

Richmond Art Gallery
SCHOOL ART PROGRAM
TEACHERS' GUIDE



Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Manga Ormolu ver. 4.0-b*, 2008, ceramics, mixed media

April 14 – June 9, 2013

Materially speaking

Jen Aitken, Lou Lynn

Brendan Lee Satish Tang, Julie York



Generous support for the School Art Program provided by
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Richmond Art Gallery School Art Program - Teachers' Guide

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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The artists featured in the *Materially speaking* exhibition each work with traditional craft materials and techniques; however they use these craft processes to create artworks that address current issues in contemporary art, rather than functional or decorative objects. **Craft** describes art practices that employ highly skilled techniques to produce items, such as quilts and ceramic vases, and that often use natural materials, such as wood, clay, glass, textiles, and metal. More and more artists today are returning to traditional craft techniques because they are drawn to the inherent characteristics of their chosen materials. Glass, for example, is fragile and delicate, whereas stone is strong and solid. These qualities add to the meaning of the artwork that the artist creates. Jen Aitken, Lou Lynn, Brendan Lee Satish Tang, and Julie York, have all created artworks that engage the qualities of their materials and that explore the relationship between art and craft.

Jen Aitken has a background in fashion design, and uses materials common to the manufacture of clothing, such as spandex, suede, and fake fur to make her **sculptures**. Her series *Components* are a set of interlocking and interchangeable objects which serve as a “habitat” for her smaller sculptures. All of the individual pieces can be reconfigured in different orientations and combinations, like building blocks, and they are based on a standard set of measurements taken from the mathematical Fibonacci series (each number in the series is the sum of the previous two numbers, i.e. 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, etc.). Aitken’s sculptures are deliberately abstract, allowing those viewing them to use their imagination and create personal connections and meanings out of what they see.



Jen Aitken, *components*, 2011,
vinyl, pvc, spandex

"I try to keep the forms ambiguous for this reason as well—I find that more genuine, uninhibited responses are triggered when there are no solid referents to hold on to. Of course the work points in many different directions (furniture, machine parts, organs, cartoons, sea life, Minimalist sculpture, textile art, etc.) but I hope that it remains too slippery to pin down."(Jen Aitken)



Lou Lynn, *Tools as Artifacts* (detail) 2008-2010, glass & bronze, Photo Credit: Janet Dwyer

Lou Lynn's installation, *Tools as Artifacts*, is inspired by the various historical tools used by tradespeople, such as carpenters, ship builders, shoemakers, and gardeners.

"The sculptural qualities of old hand tools hold a particular fascination for me, as I ponder the esthetic decisions of their makers and then re-interpret design and scale, resulting in objects that offer impractical solutions for imagined tasks."(Lou Lynn)

Lynn uses **bronze** and glass, resulting in pieces that contrast the strength and durability of metal with the fragility and delicacy of glass. This combination produces tools that are no longer truly functional or practical for everyday use. Her process of transforming these tools into artwork is reminiscent of the ways in which craftspeople throughout the ages have transformed everyday, functional objects into beautiful, non-functional artwork, such as the evolution of durable, water-carrying jugs into beautiful, porcelain vases.

Brendan Lee Satish Tang explores the history of ceramics with his *Manga Ormolu* series. The word Ormolu comes from French, meaning literally “mashed gold” and refers to the practice of gilding objects with a mixture of gold and mercury paste. The title of Tang’s series refers to the way that Chinese ceramics were purchased and collected in Europe, and were transformed by the addition of decorative gilded mountings, supports, and embellishments, creating an Asian/Western **hybrid** of two distinctly different cultural styles. In his work, Tang looks at another Asian art form that has influenced the West, Manga. Manga are comics and graphic novels originally created in Japan, and which frequently contain science fiction themes and technology. In the *Manga Ormolu* series, forms derived from traditional Chinese Ming vases are surrounded by cartoon and robotic components. For Tang, the tension between cultures evident in his art has personal significance.



Anonymous (Chinese artist),
Anonymous (French artist), Porcelain
Vase with Birds and Bamboo, 1st half
19th century; Ormolu Mounts, 1870-
1880, Walters Art Museum



“... the hybridization of cultures mirrors my identity as an ethnically-mixed Asian Canadian. My family history is one of successive generations shedding the markers of ethnic identity in order to succeed in an adopted country – within a few generations this cultural filtration has spanned China, India, Trinidad, Ireland and Canada. Cultural appropriation and assimilation seem like a natural part of my identity, a survival technique not uncommon among ethnic minorities.” (Brendan Lee Satish Tang)

Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Manga Ormolu ver.*

4.0-b, 2008, ceramics, mixed media



Robert Chapman Turner, Glazed stoneware vessel



Julie York, *White on White Series*, 2012, paper

Julie York is exploring ceramic **forms** in her artworks *White on White Series* and *Molding Moulding*. The forms she uses come from the work of five important and influential potters: Robert Chapman-Turner, Beatrice Wood, Lucie Rie, Peter Voulkos, and Shoji Hamada. York has recreated their work in miniature and installed them on decorative architectural baseboard, which is paired with a series of laser paper cuts that illustrate the structure of each ceramic form. To create these works she used both traditional ceramic processes and the latest computer & modeling technology. She started by creating 3-dimensional computer drawings of each form, which were then sent to a 3-d printer to “print” out a plastic model of each form. The model was used to make a plaster mould so that multiple clay copies of the form could be created using a process called **slip casting**. The clay was then fired and glazed, and the finished pieces mounted on a wooden baseboard. The papercuts were created from the 3-d computer drawings and were



Julie York, *Molding Moulding*, 2012, porcelain, glaze, wood, paint

cut by a laser. The rhythmic repetitions of the pieces on the baseboard, stripped of their colour and texture, and paired with the structural paper “illustrations” serve to draw our attention to the elegance and beauty of these forms.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Jen Aitken is an emerging Canadian artist. She was born in Edmonton in 1985 and grew up in Toronto. After studying fashion design at Ryerson University, she moved to Vancouver where she completed her BFA at Emily Carr University in 2010. She has a rigorous and intuitive studio practice, investigating and synthesizing her interests in sculpture, design, sexuality and the body. Her work has been included in several exhibitions, including most recently a solo show called *Components* at Trench Contemporary Art in Vancouver. Aitken is currently in the MFA program at the University of Guelph in Ontario.

Jen Aitken's Website: <http://www.jenaitken.com/>

Lou Lynn began exploring the sculptural potential of glass in the mid 1980's and attributes her interest in the use of glass as a sculptural medium to the frequent periods of study she undertook at the Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood, Washington. Inspiration for Lynn's work has been drawn from an interest in archaic and industrial tools and artifacts. She combines the strength, fragility and optical properties of glass with bronze to create forms that draw attention to the materials' inherent qualities. The tension that exists between strength and fragility is central in her re-interpretation of tools and artifacts that once held a prominent place in industrial and domestic environments. Lynn's sculpture has been widely exhibited nationally and internationally and is displayed in prominent public collections, including the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and the Canadian Clay & Glass Museum. She has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including the Gerson Award for Excellence, Innovation & Leadership from the Craft Council of BC, and was inducted into the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA) in 2010. Lou Lynn lives and maintains a studio in Winlaw, British Columbia.

Lou Lynn's Website: www.loulynn.ca

Brendan Lee Satish Tang was born in Dublin, Ireland of Trinidadian parents and is a naturalized citizen of Canada. He earned his formal art education on both Canadian coasts and in the American Midwest, where he learned to appreciate the ceramic medium. Tang has lectured at conferences and academic institutions across the country, and his professional practice has also

taken him to India, Trinidad and Japan. He has been a resident artist at the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts (Helena, MT) and participated in an international residency at the European Ceramic Work Centre in 2011. Tang's work has been showcased nationally and internationally at galleries such as the Seattle Art Museum and Art Labor in Shanghai. He has been profiled by The Knowledge Network, and his work featured in printed publications including *The National Post*, *Wired* (UK and Italy), and *ELLE (Canada)*. The broad appeal of his work is evident online, where he has received attention from prominent blogs around the globe, including *Boing Boing*, *NotCot* and *Design Boom*. Tang dedicates his full attention to his professional art practice, where he continues to explore the interface between culture and material.

Brendan Lee Satish Tang's Website: <http://brendantang.com/>

Video of Brendan talking about his work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=530vBh06Pgo>

Julie York is an artist who works in traditional craft materials using non-traditional approaches. She is one of a handful of recognized art makers currently redefining the use of clay in sculptural work. York has received a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, the Independence Foundation Fellowship, and two Creative Production Grants from the Canada Council for the Arts. Her work has been included in numerous shows internationally, including a solo exhibition at the Garth Clark Gallery in New York City; her work is also part of numerous permanent and private collections. York is an Associate Professor of Visual Arts and Material Practice at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. She received her BFA from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design and her MFA from New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. Subsequently she has held fellowships and residencies at Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, and International Ceramic Research Centre, Guldagergaard, Skaelskor, Denmark.

Video featuring Julie York's artwork & process: <http://vimeo.com/2099087>

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Discussion: Is Craft art?

One of the most confusing distinctions for people (including art experts!) is the difference between craft and art, especially now because so many artists are making art out of traditional craft materials and processes. So what is craft anyway? And how is it different from art?

One reason why there is so much confusion is because in the past, all artworks were either functional (like a Haida woven basket), ceremonial (like a West African ritual mask), or decorative (like a French tapestry). The artists who created these artworks were largely unknown, and their artworks were valued for their craftsmanship, their beauty, or their religious and cultural significance. This changed during the Renaissance, when new ideas and theories began to emerge about art. The artist's imagination, ideas, emotions, and personal technique suddenly became more important than craftsmanship, beauty, and cultural tradition. This was also the time that artists' names were attached to their work, and many artists became famous, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. The work of potters, weavers, and other craftspeople no longer fit this new definition of art, and was considered instead craft, because of its association with the skill of making and with the creation of functional, decorative, or ceremonial objects, rather than the expression of ideas or emotions.

Recently, many artists have turned again to traditional craft materials; however they are using them in ways that express ideas and emotions. The lines are being blurred between what is considered art and what is considered craft, and even the experts can't all agree on a clear definition!

Discussion: Look at a variety of artworks with your students, and discuss the qualities of the work.

- What materials is it made from?
- Is it well made? Did it require skill?
- Is it beautiful to the eye? Why?
- Is it functional?
- Is it expressing an idea or an emotion?
- Does it have cultural significance?
- What do you think makes something art?
- What qualities do you personally value in an artwork?

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Tate Debate: When is a craft an art?

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/tate-debate-when-craft-art>

V&A Museum: What is Craft? <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/w/what-is-craft/>

AFTER YOUR VISIT

Casting is a process in which an object is created by pouring a liquid substance into a **mould**, and once the materials has hardened, it is removed from the mould and any excess material is trimmed off. Lou Lynn's bronze artworks are cast from molten metal, and the tiny ceramic forms in Julie York's artwork *Molding, Moulding*, are all cast from liquid clay, called slip. You can experiment with casting all kinds of objects using plaster of Paris and modeling clay.

Materials:

Plaster of Paris

Shallow tray (Styrofoam tray or pie plate works well)

Modeling clay

Objects to cast: Leaves & flowers, toys, hands, etc. Objects should be fairly sturdy (super thin or fragile leaves will fall apart) and not complex like a pinecone otherwise you won't be able to get it out of the modeling clay.

1. Fill the bottom of your tray with modeling clay until it is about an inch thick
2. Press your objects into the modeling clay using gentle pressure. Press objects only until they are halfway buried.
3. Remove the objects carefully, and check that the details have been impressed on the modeling clay.
4. Mix the plaster of Paris according to the package directions, and pour or spoon into the mould until filled.
5. Once the plaster has set, carefully remove from the mould. This may be easier if you peel away tray from the modeling clay first.
6. Clean off the plaster with a toothbrush to remove any modeling clay.
7. Finished objects can be painted and sealed with acrylic gloss medium.

Other ideas:

Fill a balloon with plaster of Paris, and then create a freeform sculpture by twisting, bending, and shaping the balloon. Full lesson here:

http://www.firstpalette.com/Craft_themes/Colors/plasterfreeformsculpture/plasterfreeformsculpture.html

Create "fossils" by pressing natural materials into plaster of Paris. Full lesson here:

<http://www.ourbigearth.com/2009/08/25/nature-crafts-plaster-fossils/>

VOCABULARY

Bronze	A metal made from a mixture of copper and tin or zinc which is easy to melt and pour into moulds. Bronze was first made over 5000 years ago during the ancient Bronze Age, and was used to make tools and weapons due to its strength and wear resistance.
Casting	The process of creating an object by pouring a liquid or molten material into a mould where it hardens and solidifies.
Ceramics	An object made of fired clay. Clay is an earthy material which is shaped or moulded, then fired at a high temperature to make it hard and durable. Some of the different types of clay used for ceramics are earthenware, porcelain, stoneware, and terra-cotta. Each type of clay has a different consistency and different strength once it is fired.
Contemporary Art	Artwork that is produced in this current time, generally considered to be artworks made from 1970 to the present. Contemporary art is a very broad term, including artworks made in almost any medium and incorporating many different themes and ideas.
Craft	Art practices that produce useable or decorative items, such as quilts and ceramic vases, or that use natural materials, such as wood, clay, glass, textiles, and metal.
Form	The three-dimensional shape and structure of an artwork.
Hybrid	Anything that is a mixture of two different components or sources.
Mould	A mould is a form in which soft or molten materials can be placed and left to harden to produce objects such as cast sculpture or ceramic objects.
Sculpture	A sculpture is a three-dimensional work of art. Sculptures may be a carved, modeled, constructed or cast object that can be made of many different art materials.
Slip casting	Slip casting consists of pouring liquid clay (called slip) into a plaster mould, and allowing the plaster to absorb the moisture in the clay, hardening it in successive layers until it reaches the desired thickness. The excess slip is then poured out, and the mould taken apart to remove the now-solid clay piece.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Doors Open 2013

Saturday, May 4 - Sunday May 5, 11 am – 3 pm

Doors Open 2013 is Richmond's 6th annual arts, culture and heritage festival. Gallery events include:

- Docent Tours in Mandarin or English, May 4 & 5 from 11 am – 3 pm
- Richmond Printmakers Open House, Sunday, May 5 from 11 am – 4 pm

Artist Talk & Social

Thursday, May 9, 2013, 7-9pm, Free

Artists Brendan Lee Satish Tang and Julie York talk about their work in the *Materially Speaking* exhibition, followed by a meet and greet with the Richmond Art Gallery's new director, Rachel Lafo.

Film screening: AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY

Thursday, May 30th, 2013, 7pm – 9:30pm

Admission: \$5 cash at the door; free for Richmond Art Gallery members

Richmond Cultural Centre Performance Hall

Director: Alison Klayman / 91 mins / Documentary / Language: Mandarin / English

Ai Weiwei is China's most famous international artist, and its most outspoken domestic critic. In recent years, Ai has garnered international attention as much for his ambitious artwork as his political provocations. *AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY* examines this complex intersection of artistic practice and social activism as seen through the life and art of China's preeminent contemporary artist.

The movie will be introduced by independent curator, Debra Zhou (in Mandarin and English). Following the screening Zhou and Gallery Director Rachel Rosenfield Lafo will lead a conversation about the film and its relevance to the exhibition *Materially speaking*, on view in the Gallery.

GALLERY PROGRAMS

Family Sunday

Drop-in 1:00 – 4:00 pm, Free

Families are invited to participate in various exhibition-related art projects and activities on the fourth Sunday of each month. Stories, music, art...activities vary from month to month! It's free, thanks to the RBC Foundation.

2013 Schedule: Jan 27 • Feb 24 • March 24 • April 28 • May 26 • June 23 • July 28 • Aug 25 • Sept 22 • Oct 27 • Nov 24

Morning Tea

Drop-in 10:30 – 11:30 am, Free

Join us each month for a *Morning Tea with the Curator*. These monthly events are a space for community members to share ideas about art over tea and baked treats. Everyone is welcome to ponder provocative subjects and to join in the group discussion. Morning Tea takes place in the Art Gallery's *Hope Smith Art Lounge*. Light refreshments provided.

2013 Schedule: Feb 27 • March 20 • April 24 • May 29 • July 31 • Sept 25 • Oct 30 • Nov 27

Lightning Tours

12:05-12:20 pm, Free

Short on time and culture? Drop into a free Lightning Tour of the current exhibition for a quick zap. Tours are with the Art Gallery Curator or Education Coordinator, for all ages.

2013 Schedule: Feb 6 • March 6 • April 17 • May 1 • June 5 • July 3 • Aug 7 • Oct 2 • Dec 4

Tear it Up! Collage Night

6:30-8:30 pm, \$2 - \$5 Suggested Donation

The Richmond Art Gallery invites all artists and the public to participate in our monthly Collage Night. Scissors, tape, glue, collage materials and music provided, but feel free to bring your old magazines or other collage materials to "tear it up". Every month will include a theme for participants to respond to.

2013 Schedule: Feb 21 • March 21 • April 18 • May 16 • June 20 • July 18 • Aug 15 • Sept 19 • Oct 17 • Nov 21

Pick up a Pencil! Drop-in Drawing for Adults

Drop-in 6:00 – 9:00pm, Free

Draw inspiration from original works of art! Join local artists in the gallery for informal sketching fun. Instruction provided every thirty minutes. Come and go as you like between each session. Some materials are provided, but feel free to bring your own sketchbook and drawing materials. For ages 16+

2013 Schedule: Feb 7 • March 7 • May 2 • June 6 • July 4 • Aug 1 • Oct 3 • Dec 5