On the NSS PTA website you will find digital images available for download. These can be sent to the teacher to project on their Smartboards.

Digital files: Fur-Covered Good Humor bars, Good Humor, Sketch of Alphabet Good Humor, Alphabet Good Humor, Installation of Alphabet Good Humor, Floor Burger, Floor Cake, Floor Cake Insides, Ice Cream Cone, Safety Pin, Spoonbridge Cherry

In the vertical art storage rack you will find: The Art Elements & Principles posters to use in the discussion

In the black cabinet you will find a white binder with a copy of this presentation and several 8.5 x 11 prints of the other works referenced in this presentation.
Personal Information

Name: Claes Oldenburg
Nationality: Swedish
Born: January 28, 1929 in Stockholm, Sweden
Died: Living (as of March 2017)
Lived: Born in Stockholm, Claes Oldenburg moved to the United States in 1936. His family first moved to New York, but then later moved to Chicago. In 1956, he moved to New York City.
Family: He married Dutch/American pop sculptor Coosje van Bruggen in 1977, and was married to Pat Muschinski from 1960 - 1970.

Professional Information

Type of artist: Oldenburg is a sculptor, best known for his public art installations. Another theme in his work is soft versions of normally hard objects.
Artistic Credo: "I make my work out of my everyday experiences, which I find as perplexing and extraordinary as can be."
Style/Technique: For nearly twenty years, Oldenburg has collaborated with Coosje van Bruggen to produce a series of large-scale outdoor projects, which have been realized in many urban settings in the United States and Europe. Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks, Oldenburg's first monument realized for an outdoor setting, was commissioned by the graduate architecture students at Yale University and installed (on Ascension Day) in 1969. Oldenburg placed the lipstick on a tank-shaped base inspired by Caterpillar tractors and rolls of cardboard he had seen near Lippincott, Inc., a factory in North Haven, Connecticut. In addition to freestanding projects, he occasionally contributes to architectural projects; most notably the Chiat/Day advertising agency headquarters in the Venice district of Los Angeles, California -- the main entrance is a pair of giant black binoculars.

Artist Background

"Everything I do is completely original," Oldenburg explained in 1966. "I made it up when I was a little kid." Born in Stockholm, the oldest son of a Swedish diplomat, Oldenburg grew up in New York and then in Chicago, where his father was the Swedish consul and later consul general. But Oldenburg and his younger brother spent much of the time in Neubern, a country of their own invention, which the older boy documented with a newspaper, maps and scrapbooks. He was also often left to entertain himself with the consulate's various office machinery -- typewriters, staplers, adding machines and the like. "We do invest religious emotion in our objects," Oldenburg would say years later. "Look at how beautifully objects are depicted in ads in Sunday newspapers -- it's all very
Claes Oldenburg

emotional. Objects are body images, after all, created by humans, filled with human emotion, objects of worship."

After studies at Yale University and the Art Institute of Chicago, he moved to New York City in 1956, where he established himself in the early 1960s with a series of installations and performances influenced by his surroundings on the Lower East Side. He married Pat Muschinski, an artist’s model, in 1960. She was an active participant in his art – sewing his soft sculptures, and performing in his Happenings. (“Happenings” were performance art productions.) They divorced in 1970.

Since 1976 he worked in partnership with Dutch/American pop sculptor Coosje van Bruggen. They were married in 1977. Together they executed over forty Large-Scale Projects, which have been inserted into various urban surroundings in Europe, Asia, and the United States. His wife died on January 10, 2009 from the effects of breast cancer.

During his career, he has traveled around the United States and Europe, each travel influencing his style. He has spent time in Provincetown, MA; Lenox, MA; California; Paris, among others.

Artistic Persona

In 1959, Oldenburg had his first exhibition: a group of drawings depicting a young artist’s model, Pat Muschinski (who later became his first wife). Later that year, his first one-man show featured wood-and-newspaper constructions. By May 1960 he was already producing oversize three-dimensional objects for a collection of pieces known as "The Street," based, he said, on "whatever I could find on the way home." Also at that time, Oldenburg began integrating performance into his exhibitions and, influenced by the early Happenings created by Alan Kaprow, produced his own Happening -- the first of many -- at New York's Judson Gallery in "The Street" environment he had built there. He was supporting himself as a dishwasher.

His first major recognition came with the 1961 installation "The Store," a large collection of goods one might find in a neighborhood market. From 1962 on, his work was closely identified with the burgeoning pop art movement, and as the '60s progressed he became an international figure.

Oldenburg's initial interest in constructing environments such as The Street (1960), The Store (1961), and Bedroom Ensemble (1963) soon evolved into a concentration on single sculptures. Using ordinary, everyday objects as his form of expression, he went on to develop "soft" sculpture and fantastic proposals for civic monuments.

**Soft Sculptures:** Before Oldenburg, sculpture was hard and permanent. Oldenburg used soft materials in his sculptures, and so his objects could change over time – or be rearranged. His subjects were items of contemporary life – items or places that we can easily recognize and place ourselves in - and so his pieces have been labeled Pop Art. (Some of the students may have studied Andy Warhol in the prior year, presented by Art in the Classroom.)

He has created shirts and ties and dresses and ice cream cones and pies, and even the contents of an entire store, out of plaster-soaked cloth and wire. Using vinyl stuffed with kapok, he built pay telephones, typewriters, light switches and a complete bathroom -- sink, tub, scale and toilet.
Large-Scale Sculptures: Beginning in the 1970s, Oldenburg’s interests shifted to large-scale public sculptures. In 1969, Oldenburg took up fabrication on a large scale with Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks, which became a controversial focus for student protest when it was installed on the Yale campus.

Many of Oldenburg's large-scale sculptures of mundane objects elicited public ridicule before being embraced as whimsical, insightful, and fun additions to public outdoor art. With Oldenburg, items that we relate to in terms of our body size, like basketball mitts and forks, are made into large-scale items.

He constructed a catcher's mitt, 12 feet tall, out of metal and wood, and built a four-and-a-half-story clothespin out of steel in downtown Philadelphia, PA. In the last two decades, focusing almost exclusively on giant monuments, he has created a 38-foot-tall flashlight, a 10-story baseball bat, a 60-foot-long umbrella, a three-story-high faucet with a 440-foot water-spewing red hose, a 40-foot-tall book of matches and a partially buried bicycle that would fill most of a football field, among numerous other projects located from Tokyo to Texas.

Oldenburg leaves his sculptures open to interpretation; any explanation can be equally good as the next, since the viewer’s preferences and associations, not those of the artist, determine them. He remarked, "Because my work is naturally non-meaningful, the meaning found in it will remain doubtful and inconsistent -- which is the way it should be. All that I care about is that, like any startling piece of nature, it should be capable of stimulating meaning."

His inspirations for these monuments came from many places – illustrations in children’s books; the balloons in Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parades, and structures built in the shapes of animals. Frequent travel in airplanes game him the idea of representing objects out of scale and from odd perspectives.

Featured Artwork

Soft Sculptures

“I like to work with very simple ideas,” Oldenburg has said. Despite their simplicity, Floor Burger, Floor Cake, and Floor Cone were groundbreaking artworks. Their soft, pliant, and colorful bodies challenged the convention that sculpture is rigid, and their subject matter and colossal scale infused humor and whimsy. With this work Oldenburg proposed an alternate form of monumental sculpture, saluting subjects from contemporary American life. The following year, the artist began to make soft sculptures from colored vinyl.

Inspired by the luxury cars and grand pianos in midtown showrooms, Oldenburg had decided to make sculptures of an equivalent scale. Plaster was ill-suited to the task--too fragile and heavy--and so the artist, with the assistance of his then wife, Patty Mucha, a skilled seamstress, created sculptures of fabric. Working in the gallery, Oldenburg and Mucha made Floor Burger, Floor Cake, and Floor Cone, three oversized soft sculptures
Fur-Covered Good Humor bars (1963)
Soft Sculpture
Show: Digital image

Good Humor bars (leopard, tiger, cow and polka-dot) were large, stuffed with foam and made with zebra and cheetah patterned fake fur. One suggestion of its meaning is that our perception of an object is only skin-deep. If we change the “skin,” we change the perception of the object. How does our perception of the object change when it is not covered in chocolate, but animal fur? Do you still want to eat it?

It has been suggested that this sculpture is a commentary on how companies continue to expand their product lines. They continue to push the envelope of taste.

Ask: If you could invent the flavors of these ice cream pops, what would they be?
The Art Gallery of Ontario purchased the Floor Burger from the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York on Jan. 27, 1967, for $2,000. The work, created in 1962 by pop art pioneer Claes Oldenburg, was initially titled “Giant Hamburger.”

Perhaps already worried about potential controversy that would ignite regarding the acquisition of a giant canvas hamburger, the original gallery press release from Feb. 4, 1967, includes a quotation from then-director of the gallery, William J. Withrow, which states, “The Giant Hamburger has been bought with funds donated and ear-marked specifically for the purchase of contemporary Canadian and American Art. Never in the history of the Art Gallery has one cent of tax money ever been spent on the purchase of a work of art.”

Floor Cake (1962)
Synthetic polymer paint and latex on canvas filled with foam rubber and cardboard boxes. 5 ft x 9 ft x 5 ft (approx.)

Show: Digital image

Claes Oldenburg’s Floor Cake (1962) entered into the Painting and Sculpture Department at MoMA in 1975. Measuring five by nine feet, this popular piece of painted cake has been heavily exhibited in the Museum and across the United States, and has made three transatlantic voyages. The forty-seven-year old sculpture is now in the Conservation Department lab for study and treatment.
Claes Oldenburg

In 1961 Claes Oldenburg opened a shop, The Store, in his workshop in New York’s Lower East Side, from which he sold plaster re-creations of foodstuffs and merchandise.

In a subsequent incarnation of The Store at the Green Gallery in New York in 1962, Oldenburg developed an art of parody and humor by grossly enlarging the scale of familiar objects, and created such works as MoMA’s Floor Cake and Floor Burger, which is in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Free-Standing Sculptures

**Alphabet Good Humor Bar (1975)**
Cast in resin plated with polyurethane enamel; bronze, wood
5 ft x 12 ft x 2 ft (approx.)
**Show:** Digital image

Claes Oldenburg’s Alphabet/Good Humor—a bronze and fiberglass sculpture that features a vaguely peach-colored and squashy-looking alphabet formed into the shape of a frozen Good Humor bar—a playful sculpture that stands nearly 12 feet tall.

Large-Scale, Outdoor Sculptures
Steel and paint
**Show:** Digital images

Although his large sculptures seem absurd and humorous, Oldenburg is no comedian: "My single-minded aim is to give existence to fantasy," he has said. People find they are delighted to come upon his humongous spoon in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. The 51-foot-long utensil cradles a 1,200-pound maraschino cherry that sprays a cascade of water from its stem. Indeed many of Oldenburg's large-scale sculptures of mundane objects elicited ridicule before being accepted.
Claes Oldenburg

By taking mundane objects and presenting them out of context and in such colossal proportions, Oldenburg forced viewers to reassess their daily lives and values. His work was a social commentary on American popular culture and, by association, on contemporary society's approach to life itself.

General Discussion:

Look at any of the works provided and ask

- How does these sculpture make you feel? Which ones in particular and why
- What do you think Claes Oldenburg is trying to tell us?
- Do you see any evidence of humor in the sculptures?
- Does the fact that it is a sculpture of a familiar object affect your thinking about its value as a piece of art?

Talking about the Elements of Art

You can talk about these points when discussing any of the sculptures. Let the student’s interest guide your choices of which they would like to focus on.
Claes Oldenburg

**Color:**
- Think about the colors that he used. How do they set the mood of the sculpture?
- What kinds of colors did Claes Oldenburg use?
- Are the colors bright or muted?

**Shape**
- What shapes do you see?

**Texture**
What kinds of textures are depicted in the sculpture?

**Line:**
- Do the lines of the sculpture draw your attention to any one area?
- Are the lines clean and hard or soft?

**Light:**
What kind of light is Oldenburg showing?

**Resources**

http://www.nga.gov/education/schoolarts/oldenburg.htm
Sculpture in America, by Wayne Craven, 1968.
Oldenburg Art in the Classroom presentation, 2005
Claes Oldenburg, by Barbara Rose, 1970.
http://crystalbridges.org/blog/claes-oldenburgs-alphabetgood-humor-returns/
https://www.wikiart.org/en/claes-oldenburg
http://www.weirdca.com
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81450
http://arha253blogs.wesleyan.edu/2014/02/26/115/
http://www.theartstory.org/artist-oldenburg-claes.htm
http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-really-big-art-of-claes-oldenburg-1-35271235/
http://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/american-art-biographies/claes-oldenburg