



art21.org/elleperez



Elle Pérez

ABOUT

Born
1989 (Bronx, NY)

Education
Maryland Institute College of Art, BFA
Yale School of Art, MFA

Lives and Works
Brooklyn, New York

About the Artist
Elle Pérez's photos have depicted the intimate moments, emotional exchanges, and visceral details of their subjects and landscapes.

Working closely with their peers from the LGBTQIA+ community as their subjects, Pérez visualizes the complexities of gender identity: the scars left behind on a subject's chest after surgery, intertwined limbs after a moment of intimacy, a worn and tattered breast binder. Imbued with desire and a profound sense of care for their subjects, their photographs depict the traces of queer experiences and reflect the ever-changing nature of identity.

"You can use photography to depict things that you cannot actually picture." —Elle Pérez

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials
photography

Key Words and Ideas
ambiguity
authenticity
choreography
collaboration
community
documentary
gender

geography
identity
landscape
portraiture
relationship
still life
symbol

Related Artists

Eleanor Antin
LaToya Ruby Frazier
David Goldblatt
Katy Grannan
Graciela Iturbide
Tommy Kha

Sally Mann
Richard Misrach
Zanele Muholi
Catherine Opie
Jeff Wall
Carrie Mae Weems



Pérez

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 Elle Pérez into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

NOTE: Please view all films before sharing them with your students. In the film there are images of graphic nature, including instances of nudity and blood.

Before Viewing

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

- ① Why might an artist want their work to be ambiguous? How can photographs be ambiguous?
- ② What is documentary photography? How is it different from other kinds of photography?
- ③ Describe the things that come to mind when you hear the term “portrait”.

While Viewing

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

- ① How does Pérez’s work embrace ambiguity? Cite examples from the film.
- ② How does Pérez’s work relate to, and differ from, what is known as “documentary” photography?
- ③ From your perspective, what is unique about the portraits Pérez creates? What kinds of things does the artist capture in their subjects?

After Viewing

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

- ① Pérez states, “You can use photography to depict things that you cannot actually picture.” Describe some of the things Pérez is depicting in this film. What might they be attempting to depict in photographs featuring things such as the binder? How?
- ② What do you think Pérez means when they say they “could never figure out the ethics” of documentary photography?
- ③ How does the way Pérez “stages” photographs compare to Carrie Mae Weems, featured in the “Compassion” episode?

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.

- ✓ Pérez carefully considers light, shadow, and color in their photographs. But what happens when we add or subtract one of these elements? For example, utilizing a single body part— such as an arm, a hand, or the back—draw, paint, or photograph it to convey an emotion or occurrence. How will you use color, light, or the absence of these elements to convey your idea?
- ✓ Pick an item of clothing that has a history for you. Photograph it in three or more ways. Assemble these photographs together somehow to tell a story about what this item means to you.
- ✓ Pérez documents different communities through their photography. Choose a community that you’d like to know more about, such as a sports team, a theater group, or a group of people who work together in some way. Photograph portraits of these people as a way to learn about their community and share your findings.