



Production still from the
New York Close Up film,
"Rashid Johnson Makes
Things to Put Things On."
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art21.org/rashidjohnson



Rashid Johnson

ABOUT

Born

1977 (Chicago, IL)

Education

Columbia College Chicago, BA
School of the Art Institute of Chicago, MFA

Lives and Works

New York, NY

About the Artist

Rashid Johnson began his career as a photographer and now works across media—including video, sculpture, painting, and installation—using a wide variety of materials to address issues of African American identity and history. Invested in the artistic practices of both conceptualism and abstraction, his influences include literary figures such as Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright as well as artists such as Norman Lewis, Sam Gilliam, and Alma Thomas. Johnson's installations frequently include shea butter and black soap, materials that were present throughout his childhood and that carry a particular significance within Afrocentric communities.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

installation, painting, sculpture

Key Words and Ideas

afrocentric
culture
domestic
family
history

identity
materiality
objects

Related Artists

Trey Abdella
Njideka Akunyili
Crosby
Kevin Beasley
Meriem Bennani
Mark Bradford
Stan Douglas

Leonardo Drew
Marcel Dzama
Arthur Jafa
Brian Jungen
Jack Whitten
Fred Wilson

"It is important for you to live your own history." —Rashid Johnson

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 Rashid Johnson 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 materials make up a home?
- ② What is the relationship between the past and present?
- ③ How does one become an artist?

While Viewing

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

- ① List all of the objects Johnson uses.
- ② What does history mean according to Johnson?
- ③ How does Johnson describe his path to becoming an artist?

After Viewing

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

- ① How does Johnson transform a space with objects?
- ② How much power can history have over our futures?
- ③ What role does place and timing play in the process of becoming an artist?

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.

- ✓ In the *New York Close Up* film, “Rashid Johnson Makes Things to Put Things On,” Johnson is inspired by the idea of “making something to put something on.” Spend time investigating an object in your daily life and consider how it’s made. Then attempt to make the thing that made it (such as your favorite ceramic mug leading you to making clay or your favorite book leading you to how to make paper).
- ✓ Johnson talks about his family’s relationship to Blackness and Africanness having changed over time. How has your relationship to a culture changed over time? And how has that influenced your aesthetic and embodied decisions? Spend time journaling and reflecting on these questions.
- ✓ Drawing inspiration from the *New York Close Up* Film, “Rashid Johnson Trades Art with Angel Otero,” trade with a friend. But instead of trading a final artwork, trade skills. If you like to draw and your friend likes to cook, trade the skill of drawing and the skill of cooking. If you like to play basketball and your friends like to play cards, trade the skill of each.