

Nairy Baghramian

Teaching Resource

2022 Nasher Prize Laureate

About Nairy Baghramian

(Pronounced NYE-ree bahg-ROM-ee-an)

Born in Iran in 1971, Baghramian has lived and worked in Berlin since 1984. Her artwork explores spatial, political and social relationships through language and history. Trained as a dancer, her sculptures can reference the human body. She draws meaning from context and uses materials in unconventional ways.

Success and Failure

"A work of art is measured by its success... perhaps this is where my close relationship with disappointment and its possibilities lies." – Nairy Baghramian

Baghramian's work encourages us to embrace imperfection and incompleteness. She believes that sculpture should have a chance not to fulfill expectations.

- **How do you define success? How do you let the opinions of others impact your beliefs about your own work?**
- **Consider a time that you failed. Did failure allow you to explore a new path?**
- **Do you think all art should be beautiful?**

Materials

- **Imagine a traditional marble sculpture or marble architectural feature. What would it feel like to touch it? Did you imagine running your hand over a smooth, cold surface?**

When choosing marble from a quarry, Baghramian experienced *Phantomschmerz*, a German word meaning phantom pain. She noticed that a quarry was missing large sections of stone, which led her to reflect on what is NOT present as well as what we do see. Her philosophy embraces the imperfections and the cracks in the material.

- **Look at this photo of Baghramian's sculpture, *Knee and Elbow*. How did she change the surface? How might this change the way marble would feel?**



Nairy Baghramian. Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. Photo: Tucker Bair / Clark Art Institute.



Nairy Baghramian, *Knee and Elbow*, 2020. Marble, stainless steel. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. Photo: Thomas Clark.



Nairy Baghramian, *Knee and Elbow*, detail.



The Nasher Prize is an annual international award presented to a living artist whose work has had an extraordinary impact on the understanding of sculpture. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Context

Baghramian's interest in indoor and outdoor spaces influences where she places her art. Sometimes she installs her sculpture in unexpected spaces. She thoughtfully considers the relationship of her sculptures to one another and to their surrounding location. In Massachusetts at the Clark Institute of Art, she placed a sculpture in a pasture and enjoyed seeing cows interact with it.



She was invited, along with several other sculptors, to create a sculpture to place in a public location in Munster, Germany. While other artists chose beautiful locations, she chose an urban parking lot. She asks us to consider the temporary nature of a public monument. Baghramian wants us to ponder why and how artists and sculptures are chosen for display.



- **Can you find places in the Nasher galleries where two sculptures were placed near one another to create a visual dialogue?**
- **Imagine one of Baghramian's sculptures in an unexpected location. How would it change the impression you have of it?**

Misfits

"Art does suggest to combine things and words which sometimes and seemingly do not make sense at all." – Nairy Baghramian

Inspired by children's assembly-building toys (like LEGO, Tinker Toys, Lincoln Logs or K*NEX), some of Baghramian's sculptures are created to be touched. She has even created playgrounds with these sculptures. **(The sculptures at the Nasher are NOT designed for this and should not be touched.)**

Nairy Baghramian, *Entr'acte [Intermission]*, 2007. Installation: Concrete, mirror foil, metal, industrial fabric, 210 x 670 x 85 cm. Installation view 2007 © Courtesy Nairy Baghramian. Photo: Roman Mensing.

While at first glance, the sculptures may appear to fit together, they do not actually function that way. This visual trick gives the viewer a moment to ponder things that don't function quite as you'd expect. Her playgrounds make a connection with the idea of "misfits," those who fail to conform to society's expectations. To emphasize this point, she once placed some of the pieces outside while the matching connectors were left inside the gallery.

- **At museums, visitors should not touch the sculptures. Why is this important?**
- **Imagine creating a playground with sculpture strong enough to be used as playground equipment. Which sculptures would you like to include in your design?**



LEFT: Nairy Baghramian, *Misfits*, 2021. Varnished cast aluminum, walnut wood from Danh Vo's McNamara project, marble, C-print in artist frame. Installation view of Misfits at Marian Goodman Gallery Paris, 2021. Photo: Rebecca Fanuele.

RIGHT: Nairy Baghramian, *Misfits*, installation view at GAM – Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan, 2021. Photo: Nick Ash. Courtesy Fondazione Furla.

Jumbled Alphabet

“Children are expected to be happy and to smile.” – Nairy Baghramian

This photograph is from a series of photographs. While children learn the alphabet in order to read, the word “jumbled” implies that the process is not in order.

- **What is the expression on this child’s face? How is this different than a traditional portrait?**

In this photograph, the child is not happy. In fact, she looks grumpy. The quote above reinforces Baghramian’s philosophy to appreciate the misfits. She encourages us to have the option “...not to fulfill expectations.”

- **Why is it common for people to ask us to smile for a photo?**
- **How does social media enforce the idea that everyone else is having more fun than you? What could you do to contradict this pressure?**



Nairy Baghramian, *Jumbled Alphabet*, 2021. C print in artist frame. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

Additional Resources

Nasher Prize Laureate Announcement

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWBpkKZ6aFI>

Marian Goodman Gallery

<https://www.mariangoodman.com/artists/29-nairy-baghramian/>

Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Social Studies: Culture | §113.16 (a) and (b)

Fine Arts: Historical and Cultural Relevance | §117.3 Art, Level I (c)

Fine Arts: Critical Evaluation and Response | §117.4 (b), (d) and (e)



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