

SEARCHING & FINDING HIDDEN HERITAGE NEW WORKS BY PETER DANIEL BERNAL



March 8, 2025 to May 24, 2025

A Teacher's Guide for Middle and High School



Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum
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Contents

About the Exhibition	3
How to use this Guide	4
Teaching from Images and Objects	5
Michigan State Standards	7
<i>Searching and Finding: Hidden Heritage, New Works by Peter Bernal</i>	8
<i>Art as a Reflection of Personal and Cultural Struggles</i>	8
Peter Daniel Bernal and Artist Statement	9
The Creative Process and the Role of Art in Society	10
Lesson Plans	
<i>Deuteronomy 20:14, San Antonio</i>	11
<i>The Diabetic</i>	12
<i>A Young Man Stumbles Upon Two Wild Puma Cubs</i>	13
<i>It Happened</i>	14
Glossary	15
Resources	16
Visiting the Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum	17

About the Exhibition

Searching and Finding: Hidden Heritage, Works by Peter Daniel Bernal

The Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum, located on the campus of Saginaw Valley State University is pleased to announce “Searching & Finding Hidden Heritage”, a compelling exhibition by Michigan artist Peter Bernal, opening Saturday, March 8 and running through Saturday, May 24, 2025. Through a striking collection of paintings Bernal delves into the emotional weight of cultural displacement and the struggle to reclaim a lost identity.

Anchored in personal and ancestral memory, “Searching & Finding: Hidden Heritage” reconstructs histories that have been erased, forgotten, or suppressed. Bernal’s work, inspired by the legacies of his grandparents, imagines the lives of ancestors he never knew, using art as a means of inquiry, healing, and self-discovery. His visually evocative works invite viewers to reflect on their own heritage, identity, and the universal search for belonging.

“The exhibition is about more than my personal story—it’s about all of us,” says Bernal. “It’s about the ways history has shaped our identities and the ongoing effort to reclaim what has been lost.”

To deepen the conversation, historian and cultural educator Eric Hemenway will present a special lecture on Friday, March 7 from 6:00–8:00PM. This exhibition opening event will offer insights into the broader historical and indigenous contexts of Bernal’s work. This event will provide a unique opportunity for audiences to engage with the themes of the exhibition and explore the power of art as a vessel for cultural preservation. This free program will include light refreshments.

The Museum will also host an Artist Talk with exhibiting painter Peter Bernal moderated by esteemed curator and contemporary art advocate Isabelle Weiss, on Sunday, March 30, 2025, from 2:00–4:00PM. The moderated conversation will offer audiences an in-depth look into Bernal’s creative process, inspirations, and the themes that shape his work. Through an engaging dialogue, Bernal will share insights into his latest projects, the evolution of his practice, and the broader cultural and artistic influences that inform his vision. This free program will include light refreshments.

Drop-in guided tours of the exhibition are available every Saturday at noon. No reservation needed. “Searching & Finding Hidden Heritage” is free and open to the public.

Sponsor

This exhibition is sponsored in part by the Michigan Arts and Culture Council.



How To Use This Guide

Designed for educators to use as a resource in the classroom before, after, or in lieu of a visit to the Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum, this teacher's guide provides information about selected artworks, topics for classroom discussion, writing activities, and art projects that introduce key ideas of the exhibition *Searching and Finding: Hidden Heritage, Works by Peter Daniel Bernal*. The guide is designed for those teaching at the middle and high school levels. While classroom teachers across the city, state, and nation often cover similar content, each educator has a distinct approach to engaging their learners in the material. In response, the Museum's education team has created a guide to borrow from and build on to meet the needs of your specific classroom environment and teaching style.

There are multiple objectives for using this guide. One goal is to empower educators working with students of varying abilities to teach from the images presented here, and to promote teaching through an exploration of art by the self-taught. Another goal is to encourage students to ask critical questions when investigating visual art as a primary source. We hope this material will support dynamic learning in your classroom and help your students draw parallels with subjects they are already studying.

For the artwork featured in this teacher guide, you will find accompanying background information and a list of resources. In addition, each lesson plan contains questions to spark discussion as well as suggestions for related activities and projects for students meant to extend their learning even further. The questions section is separated into three categories:

Questions for Careful Looking ask students to observe each object in great detail and then work together to decode what they see.

Questions for Further Discussion tie in threads of background information on the objects to further the looking process,

Questions for Context help students identify and understand the cultural climate in which the object was created.

Questions for Context encourage students to consider their responses independent of the artwork. Depending on the contextual information your students already have about the originating time and place of the object, you might want to ask these questions before or after students discuss what they see in the image.

Whether you are in the Museum or your classroom, we are certain that you will discover new and inspiring ways to integrate work by self-taught artists into your teaching to make history and culture come alive for your students!

Teaching From Images and Objects

Object-based learning, particularly from museum collections, activates students' powers of observation, interpretation, and analysis. At the Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum, our teaching methodology is inquiry-based and discussion-driven. Through facilitated conversation about objects, students construct their own interpretations of the works, thus, establishing ownership of their ideas and cultivating confidence and pride in learning. As students link their observations and interpretations to those of their peers and bring their prior knowledge into the conversation, the class develops a collective body of knowledge, while individuals hone their critical thinking skills.

We recommend a few techniques that will help you guide students through the meaning-making process as you facilitate discussions about works of art:

Invite students to look carefully.

Start by asking students to take a minute to look silently at the work of art. At first, this process might be uncomfortable for students who are not accustomed to silent looking, but it will become easier with each new image. This invitation to look is essential; we are rarely encouraged to slow down to make observations. By spending a few moments together examining the image, students will start the lesson with a shared experience.

Use repetition in your Questions for Careful Looking.

Repeat questions you have posed to your students with different objects so they can anticipate the questions and feel comfortable responding. Repetition will help students better understand questions they might not have understood the first time, and it will provide them with a series of useful starting-point questions for when they approach an image on their own.

Engage students through open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions create space for multiple viewpoints and more than one "right" answer. In addition, these types of questions encourage discussion as opposed to single-word answers. When asked to respond to an open-ended question, students are invited to participate and share their ideas without fear of giving the "wrong" answer.

Paraphrase all students' comments.

As students offer their ideas and interpretations, paraphrase their comments to ensure that the whole group has heard each student's ideas. In addition, by voicing a student's comment in different words, you validate that comment and let the student know that you have heard the idea and understood it. Be sure to paraphrase all comments in a way that does not suggest that one comment is more valuable than another.

Introduce new vocabulary in authentic ways.

As you paraphrase students' comments, attempt to balance the vocabulary that students already have with new words. Vocabulary is best acquired when presented in context, and a discussion about a work of art in which everyone is focused on a shared stationary image provides a perfect opportunity for this experience.

Ask students to support all observations and interpretations.

Ask students to back up their inferences and ideas with evidence from the work of art to legitimize their interpretations. Ask for visual evidence even when an interpretation seems obvious.

Point to elements of the image to which students refer.

If you have the opportunity to project an image of a work of art, point to areas of the picture or object that students address in their comments. This helps ground each comment and ensures that all students can see the element being discussed.

Weave background information into the discussion in appropriate and authentic ways.

As students develop their interpretations of the work of art, you may want to share threads of background information with the group. Information about the object should further the looking process, contextualize the artwork for students, or appropriately challenge the group to push the limits of their thinking.

At the beginning of each lesson, you will find Questions for Careful Looking. At times these questions relate specifically to details in the work of art, while in other instances they have a more general scope, and they may appear in multiple lessons in this Curriculum Guide. Both types of questions are equally important in the discussion, but the latter—the more general question—is critical in order for all possible observations to be heard. However, if a general discussion seems to have tapered off, simply asking for further detailed observations can revitalize conversation and allow students who haven't yet shared ideas to find new layers and meaning in the object and lead the group in new directions.

By beginning your discussion of an artwork with concrete observations, you ensure that all students have the same starting point. As the discussion progresses, students will naturally apply a historical context to the work; with markedly increasing ease, they will piece together what they see with what they know. At the same time, they will gain confidence in asking questions about what they see and seeking the information to answer them. As a result, students will use what they have taken from the conversation and apply it to the ensuing project. In the process, students will also gain experience scrutinizing primary sources and works of art in general, while at the same time cultivating their visual literacy and critical-thinking skills.

Michigan Visual Arts State Standards

The lessons in this teacher's guide address a variety of Michigan State Standards for teaching and learning in the Arts. Because lesson plans are designed to be adapted and tailored by educators, they are not accompanied by individual lists of standards addressed. The standards listed below reflect those inherent in many of the lessons and programs in the Museum.

Middle School, Grades 6-8

Standard 1: Apply skills and knowledge to perform in the arts.

Standard 2: Apply skills and knowledge to create in the arts.

Standard 3: Analyze, describe, and evaluate works of art.

Standard 4: Understand, analyze, and describe the arts in their historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Standard 5: Recognize, analyze, and describe connections among the arts; between the arts and other disciplines; between the arts and everyday life.

High School, Grades 9-12

Standard 1: Apply skills and knowledge to perform in the arts.

Standard 2: Apply skills and knowledge to create in the arts.

Standard 3: Analyze, describe, and evaluate works of art.

Standard 4: Understand, analyze, and describe the arts in their historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Standard 5: Recognize, analyze, and describe connections among the arts; between the arts and other disciplines; between the arts and everyday life.

Michigan Social Studies State Standards, 7th grade

G1.2 Geographical Inquiry and Analysis - Use geographical inquiry and analysis to answer questions about relationships between peoples, cultures, and their environments, and interaction among places and cultures within the era under study.

Michigan Social Studies State Standards, 8th grade

8 – U4.2.3: Westward Expansion – analyze the annexation of the west through the Louisiana Purchase, the removal of Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral homelands, the Mexican-American War, the growth of a system of commercial agriculture, and the idea of Manifest Destiny.

Michigan Social Studies State Standards, Grades 9-12

8.3.4: Civil Rights Expanded – evaluate the major accomplishments and setbacks in securing civil rights and liberties for all Americans over the 20th century, including Indigenous Peoples.

Searching and Finding: Hidden Heritage, Works by Peter Daniel Bernal

Through a series of paintings and drawings, *Searching & Finding: Hidden Heritage* explores the emotional weight of cultural displacement and the struggle to reclaim a lost identity. Peter Bernal's work confronts the deep-seated challenges of alienation, history, and self-discovery, using art as a tool for both inquiry and healing.

Anchored by the memories of his grandparents and the legacies they carried, Bernal imagines the lives of the ancestors he never knew. His work is an act of reconstruction—an attempt to piece together what history has tried to erase. In reaching out through his art, he invites viewers to reflect on their own connections to heritage, identity, and the search for belonging—an experience that resonates across cultures and generations.

Art as a Reflection of Personal and Cultural Struggles

Art means of exploring and confronting deeply personal and societal issues for Peter Bernal. His work often examines the nature of abuse, power structures, and the ways in which cultural and religious influences shape personal experiences.

One of the critical themes Bernal addresses is the role of religion in shaping political and social choices, particularly within the Latinx community. He reflects on how many Latinxs, in his experience, voted against their own interests, swayed by the image of authority—a man in a suit representing conservative values. To Bernal, this mirrors his own personal history. Having grown up with an abusive father, he found himself defending and loving someone who continuously mistreated him, a dynamic reinforced by religious teachings that encouraged obedience and forgiveness at any cost. Breaking away from this cycle was a personal victory, but he acknowledges that many never manage to escape it.

This personal experience informs his art in profound ways. Bernal speaks of envy when seeing others who have nurturing parental relationships, a longing that has found its way into his work. Through his work, Bernal not only processes his own past but also invites viewers to reflect on their own relationships, cultural conditioning, and the ways in which authority—whether parental, religious, or political—can shape and sometimes distort our perceptions of loyalty and love.

Ultimately, Bernal's work serves as both personal catharsis and social commentary, illustrating how art can give voice to difficult, often unspoken truths while challenging the structures that perpetuate cycles of harm.

Peter Daniel Bernal

Peter Daniel Bernal grew up in Houston, Texas and graduated from the Kansas City Art Institute in 2000 with a Bachelor of Fine Art in painting in 2000. He received additional education at the Rhode Island School of Design and trained in printmaking and drawing in Weimar, Germany, where he lived from 2010 to 2015. In 2015, he relocated from Germany to Detroit. His primary focus is on storytelling-based oil paintings. In addition to his paintings, he also creates polychromed ceramic, linoleum prints, and pastels. In the past two years, he has completed several murals around Detroit, under the Perez pseudonym. Thematically, his work topics deals with personal social themes in relation to the philosophical; His paint is his voice.



Peter Daniel Bernal

Artist Statement

Painting, as I see it, is the ultimate voice to assert one's own existence. I value that painting does not rely on the use of spoken or written language with its implicit cultural boundaries. My own way of painting therefore becomes an extension of the way that I think and express my views.

Paint as a material is important to me. My paintings are worked over time and with much conviction. I do this not only to make an image, but to use the subject itself as a fetish to better understand human behavior or personal thoughts. Another reason I paint slowly is to connect the why and how of the act of painting to the content. After many layers of color and oil, I aim to reveal to myself, and then to the viewer, an insight or resolution of my psychological ruminations. My most recent artistic focus is specifically about my cultural self as a Chicano Mestizo, and about social behaviors in general. I feel compelled to describe with empathy for the subject, the feeling of helplessness from absurd and sometimes infuriating cultural norms.

My goal is to paint as authentically as I can, and to maintain a stance as observer.

Detroit, April 2018

The Creative Process and the Role of Art in Society

For Peter Bernal, one of the greatest joys of being an artist is witnessing how others think and create. There's something deeply fascinating about watching a street artist at work, a busker playing guitar, or any creative mind immersed in their craft. This shared experience of making art is something Bernal hopes to offer through his own work—an insight into his process and the passion that drives it.

At the same time, Bernal recognizes the challenges artists face, particularly in places like Texas, where arts programs are often the first to be cut when budgets shrink. This disregard for the arts fuels his demand for respect—not just for himself, but for all artists. He envisions a collective demonstration, a moment where artists assert their importance in society. Now, more than ever, art holds power—especially in times of authoritarian rule. Throughout history, artists have taken on the noble tradition of speaking truth to power, whether directly through political work or simply by continuing to create. Even something as seemingly simple as painting a landscape or a single rock carries meaning.

Bernal's approach to art is deeply intuitive. He rarely knows the final outcome when he begins to work; instead, he allows the process to guide him. This contrasts with artists who meticulously plan every detail before starting. Both approaches are valid, highlighting the vast range of the creative process. Regardless of method, every artwork reveals something about its creator.

For Bernal, art is not just about aesthetics—it's about existence, resistance, and the raw, unpredictable journey of creation. Whether capturing landscapes, exploring identity, or simply reveling in the act of making, his work stands as a testament to the power of artistic expression in an ever-changing world.

Peter Bernal

2024

Deuteronomy 20:14, San Antonio

Oil on canvas

65 x 65 inches

Bernal's *Deuteronomy 20:14, San Antonio* is a visual confrontation of religiously sanctioned violence, drawing directly from the biblical passage that grants victors the right to claim women and children after conquest. The painting reimagines this historical narrative in a modern context, replacing conquistadors with contemporary law enforcement, critiquing the ways in which power and control continue to be exercised under the guise of religious or moral authority.



At the center, a baby—depicted as God—bears the all-seeing eye on a red sash, yet its own eyes remain closed, a symbol of divine indifference to suffering. The inclusion of the Alamo, often celebrated as a symbol of Texas pride, challenges its conventional narrative by exposing its darker history as a site of forced conversions and cultural erasure. Through this deeply personal work, Bernal reflects on his own journey from faith to skepticism, using art to interrogate the intersection of religion, power, and the legacy of colonial violence.

“As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the Lord your God gives you from your enemies.”

—Deuteronomy 20:14, New International Version

Questions for Careful Looking

Look carefully at this oil painting and list 10 things about it.

Questions for further discussion

Why do you think the artist put a large baby in the center of the composition?

Does this baby remind you of anything?

Why are there small flying figures around the baby? What are they doing?

Do you see a building in the painting? What do you think it is?

Why would the artist put small skulls on the ground around the baby?

Questions for Context

Find pictures of the Alamo. What is the history of the Alamo?

Suggested activity

Think of a well know building in the town where you live. Draw a composition using line of your building. Why did you select this building? Why is it an important building to you or your town?

Peter Bernal

2025

The Diabetic

Oil on canvas

50 x 55 inches

In *The Diabetic*, Bernal confronts the intersection of illness, socioeconomic struggle, and systemic neglect. The painting is both personal and political, reflecting the realities of living with a chronic condition in a world where healthcare is often a privilege rather than a right.

The work's composition evokes tension—perhaps the weight of medical costs, the anxiety of an uncertain future, or the exhaustion of managing an unrelenting disease. The figure, caught between fragility and resilience, symbolizes not just individual hardship but the broader injustices of a system that commodifies health.

Through *The Diabetic*, Bernal highlights the ways in which marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by preventable illnesses due to lack of access to affordable care and nutritious food.



Questions for Careful Looking

- Look carefully at the painting and list 10 things about it.

Questions for Further Discussion

- Describe the flying figures around the man. What do they remind you of?
- Why would there be a foot prosthetic to the left side of the man?
- What color seems dominant in this composition?
- Is there anything else in the composition that you notice?

Questions for Context

Peter's art is about a reality in the United States where some people can afford insurance for healthcare and some not. Also, some communities have or have no access to affordable healthcare and nutritious food. Have students look up some news articles on these topics in their own community. Hold a class discussion on what they found.

Suggested Activities

After the discussion on what they found in their communities on access to good healthcare and nutritious food, have the students create a drawing or collage poster composition based on their unique communities and their class discussion. Ask them to use two or three symbols to express their ideas in their posters.

Peter Bernal

2024

A Young Man Stumbling Upon Two Wild Puma Cubs

Oil on canvas
65 x 63 inches

In *Young Man Stumbling Upon Two Wild Puma Cubs*, Bernal presents a symbolic self-portrait, exploring his personal journey of discovering and reclaiming his Indigenous identity. Set against a Texas landscape, the painting features two puma cubs—creatures native to the region—representing an ancestral connection that was long obscured by colonial systems of classification.



Despite having no cultural ties to Spain and not fitting the conventional image of a Mexican national, his true sense of belonging is rooted in the land itself. The act of stumbling upon the cubs mirrors his own revelation—an unexpected encounter with an identity that was always there, waiting to be recognized. This work is both an exploration and an assertion, using the wild pumas as a metaphor for Indigenous heritage: untamed, enduring, and deeply tied to the land.

Questions for Careful Looking

- Look carefully at this painting and describe 10 things about it.

Questions for Further Discussion

- Why does Peter refer to this painting as a self portrait?
- Why do you think he used warm colors in the bottom part of the painting and cooler colors on the top part?
- Why did Peter put pumas into the painting? What do they symbolize?

Questions for Context

- Research the geographic landscape in Texas. Does the landscape in this painting compare to Texas or Michigan? What are some characteristics of the landscape in this painting?

Suggested Activities

- Using waterbase air dry clay, have students create a sculpture that is a metaphor for their heritage or culture. Think about symbols and their meaning.

Peter Bernal

2022

It Happened

Oil on canvas

53 x 43 inches

In *It Happened*, Bernal crafts a harrowing narrative that blurs the line between history and imagination—yet, as the title asserts, the events depicted are not entirely fictional. The painting envisions a child leaping from a ship, choosing death over the horrors of enslavement, a fate that must have befallen many during the Columbian exchange. This act of defiance underscores the brutal reality of colonial violence and forced displacement, themes that resonate deeply within Bernal's broader exploration of identity. This painting also reflects Bernal's Tejano heritage and the many individuals who share his ancestry yet remain unaware of the history that shaped their existence.



The work serves as a companion to *Deuteronomy 20:14, San Antonio*, expanding on the legacy of conquest and forced assimilation. Here, Bernal challenges viewers to confront historical atrocities that are often omitted from mainstream narratives. More than a historical reflection, *It Happened* is a stark reminder that exploitation and human trafficking persist in the modern world. The painting is both a lament and an assertion—an acknowledgment of past suffering and an urgent call to recognize its echoes in the present.

Questions for Careful Looking

Look carefully at this painting and list 10 things about it.

Questions for further discussion

Why does a young girl seem to be over water in this painting?

When artists use a diagonal in a composition it often depicts movement or tension? Why would the artist want to express that in this composition?

Questions for Context

When you look at this painting what do you think the meaning is about? From your thoughts about this painting, are there current connections to what we experience today? Have students discuss and share their findings.

Suggested activity

Using magazines, scissors and glue sticks, have students cut out pictures that symbolize what Peter's painting says to you and combine them into interesting collage compositions. Add color to them with crayons, color pencil or paint for color balance.

Glossary

Alamo: The Battle of the Alamo was a key battle in the Texas Revolution, fought from February 23 to March 6, 1836. The battle took place at the Alamo Mission in San Antonio, Texas, where a small group of Texan defenders held off a much larger Mexican army.

Art style: The distinct characteristics and techniques used by artists to create their works. Each artist possesses unique features when creating their artworks.

Collage: An artwork made from assemblage of various materials (paper, cloth, photographs, etc.) adhered to a surface.

Color balance: Use of similar color hues, values, intensity, etc. that balance within the entire composition creating color harmony.

Composition: Art composition is the arrangement of visual elements in a work of art. It's how the parts of an image relate to each other to create a whole.

Culture: The shared beliefs, values, and behaviors of a group of people. It includes language, customs, and the arts. Culture is a complex concept that shapes how people think, feel, and behave.

Line Drawing: A simple drawing using a medium like pen or pencil and a visual element in art, line. Line is a moving dot.

Metaphor: A metaphor is a figure of speech that, for rhetorical effect, directly refers to one thing by mentioning another. It may provide clarity or identify hidden similarities between two different ideas. Metaphors are usually meant to create a likeness or an analogy.

Narrative: In visual art, use of images to tell a story.

Oil paint: A painting medium that is made from linseed oil and pigment.

Self Portrait: A self-portrait is a work of art, like a picture or a sculpture, that an artist has made of themselves. It can also be an artwork using imagery that represents the artist symbolically.

Symbolism: A concrete element like an object, character, image, situation, or action that suggests or hints at abstract, deeper, or non-literal meanings or ideas.

Resources

Digital

Online Oxford Dictionary

Google AI Overview

Photographs:

Photographs in this Teacher's Guide cannot be reproduced or used.

Links:

peterdanielbernal.com

Exhibition Development

Organized by The Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum, marshallfredericks.org



MARSHALL M. FREDERICKS SCULPTURE MUSEUM

Visiting the Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum

The Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum is located on the campus of Saginaw Valley State University in the Arbury Fine Arts Center. The Museum is open from Monday to Saturday, 11:00am to 5:00pm and has no admission charge.

Phone: 989-964-7125

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Visit the Museum's website at marshallfredericks.org or scan the QR code to the right.



We look forward to your upcoming visit!