

URS FISCHER: ERROR

TEACHER GUIDE

Grades: 6-12

This guide is designed to be used in conjunction with a visit to The Brant Foundation Art Study Center or in the classroom alongside the images provided. The suggested projects can be catered to all age groups.



MISSION

The Brant Foundation Art Study Center has a mission to promote education and appreciation of contemporary art and design, by making works available to institutions and individuals for scholarly study and examination. The Brant Foundation Art Study Center presents long-term exhibitions and extensive public programming for individuals of all ages.

The Brant Foundation strives to uphold its objective of art education advocacy by developing programs tailored to specific grade levels. These programs allow students to learn and work in a contemporary art institution through lessons designed to excite and inspire. More explicitly, because our K-12 programs are particular to individual classrooms, each group's current in-school curriculum is integrated into the docent-led tour and subsequent art project – making for a highly personalized, unique educational experience. Through immersive learning, the Foundation's activities encourage the exploration and exchange of ideas in order to develop deeper understandings of contemporary art and to help navigate today's highly visual society.



INTRODUCTION

[ERROR](#), a solo exhibition of works by Urs Fischer, shows the evolution of the artist's practice over the last twenty years. Urs Fischer is a Swiss born, multimedia artist whose practice includes various **mediums** and **subject matters** within his paintings, sculptures, and **installation art**. Having previously worked as a stage designer, Fischer's work is often theatrical and takes over the **space** it inhabits, making a dreamlike landscape. A main focus of his work is the actual process of creating and the different techniques he uses to do so, often exploring **texture**, material, and **space**. Fischer's work thus challenges traditional notions of art and generates the idea that art can be anything.

"I like the idea of error. I think it's just a beautiful word. Anything we do successfully in life is a potential error."
– Urs Fischer



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Urs Fischer was born in 1973 in Zurich and studied photography at the Schule für Gestaltung, Zurich. In Fischer's works, the meaning lies within the very substances and processes of its making, whereby ideas become material and materials take on a life of their own. He has exhibited extensively internationally, and his work is included in many important public and private collections worldwide. Fischer lives and works in New York.

OBJECTIVES

- Introduce students to the artist and works within the exhibition
- Explore how the artist uses different approaches to sculpture and **installation art**
- Analyze and discuss the exhibited works, making individual and open interpretations about the artwork
- Construct a three dimensional mobile inspired by the artist's **installation art** piece, *why do you hate me, i never helped you*

KEY TERMS

contemporary art, exhibition, medium, subject matter, installation art, space, texture, juxtaposition, scale, milling, gradient, ephemeral

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

1. What is an **exhibition**?
2. What does **contemporary art** mean?
3. What does **medium** mean in regards to art?
4. What materials or **mediums** can a work of art be made of?
5. What characteristics does a work of art have?
6. How does an artwork's material tell the story of an object?
7. Why do you think this **exhibition** has been titled *ERROR*?





KRATZ (2007), Cast aluminium, concrete, aluminium, epoxy, fiberglass, wire mesh, epoxy primer, polyester filler, polyester putty, one-component fill primer, waterborne base coat, polyurethane matte clear coat, polyurethane paint, 26 x 72 x 94 in.

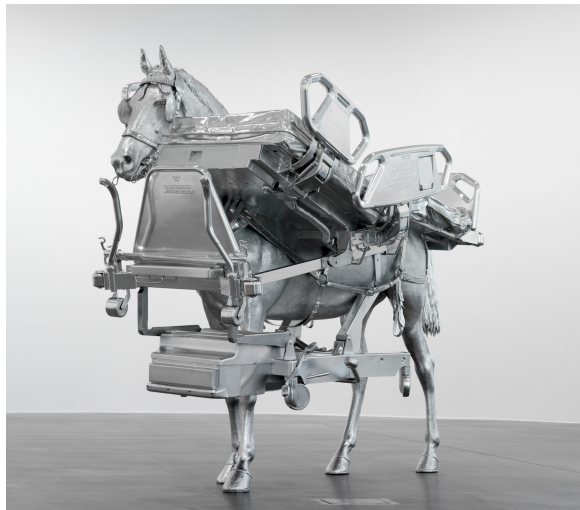
LET'S LOOK: Take a few minutes to walk around or look at images of this artwork

Fischer's work is known to challenge the perception of material and **texture**. *Kratz* presents the viewer with a bed, buckling under pressure from the weight of concrete seemingly poured on top, which cascades down onto the floor. The stark white bedsheets and pillowcases crease and fold under the concrete and give the illusion of a real bed, but in reality, the bed was created through an elaborate aluminum casting process. Therefore the bed is not soft at all, but the complete opposite. The concrete and aluminum show how Fischer is able to employ these industrial materials in his practice and also provide a commentary on the juxtaposition between the domestic and the commercial.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does **subject matter** mean? What is the **subject matter** in this work?
- What other observations can you make about this artwork?
- In what ways does *Kratz* utilize **space**?
- How would you normally describe the **texture** of a bed? How about the **texture** of concrete?
- Does anyone know what **juxtaposition** is?
- What are some pairings we often hear that include the idea of **juxtaposition**?
- How is the artist dealing with **juxtaposition** in this artwork?
- What words would you use to describe the feeling of this artwork? Playful, humorous, fearful?
- If you were to create a story behind this artwork based on what you see, what would it be?
- What questions do you have about this artwork?





HORSE/BED (2013), Milled aluminium, steel, galvanized steel screws, bolts, cyanoacrylate adhesive, epoxy adhesive, 85 7/8 x 103 5/8 x 43 3/4 in.

Horse/Bed is an extremely sleek and detailed sculpture of a horse merged with a hospital bed. The horse stands upright, wearing the bed like a harness, suggesting the **juxtaposition** of the natural world with the manufactured. In order to make this artwork, Fischer makes 3-D scans of a taxidermy workhorse and a hospital bed, and then digitally collages them. Through a process called **milling**, the artist's digital design is sculpted into solid blocks of aluminum. **Milling** is a machinery process using rotary cutters to carve out the final product.

Alluding to art history in a subtle and sometimes unconventional way, this work pays homage to artists such as Michelangelo, who would sculpt his subject by chiseling away at a block of marble. Although the artist did not sculpt this work by hand, *Horse/Bed* shows how far artists have come and the different ways art practices have evolved in the 21st century.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Do you think **scale** plays a fundamental part in this sculpture? If it was smaller, would it have the same effect on the viewer?
- What is the **subject matter** of *Horse/Bed*?
- What similarities does this artwork share with *Kratz*? What are the differences?
- We talk about the **juxtaposition** of the natural world (horse) and the manufactured (hospital bed) in *Horse/Bed*, what other **juxtapositions** can be found in this artwork?
- How do you feel about an artwork that is not sculpted directly from the artist's hand but through technology and machinery? Do you still consider this to be an artwork? Why or why not?
- Does this artwork change your perception or challenge your idea of what art can be? Why?
- What is your emotional response to this sculpture? Fear, joy, indifference, curiosity, excitement..?





WHY DO YOU HATE ME, I NEVER HELPED YOU (2018), Plaster, oil-based primer, stainless steel, nylon filament
 Dimensions variable: 3,150 raindrops, each up to 2 5/8 x 6 3/4 in.

LET'S LOOK: Take a few minutes to walk around this artwork

This **installation art** piece features 3,150 enlarged and individually hung, handmade raindrops, encompassing a **gradient** palette of 30 colors from black to white. This piece uses a combination of color, scale, and shape to transform the room it's exhibited in. *why do you hate me, i never helped you* exemplifies Fischer's background as a stage designer through dramatically changing the **space** in a fantastical way. Suspended from the gallery's ceiling, Fischer focuses on every angle of this artwork, presenting limitless views as you walk around the room's circumference. Once again, we see Fischer using an everyday "object" (the raindrop) and morphing it into a dreamlike narrative. Fischer skews our understanding of **scale** and reality through the cartoonish raindrops that exude movement even in their idle presentation. The surrounding works in the room are forced to engage as you look through the raindrops, experiencing the other artworks through this rainstorm.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does **gradient** mean?
- What other artwork in this room contains a **gradient** palette?
- How would the work be affected or different if the **scale** of the raindrops were smaller?
- How does the **scale** of the raindrops shape the viewer's perception of the artwork and the space it inhabits?
- How do the raindrops directly interact with *(Untitled) Soft Bed*? (artwork pictured in second image)
- What does **installation art** mean?
- Now knowing the term **installation art**, how would you explain *why do you hate me, i never helped you* as **installation art**?
- What other material is being used besides the sculpted raindrops?
- How does this material coincide with the visuals of the raindrops?
- What does this artwork mean to you personally?





BREAD HOUSE (2004), Bread, bread crumbs, wood, polyurethane foam, silicone, acrylic paint, spray enamel, screws, rugs, 153 x 221 x 239 in.

LET'S LOOK: Take a few minutes to walk around and inside of this artwork

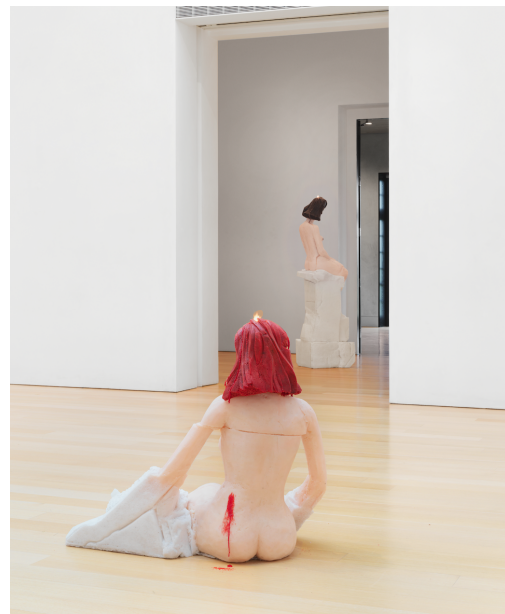
Bread House is a life-size cabin constructed of loaves of bread, foam, and wood, set on an arrangement of Oriental carpets. The installation's design leaves every element and material exposed for the viewer to see. Inspired by the chalet style houses found in Fischer's homeland of Switzerland, this work evokes the fairytale aesthetic found in childhood stories like Hansel and Gretel.

Fischer uses **ephemeral mediums** with a limited life span, such as bread and wax candles. Art is often thought of as something that will last forever, an artifact of the past that informs future generations of its history, but by using **ephemeral** materials, Fischer is challenging traditional notions of what art is and can be. It is often said that art mirrors life, and Fischer's chosen materials parallel that idea by using **mediums** that will decay over time, just as every living organism on this planet. This work not only shines light on the natural process of decay, but also connects us to global issues around food production and waste.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does **ephemeral** mean?
- Would you like your sculpture to be **ephemeral** or long-lasting?
- How does *Bread House* engage with and utilize **space**?
- Is this artwork considered a sculpture or **installation art**? Why do you feel that way?
- What **juxtapositions** do you notice in this artwork?
- In what ways does this artwork connect with the other works we have discussed? How is it different?
- How does this work of art make you feel and what questions does it raise for you?





WHAT IF THE PHONE RINGS? (2003) Wax, pigment, wick

Figure 1: 41 3/4 x 55 7/8 x 18 1/8 in., Figure 2: 78 3/4 x 21 1/4 x 18 1/8 in., Figure 3: 37 x 39 x 21 1/4 in.

What if the Phone Rings? includes three separate wax sculptures of nude female figures - one reclining, one seated on the floor, and the other on an elevated pedestal. These sculptures are fabricated life-sized candles equipped with wicks that run throughout the sculptures. The female nudes allude to a traditional representation of the female body and the typical poses seen in art history.

As the candles are regularly lit, these **ephemeral** sculptures melt and change each day and as the wax melts, the sculptures transform into surreal and abstract forms. "The title itself is both humorous and tragic, bringing to mind a tense, pivotal scene in a movie requiring the utmost silence, or women waiting around for a man to call. Either way, these women are trapped, paralyzed by their situation. This base, atavistic sense of paralysis is amplified by the crude way they are cast from carved foam, unlike later works the artist created from naturalized 3-D scans."¹

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How has this artist transformed the material of an everyday object into a work of art?
- The title reflects the constant morphing of this artwork. How do you think the title is connecting to the art?
- How is this similar to the previous works we focused on? How is it different?
- What do you think this artwork will look like after three months of initially burning it?
- How does the burning aesthetic overtime change the interpretation of the work to a viewer who did not witness it in the beginning weeks of it burning?

¹ Joachim Pissarro, *Bruno YoYo* (New York: kiito-san, 2017).



PROJECT

Ask students to think about what kinds of objects fascinate them, pique their interest, or are passionate about (animals, sports, etc.). Students will create a visual collection of three items as their subject matter in a mobile sculpture inspired by, *why do you hate me, i never helped you?* Ask students to relate the three subjects (i.e. the solar system-star, Saturn, moon) or repeat a single item like-the raindrops in *why do you hate me, i never helped you?*

MATERIALS

- Wooden stick (4 ¼ " x ⅜")
- Fishing wire
- Model Magic Clay
- Tape
- Metal washers
- Paint (optional)

ACTIVITY STEPS

Using model magic, students will create an artwork that plays with **scale** the way Fischer does in his work, *why do you hate me, I never helped you?* (from something small to big or vice versa).

1. Take a small metal washer and tie to a piece of 12 inch fishing wire. Repeat three times.
2. Sculpt your object around the metal washers. Repeat three times and let sit for about 15 minutes.
3. Tie the three strings to a wooden stick. Tape the strings with clear scotch tape to the wooden stick to secure the strings.
4. Paint your clay objects (optional)



Example Artwork: Star, Moon, Sun mobile



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the **subject matter** of your artwork?
2. Why did you choose this specific **subject matter**?
3. What were the challenges and successes you faced making your work?

EXHIBITION REFLECTION

1. What new ideas about art did you learn through this **exhibition**?
2. The artist uses a lot of humor and irony within his work, what pieces resonated with these ideas? Why do you feel this way?
3. What artworks or techniques intrigued you? Why?
4. Did any of the artworks change your ideas about what might be considered art?

KEY TERMS

Contemporary Art: A broad category of artwork produced during the late 20th (postmodern art era) and 21st centuries; artwork created in present time.

Exhibition: A public display of art

Medium: Refers to the materials used to create an artwork.

Subject Matter: The topic dealt with or the subject represented in a debate, exposition, or work of art.

Installation Art: An art movement that emerged in the 1960's and is characterized by art works which are made for a specific space and only exist for the duration of its display.

Space: Refers to the distances or areas around, between, and within components of a piece. Space can be positive or negative, open or closed, shallow or deep, and two-dimensional or three-dimensional.

Texture: The feel, appearance, or consistency of a surface or a substance.

Juxtaposition: Two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect

Milling: A process used to cut or shape metal using a rotating tool.

Scale: Refers to the overall physical size of an artwork or artwork objects in relation to the human body.

Gradient: A range of colors from light to dark.

Ephemeral: A material lasting for a short period of time, something that is not meant to last forever.

LEARNING STANDARDS: The project and lesson within this teacher guide adhere to the national learning standards for the arts.



NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS (VISUAL ARTS)

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

6TH VA:Cr1.1.6a Combine concepts collaboratively to generate innovative ideas for creating art.

6TH VA:Cr1.2.6a Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.

7TH VA:Cr1.1.7a Apply methods to overcome creative blocks.

7TH VA:Cr1.2.7a Develop criteria to guide making a work of art or design to meet an identified goal.

8TH VA:Cr1.1.8a Document early stages of the creative process visually and/or verbally in traditional or new media.

8TH VA:Cr1.2.8a Collaboratively shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present day life using a contemporary practice of art and design.

HS Proficient VA:Cr1.1.1a Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.

Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.

HS Proficient VA:Cr1.2.1a Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.

HS Accomplished VA:Cr1.1.1a Individually or collaboratively formulate new creative problems based on student's existing artwork.

HS Accomplished VA:Cr1.2.1a Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan works of art and design.

HS Advanced VA:Cr1.1.1a Visualize and hypothesize to generate plans for ideas and directions for creating art and design that can affect social change.

HS Advanced VA:Cr1.2.1a Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices, following or breaking established conventions, to plan the making of multiple works of art and design based on a theme, idea, or concept.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

6TH VA:Cr2.1.6a Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design

6TH VA:Cr2.3.6a Design or redesign objects, places, or systems that meet the identified needs of diverse users.

7TH VA:Cr2.1.7a Demonstrate persistence in developing skills with various materials, methods, and approaches in creating works of art or design.

7TH VA:Cr2.3.7a Apply visual organizational strategies to design and produce a work of art, design, or media that clearly communicates information or ideas.

8TH VA:Cr2.1.8a Demonstrate willingness to experiment, innovate, and take risks to pursue ideas, forms, and meanings that emerge in the process of artmaking or designing.

8TH VA:Cr2.3.8a Select, organize, and design images and words to make visually clear and compelling presentations.

HS Proficient VA:Cr2.1.1a Engage in making a work of art or design without having a preconceived plan.

HS Proficient VA:Cr2.3.1a Collaboratively develop a proposal for an installation, artwork, or space design that transforms the perception and experience of a particular place.

HS Accomplished VA:Cr2.1.1a Through experimentation, practice, and persistence, demonstrate acquisition of skills and knowledge in a chosen art form.

HS Accomplished VA:Cr2.3.1a Redesign an object, system, place, or design in response to contemporary issues

HS Advanced VA:Cr2.1.1a Experiment, plan, and make multiple works of art and design that explore a personally meaningful theme, idea, or concept.

HS Advanced VA:Cr2.3.1a Demonstrate in works of art or design how visual and material culture defines, shapes, enhances, inhibits, and/or empowers people's lives.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.



6TH VA:Cr3.1.6a-HS Advanced VA:Cr3.1.IIIa.

Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, & interpret artistic work for presentation.

6TH VA:Pr4.1.6a-HS Advanced VA:Pr4.1.IIIa

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

6TH VA:Pr5.1.6a-HS Advanced VA:Pr5.1.IIIa

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

6TH VA:Pr6.1.6a-HS Advanced VA:Pr6.1.IIIa

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

6TH VA:Re.7.1.6a-HS Advanced VA:Re.7.1.IIIa

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

6TH VA:Re8.1.6a-HS Advanced VA:Re8.1.IIIa

Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

6TH VA:Re9.1.6a-HS Advanced VA:Re9.1.IIIa

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

6TH VA:Cn10.1.6a-HS Advanced VA:Cn10.1.IIIa

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding

6TH VA:Cn11.1.6a-8TH VA:Cn11.1.8a

COMMON CORE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1-CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2-CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.3-CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.4-CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.5-CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5

