Doreen Garner

**Born**
1986 (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

**Education**
Tyler School of Art at Temple University, BFA
Rhode Island School of Design, MFA

**Lives and Works**
Brooklyn, NY

**About the Artist**
Doreen Garner creates corporeal sculptures that utilize glass — alongside silicone, beads, crystals, rubber, synthetic hair, petroleum jelly, and other materials — to explore the frequently suppressed and traumatic medical histories of black people’s bodies.

Her sculptures are often incorporated in her performances and video works, reclaiming power by examining the links between clinical and medical repulsions alongside sensual and sexual fascinations. Garner’s work confronts viewers, challenging them to consider their complacency in systems of objectification, racism, false narratives, and historical omissions, while commemorating those who have been subjected to enslavement, medical torture, and racial oppression.

“I want the audience to walk away feeling like they can’t unsee what they just saw.”

—Doreen Garner

**Media and Materials**
performance
sculpture

**Key Words and Ideas**
history
oppression
racism
tattoo
trauma

**Related Artists**
David Altmejd
Janine Antoni
Tanya Aguiñiga
Kevin Beasley
Abigail DeVille
LaToya Ruby Frazier
Theaster Gates
Glenn Ligon
Liu Xiaodong
Sally Mann
Kerry James Marshall
Mary Reid Kelley
Doris Salcedo
Kiki Smith
Nancy Spero
Kara Walker
Carrie Mae Weems
Fred Wilson
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 Doreen Garner 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. The word “trauma” is defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. Why would an artist choose to explore trauma in their work?
2. When have you experienced a “productive discomfort”, or learned something through the feeling of being uncomfortable?
3. In what ways are tattoos expressive or useful? How are tattoos used to communicate different things?

While Viewing
Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:
1. In addition to the definition above, “trauma” in medicine means a physical injury. How do both meanings of “trauma” inform Garner’s work in the film Doreen Garner Sculpts Our Trauma (2018)?
2. When do you experience feelings of discomfort while watching Garner’s film(s)? Notice where and how these feelings come up. What sparks them? What soothes them, or pushes them further?
3. Tattoos feature prominently in Garner’s work. How does Garner alter the process and thinking behind tattooing? What kinds of things do participants experience?

After Viewing
Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):
1. Why do you think Garner wants viewers “to walk away feeling like they can’t unsee what they just saw”?
2. What strategies and materials does Garner use to make the viewer uncomfortable?
3. What kinds of things does the artist want us to learn through discomfort? What is the benefit of this approach?
4. How can tattooing celebrate identity and become an act of self-care?

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

- With your classmates, research local monuments, memorial sculptures, and public works of art. What is the history behind these works? Why do they exist? Who do they celebrate and why? Design a collaborative map or guide to these works for your community.
- Look at how artists create work that examine and celebrate their identity, such as Meriem Bennani (New York Close Up), Kerry James Marshall (Art in the Twenty-First Century), and Wangechi Mutu (Extended Play). Create a series of designs for tattoos that celebrate identity in different ways.

Did you use this guide, Art21 films, or Art21-featured artists in your classroom? If so, tag Art21 on social media or email us at education@art21.org.