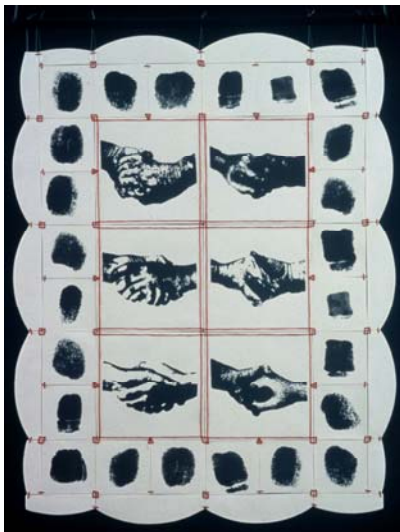




MANITOBA
ARTS
NETWORK

Crafting Contemporary Art



A. McCurdy, *Mothers/Daughters*, 2004

Exhibition Tour Strategies For Teachers & Tour Guides

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Key Concepts

Art is a language that crosses time, space and cultures.

Susan Garrett

Art refers to the conscious efforts of human beings to arrange colours, shapes, lines, sounds, movements and other sensory phenomena, to express their ideas and feelings about themselves and their world.

Cohen and Gaines

Every work of art requires an artist to make choices of subject matter, composition, materials and ideas. Some artists may wish to create as accurate a picture of the world as possible, others may wish to present ideas or emotions. Whatever manner or style the artist chooses to work in, composition, texture, materials, colour, and space are key elements to be considered. A work of art is created by arranging basic elements together in a way that is aesthetically pleasing to the eye or in a manner that presents the ideas of the piece in an apparent way.

Crafting Contemporary Art is an exhibition of ten women artists who incorporate craft materials and or methods into their artwork. The diverse way each artist incorporates these methods and materials illustrates their distinct style.

We anticipate that the viewers of this exhibition will gain an understanding of the considerations that artists make when creating a work and will have a deeper appreciation of contemporary work.

How can an art work communicate ideas?

Art works are fragments of an individual artist's personal ***perspective*** revealed within their approach to art. Each body of work is a portrayal of the artist's external or internal perspectives, a personal response to surroundings and ideas that influence ways of thinking about and approaching the world.

What motivates personal expression?

Art exhibitions offer us the opportunity to look beyond how a work of art is made, and ask the question why it was created. What motivated the artist to create it?

VOCABULARY / GLOSSARY

- . The vocabulary that you use will be tailored to the age group of the tour participants.
- . Select the most important words from the list below.
- . Introduce them to the group before the tour begins, especially with younger participants.
- . Ask the students to research the meaning of these words.
- . Ask tour participants to group words that have similar or related meanings.

Are there other words that should be added to the list?

Context: 1. the words that come before and after a particular word or phrase help to fix its meaning.
2. The circumstances in which an event occurs.

Art Forms – Classification of art works, traditional painting, sculpture, drawing and print making, etc.

Assemblage – Using a wide range of materials to create an artwork.

Mixed Media – Non traditional art forms, constructed with unusual materials.

Media: objects and materials used to make an art object.

Focal Point - Area of an artwork that attracts the viewer's attention first.

Texture: is the surface appearance of something.

Subject: something represented or indicated in a work of art.

Three-dimensional: something that possesses or seems to possess the dimensions of width, height and depth; in a pictorial image, the use of perspective, values and light and shadow help to create the sense of dimension of the subject matter.

Two-dimensional: something that possesses the dimensions of width and height but not depth; in art, a flat surface on which images are depicted, such as a piece of paper or a canvas.

Geometric & Organic Shapes: Organic shapes are free flowing, usually with soft edges and often exist in nature. Geometric shapes have hard edges and are often not found in nature, but seen in the human-made world.

Visual Literacy: the ability to interpret and engage with works of art by assessing the visual elements depicted to determine artistic meaning.

Environment: Surroundings, The external factors and forces surrounding and affecting an organism, person or population.

The Tour

Focus Attention:

Provide an opportunity for all members of the group to participate. Ask some questions which focus the group's attention and introduce some key concepts in the exhibition. Invite participants to consider their own experiences.

How many of you have seen an art exhibition before?

What did you see?

What do you expect to see today?

Why do artists make ART?

What materials do they use?

How do art works communicate ideas?

Introduce the Exhibition:

The viewing process often involves *dialogue* - either a silent one between the viewer and the work of art or a verbal one involving two or more viewers involved in a discussion about an artwork. You are a *catalyst*. Your task is to stimulate dialogue and initiate discussion. You will not tell the group about each work. You will supply some information at appropriate points. **Most of the time you will ask questions and listen to answers.**

The exhibition is being toured by **Manitoba Arts Network** to communities like yours throughout Manitoba. The Manitoba Arts Network is a non profit organization made up of over 40 arts organizations throughout Manitoba. Their mandate is to foster arts and culture in rural and northern Manitoba.

Before you talk about the images, encourage viewers to quietly walk through the exhibition and look at all the work take about 5 minutes to do this, and then meet to talk about what you saw.

A Questioning Strategy

The purpose of questioning is to set up conditions for learning. Questions can focus the group's attention on specific concepts or ideas. Following are a wide range of questions. They are presented to offer you options and stimulate your thoughts. A good questioning strategy starts with good knowledge of the exhibition being presented.

Characteristics of Good Questions:

Questions should be **clear** in their meaning - they should be **easily understood**.

They should be **simple**, not long and involved. Questions should be **specific** and to the point.

They should be **definite** and **direct**. Questions should be **thought provoking** and **challenging**. Remember there is no wrong answer.

First Impressions:

Gather the group together and ask guiding questions that will allow them to describe their first impressions of the exhibition. Begin by focussing on one artwork.

The viewer may describe what they **see** in the artwork. This will generally lead the viewer from an initial impression into a more analytical exploration of details.

Ask:

What do these works remind you of?

What feelings do you get when you look at these works?

What is the first thing in the exhibition that catches your attention?

What is the first word that comes into your mind when you look at this artwork?

What does this exhibition do, specifically, to make you think of the word craft?

Analysis: Gathering Evidence

Analysis is a process of gathering evidence. This step acknowledges that the artist has **manipulated** the **materials (media)** and the **elements** in such a way as to elicit the viewer's first impression.

The group will **compare** and **contrast** visual elements, **analyze relationships** among visual elements and **gather evidence** that leads to meaning in the work.

Begin by taking a visual inventory of the **formal elements**, such as, **texture**, **line**, **shape** and **colour** and describe how the artist has used these elements in the artwork.

Ask:

What has the artist Jennifer Smith in "A Beautiful Old Wives Tale" done, specifically, to make you think of family history?

What other details do you see in this artwork?

What do you notice first and where does your eye travel from there?

What techniques and devices (medium) did the artist use?

What do you see up close, and what is noticeable far away?

What visual elements are repeated?

Compare this artwork with another work in the exhibition.
What is different and what is the same?

Artists are aware of our expectations and cultural conditioning. They can use them when planning the impact of their work. Sometimes they deliberately challenge our ways of thinking.

Ask:

Find works that challenge what we believe or know.

What looks different than what we expect to see?

Interpretation - Discovering Meaning:

At this stage, you will be asking questions that encourage the group to explain the meaning they discover in the works. Comparing works often makes the interpretation process flow more easily.

Ask:

In Alexandra McCurdy's "Mothers / Daughters" what do you think the artist is trying to communicate?

If this artwork was the cover of a book, what kind of story would it be?

If this artwork was a song, what would the lyrics be about?

Do the art works tell stories? Which ones? What stories?

What symbols does the artist use?

What was the artist's purpose in creating these works? (See background information of artists and exhibition)

What did the artist leave out of this work?

Do these artworks speak of the past, present or the future?

Remember that there is **NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWER** to any question!

Context:

Information about the exhibition and the artists can be shared at this point. This exhibit features 10 women artists working with primarily traditional media in a contemporary way. Consider that historically women artists have been ignored in art history until recent history.

Fact-Ancient Greeks and Romans sometimes used cloths woven, hand stitched and designed by women as currency. Why aren't quilts by artists like Harriet Powers and Joyce Wieland hanging next to Matisses and Picassos?

Ask:

Look at Fay Jelly 's "Mondrian Pot Holder Boogie Woogie," why do you think she chose this title?

If you were able to give this artwork another title, what would the title be?

Does the title that the artist chose contribute to your understanding of the work?

Synthesis: Bringing it all Together

Now it is time to combine all of the information gathered during the stages of: ***First Impressions, Analysis, Interpretation*** and ***Context***, so the viewer may arrive at a ***personal evaluation*** of the artwork.

Ask:

What will you remember most about this exhibition?

Activities

GALLERY ACTIVITY #1 (Grades K - 6)

CURRICULUM LINKS:

Music, Health, Arts Education

OBJECTIVES:

To help the students come to an understanding of the content of the overall exhibition.

MATERIALS:

None

METHOD:

Begin by selecting one artwork from the exhibition.

Involve the group members in the Questioning Strategy (*see Page 6) collect First Impressions and Describe the work. When the group begins to Analyze the artwork, ask them to divide into groups of four.

Have each group sit in front of one of the works. Their task is to create a sound scape that would go with the artwork. Each student makes one sound then the group combines the sounds into a rhythmic pattern.

Each group then presents their sound scape to the others in turn. Compare these sound scapes. Are they similar? Did the sounds remind the students of an emotion? Were any of the sounds that the students made up soft and gentle or hard and loud?

Read the artists' statement for that piece and discuss it. Does the work remind you of someone in your family or something in your house? Why or why not? Has the artist been successful in getting across their point of view?

GALLERY ACTIVITY #2

CURRICULUM LINKS:

Drama, Visual art

MATERIALS:

None

METHOD:

Arrange the children in front of one of works.

Let them study the piece for a set amount of time, e.g. 30 seconds.

Have them turn their backs on the piece.

They recall the details of the artwork and the teacher records the answers on a piece of paper.

Finally they turn back to the artwork and see what they forgot.

This may be repeated with another artwork to see if their powers of observation have improved.

GALLERY ACTIVITY #3

CURRICULUM LINKS:

Visual Art

OBJECTIVE:

To introduce analysis of a work of art. To increase their understanding of the terminology of art

MATERIALS:

Various cards with the visual elements of art or properties written on them (see glossary; two dimensional, three dimensional, texture, geometric shapes, organic shapes, mixed media) or make a list of your own.

METHOD:

Divide the students into pairs or small groups. Each group is given a card.

Explain: "These words represent various art elements or properties of art. These are the tools that artists use to make a work of art." Tell the students that they are to look for an artwork in the gallery in which the term listed on their card is very important.

Once the group has chosen an artwork in the exhibition, have them place the card face down on the floor in front of the artwork. Then choose the artwork that has the most cards in front of it or randomly choose a work to initiate a discussion.

Turn the cards over. If the card states a property of colour, for example, initiate a discussion by saying, "Why is colour important to this work?" Have the group who chose the work of art answer first and then ask for other input from the whole group.

Photocopier Art (Grades 3 – 12)

CURRICULUM LINKS:

Visual Arts, Science and technology

OBJECTIVES:

To examine a non-traditional art form.

To help the students come to an understanding of the impact that technology has had on visual art and artists by trying a non-traditional medium.

MATERIALS

A photocopier, that enlarges and reduces: coloured drawing materials like oil pastels, pencil crayons, magazines, scissors, glue and paper.

METHOD

Discuss how photocopiers have revolutionized the printing process. Duplicate copies were made very differently as little as twenty years ago. Teachers used to use 'gestetners.'

Explain that today they will be using the photocopier as a tool for creating art. Images can be enlarged, reduced, duplicated, overlapped and contrasted. Have the students create a collage by cutting and gluing magazine images onto a piece of paper. Then run off four copies of their composition and glue these onto a larger sheet of construction paper. Add colour with the pencil crayons and oil pastels. Discuss the results. What effects can be achieved by using this method? What are the advantages/disadvantages of this process for the artist?