

Alex
Da Corte
Ear Worm

Over the last few decades, Alex Da Corte has emerged as one of the most important and innovative artists of his generation. His work is a blend of painting, sculpture, and installation, often exploring themes of identity, memory, and the human condition. In this exhibition, Da Corte presents a series of new works that challenge our perceptions of space and time, inviting us to look at the world through a different lens.

Educator Resource

Alex Da Corte Ear Worm

September 8, 2024 — February 23, 2025



Exhibition Overview

Ear Worm presents an immersive environment envisioned by Venezuelan-American artist Alex Da Corte. Vivid and surrealist, Da Corte's work draws from areas of pop culture, cinema, children's literature, and art and design history. His work feels familiar, yet strange. In his video art, popular symbols are distorted, shrunken, and softened, inviting us to see things we recognize in new ways and rethink their importance to us. The title Ear Worm references the phenomenon of having a song stuck in your head. In other words, Da Corte's work suggests how media outlets influence consumer culture and define how we perceive the world, identity, and our own desires.

For the Ontario Curriculum, Alex Da Corte's work can be applied to explore the impact and influence of mass media and popular culture. This Educational Resource Guide appropriately considers the Ontario Curriculum for Grades 6—12 Visual Art and Grade 11—12 Media Studies.

Key Terms

Ear Worm a song or melody that keeps repeating in one's mind

Surrealism the principles, ideals, or practice of producing fantastic or incongruous imagery or effects in art, literature, film, or theater by means of unnatural or irrational juxtapositions and combinations. Or, an arts movement that challenges traditional notions of reality through strange imagery.

Pop Culture including references to television, music, films, and consumer products

Nostalgia a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition

Materiality the physical substances that artists use

Consumerism economic theory relating to the purchase and use/non-use of products

Immersive providing, involving, or characterized by deep absorption or interest in something (such as an activity or a real or artificial environment)

Absurdity the quality or state of being ridiculous or wildly unreasonable

Elementary Curriculum (K-8)

What sorts of non-traditional art materials (things that you might not find in your art classroom, such as paint) can you identify? Why do you think the artist chose these materials? How do the mediums relate to the themes of the artworks?

What themes and connections can you come up with having seen Ear Worm? What connections is the artist making between the objects, characters, and visuals presented in the exhibition? What familiar objects, characters, and visuals can you identify?

How does the exhibition engage the senses beyond sight? Are sound, texture, or scent a significant part of your experience? How do the installations create a sense of immersion? Are you physically or emotionally enveloped by the work?

Secondary Curriculum (9-12)

Some of the artworks in this exhibition are visually strange or absurd. Can you identify instances of surrealism in the works? Explain Alex Da Corte's application of surrealism in his works.

What does Alex Da Corte's Ear Worm suggest about consumerism and media influences?

What is the relationship between the materials used and the thematic content? How do objects such as children's literature, inflatable figures, or toys function within the narrative of the exhibition? What role does materiality play in representing the exhibition's theme?

How do you interpret the use of scale, proportion, or perspective in creating a sense of disorientation or altered reality?

How does Da Corte's approach to storytelling challenge conventional narrative structures? Is the narrative linear, cyclical, or nonlinear?

Do you think the exhibition offers any critique of contemporary culture or society?

If so, what aspects of modern life, consumerism, or technology might Da Corte be commenting on?





Activity | Grades 9-12

Alex Da Corte subverts and distorts references from popular culture and media to challenge the ways in which we perceive the world, personal identity, and our own desires. His work *Mouse Museum (Van Gogh Ear), 2024* is a large-scale installation exhibiting curated objects from popular culture that explores themes of consumerism, nostalgia, identity, and the commodification of culture. This activity will encourage students to think about their own memories and relationship to material products.

Media Critique through Object Study

Explore how media representations such as advertising, film, or social media manipulates or informs the meanings of everyday objects. Participants will create their own advertisements or promotional material for the objects they've selected in their "personal museum," reflecting how media often uses objects to influence cultural desires.

Activity Instructions

Step 1: Select an object for your "personal museum" similar to Alex Da Corte's *Mouse Museum (2024)*

Step 2: Consider how an object in your personal museum might be marketed or represented in a commercial. For instance, a toy could be sold as a symbol of happiness, or a vintage item might be marketed as a rare collectible

Step 3: Choose one object from your personal museum and create an ad or promotional material for it. This could be presented as a poster, a commercial script, or a social media post designed to make the object seem more valuable, desirable, or significant

Step 4: Incorporate visual elements such as text, slogans, or imagery that you think would appeal to the emotions of consumers. Use your understanding of how brands manipulate culture to construct a narrative around your object. Encourage participants to explore various mediums

Ontario Curriculum Connections

Language Studies

Grade 2 – 4

A2. Digital Media Literacy
A3. Applications, Connections, and Contributions
D3. Publishing, Presenting, and Reflecting

Visual Art

Grade 6 – 8

D1. Creating and Presenting
D2. Reflecting, Responding and Analysing
D3. Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

Grade 9 – 12

A. Creating and Presenting
B. Reflecting, Responding and Analysing
C. Foundations

Media Studies

Grades 11 – 12

A1. Application: Interrelationships between Popular Culture and Consumerism
A2. Inquiry: Investigating Construction of Meaning in Media Representation



Discussion

The themes in this exhibition concern consumerism and media, what other themes did you explore?

How does media shape our perception of objects? Are they made to seem more important or meaningful than they are?

How might the way objects are advertised influence our desires or identities?

How did this exercise change your view of your chosen objects?

Learning Objectives

This guide provides students the themes presented in Alex Da Corte's *Mouse Museum* (2024) through hands-on activities, critical reflection, and group collaboration.

The activity allows for personal engagement with the objects that surround ourselves, while encouraging participants to think about the broader implications of consumer culture and memory.



Image Credits

Alex Da Corte, *Rubber Pencil Devil*, 2018. *Ear Worm*, installation view, MOCA Toronto, 2024. © Alex Da Corte. Photo: LF Documentation.

Alex Da Corte, *A Snake*, 2024. *Ear Worm*, installation view, MOCA Toronto, 2024. Photo: LF Documentation. © Alex Da Corte.

Alex Da Corte, *Mouse Museum (Van Gogh Ear)* 2024. *Ear Worm*, installation view, MOCA Toronto, 2024. © Alex Da Corte. Photo: LF Documentation.

Resources

[Alex Da Corte, *Puppet Master*, New York Times.](#)

[Alex Da Corte: *Mouse Museum*.](#)

[Alex Da Corte: 57 Varieties Art21 "Extended Play"](#)

["Rubber Pencil Devil: Pedagogical Look Into Ever-changing Element of Art, World," The Oberlin Review](#)