ARCHITECTURES OF POWER // RODNEY MCPHILLIAN

What symbols represent power to you? How do you know a building is powerful?

How will you design your own powerful façade?

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OBJECTIVES:

1. Identify, define, and discuss architecture as it relates to symbols of power.
2. Survey pictures of existing influential and important architecture, and create a unique building façade exploring your idea of powerful architecture using a variety of available materials.
3. Explore techniques similar to those used by artist Rodney McMillian, including methods of collage, layering, and embroidery, to create the structure.

VOCABULARY:

- Architecture – the design of a building
- Power – to have control, influence, or authority over others
- Symbol – something that stands for something else
- Façade – the front of a building; a misleading appearance
- Collage – a work of art made by gluing, sewing, taping, and layering different materials to a flat surface
- Layers – one thing stacked on top of another

MATERIALS: Anything you have available, including but not limited to paper, magazines, pencils, markers, colored pencils, crayons, or other drawing materials; glue, tape, stapler, or other adhesive materials

OPTIONAL: sewing needle and thread; reflection worksheet (last page)
LOOK AND DESCRIBE:

- Rodney McMillian is an artist who makes sculptures, paintings, videos, and more to share his ideas. He explores symbols, power, and architecture in his artwork. Take some time to look at images of McMillian’s artwork in online galleries.
- A symbol is something that stands for or represents something else. We are surrounded by symbols in our everyday life. For example, we know that the symbol for recycling is three green arrows creating a triangle. We recognize it as soon as we see it! What about the symbol for peace? Or a stop sign? List 3–5 symbols with a drawing of what they look like.
  o We have symbols that represent bigger ideas as well. Can you think of a symbol for your school or your city/town? What about America? List 3–5 symbols that represent the United States of America.
  o Buildings can be symbols, too! The White House, pictured here, is a symbol. List 3–5 things the White House represents. Who lives there? What happens there?
  o McMillian uses the White House in his artwork and relates it to power: it is the president’s house, but it is also the president’s office. What does it mean to have power? List 3–5 ideas. (Also, did you know the leader’s house in South Korea is the Blue House? Check it out: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_House)
- The design of a building is called architecture. Look at the White House’s architecture: what are some details, like columns or windows, you notice that tell you this is a powerful building? List 3–5 observations.
- All those observations you made about the White House are about the outside of the building, or the building’s façade. Let’s look at the facades of other important buildings in pictures. What do you notice about them? What’s the same or different about these buildings?
  o Why would an artist choose to call a work of art a painting even if there is no paint in the work of art? List 3–5 reasons.
  o Why would McMillian decide to use a material like fabric to depict a powerful building like the White House? List 3–5 reasons.

MAKE AND DO:

1. Now it is time to become the architect of your own symbol of power! Using available materials, design the façade of your own powerful building. It can look any way that you want, you are the architect!
   a. Begin with a sketch of the design of your building. Make a list of the features in your façade’s design that make your building look powerful.
2. Gather your materials. You are going to create a collage. A collage is an artwork made up of different pieces of paper and other materials, glued, sewn, attached, or layered to a sheet of paper to create an image. You will use the available materials to layer, or stack materials one on top of the other, to create the façade of your buildings! What details are you including in your building’s façade? What about the landscape around your building? Where is your building located?
   a. OPTIONAL: Rodney McMillian sewed his work of art The White House Painting. If you have a sewing kit available in the house, you can experiment with embroidery and sewing as
well! Use the needle and thread to sew designs and details into the façade of your building. Check out the video below of McMillian’s exhibition Against a Civic Death, for close-up details of this work of art. Use caution when using sewing materials. Sewing needles are sharp and can hurt you. Ask an adult for help.

3. Write about your powerful architecture. How did you decide what the façade of your building would look like? What makes it powerful? Sometimes what is happening INSIDE of a building also gives it power. What happens inside your building?

OTHER RESOURCES:

- To find out more about McMillian and his artwork, follow these links:
  - The Contemporary Austin: https://thecontemporaryaustin.org/exhibitions/rodney-mcmillian/
  - Here is a video of his exhibition, Against a Civic Death, where you can see The White House Painting up close (02:36): https://vimeo.com/265060791
  - Check out more of his artwork here, Vielmetter Los Angeles: https://vielmetter.com/artists/rodney-mcmillian
  - Watch this video of McMillian talking about his process and some of the themes in his work: https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/rodney-mcmillian-on-home-and-history/ (duration: 03:44)

- This is a gallery of the façades of different government buildings: https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/government-building-facade?mediatype=photography&page=2&phrase=government%20building%20facade&sort=mostpopular
  - How are these buildings similar to and different from one another? How do they compare to your idea of powerful architecture?

- McMillian has featured Shirley Chisholm, the first African American Congresswoman and first woman and African American to seek the nomination for president of the United States from the Democratic party, prominently in his artwork. During his exhibition, Against a Civic Death, at The Contemporary Austin, McMillian filled the gallery with audio of Chisholm’s voice from a speech in 1972.
  - Listen to this historic speech here: https://speakola.com/political/shirley-chisholm-ucla-campaign-1972
  - Learn more about Chisholm here: https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/shirley-chisholm
  - Why would McMillian feature this Chisholm speech in his artwork? What is Chisholm saying in her speech that McMillian thinks is important for us to hear over 40 years later?
What symbols represent power to you? How do you know a building is powerful? How will you design your own powerful façade?

**LOOK AND DESCRIBE:** Take some time to jot down your ideas.

| We are surrounded by symbols in our everyday life. | 1.  
| List 3–5 symbols with a drawing of what they look like. | 2.  
|                                                   | 3.  
|                                                   | 4.  
|                                                   | 5.  

| We have symbols that represent bigger ideas as well. | 1.  
| List 3–5 symbols that represent the United States of America. | 2.  
| 3.  
| 4.  
| 5.  

| Buildings can be symbols, too! The White House is a symbol. | 1.  
| List 3–5 things the White House represents. | 2.  
| 3.  
| 4.  
| 5.  

| What does it mean to have power? | 1.  
| List 3–5 ideas. | 2.  
| 3.  
| 4.  
| 5.  

| Why would an artist choose to call a work of art a painting even if there is no paint in the work of art? | 1.  
| List 3–5 reasons. | 2.  
| 3.  
| 4.  
| 5.  

| Why would McMillian decide to use a material | 1.  

The Contemporary Austin
like fabric to depict a powerful building like the White House?

List 3–5 reasons.

2.
3.
4.
5.

**MAKE AND DO:** Take some time to sketch or take notes before you start working. Begin with a sketch of the design of your building.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of the features in your façade design</th>
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**WRITE ABOUT WHAT YOU MADE:** How did you decide what the façade of your building would look like? What makes it powerful? Sometimes what is happening INSIDE of a building also gives it power. What happens inside your building?