



Brent Kington: Mythic Metalsmith - Activities

Illinois State Museum

Lesson Plan: Influences I : Akan Gold Weights

Inspiration: Here is a quote from Kington's oral history [interview](#) of 2001 (Smithsonian Archives):

"I kept playing around with these little funny silver birds. An African American sculptor, a big, huge man, saw them. I was hiding the birds in the studio from my classmates. It was like, I knew my peers would criticize me for misusing silver. But this guy saw them, and he really liked them. He turned me on to Ashanti gold weights. And, of course, they deal with parables and narratives. These wonderful little bronze figures-human and animal forms, small compositions.

I became interested in miniatures and thinking about objects made by nomadic peoples. Detroit was the first time I'd ever been east of the Mississippi. And so I was thinking of nomadic people and realizing I was nomadic. My family was really dispersed. I grew up within this tight-knit neighborhood and family: my cousins were leaving and going to Colorado and California and a lot of different places. And my mind fixed on the nomadic cultures. You know, Eskimos make little carvings, and the Ashanti gold weights. The scale allows for easy mobility. Miniature sculpture.

Goal: Students will demonstrate their understanding of artistic influences by creating a clay figurine in the style of Brent Kingdom after studying Akan gold weights that influenced him in his making of miniature toys.

Concepts:

- artists are influenced by other artists' ideas
- artists are influenced by other artists' techniques and materials
- artists are influenced by their own culture and other cultures

Video: Students will watch the *Arts Across Illinois* video segment on Brent Kington to see his miniature sculptures and toys. (WTTW web site)

Pre-test and Post-test questions to answer and keep in mind as you create:

- What is artistic influence of one artist on another?
- What is artistic influence of a culture upon an artist's work?
- What is the difference between being influenced and copying?

- What elements of an art work, besides materials, can be influenced by another? (e.g., themes, colors, shapes, mood, lines, method of construction, etc.)
- What do you learn by creating an art work in the style of someone else (or in the style of another culture)?

Web sites:

- Indiana University's web page on [Akan proverbs](#)
- Marshall University's web page on [Akan art](#)
- Muhlenburg University's web page on [goldweights](#)

Look at these web sites to understand the characteristics, uses, and themes of the goldweights in Ashanti or Akan culture. Be ready to choose a proverb in your own culture about which to create a miniature sculpture. Look at the slideshow of Kington's toys and compare them.

Activity: Students will view the slideshow of Brent Kington that shows his miniature cast toys. They will point out the size, shape, subject matter and material of the toys. The students look at the Web pages on goldweights and proverbs. Discuss proverbs in our culture as themes; students can brainstorm a list written on the blackboard or a chart. Illustrate an example of the activity with a given proverb and your mini-sculpture (or see our example Illustrated here). Assign students to each create in clay a miniature sculpture based on the proverb of their choice. Time-manage each section of the activity so all workers stay on task.

Materials: Air-drying clay, clay tools such as palette knives, small sponges picks, improvised instruments to shape, incise, texturize the clay.

Extension: Brent Kington has said he was also influenced by sculptor Joan Miró. Do a Google© image search on this artist and click on some of the thumbnails to get a feel for his aesthetic. Then look through the Image Gallery of this web site and find some of Kington's sculptures that may show this influence. What characteristics of Miró's sculptures are reflected in Kington's?

National art standards for grade 7-8 students addressed in this lesson:

Content Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas [-]

Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks

Illinois Visual Arts Standards for grades 7-8 and 9-10 students addressed in this lesson:

26.B.3d [-]

Demonstrate knowledge and skills to create 2- and 3-dimensional works and time arts that are realistic, abstract, functional and decorative.

25.B.4 [-]

Analyze and evaluate similar and distinctive characteristics of works in two or more of the arts that share the same historical period or societal context.