about this guide

The Learning with ART21 Guide is a resource for introducing contemporary art and artists into classroom and community-based learning. Educators are encouraged to use this guide and other available resources on the ART21 website to encourage dialogue, facilitate critical inquiry, support research and exploration, and enhance curricula in a wide range of subject areas.
art21 films

Art in the Twenty-First Century
The first and only nationally broadcast public television series to focus exclusively on contemporary visual art and artists living in cities around the world, Art in the Twenty-First Century introduces audiences to a diverse group of established artists and to the art they are producing now:

art21.org/films/
art-in-the-twenty-first-century

New York Close Up
This series of two-to-eight-minute videos explores the lives of young artists living in New York City:

art21.org/newyorkcloseup

Exclusive
This series blends newly shot and previously unreleased archival footage of artists featured in the Art in the Twenty-First Century series and focuses on a singular aspect of an artist’s process:

art21.org/exclusive

Artist to Artist
This series features contemporary visual artists in conversation with their peers:

art21.org/artisttoartist

William Kentridge: Anything Is Possible
This one-hour Peabody Award–winning film provides an intimate look into the mind and creative process of South African artist William Kentridge:

art21.org/anythingispossible

All films are available for viewing online at art21.org. ART21 Art in the Twenty-First Century and William Kentridge: Anything Is Possible are also available download-to-own from the iTunes store, or may be ordered on DVD from ShopPBS and Davis Publications. ART21 New York Close Up, ART21 Exclusive, and ART21 Artist to Artist films are available on iTunes, YouTube, and Hulu.

art21 online

art21.org
All ART21 materials are available for free online. A growing stand-alone resource, the ART21 website highlights the works and words of artists featured in our films through interviews, artwork surveys, production stills, artist projects, and resources for educators.

blog.art21.org
ART21 Blog (previously the ART21 Blog) provides a space for insightful writing on contemporary art and artists. Regular columns, original editorial features, exclusive videos and interviews, and previously unpublished content from ART21’s rich archive all reflect the organization’s approach to stimulating critical reflection. Published six times per year, each issue of the magazine is devoted to a single theme.

pbs.org/art21
ART21 on pbs.org chronicles the television series Art in the Twenty-First Century, and presents the artists and themes featured in the PBS broadcast, complete episodes, and downloadable Educators’ Guides for each season.

social-media
Join ART21’s active online communities across multiple social-media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest.

what is art21?
ART21 is a nonprofit organization dedicated to introducing audiences to today’s visual artists, stimulating critical reflection and conversation through the production of films, books, artist projects, educational programs, and special events.

what is art21 education?
The ART21 Michael C. Sandler Education Program engages audiences in dialogue about contemporary art and the artists featured in ART21 films. ART21’s educational initiatives include the ART21 Educators program and learning community, interpretive resources, professional development workshops and lectures, participatory events, and screenings.

ART21’s educational initiatives are based on the organization’s belief that the art and ideas of contemporary visual artists are powerful models for creative and critical thinking across subjects and disciplines. Inspired by our films, in which contemporary artists talk about their motivations and methods, ART21 encourages educators and their students to think and work like artists, using thematic, inquiry-driven, process-oriented, playful, collaborative, and interdisciplinary strategies that reflect how artists think and make work today.
**What is contemporary art?**

ART21 defines contemporary art as the work of artists living in the twenty-first century. Contemporary artists dynamically combine materials, methods, and concepts that challenge traditional boundaries and defy easy definition. Contemporary art is distinguished by the very lack of a uniform organizing principle, ideology, or “ism.”

In a globalized world, contemporary artists give voice to the ever-changing cultural landscape.

The work of contemporary artists mirrors contemporary culture and society, offering audiences different ways to consider current ideas and rethink the familiar. Audiences play an active role in the process of constructing meaning about works of art, and some artists consider their artworks completed when the viewer contributes his or her personal reflections, experiences, opinions, and interpretations.

ART21 content encourages audiences to access their abilities to consider, react, and respond to visual art. Curiosity, openness, and dialogue are important tools for engaging with contemporary art. Instead of questioning whether a work of art is “good” or “bad,” the study of contemporary art requires a more open-ended methodology and an inquiry-based approach. Asking questions that ignite discussion and stimulate debate is an important first step toward appreciating and interpreting works of art and understanding different roles artists play in society and how art is connected to current events, themes, and questions pertinent to the world around them.

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Artists have long explored timelaid (and timeless) subject matter and represented the pertinent issues of their day. Today, artists continue to push the boundaries of what art is and how it can be made, joining a legacy of artistic innovation and dynamism that challenge traditional boundaries and defy easy definition. Contemporary art is distinguished by the very lack of a uniform organizing principle, ideology, or “ism.”

**About ART21 films**

In ART21 films, contemporary artists speak directly to the audience in their own words, reflecting on their lives, sources of inspiration, and working processes. ART21 films offer an opportunity to go behind the scenes and into the studios, galleries, and public spaces where artists plan, create, and exhibit their work.

**ART21 films convey why artists make work.**

When contemporary artists discuss their motivations and sources of inspiration, students are able to better understand different roles artists play in society and how art is connected to current events, themes, and questions pertinent to the world around them.


Mary Mattingly talks about her personal responsibility for the objects she owns in light of global manufacturing and supply chains in the ART21 *New York Close Up* film *Mary Mattingly Owns Up.*

Carrie Mae Weems discusses her project to re-present major events in the struggle for civil rights at a time when Barack Obama was running as the first Black candidate for president of the United States, in the ART21 *Art in the Twenty-First Century, Season 5 “Compassion” episode.*

**ART21 films show how artists make work.**

When artists describe their methods inside or outside of the studio, students see the myriad ways that art is created today. From digital tools to traditional media and materials, from working independently to collaborating with specialists, ART21 films offer an expanded sense of the artistic process and present new possibilities for how ideas can take form in a work of art.

Shahzia Sikander shares how she prepares and creates her artwork, reflecting on her life, sources of inspiration, and working processes in the ART21 *Art in the Twenty-First Century, Season 1 episode “Spirituality.”*

**Cindy Sherman talks about the props and costumes she uses to set the tone of her photographic portraits in the ART21 *Art in the Twenty-First Century, Season 5 episode “Transformation.”* Glenn Ligon produces one of his stencil paintings with a studio assistant in the ART21 *Art in the Twenty-First Century, Season 6 episode “History.”*

**ART21 films show what artists make.**

From museums and galleries to public spaces, the various contexts shown in ART21 films suggest the numerous ways artists can present their work to the public. As artists discuss their work, students hear how their own ideas about a work of art relate to the artists’ ideas and intentions.

Cao Fei discusses her avatar and project for Second Life, in the ART21 *Exclusive film Cao Fei: Avatars.*

Allora & Calzadilla talk about their collaborative sound installation *Clamor* in the ART21 *Art in the Twenty-First Century, Season 4 episode “Paradox.”

**Mark Dion takes viewers on a tour of his public work installed in the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle, Washington, in his ART21 Exclusive film Mark Dion: *Neukom Vivarium.*"**
artists and interdisciplinary learning

Driven by a broad spectrum of questions, curiosities, and conceptual concerns, artists featured in ART21 films approach their work through diverse materials and methods. How might the working methods of artists—not just the works of art they make—inspire creative approaches for teaching and learning?

The following strategies are part of an evolving list that draws parallels between the artistic process and the possibilities for educational inquiry.

1. Engage in purposeful inquiry that is significantly enhanced by the work or working methods of contemporary artists. Artists and their work should be essential to an investigation rather than just supporting the presentation, visualization, or illustration of ideas.
2. Synthesize ideas or collaborate with experts from different fields to develop broader perspectives, and to foster complex ideas that are derived from the significant contributions of artists or their work.
3. Bring together diverse disciplinary sources, perspectives, media, and materials to demonstrate or help students identify new ways of thinking with and in the arts, as well as with and in other disciplines.

Pursue questions and follow curiosities

Many artists do not work in a single medium or technique but instead explore an idea, situation, or question through multiple media and visual strategies. Often motivated by a specific question or curiosity, artists utilize diverse modes of production and representation to investigate the important issues and ideas of their time. See artists Mark Dion, Doris Salcedo, Mary Reid Kelley, Alfredo Jaar, Carrie Mae Weems, Do Ho Suh, Allora & Calzadilla, Mark Bradford, and Trevor Paglen.

Focus on process, experimentation, and play

The artistic process includes conceptualization, experimentation, problem solving, revision, re-conceptualization, and production. Artists constantly make choices and learn through the process of developing ideas while they respond to opportunities, challenges, and roadblocks in dynamic and creative ways. See artists Cai Guo-Qiang, Oliver Herring, Gabriel Orozco, Janine Antoni, Keltie Ferris, Bruce Nauman, Elliott Hundley, and David Altmejd.

Collaborate

Works of art can be produced in isolation or in collaboration with assistants, specialists, fabricators, or audiences. Collaboration allows artists to consider alternative perspectives, ideas, and approaches, and can lead to productive chemistries between separate fields of practice. These productive relationships can generate new forms of interdisciplinarity, thinking, making, and learning. See artists Allora & Calzadilla, Mel Chin, William Kentridge, Mary Mattingly, Al Weiwei, assume vivid astro focus, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Mary Reid Kelley.

Move from the personal to the social, political, and global

Artists combine personal interests, curiosities, and questions with opportunities to learn from others and extend their ideas into public discourse. By connecting personal ideas and experiences to broader social narratives and conversations, a work of art can inspire social interaction and engage others in exploring important ideas and questions that resonate universally. See artists Robert Adams, Kara Walker, Do Ho Suh, Tabaimo, Carrie Mae Weems, Julie Mehretu, Shahzia Sikander, Tania Bruguera, Trevor Paglen, and Laylah Ali.

Make connections to the past

Artists constantly reference the past—building on significant themes, critiquing outmoded models, researching forgotten or contested histories, or borrowing traditional methods and techniques to realize new ideas. Understanding historical precedent is an important part of providing context and informing our current experiences. Through comparing and contrasting contemporary ideas and historical examples, students are able to see how ideas evolve and how the past informs present-day trends and ideas. See artists Ilfico Mangano-Ovaille, Al Weiwei, Pierre Huyghe, Paul Pfeiffer, Mark Bradford, Fred Wilson, William Kentridge, Yinka Shonibare MBE, Eleanor Antin, Michael Ray Charles, and Kara Walker.

What is really important about our practice is criticality. We constantly want to question and have our work trigger a possibility of self-questioning and questioning about the world: ‘What is the nature of this thing that’s affecting me or that’s around me? What is the nature of my actions upon others or the place where I am at this moment?’ A lot of our projects are an opportunity to learn something about an area or an interest that we didn’t know much about, whether it’s abstract or philosophical or pragmatic. It’s always a chance to learn more about something in the world, and to formulate some kind of a response.

— Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla

The work that artists make reflects the ideas, issues, questions, and concerns of the particular time and place in which they live. These concerns invite important perspectives on enduring themes (stories, identity, power), connect to and comment on historical precedent, or explore multi-faceted questions and topics (ecology, consumption, change). The interdisciplinary nature of these concerns often requires the artists to venture into new areas of knowledge, or use visual strategies to grapple with ideas and questions in different disciplinary fields.

The work and working methods of contemporary artists can enhance teaching and learning in the arts and across subject areas. When drawing from the art, ideas, and methods of contemporary artists to support interdisciplinary inquiry, consider the following goals for achieving meaningful student learning:

1. Engage in meaningful discourse that is significantly enhanced by the work or working methods of visual artists. Artists and their work should be essential to an investigation rather than just supporting the presentation, visualization, or illustration of ideas.
2. Synthesize ideas or collaborate with experts from different fields to develop broader perspectives, and to foster complex ideas that are derived from the significant contributions of artists or their work.
3. Bring together diverse disciplinary sources, perspectives, media, and materials to demonstrate or help students identify new ways of thinking with and in the arts, as well as with and in other disciplines.

If there were only one day, it certainly would not be this one
facilitating conversations

Before focusing on a specific artist, film, or theme, a generative discussion about the role of art and artists in society and the evolution of art over time can help contextualize ideas about contemporary art and the work of artists today.

What is art, and why is it important? What role does art play in our society? What value is placed upon artists and their art, and why?

What makes something a work of art? Is art defined by particular boundaries? If so, what are they, and how have they changed over the course of history?

What is the role of the artist? How has this role changed over time?

What distinguishes visual art from other forms of visual communication, such as advertising, design, or photojournalism?

Who decides what a work of art means—the artist, the critic, the viewer? How do history and the passage of time affect the meaning of an artwork?

What are the most important skills an artist can have?

What materials and tools do artists use to create art today? Have the tools for making art changed over time?

Where do artists find inspiration?

What is the difference between working alone and collaborating on an artwork with fabricators, audiences, or others?

In addition to museums and galleries, where else can art be shown? How does the location or context of a work of art affect its meaning?

What are the subjects, issues, and themes important to artists working today?

What role does beauty play in contemporary art?

Does a work of art need to be beautiful? Why, or why not? Who decides what is beautiful?

key words

Appropriation: The act of borrowing imagery or forms to create something new. See artists Ellen Gallagher, Arturo Herrera, Jerey Holzer, Pierre Huyge, Paul Pfeiffer, Fred Wilson.

Collaboration: A cooperative working arrangement between an artist and another person, group, or institution. Artists often work in collaboration with a variety of specialists, assistants, colleagues, and audiences. Some artists even form long-term working partnerships with other artists—these are seen as distinct from collaborations, which are often temporary. See artists Allison & Calzadilla, assume vivid astro focus, Thomas Hirschhorn, William Kentridge.

Concept/Conceptual Art: A thought or idea; a frame of mind that can include imagination, opinion, logic, etc. Concept-based art emphasizes that the idea is equal to, if not more important than, the finished product. Conceptual art can take many forms, from photographs to texts to videos, while sometimes there is no object at all. Emphasizing the ways things are made more than how they look, conceptual art often raises questions about what a work of art can be. Conceptual art is also often difficult to collect or preserve, as it can be the artist’s own experience that is the work of art. See artists Marina Abramovic, Janine Antoni, Roni Horn, Alfredo Jaar, Wolfgang Laib, Maya Lin, Gabriel Orozco, Richard Tuttle.

Experimentation: Working with new or unfamiliar materials or media and experimenting or reconceiving their form and/ or function to create a work of art. See artists Matthew Barney, Cai Guo-Qiang, Oliver Herring, Illego Manglano-Ovalle, Judy Pfaff, Sarah Sze, James Turrell, Andrea Zittel.

Juxtaposition: The state or position of being placed close together or side-by-side, so as to permit comparison or contrast. Visual artists often use juxtaposition to reference existing images or ideas while suggesting new meanings. See artists John Baldessari, Mark Bradford, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Michael Ray Charles, Waltan Ford, Barbara Kruger, Ann Hamilton, Raymond Pettibon, Shahzia Sikander.

Process: An artist’s investigation, or the steps the artist takes to make a work of art. Processes differ widely from artist to artist. For many artists the process of making a work of art has become just as important, if not more important, than the final work of art itself. See artists Janine Antoni, Oliver Herring, Pierre Huyge, Joan Jonas, Gabriel Orozco, Pepo Osorio, Ursula von Rydingsvard. Additional vocabulary can be found on art21.org.

strategies for screening

Preview all content

In order to decide which artists or sections of the film are most appropriate and relevant, view all films before sharing with students to determine how you will actively engage them in the ideas presented.

Introduce multiple artists at once

Generate playlists of ART21 Exclusive or New York Close Up films (three to nine minutes each), or compile excerpts from longer ART21 Art in the Twenty-First Century—films (twelve to twenty minutes each) that reflect diverse voices, perspectives, approaches, or media.

Present diverse art-making forms or methods

Consider how ART21 films can introduce artistic genres or contexts that are often difficult to represent or discuss in two-dimensional reproductions, such as large-scale installations, performance art, digital media, and the spaces of exhibitions (museums or public spaces).

Watch part of a longer film

Focus in on a particular idea, artwork, quote, or question.

Ask students to take the lead

Ask a student to preview the film beforehand. He/she will introduce the film to the class and pause at different points to pose questions to the group.

Look at a film multiple times

In order to revisit specific questions throughout a unit of study, check in for new understandings after each viewing. Or view a film multiple times to hone in on a new idea or aspect of the artist and the artist’s work.

Look at the film after completing a unit of study

Students sometimes find it easier to comment on what they are watching after they have had their own experiences. Use films to identify techniques, materials, and ideas students have experienced, as well as to comment on differences in their own work or learning processes.

active viewing

strategies for introducing and reflecting

Use films to illustrate new words or ideas

Initiate lively discussions about terms such as “scale,” “installation,” or “utopia” by introducing short videos from ART21 Exclusive, New York Close Up, or segments of ART21 Art in the Twenty-First Century—artists discussing or enacting these ideas.

Tie in a question

Use a question from the Educators’ Guide or develop a broader question for students to consider before, during, and after viewing a film that ties into an idea or theme related to your curriculum. In addition, ask students to develop related questions of their own.

Read about the artist

Before viewing a film segment, familiarize students with the artist’s background and work. Share the “About the Artist” summary available at art21.org. Discuss key terms and adapt language as needed for younger students.

Visualize the work beforehand

After reading “About the Artist” or giving some background information, ask students to visualize, discuss, or write about what this artist’s work might look like, or how they might make it and with what materials.

Share works of art before viewing

Prior to viewing a film segment, look at a few of the works of art featured in that film. What can students learn before hearing the words of the artist? What questions do they have?

Share related artists and sources of inspiration

Look at related artists’ work or artists in history that inspired the ART21–featured artist. What do the artworks and artists have in common? How are they different? Initiate a discussion or writing exercise using “Before Viewing” questions.
in the museum

ART21 materials can support inquiry-driven, object-based teaching in museums and other collecting institutions. ART21 films on contemporary art and artists can generate entry points for the narratives and histories contained in an institution’s collection and exhibitions. From an art museum to a historic house, ART21 materials connect museum educators with interpretive content that promotes innovative and creative strategies for engaging museum audiences.

Investigate ART21 themes in connection with exhibition themes:
• View a thematic episode from Art in the Twenty-First Century such as “Ecology,” “History,” or “Protest” and connect the work or ideas of specific artists to works on view or the key themes driving an exhibition.
• Explore the bimonthly thematic issues of ART21 Magazine, such as “Becoming an Artist,” “Publics,” or “Revolution.”

Connect the artistic process to objects on view or in the collection:
• Compare different artistic methods, processes, and media to related objects on view.
• Use the ART21 Exclusive film series that focuses on singular aspects of an artist’s process.
• Facilitate discussion about a specific artist using the ART21 Educators’ Guides available for each season of ART21 Art in the Twenty-First Century.

Utilize the artist’s voice to add additional interpretive lenses to engage audiences:
• After asking viewers to form their own ideas and interpretations of a work on view, share an ART21 video to deepen or confirm viewers’ ideas.
• Juxtapose multiple interpretive lenses for considering and interpreting a work on view: personal ideas, the formal elements (aesthetic and technical aspects), the institutional or contextual interpretation of the work (wall text, exhibition titles, etc.), current social or political events or ideas, as well as the artist’s or author’s voice using quotes or ART21 video.

young students

ART21 films are produced for general audiences. For elementary and special education students, educators can adapt and support inquiry and reflection on the work of artists today by focusing on shorter sections of ART21 films, particular studio materials and media, as well as themes and key questions that will connect younger students to artist narratives and aspects of the creative process. Educators should preview all content to determine whether it is appropriate for students’ ages, maturity levels, and learning environments.

• What do artists do? See ART21 films featuring Fred Wilson, Vija Celmins, Lucas Blalock, Graciela Iturbide, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla.
• What are different materials and media that artists use? See ART21 films featuring Janine Antoni, Shahzia Sikander, Cai Guo-Qiang, Do Ho Suh, Arilene Shechet, and Arturo Herrera.
• What are different themes and questions artists explore? See ART21 films featuring Susan Rothenberg, Mark Dion, Pepón Osorio, Kiki Smith, Cindy Sherman, and LaToya Ruby Frazier.

Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla (Grades 3–8) “Paradox” episode from Season 4 of Art in the Twenty-First Century
Keywords: Humor, political expression, social/political commentary, the ephemeral
Related media: Public art, social commentary, film, sculpture
El Anatsui (Grades 2–8) “Change” episode from Season 6 of Art in the Twenty-First Century, and the ART21 Exclusive film El Anatsui: Studio Process
Keywords: collaboration, composition, arrangement/configuration, pattern, installation
Related media: collage, sculpture
Lucas Blalock (Grades 2–6) ART21 New York Close Up film Lucas Blalock’s 99¢ Store Still Lites
Keywords: everyday objects, transformation, process, problem solving
Related media: photography
Arturo Herrera (Grades 2–6) “Play” episode from Season 3 of ART21 Art in the Twenty-First Century and the ART21 Exclusive film Arturo Herrera: Failure
Keywords: play, juxtaposition, comics, abstraction, process, experimentation
Related media: collage
Tim Hawkinson (Grades 1–6) “Time” episode from Season 2 of ART21 Art in the Twenty-First Century
Keywords: tinkering, inventing, play, transformation, kinetic art, sound
Related media: sculpture, installation, sound art
Susan Rothenberg (Grades 3–6) ART21 Exclusive film Susan Rothenberg: Emotions
Keywords: color, abstraction, shapes, imperfection, process
Related media: painting
The landscape of educational standards is rapidly changing. In an effort to serve teachers across the United States in a variety of subject areas, ART21 provides resources that address the range of standards in visual art and other subject areas.

Common Core Standards
ART21 films support many of the English Language Arts Common Core Standards. ART21 films and the artworks they highlight are complex texts about which students can make arguments by finding and evaluating evidence. Contemporary artworks are particularly suited for open-ended inquiry and ART21’s educational materials offer many suggestions for encouraging discussion and for developing domain-specific academic vocabulary.

National Core Arts Standards for Visual Arts
Creating: ART21 films show artists using a wide range of traditional and nontraditional materials and tools as featured artists discuss their unique working methods and create work both independently and through collaborating with specialists and assistants.

Performing/Presenting/Producing: Artists included in ART21 films describe their sources of inspiration, their working processes, the work they create, and the contexts in which their work is presented. Students can critically compare these narratives and explore different approaches and contexts for presenting and sharing their work.

Responding: As the artists in the series discuss their sources of inspiration and interests, students are able to trace a work of art as it develops, seeing the range of decisions that are made along the way.

Connecting: The artists featured in ART21 films are involved in interdisciplinary inquiry and studio methods. Depending on their work, some engage the expertise of researchers, writers, historians, philosophers, mathematicians, and scientists, and offer models of how artistic inquiry connects to other subjects and methods.

Other Subject Area Standards
In addition to the Standards in Visual Arts, ART21 films and interpretive resources also support many of the national standards in Social Studies, English, and Science. To see how the work of contemporary artists featured in ART21 films connects to other subject areas, see page 5 on “artists and interdisciplinary learning.”

Workshops & Events
ART21 presents workshops for teachers in partnership with schools, school districts, and museums. Workshops introduce multimedia resources and related strategies for bringing contemporary art, artists, and themes into classroom and community learning.

Screenings
ART21 provides screening toolkits for every thematic episode presented in the ART21 Art in the Twenty-First Century-broadcast season. Toolkits support individual and institutional screening and discussion forums.

For more information about ART21 educational programs, contact education@art21.org.

To host a screening, contact access@art21.org.

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