

# Art as Protection

River Arts Fest Digital Visual Art Unit

Jennifer Shiberou, art teacher

Richard A. Lou, artist



*Octopus Armor, 2021*

Jennifer Shiberou

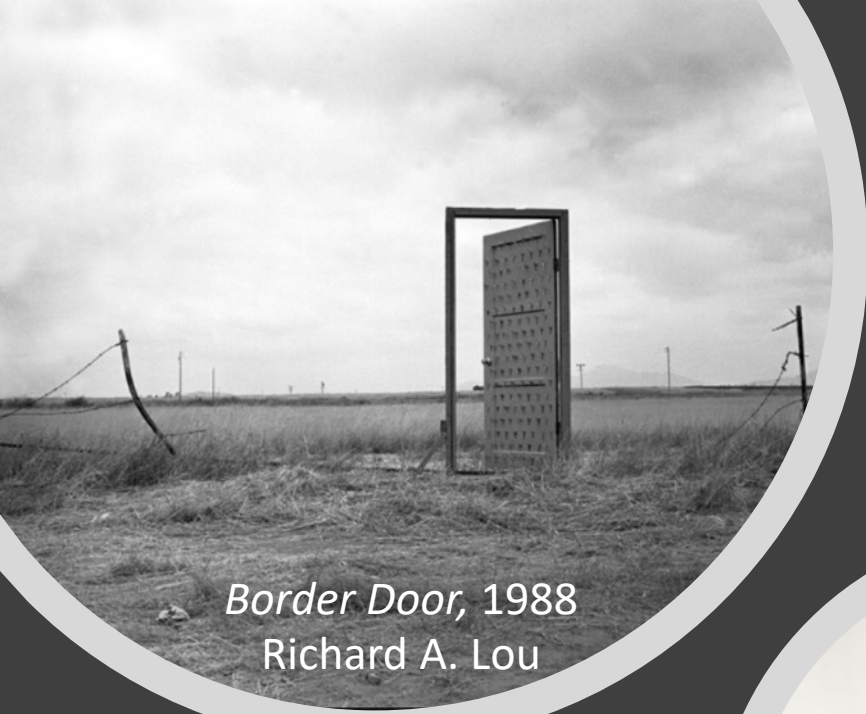
# Objective and Standards

- **Objective:** SWBAT (Student will be able to) investigate personally relevant stories and visuals IOT (in order to) create a wearable piece of 3-dimensional narrative art in the form of a suit of armor or talisman to protect or ward off danger/injustice.
- **Portfolio Domain:** Create
- **Visual Art Standard:** 6.VA.Cr1.A Investigate personally relevant content for creating art. 7.VA.Cr2.C Apply visual organizational strategies to design and produce a work of art, design, or media that clearly communicates information or ideas. 8.VA.Cr2.A Experiment, innovate, and take risks to pursue ideas, forms, and meanings that emerge when making art using course specific craftsmanship.
- **Essential Questions:** How do people contribute to awareness and understanding of their lives and the lives of their communities through art making? How do artists and designers create works of art that effectively communicate?

# Academic Vocabulary

- **Narrative art**- art that tells a story
- **Wearable art**- individually designed and crafted works of art meant to be worn.
- **Talisman**- magical object designed to repel harmful or evil forces, or to heal.
- **Sculpture**- art worked into 3 dimensions by carving, assembling, modeling, or casting.
- **Carving**- using tools to shape a material by scraping away at its surface.
- **Assembling**- art made by combining different materials together, often found objects.
- **Modeling**- working materials by hand (clay, wax, etc.) to create a 3-d form.
- **Casting**- making a mold and pouring a liquid into the mold which will harden to create a form
- **Armature**- an underlying, unseen skeleton or framework used to provide support in a sculpture





*Border Door, 1988*  
Richard A. Lou



## Featured Artist: Richard Lou

- Richard A. Lou is the chair of the Department of Art at the University of Memphis.
- He has over 25 years of teaching experience, 20 years of arts administration experience, has curated over 50 exhibitions, and continues to produce and exhibit art.
- Lou is a bi-racial artist of Chinese and Mexican descent, and his work explores family stories and culture.



*Stories on My Back, 2015*  
Richard A. Lou

# Richard Lou: *Stories on My Back*

The installation *Stories On My Back* is a narrative of his family's multi-cultural heritage. The exhibition is a multi-media exhibition including art/sculpture, photography, recordings of family stories, and text.



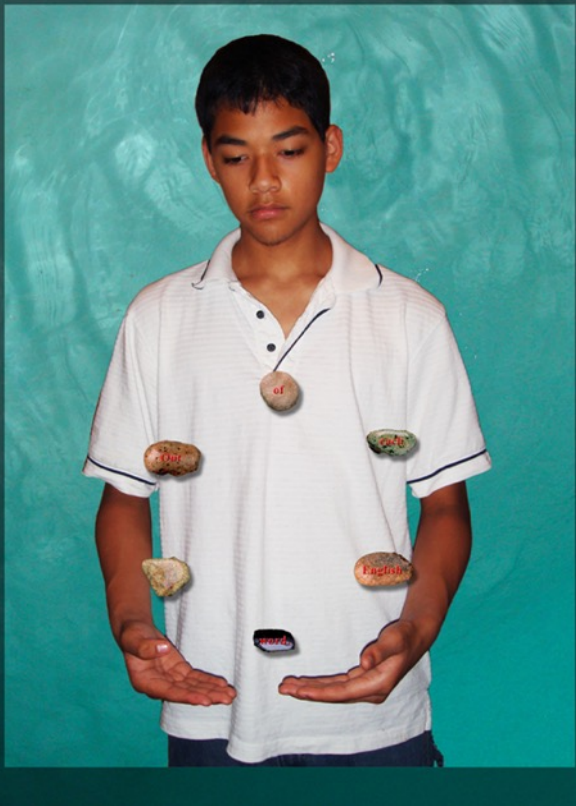
[Richard Lou Stories on My Back Video](#)



Tattoo of the Chinese character of Lou meant to carry forward their family story. Lou's 2 daughters share this tattoo. A photo of the tattoo is incorporated into the exhibition.

*Stories on My Back*, 2015  
Richard A. Lou





*Stories on My Back, 2015*  
Richard A. Lou

## Tribute to his father's Chinese culture

- Richard A. Lou's father was a "paper son" from Canton Province, China, but his father believed he was born in Coahoma, Mississippi. One of the stories he would share was about his attempt to lose his Chinese accent by placing pebbles in his mouth, while walking around Moon Lake in the Mississippi Delta, reciting vowels and consonants in English out loud. As part of an oral tradition the artist's children, photographed juggling pebbles, holding a pebble in their mouths, and holding the Chinese character that reads the family name of Lou, are charged with the obligation of carrying forward their grandfather's stories of class, power, and assimilation.



# Tribute to his mother's Mexican culture

Lou beautifully incorporated corn husk tamale wrappers with back lighting over a post and lintel structure to create a monument to his mother's Mexican heritage. Photographs of relatives and food items such as beans were also assembled to represent the blended traditions of his multi-cultural family.



*Stories on My Back, 2015*

Richard A. Lou



# Richard A. Lou's Artist Statement

*"There has never been a free people, a free country, a real democracy on the face of this Earth. In a city of some 300,000 slaves and 90,000 so called free men, Plato sat down and praised freedom in exquisitely elegant phrases."* - Lerone Bennett Jr.

These works manifest themselves in the creation of counter-images and counter-definitions made in a self-determinant manner. As a contemporary image-maker, I am interested in collecting dissonant ideas and narratives, allowing them to bump into each other, to coax new meanings and possibilities that dismantle the hierarchy of images. The work serves as an ideological, social, political, and cultural matrix from which I understand my place in this world and to make a simple marking of the cultural shifts of my community. The artwork examines how communities use images and language to dehumanize the "Other" in order to ignore the "Other's" basic human rights. It challenges unquestioned claims to territory and legal status.

*"Art is one of the most sacred ways to communicate."* - Consuelo Jimenez Underwood

The work that I create as a Chicano Artist emanates and is in response to the love I have for my family. The work embraces the contradictions, the conflicts and triumphs, the quiet and raucous moments of a routine day, the flowering, the decaying, the markings and ceremonies that compose a lifetime all within a society that subjugates. At the core, all work I do is for them. And in that hopeful light, I am willing to take the chance that the power of the work will ultimately save my children who will become the inhabitants of a New Nephantla as they negotiate a home in this destabilized world.



# Artists Who Create Wearable Art

Nick Cave, Meryl McMaster, and Yinka Shonibare

# Featured Artist: Nick Cave

- Nick Cave (born in 1959, Fulton, Missouri) uses dance, film, theater, and visual arts to deal with themes of social justice, equity, identity and the way we think about think about the materials we often throw away.



[Nick Cave Video](#)

*Sound Suits, Heard (detail), 2012*  
Nick Cave





*Sound Suit*, 1998  
Nick Cave

# The Origin of Nick Cave's Sound Suits

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- Nick Cave began creating the human-shaped sculptures in 1992 to display his reaction to the Rodney King beating by a Los Angeles police officer. The artist, who felt particularly vulnerable after the incident, created the suits as a type of skin which protected the wearer.
- He remembers sitting in a park and spotting twigs scattered on the ground. He began to think about what it means to be discarded and not part of the mainstream world. He made his first suit from twigs and sticks he collected from Chicago's Grant Park.

# The Evolution of the Sound Suits

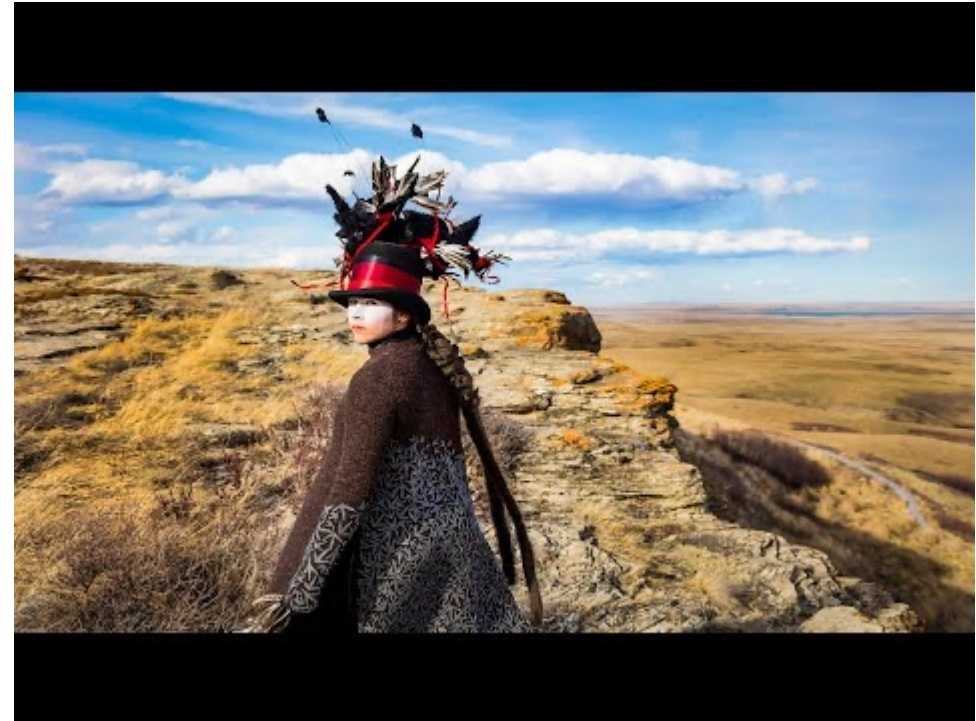
- Nick Cave starting creating sound suits to protect himself and disappear into the landscape. They were originally made of found objects, but have evolved over time to become very ornate and made from a variety of materials including buttons, beads, figurines, wire, fur, etc.
- When static (not in movement), they convey a resistance to profiling and gun violence.
- When worn by Cave and his dancers, they simultaneously act as fashion, sculpture and performance art presenting an imaginative mix of color and sound representative of a sampling of cultures, traditions and folklore.



*Sound Suits, 2012-16*  
Nick Cave

# Featured Artist: Meryl McMaster

- Meryl McMaster is a Canadian artist of Plains Cree/European descent.
- Her photography explores how one's sense of self is built from land, lineage, history, and culture.
- She crafts wearable art pieces and pairs with striking landscapes creating photographic self-portraits.



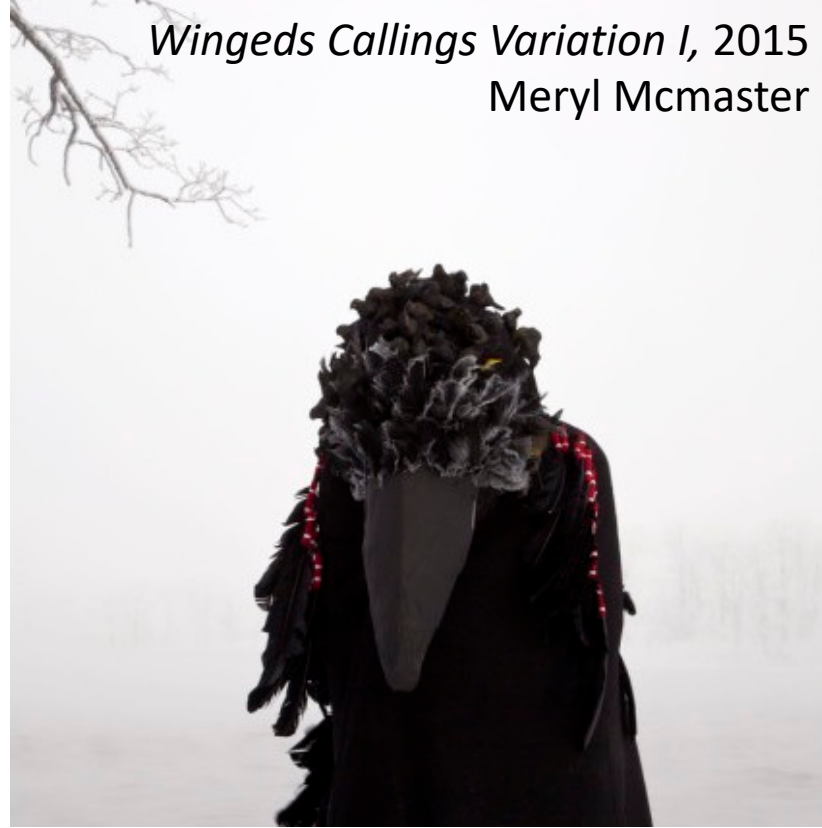
[Meryl McMaster Video](#)



*Avian Wanderer I, 2015*  
Meryl McMaster



*Winged Callings Variation I, 2015*  
Meryl McMaster



*Harbourage for a Song, 2019*  
Meryl McMaster

## McMaster's Wandering Series

- The series explores her exploration of her Plains Cree and Dutch/British heritage and documents her experience of "wandering" through the worlds of both cultures.



# Featured Artist: Yinka Shonibare

- Yinka Shonibare is a British Nigerian artist
- His work explores cultural identity and globalization
- His work take many forms including clothing, sculpture, dance, and installations.

[Yinka Shonibare Video](#)



*Cheeky Little Astronomer*, 2013  
Yinka Shonibare



*Three Graces*, 2001  
Yinka Shonibare

*Butterfly Kid (Girl)*, 2017  
Yinka Shonibare



## Analyzing the work of Yinka Shonibare

- What elements of Yinka's cultural identity do you see in his work?
- Why do you think Shonibare used a globe for the head?
- What do the butterfly wings represent?



The background is a solid light blue. On the left side, there is a cluster of colorful, irregular shapes resembling torn paper or scraps in shades of pink, orange, yellow, and purple. On the right side, a large, semi-transparent light blue circle overlaps the background. Inside this circle, the main title is written in a black, sans-serif font. Below the title, there is a short horizontal line, and then the subtitle is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

# Exploring Personally Relevant Content

Art Activities to Develop Your Narrative

# Activity 1: Explore Your Identity Stories

- Listen to this story from Richard Lou's exhibition *Stories on My Back*.
- Interview family members.
- Reflect on your experiences.
- What are some stories that are essential to your identity and your family's identity?



*Stories on My Back*, 2015

Richard A. Lou

# Activity 2: Create a Family Tree

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- Use one of the free downloadable templates available in the link below.
- <https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/family-tree-templates-family-tree-maker/>

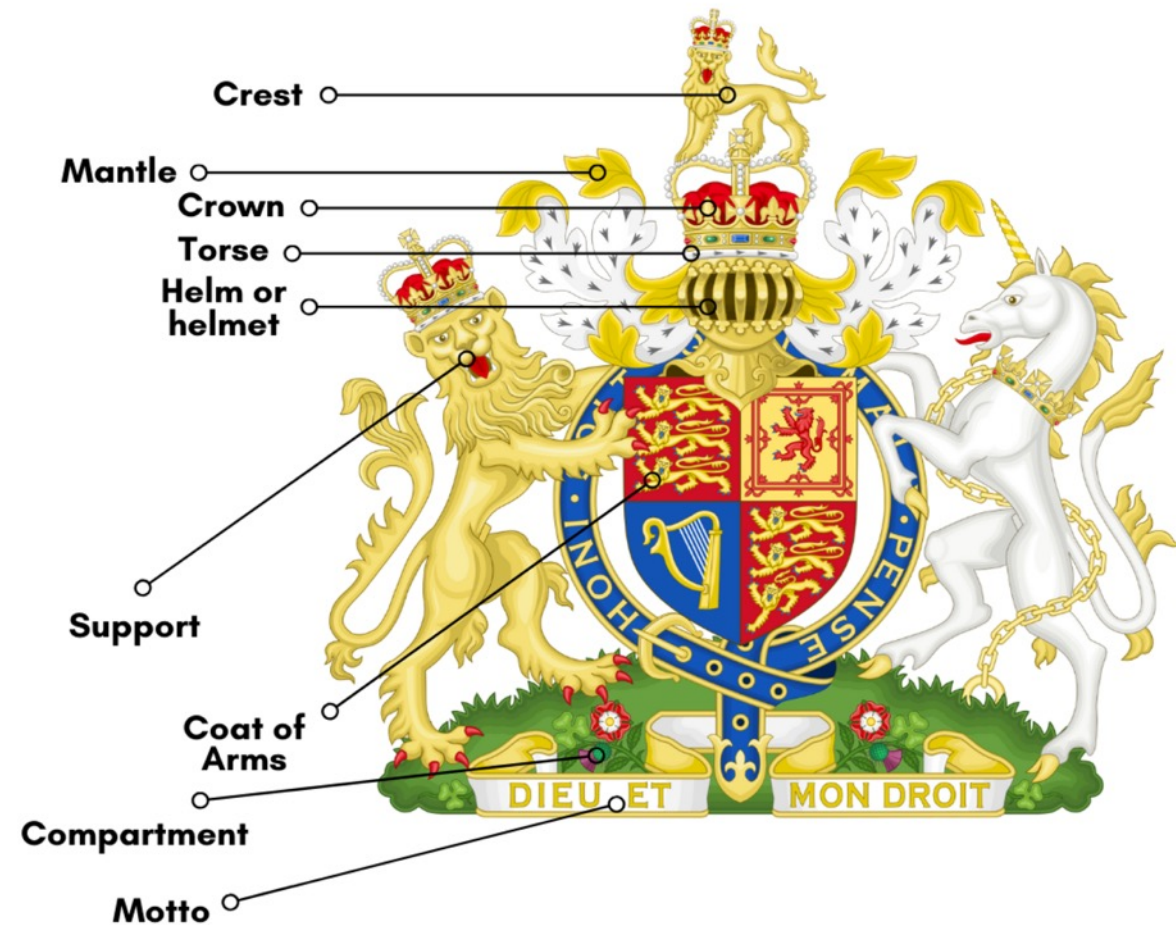


*I painted this family tree of grandchildren as a gift for my parents' 50th wedding anniversary.*



# Activity #3: Design a Family Crest

- Study the parts of the family crest on the example.
- Brainstorm the symbols and design elements you could use to represent your family.
- Think of a family motto to place on your crest.



# Example of Family Crest



Flag of Ethiopia to represent my husband's origins.

Lion= my husband's symbolic animal

Family Motto: Love written in German

Turntable to represent my husband's dj days

Paintbrush= my career as an art teacher

Spatula= my husband's career as a chef/restaurant & food truck owner

Flag of Germany to represent my origins.

Elephant= my symbolic animal

Family Motto: Love written in Amharic

Music notes to represent where we met

- This family crest was designed by my niece, Madeline Smith.
- The crest has animals, flags, wording, and other symbols to represent our family.

*Shiberou Family Crest, 2021*  
Madeline Smith





*Addis vs. The Witch*, 2018-2020, Jennifer Shiberou

This illustration series was created to help my son Addis conquer his fear of a witch living in his closet. In the series he uses items from his room in creative ways to defeat the witch.

## Activity 4: Identify Your Hopes and Fears

- Fear is an emotional response to something that we perceive as dangerous.
- A threat describes people, places, or situations that make us feel unsafe or in danger.
- Danger involves the possibility of injury or harm.
- What do you want to protect yourself or others from?
- What hopes do you have for your future or your family's future?



*Family Borders, 2021*  
Richard A. Lou

*The Blessing of Love and Safety, 2021*  
Jennifer Shiberou



# Our Culminating Projects

Family Altars as Armor





*The Merode Altarpiece, c. 1427-1432*  
Attributed to the workshop of Robert Campin

## Inspiration

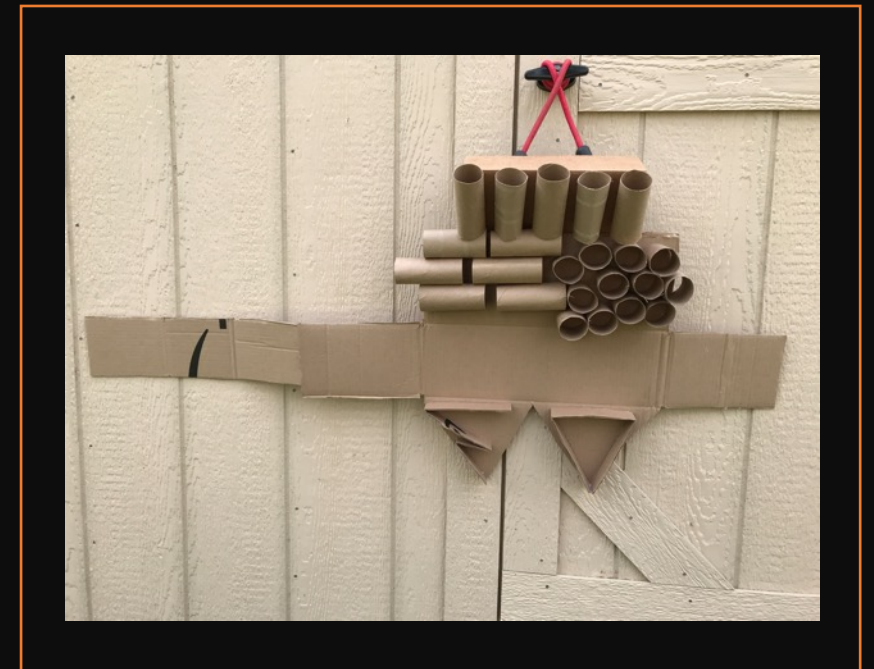
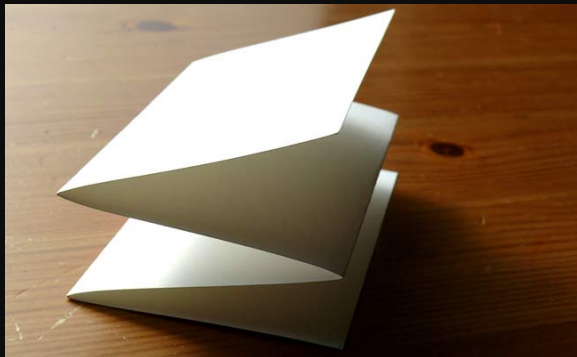
- When coming up with the design for the armor, Richard thought of triptychs. A triptych is a work of art containing hinged panels. Triptychs started during the Middle Ages and often include religious imagery.
- Another source of inspiration was from the Mexican culture of Richard's mother. As a child he remembers his mother setting up altars to honor family members.



*Home Altar, Conchita Iglesias McElwee, 2012*  
Photo: Laura Marcus Green

# Construction

- Richard created this prototype out of readily available materials of cardboard and toilet paper tubes.
- Notice how the bottom part of the armor chest plate opens like an accordion. You can achieve this by alternating the crease of the fold from the back to the front like the image below.



*Armor Prototype, 2021*  
Richard A. Lou





# Richard's Piece

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- Reflects his multi-cultural heritage.
- The top includes a planter box with cacti and succulents native to his mother's birthplace of Mexico.
- The middle section features the border wall with images of Richard's Chinese father and Mexican mother.
- The bottom section continues his family's story by showing his current family members including his mother-in-law, wife, four children, and their partners. Women are placed above the men to show Richard's belief in how the power structure should be and will be in the future. A crank on the side enables the blocks to move up and down, symbolizing the hustle and bustle of family life.



- Once opened, the viewer can see images of Richard's grandchildren. His parents are now present in spirit with their great-grandchildren.
- At the center of the piece is the Chinese symbols of his family name Lou, a tattoo that two of his daughters share.





# Jennifer's Piece

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- Celebrates her 20th wedding anniversary by telling the stories of her maternal grandmother and her husband's paternal grandmother, and how those journeys led to the creation of their blended family.
- At the bottom are the teapot which belonged to Jennifer's grandmother and the Ethiopian coffee pot in her husband's culture. The table and chairs are an imaginary meeting of their grandmothers under the family tree.
- The top includes pictures of Jennifer's family including the blessing of her husband's grandmother for the family to find love and safety.





- The center features Jennifer's wedding photo with her extended family, as well as a copy of the wedding invitation in both English and Amharic. Photos from the church wedding are on the left, and photos from the Ethiopian celebration are on the right.
- The accordion fold arms include photos of their children over the years.



# How to Design Your Culminating Project:

Create a Wearable Piece of Art as Protection

# Step 1: Develop Your Concept

## Questions to consider when creating the concept for your armor:

- Who are you designing the armor for?
- What do you want to protect the person or yourself from?
- What family history could you incorporate into your piece?
- What form will the armor or talisman take?

## Development of my concept:

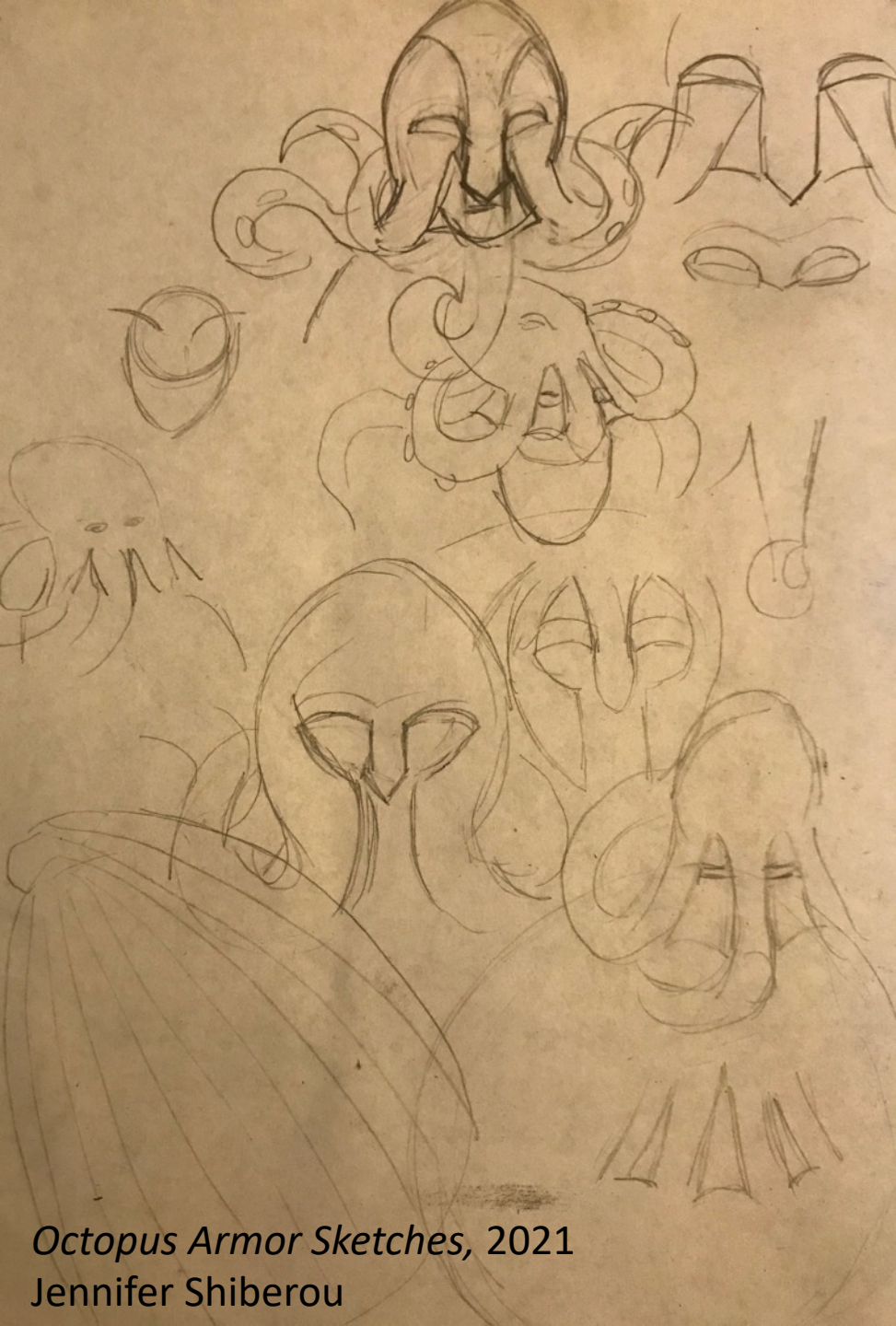
- The concept for my piece will be a helmet and shield for my son Addis.
- This armor will protect and empower him as he enters manhood as a male of color.
- The form of octopus was chosen to help him blend and adapt to different situations.
- The medieval design of the armor was chosen due to my son's fascination with medieval knights.



# Possible Materials

- Cardboard
- Paper towel/toilet paper tubes
- Masking tape
- Newspaper/tissue paper
- Wire/coat hangers
- Construction paper
- Aluminum foil
- Acrylic paint
- Found objects
- Cloth
- Pipe cleaners
- Yarn
- Markers/crayons
- Pencil/pen





## Step 2: Plan Your Design

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Brainstorm and explore images to get ideas.

Start sketching to experiment with different designs.



*Octopus Armor, 2021*  
Jennifer Shiberou

### Step 3: Build the Armature

- Use a sturdy substance like cardboard or wire.
- I used cardboard for the helmet and wire for the tentacles.
- I used masking tape to piece together the items.







## Step 4: Mold the structure

- I used newsprint (thin paper like newspaper) to fill out the structure of the shield.
- Then I coated the entire sculpture in masking tape to prepare the surface for acrylic paint.



## Step 5: Paint and Add Details

- I used copper and metallic acrylic paint for the helmet and shield.
- Model magic was used to make the shell embellishment and the suction cups on the octopus's tentacles.

*Octopus Armor, 2021*  
Jennifer Shiberou



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## Step 6: Write Your Artist Statement

- Consider opening with a quote that reflects the feelings or motivation for the creation of your armor.
- Discuss the artistic decisions you made and what those decisions symbolize.
- Explain your creative process.



# My artist statement

"Your life isn't an accident. Many generations of your ancestors struggled through life, learning lessons, making mistakes, just as you have. Each generation passed down to the next what they learned and all that they became...With each step, you carry the ancestors with you, in your mind, in your heart, and in your soul." From the book *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelson

The armor I created for my 12 year old son Addis is designed to protect him as enters into manhood as a male of color. Due to his multi-racial descent, I chose the form of an octopus since it can change colors and shapes to adapt and blend in to different environments. A shell was chosen as the shape of the shield since octopi resourcefully gather shells on the ocean floor to create their own armor from predators. The medieval style was chosen as the design of the armor due to my son's fascination with medieval knights. On the back of the shield, I wrote the meaning of the name of my son, Addis Joseph, which means "he shall add new." I included the quote above as well as our family prayer written by his maternal grandmother. Surrounding that are the names of all of his family members and ancestors who are in spirit with him.

To create the armor I used cardboard, wire, newsprint, and masking tape. It is painted with metallic acrylic paint and decorated with embellishments made from *Model Magic*.

# Reflect on the Impact of Your Wearable Art

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- Armor is meant to serve as protection for the wearer, but how is armor perceived by others?
- The artist Richard Lou explored this concept with an art experiment of wearing designs carved/painted into his hair while going about his daily life.
- If you saw someone wearing armor or wearable designs, how would you react?



*Headlines, 2012*  
Richard A. Lou



# Reflecting On Your Own Creation

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How did you (or the person you designed the armor for) feel while wearing the armor?

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How did others perceive you (or the person you designed the armor for)?

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Did you wear the armor out in public?  
Why/why not?

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If so, what were your experiences?