

# CAST-OFF OBJECTS

## ARTIST CONNECTIONS:

Stella Waitzkin  
1920–2003



Stella Waitzkin. Photo: Courtesy of Fred Waitzkin, c. 1970.

Stella Waitzkin began her career in the 1940s studying painting and drawing with Abstract Expressionists Hans Hofmann and Willem de Kooning in New York City. In the 1960s and 1970s, her ways of working expanded into the disciplines of sculpture, performance art, and film. During this time, Waitzkin's work flourished under the roof of Manhattan's cultural landmark, the Hotel Chelsea, a haven for creatives of all walks including Beat writers, jazz and rock musicians, filmmakers, and visual artists.



Stella Waitzkin, *The Wreck of the UPS* (site detail, Hotel Chelsea, New York, NY), c. 1993–2003. Courtesy of the Waitzkin Memorial Library Trust. Photo: 2006.

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## BIG IDEA: OBJECT

Objects can communicate information about an individual or a group of people's values and interests. Art-environment builders often incorporate found objects into their work or create objects to tell their story. By considering objects, learners can develop their cultural and intellectual points of view.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What kinds of values can be attributed to objects?
- How do you know an object has value?
- How can a person use objects to communicate meanings or values?
- What do we learn about ourselves and the world through objects?

## LESSON OVERVIEW:

Students will cast a small body part using dental alginate and sculptor's wax. Students will communicate meaning or value through art, by juxtaposing an object with their cast form.



Stella Waitzkin, untitled (element from *Three Cornered Library*), c. 1969–2003; polyester resin; 7 1/4 x 7 1/8 x 4 1/2 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.



Stella Waitzkin, untitled (element from the west wall), c. 1969–2003; polyester resin; 5 x 6 x 5 1/4 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

## OBJECTIVES:

(Organized by National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes)

**Connecting:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of how to communicate meaning and value through objects.

**Responding:** Students will view, analyze, and discuss the work of Stella Waitzkin.

**Creating:** Students will cast a body part in wax using dental alginate and juxtapose it with an object to express meaning or values.

**Presenting:** Students will share their assemblage and discuss their object and cast juxtaposition and write a title that informs the viewer of the message.

# CAST-OFF OBJECTS



Stella Waitzkin, untitled (element from *Three Cornered Library*), c. 1969–2003; polyester resin; 9 1/2 x 10 x 7 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

## VOCABULARY:

alginate, cast, juxtaposition, material culture (objects), mold-making, positive and negative space

## ART MATERIALS:

- **Casting materials:** Plastic or flexible vessels to hold the dental alginate, water, mixing utensils, permanent markers for labeling, sculptor's wax, heat source (electric fry pans, hot plate) for melting wax, ladle to pour the hot wax, carving tools for finishing
- **Assemblage materials:** Chosen object and display materials

## RESOURCES:

- Umberger, Leslie. *Sublime Spaces & Visionary Worlds*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007.
- Stella Waitzkin website: <http://stellawaitzkin.com/index.html>
- <http://www.kohlerfoundation.org/preservation/major-collections/stella-waitzkin/>
- Video footage of Stella Waitzkin's apartment at the Chelsea Hotel: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUWPH\\_4wWFM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUWPH_4wWFM)

## DISCUSS:

- Introduce the concept of objects:
  - What kinds of values can be attributed to objects?
  - How can a person use objects to communicate meaning or values?
  - What do we learn about ourselves and the world through objects?
- Introduce, view, and discuss the work and life of Stella Waitzkin. Objects were at the center of Stella Waitzkin's work. Her own home became an environment filled with resin-cast books, trinkets, and figurines.
  - Why do you think Stella Waitzkin chose to cast her own face, thrift store items, and personal objects?
  - What messages do you interpret from her work?
  - Discuss advantages or disadvantages of using objects, rather than language, to communicate meaning.
- Discuss juxtaposition and how it can be used to communicate a message (humor, irony, morality, social commentary, values, etc). Ask students to find and bring in an object that they could juxtapose with the small casting they will be creating.

## CREATE:



Students create a 3-D wax casting.

1. Instruct students to select a small body part to cast and have them find a corresponding vessel to cast in.
2. Have students mix water with alginate powder (according to instructions on bag).
3. Students submerge body parts into mixture and hold for four minutes until mixture solidifies to create a mold. Carefully remove body part, making sure not to damage the mold.
4. Pour melted wax (or positive casting material of your choice) into cavity; let cool (approximately 45 minutes), and remove the wax casting from mold. Discard mold.
5. With carving tools, trim and clean up the wax casting.
6. Using their chosen object, each student will create an assemblage with their casting.
7. Students should carefully consider how they mount and display their work.

## REFLECT:

Students write a title for their piece that informs the viewer about the message of their juxtaposition.