



# Postmodernism: A video programme

## Two periods in your classroom

### Grades 11 and 12

Visual Arts, Media Studies, Social Studies

### Programme description

During two classroom periods, students encounter video artworks from Oakville Galleries' permanent collection and discuss them with one of our animators. The screening of five video works by prominent contemporary Canadian artists is the entry point for analyzing the ideas, themes, techniques, and historical and social contexts that characterized early video art. Students consider the link between video and the concept of postmodernism (its principles and its strategies). They also discuss how video art relates to pop culture phenomena such as YouTube and reality television.

### Learning goals

This programme is designed to assist Grade 11 and 12 teachers and students in their exploration of postmodernism and related contemporary art practices. Through this programme, students learn to understand and engage with art being made today by discovering current practices and debating ideas while developing the necessary vocabulary and contextual background.

### Art resources

Lisa Steele, *Birthday Suit – with scars and defects*, 1974, 13:00 min.

- An example of an artist using the directness of video to explore the shaping of personal identity and subjectivity.
- Key concepts: statements of identity, gender and social politics, voyeurism and spectacle.

Colin Campbell, *True False*, 1972, 9:00 min.

- A work that reveals the difficulty of telling the truth, that explores the use of fiction and confession in front of the camera.
- Key concepts: subjectivity and representation, place of the spectator.

Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, *Nunaqpa (Going Inland)*, 1991, 58:15 min., Inuktitut with English subtitles

- An example of an Inuit community that rejected mainstream television (from the south) and created their own productions, using video technology. In this work, they reinvent and preserve the endangered verbal traditions that threaten to be overtaken by more commercial and urban cultures.

- Key concepts: representation of difference, community-based art practices, tradition and technology.

General Idea, *Shut the Fuck Up*, 1985, 14:00 min.

- A critique of the stereotype of an artist created by mass media, presented as a spoof television segment that incorporates real documentary footage with excerpts from famous TV shows and films.
- Key concepts: deconstructing culture, appropriation, juxtaposition.

Vera Frenkel, *This Is Your Messiah Speaking*, 1991, 9:50 min.

- A hybrid text and image work that ironically manipulates techniques borrowed from advertising media.
- Key concepts: reconstructing social spaces, surveillance, interaction of text and image.

Donna James, *Maigre Dog*, 1990, 7:50 min.

- A depiction and celebration of Jamaican women's traditions and their vernacular language through the documentation of casual discussions in a kitchen.
- Key concepts: representation of difference, community-based art practices, tradition and technology.

### Curriculum links

Visual Arts, Media Studies, Social Studies

### Critical Questions

- What technology and techniques were used to make this video?
- When was this video created? Does it seem dated? Is it still relevant?
- How does the setting of the video affect your response?
- Who is the subject in this video? Consider their identity in relation to gender, race, age, etc.
- Who controls the camera?