

Marie Watt: Lodge

Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University
February 4 – April 1, 2012

Teachers Guide

This guide is to help teachers prepare students for a field trip to the exhibition, *Marie Watt: Lodge* and offer ideas for leading self-guided groups through the galleries. Teachers, however, will need to consider the level and needs of their students in adapting these materials and lessons.

Goals

- To introduce students to the work of Marie Watt
- To explore the aesthetics and meaning of the materials the artist uses
- To explore the idea of community in Watt's work
- To explore the idea of memory and storytelling in Watt's work

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Discuss Marie Watt's use of blankets, their aesthetic qualities, and their many associations
- Discuss the various ways in which Watt engages a variety of communities in the creation of her work
- Discuss the role of memory, both individual and collective, in Watt's work and the objects she uses, and the role storytelling plays in sharing these memories
- Reflect upon their own stories and create works that express them

INDEX

INTRODUCTION by Rebecca Dobkins	3
BEFORE THE MUSEUM VISIT: <i>Dwelling</i>	4
AT THE MUSEUM (for self-guided tours)	7
AFTER THE MUSEUM VISIT: <i>Stadium</i>	8
RESOURCE	10
COMMON CURRICULUM GOALS	11
IMAGES: <i>Dwelling</i> and <i>Stadium</i> (with details)	12

INTRODUCTION

Rebecca Dobkins, Professor of Anthropology and Faculty Curator of Native American Art

A lodge is a space of welcome; at its center is a hearth, a place where stories are shared. A blanket becomes a lodge, a cave, a fort. A lodge can be both migratory and fixed: one comes home to a lodge, and can bring a lodge along to create home in new places. A lodge at once symbolizes the old, the grounded, and the possibility of relocation and reframing.

Marie Watt employs ordinary things to elicit the extraordinary everyday stories of human experience. Her work is simultaneously grounded in Native American art traditions and social history, twentieth-century modernist abstraction, and the rich, communal practices of American sewing bees and quilting circles. She is a practitioner of “social sculpture,” a formulation first associated with the German artist Josef Beuys (1921-1986) in the 1960s that holds that art should be participatory and has the power to effect transformations in the self and society. Watt invites the viewer to participate not only in the creation of the work but in the creation of personal and community meaning.

Born in 1967, Watt grew up in Redmond, Washington. She is fond of recalling a moment in kindergarten when she explained, “I was part cowboy and part Indian – my way of saying that my mom is Seneca and grew up at the Cattaraugus Reservation in upstate New York, and my dad, part German and part Scottish, grew up in a family of educators and ranchers who originally homesteaded ranchland in Wyoming.” Watt graduated from Willamette University in 1990, received a degree in Museum Studies at Santa Fe’s Institute of the American Indian Arts in 1992, and earned a MFA in painting and printmaking from Yale University in 1996. She is the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, among them the Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Arts (2005), the Bonnie Bronson Fellowship Award (2009), an Artistic Innovation Grant from the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation (2010), and a Smithsonian Institution Artist Research Fellowship (2011). *Marie Watt: Lodge*, composed of work from the last decade, features life stories told in multiple dimensions through the media of blankets, printmaking, sculpture, and digital media.

Artist Statement:

My work explores human stories and rituals implicit in everyday objects. I am interested in the history of wool blankets and their heirloom-like quality. Sigmund Freud considered blankets as “transitional” objects, but I like to consider how these humble pieces of cloth are transformational. Blankets are a part of how we are received into the world and also how we depart this world. Blankets are used for warmth and shelter. Children use them for hiding and to construct impromptu forts. A blanket is a catcher of dreams and a ledger of secrets. Wool blankets are the pelts of our animal relatives, the sheep. Blankets are bodylike.

BEFORE THE MUSEUM VISIT



Dwelling 2006

Reclaimed and new wool blankets, satin binding, thread,
manila tags, safety pins

Courtesy of the artist and PDX Contemporary, Portland,
Oregon

photo credit: The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut

About the Work:

Dwelling contains hundreds of blankets, and in its house-like scale, refers to the sheltering functions of ordinary wool blankets and of the stories associated with them. Watt first conceptualized *Dwelling* for the *No Reservations* exhibition project organized by The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut, in 2006. From the beginning, she designed it for community participation; a call to the Ridgefield-area community resulted in more than a hundred blankets from personal collections and then hours of volunteered time to sew satin and felt bindings on the 900 new wool blankets that comprised the installations. The purchased blankets were distributed at the end of the exhibition to regional organizations that provide social services to low-income community members. Here in Salem, artist Bonnie Hull and Willamette University biology professor Sharon Rose organized sewing circles to complete the bindings of 300 new blankets, which will ultimately be distributed to area residents in need.

The people who donated blankets from their personal collections for the original 2006 installation of *Dwelling* at The Aldrich Museum were asked to write their blankets' life story on tags that are now displayed with the work. Extraordinarily, the then seventy-six-year-old Peter Kubicek, from the borough of Queens, responded to the call for contributions by donating a blanket that he had been issued in a Nazi concentration camp. This is his blanket story:

This blanket was issued to me, together with a prisoner uniform, in March 1945, when I was transferred to the German concentration camp of Sachsenhausen.

This was the sixth camp in which I was imprisoned. I was fifteen years old. My identity was prisoner #119748. I had always been a skinny little kid, but by now I was reduced to a hollow-eyed skeleton. But the worst was yet to come.

Sachsenhausen was located a few miles north of Berlin. By this time the Russian Army was closing in and the decisive battle of Berlin was about to begin. At this point our SS masters decided that we must not fall into the hands of the Russians. So, on April 20 about 30,000 emaciated, weakened prisoners were forced on a northward trek on foot, one which became known as the infamous Hunger March.

Dressed in our blue-and-white striped uniforms, with our blankets rolled up and slung over one shoulder, we walked on and on. Whoever gave up walking was shot dead. We kept hearing the rifle shots and seeing small piles of executed prisoners lying sprawled in ditches alongside the road.

For the next twelve nights this blanket became effectively the only shelter separating me from the cold, hard earth, on which we were allowed to rest and sleep, and the dark, distant sky above. Finally on the second of May, I woke up to find that our German masters and executioners had disappeared during the night. I was a free man at last.

When I came to this country in 1946 I brought this blanket with me, as my only memento of what I call “my previous life.” Now – 60 years later – Marie Watt and The Aldrich Museum have transformed this shabby possession into a work of art: a truly unforeseen, but sweet and satisfying ending!

Peter Kubicek, Queens, New York

Watt has said that in receiving this blanket not only was she honored that Kubicek felt moved to share his story and contribute this intimate and painful memento of his “previous life,” but that it was also a confirmation of her belief that blankets “are storied objects and markers for memories and experiences.” Watt further reflects: Peter’s story made me realize I was a custodian or keeper of stories. Part of my responsibility is sharing the stories – not proselytizing or recording and shelving – but in the spirit in which these stories have been given to me, passing them on like an heirloom.”

DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

Before the Visit:

- Show students a wool blanket. Ask them to list:
 - words to describe the blanket they see (textures, colors, condition, etc.).
 - a blanket's uses (to keep warm, to build a fort, to sit on at a picnic, etc.).
 - feelings or ideas associated with a blanket (warmth, shelter, security, etc.).
- Ask students to think of a blanket they have at home, and to use the list above to describe it. Have them draw a picture or write a description of the blanket and share any stories attached to it (an heirloom, a baby blanket, one they play with, etc.). They may want to ask their parents or a family member for any stories they have about the blanket.
- Show students the image of *Dwelling*.
 - Ask them to describe what they see.
 - Discuss Marie Watt's use of the blanket, a common, everyday object in her artwork, and how it reflects her ideas about human experiences and the stories we all have to tell.
 - Share with them how it was made by stacking individual blankets to create an eight-foot tall sculpture, and the story of how she gathered the community's blankets and stories to create the work.
 - Discuss the piece as a community effort and an artwork that lives beyond the artist's original installation: blankets are added and taken away with each new installation and at each venue, a group of people, not necessarily including the artist, work to separate, lay out and stack the blankets.
 - Discuss the work using the parts and principles of art (line, shape, color, pattern texture, unity, etc.). If you were part of the installation team, what things would you have to take into consideration to create a visually interesting stack of blankets?
 - Ask students to describe how experiencing the work in person will be different than seeing a photograph in the classroom.

AT THE MUSEUM (for self-guided tours)

- Review with students what is expected – their task and museum behavior.
- Be selective – don't try to look at or talk about everything in the exhibition.
- Focus on the works of art. Encourage students to look closely at individual works and:
 - Describe what they see.
 - Describe how the artist used the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principals of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis).
- Note the various ways Marie Watt uses blankets and the blanket motif throughout the exhibition. How has she used the aesthetic qualities of the found blankets (color, pattern, texture, etc.)? How do our associations with blankets and their meanings influence our experience of the works?
- Explore the idea of storytelling in the exhibition, from the stories that speak to Marie Watt's experience as a woman of Native American and European American heritage and an artist, to those that speak to individuals and communities. Who is telling the stories? How are these stories shared?
- Spend some time with *Stadium: Jim Thorpe and Relations* (the interpretive information is included in the packet and also on the museum label) for the post-museum discussion and activity.

AFTER THE MUSEUM VISIT



Stadium: Jim Thorpe and Relations
2008

Reclaimed wool blankets, Pendleton stadium blanket, thread,
shedded antlers
Courtesy of the artist and PDX Contemporary, Portland,
Oregon

photo credit: Marie Watt Studio

Artist Statement:

Stadium: Jim Thorpe and Relations is part of a series of portraits and narratives related to the idea of Six Degrees and Seven Generations. I am interested in how a web of images might create a more telling story of who a person is, in contrast to an individual image. The six degrees of separation you may already be familiar with – referring to the idea that everyone is at an average of six introductions away from knowing another person. Seven Generations relates to an Iroquois concept and Indigenous philosophy of how our actions and decision-making affect not only the next generation, but also seven generations out. Similarly, the world as we know it has been shaped by those seven generations prior. With this as my framework, I have been investigating the intersection between lesser-known and iconic Native people with historic events and individuals from western civilization. I am interested in how these portraits are a catalyst for storytelling and a web of connections.

Marie Watt

About the Work:

Jim Thorpe (Sac and Fox, 1888-1953) has been called the greatest athlete of the twentieth century. In the first modern Olympics, in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1912, he won both the pentathlon and decathlon by wide margins, and was the star of the games. He was welcomed back to the U.S. with a celebratory ticker-tape parade on the streets of New York. Yet his medals were stripped from him after he was accused of having played semiprofessional baseball prior to the 1912 Olympics. He died in poverty in 1953; his Olympic medals were reinstated in 1982 after a long battle by his family. In this age of celebrity athletes, few Americans know about the first star athlete of the twentieth century and his American Indian identity.

Watt surrounds Thorpe in a web of his relations. These include Pop Warner, Thorpe's football coach at the Carlisle Indian School who, based on his experience coaching

Thorpe and other Carlisle athletes, went on to transform the way football is played; Dwight D. Eisenhower, who played against Thorpe in a 1912 Carlisle-West Point game that was seen as an early twentieth-century battle of the Indians versus the Cavalry, but with the Indians winning 27-6; George S. Patton, who was a teammate of Thorpe's on the 1912 Olympic pentathlon team; Sonny Sixkiller, a University of Washington football player of Cherokee descent important to Watt, in a sense her Jim Thorpe; and silhouettes of such other great athletes as Babe Ruth and Michael Jordan, who were voted first and second most important athletes of the twentieth century, ahead of Thorpe in a 1999 Associated Press Poll. Animated pairs of animal relatives complete the composition, framing Thorpe in a world of play, combat, and life-creating acts of reproduction.

Thorpe's palette relates to a sepia-toned photo with hand colored red elements; Patton similarly references a hand-painted photo. Pop Warner's palette might be compared to a black and white photo. Eisenhower's blue palette refers to the engraved postage stamp from which the image is derived. Sonny Sixkiller is more akin to a color photo while Babe Ruth and Michael Jordan are presented in black and white Victorian silhouettes.

DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

- Display the image of *Stadium* and review what you learned about the work of art while at the museum.
- Discuss the ideas of six degrees of separation and Seven Generations. Ask students to relate this to their own lives (personally and/or as a citizen living in the city, state, country or world today), and provide some examples.

Marie Watt has said that when it comes to creating a portrait, she is interested in how a web of images might provide a more telling story of who a person is, in contrast to an individual image.

- Have students create a self portrait with a web of images that reflects the ideas of Six Degrees and Seven Generations. Include people who inspire/influence your day to day life, people who inspire/influence your hopes and dreams, and the people who have inspired/influenced them (interview those you know and research the lives of those you don't). They can be family, friends, teachers, well-known people like writers, sports stars, politicians, scientists, performers – whoever you feel has helped make you the person you are today.

The images Marie Watt used in *Stadium* came from a variety of sources – sepia-toned photos that were colored by hand, black and white photos, colored photos, postage stamps and Victorian silhouettes.

- Using a large sheet of paper or posterboard, and a variety of media – drawing and painting; photographs; pictures from magazines, trading cards, postage stamps, badges, etc. – have students create a self portrait surrounded by images (even symbols) of the individuals who represent their six (or two, or three) degrees of separation and Seven Generations. Ask them to consider the following when creating their compositions:
 - How does the placement of the images reflect your relationships with the people they represent?
 - Marie Watt unified her images by making them all oval-shaped and added to the narrative by including the animal relatives. How can you use colors, shape, balance, etc. to create a visually interesting composition? What, if any, embellishments will you add to your composition? (frames for the images, related images that add to the narrative, etc.)
- Have students share their self portraits with others and discuss the people they chose, the way they represented them (media), and the decisions they made when creating their compositions.

RESOURCE:

Dobkins, Rebecca J., *Marie Watt: Lodge*. Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon. Distributed by University of Washington, Seattle, 2012

COMMON CURRICULUM GOALS

The suggested discussions and activities included in this packet can be used to support the following Common Curriculum Goals developed by the Oregon Department of Education. For specific benchmarks for your grade level check with your school district or the Oregon Public Education Network (O.P.E.N.)

www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=53

The Arts

Create, Present and Perform

- Create Present and Perform works of art.
- Apply the use of ideas, techniques and problem solving to the creative process and analyze the influence that choices have on the result.
- Express idea, moods and feelings through the arts and evaluate how well a work of art expresses one's intent.

Aesthetics and Criticism

- Use knowledge of technical, organizational and aesthetic elements to describe and analyze one's own art and the art of others.
- Respond to works of art, giving reasons for preferences.

Historical and Cultural Perspectives

- Identify both common and unique characteristics found in works of art from various time periods and cultures.
- Explain how a work of art reflects the artist's personal experience in a society or culture.

Language Arts

Writing

- Use a variety of written forms (e.g. journals, essays, short stories, poems, research papers) to express ideas and multiple media to create projects, presentations and publications.

Speaking and Listening

- Communicate knowledge of the topic, including relevant examples, facts, anecdotes and details.
- Demonstrate effective listening strategies.















