Frida Kahlo
Mexican (Coyoacan), 1907-1954

"Since my subjects have always been my sensations, my states of mind and the profound reactions that life has been producing in me, I have frequently objectified all this in figures of myself, which were the most sincere and real thing that I could do in order to express what I felt inside and outside of myself”
-Frida Kahlo

Mexican painter Frida Kahlo is probably the most well-known female artist from Latin America. Her iconic self-portraits, dream-like landscapes and dynamic still life paintings have been embraced by art historians as well as pop culture enthusiasts.

Encouraged to pursue art after an accident in 1925 which left her bedridden, Kahlo began painting portraits of herself and those around her. After befriending the Mexican muralist, Diego Rivera, her work quickly developed a unique style which was heavily influenced by her own imagination, Mexican indigenous art and Social Realism.

Kahlo’s oil paintings consist of colorful and graphic portrayals of events in her life. Using her body as a means of expression, she used symbols that were important to her to tell her story. A contemporary of the surrealists, her work was at first absorbed into that genre. She always denied that her work was surreal, however, famously stating: “They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality.” Kahlo was the first Mexican artist to have her work purchased by the Louvre Museum in Paris, France.

Frida Kahlo
Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird
1940
Oil on Canvas
24 1/2 x 17 3/4 in.

Questions to ask your students when looking at Kahlo’s Work:

1. Who is the woman in the painting? What is she thinking?
2. What are some of the symbols you see in the painting? What do you think they mean?
3. This is a self-portrait. Why do artists paint themselves?
4. What do the colors say about the artist and her mood?

Project: Using your body as a template.

Frida Kahlo, a Mexican painter, is known for painting portraits of herself in order to talk about the events and feelings she experienced. These works, called “self-portraits” used her face and body to tell about her life. Have students use their own bodies in order to tell their story. Using the body template we provide for you, have students alter the figure and add symbols in order to show the world their own “reality” through symbols.

Vocabulary:

Background: Part of a picture that is furthest from the viewer behind the main subject.

Foreground: Area of a picture that is closest to the viewer, usually toward the bottom of the plane.

Mood: Overall feeling or emotion expressed in art, often through color.

Oil Painting: Usually on canvas using slow drying paint that is made up of powdered pigment mixed with linseed oil. Paint dries to a hard, glossy finish that protects the bright colors of the pigment.
**Representational Art:** Objects or subjects created in a way that “represents” them almost realistically, though not necessarily in a rational or typical way.

**Self-Portrait:** Picture or object an artist makes using her or himself as the subject.  
Subject: That which is depicted in a work of art, usually a person or object but sometimes also an idea or emotion.

**Social Realism:** Art movement of the early 20th century that depicts everyday events and typically working class people.

**Surrealism:** Art movement of the 1920’s that used dreams and fantasy as the subject matter for art. Surrealism may be representational (depicting objects realistically) or non-representational (using abstract symbols).

**Symbol:** Form or image representing something beyond its obvious or immediate meaning.

**Template:** Stencil or overlay used to replicate shapes or letters.

**Preparation:**

Photocopy the template found in this lesson. The figure is androgynous, so that students may adapt the gender they identify with to the self-portrait. Students may trace the template onto another sheet of paper in order to modify it, or simply fill it in.

Explain that Self-portraits may be straightforward replicas of the way the artist looks or they may be symbolic and abstract. Whatever their means of expression, self-portraits are always a picture of the way an artists **wants** to be seen by others. Often, artists exaggerate features or parts of their bodies that they see as unique or special to them. For example, Frida Kahlo often exaggerated her eyebrows and transformed them into a raven. She expressed the pain in her back by transforming her spine into a broken Greek column.

Self-portraits include specific items and backgrounds that are important to the artist. Some artists use animals to represent aspects of their personalities, others use cultural, religious and personal symbols or objects related to their careers.

Encourage students to think about “symbols” that represent them and the activities that they participate in. Ask them what parts of their bodies they utilize the most in these activities. For example, an artist may prize her/his hands or eyes. A runner’s legs and feet are important to their activity, chefs use their hands and taste buds and scientists may prize their eyes and brains.

Have students develop a vocabulary of symbols that represent them and their interests. Symbols may be as common as waves for those who enjoy the water, stars for those who see themselves shine or numbers for those who enjoy math. Many young artists utilize hearts for love or race cars to express their interests in automobiles and racing. Some include their favorite animal.

Symbols may also literally be an object that is special to them, or as ephemeral as a mood that they may recall during an important time in their lives. Feelings may be symbolized using colors or changing the sizes of objects. Brainstorming symbols or the moods that colors symbolize may help. Ask students what colors they would use to express happiness, sadness, anger, excitement, etc. Remind students that some symbols are universal and apply to most human societies while others are specific to a subculture or individual.

**Materials:**
- Photocopied template
- Paper
• Pencils
• Erasers
• Coloring tools (markers, crayons on colored pencils)

Procedure:

1. Hand out templates.
2. Have students trace templates in pencil lightly, to allow for modifications.
3. Students should modify the template to look like them, using specific hairstyles, accessories or styles of dress.
4. Referencing the “preparation” discussion, encourage student artists to create a self-portrait using the aforementioned symbols.
5. Encourage them to exaggerate certain features or replace body parts with objects and symbols, a la Frida Kahlo.
6. Draw a background for the self-portrait using a place (real or imagined) that is meaningful to the artist.
7. Color in the completed self portrait using colors that reflect the artist’s mood.
8. Hang up the self-portraits in the classroom and have an art show!

Conclusion:

How accurately does the self-portrait represent the artist? Can you identify the artist from the self-portrait? What symbols were the most commonly used by many artists? If one specific symbol was used often, did it mean the same thing to every artist who used it? Do the self-portraits look human or do they now resemble objects? Would you describe this self-portrait as representing your reality? How?

Follow up:


Visit the Museum of Latin American Art and identify and discuss the self-portraits you find in the permanent collection!

Creative Writing

Who am I? What do you want people to know about you? Based on your self-portrait and the symbols you used, write a short paragraph or poem about who you are and how you want others to see you!
Diego Rivera  
**Mexican (Guanajuato), 1886-1957**

Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato in 1886 and enjoyed a long and tumultuous artistic career. Beginning his studies at the Academia San Carlos at the age of ten, his early work reflects the technical, figurative style taught at the academy. Receiving an art scholarship to study in Europe at the age of 23, he did not return to live in Mexico until 1921—after the Revolution.

While in Europe, he was heavily influenced by the cubists and conformed to that style until he was confronted with Italian Frescoes in 1920. Once he had witnessed the grandeur of Italy’s “public” art, he returned to Mexico with a mission: to create a public art specific to his native country of Mexico.

With the support of Jose Vasoncelos—Secretary of State for Public Education—Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Jose Clemente Orozco painted murals in public buildings all over Mexico. The three are now known as “Los Tres Grandes.” While painting a commission at the National Preparatory School, Rivera was approached by a young artist named Frida Kahlo. She later became his third wife and a popular artist in her own right.

Rivera was named the director of San Carlos Academy in 1929, but his radical reforms (which included mandatory employment outside of school for all students and the development of night classes) created uproar amongst students and faculty and met heavy resistance. One year later, he was forced to resign.

Rivera continued to make murals both in the Mexico and the U.S. His political beliefs and his activity within the Mexican Communist Party often put him at the center of controversy. In New York, while working on a commission for Nelson Rockefeller, Rivera decided to include a portrait of Stalin in a mural depicting the development of modern technology and political thought. Rockefeller ordered the mural destroyed. Rivera eventually reproduced the mural *Man at the Crossroads*, at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City.

**Diego Rivera**  
**The History of Mexico—The Ancient Indian World**  
1929-1935  
**Fresco**  
**North Wall, National Palace, Mexico City**

Questions to ask your students when looking at Rivera's Murals:

1. Murals are usually the size of buildings. How do you think murals are made?
2. How does the **scale** of the mural affect the way it tells a story?
3. What is the **narrative** (story) being told in this mural?
4. Can you identify a beginning to this story? How about an end to the story? What is the **rhythm** that the story moves in?
5. What **symbols** did the artist use to tell the story?
6. Do you see a **focal point** in the mural? Where is it?
7. How many stories are being told in this mural?
8. Do you see any famous people or historical figures? What are they doing in the mural?

**Project: Creating a Classroom Mural**

Diego Rivera is known as the father of the Mexican Muralist Movement. His murals tell a variety of stories based on the History of Mexico, Mexican cultural traditions, the effects of technology on human beings and the development of Mexican Nationalism. Using the Mexican public, historical figures and his own friends and family as the actors within the larger drama of his narratives, he relates a story that is important to his community. Create a mural in your classroom based on the stories of the classroom community.
Vocabulary:

**Chronology:** Arrangement of events sequentially, in order or the way that they happened in real time.

**Focal Point:** The center of attention or focus in an artist's composition. It is usually the most important part of the picture.

**Fresco:** Painting made on a wall in wet plaster. Once the plaster dries, the pigments are absorbed into the wall, making it permanent.

**Horizon Line:** The line in a picture where the sky and earth meet. It may be a straight line, it may curve around the picture plane or it may be implied. Some art does not use a horizon line at all.

**Horror Vacui:** Literally a “fear of open spaces,” Horror Vacu is used to describe a work of art with a crowded design.

**Narrative:** Representing the elements of a story.

**Rhythm:** The repetition of symbols or elements to create movement within the picture.

**Scale:** The proportion of a picture to real life.

**Social Realism:** Art movement of the 20th Century that depicts everyday events and typically working class people. In Mexico, it became the center of the Mexican Muralist Movement.

**Symbol:** Form or image representing something beyond its obvious or immediate meaning.

Preparation:

In this project, the students will create a community mural. If possible, study the murals of Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros ahead of time. Ask them to identify a horizon line if there is one. Define the difference between a background and a foreground. Are they easily identifiable in the murals you are studying? Point out the focal point of each mural and then discuss how the figures/objects that surround the focal point inform the story. Ask students to tell the story related in the murals.

Note that the muralists often utilized scale and horror vacui (fear of open spaces) to tell a more effective story. Both elements are used for dramatic effect and often to create a rhythm in the mural. The repetition of the same element gives a pattern to the mural and also sets a rhythmic pace. Blowing up certain objects makes them appear more important, benevolent or threatening. Imagine a large angelic being hovering over the space or an oversized cannon pointing at a small crowd. Filling up the space gives a sense of a story brimming with characters or of a community buzzing with activity.

Stress the non-linear (non-chronological) nature of the stories. Ask students how time and space are defined in these murals. Is it real time/space or has the artist invented his own time/space? Does time move across the mural, down (from the top) or up (from the bottom). Does time zigzag throughout the mural? How many stories can be represented in one mural? Is it true that there are always two sides to one story? If the story is representing a community (more than one person) can the story tell more than two sides?

Following the rhythm/pattern of the mural, can you identify the rhythm, pattern or flow of the story? Are there scenes in the mural similar to movie scenes? Decide on a style for your classroom mural. How will you employ horror vacui? Where will your focal point be: in the center, at the top, near the bottom or off to the side of the mural? How many focal points will your mural have?
Materials:

Butcher Paper
Pencils
Erasers
Large Rulers
Coloring Tools (markers, crayons or paint)

1. Break out into groups of 5 in the classroom.
2. Have each group write up a story about their community (classroom, school, immediate neighborhood, home)
3. Developing the mural:
   a. Choose a setting for the story. Decide upon a room, a building that is central to the story, a natural space or a street. Maybe your story encompasses more than one place and more than one period of time. How will this affect the viewer’s sense of space/time? How will show the passage of time visually?
   b. As a group, decide whether you will use a horizon line and where that horizon line will be.
   c. Develop a “visual vocabulary” made up of symbols that are common to the community. You may choose a school mascot, a sign that is common to your school/neighborhood or landmarks.
   d. Choose the characters in your story. Will you include people in your class, historical figures or mythological figures? Why?
4. Each group develops images/sketches that tell the story.
5. Share the stories and choose which images to put in the mural. You may combine images to create a mural that is made up of a collage of images from each group.
6. Choose the most powerful image(s) (relevant story) to be the focal point(s).
7. Divide the mural into non-linear sections that may overlap and assign the sections to the groups. Encourage students to play with scale.
8. Lay the butcher paper on the ground and draw sketches of the images lightly with pencil.
9. Don’t be afraid to modify the images if you can think of ways to make them more expressive.
10. Color in the images and watch your mural come to life!

Conclusion:

Once you’ve completed the mural, can you count how many stories are in the finished product? Did the stories multiply or did they blend into each other to become one story? What symbols did you use in the mural? Where does the story begin and end? Is this your entire story? Is there anything missing? Did anyone add anything that wasn’t a part of the original sketch. How do the members of the community feel about that?

Follow up:

- Visit the great wall of Los Angeles.
- Visit the site of the L.A. Mural Conservancy: [http://www.lamurals.org](http://www.lamurals.org) to learn more about LA murals.
- Visit the Sparc Murals website: [http://www.sparcmurals.org](http://www.sparcmurals.org)
- Attend MOLAA’s summer presentations: Murals Under the Stars to learn more about the Mexican Muralists.
- Take a tour of your neighborhood/school. Do you see any murals?

Creative Writing:

Write an epic poem based on your mural.
Tarsila do Amaral
Brazil, 1886-1973

Tarsila do Amaral was born in Capivari, a rural town in Brasil in 1886. She studied painting in Sao Paolo before traveling to Paris in 1920 to study at the Academie Julian. Like most artists from the Americas of that era who journeyed to Europe to learn art, Tarsila was heavily influenced by the burgeoning Modernist movement taking hold at that time. She returned to Europe and immediately formed “Grupo Dos Cinco” (group of five) with other artists and writers. Grupo Dos Cinco sought to create a new type of art that reflected their pride in being Brasilian, utilizing Modernist concepts and conventions. As a group they coordinated the “Week of Modern Art” in 1922 that showcased their new, Brasilian movement. Influenced by Cubism and Futurism, Brasilian artists and writers focused on the industrial landscape now emerging all over Brasil to create artwork that reflected pride in their national identity. Tarsila’s work is defined by the depiction of urban and rural Brasilian landscapes, vibrant color and indigenous forms.

Vocabulary

Color: Produced by light striking an object, color is one of the main elements of art. Color is used by artists for aesthetic, emotional and spatial purposes.

Cubism: A style of art developed by Picasso and George Braque in 1908 where the artist breaks up the image into geometric shapes. In Cubism the artist can depict the image from multiple perspectives or angles, instead of one fixed perspective.

Futurism: Inspired by Cubism, Futurism was developed in Italy post World War I. Futurism was focused on the modern world and glorified industrialism, war, development and the machine age. A nationalist movement, Futurism sought a break with the past and focused on developing a new type of art that focused on movement and man-made forms.

Landscape: A genre of art that depicts natural scenery.

Modernism: Generally refers to an aesthetic approach dominant in European and American art in the 20th century. Modernism rejected traditional conventions established during the Renaissance and searched for new ways of looking at objects and ideas. Each successive movement within Modernism experimented with form, content and presentation and strove to take the Art World in a new direction.

Naïve Art: Art with a simplified style, non-scientific perspective and generally bright colors. The term may also refer to artists without formal training. “Naïve” artists who have been formally trained generally find affinity with non-Western art and its bold, expressive qualities. Many modernists adopted a “Naïve” style in their search for “new” expressions.

National Identity: A sense of, and pride in, what one perceives as the character of one’s nation. That character is usually derived from cultural traditions, language and politics. National identity if often used to pull people who have little in common together, or to define oneself against “the other.”
Lesson Plan:

Preparation:
Have students look at the world around them and recognize natural versus man-made forms. To encourage students to look at the world through a cubist eye, have them reduce objects to basic geometric forms by identifying the forms within the object. Create an exercise where complex forms and figures are reduced to their basic shapes (triangles, circles, squares, etc.) and ask students to depict these forms from multiple perspectives.

Have students write about their immediate neighborhood, city or community. What are landmarks or symbols that they identify with their communities? Are they natural, man-made structures or both? What colors come to mind (literally and in terms of “mood”) when they think about their community? This all may be influenced by the time of day they are immersed in their community, weather or the colors of the community’s landmarks.

Ask students to create a “landscape” of their community. They may include figures, natural objects and man-made structures, but all must be reduced to their basic shapes. Forms may include roads, train tracks, sidewalks, fences, homes, shops, mailboxes, trees, light posts, animals, people, etc. They may draw this “landscape” from memory in the classroom, or from observation by completing the drawing at home. Students may also create a landscape of their school community, by observing the buildings or playground on campus.

Combining shapes and color, ask students to create a “mood” or setting that best defines their community. In terms of color, ask students to identify colors that are: happy, energetic, gloomy, angry, fast, slow, etc. They may identify colors with objects, seasons, or personal memories. When using shapes, ask students how they would depict a slow versus fast triangle, an empty versus busy square and a sad versus happy circle.

Tools: Paper, Oil pastels or tempera paint with brushes, rulers, pencils.

1. Ask students to create a rough sketch of their community. Have them focus on “landmarks” or symbols they feel are central to their community of that define their neighborhood or city. What is an important landmark or symbol to the people who live here?
2. Focusing on these symbols or landmarks, ask students to create a more defined sketch using their tools as “cubist” artists, reducing complex forms into basic, geometric shapes. They may use rulers and pencils to create the initial drawing.
3. Some things to keep in mind while drawing the landscape: is there a horizon line (where earth meets sky?), is the land flat or steep, dry or lush, rural or urban?
4. Once the landscape is drawn, ask students to create a color palette that defines the “mood” of their community.
5. Students apply that color palette to the drawing using oil pastels, crayons or tempera with brushes.

Conclusion: Looking at the landscapes, ask students why they chose the colors they did. Was their color choice affected by the weather or time of day they are most immersed in their community? Did their drawing come from memory of the place or an actual observation? What was it they most remembered about their community? Did they use landmarks to define that community? What are the landmarks they chose? How do those landmarks define their community?
Belkis Ayon
Cuban, 1967-1999

Curriculum Goals

Through MOLAA's Education Curriculum students will...

- Develop a working art vocabulary.
- Make the connection between art and everyday life.
- Be exposed to possible careers in art & art process. In effect, answering the question: “What do artists do?”
- Learn to communicate visually (via art)
- Explore the diversity of artists and their depictions, stories and histories—with an emphasis on the cultural, religious, economic and racial diversity of Latin America.
- Identify themselves/their cultures within the history/traditions of art in Latin America.

INICIACION by Helen Cairo

Desde esa posición de vacío,    From your status in the void
ofrendas tu corazón a los Dioses,    you offer your heart to the Gods
y recibes en lengua de tus muertos    and receive in the language of your dead
el fuerte eco    the loud echo
de tu mundo interior...    of your inner world....
Debes ser un árbol    You should be a tree
más fuerte que tu alma    stronger than your soul
para desear que te pisen la espalda,    to desire that they step on your back,
tu oráculo, quedará grabado en símbolos    your oracle, will remain engraved in symbols
como se graban las piedras,    engraved like rocks,
tu oído, se inflamará para escuchar al pez,    your ear will swell to hear the fish,
con este poder, descifrarás el enigma    with this power you will decipher the enigma
que nutrió con sangre la Ceiba,    that fed with blood the Ceiba
cuando esa sangre, recorra tu cuerpo,    when this same blood runs over your body
será parte del secreto.    It will become a part of the secret.

To Belkis Ayón by Reynaldo Fernandez

Flying into your own space, you will be forever
In our hopes.
Because your dreams were of little children and your heart goes dancing.
This side is not for you,
Maybe it is because nobody listens,
Maybe it is because your inner light
Begins to be eternal
Listen to the stars...All are crying, all are crying...

Belkis Ayon, an afrocuban artist born in Havana in 1967, was a part of a larger movement of contemporary artists who during the 90’s brought to the forefront both the strong tradition of graphic arts, as well as the long-overlooked tradition of spirituality of their island.

Receiving her degree from the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, she returned there as a professor, further exploring the beauty and power of printmaking. Working primarily in Collagraph, and almost exclusively in black and white, Ayon utilized symbols, characters and legends related to the Abakuá, an all-male secret religious society rooted in Africa.

Belkis Ayon
Perfidia/Treachery
1999
Collagraph
82"x126"

Conceptual Considerations:
The Abakuá, a secret society made solely of men, is the subject of all of Ayon’s print work. A traditionally all-male sect, Ayon “subverts” this tradition with the placement of the female figure as the main protagonist in her images.

Utilizing collagraph, a printmaking process made up of a collage pasted onto a cardboard backing, Ayon builds up a system of patterns all relating to symbols in the Abakuá legends: fish, serpents, water, plants and other animals.

The female figures presented in the work act as type of self-portrait, the spirit of Sikán expressed through the visual voice of Ayon herself. Sikán, a woman who overheard the secrets of the Abakuá from a fish in the river, was eventually sacrificed in order to save the secrets from being lost. In the story, the voice eventually is passed into the skin of a goat, which must be sacrificed and made into a sacred drum.

In this specific piece, how is the “passing on” of secrets or objects depicted? How are the figures interacting and what is being passed on? Knowing now that the Abakuá utilize natural symbol/characters in their legends, what imagery can you find in the piece that relates to the original story of the lost secret?

Technical/Aesthetic Considerations:
Collagraph, a printing process that utilizes found objects such as leaves, string, fabric, wood, etc. is executed by pasting the objects in a sort of collage on a cardboard backing. Rubbing ink into the collage, more absorbent surfaces suck up larger amounts of ink while slicker surfaces repel it. Grays and whites are created by wiping the surface selectively, taking away ink in some places and applying more of it in other places.

Once the plate is inked, damp paper is placed upon the plate and it is run through a printing press. The pressure of the press and the dampness of the paper allow for the paper to be pushed into the nook and crannies of the plate, creating a signature textured look with embossment. Rag paper, a type of thick paper made of cotton fibers, is utilized in this process as the paper must be strong enough to withstand high pressure.

Ayon’s pieces are large, and many of the works are made up of multiple sheets of 30”x42” pieces of paper. This specific piece uses nine sheets of paper, with the top two shaped into an arch and a half of an arch. The background is completely black, with textural elements only visible to the discerning eye. Why might Ayon print black on black, with subtle or faint textural elements? What might she be trying to say? Ayon herself states that she utilizes collagraph because “it adapts to the way I am...with effects and results that in a way harmonize with the subject.” What might she mean by this statement? How does the collagraph, a texture-rich collage process relate to an Afro-cuban secret society?
Project: Rubbings based on the collagraphs of Belkis Ayon

Belkis Ayon, an afro-cuban printmaker, is known for her subtle work that incorporates high texture created by collaging fabric, cardboard, natural materials and found objects. These works, called collagraphs, use the repetition of patterns associated with Cuba's landscape and mythology in order to create a visual rhythm and tell subtle stories.

While collagraphs are time-consuming and require special equipment such as a printing press, students can still be exposed to the idea of creating texture and pattern in order to create an image using rubbings. This simple method utilizes everyday objects, glue and cardboard in order to create a less intense, but still visually and technically engaging project and work of art.

Vocabulary:

Abakuá: Cuban religious all-male secret society, with origins in Africa.

Ceiba: Tree found in tropical regions such as Cuba.

Charcoal: Willow bark that is charred and often compressed in order to create a drawing tool.

Collage: A form of art in which a variety of materials (e.g., photographs, fabric, objects) are glued to a flat background.

Collagraph: Printmaking process utilizing found objects/materials collaged onto a cardboard backing, inked and run through a press.

Contrast: juxtaposition of black and white.

Focal Point: an area of an artwork that first attracts and usually sustains the viewer's attention.

Found Object: Everyday materials collected to create art. Examples are: cloth scraps, leaves, flowers, string, coins, etc.

Ink: a sticky pigment, used in printmaking.

Pattern: Repetition of elements or motif.

Rag Paper: Heavy, thick paper made from cotton fibers often used for printmaking.

Relief: Raised surface or section of a surface.

Repetition: An art element repeated over and over that can produce visual rhythm.

Sikán: The woman sacrificed by the Abakuá, in order to save the secret told to her by the Uyo.

Shape: the outline of a figure or form. Shapes can be geometric (rectangles, triangles, and circles, etc.) or organic (irregular).

Texture: The feel or appearance of an object or material. It can be actual or implied.

Tone: Referring to contrast in a picture: the range of tones from black to white.

Uyo: The sacred voice of the Abakua, transmitted from a fish to Sikán the woman.

Value: the measurement of light and darkness in a work of art.
Preparation:

Have students bring in a variety of found objects that they may collect from home, the playground or the street. Be sure that the materials are highly textured and that they each bring a wide variety of textures (rough, slick, fuzzy, smooth, hard, soft). Have textured wallpapers on hand in case students have trouble finding objects.

Direct students to use organic themes and not worry about representing things too accurately or using too much detail. The beauty of using texture to tell the story is that you may simplify other visual elements and let the texture take center stage.

Materials:

Cardboard
Glue
Scissors
Found Objects
Hard charcoal or soft graphite sticks
Construction paper
Wallpaper samples (optional)

Registration plates: A registration plate is made by placing a piece of the cardboard in the center of the sheet of paper that will be used for the rubbings. Trace around the plate with a marker. This creates the “registration” or consistent borders for each rubbing. When students are ready to make their rubbings, they simply place the cardboard face up on the sheet up paper (tape may be used to keep it in place) and then line up the edges of the registration plate with the edges of the paper. If the edges are lined up correctly, consistent borders are guaranteed!

Procedure:

1. Cut cardboard into 6”x6” squares and pass out to students.
2. Using the scissors, have students cut any materials that need to be cut into desired shapes.
3. For students interested in a “stripe” pattern, cardboard may be peeled to reveal lines.
4. Glue materials onto cardboard and let dry.
5. Once the collage is dry, place face up on the registration plate (see materials).
6. Lining up the edges of the registration plate and the piece of paper, place the paper over the collage.
7. Locating the center of the collage with your fingers, begin rubbing the charcoal/graphite gently over the paper. A texture should appear!
8. Experiment with pressure in rubbing to create darks/lights.
9. The collage may be used more than one time, with different pressures applied in order to create a variety of “prints”.
10. Sign and date the rubbing with graphite directly along the bottom edge of the image.

Conclusion:

How does the image differ when different pressure is used on different parts of the collage? If producing multiple versions of the rubbings, how consistent are they and how much do they differ?

Examine the textures on the collage versus the rubbings. How consistently or accurately are they transferred through the paper? Can you identify the objects once they have been rubbed? Can you identify patterns or repetition? How do these work with the theme of your art piece?
Look for “halos” surrounding raised objects. Do you see a white shape that appears around an object at any point? Why do you think that this happens? What does pressure have to do with this? How is this particular to “relief”?

Follow up:

- Visit a fine art printing press to learn how prints are made in a printshop.
- Visit the Museum of Latin American art to observe actual collagraphs made by Latin-American printmakers.

Creative Writing

Write a poem based on your rubbing, incorporating adjectives that describe the textures, patterns or overall subject of your rubbing.

Annotated Bibliography

Ayón, Belkis. Confesiones/Confessions. [cat]. Recuerdo Sagrado, Centro de Arte, Guantánamo, CUBA, June, 1991. (Belkis Ayón Dossier 1986-1999). This very personal essay by Ayón has been published bilingually in her dossier. It deals with her research of Abakuá and its African roots, her use of color, and her belief that her work can be “a spiritual testimony” for the viewer to experience through imagination.

Desasosiego/Restlessness [cat]. Couturier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA. March 6 to April 11, 1998. This catalogue includes a short essay by Ayón to explain her choice of title for the exhibition, which talks through her iconography and vision. The catalogue also includes a few of her images, a photo of her in her workshop, and a limited professional biography.

Becker, Wolfgang Dr. [cat]. Belkis Ayón. Unterstütze mich, halte mich hoch, im Schmerz, Pfarrkirche St. Barbara, Breining [ilus], s/p, ALEMANIA, noviembre 3-19, 1995. This German-language catalogue (from an Ayón exhibition held in Germany) includes a few critical essays and a professional biography of Ayón. The present author cannot comment on the content because she does not read German.

Belkis Ayón Dossier. After the artist’s death, the Estate of Belkis Ayón created a complete dossier for individuals and institutions connected to or concerned with Ayón’s work. This package of information included several essays by and about the artist, a CD-Rom (of images, photos, and texts), a complete professional biography, and information concerning the upcoming Catalogue Raisonné of the artist.

Belkis Ayón Website. www.belkisayon.com. The website of Belkis Ayón contains similar information to the dossier that is available for public viewing. Inside the site the public can find the artist’s work, biography, and catalogues, as well as prose and poems about the author by her contemporaries and by scholars.

Couturier, Darrel. “Belkis Ayón – Notes and thought by Darrel Courtier” This is a brief, possibly unpublished essay on Ayón by the owner of the Couturier Gallery in Los Angeles, a location that hosted on of her last exhibitions.

Couturier Gallery Website. [http://www.couturiergallery.com/images/OtherArtists/Ayon/xbio.asp?eventid=310](http://www.couturiergallery.com/images/OtherArtists/Ayon/xbio.asp?eventid=310). This website, organized by the Couturier Gallery in Los Angeles, includes comprehensive information on Ayón’s professional biography (her studies, professional activities, solo and group exhibitions, prizes and distinctions, active and passive bibliography, publications, and collections).

Figueroa, Eugenio Valdés. “Belkis Ayón: la revelación de un secreto.” Centro Wifredo Lam 1991. www.belkisayon.com/texts. This essay, published bilingually on the website, discusses the ideology behind Ayón’s work. He describes her art as a mode of unraveling the mysteries of Abakuá in “a highly expressive and symbolic use of collography.”

brief article discusses how Ayón’s monochromatic printmaking blends historical mythology with modern practices. The author greatly emphasizes the sense of mystery associated with her work. This piece was taken from a catalogue of a joint exhibition by Ángel Ramírez and Ayón. 

Mateo, David. "Belkis Ayón en confidencia irregular". La Gaceta de Cuba, La Habana, Año 35, No.2 [ilus], pág.50-51, CUBA, marzo-abril, 1997. This is a two-page, Spanish-language interview with Belkis Ayón. Ayón speaks candidly about her art: she discusses her outsider’s perspective to her subject matter, her reasons for choosing her images and media, and her opinions on contemporary printmaking in Cuba.

Minemura, Toshiaki. "Speculations of the Gaze", [cat]. Angel Ramírez + Belkis Ayón, The New Wave of Cuban Art – I. Gallery GAN, Tokyo [ilus], Japan, March 31-April 26, 1997. This short piece of art criticism begins with a discussion of “the state of mind of Cuba’s artists today,” as the author has noticed similar dominant imagery in most contemporary Cuban art. In looking more closely at the work of Ángel Ramírez and Belkis Ayón, however, the author argues that the function of the gaze in their work is less restricted than in that of their peers. Through this contrast, the author shapes an admittedly speculative theory on “self,” “dwelling place,” and objectification through the gaze. This piece was taken from a catalogue of a joint exhibition by Ramírez and Ayón.

O’Brien, John. "Belkis Ayón and Juan Carlos Alom". ArtScene, Los Angeles, CA. [ilus], pág.13-14, U.S.A., March, 1998. This is a brief review of the Ayón and Juan Carlos Alom exhibition, held at the Couturier Gallery. This exhibition included Ayón’s Restlessness series. The author takes about two paragraphs to describe the notable, uncontested qualities of each artist; for Ayón he mentions Abakua and her printing technique.

Ramírez, Maria Jose. “Obituarie, Belkis Ayon, Havana, Cuba." Art Nexus. No. 33, February-April, 2000. This brief obituary appears in Art Nexus’ News section, alongside book reviews and similar announcements. The author connects Ayón’s emotional and artistic history to lay out a respectful story of the recently deceased artist.

Rich, Adrienne. “Virtuosa de Laberintos” www.belkisayon.com/poems. This is a two-line, Spanish-language poem linking Ayón’s power with her suffering. Combine?


Wood, Yolanda. “Belkis Ayón, La Reurrección de los cuerpos marcados.” Noviembre, 1999. (Belkis Ayón Dossier 1986-1999). This Spanish-language piece, written after the death of the artist, uses the images of marked bodies to discuss the Abakua symbolism in Ayón’s body of work. The essay closes analyzes a handful of Ayón’s printings to reflect on her artistic work as a whole.

Zeitlin, Marilyn A., Ed. Contemporary Art from Cuba: Irony and Survival on the Utopian Island. Arizona State University Art Museum. New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1999. 47-48, 77-78, 129, 163-164. This is an academic text which discusses the breadth of contemporary art in Cuba and therefore positions Ayón’s work within the context of her predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. The book features two of her prints. The text pays special attention to Ayón’s printmaking process and to her use of Abakua iconography.