


art21.org/charles-gaines


Charles Gaines

ABOUT

Born

1944 (Charleston, SC)

Education

Jersey State College, BA
Rochester Institute of Technology, MFA

Lives and Works

Los Angeles, CA

About the Artist

A conceptual artist, Gaines' work investigates the ways in which society produces distinctions and categories. Examining the underlying structures of social and political life, the artist calls attention to the systems that organize our daily lives and the inequities and injustices they produce. Throughout Gaines' practice, he applies his varied systems to a range of media and phenomena. His series of musical scores titled Manifestos begin with political texts like the Dred Scott Sandford decision by the United States Supreme Court or the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which are transformed to music using an arbitrary system of translation from written text to musical notation. By abstracting the text from its usual context and stripping it of concrete language, Gaines highlights the elements outside of the text which contribute to the meaning behind it and imbue it with power.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

drawing
music
performance
sculpture

Key Words and Ideas

data
gesture
history
information
knowledge
manifesto
meaning
music
systems

Related Artists

Lawrence Abu Hamdan	Mimi Ọnụọha
Edgar Arceneaux	Howardena Pindell
Tauba Auerbach	Rachel Rossin
Mel Chin	Rose Salane
Guerrilla Girls	Kara Walker
Alfredo Jaar	Carrie Mae Weems
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer	Anicka Yi

“You can make art with any number of kinds of materials, and you don’t have to learn how to draw, and learn how to paint in order to be an artist.” —Charles Gaines

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 Charles Gaines 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 What does 'knowledge' mean? How does one learn? Where? With who?
- ② What is a "system"? Do you use any systems in your daily life? If so, what are they?
- ③ How is history important today?

While Viewing

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

- ① What types of knowledge is Gaines interested in?
- ② Note how Gaines talks about systems.
- ③ What moments in history does Gaines focus on in this film?

After Viewing

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

- ① How does Gaines share knowledge with viewers?
- ② Gaines creates systems to express data or information. List some examples of the final products. How are they similar? How are they different?
- ③ Why is Gaines interested in presenting history today?

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.

- ✓ Watch Tauba Auerbach in "Bodies of Knowledge." Compare how these two artists approach gaining knowledge, using that knowledge in their practice, and illustrating information their final work. Find a partner or small group to discuss.
- ✓ In the film, we see Gaines use grids in his series Southern Trees. Use graph paper as a source of inspiration. Create a work using a single sheet of graph paper.