**SecondHand News: Using the Headlines to make Art: Fred Tomaselli**

**Empire State Creates: Teaching Artist-Led Activities for Everyone**

**Project Title:** Current Events: Fred Tomaselli  
**Age(s):** HS Teachers

**Time:** 15-20 minute read (2 class periods)  
**Arts Discipline:** Visual Arts

### ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

**Goal(s):**
- Learn and Use Visual Thinking Strategies with contemporary art
- Learn how to use contemporary art to spur conversation in other subject areas
- To learn more about Fred Tomaselli
- Learn to make a Fred Tomaselli inspired artwork

**Materials:**


*Photo of Fred Tomaselli*

Newspapers with headlines and photographs

Paint

Color Photocopier if available

Ruler

Painter's tape

Paintbrush or brushes
Sharpie Marker
Paper of any quality for the artwork support
White gel pens
Glue stick or double sided tape
Scissors
Photoshop to manipulate images (Media Arts)

New Word(s)

Support: any material that an artwork is made/painted on
Context: The circumstances that for the setting for an event, statement, or idea in terms that can be understood
Trippy: Cool, groovy, amazing. From the 1960’s drug culture, of or relating to like a psychedelic drug trip
Cosmic: Relating to the Universe or cosmos especially as distinct from the earth.

NYS Arts Learning Standards (select no more than 2 - student audiences only)

STEPS

Step #1  INTRODUCTION: Fred Tomaselli was born in 1956 in Santa Monica, California. He grew up loving nature and building things. Tomaselli supported himself through the Painting and Drawing Program at Cal State Fullerton, working as a car mechanic specializing in electrical systems. Through his work as a mechanic, he learned to be methodical, and his art shows it. Tomaselli uses meticulously painted elements, over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, collaged newspapers, and leaves preserved in a layer of resin. He carefully and quietly chooses to criticize the world in which we live. He says that his work has been influenced by growing up
near Disneyland and by theme-park culture. His work has always had a trippy and cosmic edge. He began to transform the New York Times' front page in 2005 using gouache and collage. He scans parts of images and texts from the newspaper to create digital files that he prints on archival papers to transform through gouache paint and collage. Though he is still primarily concerned with picture-making, he includes just enough text and headlines to provide a context for the work.

On Monday, March 16, 2020 (the title of the artwork), the headline of the paper reads "FED CUTS RATES TO NEAR ZERO; VIRUS TOLLS SOARS." Tomaselli has painted a cosmic rainbow-colored archway with a solitary figure, and a rolling suitcase collaged walking into the unknown at Grand Central Terminal. The subtitle of the article is "TOO QUIET? A subdued Grand Central Terminal last week as gloom settled on a nation suddenly in the grip of a pandemic. Page A4". Tomaselli was doing work about the pandemic as he lived through it, "toggling back and forth between the reality of the crisis and the result—between the headline and the art-making process." Of this artwork, he says;

"This picture is the first one I did [in quarantine]. This woman is walking into the unknown. I wanted to make her stark and make her isolated, but I also wanted to talk about hope."

Using the actual headlines and subtitles in the newspaper, Tomaselli paints and collages elements that express the strange and somewhat otherworldly emptiness of the pandemic, particularly in a city that is always in motion. The emptiness and silence of the image describe the state of the moment poignantly.

**Step #2**

- Project the image using a SmartBoard or Projector for the class. Ask students to take a few minutes to look at the photo and write down their thoughts and reflections.

  Ask them to answer the following questions with the artwork in mind:
○ What’s going on in this picture?
○ What do you see that makes you say that?
○ What more can you find?

● In the classroom, do this process yourself while your students are writing their own.
● Ask students to share their thoughts pointing to particular details in the artwork that support their observations.

**Step #3**

- Using your notes, find newspaper headlines and photos that grab your attention.

Here are some questions to get you started:

○ How does the artist convey a feeling about the subject or issue that he or she is dealing with in the artwork? In the case of Fred Tomaselli, how does he convey that Grand Central is “TOO QUIET”?

○ Does he choose certain artistic devices (line, shape, texture, form, space, color, or value) to convey this message?

○ Is his message effective?

○ How would you “say” (make this statement) differently?

○ Look at how artists use newspapers to create art and reconstruct newspapers’ meanings. We can then make an artwork that plays with the news to change it or challenge it or use it to tell their version of the story.

When kids learn to recognize false information or misinformation, they learn to think critically about who benefits from the account of a story, their motivation, and how they might use and share it differently.

○ What makes an image express a particular moment?

○ How does Tomaselli’s artwork communicate the changes that the pandemic has brought on a city?

○ How are you touched personally by current events?
- How would you pull aspects of yourself into a project about current events?
- How would you visually interpret current events?

- When you have your image, make a few photocopies of the newspaper pages.
- Make some notes on how you might use that newspaper to create a painting or painted collage.
- Rough Draft: Using a photocopy, try out your idea. Cut it up into pieces that you think will work. Don’t worry if you do not like what you come up with. You can rearrange the pieces until you get something you like or collage or add drawn lines for you to paint. And, you still have more copies and the original.
- Try to make a strong image and a grouping of words that makes sense to you and says what you want it to say.

### Step #4

- When you are happy with your artwork, make the final artwork out of your newspaper.
- What are you trying to say in your painting or collage?

**Activity Modifications (as needed):**

*If you do not have a photocopier, cut up the original newspaper and arrange the elements of your artwork before you glue things in place.*