

Title Sculpting Identity: Functional Art with a Personal Narrative

Work of Art Water Tower Pour Over. Roberto Lugo. (1981)

Teacher Alicia Freeland. Visual Arts

School and District Christiana High School. Christina School District

Grade Grades 7-12

Content Ceramics

OVERVIEW

Imagine holding an artwork in your hands—not just something to admire, but something with a purpose. What if art could be both visually meaningful and functionally useful? This unit explores the question:

How can 3D sculpture serve as a powerful medium to communicate identity while also functioning as a purposeful object infused with meaningful imagery, as seen in Roberto Lugo's work?

Students will investigate Lugo's artwork, focusing on his use of symbols, patterns, and ceramics to tell stories. Through guided activities, they will design and create their own ceramic sculptures that reflect personal or societal themes while also serving a practical function. Whether crafting a vessel, a container, or an everyday object infused with meaningful imagery, students will explore the intersection of artistic expression and utility. The process will include research, sketching, constructing, and reflecting through artist statements.

TIME REQUIRED Approximately 4-6 weeks (12-16 class periods)

STANDARDS FOR INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas inspired by community and identity themes.
- Organize and develop ideas using 3D sculpture techniques.

Presenting

- Develop and refine artistic work for presentation through careful construction and surface treatments.

Responding

- Analyze how Lugo's work conveys meaning and apply similar strategies in their own pieces.

Connecting

- Relate artistic ideas to cultural and historical contexts by exploring themes in contemporary ceramic sculpture.

STUDENT "I CAN STATEMENTS"

- I can use 3D sculpture techniques to express themes of community, identity, and social commentary, inspired by Roberto Lugo's artwork.
- I can incorporate symbols, patterns, and textures into my sculpture to convey a personal or societal message.
- I can reflect on and describe the process and meaning behind my artwork in an artist statement.
- I can analyze how 3D sculptures, like those of Roberto Lugo, communicate ideas differently than 2D artwork.
- I can experiment with materials and techniques to create a meaningful and visually engaging sculpture.
- I can design a functional 3D artwork that serves a purpose while carrying a deeper symbolic meaning.

MATERIALS

- Clay
- Clay tools
- Underglazes and glazes
- Sketchbooks and pencils
- Reference images of Roberto Lugo's work

LESSON ACTIVITIES

Lesson 1: Introduction to Roberto Lugo and his work, discussion on themes and symbolism. Lugo's ceramic vessels are often described as "multicultural mash-ups," combining traditional forms with contemporary iconography to address themes of:

Social Justice: Highlighting issues like poverty, inequality, racial injustice, and gang violence.

Celebrating Identity: Featuring portraits of significant figures from Black and Latinx communities, including hip-hop artists, civil rights leaders, and historical figures, according to the National Museum of African American History and Culture. He also includes his family members and sometimes himself in his pieces.

Challenging Traditional Norms: Subverting the historical exclusivity of porcelain by showcasing underrepresented figures on traditionally elite forms, thereby disrupting and diversifying the ceramics world.

Storytelling and Activism: Using his work as a means to tell stories, honor those who have been marginalized, and ignite conversations about social issues. Students have class discussion and sketchbook time to discuss messages in his work.

Lesson 2: Sketching and planning sculptures based on themes of community and identity. Students will design 3D sculpture techniques to express themes of community, identity, and social commentary, inspired by Roberto Lugo's artwork.

- They will incorporate symbols, patterns, and textures into their sculpture to convey a personal or societal message.

Lesson 3: Constructing sculptures using hand-building techniques. Students experiment with techniques listed in resources. The teacher walks around class encouraging students and helping with hand-building applications and tools.

Lesson 4: Adding surface textures, patterns, and symbols. Students can decorate pieces before or after firing. Use techniques include carving, stamping, adding textures, appliques, slips, and underglazes. Students are asked to make considerations: How glazes affect textures? Look at Lugo's work for inspiration.

Lesson 5: Refining form and ensuring functionality.

Lesson 6: Finishing details, glazing, and reflecting on and describing the process and meaning behind their artwork in an artist statement presenting artist statements.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Formative

- Sketchbook entries and brainstorming notes.
- Peer discussions on symbolism and meaning.
- In-progress critiques to refine ideas and techniques.

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING (

Summative

- Completed functional ceramic sculpture.
- Written artist statement explaining symbolism and artistic choices.
- Participation in final group critique.

VOCABULARY

- bisque ware

- bone-dry
- coil
- glaze
- glaze ware
- hump & slump
- leather hard
- score
- slab
- slip
- underglaze

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/16WSrfnWtPTfKS0pEQCkTaRJ5sva6LVooEKngRPVKxmw/edit?usp=sharing>

Here's a breakdown of common handbuilding techniques,

1. Pinch pots

- **Description:** This is the most basic and intuitive handbuilding method, involving pinching and shaping a ball of clay with fingers to create a hollow form.
- **Process:** Begin with a ball of clay, press your thumb into the center to create a hole, and pinch the sides evenly while rotating the piece.
- **Applications:** Ideal for creating small bowls, cups, decorative items, or even serve as the base for more complex pieces.
- **Variations:** Students can explore making themed pinch pots like monsters, or join multiple pinch pots to create larger or more complex forms.

2. Coil building

- **Description:** This technique involves joining rolled coils or rope-like strands of clay to build forms. It's effective for creating larger shapes and textures.
- **Process:** Coils are stacked and blended together. Scoring and slipping are key for secure attachment. Coils can be visible for texture or smoothed.
- **Applications:** Commonly used for vases, jars, and sculptures, or for adding details to other pieces.

3. Slab construction

- **Description:** Forms are built from flat clay sheets that are cut and joined.

- **Process:** Clay is rolled to an even thickness using a rolling pin or slab roller. Shapes are cut and assembled using slip and scoring. Joints need reinforcement with small coils.
- **Applications:** Suitable for items like mugs, vases, tiles, and sculptures.
- **Variations:** Slabs can be draped, textured, or assembled into various shapes.

4. Sculptural handbuilding (combining techniques)

- **Description:** Students can create more complex 3D sculptures by combining techniques.
- **Examples:** Transforming pinch pots into figures, building figures with coils or slabs, assembling different forms, or altering basic shapes with details.

5. Surface decoration

- **Description:** Students can decorate pieces before or after firing.
- **Techniques:** Include carving, stamping, adding textures, appliques, slips, and underglazes.
- **Considerations:** How glazes affect textures should be considered.

EXTENSIONS

- With additional time, students could create a series of sculptures that tell a story.
- Advanced students could experiment with mixed media elements.
- Adaptations for diverse learners could include simplified techniques or digital sculpting tools.

Class Critique questions for handbuilding assignment

When conducting a high school ceramics critique, it's beneficial to use questions that encourage students to think critically about their own and their peers' work, focusing on both technical skills and artistic intent. Here's a breakdown of questions categorized for a handbuilding assignment:

1. Technical aspects and craftsmanship

- Which handbuilding techniques (pinch, coil, slab) did the artist use, and how effectively were they applied?
- How well are the various parts of the piece joined? Are the seams smooth and sturdy?
- Is the thickness of the clay consistent throughout the piece? [Blue Dog Ceramics](#)
- How has the artist handled the surface of the piece (e.g., smoothing, texturing, carving)?
- What tools did the artist use to create different effects, and how effectively were they utilized?

2. Form and shape

- Describe the overall form and shape of the piece. How does it interact with the space around it (negative space)?
- Is the piece symmetrical, asymmetrical, or does it incorporate elements of both?
- How do the different parts of the piece relate to one another in terms of size and proportion?
- Does the form feel balanced and stable, or does it suggest movement or tension?

3. Aesthetics and composition

- What elements of art (e.g., line, shape, texture, color, form) are most prominent in the piece? How are they used?
- Is there a clear focal point? If so, what is it and how did the artist create it?
- How does the piece create a sense of unity or variety?
- Does the surface treatment (e.g., glazes, decorative elements) enhance the form and overall aesthetic? [Blue Dog Ceramics](#)
- What emotions or ideas does the artwork evoke? Why do you think that? [The Kennedy Center](#)

4. Concept and intent

- What do you think is the artist's message or intention behind the piece? [The Kennedy Center](#)
- What story, if any, is the artwork telling?
- How does the artwork relate to its title (if applicable)?
- Does the piece convey a unique perspective or follow a particular artistic tradition? [Blue Dog Ceramics](#)

5. Self-reflection (for the artist)

- What were the greatest challenges you faced when creating this piece?
- What was your favorite part of the process?
- What is the most successful aspect of your artwork?
- If you could change one thing about your piece, what would it be and why?
- What did you learn from creating this piece?