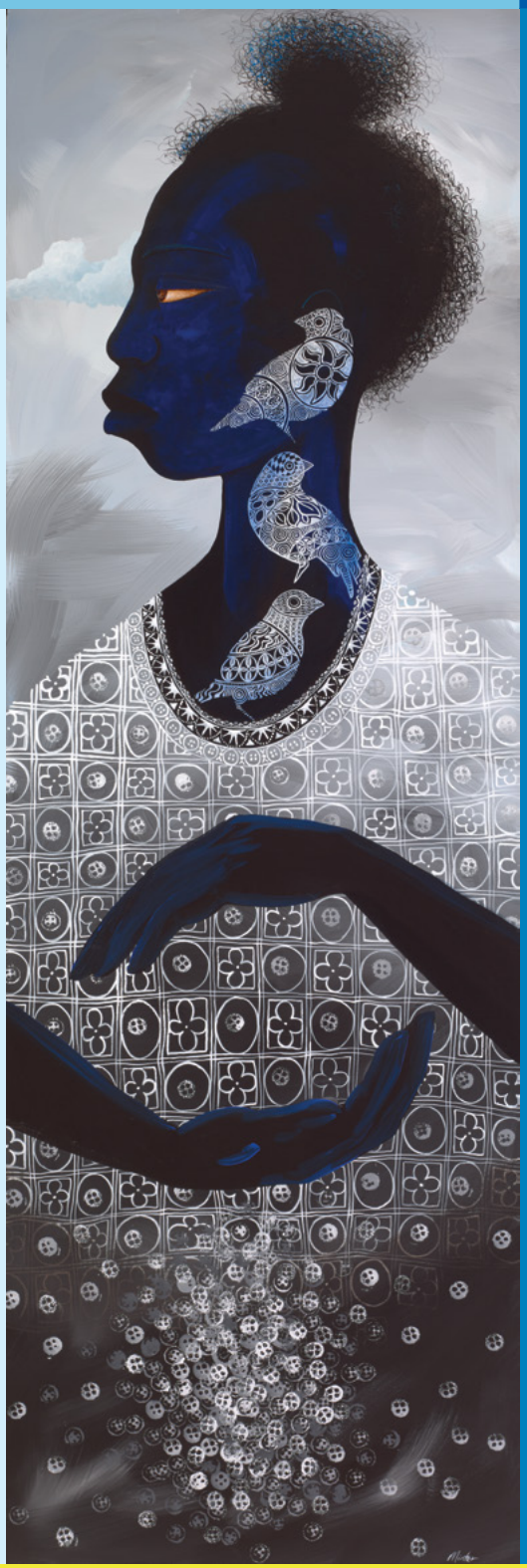
DANIEL MINTER

PMA CLASSROOM

BEST FOR
High School



THEMES

- Displacement
- Colonialism
- Home
- Belonging
- Symbols
- Identity
- Stories of the Land
- Sense of Place

LEFT: Daniel Minter (United States, born 1961), *A Quiet Reach #1*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 20 inches. Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Museum purchase with support from the Emily Eaton Moore and Family Fund for the Collection, 2022.15.1. © Daniel Minter. Image courtesy Luc Demers

RIGHT: Daniel Minter (United States, born 1961), *A Quiet Reach #5, 2021*, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 20 inches. Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Museum purchase with support from the Emily Eaton Moore and Family Fund for the Collection, 2022.15.2. © Daniel Minter. Image courtesy Luc Demers

MAINE VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS STANDARDS MET

www.Maine.gov/doe/learning/content/arts/standards

D.A1 – Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

D.B3 – Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

D.D1 – Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

D.D2 – Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical contexts to deepen understanding.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES

www.Casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework

SELF-AWARENESS

Understanding one's own emotions, thoughts, and values

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Considering other points of view, respecting others

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Examine their personal histories and discover some symbols that can be layered into paintings.
- Learn about Malaga Island and its importance in Maine's colonial history.
- Stylize the figure in their work.
- Create engaging and meaningful color schemes.
- Understand foreground, middle ground, and background.
- Use elements of assemblage or collage in their work.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How does where we live affect who we are?
- How does the past affect us in the present?
- How has racism shaped our society?
- How does our sense of place evolve over time?
- What are our personal symbols and how can we use them to convey meaning in artwork?
- How can we layer our artwork to create a sense of drama and depth?
- How can we incorporate other materials into our work in a meaningful and seamless way?
- How can artists help process the grief and loss caused by colonialism?

MATERIALS NEEDED

WOODEN BOARD OR SUBSTRATE (or blank piece of paper/canvas)

ACRYLIC PAINT (or paint of choice if access to acrylic is limited)

PAINT BRUSHES

EPHEMERA (such as newspaper clippings, old book pages, trash, objects, photos)

REFERENCE MATERIALS

INSTRUCTIONS

LOOK & RESPOND

LOOK

Look closely at these paintings. **Notice the details.** Take the time to find things you hadn't noticed at first glance.

RESPOND

Think about and respond to these questions:

What elements do you notice repeated in each of these works by Daniel Minter?

What are the similarities in the two works? How are they different?

What colors do you see? Why do you think Daniel Minter chose these colors? How do the color choices affect how you feel while looking at the paintings? Why do you think that indigo is an important color choice in Minter's work?

What patterns do you notice? What do they remind you of? Why do you think Daniel Minter chose these particular patterns?

How would you describe Daniel Minter's use of line?

Who do you think the people are in the paintings? Are they specific people or generalized people? What are you seeing that makes you say that?

What symbols do you see represented in the work? What do you think Minter is trying to say or communicate?

What is home? How do you think Daniel Minter's paintings refer to a sense of home?

Write down your responses, share them with someone in your house or class, or discuss as a class.

LEARN

Use this section to learn more about the artist, subject, and context of the artworks & objects.

Daniel Minter is a mixed-media artist living in Maine. His work explores themes of displacement, home, spirituality, and the Black experience in America. Blending painting, carving, and assemblage, Minter's work often blurs the boundaries of what is possible with a given medium, adding emotional and visual depth to his subjects.

Symbols, layering, color, and the importance of objects and places in our histories give his work a sublime, stirring, and human yet ghostly quality.

He has illustrated over a dozen children's books. He also co-founded the Indigo Arts Alliance in 2019 to support the work of Black and Brown artists in Maine.

Daniel Minter studied Malaga Island, an island off the coast of Maine where an entire population of Black, White, and Mixed-race people lived peacefully together after the Civil War. This fishing community had a school and became known as a safe space for people to live in harmony. In 1912, the State of Maine forcibly removed the entire population of the island from their homes, razed the homes and buildings, exhumed the graves, and relocated the people. Some of them were sent to a mental institution based solely on eugenics, a racist pseudo-science of the time that measured people's head shape and circumference with calipers to determine their mental fitness. Families were separated and destroyed, and the entire culture of the island was erased.

Daniel Minter (United States, born 1961), *A Quiet Reach #1* (detail), 2021, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 20 inches. Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Museum purchase with support from the Emily Eaton Moore and Family Fund for the Collection, 2022.15.1. © Daniel Minter. Image courtesy Luc Demers

When Daniel Minter discovered this piece of Maine's racist history, he visited the island repeatedly. He also joined in an excavation of the island, finding many artifacts, including buttons, bones, fishhooks, and other remnants of daily life there. He began a series of paintings that draw upon the history of the inhabitants of the island, some of whom were former enslaved people and/or descendants of enslaved people. In his imaginings of the inhabitants, and in paintings that seem to be ghostly versions of them, Minter includes imagery that grounds us in their daily existence (in roles connected to the sea for their

sustenance, as seamstresses and laundry women, and as laborers) and links them to their African ancestry. In Yoruba/Nago culture, the use of symbols and patterns connects people to their ancestors and to their belief in a god. Artists such as Laolu Senbanjo and Ebenezer Akakpo also draw from African imagery such as Adinkra symbols as a way of evoking West African cultural traditions.

"I imagine that the people of Malaga Island were able to maintain the sense of an inner home even at a time when every outward representation of home was being taken away. The image of the person standing in the water; the turbulent calm of the body and visage are reminders that in the face of eradication we may disappear but our spirits are not diminished. Our physical home is shallow whereas the depth of our inner home cannot be measured."

-DANIEL MINTER

(From the description of USM's exhibition of Daniel Minter's work in 2018, *Othered*; https://usm.maine.edu/gallery/othered-displaced-from-malaga-by-daniel-minter/)

Elsewhere, he adds, "I feel like it's important that we use art to interpret our past, interpret our history, interpret the things that we value, the things that have happened that we value and the things that have happened that we wish to never happen again."
(From an interview with *Spectrum News*, 2021; https://spectrumlocalnews.com/me/maine/vod/2021/08/23/retelling-malaga-island-s-story-through-art-)

For a deeper dive into the history of Malaga Island and Daniel Minter's connection to it through art, please visit: https://danielminter.net/essays/

Daniel Minter (United States, born 1961), *A Quiet Reach #5* (detail), 2021, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 20 inches. Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Museum purchase with support from the Emily Eaton Moore and Family Fund for the Collection, 2022.15.2. © Daniel Minter. Image courtesy Luc Demers

ACT

In this section, students will create a mixed-media painting and collage.

PREWORK

List the people and places that are important to you. Why are they important? How are you connected to them?

How could you abstract the human form?

What size is the person you're referring to? How old are they? What kind of hair style or clothing do they wear? What gender are they? How do you show these elements in the stylized painting of a person?

Notice Daniel Minter's repeated use of symbols such as the button and the bird and the hammer. Why are these symbols important in this work? Make a list of symbols that would represent things you care about. What symbols will you choose and why? How could you abstract or repeat those symbols to create a pattern or design overlay?

List the places you care about, such as landscapes or cityscapes or interiors that move you or spark a feeling. What about these places is compelling? Are they beautiful or ugly or raw? What kinds of colors would you use to show these places? Would it be day or night or someplace in between?

Whose story are you going to tell through your work? Why is this story important to you?

WORK

1. BEGIN by sketching a figure several times in different ways. How do you want to pose the figure? What are they doing with their hands? Which direction are they facing? How does the figure interact with the viewer?

2. ONCE you've settled on the specifics of your figure, begin considering your background. What is the specific setting of your painting? Is it abstracted or realistic?

3. EXPLORE a few color palettes. Experiment with color choices in a few thumbnail sketches in colored pencil. What colors work to represent the mood and feeling of your painting?

4. DECIDE on your symbols and sketch them a few times. Notice how Daniel Minter uses the repeated themes of the ocean and fish, buttons and birds, hammers and plants. What are your personal symbols? How can you repeat them to create a pattern? Practice making a pattern using your symbols.

5. ONCE all your preliminary work is done, sketch a rough outline on your board. You do not need to draw the symbols yet; those will be an overlay in your last step. Sketch your figure and map out your landscape.

6. BEGIN by painting the things that are farthest away in the picture. Work from farthest to closest, top to bottom. Paint your background first. Blend the colors.

7. ONCE your background is dry, mix some skin tones or work with your palette of choice and start mapping in your figure. Remember, this is a layering process. Do not try to add detail right away. Paint the person, add shadows and lights, then add more depth as you go.

8. NEXT, add details to the person such as facial features, hair, clothing, or jewelry.

9. LASTLY, add your overlay of patterned symbols. Use a color that stands out. Daniel Minter often used white or light blue for these symbols, giving the work a dream-like or ghost-like quality while also referring to Yoruba spiritual paintings in white. What will you choose?

10. ASSESS your work for meaning, share it with others, and talk about what drove you to create the specific things you made.

REFLECT AND SHARE

Let's reflect on what we just did and the experience we just had in engaging with this artwork.

WHAT did you learn from this lesson?

WHAT do you like most about your finished work?

WHO did you choose to represent? Why?

WHAT symbols did you design? Why?

WHAT would you do differently?

RESOURCES

https://danielminter.net

https://indigoartsalliance.me

TO WATCH SOME INTERVIEWS WITH DANIEL MINTER, HERE ARE SOME LINKS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MxauzHvtWE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-Wn6ZnYciQ

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sc9uYB4ieh0

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtupEOs7NeU

https://spectrumlocalnews.com/me/maine/vod/2021/08/23/retelling-malaga-island-s-story-through-art-

https://danielminter.net/essays

INTERVIEW WITH LAOLU SENBANJO

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxX3YNCQSpw

ADINKRA SYMBOLS AND THEIR MEANINGS

https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/