



Production still from
the *Extended Play* film,
“Abigail DeVille:
‘Light of Freedom.’”
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art21.org/abigaildeville



Abigail DeVille

ABOUT

Born

1981 (New York, New York)

Education

Fashion Institute of Technology, BFA
Yale University, MFA

Lives and Works

New York, New York

About the Artist

Abigail DeVille was born in 1981 in New York City, where she lives and works. Maintaining a long-standing interest in marginalized people and places, DeVille creates site-specific immersive installations designed to bring attention to their forgotten stories, such as the sculpture she built on the site of a former African American burial ground in Harlem. DeVille often works with objects and materials sourced from the area surrounding the exhibition site, and her theatrical aesthetic embodies the phrase, “One person’s trash is another person’s treasure.” Though collected objects are essential to her installations, DeVille’s priority is the stories her installations can tell. DeVille’s family roots in New York go back at least two generations; her interest in the city, and her work about it, is both personal and political.

“There’s always this act of digging, kind of like resuscitating life back into those lost fragments.” —Abigail DeVille

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

installation
performance
sculpture

Key Words and Ideas

commemoration
community
found objects
history
reclamation
public space
site-specific
storytelling

Related Artists

Allora & Calzadilla
El Anatsui
Eleanor Antin
Janine Antoni
Kevin Beasley
Mark Bradford
David Brooks
Nick Cave
Mel Chin
Abraham Cruzvillegas
Raúl de Nieves
Mark Dion
Theaster Gates
Ann Hamilton
Thomas Hirschhorn
Nicholas Hlobo
Rashid Johnson
Mary Mattingly
Damián Ortega
Pepón Osorio
Postcommodity
Doris Salcedo
Song Dong
Do Ho Suh
Stephanie Syjuco
Sarah Sze
Kara Walker
Yin Xiuzhen
Bryan Zanisnik

How to Use This Guide

Art21 encourages active engagement when teaching with our films. The questions and activities below are recommendations for incorporating Art21 films featuring Abigail DeVille into your teaching context. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

Before Viewing

Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):

- ① How do we honor and remember those who came before us? What are the different ways we do this?
- ② What do the terms “reclamation” and “commemoration” mean, to you?
- ③ Who writes history? Who is allowed to revise and update it? How, and in what ways, do artists teach us about our collective history?

While Viewing

Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:

- ① Who are the different people DeVille remembers and honors in her works?
- ② What is DeVille reclaiming and commemorating through her work?
- ③ What kinds of things about the history of the United States does DeVille ask us to reconsider?

After Viewing

Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):

- ① How does DeVille invite viewers to become participants in her work? How do these works become learning opportunities for those who choose to engage with them?
- ② What kinds of things have you reclaimed in your life? How do your experiences compare with DeVille's?
- ③ Which histories are we in the process of rewriting, now? Who is involved in this process?

Related Activities

Engaging in creative activities after watching Art21 films can reinforce learning and stimulate ideas. Art21 encourages educators to adapt these activities to their classrooms.

- ✓ Research who has lived and worked in your community in the past. If you choose, perhaps research who has lived in the place you currently call home. Create an installation with objects, or a series of photographs, that honor these people in some specific way. Choose objects and match them with places of significance.
- ✓ Investigate the notion of freedom during different generations, from past to present. Create a work of art, a poem, or a song that illustrates how freedom is, as DeVille says, “under continual construction and reconstruction.”