

# Looking at Contemporary Art – Let's Talk!

## TOUR GUIDE for GRADES 7 - 12 2009-2010 New Brunswick Art Bank Acquisitions

"Artists are seers - they have new ways of looking at the world."

One of the most important things about art is how the viewer experiences it. When looking at artwork, students should:

- Look carefully at artwork and describe the feelings it creates.
- Focus on how the Visual Elements\* are used to create feelings.
- Look at how the Principles of Art and Design\* are used in creating the artwork.

Visual Elements and Principles of Art and Design are the fundamentals in learning to look at, write and speak about works of art:

\* Visual Elements: *line, colour, form, space, shape, texture, value, and tone.*

\* Principles of Art & Design: *pattern, repetition, rhythm, balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, and unity/harmony.*

Contemporary art uses materials from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that are re-worked in surprising ways to challenge the viewer to think critically about contemporary life and society.

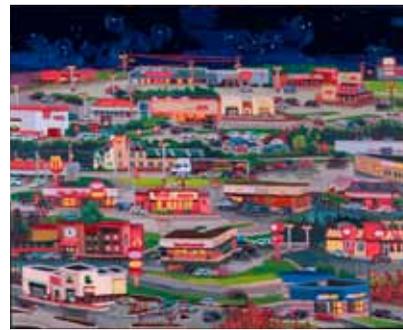
When looking at contemporary art, ask:

- Is the work challenging or interesting? Do I like the ideas this artist presents?
- What kinds of materials and techniques does the artist work with?
- Can art be made of anything?
- How do artists transform ordinary materials?
- What do artists today seem to be interested in?

## Landscape

Looking at landscapes, make believe you've entered each artwork, then ask:

- What do you see first? Move further back - what do you see next?
- If you were in this landscape, where would you be? What would you be doing?
- What would you see, hear, smell, and feel in this place? Where was the artist?
- Think about balance, asymmetry, symmetry and light/dark. How does the artist use them and how do they affect your feelings about the place?



Jack Bishop,  
*Drive-Thru Landscape / Paysage-restaurants à service rapide, 2009*

The artist is influenced by popular culture - the ever-changing set of ideas that characterize desires, needs, and cultural elements. He uses scale, repetition and colour to depict contemporary urban life. *Idea: Depict popular culture in an artwork.*



The artist's approach can be considered *minimalist*, where the power of the image is measured by bare essentials. By the use of light, shadow, shape, colour, line, form, space and surface, the image is created. *Idea: Explore "minimalism".*

Neil Rough,  
*Motel Sackville, 2008*



Hendrik Gringhuis,  
*Yellow Field / Champs jaune, 2010*

The artist finds inspiration in his homeland (Holland) with its huge skies and flat countryside. He also looks at the relationship between buildings and the land, and the work of some American landscape artists. *Idea: Contrast urban and natural environments in art.*



Inspired by children's sticker books with generic backgrounds, the artist explores the relationship between background and sticker images. Where the sky appears real, the birds are not flying naturally. What seems real is not. *Idea: Create an image of animals in unreal situations.*

Cliff Turner,  
*Pasted Birds / Oiseaux contrecollé, 2009*



Mathieu Léger,  
*Untitled (Graz-Koppling-Barnbach-79/92/100) / Sans titre (Graz-Koppling-Barnbach - 79/92/100), 2009.*

The artist calls these images "ghosts of his travels", reflecting passing moments similar to the "click" of the camera - a very tiny fraction of taking a longer look at something as it passes us. The camera cannot negotiate this, so it blurs the image. *Idea: Think about Ansel Adams' quote: "There are always two people in every picture: the photographer and the viewer."*



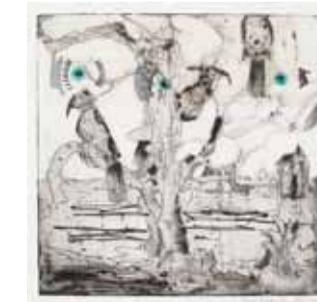
Freeman Patterson,  
*On the Shore of the Lake That Was #1 / Sur la berge d'un ancien lac (image n° 1), 2010*

The artist has been visiting the Namib desert near South Africa for 30 years where the Great Sand Sea has some of the world's highest sand dunes, petrified trees buried by advancing sand, and dry lake beds created after infrequent rain. *Idea: Create an image that shows the impact of the changing environment.*



The artist recreates an image about an everyday event and the feelings it evokes. *Idea: Create an artwork of a pleasurable event in your past.*

Yvon Gallant,  
*Ice Cream / Crème glacé, 2008*



Using the printing process of *monoprint*, the artist explores nature in distress and plant and biological matter in an altered state. *Idea: Create an artwork depicting environmental degradation.*

Adam Macdonald,  
*Series of Six / Série de six, 2009*

## Portraiture – Image as icon



Kyle Cunjak

Carnival Series #1: Nha Trang, Vietnam, 2009;

Carnival Series #2: Charlottetown, PEI, / Première série de photographies de carnivals : Nha Trang, Vietnam, 2009; Deuxième série de photographies de carnivals : Charlottetown, Île-du-Prince-Édouard, 2009

Today's portraits often depict status and/or relationships or challenge convention. The artist interprets identity through clothing, setting, body pose, mood, objects, and symbols. *Discussion: What choices did the artist make for subject matter, style, composition, background, and colour? Are these "snapshots" or carefully crafted images? What do the images tell you about the people?*

## Performance art – Live art event



Luc Charette,

Casse-tête (Iceberg au ballon)(Ensemble de 4 modèles) / Puzzle (Iceberg: Balloon) (4 parts), 2006-2009; Casse-tête (Iceberg à la plume) (Ensemble de 4 modèles) / Puzzle (Iceberg: Feather)(4 parts), 2006-2009; and Casse-tête (Iceberg à la rose) (Ensemble de 4 modèles) / Puzzle (Iceberg: Rose)(4 parts), 2006-2009

Performance Art encompasses a wide range of art forms, including theatre, dance and music. The medium is the artist's own body and the artwork is the form of actions performed by the artist. Because of the temporary nature of *performance art*, a single image can represent an entire event and can be works of art themselves. *Discussion: What do you think the performance was about? What happened before/after?*

## Conceptual Art



Joël Boudreau,

Une visite chez Orphée, 2008 / Visiting Orpheus, 2008

Using everyday objects and sculptural figures, the artist constructs a story about an idea. Conceptual artists work out their concept or idea in whatever materials and forms are appropriate, giving the idea or concept more importance than the materials. *Idea: Explore what the artist means in this work; create an artwork from an idea.*

## Painting – Abstract Art



Abstract art explores relationships of form and colour. Where more traditional art represents the world in recognizable images, the artist uses graffiti and the language of art (symbols, shapes and colour) to help the viewer create a story. Graffiti is a visual secret the artist wants the viewer to explore. *Idea: Using graffiti as a visual tool, create an artwork.*



Romeo Savoie,

Piano Series / Série – pianos, 2008

## Text in Art



Working with francophone poet Paul Bossé, the artist draws inspiration from the colours and textures of words. Through *gesture*, the movement and action of line on paper, the artist is linked to his/her work. *Idea: "Drawing is a verb." Consider its meaning.*

Angèle Cormier,

Car chaud / Hot Wheels, 2009

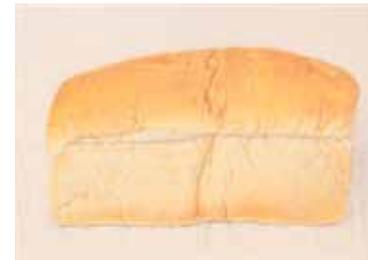


Using language and different media such as glass and metal, the artist creates multiple and hidden meanings. *Idea: Create an artwork in any media incorporating text.*

Peter Powning,

Water Book Series: Sticks and Stones / Série – livres dans l'eau: bâtons et pierres, 2009

## Spiritual Beliefs



Artists can explore personal beliefs, visualize organized religion, and examine the spiritual beliefs of others in their art. *Idea: Create an artwork that shows your personal beliefs.*

Herzl Kashetsky,

Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread / Donnez-nous aujourd'hui notre pain de ce jour, 2008

## Explorations of Media

Works of art built by an artist are explorations of formal and expressive properties of media as much as artworks that present ideas. *Discussion: What do "quality", "craftsmanship", "one-of-a kind", "decorative" and "functional" have to do with works of art?*



Think how the artist transposes special feelings for beautiful plants and flowers into her weaving. *Idea: Create a drawing/painting of a special feeling you have for nature.*

Susan Judah,

Lithospermum (Blue Lily) / Lithospermum (lis bleu), 2007-2009

Using different New Brunswick woods and presenting them in a new way, how is the artist's table different from ordinary furniture? Think about how it's made - how does this make it art? The artist presents functional things in exciting ways. *Idea: Drawing a piece of furniture, design it in a new way.*



Bruce Gray,

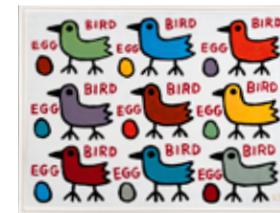
Spider Table / Table araignée, 2008



The artist explores techniques that create unpredictable surfaces showing the effects of natural substances such as rocks and twigs so his vessels appear aged. *Idea: Create an artwork showing natural materials.*

Darren Emenau,

Rawley / Rawley, 2009



Istvan Zsako,

Density / Densité, 2009 and Question / Question, 2009

The artist uses ordinary industrial materials to playfully explore philosophical and scientific questions about life and the universe. *Idea: Create an artwork that illustrates a scientific theory.*

