

## Object[ed]

### *Binary In Balance*

#### Contrasting Material Sculptures

Grades 3-12



#### **Summary**

Students build their knowledge of who has created sculpture as well as how sculpture has been created throughout art history, before learning how contemporary sculptors can both work within and challenge these traditions. Students focus on the potential of material to hold meaning, specifically gendered ideas such as strong/weak, hard/soft, and tough/flexible. Students examine visual relationships between two contrasting materials, wood and fabric, to explore various combinations. Then, they create a sculpture that combines these materials to undermine stereotypical expectations.

*This lesson is best suited for Grades 7-12, but will also work well for Grades 3-6 with increased teacher preparation time. For Grades 3-6, teachers should hot-glue the 3D wooden structures out of Popsicle sticks ahead of the in-class project. Students should use the pre-made Popsicle stick structures, string, fabric and scissors for their project, focusing on creating areas of contrast between geometric and organic forms.*

### **Curriculum Ties**

Fine Arts: 3-8.V.CR, L1-3.V.CR

Social Studies: U.S. History I – S2.O2; U.S. History II – S3.O1, S5.O2, S7.O2, S9.O1

Health Education: Grade 4 – S3.O2; Grade 5 – S3.O1; Grade 6 – S1.O2

### **Time Frame**

90 minutes

### **Materials**

Long wooden dowels (for larger sculptures) or popsicle sticks (for smaller sculptures)

Hot glue

Wire and wire cutters, or string and scissors

Fabric scraps with stretch (if needed, repurpose old T-shirts and swimsuits in various colors and patterns)

### **Intended Learning Outcomes**

1. Students can describe basic characteristics of traditional Western sculpture, as well as some ways in which contemporary artists both work within and challenge these sculptural conventions.
2. Students understand the impact of gender inequality on opportunities for and visibility of female sculptors throughout art history.
3. Students understand that material can evoke meaning.
4. Students use the concepts of contrast and balance to create a sculpture that undermines stereotypical expectations.

### **Resources**

Lizze Määttä creates sculptural compositions that contemplate our physical environment using found and manipulated materials. Upon a closer look, seemingly accidental juxtapositions of rubber, foam, glass, metal and stone are revealed to be carefully “measured” arrangements of texture and color.<sup>1</sup> As described for a 2015 exhibition at UMOCA, “Määttä finds materials on streets, in salvage yards, and dumpsters. These materials collect in piles in her studio, the cold slabs of stone mingling with the cushion of foam, enabling a relationship to develop between the objects. Temperatures of tension read hot to cold, in directions difficult to distinguish and possibly better left wide open.”<sup>2</sup>

Määttä’s *Untitled* sculptures in UMOCA’s exhibition, *Object[ed]*, present different combinations of large, vertical metal grates with pliable, spongy material. Between and around the rigid, grey bars of dirty metal, orange wire binds and bends; thin rubber strips squeeze; blue

foam quietly fills; and thick tubing drapes. Marks of wear on the material evoke a history of use and abandonment. Visual relationships between hard and soft, rough and smooth, tough and malleable, ask viewers to understand each material in opposition to the other.



*Untitled*

View Object[ed]: [www.utahmoca.org/portfolio/objected](http://www.utahmoca.org/portfolio/objected)

<sup>1</sup> [artistsofutah.org/15Bytes/index.php/material-girl-material-world-lizze-maattala-at-umocas-projects-gallery](http://artistsofutah.org/15Bytes/index.php/material-girl-material-world-lizze-maattala-at-umocas-projects-gallery)

<sup>2</sup> [www.utahmoca.org/portfolio/lizze-maattala](http://www.utahmoca.org/portfolio/lizze-maattala)

### **Students Should Understand the Following Vocabulary**

*Sculpture* - A 3D artwork. Traditional sculptural materials include stone, clay, metal and wood. However, contemporary sculptures are made from found materials, paper, fabric and much more.

*Medium* - The materials use to create a work of art.

*Contrast* - The difference, opposition, or juxtaposition of the elements of a work of art. Contrast can be created using line, form, color, value, or even choice of media.

*Balance* - Arranging elements equally so that no one part overpowers another. Balance can be symmetrical, asymmetrical or radial.

*“Master Sculptor”* - The Eurocentric idea of an artist who skillfully crafts sculpture. In Western art history, the term is used to refer to sculptors who have been deemed the most skilled and have lasting importance, such as Donatello and Michelangelo. These sculptors are virtually all white males. The masculine idea of who can create sculpture remains today; one current sculpture studio’s website describes “master sculptor” as a humble title given by a sculptor’s peers that “is as elusive or as obvious as when a boy becomes a man.”<sup>1</sup>

*Stereotype* - An oversimplified idea about individuals who belong to a particular group of people. Stereotypes are based on assumptions and unfair judgments. Racist, sexist and homophobic stereotypes are common examples.

<sup>1</sup> [carolinasculpturestudio.com/sculpture](http://carolinasculpturestudio.com/sculpture)

### **Instructional Procedures**

Lead a class discussion to introduce the idea of sculpture (limited by a Western art historical lens) and build a basic description of traditional characteristics of sculptures throughout European history. These examples can be used as visual aides:

- *Naxian Sphinx* from Delphi, Greece; 570-560 BCE; marble:  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:028MAD\\_Sphinx.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:028MAD_Sphinx.jpg)
- *David* by Donatello; 1430-1432; bronze:  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Florence\\_-\\_David\\_by\\_Donatello.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Florence_-_David_by_Donatello.jpg)
- *The Thinker* by Rodin; 1880-1904; bronze:  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Thinker,\\_Rodin.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Thinker,_Rodin.jpg)
- *Portrait of Mademoiselle Pogany* by Constantin Brancusi; 1912; marble:  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Constantin\\_Brancusi,\\_Portrait\\_of\\_Mlle\\_Pogany,\\_1912,\\_Philadelphia\\_Museum\\_of\\_Modern\\_Art,\\_Philadelphia.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Constantin_Brancusi,_Portrait_of_Mlle_Pogany,_1912,_Philadelphia_Museum_of_Modern_Art,_Philadelphia.jpg)

Ask your students: *What is a sculpture? What do you think of when you think of traditional, Western (European) sculptures?* Brainstormed answers can include these (generalized) qualities: representational and usually figurative; carved or modelled; made out of a hard, solid material like stone, wood, or metal; tall and monolithic; built on a pedestal that separates the sculpture from the ground; and derived from classical Greek and Roman ideas of sculpture. Place particular emphasis on materials by asking students to describe the characteristics of the materials in more detail: *What kinds of adjectives would you use to describe these materials? Are they rigid or flexible, moving or static, hard or soft?*

Next, ask your students to consider *who* makes sculpture. *Have mostly men or mostly women created the sculpture we learn about today? Why are most sculptures throughout art history created by men? Have women been given as many opportunities to create sculpture? When women have created sculpture, are they as visible in our history? Is there a stereotype that still exists today, that to be a sculptor you have to be a man? When you view a new sculpture without any background information, do you assume that the artist is male?*

Although they are influenced by artwork created in the past, contemporary artists working today are much less restricted in both the concepts they can explore and the materials they can use. For this project, each student will be a contemporary artist, using both expected and unexpected sculptural materials to create a relationship between contrasting ideas. In this way, their sculptures will tie together material and meaning, allowing their materials to stand in as abstract representations of contrasting gendered ideas, such as:

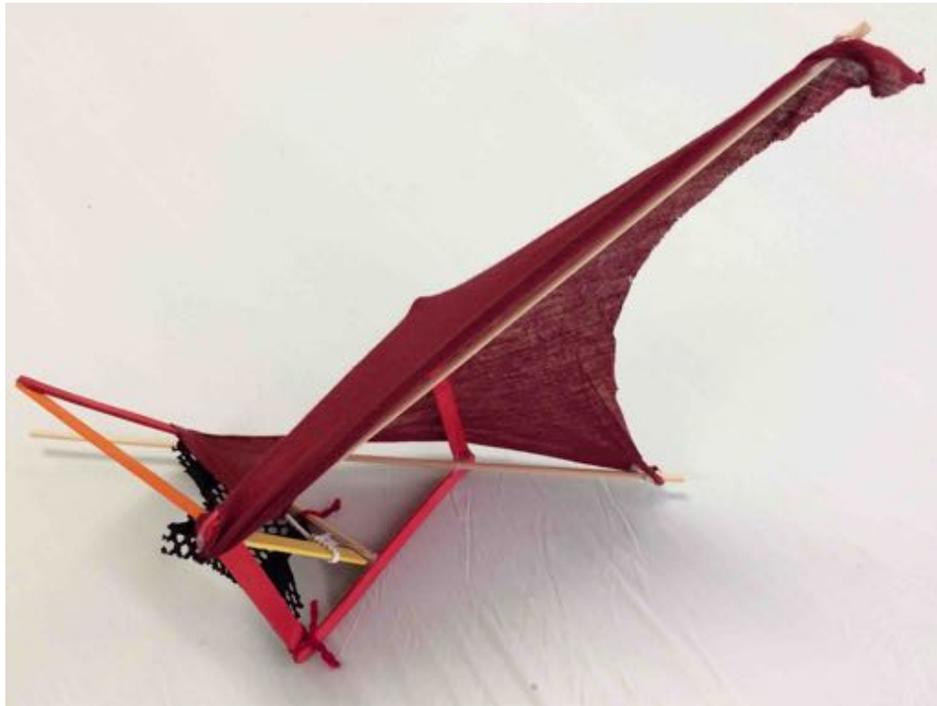
- Strong/weak
- Hard/soft
- Tough/flexible
- Geometric/organic
- Old/new
- Loose/tight

*How can ideas of masculinity and femininity be linked to physical materials? For example, do sculptures made out of “hard” materials and those made out of “soft” materials communicate different ideas? How could you create a single sculpture using both “hard” and “soft” to complicate these ideas?*

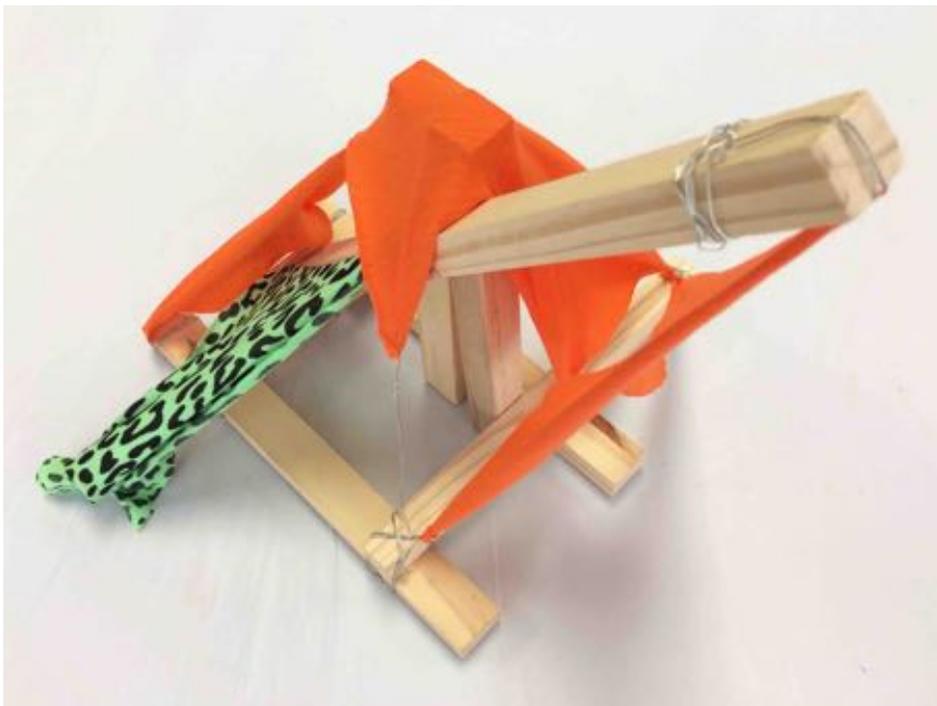
Have your students begin by using wooden dowels (or popsicle sticks) and hot glue to assemble a 3D geometric frame for their sculpture. Individual sticks can be combined into triangles, squares and rectangles, before further assembling these shapes into 3D forms. Additional pieces extending from the central base of the structure will provide a more interesting framework onto which the fabric material will be added in the next step.

After their wooden structure is fully glued together, have each student consider how to add contrasting fabric pieces to the sculpture, using wire or string to help them attach the fabric to the wood if necessary. *How will you use the fabric to stretch between, wrap around, and attach to the geometric structure in a way that balances out the rigid, geometric qualities of the wood? How can you create other contrasting relationships between these two materials?* Students can create additional areas of contrast and balance in their sculptures, such as:

- Tension/rest
- Open/closed
- Static/dynamic
- Solid/see-through
- Tight/loose
- Dark/light
- Vibrant/dull



*Example 1*



*Example 2*

QUESTIONS TO ASK AT THE END OF THE PROJECT:

- *How does the openness of contemporary sculpture allow for greater possibilities for art-making?*
- *How has gender inequality influenced our understanding of those who have made sculpture throughout history?*
- *What does it mean to combine different art materials in ways that are unexpected?*
- *Does expressing ourselves through art in new and challenging ways also allow us to understand each other better?*