


art21.org/bryanzanisnik


Bryan Zanisnik

ABOUT

Born

1979 (Union, New Jersey)

Education

Drew University, BA
Hunter College, MFA

Lives and Works

New York, NY

About the Artist

Working with both autobiographical and social subject matter, Bryan Zanisnik creates videos, performances, installations, and photographs, often with elements of the absurd and the abject as he investigates the dynamic between performer and audience.

His projects have included staging a boxing match with his childhood bully, exploring and documenting New Jersey's Meadowlands, and creating *The Philip Roth Presidential Library* from hundreds of second-hand copies of books by and about the author. Zanisnik created more than thirty performances in collaboration with his parents.

Following the loss of his mother in 2015, Zanisnik discusses his life and practice in the *New York Close Up* film "Bryan Zanisnik & Eric Winkler's Animated Conversation."

Recently returning to New York City after several years of living in Sweden, Zanisnik comically chronicles the highs and lows of life as a contemporary artist in the *New York Close Up* film "Bryan Zanisnik's Big Pivot."

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

installation
painting
performance
sculpture
video

Key Words and Ideas

American culture
biography
collaboration
death
family
history
home
humor
landscape
mourning
relationships
research
site-specific

Related Artists

Allora and Calzadilla
David Altmejd
El Anatsui
Eleanor Antin
Janine Antoni
assume vivid astro focus
John Baldessari
Phyllida Barlow
Matthew Barney
Lucas Blalock
Mark Bradford
Nick Cave
Alex Da Corte
Abigail DeVille
Mark Dion
Marcel Dzama
Trenton Doyle Hancock
Oliver Herring
Brian Jungen
Hiwa K
Mike Kelley
Paul McCarthy
Bruce Nauman
Catherine Opie
Robin Rhode
Jacolby Satterwhite
Cindy Sherman
Jaime Warren

"Maybe there's also, with age, a little more confidence to make something that I really love making, and then maybe not worry so much about the reception of it." —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 Bryan Zanisnik into your teaching context. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

NOTE: Please view all films before sharing them with your students. These films contain strong language, grotesque imagery, and scenes of a sexual nature.

Before Viewing

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

- ① How does your own family and history influence the things you create, read, and explore?
- ② Why might an artist choose to place themselves in a work of art? If you're creating art, why might you include or exclude yourself as a central figure in the work?
- ③ How does humor play a role in art?
- ④ Performance art and traditional theater share many qualities. How are they similar and how are they different?
- ⑤ How does an artist balance personal satisfaction against commercial pressure? Why would someone make a big "pivot" in their personal and professional lives?

While Viewing

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

- ① Describe Zanisnik's process for making art. What kinds of research and preparation is involved in making his work?
- ② In what ways does Zanisnik utilize his family and friends as collaborators? Why?
- ③ Jot down descriptive words you associate with Zanisnik's works.

After Viewing

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

- ① In *Bryan Zanisnik and Erik Winkler's Animated Conversation*, Winkler states, "His [Zanisnik's] sculptures are like drawings. He tries things and erases things." How would you describe the relationship between sculpture and drawing in his work?
- ② Why do you think the artist places himself in certain works? What effect does this have?
- ③ When and how does humor play a role in Zanisnik's work?
- ④ How might viewing a Zanisnik performance be different from seeing a traditional play?

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.

- ✓ Collect a variety of items and materials that remind you of home. Arrange these items to create a photographic tableau that features you and/or a member of your family.
- ✓ Create a short performative artwork inspired by family, such as family traditions, favorite relatives, or special holidays.
- ✓ Use the descriptive words you wrote down in the While Viewing activity to initiate a poem or short story about a place you love. Which words remind you of places you have visited? How do those words give you a sense of place?