

The Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology

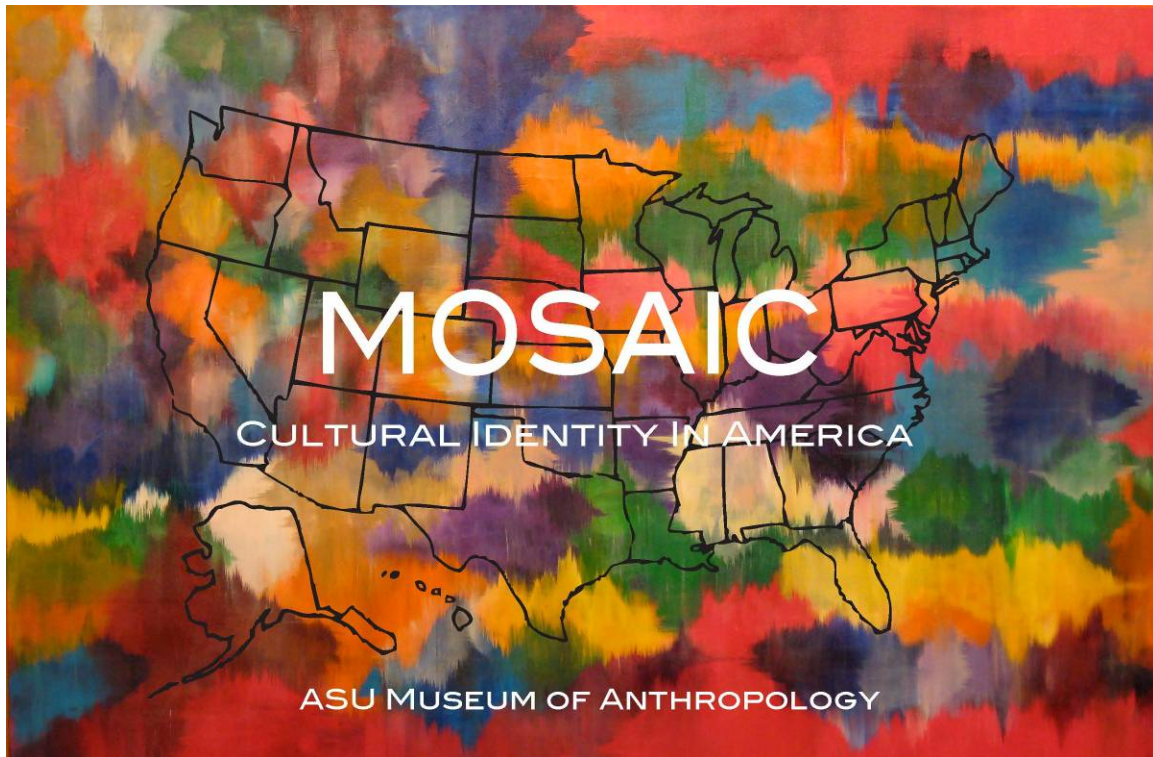


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MOSAIC: Cultural Identity in America

April 3 through October 3, 2008

Education Packet

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MOSAIC: Cultural Identity in America

Overview of the exhibition

The current exhibition is a juried show of art by students at Arizona State University, meaning the pieces on display were picked by a panel of judges from among many entries. The Guest Curator, Sarah Elsasser, was interested in how the artists feel about contemporary American identity and how they feel about their own identities in the United States. As members of the younger generation, she asked them to focus on the topic of American cultural identity. Locating an art exhibition within a Museum of Anthropology allows for more than discussion of how art is made but also why it is important to the artist and how identity can be mediated through art.

Within this exhibition we encounter artistic methods such as:

- Photography
- Digital Imaging
- Mixed Media
- Handicrafts

Topics covered by the artworks include:

- Cultural Identity
- Ethnicity
- Pop Culture
- Consumption

MOSAIC: Cultural Identity in America is showing concurrently with FUSE: Portraits of Refugee Households in Metropolitan Phoenix.

This exhibition allows the visitor the chance to consider how you display identity. If given the chance, what would you choose to say about your identity? How would you say it?

Education Website: <http://www.geocities.com/mosaicexhibition/homepage.html>

Post-Visit Exhibition Evaluation Website: <http://mosaicexhibit.blogspot.com/>

Gallery activity

At the back of the gallery is a space to think about your own identity and to bring together the two different exhibitions, MOSAIC and FUSE. Within this 'bridge' visitors can engage with various hands-on activities and questions about how they display their own identity.

GUIDED GROUP VISIT INFORMATION

1. If you would like to schedule a visit to ASUMA, please contact Catherine Nichols at anthro.museum@asu.edu
2. Please arrive at least 10 minutes prior to your scheduled time.
3. The museum can accommodate up to 30 students, but 10-15 students are ideal. Please include the number of students that plan on attending so arrangements can be made to have sufficient staff for your visitation.
4. One chaperone must be present at all times for each group of 20 children. Two chaperones are preferred.
5. Please schedule your visit one week prior to the date you want to visit the museum.
6. Discuss museum behavior before your scheduled visit. Students should have an understanding of museum etiquette. They will not be allowed to touch the art in the gallery, but there are a few interactive exhibits.
7. The museum is ALWAYS free; there are no fees for students, teachers, or volunteers. Museum hours are Monday through Friday, 11AM to 3PM. Other times can be arranged by appointment.

Please share this material with other educators. This packet is available for download at <http://www.geocities.com/mosaicexhibition/homepage.html> and <http://shesc.asu.edu/asuma>

Background Information

Keywords: Culture, Identity, Ethnicity, Pop Culture

One of the hardest questions to answer is, “what is culture?” The answer tends to come from what aspect you are looking at and within what context you are asking the question. The simplest definition, the one included in the Glossary, is that culture consists of the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group. In the past, anthropologists have tried defining culture by studying a group of people different from their own, documenting every part of their religion, their government, and other institutions, and labeling this list of features as the group’s culture. Today, multiple simple and complex theories concerning culture exist simultaneously and can be applied to the same group of people with the outcome describing or defining culture entirely differently. We have asked ourselves what is more important, the features it produces or the daily lives of the people within it? This answer is left up to each individual to decide but what most social scientists have agreed on is that there is no one overarching definition of culture.

In *MOSAIC: Cultural Identity in America*, we have defined the parameters of our culture group as people living within the United States of America. This group shares common behaviors and beliefs, but that does not mean that the group is homogenous, thinks the same, or agrees on everything all of the time. The above discussion of culture focuses on an outsider’s perspective of culture but how do we identify our own culture? Many aspects of an individual’s life contribute to the creation of a person’s identity and so no two people are exactly the same. Each person also chooses to think about and present their identity in different ways. Many people use their membership in a group as the most important factor of their identity. When you meet someone new, do you often ask what they do for a living, where they are from or what sports team they root for? These are all questions asking your new acquaintance to identify themselves to you based on their occupational group, their locality, or their allegiance to a particular team.

Perhaps one of the most common and straightforward ways that people identify themselves is through their ethnicity, a topic that continues to be discussed and debated at great length in the United States. Ethnicity, like so many aspects of American culture, seems to have a dual nature. An individual’s idea of ethnicity, especially one that is different from the majority, can produce strong feelings of belonging, dissonance (or being disconnected from mainstream society) or inequality. On the other hand, identifying oneself through your ethnicity allows an individual to be a member of a potentially larger and more cohesive group than someone who identifies primarily with an occupation or a sports team. Many of the student’s contributing to this exhibit explore the politics underlying the concept of ethnicity within mainstream US American culture. Culture and ethnicity are terms that are neither mutually exclusive nor do they always consist of identical groups of people. A person can identify with being an American and having an American culture while simultaneously identifying with their ethnicity of being Italian, or Italian-American, for example.

Along with ethnicity, popular culture continues to have a powerful influence both on how people perceive Americans and how Americans view themselves. Consumerism and media scandals are just two examples of US pop culture and society, and both are largely discussed with a negative connotation. For example, pop culture provides a dichotomy in American cultural identity: we want to look down upon our obsession with the media and our massive gas and product consumption, yet these continue to be mainstays of a particular and persistent facet of American cultural identity perpetuated by millions and millions of Americans themselves. This exhibition allows the student artists an outlet to utilize art in displaying what they think and feel about identifying themselves within American pop culture.

Suggested Pre-Visit Activities

1. Discussion Activity: thinking about museums and art

This activity is appropriate for elementary and middle school to prepare for your visit to the museum. As a Museum of Anthropology, we aim to address many themes and topics concerning human creativity. This particular exhibit is different from others students may have seen in the past because it is an art exhibition located in an Anthropology Museum rather than in an Art Museum.

- Ask the students to define the term museum and discuss the purpose of a museum.
- Ask the students to talk about what kinds of museums they have visited and what they liked or disliked about them.
- Ask the students to define the term art. What do they consider to be art?
- What kind of art do the students expect to see in a museum?
 - o This exhibition holds many different types of artworks including photographs, video installations, paintings, digital images, and mixed media. These terms are defined in the Glossary.
- Conclude by asking for different ways students have seen art displayed and how they would display art if it were up to them.

This is also a good time to discuss museum behavior with your students. It is important to enjoy the visit but also to be respectful of the tour guide and the things they will see.

2. Discussion and Writing Activity: thinking about identity

This activity is appropriate for middle and high school to prepare the students to engage with the concept of identity in the exhibition. No two people live the exact same lives or have the exact same identity, much like how all fingerprints are different. Many variables and life experiences factor into a person's identity.

- Encourage your students to think about their own identity. Brainstorm as a group some ways in which they display their identity (ex. language, behavior, dress).
- Have students write a short prose piece on how they display their own identity to others. The length of the piece can be tailored to be appropriate for the grade-level.

Possible Visit Activity

Some of the Post-Visit Discussions are geared towards concepts or themes found in particular artworks. If utilizing particular discussions after your visit, some students might benefit from knowing which pieces will be discussed so as to pay attention to them within the gallery.

Maria Navarro's piece, "92,160," includes 92,159 red dots and a single black dot. When you visit the museum can you find the black dot? More information on the piece is available below and in the Gallery Guide.

Maria has calculated that the average human body has 92,160 drops of blood. Due to a law enacted in 1910, a single drop of sub-Saharan African blood would make one be considered to be black. The single black dot signifies the amount of blood it would take to define someone's identity for them until the law was considered unconstitutional in 1967.

Suggested Post-Visit Activities

Access to images of specific pieces in MOSAIC is available online at <http://mosaicexhibit.blogspot.com/>

1. Discussion Activity- middle school

Amanda Stevens chose to photograph a mother with a bag over her head showing a generic woman's face rather than her own to symbolize how the concept of June Cleaver as the ideal American wife forces some mothers to give up their own identity. These women are known as wives and mothers rather than as individuals.

- Ask your students what their concept of the perfect mother is.
- Ask them to think about where they got these concepts from.

2. Discussion or Art Activity- elementary, middle and high school

Layla Luna's artwork, "Slums to Suburbs," included two different kinds of houses, layers of shacks and rows of suburban houses. She utilizes this representation to discuss the reality and the ideal of the American Dream for many illegal immigrants, while also allowing the shacks to represent countless impoverished communities worldwide.

* The activity itself is appropriate for elementary school, discussion of the reasoning for the piece is at the discretion of the teacher.

- Ask your students to think about what their ideal house is. Would they consider it to be their "American Dream" house?

- Ask to write a descriptive short essay of the house.
- One alternative is to draw a picture of the house.
- A second alternative is to have students create a room inside their perfect house.
 - o Possible supplies include:
 - A shoebox to create the base of the room
 - Miscellaneous craft supplies that are available
 - Crayons, Markers, Pens, Pencils, etc
 - Construction paper, Card stock, etc
 - Popsicle sticks, Empty paper towel rolls , etc

3. Discussion and Art Activity- elementary school

Leah Abriani’s hand-sewn piece, “Embroidered Banner,” presents a group of symbols, each standing for a specific characteristic or part of her life with her husband. Leah has learned many handicrafts over the years, and currently wishes to display her identity through sewing.

- Ask your students to define the term symbol. What are some symbols we see around us?
- Ask the students to think of a symbol meaningful to their life, or that represents a part of their identity.
- Have the students create their own hand-sewn symbols
 - o Supplies:
 - Acrylic yarn
 - Construction Paper
 - Plastic yarn needles
 - One-hole punches
 - o Instructions:
 - Draw the symbol on the construction paper
 - Use the one-hole punch to create holes around the outline of the symbol
 - Use the needle and yarn to sew through the holes
 - o Sample symbols for this activity are attached at the end of the packet

4. Discussion and Writing Activity- elementary and middle school

Gretchen Keck’s book art piece, “Americanizing an American,” talks about her struggle to belong in Florida after moving from Puerto Rico as a child. Both places are within the United States, but they are extremely different. Gretchen grew up with two languages and two cultures.

- Ask the students to discuss what it is like moving to a new place.
- Have the students write short narratives of a time they once had to move and make new friends, or when they made friends with a new student from a new place.

Glossary

Community- a group of people who share common characteristics or interests and are perceived or perceive themselves as distinct in some respect from the larger society

Culture- the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group; a complex term sometimes used to identify or describe groups but also used as the general nature of the human experience (ex. humans create cultures)

Digital Image- an image that is available in electronic form; readable and manipulable by computer

Ethnicity- identity with or membership in a particular racial, national, or cultural group and observance of that group's customs, beliefs, and language.

Generation- a group of individuals, most of whom are the same approximate age, having similar ideas, problems, attitudes, etc.

Handcrafts (handcrafts)- an object or craft which is made by someone's hands

Identity- the sense of self, providing sameness and continuity in personality over time

Video Installation- using film as a medium of art where the art is captured on video and installed to play on a continuous loop

Mixed Media- artistic media, as pen and ink, chalk, graphite, etc. used in combination

Photography- the process or art of producing images of objects on sensitized surfaces by the chemical action of light or of other forms of radiant energy, as x-rays, gamma rays, or cosmic rays.

Pop culture- contemporary lifestyle and items that are well known and generally accepted; cultural patterns that are widespread within a population

Sewing (stitching)- to work with a needle and thread

Symbol- something used for or regarded as representing something else

Identity Word Search

L L V L D P G E I T N T C Q X K
T U I T K R A E T J E A S S E A
O T D Q E M C I N H B S M K C A
M H E E P I H S N E N F E S D K
U J O O T H H T E T R I X W J P
L N Z S J A O I W L S A C R O I
T P A S I N S T A L L A T I O N
I L Q E D D G C O M M U N I T Y
P D M S E C O H P G E E A P O Y
L P S V N R P I O H R R D R O N
E K M E T A E N P X X A I I I S
G E G F I F S G U E S I P C A E
I N R N T T C U L T U R E H A D
N A E O Y S P F A M I L Y H F N
L D J G E N D E R D H P F E X O
H W E C E O X I M N G O I G E Q

Find these words in the grid above. Keep in mind that words may be hidden vertically, horizontally, or backwards.

ETHNICITY
PHOTOGRAPH
MEDIA
VIDEO
INSTALLATION
CULTURE
IDENTITY
GENERATION
POPULAR

AMERICAN
MULTIPLE
HANDCRAFTS
STITCHING
FAMILY
COMMUNITY
PLASTIC
PAINT

Activity Appendix
Sample Symbols for Post-Visit Discussion and Art Activity 3



