

Craft Contemporary

Lesson Plan Expressive Embroidery

Essential Question How can we use simple embroidered lines, shapes and colors to represent a special place and the feelings and emotions associated with it.

Grade 6th - 12th (lesson plan will be scaled depending on grade level and lesson time)

Time 2 hours

Please note: Groups larger than 25 students may be divided into two. One group will start with the workshop and the other will start in the galleries. After 1 hour the groups will switch for the remaining hour.

Art Concepts Embroidery, Mixed Media, Symbolism

Materials Embroidery hoop, embroidery floss, plastic needle, burlap, yarn, scissors

Artworks/Exhibition in Focus *Strings of Desire* exhibition: Jordan Nassar, Ken Gun Mi, Carmen Mardonez

Vocabulary

Embroidery- the craft of forming decorative designs with hand needlework.

Motif- a stitched shape in embroidery. Motifs can be repeated again and again to create patterns.

Symbol- an object, shape, color or picture that represents something else.

Color- Color is what you see when light shines off an object. Different colors (red, blue, yellow, green, orange, purple) can symbolize different meanings and emotions. The color red often represents anger but also is used in traffic lights to mean stop.

Identity & Culture- Simply put – your identity is 'who you are'. Identity can mean different things to different people. It might include who you hang out with, what music you listen to, where you live or what ethnicity you are. Culture is a pattern of behavior shared by a society, or group of people. Many different things make up a society's culture. These things include food, language, clothing, tools, music, arts, customs, beliefs, and religion.

Rebellion - A rebellion is when people refuse to obey orders and fight against authority or set of rules. Those who do this are "rebels".

VISITING THE GALLERIES

Introduction

Who has been to a museum before? What are some of the do's and don'ts while we are in the galleries?

- **No touching artworks:** please help us to protect you (the students) and artworks on view by not touching artworks, or leaning against walls when visiting the galleries.
- **Look and be aware of the space around you:** we have artworks everywhere, on the walls, floor and ceiling so make sure you don't step on or bump into objects.

- **Listen to educators and each other:** we will be discussing our opinions and ideas about artworks and we want to make sure everyone's opinion is heard and respected.
- **Masks:** are encouraged for all students, teachers, and chaperones while indoors.
- **No food and drink in the galleries:** students must leave lunches, snacks and drinks in their bags which can be stored at the front desk on arrival.

What is Craft?

Craft has been described as the skilled creation of objects, installations and other artworks using metal, fiber (thread, fabric, etc.), glass, clay and wood. The artists we will look at today, use some of these different materials in their art to create meaning. Craft is often collaborative and involves techniques, colors, patterns and ideas passed on between people in different cultures and communities.

What is embroidery? Embroidery is the craft of making designs with needle and thread (by hand or using a machine).[Hold up embroidery sample] Does anyone here have a family member or someone in their community that embroiders or does needle point? What kinds of objects or things did they make? Has anyone ever done it themselves?

We are going to look at some artworks made by multiple artists of different genders and from different places and backgrounds. All of these artists use embroidery in their own unique way. Let's see if they challenge what we think about embroidery and give us new ideas!

Artwork 1 : Jordan Nassar

Our first stop in the gallery is Jordan Nassar's detailed embroidery artworks. What do you see here? [patterns, colors, mountains, sky, materials - fabric and thread only].

How long do you think just one of these embroidery pieces takes to complete? It can take six weeks to complete one work! The artist works about seven hours a day embroidering- that's as long as a day at school, can you imagine stitching for so many hours straight?!

This style of embroidery is called *tatreez* and is from Palestine, where some of the artist's family is from. Palestine is a place in West Asia. Has anyone heard of Palestine or Asia before? Raise your hand.

Jordan's grandfather was from Palestine before he moved to the United States which is where Jordan was born and where he grew up. Is anyone or anyone's family member from a different country outside of the US? Raise your hand. Jordan grew up seeing many objects from Palestine, which were very special to him because they connected him to his family history.

Let's go back to looking at the work. You noticed that we see a landscape in this artwork with mountains. Have you seen a place like this before? Where? Landscapes are very common in Palestinian embroidery and they are Jordan's favorite thing to create. Jordan is proud to be Palestinian and practices embroidery to celebrate the crafts of his ancestors.

This style of embroidery is more than just art, it's like a language- because the colors, shapes and patterns have different meanings. Let's look closer and find out what these colors and shapes mean.

Look at the red color in this artwork. What different meanings could the color red have? Red can have lots of different meanings. In Palestinian red stitches can symbolize beauty and life. Red reminds us of blood, which keeps us alive.

We don't know exactly why Jordan used all of these colors and shapes but let's imagine what a few more of the colors could mean. How about the green, red and black? What shapes do we see in the work?
[Triangles]



[Hold up image of Palestine flag] Shapes and colors have powerful meanings for us because they communicate ideas without words. This is the Palestinian flag, can you see any similar colors and shapes in Jordan's work? The triangle motif in Jordan's work is a very popular motif in Palestinian embroidery.

[Partner talk] Imagine that you are making an artwork inspired by your family and culture. What would it look like? What materials would you use? What colors would you choose? If your family is from another country you could be inspired by that place.

[Transition] Jordan's work is a more traditional type of embroidery that we often see. Very detailed and just using fabric, needle, and thread. Now we are going to see an artist who uses embroidery in a different way.

Artwork 2: Ken Gun Min, *Night Lake* (2022)

Let's look at this artwork by Ken Gun Min. What do you notice? How is this artwork similar or different to Jordan Nassar's artwork? [place, different materials - paint, beads, crystals, embroidery, swans, water, trees]

Ken builds his artwork with paint and layers it with fabric, embroidery, crystals and beads. All of the materials here are a part of the artist's universe which include his memories of places he has lived and inspiration from photos he has taken.

Let's talk a little bit about the artist, Ken is from Korea but has lived in multiple cities around the world, now he lives in Los Angeles. He combines art materials and techniques from all of the places he has lived in.

What kind of place might this be? What time of day do you think it is? What do you see that makes you say that? The setting of this painting is inspired by a real place here in Los Angeles, can you guess where? The artwork is called *Night Lake* and it was inspired by MacArthur Park Lake which is near where the artist Ken Gun Min currently lives.

[Partner talk] Look at all the dark and light colors and shiny reflective objects and textures. Imagine you could step into this artwork. What might it feel like to be in this place? What words would you use to describe the mood or emotion of this place? Does anyone have any different opinions about how this makes them feel? Which area in the painting is the darkest and which is the most colorful? How would each area make you feel if you walked through it?

Artists can use light and dark colors and different textures to create emotion, mood and meaning. Ken has created an artwork about the place he lives which also makes us feel something, and has a strong sense of mood.

Ken is a gay man and when he was growing up in Korea he did not always feel like he fit in. He found that he fit in better and found community in some of the places he traveled to. Have you ever felt that you didn't fit in somewhere? Life is full of different experiences and moods, some dark, some light, some joyous and happy, some tragic, difficult or sad - we can see all of that in this artwork - and isn't it powerful that shapes, colors, tones and textures can reflect those emotions?!

Activity

Use simple shapes to draw a place that is special to you. Use shading to create shadow and mood. You could combine more than one place into your drawing. It doesn't have to look exactly how it does in real life, like Ken you can add abstract shapes and details from your imagination to show how you feel about the place.

[Transition] We are now going to look at an artwork that involves freestyle embroidery. What does the word freestyle mean to you? Maybe you have heard of freestyle rap or dance! The word free is in the word so what does that tell us? If I tell you we are going to see freestyle embroidery what might that look like?

Artwork 3: Carmen Mardonez, *All-Nighter (2022)*. *Dusk (2022)*. *Twilight (2022)*.

These artworks are by Carmen Mardonez who is from Chile in South America. Do these artworks fit with what you thought freestyle embroidery would look like? Look at Jordan's work compared to Carmen's. What is different about it? [tightly stitched and made up of neat patterns vs. Carmen's work is all tangled, layered strings, stitched into a 3D object.] Instead of making artwork that looks "perfect" she wants to experiment with color and texture. She is not interested in making a neat piece of embroidery, she wants to make work that expresses her feelings!

Do these colors remind you of anything? [flowers, nature, sunsets, feminine]

Carmen is often inspired by pictures of nature; in this case she is inspired by the colors of the sunset. Have you ever seen these colors when the sun sets in Los Angeles?

When we think of embroidery, what type of person do we think of? What gender might they be? There has been a long history of women being expected to use needle and thread to create neat and tidy stitches, to mend things around the home or create functional items. Carmen is breaking free from this idea with her freestyle embroidery—she is rebelling against some of the traditional rules of embroidery and she says "I love the mess!"

Activity [if time]

Use coloring tools to add color to your drawing of a special place. You don't have to follow the rules, you can add new shapes, and use colors that aren't real. You could also choose colors that have special meaning to you, or tell us how you feel about the place, or how you are feeling today.

[For groups who are divided into two]

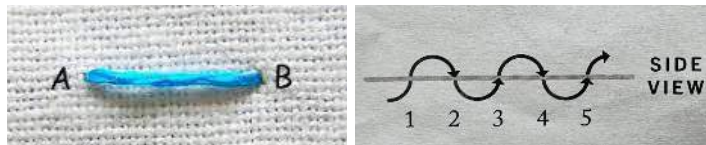
- Group 1 This may be used as inspiration for the embroidery you will be making.
- Group 2 You could take inspiration from the embroidery you created in the workshop.

VISITING THE WORKSHOP

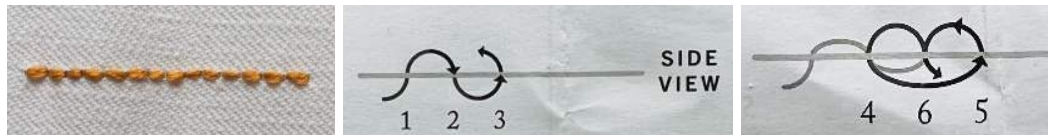
Artists Carmen Mardonez, Ken Gun Min and Jordan Nassar all create work inspired by landscapes and nature. Inspired by Carmen's freestyle embroidery, Ken's use of color and textures, and Jordan's use of simple shapes, students will be using vibrantly colored textured yarns and threads to learn the basics of embroidery and create their own embroidered piece. They can choose colors that have special meaning to them or simple shapes that remind them of a special place.

1. Let's look at our embroidery materials and identify them. Each of you has an embroidery hoop (which stretches the fabric and keeps it flat), burlap (fabric), a needle, and thread. We are going to start with one color of thread to learn how to embroider and then later we will experiment with different colors.
2. Let's start by prepping our thread! Unravel a strand of thread about arms length and cut it. Feed the thread through the eye of your needle. The eye is the hole at the top of the needle. Pull the thread through until you have a long tail, there should be two long strands sticking out of both sides of the needle.
3. Before we start there is just one important rule to keep in mind. **YOU CAN ONLY EMBROIDER ON THE INSIDE OF YOUR CIRCULAR HOOP!** Not on the fabric outside/around the hoop. When we start stitching, stay inside the circle.
4. We normally start from the back of your embroidery hoop [show front and back] and tie off our thread, but in the spirit of Carmen's freestyle approach we will let our thread hang loose. Take your needle and poke through the fabric. Pull it through the other side but not all the way. Leave a finger's length of floss on the backside of the hoop. If you accidentally pull it all the way through, just try again! Now push your needle back through the front of your fabric in the place/direction you want your thread to go.
5. I'm going to show you some stitches you can try. You can also just experiment and make long or short stitches in any direction.

- a. **Straight stitch** creates one line. You can repeat a straight stitch to make a dashed line by leaving space between stitches, this is called a running stitch.



- b. **Back stitch** creates a closely spaced dashed line. Create a stitch up and under, then back to the end of your previous stitch.



- c. Try **overlapping** your stitches, to create more color, texture and volume. You can create x shapes, criss crossing lines, or star shapes.
6. Now that you have learned some of the basics of embroidery you can start experimenting by doing some freestyle embroidery [For students who have not been to the galleries yet, introduce 'freestyle embroidery'] Feel free to make long stitches that spread far and wide across the hoop as you practice in any direction! Here are some tips to start:
 - a. Try doing a combination of long stitches and short stitches.
 - b. You don't have to pull the thread tightly against the burlap; you can leave loose loops and hanging threads.

- c. If a knot forms while you embroider that's ok! Just keep stitching, it will add an interesting layer to your fabric! You could even try making knots on the front of your hoop on purpose! The artist Carmen Mardonez likes to leave knotted threads hanging from her sculptures to create texture and volume!
7. After you run out of your thread it's time to think about what colors you will be using for the rest of your embroidery. All of the artists we will see/ have seen today are inspired by the colors and shapes in different places and landscapes. Think about the colors that you see around your neighborhood. The colors of buildings, plants, the sky, graffiti around the corner, the fruit at the mercado etc. If you need inspiration, look at the colors in the pictures from Los Angeles around the workshop. This can be a way to start and after that you can continue with whatever colors feel right to you.
8. When you feel like you have finished you can tie loose threads together to keep them in place or leave them loose. You can leave your fabric on the embroidery hoop or take it off. If you would like to take it off, twist the metal screw on the top forward to your direction to loosen the hoop. Keep twisting until the hoop is loose and you are able to lift the top hoop up. Pick the burlap off the bottom hoop and admire your embroidery!

Reflection

Do any of the textures or shapes in your embroidery remind you of something else? What colored floss or yarn did you choose and why? Do the colors symbolize a feeling or something about you? How did the process of creating a piece of embroidery make you feel?

BEFORE/AFTER YOUR VISIT

Suggested Pre-visit / Post-visit Activity

Pre-visit

Review vocabulary words listed in this lesson plan with students.

Ask students to think about their favorite places and list all of the colors they see there (in the sky, buildings, at different times of day, etc.)

Introduce students to the idea of colors as symbols for different emotions and meanings (eg. Inside Out movie reference - each character is a different color and represents a different emotion. Red can mean angry, but also stop, and pay attention!)

Post-visit

Students may not finish all of the details during their visit and the project could be extended by giving the students an extra class to complete it. Teachers will be supplied with extra materials to take back to school.

Students could write a reflection on the meaning of the colors they used or write a story about the place that inspired their embroidery.

Students could create an artist's statement about the artwork (including title, materials, date, description, etc.) and create a classroom embroidery exhibition.

Curriculum Connections

California Arts Standards for Public Schools—Visual Arts

3.VA:Cr1.2: Apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the art-making process. 3.VA:Cr2.1: Create personally satisfying artwork using a variety of artistic processes and materials. 3.VA:Re7.2: Determine messages communicated by an image.

3.VA:Re7.1: Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art.

4.VA:Cr2.1: Explore and invent art-making techniques and approaches. 4.VA: Re7.2: Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages. 4.VA:Re9: Apply one set of criteria to evaluate more than one work of art.

5.VA:Cr2.1: Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice. 5.VA:Re7.2: Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.

6.VA:Cr2.1: Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design.

7.VA:Re8: Interpret art by analyzing art-making approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed. *(Post-visit Activity)* 7.VA:Cr3: Reflect on and explain important information about personal artwork in an artist statement or another format.

8.VA:Re7.1: Explain how a person's aesthetic choices are influenced by culture, environment, and personal experiences that impact the message it conveys to others. 8.VA:Re8: Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, artmaking approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

Prof.VA:Cn11: Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

Acc.VA:Re8: Identify types of contextual information useful in the process of constructing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works. Acc.VA:Pr6: Make, explain, and justify connections between artists or artwork and social, cultural, and political history. Adv.VA:Cn10: Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.

Adv.VA:Cn10: Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.

NOTE: If you choose to do the suggested pre/post-visit writing activities, English Language Arts standards can also be incorporated.

Prepared by Danila Cervantes, Education Assistant & Billie Rae Vinson, Director of School and Family Programs, Craft Contemporary

EXAMPLE ARTWORKS



ARTWORK INFORMATION

Jordan Nassar he/him/his

Jordan Nassar's embroidered landscapes reference memories of war-ravaged Palestine, a place that has been split, fractured, lost its original demarcations, and reduced its population following the Israeli occupation. The grid that divides the works into panels reflects this fracturing. Issuing from both the Jewish and Palestinian diasporas, Nassar's experience of that region is a double consciousness: *"When I'm in Haifa, modern-day Israel, I think of it simultaneously as where my grandfather was, Palestine. I like to imagine that it's a parallel universe, which might sound dorky—how in TV shows, on a different plane of existence, there's someone else in the same room at the same time. In Ashkelon, the Palestinian city of Majdal is still there, in the streets and the buildings. It's two places at the same time."*

Since political circumstances prevent him and others from the Palestinian diaspora from returning to their homeland, Nassar's use of traditional Palestinian craft techniques and regional motifs keep him connected to his ancestry, where embroidery is a way of life. He utilizes the matrilineal technique of Palestinian cross-stitch, *tatreez*, as a gesture to safely keep and uplift his ancestors' craft across time and space. *Tatreez* is an Arabic word that means farmer or village worker. It was named that way because traditionally women from the countryside were known for their embroidery.

Jordan Nassar's love of craft started with origami when he was seven and then he got interested in crocheting and weaving – something that these crafts have in common is they take time and patience to produce.



The Pink Column, 2022

Hand-embroidered cotton on cotton, over canvas

Ken Gun Min he/him/his

Born South Korea. Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

Ken Gun Min's rich tapestries of figures, wild animals, anatomical drawings, flowers, Western fabrics, and rich landscapes blend narratives from his experience of coming into his queer identity in the 1980-90s, his Korean heritage, and his formative years in Europe and the U.S. In *Night Lake*, the artist sets the stage for his childhood awakening as a gay boy in 1980's Korea with the backdrops of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and the local, modern, true crime story of MacArthur Park Lake murders in Los Angeles, where he currently resides.

Two Mothers conveys the impossibility of a decision between two exquisitely beautiful desires. It depicts an immigrant history inspired by two great women: the artist's grandmother who was forced to immigrate from Korea to Japan during the Japanese occupation in the 1940s and his partner's mother who moved to the U.S. from Korea in the 1960s.

Night Lake, 2016-2022

Korean pigment, collected bead/crystal, silk thread, embroidery wax, oil paint on canvas



Carmen Mardóñez she/her/hers

Born 1988, Santiago, Chile. Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

All-Nighter, 2022 Hanging sculpture on pillows and hand embroidered bed sheet and lemon mesh
Dusk, 2021. Twilight, 2021. Both works hanging sculpture on pillows and hand embroidered bed sheet



Carmen Mardóñez confronts the traditional roles of wife, mother, and homemaker by turning her stitching into large-scale wall hangings and sculptures in shocking pink and orange colors that scream feminine but are unruly and wild. The substrate for Mardóñez's stitches is the bedsheets and pillows cast off by neighbors and friends, materials associated with dreams and intimacy. The three hanging sculptures are part of the series *Before the Sun Goes Down*, chronicling the spectacle of the changing

colors as day becomes night. The effusion of brightly colored threads forms dense cloud-like concentrations of creative energy that are unleashed once the day's work is done.

EXHIBITION INFORMATION

Strings of Desire

January 29 – May 7, 2023

United by themes of human desire and longing, this group of thirteen artists have chosen to work with embroidery either as a singular medium or as a part of a multimedia art practice. The assembled artists have embraced needle and embroidery floss to connect with and integrate their non-Western cultural heritages, their queer identities, and their fantasies. *Strings of Desire* sets forth artists who have created a hybrid aesthetic that conflates embroidery, painting, sculpture, and architecture to explore personal identities that, like their art forms, are not solitary. Often either self-taught or gained through matrilineal knowledge, embroidery is a practice that is personal at its core, allowing the artists to explore different aspects of themselves in relation to larger aesthetic concepts, such as the hand and technology, childhood memories and adulthood, and lived and projected visions of their hearts' desires.

Exhibition artists: Diem Chau, Jenny Hart, Kang Seung Lee, Aubrey Longley-Cook, Carmen Mardóñez, Erick Medel, Ken Gun Min, Sophia Narrett, Jordan Nassar, Miguel Osuna, Ardeshir Tabrizi, Chiffon Thomas, 25 Million Stitches/Jennifer Kim Sohn.

This exhibition is supported in part by the Antonia and Vladimer Kulaev Cultural Heritage Foundation, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, and the Bernard Kester Trust in Memory of Edith Wyle.