



Artists' Lessons to Thrive! 7.2 Meghan O'Connor: A Unique Blend of Characters

Big Idea: Strength of Character



FIGURE 7.2.1 Meghan O'Connor, *Birds of a Feather Blend Together*, 2010. Woodcut with framing.

Source: Courtesy of the artist; www.curlymeg88.com.

Birds of a feather flock together, in life and in Meghan O'Connor's expressive artworks. Flocks of birds represent safety in numbers. When referencing human nature, the proverb identifies how like-minded individuals prefer each other's companionship. O'Connor regularly incorporates birds as iconic symbols for humanity in her drawings, prints, and mixed media works. While her birds have beautiful, fluffy feathers and intricate details, O'Connor incorporates visual references, including heavy marks and juxtaposition of irregular objects, to signify that something unusual is taking place within the birds' immediate vicinities. Her woodcut *Birds of a Feather Blend Together* (Figure 7.2.1) depicts three birds surrounded by a bright red window frame. The birds, resting on perches, stare directly at the viewer. They serve as physical barriers that prevent onlookers from entering the kitchen, which is normally meant to be an open and welcoming home environment. O'Connor has designed the kitchen as a crowded space filled with seven blenders that bear the brand name Aviary, indicating that they were developed especially for the birds.

While O'Connor's flock symbolizes humanity, her blenders signify sources of power. The artist's large grouping of this seemingly banal household appliance shows their strength in numbers and alludes to a mechanical flock. The blenders have the power to influence human behavior with their electrical charges. Their powerful force has taken over one of the birds, whose core lacks its original organic components. O'Connor explained that the two remaining organic birds recognize the mechanized bird's physical and emotional transformation. Yet, despite their identification of these drastic changes, O'Connor has illustrated hope for humanity by providing the organic birds with a possible way out of the situation. The pair can decide to remain on their perches or take their power back as fully aware,

conscious beings willing to navigate bravely through the scenario O'Connor has presented and escape through the window above the faucet or through the artwork's foreground. O'Connor explained: "They know it will be a difficult path: making a choice that is the best for self, but not necessarily the most convenient or easy choice." Will they provide the blenders with additional power through further self-destructive behaviors? Or will they show that they can control their unhealthy impulses and emotions? As individuals, each bird must determine if the flock provides healthy companionship or if they have indeed joined the wrong flock, as people sometimes fall into the wrong crowd and lose their sense of self. By making the decision to fly away to a better environment, the pair will have demonstrated to themselves that they have strength of character to begin anew.

Essential/Guiding Questions

1. What does strength of character mean to you? Why do people sometimes say that they need to regain their power and inner strength?
2. How has O'Connor presented a power struggle in *Birds of a Feather Blend Together*? Why do you think she has chosen to represent animals and machines instead of people to depict human concerns?

Preparation

Students will discuss the big idea of strength of character and show their understanding of the subject by providing their own examples. They will also discuss the meaning of a metaphor and identify ways to present a metaphor through art.

Daily Learning Targets

I can write a paragraph that explains how O'Connor's *Birds of a Feather Blend Together* correlates with the aesthetic category expressionism.

- I can provide at least two examples to defend my position.
- I can present my response in my journal.

I can create an artwork that depicts the concept strength of character using the media of my choice.

- I can incorporate a metaphor into my design.
- I can show craftsmanship and unity in my creation.

National Core Arts Anchor Standards 2, 4, 9, and 11

www.nationalartsstandards.org!

Quoted artists' statements not listed in the reference section result from personal communications with the author (personal communications, 2014–2018).

Teaching and Learning in Art Education 2nd Ed Cultivating Students' Potential from Pre-K through High School

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