



ELEMENTARY VISUAL ARTS

A Partnership Between:



Jeff Koons: Popular Culture - 3D Art Banal Art Series

How do artists make everyday objects or subjects into art?
How does a 3D representation impact the art and the viewer's experience of the artwork?

LESSON OVERVIEW/OBJECTIVES

Students will learn about the artist and work of Jeff Koons. He is an American artist known for working with popular culture subjects and his reproductions of banal objects—such as balloon animals produced in stainless steel with mirror-finish surfaces. Using clay, students will make their own Koons like balloon animal while learning about 3D art, composition and spatial awareness.

KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT TO VISUAL ARTS CORE CURRICULUM:

Based on Utah State Visual Arts Core Curriculum Requirements (3rd Grade)

Standard 1 (Making): The student will explore and refine the application of media, techniques, and artistic processes.

Objective 1: Explore a variety of art materials while learning new techniques and processes.

- a. Practice using skills for beginning drawings.
- b. Use simplified forms, such as cones, spheres, and cubes, to begin drawing more complex forms.
- h. Explore the design possibilities of a 3-D object by examining views of it from many angles.

Objective 3: Handle art materials in a safe and responsible manner.

- a. Ventilate the room to avoid inhaling fumes from art materials.
- b. Dispose and/or recycle waste art materials properly.
- c. Clean and put back to order art making areas after projects.
- d. Respect other students' artworks as well as one's own.

Standard 2 (Perceiving) : The student will analyze, reflect on, and apply the structures of art.

Objective 1: Analyze and reflect on works of art by their elements and principles

- a. Determine how artists create dominance in their work; e.g., size, repetition, and contrast.
- b. Examine significant works of art and point out how the artists have created illusion or feeling of depth.

Objective 2: Create works of art using the elements and principles.

- a. Identify dominant elements in significant works of art.
- e. Create a work of art that uses contrast to create a focal point. Use that to convey the most important idea or part of the work.

Standard 3 (Expressing):The student will choose and evaluate artistic subject matter, themes, symbols, ideas, meanings, and purposes.

Objective 1: Explore possible content and purposes in significant works of art

- a. Explain possible meanings or interpretations of some significant works of art.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Learn about the artist Jeff Koons and his work.
- Understand the significance of Koons' art contributions to the postwar generation by turning banal i.e. everyday objects into extraordinary works of art.
- Learn about 3D art, composition and spatial awareness.
- Understand Koons' Banal Series that includes works such as the Balloon Dog and Play Doh.
- Experiment with clay to make their own balloon like animal in the style of Koons.

SUPPLIES

- Images and art samples of the work of Jeff Koons to include Balloon Dog and Play Doh.
- Art pencils and markers.
- White paper to sketch out ideas.
- Foamcore or other suitable material for base for clay structure.
- Clay (air dry or other in a variety of colors), sculpey, model magic etc.
- Objects to accessorize clay animals such as buttons, beads, etc.

VOCABULARY

Banal Objects/Ideas - So lacking in originality to be obvious and boring; commonplace.

Neo-pop - The term refers to artists influenced by pop art.

Kitsch - A low-brow style of mass-produced art or design using popular or cultural icons.

Pop Art - Art based on modern popular culture and the mass media, especially as a critical or ironic comment on traditional fine art values.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

Introduction

Before beginning the lesson, introduce students to the work of Jeff Koons by showing images of his varied artwork including the Balloon Dog, Play Doh amongst others. Highlight the subject matter, size and style of the works.. Give them a few minutes to respond to the images. Encourage comparisons and contrasting statements as well as descriptions of what they see.

Introduce your students to the idea of how everyday objects and ideas may be called banal or ordinary, but can be turned into exemplary works of art. Talk about what constitutes art and subject matter for art. Ordinary items can be a vehicle for more complex thoughts, ideas and forms of expression. Tell students that you will be discussing Jeff Koons, his artwork, his inspiration for his art and his large scale 3D pieces. They will be creating their own 3D version of a Koons balloon animal out of clay.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN CONTINUED

About the Artist

Jeffrey “Jeff” Koons (born January 21, 1955) is an American artist known for working with popular culture subjects and his reproductions of banal objects—such as balloon animals produced in stainless steel with mirror-finish surfaces. He lives and works in both New York City and his hometown of York, Pennsylvania.

In the early 1980s, inspired by pop culture, Koons boldly emerged with his first series of works, entitled *The New*, which consisted primarily of new household appliances displayed in plexiglass cases. Soon after, he adopted the role of a prototypical American art star, actively cultivating his own image and running splashy advertisements in art magazines featuring pictures of himself that appeared to flaunt the lifestyle afforded by his artistic success.

His works have sold for substantial sums of money, including at least one world record auction price for a work by a living artist. That was on November 12, 2013, when Koons’s *Balloon Dog (Orange)* sold at Christie’s Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale in New York City for US\$58.4 million, above its high US\$55 million estimate.

Critics are sharply divided in their views of Koons. Some view his work as pioneering and of major art-historical importance. Others dismiss his work as kitsch, crass, and based on cynical self-merchandising. Koons has stated that there are no hidden meanings in his works, nor any critiques. “A viewer might at first see irony in my work... but I see none at all. Irony causes too much critical contemplation. The meaning is only what one perceives at first glance; there is no gap between what the work is in itself and what is perceived.”

Since 1979 Koons has produced work within series. His early work was in the form of conceptual sculpture, an example of which is *The Pre-New*, a series of domestic objects attached to light fixtures, resulting in strange new configurations. In subsequent work, Koons has explored a range of commercial objects, including basketballs suspended in aquariums of distilled water and monumental paintings and sculptures of pop culture objects. Much of his subject matter is drawn not from high-end products, but from kitsch—inflatable toys and cheap ceramic figurines.

Koons employs assistants and fabricators to copy these objects with the highest attention to detail and often in fine materials such as porcelain, crystal, and stainless steel. “I’m basically the idea person. I’m not physically involved in the production,” he explained in a 1986 interview. “I don’t have the necessary abilities, so I go to the top people, whether I’m working with my foundry or in physics.”

Koons is one of the few artists of his generation who has transcended the fine art world to work with a variety of cultural figures, including filmmaker Gus Van Sant, fashion designer Stella McCartney, and pop star Lady Gaga. His work is in the collections of many prestigious institutions in the United States and around the world.whitney.org

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN CONTINUED

Lesson:

Create: Your own 3D balloon animal in the style of Jeff Koons.

1. To understand the Jeff Koons' artwork, show them image samples of an array of works. *Balloon Dog* for example, was created as part of his Celebration series that paid tribute to the milestones that mark a year and the cycle of life. *Balloon Dog* was inspired by an invitation to design a calendar for which he created photographs that referred to holidays and other joyous events. *Play Doh* on the other hand, is a tribute to childlike imagination. These images formed the basis for a series of large-scale sculptures and paintings.
2. Have students look closely at Koons' art examples. While seemingly simple, attention is paid to representing every detail of that object. *Balloon Dog*, for example, shows the precise detail seen in a twisted balloon sculpture.
3. On sketch paper, have students draw an animal they would like to create in 3D. Once they have the idea, have them reimagine and redraw this animal as though it were a balloon.
4. Taking the balloon sketch of their animal, have students use colored clay to begin to shape and build their animal. Talk to students about composition and how this animal can be viewed from all sides. Reinforce how they are taking a well known animal and turning it into a stylized 3D art piece.
5. Add accessories and/or clay details as desired.
6. When finished, allow time for students to share with one another.

Additional Resources:

<http://www.jeffkoons.com/>
Jeff Koons's website.

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/jeff-koons>
Jeff Koons on Art21.

<http://www.gagosian.com/artists/jeff-koons>
Jeff Koons on Gagosian's website.

<http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/JeffKoons>
Jeff Koons exhibition page on whitney.org.

http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/AudioGuides?play_id=1045
Audio guide for Jeff Koons: A Retrospective.

<http://whitney.org/ForTeachers>
The Whitney's collection and resources for K-12 teachers.

VISUALS



BALLOON DOG (YELLOW), 1994–2000

Koons conceived his series Celebration in 1994 as a paean to the milestones that mark a year and the cycle of life. Fittingly, it was inspired by an invitation to design a calendar for which he created photographs that referred to holidays and other joyous events. These images formed the basis for a series of large-scale sculptures and paintings.

Despite its ten-foot stature and one-ton weight, Koons's Balloon Dog (Yellow) uncannily conveys its ephemeral source. Koons worked with a specialized foundry in California to cast and finish the work's separate precision-engineered, stainless steel parts. He stipulated that not only should the outside of the sculpture capture the curves and puckers of a balloon dog but also that its inside suggest the free circulation of air, as if it were actually fashioned from a single balloon. Koons has also compared its form to a "Trojan horse," the giant wooden gift that the Greeks bestowed on their Trojan enemies, while Greek soldiers lurked inside to surprise their enemy. Like all of the Celebration sculptures, Balloon Dog (Yellow) is one of five examples in different colors, lending each version a unique character and distinct emotional charge.



Michael Jackson and Bubbles



PLAY-DOH, 1994–2014

In contrast to the perfect smoothness and largely monochromatic palette of many works in Koons's Celebration series, this sculpture represents an enormous craggy mound of Play-Doh. The material is one of the first that American children use to make simple artworks, and Koons remembers his son Ludwig proudly presenting him with a Play-Doh sculpture. Yet here the freedom, confidence, and spontaneity of the boy's initial gesture ironically prompted one of the most complex sculptures Koons has ever made, requiring two decades to fabricate. The sculpture was first conceived in polyethylene but was ultimately fashioned from twenty-seven individual interlocking pieces of painted aluminum, unveiled for the first time in this retrospective exhibition. The mountain of Play-Doh may call to mind scatological associations or geological forms, but for Koons, it's also "a very joyous, very pop material." A perfect replica of an offhand creation, Play-Doh serves as a monument to childlike imagination.



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