

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

The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two

Educator Handout: Grades K-6

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

[*The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two*](#) features videos, drawings, paintings, photographs, silkscreens, sculptures, installations, and textiles made by artist [Kambui Olujimi](#) between 2005 and 2023. Embedded with a sense of extended time and exploration of memory, the exhibition shows Olujimi's lasting interest in how imagined spaces are created, changed, and unmade through stories, monuments, and other forms of memorials. The exhibition includes work from multiple series, many of which were long-term projects. By presenting these bodies of work together, it becomes possible to see the overall weight and significance of Olujimi's practice over the past two decades.¹

ABOUT THE ARTIST

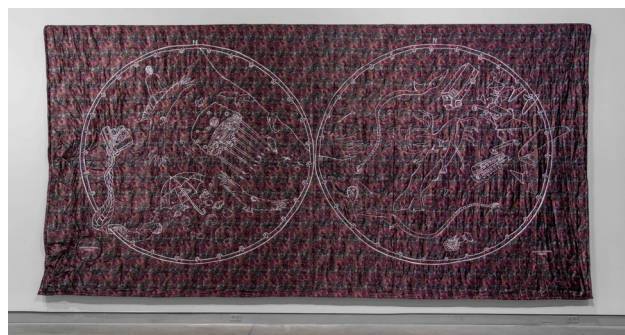
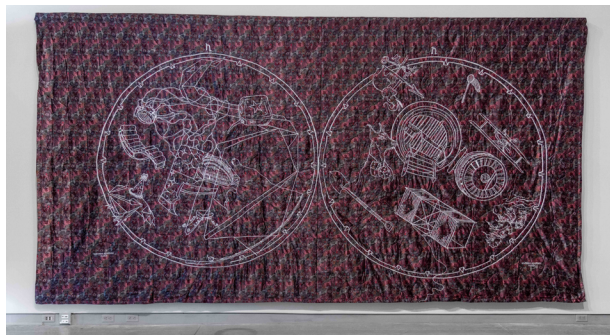
Kambui Olujimi was born and raised in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, and is currently based in New York City. He received his M.F.A. from Columbia University and B.F.A. from Parsons School of Design. Olujimi is an artist, filmmaker, and writer. His work has been screened or exhibited at multiple venues 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

- **Constellation:** refers to a group of stars that form a distinct pattern and has been given a name²
- **Fiber art:** refers to artwork made with natural or synthetic fibers such as fabric, yarn, or thread, and techniques such as weaving, felting, sewing, or knitting
- **Subject matter:** what is portrayed or suggested in an artwork—such as a person, place, thing, or idea
- **Symbol:** an image or object that stands for an idea or a feeling—such as a heart for love
- **Theme:** recurring ideas, materials, or subject matter

¹University Galleries of Illinois State University (n.d.). *Kambui Olujimi: The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two*. <https://galleries.illinoisstate.edu/exhibitions/2023/kambui-olujimi/>.

²Science Mill (2023, May 25). *Constellations according to different cultures*. <https://www.sciencemill.org/blog/2023/5/13/constellations-according-to-different-cultures>.



Kambui Olujimi, *Wayward North*, 2010. Fabric, rhinestones, and embroidery. Installation views 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.

Begin by introducing students to **constellations** across cultures. Consider using the [Science Mill's *Constellations According to Different Cultures*](#). Explore an interactive visualization of **constellations** in the night sky by clicking on the [link](#) at the bottom of the web page.

Then, introduce students to [Wayward North](#), a series of twelve hand-quilted tapestries created by Kambui Olujimi. The tapestries detail the stars in the northern and southern hemispheres during each month of the year. The stars are connected by newly-imagined **constellations**—each of which is based on a character or event from a story written by Olujimi.

RESPOND - VA:Re8 - Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work.

Analyze the [Wayward North](#) tapestries using the following prompts:

- Identify and describe the **subject matter**.
- Describe how the **subject matter** is arranged.
- What **themes** can you find? What do you think the **constellations** might be about based on your observations?
- What similarities do you see between *Wayward North* and the **constellations** you learned about from other cultures?

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

After examining *Wayward North*, share that Olujimi based the **constellations** on characters from a story he wrote. Each of the characters was inspired by people from his life—including personal relationships, historical figures, and characters from other stories—particularly trickster characters. Then, guide students in the process of individually or collaboratively constructing narratives based on people, places, or things from their own lives.

After students have written their narratives, have them select a limited number of subjects and events in their stories and draw **symbols** to represent each of them. Provide students with printed or digital maps of the stars. Use resources such as [In-The-Sky.org](#)'s online planetarium, a star-mapping software that allows you to see and print the stars at specific dates and times; or [Night Sky](#), a free app that provides a real-time view of the stars. Prompt students to look for patterns in the stars that are similar to the **symbols** from their story. Then, have them create **constellations** by connecting the stars with pencil.

Extension activities:

1. Create **cyanotypes** with students' **constellations**:
 - Scan students' **constellations** and print negative images onto transparencies. Or, have students use a black marker to trace their **constellations** onto a transparency.
 - Place the transparencies over pre-sensitized cyanotype paper and expose in the sun for 5-10 minutes.
 - Rinse the cyanotypes in water and set out to dry.
2. Create a class "quilt" by projecting and tracing students' **constellations** onto a large piece of paper or fabric. Accompany the "quilt" with students' stories. Consider hosting a read-aloud event where students share their stories with the audience.



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

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

You can find [University Galleries](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Vimeo](#) and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact galler@illinoisstate.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to this exhibition.