



art21.org/ilana-harris-babou

Ilana Harris-Babou

ABOUT

Born

1991 (Brooklyn, NY)

Education

Yale University, BA

Columbia University, MFA

Lives and Works

Brooklyn, NY

About the Artist

In her work, Harris-Babou investigates the forms and functions of what she calls “aspirational media,” which range from beauty tutorials and cooking shows to home improvement television and advertisements. While drawing from the overwhelmingly positive and impossibly pristine aesthetics of her sources, the artist creates videos, sculptures, and installations that trouble these formats through the usage of absurd narratives and grotesque materials. Capitalizing on concepts like good taste, authenticity, and personal optimization, Harris-Babou contemplates and complicates the products, routines, and lifestyles that present the promise of becoming healthier and wealthier.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

film
 installation
 performance
 sculpture
 sound

Key Words and Ideas

aspiration
 family
 fantasy
 history
 home
 how-to

material
 pop culture
 satire
 television
 tutorials
 wellness

Related Artists

Laurie Anderson
 Minerva Cuevas
 Alex Da Corte
 Song Dong
 Christine Sun Kim
 Paul McCarthy

Christian Marclay
 Aki Sasamoto
 Cindy Sherman
 Stephanie Syjuco
 Anicka Yi

“The state of becoming is what is
 really exciting to me.” —Ilana Harris-Babou

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 Ilana Harris-Babou 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 Have you watched a “how-to” video before? Why do people watch these videos?
- ② How can family be a source of inspiration?
- ③ Is perfection or imperfection more interesting to you? Why?

While Viewing

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

- ① According to Harris-Babou, what do “how-to” videos or tutorial television show us?
- ② What is the role of family in Harris-Babou’s work?
- ③ How does Harris-Babou use humor and play to comment on society?

After Viewing

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

- ① How does Harris-Babou’s work comment on the fantasy of aspirational television?
- ② Harris-Babou and her mother collaborate throughout the film. What words would you use to characterize their relationship as family? As artists?
- ③ What do you think the artist’s message is about today’s society and its focus on perfection and aspiration?

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.

- ✓ Embrace Harris-Babou’s use of satire. Create a comic strip that uses humor to expose a negative or complicated aspect of society. Post them on a bulletin board for other classes to see.
- ✓ What does it mean to be happy? How could you teach someone else to be happy? Work with a partner to create a collage on teaching happiness.
- ✓ Harris-Babou’s work draws inspiration from Julia Child reenactments her mother would do in their kitchen growing up. Are there any interesting quirks or small moments of performance that you witness in your home (like a parent whistling in the garden, a sibling singing in the shower, or someone flexing in the mirror after a workout, etc.)? Reenact those moments to create a performance that tells a story about these characters in your life.