



UCLA CHICANO STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER PRESS

MARÍA BRITO

JUAN A. MARTÍNEZ



TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR *MARÍA BRITO*

A VER: REVISIONING ART HISTORY,
VOLUME 4

VERONICA ALVAREZ AND THERESA SOTO

The A Ver teacher's guides are supported in part by a grant from the Ford Foundation

María Brito, by Juan A. Martínez, was published by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press in 2009. Books in the A Ver series are distributed by the University of Minnesota Press:
www.upress.umn.edu.

The publication of *María Brito* was sponsored by the Joan Mitchell Foundation

A Ver: Revisioning Art History is made possible through the generous support of the following institutions: The Getty Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The JPMorgan Chase Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation

Copyright © 2011 by the Regents of the University of California

All rights reserved

PUBLISHED TITLES IN THE A VER SERIES

Gronk, by Max Benavidez (2007)

Yolanda M. López, by Karen Mary Davalos (2008)

Celia Alvarez Muñoz, by Roberto Tejada (2009)

María Brito, by Juan A. Martínez (2009)

Carmen Lomas Garza, by Constance Cortez (2010)

Malaquis Montoya, by Terezita Romo (2011)

A Ver: Revisioning Art History stems from the conviction that individual artists and their coherent bodies of work are the foundation for a truly meaningful and diverse art history. This series explores the cultural, aesthetic, and historical contributions of Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and other U.S. Latino artists. **A Ver ... Let's see!**



CONTENTS

María Brito: Breaking Barriers	1
Lesson 1: "Installing" a Family Journey.	7
María Brito, <i>Pero Sin Amo</i>	11
Lesson 2: Depicting the Self: Appropriation and Assemblage	17
María Brito, <i>The Juggler</i>	21
Andrea Mantegna, <i>Madonna and Child with Cherubim</i>	22
María Brito, <i>Self Portrait in Grey and White</i>	23
Lesson 3: You're Invited: Re-creating a Historical Dinner	29
María Brito, <i>They Spin Finely</i>	32
María Brito, <i>What a Sacrifice!</i>	33
María Brito, <i>There They Go Plucked</i>	34
María Brito, <i>Until Death</i>	35
María Brito, <i>Party at Goya's (First Arrivals)</i>	36
Additional Resources	37

MARÍA BRITO: BREAKING BARRIERS



EXCERPTED AND ADAPTED FROM *MARÍA BRITO*, BY
JUAN A. MARTINEZ

Since the 1980s Cuban-American artist María Brito has developed a unique body of work in mixed-media constructions, painting, and sculpture. She is perhaps best known for her mixed-media assemblage installations—highly evocative yet ambiguous works that symbolize autobiographical experiences and express emotional states. She has also painted a number of self-portraits, drawing from personal symbols, religious imagery, and a vocabulary influenced by Renaissance portraiture. More recently she has experimented with polymer clay sculpture in a group of works that engage more directly with current political and social issues.

BREAKING CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND ARTISTIC BARRIERS

A theme that seems to run through María Brito's artistic career is "breaking barriers." At the end of the twentieth century, when the mainstream American art world partially opened to the work of women and minorities, Brito's art received wide exposure in the United States. Despite the challenges presented by cultural and gender-based barriers, she pursued an artistic education, earned several degrees, became a practicing artist, and enjoyed international recognition in the form of exhibitions and commissions, articles and essays by noted critics and art historians, purchases by museums and collectors, and numerous prestigious awards.

María Brito arrived in the United States from Cuba in 1961 at the age of thirteen as part of Operation Pedro Pan. Following the Cuban revolution in 1959, the U.S. government lifted visa requirements for children, allowing parents who opposed the new Marxist government to send their children to the United States. Operation Pedro Pan arranged care for these children,



María Brito. Photograph by Patricia Wiesen.

María Brito, *Merely a Player* (details), 1993. Mixed-media installation, 102 x 180 x 204 inches.



María Brito's Cuban passport.

who were placed with friends or relatives or in group homes. It was one of the largest migrations of unaccompanied minors ever recorded. During the years that Brito attended high school, 1962–1965, Miami became home to thousands of Cuban refugees. The first wave, approximately 270,000 people, arrived between 1959 and 1964. Brito's parents were part of this first wave. The second wave of around 300,000 arrived from 1965 to 1973. By 1980 there were over half a million people of Cuban descent in Dade County, constituting 35.7 percent of the population.

For young Cuban Americans growing up in Florida, the American side of their dual identity, as experienced in school and public life, encouraged individual choice and personal fulfillment. Although middle-class Cuban traditional values of that time—values that were deepened by exile—held that a young woman should not become an artist, the new society in which Brito was coming of age offered it as a possibility.

Brito is one of the members of the so-called Miami Generation, a name that comes from a pioneering 1983 exhibition that featured the art of Brito and eight other Cuban Americans. These first-generation Cuban American artists appropriated artistic forms and media from a wide range of sources to communicate their experiences as exiles. Although the Miami Generation artists are grouped together based mainly on their ethnicity, upbringing, and, to a degree, age, their art has certain affinities. Catholic images, appropriation of motifs and styles from earlier art historical time periods, and self-portraiture are encountered frequently in their work, and painting and assemblage—mixed-media constructions—prevail.

ASSEMBLAGE: FROM SMALL-SCALE TO HUMAN-SCALE

In her early undergraduate coursework, Brito initially found inspiration in drawing classes. While pursuing her masters of fine arts at the University of Miami, she realized that her ideas were better expressed in mixed media. During the 1980s, Brito began working in assemblage.

Assemblages are three-dimensional objects created by combining various elements, especially found objects (including junk and debris). Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, and Kurt Schwitters were among the artists who pioneered assemblage techniques. (Photographs of these artists' works are available on the Museum of Modern Art's website.)

Assemblage opened Brito's eyes to the artistic and symbolic potential of household objects in her neighborhood garage piles. The chairs, beds, doors, picture frames, mirrors, clocks, suitcases, faucets, jars, masks, and old photos that are incorporated into her assemblages relate to larger universal themes of memory/dream, separation/dislocation, loss/liberation, and pain/anger. While the ideas expressed are universal, Brito's assemblages are inspired by personal experiences: leaving her homeland as a child, adapting to a new life in the United States of the 1960s, receiving a Cuban Catholic upbringing in an Anglo-Saxon culture, marrying and becoming a mother, grappling with cancer, and searching for self-knowledge.

Among Brito's earlier assemblages are small boxes containing objects and reproductions of Western art. They are similar in format to artist Joseph Cornell's poetic boxes of worn, displaced objects. (Photographs of Cornell's work are available on the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's website.) By comparison, Brito's boxes show more elaborate and layered compositions and a rough edge. Her boxes usually consist of found weathered wood divided into two or more compartments that are filled with the objects and images that recur in her work: doors, masks, mirrors, cups, and cranks, all miniaturized in the boxes, as well as images of the sky and violent biblical scenes by old master painters.



María Brito, *Epiphany*, 1980. Mixed media, 20 x 10 x 6 inches. Photograph by María Brito.

One box, *Self-Portrait in Grey and White* (page 23), is the artist's earliest self-portrait. In this work Brito explored the issue of identity from various points of view—María the mother, María the wife, and María the artist in her home studio. The box, which is structured like a house, has two sides: a "public" side with wooden slats and a doorknob similar to a locked door, and a "private" side divided into different compartments. The bottom compartment includes images that represent her four children, the large middle compartment contains images representing the artist and her then-husband, which are placed on either side of a red heart. The top compartment signifies the artist's studio; it includes a ladder that reaches toward a cloud-filled space that symbolizes the artist's mind in the act of creation.

By 1985 Brito's assemblages had increased to human scale and the artist had begun exploring the theme of domestic interiors. *The Room of Two Marías* is a fragmented interior in the form of a corner of a room. On the left wall, the back of an implied chair becomes a mirror that can be covered at will by a partially rolled-up shade. According to the artist, the mirror "reflects reality" while the blind, when rolled down, represents "denial of reality." On one implied wall hang two masks—life casts of the artist's face—one with a serene look, the other distorted. These masks, along with the title, bring up the theme of duality—in this case a duality of self, of peace versus rage. There is also an altarlike structure affixed to the upper corner of the room. Hanging from an area directly behind the altar are four small human silhouettes cut out of plywood. They represent Brito's two sons, her husband at the time, and her former husband as well. The work expresses another duality: self/family.

APPROPRIATION AND IDENTITY

From the vignettes in her assemblages to small independent works made in the early 1980s, Brito has produced a significant body of paintings. From 1983 through 2002 she painted numerous self-portraits that focus on personal identity and that use Catholic imagery to symbolize aspects of that identity and of the artist's journey.

For Brito, self-portraiture is not so much a mirror as a window into human experiences and emotions. She uses Catholic images from well-known Renaissance paintings not only to serve symbolic purposes but also to universalize the subject matter. In her 1989 painting *The Juggler*, Brito invokes Mantegna's *Madonna and Child with Cherubim*, but turns the Virgin into a juggler (pages 21, 22). The objects that Brito, as the Virgin, is juggling—a tiny child, a miniature house, and wood spheres—are all in midair. The artist appears detached and still, yet the facial expressions of the angels surrounding her suggest that her act is a precarious one. Brito represents herself stoically juggling her various roles of mother, head of household, and breadwinner. The painting was done at a time when she was questioning these roles and, by extension, the social-cultural-religious traditions, expectations, and limitations that accompany them.

The synthesis of self-portraiture and Catholic symbolism in Brito's paintings springs from the artist's religious upbringing and love of Renaissance painting as well as from her desire to use these means to define a personal identity (or identities). Her painted self-portraits express a connection between the divine, the self, and the body. In paintings like *The Juggler*, divine figures fuse with Brito's self-portrait. Art historian Dorothy Limouze observed that Brito's appropriation of the art of a historical period puts her paintings in the postmodern camp, meaning that her paintings are not bound by the modernist preoccupation for creating new artistic styles. Unlike her assemblages, which are informed by avant-garde art, her paintings deal with themes and an artistic language from a distant past.



María Brito working on *Viva la Vida* in her studio, 1988.
Photograph by Otto Zequeira.

María Brito, *Self-Portrait as a Swan*, 2001. Oil on wood construction, 30 x 37 x 2 inches. Private collection. Photograph by Teresa Diehl.



SOCIAL COMMENTARY: INSTALLATION AND ALLEGORY

In the mid- to late 1990s Brito turned to more socially critical works. Her large assemblage installation *Pero Sin Amo* (But without a master) is a mazelike construction of plywood planks, sand, clear vinyl, and various objects (pages 11–16). Its title comes from José Martí's phrase, often quoted by Cuban exiles, "*Sin patria, pero sin amo*" (Without homeland, but without master). Brito used part of the phrase to contextualize the plight of the *balseros* (rafters), the tens of thousands of refugees who since the 1960s have crossed the Florida straits from Cuba or perished trying. The main features of *Pero Sin Amo* are a labyrinth of coffinlike boxes covered in transparent vinyl. The vinyl reflects the light, recalling light reflecting off water, while offering glimpses of sand-covered shoes, glasses, and body parts. On either side of the labyrinth are platforms to which viewers climb to find three binoculars with capped lenses.

When looking through the blind binoculars, viewers become complicit in the scant attention given to the plight of the balseros. A glass of water sitting on a shelf outside the maze symbolizes one of the dangers the rafters faced: running out of drinking water.

Although many Cuban and Cuban American artists have represented the odyssey of the Cuban refugees from various points of view, *Pero Sin Amo* stands out due to its ambitious scale, involvement of the spectator, and the absence of a raft. Brito's installation offers a bleak view of the passage: the sea as labyrinth and tomb, and the dead as unseen and forgotten.

Brito's work after 2000 shifts direction, moving from the three-dimensional work in wood and found objects she did during the 1980s and 1990s to white polymer clay figures that explore social concerns. Inspired by and reflective of a fearful and unsettling decade marked by the terrifying events of 9/11, the subsequent war on terrorism, and the Iraq war, Brito investigates the degradation of the environment (*The Plague*, 2003), man's propensity for destruction and war (*Of Mice and Men*, 2005), and human folly (the Las Goyescas series, 2005–2006). Brito's work from this period expresses an ugly and dark side of humanity.

In these works Brito took the concept of appropriation—using something created by someone else—to the limit. Some of these works were inspired by literary works, specifically Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. *The Plague*, which was inspired by *Walden*, is a long frieze consisting of eleven sections made up of plywood cutouts, which suggest earth, vegetation, and humans. Written in pencil on some of the cutouts are excerpts from Thoreau's text. In this dark and ironic work, Walden Pond has been ravaged by the plague—and the plague is us.

Of Mice and Men shows thirty small white figures, each half man and half mouse. As the title suggests, the work was inspired by Steinbeck's classic novel of the Great Depression, in which two displaced migrant farmworkers see their plans go wrong and their dreams unfulfilled. The novel provided Brito with an allegory for the desire for power, which can lead people to make plans that often go awry at their own expense—and the expense of the weak.



María Brito, *Of Mice and Men*, 2005. Mixed-media installation, 27 x 42 x 42 inches. Photograph by Mariano Costa Peuser.

SCULPTURAL APPROPRIATION

The most ambitious of Brito's sculptural works is the Las Goyescas series, her tribute to Francisco Goya in the form of an installation of figural groupings (pages 27–30). In Las Goyescas she created three-dimensional representations of selections from Goya's *Los Caprichos* (1799), a set of eighty aquatint prints. In *Los Caprichos* Goya criticized Spanish society, lampooning the predominance of superstition, the ignorance and incompetence of the ruling classes, education, religious and marriage practices, and the lack of rationality in Spain and beyond. Brito found in Goya's critique of social ills and human frailties a powerful model for a critical look at her own time.

Each of Brito's Goyescas re-creates a print by Goya that emphasizes either the (mis)treatment of children or the (dis)union of man and woman. Brito reinterpreted the scenes by simplifying, adjusting, or adding details to solve problems of translation from one medium to another, to emphasize her point of view.

In *Party at Goya's (First Arrivals)* (2006) a motley cast of four-inch-tall characters mill about; they include a portrait of Goya and the artist, who are engaged in an animated conversation (page 31). Although the party is at Goya's, Brito chose the guests. She incorporated specific characters from *Los Caprichos* into this work. Brito commented that *Party at Goya's (First Arrivals)* contains "a possible cast of characters that can very easily be present at any such social gathering today. It is yet another piece that deals with the dark side of human nature."

In Las Goyescas Brito honed in on her interest in and powerful representations of the irrational and sinister side of humanity, again using allegory. While coming from a less personal point of view than her mixed-media constructions and paintings, Las Goyescas continues to deal with some themes dear to Brito in her earlier work, such as entrapment, control, and disunion. More significantly, the sculptural work points to Brito's capacity for growth and renewal as she continues to explore new frontiers thirty years into her distinguished artistic career.

LESSON 1



"INSTALLING" A FAMILY JOURNEY

Grades: 6–12

Subjects: Visual Arts, History-Social Studies

Time Required: Four 45- to 50-minute class periods

LESSON OVERVIEW

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students should be able to

- Discuss and analyze María Brito's mixed-media assemblage *Pero Sin Amo* as installation art
- Research his or her family's history of migration
- Create a mock-up of a mixed-media installation piece that is inspired by Brito's work and that illustrates her or his family's history

MATERIALS

- Background information: "María Brito: Breaking Barriers" (pages 1–6)
- Transparencies or digital images of María Brito's *Pero Sin Amo* (pages 11–16)
- Overhead projector or a computer with an LCD projector, depending on type of reproductions available
- Internet access and books about immigration
- Shoeboxes or other kinds of recycled containers
- Various materials for creating assemblages, such as cardstock, found objects, construction paper, pencils, scissors, glue

LESSON STEPS

Warm-up: Defining Installation Assemblage

1. Discuss with students what the term *installation art* means; point out that it is a work that incorporates the exhibition space as part of its design. Talk about the factors and constraints that an artist has to consider when creating installation art (for example, the location, the dimensions of the exhibition space, the lighting). How might a viewer's experience with an installation piece be different than an experience with more traditional media, such as drawing or painting?
2. Ask students to speculate about what the term *assemblage* means in reference to art; point out that it is a three-dimensional work made by combining various elements, especially found objects. How does grouping objects change the meaning of the individual objects? Consider, for example, an apple sitting alone, versus an apple placed beside a snake. How would the viewer interpret the apple in each of these cases?
3. Inform students that they will be looking at an artwork by contemporary artist María Brito that combines installation and assemblage and then creating their own artwork.

Toward Social Issues: The Balseros

1. Display reproductions of María Brito's mixed media assemblage *Pero Sin Amo* (1999–2000) and inform students that this is a room-sized, site-specific installation.
2. Lead a class discussion about the work of art using the following prompts:
 - What do you see? (Students should note the two platforms, the binoculars, the maze-like structure between the platforms.)
 - What materials did the artist use? (Wood, sand, vinyl sheets, binoculars and other objects.)
 - Inform students that the boxes are meant to represent coffins, symbolizing the Cuban refugees who perished on their journey to the United States.
 - How does the formation of the boxes represent a labyrinth? What do labyrinths and mazes symbolize? (Examples: confusion, hardship, disorientation.)
3. Display the details of the boxes. Ask students to describe what objects are inside (sand, shoes, casts of body parts) and outside the maze (a glass of water). List responses on the board. With a partner, have students speculate why these objects are grouped together and why the artist has placed them in or outside the boxes.
4. Pass out "Maria Brito, Breaking Barriers" (pages 1–6). Have students read about the life of the artist and discuss with their partners whether the information provides further clues about the intent of *Pero Sin Amo*.
5. Have a class discussion about Brito's life and her experiences as a Cuban exile and her family's migration to the United States. Discuss how Brito's experiences as a Cuban exile influenced her art (refer to her biography, which points out how she incorporated elements of memory/dream, rupture/dislocation, and pain/anger in her autobiographical works). Discuss how she incorporated these elements in *Pero Sin Amo* as a way to identify with members of her community.
6. Draw students' attention to the title of the work. Point out that the piece takes its title from a poem by Cuban hero and exile, José Martí: "Sin patria, pero sin amo" (Without homeland, but without master). Inform students that José Martí was an important figure in Cuban history, who died fighting for Cuban independence from Spain in the nineteenth century. Tell them that Brito appropriated part of the phrase to contextualize the flight of the *balseros* (rafters), referring to the thousands of refugees who since the 1960s have crossed the Florida straits or died trying to reach the United States.
7. Inform students that by placing items in the boxes, Brito created an assemblage. The coffin-like boxes, placed in a maze-like configuration, are meant to represent the objects "lost" by the *balseros*—sand-covered shoes, glasses, body parts. Refer back to student responses in step 3 and add any objects not previously discussed.
8. Draw students' attention to the platforms on either side and discuss how they think a viewer is intended to interact with this work of art. Point out that Brito intended the viewer to climb onto the platform, pick up a pair of binoculars, and look out over the structure. Ask students to describe the function of binoculars. Inform students that in *Pero Sin Amo* the binoculars' lenses were covered. Ask students to speculate as to why Brito would deliberately place caps on the lenses; one possible explanation is that Brito is referring to the unseen and forgotten plight of the *balseros*.

Researching Migrations

1. Remind students that Brito came from Cuba during Operation Pedro Pan. Inform them that many Cuban American artists depicted their journey to the United States and the expatriate experience. Point out that unlike most of these artists, in *Pero Sin Amo* Brito chose not to symbolize the plight of the *balseiros* with a raft.
2. Instruct students to research their own family history by interviewing several family members. Ask them to think about their family's or an ancestor's migration, whether they moved from one house to another, one neighborhood to another, one city or state to another, or one country to another.
3. In a class discussion, have students discuss and compare their experiences and perceptions of their displacement/dislocation and whether their feelings and experiences were similar to those expressed by María Brito. Use the following prompts:
 - What was the mode of transportation from one place to the other?
 - Was any danger involved?
 - Was it a voluntary move?
 - What were the motives for the move? Were they similar to or different from those for María Brito's family?
 - Were there memorable symbols or images from the former home(s)?
 - What objects were taken along? Were any left behind (either voluntarily or not)?
 - What feelings do you associate with the move? Are there objects that can be used to symbolize those feelings?

"Installing" a Family's Migration

1. Remind students that a site-specific work is meant to be installed in a particular location. Inform them that, just like Brito, they are going to create a work of art that depicts their experience, but on a smaller scale.
2. Ask students to pick a space on the school campus, then check with the teacher about location; this will help them make decisions based on the constraints of the location. Ask students to do the following:
 - Measure the dimensions of the space.
 - Find or create a box or container that is to scale.
 - Look for objects and/or think of symbols, etc., that depict their family or ancestor's migration/dislocation story.
 - Draw each object to scale on individual pieces of card stock or, alternately or in addition, bring the original objects from home.
3. Ask students to arrange their objects within their box or container, being sure to experiment with different ways of arranging them. Tell them to think about the different meanings each grouping would signify.
4. Instruct students to add at least one element that would encourage viewer participation. Remind them that Brito created a life-size installation that prompted viewers to ascend a platform to overlook the maze-like "coffins" with lens-covered binoculars. Ask students to consider how they will encourage viewer participation. It can be as simple as leaving a lid on the box, requiring a viewer to lift it to see the box's contents, or use viewing devices (as Brito used the binoculars).
5. Have students orally present their work of art to the rest of the class.

ASSESSMENT

Assess students' participation in class discussion and analysis of Brito's *Pero Sin Amo*.

Assess students' research of their family's migration by having interviewed at least two family members.

Student artwork should be assessed on the assemblage of objects to depict a story of family migration, as well as using at least one element of viewer interaction within the work.

EXTENSION

Have students realize their artwork in full scale, using the actual objects that they represented in cardstock. Or, have students write a proposal for realizing their projects in a specific location at school. If possible, organize a contest in which the most realistic proposal is realized.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

National Visual Arts Standards—Grades 6–12

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts

Standard 3: Chooses and evaluates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Standard 5: Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others

Standard 6: Makes connections between visual arts and other disciplines

National History-Social Science Standards—Grades 6–12

Standard 4: Understands historical research capabilities

Standard 10: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States



María Brito, *Pero Sin Amo*, 1999–2000. Mixed media, 6 x 35 x 35 feet. Photograph by Teresa Diehl.

María Brito, *Pero Sin Amo*, 1999–2000. Mixed media,
6 x 35 x 35 feet. Photograph by Teresa Diehl.

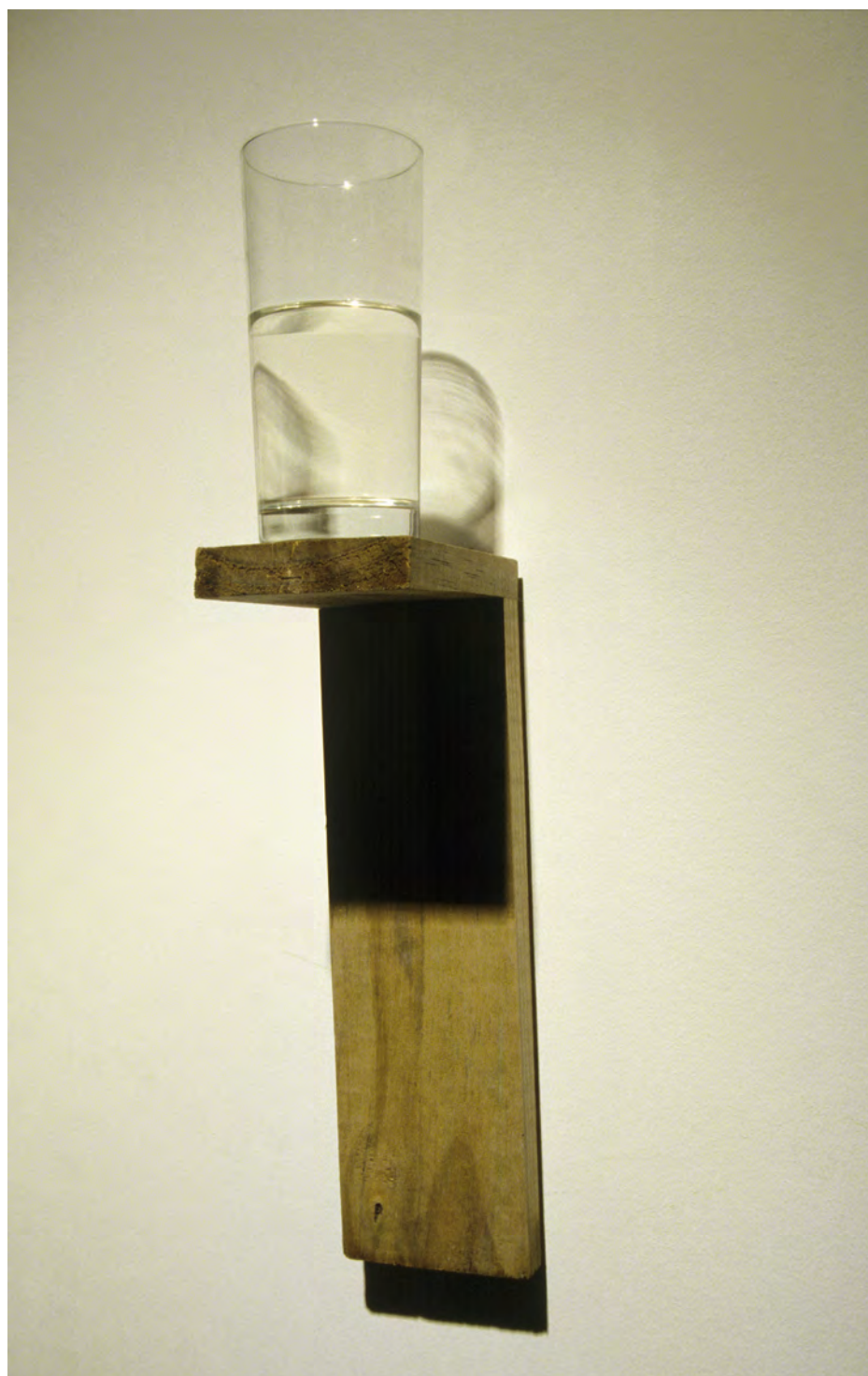




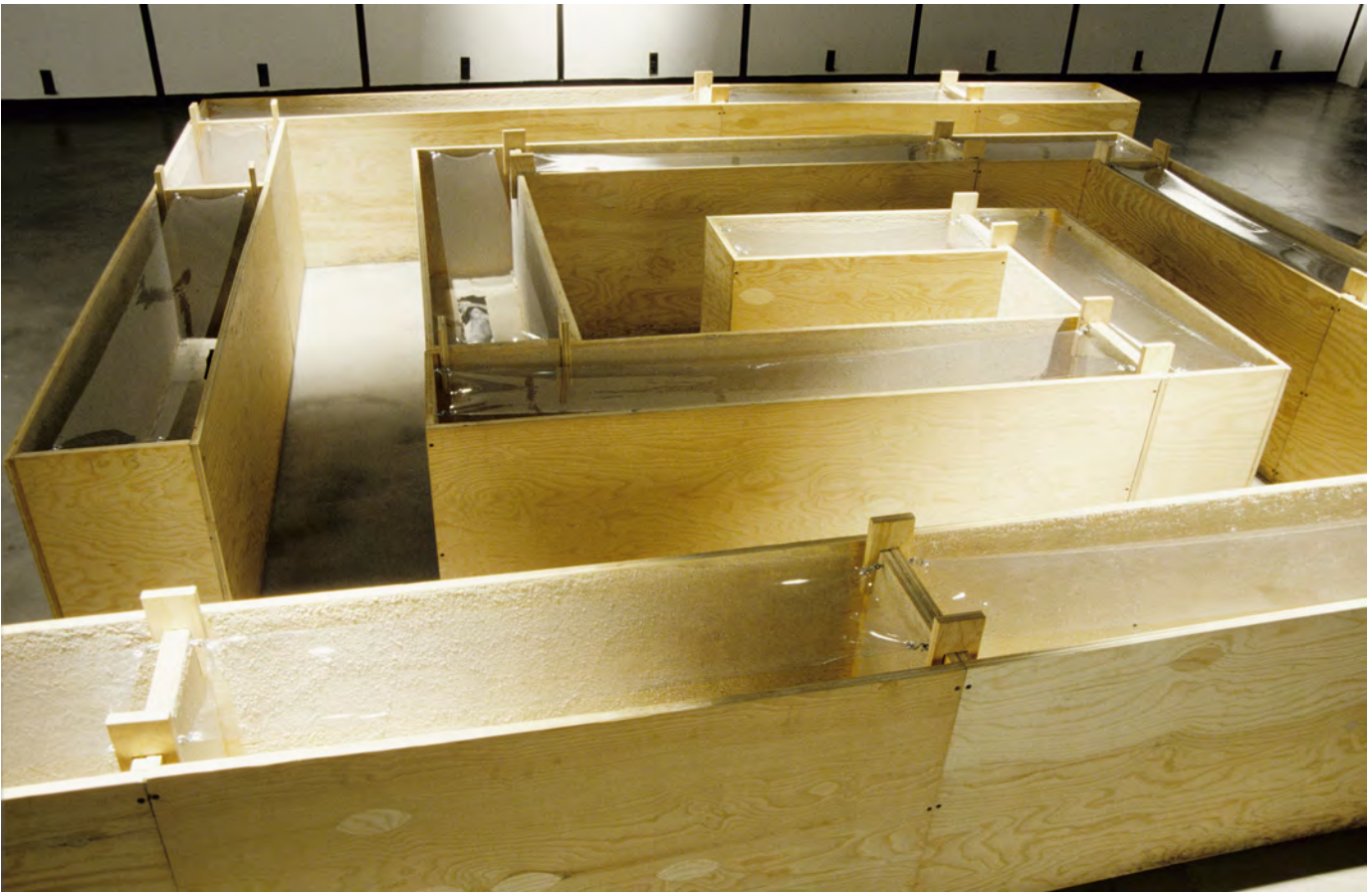
María Brito, *Pero Sin Amo*, 1999–2000. Mixed media, 6 x 35 x 35 feet. Photograph by Teresa Diehl.

María Brito, *Pero Sin Amo*, 1999–2000. Mixed media, 6 x 35 x 35 feet. Photograph by Teresa Diehl.





María Brito, *Pero Sin Amo*, 1999–2000. Mixed media, 6 x 35 x 35 feet. Photograph by Teresa Diehl.



María Brito, *Pero Sin Amo*, 1999–2000. Mixed media, 6 x 35 x 35 feet. Photograph by Teresa Diehl.

LESSON 2



DEPICTING THE SELF: APPROPRIATION AND ASSEMBLAGE

Grades: 6–12

Subjects: Visual Arts

Time Required: Three to four 45- to 50-minute class periods

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will discuss two works of art by Cuban-American artist María Brito that depict the self. They will analyze what Brito is communicating about herself through the use of personal symbols, appropriation, and juxtaposition. Students will create a self-portrait that includes personal symbols and incorporates either appropriation or juxtaposition (refer to “María Brito: Breaking Boundaries,” pages 1–6, for definitions of these terms).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students should be able to:

- Analyze María Brito’s use of personal symbols in her assemblages and self-portraits to convey universal themes
- Discuss the use of appropriated imagery in artworks, including what such images can reveal about an artist
- Analyze the juxtaposition of disparate images, particularly how two or more objects suggest a different meaning than each object individually
- Create a self-portrait inspired by the works of María Brito, using either juxtaposition or appropriation

MATERIALS

- Background Information: “María Brito: Breaking Boundaries” (pages 1–6)
- Overhead transparencies or digital images of María Brito’s *The Juggler* (page 21) and *Self-Portrait in Grey and White* (pages 23–27)
- Overhead transparency or digital image of the fifteenth-century painting *Madonna and Child with Cherubim* by Andrea Mantegna (page 22)
- Overhead projector or a computer with an LCD projector, depending on reproductions available
- Student journals
- Various materials for creating mixed-media assemblages, such as paint and paintbrushes, pieces of cardboard, discarded household objects, and old magazines for found images (found objects and images may be brought by students)

LESSON STEPS

Warm-up: Defining and Re-Defining Books

1. Ask students what they think of when they hear the term *self-portrait* and write their responses on the board. Tell them they will discuss and create works of art that explore the self. Have them reflect on the aspects of their identity that they would like to communicate

in their own self-portraits. Allow them a few minutes to write in their journals about how they want to portray themselves. What do they want to reveal about their identity? What do they want to conceal about their identity? What else should be included in their self-portraits?

2. Tell students that they will be discussing works of art created by contemporary Cuban-American artist María Brito and what the artist chooses to reveal and conceal about herself.

Depicting the Self: Appropriation

1. Display a reproduction of María Brito's *The Juggler* without revealing its title and discuss students' initial responses. Have students write down in their journals at least four meaningful symbols or motifs that they notice in this work (for example, mask, angels, home, baby). Instruct them to leave room to write beneath each word. Then tell students to list all the qualities or characteristics they associate with each word. Tell them to set aside the list for now.
2. Prompt further group discussion about the artwork with the following prompts:
 - Look closely at the figure. What do you think she is doing? What do you see that makes you say that?
 - The title of the painting is *The Juggler*. Based on the title, what else can you say about this artwork?
 - Look closely at what the figure is wearing. The artist has portrayed herself as the Madonna surrounded by angels. What qualities or characteristics do you associate with the Madonna? What do you think the artist is communicating by depicting herself this way?
 - Describe the facial expression of the figure. What does the expression reveal about the figure's state of mind?
 - Notice that the artist included a mask in this work of art. What qualities or characteristics do you associate with masks? (Students can refer to their journals if they chose to write about this.)
 - Why do you think the artist included a mask in the work of art? What does the mask reveal and conceal?
 - What else can you add to the discussion based on what you wrote in your journals?
3. Display a reproduction of Mantegna's *Madonna and Child with Cherubim*. Compare and contrast this painting with Brito's *The Juggler*. Prompt discussion by asking students the following:
 - What is similar and different about these works of art?
 - What aspects of Mantegna's painting did Brito retain in *The Juggler*? Which aspects did she leave out?
4. Distribute copies of "María Brito: Breaking Boundaries" (pages 1–6. Ask students whether they learned anything about the artist that enhanced their understanding of the work of art. Have students discuss the following:
 - After reading background information about María Brito's life, why do you think she would depict herself as the Madonna?
 - Think of a time when you felt you were juggling too many things. Remember how you felt at the time. How does that feeling compare with the expression depicted on the figure's face in *The Juggler*?
 - How did a contemporary female artist make new meanings with loaded imagery appropriated from a fifteenth-century painting? What is the difference between appropriation and plagiarism?

Depicting the Self: Juxtaposition

1. Tell students that they will look at another work of art by Brito in which the artist has represented herself. Divide the class into five groups. Distribute a detail of one of the five compartments from *Self-Portrait in Grey and White* to each group. Have each group write a list of what images they see in their compartment and create a list of the qualities and characteristics they associate with each of the images. What could each of these images symbolize? Discuss in their groups what they think Brito is communicating in each compartment, and then invite students to share their responses. Write students' responses for each compartment on the board.
2. Display a reproduction of Brito's *Self-Portrait in Grey and White* and discuss students' initial responses. Explain to students that assemblages are mixed-media constructions that contain materials such as found objects and wood. Point out that *Self-Portrait in Grey and White* represents multiple facets of Brito's life. Discuss the work of art using the following prompts:
 - Determine where each compartment is located in Brito's representation of a house. What do you associate with basements and with attics? How does the placement of images on different levels of the house create new meanings?
 - Artists mix and match various objects and place them together in a different context in order to create new meanings. This is called juxtaposition. Consider the potential symbolic meanings that are written on the board. How does Brito's juxtaposition of various objects convey a different meaning than the symbolism of each object separately?
 - Now that you see the five compartments as a whole, what do you think Brito is communicating about herself?
 - What does the exterior of the house reveal and conceal?

Wrap-up Discussion

1. Allow students time to reflect in their journals on what they learned about the different ways an artist can depict himself or herself in works of art. Ask them to note what was most surprising about the different ways Brito chose to depict herself.
2. Lead a wrap-up discussion about *Self-Portrait in Grey and White* and *The Juggler* by discussing the following:
 - Compare and contrast the works. What are the advantages of using symbols versus realistic depictions to communicate aspects of one's identity?
 - Why do you think Brito's symbolic representation of herself in *Self-Portrait in Grey and White* was considered a self-portrait by the artist while the more realistic depiction of the artist's appearance in *The Juggler* was not titled as a self-portrait?
 - What are the advantages of using mixed-media assemblage to communicate ideas versus the use of two-dimensional painting?
 - Which work of art did you feel was more effective, and why?
3. Return to the list of responses about self-portraiture on the board. Ask students what they can add to the list based on their analysis of Brito's work.

Expressing Identity

Students will create a self-portrait that includes personal symbols. The self-portrait will take inspiration from either *The Juggler* or *Self-Portrait in Grey and White*. Students will choose one of the following options:

Option 1: Choose a work of art with which you have a strong connection. Consider using murals in your community, photographs in your home, Brito's work, or art or architecture you've seen in museums or libraries. Create a self-portrait that appropriates an aspect of this work of art and includes a depiction of your physical appearance. Which aspects of the work of art will you keep? Which aspects will you revise or leave out?

Option 2: Create an assemblage of a building using found objects. What rooms would you include to convey an aspect of your personality? What objects could be juxtaposed in these rooms to signify important events in your life? On what level of, or room in, the building would you place these objects?

1. Have students brainstorm ideas in their journals. Tell them to sketch out or describe their initial ideas for both options. What images could they include in a symbolic self-portrait versus a more realistic representation of themselves? After they have carefully considered both options, have them choose the option that they feel will best communicate something about themselves.
2. Allow students class time to work on their projects. Student will present their self-portrait and describe their artistic process, including why they chose option 1 or 2 and why specific motifs or objects were used to convey personal symbols.

ASSESSMENT

Assess students' participation in class discussions, including their ability to analyze the symbols in Brito's works of art.

Students' artworks should be assessed on each student's effectiveness at creating a work that:

- Includes personal symbols
- Communicates an aspect of a student's persona by incorporating an appropriated image that has a personal meaning for students or a juxtaposition of disparate images
- Reflects students' intentions, as outlined in their journals and described orally

Assess what students learned about self-portraiture based on whether their journals reveal an understanding that self-portraits can be: symbolic or representational, created in any media, inspired by personal experience or interests.

EXTENSION

Have students read excerpts from Juan Martínez's book *María Brito* in which Brito discusses her work with the author. Students will work in pairs to interview each other about their self-portraits and write a feature about their classmate's work in a class exhibition brochure.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

National Visual Arts Standards—Grades 5–8

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes

Standard 2: Uses knowledge of structures and functions

Standard 3: Chooses and evaluates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Standard 5: Reflects and assesses the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

National Visual Arts Standards—Grades 9–12

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts

Standard 2: Uses knowledge of structures and functions

Standard 3: Chooses and evaluates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Standard 5: Reflects upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others



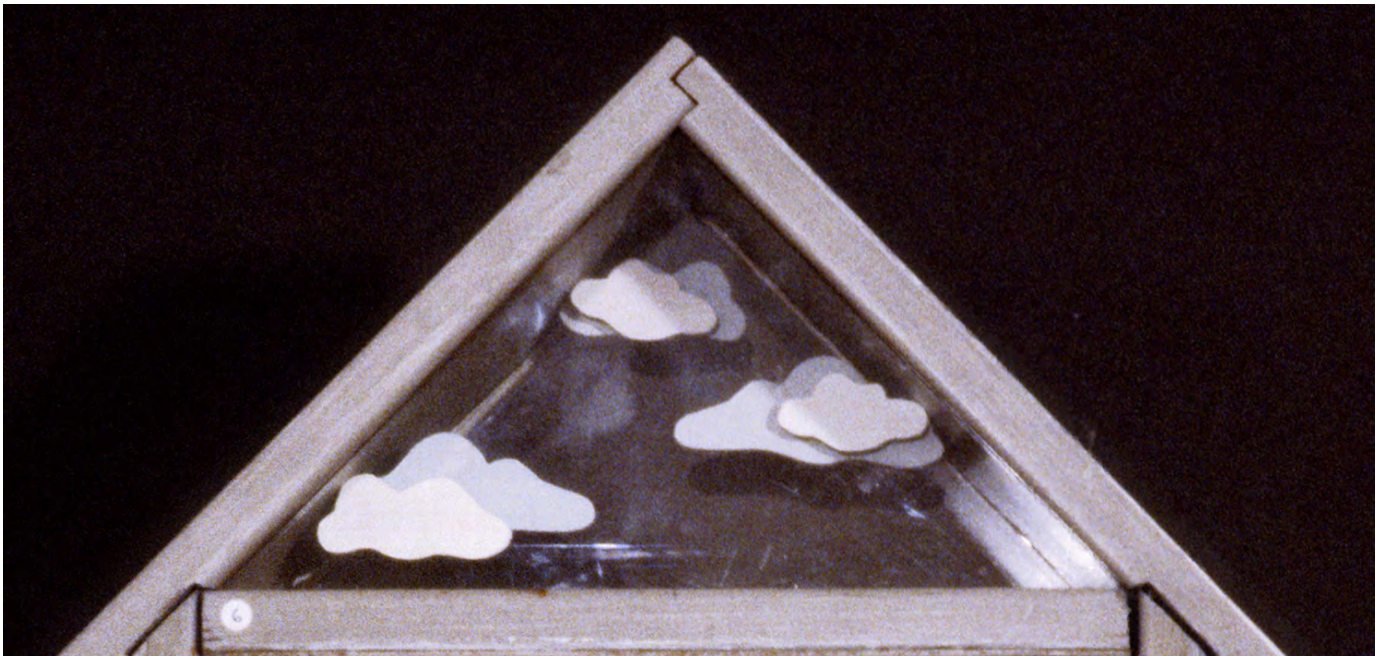
María Brito, *The Juggler*, 1989. Oil on wood with chalkboard and mask, 31 x 21 x 4 inches. Private collection. Photograph by María Brito.

Andrea Mantegna, *Madonna and Child with Cherubim*, c. 1485. Oil on wood, 35 x 30 inches. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Italy. Photograph courtesy of Scala/Art Resource, NY.

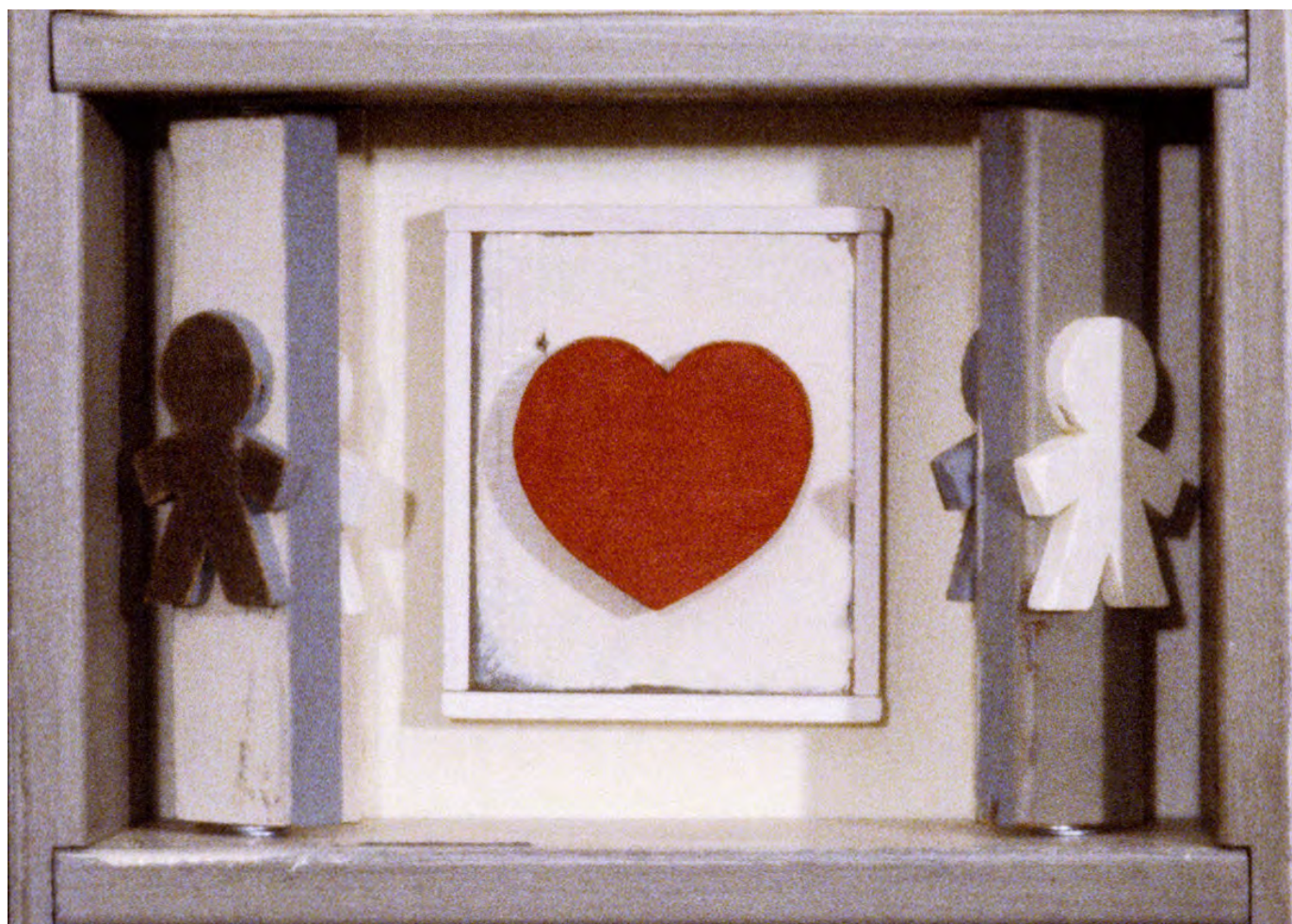




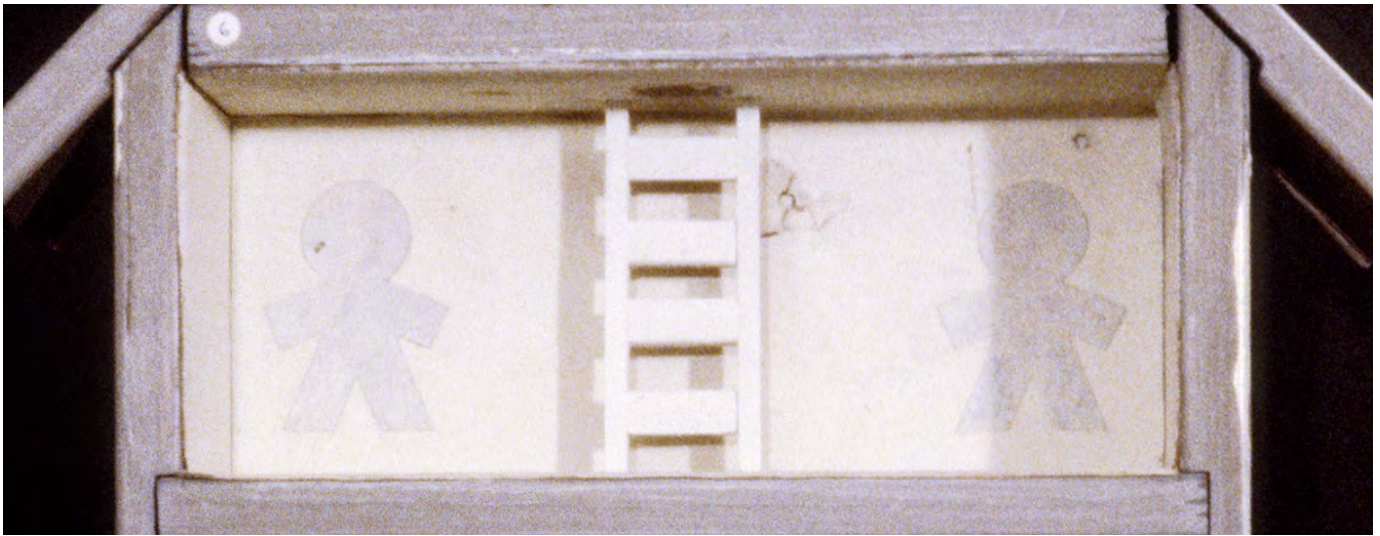
María Brito, *Self Portrait in Grey and White*, 1982.
Mixed media, 24½ x 14½ x 6½ inches. Photograph by
María Brito.



María Brito, *Self Portrait in Grey and White* (detail),
1982. Mixed media, 24½ x 14½ x 6½ inches.
Photograph by María Brito.



María Brito, *Self Portrait in Grey and White* (detail),
1982. Mixed media, 24½ x 14½ x 6½ inches.
Photograph by María Brito.



María Brito, *Self Portrait in Grey and White* (detail),
1982. Mixed media, 24½ x 14½ x 6½ inches.
Photograph by María Brito.



María Brito, *Self Portrait in Grey and White* (detail),
1982. Mixed media, 24½ x 14½ x 6½ inches.
Photograph by María Brito.



Maria Brito, *Self Portrait in Grey and White* (detail),
1982. Mixed media, 24½ x 14½ x 6½ inches.
Photograph by Maria Brito.

LESSON 3



YOU'RE INVITED: RE-CREATING A HISTORICAL DINNER

Grades: 6–12

Subjects: Visual Arts, Language Arts, History-Social Studies

Time Required: Five to six 45- to 50-minute class periods

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will discuss Francisco José de Goya's *Los Caprichos* and learn that he created this series of prints as a biting satirical commentary on society of his time. Students will discuss and analyze two of María Brito's works of art in which she appropriated one of Goya's prints and transformed it into a sculpture. The lesson culminates in students creating their own 3-D sculptures of literary, historical, and artistic figures at a "dinner party." This lesson can apply to any historical period studied.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students should be able to:

- Learn about the historical events of Goya's lifetime and how his *Los Caprichos* prints are reflective of his views of society at that time
- Analyze how appropriation is used by contemporary artist María Brito's to connect the past and present
- Research one artist, one historical figure, and one literary figure from different time periods
- Create sculptures based on their research for a "dinner party" of people from history and write an imaginary dinnertime conversation

MATERIALS

- Background information: "María Brito: Breaking Barriers" (pages 1–6)
- Transparencies or digital images of María Brito's *Las Goyescas* series (2005–2006) and *Party at Goya's (First Arrivals)* (2006) (pages 31–35)
- Overhead projector or a computer with an LCD projector, depending on type of reproductions available
- Internet access and other resources
- Paper and pencils
- Klean Klay® (two packets per student)

LESSON STEPS

Warm-up: El Caprichoso Goya

1. In groups of three to four, have students do brief internet research on the life of artist Francisco José de Goya and his *Los Caprichos* prints. Students should view these prints: no. 19, "Que sacrificio!" (What a sacrifice!); no. 20, "Ya van desplumados" (There they go plucked); no. 44, "Hilan Delgado" (They spin finely); and no. 55, "Hasta la muerte" (Until death); they can be found on the website for the Davison Art Center at Wesleyan University (www.wesleyan.edu/dac/coll/grps/goya/goya_intro.html). Ask students to consider the following:

- Based on Goya's prints, what do you think life was like in Spain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries?
- How do the titles of the prints shed light on their intended meaning?
- How do the titles and commentary notes on the plates reflect Goya's view of society?
- What are some common themes? (Among them might be anti-religion, questioning social conventions such as marriage, questioning authority and authority figures.)
- Who are some personages reflected in the works? (Among them are the Queen of Spain, religious figures, peasants.)

Have each group share their findings with the rest of the class.

Appropriating Goya

1. Display several images of María Brito's Las Goyescas series. Inform students that Brito often incorporated the artistic concept of appropriation—using something from someone else—into her artwork. Lead a class discussion on the works by asking students the following:
 - Why do you think Brito was inspired to appropriate Goya's work? (Artists often appropriate familiar objects or images from other artists as a way to make a fast, direct reference to a common cultural image or theme.)
 - What do you notice about the works she chose to appropriate? (Point out that they dealt with issues similar to those she was interested in: the (mis)treatment of children and (dis)union of man and woman.)
2. Pass out "María Brito: Breaking Barriers" (pages 1–6). Lead a class discussion comparing events in Goya's lifetime (based on research done in the warm-up) and the social events that affected and influenced María Brito's Las Goyescas series.
 - What are some similarities between the themes in her work and Goya's? (They are both comments on the society of the artist's time. Both artists are interested in the manipulative way that parents, society, and church educate children and how the education that children receive by these entities extends into adulthood. This is as true in Brito's time as it was in Goya's.)
 - How did she change or add to Goya's work? (Students should notice that she made the figures in his drawing into three-dimensional sculptures. She also updated themes such as the economics and social pressures of marriage in Goya's time to the prevalence of divorce in Brito's time.)
 - Was one artist more effective in communicating their observations about their society? Why or why not?

Have students pair share their preferred medium and artist.

3. Display several images of María Brito's *Party at Goya's (First Arrivals)*. Discuss how Brito included a sculpture of the artist Goya and herself interacting at a "dinner party." Point out that Brito has juxtaposed figures from one drawing and placed them next to figures from another drawing, thereby redefining each of the figures.
4. In their groups, have students analyze one way that Brito took different characters from Goya's *Los Caprichos* and has them interact in different ways, creating a new context and thus a commentary on her contemporary society. Ask students to consider the following:
 - What theme is she exploring?
 - How has her reconfiguration of the figures changed their original meaning?
5. Have each group imagine a conversation between Brito and Goya at this dinner party.
 - What questions would she, a Cuban-American woman working in the twentieth century, ask of the nineteenth-century Spanish artist Goya?
 - How would he respond?
 - Instruct students to act out the conversation they developed as a group.

Appropriating Historical Figures

1. Inform students that María Brito not only appropriated works from other artists but also appropriated images from literary works like John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*.
2. Instruct students to research one artist, one historical figure, and one literary figure. Encourage students to choose three figures that relate to a unit or units students have or are currently studying. For example, if studying slavery, they might include important figures from that time period such as Mathew Brady, Abraham Lincoln, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Or they might choose figures who relate thematically around a topic such as slavery; in this case, an example would be Jacob Lawrence, Frederick Douglas, and Harriet Tubman.
3. Pass out two packets of Klean Klay® to each student. Inform students that they are going to sculpt four figures. Instruct students to sculpt a self-portrait and each of the figures researched to create their own "dinner party." Students should consider how their figures will be dressed, posed, and grouped before they begin modeling. Inform students that the portraits can be as realistic or representational as they like.
4. Instruct students to write an imaginary conversation informed by their research; the conversation should center either on what their "guests" have in common or on an issue they would disagree with. Have students base the conversations on three questions that the figures, including the student, ask of one another and their responses. Have students include their rationale as to why they brought these three figures together.

ASSESSMENT

Assess students' participation in class discussions and participation in group research.

Student artwork should be assessed on their selection of whether they chose historic figures around a common theme or issue. Assess student writings on their effectiveness in using research learned to create an imaginary conversation among their figures from history.

Assessment can be done by the teacher, by classmates, and/or within each student group.

EXTENSIONS

Have a class exhibition about students' works of art.

Have students orally present their "dinner party" conversation.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

National Visual Arts Standards—Grades 6–12

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts

Standard 3: Chooses and evaluates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Standard 5: Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others

Standard 6: Makes connections between visual arts and other disciplines

National English-Language Arts Standards—Grades 6–12

Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

National History-Social Science Standards—Grades 6–12 (as applicable)

Any standard can apply to this lesson, based on which historical figures students invite to their "dinner party"



María Brito, *They Spin Finely*, from the Las Goyescas series, 2005–2006. Polymer clay, 10¾ x 11½ x 13½ inches. Photograph by Mariano Costa Peuser.



María Brito, *What a Sacrifice!* from the Las Goyescas series, 2005–2006. Polymer clay, 9½ x 10½ x 15 inches. Private collection. Photograph by Mariano Costa Peuser.



María Brito, *There They Go Plucked*, from the Las Goyescas series, 2005–2006. Polymer clay, 11¼ x 15¼ x 13 inches. Photograph by Mariano Costa Peuser.



María Brito, *Until Death*, from the *Las Goyescas* series, 2005–2006. Polymer clay, 10 x 10¼ x 16 inches. Private collection. Photograph by Mariano Costa Peuser.



María Brito, *Party at Goya's (First Arrivals)*, 2006.
Polymer clay, 13 ½ x 24 x 30 inches. Photograph by
Juan Martínez.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



ARTICLES, CHAPTERS, AND BOOKS

Bosch, Lynette M. F. *Cuban-American Art in Miami: Exile, Identity, and the Neo-Baroque*. Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2004.

This essay considers Brito's work within a contemporary art context and explores the personal and political themes in her work. Images and critical analysis of *After the Conquest*, *Meanderings*, *Theory on the Annihilation of Dreams*, and other of her works are included.

Brito, Maria. "Maria Brito-Avellana." *The Studio Potter* 17, no. 2 (1989): 29–31.

The artist reflects on her life and career in this highly personal short essay.

Cuba-USA: The First Generation. Washington, DC: Fondo del Sol Visual Arts Center, 1991.

Over two dozen artists were considered in this 1991 exhibition of Cuban art in the United States, which was curated by Marc Zuer. Many of the essays in the catalog emphasize gender and the participation of women artists. Brito's work is placed in the category "Dream States, Surrealism, Magical Realism." A statement by the artist is included.

Henkes, Robert. *Latin American Women Artists of the United States: The Works of Thirty-three Twentieth-Century Women*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999.

An overview of the artist's career and artistic production, the book includes illustrations and careful analysis of several works, including *The Traveler* and *El Patio de Mi Casa*.

Lippard, Lucy. *Mixed Blessings*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.

The author discusses Brito's sculpture *Altar*. An illustration is included.

Rubinstein, Charlotte Streifer. *American Women Sculptors: A History of Women Working in Three Dimensions*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990.

The entry for Brito in this broad encyclopedic survey focuses on her installation *A Garden and the Fruit*.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Brito, María. Oral history interview by Juan Martínez, October 25, 1997. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Available at: www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/brito97.htm

Juan Martinez conducted this interview in Spanish with the artist in Miami. Brito talks about Havana, Cuba (her birthplace), her early art education, the Peter Pan Project, and her studies at Miami-Dade Community College and the University of Miami. She also comments on her art and her exhibitions.

A VER SERIES EDITOR

Chon A. Noriega, University of California, Los Angeles

ASSOCIATED EDITOR

Colin Gunckel, University of Michigan

NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Alejandro Anreus, William Paterson University

Gilberto Cárdenas, University of Notre Dame

Karen Mary Davalos, Loyola Marymount University

Henry C. Estrada, Smithsonian Center for Latino Initiatives

Jennifer A. González, University of California, Santa Cruz

Rita González, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Kellie Jones, Yale University

Mari Carmen Ramírez, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Yasmin Ramírez, Hunter College

Terezita Romo, Mexican Museum, San Francisco

AFFILIATED INSTITUTIONS

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution • California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives (CEMA), University of California, Santa Barbara • Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York • Cuban Research Institute, Florida International University • Hispanic Research Center, Arizona State University, Phoenix • Inter University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR) • Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame • Jersey City Museum • La Plaza de Cultura y Arte, Los Angeles • Latino Art Museum, Pomona • Latino Museum, Los Angeles • Los Angeles County Museum of Art • Mexican Cultural Institute, Los Angeles • Mexican Museum, San Francisco • El Museo del Barrio, New York • Museum of Fine Arts, Houston • National Association of Latino Arts and Culture (NALAC)

VERONICA ALVAREZ is an educator and historian. She has worked with elementary, high school, and college students, teaching subjects such as Spanish and ancient Mediterranean history, and has served as an art education consultant for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. For the past eight years she has worked in the education department at the J. Paul Getty Museum, where she helped develop educational programming for the newly reopened Getty Villa in Malibu. She currently is an education specialist for teacher audiences at the Getty Center, developing curriculum for ESL teachers and facilitating professional development workshops for K-12 teachers.

THERESA SOTTO is a writer and art educator who lives in Santa Monica, California. She has experience teaching poetry, English Composition, and art to students in kindergarten through college. She has also worked as an art education consultant and curriculum writer for institutions such as the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the University of Arizona's Poetry Center. Currently, she works as an education specialist at the J. Paul Getty Museum, where she develops curriculum and facilitates professional development workshops for K-12 teachers.

This publication was developed under the guidance of Sandy Rodriguez, who served as content advisor for this project.

UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press

CSRC Director: Chon A. Noriega

Senior Editor: Rebecca Frazier

Manuscript Editor: Catherine A. Sunshine

Design and Production: William Morosi

Production Assistant: Jenny Walters

Developmental Editor: Colin Gunckel

Research Assistants: Janyce Cardenas, Lauro Cons, Beth Rosenblum, Ariana Rosas

Getty Intern: Nathalie Sanchez



UCLA CHICANO STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER PRESS

193 HAINES HALL

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, USA 90095-1544

WWW.CHICANO.UCLA.EDU