

# EDUCATOR GUIDE



Joan Tanner

*Flaw*

March 5, 2021 - August 8, 2021



## **Welcome!**

Dear Educators,

We are delighted for you join us, as the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) brings you the work of Joan Tanner March 5, 2021 - August 8, 2021.

In this site-specific installation, FLAW, Tanner will create a "mangled 'wave; made primarily with generic industrial materials." Tanners use of raw materials and forms will create a dynamic respond to Zaha Hadid's architecture.

Tanner's installation will not act just as a response but a challenge to the architecture. Taking an interest "in spatial discord and reconfiguration by way of stacking, building, sequence and chanced movement." Employing structures that appear makeshift and precarious, she deliberately realizes an aesthetic of "unfinishedness" -a principle at the heart of her artistic thinking that acknowledges the impermanence and change that governs our world.

We invite you to explore, create, immerse yourselves, and discover what stories, connections and lessons can be found within this exhibition.

Enjoy!

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## About the Artist

- Born in 1935 in Indianapolis, IN
- Received a BA in Fine art from the University of Wisconsin Madison in 1956.
- Tanner currently lives and works in Santa Barbara, CA.
- Notable solo exhibitions include the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (1967 and 1986), MCA Santa Barbara (1995), the Speed Museum (2001), Fresno Art Museum (2009), Suyama Space, Seattle (2016), and the Weatherspoon Art Museum (2017).
- Said to be “hooked” from watching her father practicing medicine, how he would worry about disease, malady, imperfections, and structural weaknesses.



## About Tanner's work

- Tanner's work often uses found, common, and industrial materials.
- Her practice has spanned everything from painting, sculpture, video to assemblage and installation.
- Her current work engages in the three-dimensional world, playing with ideas of precarity and impermanence through assemblage.
- Her artistic approach is multi-disciplinary and purposeful, although at times its appearance may deceive the viewer.
- Through assemblage she invokes questions about our connections to space, permanence, and precarity.

## Quotes

“The more that you extend something into its unstable aspect - for me, in my way of thinking - it's much more of a compelling idea. I think it has to do with the time we live in, where we live in a tremendous amount of chaos, we can't resolve problems that seem to be resolved once and then they can return with a same sort of vengeance.”

- Joan Tanner

## About *FLAW*

Californian artist Joan Tanner's oeuvre has evolved from her origins as a painter to the large sculptures and installations that now preoccupy her. Throughout her prolific, 60-year career Tanner has been absorbed with ideas of history, disruption, and inconsistency in her exploration of materials and form. Compelled by a "curiosity to engage contradiction" and an impulse to disrupt "assumptions about spatial relations," Tanner's work challenges the viewer's imagination and refuses simple categorization.

*FLAW* is a site-specific installation in the second-floor gallery at the CAC. Tanner says that "in one sense I'm thinking of the definition of *FLAW* as a short explosive storm, a squall." She sees *FLAW* "as an encounter with the challenging and powerful Brutalist aesthetic of Zaha Hadid's architecture," and describes it as a form that "accelerates" through the gallery space, "a mangled 'wave' made primarily with generic industrial materials."

Tanner's installations often fill whole gallery spaces and surround the viewer with distinctive arrays of curiously awkward yet oddly familiar forms. Each installation is simultaneously a response to the architecture that contains it but also a challenge to the authority that architecture holds over space. Tanner states that her interest is "in spatial discord and reconfiguration by way of stacking, bundling, sequence and chanced movement." Employing structures that appear makeshift and precarious, she deliberately realizes an aesthetic of "unfinishedness"—a principle at the heart of her artistic thinking that acknowledges the impermanence and change that governs our world.

## Vocabulary/Key words

Disjunction	Disruption	Inconsistency	Organic
Contingency	Resistance	Curiosity	Spatial relations
Assemblage	Installation	White Cube	Space
Four-dimensional	Tableau	Modernism	Arte povera
Spatial discord	Illogical	Tension	Site-specific

## Themes

*Disrupting the White Cube:* Tanner's work is purposefully discordant and defies consistency, in this way it resists the inherent authority of the "white cube" or formal gallery space. *FLAW* will have Tanner's work in direct conversation with the architecture of Zaha Hadid, sparking conversations about formality, impermanence, and the role of the viewer.

Materially, Tanner's use of found items - both industrial and natural - also protests the "cleanliness" and status of the traditional, white-walled gallery space. While the CAC is not architecturally a cube, it still evokes notions of class and hierarchy that *FLAW* is pushing against and being pulled by.

*Disjunction:* defined as "a lack of correspondence or consistency." Tanner's work uses a range of objects and materials that together might clash, feel inconsistent. At first impression, they might seem random, unplanned assemblages but we must understand that the artist works very purposefully in her material choices, deliberating over arrangements to evoke different kinds of emotions and curiosities.

*Discreteness/Connection:* In the assemblage, there are parts that stand alone more than other sections which seem to connect the whole work. The artist is intentionally playing with our expectations of the work as a "whole unit", using elements of connection, separation, and space to articulate how the work can be one and many pieces at once.

*Surrealist Thought:* Tanner's work exists in conversation with artists before her, including Louise Bourgeois, Marcel Duchamp, and Joan Miro. The artist looks to these other artists who investigated assemblage, the subconscious, and who rejected formalist demands of their time. We can see how Tanner's work is inspired by them because of her use of found materials, how she engages the space around the work, and how the art is kind of surreal or unconventional.

## **PRE-VISIT DISCUSSIONS**

### ***ABOUT THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER***

In 1939, Betty Pollak Rauh, Peggy Frank Crawford and Rita Rentschler Cushman took the advice of Edward M.M. Warburg, the founding father of the American Ballet and a founder of the Museum of Modern Art. He suggested that rather than stress about finding non-existent art jobs in New York, “Why not starting something in Cincinnati? Plenty of room there. If you decide to try, come and see me and I’ll help you.” By August of that year, Peggy Frank Crawford, Betty Pollack and Rita Rentschler raised \$5000 (about \$93,000 today) and created the Modern Art Society (MAS). For almost a year their “office” consisted of a letter file and a portable typewriter set up in one or another living room. Within a few years, the MAS had exhibited Renoir, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Picasso, Beckman, Klee and many more in the lower levels of the Cincinnati Art Museum. In 1952, the MAS changed their name to the Contemporary Arts Center and in 1964 they earned a space of their own in downtown Cincinnati. In 2003, the CAC moved into the Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art designed by architect Zaha Hadid. The NY Times called the structure, “the best new building since the Cold War.”

The Contemporary Arts Center is a non-collecting institution, meaning there is no permanent collection. All exhibitions are borrowed from artists, collectors and other art galleries and institutions. We strive to create exhibitions that allow visitors to “open their minds” to the arts, and to the dialogue that can be had when viewing contemporary art. We believe that art and the creative process belong to all people and that contemporary artists are an important part of how we see and interact with our world today.

### ***ABOUT THE LOIS & RICHARD ROSENTHAL CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS***

In the late 1990s, after acquiring the lot on which the Contemporary Arts Center now sits, a committee narrowed a field of over 300 architects chose to design the building—first to 97, then to 12 and finally 3 of the most exciting designers working in the world today. From them, a unanimous choice emerged: Baghdad-born, London-trained Zaha Hadid.

The decision was in keeping with the CAC's 60-year history of promoting the new. Though Hadid had been the subject of adulation, study and controversy, her work exhibited at major museums with international critical acclaim, she had only completed two freestanding structures during her career. As a largely untested inventor, a woman and an Arabic Muslim, Hadid had not found the construction world easy to enter. This renowned building is Hadid's first American building, and is the first American museum building designed by a woman. Groundbreaking took place in May 2001 and the new Center opened to rave reviews on May 31, 2003. The seven-story, 82,265 square-foot Contemporary Arts Center is named the Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art after the CAC's former Chairman of the Board and the most generous contributor to the new building. It sits on a narrow 11,000-square-foot footprint, and includes a 2,366-square-foot black box performance space.

Born in Iraq in 1950, Hadid received her degree in mathematics from the American University in Beirut and studied at the Architectural Association in London where she won the Diploma Prize in 1977. Upon graduation, Hadid became a partner at the Office of Metropolitan Architecture where she worked with influential architects Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis. Establishing her own practice in London in 1979, she soon gained international attention with her groundbreaking plan for the Peak International Design Competition for Hong Kong in 1983. In 2004, she became the first female recipient of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, which is the equivalent to the Nobel Prize for Architecture. In 2008, she was listed as one of Forbes Magazine's "100 Most Powerful Women," and in 2010, Time Magazine named her one of the "100 Most Influential People in the World," and UNESCO Artist for Peace. She was awarded the Stirling Prize for Architecture in 2010 and 2011. In 2012, Hadid was awarded Damehood by Queen Elizabeth II. And, in 2015, she received the Royal Gold Medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects. Hadid died in 2016.

## **RULES AND GUIDELINES**

- Visitor admission and school tours are free at the Contemporary Arts Center.
- We require that there must be a chaperone for every 5 students under the age of 18 for self-guided groups. For docent-led tours, the required ratio is 1 to 10 for students through grade 5 and 1 to 15 for students grades 6-12.



- No backpacks, coats or lunches are permitted in the galleries, but personal belongings may be stored in the large bins or lockers we have available. Instructors may keep any emergency bags and purses with them.
- Currently photography is permitted in all areas of the museum. The CAC encourages you to post photos to various social media sites using @CincyCAC and #CincyCAC.
- Pens are not permitted in the gallery spaces. Pencils are available for use at the front desk.
- Walk throughout all galleries- no running, climbing, or roughhousing. If visiting with students under 18 please provide guidance and supervision.

## **ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION**

- Our facility is ADA compliant and we will make every effort to provide accommodations when requested.
- Hearing protection is available upon request.
- Fidgets are available upon request.
- Sensory maps and social stories are available upon request.
- Large text is available upon request.
- Two quiet spaces are available—the Lower Level Lobby and the Contemplation Room.
- For further inquiries or requests, please contact Shawnee Turner at [sturner@cincycac.org](mailto:sturner@cincycac.org)

## **ARTWORK DISCUSSIONS**

*These discussions can occur prior to, during and after viewing.*

- What does this look like? Does it resemble anything in real life? Is it abstract?
- Why would the artist make something like this?
- The artist is said to run her studio “like a laboratory.” Is an artist like a scientist? What kind of experiments do artists do?
- How do you think these were made? What kinds of materials do you see? Why do you think the artist used these materials?

- How does the art affect the space around it? Does it make you think about the space around it differently, how so?
- What is the difference, to you, between sculpture and installation?
- Does the art look organized, purposeful? Do you think it is all intentional?
- Does the work become part of the architecture? Does it create tension?

## LESSON PLAN IDEAS

- Tanner's work is a great example of experimentation and a response to materials. Using simple materials students can build and use creative problem solving. While students are getting familiar with Tanner's work it is a great opportunity to discuss form, color, space, line and composition.
  - K-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade
 

Using recycled materials students will work together or individually to create a free-standing sculpture. It would be helpful to prompt them to make a structure as tall or wide as they can by stacking items.
  - 3-5<sup>th</sup> Grade
 

Using recycled and found material students will work together or individually to build organic sculptures. By incorporating scissors students can create slots in cardboard to connect their materials and make more complex sculptures. Acrylic or tempera paint could be used to add color. Once dry students could focus on installing their sculptures somewhere in the classroom or at home. Once they have found a space to install their work, students may add additional elements in response to their chosen space.
  - 6-12<sup>th</sup> Grade
 

Using recycled and found materials students will work together or individually to construct organic installations. First students will need to locate a space for their installation. This could be somewhere in their classroom or in their home. Next students will create a design plan. Using paper and pencil students will sketch ideas for their installations. Tanner's work offers a lesson in compiling shape, line and color to create free flowing installations. It may be helpful for students to look at her work for ideas and inspiration. Additional materials needed will be scissors, glue sticks, hole punch and fishing line/string/yarn. With these materials students will be able to

attach items together by making tabs, slots, or tying them together. Students will then build and install their works of art adding color through paint, markers or colored paper. After students have completed their installations, they will write 3-4 sentences on their piece response to and/or challenges the space around it.

## **ARTWORK AND WALL TEXT INFORMATION**

### **Introductory Wall Text**

During her prolific, five-decade long career, Joan Tanner has worked in painting, photography, video, sculpture, and assemblage. Compelled by a “curiosity to engage contradiction” and an impulse to disrupt “assumptions about spatial relations,” she explores ideas of history, impermanence, and inconsistency. In her assemblages and installations, Tanner plays with the makeshift and precarious in such a manner that form unfolds as a reflection on temporality—of development and decay—in ways that seem purposefully unresolved. Tanner’s provocative and engaging work challenges the viewer’s imagination and defies categorization.

*FLAW* continues Tanner’s professed interest in disjunction and inconsistency. In this site-specific installation, net-like structures hang from the ceiling; corrugated fiberglass panels disguise corners, wrap around columns, and bloat outward; freestanding elements of cut and painted wood congregate in mass. Tanner both embraces and challenges Zaha Hadid’s building by displacing attention from the neutral space of the gallery and toward the building’s aesthetic. As much as *FLAW* responds to Hadid’s architecture, it is also deploying a discordant vocabulary of objects as a form of resistance to the authority of the white cube. This stems, on her part, from the artist’s desire to acknowledge the contingent nature of the artwork, its dependence upon both place and time, and the presence of the viewer. And, it is a contingency made all the more complex by Tanner’s continual recycling and reshaping of the elements that make up her installations.

## **RESOURCES**

<https://www.joantanner.com/>

<http://inthemake.com/joan-tanner/>

<https://under-main.com/tag/joan-tanner/>

Video: "everything could be something else" Joan Tanner

<https://vimeo.com/59329168>

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-07-31-ca-29796-story.html>

<https://carolinianuncg.com/2017/02/08/joan-tanner-donottellmewhereibelong/>

<http://museumofperipheralart.blogspot.com/2014/02/shes-tanner-in-california.html>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/arte-povera>

## **LEARNING STANDARDS**

Common Core Standards

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

Ohio Common Core Links

<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/OLS-Graphic-Sections/Learning-Standards>

<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Fine-Arts/Fine-Arts-Standards>

Kentucky Common Core Links

<https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/standards/kyacadstand/Pages/default.aspx>

[https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/standards/kyacadstand/Documents/Kentucky\\_Academic\\_Standards\\_Arts\\_and\\_Humanities.pdf](https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/standards/kyacadstand/Documents/Kentucky_Academic_Standards_Arts_and_Humanities.pdf)

Indiana Standards Links

<https://www.doe.in.gov/standards>

<https://www.doe.in.gov/standards/fine-arts-dance-music-theatre-visual-arts>

Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change  
<http://www.animatingdemocracy.org/aesthetic-perspectives>