

Title

José Toirac and Meira Marrero, Cuban Artists and Cultural Translators

Concept/Main Idea of Lesson

The purpose of this lesson is to familiarize students with the work and life of Cuban artists José Toirac and Meira Marrero.

Intended Grade Levels

Grades 9-12

Infusion/Subject Areas

Visual Arts

Social Studies

Curriculum Standards

Visual Art:

VA.5.C.3.3: Critique works of art to understand the content and make connections with other content areas.

VA.5.H.1.1: Examine historical and cultural influences that inspire artists and their work.

VA.68.C.3.1: Incorporate accurate art vocabulary during the analysis process to describe the structural elements of art and organizational principles of design.

VA.912.H.3.1: Synthesize knowledge and skills learned from non-art content areas to support the processes of creation, interpretation, and analysis.

Social Studies:

S.912.H.1.2: Describe how historical events, social context, and culture impact forms, techniques, and purposes of works in the arts, including the relationship between a government and its citizens.

SS.912.H.1.5: Examine artistic response to social issues and new ideas in various cultures.

SS.912.H.2.1: Identify specific characteristics of works within various art forms (architecture, dance, film, literature, music, theatre, and visual arts).

SS.912.H.2.3: Apply various types of critical analysis (contextual, formal, and intuitive criticism) to works in the arts, including the types and use of symbolism within art forms and their philosophical implications.

SS.912.H.2.4: Examine the effects that works in the arts have on groups, individuals,

and cultures.

SS.912.H.2.5: Describe how historical, social, cultural, and physical settings influence an audience's aesthetic response.

Common Core:

LACC.1112.RI.1.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

LACC.1112.RI.2.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

LACC.1112.L.3.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

LACC.1112.L.3.6: Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.

LACC.1112.SL.1.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

National Council for the Social Studies Curriculum Themes

Culture: Human beings create, learn, and adapt culture. Cultures are dynamic systems of beliefs, values, and traditions that exhibit both commonalities and differences. Understanding culture helps us understand ourselves and others.

Time, Continuity, & Change: Human beings seek to understand their historic roots and to locate themselves in time. Knowing what things were like in the past and how things change and develop helps us answer important questions about our current condition.

People, Places, & Environment: Today's students are aware of the world beyond their personal locations. As students study this content, they create their spatial views and geographic perspectives. Social, cultural, economic, and civic demands require such knowledge to make informed and critical decisions about relationships between people and their environment.

Power, Authority, & Governance: Understanding the development of structures of power, authority, and governance and their evolving functions is essential for the emergence of civic competence.

Global Connections: The realities of global interdependence require understanding of the increasingly important and diverse global connections among societies. Persisting and emerging global issues require solutions.

Civic Ideals and Practices: All people have a stake in examining civic ideals and practices across time and in diverse societies, as well as in determining how to close the gap between present practices and the ideals on which our democratic republic is based. An understanding of civic ideals and the practice of citizenship is critical to full

participation in society.

Instructional Objectives

The student will:

- have a basic understanding of the government and social conditions in contemporary Cuba;
- discuss U.S.-Cuba relations in the context of the Cold War;
- describe the “Special Period” in Cuban history;
- describe the artistic training of Cuban artists José Toirac and Meira Marrero;
- define and apply the vocabulary word, “icon”;
- identify selected works by Cuban artists José Toirac and Meira Marrero.

Teacher Background Information on José Toirac & Meira Marrero

José Toirac and Meira Marrero are a husband and wife art duo living and working in Cuba. Toirac, born in 1966 in Guantánamo, Cuba is an artist with a background in painting and installation. Marrero, born in 1969 in Havana, Cuba, with a background as an art critic and curator.

In their work, Toirac and Marrero combine references to Cuban politics, history, and culture; much research goes into the artworks. One such work that combines research and painting is *Cuba 1869-2006* (2006). Another notable recent work from Toirac and Marrero is *Ave Maria* (2010), a curated sculptural installation that shows a variety of depictions of La Caridad del Cobre, Our Lady of Charity, the patron saint of Cuba. This work represents ways in which a traditional religious icon can be depicted in so many different ways that illuminate issues of race, religion, social structures, and material culture.

Learning Activities Sequence

Set Induction/Hook: Project this quote (access the presentation, *Martí Quote*, or simply write on board) by José Martí:

Liberty is the right of every man to be honest,
to think and to speak without hypocrisy.

Ask: What does the statement mean? Put it in your own words. Who do you think said this? (Common answers are George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.)

Say: It was said by Cuban poet, journalist, and hero José Martí. Like Washington and Lincoln, Martí is an icon and well-known throughout Latin America. Today you will learn more about Cuba and the role Martí played not only in the nation’s history, but also in the art of Toirac and Marrero. You will also explore how Toirac and Marrero use icons and well-known images in their art.

Teacher Explanation and Presentation: Part I: Using the presentation entitled, *Toirac, Marrero, & Cuba*, provide students with a brief overview of Cuban history, culture, and contemporary society. Teacher Background Notes and discussion questions are

provided in the “Notes View” of the presentation; review those before you share the presentation with students.

[Note: The purpose of this presentation is just to acquaint students with Toirac and Marrero’s work. In the next lesson, more detailed information about individual artwork will be presented.]

Reading: Distribute the reading, “Berlin-Moscow-Havana,” by Dennys Matos. Tell students they will learn more about Cuba’s “Special Period”; they are to read the passage and answer the questions. After allowing a sufficient amount of time, bring the class together and discuss the students’ responses as a whole group.

Teacher Explanation and Presentation: Part II: Continue the presentation by sharing images of Toirac and Marrero’s life, work, and homeland of Cuba. Teacher Background Notes are provided in the “Notes View” of the presentation; review those before you share the presentation with students.

Closure: Conclude the lesson by playing the 11-minute video clip of an interview with Toirac and Marrero at the Cleveland Institute of Art (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkEM00fG5hl>).

Materials and Resources

Presentation: *Martí Quote*

Presentation: *Toirac, Marrero, & Cuba*

Computer, Projector, and Screen

Reading: *Berlin – Moscow – Havana*

Optional Extension Activities

Have students select one of political figures mentioned in the reading and conduct independent research on them, reporting back to the class.

References

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