

Bugs: A Portfolio (The Spider that died in the Tower of London),
Cornelia Parker

University Art Museum, CSU, collection of Mark and Polly Addison, 2005.143.6



...About the artist



Cornelia Parker was born in Cheshire, UK and is an English sculptor and installation artist. Parker transforms familiar, everyday objects in ways to get the viewer to think of them in a different way. She does this by suspending, enlarging, exploding, crushing, stretching objects, and even through language with her titles.

Parker is married and has one daughter. She works in London.

Lesson Overview

Students will explore the contemporary art work *The Spider that Died in the Tower of London* by Cornelia Parker and investigate how artists can use familiar objects and images to intrigue and puzzle the viewer. Students will create a mixed media representation of their own after examining the intentions of contemporary artists.

Objectives

1. Students will be able to write an interpretative narrative based on the art work, *The Spider that Died in the Tower of London*.
2. Students will be able to define and describe installation art, mixed media, artistic intent and concept.
3. Students will be able to critically reflect on and describe works of art by interpreting artistic intent.
4. Students will be able to identify and describe works of art by Cornelia Parker, Claes Oldenburg, Charles Simonds and Sandy Skoglund.
5. Students will be able to create a mixed media art work based on the concept of transformation by employing juxtaposition, scale, naming, animation or contrast.

Vocabulary

- Installation art
- Sculptor
- Contemporary art
- Modern art
- Mixed media
- Artistic intent
- Concept
- Scale
- Juxtaposition

Artists

- Cornelia Parker
- Claes Oldenburg
- Charles Simonds
- Sandy Skoglund

Procedures: Part I - Comprehend and Reflect

1. Show students Parker's *The Spider that Died in the Tower of London*. (Slide 1) Ask them to carefully describe what they see. Ask students to be very specific in their descriptions. Ask students if they find this art work beautiful? Why? What did the artist do in the work that makes them think this way? Do they find it ugly? Why? What did the artist do in the work that makes them think this way? Do they find it puzzling? Why? What did the artist do in the work that makes them think this way?

2. Parker makes us think differently about this spider because it looks like it might be swimming...or it might be in outer space. Ask students where they think the spider is? Parker's title tells us that the Spider is in the Tower of London. (Slide 2) The Tower of London has played a prominent role in English history. The Tower has served variously as an armory, a treasury, a menagerie (early version of a zoo), the home of the Royal Mint, a public records office, the home of the Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom and (most famously) a prison. This use has led to the phrase "sent to the Tower". What happened to the spider in the Tower of London? How did the spider die? Why was the spider in the tower in the first place? Have students write a short story (2-3 paragraphs if age appropriate) about the spider's demise. Stories and personal experiences can be a starting point for the development of a work of art.

3. Have students share their stories. Discuss the idea of artistic intention. Artists have specific ideas or concepts, even stories that serve as the basis for their art. Parker uses the title for this work to "present" this spider in an unusual way to the viewer. Artists use many different approaches to puzzle and capture the attention of the viewer.

--Claes Oldenburg takes ordinary objects and makes them gigantic. Placing them in an environment where people are forced to view them and wonder about the art work. *Clothespin*, Claes Oldenburg.

(<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/images/IMG0058.jpg>) (Slide 3) What could this clothespin be used for?

--*The Applecore* (at the Israel Museum), Claes Oldenburg (<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=claes+oldenburg&view=detail&id=D2695E6E819B15EBDF9B14EEFF06425DFEFB271B&first=61&qpv=claes+oldenburg&FORM=IDFRIR>) (Slide 4) Who ate this applecore? Why was it placed here?

--Charles Simonds creates miniature dwellings out in clay. *Dwellings*. (Slides 5, 6, 7, 8) At the start of his career, Simonds' work was strictly for the streets. He would arrive at a site in the morning and begin building his ruins with tweezers, gluing together the tiny, unfired clay bricks that he had made beforehand. "Working outside, as I did, I got immediate response to my work, particularly from the children," he says. "Since they'd never had a gallery experience, it was not like 'art seeing.' They entered it right away as fantasy."

(http://www.puppiesandflowers.com/archives/2009/05/the_art_of_charles_simonds.html) Who lives in the villages/cities? Why are these villages/cities hidden? What would you think if you saw one of these miniature villages/cities on your way to school? Does it matter that they were often destroyed by wind, rain and people? Why?

--In *The Cocktail Party* (<http://norulesnoshame.wordpress.com/2009/06/22/sandy-skoglund/sandyskoglund1/>) by Sandy Skoglund (Slide 9) the room, the furniture, even the guests, are made of Cheese Doodles. The installations are created by Skoglund so that she can photograph them and exhibit the images. In using cheese doodles Skoglund discusses the role of eating and ritual. Eating, in human society, is a ritual," Ms. Skoglund says. "The 'Cocktail Party' has got this artificial seemingly unnatural, color. The Cheese Doodles seem to be alive, like worms or caterpillars. Then you have the cocktail party, which is all about ritualistic behavior. We think about rituals in other societies, but we don't think of our own rituals." What if Skoglund covered the furniture, room and people with worms or caterpillars? How would you react to the work? What would you title this new work of art? Why?

Procedures: Part II – Create and Transfer

4. Show students images of everyday objects. As a group, brainstorm how they might get a viewer to “reconsider” the purpose of the object. Will they change the scale of the object, place the object in an unlikely environment, give the object a peculiar title, animate the object or juxtapose the object with an unlikely pairing? Have the students consider the following. Show examples after they have exhausted their ideas. French fries (<http://www.euphoria-magazine.com/photography/400-awesome-art-made-of-every-days-objects>), (Slide 10), eating utensils (<http://www.euphoria-magazine.com/photography/400-awesome-art-made-of-every-days-objects>) (Slide 11), office supplies (<http://www.euphoria-magazine.com/photography/400-awesome-art-made-of-every-days-objects>) (Slide 12), shoes (<http://modernart2011.blogspot.com/2011/04/red-model.html>) (Slide 13), food: ice cream bar (<http://www.ebsqart.com/Art/Food-Paintings/Acrylic-on-canvas/256941/650/650/Chocolate-Ice-Cream-Bar.jpg>) (Slide 14), apples (<http://www.ebsqart.com/Art/Still-Life-Paintings/Acrylic-on-canvas/255691/650/650/Two-Green-Apples.jpg>) (Slide 15).

5. Conclude by showing students two more examples of work by Cornelia Parker. *Thirty Pieces of Silver* (http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_r59OE_t0dXM/Sw7JsBMo23I/AAAAAAAAACY/iN_UUBT_y-k/s1600/cornelia+parker.jpg) (Slide 16) and *Breathless* (http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_fcQLhxXUm7E/TWVprKqU4tI/AAAAAAAAAC4/3jUWTD7VEPA/s1600/c+parker2.jpg) (Slide 17). Parker presents the viewer with installations of silverware and musical instruments that have been flattened with a steamroller. Why do you think she gave them the titles *Thirty Pieces of Silver* and *Breathless*? What would you title each piece? Why? In both art works the elements of the installations float. Why do you think the artist did this?

6. After the group discussion, have each student develop a list of items to “transform”. Ask them to elaborate on the list by describing how their choices might convey mystery to the viewer. Will they change the scale of the object, place the object in an unlikely environment, give the object a peculiar title, animate the object or juxtapose the object with an unlikely pairing?

7. Discuss the term mixed media. Have students determine what combinations of materials and approach (two or three-dimensional) will best communicate the intent of their art work. For students with less experience, teachers might limit the use of art materials and processes. Teachers could also introduce new materials and processes (i.e. printmaking, found object sculpture, digital and animation programs, Xerox transfer, etc.)

Discussing Student Work / Assessment

1. Have students display their art work around an open space. Have a gallery walk, allowing students time to view and reflect on each piece. Before students begin explain that they will act as “art critics” by reviewing the show, writing about one work they find intriguing.

2. Give students an outline to consider when studying the work. Students will also use the outline when writing their art review:

- Carefully describe the art work you are viewing. Be specific. Remember, the reader may not have seen the art work so you need to communicate the description clearly and accurately.
- Discuss how the artist has “transformed” a simple object to give it new meaning. Did the artist use scale, juxtaposition, irony, a “suggestive” title or any other artistic strategy? Explain.
- Was the intent of the artist communicated in the work? How? Students should discuss how art materials and the expressive characteristic of art (elements and principles) are used by the artist to “get their point across.” Remind students that they are not writing about whether the art work is “good or not”—but if the artistic intent is evident to the viewer.
- Ask students to share their reviews if comfortable. Give reviews to the artists and have them respond.

Standards and 21st Century Skills

All lessons created using the University Art Museum's Permanent Collection align with the four Colorado Model Content Standards for Visual Art:

1. Observe and Learn to **Comprehend**
2. Envision and Critique to **Reflect**
3. Invent and Discover to **Create**
4. Relate and Connect to **Transfer**

Since lessons are written so that teachers can modify them for a variety of grade levels and learning objectives they are not aligned to grade level expectations. Lessons are aligned to Prepared Graduate Competencies. PGCs addressed in this lesson include:

- Analyze, interpret, and make meaning of art and design critically using oral and written discourse
- Explain, demonstrate, and interpret a range of purposes of art and design, recognizing that the making and study of art and design can be approached from a variety of viewpoints, intelligences, and perspectives
- Recognize, interpret, and validate that the creative process builds on the development of ideas through a process of inquiry, discovery, and research
- Create works of art that articulate more sophisticated ideas, feelings, emotions, and points of view about art and design through an expanded use of media and technologies
- Recognize, compare, and affirm that the making and study of art and design can be approached from a variety of viewpoints, intelligences, and perspectives
- Critique personal work and the work of others with informed criteria
- Recognize, articulate, and implement critical thinking in the visual arts by synthesizing, evaluating, and analyzing visual information

Extensions

1. Older students can research the history of the London Tower; exploring the relationship between the history of the Tower, Parker's choice of a spider for the subject matter of the print and the title of the art work.
2. Explore digital printing techniques. Discuss with students that the difference between digital printing and traditional methods such as lithography, gravure, or letterpress is that no printing plates are used, resulting in a quicker and less expensive printing time. The most popular methods include inkjet or laser printers that deposit pigment or toner onto a wide variety of substrates including paper, photo paper, canvas, glass, metal and others.
3. Critique can be done orally with experienced students.

Relevance and Application:

- The inquiry skill sets of analyzing, assessing, and evaluating are valuable in becoming informed consumers of visual images in marketing and in mass media.
- Critique fluency encourages and develops higher-order thinking that builds a deeper awareness of details in the surrounding environment.
- Media choices, including technology, can imply meaning.
- Works of art reflect the artist's ideas, interests, and background.
- The persuasive quality in art can be enriched by the use of traditional and new technologies.
- A work of art allows the artist to communicate intended meaning to the viewer and evokes new meaning through the viewer's perspective.

**Colorado
State**
University

University Art Museum