



art21.org/taulewis



Tau Lewis

ABOUT

Born

1993 (Toronto, Canada)

Lives and Work

Brooklyn, New York

About the Artist

A self-taught artist, Lewis has crafted her education through communion with peers and pilgrimages to meet the artists and institutions that inspire her, such as Atlanta-based artist Lonnie Holley and the Gee's Bend Quilting Collective. Once a student of journalism, the artist channels stories through material constructions.

Using labor-intensive techniques like hand-sewing, appliqué, carving, and assemblage, she transforms recycled materials into large-scale figurative works. She likens the practice of upcycling to diasporic methods of art making and survival, situating her work within the deep history, vibrant present, and oracular future of Black cultural production.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

fabric
installation
sculpture

Key Words and Ideas

ancestors
assemblage
communication
interior self
layering

mask
materiality
memory
sewing
upcycling

Related Artists

El Anatsui
Janine Antoni
Tauba Auerbach
Leonardo Drew
Song Dong
Ellen Gallagher
Ann Hamilton

Tim Hawkinson
Nicholas Hlobo
Cannupa Hanska Luger
Azikiwe Mohammed
Xu Bing
Ursula von
Rydingsvard

“A lot of black creation is an upcycling, regardless of a lack thereof, regardless of an access to. Taking things as they are and letting them shine.” —Tau Lewis

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 Tau Lewis 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 How do you create a sense of calmness? What sounds, smells, or textures foster that feeling for you?
- ② What does it mean to have an “interior life”? How might it differ from a public life?
- ③ “Upcycle” means to reuse an object to make a product of higher value than the original. Describe your experience with upcycling and the effect it had.

While Viewing

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

- ① What elements create a sense of calmness in Lewis’s studio?
- ② Listen to what Lewis says about her childhood and her interior self. What words does she use to describe that time?
- ③ Notice Lewis’s process for creating the sculptures. How does the artist use materials?

After Viewing

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

- ① What qualities of the sculptures provide a sense of calmness for Lewis? Do you think the viewer of the work feels the same immediately? Does it matter if the finished work provides the artist or viewer with different feelings?
- ② Why might an artist, like Lewis, reveal aspects of their interior lives? What did we learn about Lewis from the film?
- ③ How do Lewis’s sculptures share “shreds of the same memory”?

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.

- ✓ Reflect on the tone of the film. The film’s director, Crystal Kayiza, chose to use 16-millimeter film coupled with the artist’s vocal tone and the background music created a sense of calmness. Ask students to create a work of art that fosters calmness in any medium, except fabric or film.
- ✓ Lewis states that, by upcycling, her sculptures have “shreds of the same memory.” Have students choose a memory they share with a family member, friend, or mentor and interview that person about their shared experience. After the interview, ask students to create a drawing of a small piece or shred of that memory. Once the drawing is shared with the class, invite the artists to give that drawing to the person they interviewed.