ALBERTA
FOUNDATION
FOR THE ARTS
TRAVELLING
EXHIBITION
PROGRAM

# Room to Reflect

Interpretive Guide and Hands-On Activities

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program Presents

# Room to Reflect

Curated by Steven Teeuwsen
Framed and crated by Elicia Weaver
Catalogue designed and photographed by Steven Teeuwsen
Produced by the Art Gallery of Alberta
Funded by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

**Image Left**

**Gillian Willans**
*Midnight Light*, 2023
Oil on Canvas
20 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist

*The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Travelling Exhibition Program (TREX), and the Art Gallery of Alberta acknowledge that the artistic activity we support takes place on the traditional territories of Treaty 6, 7 and 8. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived on and cared for these lands for generations and we are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers, Elders and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on. We reaffirm our commitment to strengthening our relationships with Indigenous communities and growing our shared knowledge and understanding.*

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# About TREX

## The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program (TREX) strives to ensure every Albertan is provided with an opportunity to enjoy fully developed exhibitions in schools, libraries, health care centres and smaller rural institutions and galleries throughout the province.

The TREX program assists in making both the AFA's extensive art collection and the work of contemporary Alberta artists available to Albertans. The program also offers educational support material for teachers to encourage visual arts exhibitions into the school curriculum.

Four regional organizations coordinate the program:

**TREX NORTHWEST**
Produced by The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie

**TREX CENTRAL & NORTHEAST**
Produced by Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

**TREX SOUTHWEST**
Produced by Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary

**TREX SOUTHEAST**
Produced by Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat

These partners 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!

## Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Beginning in 1972, the Alberta Art Collection was proposed as an opportunity to support and encourage Alberta artists by purchasing original works, as well as creating a legacy collection for the people of Alberta.

The AFA was established as a Crown agency of the Government of Alberta through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act in 1991, with a mandate to support the arts in Alberta. This mandate is accomplished by providing persons and organizations with the opportunity to participate in the arts in Alberta; fostering and promoting the enjoyment of works of art by Alberta artists; collecting, preserving, and displaying works of art by Alberta artists; and encouraging artists resident in Alberta to continue their work.

## Art Gallery of Alberta

The Art Gallery of Alberta is a centre of excellence for the visual arts in Western Canada, connecting people, art and ideas. The AGA is focused on the development and presentation of original exhibitions of contemporary and historical art from Alberta, Canada and around the world.

The AGA produces TREX Central & Northeast Alberta. Through TREX the AGA ships exhibitions to over 50 venues in over 35 communities each year.

## Interpretive Guide

With each TREX exhibition comes an educational Interpretive Guide. The suggested topics for discussion and accompanying activities can act as a guide to increase the viewers' enjoyment and to assist in developing programs to complement the exhibition. Questions and activities have been included at both beginner and advanced levels. This guide also contains images of the artworks in the exhibition which can be used for review and discussion. Be aware that copyright restrictions apply to unauthorized use or reproduction of artists' images.

## Contact

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# Exhibition Statement

# Room to Reflect

At first glance, our homes may seem ordinary—living rooms, bedrooms, hallways—but they are landscapes of our lives. They tell stories of memory, comfort, tension, and change. The rooms in this exhibition are never just physical containers; they reflect how someone lives and what they value.

Gillian Willans portrays domestic scenes that are both familiar and unsettling. Painting from found images, her work depicts the homes of others yet is rooted in personal reflection. These paintings communicate the contradictions of home life. Each canvas becomes a study in social roles, interior chaos, and the tension between expectation and reality.

Brianna Tosswill conducted interviews about comfort as inspiration for her series of linocut prints. She playfully blends real-life accounts with elements of magical realism to create fictional rooms filled with mementos and intimacy. Each room is conceived for a specific individual, yet when viewed together the works form a patchwork of emotional connections.

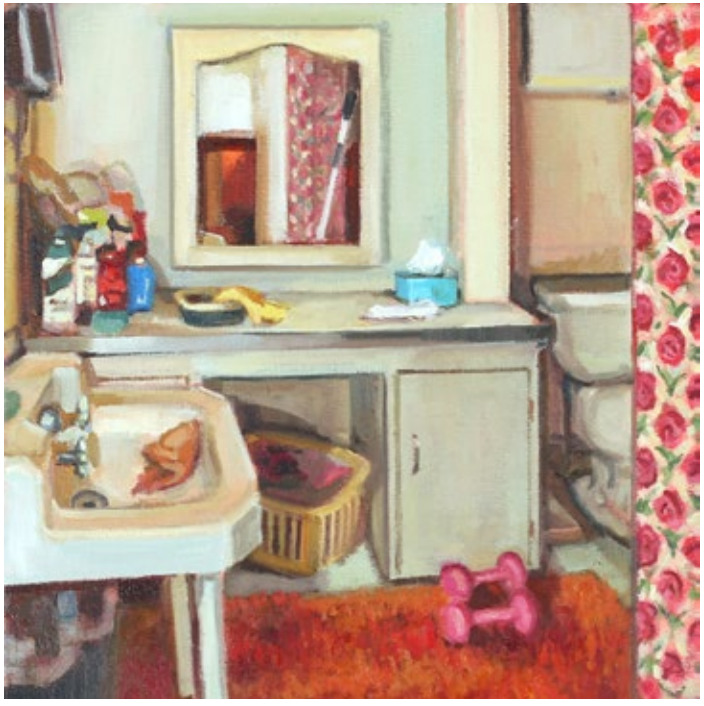
Melissa Baron shares the textures of daily life by painting her own home and incorporating pieces of it onto the canvas—her son's drawings, glitter glue, and bits of textiles. Open and closed doors, shifting light, and layered scenes communicate longing, belonging, and the passage of time. These works transform the rooms of her family home into intimate portraits of motherhood and change.

Together, these works remind us that domestic spaces are not just backdrops to our lives—they are active characters in our stories.

# Exhibition Inventory

3 artists | 20 framed artworks | 2 text panels | 60 running feet

**Gillian Willans**
*10:05 am*, 2021
Oil on Canvas
12 x 9 inches
Courtesy of the artist



**Gillian Willans**
*2:31 pm (The Watched)*, 2021
Oil on canvas
12 x 12 inches
Courtesy of the artist

**Gillian Willans**
*4:02 am (The Sentinel)*, 2021
Oil on canvas
12 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist

**Gillian Willans**
*3:25 am (Late Night)*, 2021
Oil on Canvas
12 x 9 inches
Courtesy of the artist

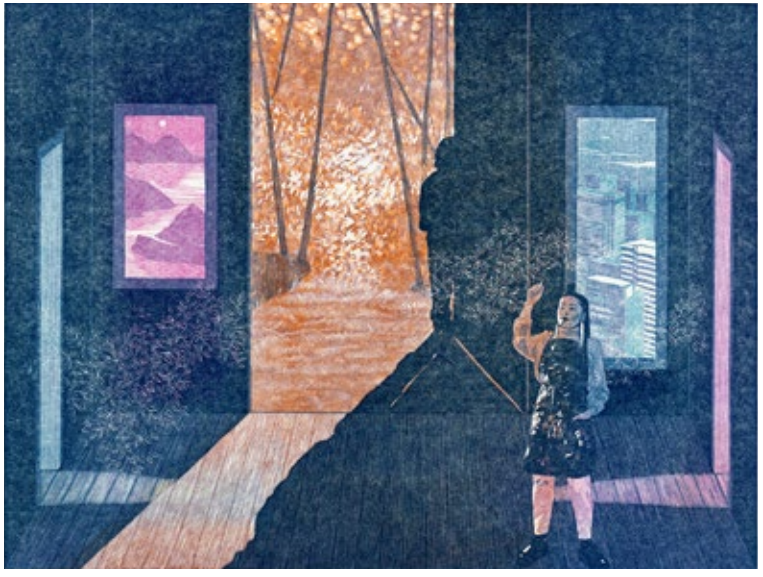
**Gillian Willans**
*Midnight Light*, 2023
Oil on Canvas
20 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist

**Gillian Willans**
*Unfinished Business*, 2022
Oil on Canvas
20 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist

**Gillian Willans**
*The Nocturne Suite*, 2022
Oil on Canvas
16 x 12 inches
Courtesy of the artist

**Brianna Tosswill**
*I'm going to do this until it doesn't make sense anymore*, 2023
Linocut
16 x12 in
Courtesy of the artist

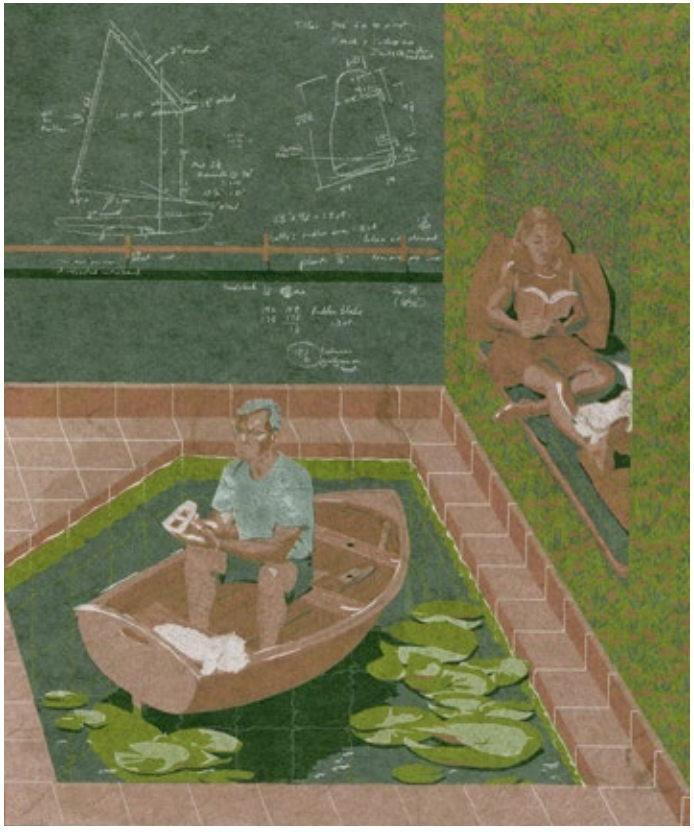
**Brianna Tosswill**
*Growth comes through love*, 2022
Linocut
16 x12 in
Courtesy of the artist



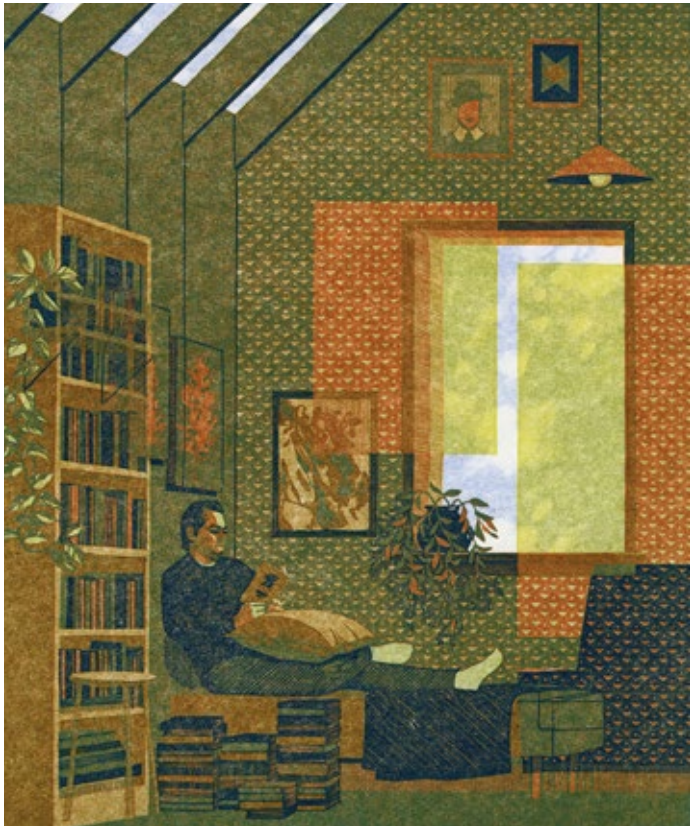
**Brianna Tosswill**
*I can always come back home*, 2023
Linocut
16 x12 in
Courtesy of the artist

**Brianna Tosswill**
*Every day I become more and more myself*, 2023
Linocut
12 x12 in
Courtesy of the artist

**Brianna Tosswill**
*In silence and solitude you can hear your own soul*, 2023
Linocut
12 x12 in
Courtesy of the artist



**Brianna Tosswill**
*The wind will take me where I need to go*, 2022
Linocut
10 x12 in
Courtesy of the artist



**Brianna Tosswill**
*Change offers an opportunity to heal*, 2023
Linocut
10 x12 in
Courtesy of the artist

**Melissa Baron**
*Evening Light*, 2024
Mixed media
20”x 30”
Courtesy of the artist

**Melissa Baron**
*Play Kitchen*, 2024
Mixed media
18 x 24 in
Courtesy of the artist

**Melissa Baron**
*Garage Door*, 2024
Mixed media
9 x 12 in
Courtesy of the artist

**Melissa Baron**
*Baby's Door*, 2024
Mixed media
9 x 12 in
Courtesy of the artist

**Melissa Baron**
*Afternoon Light II*, 2024
Mixed media
9 x 12 in
Courtesy of the artist

**Melissa Baron**
*Dining Room Light*, 2024
Mixed media
12”x 24”
Courtesy of the artist

# Education Guide

## Themes

- Realism
- Magic Realism
- Expressionism
- Alberta Art
- Visual Learning
- Elements of Composition
- Observation Drawing
- Perspective Drawing

## Alberta Curriculum Connections

- Grades 1–12 Visual Arts
- Grades 4–8 Science
- Grades 6–9 Social Studies

## Visual Learning

All art has many sides to it. The artist makes the works for people to experience. They in turn can make discoveries about both the artwork and the artist which contributes to their enjoyment of art. How we look at an object determines what we come to know about it. We remember information about an object far better when we are able to see (and handle) objects rather than by only reading about them. A careful investigation through observation helps us to understand how objects fit into our world and helps us reach a considered response to what we see. The following is a six-step method to looking at, and understanding, a work of art.

1. **INITIAL, INTUITIVE RESPONSE**
   The first 'gut level' response to a visual presentation. What do you see and what do you think of it?
2. **DESCRIPTION**
   Naming facts: style, medium, and elements of composition.
3. **ANALYSIS**
   Exploring how the parts relate to each other.
4. **INTERPRETATION**
   Exploring what the work might mean or be about
5. **INFORMATION**
   Looking beyond the work for information that may further understanding.
6. **PERSONALIZATION**
   Reaching a considered response.

# Elements of Composition Tour

The following pages provide definitions and examples of elements and principles of art that are used by artists in the images found in the exhibition.

The elements of composition are components of an artwork that can be isolated and defined. They are the building blocks used to create a work of art.

***Use this tour to better understand the purpose of the artist's choices!***

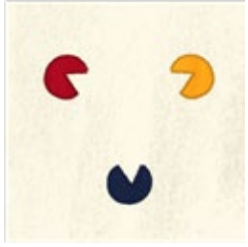
## *5 Elements of Composition*

**LINE**
An element of art that is used to define shape, contours and outlines. It is also used to suggest mass and volume.

**COLOUR**
Colour is light that is reflected off objects. Colour has three main characteristics: Hue, or its name (red, blue, etc.) Value: (how light or dark the colour is) and Intensity (how bright or dull the colour is).

**SHAPE**
When a line crosses itself or intersects with other lines to enclose a space it creates a shape. A two dimensional shape is one that is drawn on a flat surface such as paper. A three-dimensional shape is one that takes up real space.

**TEXTURE**
The surface quality of an object that can be seen or felt. Texture can also be implied on a two-dimensional surface through mark making and media handling.



**SPACE**
Space is the relative position of one three-dimensional object to another. It is the area between and around objects. It can also refer to the feeling of depth in a two-dimensional work.

# Art History: Visions of Home

The depiction of domestic interiors has long been a touchstone in art history, offering artists a lens through which to explore personal and societal narratives. Across movements such as Realism, Magical Realism, and Expressionism, interiors have served as more than mere backdrops—they are active participants in the storytelling.

Realism emerged in the 19th century as artists sought to represent everyday life with unflinching honesty. Gustave Courbet's *The Wheat Sifters* (1854) exemplifies this approach, presenting three women engaged in the repetitive labour of sifting grain. Courbet's choice to depict labourers was revolutionary and challenged the idealized portrayals of the time.

> ***"For me, painting was about representing 'real and existing things', and in so doing I saw myself as 'a sincere lover of the honest truth'.***
>
> — Gustave Courbet

Gillian Willans draws on this lineage by reworking found images of interior spaces. Her paintings transform anonymous rooms into sites of contemplation and social commentary, demonstrating how Realism has historically uncovered the complexity embedded in the everyday.

**Gustave Courbet**, *The Wheat Sifters,* 1854, oil painting
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, Nantes

Magical Realism offers a different lens, blending the real with the fantastical to evoke deeper truths. Remedios Varo's *Creation of the Birds* (1957) exemplifies this mode: in a dimly lit room, a mystical figure paints birds that spring to life, merging the mundane activity of painting with the wonder of creation. Varo's interiors are both familiar and uncanny, transforming ordinary spaces into thresholds to another realm.

Brianna Tosswill's linocut prints resonate with this tradition. Inspired by interviews about comfort, she merges lived experience with imaginative invention to create intimate fictional rooms.

**Remedios Varo**, *Creation of the Birds*, 1957, Oil on Masonite, Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City

**Edouard Vuillard**, *Breakfast at Villerville*, 1910, Oil on Board, Private Collection

> ***I paint my own reality. The only thing I know is that I paint because I need to, and I paint whatever passes through my head without any other consideration.***
>
> — Frida Kahlo

Impressionism brought yet another perspective, emphasizing atmosphere, fleeting perception, and the intimacy of private life. Édouard Vuillard's *Breakfast at Villerville* (c. 1910) is one such example, where light, pattern, and everyday gestures merge into a richly textured view of domestic life. Rather than documenting interiors with strict realism, Vuillard and his contemporaries sought to capture the sensory and emotional experience of being within them.

Melissa Baron's work aligns with this tradition. By layering materials from her household—her son's drawings, glitter glue, and textiles—she animates the familiar rooms of her home. Shifting light, patterned surfaces, and the play of open and closed doors create an atmosphere that is less about literal description than about lived sensation. In doing so, her paintings echo the Impressionist impulse to portray the poetry of daily life through the textures of its spaces.

Taken together, the exhibition shows how contemporary artists continue to adapt historical approaches to the domestic interior. From Realism's insistence on observable truth to Magical Realism's merging of reality and the uncanny to Impressionism's focus on perception and atmosphere, the home remains a potent and enduring subject in art.

# Activities

## An Art-full Scavenger Hunt

In teaching art, game-playing can enhance learning. If students are engaged in learning, through a variety of methods, then it goes beyond game-playing. Through game-playing we are trying to get students to use higher-order thinking skills by getting them to be active participants in learning.

**OBJECTIVES**
A scavenger hunt based on art works is a fun and engaging way to get students of any age to really look at the art works and begin to discern what the artist(s) is/are doing in the works.

### *Ages 6 - 12*

**INSTRUCTIONS**
Using the exhibition works provided, give students a list of things they should search for that are in the particular works of art. The students could work with a partner or in teams. Include a blank for the name of the artwork, the name of the artist, and the year the work was created. Following the hunt, gather students together in the exhibition area and check the answers and discuss the particular works in more detail.

***Sample List***

| Scavenger Hunt Item | Title of Artwork | Name of Artist | Year Work Created |
|---|---|---|---|
| a photograph | | | |
| a door | | | |
| wood | | | |
| an inside scene | | | |
| an outside scene | | | |
| a plant | | | |

# Reading Pictures Program

Art can be read in two ways. It can be looked at **intuitively** – what do you see? What do you like or not like? How does it make you feel and why? – or it can be read **formally** by looking at the elements of the composition – the "tools" artists use or consider when creating a piece of work.

## *Art is a language like any other and it can be read!*

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. Introduce participants to art and what artists do – this includes examinations of art styles; art composition; the possible aims and meaning(s) in an artwork and how to deduce those meanings and aims
2. Introduce visitors to the current exhibition
   - The aim of the exhibition and the kind of artwork found in the exhibition
   - The artist(s) - his/her background(s)
   - His/her place in art history
3. Engage participants in a deeper investigation of artworks

## *Ages 12 - adult*

**FACILITATOR INTRODUCTION TO PROGRAM:**
Before we can 'read' art, however, we should have some understanding of what we're talking about.

*What is art? How would you define it?*

Art can be defined as creative expression–and artistic practice is an aspect of expression. It can express a peoples' culture or the artist's identity.

*How many of you would describe yourselves as artists?*

Art is all around us and we are all involved in artistic endeavours to some degree. The photographs we take, the colour and styles of the clothes we wear, the ways we build and decorate our homes, gardens and public buildings, the images we see and are attracted to in advertising or the text or symbols on our bumper stickers – all of these things utilize artistic principles. They say something about our personal selves and reflect upon and influence the economic, political, cultural, historical and geographic concerns of our society.

Art, therefore, is not just something some people in a society do – it is something that affects and informs everyone within a society.

Today we're going to look at art - paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures – and see what art can tell us about the world we live in – both the past, the present and possibly the future – and what art can tell us about ourselves.

# Reading Pictures Tour Program

Choose two very different pieces of artwork in the exhibition and work through the following steps. This can be a group discussion or participants can be divided into small groups and given these questions as a worksheet

**STEP 1: INITIAL, INTUITIVE RESPONSE**

The first 'gut level' response to a visual presentation.

- *What do you see and how does it make you feel?Why do you feel this way?*
- *What do you like? What don't you like? Why?*

**STEP 2: DESCRIPTION**
Naming facts: style, medium, and composition (see the elements of composition on pg. 20)

- *What is the work made of?*
- *How would you describe the style?*
- *What colours and shapes do you see?*
- *What objects are most apparent?*
- *Describe the lines and textures in the work.*

**STEP 3: ANALYSIS**
Exploring how the parts relate to each other.

- *What is the focus or of the artwork?*
- *What proportions can you see? Background? Foreground? Land? Sky?*

**STEP 4: INTERPRETATION**
Exploring what the work might mean or be about

- *What word would best describe the mood of this work?*
- *What do you think this painting, photograph, or sculpture about?*
- *Is the artist trying to tell a story? What might be the story in this work?*

**STEP 5: INFORMATION**
Looking beyond the work for information that may further understanding. (See artist bios on pg. 18)

- *What is the artist's name? When did he/she live?*
- *What art was being made at the same time as this artist was working?*
- *What was happening in history at the time this artist was working?*
- *What social/political/economic/cultural issues is this artist interested in?*

**STEP 6: PERSONALIZATION**
Reaching a considered response.

- *What do you think about this work?*

# Drawing From Life

At its heart, drawing is an exercise in looking. For generations, art students have learned the basics by observing objects, people, and scenes around them.

In this activity, students will hone their skills in looking by studying the artworks in this exhibition made using different formal techniques, then creating their own pencil drawings from objects observed in the classroom.

**Annie Pootoogook**
*Coleman Stove with Robin Hood Flour and Tenderflake*, 2003–4
44 x 30 in
Coloured pencil and ink on paper
Collection of Reid Shier and Zoe Lasham

## *Ages 10 - adult*

**OBJECTIVES**

- Use critical thinking and creative skills to analyze an artwork.
- Identify formal elements in a drawing, including colour, line, shape, space, and texture.
- Create a drawing from carefully observing your surroundings.

**MATERIALS**

- Images from this exhibition
- Shading pencils
- Sketchbooks or loose paper
- Still-life props of choice

**PROCESS**

1. Begin by introducing the concept of realism in art (see Talking Art on pg. 15). Ask students their opinions on realism in art.

   - *Is realism or abstract painting more creative? Why?*
   - *Is realism just making art that looks like a photograph or something more?*
   - *How does realism reveal the artists perspective on the world?*

   Record student responses on a whiteboard.

2. Take a tour of the exhibition or share the visual inventory in this guide. Engage students in a comparative discussion about these works, noting differences in style, technique, and form. Prime students with a refresher on the five elements of composition (see the Elements of Composition Tour pg. 19). Questions to prompt discussion might include:

   - *What is the subject matter of this artwork?*
   - *What materials has the artist used to make the work?*
   - *How does the artist's use of line contribute to the drawing's overall look and feel? Describe the types of lines used in each (e.g., thick, thin, straight, curved, broken).*
   - *What textures do you see in the drawing (e.g., smooth, rough, bumpy)? How does texture contribute to the drawing's visual impact?*
   - *How does the artist use space to create a sense of depth or perspective?*
   - *How has the artist arranged the elements in the drawing? Is the composition balanced or unbalanced? What is the focal point, and how does the artist lead the viewer's eye to it?*

3. Once students have had a chance to discuss a few examples, they can begin making their own drawings. Set up a series of drawing stations with different kinds of props—books, fruit, jars, jugs, or any other object already in the classroom. Encourage students in advance to bring their own objects from home and set them up at the different drawing stations around the room. Have as many different objects as possible with interesting physical attributes (e.g., textures, materials, reflective surfaces) so students can hone their skills in observation and build their technique.

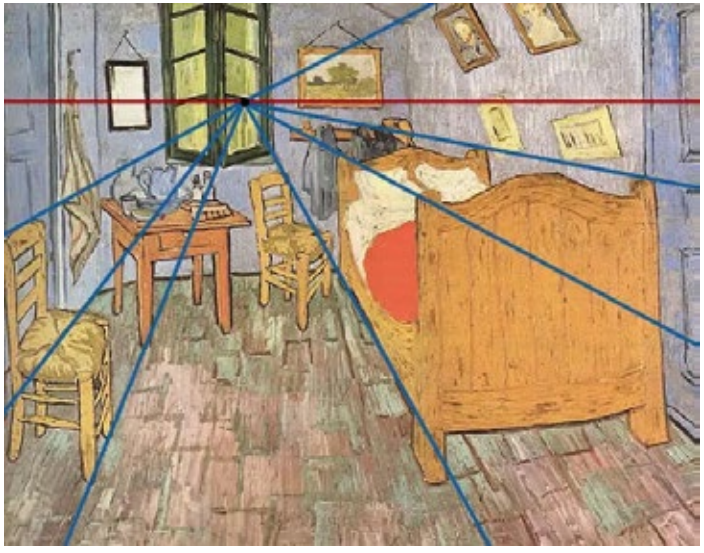
4. Encourage students to rotate through the stations, selecting a new object to draw at each one. Students can determine on their own when they would like to move on and select a new object.

5. As an optional step, prompt students to try out different shading or line techniques with each rotation, to get them thinking creatively about their subject matter.

6. At the end of the activity, ask students to select their favourite drawing from their sketchbooks. Display the works and have each student present their selected drawing.

# Draw Your Room, One-Point Perspective

Rooms are spaces we know intimately—they hold our belongings, our memories, and our daily routines. In *Room to Reflect*, artists use the idea of a room as both a physical place and a metaphor for inner life. In this activity, students will learn the basics of one-point perspective while reflecting on their own rooms as personal spaces. By combining technical drawing skills with personal expression, they will create a perspective drawing of their room.



**Vincent van Gogh**
*Bedroom in Arles*, 1888 (First Version)

## *Ages 12 - adult*

**OBJECTIVES**

- Learn the principles of one-point perspective.
- Use drawing to reflect on personal space and memory.
- Apply line and proportion to create depth in a drawing.
- Develop observation and spatial reasoning skills.

**MATERIALS**

- Sketch paper or drawing paper
- Pencils
- Rulers
- Erasers

**PROCESS**

1. Begin with a short discussion about the exhibition *Room to Reflect*.

   Ask students:

   - *Whose rooms is each artist focusing on?*
   - *What is the artist trying to tell us about the people who lives in the rooms?*
   - *What does your room mean to you? Is it a place to be alone; a place to rest; a place to work and create?*

2. Introduce the concept of one-point perspective. Use simple examples (a cube, a hallway, or railroad tracks) to show how parallel lines appear to converge at a vanishing point.

   Demonstrate by drawing:

   - A horizon line
   - A single vanishing point
   - A rectangle that becomes the back wall of a room
   - Diagonal lines from the corners of the rectangle to the vanishing point to form the sides of the room.

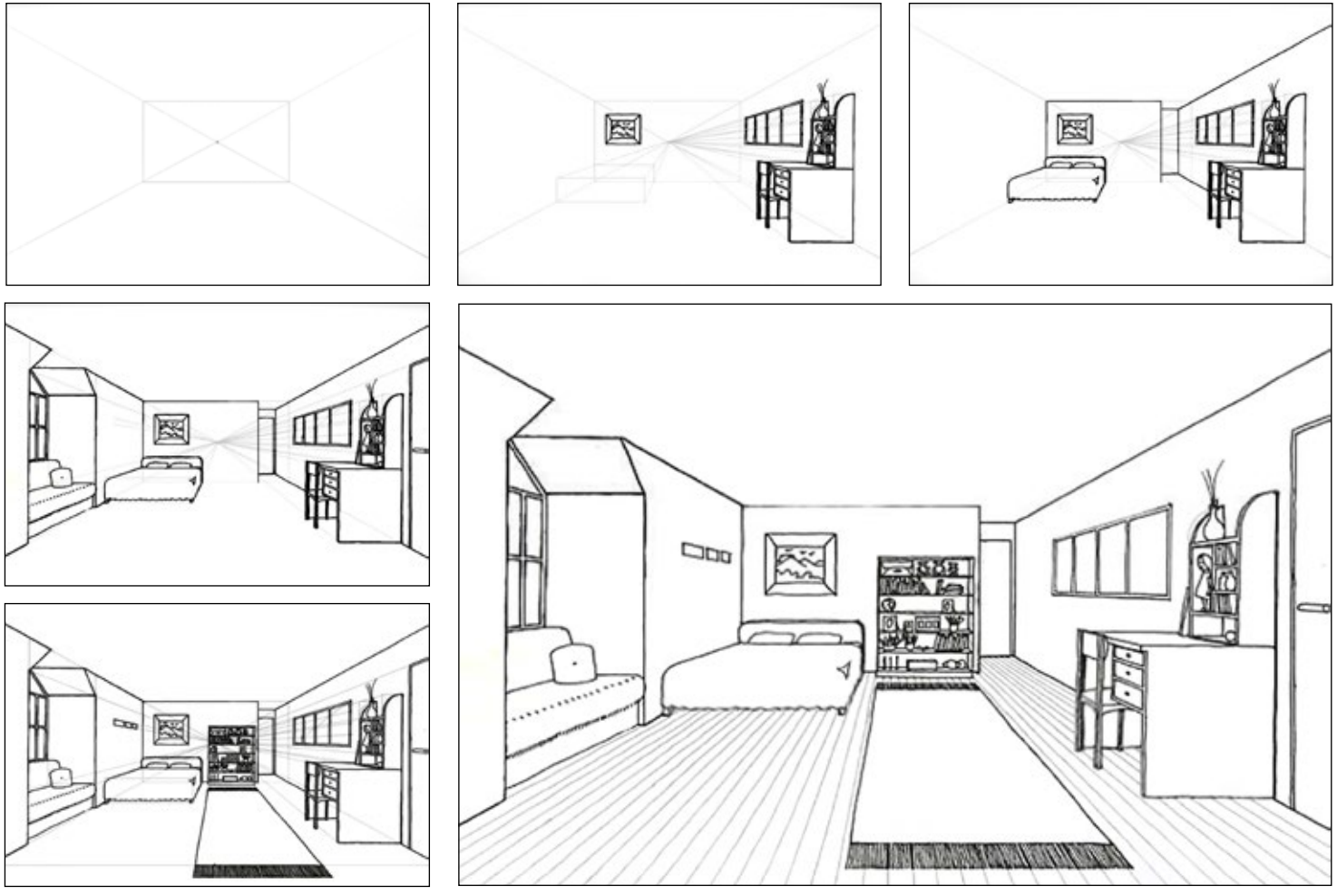
   Explain that everything in the room—beds, desks, windows, doors—can be built from rectangles or cubes that follow the same vanishing point.

3. Have students begin their own drawings by:
   - Drawing a rectangle for the back wall.
   - Placing a vanishing point at the center of that wall.
   - Using their ruler to create the walls, ceiling, and floor.
   - Encourage them to picture their own rooms as they draw.

4. Students add furniture and objects from their room:
   - A bed can start as a box shape.
   - A desk or dresser can be built from rectangles.
   - Posters, windows, and doors all follow the same perspective.
   - Encourage them to think about what details make their room their own. Which objects best represent them?

5. As students work, prompt them to reflect:
   - Which objects are most important to include?
   - How does arranging the space on paper make them think differently about their room?
   - Does their drawing feel private, welcoming, organized, chaotic?

6. At the end of class, ask students to share their drawings. They can explain one detail they chose to include that makes their room feel personal.



# Glossary

## Art Movements & Styles

Ashcan School – An early 20th-century American art movement that depicted urban life with raw, unidealized realism.

Expressionism – An art movement emphasizing the artist's emotional experience through distortion, vivid colours, or exaggerated forms.

Magical Realism – A style blending realistic detail with fantastical or dreamlike elements to reveal deeper truths.

Realism – A 19th-century art movement focused on depicting everyday life with truth and accuracy, rejecting idealization.

## Concepts & Terms

Linocut – A printmaking technique in which a design is carved into a linoleum surface, inked, and pressed onto paper.

Mementos – Objects kept as reminders of people, places, or experiences.

Narrative – The story or sequence of events conveyed through an artwork.
One-Point Perspective – A drawing method where parallel lines appear to converge at a single vanishing point on the horizon, creating depth.
Composition – The arrangement of visual elements in an artwork.

Still Life – A work of art depicting inanimate objects, often arranged for study or symbolism.

Subject Matter – The objects, figures, or themes depicted in an artwork.

## Elements of Composition

Colour – Light reflected from objects; includes hue (name), value (light/dark), and intensity (bright/dull).

Line – A mark that defines shape, contour, or outline; can suggest volume, direction, or movement.

Shape – A two- or three-dimensional enclosed area created when lines meet.

Space – The area around and between objects; can also suggest depth in two-dimensional art.

Texture – The surface quality of an object, real or suggested, that can be seen or felt.

**Image Right**

**Brianna Tosswill**
*Growth comes through love*, 2022
Linocut
16 x12 in
Courtesy of the artist

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