



# THE NATURE OF ORNAMENT

A Travelling Exhibition from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Permanent Collection



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*The Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Travelling Exhibition program acknowledges that the artistic activity we support takes place on the territories of Treaties 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.*

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition (TREX) program

Artworks by Denys Cook, Maggie E.M. Dunbar, John Fukushima, Tom Hamilton, Illingworth Kerr, Irene Klar, William Laing, RFM McInnis, Gary Olson, Coral Poser, and McKenna Prather

Curated by Ashley Slemming

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## Image left



William Laing  
*Blue Print*, 2000  
30 x 22 1/4 in, silkscreen on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

# ABOUT

## **Travelling Exhibition Program (TRES)**

Since 1980, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial travelling exhibition program. The TRES program strives to ensure every Albertan is provided with an opportunity to enjoy fully developed exhibitions in schools, libraries, healthcare centres, and smaller rural institutions and galleries throughout the province.

The TRES program assists in making both the AFA's extensive art collection and the artwork of contemporary Alberta artists available to Albertans. Four regional organizations coordinate the program for the AFA:

REGION ONE — Northwest: The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie

REGION TWO — Northeast / North Central: The Art Gallery of Alberta

REGION THREE — Southwest: The Alberta Society of Artists

REGION FOUR — Southeast: The Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre

## **The Alberta Society of Artists (ASA)**

The Alberta Society of Artists is a large part of Alberta's visual arts history, through its members, its exhibitions, and other initiatives. The ASA was founded in 1931, making it the oldest society of juried professional artists in the province.

The ASA is an active membership of professional visual artists who strive for quality and distinction. Through exhibition, education, and communication the society increases public awareness of the visual arts.

The ASA is contracted by the AFA to develop and circulate TRES exhibitions to communities throughout southwestern Alberta.

## **The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA)**

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.





# EXHIBITION STATEMENT

*The Nature of Ornament* highlights parallels between aesthetic patterns that exist naturally in the wild with humanity's timeless inclinations towards adornment. Patterns are everywhere, and humans are pattern-seeking creatures. As mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861 – 1947) wrote, "Art is the imposing of a pattern on experience, and our aesthetic enjoyment is recognition of the pattern."<sup>1</sup> The patterns, textures, and designs that adorn our garments, home interiors, and architectural structures reveal an innate mimicry of the natural world.

We can look at segmented leaf vein patterns in William Laing's silkscreen titled *Blue Print* (2000), and compare them to the decorative tile shapes painted in Maggie E.M. Dunbar's *Gentrification/Arena #2* (1988). We can observe the vibrantly speckled fish in Illingworth Kerr's drawing *St. L* (1972), and appreciate clear similarities with the colourful and geometrically patterned garments in Tom Hamilton's figure painting, *Untitled* (1984). Floral repeat patterns inspired by natural repetition show up on vases and wallpapers as seen in William Laing's mixed media work, *Near and Far* (1990), as well as on Mrs. Matsuno's floral button-up shirt in John Fukushima's 1977 photographic portrait of her – affectingly set against a natural landscape painting with a foreground of repetitious leafy branches reaching inward toward Matsuno. The parallels between nature's patterns and our own forms of ornamentation are ubiquitous, both in art and in daily life.

This exhibition features artworks from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) collection as well as from artists' personal collections. *The Nature of Ornament* was curated by Ashley Slemming and includes eleven artists: Denys Cook, Maggie E.M. Dunbar, John Fukushima, Tom Hamilton, Illingworth Kerr, Irene Klar, William Laing, RFM McInnis, Gary Olson, Coral Poser, and McKenna Prather.

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<sup>1</sup> Whitehead, Alfred North and Lucien Price, "June 10, 1943," *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, As recorded by Lucien Price. [1st ed.] Boston, Little, Brown, 1954, pp. 228-229.



## Image right

John Fukushima  
*Mrs. Matsuno, Raymond, Alberta*, 1977  
(#2 OF FOLIO), 1977  
Silver gelatin on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts





# ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

**Denys Cook** — Cyril Denys Cook, son of a World War I veteran, joined the Welsh Guard under age, at 17 years old. By age 19 he was promoted to Sergeant; at the outset of World War II, he was captured by the Germans and held as a prisoner for 5 years. After his release, he became a Police Sergeant and police college instructor in Herefordshire, Wales, and he married the woman who wrote him letters during the war. They emigrated to Canada in 1957 with their three children. Cook worked until 1974 as Director of Inspection Services with the Attorneys General's Department, Government of Alberta. When he retired, he began to develop his professional artistic career. He went to the library, read books, and taught himself the mediums of British Scrapperboard, India Ink, Watercolour, Oil, and Acrylic painting. British Scrapperboard is an artistic medium also known as scratchboard, used to create detailed images similar to engraving. Cook scrapes into the top layer of black ink using dental implements to reveal the white porcelain below.

In 1976, Cook was chosen by Nature Canada as one of 29 Canadian artists to have his series Raccoon Studies toured across all Provincial museums in Canada. In 1977, he was chosen as the Official Artist to the First Canadian Airbourne Regiment stationed in Edmonton, Alberta. Since then, his work has been commissioned by the Government of Alberta and the City of Edmonton, and presented to numerous officials including The Right Honourable John Diefenbaker, 13th Prime Minister of Canada. His work is also held in the collections of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Legislative Building (Edmonton), Grant MacEwan College (Edmonton), and Selkirk Holdings Ltd. (Ottawa, ON).

Cook has contributed substantially to provincial, national, and international arts and crafts development and promotion. He was a staunch Member of the Edmonton Art Club, the oldest continuing art organization in Alberta. Along with five other artisans, he co-founded the Arts and Crafts Society of Alberta, now called the Alberta Craft Council, and served as president for four years. Cook is an original founding member of the Canadian Craft Council, now called the Canadian Crafts Federation, for which he served as Vice President for the Western Region for five years. He was also a Member of the World Crafts Council, which works to promote fellowship amongst the craftspeople of North America and the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Denys Cook," The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) Virtual Museum, accessed August 25, 2023, <http://alberta.emuseum.com/people/475/denys-cook>

**Maggie E.M. Dunbar** — Scotland-born Maggie E.M. Dunbar studied at the Banff School of Fine Arts (summer 1980; winter 1981 - 1982) and earned her B.F.A. from the University of Calgary (1981). During a brief teaching career that included four years at the City of Calgary (1982 – 1986), a mural at the Banff School of the Arts (March 1985), and a visiting artist stint at the Emily Carr College of Art (January 1987), Dunbar conducted her own research in the San Juan Islands of Washington State (May 1983), Howlett’s Gorillarium in the U.K. (September 1984), Rome (May 1987), and Djerassi, California (September – October, 1987).

Dunbar’s art discusses—sometimes ironically—the work of historically significant painters such as sixteenth-century Venetian artist Tintoretto (“Susannah and the Elders”); at other times, it juxtaposes disparate imagery to force reconsiderations of the values and morals of various eras and cultures of human history (as with “Gothic Request”).

Dunbar has mounted several solo exhibitions, including at the C.H. Scott Gallery of Emily Carr College of Art, the Vanderlelie Gallery of Edmonton, and the Peter Whyte Foundation of Banff. Her work dwells in several private, corporate, and public collections, including those of the University of Calgary, the Glenbow Museum, and the Canada Council Art Bank. She has been awarded several grants, including one from the Canada Council.<sup>3</sup>

**John Fukushima** — John Fukushima had a very short career as a photographer. After graduating from the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts in 1976 he completed a documentary of the Japanese Issei: first generation immigrants to Canada who settled primarily on the west coast in British Columbia but who were interned in Southern Alberta during the Second World War. Many of the artist’s subjects were friends of his parents. After completing this series, Fukushima helped raise his family and worked for a major oil company for over 30 years.

Before John Fukushima embarked on his deeply personal portrayal of Japanese internees, he had already completed a photo essay about a rural auction sale and, pertinent to the Canadian Rockies: portraits of Lawrence Grassi, Elizabeth Rummel and others. With parents who were also Second World War internees, Fukushima had the simple intention of photographing a unique group of people before they passed away. He would not be the only photographer to do this but his early intervention and direct ties to the community made his work all the more relevant. They are also, as black and white photographs, rich in detail and mood. Of the 24 portraits, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts purchased 18 of them a few years after they were taken.<sup>4</sup>

3 "Maggie E.M. Dunbar," The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) Virtual Museum, accessed August 25, 2023, <http://alberta.emuseum.com/people/659/maggie-em-dunbar>

4 Mary-Beth Laviolette, *BEFORE DIGITAL: POST-1970 PHOTOGRAPHY IN ALBERTA* (brochure), hosted at Illingworth Kerr Gallery in partnership with Contemporary Calgary, January 15 – March 16, 2019, p. 5 and 36.





**Tom Hamilton** — Thomas Hamilton was born July 2nd, 1951 in Queens, New York. He was adopted at the age of six months by a Canadian couple who were residing in New York. This gave Tom dual Canadian/American citizenship. At the age of ten, he and his family moved to Alberta, Canada, where they settled in Tomahawk, a town west of Edmonton.

Tom graduated from high school in 1968, and later attended the Fine Arts program at the Alberta College of Art (now Alberta University of the Arts), in Calgary. He graduated from the program in 1974 and moved to Medicine Hat to take up work as a ranch foreman. It was during this time that Tom taught art for two years at Medicine Hat College. Eventually, Tom began doing some long-haul trucking to help support his passion for creating art. It was during a trip to Chilliwack, B.C. that Tom met Sharon Price with whom he fell in love and married in October of 1989. With this union, came two wonderful stepchildren, Lisa and Jason.

Throughout his adult life, Tom maintained art studios wherever he lived, including Medicine Hat, Cochrane, and Calgary, Alberta. He was honoured to be selected as an ‘artist in residence’ through an affiliation with the Tate Gallery, in both London, England (1996) and Beijing, China (1997).

In 2010, Tom was diagnosed with brain cancer. Despite this terrible set-back, he continued to energetically create his art. Following surgery to try to arrest the cancer, he found that his colour palette had changed, and he began to use more oranges and yellows in his paintings. Tom was committed to his work right up to his untimely death, in February 2011, at the age of 60. Patrons of Thomas Hamilton’s art include Esso Canada, Gulf Canada, and the Calgary Children’s Hospital, and his work is also held in the permanent collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.<sup>5</sup>

**Illingworth Kerr** — Illingworth Kerr studied at the Central Technical School, Toronto in 1924. From 1924 to 1927, Kerr studied under Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, Frederick Varley and J.W. Beatty at the Ontario College of Arts. Kerr also studied at the Westminster School of Art, London, in 1936, as well as with Hans Hoffman in Provincetown, Massachusetts in 1954. In 1955 and 1957, he attended Emma Lake Workshops.

Kerr traveled the Georgian Bay area, Ontario, in 1927, and England and France from 1960 to 1961. He taught at the Vancouver School of Art from 1945 to 1946, and was head of the Alberta College of Art (now Alberta University of the Arts) from 1947 to 1967. He was a great influence and friend to many artists of that era. As well, from 1952 to 1953, he was president of the Alberta Society of Artists. Kerr was also a member of the Canadian Authors Association; he wrote many short stories and illustrated many publications, including his autobiography, *Gay Dogs and Dark Horses*, in 1946. He received a Canada Council Award in 1960.

He painted portraits, the life of Indigenous peoples, urban views, wildlife, and the Prairie and Ontario landscape. He used the media of oil, acrylic, watercolour, charcoal, and ink, as well as woodblock, linoblock, monotype and silkscreen prints.<sup>6</sup>

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5 "Biography of Canadian Artist Thomas Hamilton: 1951 – 2011," Mid-Century Rehab, accessed August 25, 2023, <https://www.midcenturyrehab.com/biography-of-artist-thomas-hamilton>

6 "Illingworth Kerr," The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) Virtual Museum, accessed August 25, 2023, <http://alberta.emuseum.com/people/1351/illingworth-kerr>

**Irene Klar** — Irene Klar has been painting professionally for over 40 years. She could not resist the lure of art. A few years after graduating with degrees in Physical Therapy and Science from McGill University in Montreal, she received her Bachelor's of Fine Arts from the University of Alberta, Edmonton, in 1977. She has devoted herself to painting and printmaking since then. She taught watercolour at the University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension. Irene created several commissioned pieces for the Trans-Canada Trail, the Unitarian Services Committee and Amnesty International (United States, Canada, and Spain). She has donated her designs for many nonprofit fundraising activities and charitable organizations.

Although she began her professional career as a watercolour painter, she is also a printmaker. She produced numerous silkscreen editions over the years and is also an accomplished etcher. Her works have been included in juried shows in New Zealand, Slovenia and Spain. The book, *Common Threads*, features Irene Klar's etchings and explains the printmaking process. The Gitskan village of 'Ksan in British Columbia mounted an exhibition of Klar etchings and artwork in 2004. In 2008, she illustrated "Nine Minutes", a children's book for Yeo Wan Media, Korea. Her work is featured cover art on several books and was included in a number of film sets.

Irene Klar maintains a busy exhibition schedule of watercolours, acrylics and etchings in Canada and the United States. Her work is included in countless private collections from Norway to Australia as well as in over fifteen prominent corporate and government collections, most notably – Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Art Gallery of Alberta, and Canada Council Art Bank.<sup>7</sup>

**William Laing** — William (Bill) Laing was born in Glasgow, Scotland and immigrated to Canada in 1960. He studied at the Vancouver School of Art, Brighton Polytechnic in England and received his Master's Degree from the Royal College of Art in London, England in 1974. Bill came back to Canada to teach at the Alberta College of Art and Design (now Alberta University of the Arts) and during the three years that he spent there as an instructor in printmaking, photography and design, he was responsible for establishing their serigraphy and etching department.<sup>8</sup> He was then hired by Harry Kiyooka to teach at the University of Calgary in 1977, alongside John Hall, John Will, Noboru Sawai and John Chalke. Bill taught at the University of Calgary for 39 years, retiring at the end of 2015.<sup>9</sup>

Bill Laing has exhibited in over 500 group shows and 50 solo shows across Canada and around the world, is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (R.C.A.), an elected Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Painters and Printmakers (London, England), and has received the Order of The University of Calgary in 2006. Bill Laing's extensive collections list includes (to name a few): British Museum, National Gallery of Canada, Museum of Art, Strasbourg, France, Saidye Bronfman Centre, Montreal, National Gallery of Australia, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles County Museum, the Kyoto Museum of Art, Japan, Guangdong Museum of Art, Shanghai, China and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, England.<sup>10</sup>

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7 "Irene Klar Biography," Irene Klar Studio, accessed August 23, 2023, <https://ireneklar.com/biography/>

8 "William Laing," The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) Virtual Museum, accessed August 28, 2023, <http://alberta.emuseum.com/people/1465/william-laing>

9 "Bill Laing, RCA: Biography" Herrerger Kiss Gallery, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://www.herrergerkissgallery.com/bill-laing-biography>

10 Ibid.





**RFM McInnis** — Robert McInnis has lived and painted in many regions of the country and has a special affection for the southern Alberta prairie with its tonal ochres. During his lifetime McInnis has also painted the figure in watercolour and oil. At heart, McInnis considers himself a figurative artist in the Maritime tradition of Fred Ross, Millar Brittain, Jack Humphrey, Alex Colville and Christopher Pratt. In addition, as a photographer, the artist has shown a keen appreciation for historical sites, railways and prairie grain elevators.

McInnis has a Diploma in Fine and Applied Arts (1961) from Saint John Vocational School (NB). Noted teachers included Fred Ross and D. Edwin Campbell. From 1961-1971, McInnis served as the head of the Prince George College Art Department before returning to Toronto to begin his “real art career.” Since then, the artist has worked independently with what he once described as a systematic plan to make himself known nationally by “living regionally” as a bold and brushy landscape artist. In doing so, McInnis has had the opportunity to interpret the rural environments of Alberta and eastern Canada especially the picturesque Charlevoix region of Quebec. A prolific artist, McInnis’ oeuvre also includes a series of railway paintings and more familiarly a large body of work devoted to the female subject. Begun in Toronto in the 1970s, his Women in Interiors series is an example of what the artist termed Expressive Realism where his best results convey feeling rather than just being descriptive. Public collections containing his work include Hart House (U of T, Toronto, ON), the Glenbow Museum & Nickle Galleries (Calgary, AB), Library and Archives Canada (Ottawa, ON), the New Brunswick Museum (Saint John, NB) and the Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton, AB).<sup>11</sup>

**Gary Olson** — A veteran printmaking instructor who taught at Alberta College of Art and Design (now Alberta University of the Arts) for close to 40 years, Gary Olson has spent a large portion of his practice depicting animals and animal subject matter. He is best known for his large-scale unsentimental portraits of cows. Starting in the 1970’s, he used cows to tackle formal issues in contemporary art including illusion, magnification, and foreshortening. His approach to the subject is not personal, but straight ahead and blunt, and at times, confrontational. In the mid 1980’s, Olson expanded his subject matter to include wild animals from the nearby Rockies, exploring life in the wide-open landscapes surrounding his home in Cochrane, Alberta. Olson’s realist images of animals have often been used to comment on the skewed relationship between animals and society, and the alienation between humans and the natural world. At the same time, Olson takes the opportunity to poke fun at the theory of art, capturing something of his own irreverent desire to continuously push the envelope.<sup>12</sup>

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11 "RFM McInnis," The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) Virtual Museum, accessed August 28, 2023, <http://alberta.emuseum.com/people/1751/rfm-mcinnis>

12 "Gary Olson," The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) Virtual Museum, accessed August 28, 2023, <http://alberta.emuseum.com/people/1985/gary-olson>

**Coral Poser** — Coral Poser grew up in Montreal, and had the good fortune as a young person to take art classes offered at the Art Museum with Arthur Lismer. At the time she had no idea that he was a famous Group of Seven painter, but just loved going to paint with him on Saturday mornings. In the mid-seventies she began her foundation in art studies in the two-year Arts Plastique program at Dawson College. Then she moved to Vancouver and enrolled in the B.F.A. studio arts program at the University of British Columbia. She graduated with a scholarship award in 1979.

In August 1984, Coral Poser travelled to Oke-Ila in Oyo State, Nigeria to teach basic English in the secondary school. Oke-Ila is a one-street mountain village in West Africa home to the Yoruba people, where the street flows with life day and night and beautiful women carry their babies on their backs, wrapped together in colourful fabrics. Coral Poser was befriended by a number of people in Oke-Ila who made her stay in their village unforgettable, and the artwork *E Kabo Oke Ila: Adiku's Egungun* in this exhibition was made as part of a series of illustrations and a narrative poem that the artist created to honour the time she spent in this village.

After her time in Oke-Ila, Coral returned to Canada and painted backdrop scenes for Vancouver theatre companies, and nature displays for parks. She illustrated children's activity manuals for teachers, and wrote exhibition reviews for Vanguard Magazine. In recent years, she has continued to exhibit her work in solo and group shows and participate in local art initiatives.

**McKenna Prather** — McKenna Prather is a freelance artist based in Calgary, Canada. In 2018, she graduated with a BFA from Alberta University of the Arts, and began freelancing full-time in 2019. McKenna was the Homes by Avi Stampede Rotary Dream Home Artist in both 2019 and 2023, and since then, her following of collectors has grown across Canada thanks to social media and displaying/selling work through locally owned businesses like Red Door Home Living, Maillot Homes and FivePoint Cannabis Gallery.



McKenna's work consists of animals, plants, landscapes, portraits and still-life objects. Using acrylic paint on hand-made stretched canvas, she builds up layers of paint in a collaged fashion, painting some elements realistically, flat or patterned. Each painting is embellished with embroidery, where she lays the canvas down and stitches into the painting to add final texture.

Her painting style is influenced by folk art and hand-made crafts like quilting and needlepoint. McKenna looks up to artists like Mary Pratt and Maude Lewis, and aims to capture Mary's sense of light & colour and Maude's whimsicality & storytelling aesthetic.

McKenna is most inspired by her family of artisans and makers. They are her biggest supporters and the reason she became an artist -- her family in Newfoundland and Alberta is comprised of painters, knitters, cooks, and craftsmen. Everything that they make is with the intent of creating a cozy, happy home.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "McKenna Prather Bio," [mckennaprather.com](https://mckennaprather.com), accessed August 28, 2023  
<https://mckennaprather.com/about>

# ARTWORKS



Illingworth Kerr  
*St. L.*, 1972  
19 15/16 x 13 15/16 in  
Pastel and ink on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts





Tom Hamilton  
*Untitled*, 1984  
223 x 29 1/16 in  
Oil on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts







**Left**

Irene Klar  
*Blanket Toss*, 1984  
28 1/8 x 23 1/16 in  
Lithograph on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

**Below**

Denys Cook  
*Canada Goose #762*, 1980  
12 x 16 in  
Ink on illustration board  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts







McKenna Prather  
*Striped Grasslands*, 2023  
18 x 18 in  
Acrylic and embroidery on canvas  
Courtesy of the Artist



RFM McInnis  
*Studio*, 1985  
30 1/8 x 29 15/16 in  
Oil on linen  
Collection of the  
Alberta Foundation for the Arts





John Fukushima  
*Mrs. Matsuno, Raymond, Alberta, 1977*  
13 7/8 x 10 15/16 in  
Silver gelatin on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts







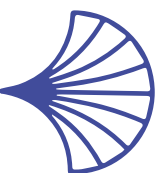
William Laing  
*Near & Far*, 1990  
28 1/8 x 23 1/16 in  
Silkscreen and collage on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

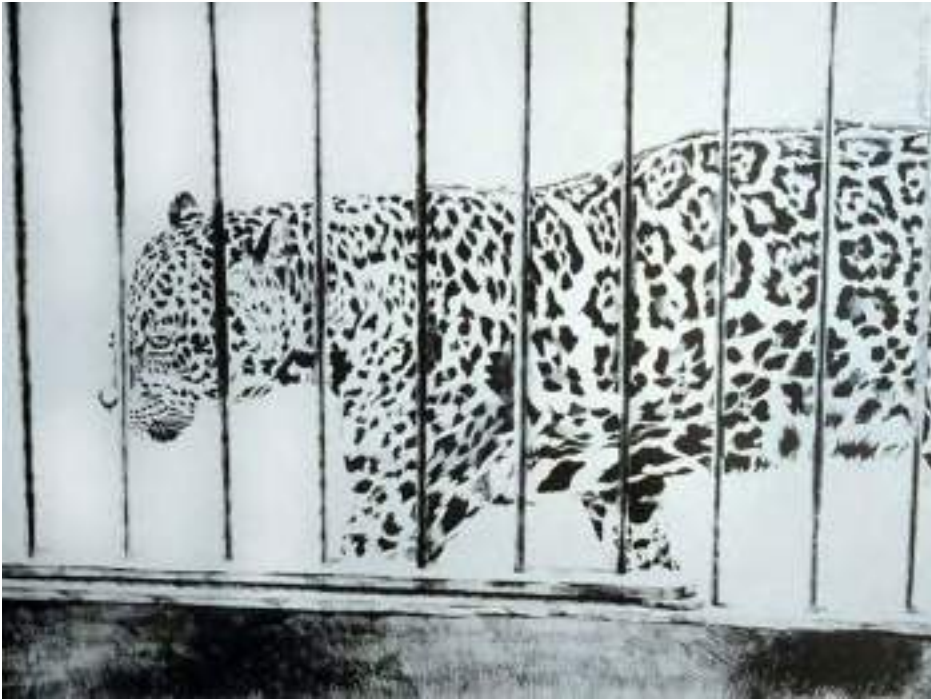






William Laing  
*Blue Print*, 2000  
30 x 22 1/4 in  
Silkscreen on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts





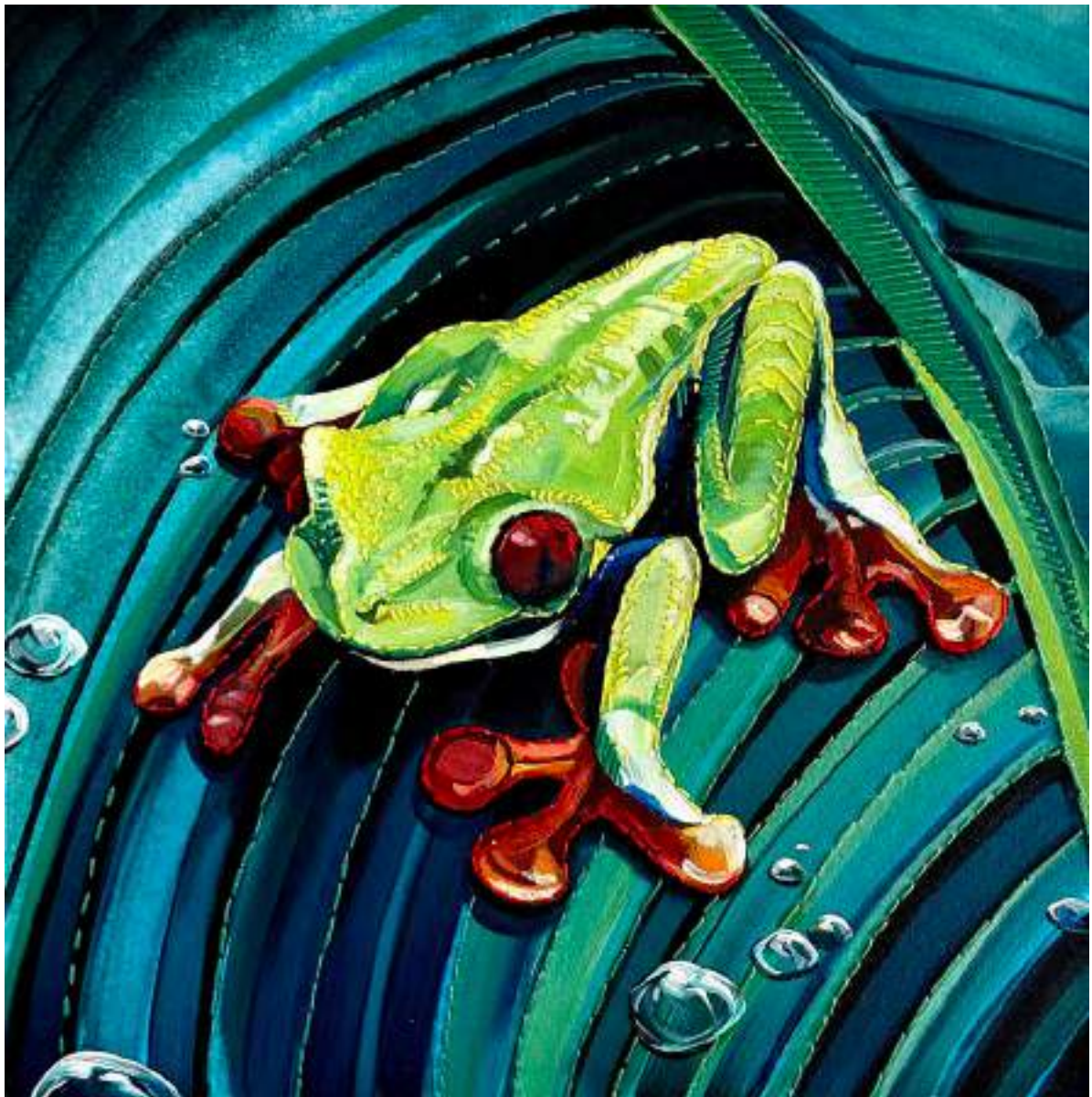
Gary Olson  
*Leopard*, 1976  
26 3/16 x 33 7/8 in  
Lithograph on paper  
Collection of the Alberta  
Foundation for the Arts



Maggie E.M. Dunbar  
*Gentrification/Arena #2*, 1988  
19 15/16 x 25 7/8 in  
Acrylic, charcoal, chalk pastel  
on paper  
Collection of the Alberta  
Foundation for the Arts







McKenna Prather  
*Lush*, 2023  
18 x 18 in  
Acrylic and embroidery on canvas  
Courtesy of the Artist





Coral Poser

*E Kabo Oke Ila: Adiku's Egungun*, 1985-1988

22 1/2 x 30 1/4 in

Pencil crayons, ink, watercolour, and collage on paper

Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts



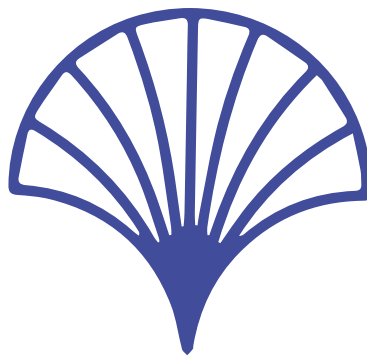
# EDUCATION GUIDE

This Education Guide consists of activities to move audiences through the various themes presented in *The Nature of Ornament*. The content of the exhibition and the following lesson plans have been carefully developed and designed to enhance the curriculum set by Alberta Education. The guide includes questions for discussion, engagement activities, and art lessons designed for the level of ability, understanding, and complexity of the participants:

**Beginner** – participants who are just beginning their exploration of art.

**Intermediate** – participants who have some experience looking at and creating art.

**Advanced** – participants who have much experience looking at and creating art.





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions offer a starting point for exploring the multifaceted relationship between fashion, ornament, and the natural world. They encourage contemplation about how fashion and interior dwelling-space adornment's mimicry of nature influences aesthetics, culture, and our understanding of the environment.

## ***Color Inspiration:***

How does fashion often draw inspiration from natural color palettes? Can you think of examples where clothing colors directly mimic those found in nature?

Interior design often employs colors inspired by nature, such as earth tones, ocean blues, and forest greens. How does the use of these colors evoke specific feelings and emotions in a space for living or dwelling?

## ***Texture, Pattern, and Form:***

Many fashion designs, home decor, or architectural motifs incorporate textures and patterns reminiscent of natural elements like leaves, flowers, grasses, feathers, or animal prints. Can you think of some other examples? Go on a photo scavenger hunt and take photos of garments or interior decor objects that mimic a plant or animal's visual qualities.

Animal motifs and patterns have been popular in fashion for centuries. What are some iconic animal-inspired fashion pieces, and why do you think humans are drawn to these designs?

From floral prints to vine-like embroidery, plants have heavily influenced fashion and textile designs throughout the globe. Why do you think we have displayed such reverence for plants in this way, and for so long throughout the history of visual art?

## ***Cultural Connections:***

Different cultures use ornamentation to pay homage to their natural surroundings and traditions. Can you provide examples of how various cultures incorporate nature into their clothing and dwelling spaces? How might this reflect universal parallels between nature and cultural tradition?

Many cultures use natural elements in traditional ceremonies and rituals, and these often involve unique forms of ritualistic garments, and adornment of sacred spaces. How do these practices reflect a deep connection between humans, nature, and personal/cultural expression?



### ***Imitating Nature's Behavior:***

Some fashion pieces mimic the movements or patterns of animals, like a flowing dress resembling trailing peacock tail feathers, or a tailored suit resembling the crisp symmetry of beetle wings. What is the artistic appeal of incorporating animal behavioral qualities into fashion? Can you think of other examples where you've seen this?

Fashion and interior design often mirror the changing seasons, with warm colors and cozy textures for fall, and bright colours and airy fabrics for summer. How do these seasonal shifts in aesthetics shape our perception of time?

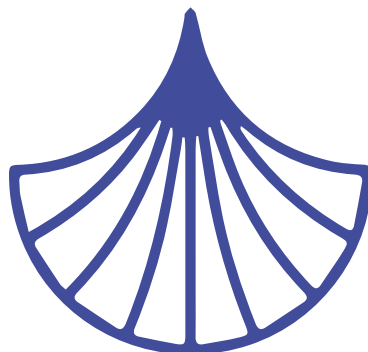
### ***Sustainability:***

High fashion and high-end interior design often feature elaborate, nature-inspired creations. How do the artists and designers working in these creative industries engage with the natural world while sometimes contradicting environmental concerns?

How can the fashion industry better incorporate sustainability to honour nature? Discuss the rise of eco-friendly and vegan movements, as well as slow-fashion and upcycled fashion.

The use of natural and sustainable materials like wood, stone, bamboo, and organic textiles is prevalent in interior design. How does this mimicry of natural materials contribute to both the beauty and eco-friendliness of indoor spaces? In what ways could the industry of interior design be more sustainable?

How does technology contribute to our ability to mimic nature? Explore examples of biomimicry in clothing design, interior design, and architecture, where nature's solutions inspire human-made garments and structural forms. Discover relationships between fashion, interior design, architectural design, and biomimicry as it relates to sustainability.



# ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

## *Pattern Scavenger Hunt*

Ask participants to find the following patterns in *The Nature of Ornament* exhibition: Stripes, spots, criss-cross, grid or mosaic, and organic foliage/floral. Participants should find each pattern twice; once within something human-made in an artwork, and a second within a depiction of nature in an artwork.



## *Sustainable Fashion Runway*

The fashion industry is continually repeating itself, and textiles are ubiquitously produced with florals, animal prints, and more nature-inspired designs, yet the industry has quickly become unsustainable and harmful to the very natural world which it seeks to revere and celebrate. Discuss fast fashion and sustainability, and plan an upcycled fashion runway! Watch this [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qqiKNzwHMg) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qqiKNzwHMg>) on upcycled textiles and how one individual and his team creates incredibly creative and fashionable garments using discarded fabrics. Invite participants to make their own unique pieces from thrifted or old materials that feature nature-inspired patterns., and then plan a runway to show off all the creations!

## *Community Mosaic*

Provide a group of participants with a tile each to decorate with a nature-inspired design. When everyone has completed their tile, display them together, symbolising community and care for nature!



# BEGINNER ART LESSON

## - NATURE'S ORNAMENTAL VASE -

In this activity participants will pay attention to the patterns and textures that appear in nature, and how they might also influence ornamentation and patterns in human-made items! The activity involves taking photos of nature's repeating organic forms through a silhouette of a vase, creating photographs that mimic ornate patterned vases, but with actual organic patterns.

### **Materials:**

- Printed off vase template (page 30)
- Scissors or exacto blade (have an adult help)
- 8 x 10 in cardboard sheet
- Pen, pencil or marker
- Camera

### **Instructions:**

Step 1. Use the template on page 30 (opposite), and cut out the vase form. To make cutting out the full form easier, you can fold the page in half and cut using symmetry to your benefit.

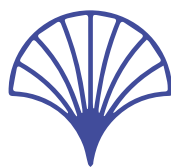
Step 2. Using the cut out template, trace the outline onto a piece of cardboard, and cut out the same shape. The cardboard will be sturdier for holding up as a frame to take photos through.

Step 3. When you have cut out the see through sections of your cardboard vase frame, you can take the frame on a woodland walk and hold it up against any of the interesting natural objects, textures, patterns and shapes you can see and find.

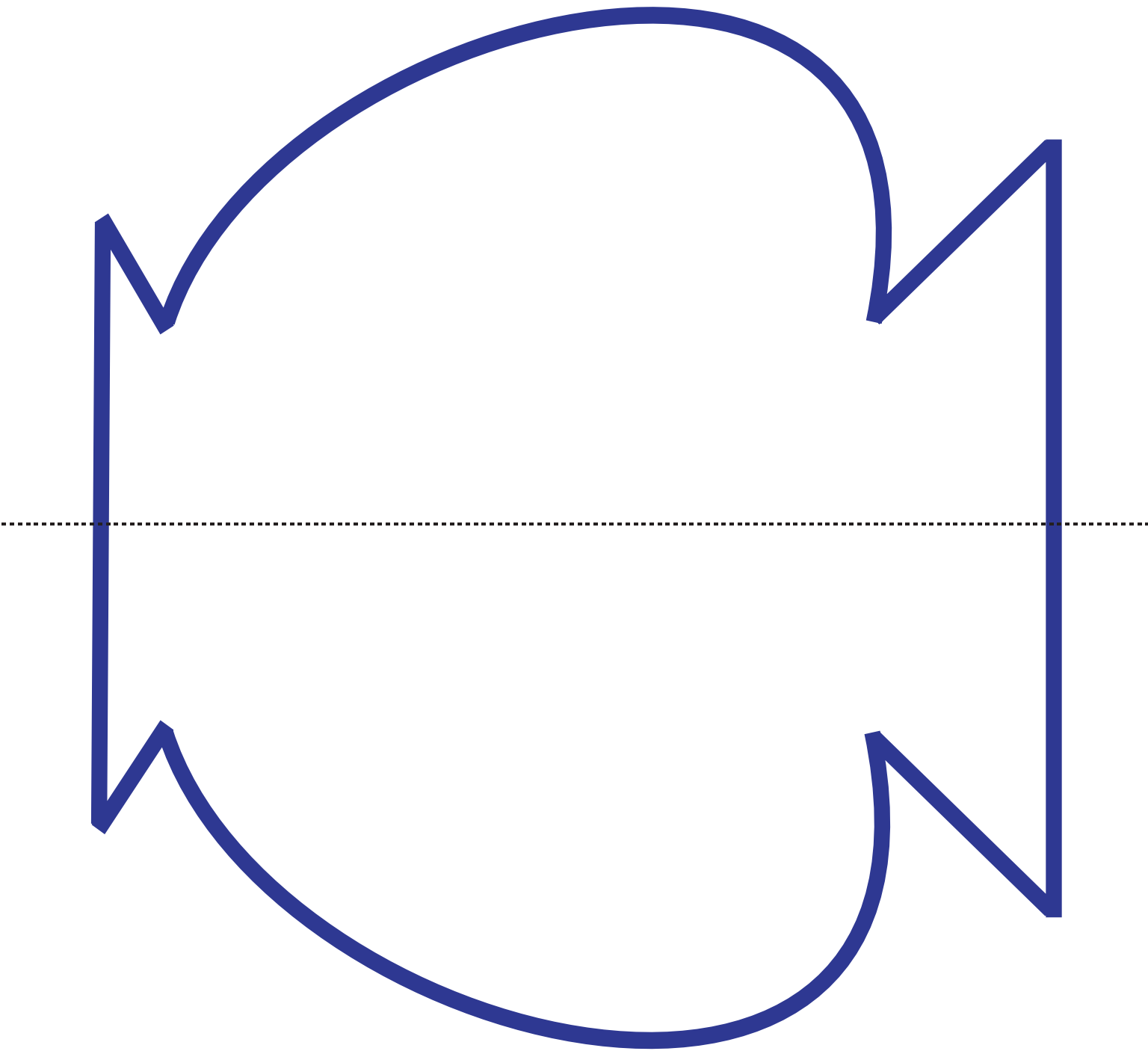
Step 4. Have participants share their photos by uploading them to a shared drive and viewing on a projector screen, or participants can choose to print them off as an art piece.

### **Variations:**

This activity can be completed with any variety of frame shapes in the cardboard silhouettes. Participants can choose to make a tshirt frame, a dress frame, or any other fashion garment or ornamental home decor object.















# INTERMEDIATE ART LESSON

## - POTATO STAMP WALL TAPESTRY -

In this activity participants will create their own repeat-print wall tapestry using a potato printing technique. Encourage participants to consider what kind of repeat print they might like to make, but keep shapes as simple as possible to avoid complicated carving. This activity should be fun and quick to make! This instruction sheet is written to create a tulip design, but can be altered for other repeat-print patterns.

### Materials:

- Sheet of raw canvas fabric (approximately 10 x 10 in)
- Potato
- Acrylic paint or fabric paint (use fabric paint if you intend to wash the print at any time)
- Plate or palette for paints
- Paint brush
- Paring knife (to carve the potato)
- Protective work surface
- String
- Pencil

### Instructions:

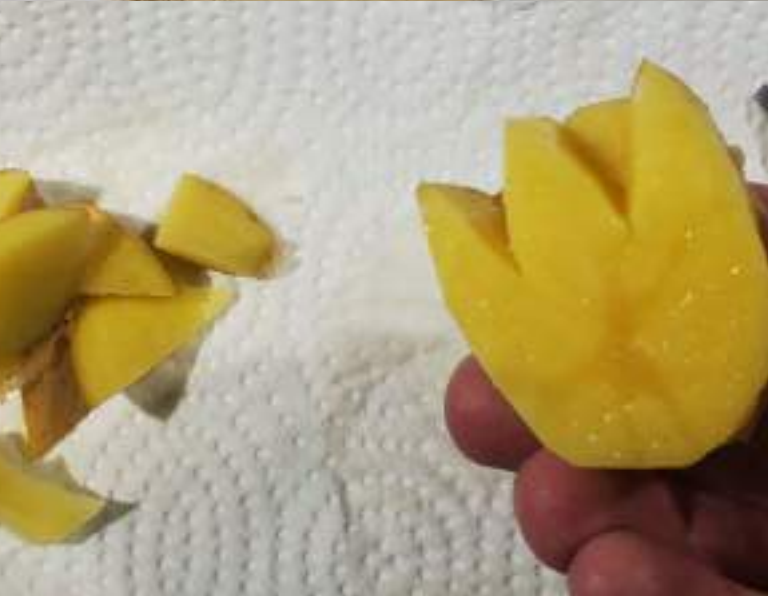
*Note: For visual instructions, see pages 35 and 36.*

- Step 1. Cut (or have an adult cut) one end off of a potato, about one or two inches thick.
- Step 2. Carve (or have an adult carve) notches into the potato end piece, to create a tulip flower shape.
- Step 3. From the remaining part of the potato, cut off the mid-section (about one inch thick) leaving another end piece about one or two inches thick.
- Step 4. Cut the mid section into a rectangular stem, and cut the other end piece into two half circles that will create leaves.
- Step 5. Repeat-print the tulip flower potato piece by dipping it into paint, wiping off excess paint on the edge of the paint tray, and pressing it onto the fabric. Re-dip the potato stamp in the paint before each press on the fabric.
- Step 6. Repeat-print the tulip stem under each tulip flower, following the same process in step 5.
- Step 7. Repeat-print the tulip leaves, on the sides of a select few tulip stems, following the same process used in step 5.
- Step 8. Let dry, and then poke two holes in the top of the fabric piece using a pencil, making the holes about three inches apart, and then attach a string to the top to hang the potato-print tapestry from.













**Variation:** Use fabric paints to print repeat-patterns onto jeans or yardages of fabric for sewing unique fashion pieces.

# ADVANCED ART LESSON

## - NATURE INSPIRED FASHION DESIGN -

Fashion designers are often inspired by the natural world when coming up with a new collection, or designing a unique garment. In this activity, participants will select a photograph of something they find interesting or beautiful from nature, and design a unique wearable art piece or outfit with elements that resemble or are inspired by that photo.

Participants should be directed to pay attention to texture, pattern, form, and shape when drawing their fashion garment(s).

### **Materials:**

- Printed off drawing models
- Printed off nature-inspiration photo (some examples can be found on page 40)
- Blank sheet of printer paper
- Pencil
- Coloured pencils

### **Instructions:**

Step 1. Print off page 38 (Drawing Models) and select one of the models to draw your garment(s) on.

Step 2. Trace or sketch out your chosen model on a blank sheet of paper, so there is only one model on the page, creating a focal point for your design.

Step 3. Plan out your fashion garment(s), paying attention to the forms, colours, patterns, and textures that you see in the nature photo you are drawing inspiration from. In our example visual instructions on page 39, we have drawn inspiration from the texture and form of the flower's pistil to create the texture and form of the pants, and the flower petals inspired the structure and form of the lapels on the outfit's top.

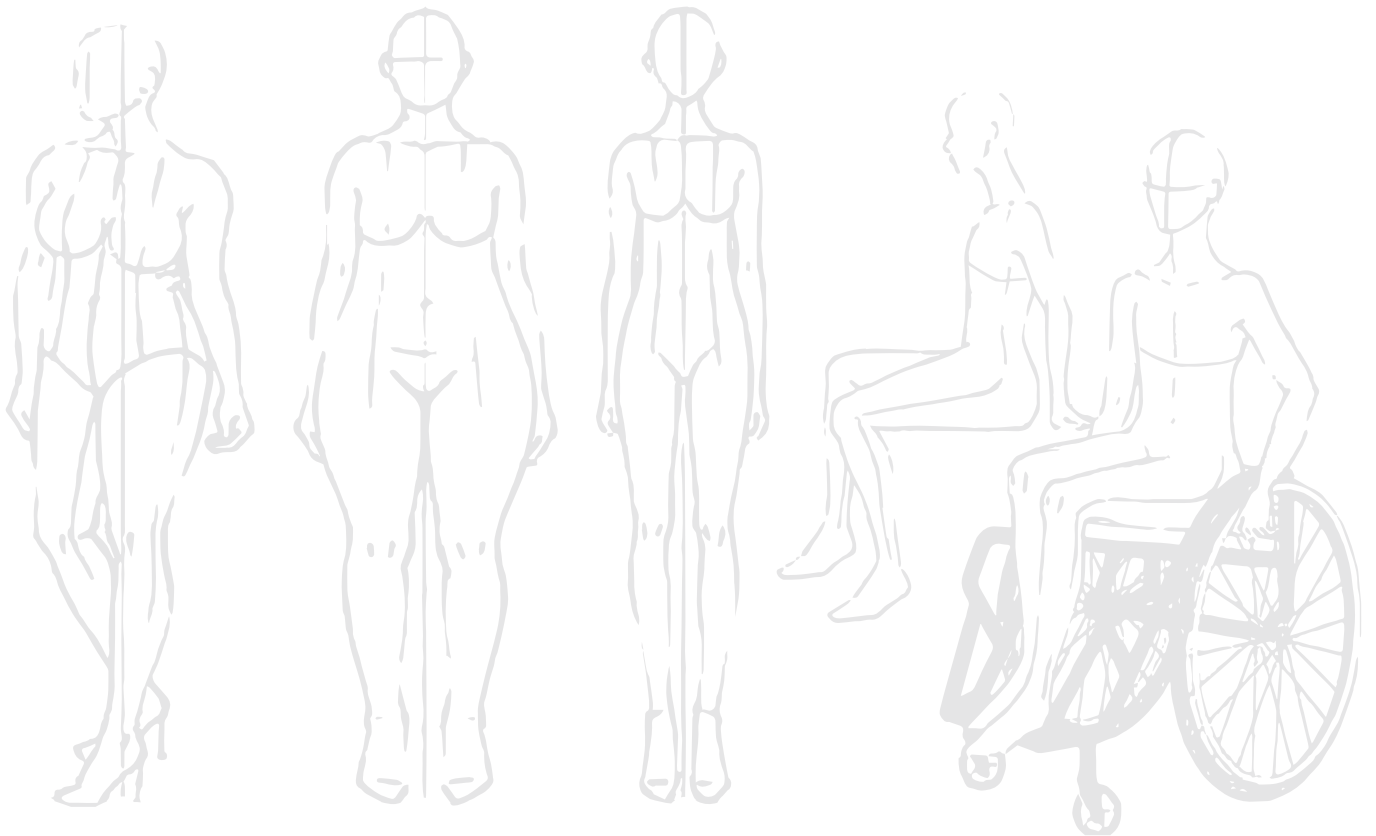
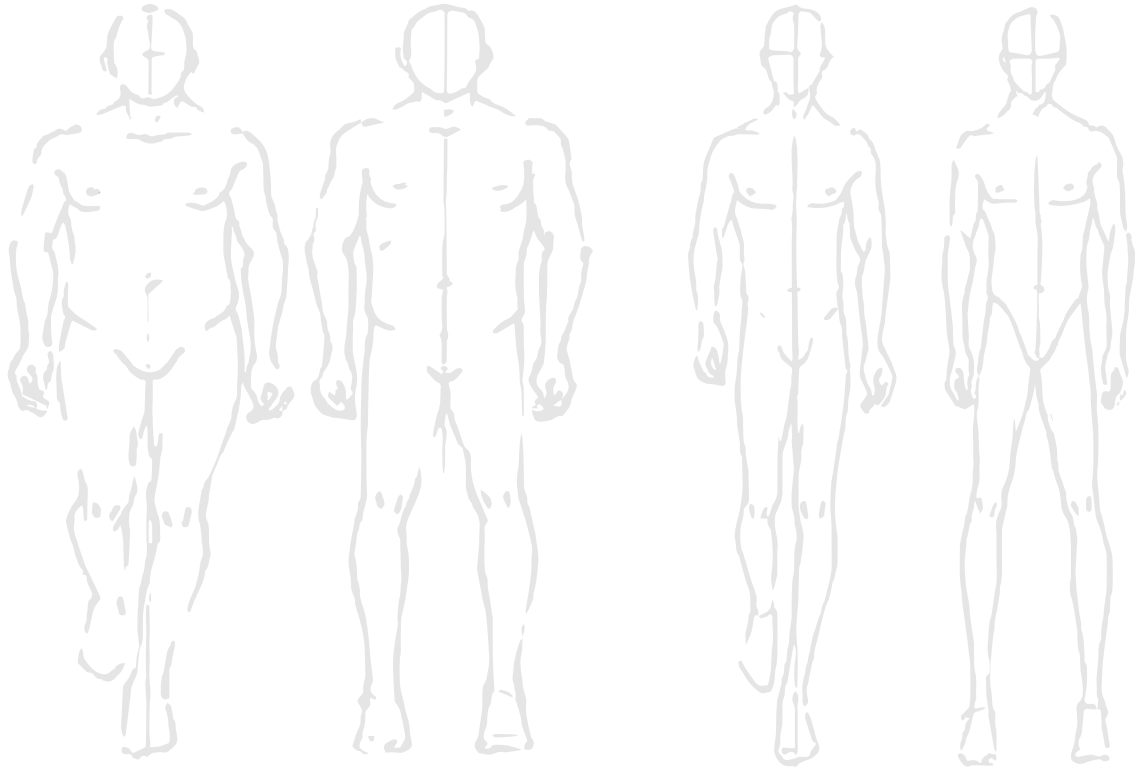
Step 4. Have participants share their fashion designs and describe how nature inspired them.

**To see more examples of nature-inspired fashion design, watch the video or visit the fashion blog below:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGb55phLhzw>

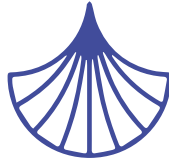
<https://mabelthefashionmuse.com/nature-in-fashion>

# Drawing Models









Using your own nature photograph, one of the above examples, or a photo found using an online search engine, design a full outfit based on something found in nature.

### **Variation**

This activity can be altered to suit a collage making activity by having participants cut out pieces from nature magazines in the shapes of garments, and create a fashion collage artwork.

# RESOURCES

"How and where to find inspiration for your designs," YouTube. Uploaded by Fashion Teaching. Apr 23, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGb55phLhzw>

Jill Sherman. "Nature as Inspiration." Mabel the Fashion Muse. Accessed Sept 11, 2023. <https://mabelthefashionmuse.com/nature-in-fashion>

Rahul Mishra. " World's best designers turn to nature for inspiration, present spectacular collections." Luxebook. June 8, 2020. Accessed Sept 11, 2023. <https://luxebook.in/best-new-fashion-collections-inspired-by-nature/>

Victoria and Albert Museum. "Fashion inspired by the natural world." Accessed Sept 11, 2023. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/fashion-inspired-by-the-natural-world>

"Zero Waste Daniel Turns Clothing Scraps Into Fashion | NowThis." YouTube. Uploaded by NowThis News. Aug 12, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qqiKNzwHMg>

## **PATTERN INDEX RESOURCE:**

<https://patternity.org/keywords/>



# CREDITS

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**Artists** – Denys Cook, Maggie E.M. Dunbar, John Fukushima, Tom Hamilton, Illingworth Kerr, Irene Klar, William Laing, RFM McInnis, Gary Olson, Coral Poser, and McKenna Prather.

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*Alberta* 