

Art and Activism

Learn about **Art and Activism** by completing the following sections:

#1

Relate

In this section, learn more about **Art and Activism** by making connections to your own life.

#2

Investigate

In this section, learn more about **Art and Activism** by investigating art that incorporates activism.

#3

Create

In this section, share what you have learned about **Art and Activism** by creating your own art and caption label.

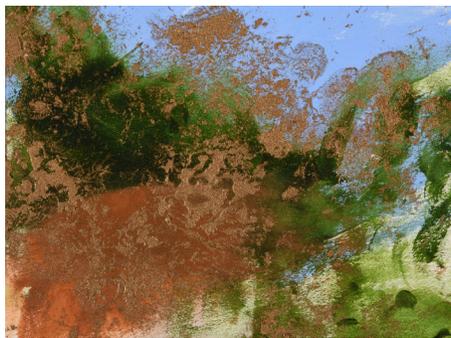
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#2

PART 1 – Creating art is a form of activism. Artists have been creating art as a form of activism throughout history. Artists can educate others about the different social issues affecting communities through their art. Let’s analyze (study) art that incorporates activism by noticing the communities and social issues represented in the art. Take a moment to look closely at this series (a number of things of a similar kind coming one after another) of paintings from the Autry Museum of the American West. Then look at the three individual paintings from the series of paintings.



A Series of Paintings from the Autry Museum of the American West



Three Individual Paintings from the Series of Paintings

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#2

PART 2 – After looking closely at the paintings, describe what you see in the paintings by writing the answers to the questions in the chart on a piece of paper or in the space below.

ART ANALYSIS QUESTIONS	MY DESCRIPTION
What colors do you see in the paintings?	
What do you think the first color you noticed <i>represents</i> ?	
What do you think the second color you noticed represents?	
What do you think the third color you noticed represents?	
What do you think the fourth color you noticed represents?	
What do you think any of the other colors you noticed represent?	
How many individual paintings are in the series of paintings from the Autry Museum of the American West?	
What do you think all of the individual paintings in the series represent together?	
What else do you notice in the paintings?	

Represents: to serve as a sign or symbol

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#2

PART 4 – Prove or disprove your hypothesis by reading the caption label and the artist’s quote below. The caption label gives more information about the art while the artist’s quote describes the art in the artist’s own words.

Caption Label

The Discovery of Gold in California Series

1997

Harry Fonseca (Nisenan Maidu)

United States, 1946-2006

Acrylic paint with glitter and dirt

Autry Museum of the American West; 2016.10.23, 2016.10.38, 2016.10.154

Harry Fonseca (Nisenan Maidu) grew up along the American River, a place known for the discovery of gold in California in 1848. When the California Gold Rush first comes to mind, many people think of the brave travelers who came from other countries and different parts of the United States to look for gold and work in California. Fonseca retells the history of the California Gold Rush through *The Discovery of Gold in California* series that he painted near the actual spot in which gold was discovered along the American River. In the mid-1800s, competition for gold led to the unfair treatment of certain groups of people including the Native American people who had already been living on the land for thousands of years. Native American communities, including Fonseca’s community, depended on the Californian environment for food, medicine, clothing, and tools. With approximately 300,000 people coming to California, many Native American communities experienced the loss of plants, animals, land, people, and their way of life during the California Gold Rush. *The Discovery of Gold in California* series of paintings represents one entire *landscape*. The top paintings are the sky. The middle paintings are the area above the ground. The bottom paintings are soil and blood. In some of the paintings, dirt from the American River is mixed with red paint. Colors such as blue *symbolize* the sky, green and brown stand for land, and red means blood. The gold colors, which can be found in each of the paintings, represent the gold that changed the lives of thousands of Native Americans in California forever.

Artist’s Quote (Harry Fonseca)

“The gold rush was an explosion on all levels—beautiful stuff to work with. There were cultures coming together, conflicting; a profusion of greed, of loss; massive change; and I hope this overall drama is expressed by the passion in these pieces. As I painted, the brutality which took place during the gold rush began to surface in a thickening, a dripping, an actual eruption of gold paint in the work. The damage inflicted during that chaotic time was extensive. It injured the land and the living things that were there, Native Americans, and other peoples as well.”

Glossary

Landscape: a picture representing all the visible features of an area of countryside or land

Symbolize: to serve as a sign or symbol

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PART 5 – Now that you have learned more about the story that the artist is telling through *The Discovery of Gold in California* series, answer the questions in the chart about the art, caption label, and artist’s quote by writing your answers on a piece of paper or in the space below.

ART ANALYSIS QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Who is the artist? Look for the artist’s name in the caption label and the artist’s quote.	
What is the title of the artwork? Look for the title in the caption label.	
What year was the artwork created? Look for the date in the caption label.	
Which historical event from the past is the art, caption label, and artist’s quote about?	
Which communities are represented in the art, caption label, and artist’s quote?	
Which social issues are represented in the art, caption label, and artist’s quote?	

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#3

PART 1 – Now it is your turn to create art as a form of activism. Make a piece of art that educates others about the social issues that affect your communities. Plan your art before creating it by writing your answers to the questions in the chart on a piece of paper or in the space below.

QUESTIONS	ANSWER EXAMPLES	MY ART DESCRIPTION
What type of art will you create?	Drawing Painting Other	
What materials do you need for your art?	Crayons/Markers Pencils/Pens Paint Paper Other materials	
Which community/communities will you represent in your art? Pick from the list of communities that you created in Section 1.		
Which social issues that affect your community/communities will you represent in your art? Pick from the list of social issues that you created in Section 1.		
What people, places, and/or things will you show in your art?		
Which colors will you use in your art? What will the colors represent?		

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#3

PART 2 – Based on your answers from the previous page, create a piece of art as a form of activism. Depending on the type of art you are creating, feel free to use a piece of paper or the space below to create your art. Include a title for your art.

Title: _____

Resources

This activity was inspired by the Autry Classroom Curators partnership with Sonia Hanson of Maywood Center for Enriched Studies.

Images

Discovery of Gold in California display, photo Carmel France, 2016

Harry Fonseca (Nisenan Maidu, 1946–2006), *Discovery of Gold in California*, 1997, acrylic paint with glitter and dirt. Autry Museum of the American West; 2016.10.23, 2016.10.38, 2016.10.154

Texts

“The Discovery of Gold in California: Paintings by Harry Fonseca.”

URL: <http://explore.museumca.org/goldrush/fonseca06.html>. n.p. n.d. April 8, 2020.