

Grade level 6–8

## Curricular Connections

Visual Arts

Artist

Jim Dine

(American, 1935)

Divides his time between Washington State and Paris, France

## Artwork

*Two Big Black Hearts*, 1985, bronze,  
2' x 12' x 33" each, Lent by Hamilton

Arts



Jim Dine was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1935. He attended the University of Cincinnati, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Ohio University, from which he received his BFA in 1957. Dine was a pioneer in a series of performative demonstrations with Claes Oldenburg, Allen Kaprow, and Robert Whitman called the *Happenings*. The *Happenings* drew on personal experiences and everyday events, often using everyday junk as a means of engaging with popular culture. Dine was closely associated with the development of Pop art in the early 1960's, however, he did not identify solely as a Pop artist, nor did he feel that Pop art and Abstract Expressionism had to contradict each other, but rather embraced both sensibilities.

This particular work diverges from Pop art with the evidence of the hand and its personal quality, but it does directly connect to Dine's earlier Pop work in which hearts frequently appeared. Dine once said that hearts function as a, "sign that one can care. That there is a constant presence of feeling." Dine's touch is evident in the work, with imprints of his hand frequently appearing on the sculpture. The tools incased in the sculpture reflect Dine's childhood memories of the hardware store owned by his grandparents. Beyond working with the heart as a symbol, Dine seeks to involve the viewer in his work by incorporating objects in the casting process intended to relate to the viewer. In this work, Dine demonstrates his ability to transform the superficial interest in objects into a language of expression and emotion.

*Two Big Black Hearts* is a bronze cast sculpture, with each heart weighing over 3200 pounds. Bronze cast sculptures originate from clay creations. The clay sculptures are then covered with rubber to create a mold. The clay is then

removed from the rubber mold and coated with hot wax. Once cool, the wax copy of the original clay model is removed from the mold and dipped repeatedly in a ceramic shell until it forms a solid cast around the wax. Once the ceramic has hardened and dried, it is fired to create a solid mold, melting the wax. The ceramic mold is durable enough to not melt or crumble under the weight of the 2100° F molten bronze that is poured into its shell. Once cool, the ceramic is broken to reveal the first stage of the bronze sculpture. Most bronze sculptures are cast in pieces and then must be welded together to create the entire sculpture. The bronze sculpture is then sandblasted to clean off any unwanted ceramic debris and then chemicals are applied (such as sulfur) to bring out the desired patina. In order to protect the bronze and the patina, a wax coating is applied creating the finished work of art.

### Goals:

1. Students will learn to carefully view and describe the work.
2. Students will learn about the casting process and discuss how Dine's process relates to the content of the work.

### Vocabulary:

**Cast:** To give shape to a substance by pouring liquid or plastic form into or onto a mold and letting harden without pressure

**Pop art:** An art movement that began in Britain in the mid 1950's and emerged in the United States in the early 1960's, which drew inspiration from sources in popular and commercial culture. It was a revolt against prevailing orthodoxies in art and life and can be seen as one of the first manifestations of Postmodernism. It took on new subject matter and developed new ways of presenting that matter in art. Prevalent Pop artists include Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein.

**Objective:** Not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice; based on facts.

**Subjective:** Pertaining to or characteristic of an individual's thoughts; not based on facts.

**Medium:** A mode of artistic expression or communication. Ex: Paint, ink, bronze, wood etc.

### Looking Questions:

- What do you see?
- What do you notice about the shape, size and color of the hearts? Why do you think Dine chose to make the hearts this way? Do you notice anything about the two sides of each heart?
- How might the size of the sculpture change the way it is interpreted by the viewer? How does the scale and size of the sculpture, affect the content, or the meaning behind the work?
- Do you notice anything about the two sides of each heart?

- How would you describe the sculpture's texture?

**Discussion Questions:**

- If Dine had not cast the sculpture in bronze, would it have been as successful?
- How does Dine involve the viewer in his sculpture, *Two Big Black Hearts*?
- Would you consider this an objective or subjective sculpture? Why?
- Would *Two Big Black Hearts* function the same way if Dine had chosen to create the hearts in a two-dimensional medium as opposed to a three-dimensional medium? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Dine chose to include tools and other objects in the sculpture?
- What are some objects that remind you of home?

**Activity: Symbols and Personal Meaning**

- Through mold-making, students will create their own 3D cast sculpture showcasing objects of personal importance.

**Materials**

- Paper
- Pencil
- Quick setting clay plaster
- Room temperature water
- Aluminum pans
- Sand
- Plastic utensils or clay tools
- Paint (optional)

**Day One (at deCordova) Directions:**

1. After viewing and discussing *Two Big Black Hearts*, ask the students to discuss what is important to them. Encourage students to begin thinking about how they could portray things that are important to them as symbols.
2. Distribute a piece of paper and a pencil to each student.
3. Ask students to sketch a heart on the piece of paper.
4. Instruct the students to sketch symbols of objects that are important to them inside the hearts they have drawn.
5. Inform the class that they will be creating three-dimensional versions of their sketches the following day of class and that they may bring in small objects to incorporate into their final pieces. Ex: toy cars, shells, pendants, etc.

**Day Two Directions:**

1. Remind the students of Jim Dine's, *Two Big Black Hearts* and the way he used the heart as a symbol.
2. Have students prepare their own sandbox by forming wet sand inside the aluminum pans. Instruct the students to create a shape of a heart in their sandbox using the plastic utensils to lightly draw in the sand.
3. Once the students have formed their hearts, they may begin to draw or press objects into their sandbox, creating a mold for their sculpture.
4. When students are satisfied with their mold, pour the plaster mix (2 cups of quick setting dry plaster to one cup of water) into their molds.
5. Allow twenty-four hours for the sculptures to dry, and then have students dig away the sand to reveal their creation. The students can then paint the sculptures or take them home.

**Reflections:**

- Why did you choose to include these objects in your sculpture?
- Do you consider your work to be objective or subjective? Why?
- Do you feel your sculpture conveys more than your sketch? Why or why not?
- If you had the opportunity to meet Jim Dine what would you ask him about the sculpture? Why?