

ART

since the 1960s:

CALIFORNIA EXPERIMENTS

Pre-Visit Activities for
Elementary School Students



Orange
COUNTY
MUSEUM
OF ART

850 San Clemente Drive Newport Beach CA 92660 949-759-1122 www.ocma.net



This pre-visit activity prepares your students for their museum visit to see *Art since the 1960s: California Experiments*. This exhibition is a part of a series of collection installations that focus on the story of California art, highlighting key artistic developments of the twentieth century as well as groundbreaking exhibitions held at the museum. *Art since the 1960s: California Experiments* features examples of new art forms created from the 1960s through the 1990s: pop art, assemblage, conceptual art, video, and performance art, just to name a few. The artists in *Art since the 1960s* all contributed to the nation’s artistic and cultural development by experimenting with innovative art forms. They expanded the idea of what art can be by making art out of things like comics, trash, video, air pollution, mannequins, even lipstick. When you visit this exhibition, you are likely to see things you might never have expected to find in a museum! Your museum visit and pre-visit activity support interdisciplinary learning by connecting Visual Art, Language Arts, and Social Studies content areas, and address the California State Content Standards in the Visual Arts.

- 1.0 Artistic Perception
- 2.0 Creative Expression
- 3.0 Historical and Cultural Context
- 4.0 Aesthetic Valuing
- 5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications

Please adapt these activities according to your classroom needs.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

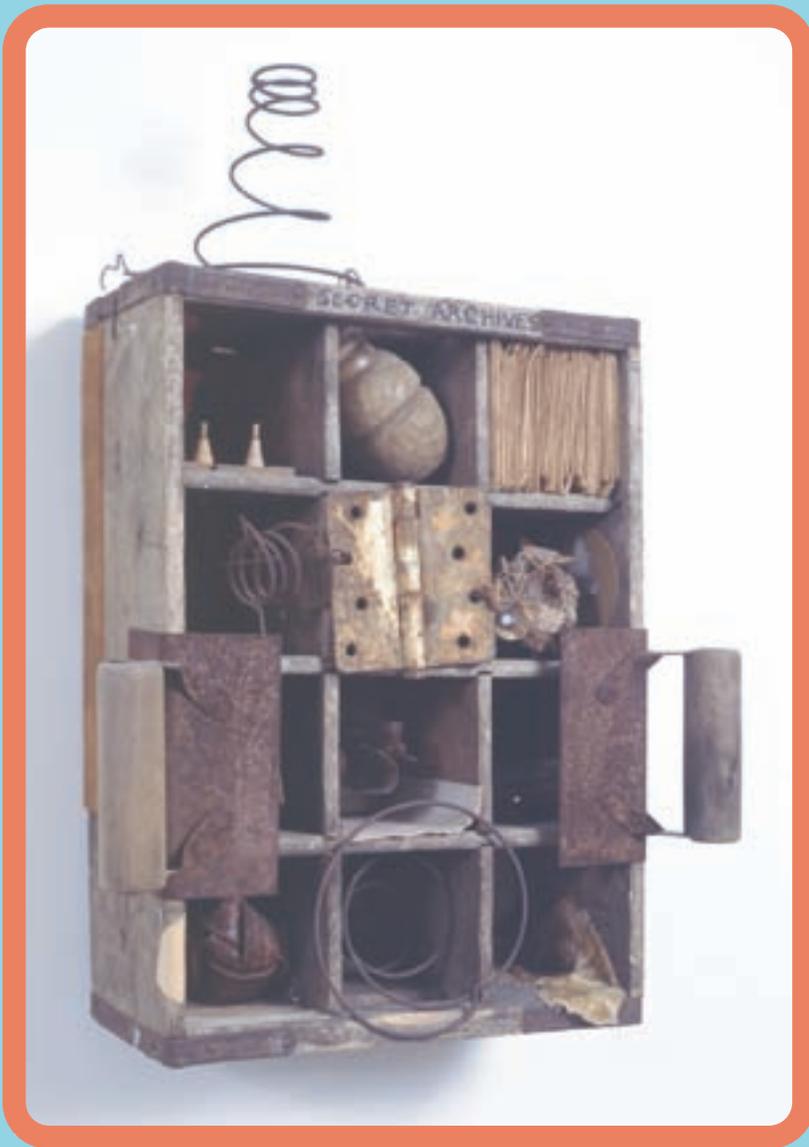


Students will discuss a work of art featured in *Art Since the 1960s: California Experiments* to explore artistic concepts and vocabulary related to the exhibition. They will learn about assemblage and “found objects”, and consider different ideas about what art can be. Students will experiment with “found words” to create a diamante poem, and create a drawing inspired by their poetry. When students visit the museum, they will create their own assemblage.

FEATURED ARTIST:



George Herms, *Deed to Secret Archives*, 1974, mixed-media assemblage



MATERIALS:



- Transparency of George Herms, *Deed to Secret Archives*
- Strips of paper
- Pencils
- Three buckets or other small containers
- Thick white paper
- Pastels, colored pencils, or other coloring media

DISCUSS:



Ask your students if they collect anything. What do you collect? Why do you collect these things? How do you display and care for your collection? Why do you think a museum collects certain objects? Ask your students why it is important not to touch anything at the museum.

Explain that a museum collects beautiful, valuable, fragile, historical, and thought-provoking objects, such as artworks like painting and sculpture. A museum cares for these objects, and shares them with people who come to visit their exhibitions. The Orange County Museum of Art is a special museum because many of the works of art in the collection were made right here in California! In the exhibition you are going to see, *Art since the 1960s: California Experiments*, you will be introduced to art that was made from the 1960s to the 1990s. Ask students, “How long ago was the 1960s?” By visiting the museum, we can see how artists have been **experimenting** with, or trying out, new materials and ideas in art over these three **decades**, or ten-year periods. Some artists began to make **conceptual art**: art in which the ideas behind it are as important as the finished art object. When we visit the museum, we will see the impact that these artists, living and working in California, have had on the nation’s cultural development. There is a lot to discover at the Orange County Museum of Art.

Ask your students what they think they will see when they visit the Orange County Museum of Art. What types of art do you think you will see? (Sculpture, painting, drawing, etc.) What else can art be made of? Ask students to brainstorm about all the different materials they think art can be made out of. Make a list on your blackboard or dry erase board. Encourage students to think creatively, and to imagine all the different possibilities.

We are going to look at one example of what we might see when we visit the museum. The artist George Herms collects things just like you do. Instead of collecting precious objects, however, this artist collects junk! Here is a story about this artist:

A square of rusted yellow steel lay in the middle of the Pacific Coast Highway, where most of the drivers swerved to avoid it. George Herms pulled his car off to the side of the road and with a hasty warning to his son—“Don’t ever try to do this”—leaped from the car, dashed into traffic and rescued the corroded castoff. Herms took the treasure to his downtown studio and eventually attached a small rusted tin can, transforming the undesirable junk into an assemblage portrait of an old friend.

Is it possible to turn old metal and other garbage into art? Let’s look at an artwork by the artist George Herms and decide for ourselves.

LOOK:



Project the transparency provided. Ask students to describe what they see in this picture. Rather than pointing to elements in the sculpture depicted, instruct students in using directional language to describe what they see. Is what you see in the center? Is it in the upper right hand corner? Is it near the bottom? Students may identify words, metal objects, and paper in this piece. They may make personal associations with the objects in the sculpture. They may see wires and think it looks like a bird's nest, for example. All of these observations are valid.

“My whole body of work is experimental,” Herms has said. Where do you think Herms got the materials for this object? How did he construct this? When creating art, Herms **experiments** by placing different objects in different configurations until he achieves a composition that he likes. Why do you think an artist would chose to experiment, instead of creating the same thing everytime?

Tell students that this is an **assemblage** entitled, *Deed to Secret Archives* by the artist George Herms. Introduce the word, “assemblage” (pronounced uh-sem-blij). Write the word on the board. Ask students to think about what this word might mean. Look for the roots of a word you already know: “assemble.” What does assemble mean? Based on your definition of assemble, can you deduce the meaning of “assemblage?” An assemblage is a type of additive sculpture where different objects are added together or assembled into a new work of art.

Have students analyze the title of this piece. Ask them to define each word in the title *Deed to Secret Archives*. Have students write a sentence with each of the words on scrap paper.

- A **deed** can be an act, as in, “Do a good deed every day.” A deed can also be an important document, like the papers that prove you own your house.
- A **secret** is something you don't tell anyone, or a mystery.
- An **archive** is a collection of information, and is a place where historical documents are kept.



detail, George Herms, *Deed to Secret Archives*



Deed to Secret Archives is an old cabinet used for sorting mail and papers that Herms made into an assemblage. For many years, Herms had been collecting old papers and other materials so that he might make art out of them some day. He has made many assemblages with his collection of papers and objects, or his archive. In this piece, Herms used objects that have been of personal importance to him. Now that you know what each of the words of the title means, as well as what inspired Herms to create this assemblage, why do you think the artist titled this piece, *Deed to Secret Archives*? What can you learn about the artist by looking at this piece?

Tell students that Herms gathers up **found objects**, and transforms them into sculpture, paintings, drawings, environments and poetry. He gives old, throw-away objects new life by recycling them into art. How is this work of art different from art you have seen before? Did you ever think you would see recycled objects in an art museum? Imagine that you were the **curator**, and you are organizing an exhibition of artworks in a museum. A museum curator selects works of art that will be displayed in an exhibition. Would you put this object in your exhibition? Why or why not?

Ask students what makes art, art? Draw two columns on your blackboard or dry erase board. Write “art” at the top of one column, and “not art” at the top of the other column. Ask students what qualities make something art, and what qualities make something not art. Ask students to respond to the following questions:

- Does art have to be beautiful?
- Does art need to take a long time to create?
- Does art need to look realistic?
- Does art need to be made with traditional materials like paint, marble, etc.?
Can art be made of anything?
- Does a work of art need to be worth a lot of money in order to be good art?
- Should art make you think about things in a new way?
- Do artists need to experiment with new ideas? Can artists use old ideas in their art?

Next, have students play “devil’s advocate” in relation to the “art/not art” debate. Students that think the Herms piece is not a work of art must give reasons for why it is a work of art, and vice versa. Initiate a debate where students must defend the position they did not take originally.

Tell students that when they visit the museum they will see artworks by artists who were interested in experimenting and expanding definitions about what art could be. Artists from the 1960s to the present want the public to ask questions and engage in discussion about the purpose and nature of art. When you visit the museum, you will be asked to express your opinions and share your ideas about art.

WRITE:



Like his assemblage works of found items, Herms also creates assemblages of words, or poems, to express himself. Tell students that in class, they will create poetry and artwork based on a “word assemblage.” They will take “found words” instead of found objects and create a conceptual work of art. When they visit the museum, students will create an assemblage of physical found objects to take home.

1. On three separate slips of paper, have students write 1. an adjective; 2. a verb; and 3. a noun. Have students drop each slip of paper into one of three containers labeled “Adjectives,” “Verbs,” and “Nouns.”
2. Shake up the containers. Now have each student choose a random slip of paper from each container.
3. Have each student line up their words by adjective; verb; noun. These are their found words.
4. Students’ phrases will probably sound silly—that is the idea!
5. Ask students to think of three **synonyms**, or words with similar meanings, for their adjective. Students write these synonyms on notepaper.
6. Next, have students write five synonyms for their verb.
7. Then have students write four synonyms for, or words related to, their noun.
8. With these words, have students build a diamond poem, or **diamante**. Explain to students that diamond poems are seven-line poems that take on the shape of a diamond because of the way they look when you have finished writing one. Take students through the process of composing a diamante.

- a. The first line and the last line of the poem are the same word: your noun.
- b. Line 2 is made up of two of your adjectives. Use the adjective you picked from the bucket and one of your other adjectives.
- c. Line 3 is made up of three participles--verbs that end in the -ing suffix--that convey actions related to the subject of the poem. Use three of your verbs and two synonyms.
- d. Line 4 has four nouns that are synonyms of the subject of the poem in Line 1.
- e. Line 5 is comprised of the three remaining participles.
- f. Line 6 is made up of the two remaining adjectives.
- g. Line 7 is the original noun (as in Line 1) repeated.

Example: Student picks the words delightful, running, thermometer.

Thermometer
Delightful, joyous
Running, jogging, sprinting
Fever, degree, Fahrenheit, mercury
Dashing, racing, hurrying
Happy, optimistic
Thermometer

CREATE:



1. Partner students.
2. Have partners exchange diamante poems.
3. One student closes their eyes while another student reads their diamante aloud. Tell the students who have their eyes closed to **visualize** their diamante in their mind's eye, or form mental pictures of what their poem might look like if it were to become a picture. What colors do you imagine? What shapes? Do you see animals, plants, people, or other objects?
4. Have the partners exchange roles.
5. Pass out thick white paper and pastels, colored pencils, or other coloring media. Have students create a picture inspired by their diamante based on what they visualized.

VOCABULARY:



Archive:

A collection of information, and a place where historical documents are kept.

Assemblage:

An additive sculptural technique of choosing unrelated found objects, and putting them together in one artwork.

Conceptual art:

Art in which the ideas behind it are as important as the finished art object.

Curator:

Someone who works in a museum and selects works of art that will be displayed in an exhibition.

Decade:

A period of ten years.

Diamante:

A seven-line poem in a diamond shape.

Experiment:

To try or test.

Found object:

An object found and transformed into art by an artist.

Synonym:

A word with a similar meaning to another word.

Visualize:

To form a mental picture of something that does not exist.



WHO IS GEORGE HERMS?:

George Herms was born in Woodland, California in 1935. Herms came to art in the late 1950s, but never had formal training in an art school. Herms scavenges objects from trash, waste bins, the roadside and the seashore and then turns them into sculpture, paintings, drawings, and poetry.

George Herms thinks it is fun to experiment with junk. He thinks assemblage art is like painting in many ways. Herms says that “instead of working with paint you have the same set of problems but volume is added. Instead of pigment and brush you have nails and glue, and instead of a palette you have objects.”

Herms often puts words, such as the word “LOVE” in his works of art. It is a personal reminder that his creations are gifts of love. Sometimes he gives his assemblages away as birthday presents to friends and family members. He has said that “Art is hugs and kisses.” See if you can find the letters L-O-V-E stamped somewhere on the assemblage when you visit the museum!

George Herms is alive and well, living and making art in Southern California. He shows his artwork all over California, the United States, and the world.



George Herms, *Deed to Secret Archives*, 1974, mixed-media assemblage



detail, George Herms, *Deed to Secret Archives*, 1974, mixed-media assemblage