



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume II: The Family in Art and Material Culture

Interpreting Selected Works of Art from the 20th Century African-American Experience

Curriculum Unit 91.02.03
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INTRODUCTION

This unit is designed to integrate art appreciation into the art curriculum at the high school level. Many students come to art class with little respect for the subject. They feel that it is not a “serious” course, but rather something trivial and certainly not exciting.

In order to change this perception about art, we should consider the type of visual information that many students are currently receiving and how it is being delivered to them. Teenagers in our culture are constantly exposed to images from advertisements in magazines and on billboards, from commercials on television, and from movies and videos. This information, produced as powerfully persuasive messages, is designed to have an instant impact on the viewer. Only a short attention span is needed to comprehend the point of a commercial or a TV sitcom. The receiver need not reflect on what he or she has just seen, because there isn't time—something else immediately pops up on the screen to engage the eye and the mind. Most of this information is created to sell some kind of product and requires “passive” viewing. One can accept or reject what one has just seen, but interaction is not necessary.

In direct contrast to commercial images, art such as the examples in this unit demands “active” viewing. Each work is presented so that analysis and discussion will lead to informed opinions from the students, instead of instant rejection or acceptance. This process of becoming an “active” viewer will be discussed later under the heading of *Objectives and Strategies* .

The artists to be considered: Archibald Motley, Jr.

Jacob Lawrence

Romare Beardon

William H. Johnson

Faith Ringgold

Betye Saar

all African-Americans, were chosen because they project a personal viewpoint within the American cultural experience. Their subject matter can be interpreted as socially or politically significant, or as examples of the Black experience in America, but, ultimately their art has intrinsic value because it reflects specific times, places, and events through the individual artist's perspective. These works speak to the viewer about feeling and spirit within us through a universal language of form.

This unit is designed for a student population in an arts magnet public high school. It is aimed primarily at grades ten through twelve, or for those who have completed at least one semester of art. This population contains students who are college-bound as well as those who do not know what they will do with themselves, even if they graduate. Some students come with a sophisticated art background, but most do not, and this curriculum is directed towards the less sophisticated students, enabling them to build onto what he or she already knows.

In my school, most students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds are Afro-American and Hispanic. There is a high level of visual awareness among these high school students with regard to dress and hairstyle, and they coordinate rich patterns, colors, and textures into inventive, attractive combinations of clothes, shoes, hair, and makeup. These students tend to lack a vocabulary to describe the details of their look, and cannot take this awareness out of context. For example, it is very difficult to get them to paint with the colors they wear. Even when they learn to control color mixing, they often do not see the fitness of using these mixed colors for their art work.

Most of our students have very good gross motor skills and a strong kinesthetic sense. Many are involved in dance and drama, activities in which they exhibit these abilities with confidence. However, a large percentage of arts students seem to lack experience in using their fine motor skills; therefore, many are frustrated with three-dimensional techniques such as folding, cutting, and gluing, and are dissatisfied if their work appears messy or comes apart. Much of this frustration can be alleviated through careful demonstrations of techniques. The arts classes also contain learning disabled students, some of whom exhibit extraordinary abilities, particularly in drawing or painting. These students often need special help in understanding directions or in trying something new. Also, the arts magnet school has plenty of completely unmotivated students who are uncooperative and seemingly uninterested in the arts.

The lessons in this unit have been designed to help students to produce satisfying works of art in a relatively short time. All art activities should take between 3 and 5 regular class periods.

The whole unit is designed to be used at the beginning of a semester, when students are still relatively unsure about the expectations of the class. It should last between six and eight weeks, depending on the school calendar of events and the speed with which activities are completed. Students should be allowed to proceed at their own pace as long as work is continuous.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Objectives

1. Increase the methods in which visual information is delivered.
2. Develop awareness of the cultural heritage represented by selected artists.
3. Learn an art vocabulary for purposes of oral discussion as well as for written descriptions of works of art.
4. Sharpen observational skills in order to become an “active” viewer and to identify with the artist or subject matter.
5. Understand that works of art have value because they define an individual or a society in a particular place, at a particular time.
6. Gain cultural perspective by analyzing and understanding disparities in experience and by searching for common experiences. ¹

Strategies

1. Students will observe works of art in the form of slide reproductions, print reproductions (22” x 30”), and books in order to increase the ways in which visual information is received. The reproductions will be available long enough for students to observe the work at their own rate.

2. Students will be asked to define what they think art is. Works of art from various cultures and centuries will be shown in a brief slide presentation. Art will be described as a message, a means of communication. It expresses people’s experience and how they feel about that experience.

3. Students need to have a working vocabulary of art terms before they can use the object analysis process for sharpening observational skills. The individual teacher will know best as to how extensive this vocabulary needs to be in order to suit the ability of his or her class. The terms can be described as similar to the parts of speech, only these terms are parts of a language of form. Descriptions of line, color, shape, space, and texture should be included. For example, in discussing the element of line, students should become familiar with placement and direction, as in horizontal, vertical, diagonal, and parallel. More advanced students can talk about converging or intersecting lines. Also, the use of adjectives should be encouraged in order to differentiate lines, as in “jagged” diagonal line or “thick” parallel lines. It is important to keep the descriptions as factual as possible.

- A. The students will make their own glossary by writing down the terms from the board as they appear in the context of looking at and describing a reproduction together with the teacher.
- B. Flash cards will be made in class in groups. The term will appear on one side and the definition on the other.
- C. Evaluation of terminology knowledge can be made through matching or fill-in-the-blank tests. Using their own flash cards, students will look at an unfamiliar work and describe it according to the formal elements of line, shape, color, value, and texture. These elements correspond to those used in the complete formal analysis of an object, which is the next strategy in becoming an “active” viewer.
- D.

OBJECT ANALYSIS

- The process of object analysis allows the student to perceive the facts of a work by taking it apart layer by layer. In this way, speculation or how they feel about a work is reserved until last, and students are able to see things in the work they would ordinarily pass by with casual observation. Students interact with the works of art and become “active” viewers, not just “passive receivers.”
4. last, and students are able to see things in the work they would ordinarily pass by with casual observation. Students interact with the works of art and become “active” viewers, not just “passive receivers.”
 - A. Describe physical characteristics (may be unclear in reproductions)
 1. Size
 2. Materials
 - B. Taking inventory (this is also subject matter, but I have renamed the idea to make it clearer to the students).
 1. Name the things (everything!)
 2. Work larger to smaller
 - C. Formal analysis using art terms of line, shape, color, value, texture
 1. Where are dominant lines?
 2. Where do lines come together into geometric shapes?
 3. Does it look like there are any solid geometric shapes in the work?
 4. Describe the colors from strongest (most saturated) to weakest.
 5. Describe the light or value in the work from brightest to darkest.
 6. Where is the texture? Is it on the surface? Is it depicted (painted to look like) or could you really feel it?
 - D. Arriving at deductions: using the descriptions from above, what are some reasonable conclusions? What seems logical?

Two ways to help figure out what is going on in the piece are, first, to imagine being inside the work and wondering what you see. The second is to imagine being outside the work thinking about what they might see in relation to you.
 - E. Speculation—the fun part!

How do you feel about it? Why do you feel that way? Students should be able to back up their judgments with reasons. This will help them feel more confident about offering an opinion, since it is now an “informed” opinion. Using the art vocabulary should also be encouraged at this point to help legitimize students’ feelings. ²

Understanding the intrinsic value of works of art and gaining a cultural perspective (objectives #5 and #6) will come from the last section, speculation, of the object analysis process, and through the actual creation by students of their own art based on various aspects of the selected works of arts viewed.
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Art elicits both individual and cultural responses because each of us has aesthetic needs and expectations. These needs manifest themselves in a concern for how things look and for harmonious organization. This awareness is processed through the personal experiences and the development of the individual. A wide variety of individual responses may be expected from students since these responses result from various levels of awareness, including knowledge of self and sensitivity to one’s social environment. In contrast, a cultural response reflects identification with peers or community, and students have a tendency to stay within

the confines of the peer group's value system. Therefore, the students should be encouraged to define their personal reactions to works of art in order to stimulate the understanding of something new and unfamiliar. In this way, they have the opportunity to learn more about themselves and their own culture.

Students will also learn to value art as they begin to create their own work based on a particular aspect of one of the selected works of art. Several slides by the same artist will be shown, accompanied by biographical information about the artist. One work will be selected and analyzed according to strategy #4 in group discussion. A lesson will be presented which incorporates a stylistic or characteristic quality of the artist. Students will be encouraged to use what they have seen, discussed, and felt about the selected works of art. They will gain cultural perspective through active involvement and invention. In this way, they will have transformed their own experience into something concrete and fulfilled a universal need to express the human spirit.

Lesson Plan #1 "OBJECT ANALYSIS: BLUES , BY ARCHIBALD MOTLEY, JR. (1929)"

Objective Produce a written analysis of Archibald Motley, Jr.'s painting, Blues (1929).

Materials List The Cotton Club , 1984, Francis Ford Coppola, Director

Reproduction of *Blues* (1929)
Handout

Motivation Show the opening segment of the movie The Cotton Club that depicts the atmosphere inside the club in 1928. The film should be stopped to allow the class to describe the scenes in detail. Students should be encouraged to describe the characters and their dress or costuming, art forms (singing, dancing, instrumental music, etc.), and props. Students should also discuss the social stratification portrayed in the film.

Display the reproduction of *Blues* (1929), supplying artist's name, title of work, and when it was painted. Distribute handouts and follow the process of object analysis as explained in strategy 4. Use the descriptive experience from the film to initiate the inventory phase. This first analysis can be done as a group with the teacher writing the students' interpretations on the board as they write the same material on their own papers. The speculation section can be individually written and voluntarily read aloud so as not to intimidate budding critics.

Provide the remaining biographical information in its historical context and encourage discussion.

Lesson Plan #2 "MOVING FIGURE"

Objective Paint a repeated moving figure using geometric shapes.

Materials List Magazines and catalogues

Tracing paper
Tape

Pencils
Watercolor paints, brushes, and paper
Water containers
Sponges

Words to Emphasize Value—perceived lightness and darkness in a visual image

Contrast—Noticeable differences in one art element, such as value, color, or texture

Motivation Present the slides of Jacob Lawrence’s art with biographical information. Analyze Parade (1960) according to strategy 4.

Describe the lesson objective and display an unfinished example. Start by demonstrating how to look for a high contrast color photograph of a complete figure, at least 5’ or 6’ high, in magazines and catalogues. Look for one which suggests movement. Point out the shapes made by the lighting contrasts in the photograph. Where are the darkest values, the lightest, and the medium values? Demonstrate how to tape tracing paper over the photo and trace the outlines of the darkest shapes first, the lightest second, and the medium value shapes last, working from the most obvious values to the most subtle. Simplify each form and leave no unconnected lines.

Take finished tracing, turn it over so that the pencil side is next to the watercolor paper, and retrace, transferring the tracing as if it were a carbon. After the first figure is finished, move the tracing around as desired and retrace three or four more times. Add a simple background suggesting an indoor or outdoor space.

Review watercolor techniques and have students choose a limited palette of four or five mixed colors. Show how to control the values by adding more water to get a light shade and how to use the sponge to avoid “puddles.” The use of black should be minimal in order to maintain clarity.

By painting the repeated shapes of the figure with a limited palette of contrasting colors, students will understand how to unify their compositions in much the same way Jacob Lawrence did in *Parade*. The appeal lies in the manipulation of formal elements, and our students can learn to do it, too.

Lesson Plan #3 “MEMORY PICTURE”

Objective To make a cloth collage representing an event or memory.

Materials List

Felt and cloth scraps
12” x 12” burlap
White muslin

Scissors
Glue
Newsprint
Pencils
Permanent fine-line markers
Tape

Words to Emphasize Style—the quality which gives a particular character to artistic expression

Naive—referring to style: unsophisticated, unschooled, or natural. This term, when used in art, does not refer to lack of talent or ability; it is descriptive rather than judgmental.

Motivation Present the slides of Faith Ringgold’s art with biographical information. Choose one work and analyze it according to strategy 4. Read and discuss together Ringgold’s children’s book, *Tar Beach* . (Refer to bibliography.)

Ask students if they have any wishes or memories similar to Cassie’s in *Tar Beach* . (Suggestions: birthdays, a new baby, falling off a bicycle.) How would they draw this event?

Does it have to look realistic? Why or why not? Do Ringgold’s works of art look realistic? Why did she choose this style of painting?

Sketch two or three ideas onto newsprint. Write down the accompanying memories and make sure that the picture idea coordinates with the written statement.

Draw desired shapes onto scraps of fabric and felt and cut them out. Assemble pieces large to small, layering and overlapping as desired. Glue in the same way, large pictures first.

Tape a muslin strip flat and use a ruler and pencil to space writing. Write down in pencil *very lightly first* . Write over with permanent marker. Cut out strip and glue to 12” x 12” burlap square.

Piece together or arrange separately.

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Hundreds of thousands of African-Americans from the rural South migrated to the cities in the North during and after World War I looking for jobs and better education for their children. The new arrivals found themselves channeled into decaying, overcrowded ghettos, culturally isolated from other populations and recent immigrants. This isolation, however, created a new sense of community and a growth in racial pride, which led to an interest in African heritage during the nineteen twenties. Filled with a new sense of self-reliance, many African-Americans felt a need to redefine the meaning of the Black experience in America through the creative process. Artists such as Henry Tanner (1859-1937), whose family belonged to a small group of integrated middle-class Blacks, were viewed with suspicion by the new generation of artists. ³ He studied with the important American artist Thomas Eakins, subsequently spent much of his life as an expatriate living in France, and was eventually elected to the French National Academy.

The emerging group of Black painters, dancers, musicians, and writers, led by scholars Alain Locke and W. E. B. DuBois, and the poet Langston Hughes, among others, preferred to contribute their efforts towards a New Negro Movement, searching for alternate lifestyles that were inspired by the folk culture the previous Black generation had rejected. ⁴ The New Negro Movement also became known as the Harlem Renaissance (or rebirth) since Harlem was the center of this new creative energy. White intellectuals found Harlem very attractive as well, describing the new forms of cultural expression as “primitive,” “exotic,” and “sensual.” With this perspective, African-Americans continued as the subjects of myths and stereotypes to the majority white culture. ⁵

Meanwhile, the role of the Negro artist was hotly debated, with Black writers and artists who accepted traditional white values on one side of the argument and the “New Negro” on the other. The Black intellectual elite, including writer Wallace Thurman and editor George Schyler, expected artists to be concerned with aesthetic decisions while enhancing the image while society had of “Negro culture.” They felt that this was one way to break down cultural barriers towards their goal of assimilation. Younger artists wanted to retain a separate, cultural identity and to present themselves as true to life as possible, reflecting the crucial social problems of their time. ⁶

ARCHIBALD MOTLEY, JR. (Figures 1-4)

Archibald Motley, Jr., born in 1891, came from a family that migrated from New Orleans to Chicago. His artistic talent was discovered in high school, and a sponsor enabled him to study painting at the Art Institute of Chicago for four years. While still at school, he worked as a laborer and experienced the street life of Black urban Americans. This world, which existed both in Harlem and in Paris during the 1920s, included prostitutes, gamblers, and those who frequented illegal drinking establishments, and was the source for some of his most memorable paintings, such as *Blues* (1929). ⁷ His compositions, rendered with sharp-edged brushstrokes in vivid color schemes, bordered on caricature. These vibrant and dramatic works of art presented a striking contrast to his earlier portraits of African-Americans, which were objective psychological studies. Examples of this genre are found in *Mending Socks* (1922) and *Old Snuff Dipper* (1928). A few years later, Motley completed *Blues* (1929) and *Parisian Street Scene* (1929), which, shown alongside his portraits, demonstrate a shift from academic realism to a more folk-oriented style of painting. ⁸

In 1928, he was recognized by the art establishment with a one-man show in at the Ainslee Galleries, New York. Nevertheless, patronage for African-Americans, even acclaimed painters, was almost nonexistent and

Motley was one of many artists during the Depression who supported themselves by creating murals for the Federal Arts Project (1935-39), a division of the Works Progress Administration. ⁹

WILLIAM H. JOHNSON (Figures 5-11)

William H. Johnson (1901-1970) came to New York in 1918 just as the Harlem Renaissance was in the making. He brought with him an interest in art gained from looking at cartoons in the local newspapers of his home state, South Carolina. After four years of study at the National Academy of Design, during which time he worked as a hotel porter, cook, and dockworker, a friendly teacher helped raise enough money to send him to Paris to develop his artistic talents.

Johnson had been awarded numerous prizes, and *Still Life*, produced between 1921 and 1926, is an example of his academic style of painting in New York. While in Paris, he met Henry O. Tanner and was influenced by modern French artists. This exposure to different kinds of painters led Johnson to experiment with his own style, and by the late nineteen twenties, he settled on an interpretation of German Expressionism (a manner of painting using coarse brushstrokes, distorted forms, and bright, unrealistic color to convey feelings) as seen in his *Self-portrait* from 1929.

Around this time, he married a Danish woman who was a ceramicist and textile artist, and they went to live in a small fishing village in Denmark. He related closely to the country people's way of living, because it reminded him of his own people in the rural South. A few years later, the couple traveled to North Africa in order to learn about African pottery and other native arts and crafts, and those experiences increased Johnson's interest in what he perceived as the primitive ways of people. ¹⁰

As this interest grew, so did a need to change his way of doing art. He wanted his paintings to represent the spiritual awakening within himself regarding his African-American cultural heritage, and made a conscious decision to "unlearn" previous academic training. Johnson worked hard towards formulating this new artistic goal. *Harbor Under the Midnight Sun* (1935-38) is an example of that transitional phase, and upon his return to Harlem in 1938, Johnson devoted his energy to creating paintings that expressed aspects of the Black experience in America.

The works of art of this period (1939-41) are simplified into crude and somewhat awkward shapes using four or five colors with little or no change in value. ¹¹ Subject matter regarding traditional Christian themes appeared in Johnson's work during these years, but his interpretations broke with tradition and celebrated Black Christianity. All of the figures in *Mt. Calvary* (1939) and *I Baptize Thee* (1940) are black, and the clothes and postures of the individuals are not very different from those in his paintings of modern day themes. Johnson intended his works of art to be interpreted as social statements, linking the contemporary suffering of an oppressed people to the story of Christianity. ¹²

ROMARE BEARDEN (Figures 12-16)

Romare Bearden (1912-1988) was one of many Federal Art Project artists whose job it was to interpret American culture between the years 1936-1939. This enormous program, a division of the Works Progress Administration, was undertaken during the Depression, a time when many people were out of work, and employed over 5,000 people in the fine arts and crafts. Thousands of works of art were added to the nation's

galleries and museums, and hundreds of murals were commissioned for post offices, schools, and other public buildings. For many artists working at this time, the W.P.A. kept them stimulated and active as well as on the payroll. ¹³

Bearden's paintings of Black life in the South fit into the program agenda, which encouraged imaginative and emotional interpretations of all aspects of American life rendered in a technical, realistic manner. He did not stay within the artistic mainstream, however, and throughout his life he studied and borrowed from Western, Chinese, Japanese, and African art. The Bible, Homer, and Jazz were also sources for his creative expression. ¹⁴

Believing that meaningful art needed a subject, he chose to concentrate on the African-American experience. His paintings were intended to go beyond what they appeared to represent, conveying the historical and ceremonial content of his subject matter. Through a personal visual language which included images symbolizing memories of the South, Harlem, and, later, the Caribbean, along with guitar players, conjure women, trains, cats, birds, and other winged creatures, Bearden expressed his rich heritage. Examples of his symbols can be seen in *The Visitor* (1976) and *Sunset Limited* (1978), in which the train represents another world and a break from long, boring days. In *She-Ba* (1970) the conjure woman represents the African diaspora, the keeper of spiritual knowledge, and the manipulation of mysterious forces. ¹⁵ Ritual activities of daily work and life, such as baptisms, funerals, families eating together, and nightclub scenes, tied his personal experience to a more universal one which he hoped would elevate his works above "mere designs."

¹⁶

The medium which best suited his purposes was collage, in which unrelated pieces of paper and other materials are glued onto a surface. Bearden used bits and fragments of photos, photocopies, and enlargements, along with his own recycled works and additional paint, to create images. The parts were layered, overlapped, torn, and otherwise assembled to create a unified statement. By all standards, Bearden achieved unique results. ¹⁷

JACOB LAWRENCE (Figures 17-22)

By the time Jacob Lawrence (1917-) was thirty, he was the best-known African-American artist in the United States and was represented by a New York gallery. His universal themes, painted in colorful, flat shapes, have gained a wide audience and he is also greatly respected as a teacher of drawing, painting, and design. ¹⁸

Although acceptance as an artist happened relatively early in life, getting to that point required enormous commitment. Lawrence grew up in Harlem during the Depression, juggling odd jobs and absorbing the atmosphere left over from the Harlem Renaissance. While attending various workshops and art center classes, Lawrence was influenced by other writers and artists to turn towards history as a source for his inspiration. In 1938 he painted the *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series (the story of a slave revolt in Haiti). Powerful subject matter was being developed at this time in murals in Mexico and the United States by Diego Rivera; in *Guernica* (1937), Picasso's painting of a Nazi bombing attack on Spain; and in works of art by W.P.A. artists. Lawrence's approach was different from these other artists as he communicated his strong messages through the controlled distortion of shape, space, and color, avoiding raw expressionism as well as cubist abstraction. ¹⁹

Throughout his career, Lawrence worked in the narrative format with subject matter either describing contemporary life in the Black community or the historic struggle of an oppressed people. *The Migration of the Negro* (1940-41) was a series of sixty panels done in tempera paint which included images of a crowded train station and the inside of a church, as well as a noose left from a lynching. The everyday life of workers, such

as shoemakers, seamstresses, and ironers, was painted with emphasis on the tools of the trade and the hands that used them. A series concerning World War II was finished after the artist had served in the Coast Guard. Even a stay in a mental hospital provided material for Lawrence's personal creative expression.

The works of art completed during the 1980s maintain earlier themes, but with several variations. The workers in the *Builders* series are now racially integrated, and the *Hiroshima* series reflects moral outrage which reaches beyond national borders. Throughout his career, Lawrence has maintained an emotionally autobiographical position through which he expresses a humanist vision. ²⁰

FAITH RINGGOLD (Figures 23-28)

Growing up in Harlem, Faith Ringgold (1930-) heard that only those kids who were too dumb in other classes should take art. Because she was academically gifted as well as artistic, her experiences at school were conflicting. A drawing teacher discouraged her with his racist attitude and male chauvinism. Even as a student at City College of New York, she felt that no one did anything to stimulate her creatively. ²¹ Her response was to become a public school teacher and an artist who could get around the biases of the mainstream art world.

Ringgold is by her own definition a politically aware, self-consciously Black woman, a mother, grandmother, writer, and artist. Her creations and statements are responses to the African-American community of Harlem. As a painter in the late sixties and early seventies, her work reflected interracial strife and in 1967 she painted *The Advent of Black Power* , which was reproduced as a U.S. postage stamp.

When her children were young, soft sculptures were Ringgold's favorite medium and she produced many of these works in collaboration with her mother, Willi Posey, a fashion designer and dressmaker. One of the most important pieces of this time consists of detailed, free standing figures depicting the diversity of Harlem street life, complete with graffiti walls as a backdrop. ²²

The roots of her creative work with fabric did not stem from her mother, however, since Ringgold traces quilt-making back to her great-grandmother Susie Shannon, a slave in antebellum Florida. This creative heritage, combined with painting and writing, was developed by Ringgold into a unique art form, the "story quilt," her preferred medium for the last ten years. Ringgold's main concern is the experience of Black women or girls in America. One such story quilt, entitled *Tar Beach*, is taken from the *Woman on the Bridge* series, completed in 1988. This story has Cassie, the narrator, dreaming of being free to fly off of her rooftop apartment to wherever she wants to go for the rest of her life. Ringgold also has the young heroine performing valiant, creative endeavors, and endows her with the power to free her father from discrimination at work. ²³

Faith Ringgold's work symbolizes her own life in a number of ways. She lives the freedom interpreted in her art by producing works of art in her home town for half the year and teaching art at the University of California, San Diego, for the other half. Her own heroic and creative endeavors are widely acknowledged, and the *Woman on the Bridge* series is in the collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

BETYE SAAR (Figures 29-35)

Betye Saar (1926-) recalls that her interest in religious spiritualism was sparked by visits to the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. The traditional ritual objects of Africa, the South Seas, and the Caribbean seemed to emanate a kind of power, and she began to use objects from diverse cultural and historical contexts in a combined search for her identity as a woman, and artist, and an African-American. ²⁴ The format for these early pieces was influenced by the boxes of Joseph Cornell (refer to appropriate slides) and she used

materials, images, and construction techniques from various sources, found and manufactured, which were then layered and assembled into a unified composition. These works of art, which eventually evolved into altar pieces, were intended to create a relationship between magic and technology in the eye and mind of the viewer.

During a phase in the nineteen sixties, derogatory images of African-Americans were turned into political statements. One example shows Aunt Jemima in the center of the piece surrounded by her power objects, a hand grenade and a rifle. ²⁵

In more recent works, old photographs of African-American families, lace gloves, handkerchiefs, and other nostalgic fragments are balanced to produce a sense of memory and experience. Phases of the moon, sun, mirrors, and autobiographical symbols, such as photographic fragments of hand or footprints, are also part of Saar's visual language that promotes self-reflection and personal enlightenment. ²⁶

Notes

1. "New Ways to Battle Biases: Fight Acts, Not Feelings," *New York Times* , 16 July 1991, pp. C1 and C4.
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3. Elsa Honig Fine, *The Afro-American Artist* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1973), pp. 80-81.
4. Mary Schmidt Campbell, David Driskell, David Levering Lewis, and Deborah Willis Ryan, *Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America* (The Studio Museum of Harlem, New York, Harry H. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1987), pp. 138-139.
5. Fine, pp. 82-83.
6. David Driskell, *Two Centuries of Black American Artists* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1976), p. 61.
7. Fine, pp. 106-112.
8. Campbell et al., p. 40.
9. Driskell, p. 62.
10. Campbell et al., pp. 134-135.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.
13. John A. Garraty, *The American Nation* (Harper & Row, Inc., New York and London, 1966), p. 844.
14. Kinshasha Holman Conwill, Mary Schmidt Campbell, and Sharon F. Patton, *Memory and Metaphor* (The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1991), pp. 18-19.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

18. Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence American Painter* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1981), p. 23.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-18.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
21. Elton C. Fax, *Seventeen Black Artists* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1971), pp. 188-194.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
23. Faith Ringgold, *Tar Beaches* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1991), p. 26.
24. *Tradition and Conflict* (The Studio Museum in Harlem: Images of a Turbulent Decade 1963-1973: Jan. 26-June 3, 1985), p. 60.
25. J. Albright et al., *The Appropriate Object* (Buffalo, New York: Knox Art Gallery, The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, 1989), pp. 57-58.
26. *Ibid.* pp. 51-53.

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