

# OPEN STUDIO ANYWHERE



## The Art of Kara Walker



Use this kit to learn about Kara Walker, her story, and her artwork. Inside you'll find prompts, projects, and more to help you create your own art!

To learn more about Artists Creating Together, visit our website at [artistscreatingtogether.org](http://artistscreatingtogether.org)

# Who is Kara Walker?

Kara Walker is a contemporary American artist. Born in California in 1969, she now lives in New York City. In addition to making art, she is also a professor.

Kara Walker's work focuses on people and history. She is a multi-media artist: she uses paint, paper, film-making, print-making, sculpture, and more to create art.



"There's no diploma in the world that declares you as an artist - it's not like becoming a doctor. You can declare yourself as an artist then figure out how to be an artist."

[Watch Kara Walker talk about her life as an artist!](#)

Art Vocabulary:

Contemporary means the art of today - Kara Walker is alive and making art now, just like we are!

Multi-Media means using more than one type of art material to make artwork. If you combine paint and marker on a page, that is a multi-media artwork!





# Looking at Kara Walker's Art

A big part of understanding artwork is just looking at it! It may sound silly, but art historians spend a long time learning how to look at art. Let's practice looking!



What do you see in this artwork?

What feeling does this artwork give you?

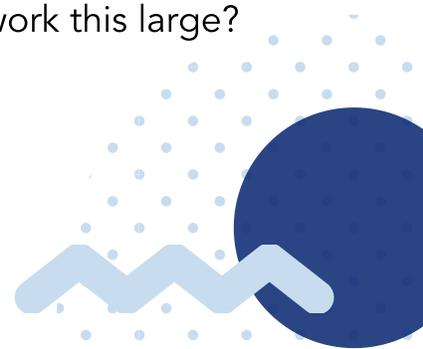
How do you think this artwork was created?



Often the scenes she creates take up entire walls - sometimes even entire rooms!

Have you ever made artwork that takes up an entire wall?

How much time do you think it takes to create artwork this large?



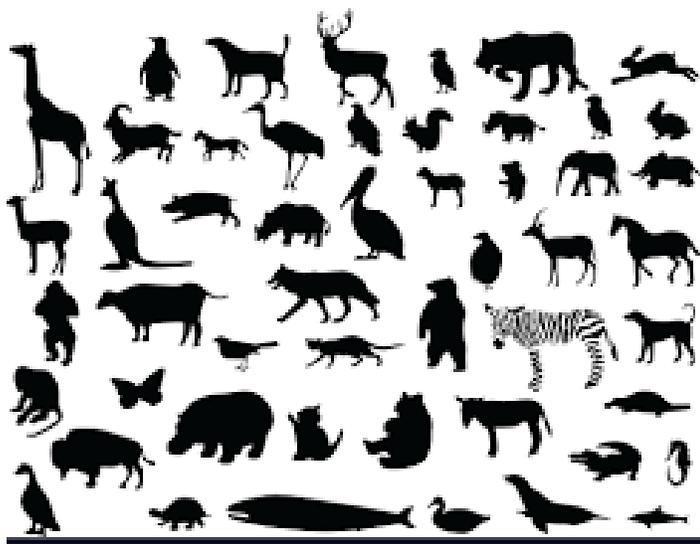


# Silhouettes

Have you heard the word silhouette before?

It is pronounced sill-o-et.

Maybe you have seen one! A silhouette is the image of a person (or animal, or object, or whole scene) represented as a solid shape of a single color, with it's edges matching the outline of the subject. A little confusing? Let us show you some examples !



Can you still tell what these images are?

Did you notice there is no color and no detail? There are no eyes or mouths drawn on those faces! Instead we rely on the edges, or the outlines of these images to show us what they are.





# Creating a Silhouette

Much of Kara Walker's artwork uses silhouettes!

Here are a two different ways you can create a silhouette:

## Version 1: Play with Shadows

For this version you will need a helping hand - it could be a parent, a sibling, or anyone that lives with you!

### Tools:

Piece of white paper

Pen or pencil

Tape

Scissors

A light source, like a flashlight or desk lamp

### Steps:

1. Tape your paper to the wall
2. Have your helper sit sideways on a stool or chair in front of the wall with the paper taped onto it
3. Shine your light towards them, so that their profile creates a shadow on the paper
4. Trace the outline of their shadow using your pen or pencil - don't worry about details, remember that we are focusing on outlines!
5. Remove the paper from the wall and cut with scissors following your pencil line
6. Now you have a silhouette! You can trace it onto another color paper if you have some, or color this piece of paper a solid color.  
Remember how Kara Walker's silhouettes look!

## Version 2: Trace What You See

### Tools:

Piece of white paper

Pen or pencil

Tape

Scissors

An object that you have nearby

### Steps:

1. Lay down your piece of paper on a flat surface in front of you
2. Set your object on top of the paper
3. Trace your object using a pen or pencil - don't worry about the details and focus on the outline of the object!
4. Remove your object - now you have a silhouette! You can trace it onto another color paper if you have some, or color this piece of paper a solid color. Remember how Kara Walker's silhouettes look!





# The Emancipation Approximation



Kara Walker often talks about people, history, and social issues through art.

This artwork is part of a series called "The Emancipation Approximation".

Kara Walker gave her work this title to reference a moment in American history. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves who were in Confederate states.

Notice the words: Approximation and Proclamation

Kara Walker choose this name for her work because of how close those two words sound. They may sound very similar, but they mean different things.

## Your Turn:

Try to create two silhouettes using one (or both!) of the methods we talked about on the last page.

The two silhouettes should be different. Two different colors, two different meanings, or maybe both!





# Creating a Scene

We've seen how Kara Walker will make whole scenes with her artwork - sometimes those scenes are so big they take up whole rooms!

Now, you are going to use your silhouette skills to create your own scene!

Things to think about for your scene:

- What is the action happening?
- How many people are in your scene?
- Are there people in your scene - or is it animals or plants? Or all of the above!



Use this space to sketch out what your scene will look like!





# Think about Scale

Art Vocabulary:

Scale means size of an object in relationship to another object.

Your last step when creating a Kara Walker inspired artwork is to think about scale. How big is your artwork going to be? The size of the paper you have might decide for you!

Remember that Kara Walker works on a lot of different scales, sometimes taking over whole rooms - and other times in smaller, framed art works.



There is no wrong size, scale or way to create. So be creative with how you create your scene!

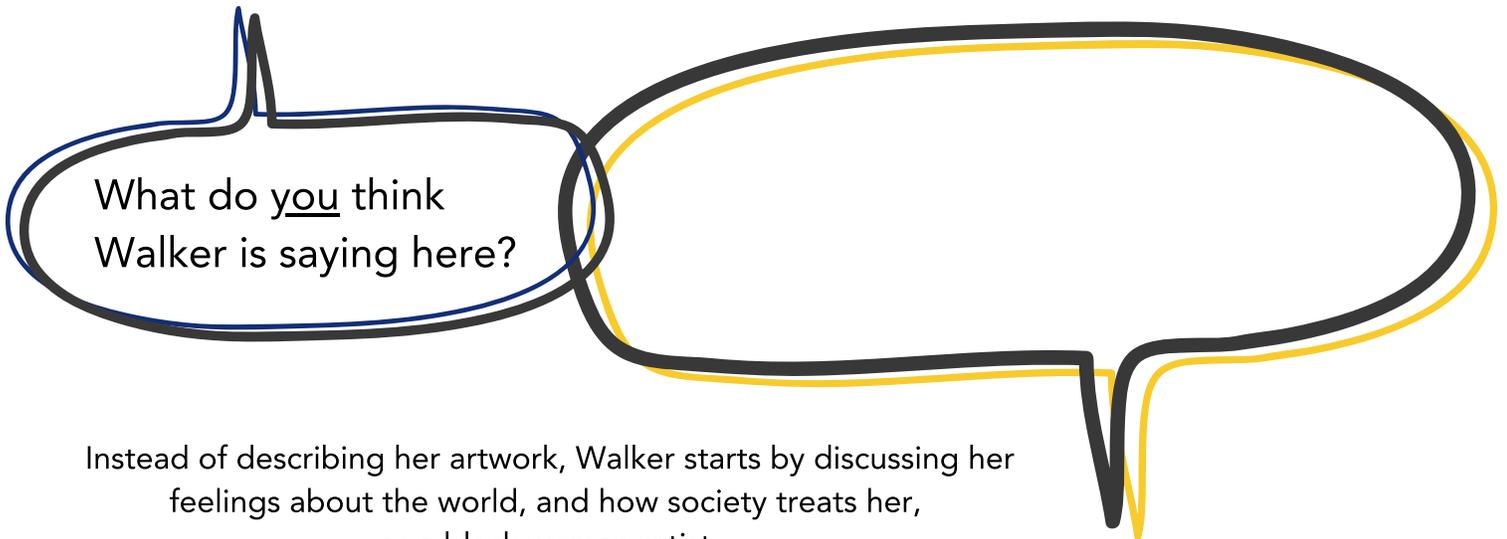




# Final Step: Your Artist Statement

Have you ever tried to write about a work of art you made? Let's look at how Kara Walker writes about her artwork - it might be a little different than you are used to:

"I don't really feel the need to write a statement about a painting show. I know what you all expect from me and I have complied up to a point. But frankly I am tired, tired of standing up, being counted, tired of "having a voice" or worse "being a role model." Tired, true, of being a featured member of my racial group and/or my gender niche."



Instead of describing her artwork, Walker starts by discussing her feelings about the world, and how society treats her, as a black woman artist.

Practice writing your own artist statement below. Think about your identity and your place in the world and how it affects your art:





# Learn more about Kara Walker

<http://www.karawalkerstudio.com/>

<https://www.moma.org/artists/7679>

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/kara-walker/>

<https://art21.org/artist/kara-walker/>

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/walker-kara/>

<https://walkerart.org/collections/artists/kara-walker>

<https://www.artsy.net/artist/kara-walker>

<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/kara-walker-larry-walker/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhByMffG9IA>

