

MICROCOSM

Exhibition Guide



Alberta
Foundation
for the Arts

TRAVELLING EXHIBITION PROGRAM

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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 600,000 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 9,000 artworks showcasing the creative talents of more than 1700 artists. The AFA art collection reflects the development of the vibrant visual arts community in the province and has become an important cultural legacy for all Albertans.





M I C R O C O S M

There is a miniature embodiment of the vivacity of life and the progression of existence within this exhibition, with systems that appear simple but are quite complex, and all the little creatures and plants that help it along; and thus, a microcosm is born. Many of us enjoy the creation or viewing of microcosms, whether it be a story, a diorama, or artworks - we adore viewing things in a smaller nature.

In "Microcosm" we find subtle characters in their natural domain, almost hiding away among the foliage. Where is that snail going? Whose nest is that? What are the fish staring at? What type of tea does the bear drink? Who made him that scarf? Who lives in that house? We are entranced with the illustrative details and the creatures we find within these tiny worlds. Encouraging the viewer to explore the artworks in depth and to look for clues, as each image holds the potential for a beginning, middle, or end of a story; welcoming the audience to interpret and apply their own narratives and unique perspectives.

These pieces encourage imagination, illustrating moments in time, as well as bringing small treasurable details from the outside to light. By carpeting the compositions with use of beautiful line work, these entangled depictions are reminiscent of William Morris wallpaper designs, which hummed with life during the late nineteenth century. Much like the Arts and Crafts movement of that time, Merkley brings the outside inside, as if the creatures from one of his wallpapers came alive and decided to have a garden party. And just like Morris, Merkley creates these for the sake of creating, filling the need for the artworks to get out and explore the world and grace other settings. With a romantic notion of bringing the countryside to interiors of homes and community centres, these designs and characters are created with careful consideration and diligence, in intricate lines and accentuated in a variety of mediums such as watercolour, collage, and ink.

In Canadian art there is a strong tradition of landscape paintings, and being inspired by nature, but there is a great deal of subtle intricacies within nature that are smaller than a mighty river, or mountain, or sunset. Instead focusing on the vast, Merkley examines in meticulous marks the close-up botanical details that make up the difference between species such as having a serrated versus a smooth-edged leaf. Like the artwork found on the walls of our homes, the small bees and moths that grace our everyday lives sometimes go unnoticed, and yet play such a fundamental role in our day to day lives. Bees as pollinators of this world to provide us with food and flowers; art to bring us joy and escape into another reality, or to have something beautiful to brighten a dull space.

A sense of mystery resides over all of these species and creatures, and by not always knowing the exact place, plant, or insect, with only suggestions to where they might call home, we instinctively fill in the blanks and expand each piece beyond the borders of the page. Full of many hidden details and playful compositions these renderings of the natural world explore the lush and vibrant landscapes in which Merkley's critters inhabit. Just as with any artwork, the final meaning, effect, or story, lies within the eyes and mind of the viewer - yet we are reminded of the precise and delicate balance that take place within these microcosms and are gently reminded 'to hurt no living thing'.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Bailey Merkley was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, and moved to the Peace Country at 11 years old. From 2013 to 2019 she attended the Grande Prairie Regional College where she received an Associate's degree in Visual Art and Design. She intends on pursuing a degree in illustration and children's literature.

Inspired by her surrounding environment, Merkley began using environmental motifs in her work, using botanicals, prairies and mountain ranges. She predominantly works with drawing and illustration but also uses painting, photography and mixed media throughout her practice.

Merkley has exhibited work at the Grande Prairie Regional College, The Centre for Creative Arts, Beaverlodge Cultural Center and the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie. She was also commissioned by the GPRC Fairview Campus in 2016, Rotary House's 2017 Dream Home, and the GPRC National Bee Diagnostic Centre in 2018. She is featured in the permanent collection at the Grande Prairie Regional College and in private collections in both Alberta and British Columbia.

ARTIST STATEMENT

All my paintings explore, in progressively greater consideration and detail, lush and vibrant landscapes which act as a background, or prelude, for the creatures and characters inhabiting them. [...] These narratives are intricate, detailed, but most importantly they are undecided, free to be interpreted in a different and unique perspective by each person that these pieces have reached.

IMAGE INVENTORY

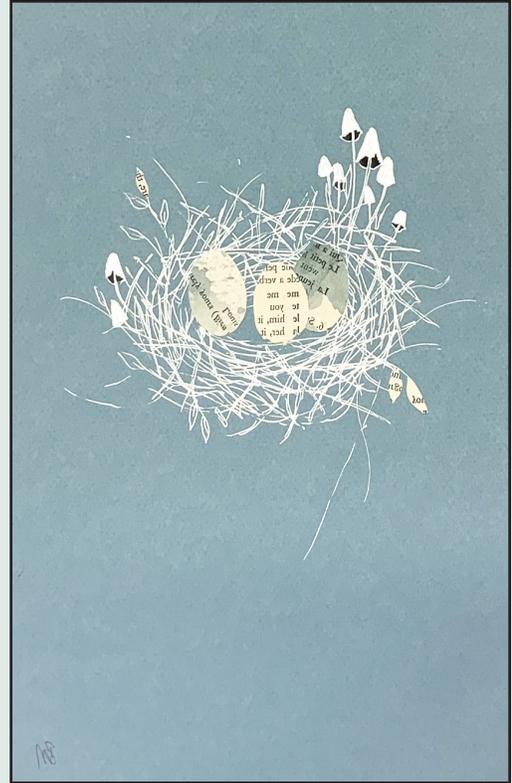
Bailey Merkley

BIRDS NEST

2020

ink and collage on paper

Framed: 16in x 13 3/4in



Bailey Merkley

REJECT EGGS

2020

mixed media collage on paper

Framed: 16in x 12 1/2in

IMAGE INVENTORY



Bailey Merkley

LUNCH TIME

2020

mixed media on birch panel

Framed: 11 1/4in x 9 1/4

Bailey Merkley

FISH TALES

2020

mixed media on birch panel

Framed: 9 1/4in x 11 1/4in



IMAGE INVENTORY

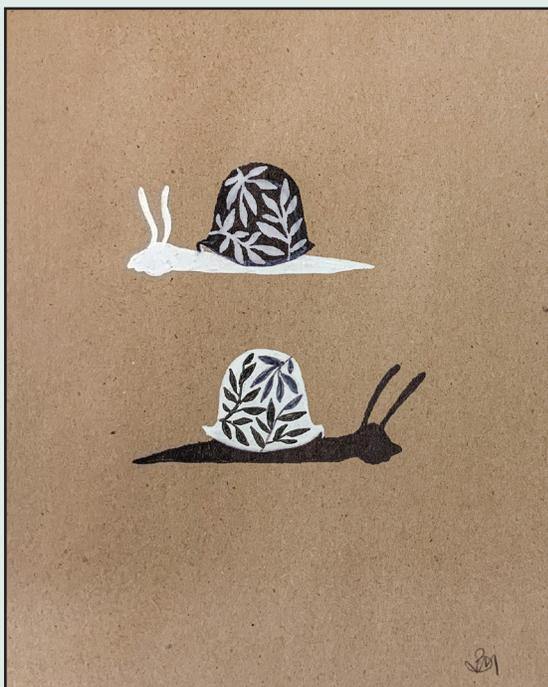
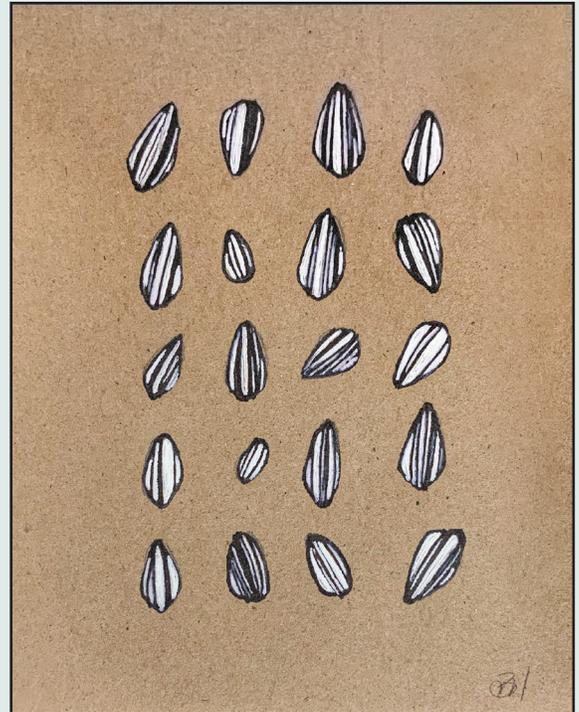
Bailey Merkley

SUNFLOWER SEEDS - diptych

2020

ink on recycled paper

Framed: 23in x 18in



Bailey Merkley

TWO SNAILS - diptych

2020

ink on recycled paper

Framed: 23in x 18in

IMAGE INVENTORY



Bailey Merkley

BEAR & BEE

2020

mixed media inside shadow box

Framed: 8 3/4in x 8 3/4in

Bailey Merkley

SNAIL EXPLORING

2020

mixed media inside shadow box

Framed: 8 3/4in x 8 3/4in

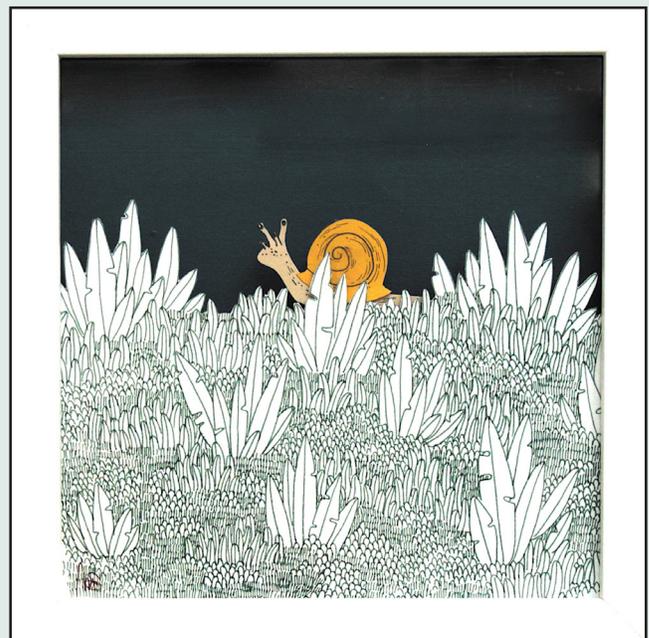


IMAGE INVENTORY

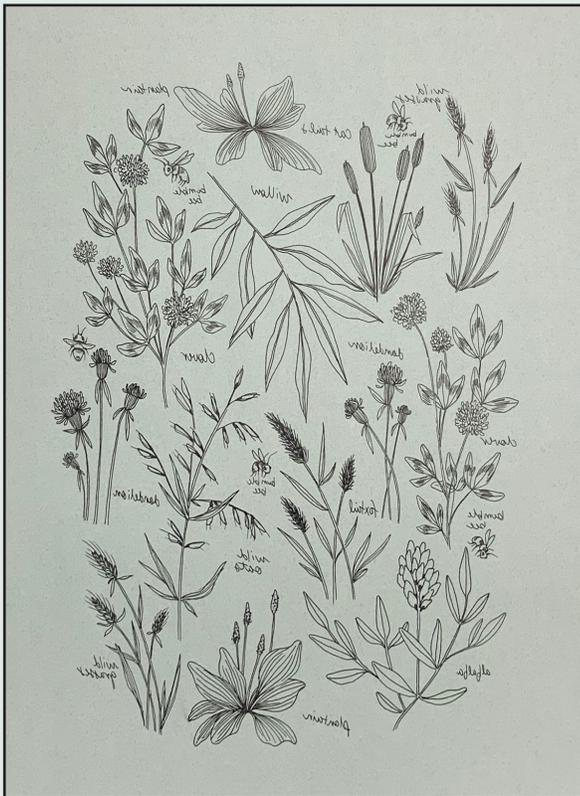
Bailey Merkley

BEES ARE FRIENDS

2020

pastel and ink on paper

Framed: 16 1/2in x 12 1/2in



Bailey Merkley

DISSECTED GARDEN I

2020

mixed media on birch panel

Framed: 16 1/2in x 12 1/2in

IMAGE INVENTORY



Bailey Merkley

FLOCK AND FLUTTER

2020

ink on paper

Framed: 17in x 23in

Bailey Merkley

GOLDEN MOTHS

2020

ink on paper

Framed: 16in x 13 3/4in



IMAGE INVENTORY

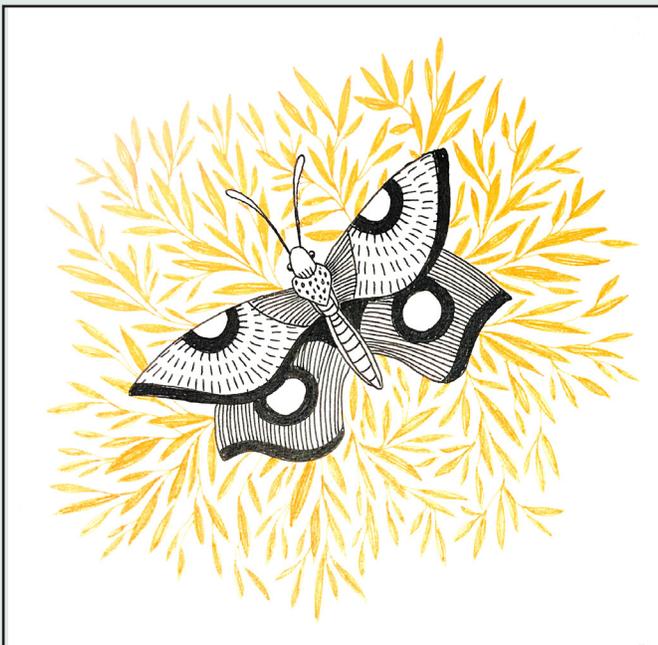
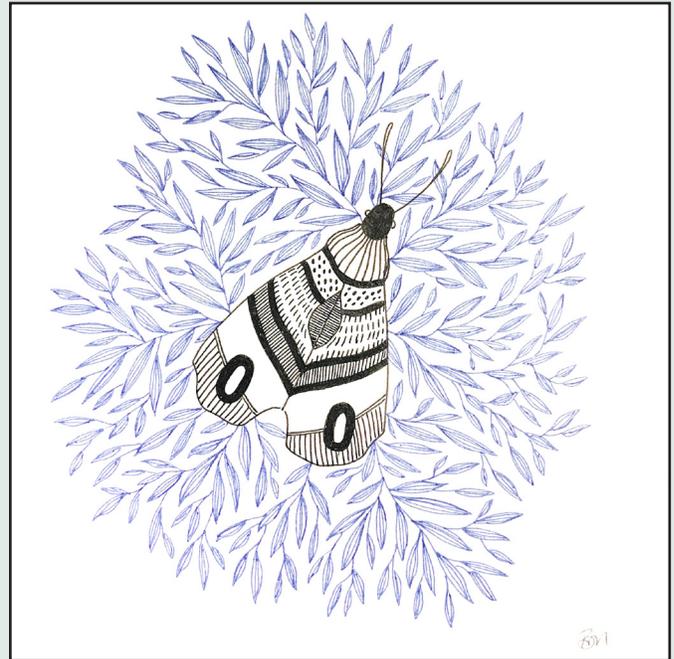
Bailey Merkley

TWO MOTHS II - diptych

2020

ink on paper

Framed: 23in x 18in



Bailey Merkley

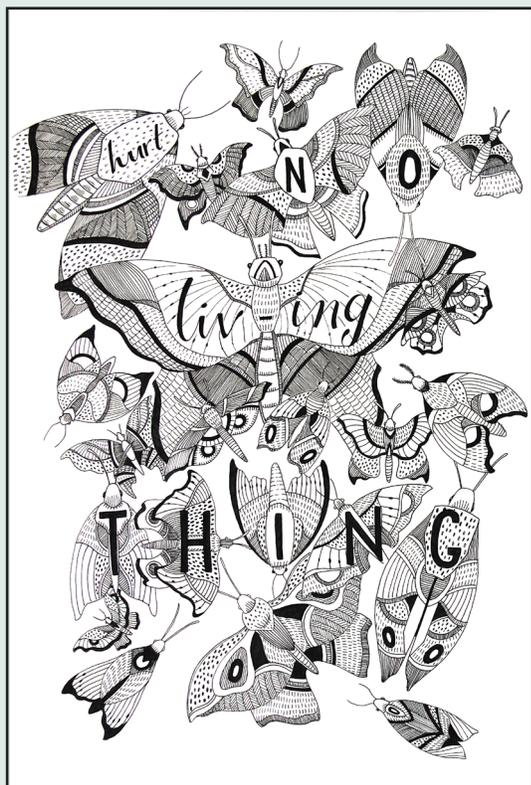
TWO MOTHS I - diptych

2020

ink on paper

Framed: 23in x 18in

IMAGE INVENTORY



Bailey Merkley

HURT NO LIVING THING

2020

ink on paper

Framed: 17in x 23in

Bailey Merkley

HOMEBODY'S GUIDE TO
SOCIAL DISTANCING

2020

mixed media on paper

Framed: 17in x 23in

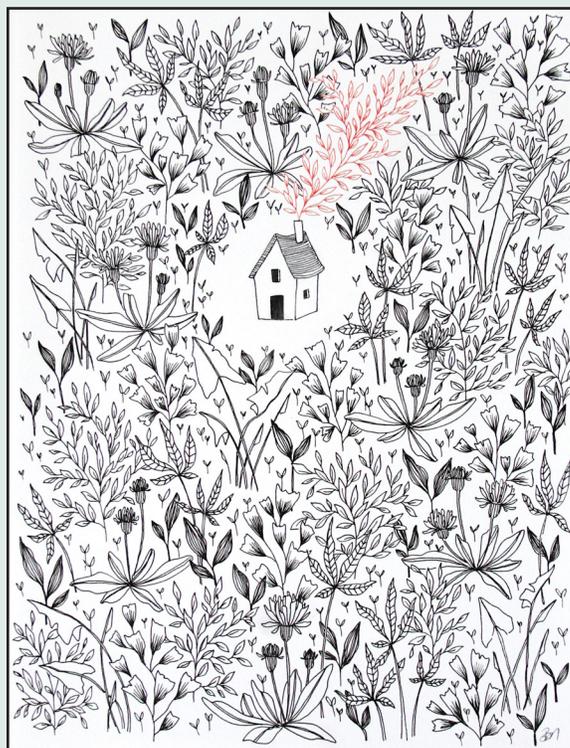


IMAGE INVENTORY

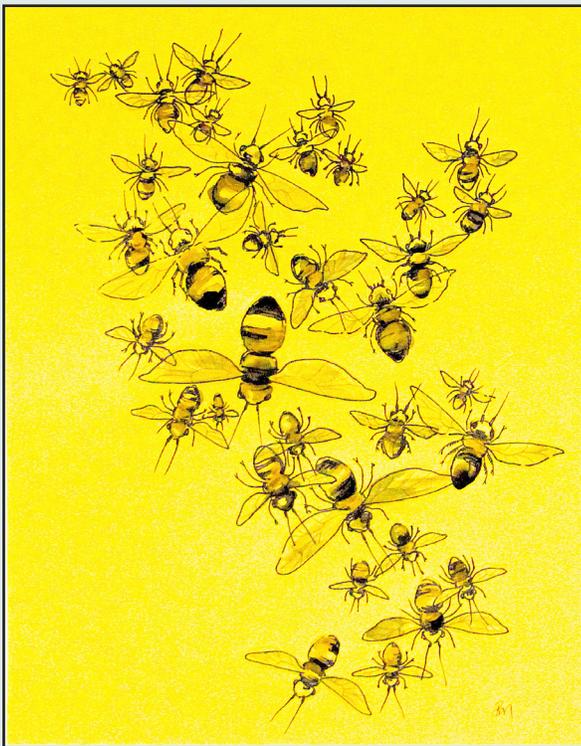
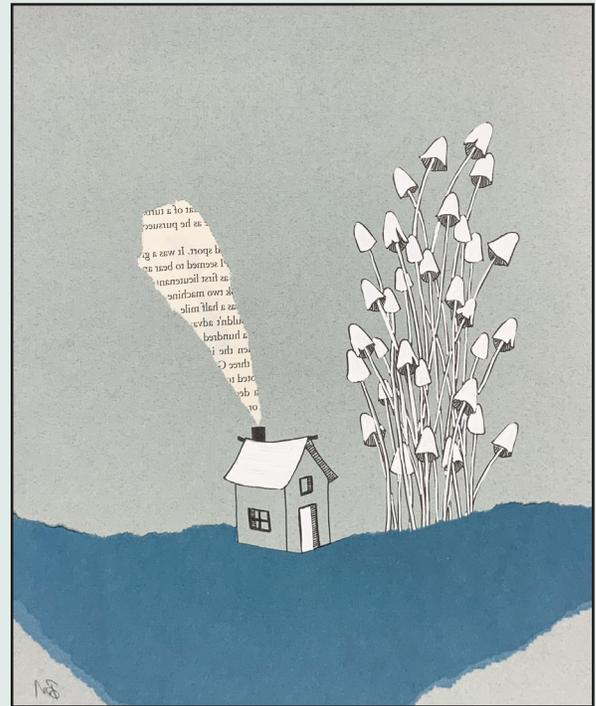
Bailey Merkley

SMOKE SIGNALS

2020

mixed media collage on paper

Framed: 17in x 23in



Bailey Merkley

GOLDEN BEES

2020

Ink on paper

Framed: 16in x 13 3/4in

IMAGE INVENTORY



Bailey Merkley

GOLDEN BEES II

2020

ink on paper

Framed: 16in x 13 3/4in

Bailey Merkley

SNAILS LOVE DANDELIONS

2020

white gel pen on paper

Framed: 16in x 13 3/4in

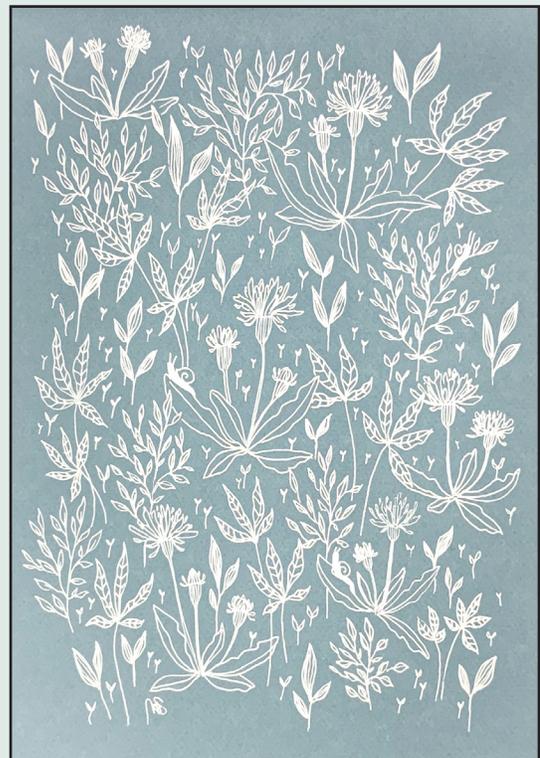


IMAGE INVENTORY

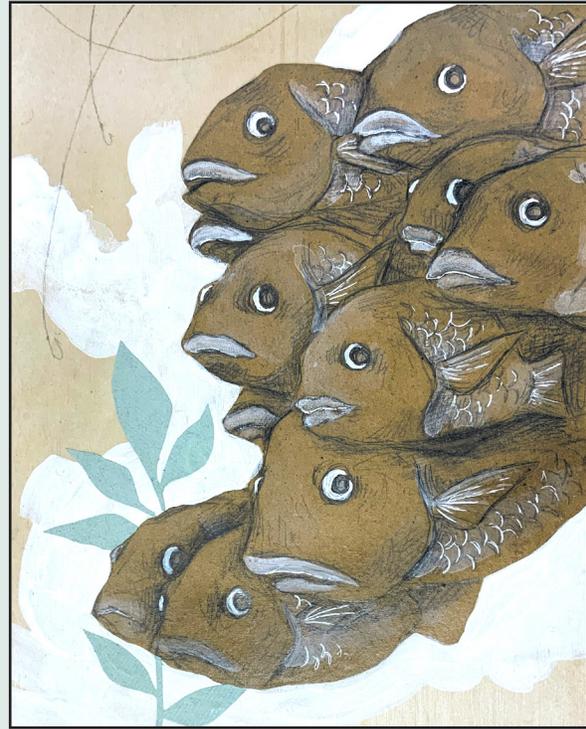
Bailey Merkley

FISH HAVE ANXIETY TOO

2020

mixed media on birch panel

Framed: 9 1/4in x 11 1/4in



CRATE LISTINGS

CRATE # 1

1. GOLDEN MOTHS, ink on paper
2. SMOKE SIGNALS, ink on paper
3. GOLDEN BEES, ink on paper
4. GOLDEN BEES II, ink on paper
5. SNAILS LOVE DANDELIONS, white gel pen on paper
6. HOMEBODY'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL DISTANCING, mixed media on paper
7. BIRDS NEST, ink and collage on paper
8. REJECT EGGS, mixed media collage on paper
9. BEES ARE FRIENDS, pastel and ink on paper
10. DISSECTED GARDEN, ink on paper
11. SUNFLOWER SEEDS & TWO SNAILS - diptych, ink on recycled paper
12. TWO MOTHS I & TWO MOTHS II - diptych, ink on paper
13. FISH TALES, mixed media on birch
14. FISH HAVE ANXIETY TOO, mixed media on birch
15. LUNCH TIME, mixed media on birch
16. SNAIL EXPLORING, mixed media inside shadow box
17. HURT NO LIVING THING, ink on paper
18. FLOCK AND FLUTTER, ink on paper

- A. Travelling Exhibition Didactic
- B. Curatorial Statement

NOTE: FRAGILE WORKS- Carefully review how the works are packed.

NOTE: Only remove foam packing that is marked remove/replace.
Keep all packing with the crate.
Repacking – Line up the numbers.

Concerns Contact: Art Gallery of Grande Prairie
Robin Lynch, TREX Manager, 780.357.7483
Region 1, AFA Travelling Exhibitions

M I C R O C O S M

EDUCATION GUIDE

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HOW TO LOOK AT ART

Using the Four Stages of Criticism

» **What is criticism in art?** In everyday speech, the word “criticism” is often used to describe “finding fault” with a person or their work. In the vocabulary of art, criticism has a broader definition: **criticism describes looking carefully at, questioning, and forming conclusions about artistic works.**

The four stages of criticism listed below help the audience viewing the art to spend time analyzing the work and their own reactions to the work. Without spending that time, we may miss important aspects of the work’s technical content, its message, or our own connection to the piece.

AGE LEVELS: If age-appropriate language is used to ask critical thinking questions, children of all ages can participate in all four stages of questioning. Further suggestions for age-appropriate questions can be found in the “Educator’s Guided Tour” section of this educational package.

STAGE 1: DESCRIPTION

What do we see when we look at a work of art?

Note: In this stage, we list or describe everything that is literally in the image. The things that the image implies to our imagination or emotion will be discussed in Step 3. For this stage, it will be useful for students to know the Elements of Art and Design (line, shape, form, colour, texture, value) as they name aspects of the work.

- » Describe the subject: What do we see in this image? Landscape, nature, people, animals, flowers, still life, etc.
- » Describe media (materials): what is this work made of? Oil painting, clay, sculpture, digital photography, film photography, etc.
- » Discuss Elements of Art and Design: (line, shape, form, colour, texture, value)
 - › What colours are used (bright, dull, monochromatic, analogous, complementary)?
 - › What kinds of lines are used (horizontal, vertical, wiggly, straight, angular, curved)?
 - › What kinds of shapes are used (organic, geometric, large, small)?
 - › Does the image depict or literally have texture (rough, smooth, wet, dry)?
 - › Does the work have dark and light areas/values?
 - › How is line being used? How is color and line being used?
 - › What are the different materials being used? What do these mediums tell us about the work?
 - › Which plants, animals, and insects are visible within the piece? How may this be important not only to the work but also to the artist?
- » Describe the style of the work: Is the work non-objective (abstract)? Is it experimental or traditional when compared to other works in the same medium? Does it focus on expression, or on documenting the subject (or possibly both)?



STAGE 2: ANALYSIS – OBSERVING RELATIONSHIPS

How is this artwork (composition) arranged?

Note: It will be useful to discuss relationships in the work using the Principles of Art and Design (movement, contrast, harmony, balance, emphasis, rhythm, scale and space). With younger students, it may be more effective to discuss the work without first teaching these terms, and instead provide the terms as you discuss different relationships in the work.

- » Are there contrasts of dark and light colours?
- » Are colours or shapes repeated to create unity or rhythm?
- » Is there one object that stands out and is more emphasized than other objects?
 - › What makes that object stand out?
- » What type of balance is it, symmetrical or asymmetrical?
- » Is movement implied in the image? How do the lines, balance, and rhythm direct the movement of your eye when you look at the work?
 - » How does the scale of the objects change how we perceive the space? Does the image seem flat (all the objects are pressed up against the front of the image), or is the image deep (objects recede in space)?
 - » How are the different materials and backgrounds being used within the piece?
 - » How does the exhibition function as a completed piece?
 - » Looking at the works separately, or together as a collection, what new meanings emerge?
 - » How is tone or mood represented within the work? Is there tone or mood present within the work?
 - » What role does text play throughout the exhibition? Does it function to communicate meaning or does it function aesthetically?



STAGE 3: INTERPRETATION

What meaning or intent did the artist have in making this work?

Note: In this stage, the viewer imagines the meaning or intent behind the technical choices and content that they have observed in the first two steps. This stage can be challenging, because the meaning is often unclear, and it is often left to the viewer to use their own knowledge to formulate the meaning of the work. For this reason, interpretation requires creativity, empathy, and courage. The interpretation is an educated conclusion that utilizes the viewer's observations of the content of the artwork and the viewer's own experiences to imagine the intent of the artist.

- » What mood or feeling do you get from this work?
- » Does the work remind you of other works, or of other experiences you have had?
- » How does this work fit into or respond to historic and contemporary trends in art?
- » What does this work tell you about how the artist feels about the world?
- » Is the artist trying to solve or comment on a challenge in art?
- » Is the artist trying to solve or comment on a challenge in society?
- » Is there a narrative (story) that is being told?
- » Why did the artist create this work?
- » What do you think this work is about?
- » What are some of the narratives present within this piece? How do these narratives affect your perception of the piece? Do you consider them relevant to the viewing of the work?
- » Is there a clear intention made by the artist as to the meaning of the work? How does the open-ended interpretation of the work change its meaning?

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers in interpretation; each viewer's experiences will provide a different insight into the work's potential meanings. For educators, instead of approaching students' interpretations as correct or incorrect, it can be helpful to ask the student to explain their conclusion, and then allow others to share why they feel the same or differently about ideas that are being presented.

HOW TO LOOK AT ART continued

Using the Four Stages of Criticism



STAGE 4: JUDGEMENT – CONCLUSION ABOUT WORK

What do I think or feel about this work?

Note: In this stage, we decide what we like or dislike about the work. This decision is subjective, but an explanation for the decisions should be provided. The judgement stage is an important opportunity to practice using art vocabulary and participating in art critiques, potentially discovering ways to improve the work.

- » Do you like the work? Why or why not?
- » Do you agree with the message the artist is sharing?
- » What are the strengths about this work?
- » What are the weaknesses and how could they be changed?
- » How did your initial opinion change or stay the same after analyzing the work?
- » Does the addition of narratives enable a stronger connection between the work and the viewer? Why or why not?
- » Does the identification of the plant life within the piece enhance your understanding of the work? Is it necessary in order to understand the exhibition?
- » How may this exhibition affect your perspective on your own surrounding environment? Does it enable you to consider nature differently, or more critically?

EDUCATOR'S GUIDED TOUR

“Microcosm” is a mixed media solo exhibition containing nineteen works by Grande Prairie based artist Bailey Merkley. The exhibition explores narrative and environmental themes through careful pen and ink illustrations. Each image encapsulates the beginning, middle or end of a narrative, and allows viewers to explore and interpret these stories from their own perspective. The work represents a journey, not only for the artist throughout her practice, but for the environments and creatures that inhabit the work. Using botanical and natural iconography through repetition and pattern the exhibition functions as a complete collection, each informing the meaning of the works around it.

A primary focus of “Microcosm” is the importance of narrative and storytelling. Several of the works prompt viewers to engage with the work and investigate the worlds that have been created inside them. By contrasting recognizable imagery, altering scale, and challenging expectations, the viewers become engaged with the work. Each component of the exhibition can be used to tell a story, whether that's through an environment or a particular character or creature. The environments included have been constructed with the intention of being inhabited.



“Bear and Bee” is a great example of the use of illustrative storytelling that is present throughout the exhibition. The focal point of this particular piece is the pair of stylized characters, a bear and a bee, where viewers are invited to watch them interact. The inclusion of the characters develops the environment in which they inhabit, which is achieved not only through the objects in their possession but also through the detail put into the surrounding environment.

This piece demonstrates the use of illustration and narrative being used collaboratively to engage viewers in its story. This is achieved through the anthropomorphizing of its creatures, which is to give them human-like characteristics. By characterizing the bear and bee with man-made objects such as the scarf and coffee mug, this artwork directly references the artist’s influence of illustrative literature, while many of the other artworks in the exhibition depict more subtle and indirect interpretations of story and illustration.

The narratives within “Microcosm” are designed to be definitive and yet open-ended. Clear decisions have been made by Merkley to create a specific world for her characters to inhabit, yet the story that is being told is entirely up to the viewer to decide. This enables each viewer to bring their own meaning to the exhibition as each person places their own unique view onto the work, an approach that is not always utilized or valued by other illustrative artists.

Another example of narrative can be seen when comparing the works “Smoke Signals” and “The Homebody's Guide to Social-distancing”. “Smoke Signals” is a pen and ink drawing, filled with an assortment of illustrated flowers and fauna. In a small clearing in the center of the work sits a small house with plants emerging from the chimney in contrasting red ink. “The Homebody's Guide to Social Distancing”, a mixed media work, also depicts a small house. However, from its chimney spills text taken from a book. The text is being seen through a ripped portion of the work, peeking through the back of the piece, and beside this small house are tall mushrooms emulating that of a bustle of trees. In both of these works the small house is giving viewers a glimpse at what is inside, achieved by the contrasting materials flowing from the chimney. These works begin a narrative with the viewer. Through the observation of these pieces viewers may begin to question what kind of story is being told, and in which world it is taking place. Within these artworks the houses have been contrasted in size beside large than life botanical illustrations. An immediate interpretation may be to perceive the house as very small, however, these pieces are meant to challenge your initial assumptions. In considering the decisions made by the artist, the work inverts your expectations and engages you in the process. Enabling viewers to participate in the imaginative meaning and design of the work.

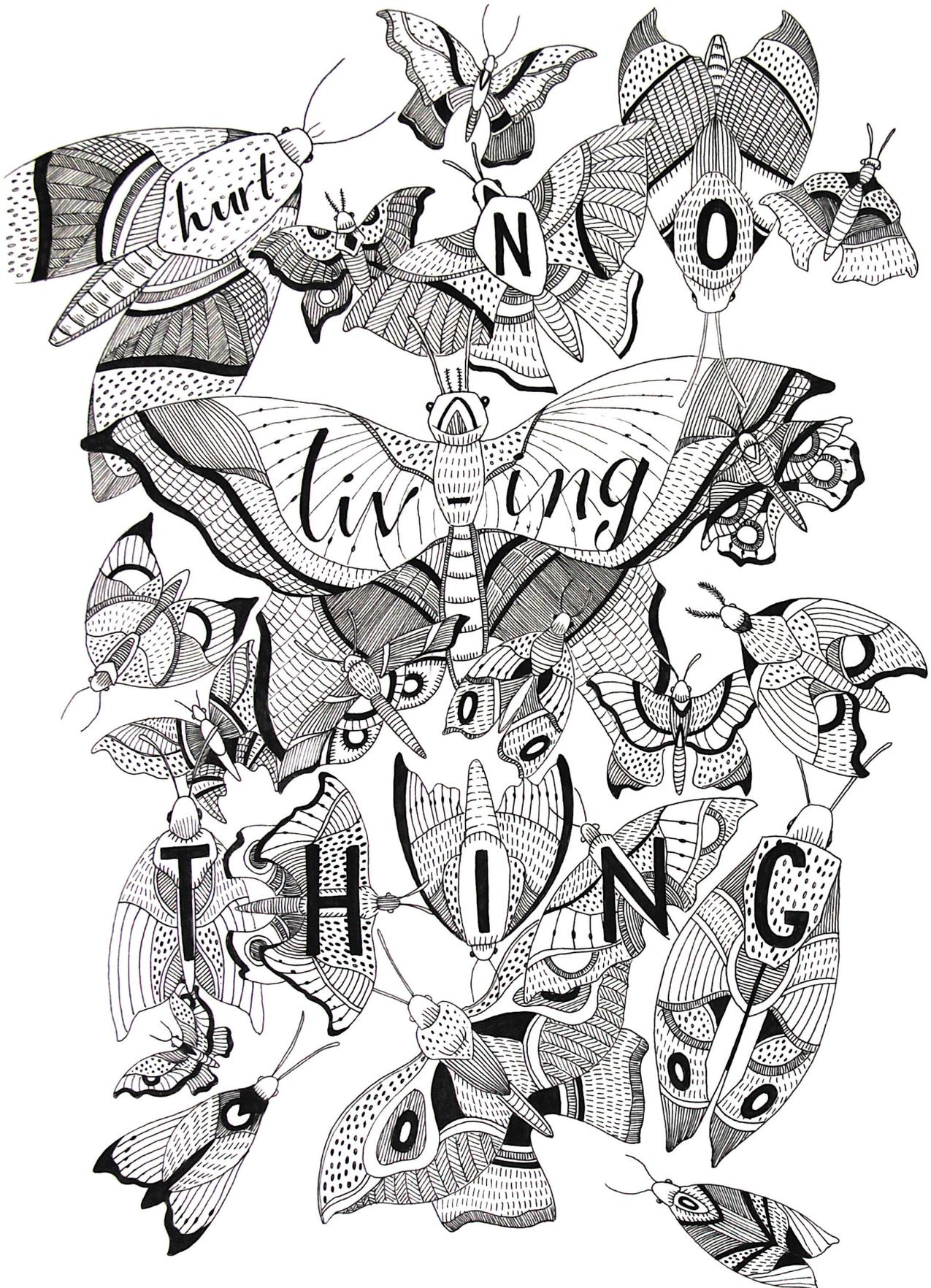


In the artwork "Smoke Signals" there is an interesting comparison being made in regards to what belongs inside or outside. This is seen through the contrast in colour from the plants that are flowing outside of the home's chimney. While viewers only have access to the exterior of the home it may be assumed that these plants were inside the home, and have somehow transformed after being inside. While all of the plant life on the exterior, even including the exterior of the home, is colourized in the same black ink. This juxtaposition between what belongs inside or outside acts as a larger overarching theme within the exhibition. All of the artworks featured in the exhibition depict nature in one form or another, and yet they are being displayed and viewed in indoor spaces.

Further, when exploring all of the elements of "Homebody's guide to social-distancing" it is crucial to explore the mixed media aspect of the work. When considering mixed media work, as with any artwork, it is important to examine the materials being used. In "Homebody's guide to social-distancing" we are able to observe three different planes within the piece, the original background, the additive paper on the front, and the text that comes through underneath. Naturally the thing to explore within this piece is the text. As viewers we understand that the artist has chosen this book page intentionally, whether for aesthetic reasons or to supply context. In this case it is important that no more than a few words can be read from a single line, notifying viewers that they are not meant to know what it is that the text originally says.

Another common aspect of this exhibition is the depiction of the artist's own mental awareness. Which can be seen through the use of repetitive botanical illustrations that allows Merkley to use creation as a method of meditation. This is best seen in "Smoke Signals" and "Homebody's Guide to Social-Distancing" which depict both the manifestation of anxiety and isolation. The small homes, which function independently in the work, represent the feeling of being isolated and making oneself to feel small. This is achieved through the homes being the only man-made structure within the work in contrast to its surrounding natural environment. Therefore representing the feeling of being closed off and distanced from the enveloping nature of the outside world.

"Microcosm" also uses intentional messages and text to communicate meaning. The way in which text is used throughout the exhibition challenges the viewers to take a closer look at the artwork, as well as impacting how the entirety of the exhibition is to be understood.



“Hurt No Living Thing” is an incredibly detailed work, as are many of the illustrations included in the exhibition, and is the only piece within the collection that emphasizes its use of text. For this piece the text is the focal point, it is clear and intended to be read. Yet, it has been intentionally integrated within the subject matter of the work i.e. the butterflies and moths. This attaches the meaning directly to the work and informs viewers that the text and imagery are to be examined as a single entity. As viewers we are being confronted with the message and are able to understand it clearly. ‘Hurt No Living Thing’ is not only referring to the creatures in the picture plane but is to be carried throughout the exhibition. The statement includes not only animals and insects, but means nature in its broadest definition. This piece is direct in its meaning, communicating directly from the artist to the viewer the intention behind the work. “Hurt No Living Thing” is the only piece throughout the exhibition where text is used to directly interact with the viewer, and therefore should be acknowledged as a crucial component to the exhibition.

The art of illustration is one of the oldest forms of communication that we have access to and is frequently relied on to understand and interpret history. This includes historic cave paintings or Egyptian hieroglyphs. Illustration has consistently been used to convey narrative. This is commonly seen in its use in books, as illustrations are used to help convey the meaning being described within the text. Through “Microcosms”, illustration is being utilized in the same way, but through the absence of text. Allowing viewers to bring their own interpretations and perspectives to the artwork, and therefore creating a distinct relationship with its viewers.

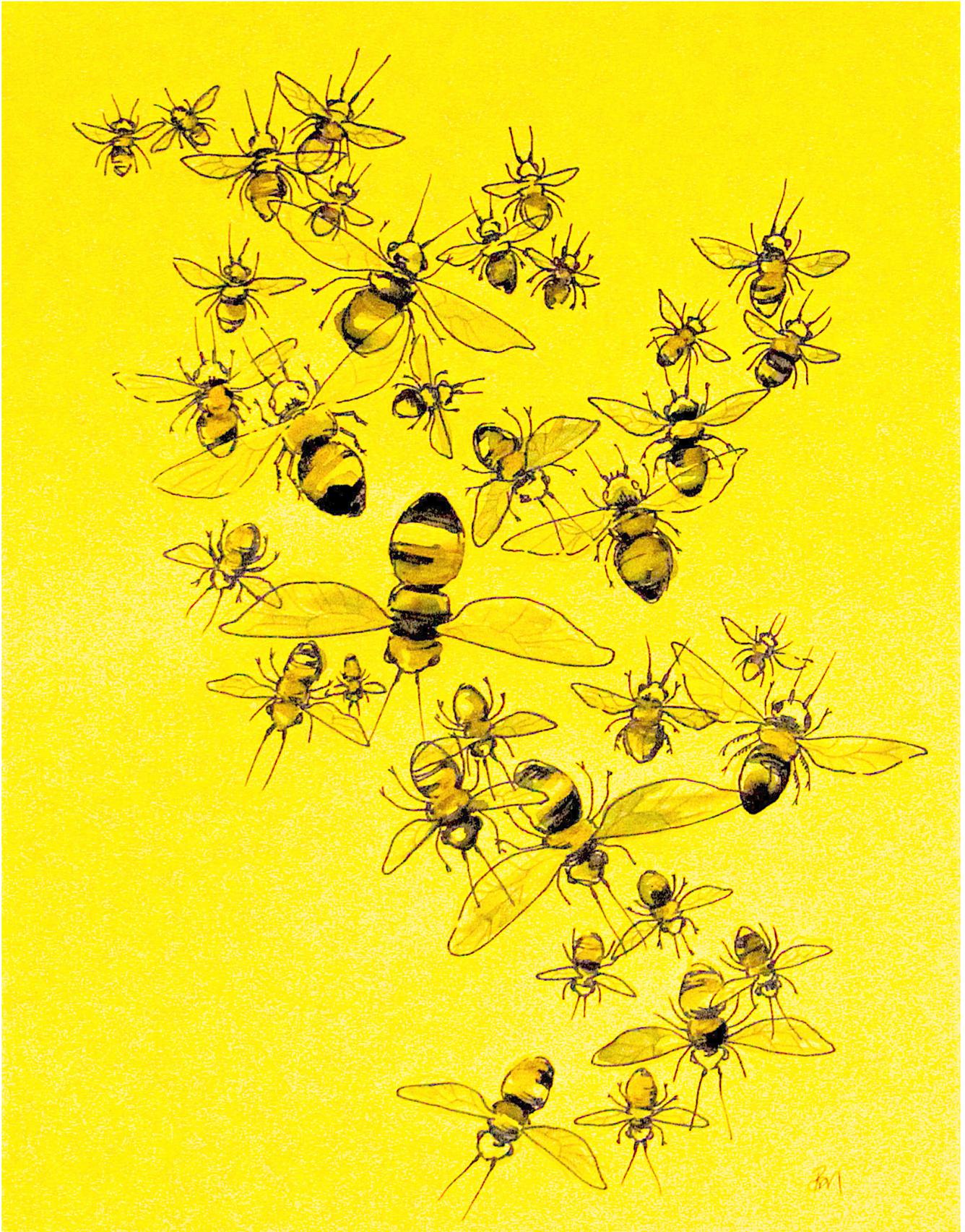
“Dissected Garden” is a great example of illustrative design, having been influenced by botanical illustration used throughout the eighteenth century. Within this piece are several varieties of plants and flowers, each of which is distinct in its own design and identification. In doing so, Merkley is communicating to viewers how the artwork changes our understanding of the particular plants that are depicted within the artwork. She is sharing her knowledge and interest in nature, but is also informing the viewer that there are scientific components to be considered while examining the exhibition. “Dissected Garden” is also a great example of the meditative repetition that Merkley uses throughout her work. The labelling of plant life within the work serves to aid viewers in their understanding of the piece, whereas the methodical repetition functions to serve the artist's own method of meditation.



This particular piece prompts a variety of questions in regards to the rest of the exhibition. Which plants and insects are visible in this piece? How many that be important not only to the artwork, but also to the artist? Will identifying the plant life in this image change or enhance my understanding of the piece? As botanicals are a prominent and repeated motif throughout the exhibition, this piece acts as a suggestion for other ways the exhibition can be interpreted.

The definition of “Microcosm” makes reference to a particular place, or setting, that has been contained and translated into something miniature, while still maintaining all of its characteristic qualities. This idea is seen throughout the exhibition as it encapsulates a variety of natural environments and creatures and places them within the artworks. “Golden Bees” uses this idea as it depicts a small colony of bees. The artistic style used for “Golden Bees”, and the concept of “Microcosm”, is exemplified throughout the exhibition, specifically in its depiction of single species in a vibrant illustrative style, like that of bumblebees, moths, or butterflies.

“Microcosm” encompasses nature in a space where it can be easily viewed and interpreted, it demonstrates tremendous illustrative skill and celebrates our surrounding environments through exhibiting local flora and fauna. The artworks encourage participation and invites viewers to reflect on their own relationship to nature; enabling the audience to reflect on their own contribution and participation as they gaze upon the natural patterns and humble characters, in order to inform and delve into the exhibition’s narratives.



A CLOSER LOOK AT...

BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATION

Botanical Illustration is the accurate drawing and scientific labelling of a particular plant. These drawings depict the form, colour, size and details of the plant life in order to aid in its identification. They were most commonly created with watercolours and pen and ink; and were most popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Before the invention of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, scientists and medical professionals relied on the accuracy of botanical illustrations to classify the properties of particular plants. Its earliest use was for identifying plants for their medicinal properties, and in the eighteenth century it was up to artists and illustrators to represent these plants accurately to limit confusion between plants that looked similar but had very different medicinal purposes.

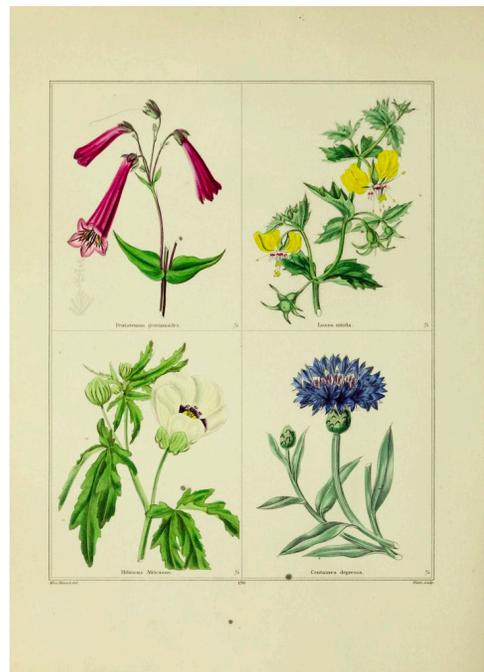
Botanical Illustration can be dated back as far as the first century, though it was not until the eighteenth century that it became a common and popular practice. Advancements to the printing presses were being made which allowed for greater detailed images to be printed, as well as become more affordable as a result of the speed and ease in which prints could be manufactured. These improvements meant that not only would illustrations be more accurate through their colouring and details, but that there was a greater demand for printed materials. Books, fabrics, wallpapers, and other printed items were made affordable to lower-income homes due to the cheaper and faster rate that they were being produced. This also led to an increased interest from new amateur botanists, natural historians, and herbalists.

The original drawings would be completed in watercolours to match the colour of the plant perfectly and in order to eliminate confusion when comparing it to plants of the same species. Illustrators were commonly required to draw a variety of angles of the same flower, and included detailed drawings of leaves, stems and flower petals. Botanical Illustrators were required to possess a great amount of technical drawing skills in addition to having a vast knowledge of plant life, as artists would have to establish what the most prominent features of the plant before drawing it.

A Closer Look At...

There were even a few occasions where artists would join explorers in order to document any newly discovered plants, however it was more common for artists to receive samples of the plants that had been pressed for preservation. Pressing a plant means to dry and flatten it out, by doing this it would stop the plant from decaying and preserve it. Although, this meant that the plant would lose its vibrant colouring and three-dimensional shape. This is the state in which illustrators would receive plants to examine, and it was up to the artist to document the plant as if it were still growing, considering not only what it would have looked like at full bloom but also determining the truest colour of the plant while examining the faded sample.

In recent years the art of botanical illustration has begun to re-emerge. As plants continue to change and grow, it is important to document them in traditional art forms. While these drawings are no longer suited for researchers today the traditional drawings of botanical illustration has enabled a variety of contemporary artists to share their own interest in plant life through a variety of mediums.



ARTS & CRAFTS MOVEMENT

The arts and crafts movement was established in the late-nineteenth century. It emphasized the importance of handmade craftsmanship that many artists thought was being lost through the new age of industrialization. As industrialization advanced there was an emphasis on producing products fast and inexpensively, instead of the quality and beauty of an object.

The movement was established around a particular set of ideals, such as criticizing the manufacturing of domestic objects, as opposed to being united under a particular style of work. As a fight against Victorian industrialization artists began creating highly detailed and ornate objects. The delicate patterns and high quality work demonstrated individual craftsmanship that would have been impossible to recreate with a machine at that time. Its participants often looked towards historical and rural practices and techniques as they argued for the return of small-scale workshops. Patterns were commonly based on natural motifs, and were frequently used for wallpapers and fabrics.

The Arts and Crafts Movement was largely focused on architectural, interior design and decorative art. Many of its participants having been trained as architects. This created a shared understanding of designing a complete interior; a space where the architecture, furniture, and wall decorations were unified in their design. This invited a wide range of artists and craftsmen to join the movement, as design techniques from one practice were being applied to others in order to harmonize an interior's overall design.

The most prominent member of the movement was William Morris, who was an established designer and craftsman by the late-nineteenth century. Morris joined the movement a few years after its foundation but his ideals were greatly influential to the artists whose work it helped popularize.



WILLIAM MORRIS

William Morris was an artist, designer, craftsman, writer, and social activist who was a prominent figure during the Arts and Crafts Movement of the 19th century. Born in 1834 in Walthamstow, England (now a part of Greater London) Morris studied Theology at Oxford University in 1853 before later studying Architecture.

Morris is well-known for his detailed wallpapers. In 1861 Morris founded the company "Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co." with Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Webb and other like-minded artists. It was a decorative arts firm where everything was to be handcrafted, embracing highly decorative and elaborate patterns in rejection of the Victorian manufacturing of the mid-nineteenth century.

Through their intricate designs the firm became a great influence to interior design of the Victorian era. The firm produced tapestries, wallpapers, fabrics, furniture and stained glass windows; many of which were of Morris' design. When Morris began designing wallpapers he researched historical printing and dyeing techniques to ensure that the work could be entirely produced from scratch. In 1875 after receiving control of the firm Morris renamed the business to "Morris & Co.", which stayed in production until the 1940s.

After taking control of the firm Morris went on to create new designs at an accelerated rate, having new printed fabrics, woven fabrics, wallpapers, carpets and rugs. He was greatly inspired by the middle ages, and frequently used ornate medieval forms in his designs. This included the work "Strawberry Thief" which was one of Morris' most popular repeating wallpapers, having designed the print in 1875 Morris was unsuccessful in producing the print until 1881. This was due to the delicate process of using indigo dye within the pattern, as this particular pattern was the first to ever add red and yellow dyes to a basic blue and white cotton. He continued his textile exploration by collaborating with a variety of other craftsmen in order to learn new dying and printing techniques, such as silk dying and silk weaving. He also explored a variety of different dyes but found chemical aniline dyes to be of lesser quality than that of their organic counterparts, and therefore favored using organic dyes for his patterns.

WILLIAM MORRIS

Towards the end of his career Morris focused more on his literary works. In 1891 he founded "Kelmscott Press" which produced works using traditional printing methods. This included using a hand-driven press and hand-made paper. Morris published several of his literary works through Kelmscott Press including his novel "The Story of Glittering Plain" which was published in 1891. Kelmscott Press published over fifty works before its closure in 1898, and later influenced the Fine Press Movement in the early twentieth century that valued books as aesthetic objects as much as literary works.

William Morris was a strong advocate for handmade production and challenged Victorian manufacturing. He is considered to be one of the most influential figures in the Arts and Crafts Movement and in British textile work, as he revived several traditional techniques that were no longer being used. Morris died in 1896 in Hammersmith, England.



Strawberry Thief by William Morris

BOOK BINDING

Purpose

Understand the process of creating a book, journal or sketchbook.

Objectives

- » Think critically of the production of daily objects, and the artistic process that goes into their production.
- » The importance of not only what goes into a book, but also what goes into the making of a book.

Materials

- » Cardstock
- » Newsprint or printer paper
 - » 8.5 x 11, this will equal 4 pages
- » Embroidery Thread
 - » Each thread will need to be the height of your book (x3)
- » Sewing needle
- » Ruler
- » Push pin

Motivation

In this activity students will be able to consider and understand the process of creating a book, and how that process can be just as important as what goes inside of it. Through this activity students are able to connect to a variety of themes present within the exhibition, such as narrative, illustration and text. This exercise can also function as an introduction to a later exercise such as story writing or drawing.

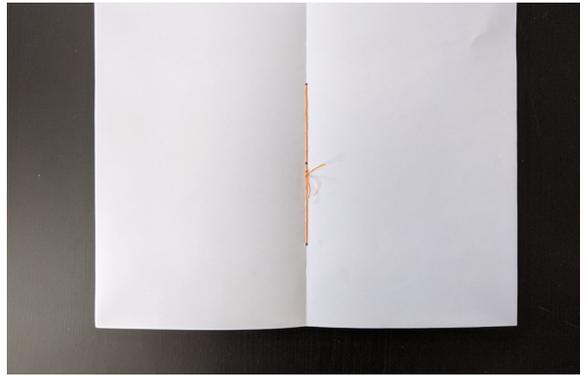
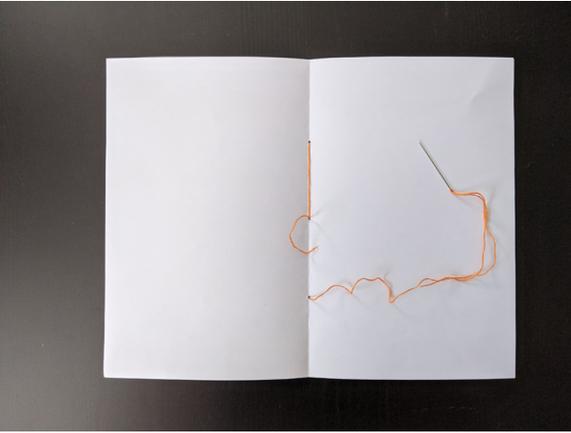
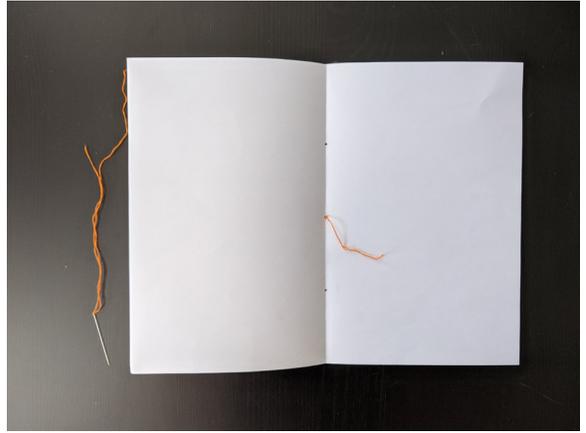
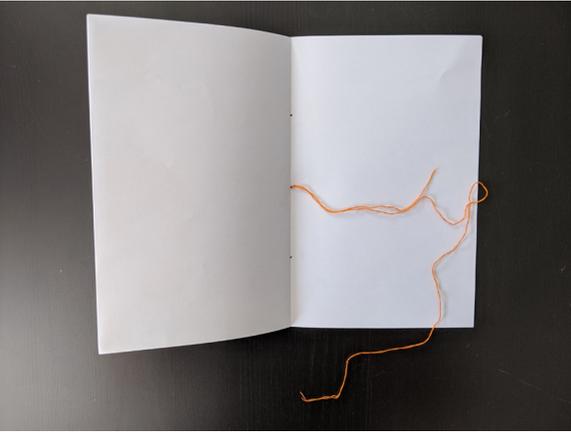
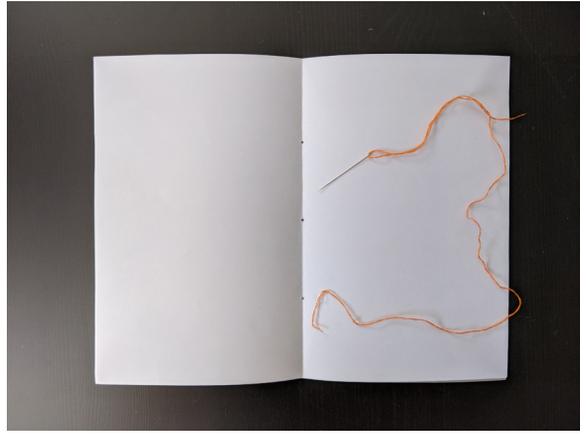


Project

*See reverse side for photo references

- 1 Begin by laying out the paper that you will be using. Start by folding each piece of paper in half. You can use paper of any size and are free to fold the pages however you want, however it is recommended to fold it "hamburger" style in order to have the largest surface area inside of your booklet to use. It is also easiest to fold your paper one at a time opposed to folding the entire booklet at once.
- 2 Once all of your pages have been folded, stack them up so that the cover page is on the outside. This should resemble an unbound booklet at this stage.
- 3 Take the piece of paper on the top of your booklet, ie, the center fold of your booklet, and using a ruler measure to the center of the folded line. If you were to unfold your paper this would be the very center of the page.
- 4 Once measured mark the center with a push pin. Make sure to push the pin all the way through the paper.
- 5 Now make two more measurements on the top and bottom of the center fold. Essentially you will be finding the center point between the middle of the page and the edge. Do this so that you will have 3 equally spaced pinholes on the center fold of your page.
- 6 When the pinholes have been made and pushed all the way through, restack your booklet so that the page with the holes in it is in the center. Laying down the stack, line up all of the pages so that they are all equal to each other.
- 7 Using the center fold piece of paper as a guide, push your pin through the holes again, while also piercing the pages underneath. Repeat this for the remaining two holes.
- 8 Grabbing your embroidery thread and sewing needle start binding the pages together. Put the thread through the needle and make a knot on the far end of the thread. Leave enough room on the string between the knot and the end of the thread as this will be used to tie a knot at the end.
- 9 Starting in the center push the needle through the center hole. Pull through until the knot is snug in the center fold. Your thread and needle should be on the outside of your booklet.
- 10 Now feed the needle through the top hole through the outside, pull until snug, and then back through the middle hole again. Pull until snug, and then feed it through the hole on the bottom half of the page through the outside. Essentially a figure eight motion has been created in binding your booklet. You should now have excess thread from the bottom hole to be tied and knotted with the excess thread from the initial knot.
- 11 Tie the two threads together, ensuring the threads are tight, otherwise your book pages will come loose. Once tied the excess can be trimmed and your booklet is complete.

- » **Optional:** This booklet can then be used for a variety of other activities. Students may use them to record their short stories, record different plants upon outside visits, or can be used as a journal or a sketchbook.



CHARCOAL PLANT PRINTS

Purpose

To demonstrate to students the structures and patterns visible within plant life.

Objectives

- » Think critically of plant structures and forms
- » Consider the representation of plant life artistically vs scientifically

Materials

- » Charcoal
 - » soft charcoal, such as willow
 - » Alternative: Soft Pastels
- » Newsprint or printer paper
- » Leaves or Flowers
 - » These can be of any size or shape, but should be relatively "fresh" or green.
 - » For instance, if using dry fall leaves they will likely



Motivation

In art, particularly illustration, plant life is represented as its most basic structures and forms. This is visible throughout the Microcosm exhibition, but it is also clear to distinguish the varieties of plant life that are present within the work. This is due to the careful execution of particular features that are essential to the identification of the plant, such as size and shape of flowers, leaves and stems.

This activity gives students the opportunity to understand exactly how those shapes and structures are being represented, and where those depictions come from. Further allowing students to explore the textures and patterns that are present within plant life.

Project

1

Start off by enjoying a walk in order to collect all of your outside materials.

» **Optional:** This can also be enhanced if accompanied with an identification chart which will allow children to find out the names of the plants and any other information about them.

2

With your materials ready to go, place the plant on a hard surface and place the piece of paper over top. Hold the paper firmly in place so that the plant won't move or shift underneath.

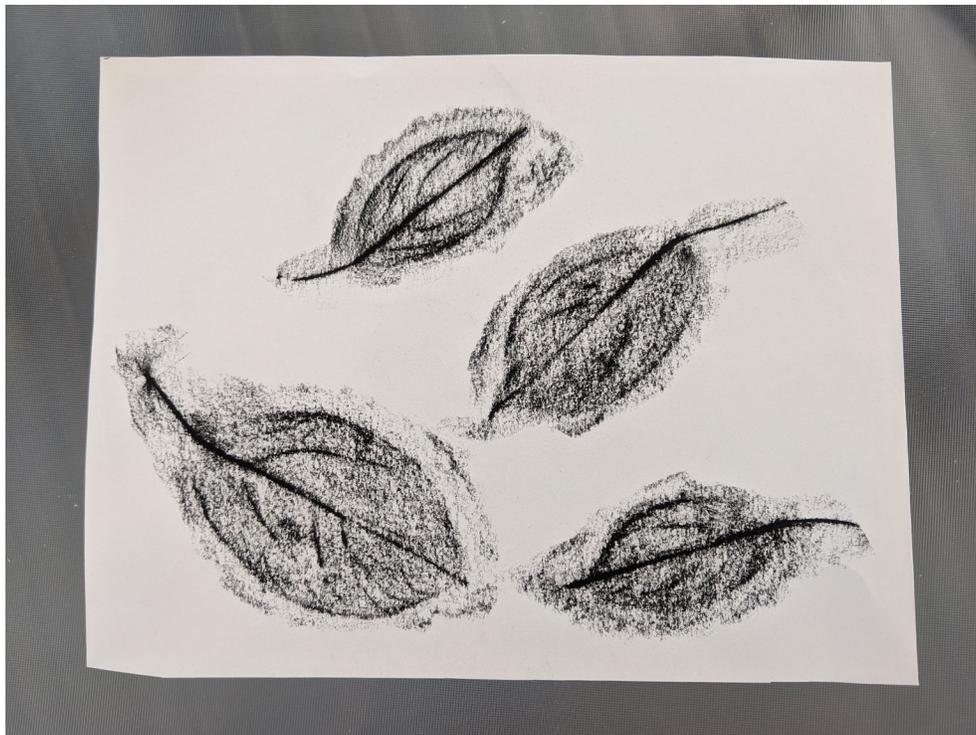
3

Begin rubbing the charcoal stick overtop of the paper. As you rub a relief print of the plant will appear.

4

Experiment with holding and using the charcoal in different ways, as well as testing which side of the leaf gives a better impression. When complete the charcoal drawings should reveal its texture, lines, stems and patterns.

» **Optional:** When the page is complete spray it with fixative spray (or hair spray for a more cost efficient method) in order to prevent the charcoal from smudging. It is also a good idea to place another blank piece of paper over top of it for travelling purposes.



FAIREY HOUSE PAINTED ROCK

Purpose

To engage world building and object analysis through story telling.

Objectives

- » Learn basic world and narrative building.
- » To demonstrate how much information we can gather from a single object

Materials

- » An assortment of rocks
- » Acrylic Paint or paint pens
- » Glue Gun and glue sticks
- » Any additional decorative materials such as, construction paper, glitter or markers.
- » Natural materials such as leaves, flowers, pebbles, small sticks

Motivation

In many cases, our understanding of history is done through the examining of objects. Archaeologists are able to determine when and how people lived ages ago from the studying of their objects.

Through this activity students will be able to understand world and narrative building through the creation and later examining of their object. This will allow students to better understand the world that they have unintentionally created through the making of their house.



Project

1

Begin by collecting your natural materials, and most importantly, your rocks. They should have a flat edge and the 'larger' the better.

2

Start by designing the front of your house with paint or paint pens, by drawing windows and a front door. These elements can be whatever shape or size that they desire. Then feel free to add these elements all around the house, such as large windows on the sides and back.

3

Once the basic layout of the house has been made, students can start decorating. This can include adding a roof with natural or decorative materials, adding flowers or glitter to the walls or gluing small sticks to create a fence. These fairy houses can be any shape and size and can be as lopsided or as functional as students desire.

4

After the completion of their house, students should then try to imagine where their house belongs. What kind of environment it would be found, who would live there, and why.

5

Next students will be asked to create and depict the environment that their house would be found, this can be done in several different ways:

- » **Variation:** For younger students, they can draw the environment that is best suited for their house. This can be done as a landscape drawing in which the house can be placed in front of, or have students include the house within their drawing for a complete composition.
- » **Variation:** If there is easy access to different natural and man-made environments, these houses can be taken outside and photographed where students best believe their house would be found. They should then have to explain in a short paragraph either why their home is best suited for that environment or have to tell it in a short story format.
- » **Variation:** Older students should be encouraged to write a short story regarding their fairy house. This can be a few pages long and should explain where their house is and who may live inside their house and environment, using elements and details from the initial creating of their house throughout the story. Details from the house, such as materials used, size and shape, should inform the story and its microcosm.

NARRATIVE EXERCISES

Purpose

To consider the narratives and themes of the exhibition in a critical way.

Objectives

- » Explore the limitless interpretations of the exhibition
- » Explore how artwork can have a variety of interpretations, and how our experiences change that perception.
- » Practice critical writing and analyzing of artwork

Materials

- » Access to the exhibition
- » Pen or pencil
- » Paper
- » Imagination

Motivation

Throughout the exhibition Microcosm narrative is one of the key themes used, and it has been done in such a way that promotes numerous perspectives and interpretations of the artwork.

With this exercise students will be asked to think critically about their own interpretation of the work. This will encourage them not only to consider all of the possible narratives present within the exhibition, but also forces them to think critically about the exhibition itself. It also introduces students to the concept that within art, particularly abstract and contemporary art, there is no one meaning behind a piece of artwork.

Project

1

First allow students to spend some time with the exhibition, roughly 5 minutes before they will need to select which piece they would like to analyze and write about.

2

Once students have taken a look at all of the artworks within the exhibition, have them select one to focus on, and give them another 5 -10 minutes to develop ideas. This is when they should be considering what the work is about.

3

Ask students to then write a paragraph as to what they believe the artwork is about.

4

This is a chance for students to explain their analysis. They should not be writing the narrative themselves but instead explaining why and how particular things are happening within the artwork.

5

When complete, have students share their analysis with one another. This will work best as a discussion, allowing other students to add their ideas or opposing views to the conversation. Though it is important to emphasize that there is no one way to interpret the work, and that ultimately all interpretations are correct no matter how far-fetched they may seem.

Optional: After writing their first paragraphs, and before sharing aloud, have students write another short paragraph. This second paragraph will be on the same piece as their previous exercise. This will challenge students to view the artwork differently, and try to bring another unique point-of-view to the piece.

- » **Variation:** To better demonstrate all of the different interpretations of a single work, have the class select a single artwork that they will all write about. Once they have written their analysis, have them share their ideas with one another, ensuring that they share their point of view with one another. This will better demonstrate all of the different and unique perspectives that can be brought to a single artwork.

Optional: This exercise can be taken one step further by having students write out their analysis as a short story. This will allow them to apply all of the different elements that they already, examined, analyzed and explained into their story easily.

REPEATING PATTERNS

Purpose

To create a composition that can viewed independently and as a larger repeating pattern.

Objectives

- » Consider how imagery works together, or against one another
- » To create a detailed and developed composition
- » Understanding how viewing a section of a pattern, versus the full pattern, can change its interpretations and meaning

Materials

- » Paper (any size)
- » Drawing Tool, preferably permanent marker or a black pen
- » Scissors or an exacto knife
- » Ruler
- » Clear tape
- » Photocopier

Motivation

This activity reflects the artwork of designer William Morris. William Morris was an important artist and designer of the nineteenth century, and more importantly was a distinguished participant of the Arts and Crafts movement. Morris is most well-known for his elaborate and detailed wallpaper designs.

Through this activity students will be challenged by viewing and creating their artwork as a single independent image versus when it becomes a part of a much larger repeating pattern. It will allow students to think critically about how the interpretation and meaning of an artwork

Project

- 1 Begin by filling your page with any design of your choosing without any of the images touching the edge of the paper.
- 2 Once your design is complete, cut the drawing in half vertically. You can also photocopy your original design before cutting if you wish. When the paper has been cut, move one half to the other side so that the two outside edges are now in the center. Tape the paper back together on the backside of the paper.
- 3 With the page taped together, once again cut the design in half, but this time do so horizontally. Repeat the previous step by moving one of the halves to either the top or bottom of the other half so that the two outside edges are touching. Tape the image together again in the back.
- 4 Now that the original design is all along the outside edges it's time to fill in the rest of your pattern. Fill in all of the remaining space inside the image, while again, not drawing on the outside edges.
- 5 When done, simply photocopy the page as it is. This can be done as many times as you would like and when the pages are aligned next to one another you will have your repeating pattern.



4

RESOURCES

Microcosm Bibliography

Closer Look At:

Botanical Illustration

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MANDATE

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

The purposes of the foundation are:

- ▶ To support, promote, and contribute to the development of the literary, performing and media arts in Alberta.
- ▶ To provide people and organizations with the opportunity to participate in the arts in Alberta.
- ▶ To foster and promote the appreciation of artworks by Alberta artists.
- ▶ To encourage Alberta artists in their work.

Three regional galleries and one arts organization coordinate the program for the AFA in the province of Alberta:

- ▶ REGION 1 – Northwest Alberta
Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie
- ▶ REGION 2 – Northeast and North Central Alberta
Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton
- ▶ REGION 3 – Southwest Alberta
Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary
- ▶ REGION 4 – Southeast Alberta
Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat



These coordinating organizations offer a wide range of exhibitions to communities from High Level in the north to Milk River in the south, and virtually everywhere in between.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- ▶ Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA)
- ▶ Alberta Community Development
- ▶ Government of Alberta
- ▶ The AFA Collections Management Unit
- ▶ Art Gallery of Grande Prairie Staff and Contract Staff
- ▶ Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton)
- ▶ Alberta Society of Artists (Calgary)
- ▶ Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre (Medicine Hat)
- ▶ Participating Alberta Artists
- ▶ Venue Participants & Volunteers
- ▶ KMSC Law LLP, Region 1 Sponsor
- ▶ Graphic Design: Katrina Shirley & Danielle Ribar
- ▶ Curator: Danielle Ribar



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Thank you for your generous support

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The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie is one of the largest Free Admission galleries in Western Canada. Our mission is to enrich the community through the creation, conservation and sharing of art. Located in the Montrose Cultural Centre, this beautifully designed art gallery offers a diverse display of local, regional, national and international exhibitions and provides guided tours, educational programs, and activities for all ages.

#103, 9839 – 103 Avenue
Grande Prairie, Alberta T8V 6M7
Located in the Montrose Cultural Centre PH:
(780) 532-8111 / FAX: (780) 539-9522 EMAIL:
info@aggpca

ART GALLERY
of GRANDE PRAIRIE

Free Admission
aggp.ca

Sunday	1 pm – 5 pm
Monday	Closed
Tuesday	10 am – 6 pm
Wednesday	10 am – 6 pm
Thursday	10 am – 9 pm
Friday	10 am – 5 pm
Saturday	10 am – 5 pm



The Traveling Exhibition Program (Trex) Region 1: Northwest Alberta is thankful for our generous sponsor KMSC LAW LLP



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