

JENN DEMKE-LANGE THE WILD



The Wild

Narrative Porcelain Plates by Jenn Demke-Lange
Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program





About the Esplanade

The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre is where the stories of our great collective culture are told through music and dance, painting and sculpture, plays and concerts, exhibitions and installations, artifacts and art, education programs and private events. Featuring a 700- seat main stage balcony theatre which boasts superior technology and striking design, the Esplanade is where Medicine Hat celebrates arts and heritage.

A marvel of contemporary Canadian architecture on traditional Blackfoot territory just steps from the South Saskatchewan River, the Esplanade occupies an eminent position on downtown's historic First Street Southeast. From its rooftop terrace, you can see Saamis, the dramatic shoreline escarpment which is the setting for the story of how Medicine Hat got its name.

Inside, visitors discover the vibrant Esplanade Art Gallery, the prized Esplanade Museum, the Esplanade Studio Theatre across the lobby from the Esplanade Main Stage Theatre, the expansive Esplanade Archives and Reading Room, an art education space called the Discovery Centre and the catering-friendly Cutbanks Room.

In the northeast corner of the Esplanade grounds stands the oldest remaining brick home in Alberta, the Ewart-Duggan House. With its gingerbread trim and quaint heritage gardens, it now serves as a charming venue for select cultural events and a home away from home for artists in residence.

The Esplanade opened in celebration of Alberta's centennial in 2005 and ever since, Medicine Hat has welcomed a steady procession of artists and audiences, storytellers and story-lovers from around the region and around the globe. The celebration continues today.

About the AFA Travelling Exhibition Program

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial travelling exhibition program since 1981. The mandate of the AFA Travelling Exhibition Program is to provide every Albertan with the opportunity to enjoy visual art exhibitions in their community.

Three regional galleries and one arts organization coordinate the program for the AFA:

Northwest Region: The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie

Northeast and North Central Region: The Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

Southwest Region: The Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary

Southeast Region: The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat



Each year, more than 300,000 Albertans enjoy many exhibitions in communities ranging from High Level in the north to Milk River in the south and virtually everywhere in between. The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program also offers educational support material to help educators integrate the visual arts into the school curriculum.

Exhibitions for the TREX program are curated from a variety of sources, including private and public collections. A major part of the program assists in making the AFA's extensive art collection available to Albertans. This growing art collection consists of over 8,000 artworks showcasing the creative talents of more than 2000 artists. As the only provincial art collection in Alberta, the AFA collection reflects the development of the vibrant visual arts community in the province and has become an important cultural legacy for all Albertans.





Curatorial Statement

Many Canadians have fond memories of driving for hours on the open highway, anticipating the smell of the boreal forest or the salty ocean air. We remember getting bug bites, swimming in cold, deep lakes, roasting marshmallows, singing songs around the campfire and crawling into wet sleeping bags. Years later, with our own children, keen to experience new adventures, we escape to the wilderness with a new tent in our packs, ready to sleep under the canopy of stars away from the hustle and bustle of city life.

This year, 2017, Canadians are celebrating 150 years as a nation. TREX Southeast thought it would be most appropriate to participate in Canada's sesquicentennial by presenting a high-calibre Medicine Hat artist working in clay, a medium that is the bedrock of our region. Jenn Demke-Lange has combined traditional ceramic techniques, such as surface relief and overglaze, with digital illustrations to create a series of large porcelain plates. The overall narrative theme of these plates, and the exhibition as a whole, is based on her identity as both a Canadian and a mother.

Lange grew up in Calgary and regularly went on summer camping excursions in the Rocky Mountains. She continues that tradition today with her own family. "Recollecting on my own personal experiences camping as both a child and in motherhood, this body of work celebrates the experience of wilderness and its ability to de-civilize," she explains. "It can be a strange sort of power to relax into forgetfulness, escape from reality and slip into a more simplistic life."

Raising children provides an opportunity to experience childhood all over again; we want to share what we loved from our childhood with our kids. So, we pack up the car and head into nature. We build forts, pull off leaches, make fishing rods out of sticks and eat hot dogs for dinner and breakfast (because that's just what you do when you camp). In *The Wild*, Demke-Lange captures these Canadiana experiences. Her plates visually express a narrative that encompasses both the shared realities and magical wonderment of time spent in the wilderness.



Biography

Jenn Demke-Lange, originally from Calgary Alberta, now lives in the sunny Southern Alberta city of Medicine Hat with her husband, two children and beagle. As a BFA graduate from the Alberta College of Art and Design, with a major in ceramics, she maintains a studio practice producing handmade ceramic objects (from tableware to jewellery) that are canvases for her hand-drawn illustrations. Her illustrations are often inspired by children's books and depict common activities that are relatable to childhood experiences. Specifically to the artist, they are interpretations of her relationship with her own children; visual archives from daily interactions along with contributions from a healthy imagination and reflections of her past.

Jenn's professional practice is based out of Medalta, a unique communal ceramic based makerspace located within a national historic clay district. It is home to a working museum and international artists-in-residence program, where she also maintains a part-time position as the residency programs Studio Coordinator.



In this country there is neither measure nor balance
To redress the dominance of rocks and woods.
The passage, say, of these man-shaming clouds.

No gesture of yours or mine could catch their attention,
No word make them carry water or fire the kindling
Like local trolls in the spell of a superior being.

Well, one wearies of the Public Gardens: one wants a vacation
Where trees and clouds and animals pay no notice;
Away from the labeled elms, the tame tea-roses.

The horizons are too far off to be chummy as uncles;
The colors assert themselves with a sort of vengeance.
Each day concludes in a huge splurge of vermilion.

And night arrives in one gigantic step
It is comfortable, for change, to mean so little.
These rocks offer no purchase to herbage or people:

They are conceiving a dynasty of perfect cold.
In a month we'll wonder what plates and forks are for.
I lean to you, numb as a fossil. Tell me I'm here.

The pines blot our voices up in their lightest sighs,
Around our tent simplicities sough.
We'll wake blank-brained as water in the dawn.

-Excerpt from *Two Campers in Cloud Country* by Sylvia Plath (written while camping in Canada in 1960.)

Artist Statement

Canada is wild, it is a country dominated by its vast landscapes and open skies, much of which is still left untamed by human power. In contrast, we live daily within an imposed order of human civilization but often with the desire to seek reprieve from this order, even if momentary. Wilderness and the wild un-inhibited spirit of a child has the power to provide relief.

Recollecting on my own personal experiences camping as both a child and in motherhood, this body of work celebrates the experience of wilderness and its ability to de-civilize. It can be a strange sort of power to relax into forgetfulness, escape from reality and slip into a more simplistic life. It is often within this moment, when we have the opportunity to leave our world of everyday experience behind and depart from our routine duties and obligations, that we allow ourselves to be fully occupied with a blank mind, new experiences and perspectives. While adults easily become tame to civilization, it is the perspective and inherent nature of a child that can re-connect us to the innocence, wonderment and freedom of our child-like wild spirit. The imaginative "How to" illustrations explore whimsical ways of connecting to the wilderness; reminding us to howl at the moon, roar with laughter and wander with wide eyes.

Visual Inventory - List of Works



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to be invisible*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10" h x 10" w x 1 13/16" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to be tall*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10 7/8" h x 10 7/8" w x 2" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to build a castle*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 11" h x 11" w x 1 15/16" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to build a cocoon*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10" h x 10" w x 1 7/8" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to feel the moon*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10 1/4"h x 10 1/4"w x 1 3/4"d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to feel the wind*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10 15/16"h x 10 15/16"w x 2"d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to follow a scent*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10 1/4"h x 10 1/4"w x 1 7/8"d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to hold your breath*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10 1/4"h x 10 1/4"w x 1 3/4"d, collection of the artist

Visual Inventory - List of Works



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to make friends*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10"h x 10"w x 1 13/16"d, collection of the artist



How to make the darkness disappear, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 11 1/4"h x 11 1/4"w x 1 13/16"d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to plan the safest way*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 9 7/8"h x 9 7/8"w x 1 5/8"d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to see a long long way*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10 1/4"h x 10 1/4"w x 1 13/16"d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to see the light*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 11" h x 11" w x 1 7/8" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to stay up all night*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10 1/8" h x 10 1/8" w x 1 15/16" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to talk to birds*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 11" h x 11" w x 1 15/16" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to wash your hands and face*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10 3/8" h x 10 3/8" w x 1 7/8" d, collection of the artist

Visual Inventory - List of Works



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to whisper*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital ceramic decal, 10 13/16" h x 10 13/16" w x 2 3/16" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to walk a mile*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital 3D anaglyph ceramic decal, 11" h x 11" w x 2 3/16" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to be still*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital 3D anaglyph ceramic decal, 10 7/8" h x 10 7/8" w x 2" d, collection of the artist



Jenn Demke-Lange, *How to disappear*, 2017, hand-built porcelain, digital 3D anaglyph ceramic decal, 11 1/8" h x 11 1/8" w x 2 1/8" d, collection of the artist





Introduction to Educators' Guide and Lesson Plans

The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program Southeast created this educators' guide based on the exhibition's themes and concepts. It is composed of lesson plans and informative material. We strive to create projects that will inspire individuals to experience our exhibitions beyond the decorative and to explore their own creativity. Educators', writers, curators and artists have all contributed content; we hope you create something amazing from it.

Lesson 1: Imaginary Animal Self-Portraits (Grades 1–6)

Overview

Jenn Demke-Lange’s delightful images of childhood include illustrations of playing make-believe, and incorporate characteristics of animals. This project asks students to use their imaginations and choose an animal they identify with to create a painted and collaged self-portrait. Through photography, watercolour painting, and drawings, they will create a magical interpretation of childhood games. If students are past the age of playing pretend, this project asks them to reflect on younger years, much like the artist did in this exhibition—to fondly recall the fun of childhood years, when imaginary wings were just as good as real ones!

Note: this is a multi-step project to be completed over a couple of sessions.

Objectives

Students will:

- plan and design a mixed-media self-portrait
- observe and draw in proportion
- utilize a variety of art mediums

Materials

Photograph of student (laser-printed on card stock or photo paper)

Heavy watercolour paper (two sheets per student)

Salt for sprinkling

Watercolour paints

Glue

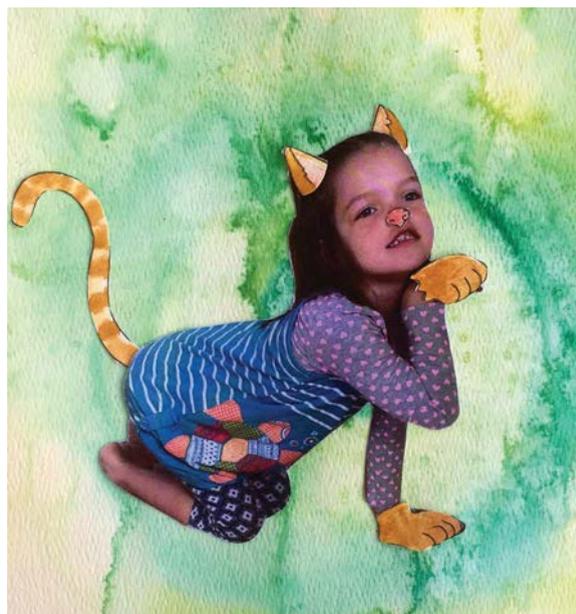
Brushes

Permanent fine-point felt pen (black)

Pencil

Newsprint or other scrap paper for sketches

Scissors



Example of completed piece



Example of completed piece

Instructions

Step One

After some reflection, decide what animal, insect, etc. you would like to portray in your self-portrait. Next, select a pose to work with. Have a teacher or classmate photograph you against a plain background in your chosen pose. Print selected photographs out in colour on either photo paper or card stock (image 1).



Image 1

Step Two

Carefully cut yourself out of the photograph (image 2). Using your pose as a template, draw different animal components (image 3), such as ears, tails, wings, and paws, in pencil on watercolour paper. It does not matter where you draw them on the paper, as they will be painted, cut out, and arranged in a collage on the final piece. Paint these elements with watercolour paints in colours of your choosing. When dry, add details and outlining using the fine-tipped felt pen.



Image 2

Note: you are not drawing or painting on your photograph but on separate paper so everything can be collaged together.

Step Three

As this project is all about imagination, it utilizes a unique watercolour technique to create a fantastical backdrop for the portraits. Each student should have a single full sheet of watercolour paper. They can tape the corners down to the work surface to prevent curling.



Image 3

Using a big brush and clean water, coat the surface of the watercolour paper completely. Then, working quickly, add big strokes of colour. Spirals, stripes and zigzags all work well—whatever motif you want. While the paper is still very wet, sprinkle salt on it to create a speckled effect (image 4). If the paper is drying out too quickly, after sprinkling the salt, spray a little water on the paper and the same effect will appear. Then leave the paper to dry. Try not to move it.



Image 4

Step Four

When everything is completely dry, brush the salt off the watercolour sheets and cut out the animal components. Using white glue sparingly, create a collage with the components and photograph on the watercolour background.

Lesson 2: Branch Weaving (Appropriate for most ages depending on available help)

Overview

This craft is an easy, portable lesson to do on a field trip, a camping trip or after a nature walk. It provides students an opportunity to get outdoors and engage with their natural surroundings. Students will select a small branch with a V or Y shape in it. This will be the frame of the weaving. Trim the branch to a manageable length/shape if necessary.

Objectives

Students will:

- develop craftsmanship and attention to detail
- engage with their natural environment and recycle found objects
- create a unique design while making choices about colour and texture

Materials

V- or Y-shaped branch (preferably one that has fallen, or been trimmed). Ensure the branch is strong enough to withstand the pull of the yarn from the weaving.

Assorted wool and yarn scraps

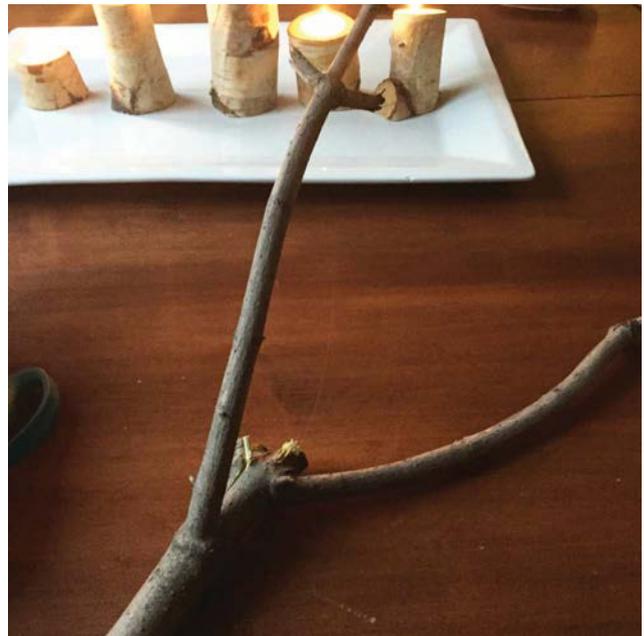
A sewing needle large enough for wool to fit through (plastic needles will work as well)

Fork (optional)

Clippers to trim branches if necessary (for use by teacher)



Example of completed piece



V- or Y- shaped branch

Instructions

Step One

Start the weaving in the crook of the branch. Tie the wool (or string), wrap it around one side of the branch, and then move it across to the other side and wrap it around. Slowly make your way up the branch, alternating sides (image 1). Tie the wool tightly in a knot when you reach the top. The wool should be taut. This creates the *warp* of the weaving. Depending on the thickness of the wool, try to keep the lengths fairly close together in order to achieve a tight weave.

Step Two

Thread the needle with a long strand of yarn (in your desired colour) and tie the end in the crook of the branch. Begin weaving up along the warp in an over/under pattern (image 2). When the yarn runs out or you want to change colours, tie the end to the closest side. Begin with a new colour by tying it just above where you left off. To tighten up the weaving, use your fingers to pull the *weft* (yarn) down. If the yarn is woven too tightly, use a fork.

Step Three

Continue weaving until the branch is aesthetically pleasing, or until the space within the branch is filled with woven yarn (image 3).

Variation

Add beads, buttons or small strips of fabric.



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3, example of completed piece

Lesson 3: Sketchbook: Nature Study (Grades K-12)

Introduction

Jenn Demke-Lange’s exhibition is a testament to the restorative benefits of spending time in nature. This lesson asks students to do just that: take an art lesson outside in order to spend time in and observe nature. Obviously, this lesson is most enjoyable when the weather is nice. When studying nature through an artistic lens, students must pay close attention to details, variations, growth patterns and micro-environments.

Objectives

Students will:

- practice observational research and recording
- develop craftsmanship and representational drawing abilities
- observe diversity and change in the natural environment

Materials

Sketchbook or writing paper stapled into a booklet
Drawing pencils
Fine-point felt drawing pens
Additional drawing materials, such as chalk pastels
Optional: water bottle, snack, sunscreen, a blanket or jacket to sit on



Example of completed piece



Materials

Instructions

Step One

Find a comfortable location to observe and draw, preferably one with a plethora of different plants and trees—although even small grassy patches can offer surprising diversity. The goal is to find somewhere non-manicured and uncultivated to observe and record.

Step Two

Select a few of the inspiration cues. Try to be as accurate as possible when drawing the specimens. (image 1) Take notes on temperature, location, surrounding environment, sounds and other information that will contextualize this study.

Step Three

Compare your sketches with classmates' (if others are comfortable doing so).

Inspiration Cues

Find and draw as many different examples of the following as possible. Make note of how items in each category are different or similar. Try to make your drawing as accurate as possible.

- Seed pods or casings (pinecones, pods, nutshells, etc)
- Branches of trees or shrubs (do they grow symmetrically or asymmetrically?)
- Leaves and needles
- Flowers in different stages of bloom
- Insect or animal home (nests, cocoons)
- Tree shapes
- Bark
- Rock formations
- Evidence of animal activity (tracks, scratches, holes)



Example drawings



Acknowledgments

This publication was produced in conjunction with the TREN exhibition *The Wild* by the AFA Travelling Exhibition Program (TREN) Southeast Region 4, at the Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre. *The Wild* will tour throughout Alberta to non-traditional gallery spaces August 2017–February 2020. Visit www.trenprogramsoutheast.ca to find out more about the program and locations of each exhibition.

Curator and Editor: Xanthe Isbister, Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre

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Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre
401 First St. SE
Medicine Hat, AB Canada T1A 8W2
403-502-8580 | www.esplanadeca.ca



