



art21.org/kingcobra

KING COBRA

ABOUT

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

KING COBRA (documented as Doreen Lynette 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. COBRA'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.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

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

“I want the audience to walk away feeling like they can’t unsee what they just saw.” —KING COBRA (Doreen Lynette Garner)

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 KING COBRA 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 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 COBRA’s work in the film *Doreen Garner Sculpts Our Trauma* (2018)?
- ② When do you experience feelings of discomfort while watching COBRA’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 COBRA’s work. How does COBRA 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 COBRA wants viewers “to walk away feeling like they can’t unsee what they just saw”?
- ② What strategies and materials does COBRA 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.