

Heather Hart and Installation Art

Objectives

Students will know the definition and purpose of Installation Art through the work of Heather Hart.

Students will collaborate to create their own Installation Art projects.

Vocabulary

Installation Art:

a movement/genre of 3-dimensional, immersive, site-specific artwork designed to engage an audience.

Materials

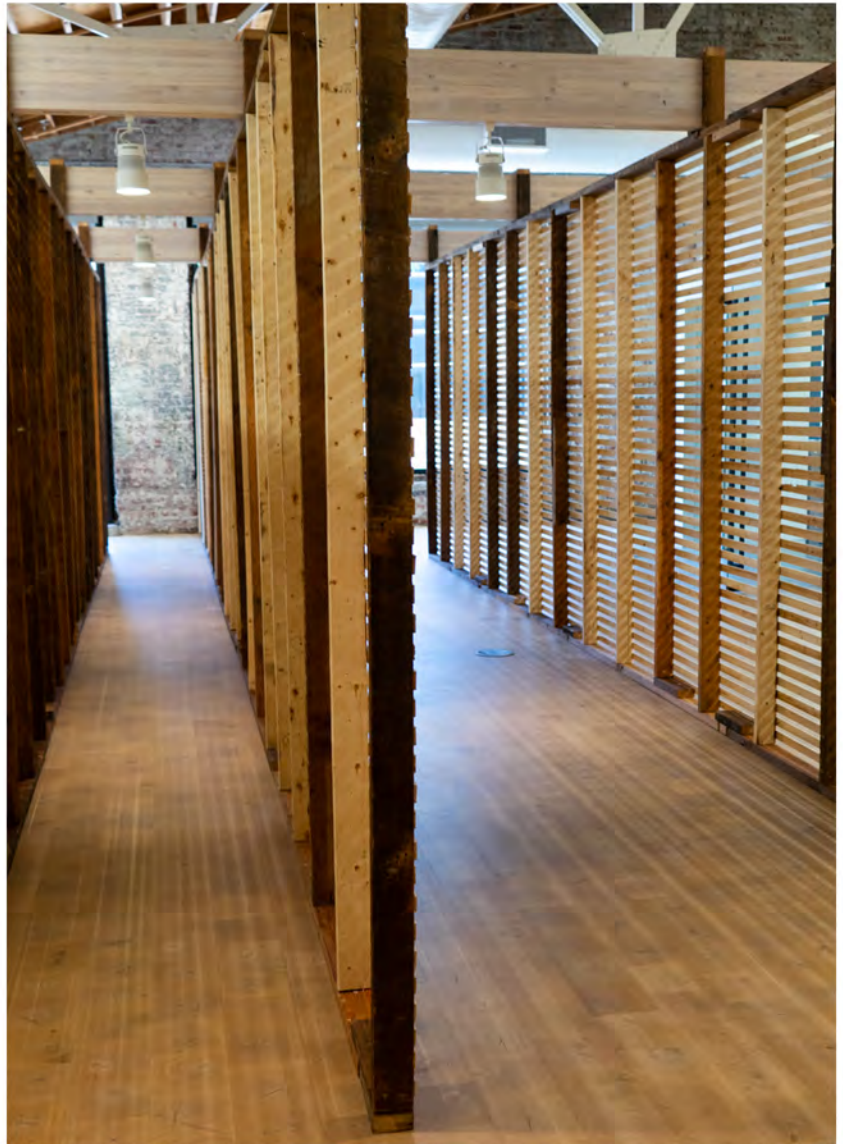
Pencils, sketchbooks
Various art/office supplies

Resources

Artist Dossier (attached)
<https://www.heather-hart.com/>
<https://www.u-ca.org/exhibition/the-texture-of-the-weave>

National Standards

Va.Cr.1.1
Va.Cr.2.1
Va.Pr.5.1
Va.Cn.10.1



Detail from "Texture of the Weave," UCA

Rationale

This lesson plan introduces students to the concept of installation art through the work of Heather Hart. It includes resources and suggested best practices for engaging in a collaborative, community-oriented art installation design process.

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Anticipatory Set:

Select a volunteer to act out being in an art gallery, looking at a painting. As a class, discuss what you observed. The volunteer probably walked a little bit, looked at a wall, maybe nodded their head, stroked their chin, leaned in a little, and left. There's a familiar set of gestures we see in gallery/museum spaces when the public interacts with traditional, two-dimensional art.

What kind of art can get people more involved?

That's what we're going to explore.

Introduce the artist:

We're going to explore the work of multi-disciplinary, studio artist Heather Hart. Use the Artist Dossier to learn more about her work.

Vocabulary building:

These examples from Heather Hart can all be described as Installation Art. Installation Art can be defined as a movement or genre of 3-dimensional, immersive, site-specific artwork designed to engage an audience.

How is this different from sculpture? How is this different from public art in other forms?

Discuss:

Brainstorm a list of questions needed to embark on designing an installation. If we were to make a work of installation art, what would we need to know?

What materials are available? What themes would we want to explore with the art? Where could we install the art? How would the public interact with the art? How long would we leave the installation in place? Could we host a reception for the art? Etc.

Collaborate as a class to answer these questions. Encourage students to sketch/draft their own ideas, individually or in small groups. Work together as a whole class to incorporate these different ideas into a cohesive installation.

Create:

Make a plan that suits your classroom to execute the installation art project they designed. Consider having students select/assign leadership roles to keep the project running smoothly.

If possible, include event programming to engage the community/school.

Expand:

Think about the legacy of the project, documentation of the project, and demolition of the project. Is this an installation that could be replicated or improved upon? Did you document the installation well enough to create additional media - a newspaper article, short documentary, or photo book? Is there a special way to take down the installation that pays respect to its existence?

UNION Artist Dossier



Heather Hart, based in Brooklyn, is an interdisciplinary artist exploring the power in thresholds, questioning dominant narratives, and creating alternatives to them. Hart is an Assistant Professor at Mason Gross School for Art + Design, a member of the Black Trustee Alliance for Art Museums, an external advisor for AUC Art Collective, and a trustee at Storm King Art Center. She was a 2021-2022 Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University.

***Eastern Oracle,
We Will Tear the Roof Off the Mother, 2012***



The Eastern Oracle, We Will Tear the Roof Off the Mother was an installation created in April 2012 at the Brooklyn Museum in Brooklyn, New York as the fourth exhibition in the Raw/Cooked Series. It consisted of a massive, wooden, a-frame roof with three dormer windows on one side and a brick chimney set on the floor of the gallery, built with the intention of inviting visitors to climb and explore the structure. Inside/under the roof was a central walk space with a mirror, altar and mural placed opposite the entrance. At this altar visitors were invited to apply gold leaf to the altar's frame in "exchange for a prayer or wish" and reflect in the space.

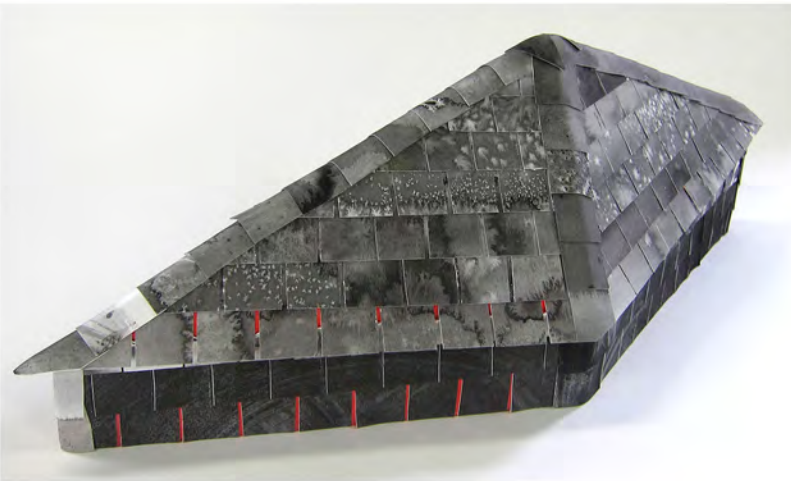
<https://www.heather-hart.com/eastern-oracle>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUTF-yjmBMc>

Western Oracle, We Will Tear the Roof Off the Mother, 2013



The Western Oracle, We Will Tear the Roof Off the Mother was an outdoor installation created in June 2013 in conjunction with the Seattle Art Museum at the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle, Washington. It consisted of a massive, wooden a-frame roof with two dormer windows, a gable with a round window, a brick chimney, a four pane window and an entrance, built with the intention of inviting visitors to climb and explore the structure. Inside/under the roof was a central walk space with rectangular drum heads installed around the four pane window. At this wall of drums visitors were invited to play and strike the drums and reflect in the space. The inclusion of drums was a nod to Indigenous cultures of the Pacific Northwest.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-eAKeAe8jk>

The Texture of the Weave, 2022

The Texture of the Weave was an installation created in July 2022 at the Union for Contemporary Art in Omaha, Nebraska. It consisted of wall-mounted sculptures of various shapes and sizes resembling shingled roofs. In the main space of the gallery were framed, slat board walls arranged to create a winding corridor that zig-zagged the length of the gallery. These corridors led to the gallery annex where a large, star-shaped roof structure filled the center of the room.

<https://www.u-ca.org/exhibition/the-texture-of-the-weave>

Heather Hart's Artist Statement for "The Texture of the Weave"

Through my interdisciplinary practice I fuse fabricated and historical belief systems; legends that have been bequeathed through generations mixed with invention and intuition. I ask the public to take some responsibility in the art "viewing" process. Each participant who engages with my work brings their frame-of-reference and ideas to mingle with the environment I offer as a catalyst to create something that lasts longer than the direct art-viewing event. I believe people listen better when they are physically involved in the process of discovery.

I found an essay that was based on an interview with my great-grandfather. The son of a slave, he had moved North from Virginia at 17 years old, alone, ten years before the Great Migration. In this essay he mentions the tribe in Africa from which he was descended. I realized this detail was likely fabricated. My great-grandfather had constructed a persona not just to forge his fantastic life, nor for attention, or honor, but like any Black American of his generation, for survival. I instantly felt a relationship to him that I hadn't noticed before; he too was fabricating belief systems. This persona he created was a graceful blend of fact and fiction, like an oral history that is transformed with each retelling.

With inspirations of this space between the cognitive and mystical, I propose creating an architecture that directs the visitor to physically interact with the work, with each other, with themselves. As an oral history, the method of building is passed from person to person. The form of my work is inspired by traditional framing structures, taught to me as a child by my father. I want to build a piece where the visitor's physical perspective on their world changes as they interact, as a metaphor for a potential shift in perception. I am interested in not only creating site-specific liminal space but also in questioning dominant narratives and creating alternatives to them.

With this opportunity I'm drawing parallels between forms of oral history; carpentry, but also tropes of quiltmaking as well as fantasy. I'm interested in representation of Black culture in an othered space. I'm interested in the concepts of the Black fantastic, of agency and of legends.

My initial idea is to construct elevated and labyrinth-like pathways to recontextualize space and the body and amplify a context and value system that reflects inherited belief systems and Black power in architecture.

The title quotes a thought of Edouard Glissant when he argues for the right to opacity. That we each have a unique space that may not be meant for others and it is valuable; our unique experience and understanding and translation is irreducible and valid.

"Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. ... Thought of self and thought of other here become obsolete in their duality. ... What is here is open, as much as this there. I would be incapable of projecting from one to the other. This-here is the weave, and it weaves no boundaries." (Glissant, Edouard. *Poetics of Relation*. p.190.)

Thus, this work depends on the public and activation to complete it. Each interpretation is correct and mine is only one of many. I want my installation to act as my translator between these thoughts and a public.