

Symbols and Social Issues in Artwork



A C T I V I T Y S H E E T

Activity Sheet: Middle/High School



The work of Selma Bortner addresses social issues, such as domestic violence and war. She also addressed themes of identity, body image, and self-esteem. Look at the work, *Aida and The Mirror*, 1992, shown above. What is going on in this work? Write a description of the work here: _____

One of the important areas of this work is the woman holding the mirror. What statement is Bortner making with this symbolism? _____

Why do you think Bortner included animals in her image? What importance could they have? Explain your answer. _____

What do you think is the overall message with this work? _____

This work also can also apply to contemporary society, how it can address the way society places value on being beautiful. How do we see age and beauty discrimination in society today? What messages does mass media and advertising place as the ideal of female and male beauty? These messages can affect young viewers' confidence and self-esteem. How do you feel about these messages? (Use other side....)

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Explore the Aida Series:

Look at the other work in the *Aida Series*, which includes *Aida and the Serpent*, 1988 (seen below), and *Aida, Queen of the Jungle*, 1990. This series of allegorical prints were created in response to Bortner's struggle with and survival of breast cancer. Bortner is using symbolism to tell her story. Look at the artwork below and discuss the similarities and differences with *Aida and the Mirror*.



Compare + Contrast Activity:

Compare and contrast Bortner's *Aida and the Mirror* with Edouard Manet's *Olympia*, 1863-1865, in the collection of the Musee d'Orsay, Paris, France.

Visit the website: www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/manet/olympia/ to see the image.

Visit the website: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock> to learn more about the controversy surrounding the artwork.

The National Art Standards addressed in this activity are: Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes; Content Standard 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions; Content Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas; **The Pennsylvania Arts and Humanities Standards addressed in this activity are:** 9.1 Production, Performance and Exhibition; 9.3 Critical Response;