

Self-Guided Tour

Artist as Storyteller

How do artists tell stories? Consider how contemporary artists convey compelling narratives through a range of media using this self-guided tour to guide your looking. Developed by ICA Education staff in collaboration with volunteer Tour Guides, this activity can be completed alone or with a small group. Questions are designed to encourage closer looking, critical thinking, and conversation. Please remember to view the artworks from a safe distance.



Nina Chanel Abney, 2019

Location: first floor, Sandra and Gerald Fineberg Art Wall
On view through January 3, 2021

- What do you first notice? Consider the scale, colors, forms and shapes, materials you recognize, figures, and the setting. Try viewing the work from closer up or further away, or from a different place in the lobby. What else do you notice from this new position?
- What is happening here? What is the story? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Nina Chanel Abney intentionally uses imagery and symbols that hold multiple meanings so that viewers can create their own stories and conclusions about the work. What symbols or images can you identify that have multiple meanings? How does the overall narrative change when you consider one of these alternative meanings?
- If you could ask the artist Nina Chanel Abney one question about this work, what would you want to know? How do you think she might answer your question?

Nina Chanel Abney, installation view, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2019. Courtesy of Nina Chanel Abney Studio. Photo by Charles Mayer Photography. © Nina Chanel Abney



Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2009

Mixed media

Location: *Beyond Infinity: Contemporary Art after Kusama*, Fourth floor, Kim and Jim Pallotta Gallery
On view through February 7, 2021

- Take a visual inventory, noting your initial observations. Consider scale, colors, shapes, and recognizable materials or objects.
- Many of Nick Cave's Soundsuits are worn for performances and some, like this one, are meant to be static sculptures. Imagine you were wearing this Soundsuit. In what context might you wear it? How do you think it would feel to wear this Soundsuit? How would the ways you move your body change?
- In reflecting on the element of sound with these works, Cave has said that it makes him think about protests and how during protests "in order to be heard, you have to speak louder." What kind of "sound" or statement would someone make while wearing this work? What might you be able to tell or not tell about a person wearing this Soundsuit?
- Nick Cave's first Soundsuit was created in response to police violence against Rodney King in 1991. Cave created the first and many subsequent Soundsuits (he's made over 500) as a "second skin" or armor-like protection. Knowing this, what narrative do you believe Nick Cave is telling with this work?

Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2009. Mixed media, 97 × 26 × 20 inches (246.4 × 66 × 50.8 cm). Gift of Steve Corbin and Dan Maddalena. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo by James Prinz Photography. © Nick Cave



Tschabalala Self, *Lite*, 2018

Acrylic, Flashe, milk paint, gum, and fabric on canvas

Location: *Tschabalala Self: Out of Body*, Fourth floor, Fotene Demoulas Gallery

On view through September 7, 2020

- What do you first notice? Consider the scale, colors, forms and shapes, materials you recognize, figures, and the setting.
- Describe what is happening in this scene. Where do you think these characters are located? What do you think they are doing? What do you think is the relationship between them?
- This painting is part of a series of works Tschabalala Self made about the bodega or neighborhood corner store in Harlem, New York (where she grew up). Additionally, Self describes the figures in her works as avatars of people she may encounter in her everyday life. Knowing this, how does it change or add to the story you imagine being told?
- Tschabalala Self's style of painting involves sewing textiles onto the canvas. How does this technique impact the narrative?

Tschabalala Self, *Lite*, 2018. Acrylic, flashe, milk paint, gum, and fabric on canvas, 96 × 84 inches (243.8 × 213.4 cm). Acquired through the generosity of the Acquisitions Circle, Tristin and Martin Mannion, Patrick Planeta and Santiago Varela, Rob Larsen, and anonymous donors. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London. © Tschabalala Self

Sterling Ruby, *FIGURES. PILE. (6691)*, 2018

Fabric, yarn, and fiberfill

Location: Sterling Ruby, Fourth Floor, Bridgitt and Bruce Evans and Karen and Brian Conway Galleries

On view through October 12, 2020



- Take a few moments to slowly consider the work in full from various positions within the gallery. What do you notice? Consider the scale, colors, shapes, and materials.
- What might the narrative be? What do you see that informs your interpretation?
- At the ICA *FIGURES. PILE. (6691)* is part of an installation with two other artworks (*DOUBLE VAMPIRE 14* and *DOUBLE CANDLE (6992)*) arranged by the artist himself. All three artworks use the same American flag pattern fabric. How do these three works relate to one another? How does the artist's choice of fabric pattern impact how we interpret the works? How do these works compare to other works by Sterling Ruby on view in this exhibition?

Installation view, *Sterling Ruby*, Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2020. Courtesy Sterling Ruby Studio, Los Angeles. Photo by Mel Taing. © Sterling Ruby

As you explore the rest of the ICA's galleries today, consider the theme of Artist as Storyteller and select other artworks that you would include under this theme. What story do you think the artist is telling? What other questions might you ask yourself or those visiting with you?