



Walt Disney Contemplating Francis Bacon, 2016, paper cut collage, 17.25 x 17.25 inches framed



Seeds of Change (after Ai Weiwei), 2016, paper cut collage, 17.25 x 17.25 inches framed

Body Language: Papercut Collage

Artist: Tiko Kerr
Educator: Daylen Luchsinger

Biography:

Born in Edmonton and currently based in Vancouver, Canadian artist Tiko Kerr has earned high-profile recognition for his artfully liberated visual explorations of landscape and figurative scenes. His early body of work in his *The Past Is Personal* series explored the way that memory, emotion and personal narrative influenced his perception of his quotidian environment. In his recent collage work, Kerr investigates perception from a more conceptual angle that shifts into the surreal sublime. Investigating the spectrum of perception that exists between Pareidolia (perceiving an object where none exists) and Camouflage (where an existing object is made invisible), Kerr creates minimalist narrative spaces

that are at once cunning, comedic and culturally poignant. Through the fragmentation of these figurative scenes and the abstracted reimagining of the source material, Kerr distorts our understanding of what we are looking at. The collages become masters of disguise - appearance artfully scabbled out so it is open to a variety of views. The full series explores the way marginal, outcast or outsider figures can be culturally-encoded by shape and pattern recognition but also creatively reimagined through the cleverly prickly use of the collaged source material. Kerr has been widely recognized for his creative accomplishments and longtime activism. Along with many solo shows, Kerr has undertaken prominent creative partnerships with many arts organisations. Kerr provided the sumptuous artistic scenery and visual through-line for Ballet BC's acclaimed *Wonder Boy*. In 2014, Kerr was the featured biographical subject of *Cue The Muse*, an Emmy-nominated documentary series that focused on artistic freethinkers and creative rebels. Kerr's work has been the feature of many published articles and his work is in many private and corporate collection.¹

Artist Statement:

Perception - how we see and what shapes and distorts our visual impressions - has been the root of much of my work though the vines of my awareness have twisted off in different directions over the years. My recent series of paper cut collages explores the notion of how the innate process of pattern recognition is influenced by our current set of cultural indicators - the panoply of visual clues that make us rush to judgement about what we are seeing.

Certainly evolutionary survival has imprinted archetypes that make us compose faces and figures out of random arrangements. But we are quick to fill in cultural prejudices, socio-economic biases, emotional connections and narrative constructions based on a minimal set of visual clues. We see signals and make assumptions. But the truth of identity is malleable and can be cut up in many ways.

We are in a historical moment when how we categorize people, how we instinctually and culturally encode them with loaded negative values or misplaced judgments can lead to political opposition, severe ostracization, harsh actions or, most commonly, the psychological grief of societal indifference occurring when individuality is reduced to invisibility. No one really wants to look carefully for more than is what is supposedly obvious. It is that attitude of contemporary cultural ignorance that I seek to upend with my new series of paper cuts and paintings entitled *Body Language*.

The work challenges us to consider how we construct - and need to loosen - our visual assumptions about identity.²

Top left:
Flight from Damascus, 2015,
paper cut collage, 17.25 x 17.25 inches framed

Bottom right:
Sunset over Aleppo, 2016,
paper cut collage, 17.25 x 17.25 inches framed



Body Language: Papercut Collage

Tiko Kerr's paper cut collage work provides an excellent launch pad for art educators to design projects that involve a great deal of intricacy. Students so often experience collage as searching and acquiring images that exemplify a subject. In this process students are challenged to create and look at imagery in other ways – to play with an image, flip it around, use a stencil to isolate imagery, so the image gains complexity and layered meaning.

Students are asked to see a different figure or object within other found imagery, how can Mickey Mouse all of a sudden take on characteristics of a Francis Bacon figure? Kerr's paper cuts provide masterful examples of how this can and does occur, and inspire students to embrace a process of artistic play and arrangement with colour and imagery. Exploring simple visual cues like a horizontal line where two colours meet becoming the horizon line and suddenly there is a landscape or setting in which a figure can be placed.

Using contemporary art, art history and popular culture as a source of imagery students appropriate and modify imagery that catches their eye and the viewer's eye. The selection of iconic or recognizable imagery and then altering it is a useful technique for young artists to learn as it helps to catch and hold a viewer's attention. This process also encourages students to develop their own catalogue of art influences in a playful manner, rather than more structured or academic presentation of art history.

In developing and teaching this project with Tiko Kerr I observed students taking collage, often considered a very simple process, and using it in extremely complex and playful ways to create meaningful works of art.

Artist Tiko Kerr and secondary students



work in progress by Sarah Sullivan, AFK Studio Art Academy

Art Project:

Question: How can you use images created by other artists & popular culture?

The assignment is to assemble an artwork based upon images/text from other people into your own unique image. Create 7-10 collages upon the theme of the Figure and then using critique pair this down to a finished body of work (perhaps a series of 3-4).

Demonstrate creating a stencil and using a stencil to frame and select new imagery.

Find a figure from a magazine or draw a human figure in action and cut it out of a piece of white paper, so that you create a silhouette that you can lay over magazine images as if it were a stencil.

This is an exercise to train the eye to see how random placement of the stencil on source materials somehow makes associations. It's about chance and making random relationships that are intuitive. Rotate the stencil around and see how it can create interesting compositions.



example of a stencil and simple collage background

Demonstrate building a background (landscape or architectural space) within which the figure is placed.

- Lay down a solid piece of paper in the same colour pallet as the magazine images. This is your base.
- Lay down another piece of solid paper in another colour, in order to create a horizon line and a ground for the shapes. This will trigger how the magazine images come together.
- The horizon can create some sort of narrative. In much of Tiko's work he is discovering that his subconscious is creating archetypes that register for us all in a recognizable way.

Collecting Imagery

When collecting source material there are a few things to consider:

- Colour selection is important, tear out full pages from magazines that somehow are consistent with each other in a particular palette of colours, mostly greys or blues for example. Make a pile of 10-20.
- Choosing iconic figures/images and using portions of these - this creates a recognizable hook to engage your viewers.
- Think about these images in terms of being abstractions so that they lose their original identity of what they were in the magazine.
- Go through the pile and cut off the white margins of the page so that the coloured parts are freed up to morph into relationships with one another.
- You can also double up on this process by collecting another pile of magazine images in a different colour and choose solid papers as your base that compliment the colour in the images. You can create 2 collages side by side and learn more quickly about how to work intuitively and freely. It should be a fun process!

Collage Process Notes

- Don't be literal, for example don't make a human figure in the source material also a human figure in your collage.
- Take your selected magazine images and cut them into your stencil shapes and other medium sized shapes by having the scissors follow any sort of line that you discover in the imagery. It can be the contours of a shape or it can cut across shapes and patterns.
- Make decisive, bold, not tentative cuts. Paper is not precious.
- Resist the temptation to cut into tiny pieces. Smaller pieces can be applied later to finesse the composition. Tiny shapes create a hesitant approach to the process.
- Start laying the cut magazine images on the solid papers. Trim pieces in order to organize your composition. Try various combinations of arrangements.
- As you begin to like what you're creating, start gluing your selections down. Glues sticks work but photo-mount spray works best. Use a rubber glove on your non-dominant hand and spray Photo-mount adhesive (in a ventilated area) on the back of the papers and lay over the solid papers to stick.

Materials:

Magazines - I find using archives of old art magazines creates more of an interaction with art history and contemporary art than using all the *Martha Stewart Living* magazines that end up on the doorstep of my classroom.

coloured fadeless paper, glue, scissors, pre-cut backing paper 12" x 12"

Vocabulary:

Collage describes both the technique and the resulting work of art in which pieces of paper, photographs, fabric and other ephemera are arranged and stuck down onto a supporting surface.³



work in progress by Yena Yoon, AFK Studio Art Academy



work in progress by Anna Markus, AFK Studio Art Academy

Sources:

1. <https://www.saatchiart.com/tikokerr>
2. <http://tikokerr.com/page5/>
3. <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/>



AFK offers a series of workshops for elementary and secondary students yearly. These workshops bring together professional artists and art specialist educators to collaborate and create an enriched art workshop for students. The symbiotic nature of this relationship between artist and teacher creates a unique studio environment in which students are challenged and supported in their artistic learning. These programs are funded by the sale of limited edition prints by some of Canada's leading artists, please visit our website for more information:

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