

art21

Still from the New York  
Close Up film, "Meriem  
Bennani: In Between  
Languages"  
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Bennani

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# Meriem Bennani

**"I have a hard time connecting to anything that doesn't have humor, because for me humor is like survival."** —Meriem Bennani

ABOUT

**Born**  
1988 (Rabat, Morocco)

**Education**  
Cooper Union, BFA  
École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs,  
MFA

**Lives and Works**  
New York, New York

**About the Artist**  
Meriem Bennani's videos and installations embrace play and the absurd while contemplating the intricacies of human behavior. The artist often finds inspiration in her lived experiences, beginning with a subject like migration and diasporic identity, or by envisioning a figure and building imaginative worlds around them.

Drawing from documentary or vérité styles, Bennani's videos play with and disrupt the logics of those genres: moments of humor break up the seriousness of the artist's subject matter, creating points of access for audiences to connect with the characters and think differently about complicated social, political or cultural questions. The many styles, forms, and methods Bennani employs in her videos work alongside her sculptural installations to reflect the world we live in while exploring possible futures and new ways of engaging with visual culture.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

**Media and Materials**  
installation, sculpture, video

**Key Words and Ideas**  
absurdity  
culture  
family  
humor  
identity  
language

**Related Artists**  
Matthew Barney  
Cao Fei  
Nick Cave  
Alex Da Corte  
Nathalie Djurberg &  
Hans Berg  
Trenton Doyle  
Hancock  
Tim Hawkinson  
Azikiwe Mohammed  
Elizabeth Murray  
Paul Pfeiffer  
Mary Reid Kelley  
Jamie Warren

**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 Meriem Bennani into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

**NOTE:** Please view all films before sharing them with your students.

**Before Viewing**

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

- ① Where do cultural trends come from, and how do they spread?
- ② Why might humor be used in an artwork?
- ③ How do you understand “identity?” How does a person’s identity form?
- ④ How can family influence an artist’s work?

**While Viewing**

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

- ① To what forms of popular culture does Bennani refer during the segment, and how do they influence her work?
- ② Consider how Bennani mixes video and installation. What adjectives would you use to describe these pairings?
- ③ How does Bennani bring aspects of private life into the public realm?

**After Viewing**

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

- ① Why might Bennani choose to use cultural references in her work? What effect do they have?
- ② Compare Bennani to Cao Fei, featured in the “Fantasy” episode. How does each artist use cultural trends and pop culture in their work? What similarities and differences can you notice between them?
- ③ Review the physical locations of Bennani’s work, both where the original documentary film was taken and where the final edited film was shown. Does location impact an artwork’s meaning? What purpose would an artist have in showing images of one location in another part of the world?

**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.

- ✓ Combine three or more media, such as music, drawing, and video, in order to make a single work of art.
- ✓ Discuss a number of ways of representing the contradictory nature of identity: how you perceive yourself and how you might be perceived by others, as well as the mundane self and an imagined or exaggerated self. Create a self-portrait that combines these contradictions.