

Fashioning Self

Lesson Plan

Recommended for 6th–12th grades



Artist Eric N. Mack (b. 1987) expands the boundaries of painting, sculpture, and fashion. Mack uses fabric, paint, and found materials to create sculptural paintings that transform the three-dimensional spaces they occupy. Through abstract compositions, he unpacks how we assign value to material objects and explores the ways human bodies move through space.

Eric N. Mack
Palm, 2015

Mack created *Palm* (2015) as an artist in residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem. *Palm* is a mixed-media assemblage of various dyed, bleached, and painted textiles with wood and other materials. This artwork showcases the artist's deep investment in the history and techniques of painting and fashion by utilizing gestural abstract expressionist painting methods in addition to draping and sewing processes used by fashion designers. This artwork moves freely between three-dimensional and two-dimensional space and is in direct conversation with the body of both the artist and the viewer.

Interested in fashion from a young age, Mack grew up sometimes working in his father's discount clothing store. During his time as an artist in residence, he had the opportunity to source materials from clothing stores in Harlem. In *Palm*, we see how an interwoven vocabulary of everyday objects, abstract expressionist painting, and fashion contribute to Mack's unique style. In this lesson, students will use Mack's practice as inspiration as they consider the role of fashion in their own lives and create an artwork that responds to the human body.

Objective

Using recycled, found, or discarded everyday materials, students will create abstract sculptures that explore their relationship to fashion and respond to the human body.

Essential Question

How can you make an artwork that references the body without depicting the human form?

Vocabulary

Assemblage

A work of art made by gathering a diverse and seemingly unrelated group of two-dimensional and three-dimensional materials.

Mixed media

A combination of materials and methods. In Eric N. Mack's work, this includes the use of paint, discarded clothing, found textiles, and other objects and materials.

Abstract expressionist art

Art characterized by gesture, spontaneous mark-making, and improvisation that does not attempt to represent recognizable forms or figures.

Installation art

Artwork that interacts with a three-dimensional space to create a new environment.

Materials

Found Fabric (t-shirts, bandanas, scarves, pillowcases/bedsheets, stockings, towels)

Glue and/or Tape

Stapler

Needle and Thread

Yarn

Scissors

Fabric Dye and/or Acrylic Paint

Brushes and Cups for Water

Cardboard and/or Wood

Preparation

1. Introduce *Palm* using visual inquiry. Ask: Why do you think the artist chose these materials? Ask: If this artwork was a person what do you think their personality would be like? How would they walk?
2. Ask students to think about their relationship to fashion by doing a descriptive writing activity where they describe an outfit or item of clothing. Encourage them to write about how the item moves when they wear it, and how wearing it makes them feel.
3. Have students work in small groups to brainstorm how they can translate their descriptive writing into an artwork. Ask them to consider what materials they will use, how they will be attached to one another, and whether the sculpture will be freestanding, hang from the ceiling, or be wearable.

Methods

1. Demonstrate different techniques for altering and connecting fabrics.
2. Have students test out techniques with various materials and processes before starting on their sculpture. Challenge students to think of their sculptures as an abstract body. Ask: How does it stand?, What is its gesture?, Does it move?, How does it balance?, How does it interact with the people and environment around it?
3. As students start their own sculptures, encourage them to experiment with materials they like and ones they find challenging.
4. Have students install completed sculptures and share the descriptive writing that inspired them without telling the group which artwork is theirs. Have the group guess the artwork based on the writing.

Reflection

1. Have students mimic the postures, gestures, and movements of the sculptures with their bodies, emphasizing links between abstraction and the body.
2. Encourage group conversation about the connections between fashion and visual art.



Eric N. Mack
Palm, 2015
Dye on bleached cotton, silk, felt, with metal armature, wood,
decorative palm fronds, and paper
77 × 77 × 38 in.
The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided
by the Acquisition Committee
2015.16