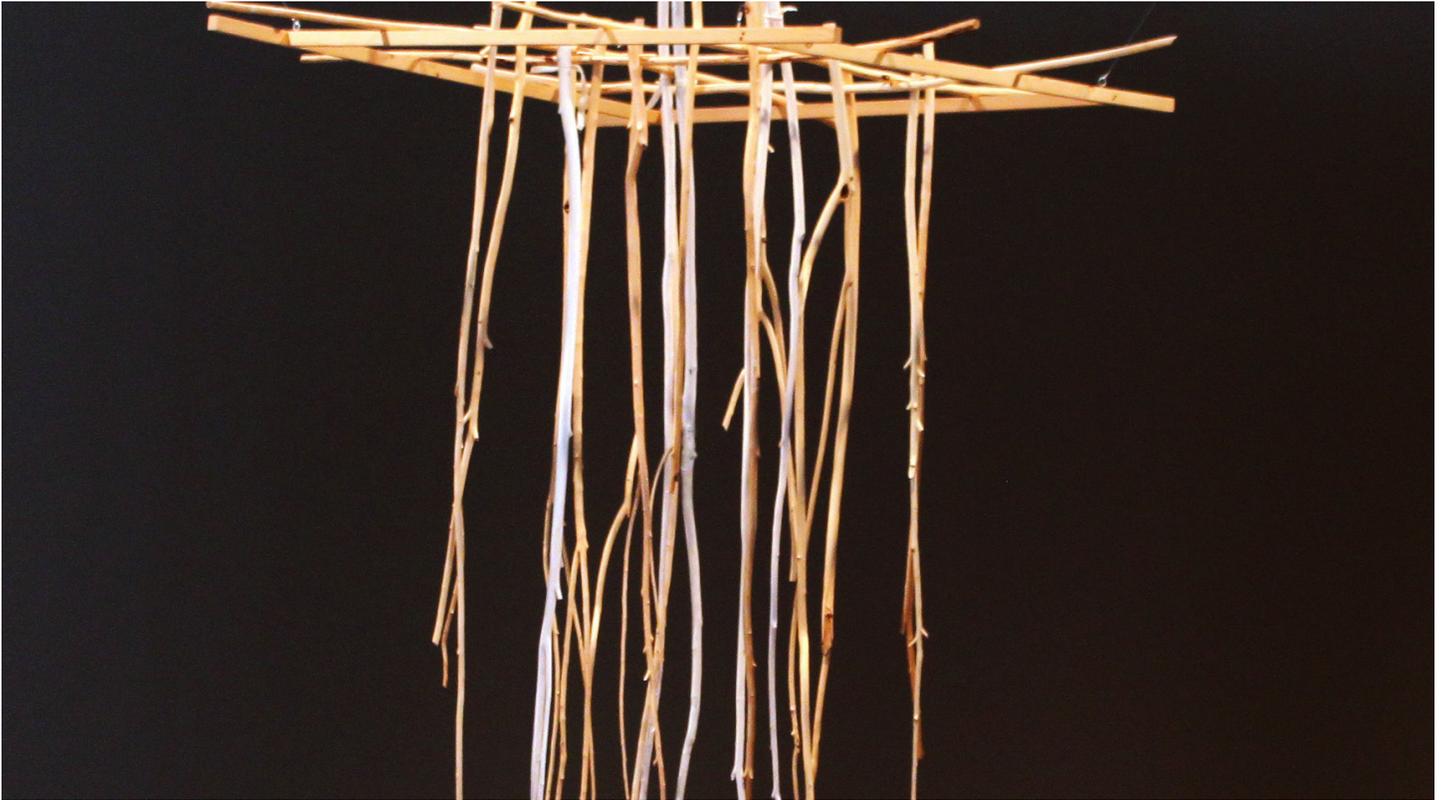


TRUMAN LOWE: MATERIALS WITH MEANING



Truman Lowe, *Thunder*, 2010 (detail)

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Students will examine *Thunder* by Truman Lowe. Through guided discussion, students will analyze how Lowe's use of willow reflects his Ho-Chunk heritage and relationship to land. Students will also analyze how Lowe's sculpture helps the viewer understand it as representation of a thunderstorm.

Students will then apply these concepts by creating an abstract sculptural composition using materials meaningful to their lived environments. Rather than imitating Lowe's materials or cultural symbols, students will focus on personal materials and subject matter.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Identify how material choice contributes to the meaning of an artwork
- Analyze how cultural identity and environment can influence artistic practice
- Communicate ideas through abstract sculptural form
- Reflect on how materials from their own environments carry meaning

MATERIALS LIST

- Image of *Thunder* by Truman Lowe (digital or printed)
- Student-collected materials from their own environment (recommended)
- Assorted materials such as cardboard, wire, string, paper strips, fabric scraps, recycled materials, and wood pieces
- Optional: Computers for researching images



Learn more about
Truman Lowe's
Thunder

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SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- View the sculpture without knowing the title. What does it remind you of? Why?
- View the sculpture with knowledge of the title. How does this change your interpretation?
- How can material choice affect the meaning of an artwork?
- How did Lowe visually communicate a thunderstorm?

ACTIVITY STEPS

1. Facilitate a class discussion using the guiding questions and background information about the artist. Explain that Lowe was born in Black River Falls on the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin Reservation. Emphasize that his materials are meaningful because they are rooted in his lived experience and community traditions. He was influenced by his parents who made split-ash baskets that they sold at roadside stands to tourists. His sculptures combine traditional Ho-Chunk materials with contemporary intuitive practices.
2. Explain that students will be creating their own abstract sculptures, much like how *Thunder* is an abstract sculpture of a thunderstorm. Clarify that students will not replicate Lowe's materials or cultural symbols, but instead explore how their own materials and subject matter carry personal meaning.
3. Invite students to reflect on materials that hold personal, familial, or community meaning. Students will make a list of 3–5 materials that are personally or conceptually significant, emphasizing intentionality in material selection.
4. Once students have identified potential materials, ask them to consider the conceptual direction of their work. Students will choose a subject matter that feels significant to them and break it down into simple shapes and forms. They may consider memories, traditions, heritage, and geographical location as sources of inspiration.
5. To conclude, students will construct an abstract sculpture that expresses their chosen subject matter using materials that represent personal significance. Invite students to write a brief artist statement explaining how they selected their materials and subject matter and the choices they made while designing the sculpture.

REFLECT AND CONNECT

- How did your choice of materials help convey meaning?
- What influenced your material choices or design?
- How is your sculpture similar to Lowe's style? How is it different?
- What did you learn about expressing ideas or experiences through abstract forms instead of literal images?



Truman Lowe, *Thunder*, 2010