

## LESSON PLAN: Functional Art

By Amy Wunsch, October 2008

Learn about art that can be used and create a miniature piece of furniture.



### Key Idea

People in many cultures create objects that serve a functional or useful purpose. Skilled craftsmen and artisans transform what might otherwise be an ordinary item (a bowl, a plate, a chair) into a work of art by using personal and cultural symbols and design motifs. Many contemporary artists use the form of a functional object for their own personal explorations of these very same ideas.

### Objectives

1. Students will explore the terms "functional" and "utilitarian" by brainstorming and listing items that would fall in to these categories. For example, the students will list objects they think are functional at their school (desks, tables, chairs, pencils, etc.). Which items do they find the most functional and practical? Which items do they find artistically and visually pleasing? Are there any items that are both? If given a choice, would you rather use a plastic fork to eat your spaghetti with or a metal fork designed to look like a branch with leaves? What makes an artist decide to enhance the appearance of an object that already works without decoration?
2. Students will go on an instructor-led tour of several artworks in the Nerman Museum and JCCC campus to view a variety of contemporary artworks which combine utilitarian form with artistic considerations.
3. Students will create their own piece small piece of furniture using foam board and mixed media. Students may choose a person or character (real or fictional) to inspire their creation. What kind of chair would these people or characters like to sit in: Elvis, Nemo, Lightning McQueen, Sponge Bob, etc? Students may also choose a more general theme for their piece of furniture: what kind of table would an artist use? What kind of chair would an insect choose? What would a chair look like that was based on the game of Monopoly? What would bookshelves look like if they were designed for someone who loved desserts?

### Vocabulary

Applied art=the application of design and aesthetics to objects of function and everyday use.

functional = designed or developed for use.

utilitarian = useful rather than beautiful; designed for or capable of a particular function or use.

aesthetics = a guiding principle in matters of artistic beauty and taste; artistic sensibility.

scale = the relationship between the size of something and a representation of it

proportion = size of something in relation to other things

decoration = something added by way of embellishment; ornament

### Materials Needed

Variety of sizes of foam board pieces (squares, rectangles, triangles)

8" squares for chair seat.

Instructors: pre-score foam board for legs of furniture to create hinged pieces

Paper rolls from bath tissue and paper towels

Poster putty (removable)  
Glue stick for each student  
Double stick tape  
Scissors  
Construction paper  
Markers  
Pipe cleaners, craft sticks, beads, buttons, ribbon, foam, and other mixed media  
Model Magic modeling clay for sculpted details

### **Assessment**

The instructor will lead the students through a group critique of their finished furniture creations.

- When is a furniture design considered successful?
- What things do we look for when determining whether it is successful or not?
- Tell us how you took what would ordinarily be a very functional piece of furniture (a table leg, for example) and made it aesthetically and artistically interesting.
- What was most challenging to you today?
- € Coming up with an idea or theme for your piece of furniture.
- € Constructing your piece of furniture.
- € Transforming your piece from “ho-hum” functional to something “hip-hip hooray.”

### **Tour Artwork Images**



**Kenneth Ferguson** (American, b.1928 - d. 2004)

*Rabbit Basket*, 1986

Stoneware

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990.17



**Yoshiro Ikeda** (American, b. Japan, 1947 - d. 2014)

*Untitled*, 2001

Stoneware

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002.12

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



**Barry Flanagan** (British, b. 1941-d. 2009)

*Hare and Bell*, 1988

Bronze

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995.16

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Jules and Doris Stein Foundation



**Jesus Bautista Moroles** (American, b. 1950 - d. 2015)

*Fountain of Knowledge*, 1998

Granite

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998.07



**Todd Defoe** (American Indian, Ojibwe)

*End of the Road*, 2000

Catlinite pipe with silver inlay

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008.32



**Fannie Mann** (American Indian, Navajo, b. 1933 - d. 2004)

*Navajo pictorial rug*, 1986

Wool and natural dyes

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013.32





**Carla Hemlock** (American Indian, Mohawk, b. 1961)

*Turtle Island Unraveling*, 2014

Cotton, glass beads, cotton and nylon thread

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2014.41