

 EVERSON MUSEUM OF ART

EDUCATOR PACKET

***Ah Leon Memories of
Elementary School***

MARCH 12 – JUNE 5, 2011

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, Ah Leon envisioned a monumental ceramic installation showcasing dozens of stoneware desks and chairs in neat rows like the classrooms of our youth. It began with a small grouping called Memories of Elementary School first exhibited in August 2008 at The Taipei Gallery Exposition and in 2009 at the Phoenix Art Museum in conjunction with the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) annual conference. Ah Leon continued to make more desks, which were exhibited at the American Museum of Ceramic Art (AMOCA) in 2010. Another year has passed and Ah Leon has completed the twenty sets of desks and chairs, which will be showcased in this exhibition.

His original idea was to create a classroom environment that would “lead audiences to remember their childhood stories.” Ah Leon studied elementary school desks, determined that his creations would be authentic, revealing memories through carved initials, scratches and drawings on their worn surfaces. His classroom would preserve the stories of our childhood as if they were “frozen in the museum space.”

The first two rows of tables and chairs appear new. They become progressively more dilapidated—some broken, some leaning—until the last rows where the furniture is falling over and ultimately only chips and severed parts remain on the floor. In one area the desks are arranged as if a teacher reads to a group of children. The impact of the scene is immediate: viewers are taken back to their own childhood classroom and long forgotten memories drift to the surface.

Lessons

Lesson 1	Memory Collage
Lesson 2	That's Clay??!!

Lesson 1: Memory Collage

Theme: Memory

Introduction:

Taiwanese artist Ah Leon draws upon childhood memories in the exhibition, *Memories of Elementary School*. This painstakingly detailed ceramic installation includes dozens of stoneware desks and chairs in neat rows like the classrooms of our youth. The inspiration for this work stems from a visit to his childhood town in southern Taiwan. Ah Leon reconnected with many of his old classmates at a school reunion. They had not seen each other in 40 years, but memories rushed back as they reminisced amidst their old school and classrooms. After this visit Ah Leon had the idea to create a classroom environment that would “lead audiences to remember their childhood stories.” Ah Leon studied elementary school desks, determined that his creations would be authentic, revealing memories through carved initials, scratches and drawings on their worn surfaces. The first two rows of tables and chairs appear new. They become progressively more dilapidated- some broken, some leaning- until the last rows where the furniture is falling over and ultimately only chips and severed parts remain on the floor. The impact of the scene is immediate: viewers are taken back to their own childhood classroom and long forgotten memories drift to the surface.

Objectives:

Each student will create a collage and short written passage that represents a childhood memory.

Motivation & Discussion:

Show students images of the installation, *“Memories of Elementary School”* and start a discussion using the following questions:

- What is going on here?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Begin a discussion about childhood memories. Memories may not come in the same order as the events occurred. For example, the memory of something that happened an hour ago may spark the memory of something that happened several years ago. That memory may cause them to recall something that happened last month and so on. People also recall memories in different ways. For example you may remember parts of an event that another may not remember and vice versa. Memories may also be evoked through smell, taste, sound, color and music. Perhaps there is a song that reminds them of a favorite party or the smell of a particular dish that reminds them of their Mothers cooking.

Materials:

Found objects
Photographs
9 x 9" Paper
Scissors
Glue
Newspaper, magazines
Construction paper
Fabric
Paints
Pencils
Optional: Shadow boxes

Directions:

Students will draw upon their childhood memories to create a collage. Ask students to brainstorm ideas for their memory collage by writing them down on a piece of paper. Perhaps it is a favorite moment/ event or a memory created with a family member or friends. Ask your students to reflect upon that event. What do they remember most about that event and why? Why is this particular moment so memorable/ important to them?

Students will bring in found objects and photographs from home that are related to the memory they have chosen. Have construction paper, paints, newspaper, magazines and fabric available so that they can enhance their collage. When creating their collage ask your students to consider placement of objects. By incorporating themes and symbols that personify the memory their collage will tell a story. They should also think about the materials they choose to use and how they relate to the memory they are representing.

Each student should receive a 9 x 9" sheet of heavy weight paper as a substrate for his or her collage. As an alternate option distribute shadow boxes to be used for a 3D collage/ assemblage. Once the collage is complete ask your students to write a short paragraph describing the meaning behind his or her piece. Afterward ask students to share their memories with their classmates by showing their collage to the class and reading their passage. Collect the collages and patch them together like a quilt and hang it for display.

Lesson 2: That's Clay??!!

Trompe-l'œil

French for 'deceive the eye', is an art technique involving extremely realistic imagery & construction in order to create the optical illusion that the depicted objects appear as the 'real' object.

Every material has unique properties, but through manipulation, it is possible to make them look like something else.

Artists as Reference (EMA Permanent Collection):

- Richard Shaw – Whiplash, 1978, porcelain (12.75x10x7")
- Richard Shaw, Open Book II, 1978, porcelain, (3.25x12.75x11")
- Giselle Hicks, Untitled, 2005, porcelain (8x8x9")
- Eric Serritella, Swinging Birch Teapot, 2008, ????, (23x18x8")
- Victor Spinski, Sun Valley Brewery, 1992, porcelain, (8.5x17x12")
- Peter Shire, Accordion Donut Teapot, 1984, porcelain (15.75x15.75x5.5")



Richard Shaw, *Whiplash*, 1978

Questions for Discussion: (refrain from revealing that objects have been made with clay)

- What are 5 words that come to mind when looking at this piece?
- What material do you think the artist used to make this piece?
- How do you think the design elements were applied? (stencil, paint, vinyl, slip)
- Describe what iconography, if any, you see? (designs, patterns, words, diagrams)
- Describe the object's formal design characteristics. (line, shape, form, color, texture)
- How do you think the artist created this piece? How is it put together? (slab, mold, etc)
- What is the expression of this piece? Does it convey a particular emotion (fear, joy, humor, indifference, curiosity, revulsion, excitement), a social commentary?

- What might the artist's intent have been?
- Which artist makes true use of Trompe-l'œil and which ones exaggerate or get more creative with this idea?

Box(ed) Trompe-l'œil

Before working with clay, have students brainstorm some unique uses for a box (to contain jewelry, special notes, photos, objects representing memories, collections). Then choose something they will use their box for.

Have students brainstorm/sketch some possible designs. If desired, students may create their box to echo/relate to what it will hold. Think about shape size, will it have a lid – how might that be integrated into the overall design?

Choose building techniques that will work best to construct the object.

What textures will it possess? (ridges, bumps, grooves, etc.)

How might these textures be created on the clay object? (carving into the clay, creating a textured stamp to press into the clay, using actual object, such as a leaf, etc.)

Are there surface patterns on the object? How might these textures be created on the clay object? (creating a stencil, painting free-hand, application of materials, such as mosaic, etc.)

Demonstrate techniques for working with clay: pinching, smoothing, pulling, coiling, etc. Pass out clay and begin.

Lesson will work for self-hardening or kiln-fired clay