

Educator Guide

In April 2009, Gallery Crawl visited Stephen Wirtz Gallery and Rena Bransten Gallery to see the exhibitions **Violent Times** by Melanie Pullen, **Dark Mirror** by Marci Washington, and **Foreign Relations** by Tara Tucker. This guide provides resources for educators to support the utilization of this online virtual visit to the gallery to teach about contemporary art. The Gallery Crawl video can be found at www.KQED.org/gallerycrawl. Information about taking your students to the galleries can be found at the bottom of this guide.

Exhibitions *Violent Times*, *Dark Mirror*, and *Foreign Relations*

Location Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco [Google Map](#)

Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco [Google Map](#)

Grades 9 - 12

Standards Addressed Artistic Perception, Creative Expression, Aesthetic Valuing

*Note: Graphic images are included in this episode of Gallery Crawl, please preview the video to determine its appropriateness for your classroom.

The Exhibitions

Melanie Pullen's photographic series *Violent Times* was created on the heels of her highly regarded series, *High Fashion Crime Scenes*, which served as a critique of Americans' desensitization to violence, and the media's portrayal of criminal activities. For her *Violent Times* series, Pullen spent years researching historical photographs and paintings of images glamorizing war and violence. She recreated portraits of soldiers and historic battle scenes with the help of fashion models, movie studios, historians, and costume shops. Pullen also spent several years obtaining samples of substances used in biochemical warfare, such as anthrax, in order to photograph them as part of the *Violent Times* series. Inspired by the art of cinema and historical representation in photography and painting, Pullen challenges our views of world history through her photographs which take a crew of more than sixty people to create.

Tara Tucker uses animal imagery to express her views on political and environmental turmoil. She has spent many years perfecting her drawings of animals, and she recently gathered recycled materials to create a large hooked rug. More information from Rena Bransten Gallery's Web site: "Tara Tucker's meticulously rendered drawings portray bizarre yet realistic hybrid creatures from a future animal kingdom, free from the fetters of human intervention. Imagining the evolution of various species to survive climactic and environmental changes, Tucker documents the survival of the fittest through cross-species breeding and even imaginative flora-fauna mergers. Often displaying convincingly anthropomorphic emotions, such as anger or fear, the creatures' zoological accuracy is due to Tucker's familiarity with animal skeletons acquired in her youth by assisting her mother, a taxidermist at the local Natural History Museum."

Marci Washington illustrates an imagined haunting narrative, a story of cannibalism and vampirism that quietly allegorizes deeply-rooted problems in Capitalism. Her searing imagery is partly inspired by her interests in fashion photography and the dark, scary stories she read growing up. There is a multi-layered story behind Washington's artwork, some of which she has written out in narrative form. She created a 'zine to accompany her current exhibition at Rena Bransten Gallery to provide her audience with a glimpse of the story she is working to illustrate.

Teaching with Gallery Crawl

Using video in the classroom can breathe life and meaning into almost any lesson. In the arts, video can be particularly effective for introducing large concepts, aspects of the creative process, and key arts-related vocabulary to introduce students to discipline-based and concept-based study. Using media in the classroom helps connect students with artists and promotes critical viewing skills and media awareness. For more information about using media in the classroom download KQED's [Media Tips](#) teaching tool (a direct link is provided in the resource section of this guide).

Using a Gallery Crawl video in the classroom allows student to virtually view a local art exhibit, while listening to firsthand information about exhibitions from curators, gallerists, and artists. In order to present Gallery Crawl to your entire class, you will need a projector and computer with the capacity to stream video. Alternatively, assign students to watch the video on their own or in groups. Gallery Crawl is also available as a free video podcast on iTunes and YouTube. After soliciting student responses to the video, continue the lesson by implementing hands-on or discussion activities to deepen the impact of the media – ideas are provided in this guide.

Making the Most of your Virtual Visit

The following activity ideas may be used in the classroom after viewing the Gallery Crawl Video, **and/or** after a school tour of Stephen Wirtz Gallery or Rena Bransten Gallery.

- In this episode of Gallery Crawl, all three artists comment on issues that have pervaded American history – Melanie Pullen addresses the media and its desensitizing effects, Marci Washington critiques Capitalism, and Tara Tucker comments on political and environmental relationships through her animal imagery. Initiate a discussion about one or more of these topics with your students, using the Gallery Crawl video and the questions and ideas listed below as a starting point:

Do students feel desensitized to violent images they see in the news? What does it mean to be desensitized? How does Melanie Pullen's work critique the media? Invite students to research images of war on the internet or in the library. Ask them to find war-related photographs, then critique the images as a class. Do the images accurately represent the events? Why or why not?

How does Tara Tucker address environmental and political issues in her artwork? Why would she choose to use animals instead of humans in her drawings? What message is she trying to get across with her images of "hybrid" animals? Invite students to create an animal hybrid of their own, creating a mock-scientific drawing of the animal and charting its specific features, habits, and functions. Finally, Tucker's textile art pictured in the video is made of recycled materials and was created using the traditional American craft of rug hooking. Why might she have chosen to work with this technique? Can students list other traditional American craft techniques?

How does a Capitalist society work? What are the pros and cons of Capitalism? Marci Washington talks about her paintings being allegories for Capitalism – what is an allegory? Pause the Gallery Crawl video on images of Marci Washington's work and ask students to point out allegorical references. In addition, ask them to do a "free-write" about Marci's paintings,

inspiring their creative writing process by projecting images of her artwork from the Gallery Crawl video or from Rena Bransten Gallery's Web site (<http://www.renabranstengallery.com/Washington.html>). The artist has a story in her mind that reveals the meaning behind the paintings, what do students think the story is about? Who are the main characters? What is the plot?

- Challenge students to collect a series of images from home, Internet, magazines, etc. and to create a 'zine addressing one or more social issue(s) of their choosing. They may also include images they've drawn, painted, photographed, or created using digital media. Discuss the concept of a 'zine, exploring the idea of telling a story (beginning/middle/end) and visual flow (images that are related to one another through color, light, composition, subject, texture, etc. For instructions on making a 1-sheet mini 'zine, visit "The Pinky Show" Web site: http://www.pinkyshow.org/archives/minizines_help.html
- Talk about the idea of an embedded photographer – someone from a community – taking pictures of that community. Then compare it to a journalistic photographer who enters a scenario with the sole purpose of taking photographs. What are the differences? Look at works of the same place, people, or objects taken by different types of photographers by searching for a specific event in Google images (www.Google.com/images). What are the similarities and differences? Does one appear more "truthful" than the other? How is that expressed? What the points of view of the various photographers? How is that expressed?
- Discuss as a group the relationship of photography with truth. Because photography has an analogical relationship with objects and people in the world, it was long held as being a thoroughly truthful document, not manipulated for anyone's particular aims. Choose a number of photos that represent misrepresentations or falsehoods, such as Hippolyte Bayard's self-portrait called Drowned Man from 1840 (below), designed to play with the prevailing belief in photography as a document of truth at the end of the 19th century. Talk about the notion of truth and photography, showing contemporary examples of manipulated photographs. What techniques are used today to achieve similar effects?



Hippolyte Bayard, *Drowned Man*, 1840.
<http://commons.wikimedia.org>

Visiting the Galleries

Both Stephen Wirtz Gallery and Rena Bransten Gallery are located in Downtown San Francisco, CA. Melanie Pullen's exhibit will be on view through April 25th, 2009 and Marci Washington and Tara Tucker's exhibits will be on display through May 16th, 2009. For gallery hours and public transportation information, visit the galleries' Web sites listed below.

Resources to extend learning about the exhibits, art forms, and featured artists

Stephen Wirtz Gallery <http://www.wirtzgallery.com>

Rena Bransten Gallery <http://www.renabranstengallery.com>

Marci Washington's Web site <http://www.marciwashington.com/>

Melanie Pullen's Web site <http://www.melaniepullen.com>

Tara Tucker's Web site <http://taratucker.blogspot.com/>

KQED.org/Arts review of *A Complicated Dominion* exhibition featuring Tara Tucker
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/visualarts/article.jsp?essid=23024>

Wikipedia entry on History Painting http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_painting

Web site for the [Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery](#), including Educator Guides on portraiture.

Wikipedia entry on Traditional Rug Hooking http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_rug_hooking

For more educational resources about traditional American Craft, visit PBS's Craft in America Web site
<http://www.pbs.org/craftinamerica/>

The following KQED Spark documentaries may be used for compare/contrast purposes and to extend learning about contemporary art:

KQED Spark documentary about sculptor [David Hevel](#).

KQED Spark documentary about photographer [Catharine Wagner](#).

KQED Spark documentary about painter [Josephine Taylor](#).

KQED Spark documentary about photographer [Trevor Paglen](#).
An in-depth Spark Educator Guide accompanies this video.

KQED Spark documentary about textile artist [Anna Von Mertens](#).
An in-depth Spark Educator Guide accompanies this video.

Visit the KQED Spark Web site for additional Educator Guides and videos about local contemporary artists at www.KQED.org/spark. Also available are educator resources on media literacy and production, using video in the classroom, standards-based arts instruction, program development, and more. For more information about KQED's Arts Education resources, send an email to ArtsEd@KQED.org or call 800.723.3566.

Direct Links

- Gallery Crawl: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/gallerycrawl/>
- KQED "Media Tips" Tool: <http://www.kqed.org/assets/pdf/arts/programs/spark/video.pdf>
- Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery: <http://www.npg.si.edu/>
- David Hevel Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=15188>
- Catharine Wagner Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=4274>
- Trevor Paglen Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=5824>
- Josephine Taylor Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=16340>
- Anna Von Mertens Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=4163>
- Google Map, Stephen Wirtz Gallery
http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=49+Geary+St,+San+Francisco,+CA+94108&sl=37.0625,-95.677068&sspn=31.426353,55.898438&ie=UTF8&ll=37.789184,-122.404261&spn=0.007648,0.013647&z=16&iwloc=A
- Google Map, Rena Bransten Gallery
http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&q=77+Geary+St,+San+Francisco,+San+Francisco,+California+94108&sl=37.789184,-122.404261&sspn=0.007648,0.013647&ie=UTF8&cd=1&geocode=FYyYQAIduEC0-A&split=0&ll=37.789133,-122.40469&spn=0.007648,0.013647&z=16&iwloc=A