ROBERT O’NEAL: CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

“I work with the arts, and I work in the community. And art is, after all, the feelings and emotions of the community.”

GRADE LEVEL: 6-12

OBJECTIVE

Many artists create work that intersects with political activism and social justice causes. In this research based lesson, students will explore the life and art of Robert O’Neal through the lens of contemporary public art, analyzing and discussing the concepts around art and activism. Students will then create their own “pitch” and design for a public mural - in the style of the artist - inspired by issues and conversations in their community.

VOCABULARY

- Civics
- Interpretation
- Community Organizing
- Black Arts Movement (BAM)
- Identity
- Community
- Advocacy
- Activism

MATERIALS

- computer, tablet
- printed mural guide of Downtown Cincinnati via ArtWorks
- miscellaneous art materials

PRE-DISCUSSION

- Use the educator guide to familiarize yourself with the exhibition.
- Discuss identity, community, and belonging. Where do these themes come up in the exhibition?
  - How does O’Neal find ways to discuss these topics visually?
  - How do you – the student - define these ideas? Are your definitions the same or different from those depicted by the artist?
- Where do you find your community? Is it where you were born or somewhere else? What communities are you a part of?
ACTIVITY

- Provide each student with a printable mural map packet (6 pgs.). Working in small groups, have students identify murals they have seen in person. How did the student first encounter the art? (e.g., from the school bus window, while walking to a sporting event)
- After students have had time to review the maps and murals, come together as a class to share favorites:
  - Are there some works that are more popular or recognized than others?
  - Are there themes/symbols/ideas that emerge as patterns among those identified works?
- Next, compare the murals to the works from the O’Neal exhibit and repeat the question from the previous prompt: Are there themes/symbols/ideas that emerge as patterns between O’Neal’s art and the contemporary murals?
- Finally – in the small groups – imagine you are being commissioned to design a new mural for ArtWorks:
  - Write a short proposal in which you explain the design of your mural and include a description of its significant historical figures, people or groups, landmarks or other objects, and any text that you plan to include on your mural.
  - Sketch a rough draft of the mural that includes large details like shape of mural, location of images in mural, and colors to be used. Does your mural design address an issue that is seen in another piece of public art in the city – why or why not?

RESOURCES

Note: more resources can be found in the exhibit Educator Guide.
- https://cet.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/art_socialjustice/
- https://americanart.si.edu/education/oh-freedom/resources/glossary
- https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Fine-Arts/Fine-Arts-Resources