccGwire used pigeon feathers?
- Where do you live and what kinds of birds do you see often? What kind of feathers would you have used if you were the artist?

Urban dwellers have different associations to Pigeons than they do other birds.

- What might be those associations?
- How different would the sculpture look or be interpreted if the artist had used a different kind of feather (how would it change if she used eagle feathers or peacock feathers)?
- How important do you think the process of making (and gathering) is for the artist upon viewing the image of this installation?

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<sup>55</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 29.



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The artist Kate MccGwire “asks questions about the very nature of beauty. She’s intrigued by the possibility of envisaging beauty as something more complex than merely what delights the senses: beauty can be a problem; it can be something that repels you or makes you question the status quo.”<sup>56</sup>

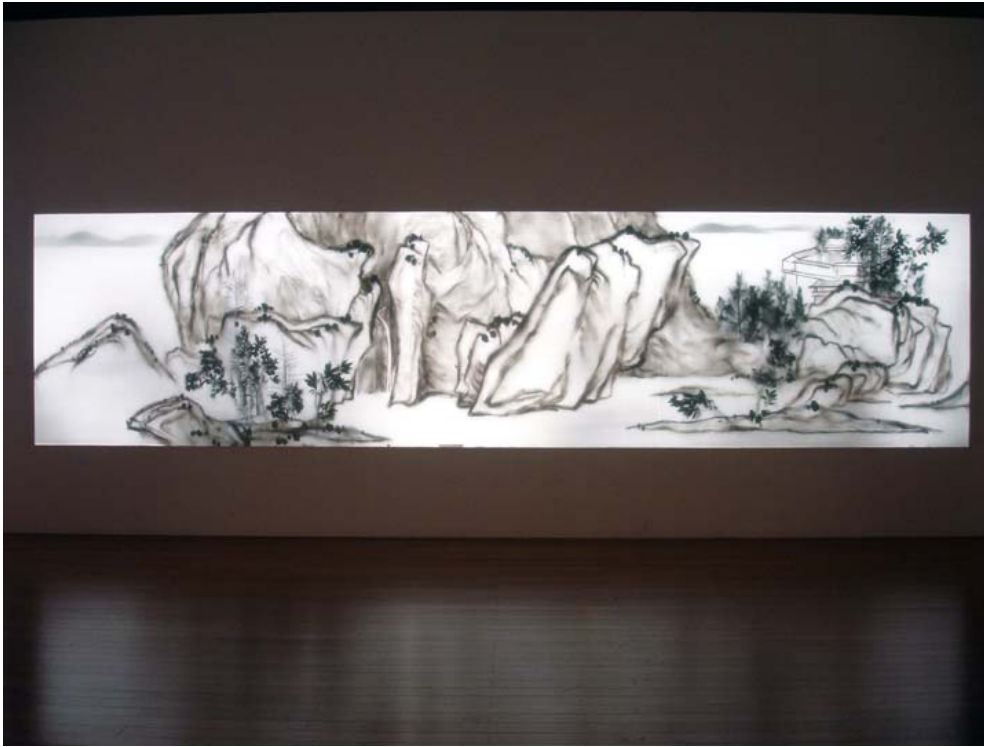
- What do you think MccGwire means by beauty being complex and problematic?
- Have you had times in your life where you felt that way? And how are those issues addressed through this work? (Also discuss the idea of inherent beauty found in all things)
- Can something be both beautiful and repulsive at the same time?
- How does the artist force you to question the “status quo” in this sculpture?
- Did you have opinions about pigeons (or the notion of beauty) that may have changed after viewing this work?
- Can what seems “repulsive” to some be beautiful to others? Give some examples.
- Do you think the artist intended the viewers to feel discomfort when viewing this work? Why would an artist do that?
- Have you encountered other works of art that were disturbing to you? Give examples and explain how those encounters may have been a valuable learning experience.

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<sup>56</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 71.



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Xu Bing

*Background Story 3*, 2006

(Installation at Suzhou Museum, Jiangsu, China 2006)

Various materials and natural debris attached to frosted glass panel, based on a hand-scroll of Gong Xian (d. 1689)

5 ft. 7 in. x 29 ft. 5 in. (glass panel) (170 x 900 cm)

Photo: Xu Bing



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Ask students to go around the room and give a description of what they notice when they examine the artwork.

### **Questions to consider while viewing the art work:**

- What do we notice about his work?
- Are there people in this drawing/painting?
- What is the focus of this work?
- Have you ever seen this type of landscape before? If so where?
- Do you believe that this type of landscape painting is associated with a particular culture or country? Why?

There is a longstanding Chinese artistic tradition of painting landscapes and using images of the natural world. Traditional Chinese landscape paintings, often depict monochrome images of trees, bamboo, rocks using various brush stroke techniques and treatment methods.

- What materials are usually associated with Chinese landscape painting? (paper scroll, calligraphy, brush stroke)
- Imagine yourself standing in front of the painting in a room, would the painting evoke a particular mood, what type?
- What type of affect would the scale of the painting have on you, it is 5feet, 7 inches in height by 29feet and 5 inches wide?
- Do you think that this painting is meant to be an exact replica of nature (realism) or is it meant to grasp an atmosphere or emotion? What makes you think so?





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David McFadden states in his essay which accompanies the catalog for the exhibition that Xu Bing simultaneously explores landscape, painting, and the history of Chinese art in his installation *Background Story 6*, 2010.<sup>57</sup>

While the traditional materials usually employed in creating a traditional landscape painting are paper, calligraphy, brush and ink, Xu Bing uses un-traditional materials to replicate the affect of a historical landscape painting.

- What un-traditional materials might be used to create such a work?
- What type of materials would you use if you were trying to create a landscape painting but wished to push break the barriers?

*Background Story 6*, 2010 was made out of stringing together dead sticks, leaves, roots and blossoms fishing line presented behind frosted glass to create the illusion of a painting. "Each brushstroke is carefully reproduced as shadows on a frosted glass panel".<sup>58</sup>

- Was it necessary for Xu Bing to use the original historical painting as a reference to create his *Background Story 6*?
- How do the materials being used to create this work of art relate to the scene being depicted?
- Does this change the meaning of the piece for you? How so?

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 22.



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If during the long history of Chinese Landscape painting, artists wanted their paintings to embody a universal longing for communal with nature, sought sanctity from a chaotic world, to depict an inner harmony with man and nature.

- Why did you think Xu Bing chose to use detritus to make his work?
- Is it less atmospheric, scenic, and tranquil now that we know the materials? Why or why not?



Behind the installation, viewers are invited to see how Xu Bing installed the artwork



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The title of the installation in the *Dead or Alive* exhibition is “*Background 6*”.

- In what way is the painting a background?

Each installation in the *Background*’series is installed in the gallery to allow the viewer to walk behind the work and witness the behind-the-scene view of how it is constructed (detritus from the garden – dead sticks, leaves, roots and blossoms).

“The beauty of a natural landscape has a variety of contexts: visual, pictorial, lyrical, mental, or memorial. The beauty that I am drawn to lies in “shadow.” It only exists in the emptiness of shadow. Like the spirit of a landscape, adrift, it embodies the essence of life”.<sup>59</sup>

### **Suggestions for further study:**

Divide the “Great age of Chinese landscape” into areas that students can research, ask them to present their findings to the class.

### **Helpful websites:**

<http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/asian/Chinese-Landscape-Painting.html>

[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/clpg/hd\\_clpg.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/clpg/hd_clpg.htm)

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<sup>59</sup> David Revere McFadden and Lowery S. Sims, *Dead or Alive* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2010), 55.



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**Classroom Activity Suggestions**  
For  
***Dead or Alive***



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### Global and Local

#### K-2

Have students spend a week collecting small objects from nature on their way to and from school, and while engaging in other activities they do on a regular basis. Have students work in small groups to assemble and categorize the objects they have amassed. Then create collages with the groupings of found objects.

#### 3-5

Have students research or come up with a list of bugs and insects that they can find locally. Alternatively, they can choose to list bugs and insects that are indigenous to a geographic location that they are studying about. The children can then create bugs or insects of their choice out of paper machê and cover them with natural materials such as leaves, bark, pine needles, flowers, etc. by carefully considering their exterior texture and colors.

#### 6-8

Why is the skull an important motif in popular culture? What do you think when you see a skull? How do you feel? Does a human shaped skull have a different meaning to that of an animal? Find images by different artist on the internet.

Create your own skull using one from a variety of materials like shells, insects, seed pods, leaves and petals and other organic materials. Write a short report about the significance of your skull and the reason why you chose the material.

#### 9-12

In response to the artwork, *Ghettobird Tunic* by Sanford Biggers, have students discuss the importance of location with this work. The artist is from Los Angeles. Does this work resonate more in L.A. than a city like San Francisco or Miami? Why? Does this work have as much power in New York City? What if it was exhibited internationally?

Create a design for an article of clothing that would help you in your community. What materials would you use? Why? Would it translate and be helpful for another community? Would that community know what it was for?



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### **Narrative and Content**

#### **K-2**

Get the students to come up with two creatures (insects, birds, mammals, etc.,) that they each like. Ask them to list (verbally for very young students) the characteristics of the two creatures that they picked. How many legs do they have? What do their wings look like? What colors do you find on their bodies? Then each student will draw, paint or create a collage of a new creature that has some features and characteristics from both of the animals/insects. Find out what kind of narrative the students come with for their new hybrid creatures.

#### **3-5**

Have students collect one found object from nature. Have students write a few paragraphs from the point of view of the object. They should retrace its journey from the moment they found it, back through to the beginning of its life cycle. For example, if the object is a twig, they should trace the twig's journey all the way back to the seedling of a tree.

#### **6-8**

What object in nature could most represent you? Why?

Write a brief description of why you have chosen this object.

Is it possible to find this object near where you live?

If so take a walk as a class and collect the objects. Using these objects create a three dimensional self portrait.

If not possible to find these objects in your community, create a drawing of yourself made from your natural object.

#### **9-12**

Based on the information and artwork in the teacher's resource pack, have students write an editorial critiquing the exhibition *Dead or Alive* for the local paper. Present this editorial to the class. A newspaper editorial is an article that is written based on the opinion of the writer.



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### Form and Structure

#### K-2

Have students look closely at an image of a bird's nest and allow them to share their observations. Then have students create a small nest/3-dimensional sculpture out of twigs, twine, raffia, string, cardboard or other found objects for a nest that would serve as a home for an imagined or real creature.

#### 3-5

Discovering areas and the volume of 3D shapes.

A caterpillar spins a cocoon around itself to protect it while it undergoes metamorphoses and eventually emerges as a butterfly or moth. How much space is there in the cocoon? What does the insect do to fit into the space? Create an insect that can be placed into a cocoon made from cotton wool. How would you make the insect fit?

Organic materials like leaves could be used to make the insect and the wings made out of paper. Use brads or split pins to make articulated joints (folding wings).

#### 6-8

Many living organisms, whether they are microbes, plants, insects or animals, often have intricate patterns on them. Ask the students to research and select one of these motifs found in nature (e.g. a turtle shells, rings on a log, spider webs, close up of a housefly's eye, etc.). The students will then create artwork (2-D or 3-D) that incorporates some of these beautiful patterns that are found in nature.

#### 9-12

There are many site-specific installations in *Dead or Alive*.

Gather found materials and recycled objects. Select a space in your classroom and create a site-specific installation using those materials based on the concept of the word alive.



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### **Process and Materials**

#### **K-2**

Take a trip to a local park or outdoor area and gather natural materials such as twigs, branches, leaves, seed pods and rocks. Using these materials, build a structure that would house an existing animal or one that you have created.

Draw the animal that would live inside.

#### **3-5**

Take a nature walk. Collect natural materials. Use them to create a 3 dimensional sculpture that brings these found objects back to life.

#### **6-8**

Choose just one of the materials found in the exhibition Dead or Alive to use as the primary material for a 3-dimensional sculpture of an animal. You might choose one of the following: feathers, twigs, leave, spices, or beans. Using only one of these materials, along with adhesive and construction materials such as string, glue, wire or tape, students should create a 3-dimensional sculpture that is similar to an animal form, or another form found in nature. Urge students to transform the original material as much as possible by cutting, bending, disassembling, or stacking the material to create an entirely new form.

#### **9-12**

What happens to leaves from the time it is green (spring/summer) until they fall off the branches (fall)? What happens when insects complete their life cycle? Consider the changes in color, shape, texture, density, cellular structure etc. when living organisms in nature transition from life to death. Also, students can research what taxidermists do to preserve "the live look" of creatures using chemicals and other processes. Create a 2-D (painting) or 3-D (clay or mixed material sculpture) artwork that depicts this transition in a non-figurative, abstract manner. Ask the students to think deeply about expressing the life-to-death transition in texture, material, color, shape, etc. This is a challenging project for students of all levels, so they should keep notes, journals and sketches prior to starting their artwork.





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### **MAD Resources:**

**Please visit our web site [www.madmuseum.org](http://www.madmuseum.org)**

You will find under the drop down menu “learn” and “teach” resources and information for educators including:

- **Teachers’ Lounge** (drop down menu “learn” to access)

The Teachers’ Lounge is MAD’s central online location for engaging local, national and international educators in the support, conceptualization and integration of arts- and design-based programs, projects and partnerships. Information can be found about all our programs at MAD including a Teacher’s Blog- active online community for arts educator to share ideas and experiences

- **Curate the collection** (drop down menu “interact” to access)

Create your own on-line exhibition of objects from the collection of the Museum of Arts and Design. Save the collection for future reference and share it with others. To get started open the curate the collection page and register for this free service.

- **Cell Phone Audio Tour** (drop down menu “interact” to access)

Listen to MAD curators, artists and outside experts discuss artworks on exhibit, as well as highlights of MAD's new home at 2 Columbus Circle, on your cell phone. When visiting the museum, look for the phone icon posted throughout the Museum and in the galleries on selected labels. Call 212.514.0017 and then enter the number printed on the label to listen.

- **Videos on YouTube** (drop down menu “interact to access)

Watch videos of artists, curators and other guest speakers discuss the art and design process, installations and exhibitions on view at MAD.



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### **Artists' Websites For Further Looking:**

**Jennifer Angus**

<http://www.jenniferangus.com/>

**Sanford Biggers**

<http://www.sanfordbiggers.com/>

**Maria Fernanda Cardoso**

<http://www.mariafernandacardoso.com/>

**Lonneke Gordijn/ Ralph Nauta (studio DRIFT)**

<http://www.designdrift.nl/>

**Billie Grace Lynn**

[http://www.billiegracelynn.com/index\\_flash.html](http://www.billiegracelynn.com/index_flash.html)

**Kate MccGwire**

<http://www.katemccgwire.com/>

**Christy Rupp**

<http://www.christyrupp.com/>

**Levi van Veluw**

<http://www.levivanveluw.nl/>

**Xu Bing**

<http://www.xubing.com/>

**Damien Hirst**

<http://www.damienhirst.com/>



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### **Taxidermy websites**

<http://www.taxidermy.net/>

<http://www.breakthroughmagazine.com/>

### **Paper Mache Websites:**

<http://familycrafts.about.com/cs/papermache/a/051500pm.htm>

<http://www.kinderart.com/multic/machemask.shtml>

### **Rubbings Websites:**

[http://www.ehow.com/how\\_2097428\\_do-tree-rubbing.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_2097428_do-tree-rubbing.html)

<http://www.busybeekidscrafts.com/Tree-Rubbings-Collage.html>

### **Weaving Websites:**

<http://www.artprojectsforkids.org/2008/11/paper-weaving.html>

### **Shadow Puppet Websites:**

[http://www.ehow.com/how\\_4479611\\_make-shadow-puppets-out-construction.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_4479611_make-shadow-puppets-out-construction.html)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WlbQPmXg08>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadow\\_play](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadow_play)

### **Bookbinding/ Book Arts:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XHfwe\\_VfbM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XHfwe_VfbM)

<http://www.videojug.com/film/how-to-make-a-book>

[http://homepages.nildram.co.uk/~dawe5/bookbinding\\_pages/BB\\_welcome2.html](http://homepages.nildram.co.uk/~dawe5/bookbinding_pages/BB_welcome2.html)

<http://www.life123.com/hobbies/scrapbooking/binding/bookbinding.shtml>

<http://www.sff.net/people/brook.west/bind/bindit.html>

<http://www.aboutbookbinding.com/>

### **Paper Relief Sculpture:**

<http://www.mmwindowtoart.com/3d.html>

### **BOOKS:**

Shadow Puppet Books:

“Making Shadow Puppets,” by Jill Bryant

“Shadow Puppets” by Orson Scott Card

“The Art of Chinese Shadow Puppet Theater,” by Kyle Okada & Susan Olivier-Hirasawa



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### Checklist with complete credits:

Levi van Veluw

*Landscape I*, from the Landscapes series, 2008  
Lambdaprint on dibond, antireflex Perspex (2 prints)  
47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in. (120 x 100 cm)  
23 5/8 x 19 11/16 in. (60 x 50 cm)  
Courtesy of Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam/Rotterdam  
Photo: Levi van Veluw

*Landscape III*, from the Landscapes series, 2008  
Lambdaprint on dibond, antireflex Perspex (2 prints)  
47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in. (120 x 100 cm)  
23 5/8 x 19 11/16 in. (60 x 50 cm)  
Courtesy of Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam/Rotterdam  
Photo: Levi van Veluw

Jorge Mayet  
*Obatala*, 2010  
Electrical cable, paper mache, feather, acrylics  
64 9/16 x 39 3/8 in (164 x 100 x 100 cm)  
Courtesy of Galería Horrach Moya, Palma de Mallorca, Spain

Nick Cave  
*Soundsuit*, 2010  
Mixed media  
96 x 33 x 27 in. (243.8 x 83.8 x 55.8 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York  
Photo: James Prinz

Sanford Biggers  
*Ghettobird Tunic*, 2006  
Bubble jacket, exotic feathers, 61 x 31 in. (154.9 x 78.7 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist; Michael Klein Arts, New York  
Photo: Joshua White  
Collection of Artists' Legacy Foundation, Oakland

Maria Fernanda Cardoso  
*Emu Flag + Cloak (Fluro Orange)*, 2006–8  
Nylon netting, emu feathers, glue, fiberglass rod, metal, lambda print  
47 x 55 x 23 in. (119.3 x 139.7 x 58.4 cm) (cloak)  
Courtesy of the artist; Sicardi Gallery, Houston  
Photo: © Maria Fernanda Cardoso  
Collection of Artists' Legacy Foundation, Oakland  
Photography by Michael Tropea, Chicago

Damien Hirst  
*Prophecy*, 2008  
Butterflies, household gloss on canvas  
Diameter: 60 in. (152.4 cm)  
Collection of Claudine and Stephen Bronfman  
Photo: Brian Merrett, Montreal



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Jennifer Angus

*A Terrible Beauty, Chapter III: To Have and to Hold*, 2007 (installation at Musée d'art de Joliette, Quebec, Canada)

Handprinted wallpaper, *Heteropteryx dilatata*, *Phyllium giganteum*, *Sanaea intermedia*, *Pompoina imperatorial*, *Tropidacris Dux*, pins, *Angamiana floridula*, *Ayuthia spectabilis*, *Tosena Albata*, frames, curio boxes, various items from the permanent collection of the Musée d'art de Joliette

37 ft. x 31 ft. 6 in. x 11 ft.

Photo: Denis Farley

Christy Rupp

*Great Auk, Iceland*, 2007

Fast-food chicken bones, mixed media

29 x 17 x 20 in. (73.7 x 43.2 x 50.8 cm)

Courtesy of the artist; Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York

Photo: Nick Ghiz

Billie Grace Lynn

*Mad Cow Motorcycle*, 2008

Cow bones, bicycle frame, electric motor

96 x 24 x 36 in. (243.8 x 61 x 91.4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist; Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, Florida

Photo: Billie Grace Lynn

Lonneke Gordijn and Ralph Nauta

*Fragile Future.3*, 2009

Phosphorus bronze, dandelion puffs

Dimensions variable

Photo: Courtesy of DRIFT, Amsterdam; Jesse Howard

Christiane Löhr

*Giant Seed Cloud*, 2010

Thistle seeds, hair net

Approx. 9 ft. 10 in. x 9 ft. x 10 in. x 9 ft. 10 in. (300 x 300 x 300 cm)

Courtesy of the artist

Kate MccGwire

*Discharge*, 2010

Pigeon feathers, mixed media

Photo: Courtesy of MAD

Xu Bing

*Background Story 3*, 2006

(Installation at Suzhou Museum, Jiangsu, China 2006)

Various materials and natural debris attached to frosted glass panel, based on a hand-scroll of Gong Xian (d. 1689)

5 ft. 7 in. x 29 ft. 5 in. (glass panel) (170 x 900 cm)

Photo: Xu Bing



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