

# Tattooing Objects in the Style of Dr. Lakra

## Related

**Subjects:** Visual and Performing Arts  
**Grades:** High School  
**Medium:** Mixed Media  
**Author:** Crystal Clem, MCASD teaching artist  
**Time:** 2-3 hours

## Summary:

Students will layer a tattoo design on a found object of their choice (a poster, old record cover, doll, etc) in the spirit of Dr. Lakra. This lesson provides the opportunity to develop an opinion of the aesthetic value of what is conventionally thought of as a "low" artform. Through discussion of the work of Dr. Lakra, students will examine aesthetic links between Dr. Lakra's works and the artistry of varied cultural groups ranging from indigenous peoples to some contemporary subcultures. Also, students will examine the concept of "alternative canvases".



## Materials:

- Object to be "tattooed" – dolls, old record covers or CD jewel cases, posters, images from magazines, old art pieces, etc.
- India Ink
- Brushes
- Sharpies – varying colors and widths

## Glossary:

- *Aesthetics* – pertaining to a sense of the beautiful, concerned with pure emotion and sensation as opposed to pure intellectuality
- *Low art* – refers to what were traditionally considered the lesser or minor arts – works that cater to popular taste. The boundary between high and low art has faded in the contemporary art scene.
- *High art* – also known as fine art or beaux-arts, art that is thought to represent the epitome of artistic achievement. Traditionally, high art consists of the meticulous expression in fine materials of refined or noble sentiment, appreciation depending on such things as intelligence, social standing, and educated taste.



**Artist Biography:**

Much can be learned about Jeronimo Lopez Ramierez by investigating his street name, Dr. Lakra. "Lakra" is a Spanish colloquialism meaning "scum" or "joker" and also refers to a blemish or scar, and by extension to a socially disgraceful group or individual. The title "Dr." was bestowed upon him when he first started tattooing and carried his supplies around in an old doctor's bag.

The son of Francisco Toledo, a well known Mexican artist, Jeronimo began adding personal embellishments to everyday objects such as notebook covers and school books, from a young age. He began tattooing as a teenager, using a homemade machine comprised of the motor of a walkman and a single needle. Although he initially practiced on his legs, he moved on to embellishing vintage Mexican pin-up posters and images of celebrities with tattoo inspired designs.

**Preparation for Teachers:**

- Gather images of "tattooed" items by Dr. Lakra, as well as images of tribal, traditional, and contemporary tattoo designs
- Select items for students to embellish, or ask students to bring in objects with personal meaning

**Pre-project class discussion:**

- Begin by discussing the life and work of Dr. Larka.
- Examine tribal, traditional, and contemporary tattoo designs.
- Discuss tattoos and their meaning. *Who values tattoos in contemporary culture? Who does not? How were tattoos perceived 50 years ago? Why do people get tattoos?*
- Discuss tattoos from a design standpoint. *Where do you see tattoo designs integrated in other media? Do we usually see tribal, traditional, or contemporary tattoo designs making the leap to other media?*
- Lead a discussion related to "alternative canvases". *What does "alternative canvas" mean? What are some examples? Can our bodies be mediums for artistic expression?*

**Project procedure:**

- Have students select an object to tattoo (or use an object they brought in from home).
- Allow students time to conceptualize how they would like to tattoo their object, and encourage them to create a preliminary sketch.
- Work with students to select the appropriate medium with which to tattoo their object, based on the material of the object.

**Post-project discussion:**

- Lead a discussion related to the personal meaning of their tattoos. *How did your tattoo design reflect what is interesting or important to you? How did this "alternative canvas" provide you with the opportunity to express yourself? Why do you think Dr. Lakra chooses to tattoo objects rather than people?*



## CA Content Standards:

High School Visual Arts – Proficient

4.3 Formulate and support a position regarding the aesthetic value of a specific work of art and change or defend that position after considering the views of others.

High School Visual Arts – Advanced

3.2 Identify contemporary artists world-wide who have achieved regional, national, or international recognition and discuss ways in which their work reflects, plays a role in, and influences present-day culture

4.1 Describe the relationship involving the art maker (artist), the making (process), the artwork (product), and the viewer.

4.2 Identify the intentions of artists creating contemporary works of art and explore the implications of those intentions.

4.3 Analyze and articulate how society influences the interpretation and message of a work of art.

## Bibliography/Webography

Cruzvillegas, Aaron and Dr. Lakra, *Dr. Lakra: Health & Efficiency*. Editorial RM Publishing, 2009.

Orozco, Gabriel and Dr. Lakra, *Dr. Lakra*. RM Publishing, 2010.

Saatchi Gallery: Dr. Lakra

[http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/dr\\_lakra.htm](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/dr_lakra.htm)

The Dr. Lakra page on the Saatchi Gallery website features biographical information on the artist, as well as images of his works.

"High Art Versus Low Art" by John A. Fisher

[http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/paper\\_fisher\\_high\\_low\\_art.pdf](http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/paper_fisher_high_low_art.pdf)

Available through the University of Colorado, Boulder, this paper dissects the distinction between high art and low art, looking at topics such as whether or not the distinction is real, mass art, and art in entertainment.



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