

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Subject: Victor Cartagena
Discipline: Visual Art

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Detail from Victor Cartagena's *Invisible Nation* exhibit.
Still image from the SPARK story, 2008.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

SUBJECT

Victor Cartagena

GRADE RANGES

6-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts, Language Arts, Social Studies

OBJECTIVE

Understand the development of Victor Cartagena's artwork and its relationship to broader social themes and ideas, abstract concepts, and Salvadoran history. Develop visual, written, listening and speaking skills through looking at, creating and talking about visual artworks, focusing on Latino artists in America. Develop an expressive visual vocabulary with which to address personal, political, or social themes and ideas. Develop an understanding of the Salvadoran Civil War and its history.

STORY SYNOPSIS

The work of visual artist Victor Cartagena defies stylistic or cultural categories. Cartagena's installations, paintings, assemblages, and video-based work shift easily from medium to medium, while remaining resolutely political, fearlessly addressing thorny topical issues. Spark visits with Cartagena as he guides viewers through his artistic process.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing as a group.

Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance.

Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently.

Hands-on group projects in which students assist and support one another.

Critical reflection on personal expressions and how they are seen and received by others.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to the artwork of Victor Cartagena and other local artists
- To provide context for the understanding of the Salvadoran Civil War
- To inspire students to develop their own views on contemporary socio-political issues

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story about Victor Cartagena on DVD or VHS and related equipment or a computer with Internet access, navigation software, video projector, speakers and a sound card.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers.

Pencils, pens, and paper.

Scissors, glue, markers, colored pencils, collage materials such as magazines and fabric scraps.

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems



See more information on [Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at www.kqed.org/spark/education.

MEDIA MATTERS

The following Spark stories may be used for compare/contrast purposes:

Favianna Rodriguez, printmaker

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/spark/edguides.jsp>

Enrique Chagoya, printmaker

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/spark/edguides.jsp>

Caleb Duarte, painter and sculptor

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=15440>

Stephanie Syjuco, conceptual artist

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=22692>

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

The work of visual artist Victor Cartagena defies stylistic or cultural categories. Cartagena's installations, paintings, assemblages, and video-based work shift easily from medium to medium, while remaining resolutely provocative, causing his audience to think carefully about what are often thorny topical issues. Spark visits with Cartagena as he guides viewers through his artistic process.

Cartagena left his native El Salvador in 1985 and came alone to San Francisco at the age of 19, fleeing a bloody civil war that had begun in 1980. Growing up in the war politicized him at a young age. As a result, Cartagena's early work drew on his experiences from that terrible time of suffering, exploring memories and images from his experience of the civil war. As Cartagena's work developed, he began to turn his eye to his adopted home and beyond, taking on several of the major issues of the 21st century.

Spark visits the Galerìa de la Raza for Cartagena's "Invisible Nation" show, which deals directly with the challenges that many immigrants face when they arrive on American shores. Several of the works in the exhibition draw on a collection of passport portraits that Cartagena acquired from a photo store in downtown San Salvador. Since the outbreak of the Salvadoran Civil War more than 25 years ago, over 2 million people have come to America from Cartagena's native country. Arriving as refugees, many became low-paid laborers. Cartagena addresses their stories in an installation called *Labor Tea*, a pun on the word "liberty." Affixing the small photos to tea bags, the images are repeatedly dunked into teacups filled with water. As Cartagena explains, it's a strong commentary on the back-breaking work many recent immigrants perform, which sucks as much energy as possible out of the laborers before they are replaced with others.

Cartagena's work also relates to local issues in San Francisco's Mission District, like homelessness and gang warfare — issues that have touched the artist

directly. Cartagena's younger brother got involved with gangs and was shot. Partly in response to this, Cartagena created *Bang Bang Toy Gun*, an installation that combines dozens of toy guns suspended from the gallery ceiling with video images of young boys shooting toy guns directly at the camera. The piece speaks to a culture of violence that the artist sees in America, which he feels is supported by the Second Amendment to the American Constitution, which guarantees the rights of citizens to bear arms. The installation draws relationships between play violence and the real life violence that is part of the everyday reality of many young people, both here and in war torn regions.

Cartagena draws on contemporary world events in his work and the manner in which he has experienced them. On the eve of the Iraq war, Cartagena was at a dinner party with friends. Despite the fact that Cartagena and his friends were concerned about the impending invasion, they did not discuss it. The experience helped crystallize an idea that the artist had been exploring in his scrapbooks, eventually leading to *Con los Ojos Vendados (With their Eyes Blindfolded)*. The installation features an elegantly set an elegant table, with blindfolded faces made of bread dough served on the plates. The work evokes images of war prisoners and hostages, but also suggests American's detachment from the war, far from the horror of the conflict.

Victor Cartagena has exhibited throughout the Bay Area at Southern Exposure, Palo Alto Cultural Center, the University Art Museum at UC Berkeley, Galerìa de la Raza, New Langton Arts, Ampersand International Arts, Intersection for the Arts, Catharine Clark Gallery, Euphrat Museum, the Mission Cultural Center, MACLA/Center for Latino Arts, and the Sonoma Museum of Visual Arts, among others. Cartagena has also exhibited in New York, Philadelphia, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Japan, El Salvador, Spain, Belarus, Ecuador and Greece. He has served as Artist-in-Residence at ZEUM, Southern Exposure, and SF Art

Commission's Writers Corps, and has taught at New Age Academy.

THE BIG PICTURE

Victor Cartegena's early work was created in response to and as an exploration of the artist's experience with the Salvadoran Civil War. The war was especially brutal, claiming over 75 thousand lives, and turning more than a quarter of El Salvador's population into refugees. The Commission on the Truth, an official group that was formed in 1992 to determine the extent of the violence during the civil war, registered over 22 thousand complaints of serious acts of violence in only three months.

The Salvadoran Civil War broke out in 1980 after years of violent uprising and continued into the early 1990s. It was fought principally between the government of El Salvador and a coalition of guerilla groups known collectively as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) who opposed the ruling alliance of the right-wing military and an oligarchy of land-owning families.

At the end of 1979, the Revolutionary Government Junta (JRG), a group composed of reformist military officers and civilian leaders deposed the government of the president, General Carlos Humberto Romero. Despite the many reforms that the JRG instituted, fissures within the organization, the brutal assassination of dissenting leaders, and continued insurgency rapidly escalated into full-scale fighting between extreme right-wing and extreme left-wing factions.

Supported by Cuban aid, guerrilla leaders met in Havana in May 1980 to form the Unified Revolutionary Directorate (DRU). They further united with popular fronts by forming the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN-FDR) in October of that year, forming its military strategy by combining Maoist, Vietnamese, and Guevarist principles. The FMLN planned to consolidate revolutionaries of all ages in rural areas, while building urban support to prepare for a general overthrow of the state. Concerned with the emergence of a communist state, the United States backed the ruling right-wing government.

Though elections were held during the course of the war, they were compromised by paramilitary intimidation and boycott by the FMLN. An earthquake in the region in 1986 prompted a three-year period of negotiations that allowed the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador (CDHES) to come into being. The Commission published a lengthy report on the Mariona prison, outlining over 40 kinds of torture that political prisoners were routinely subjected to in the facility. The report also noted that United States servicemen stationed in El Salvador regularly supervised the torture.

In October 1987, Herbert Ernesto Anaya, the head of the CDHES was assassinated, spurring four days of protest, wherein Anaya's body was brought to the United States embassy and the Headquarters of the Salvadoran Armed Forces. Many in El Salvador held that the assassination of Anaya was ordered by the José Durante, the head of the Salvadoran State, in collusion with the armed forces and the United States embassy. The event prompted outcry from numerous countries and human rights organizations around the world.

The war continued to escalate until 1991, when negotiations between factions began to resume, in part due to pressure on the government from the United States for free elections. In April of that year, a truce was declared that culminated in the enactment of a new constitution in early 1992. The armed forces came under regulation, a police force comprised of civilians was established, and the FMLN became a legal political party.

RESOURCES – TEXTS

America's Watch: El Salvador's Decade of Terror. Human Rights Watch Books, Yale University Press, 1991.

Argueta, Jorge. *A Movie in My Pillow (Una Película en mi Almohada)*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 2001.

Bonner, Raymond. *Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy and El Salvador*. New York, NY: Times Books, 1984.

Camnitzer, Luis. *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.

Cordova, Carlos. *The Salvadoran-Americans*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005.

Dalton, Roque. *Poemas Clandestinos (Clandestine Poems)*. San Francisco: Solidarity Publications, 1984.

Gonzalez, Rita, et al. *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Kufeld, Adam. *El Salvador*. New York, NY: WW Norton and Co., 1990.

LeoGrande, William M. *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Montgomery, Tommie Sue. *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995

Whitfield, Teresa. *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995.

RESOURCES – WEB SITES

Victor Cartagena's website:
<http://www.victorcartagena.net/>

Bio on Cartagena and his work from Ampersand International Arts:
<http://www.ampersandintlarts.com/cartagena.history.html>

Description of the *Invisible Nations* exhibition from Flavorpill:
<http://flavorpill.com/sanfrancisco/events/2008/3/7/victor-cartagena-the-invisible-nation>

Wikipedia entry on the Salvadoran civil war:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvadoran_Civil_War

Wikipedia entry on the history of El Salvador:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_El_Salvador

Website for local Children's Book Author and Poet, Jorge Argueta: www.jorgeargueta.com
Argueta is available for classroom visits and his book, *A Movie in my Pillow* (listed above) was the first to address immigration during the Salvadoran Civil War from a child's perspective.

Sample photographs from Adam Kufeld's book, *El Salvador* (listed above)
http://www.atlasmagazine.com/photo/kufeld/ch01_p01.html

Report from The Commission for the Truth on El Salvador:
http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/el_salvador/tc_es_03151993_intro.html

VIDEO RESOURCES

For more videos and Educator Guides related to local Latino artists and conceptual artists, visit the Spark digital archives: www.KOED.org/Spark.

The following films are appropriate for college-level students but should be previewed by an instructor:

Salvador. Dir. Oliver Stone, 1986. 123 mins.

Voces Inocentes. Dir. Luis Mandoki, 2004. 120 mins.

Romero. Dir. John Duigan, 1989.

Enemies of War. Dir. Esther Cassidy, 2001
<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/enemiesofwar/>

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

Galería de la Raza
2857 24th Street at Bryant
San Francisco, CA 94110
415 826 8009
Open Tuesday 1pm – 7pm
Wednesday-Saturday Noon-6pm
<http://www.galeriadelaraza.org/>

Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts
2868 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
415 821-1155
<http://www.missionculturalcenter.org/>

Victor Cartagena was one of the founders of San Francisco State University's annual Community Service Learning trip to the rural Salvadoran village of Colima. To learn more, visit:
<http://www.sfsu.edu/~ocsl/>

SECTION III – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND WORDS AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Amnesia

Loss of memory, forgetfulness

Anatomy

Composition, structure, framework

Also refers to analysis and investigation

Anguish

Suffering, torment

Collage

An artistic composition made of various materials (e.g., paper, cloth, or wood) glued on a surface

Collusion

A secret agreement between two parties for a fraudulent or deceitful purpose

Compel

To force; to have a powerful and irresistible effect, influence, etc.

Complacency

Self satisfied, smug

Composition

The overall placement and organization of elements in a work of art, as well as the interrelationships between individual elements

Contemporary

Modern, current, up-to-date

Digest

Take in, process, absorb

Distraction

Diversion

Evolve

Develop, change

Guerrilla

A member of a band of irregular soldiers that uses guerrilla warfare, harassing the enemy by surprise raids, sabotaging communication and supply lines, etc.

Guevarist

A theory of communist revolution and a military strategy of guerilla warfare associated with Marxist revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guevarism>

Impending

Imminent, looming, about to happen

Installation art

The combining of elements into a singular artwork that is only located specifically in one place; an artwork that only exists in the place in which it was/is installed, and is not able to be relocated like a painting or a print

Medium

Particular material or form used to create a work of art

Metaphor

Picture in words Not a literal description, but a word or phrase usually applied to one thing is used to describe another e.g. heart of stone

Prophetic

Visionary, able to predict

Ravage

Devastate, wreak havoc, ruin

Refugee

A person who flees for refuge or safety, esp. to a foreign country, as in time of political upheaval, war, etc.

SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Introducing Victor Cartagena

Screen the Spark episode on Victor Cartagena. Ask students to take notes as they watch the segment, noting in particular their responses to his work. Play the segment a second time and ask students to focus on one piece of artwork and respond to the following questions;

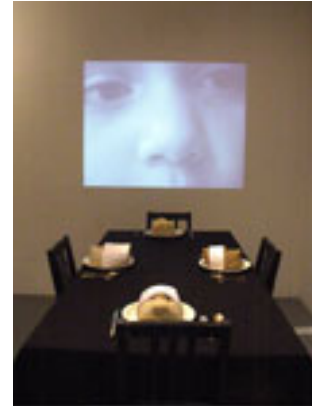
- Describe the piece in as much detail as possible
- Explain what it depicts - literally and metaphorically
- Is there a political message in the piece?
- Does it convey ideas and associations through metaphor or humor?
- Is the piece powerful/ compelling?
- Does it impact them emotionally or intellectually? In what ways?

Ask students to share their thoughts with the group.



Antomy of la Menitra (Anatomy of Lies),
Victor Cartagena
<http://www.victorcartagena.net/Installations/Installations.htm>

Invite students to discuss Victor Cartagena’s drive to “make art that challenges injustice and complacency” and his view that “art should say something” and encourage people to participate. Do they agree? Can art raise political awareness? Does Victor Cartagena achieve this goal with his work? Ask students to summarize the discussion in one or two paragraphs and conclude with their own view of the issue at stake i.e., the role of social and political critique in art.



Blindfolded, Victor Cartagena
<http://www.victorcartagena.net/Installations/Blindfolded/Blindfolded.htm>

SPARKLERS:

Topics for further discussion and exploration:

*Suggest that students compare Victor Cartagena with a Conceptual artist such as Stephanie Syjuco. In what ways is their approach to art different? In what ways is it the same? See Syjuco’s **SPARK** profile at <http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=22692> View the educator guide (page 7) for a brief introduction to Conceptual art.

Making Political Art

Suggest students work in small groups to discuss social or political issues they feel strongly about. Ask them to choose one issue that speaks to their group as a whole or an issue all students can align with.

Explain to the class that they will be working in these groups to create a mixed-media piece, an installation or collage, mural, or painting to interpret the issue through art. It is advisable to set up the project well in advance so that students have time to assemble materials. Provide basic materials such as glue sticks, scissors, paper, colored pencils and markers.

Ensure students have sufficient time to reflect on what they want to say, and how they want to say it. They will also need time in their groups to look through images, newsprint, symbols, fabric, labels, products, etc. and discuss how they want to represent their ideas. Advise them to think about incongruity in their piece – seemingly contradictory images or materials can elucidate an idea or challenge well-worn assumptions. Offer examples of how this can work.

When the work is complete, ask each group to present their installation, collage, mural or painting to the class, and encourage the larger group to ask questions about the message and artistic choices.

- What is the piece trying to say?
- Does the piece make its point effectively?
- Does it invite dialogue?
- Does it offer insight into the issue?

RELATED STANDARDS -VISUAL ARTS

Grade 8

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

4.2 Develop a theory about the artist's intent in a series of works of art, using reasoned statements to support personal opinions.

4.3 Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work

Grades 9-12, Proficient

1.5 Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work.

1.0 Artistic Perception

Analyze Art Elements and Principles of Design

1.3 Research and analyze the work of an artist and write about the artist's distinctive style and its contribution to the meaning of the work.

3.0 Historical & Cultural Context

3 Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.

RELATED STANDARDS -VISUAL ARTS

Grades 9-12, Advanced

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

4.2 Identify the intentions of artists creating contemporary works of art and explore the implications of those intentions.

5.0 *Connection, Relations & Applications*

5.2 Compare and contrast works of art, probing beyond the obvious and identifying psychological content found in the symbols and images.

SPARKERS:

*Explore the idea of metaphor versus symbol in art with students. The following web site can assist with this comparison.

http://instructional1.calstatela.edu/laa/sign_3.html

*Ask students to look carefully at Victor Cartagena's work to identify his use of metaphor. Draw on both the **SPARK** segment and Cartagena's website at <http://www.victorcartagena.net/> for this exercise.

*Victor Cartagena addresses political topics in his artwork. To contextualize his work, encourage students to research the history of El Salvador from the 1970s to gain insight into his background and the kind of memories he is working through.

Where is Latino Art?

Move on to explore Latino art by organizing a visit to the Galería de la Raza – “an interdisciplinary space for art, thought and activism” - and the Mission Cultural Center, both gallery spaces exhibited Victor Cartagena's work in 2008.

The group exhibit “Where is Latino Art?” at the Mission Cultural Center in April 2008 raised the question: What constitutes Latino art today? How do Latino artists self-identify in America today? *Johnny Ray Huston, from the BAY GUARDIAN (April 16, 2008) responds: “Here is where — and where is here? The multifaceted title of this group show more than hints that curator Anthony Torres and the artists he's assembled challenge old assumptions about what makes up Latino art and put forth ambiguous and truthful examples of what it can be.”* Encourage students to explore Latino artists today using the Mission Cultural Center website page listing artists included in the exhibit at:

<http://www.missionculturalcenter.org/gallery08.htm>

Students may also reference LAN, the Latino Arts Network of California site at,

http://web.mac.com/latinoartsnetwork/LAN/About_LAN.html

Additionally, students should explore the work of artists from other communities whose artwork appears to be influenced by traditional Latin American aesthetics. There are many more Spark videos that will provide further opportunities for research. Samples can be found on page 2 of this Educator Guide. For more ideas, visit Spark's digital archives: www.KQED.org/spark.

To support this exercise set up a projector in the classroom and project a selection of images from the websites of selected artists.

- Ask students to respond to the question posed by the “Where is Latino Art?” exhibit and discuss their ideas.
- Invite students to compare Cartagena with another local artist who makes art with political content.
- Conclude by asking students to write a short essay responding to the question: “Where is Latino Art?”

RELATED STANDARDS – SOCIAL STUDIES

Grades 10

10.10 Students analyze instances of nation-building in the contemporary world in at least two of the following regions or countries: the Middle East, Africa, Mexico and other parts of Latin America, and China.

1. Understand the challenges in the regions, including their geopolitical, cultural, military, and economic significance and the international relationships in which they are involved.
2. Describe the recent history of the regions, including political divisions and systems, key leaders, religious issues, natural features, resources, and population patterns.
3. Discuss the important trends in the regions today and whether they appear to serve the cause of individual freedom and democracy.

RELATED STANDARDS – LANGUAGE ARTS

1.0 Writing Strategies

Grades 6 – 8

1.4 Identify topics; ask and evaluate questions; develop ideas leading to inquiry, research, and investigation.

Grades 9 – 10

1.4 Use clear research questions and suitable research methods to elicit and present evidence from primary and secondary sources.

Grades 11 – 12

1.3 Structure ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way and support them with precise and relevant examples.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California State Content Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>