SecondHand News: Using the Headlines to make Art: Elissa Levy

Empire State Creates: Teaching Artist-Led Activities for Everyone

**Project Title:** Power Structures: Elissa Levy  
**Age(s):** HS Teachers

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

### ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

**Goal(s):**
- To make a sculptural work inspired by *Power Structures*: Elissa Levy
- Learn and Use Visual Thinking Strategies with contemporary art
- Learn how to use contemporary art to spur conversation in other subject areas or topics other than visual art
- Learn about Elissa Levy
- Learn to make an Elissa Levy inspired artwork and learn how the newspaper can become a sculpture

**Materials:**
- Projected Image of [Elissa Levy’s sculpture Power Structures](#)
- Newspapers
- Cardboard or foam board to make sculptural support
- Glue
- Pencil and notebook/notepaper
- Scissors
**New Word(s)**

**Found Object:** A found object is a natural or man-made object or fragment of an object, that is found (or sometimes bought) by an artist and kept because it is interesting to the artist or it has an intrinsic value beyond a purchase price. It is interesting to look at, it conveys meaning, it makes the artwork “work” for the artist.

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

---

### STEPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step #1</th>
<th>• <strong>INTRODUCTION:</strong> Elissa Levy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Levy was born in New York and received her B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design. She is interested in how newspapers mirror people, reflecting people's events, fears, and hopes. She considers the newspaper a found object—an artifact to edit and transform. She said in an email that she likes to think about making something from nothing—something that she wants people to remember that is possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think of the newspaper as an object, sometimes a found object, and I think about all of this work as sculpture even when it's flat. When looking at the newspaper I focused on images that were about power--either having or losing power. I thought that both things were celebrated in the newspaper and that was a reflection of the reader/viewer. That's what we want to see. If it's &quot;victory&quot; we feel what's possible and if it's loss, we feel that it connects to our losses or fear of loss. And I especially am attracted to images that touch upon both. The gloved police hands -- I'm pretty sure they were at a funeral for a fellow officer. There's an element of theater to anything that the press is documenting and shame and glory are on display for entertainment.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Levy transforms newspapers "to deconstruct the icons of power and loss" by altering their shape and context. In *Hands Up*, Levy cuts up a newspaper image of white-gloved police officers sitting in a ceremony and rearranges them bodiless—just gloved hands. The hands seem to float up from the page, almost seeking surrender. Does she flip the power of a police officer, who is usually the one to demand that someone put their "hands up forcefully"? In Levy’s work, the officers seem to be in the position of surrendering. They are both powerful and vulnerable.

**Step #2**

The image can be projected using a SmartBoard or Projector for the class. If a color printer is available, you can print out individual copies of the artwork. But think before you print; if you don’t need to it is kinder to the environment.

Visual Thinking Exercise:

Ask students to take a few minutes to look at the image 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 supports their observations.

**Step #3**

- Using your notes find a photo that grabs your attention.
- In this project inspired by Elissa Levy’s work, focus on the newspaper image rather than the words in your artwork.
- 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 sculpture. Even make some sketches or folded paper 3-D sculptures.
- **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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step #4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - When you are happy with your sculpture, make it out of your newspaper.  
- What are you trying to say in your sculpture?  
- Do you think that someone looking at your artwork will understand your meaning?  
- How can you show how the newspaper tells just one part of the story in your artwork? |

**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.*