

K A M B U I O L U J I M I

The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two

Educator Handout: Grades 7-12

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two features Olujimi's expansive and diverse output, including videos, drawings, paintings, photographs, silkscreens, sculptures, installations, and textiles made by the artist from 2005 through 2023. Embedded with a sense of duration and exploration of memory, the exhibition demonstrates Olujimi's long-term interest in both the construction and deconstruction of mythic spaces, via memories, monuments, and other forms of memorials. The exhibition includes work from multiple series, many of which were long-term projects ranging from three to ten years.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Kambui Olujimi was born and raised in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, and is currently based in New York City. He received his M.F.A. from Columbia University and B.F.A. from Parsons School of Design. Olujimi is an artist, filmmaker, and writer. His work has been screened or exhibited at multiple venues including Sundance Film Festival; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; MASS MoCA; and on the screens in New York City's Times Square, among others. His work was also featured in the 2023 *Sharjah Biennial* in the United Arab Emirates. Olujimi has been awarded residencies from Black Rock Senegal, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, and MacDowell. He has received grants, commissions, or fellowships from the Jerome Foundation, NYSCA/NYFA, MTA Arts & Design, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. His work has been reviewed in *The New Yorker*, *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, *Art in America*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *The Guardian*, and CNN.

VOCABULARY

- **Concept:** idea(s) behind an artwork
- **Context:** the situation in which something occurs
- **Novella:** a story that is longer than a short story, but shorter than a novel
- **Project-based artmaking:** when decisions for an artwork (such as mediums, techniques, and processes) are informed by the artist's concept(s)
- **Medium:** refers to the type of art (such as drawing, quilting, or photography), as well as the materials an artwork is made from (such as ink, fabric, or glass)¹
- **Subject matter:** what is portrayed or suggested in an artwork (such as a person, place, or thing)
- **Technique:** the way in which an artist uses a medium

¹Tate (n.d.). *Art Term: Medium*. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/medium>.



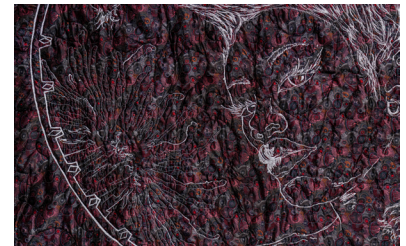
Installation views of *Kambui Olujimi: The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two* at University Galleries of Illinois State University. Photo credits: Jade Nguyen.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONNECT - VA:Cn11 - Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Kambui Olujimi is a **project-based** artist, which means that he determines the **mediums** and **techniques** for artworks based on the concepts he is exploring. Before asking students to engage in project-based artmaking, introduce them to bodies of work presented in [The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two](#). Provide students with the following **context**:

- [Wayward North](#) is a series of twelve quilted star-maps. The quilts detail characters and events from each chapter in a **novella** written by Olujimi. When working on this project, someone Olujimi loved was traveling by sea and he was thinking about the ways humans have historically communicated over time and distance. Stars have been used as both navigational tools and storytelling devices by people throughout time and across cultures. Quilts are collaboratively made, can be folded and carried from place to place, and have a long narrative history, particularly within the [African Diaspora in America](#).
- [InDecisive Moments](#) is a series of handblown glass sculptures that considers time on the geologic scale. Olujimi had no prior glassblowing experience when he conceived of this project. To learn how to work with this **medium**, he reached out to a friend who introduced him to the processes and **techniques** necessary to execute his idea. The final sculptures resemble melting hourglasses that encapsulate water and iceberg forms. The works convey the fragility of Earth's systems and the urgency of the climate crisis.
- For over a decade, Olujimi has created artworks based on his research related to the history of [Depression-era dance marathons](#) in the United States. These marathons were highly segregated spaces that challenged the mental and physical limits of participants. Through [performances, videos, long-exposure photographs, silkscreen prints, and more](#), Olujimi explores the underlying implications of these events and examines how dance marathons embodied, in his words, "[endurance, defiance, and a desire to live beyond the capacities we have internalized](#)."



Kambui Olujimi, *Wayward North* (detail), 2010. Fabric, rhinestones, and embroidery. Courtesy of the artist. Photo credit: Jade Nguyen.

CONNECT - VA:Cn10 - Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Guide students in developing ideas for a series of artworks that respond to a topic of personal interest. Provide students with the following prompts.

Select a topic to explore through research. Document your findings through writing, sketching, audio recording, mind mapping, or a combination.

- Consider conducting personal interviews, reading [newspaper archives](#), or watching videos on related subjects.
- How have similar subjects been explored through art; written, oral, and visual storytelling; and other cultural artifacts—such as music, clothing, food, etc.?

Develop multiple ideas for a series of artworks that respond to your research.

- One of Olujimi's early ideas for *Wayward North* was to cast the subjects in bronze. Although bronze statues carry narrative weight, they are also physically heavy and not easily transportable. Consider what feelings and ideas are conveyed by various **mediums**, **techniques**, and processes. How do they relate to the **concept(s)** for your project?
- As seen in [Wayward North](#), will you use the same **medium(s)**, **technique(s)**, and processes to depict the same **subject matter**? Or will you use a variety—as seen in Olujimi's [Endurance](#) series and [Zulu Time](#)?
- If your project requires you to learn a new **medium** or **technique**, consider from whom in your class, school, or community you could learn the necessary skills. Be open to sharing your own skills and knowledge with your classmates.

Afterwards, prompt students to create a series of works in response to their research and concept development.

- Consider having students work on their series throughout the semester. Encourage them to reflect on how their work—and the way they are thinking about it—changes over time.

Educator resources are available on the exhibition [webpage](#).

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