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AIM: To find out about RIBOCA and artist Paweł Althamer. To explore the hallmarks of a cultural era in the context of relationships, to gain experience in the creative process, and develop an understanding of aesthetic values.

AGE GROUP: 9th–12th grades

LESSON DURATION: 40–60 min

WHAT YOU NEED: paper and materials for drawing (if the lesson is online, then a computer with internet connection)

INTER-SUBJECT LINKS: visual art, philosophy

ACTIVITY PLAN

- PART 1:** Introduce students to the Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA), why it was founded, and why a film was made of the second biennial. Afterwards, the students read the film text, watch an excerpt of the film and read the accompanying text about the artist, and the artwork shown in the excerpt.
- PART 2:** The students agree on a method of organising their draftsmen's congress: class-wide, school-wide, or remotely. If the activity is being organised in the class only, then, before the task begins, everyone reflects on their beliefs about aesthetic art: is art aesthetic today; do they like aesthetic art? Once this is done, everyone draws what they want on a piece of paper. When this is organised on a school-wide scale, students are informed in advance of the questions above and asked to submit their works by a certain date. When this is organised online, students photograph their works and send them to the teacher, who combines them in a presentation.
- PART 3:** Arrange the works in a circle, as seen in the film, or, if the task is done remotely, the works can be compiled in a presentation.

Discuss the works as a whole with your students.

Are they aesthetic?

Are there any common themes which appear in the works?

How does the students' joint work match the artist's vision?

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VOCABULARY

Aesthetics – a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of beauty and taste, as well as the philosophy or art.

Roman Forum – the central square in a city, a location for public gatherings, courts and markets.

Joseph Beuys believed that every human being is an artist – every activity that a person performs can become art. By the words "social plasticity", Boiss refers to actions that are not limited to a completed work, but include a person's creative thinking and action.

Performance – an activity of an individual or a group at a specific time and place to create a particular work of art. The action can take place anywhere and for any length of time. A performance art can also be any situation that includes four main elements – time, place, an object of a performance and the relationship between the object of the performance and the audience.

Happening – Art in action. The term was coined in the 1950s to denote public activities that lacked a certain scenario. Art genre that seeks to bridge the gap between the viewer and the artist. The progress of events in happenings depends on the involvement of the audience.

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PAWEŁ ALTHAMER

Draftsmen's Congress has taken place on several occasions and is guided by the desire to build emotional bonds between strangers and to create an environment that fosters empathy and relationships. The essence of this work can be compared to the Roman Forum – an open place for exchange, where discussions are encouraged. Althamer's practice can fit into three groups: works in relation to the institution, those addressing a community, and those associated with the family. The scale of his work goes from discrete and subversive to spectacular gestures, like flying 150 of his Warsaw neighbours in golden suits and a golden jet to Brussels and Mali. He organises social engagements both as an existential and aesthetic ideal, collaborating with marginalised Polish communities, Venetian street workers and Viennese homeless people. His interventions carry the idea that art can emancipate people.

As Pawel Althamer states, "The basic motive of any exhibition is that there is a power in the collective. It's a very deep, traditional knowledge that we can collectively create extra power". From the beginning of his artistic career, Althamer worked in various media, from classic performance techniques, happenings and "action" art to the discipline he founded his education on: sculpture. Today, he continues to teach ceramics workshops for Grupa Nowolipie, a group of patients suffering from multiple sclerosis and other diseases.

On the practice of bringing people together, Pawel Althamer states: "My role is to integrate [...] It's just a job, and it's the basic tradition of the artist – it goes all the way back to the work of the magician and the shaman.", quoting key notions of the German artist Joseph Beuys. Beuys pushed for an expansion of art to achieve what he called a social sculpture, the same ethic at the core Draftsmen's Congress. Art and life are entangled as the act of creating together becomes a social and universal binder. Paweł Althamer is best known for his transformative social projects. His multidisciplinary practice always centers around the notion of a public sphere, and he is referred to in his neighbourhood as the Shaman or the Space Alien (Przybysz z Kosmosu) for his capacity to create shifts in social, political and psychological perceptions.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **Paweł Althamer:**

<https://riboca.digital/en/participants/althamer-pawe%C5%82>

- **Draftsmen's Congress:**

<https://riboca.digital/en/artworks/11>

- Material from **RIBOCA Talks** that can be used for an in-depth understanding of the topic:

<https://www.rigabiennial.com/en/education/riboca-talks/event-imagination>

- **Additional questions** taken from the RIBOCA2 public programme to reflect on the topic:

- How do we foster new aesthetic gestures after the end of a future?

- How can poetics and ethics of care articulate deeper, more meaningful worlds?

- What horizons has utopian thinking for an aesthetic practice of the arts?

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