

# TEACHER RESOURCE PACKET

Swept Away:

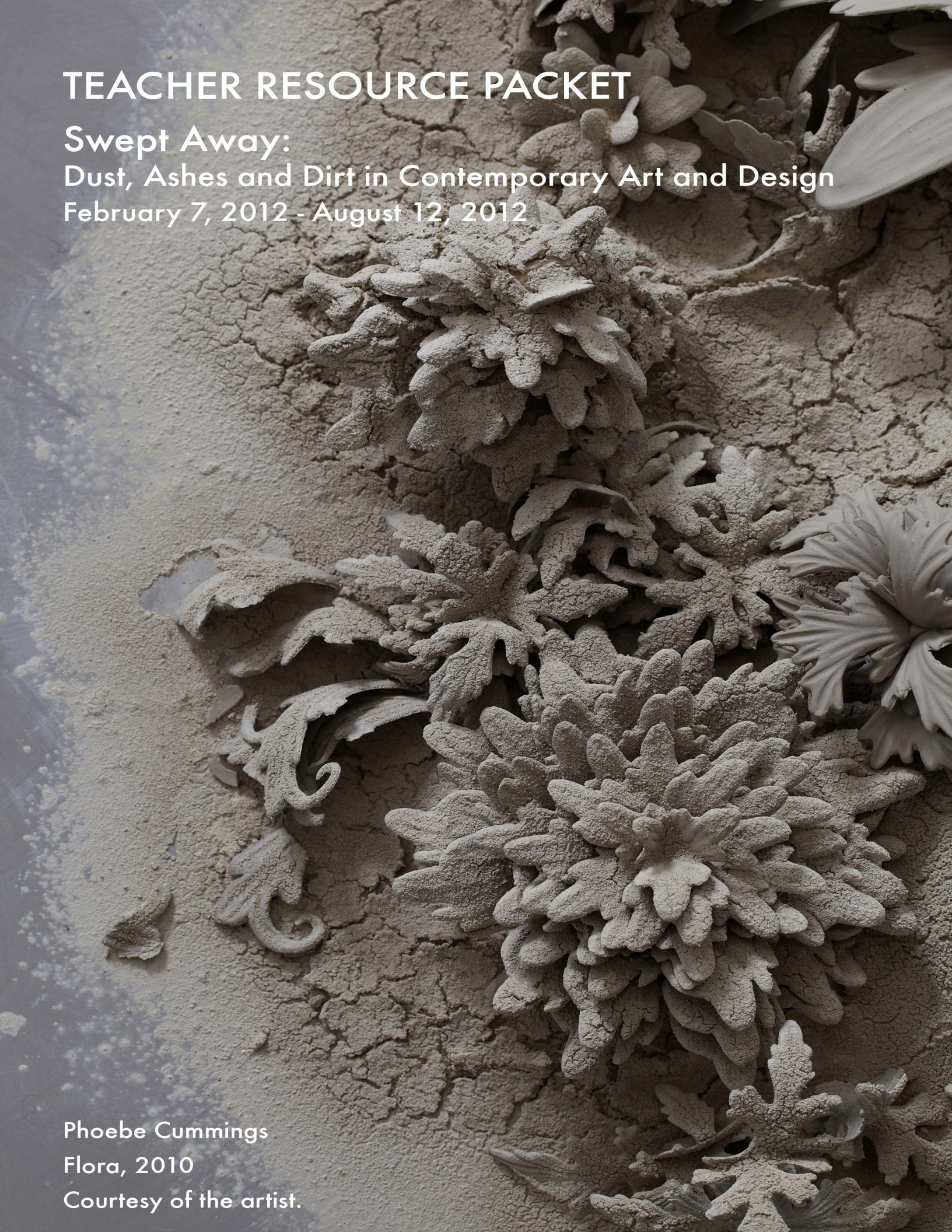
Dust, Ashes and Dirt in Contemporary Art and Design

February 7, 2012 - August 12, 2012

Phoebe Cummings

Flora, 2010

Courtesy of the artist.





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## WELCOME

Dear Educator,

We are delighted that you have scheduled a visit to *Swept Away: Dust, Ashes, and Dirt in Contemporary Art and Design*. When you and your students visit the Museum of Arts and Design, you will be given an informative tour of the exhibition with a museum educator, followed by a visit to the MAD studio where students can make a hands-on art project to take home. To make your museum experience more enriching and meaningful, we strongly encourage you to use this resource packet as a way to involve your students in the classroom before and after your museum visit.

This resource packet includes topics for discussion and activities intended to introduce the key themes and concepts of the exhibition. Writing, storytelling, and art projects have been suggested so that you can explore ideas from the exhibition in ways that relate directly to your students' lives and experiences.

Please feel free to adapt and build on these materials and to use this resource packet in any way that you wish.

We look forward to welcoming you and your students to the Museum of Arts and Design.

Sincerely,

Cathleen Lewis  
Manager of School, Youth, and Family Programs  
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Lessons written by Petra Pankow, Museum Educator, in collaboration with the Museum of Arts and Design Education Department.



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**THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN** has been functioning as an international resource center for craft, arts and design since 1956. Through its collections, exhibitions, programs and publications, the Museum serves as a forum for critical debate concerning the nature of craftsmanship and the engagement with the process that links materials, techniques, forms, patterns and concepts in all creative work.

## HOW DOES A MUSEUM WORK?

**Administration:** The team, led by the Director of the Museum, determines the programs, plans and philosophy of the Museum. It also raises funds to realize the Museum's goals and works directly with the Board of Governors, who guide the Museum's functions.

**Curatorial:** This is the team, led by the Chief Curator, who work together to decide which exhibits will be shown, how they will look, what artwork is to be included, and how they are to be interpreted.

**Registration:** Led by the Registrar, this team arranges the safe handling of art to be placed in an exhibition and maintains the permanent collections acquired by a museum.

**Education:** This team provides the interactive interpretation of the objects on view through the educational programs designed for children, adults and families who visit the Museum.

**Facility Maintenance:** This is the team that allows the day-to-day operations of a museum to continue: from the lights being turned on, to the safety of all who enter the building.

**Security Guards:** This is the team who are most often seen in a museum. Their main task is to protect the artwork from harm so that in the future people will be able to see the same objects as seen in a museum today. Security guards also are helpful to visitors who have a variety of questions.

Museums are places where we can learn about the past, present, and future of the world around us. When the habit of museum exploration is formed at a young age, students learn early on that the diversity of knowledge is endless. We look forward to welcoming your group into our galleries.



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## HELPFUL HINTS FOR YOUR MUSEUM VISIT

*"I try, when I go to museums, to do two things. One, to appreciate what I'm looking at, just to see it, but then to isolate a few pieces that I really look at in detail. I study and I draw not with any purpose in mind. I mean, I don't go looking for specific things. I just try to be open-minded and keep my eyes open. It's interesting that every time I go back to the same place, I see something different."* Arline M. Fisch (1931- ) Brooklyn, New York

While visiting the exhibition try to use all your senses. Notice the way the pieces are displayed. *Are there any specific groupings of pieces you can distinguish? If you enjoy looking at one piece more than others, can you explain why?*

Here are some questions and suggestions to think about as you move around the exhibition:

### *I. What can be objectively observed?*

- a. *What is the physical description? Measurement, weight, materials used, articulation of materials...*
- b. *What iconography, if any, is used? Designs, words, diagrams...*
- c. *What are the object's formal design characteristics? Lines, shapes, forms, color, texture...*

### *II. What would it be like to interact with this piece of art? How would you handle, lift, display it?*

- a. *How would the work of art feel, move, and sound?*
- b. *What does it do? Does it have a function? How would the figures move if they were alive?*
- c. *What is our emotional response to this work? Fear, joy, indifference, curiosity, revulsion, excitement...*

### *III. What is in the mind of the artist? What are the viewers thinking and feeling? Use creative imagining and free association.*

- a. *In order to develop possible interpretations, review all of the above information and consider what was going on in the world when the work was produced. (Theories and hypotheses)*
- b. *Do the figures tell a story? Does the piece have underlying political or social meaning? (Understanding and visual thinking)*
- c. *Develop a program to investigate the questions posed by the material evidence. (Program of research)*

### *IV. Brainstorm about an event or situation happening in your life that you could play out as a scene or that could be made into your very own figurative sculpture. (Design themes)*



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**S W E P T   A W A Y :**  
**DUST, ASHES, AND DIRT IN**  
**CONTEMPORARY ART AND DESIGN**

**FEBRUARY 7, 2012 - AUGUST 12, 2012**



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## INTRODUCTION

*Dust, ashes and smoke, dirt—these humble materials lead double lives. They comprise the anonymous detritus of our lives, the stuff we leave behind, the stuff we try to ignore, the stuff we deem unclean and therefore strive to remove or discard, to disguise or hide. They are the remnants of what once was, whispering reminders of the fleeting nature of existence.<sup>1</sup>*  
David Revere McFadden

The latest installment of the Museum of Art and Design's ongoing investigation into unusual materials in contemporary art, *Swept Away* highlights the multilayered cultural significance of dust, ashes, dirt, and sand. Humble, overlooked, and often unwanted, these materials are also powerful symbols for the ephemeral nature of life. In the hands of the featured artists, they illustrate the elusiveness of memory, become haunting signifiers of loss and decay, and emerge as carriers of messages concerning social norms and values. The works on view, many of which are site-specific installations or photographs or videos documenting temporary interventions, engage space, time, and especially museum visitors, who are frequently invited to become active participants.

Since ancient history, the ritual use of dirt, sand, and powdered pigments has been part of the spiritual practices in a number of cultures around the world. The ceremonial creation of Tibetan Sand mandalas as a meditative practice, Navajo Sandpainting for physical and psychic healing, and Aboriginal Australian Sand compositions that recorded time, place, and identity are the most salient examples. In all of them, process and ritual are more important than the physical artwork, the destruction and dispersal of which is already included in its creation. Like these historical precedents, many of the works in *Swept Away* have a strong performative quality.

## EXHIBITION THEMES:

### **MEMENTOS, VESTIGES, TRACES**

A number of the works on view mine the territory of memory, history, and imagination. By using ashes, dust, and dirt, artists create a visual liaison between psychological and physiological states.

### **PHRASES, FRAGMENTS, WORDS**

Several artists invited to participate in *Swept Away* have focused on the relationship between the ephemeral and our understanding of language. Like sand constantly being blown into different configurations in the desert, living languages are never static, but rather are in a state of perennial evolution.

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<sup>1</sup> David Revere McFadden, *Swept Away: Dust, Ashes, and Dirt in Contemporary Art and Design* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2012) p. 10.



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## **HORIZONS AND SPACES**

Many of the artists in the exhibition take on issues of space, either directly by manipulating entire landscapes and working with a given natural environments. Others engage interior spaces through site-specific installations. Still others create imaginary places into which we are invited to project our own **narratives**.

## **TRANS(PER)FORMERS**

Because they are inherently ephemeral, dust, ashes, and dirt lend themselves to use in performance works that embrace and encapsulate the passage of time. While such performances may be recorded for posterity in photographs and video, it is the vitality of the process itself that imbues the performance with urgency and presence.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

- What are the symbolic meanings of dust, dirt, sand, and ashes in our culture?
- How are dust, sand, and ashes connected to ideas of time and temporality?
- Look for works of art with a strong storytelling component. What sorts of places, stories, or memories do they evoke?
- Many of the works on view employ common contemporary art practices: performance, site-specific installations, and time-based interventions that lend themselves to investigations into time, memory, and fleetingness, while at the same time they engage both space and viewers in the process. Which works make use of these formats and why?
- A number of the artists in *Swept Away* use dirt and ashes (in the form of pollutants) to comment on environmental issues. Find works with such themes and discuss their effectiveness.





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**Phoebe Cummings**

*Flora*, 2010

Unfired clay

13 x 18 x 11 ft. (3.7 x 5.5 x 3.4 m)

Courtesy of the artist



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*Clay [...] seems to have the potential to become almost anything, like words on a page or a pencil line. I enjoy the immediacy of the material and of working entirely by hand, as well as the ongoing possibilities for making and remaking with the same material. [...] For me, working with clay is a process of constructing three-dimensional fiction where nothing is fixed or permanent.<sup>2</sup>*  
Phoebe Cummings

## LOOK :

Take a moment to look at this image.

- What shapes do you recognize?
- What colors do you notice?
- How do the individual parts of this image relate to each other?
- Describe the **texture** of the flowers. What would they feel like to the touch?
- What would happen if you touched them?
- What materials did artist Phoebe Cummings use to make this work?
- How did she manipulate these materials to create forms and shapes?

## THINK ABOUT :

Imagine coming across this arrangement of flowers not in the form of a photograph or something exhibited in a museum but at a place you happen upon, inside or outside, urban or rural.

- Describe this place. What might it look like?
- Describe what it might feel like to be in this imaginary space.
- Now, tell the story of the flowers in the context of this place: how did they get there, how do or don't they fit in with their surrounding? In what way do they change the overall atmosphere of the space around them?
- Imagine seeing the flowers one month before. How might they have looked different? Why?
- Now imagine looking at the flowers one month or even a year in the future. Would they have changed?

## DISCUSS :

Phoebe Cummings uses clay in her work. In the case of *Flora*, she molded the material into intricate flower sculptures, which are based on landscape designs on historical **ceramic** vessels, such as 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century cups and plates. She then covers these shapes with a thin coat of **slip**. As the water in this liquid clay mixture evaporates, it forms tiny, vein-like cracks and becomes a fine, dusty powder.

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<sup>2</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 96



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- Why do you think this work was chosen for *Swept Away*, an exhibition focusing on dust, dirt, and ashes in contemporary art?
- In what way does clay, ceramic, or porcelain fit into a category with these other materials?
- Discuss the idea of dust and its meanings in our society. What is it? What is it composed of? What does it symbolize? What is our personal and collective relationship to it? I
- In what way does Phoebe Cummings' work address some of these associations?

*Flora*, created in 2010, illustrates the artist's interest in creating temporary **site-specific installations** and/or **interventions** that demonstrate the fragility and fleeting nature of the world around us. Loss, destruction, and decay are built-in components of the work. The **unfired clay** from which the fragile sculptures are made is either left to disintegrate or reused for future works.

## DO :

Form teams of 3-4 artists each. Each group will choose an area of the classroom and, using **unfired clay**, create a **site-specific** sculpture that reflects on the relationship between interior environment and the natural world (for example, something might grow out of a crack in the wall or on the floor, a mouse might be hiding in a corner). When all groups are done with their work, each team will take on the role of archeologists and investigate the artwork of another group. Each team will write the story of this work, then share. Compare and contrast the intention of the artists and the interpretations of the archeologists.



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**Kim Abeles**

*Give Us This Day*, 1993

Smog (particulate matter) on linen tablecloth

Courtesy of the artist



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*We live in a contradiction—the dangers are out there, in the beyond, while we are safe in our homes. Since the worst in our air can't be seen, Smog Collectors are both literal and metaphoric depictions of the current conditions of our life source, of the air we breathe. They are reminders of our industrial decisions: the road we took that once seemed so modern.*<sup>3</sup>  
Kim Abeles

## LOOK :

- Describe this work of art.
- What individual elements does it consist of?
- How are they arranged?
- What in the arrangement strikes you as unexpected? Please explain.
- What do you notice about the colors in the work?
- How do you think artist Kim Abeles created this work? What materials did she use?
- What might her process have been?

## THINK ABOUT :

The image above is a photo of an **installation** created as part of Kim Abeles *Smog Collectors* series. To make them, the artist places pre-cut stencils on white fabric before laying it out on the roof of her Los Angeles studio. After some time, the air pollution settling on the exposed surfaces appears in stark contrast to the white fabric covered by the stencils.

- What do you think Kim Abeles wants to communicate with her artwork?
- Can you come up with a good title for the work pictured above?
- Kim Abeles entitled it *Give Us This Day*. Why do you think she chose this title?
- Why did she choose an everyday domestic setting like a dinner table for the work?
- In what way does it relate to her overall message?
- Can you think of other contexts or motifs that would help stress the point the *Smog Collectors* are trying to make?

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<sup>3</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 84.



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## DISCUSS :

Kim Abeles demonstrates that our attitude towards environmental problems is often characterized by denial. While we know about smog and other forms of pollution, we often remain passive because the problems remain largely invisible. “The *Smog Collectors* materialize the reality of the air we breathe,”<sup>4</sup> says the artist.

- How does a work like *Give Us This Day* affect your attitude towards smog? Please explain.
- In small groups, discuss the following questions: Would you say that Abeles’s work is an effective way of political criticism or even social activism? Why? Why not?

## DO :

The *Smog Collectors* reflect on environmental problems that surround us. As a whole class, discuss the most pressing environmental issues in New York City. Then form “task forces” of 3-4 students each. Every group picks the issue they find most relevant and thinks of a way this issue could become subject of an artwork. Write a short description of this work and present it, together with a sketch of what it would look like, to the rest of the class.

## COMPARE :

Like Kim Abeles, Alexandre Orion is also preoccupied with urban pollution. Compare and contrast the work of both artists.

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<sup>4</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 84



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**Glithero**

*Burn Burn Burn*, 2007

Stills from video; wood, flammable paint, glass vase, roses

Courtesy of the artists



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*Glithero's [work] follows a consistent conceptual path; to capture and present the beauty in the moment things are made. From machines that miraculously create wax chandeliers from strung wick, a pouring slide that becomes a 10 metre long poly-concrete table, to ceramics that turn vivid blue with UV light, the key ingredients of their work are time and transformation<sup>5</sup>.*

*Glithero*

### LOOK :

- Take a moment to look at the top image:
- Describe the setting. What are its different components?
- How do the individual parts of this arrangement relate to each other?
- Is there any one part in the **installation** that stands out to you? Which one? Why?
- How would you describe the use of line in this work?
- Now look at the photograph on the bottom:
- How does it relate to the image above?
- What are the major differences between the two photographs?
- What do they have in common?
- Can you reconstruct a story of what happened here, based on what you see?
- Find suitable titles for both images.

### THINK ABOUT :

The two designers who make up London-based Studio Glithero are interested in process, the passing of time, and in change. For *Burn Burn Burn*, they invented a flammable paint (derived from the same material used for matchstick heads) and used it to draw a decorative path on the wall, connecting a picture frame, a chair, and a table. When the paint is lighted, the flame dances along this predetermined path until it reaches its end.

- The idea of time and temporality is an important thread that connects many of the works in *Swept Away*. In what way does *Burn Burn Burn* fit into this category?
- What aspect of fire and ashes does the work illuminate?
- In what way does or doesn't this perspective differ from the way we might otherwise think about those two things?

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<sup>5</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 106.





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## DISCUSS :

The images above are stills from a video documenting the **performance** at the center of this artwork.

- Discuss why you think the artists are attracted to video as an important component of their work?
- Would you prefer to witness the unfolding of *Burn Burn Burn* live or in video format? Please explain.

## DO :

Using repurposed materials like plastic bottles or cardboard boxes, create an artwork that combines the ideas of creation and destruction.



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**Jim Dingilian**

*Unspoken Conclusion (Footbridge)*, 2009

Smoke inside empty glass bottle

8 x 3 ½ x 1 ½ inches

Courtesy of the artist; McKenzie Fine Art, New York, N.Y.



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*The bottles are elements of the stories suggested by the miniature scenes within. Empty liquor bottles found in the woods or near parking lots are artifacts left behind, representing marginal activity. They provide evidence of joy, despair, companionship, or isolation. The drained bottles and elusive images remind me of the galloping potential of youth and the bittersweet role of recollection.*<sup>6</sup>  
Jim Dingilian

### LOOK :

- Describe this object. What is its overall shape?
- What sort of bottle is it? Give visual evidence that supports your answer (notice the shape of the bottle, the bottle cap, etc.).
- Describe the scene on the bottle.
- What sort of place does it depict? Where could this place be?
- How would you describe the atmosphere in the picture?
- How did the artist create this mood?
- Why do you think this scene is depicted on an empty bottle?

### THINK ABOUT :

The image, which the artist calls “elusive,” has a film-like quality and seems to freeze a dreamlike moment in time. Imagine it was taken from your own dreams or memories and recall the **narrative** of the scene.

- What events lead up to the depicted moment? What has just happened?
- What is the next thing that is going to happen?
- Imagine the **narrative** unfolding like a movie. What sort of soundtrack might go along with it?

### DISCUSS :

Artist Jim Dingilian created this work by first coating the inside of an empty bottle with smoke from a candle. Then he used brushes and small objects to reach inside the bottle, scratching away specific areas until the remaining smoke reveals the image.

- In what way does this process connect to the story the artist tells in this work?
- In a statement about his work, Dingilian says that he aims to “suggest the passage of time and the fleeting nature of memory.” Do you think he is successful in doing so? Please explain.

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<sup>6</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 100.



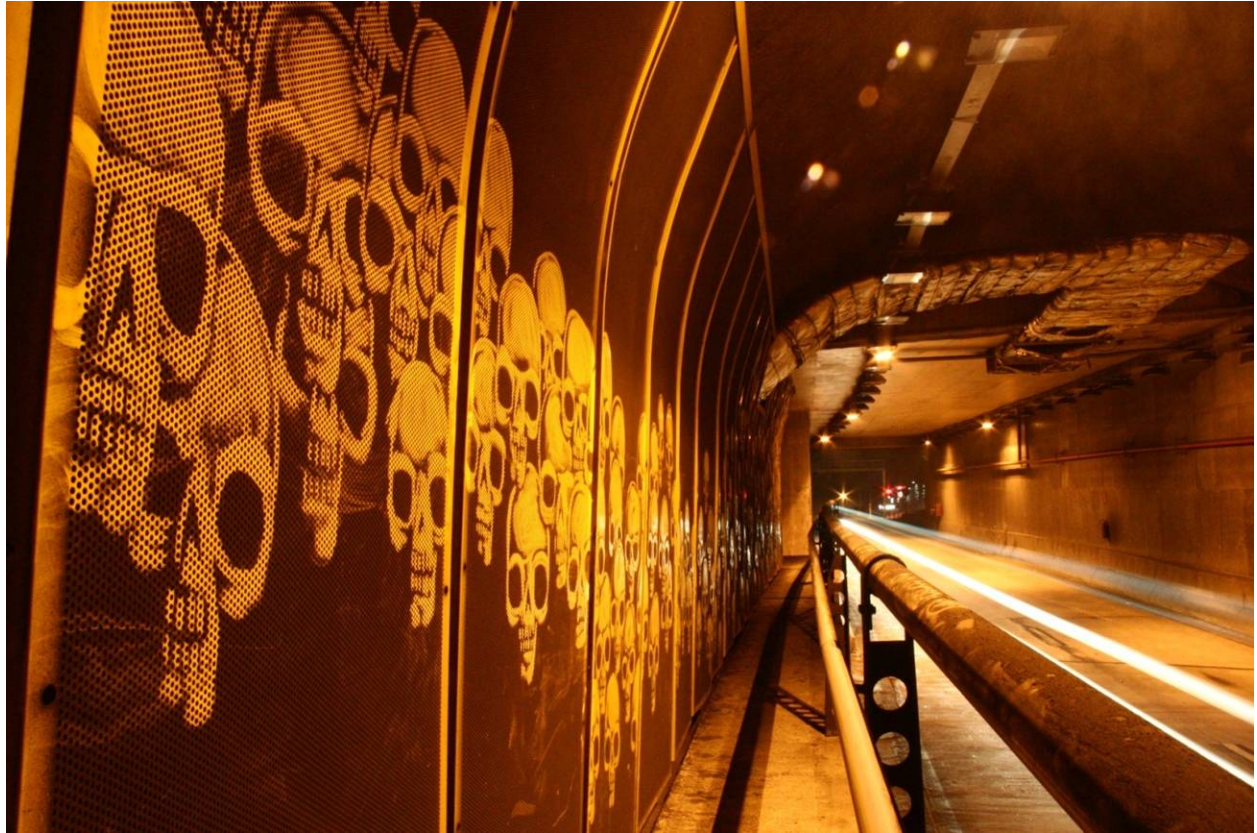
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## DO:

Form teams of 4 students each. Based on a discussion of what events lead up to the moment in the picture and what events followed, draw a storyboard including two “before” panels and two “after” panels (each student can take on one of them). Present your **narrative** to the rest of the class.



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**Alexandre Orion**

*Ossário*, 2006–11

Stills from video; soot from automobile exhaust in São Paulo tunnel

Courtesy of the artist; Foley Gallery, New York, N..



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*The tunnel became a virtual catacomb with over 3,500 skulls and a reminder that the same black soot impregnating tunnel walls also darkens our lungs and our lives*<sup>7</sup>  
Alexandre Orion

## LOOK :

- What is the first thing you notice when looking at this image?
- Why do you think it immediately caught your attention?
- What other details do you notice? Please describe what else you see.
- What sort of place is depicted in the work?
- What is the atmosphere like?
- What sounds might you hear if you were there?
- Why do you think the artist documented the scene?

## THINK ABOUT :

The image above is taken from a four-minute video by Brazilian artist Alexandre Orion.

- Judging from looking at the film still, what might we see in the rest of the video? Explain your assumption.

In 2006, Orion spent 17 nights removing car exhaust that had settled on the walls of the Ossário tunnel in São Paulo in order to create over 3,500 skull drawings.

- What do you think is the significance of the skulls?

Orion is interested in bringing art and everyday life together and creates his work in public places where thousands of people pass it every day.

- How might commuters have reacted to the work?
- In what way does their witnessing of the work contribute to its meaning?

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<sup>7</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 120.



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## DISCUSS :

- As with many of the works in *Swept Away* (and with contemporary art in general), the process of making the work is as important as the final product. In what way is this true for Orion's *Ossário* project?
- Orion's technique involves the act of erasing smog accumulated on the tunnel walls. Compare and contrast this approach with traditional graffiti, where paint is added to a surface instead.
- Orion's work resulted in the tunnel's cleaning by city authorities. However, only the walls he had worked on were cleaned at first. Only when it became apparent that he would continue on the soot-covered walls that were still left, were they cleaned up as well.
- Why do you think Orion's act of selectively cleaning the tunnel walls was seen as transgressive by the authorities?
- Works like *Ossário* are often referred to as **interventions**. In what way does the artist intervene?
- Discuss how the context in which a work of art is created (public space vs. museum, size and demographics of the audience, etc.) becomes a part of its meaning.

## DO :

Like many graffiti artists, Orion creates a simple, easily recognizable symbol that clearly communicates a strong message. Come up with your own logo, tag, or simple, symbolic picture that brings across a social or political message. Create a stencil and create an imprint of your symbol on the blackboard in your classroom. Ask your classmates to guess what it means.

## COMPARE :

Ironically, all São Paulo tunnels were cleaned after Orion's project, though a new layer of soot settled in almost immediately. In addition to continued work in road tunnels, the artist also started taking the rags he used in this work home, where he would wash them and waited for the water to evaporate, leaving behind the dried car exhaust. *Swept* features three paintings, which were made with soot pigment harvested in this way. Compare and contrast the use of skulls in *Ossário* and these paintings, entitled *The Prize* (pictured below), which resembles the line-up of shapes in a slot machine.



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**Alexandre Orion**

*The Prize*, 2012

Soot on organic cotton canvas

Courtesy of the artist; Foley Gallery, New York, N..





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**Vik Muniz**

*Pointing Hand (Itabira Iron Mine), 2006*

Digital C-print

50 x 40 in. (127 x 101.6 cm)

Courtesy of the artist

Art © Vik Muniz/Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y.



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*The landscape has changed, but the role of the artist remains the same: to shed light on the complexities of the relationship between mind and phenomena. Documentation and dissemination have become fused with ideas of the events and the things themselves<sup>8</sup>.*  
Vik Muniz

### LOOK :

- What is the first thing you notice in this photograph?
- Describe what else you see. How do the different elements of the image fit together?
- What do you notice about the use of lines in the image?
- What is the importance of scale in the work?
- How do you think this photograph was taken and what is it a picture of?
- Describe the place depicted here.

### THINK ABOUT :

The photograph is an artwork by Vik Muniz. Over the course of several years, using mining equipment, Muniz and a team of assistants carved simple line-drawings of everyday objects—a shovel, an electric outlet, socks—into the earth at an ore-mining site in central Brazil and then photographed the outcome from a helicopter. He called his series *earthworks*, in direct reference to a term coined by the founders of **Land Art** in the 1960s and '70s, who created large-scale **interventions** in various sites, especially in the western United States. For them, landscapes were no longer just places depicted by artists or sites where art could be placed. Rather, they became both the location and material for art making on a grand scale.

- What is the relationship between art and landscape in *Pointing Hand*?
- How can it be experienced by viewers?
- In what way does this differ from the way we usually experience art? In what way is it similar?

In his work, Muniz plays out the difference between direct experiences and those mediated by photographs.

- By exhibiting photographs of his *Earthworks* in museums and galleries, what does the artist add to the original project? What is lost?
- Compare this work with Alexandre Orion's work. Highlight similarities and differences: In what way does public art differ from that exhibited in private collections? How might the impact of the work change, depending on whether it is shown in a public space or a cultural institution?

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<sup>8</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 118.



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## DISCUSS :

- Have you seen a simplified rendering of a pointing hand before? If so, where?
- Why do you think Muniz chose this iconic image?
- What is the relationship of the labor-intensive process of changing an entire landscape to the generic image the artist created?

While Muniz is inspired by **Land Art**, he also draws from another 1960s art movement: **Pop Art**, which often made use of mass-produced, mundane objects. By isolating soup cans and other consumer goods from their everyday context and elevating them to the subject of fine art, artists made these objects appear in a new light.

## COMPARE :

Research different examples of **Land Art**, from the ancient **Nazca Lines** in Peru to the works of Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer. Compare and contrast these works with Muniz's *Earthworks*.



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**Elvira Wersche**

*Taqsim - Division*, 2009

Sand collected from around the world

21 ¼ x 21 ¼ ft. (6.5 x 6.5 m)

Courtesy of the artist; Sammlung

Weltensand Foundation, The Netherlands



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*Sand is such a basic material, with a diversity of color and mineral composition, yet it represents the history of the earth and is also mysterious. I see it as holding the wisdom of the cosmic origin of our planet, being the memory of the earth, layer after layer preserving the traces of ephemeral human existence.*<sup>9</sup> Elvira Wersche

### LOOK :

Take a moment to look at the image, then start describing it.

- What colors do you notice?
- What shapes can you identify? List as many as possible.
- How are the different shapes in the work arranged? Can you make out any patterns?
- Does the design of the work make you think of something you might have seen in a different context (a kaleidoscope, a mosaic, a floor pattern)? If yes, please explain.
- In what way does the picture change the longer you look at it?
- What might cause this change?
- How do you think the artist created this image?
- What materials did she use?

### THINK ABOUT :

The photograph shows one of Elvira Wersche's **installations** from her *Weltensand* (world sands) series. In an often weeks-long process, the artist combines sand from all over the world to form intricate patterns, which are often based on the careful mathematical constructions that are at the root of Islamic **mosaic** designs.

- Why do you think some people are interested in collecting sand from different locations they visit?
- What comes to mind when you think about sand? Where can we find it? What are its characteristics?
- What ideas does it symbolize?
- Which of these ideas does Wersche's work highlight? Please explain.

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<sup>9</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 130.



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## DISCUSS :

Over the years, the artist has collected sand from over 600 different locations worldwide (including an archeological site in ancient Troy, Ground Zero, as well as deserts and beaches). Some of it she brought back from her own travels, the rest was given to her by friends or admirers of her work. While Wersche is creating her floor **installations** in museums or at other public sites, visitors are invited to watch her at work.

- Why do you think this public interaction is important to the artist? In what way does it suit the nature of the *Weltensand* project?
- Once the **installation** is finished, it can be seen for only a few hours before dancers start moving over it, obliterating the divisions between different areas and mixing the sand, little samples of which are then given to spectators.
- Why do you think the artist allows the carefully arranged sand pattern to be mixed and scattered after it is finished?
- Discuss in what way the idea of time is important for Wersche's work.
- What is the significance of passing on sand samples to spectators?

## DO :

Each student is responsible for bringing one kitchen-essential like flour, salt, sugar, or spice to class (make sure there is a wide range of colors and aromas: nutmeg, turmeric, cinnamon, baking soda, pepper, curry, cardamom, cornmeal, etc.). You might want to bring something that is used a lot in your family's cooking and ask your mother or father why they use it and if they have any associations or memories connected to it. Otherwise, research its origins, cultural significance, etc. In class, create a group **installation** by mapping out an image on the floor of your classroom or schoolyard. Talk about the different geographic and cultural associations of each spice or ingredient. Once your work is finished, come up with a choreography for "dancing away" your composition.

## COMPARE :

Sandpaintings in different cultures often have a performative quality and are created (and destroyed) in highly ceremonial rituals that involve chanting and praying. Research Tibetan or Navajo sandpainting practices and compare and contrast them with Elvira Wersche's work.



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**Andy Goldsworthy**

*Bones/Sand/Ball/Tide*, 2008

Suite of 13 C-prints

16 x 16 in. (40.6 x 40.6 cm) each

Courtesy of the artist

Galerie Lelong, New York, N.Y.



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*Each work grows, stays, decays—integral parts of a cycle, which the photograph shows at its height, marking the moment when the work is most alive. There is an intensity about a work at its peak that I hope is expressed in the image. Process and decay are implicit in that moment.*<sup>10</sup> Andy Goldsworthy

## LOOK :

Imagine you were standing at a point from where you could see exactly what is in the photograph. Start describing how you might experience this place with all your senses:

- What do you see (shapes, colors, different elements of the natural world)?
- What do you hear?
- What do you feel (between your toes, in your hair, on your skin)?
- What do you smell?
- What time of the day is it? How can you tell?

## THINK ABOUT :

- Now imagine coming back to the same spot a few minutes later. In what way might it have changed?
- How might it be different after a few hours?
- What is the relationship between the big sand ball in the center of this image and its surrounding? Would the sand ball be part of the change?

## DISCUSS :

British sculptor Andy Goldsworthy works in direct collaboration with nature to create **site-specific** works of art from sand, rocks, twigs, leaves, icicles, and other materials found outdoors. In *Bones/Sand/Ball/Tide* from 2008, he documented in 13 photographs what happened to the sand ball he made at a beach as the tide started to rise.

- In what way does Goldsworthy's project illustrate fleetingness and transience as characteristics of life on Earth?
- Goldsworthy says that his photographs are meant to mark "the moment when the work is most alive." Discuss the truth of this statement with regard to *Bones/Sand/Ball/Tide*.

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<sup>10</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 108.





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## DO :

Make four sketches documenting what you think will happen to the sand ball in the image once the tide starts rising. Compare your results with those of your classmates.

## COMPARE :

Like Vik Muniz in his *Earthworks*, Andy Goldsworthy practices a form of **Land Art** and documents his results with the help of photography. Please compare and contrast the work of both artists.



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**Cai Guo-Qiang**

*Black Ceremony*, 2011

8,300 black smoke shells fitted  
with computer chips

Commissioned by Mathaf:  
Arab Museum of Modern  
Art; courtesy of the artist



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*Over 8,000 firework shells embedded with computer microchips were ignited, creating many configurations—one like drops of ink splattered across the blue sky multiplying into fresh black blossoms, another a multicolored rainbow. Ultimately a black pyramid stood high above the Earth, like a tombstone, while thunderous noise shook the ground, making the spectators shudder.<sup>11</sup>*  
Cai Guo-Qiang

## LOOK :

Take a moment to look at this photograph and describe what you see.

- What can you tell about the place documented here?
- What do you notice about the people in the photo?
- What is going on? Back up your assumptions by what you see in the photo.
- Focus on the formation in the sky. What is it made of? What is its shape? What does it resemble?

## THINK ABOUT :

- Does the scene unfolding here remind you of something you have ever experienced? Please explain.
- In what way is it similar to your experience?
- In what way is it different?

The image above is an excerpt from a video documenting a **Performance/Installation** by Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang. Originally trained in stage design, he has become world-renowned for his time-based spectacles, often featuring carefully choreographed gunpowder explosions and fireworks. By artificially creating rainbows, smoke, and clouds, he stresses the ephemeral nature of life and the things that surround us.

- In what way is *Black Ceremony* a **performance**?
- What in it is, as the title suggests, “ceremonial”?
- What role are we assigned as viewers of this work? In what way is it different from the role of someone looking at a painting in a museum?

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<sup>11</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 90.



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## DISCUSS :

Cai Guo-Qiang's work often has a political, historical, or social dimension as well. This work, which he devised at the occasion of an exhibition of his work at the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Qatar, commemorates the large number of Arabs who more than 1,000 years ago settled in Quanzhou, the artist's hometown and the starting point of the maritime silk road. More generally, it is intended to serve as a memorial to all who have died in foreign lands.

- In your opinion, what aspect of the work underscores this opinion?

Curator David Revere McFadden describes *Black Ceremony* as follows: "This reverent and ceremonial work makes use of the powerful visual and aural character of gunpowder and fireworks to generate reverberations in the viewer's body, mind, and spirit."

- Please discuss what these "reverberations" might be for different individuals witnessing the work.

## DO :

Imagine you had attended the actual **performance** of *Black Ceremony*. Write a postcard describing your experience, taking into account all the senses. Explain in what way it might have stirred up memories or other thoughts and associations.



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**Sasha Meret**  
*Sand Calligraphy*, 2010  
Still from video  
Wood, foam core, sand, and glue  
Courtesy of the artist



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*When I work on an idea, I am very focused as if it is the ultimate thing to do. One solution leads to another, which, in turn, leads to new solutions and new ideas. Such was the case when stencils used for a series of works on paper were incorporated into a new series of works where sand was used for texture. The stencil became a three-dimensional piece, and this led to a new set of works that celebrated ancient writing and calligraphies. While working with sand I became fascinated with the almost liquid flowing of particles. I grabbed the video camera and started filming.*<sup>12</sup> Sasha Meret

## LOOK :

Take a moment to look at this image and describe it in terms of the elements and principles of design:

- What colors do you notice?
- What shapes and forms do you see?
- How are these shapes composed?
- How is space used in the work?
- Do you see any repetition of shapes or patterns?
- Do you think the artist creates a sense of balance in this work? If yes, how does he achieve that?
- Is there a sense of unity? Please explain.
- What materials do you think the artists used?
- How did he manipulate these materials?

## THINK ABOUT :

The image above is a still from Sasha Meret's video *Sand Calligraphy*, which curator David Revere McFadden describes as follows: "It offers a bird's-eye view of a sand field that constantly changes as wind blows across it. The sand moves and collects in specific patterns until a calligraphic rendering of the first verse of the Quran emerges, only to be swallowed up again by the shifting sands."

- What moment of this process does the image above capture?
- What is the meaning of the emergence and disappearance of the words?
- Why do you think the artist chose the first verse of the Quran, which reads "God is great and merciful," as the text that would emerge and disappear in the work?
- Can you imagine another historical or religious text that might have been used as well? Please explain.

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<sup>12</sup> *Swept Away*, p. 106.



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## DISCUSS :

- What attitude about language, writing, and by extension, culture does the work reflect?

In a statement about *Sand Calligraphy*, Sasha Meret cites a Pre-Columbian saying: "If you want to make the gods laugh, tell them you have a plan."

- What do you think this saying means?
- In what way does it relate to *Sand Calligraphy*.

## DO :

Meret is fascinated with language and writing. About *Sand Calligraphy*, he said: "I am interested in the beauty in Islamic calligraphy; it is a very special form of art because Islamic figurative art is forbidden; therefore many artists have channeled their artistic output into calligraphy".

Choose a poem, a passage of your favorite book, or an excerpt of a historical or religious text that is meaningful to you. Think about a way of rendering this text in a way that reflects its message (or your thoughts about it). What medium might you use? What processes might be most suitable. Where and how would it be displayed? Based on these thoughts, create a model/sketch and description of your work and present it to the class.

## COMPARE :

Both Elvira Wersche and Sasha Meret use sand as a material for works that deal with ideas about culture, time, and a world in flux. Compare and contrast the work of both artists.



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## GLOSSARY

**CERAMIC:** Pottery; clay that was shaped by hand or cast into a shape and then fired (heated in an oven called a “kiln”). One of the oldest art forms and one of the traditional craft media.

**INSTALLATION:** A mostly three-dimensional artwork designed to transform the perception of a space either permanently or temporarily. Often installations are site-specific, created for a particular setting, which could be a public, private, or institutional place.

**INTERVENTION:** Art that enters a situation, either inside or outside the art world, in an attempt to change the existing conditions there.

**LAND ART:** Art movement that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s and that used landscape both as a site and as an artistic medium.

**MOSAIC:** The art of creating images with an assemblage of small pieces of colored glass, stone, tile, or other materials.

**NARRATIVE:** A story or the act of telling a story.

**PERFORMANCE ART:** Artistic presentation in which the artist, directly or indirectly, performs in front of an audience. Performance works usually create a situation that involves time, space, the performer's presentation, and a relationship between performer and audience.

**POP ART:** Modern Art movement in the 1950s and '60s that imitated the methods, styles, and themes of popular culture and mass media, such as comic strips and advertising.

**SITE-SPECIFIC:** A work of art created to exist in a certain place. Typically, the artist takes the location into account while planning and creating the work, the meaning of which is often linked to the particular sit.

**SLIP:** Liquid mixture of clay and water often used as a basic material by ceramic artists.

**TEXTURE:** The way a surface looks and feels.





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**UNFIRED CLAY:** Clay that has not been fired (baked) in a kiln (oven). Firing the clay makes it hard and relatively sturdy. Unfired clay is fragile. As its moisture content evaporates, it becomes prone to crumbling.

## **W E B O G R A P H Y**

### **KIM ABELES**

<http://kimabeles.com/>

### **PHOEBE CUMMINGS**

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/people-pages/phoebe-cummings/>

### **JIM DINGILIAN**

<http://www.aldrichart.org/exhibitions/Dingilian.php>

### **GLITHERO**

[www.glithero.com](http://www.glithero.com)  
<http://vimeo.com/13908389>

### **ANDY GOLDSWORTHY**

<http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/>

### **CAI GUO-QIANG**

<http://www.caiguoqiang.com/>

### **SASHA MERET**

[www.sashameret.com](http://www.sashameret.com)

### **VIK MUNIZ**

[www.vikmuniz.net](http://www.vikmuniz.net)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z66AT1Ap2g>

### **ALEXANDRE ORION**

[http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content\\_0601/har/index.html](http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content_0601/har/index.html)

### **ELVIRA WERSCHE**

<http://www.elvirawersche.com/>



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