

Unit

1

ART AND ACTION



intersections

WORLD ARTS / LOCAL LIVES



UNIT ONE: ART and ACTION

TABLE OF CONTENTS



- 3 Unit Overview

- 8 Lesson 1: The Role of the Artist
Crown for Yoruba Initiation by José Rodríguez, U.S.

- 18 Lesson 2: Efficacy and Action
Nkisi Nkondi: A Power Figure of Central Africa

- 25 Lesson 3: Beauty and Purpose
Capturing Beauty: Ikebana Baskets, Japan

- 34 Lesson 4: Encounters of Ideas, Time, and Place
Textiles of Southeast Asia



ART AND ACTION

Unit Overview.

Introduction

The works of art in the exhibition's first gallery served to make things happen. As they inspired awe and imparted a sense of wonder, they also facilitated devotion, imparted wisdom, conferred prestige, carried out litigation, mediated with the spirit world, and/or defined social relationships.

While the objects here were not made solely as "art," they nevertheless had to satisfy particular aesthetic criteria in order to be effective. The outward appearance, including the form and iconography of an object, contributes to its ability to work, that is, its capacity to act. The beliefs and concepts that give objects power and meaning in turn dictate their aesthetic appearance. In other words, how an object looks has everything to do with how it works: form and function are closely intertwined. We explore these concepts in Lessons 2 and 3.

This introductory unit considers these ideas in relation to the makers of the objects and in Lesson 1 the role of the artist is closely examined, demonstrating artists' importance in their respective societies. As they pushed the boundaries of the knowable world through their creations, artists produced channels through which humans could mediate myriad relationships, both earthly and divine.

Throughout the exhibition and accompanying resource materials we call out objects that reflect cultural dynamism, transaction, interaction and change. A group of objects discussed in Lesson 4 lets us see how intersections foster an exchange of ideas and images, which in turn become reflected in the arts of a people.



(left)
Power figure, Yombe peoples,
Democratic Republic of the
Congo, 18th-19th century.
Wood, various media.
Fowler Museum at UCLA.
Gift of the Welcome Trust.
X65.5837



(right)
Flower basket, Japan,
19th-20th century.
Bamboo, plant fiber.
Fowler Museum at UCLA.
Gift of Nancy and
Richard Bloch.
X87.189

Unit 1

ART AND ACTION Unit Overview

Questions for Thought In what ways can art be expressed?

What do we mean when we say an object is “*active*” in our lives?

What is meant by “*efficacy*?” How can that term be applied to an inanimate object? How can aesthetic considerations enhance the effectiveness of an object?

What qualities in an object define its appearance? What aspects define its use?

What are criteria for evaluating art beyond aesthetics?

How does art change in response to the encounters of diverse peoples?

Can you cite instances of new influences enriching the expression of art?

What might happen to an object as a result of these intersections?
encounters of people of differing backgrounds
an artist and the person commissioning a work
a newly acquired object and the person using it

Whose perspective should we use in defining art?



(right)
Flower basket, Japan,
19th-20th century. Bamboo.
Fowler Museum at UCLA.
Gift of Nancy and
Richard Bloch.
X87.206

Unit 1

ART AND ACTION Unit Overview



Art, Action and You Consider the roles that art plays in your life. Are you aware of the artistic qualities of objects in places other than museums, galleries, and books? Are there articles (of clothing, home, or environment) with aesthetic qualities that make you more aware of the article?

You have undoubtedly experienced works of art that “make things happen” in your own life. Think about objects that perform better for you because of their appearance. Is their appearance always positive in order for them to become more effective or might there be negative aspects that play in their effectiveness?

In your family or community do you see objects that display the result of encounters with people who have owned or used them in the past? Do some objects show some influence of other places in the world?



Detail (right)
Ikat cloth, Indonesia. Cotton.
Fowler Museum at UCLA.
Gift of Anne and
John Summerfield.
X93.26.32



Unit 1

ART AND ACTION Unit Overview

Using the Video in Your Classroom

Teachers may use the introductory short video from the exhibition to begin their study of *Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives*. Open-ended discussions and questions around speakers' comments invite students' individual responses, and introduce the idea that

- People create personal meanings and associations with works of art,
- Objects play active roles in people's lives, and
- Works of art and their performance contexts remind us of the local community from which they emerge and the broader global community which has shaped their multiple meanings.

Introduce the students to the exhibition with the introductory video (viewable on the *Intersections* website <http://collections.fowler.ucla.edu/intersections>.) The perspectives of artists, scholars, religious practitioners, and community leaders convey the idea that objects have lives and that people have deep and abiding relationships with objects. Viewers encounter works from the Americas, Asia, the Pacific, and Africa and may witness the contexts in which works of art appear. The video also serves as introduction to themes that are stressed throughout the exhibition.

Advise students that the video serves as an introduction to the exhibition *Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives* that they will see at the Fowler Museum, but offer little other comment. You may want them to watch the video a second time. After viewing, ask the students for reactions, questions, and general comments. Let ensuing discussions be without structure, addressing your students' questions. Encourage dialogues through which students can make comparisons with their own lives.



(screenshot from
introductory video)

ART AND ACTION

Unit Overview

You may wish to present, for special consideration, some of the following statements excerpted from the video narration. Students can put these excerpts into context and offer interpretations.



Detail (above)
Mask, Tsimshian peoples,
British Columbia, Canada.
Wood, pigment.
Fowler Museum at UCLA.
Gift of the Wellcome Trust.
X65.4273

The narrators in the video are Hirokasu Kosaka, Shingon Buddhist priest; Diyah Larsati, Professor in Department of Dance, Institute of Arts, Indonesia; Rowland Abiodun, Professor of African Art History, Amherst College; Robert Farris Thompson, Professor of African Art History, Yale University; José Rodriguez, Brooklyn artist; Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Professor of Chicano/a Studies and English, UCLA; Ysamur Flores-Pena, Associate Professor, Otis College of Design; Robert Wisdom, actor; Mary Nooter Roberts, former Chief Curator, Fowler Museum at UCLA; John Latsko, Teacher, Manual Arts High School; and Cindi Alvitre, Director of Ti'At Society, Tongva Tribe.

“It’s part of the life cycle. It’s living.... It’s not dead. It’s still constantly moving, changing, and wanting to go back to nature.”

“...it’s very precious because it’s about memory.... It’s a message and also always reminds me about what we have in the family, being together or being separate.”

“Just the act of threading beads is like a meditation, and it brings you really deep into...yourself. And through the process of it, your hopes and your desires kind of take a physical form.”

“When he’s wearing this crown, he’s transformed. He’s no longer known by his first name. He can no longer be called Bob or Joe or anything. He’s revered like any other divinity.”

“And people use these images—I use these images—as a way of connecting to that divine source.”

“...an object has to serve many levels and many duties and be able to keep its essential quality.”

“...But at the end of the day, they’re objects. What do I do to meet these objects? What do I have to summon up through myself to begin to understand how they live in me?”

“These objects all intervened in people’s lives in some very particular manner. They are objects of artistic genius, but they weren’t made only for visual delight.”

“But it’s the combination of their outward form and beauty, and their inner power and efficacy that makes them work.”

“When you see an object, refocus your lens. Think about the people who made this object, and how they used it. And let your imagination also take you on a journey of other people of other lands. It’s the best education you can have.”