

## PAMA Spotlight: Art

### Miles Regis & Owen Gordon

Grades 4 to 6 The Arts, Visual Arts & Language



## Introduction

How are artists influenced by current events? In what ways do artists use visual language to share ideas at different moments in time?

Discover how artists often take inspiration from current events to express feelings and themes to the viewer. Art is also often used to comment on social concerns or events that they are living through.

In this Learning Resource we will be exploring two pieces in the PAMA art gallery collection acquired with funds from the David Somers Works on Paper Endowment Fund: *The Heist* (2015) by Jamaican-Canadian artist Owen Gordon (1946-) and *Love on Lockdown* (2020) by Trinidadian-American artist and clothing designer Miles Regis (1967).

Both works draw inspiration from real historical events. With its representation of passing time in front of the television screen, *Love on Lockdown* underlines passive activity as an outcome of the pandemic and the importance of family bond in the face of a global disaster. *The Heist* opts for a more sinister demonstration of the tragedy of institutional corruption and greed.

## **Let's Get Started**

With the following curriculum Overall Expectations in mind, take a look at the art pieces, read through the About and About the Artist sections in this package.

### **Curriculum Links: Grades 4 to 6, The Art – Visual Arts**

D2 Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing

D2.1 interpret a variety of art works, and identify the feelings, issues, themes, and social concerns that they convey

D2.2 analyse the use of elements and principles of design in a variety of art works, and explain how they are used to communicate meaning or understanding

D2.3 demonstrate an understanding of how to read and interpret signs, symbols, and style in art works

D3 Exploring Forms and Cultural Context

D3.1 describe how forms and styles of visual and media arts represent various messages and contexts in the past and present

D3.2 demonstrate an awareness of a variety of art forms, styles, and traditions, and describe how they reflect the diverse cultures, times, and places in which they were made

### **Curriculum Links: Grades 4 to 6, Language**

A3. Application, Connections and Contributions

A3.1 Cross Curricular and Integrated Learning

A3.2 Identity and Community

C. Comprehension: Understanding and Responding to Text

C1. Knowledge and Text

C2. Comprehension Strategies

C3. Critical Thinking in Literacy





Miles Regis (Trinidadian/American, 1967-)  
Love on Lockdown, 2020  
archival pigment print on paper  
2/10  
30 x 36 inches  
Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives  
Purchased with funds from the David Somers Works on Paper Endowment Fund

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### **About *Love on Lockdown***

*Love on Lockdown*, a special and limited-edition print commissioned by PAMA, might seem familiar to those who visited the online exhibition in 2020, where the original painting was on display. It is an intimate and personal portrayal of the artist's family confined to isolate together in their home at the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The couch they are huddled on is the symbol of the domestic frontier as the only place of safety in this new reality. It is a familiar scene to which we surely could all relate!

### **About the Artist**

Born in Trinidad in 1967, Miles Regis moved to Los Angeles at the age of twenty-one to study at the University of Southern California, graduating in 1993 with a BA in English. His creative impulses led him to work both in the fields of fine arts and fashion design often allowing these two areas of interest to intersect. His mixed media paintings incorporate wearable materials like textiles, sequins and buttons while his clothing is hand painted.

In his artistry, Regis explores themes of personal strife, socio-political activism, current affairs and the Black human condition through portraiture, figurative and abstract imagery.

As an extension of his work in fashion, in 2017 during a month-long residency at the Institute for Art and Olfaction in Los Angeles, Regis developed a new line of signature scents. He has also been experimenting with virtual reality technologies in the creation of his imagery.

Regis work can be found in the permanent collections of Intel Corporation in California, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., and California African American Museum, and was featured in group and solo exhibitions in the USA, Germany, Jamaica and South Africa including the inaugural exhibition of Caribbean Art Fair in Jamaica (2020) and Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives (2020).





Owen Gordon (Jamaican/Canadian, 1946-)  
 The Heist, 2015  
 acrylic, pen, ink and collage on newspaper reproduction  
 22 x 28 inches  
 Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives  
 Purchased with funds from the David Somers Works on Paper Endowment Fund

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## About *The Heist*

Gordon's collage of drawings and reproduced newspaper clips speaks of another moment in recent memory—the 2008 economic crisis, which saw the collapse of the stock market and its impact on human life. Both works draw inspiration from real historical events. With its representation of passing time in front of the television screen, *Love on Lockdown* (above) underlines passive activity as an outcome of the pandemic and the importance of family bond in the face of a global disaster. *The Heist* opts for a more sinister demonstration of the tragedy of institutional corruption and greed. In this black-and-white cinematic-like production, one vignette represents banks and moneylenders as a con-artist who is attempting to defraud a woman out of her home. At the same time, Justice, who is holding her scales, pretends not to notice.

## About the Artist

Born in Jamaica in 1946, Owen Gordon is a Toronto-based artist who paints, collages and sculpts. As a school-aged child, Gordon often frequented Jamaican artist Kenneth Spencer whose studio was located across the street from Gordon's one-room schoolhouse. His early interest in artmaking led him to sell his first watercolour painting at age eighteen to the USA Ambassador to Jamaica, Wilson Thomas Moore Beale Jr. (1909-1997) which the latter saw hanging in a gallery in the old craft market.

In 1969, Gordon won second prize in an exhibition of work by self-taught artists at the Institute of Jamaica. He was awarded a one-year tuition at the Jamaica school of Arts and Crafts (now Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts). Alongside his paintings, Gordon developed a distinctive style for his elongated wood sculptures which he exhibited in 1976 at the Creative Arts Center (today known as The Philip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts), Mona Campus, University of the West Indies.

In 1984, Gordon immigrated to Canada, after several trips he had taken there between 1975 and 1977 and made Toronto his new home. He gained fulltime employment working for the City of Toronto but continued with his artistic practice presenting his work in group exhibitions wherever an opportunity arose. In 2011, he retired finding more time to devote to artmaking.

Gordon's body of work demonstrates an interest in a number of subject matter from portraiture and everyday scenes to landscape, still life and abstraction. His depictions of political intrigues, social events and current affairs reveals him to be an observer and storyteller of the human condition across communities and nations but with an emphasis on the Black experience which he records with meticulous detail, insight and sensitivity.

His paintings are typically vivid with colour, crowded with detail and busy pattern, and compositionally complex conveying an overload of information that requires patience to process. They also betray a skilled understanding of the styles, trends and techniques of Western art such as Surrealism, Cubism and Abstract Expressionism which he had assimilated proficiently into his brand of work.

Gordon had his first solo exhibition *A World Asleep But Me* in Toronto at Black Artists' Network In Dialogue (BAND) in October, 2020. A month later his work appeared in another solo exhibition *Owen Gordon: Towards the Horizon* (November 26, 2020-January, 2021) at a commercial gallery, the Nicholas Metivier Gallery. He concurrently participated in the group exhibition *when night stirred at sea: Contemporary Caribbean Art* (October 29, 2020 - February 21, 2021) at the Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives.

## **Closer Look**

**Work through the following questions with students to draw out meaning from each piece or artwork. Art is up for interpretation, there are no real wrong answers.**

**See Tips and Speaking Points below to help prompt students' conversations.**

**Students are encouraged to use their Critical Thinking skills from Language to "read" the paintings like a book.**

### **Initial Reaction**

Where is your eye drawn to first? Where/what is the focal point in your option?

List the elements and principles of art that lead you to the focal point.

How does this piece make you feel?

What in the piece makes you feel that way? The colour, the subject, composition?

What is the work about? What do you see?

Is there a theme represented?

### **Reflection and Responding**

Look beyond the surface meaning of artwork and observe not only what is present but what is missing to find the artist's intent.

How are elements and principle of design used to communicate meaning?

Pick out the elements and principles that are used to visually represent the key message.

How are the elements and principles used together to create a meaningful composition?

### **Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts**

Many artists use art as social commentary that highlight pressing issues of their time.

Discuss what these pieces mean to you. Look at the artist descriptions for more background on the artist and the piece.



## Tips and Speaking Prompts

Elements of Art: line, shape, colour, texture, form, space.

Principles of Art: balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm, and unity/variety.

Elements and principles of art are used by artists to keep the viewer's interest in their piece.

In *Love in Lockdown*, perhaps your eyes are drawn to the pink item being held by one of the figures. The elements of art at play are colour (only item pink in the painting), texture (item looks soft almost like a stuffed animal or piece of clothing, perhaps a sweater).

In *The Heist*, there is very strong contrast in colour. Intense white and dark variations allowing the viewer's eye to move around the whole piece creating movement and interest.

When talking about how the piece makes you feel, referencing colour, emphasis and perhaps other elements will help to describe why someone feels the way they do.

The viewer may feel uneasy with the shadowy figures in *The Heist*. Alluding to the injustice and greed.

In exploring themes, feelings and subjects, students can also look to the title of the piece to find clues. In *Love on Lockdown*, the painting references the pandemic lockdowns where households were confined and isolated.

It is also important to note what is in the painting and what is not. What is that not part of the painting? Is that intentional?

## Extension Activities

Part One: We have discussed how art is used to communicate various social, political and economic issues. Choose an issue that has impacted your life. Create a mixed media response that expresses the topic. Once complete, share with your class. Ask them to interpret your work and see if it matches up with the theme you wanted to express.

Part Two: After looking at the art of your classmates, choose a new theme or issue that had an impact on you. Respond to your classmate's artwork using a new medium. Consider what medium would best express the ideas you want to share.