

## GREAT ART IDEAS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

# OBSCURED FIGURES: INSPIRED BY NICK CAVE'S SOUNDSUIT SERIES

YEAR 5–6

### OVERVIEW

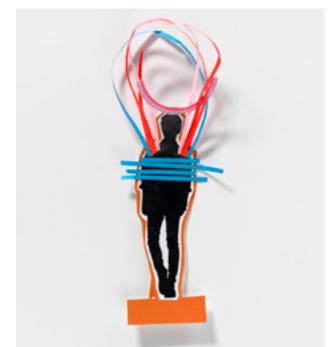
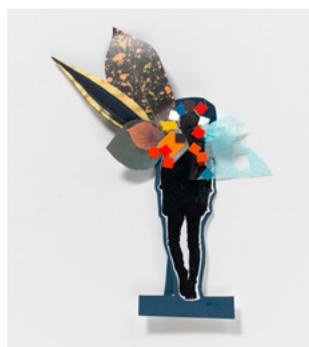
In this activity students will consider the theme of identity through an exploration of sculptural installations by American artist Nick Cave. They will deepen their understanding of the ways social and cultural events can influence artists and their creative practices, and how identity can be expressed through art. Reflecting on their own identities, students will then produce an artwork exploring how they have been shaped as young people growing up in their own communities.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Identify and discuss the ways Nick Cave communicates his views, beliefs and opinions in artworks.
- Identify key events in their lives that have influenced their own identity and development and make aesthetic choices to express these formative events.
- Create an artwork that explores and represents their own individual identity using a variety of materials.
- Analyse how symbolic meanings are constructed in their own artworks and the artworks of their peers, and reflect on how effectively their ideas have been expressed.

### STUDENT EXAMPLES



Made by students during a workshop at the NGV

## RELATED ARTWORKS



**Nick Cave**

*Soundsuit* 2015

from the *Soundsuit* series 1992–

fibreglass, cotton, shell, glass, metal

230.0 x 122.5 x 76.5 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by the Fox Family Foundation

and the NGV Foundation, 2016

© Nick Cave, courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



**Nick Cave**

*Soundsuit* 2015

from the *Soundsuit* series 1992–

fibreglass, cotton, shell, glass, plastic, metal

227.5 x 71.0 x 79.3 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by the Fox Family Foundation

and the NGV Foundation, 2016

© Nick Cave, courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

# DISCUSS

Nick Cave is an American fabric sculptor, dancer and performance artist. He began creating his *Soundsuit* series in an attempt to process his trauma associated with the 1992 Los Angeles riots. These full-body, wearable sculptures act as symbols of endurance and a form of protection by obscuring all signs of the wearer's race, gender, age and class. Bearing some resemblance to African ceremonial costumes, Cave's *Soundsuits* are made from everyday materials sourced largely from flea markets, including dyed human hair, plastic buttons, beads and feathers. They are joyous and spectacular, reminiscent of a marching band in procession. Cave's *Soundsuits* rattle and resonate when worn in performance.

Introduce your students to the related works of art and use the following discussion prompts to explore the formation and expression of identity:

## 1. Identity

- What does identity mean? How do we express our identity?
- How do factors such as our culture and events in our lives shape our identity? How does the way we view ourselves differ from the way we view others?
- How does *Soundsuit*, 2015, hide the identity of the wearer? Consider the way it obscures the face, the body, the voice, the walk and mannerisms of the wearer.
- The *Soundsuit* series was created in response to a violent event in the artist's home country. Why did the artist respond in this way? How does the idea of hiding your identity relate to issues of violence?

## 2. Symbols

- What is a symbol? What can constitute a symbol?
- What symbols can you see embedded in *Soundsuit*? Can you see the flowers and the red and white target? Why did the artist include these symbols in his works? How do they enrich the meaning of the artwork?
- Before beginning the Create activity, reflect on events in your life that have influenced your life and shaped your identity as a young person. How could these events be turned into symbols?  
*For example, a significant birthday might be symbolised by candles, cake, joyful colours, the number of the person's age, or shapes which represent community, love, celebration and happiness.*

## RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Paper human silhouettes – draw and copy some generic figures or create silhouettes from the shadows of each student.
- Mounting board
- Scissors
- Glue
- A variety of art and craft supplies such as coloured paper, textured card sequins, beads, feathers, buttons, fabric and ribbon.

## CREATE

Students design and create their own individualised obscured figure collage through the following steps:

1. First, create the paper human silhouette that will form the base of your figure:
  - Cut around your chosen paper silhouette.
  - Paste the silhouette onto a piece of mounting board for durability.
  - Cut around the silhouette again, leaving some mounting board at the bottom of the figure to form a stand if desired.
2. Reflecting on the class discussion, choose some significant life events to represent in your obscured figure, and three or four symbols which depict each event.  
*The events could relate to experiences with your family, your friends, or your school community.*  
*The symbols can come from a variety of life events, or they might come from one or two life events.*  
*Consider use of colour, texture and shape, and how you could depict these symbols using the art and craft supplies provided.*
3. Create your chosen symbols and place them on your figure to create an expanding obscured figure collage.  
*Before pasting your symbols down, just place them on your figure to see how they look together.*
4. Once you are happy with your arrangement, glue them into place.

## PRESENT & REFLECT

Students show their completed figure to their partner and explain:

- Which key events from your life did you choose to include in your artwork, and why did you choose those events?
- How did you choose to symbolise these events in your artwork? Consider your choice of materials, colours, shapes and structure for the symbols.
- How effectively does the symbol reflect the life event you have chosen?

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