

TEACHER RESOURCE

HIGH



A CONTINENT OF CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

Vitra
Design
Museum

Making Africa—A Continent of Contemporary Design showcases works from a diverse range of creative fields: object and furniture design, graphic arts, illustration, fashion, architecture, urban planning, art, craft, film, photography, and digital production. These works deliberately occupy the grey areas between the disciplines, and yet they provide concrete answers to the question of what twenty-first-century design can and should achieve. They are rarely created in large quantities and often by collectives of individuals. They are oriented more toward the process than the result. They often emerge from the informal maker culture in which something existing is reworked or new work is produced with traditional and electronic tools. They establish connections between the digital revolution and our analog existence. They radically rethink materials. They reflect a sense of responsibility toward society rather than the market. Last but not least, they make bold statements about the future.

To learn more about this exhibition, visit www.makingafrica.net.

Key Concepts, Exhibition Highlights, and Suggested Activities

Shifting Paradigms (Grades 4-12)

"Paradigms are like glasses.
When you have incomplete paradigms
about yourself or life in general,
it's like wearing glasses with the
wrong prescription. Those lenses
affect how you see everything else."
—Sean Covey

What is a paradigm? A *paradigm* (pronounced "pair-a-dime") is the way we see, understand, and interpret the world. Paradigms about other people, places, and ideas are often inaccurate or incomplete.

Artist Connection: Cyrus Kabiru creates wearable eyewear sculptures that he calls *C-Stunners*. He makes them from discarded objects, therefore giving the objects new life. The *C-Stunners* are intended to give the viewer a new perspective on reality and serve as a reminder that glasses can narrow or focus one's vision and change one's view of the world.

Analyze: Have students compare and contrast the two pairs of *C-Stunners* below. How are they similar? How do they differ from one another? How might the view from the first pair be different from the one seen through the other? How would it feel to wear each pair?



Cyrus Kabiru (Kenyan, born 1984), *American Grill*, 2012, from the *C-Stunners* series, digital print. © Carl De Souza/AFP/Getty Images

Cyrus Kabiru (Kenyan, born 1984), *Caribbean Sun*, 2012, from the *C-Stunners* series, digital print. © Cyrus Kabiru, photo: Miguel Luciano

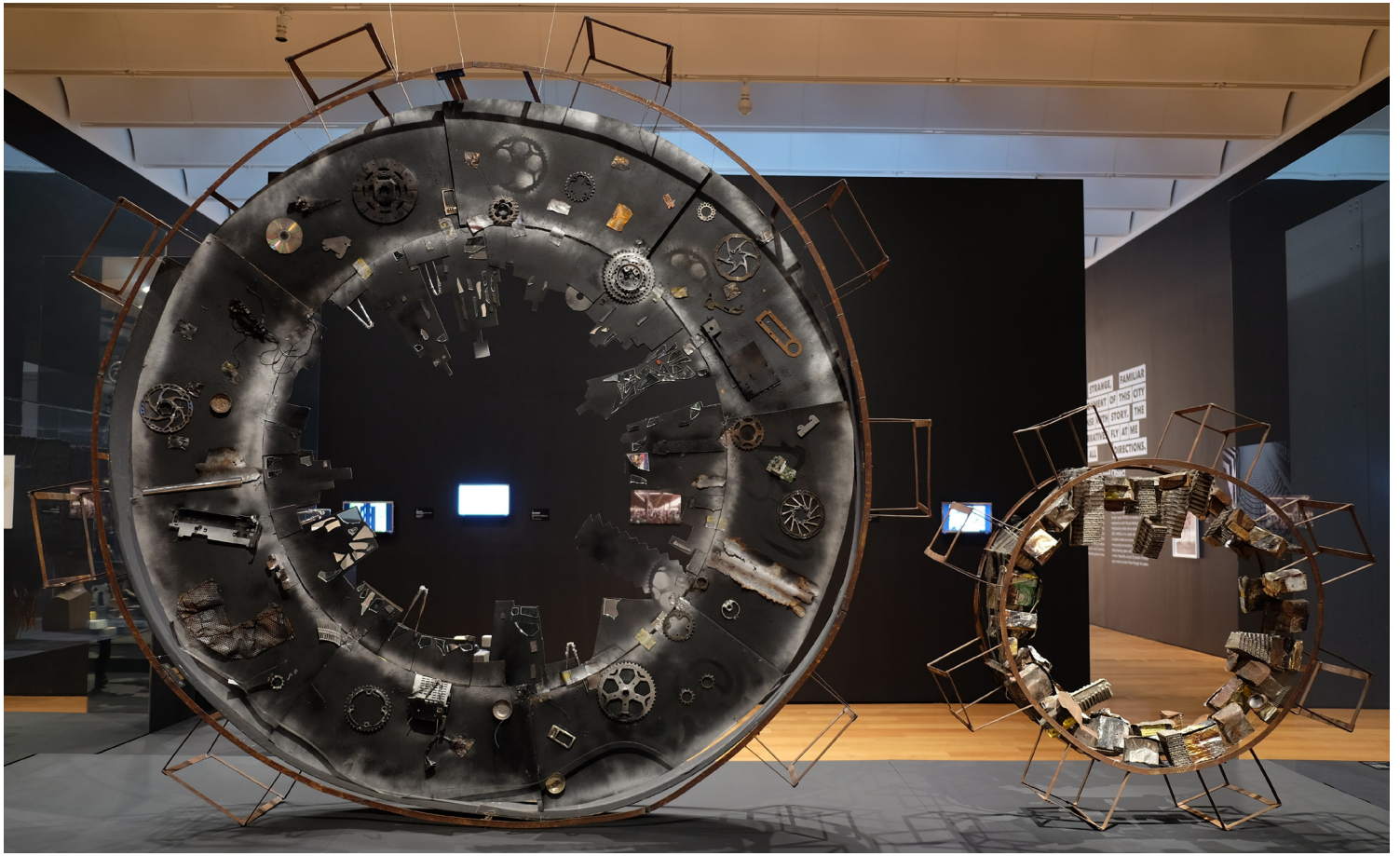
Contextualize: The *C-Stunners* series draws attention to the limited or restricted paradigms through which the world often views Africa.

- Have students use one color of marker or pen to write a list of things they know about Africa leading up to your museum field trip or before having students explore www.makingafrica.net. After the field trip or viewing the website, instruct students to add information they learned about Africa to the list using a different color of marker or pen. As a follow-up activity, ask students to write one or two paragraphs explaining if and how their paradigms about Africa shifted.

Paradigms shape how we see many components in the world around us. Extend this lesson to other topics such as politics, identity, or social issues. For example:

- Ask students to write a list of 15 words that describe themselves. The words should fill a full sheet of paper and resemble a word cloud. Imagine that someone were to look at the list of words through one of Kabiru's *C-Stunners* glasses and 5 words were hidden from view. How might the paradigm where 5 identity markers are unknown or unseen change someone else's perception of you? Why is it important to be aware of the paradigms that we hold?
- Ask students to reflect on a time when one of their paradigms or points of view changed. They will then design a pair of glasses that represents the paradigm before or after the shift.

Jua Kali–Fierce Sun (Grades 6-12)



Tahir Carl Karmali (Kenyan, born 1987), *Jua Kali*, 2014, from the *Jua Kali* series, metal, wood, plastic, and glass. © Artists Tahir Karmali, Tonney Mugo, and Denis Muraguri, photo by Tahir Carl Karmali

What does *jua kali* mean? In Kenya, the term *jua kali* translates to “fierce sun” and is applied to people who work informally in the streets to fix just about anything on demand. They form an intricate, self-organizing community of mechanics, welders, woodworkers, and other tradespeople.

Artist Connection: Artists Tahir Karmali, Dennis Muraguri, and Tonney Mugo collaborated to create *Jua Kali*, a multimedia installation that comprises two cogs. The larger cog represents the “formal” economy, featuring a stylized city skyline composed with steel, wood, glass, and computer parts. It appears polished from a distance but rough and flimsy on closer inspection. The smaller cog, representing the informal sector, is made of 3-D models in corrugated steel, scrap metal, and wood—materials commonly used within the *jua kali* community. “These two cogs represent function, where one of them shows a slum-like dwelling and the other a glass city, depicting how the informal and formal sectors rely on each other to survive,” says Karmali. “Without the resourcefulness and innovation of the informal sector, the ‘glass’ city, or formalized economy, would not be able to move.”

As a class, watch the following video clip to learn more about this installation: <https://vimeo.com/102216457>

Analyze: Display an image of the *Jua Kali* structures in your classroom. Ask students to work individually to consider the following questions:

- What do you see?
- What do you *think* about what you see?
- What do you *wonder* about?

Contextualize:

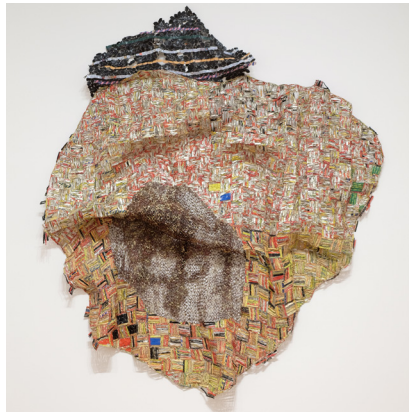
This installation explores the economy in Kenya. Use this work of art as a springboard to explore the human systems that have shaped contemporary Kenya and other communities in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- Students may write short essays regarding the artists’ intent. Consider why the artists may have created this installation. What can we learn about Kenyan economics from it?
- Why is the *jua kali* community important to Kenya’s infrastructure? How is this represented in the installation?
- Consider other cultures or areas around the world. Can you think of communities similar to the *jua kali*? How are they similar? How are they different? How would an art installation representing that community differ from *Jua Kali*?
- What is the lasting impact of colonialism on Kenyan communities?

Upcycled Art and Environmental Issues (Grades 3-12)



Amadou Fatoumata Ba (Senegalese, born 1977), *Canapé Tressé, Pouf Tressé*, 2014, bench, rubber tires, and woven pouf. © Fatoumata Ba, photo by Jean-Baptiste Joire



El Anatsui (Ghanaian, born 1944), *Iris*, 2012, aluminum and copper wire. Courtesy of October Gallery © El Anatsui



Fabrice Monteiro (Beninese-Belgian, born 1972), *Prophecy #1*, 2013, Lambda C-print on Dibond. Courtesy of M.I.A. Gallery. Set design and costumes by Aam. © Fabrice Monteiro

Define upcycling: Upcycling, also known as creative reuse, is a process of repurposing waste materials into new objects or products. The purpose of upcycling is to reduce waste in a way that is productive and can have a positive impact on communities through the use of art and design.

Artist connection:

Amadou Fatoumata Ba works in Senegal's capital, Dakar. He uses worn rubber tires to create furniture, sculptures, and two-dimensional artworks. He states: "Tires are an adventure in themselves. They accompany you on journeys, go with you wherever you want to go until they are flat and are thrown away. Everything that is discarded and declared useless can be brought back to life."

El Anatsui is inspired by discarded bottle caps that he finds in near his studio in Nsukka, Nigeria. He is able to find many of these to work with, as they are not recycled by local factories as glass bottles are. Anatsui and his team link the caps together with copper wire to create metallic tapestries. In addition to his interest in repurposing the material, Anatsui is making a commentary on the role alcohol played in the transatlantic slave trade and its lasting impact on African cultures.

Photographer Fabrice Monteiro and fashion and costume designer Doulsy (Jah Gal) collaborated to create *The Prophecy*, a series of surreal photographs, to raise awareness about environmental issues. The images combine costumed figures with photographs of polluted locations in Senegal.

Analyze:

Divide students into three groups. Assign each group an artist or pair of artists listed above. Ask each group to research the work by these artists and present their findings to the rest of the class. Have each group participate in Parts/Purposes/Complexities, a thinking routine developed by Project Zero. Observing the assigned work of art, students will consider the following: What are its parts? What are its purposes? What are its complexities?

Contextualize:

Explore the use of recycled materials in these works of art.

- Discuss why artists might be concerned with environmental issues. In what ways can art and design have an impact on communities?
- Have students create artworks using materials that would otherwise be discarded. Discuss how the arts increase awareness surrounding human consumption and the growth of landfills and polluted spaces.

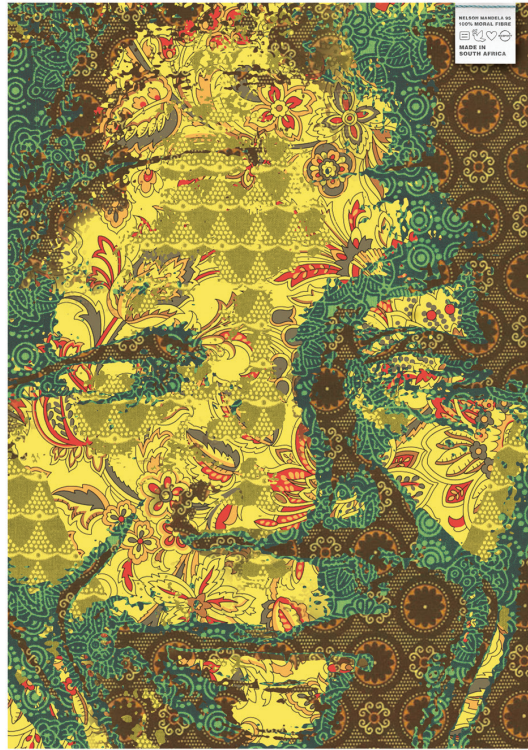
Use *Iris* by El Anatsui to springboard teaching and learning about the transatlantic slave trade.

- Have students create a map indicating what was traded and how. What are the effects of this part of history on contemporary societies in Africa, America, and Europe? Why might El Anatsui be interested in exploring this topic?
- What other kinds of materials have historical connections or problematic connotations? Have each student select a material and create a drawing of an artwork made from that material. Consider: What might this material communicate to viewers? How might my design influence the viewer's interpretation?

Nelson Mandela



Martin Joel | Long walk | Botswana



Gareth Steele | South Africa

Martin Joel (Botswana, born 1985), *Long Walk*, 2013, digital print. Courtesy of The Mandela Poster Project Collective. From the collections of the SABS Design Institute and the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital Trust © All rights reserved

Gareth Steele (South African, born 1987), *100% Moral Fibre*, 2013, digital print. Courtesy of The Mandela Poster Project Collective. From the collections of the SABS Design Institute and the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital Trust © All rights reserved

Who is Nelson Mandela? Nelson Mandela helped bring an end to South African apartheid, a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination that took place between 1948 and 1991. After serving as a leader of protests against the oppressive white regime, Mandela was sentenced to life in prison and became the face of the antiapartheid movement. Following his release in 1990, he was South Africa's first democratically elected president.

Artist Connection:

In 2013, designers Mohammed Jogie and Jacques Lange initiated The Mandela Poster Project. They sought to collect 95 poster designs from around the world, one to celebrate each year of Nelson Mandela's life. The collection has since been exhibited around the world.

Project co-founder Jacques Lange states: "The special thing about The Mandela Poster Project is that it was carried out as a voluntary initiative by a group of like-minded designers in honor of a great man and his contribution to humanity and to celebrate the spirit of Mandela's unlimited altruism."

Analyze:

Begin by analyzing the portraits of Mandela by Joel and Steele. Ask students to answer the following questions in pairs:

- How are the two portraits similar? How are they different?
- What can we learn about Nelson Mandela from looking at these images?
- Why might the artists have made the design choices they did?

Contextualize:

Nelson Mandela left a lasting global impact on civil and human rights. Start with these images as a jumping off point to explore Nelson Mandela's life and legacy. Students will research the following questions and then create their own posters inspired by The Mandela Poster Project:

- What were some of the significant events that took place during Mandela's lifetime?
- Which characteristics or leadership traits is Mandela known for? How did these make him more or less successful as a leader?
- How has South Africa changed as a result of Nelson Mandela's leadership?
- How did Mandela's work affect the international community?

Ask students to select a person, other than Mandela, who is or was an advocate for civil and human rights. Students will research the individual and create a poster commemorating his or her life. Students will consider:

- What did this person accomplish? Whom did he or she work with to do so?
- What impact did this individual have on his or her community?
- Why should this person be celebrated?
- Which design choices would best communicate this person's accomplishments? Consider color, medium, line, and style.