

Unit 6: Alexa Meade: Your body is my canvas

Level: Upper-intermediate

Aims:

- Introduce and practice vocabulary.
- Develop listening skills.
- Develop speaking skills.

Wordlist:

absence
acid
to be embarrassed
canvas
collaborator
to embrace
exhibition
to flicker
to foresee
flux
to graduate from
grease
to mimic
to pursue
to smear
to stretch
surface

Time:

Before watching section
– 10 minutes
While watching section
– 40 minutes
After watching section
– 30 minutes

Keys.

1. Students' own answer.

2.

1) g

5) c

9) a

2) d

6) b

10) j

3) f

7) e

4) i

8) h

3.

a) *False*

d) *False*

b) *True*

e) *False*

c) *True*

4.

- 1) put shadows on
- 2) highlights
- 3) specific vision
- 4) kept on flickering
- 5) to take a step back
- 6) have foreseen
- 7) whole other dimension
- 8) degree in political science

5.

Object	Difficulties
Fried food	It's nearly impossible to get paint to stick to the grease in an egg.
Grapefruit	Even harder was getting paint to stick to the acid in a grapefruit. It just would erase my brush strokes like invisible ink. I'd put something down, and instantly it would be gone.
People	well, I was a little bit embarrassed to bring people down into my studio

6.

1. They had the idea of creating painting in a more unusual surface, that was milk.
2. 'Sometimes, when Sheila would lay down in the milk, it would wash all the paint off of her arms, and it might seem a little bit clumsy, but our solution would be, okay, hide your arms. And one time, she got so much milk in her hair that it just smeared all the paint off of her face. All right, well, hide your face. And we ended up with something far more elegant than we could have imagined'
3. Look beyond what's already been brought to light, that you can see what's below the surface, hiding in the shadows, and recognize that there can be more there than meets the eye.

7.

- a). flux
- b). surface
- c). canvases
- d). grease
- e). was mimicking
- f). collaborator
- g). acid
- h). had smeared
- i). exhibition

8. students' own answer

9. students' own answer

Transcript.

Part 1

Alexa Meade: Your body is my canvas

You may want to take a closer look. There's more to this painting than meets the eye. And yes, it's an acrylic painting of a man, but I didn't paint it on canvas. I painted it directly on top of the man.

What I do in my art is I skip the canvas altogether, and if I want to paint your portrait, I'm painting it on you, physically on you. That also means you're probably going to end up with an earful of paint, because I need to paint your ear on your ear. Everything in this scene, the person, the clothes, chairs, wall, gets covered in a mask of paint that mimics what's directly below it, and in this way, I'm able to take a three-dimensional scene and make it look like a two-dimensional painting. I can photograph it from any angle, and it will still look 2D. There's no Photoshop here. This is just a photo of one of my three-dimensional paintings.

You might be wondering how I came up with this idea of turning people into paintings. But originally, this had nothing to do with either people or paint. It was about shadows. I was fascinated with the absence of light, and I wanted to find a way that I could give it materiality and pin it down before it changed. I came up with the idea of painting shadows. I loved that I could hide within this shadow my own painted version, and it would be almost invisible until the light changed, and all of a sudden my shadow would be brought to the light.

part 2

I wanted to think about what else I could put shadows on, and I thought of my friend Bernie. But I didn't just want to paint the shadows. I also wanted to paint the highlights and create a mapping on his body in grey scale. I had a very specific vision of what this would look like, and as I was painting him, I made sure to follow that very closely. But something kept on flickering before my eyes. I wasn't quite sure what I was looking at. And then when I took that moment to take a step back, magic. I had turned my friend into a painting. I couldn't have foreseen that when I wanted to paint a shadow, I would pull out this whole other dimension, that I would collapse it, that I would take a painting and make it my friend and then bring him back to a painting.

I was a little conflicted though, because I was so excited about what I'd found, but I was just about to graduate from college with a degree in political science, and I'd always had this dream of going to Washington, D.C., and sitting at a desk and working in government.(Laughter) Why did this have to get in the way of all that?

part 3

I made the tough decision of going home after graduation and not going up to Capitol Hill, but going down to my parents' basement and making it my job to learn how to paint. I had no idea where to

begin. The last time I'd painted, I was 16 years old at summer camp, and I didn't want to teach myself how to paint by copying the old masters or stretching a canvas and practicing over and over again on that surface, because that's not what this project was about for me. It was about space and light.

My early canvases ended up being things that you wouldn't expect to be used as canvas, like fried food. It's nearly impossible to get paint to stick to the grease in an egg. (Laughter) Even harder was getting paint to stick to the acid in a grapefruit. It just would erase my brush strokes like invisible ink. I'd put something down, and instantly it would be gone.

And if I wanted to paint on people, well, I was a little bit embarrassed to bring people down into my studio and show them that I spent my days in a basement putting paint on toast. It just seemed like it made more sense to practice by painting on myself. One of my favorite models actually ended up being a retired old man who not only didn't mind sitting still and getting the paint in his ears, but he also didn't really have much embarrassment about being taken out into very public places for exhibition, like the Metro.

part 4

I was having so much fun with this process. I was teaching myself how to paint in all these different styles, and I wanted to see what else I could do with it. I came together with a collaborator, Sheila Vand, and we had the idea of creating paintings in a more unusual surface, and that was milk. We got a pool. We filled it with milk. We filled it with Sheila. And I began painting. And the images were always completely unexpected in the end, because I could have a very specific image about how it would turn out, I could paint it to match that, but the moment that Sheila laid back into the milk, everything would change. It was in constant flux, and we had to, rather than fight it, embrace it, see where the milk would take us and compensate to make it even better. Sometimes, when Sheila would lay down in the milk, it would wash all the paint off of her arms, and it might seem a little bit clumsy, but our solution would be, okay, hide your arms. And one time, she got so much milk in her hair that it just smeared all the paint off of her face. All right, well, hide your face. And we ended up with something far more elegant than we could have imagined, even though this is essentially the same solution that a frustrated kid uses when he can't draw hands, just hiding them in the pockets. When we started out on the milk project, and when I started out, I couldn't have foreseen that I would go from pursuing my dream in politics and working at a desk to tripping over a shadow and then turning people into paintings and painting on people in a pool of milk. But then again, I guess it's also not unforeseeable that you can find the strange in the familiar, as long as you're willing to look beyond what's already been brought to light, that you can see what's below the surface, hiding in the shadows, and recognize that there can be more there than meets the eye.

Thank you.

(Applause)

Alexa Meade: Your body is my canvas

Before watching

1. Answer the questions.

- Do you think that non-typical pieces of art develop new trends in the field of art?
- What is your attitude to modern art?
- Do you find painting a possible profession?

2. Match the words with their definitions.

1). to flicker	a). a piece of this cloth used by artists for painting, usually with oil paints, or the painting itself
2). to graduate from	b). to spread a liquid or a thick substance over a surface
3). to stretch	c). to accept a change, an idea
4). to be embarrassed	d). to complete a university degree course successfully
5). to embrace	e). to follow someone or something, usually to try to catch or kill them
6). to smear	f). to cause something to reach, often as far as possible, in a particular direction
7). to pursue	g). to shine with a light that is sometimes bright and sometimes weak
8). to foresee	h). to know about something before it happens
9). canvas	i). to feel nervous, worried, or uncomfortable
10). absence	j). not to exist

While watching

3. 0.00 – 1.48 **Watch part 1 of the video and decide if these statements are true or false.**

http://www.ted.com/talks/alexa_meade.html

- a) Alexa paints people's portraits on canvas.
- b) Every detail on somebody's body is replicated by a mask of paint.
- c) Alexa doesn't use Photoshop.
- d) She was fascinated with brightness of the light.
- e) Alexa's idea of painting shadows came to her mind after she painted on people.

4. 1.49 – 3.04 **Watch part 2 of the video and fill in the gaps.**

http://www.ted.com/talks/alexa_meade.html

"I wanted to think about what else I could 1) _____, and I thought of my friend Bernie. But I didn't just want to paint the shadows. I also wanted to paint the 2) _____ and create a mapping on his body in greyscale. I had a very 3) _____ of what this would look like, and as I was painting him, I made sure to follow that very closely. But something 4) _____ before my eyes. I wasn't quite sure what I was looking at. And then when I took that moment 5) _____, magic. I had turned my friend into a painting. I couldn't 6) _____ that when I wanted to paint a shadow, I would pull out this 7) _____, that I would collapse it, that I would take a painting and make it my friend and then bring him back to a painting.

I was a little conflicted though, because I was so excited about what I'd found, but I was just about to graduate from college with a 8) _____, and I'd always had this dream of going to Washington, D.C., and sitting at a desk and working in government. (Laughter) Why did this have to get in the way of all that? "

5. 3.05 – 4.44 **Watch part 3 of the video, complete the table with information from the video.**

Put down the difficulties Alexa faced while painting on different objects.

http://www.ted.com/talks/alexa_meade.html

Object	Difficulties
Fried food	
Grapefruit	
People	

6. 4.45 – 7.04 **Watch part 4 of the video. Answer the questions.**

http://www.ted.com/talks/alexa_meade.html

1. What was the idea for photography Alexa and her collaborator had?
2. What seemed to be a problem while shooting photos but accidentally making photos more elegant?
3. Can you find something unexpected in usual things? How?

After watching

7. Fill the gaps. Use the words from the table.

mimic surface grease acid
exhibition collaborator flux smear canvas

- a) Our plans are in a state of _____ at the moment.
- b) Neil Armstrong was the first person to set foot on the _____ of the moon.
- c) These two _____ by Hockney would sell for £500,000.
- d) The dinner plates were thick with _____.

- e) She _____ the various people in our office.
- f) This book is a new production by Andrew Davies and his _____.
- g) These shrubs must have an _____, lime-free soil.
- h) The children _____ peanut butter all over the sofa.
- i) There's a new _____ of sculpture on at the city gallery.

8. Answer the questions.

- a) Does a public speech make you feel embarrassed?
- b) Will you embrace the idea of going to another country, if you don't know anything about it?
- c) Is it possible for you to pursue your dream if your parents disapprove of it?
- d) What is your attitude to people whose style is in constant flux?
- e) What are advantages and disadvantages of three-dimensional films?
- f) Do you think that by mimicking somebody you can gain popularity?

9. Discussion:

You should make up a dialogue between two artists. One of them is a stickler for the classic art and the second one is a follower of the modern art. They protect their views in the discussion.