

from generation generation to

INHERITED MEMORY & CONTEMPORARY ART

EXHIBITION RESOURCE

NOV 25, 2016–APR 2, 2017

**CONTEMPORARY
JEWISH MUSEUM**

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This exhibition guide, intended for educators or anyone interested in exploring the themes and ideas of *From Generation to Generation: Inherited Memory and Contemporary Art*, may be used before or after a visit to The Contemporary Jewish Museum (The CJM), or as a stand-alone resource for teaching.

A TIMELY TOPIC

From Generation to Generation examines memory, sometimes personal, but more often collective or historic, through the lens of art. The artists invite us into their worlds, urging us to make connections between past and present, to consider the changing nature of history and memory, and to reflect on how and why certain memories are handed down from generation to generation. In our current world context, the exhibition has a new urgency. These works of art, created by twenty-four artists from around the world, are in conversation with one another in the gallery—a conversation that crosses the lines of nation, culture, and religion. It is easy to walk through and see what these artists and artworks have in common—overcoming trauma, surviving war, fighting for justice, and that we, no matter where we come from, have memories that have been handed down to us. Through these personal, human, memory-based reflections on history, we as viewers are able to develop empathy and new understandings of the time periods on which they reflect. We need more empathy, understanding, and dialogue in today’s world. Yet more importantly, the exhibition implies that we also have an obligation when we inherit someone’s memories. What do we do with these stories from the past, and how will we use them to guide our way to the future?

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

THE ARTISTS INCLUDE

Christian Boltanski
Nao Bustamante
Binh Danh
Silvina Der-Meguerditchian
Bernice Eisenstein
Eric Finzi
Nicholas Galanin
Guy Goldstein
Fotini Gouseti
Ellen Harvey
Aram Jibilian
Loli Kantor
Mike Kelley
Lisa Kokin
Ralph Lemon
Rä di Martino
Yong Soon Min
Fabio Morais
Elizabeth Moran
Vandy Rattana
Anri Sala
Wael Shawky
Hank Willis Thomas
Chikako Yamashiro

Memory can take many forms: memories of events we have experienced, memories we have heard about as family stories, memories seen through images in popular culture, or even memories of an imagined world. The twenty-four artists in *From Generation to Generation: Inherited Memory and Contemporary Art* work with memories that are not their own. They remember and recall stories that were never theirs and assemble them in a variety of media to be shared, seen, heard, and experienced by others. It is precisely this distance in time and space that allows them to offer powerful narratives, some of which are still being written.

This exhibition expands on the groundbreaking work by Dr. Marianne Hirsch on postmemory, defined as “the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.” (Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, 2012) Through their work, the artists presented in these galleries search, question, and reflect on the representation of truths related to ancestral and collective memory—ultimately attempting to make sense of and connect with their own pasts. The title of the exhibition is taken from the Hebrew idiom *l’dor vador*, typically translated as “from generation to generation,” meaning that one generation has a responsibility to educate the next.

The exhibition follows themes suggested by the artworks themselves, and especially the type of memories used as material. Some of the works include media imagery that depict historical events such as the Vietnam War or the Civil Rights movement; others memorialize lives lost during the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. Some artists incorporate personal and family narratives to their pieces, blending together collective and ancestral memory. A final selection presents works that look at the near-present from an imagined distant future.

Pierre-François Galpin and Lily Siegel are the co-curators of this exhibition.

SET INDUCTION: EXPLORING INHERITED MEMORY

Use this worksheet to explore the idea of “inherited memory.” Then, discuss the answers using the “For Discussion” prompts on the next page.

Please share a story, memory, or incident that has been passed down to you (family or cultural).

How was it shared? What objects, images, etc. do you associate with this “inherited memory?” How, if at all, has it changed over time?

Please share a story, memory, or incident that you have shared with others.

How did you share it? How, if at all, has it changed over time?

FOR DISCUSSION

- The top two boxes relate to memories that you have inherited. What types of memories have you inherited? What do they have in common? Do they relate to family stories? Culture? Overcoming challenges? Tragedy?
- How were these stories passed down to you? Orally? Using objects or photos? What helps you remember them?
- Why do you think these particular memories were passed on? How may they have impacted you or your life?
- Do you think these stories or memories have changed over time? If so, how?
- Do any of these inherited memories relate to historical events? If so, how do these personal stories differ from historical accounts?
- Now, consider the bottom two boxes. What memories of your own have you chosen to share with others? Why did you choose these memories to share? How did you share them?
- What do these memories have in common with the memories you “inherited?”

GUIDING QUESTIONS: HISTORY AND MEMORY

Discuss these questions and concepts for a deeper exploration of the themes of the exhibition.

- What are the differences between history and memory? How might a personal story impact our understandings of history?
- Do you think history is “fixed” or “objective”? How might historical accounts change based on who is telling the story?
- What ideas or events from the past impact you today? What is the relationship between the past and the present? How do we make meaning from the past?
- When you are learning about history, what helps you remember it? What role do objects, music, or photographs have in reminding us of the past? How do they shape our memories and understandings of times past?
- Do you think we have a responsibility to the memories we “inherit”? Can you think of a time that a story or memory you learned about influenced a decision you made?

EXPLORATION OF ART IN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

First, look at one or more of the artworks in *From Generation to Generation*, using the discussion questions below for further exploration (click the images to see them full size). Then, view the video interviews with the artists to learn how their art explores their own relationships with inherited memories of past events.

Suggested artworks include:



VIETNAM WAR

Binh Danh, *Holding #2*, From the series *Immortality: The Remnants of the Vietnam and American War* (2009)

Video: Binh Danh on physical remnants of war, the lasting impact of war on nature, and media images and memory (vimeo.com/194087499)



KOREAN HISTORY, WAR, AND IMMIGRATION

Yong Soon Min, *Motherload* (1996)

Video: Yong Soon Min on her mother's experiences in Korea, through the art of the bojagi, a traditional Korean wrapping technique (vimeo.com/194085826)

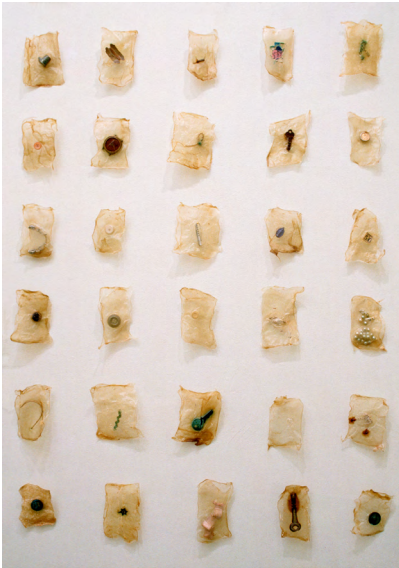


THE HOLOCAUST

Christian Boltanski, *Scratch* (2014)

EXPLORATION OF ART IN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

(continued)



THE HOLOCAUST

Lisa Kokin, *Inventory* (1997)

Video: Lisa Kokin on tiny objects, concentration camps, and collective post-memory of the Holocaust (vimeo.com/193401543)



CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Hank Willis Thomas, *What Goes Without Saying* (2012)

Video: Hank Willis Thomas on connecting the past and present, and cultivating active participation against injustice (vimeo.com/193634303)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Consider the following:

- What stands out to you about this artwork?
- What kind of story might the artist be telling?
- What aspects of history or memory can you find here?
- Does the artist seem to have a particular perspective or message? If so, what is it?
- What materials does the artist use to share this memory? Why do you think he/she chose these particular materials?
- What is the relationship between this artwork and the present moment? How might we interpret it in light of current events?
- Do a bit of research to see if you can identify the event or memory the artist is exploring. How does the artwork relate to this event? How does it impact your understanding of the historical event? Does the artist work with any primary source materials? If so, how does he/she use them in the artwork?
- “Historians use the materials of history (primary sources) to create an account of the past, but then use them to act in the present and the future.” (Bob Bain, Associate Professor, School of Education; Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Michigan) If we consider these artworks a form of historical material, how might they inspire us to act today and in the future?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

After exploring the themes of history and memory as well as the works of art and artists in *From Generation to Generation*, use the following ideas to guide further exploration of these ideas.

CREATIVE ACTIVITY: FIVE SENSES MEMORY POEM

Sensory experiences are very closely linked to memory. Often our memories are related to a particular smell, song, or texture. The artists in *From Generation to Generation* engage many of our senses in their artworks—working in sound, fabric, installation, video, and more.

Develop your own memory poem, using all of the senses to evoke the memory. Think of a significant memory or moment from your life. (It can be joyful or difficult, or otherwise, but a reminder to be sensitive to your students' personal stories and situations.) Respond to the following prompts:

- I see . . .
- I hear. . .
- I feel . . .
- I smell. . .
- I taste. . .

Put these sensory recollections together to create a five senses poem to share your memory.

RECOMMENDATION: OBJECTS, HISTORY, AND STORYTELLING ONLINE EXHIBITION

We recommend exploring *Your Story, Our Story*, The Tenement Museum’s online exhibition and curriculum, for looking at objects and what they tell us about the past and ourselves. View and learn from the digital exhibit, or add your own objects to the “collection.”

tenement.org/yourstory.php

TEACHING WITH FIRST PERSON TESTIMONIES

From Generation to Generation features artworks that highlight inherited or post-memories. How might these differ from first-hand testimonies about historical events? Explore various works of art created by second- or third-generation Holocaust survivors, such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman or *Scratch* by Christian Boltanski.

Then, listen to one or more of the online testimonies from Holocaust survivors (hidden children or concentration camp survivors), housed on the JFCS Holocaust Center’s website. jfcsholocaustcenter.org/oral-histories

Discuss the following:

- How was the firsthand account different from the second-generation account?
- Did one depiction of the Holocaust resonate with you more than the other? Which one? Why?
- What historical event would you want to learn about through a first-person account? Who would you like to ask about a moment in history?
- How might you prepare to meet someone who is giving a firsthand testimony? What would you want to know in advance?

TOURS

Tours of *From Generation to Generation* use works of art to explore memory, the past, and to make personal connections to historical content. All CJM tours are dialogue based, inviting students to observe, create interpretations, and make contemporary meaning from the works of art. Tours are one hour long, include in-depth stops at 6–8 works of art, and encourage observation, conversation, and reflection.

Tour groups may add a hands-on art workshop to their experience.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY: FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION TOURS + SURVIVOR TALK

Six special opportunities to hear firsthand accounts of Holocaust survivors, in conjunction with a tour of *From Generation to Generation* Tours + Survivor Talks are a 2.5 hour experience and are available on select dates only. *Presented in conjunction with the JFCS Holocaust Center.*

To book a tour of *From Generation to Generation*, visit thecjm.org/tours, call 415.655.7857 or email tours@thecjm.org.

PRICING

K–12 California Public Schools	Free with \$25 deposit
Private Schools	\$25 per class
Art-Making Workshop	\$75 per class
Survivor Tours + Talks	\$75 per class

All class prices are per group of 22 students.

For more information: thecjm.org/programs/36