

Educator Guide

Rina Banerjee

Make Me a Summary of the World

October 2020–January 2021

Frist Art Museum

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Tennessee State Standards

Fine Arts Standards

By analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating artworks, students fulfill the Respond domain of Tennessee's Fine Arts Standards. Synthesizing information and contextualizing the works applies to the Connect domain. The Create domain includes the generation, conceptualization, development, and refinement of artistic work.

Writing Standards

Writing activities based on artworks and themes presented in this exhibition may connect to Tennessee's Writing Standards.

W.TTP.2 Cornerstone: Write informative/explanatory texts to analyze, synthesize, and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection and organization of content.

Social Studies Standards (Grades K–2)

SSP.05 Develop historical awareness by:

- Sequencing past, present, and future in chronological order
- Understanding that things change over time

SSP.06 Develop geographic awareness by:

- Identifying geographic symbols on maps and globes
- Understanding relationships between people, places, and resources

Culture Overview (Social Studies Grade 2): Students will explore how collaboration and respect for others is necessary to achieve and maintain a functioning society.

2.01 Identify various cultural groups within the U.S. and the students' community.

2.02 Compare and contrast the beliefs, customs, ceremonies, and traditions of the various cultures represented in the U.S.

2.03 Distinguish how people from various cultures in the community and nation share principles, goals, and traditions.

Social Studies Standards (Grades 3–12)

SSP.05 Develop historical awareness by:

- Recognizing how and why historical accounts change over time **(Grades 3–12)**
- Recognizing how past events and issues might have been experienced by the people of that time, with historical context and empathy rather than present-mindedness **(Grades 3–12)**
- Identify patterns of continuity and change over time, making connections to the present **(Grades 3–12)**
- Determining relationships among people, resources, and ideas based on geographic location (local, national, global) **(Grades 3–5)**
- Analyzing the spatial relationships between people, circumstances, and resources **(Grades 3–5)**
- Examining how geographic regions and perceptions of the regions change over time **(Grades 3–5)**
- Evaluating how unique circumstances of time and place create context and contribute to action and reaction **(Grades 6–12)**
- Using the geographic perspective to determine relationships, patterns, and diffusion across space at multiple scales (e.g., local, national, global) **(Grades 6–12)**
- Determining the use of diverse types of maps based on their origin, structure, context, and validity **(Grades 3–8)**
- Analyzing interaction between humans and the physical environment **(Grades 6–12)**
- Examining how geographic regions and perceptions of regions are fluid across time and space **(Grades 6–12)**
- Analyzing locations, conditions, and connections of places and using maps to investigate spatial associations among phenomena **(Grades 6–12)**

Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World

Rina Banerjee explores the idea that in the current social imaginary, characteristics of society that were once thought to anchor identity—languages, political and economic beliefs, nationality, race, and sexuality—limit the ways individuals can define themselves or be defined by others. While the resulting ambiguity may seem to be a sign of cultural disarray, works in this exhibition offer the tantalizing possibility of a more inclusive and open-ended future.

Banerjee is a voracious gatherer of objects. Reflecting the history and symbolism of items acquired from around the world, her constructions include things like cowrie shells, Chinese umbrellas, Pyrex tubes, glass beads, alligator heads, and epoxy buffalo horn replicas. Their strong colors, patterns, and frequent allusions to South Asian materials and images recall Banerjee's Indian heritage while telling a larger story about the transmission, exploitation, and adaptation of cultures from colonial times to the global present.

This exhibition includes sculptures, installations, and paintings produced over the past twenty years. Together, they show Banerjee's ongoing desire to summarize the complexity, beauty, and sense of disequilibrium that can arise in a world undergoing constant fragmentation and renewal.

About the Artist



Rina Banerjee working on paintings
in her studio, ca. 2013

Born in Kolkata, India, in 1963, Banerjee moved with her family to England in 1968 after her father, a civil engineer, was recruited to work there by a multinational company. The family moved again in 1970 when her father accepted a position in New York City. After starting her professional life as a polymer research chemist, Banerjee realized that her real passion was for art. Since receiving her MFA from Yale University in 1995, Banerjee, who currently lives in New York City, has exhibited in museums, galleries, and biennials internationally. Her work is in the collections of the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the San José Museum of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among others.

Identity



The gene was his mule. Mendel with his peas in the monastery in thick garden made variety, made mischief while green ponds, unripe flower took to crossing, blended fluids so dominant was recessive, 2014. Acrylic, ink, marbled paper collage on watercolor paper, 29 x 25 in. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo. © Rina Banerjee. Image courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo

Banerjee's lengthy, poetic titles are more evocative than informative, and deliberately distort the precision with which language is used to identify and define concepts and ideas. Here she refers to the experimental breeding of pea plants by Gregor Mendel, a nineteenth-century Austrian friar. His discovery of dominant and recessive patterns of inherited genes ushered in the modern age of genetics. *The gene was his mule* is a **collage** both literally and representationally: it combines elements and stories from many cultures and serves as an apt visual metaphor for assimilation and identity formation. Banerjee's hand articulates a multiplicity of styles, guided by cultural curiosity and tourism and unbounded by genetic inheritance.

Questions

- Choose three words to describe yourself. (Grades K–2)
- Look closely at this collage and describe what you see. (Grades K–12)
- How have your experiences played a role in forming your identity? (Grades 6–12)
- It is stated that "Banerjee's hand articulates a multiplicity of styles, guided by cultural curiosity and tourism and unbounded by genetic inheritance." In this context, what does it mean to be "unbounded by genetic inheritance"? (Grades 9–12)

Activity: Identity Collage

Create a collage that is an expression of who you are. Consider cutting images from magazines or copies of photographs, making drawings, and selecting pieces of decorative fabric, buttons, yarn, feathers, and other small objects to use in the collage. Manipulate and arrange the materials on paper or cardstock. Once you are satisfied with your composition, glue the pieces in place to complete your artwork. For a guided experience, see the Art Trunk video and lesson sheet under "Resources" at FristArtMuseum.org/Banerjee.

Culture



In breathless confinement she wooed an uncertain danger, lit a candle to angeress, a blessed wilderness, a tropical justice, she came to her enacted jungli joy, a letting drew droppings, seeds and leaked solitudes whispers, awoke twice like no other, not like him but like all the others joined a sprawling universe, 2018. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels. © Rina Banerjee. Installation view of Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, October 27, 2018–March 31, 2019. Photo: Zachary Hartzell

In some of Banerjee's works, the spreading of disease is a dark metaphor for the treatment of **immigrants** and **refugees** throughout the world. This **installation** represents a medical experiment gone awry. Banerjee calls out prevailing fears in the United States of people from other **cultures**—a powerful statement at this time, with the dislocation of thousands because of war, famine, crime, poverty, and the global pandemic.

Questions

- Look closely at this installation, and describe what you see. (Grades K–12)
- What is culture? (Grades K–12)
- Why do so many of us fear people who are culturally different from us? What can we do to change this? (Grades 3–12)

Activity: Writing about Culture

Culture, in simple terms, is the common way of life among a group of people. There are cultures at your school, within your family, in the city where you live, and in your country of origin. Think about a culture with which you identify. Write about its unique characteristics, and then about its similarities to other cultures.

The Global Community



Make me a summary of the world! She was his guide and had traveled on camel, rhino, elephant and kangaroo, dedicated to dried plants, glass houses—for medical study, vegetable sexuality, self-pollination, fertilization her reach pierced the woods country by country, 2014. Mixed media, 84 x 48 in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels. © Rina Banerjee. Image courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

According to Banerjee, "Globalization means that we no longer need to go on 'expeditions' the way Victorian explorers did. The East has arrived." Her approach to **assemblage** and installation represents a new version of "hunting and gathering" facilitated by the Internet, which enables materials to be efficiently sourced and delivered from all over the globe. In *Make Me a Summary of the World*, she creates a universe that is less centered and coherent and more cross-referential and hybrid—a world made richer through a harmony of interdependence. Banerjee's sculptures are alive with the perpetual transformation of global culture as it adapts to different places and times.

Questions

- Look closely at this sculpture and describe what you see. (Grades K–12)
- Why did the artist choose to incorporate so many different objects in this work? (Grades K–12)
- This work represents "a world made richer through harmony and interdependence," which is to say that the global community is better when we learn from one another and work together to solve problems. Talk about some examples of people coming together or learning from one another that you have seen in person or on the news. (Grades 6–12)

Activity: Found Object Assemblage

Create a found object assemblage using items that you have collected or that have been provided by a teacher. As you create your artwork, think about what the objects mean to you. When these objects are put together, what story do they tell about you or the world around you?

Resources

Elementary School Books

**Whoever You Are*, by Mem Fox and Leslie Staub

The Colors of Us, by Karen Katz

**Same, Same but Different*, by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw

It's Okay to Be Different, by Todd Parr

We Came to America, by Faith Ringgold

Shades of People, by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly

Oh, The Places You'll Go! by Dr. Seuss

Me on the Map, by Joan Sweeney

**Little Red*, by Bethan Woollvin

*A Storytime selection. Visit [FristArtMuseum.org/Family-Mondays](https://www.fristartmuseum.org/Family-Mondays) to view the current video.

FristKids Videos and Activities

Telling a Story through Art, with Storytelling Drawing activity: [FristArtMuseum.org/resource/stories-and-art/](https://www.fristartmuseum.org/resource/stories-and-art/)

What Is Texture? with Texture Print Collage activity: [FristArtMuseum.org/resource/texture-in-art/](https://www.fristartmuseum.org/resource/texture-in-art/)

What Is Unity? with Unified Shape and Color Collage activity: [FristArtMuseum.org/resource/unity-in-art/](https://www.fristartmuseum.org/resource/unity-in-art/)

Middle and High School

Books

America Street: A Multicultural Anthology of Stories, edited by Anne Mazer and Brice Particelli

The Arrival, by Shaun Tan

Video

Studio Visit with Artist Rina Banerjee, by Christie's: youtu.be/y-RWCyeCjO0

Docent Tour Videos

These will be posted at [FristArtMuseum.org/resources](https://www.fristartmuseum.org/resources) as they become available.

Glossary

assemblage: an artistic composition made from scraps, junk, and odds and ends (as of paper, cloth, wood, stone, or metal)

collage: an artistic composition made of various materials (such as paper, cloth, or wood) glued on a surface

culture: the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time; the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization

immigrant: a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence

installation: a work of art that usually consists of multiple components often in mixed media and that is exhibited in a usually large space in an arrangement specified by the artist

migrate: to move from one country, place, or locality to another

migration: the act, process, or an instance of migrating

refugee: a person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution

These definitions are from Merriam-Webster.com.

Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World was co-organized by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, and the San José Museum of Art, California.



Pennsylvania Academy
of the Fine Arts

SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

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Rina Banerjee (b. 1963). *The gene was his mule. Mendel with his peas in the monastery in thick garden made variety, made mischief while green ponds, unripe flower took to crossing, blended fluids so dominant was recessive*, 2014. Acrylic, ink, marbled paper collage on watercolor paper, 29 x 25 in. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo. © Rina Banerjee. Image courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo



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Rina Banerjee (b. 1963). *Make me a summary of the world! She was his guide and had traveled on camel, rhino, elephant and kangaroo, dedicated to dried plants, glass houses—for medical study, vegetable sexuality, self-pollination, fertilization her reach pierced the woods country by country*, 2014. Mixed media, 84 x 48 in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels. © Rina Banerjee. Image courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels