Moments in Movement

Senga Nengudi’s Performance Piece (1978) is a photographic series that documents artist Maren Hassinger activating one of Nengudi’s nylon mesh sculptures with her body. Nengudi’s work often incorporates black and brown nylon pantyhose that are stretched, filled with sand, and manipulated to mimic the flexibility of the human body in motion.

This lesson provides educators the opportunity to incorporate performance art into their classrooms and explore how incorporating the body can affect the story of an artwork. This artwork provides a basis for a discussion about improvisation, motion, and mass. As students engage in the art making process they will gain experience constructing their own installations and exploring the relationships between gravity, their bodies, and performance.

Senga Nengudi
Performance Piece, 1978
Activated by Maren Hassinger
Silver gelatin print, 31.5 × 40 in.
Edition of 5 (+ 1 AP)
Courtesy the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York
Photo: Harmon Outlaw
**Objective**
Students will investigate gravity and the relationships between sculpture and performance as they create artwork that explores an aspect of their own identities.

**Essential Question**
How can using your body to create or activate a work of art change the story of the artwork?

**Vocabulary**

**Gravity**
Force that attracts an object with mass to the center of the earth or to another object. Why objects fall when dropped.

**Mass**
Measurement of matter in an object.

**Improvisation**
To create something spontaneously or without specific planning.

**Performance Art**
Artwork that explores the relationship between time, space, the performer’s body, and the audience. It can also incorporate sculpture, installation, video, or sound.

**Installation Art**
Artwork that creates a three-dimensional environment and occupies a specific site, can be the location of a performance.

**Threading**
To pass thread through the eye of a needle or a space to connect two parts together, or create a pattern.

**Materials**

Cardboard
String/yarn/rope (variety of style and color suggested)
Hole punchers
Tape or other adhesive
Camera for documentation

**Preparation**
1. Introduce vocabulary words and discuss the meaning of gravity, mass, improvisation, performance art, installation, and threading.

2. Display images of performance art and installation art, specifically Senga Nengudi’s *Performance Piece* as an example.

3. Place tape and other adhesives at center of table. Leave space for students to improvise with materials and their bodies.

4. Set our threading materials and cardboard, making sure students have a variety of string, yarn, rope, or ribbon to experiment with.

**Methods**
Pose the question to students: How can I capture my fingers in a moment of movement?

1. Introduce the materials.

2. Have students plan out their installation. How will the string interact with the cardboard? Where will it be threaded and how will it be attached?

3. Punch holes in the cardboard.

4. Thread string through cardboard then secure ends with tape.

5. Have students improvise activating their cardboard and string sculptures with their bodies.

6. Have students document a moment of their partners’ improvisation with a camera.

**Reflection**
1. Display images captured during the process on a screen or as printed images.

2. Ask students to explain the choices they made in creating their art.

3. Discuss how activating the work with their body did or did not change the artwork.
Lesson Plan
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Senga Nengudi
R.S.V.P. V, 1976
Nylon, mesh, sand, 48 × 36 × 2 in.
The Studio Museum in Harlem;
Museum purchase with funds provided by
the Acquisition Committee 2003.10.22
Photo: Adam Reich
Senga Nengudi
*Performance Piece*, 1978
Activated by Maren Hassinger
Silver gelatin print, 31½ × 40 in.
Edition of 5 (+ 1 AP)
Courtesy the artist and
Thomas Erben Gallery, New York
Photo: Harmon Outlaw