

Janice Mason Art Museum
LESSON PLANS FOR WIER EXHIBIT
Background Information

ARTIST NAME : Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid

ART PIECE(S) ON DISPLAY: “Head of Worker-Bergen Point Brass Foundry”

About the Artist

Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid were both born in Moscow in 1945; Komar, on September 11 and Melamid, on July 14. Both artists attended the Moscow Art School from 1958 to 1960, and the Stroganov Institute of Art and Design, Moscow from 1962 to 1967. They began their [collaborative](#) art work in 1965, and two years later they began the [SOTS Art movement](#) (the Soviet version of Western [Pop Art](#)). They were mavericks from the very beginning. They joined the dissident underground and showed their works in unsanctioned exhibitions. The youth section of the Moscow Union of Artists expelled them in 1974, and they also lost their membership in the Graphic Artists’ Organization. Their first international exhibition was in New York in 1976. However, their careers took one risky turn after another, and in 1977 they managed to escape the Soviet Union and settled in the United States the following year. They both became American citizens a decade later.

In addition to having numerous public commissions and exhibitions after arriving in the United States, they were the first Russian artists to receive a National Endowment for the Arts in 1981. Between 1995 –97, Komar and Melamid, with sponsor Chase Manhattan Bank, launched an innovative internet art project. They conducted an extensive survey in more than a dozen countries to determine the characteristics of art that those surveyed most liked and most disliked. Some of the questions were about the preferred size of art pieces, colors used, and subject matter in paintings. Based on the data they received from these surveys, both artists created a most wanted and most unwanted picture for each country. In addition to an online edition of the images, the Alternative Museum in New York hosted “People’s Choice,” an exhibit of “America’s Most Wanted” and “America’s Least Wanted” paintings.

Their most recent project was trying to help elephants learn to paint. Elephants in Thailand were once used to move timber from one place to another. Then timber logging was outlawed, and the elephants lost their jobs. This is where Komar and Melamid came in. They “retrained” the elephants to paint and then sold the paintings to buy food for the elephants. In March of 2000 in the prestigious Rockefeller Center, Christie’s auction house held “The World’s First Auction of Elephant Art”. They raised \$75,000.

About the Art

Komar and Melamid rebelled against the [Socialist Realism](#). They refused to pursue the careers for which they had been trained in Moscow. The Soviet regime provided comfortable places for artists who were willing to illustrate the Marxist-Leninist version of reality; however, the artists preferred to renounce their Soviet citizenship to pursue instead the freedom to express themselves in very interesting and creative ways. In addition to the creation of [paintings](#) and [linographs](#), they have also become known for their novel [performance art](#). They have, for example, created a performance piece entitled “Canine Art (Teaching a Dog to Draw). Dipping

a dog's paw in ink, they pressed it repeatedly to a sheet of drawing paper. They also gave a Polaroid camera to a chimpanzee to take pictures of Moscow landmarks. Their methods and art are, to say the least, unconventional and hard to categorize as part of any art movement.

The Komar-Melamid art piece in this exhibit is entitled "Head of Worker-Bergen Point Brass Foundry." It is a [lithograph](#), [woodcut](#), incorporating copper leaf and [embossed](#) leather. This work is made up of four panels that depict workers in a brass foundry, which is located near the artists' studio. The last panel shows the kind of [embossing](#) that is done at the foundry. This piece was completed in 1989 and framed, it measures h 24" X w 84".

Related terms

- collaborative
- embossed
- lithograph
- painting
- performance art
- Pop art
- Socialist Realism
- SOTS art movement
- two-dimensional
- woodcut

Specific Lesson Plans

Grades K-5

Kentucky Core Content

AH-E4.1.34 Describe a variety of media and processes used to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

AH-E-4.2.35 Recognize that artists choose to express themselves in different styles and subject matters.

AH-E-4.1.42 Use a variety of media and art processes to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

AH-E-4.2.31 Identify various purposes for creating works of art.

AH-E-4.2.35 Recognize that artists choose to express themselves in different styles and subject matters.

AH-E-4.2.36 Styles: realistic, abstract, non-objective

Objectives

- To learn that Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid, Russian artists, were not able to express themselves openly and creatively without getting in trouble with the Russian government.
- To understand that Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid worked together and began the Soviet version of Western [Pop Art](#), which was rejected by the Soviets.
- To realize that Komar and Melamid fled Russia because of their non-compliance with the government authorities.
- To learn that Komar and Melamid came to the United States in 1977 and became American citizens ten years later.
- To appreciate that Komar and Melamid have been free to do many unusual and different projects during their life time in the United States.

Suggested Questions

1. What did the Russian artists, Komar and Melamid, do that got them in trouble with the Soviet government?
2. How did the Soviet people and government let Komar and Melamid know they were not accepted as artists in their own country?
3. What kind of unusual projects have Komar and Melamid been involved in since they came to the United States?
4. What kind of art work have Komar and Melamid produced?
5. Why is it hard to associate their art work with any special movement?

Related Activities

1. Have students write a paragraph about the interesting projects Komar and Melamid have undertaken since they became American citizens.
2. Have students produce a piece of art using the most unusual idea/method they can imagine.
3. Discuss why freedom of expression is so important to an artist.

Grades 6-8

Kentucky Core Content

AH-M-4.1.32 Art Elements: line, shape, color (tints and shades) and color groups (monochromatic), form, texture, space (positive/negative and perspective), and value (light and shadow).

AH-M-4.1.34 Identify and describe a variety of art media, art processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, experiences, and stories.

AH-M-4.1.35 Media: two dimensional-crayon, pencil, fabric, yarn, paint (tempera, watercolor), ink and pastels.

AH-M-4.1.39 Subject Matter: landscape, portrait, still life, abstract, and non-objective.

AH-M-4.1.42 Effectively use a variety of art media, processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, and experiences.

AH-M-4.1.37 Art Processes: two-dimensional-painting, fabric design, printmaking, and mosaics.

AH-M-4.2.31 Describe and compare the characteristics and purposes of works of art representing various cultures, historical periods, artists, and/or styles.

Objectives

- To learn that freedom of artistic expression is very important to Russian born Komar and Melamid.
- To realize that governments may impact artistic expression.
- To understand that art may be produced in many different ways.
- To know that Komar and Melamid produced and completed an interesting internet project that had special interest to the art world.
- To learn that animals can create art.
- To find out what is meant by [performance art](#).
- To be able to describe the art piece “Head of Worker-Bergen Point Brass Foundry” which is in the current museum show.

Suggested Questions

1. What did Komar and Melamid do with their art that got them in trouble with the Soviet authorities?
2. What did the Soviet authorities want them to do?
3. What did Komar and Melamid do to solve this problem?
4. Discuss the elephant project and why it was helpful to the elephants?
5. Why was Komar and Melamid’s internet project interesting to the art world?
6. Explain [performance art](#) and two examples of Komar and Melamid’s [performance art](#).
7. What was the [SOTS art movement](#) and what western art movement was it like?
8. Describe Komar and Melamid’s art piece “Head of Worker-Bergen Point Brass Foundry” using the following terminology: [lithograph](#), [woodcut](#), and [embossed leather](#).

Related Activities

1. Have the students develop an unusual art work utilizing paint and stamps on paper.
2. Have the students write a paragraph about why Komar and Melamid helped produce and sell elephant art.

3. Have students develop a questionnaire about art and administer it to at least four other people. The students will then write a paragraph about what they found from the questionnaire.
4. Have the students describe why Komar and Melamid's art is difficult to categorize as part of any art movement. Have them give specific examples in the paragraph they write.

Grades 9-12

Kentucky Core Content

AH-H-4.1.31 Describe works of art using appropriate terminology.

AH-H-4.1.32 Art Elements: color and color theory: primary and secondary hues, values (tints and shades), intensity (brightness and dullness); color relationship: triadic, complementary, and analogous.

AH-H-4.1.33 Principles of Design: Balance (symmetry/asymmetry), emphasis (focal pattern), pattern, repetition, contrast, variety, movement, rhythm, proportion, transition/gradation, and unity.

AH-H-4.1.34 Defend personal interpretations of works of art and architecture by using arguments.

AH-H-4.2.39 Purposes of Art: persuasive (advertising, marketing, propaganda); formalist (abstract, non-objective, arrangement of elements and principles as subject matter).

Objectives

1. To learn that governments may impact artists and how Komar and Melamid reflect this fact.
2. To understand that Komar and Melamid have produced some very unusual art and explain some of the different kinds of art they have produced.
3. To realize that [performance art](#) was a novel idea introduced by Komar and Melamid.
4. To learn that Komar and Melamid produced [paintings](#), [linographs](#), [performance art](#), [lithographs](#), [woodcuts](#), and [embossed](#) leather work.
5. To learn to describe art utilizing the [Four Step Art Criticism Method](#) included at this website.

Suggested Questions

1. Explain how Komar and Melamid's art and lives were impacted by the fact that they were born and lived in Russia?
2. Explain Komar and Melamid's [performance art](#) and give two examples.
3. What interesting internet project did Komar and Melamid conduct? Explain.
4. How did Komar and Melamid's art have a connection with elephants, dogs, and monkeys?
5. Explain the various types of art processes that Komar and Melamid used in their art production.
6. Using the Four Step Art Criticism Method model critique a work of Komar and Melamid, such as the "Head of Worker-Bergen Point Brass Foundry" which is in the Janice Mason Art Museum or one of their works on the internet or library.
7. Explain what [linographs](#), [performance art](#), [lithographs](#), [woodcuts](#), and [embossed](#) leather are. These were all techniques/materials that Komar and Melamid used.

Related Activities

1. Give students several different types of materials to produce art. Tell them to produce the most creative [two-dimensional](#) art work that they can imagine. Give a prize/praise for the most creative.
2. Have two students collaborate together to produce a creative [two-dimensional](#) art work. Have the other students critique the art piece.
3. Have students write a paper explaining how the art of Komar and Melamid is very untraditional.

4. Have students develop an art survey and administer it to at least five other people. Have them produce a piece of art representing the answers of the five people. Relate this project to Komar and Melamid's internet survey.