



EXPLORING STUDIO MATERIALS

Teaching Creative Art Making
to Children

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Artist Profile: MONIKA MALEWSKA

Like Rebecca Clark, Monika Malewska works in graphite to realistically depict individual objects, but the juxtapositions of subjects she portrays are often anything but natural (see Figure 2-25). Dolls, toys, and corporate icons merge kitsch and high art by, according to the artist, “alluding to the theme of Vanitas in seventeenth-century Dutch still-life paintings.” The scenes themselves may at first appear playful and innocuous. For Malewska, the works use “the conventions of the historical still-life genre in relation to contemporary consumer culture in America.” Her aim is to “manipulate the representation of objects to deconstruct the aesthetics of commercial ads and the politics of a world constituted by material desire.”

How does the artist’s use of graphite contribute to the feeling and mood of the drawings? What qualities and characteristics of the objects is she able to suggest or convey? Malewska says,

I work in a range of different media but I mostly consider myself a painter who also

creates drawings. I do not use drawing as preliminary sketches for my paintings. Rather, I see drawing as a medium of choice that is complete in itself. From the beginning, I envisioned the Pillsbury Doughboy series in black and white, using graphite to give a rich tonal range to my compositions. I wanted the dough to appear perceptually convincing and somewhat unappetizing. I also wanted to emphasize certain textural qualities of the dough and did not think I could do this as effectively in another medium. I used a fairly extensive range of graphite, from H2 to B6, to manipulate the tonal range and create the illusion of tactile properties (from dry to sticky and gooey). This texturally rich, realistic rendering of physical properties provides a contrast with the absurd, surreal depiction of this popular commercial icon to suggest a darker or mischievous side.



F 2-25

Monika Malewska, Pillsbury Doughboy #3, 2005, graphite on paper, 22" × 18".

More Artists on Media



From the standpoint of art materials and their use, selecting artists' works to share with kids is a matter of finding examples of artworks that collectively exemplify a range of approaches that students can both learn from and be inspired by. When I share artists' works with kids, along with interpreting narrative and other content ideas I get them to look closely at how the artists select and use materials. Looking at artworks together, we notice how the materials and the artists' particular ways of working with them create certain visual effects (such as light and dark tonal contrasts, as shown in Figure 2-23) that in turn can suggest specific ideas and meanings in an artwork. While sometimes we look at artists' works before we begin our own, I often initiate these discussions after my students have been working on their own drawings so that they don't simply copy the artists' techniques. With students' immediate experiences with materials in mind, and with their in-process artworks displayed for the group to see, the conversation is more about how "other artists are doing and communicating some of the same things we are." This creates a sense of community in which experiences are shared among artists rather than a hierarchical deference to external experts for the "right" way to do things. In this artist community environment, my students are just as likely to find great ideas to borrow from each other as they are to incorporate the approaches they admire in adult artists' works.

Older students are adept at and enjoy finding irony in artists' works, and are interested in playing with these relationships in their own artwork. Getting them to consider how a material like graphite can help other artists in this pursuit gives them the chance to be more purposeful in their own selections of media.



F 2-23

Manika Malewska, *Desert Storm*,
2006, graphite on paper,
47" × 56".