

# SPARKed

SPARK in Education

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

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Discipline: Visual Art

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*Still image from the SPARK story, 2006.*

## SECTION I - OVERVIEW

### SUBJECT

Michael Arcega

### GRADE RANGES

6-12 & Post-secondary

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

### OBJECTIVE

- Understand the development of personal works of art and their relationship to broader social themes and ideas, abstract concepts, and the history of art.
- Develop basic observational drawing and/or painting skills.
- Develop visual, written, listening and speaking skills through looking at, creating and talking about visual artworks.
- Develop an expressive visual vocabulary with which to address personal and/or social themes and ideas.
- Develop observational and representational skills by looking at and reproducing images of people, places and things accurately and thoughtfully.

### STORY SYNOPSIS

Conceptual artist Michael Arcega likens the titles of his works to punch lines. The titles speak to the artist's quirky sense of humor and his obsession with wordplay, while mobilizing humor to delve into weighty issues. Born in Manila, the 30-something artist uses his puns to address his interest in Filipino history, imperialism and global socio-political issues.

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing as a group
- Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance
- Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently
- Hands-on group projects in which students assist and support one another

- Critical reflection on personal expressions and how they are seen and received by others

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to Michael Arcega's artwork and the social and cultural issues he addresses
- To provide context for the understanding of Conceptual Art
- To inspire students to analyze and discuss contemporary art, and develop their own conceptual art projects

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- SPARK story "Think Globally" about Michael Arcega (download free on iTunes, search for **KQED Spark** under podcasts)
- Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card, and a video projector (if available)

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers
- Pencils, pens, and paper

### INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems

### Media Matters

Introduce your students to other Bay Area Conceptual Artists for compare/contrast purposes:

#### Stephanie Syjuco

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=22692>

#### Paul Kos

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=5425>

#### David Ireland

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=5020>



## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

Conceptual artist Michael Arcega likens the titles of his works to punch lines. There's *El Conquistadork*, a 10-foot high Spanish galleon he made from manila folders and sailed on Tomales Bay, and *Conquistadorks I & II*, elaborate suits of armor also crafted with manila folders. The titles speak to the artist's quirky sense of humor and his obsession with wordplay, while mobilizing humor to delve into weighty issues. Born in Manila, the artist uses his puns to address his interest in Filipino history, imperialism and global, socio-political issues.

Tucking himself into the paper-hulled vessel, Arcega managed to sail his *El Conquistadork*, a tiny, masted ship, in open waters without springing any leaks. The boat's solid construction is characteristic of Arcega's meticulous approach to his work. About *Conquistadorks I & 2*, Arcega notes, "I use manila folders to talk about trade and business and colonialism. Having paper armor, I think, shows the frailty of military strength."

With *Conquistadorks I & II*, which first appeared in the 2006 solo show "Getting Mid - Evil" at the Heather Marx Gallery in San Francisco, Arcega emphasizes the frameworks of power that fueled the 16th- and 20th-century European and Spanish conquests in the Philippines. As for the paper armor so prominently displayed in the same show, Arcega says that it points to both the common material's economic implications and its fragility.

His other works comment on and satirize contemporary themes, like the United States' complicated relationship with oil production. *In Gaud We Trust*, a 12-foot-high gothic cathedral constructed with black petroleum-based plastic, features oil derricks as its spires and a cross that looks as if it is spitting out black gold.

Although many of his most recognized pieces are mixed-media sculptures, Michael Arcega is a true interdisciplinary artist whose works range from paintings to installations, videos to drawings. He earned a B.F.A. in interdisciplinary studies at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1998 and his M.F.A from Stanford in 2009. Arcega was awarded residencies at the de Young Museum in 2002 and at the Headlands Center for the Arts in 2005. Arcega is represented by the Marx & Zavattero gallery in San Francisco.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Much of Michael Arcega's art employs deliberate mis-readings of Filipino-American accents, introducing unexpected double meanings. In this sense, Arcega's work participates in a modern tradition of humor and wordplay exemplified by Marcel Duchamp and the Surrealist artists for whom Duchamp was an important touchstone.

Duchamp is commonly considered to be among the most influential artists of the 20th century, having been instrumental in the development of Dadaism, Surrealism, and Conceptual Art. One of his more notorious early works, and one that cemented his participation in the Dada Movement is a kind of visual pun. Under the pseudonym R. Mutt, Duchamp submitted an inverted urinal to the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition and named it *Fountain*.



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917  
[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f6/Duchamp\\_Fontaine.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f6/Duchamp_Fontaine.jpg)

In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Sigmund Freud wrote about how humor results from the conscious recognition of a socially repressed thought. In this sense, humor, and wordplay in particular, can offer insight into both the workings of the psyche, and those of society at large. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud points again and again to the ways in which dreams use wordplay to convey meanings that the communication of the unconscious mind.

## RESOURCES – TEXTS

Arcega, Michael. *Minor Monuments for Cultural Residues*. Michael Arcega, 2009.

Caws, Mary Ann. *Surrealism*. Phaidon, 2010.

Duchamp, Marcel. *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*. Da Capo Press, 1989

Godfrey, Tony. *Conceptual Art (Art & Ideas)*. Phaidon, 1998.

Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. Trans. James Strachey. W.W. Norton & Co., 1990.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Avon, 1980.

Mink, Janis. *Marcel Duchamp: 1887-1968; Art as Anti-Art*. Taschen, 2000.

Taylor, Michael R. *Marcel Duchamp: Etant Donnes*. Yale University Press, 2009.

## RESOURCES – WEB SITES

Michael Arcega's website:  
<http://www.arcega.us/Home.html>

Michael Arcega at Marx & Zavattero Gallery  
<http://www.marxzav.com/artist.php?artistID=13>

Interview with Michael Arcega for SFist:  
[http://sfist.com/2005/02/18/interview\\_mike\\_arcega.php](http://sfist.com/2005/02/18/interview_mike_arcega.php)

Article about Marcel Duchamp's use of puns and wordplay:  
[http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue\\_2/Articles/gould.html](http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_2/Articles/gould.html)

Wikipedia entry about Marcel Duchamp:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel\\_Duchamp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel_Duchamp)

## VIDEO RESOURCES

Short video interview with Michael Arcega for Mission Local:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3K3yA9TGNgk&feature=related>

Footage of Michael Arcega show at Marx & Zavattero, October 2009:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eY1K-lFguM>

## BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

Marx & Zavattero Gallery  
77 Geary Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
San Francisco, CA  
Call 415 627 9111 for hours

Valencia Street @ 16<sup>th</sup> in the Mission District  
Michael Arcega's Public Post installation:  
[http://www.arcega.us/Work/Entries/2010/6/8\\_Valencia\\_Street\\_Posts.html](http://www.arcega.us/Work/Entries/2010/6/8_Valencia_Street_Posts.html)

## SECTION III – VOCABULARY

### DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND WORDS AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY AND

#### **Colonialism**

This term refers to the control by Western European countries of emerging or developing nations called colonies for economic profit, although it was often justified in religious or ideological terms.

#### **Conceptual Art**

Artwork in which the idea is primary rather than the object produced. The best medium is chosen to achieve the desired effect. The term is derived from an art movement beginning in the 1960s and 70s in which artists deliberately sought to avoid using traditional fine art materials and approaches to making art.

#### **Conquistador**

Spanish conqueror or adventurer, especially one of those who conquered Mexico, Peru, and Central America in the 16th century

#### **Façade**

Front, front wall, portico or front elevation

#### **Galleon**

Large ship with sails used mainly by the Spanish between the 15th and 17th centuries for fighting and for carrying goods.

#### **Gothic**

This is a term derived from Western European architecture between the 12th and 15th centuries, the Middle Ages in Europe. This style was characterized by tall, pointed arches and high curved ceilings and other very distinct features such as flying buttresses. For illustrative images, visit [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/cas/fnart/arch/gothic\\_arch.html](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/arch/gothic_arch.html)

#### **Installation Art**

The combining of elements into a singular artwork that is located specifically in one place; an artwork that only exists in the place in which it was/is

installed, and is not able to be relocated like a painting or a print.

#### **Medium**

Particular material or form used to create a work of art.

#### **Metaphor**

A picture painted by words - that is a word or phrase used to describe something to which it is not literally applicable.

#### **Middle Ages**

The period in European history between antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, often considered to be between the end of the Roman Empire in the 5th century and the early 15th century.

#### **Mixed media**

Artwork in which more than one type of art material is used, for example a collage or work on canvas that combines paint, ink, photography, paper etc

#### **Multimedia**

Computer programs that involve users in the design and organization of text, graphics, video and sound in one presentation.

#### **Oligarchy**

Power held by a small group of people who govern or control a nation or an organization, often in their own interests.

#### **Performance Art**

A form of art in which an event or events are planned and enacted before an audience for aesthetic reasons.

#### **Whimsical**

Quirky, unusual, capricious

## SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

#### Engaging with Conceptual Art

In the **SPARK** episode, Michael Arcega is described as a conceptual artist. Ask students to explain what they understand by the term and to give examples of conceptual artists they are familiar with.

Introduce the ideas underpinning the conceptual art movement of the 1960s and 1970s, for example that art should be mainly about ideas instead of objects. Explain that conceptual artists usually set aside the traditional processes of art like painting or carving, and their work can seem confusing because it does not necessarily fit conventional definitions of “art”, nor is it always exhibited in the spaces we associate with viewing art, such as galleries or museums. The term can be applied to many artists and approaches and can be understood more as an attitude toward making art than a movement defined by a single style.

For more information on conceptual art visit: <http://www.biddingtons.com/content/pedigreeconceptual.html>

Play the **SPARK** episode on Michael Arcega at <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=6182> and allow students ten minutes to free-write their thoughts and responses to the artwork. Invite them to share their ideas, using the following prompts to guide the discussion.

- What ideas underpin Michael Arcega’s work? Are there common themes?
- Explore the playfulness in Arcega’s artwork. Do you find his work witty or funny? Thought provoking?
- How does wordplay impact the way his work is viewed and understood? Give examples.
- Arcega’s work engages with political ideas. Is his work political? Give examples.
- Does it sustain your interest – will it have staying power? Is it relevant as he intends?
- Does the work belong in an art gallery?

Stream the slideshow at <http://www.arcega.us/Overview.html> and ask students to focus on **one** piece of Arcega’s artwork, featured either in the **SPARK** episode or exhibited in the slideshow. Working in a computer lab or assigning this activity for homework would enable students to stream the episode and/or slideshow at their own pace.

Ask students to use the prompt questions above to structure a 300 word critical response to the piece they have selected.

**Blogging** For students in 9<sup>th</sup>-12 grades Direct students to the **KQED Arts and Culture** web page at <http://www.kqed.org/arts/> and ask them to review the blog format for posting reviews. Suggest they read through some guidelines at <http://www.problogdesign.com/blog-usability/format-your-posts-for-readability/> or <http://www.beawesomeonline.com/how-to-format-a-blog-post>. Discuss the conventions of blogging with the class.

Ask students to write their response to one of Michael Arcega’s installations in the form of a 200 word blog post. Suggest they email their blog to a member of the class to review. Share a selection of the blogs with the whole class, and discuss both the content and effective use of the format.



Michael Arcega, *In Gaud We Trust*, 2006  
<http://www.arcega.us/Overview.html#15>

## **SPARKLER**

\* Ask students to view work by other conceptual artists by visiting a gallery or museum which is easily accessible to them, such as the San Francisco or San Jose Museums of Modern Art, New Langton Arts, Berkeley Art Museum or New Leaf Gallery. Invite them to report back on the work of other conceptual artists whose work they view.

Alternatively suggest they visit the online conceptual art gallery at: The Global Virtual Museum of Conceptual Art <http://www.art-life.com/MOCA/> and view a current conceptual art exhibition.

### **Planet Conquistadork**

Working in groups of three, explain to students that they are going to design their version of Conquistadorks, modeled on the elaborate suits of armor crafted by Arcega with manila folders.

Starting with the concept, each group will create a mask or body costume to represent a persona or idea. The following prompts will help each group to devise a narrative to go with their conquistadork.

- Who is their conquistadork?
- Does it have a name?
- Where does it come from?
- What does it look like?

From their narrative describing their conquistadork, they should then produce a summary of their idea and start to create a design or sketch for their persona.

- How will they represent their idea?
- What would it be made of?
- What materials work with the central idea?
- How should it look?

Encourage students to think imaginatively about materials, in the way that Arcega deliberated on his choice of manila envelopes to construct body armor and symbolize an idea. Thinking about the identity they are seeking to create, suggest they draw on materials they use everyday, found objects, particular textures, shapes, angles, and colors to animate their idea.

Once all the conquistadorks are created, exhibit the models around the room and invite each group to come forward and introduce their persona, read the narrative describing the character and be prepared to answer questions about this conquistadork. It may be helpful to appoint a student moderator to oversee the group critiques.

Take pictures of each group and their named character and post the photos on a group Flickr site. Invite students in other classes to view the site and vote on their favorite conquistadork.

### **Researching a Conceptual Artist**

Ask students to choose ONE conceptual artist from the 1960s or 1970s to research and introduce to the group. Suggest that students choose a well known artist whose work is often exhibited – for example, Paul Kos, Marcel Duchamp, Louise Bourgeois, Ed Ruscha, Sol Lewitt, Yoko Ono or Gerard Richter, etc.

As a basis for the presentations, have students write 500 words about their chosen artist including:

- an overview of the artist's life
- a summary of main works
- an in-depth description of one piece of work that they find particularly interesting
- a personal response that addresses the appeal of the work. For example, do they find the work witty? Challenging? Thought provoking? Evocative? Disturbing?

Allow sufficient time for the presentations so that students have the opportunity to engage with the artist being discussed. Provide a projector so that slides from artists' websites can be projected onto a wall in the classroom to illustrate the research

Conclude by inviting students to choose from the range of artists presented and compare two conceptual artists. For example Arcega could be compared to any one of the artists chosen or an interesting comparative pair would be Marcel Duchamp and Paul Kos, two artists working at in different time periods, and using differing materials and cultural referents.

### **Thinking about Pleasure and Art**

Introduce the notion of pleasure and art. Do students enjoy viewing art and is the idea of

aesthetic beauty a central component of viewing pleasure? What else do they respond to? How does conceptual art fit into this framework?

Encourage students to reflect on the ways in which they engage with conceptual art.

- Are there accepted notions of beauty in art?
- Should art be aesthetically pleasing? Why?
- Are there other objectives? What might they be?
- Does intellectual challenge offer pleasure in the same way?
- Is aesthetic pleasure a personal response?
- What informs aesthetic response?
- How does culture shape the way art is ascribed meaning?

Explore with the class how conceptual art can depart from traditional ideas of artistic beauty and encourage students to think about these issues which are fundamental to aesthetics and notions of pleasure.



Marcel DuChamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1951  
[http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=81631](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81631)

#### RELATED STANDARDS - VISUAL ARTS

Grade 4

##### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.5 Describe and analyze the elements of art (color, shape/form, line, texture, space, and value), emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

Grade 6

##### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.1 Use various observational drawing skills to depict a variety of subject matter.

Grade 8

##### *Develop Perceptual Skills and Visual Arts Vocabulary*

1.1 Use artistic terms when describing the intent and content of works of art.

##### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

4.1 Students analyze, assess, and derive meaning from works of art, including their own, according to the elements of art, the principles of design, and aesthetic qualities.

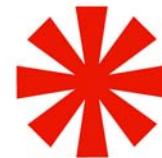
##### *Derive Meaning*

4.2 Develop a theory about the artist's intent in a series of works of art, using reasoned statements to support personal opinions.

4.3 Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at

<http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/standards/vpa>.