



UNION

Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

Sacred Symbols

Gordon Baldwin, Charles O. Dewey Middle School, Brooklyn NY

Essential Question:

Can one capture / represent a person's beliefs (religious, cultural, or secular) through an object or image that they consider sacred?

Materials Needed:

Primary source photos (included below), computer, digital projector, digital cameras, workbooks, colorful poster board to use as backdrops.

Primary Sources: (see below)

Robert Frank, Fourth of July, Jay, New York, 1954;
Neil Winokur, New York City, 2000

Students will be able to:

- Know: Symbols are things that stand in for something else or "point" to something else.
- Understand: Photographic content (what the picture is of) can function like a symbol, representing things not seen or not physically in the picture.
- Do: Students will be able to identify symbols and look for meaning in pictures that may not be visualized.

Teacher Preparation:

Ask students to bring in an object (small to medium size) that they see as sacred to themselves. It can be religious, cultural, or secular. They should think independently about what they consider sacred. This object will be used for the photo exercise.

Procedure:

Can photographs function as signs and symbols?

- Robert Frank, Fourth of July, Jay, New York, 1954:
 - Ask your students:
 - “What do you see?”
 - “What is being celebrated and how do you know that?”
 - “What evidence is there in the picture that tells you that?”

- Show Neil Winokur’s images (do NOT tell them the titles of the works). Ask again:
 - “What do you see?”
 - “What do the individual objects represent?”
 - Show them the entire grouping and ask: “What do they symbolize when grouped together?”

- Share 4 objects based upon Brent Rodriguez-Plate’s book *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects* (stone, incense, drum and bread):
 - Ask the students to: Describe the object, Interpret the object and state its sensual affect

Photo exercise:

Sacred Object Still Life

Have each student present their object. Work with them to photograph it against a curved colored poster board backdrop to create a still life “self-portrait” in the style of the Winokur images. The objects should be evenly and well lighted.

The students should take several images and will share their strongest one. Along with the image the student must, in writing:

- Title the image
- Describe the object
- Interpret the object’s sacred meaning to the student
- Explain the object’s sensual (5 senses) effect on the student.

Sharing / Assessment:

Have the students share their images without the writing, several images per table. Have the students at each table view the images and follow the steps we have run through previously (what do you see; what does the object represent; what does the object mean to you or do you think it means to the artist) Now title each image on a post it note. Come together as a class and reveal titles and students meaning and meaning.

Images and student statements will be publicly presented in a gallery exhibition.

Sacred Symbols

Primary Source Photos





Robert Frank, *Fourth of July, Jay, New York, 1954*

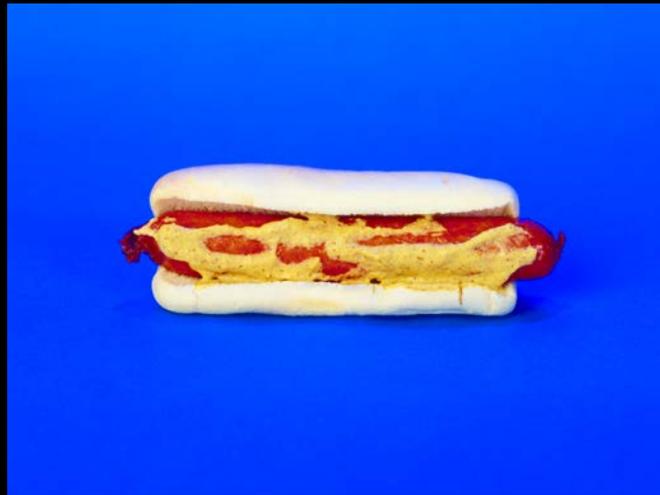


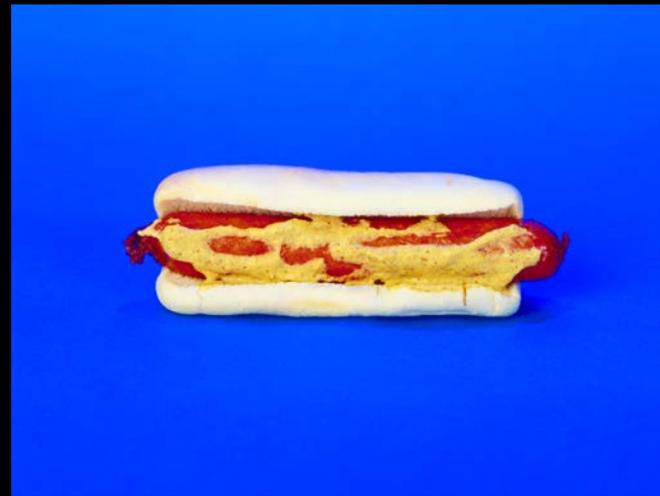












Neil Winokur, *New York City*, 2000