Touching the Sky

Esther Hoflick | Angela Fehr | Elizabeth Hutchinson

Elizabeth Hutchinson
Nostalgia IIII, 2022

ART GALLERY of GRANDE PRAIRIE

Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program

Alberta Foundation for the Arts

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.

Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Alberta

ART GALLERY of GRANDE PRAIRIE

art gallery of alberta

The Alberta Society of Artists

ESPLANADE
Arts & Heritage Centre

The AFA and TREX partners respectfully acknowledge that the artistic activity we support takes place on the territories of Treaty 6, 7 and 8: lands of First Nations and Métis peoples.

TREX

Touching the Sky

Esther Hoflick | Angela Fehr | Elizabeth Hutchinson

Curated by Robin Lynch

How can an artwork capture the dynamic experience of space? What does the smell of rain look like in a painting? Or our dream experiences in relationship to our waking experiences? Even in a moment when the landscape appears still, there is tons of activity happening that cannot be captured in a single frame—from the intricate and complex patterns of weather and climate to the buzzing of cellular exchanges on a micro level. The landscape is alive, and fluctuating—and so is our own journey through it. As we move through the world, we experience a wonderful abundance of senses, thoughts, and feelings, as our bodies respond to, absorb, and contribute to our surroundings. For millennia, artists have imaginatively worked to translate these embodied experiences, including phenomena that extend beyond the visual senses like smell, touch, emotion, spirituality, sound, and time. Balancing between abstract marking and painterly realism, Touching the Sky features three Peace Region artists whose work is rooted in exploring these embodied experiences and our ability to represent them through art.

Working with watercolours, Angela Fehr embraces the ephemeral nature of water in relationship to her depiction of the landscape, allowing her experience of the materials and the elements to shift the direction of the artwork. Inspired by Theosophists from her matrilineal history, dreams, and philosophies of matter, Esther Hoflick questions the separation of the body from the world, blurring the distinction between external and internal, as well as the interrelations between the painter, painting materials, and environment. Inspired by nostalgia as an experience, Elizabeth Hutchinson's artworks combine her ecological memory of the landscape along the Atlantic coast with the personal significance of the same location as it lives in her memory. Each of the artworks in Touching the Sky hover between our ability to represent space, and our environment's profound shaping of our daily experiences. As Elizabeth Hutchinson writes, "More than a collection of images, they are a gathering of memories that remind us of the poetic potential of our collective emotional relationship to the landscape."

MEET THE ARTISTS

Esther Hoflick

Moving from her childhood home, a rural community north of Peterborough, Ontario, Esther Hoflick completed her B.A. Honours in Studio Arts from the University of Guelph in 2007 - with a minor in English Literature. In 2012, the artist moved to Montreal where she lived and worked until her MFA at the University of Ottawa, 2017-19. The artist also occasionally spends summers living in a tent in Dawson City, Yukon and currently, is Chair of the Department of Fine Arts at Grande Prairie Regional College in Northern Alberta (but not living in a tent).

Hoflick was the co-founder of Night Owl Contemporary, a gallery for emerging artists in Montreal, and ran The Living Art Room, a small community-based art school. She worked as curator for Artbomb Montreal, a daily auction of Canadian art, and received a grant from the Québec Jeunes Volontaires program. She has worked as a studio assistant for painters Peter Barron and Richard Hayman in Peterborough, Don Russell, in Guelph, and John Brown, in Toronto. Her work has been exhibited at Artspace, in Peterborough; the Art Gallery of Guelph; Espace Projet, in Montreal; Galerie UQO, in Gatineau, QC, and Gallery Karsh Mason in Ottawa, among others.

Artist Statement

I am fascinated both by materials and by philosophies of matter. Specifically, I'm curious how we perceive ourselves in relation to the physical world and how these intrinsic perceptions are paralleled, metaphorically, by the act of creating visual objects.

In consequence, I've been thinking in terms of new materialist philosophies which are an environmentalist and feminist way to interpret the interactions between internal perceptions and the external world. Fluctuating between representation and abstraction, my artworks use the malleability of visual language to address these ambiguities of perception.

I am currently painting with an oil emulsion on plaster where the pigment and surface become inseparable, much as we are inseparable from our physical environment. I think of the paintings as objects in the world and so place the works in conversations amongst themselves and with the space around them. By filtering my own experiences of place and body through neo-materialist thought processes and the act of painting itself, images surface, hover indeterminately. The paintings reference an almost schizophrenic understanding of the rhizomatic nature of all and everything, while brooding on specific moments of intra-activity. The paint soaks into the surface, and yet is removable by sanding and scraping, thus the images are permitted to emerge, and then rebutted; subtle and surrounded by a blankness. The interpretation of image, or the hunt for it thus evokes an awareness of perception; the paintings, as objects, take over some of the control. My paintings address the inextricability of meaning, nonsense, myself, or the world, from myself, itself: from matter.

Esther Hoflick *Spell for Healing a Fracture*, 2022
Oil emulsion, coloured pencil and graphite on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

MEET THE ARTISTS

Elizabeth Hutchinson

Elizabeth Hutchinson is a professional artist and arts integration educator who lives and works in Grande Prairie, Alberta. She is passionate about how we form relationships with the living world. She approaches the role of artist and educator in a similar manner, led by curiosity and a deep enchantment with the marvels of nature. She advocates forthe myriad of gifts that come from creating space for creativity, nature, and play in our lives.

In line with a love of play, the artist enjoys a variety of mediums, believing they are all tools to communicate your personal visual language. She divides her time between slow and thoughtful oil paintings and visceral mixed media works combining watercolor and soft pastel.

Hutchinson is represented by the Grant Berg Gallery. Her work has been shown in group and solo shows in Alberta, BC, and New Brunswick, with collectors across Canada and the US. She was a featured artist in the December issue of Arabella Magazine. She holds a BFA from Mount Allison University and a BEd from the University of Maine and Presque Isle. Hutchinson is an active juried member of the FCA and an executive member of the PRFCA. She loves to learn and has benefited with gratitude from workshops and courses with the Grand Central Atelier (NY), Jean Pederson, Mark Heine, Charles Miano, Edward Povey, Kathleen Speranza, Susan Woolgar, and more.

"I love the organic surprises that happen with watercolor. You co-create with gravity and chance. The medium demands you drop your plan and tune in to opportunities as they present themselves, letting your intuition lead. It is a wonderful middle ground between realism and abstraction, memory and imagination."

Artist Statement

I am fascinated by the overlap between our ecological memories and our inner narratives. Once, I played in the woods, chased streams, and caught water skippers by following their shadows. Small children understand what treasure is. They fill their pockets with stones and feathers. They pull wildflowers for the ones they love. Children connect with nature effortlessly, with no need for anyone to teach them. There is a hidden narrative I was told somewhere along the way, that nature is a pristine 'other' that only thrives when I am not near. I want to tell our children a different truth. That nature thrives inside them and the wind longs for them to dance. An entire world ebbs and flows in response to our movement. We are part of a symbiotic web where all of our actions have repercussions for the pulse of life around us. The rocks at our feet hold our memories. No wonder they are treasures collected by little hands. The sublime sits unnoticed in our daily lives and waits for us to hold our breath in wonder.

My images in 'Touching the Sky' are expressive works that draw on more than the immediate and visual. They explore our relationship with place and concepts of belonging. They become recollections of sensation; the feeling of wind, the rustle of long grass, the smell of earth. I am amazed at how a specific hue of green or the angle of a horizon line can instantly connect a viewer to their own experiences. More than a collection of images, they are a gathering of memories that remind us of the poetic potential of our collective emotional relationship to the landscape.

Elizabeth Hutchinson
Nostalgia III
2022
Mixed Media on Paper
Collection of the Artist

MEET THE ARTISTS

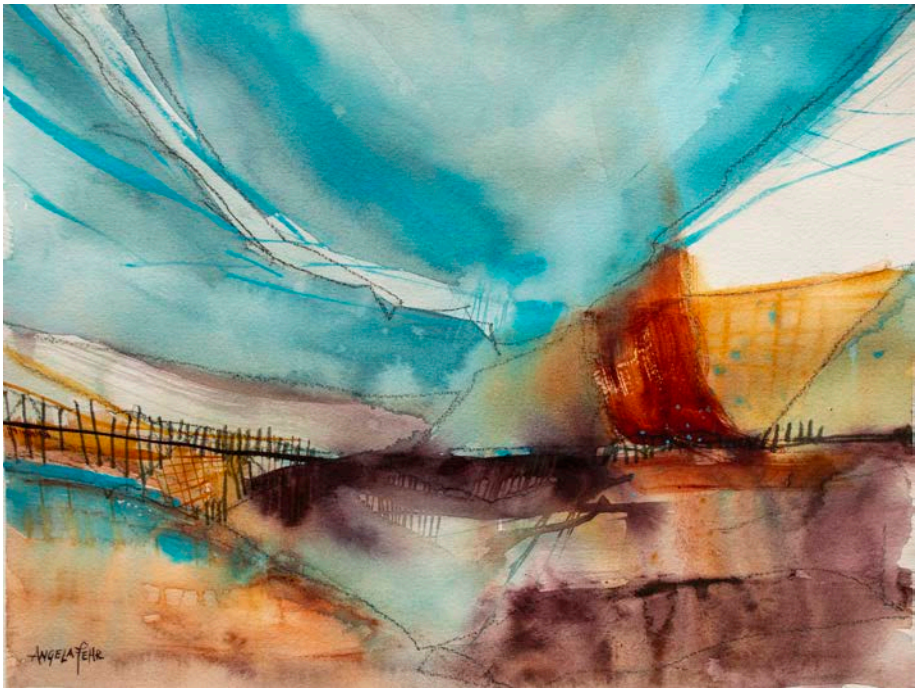
Angela Fehr

Perhaps resilience is the only option for a northern artist. Born in the Peace River region, Angela Fehr returned there to settle after spending her childhood in Ontario, the USA and Papua New Guinea. A childhood love of art led her to take her first watercolour classes at the Dawson Creek Art Gallery, and isolation as a stay at home mum led her to reach out to communicate to other artists via YouTube and teaching watercolour lessons online. That same resilience is what helped Angela realize that the key to creating her most authentic work came, not from flawless technique, but in giving herself permission to fall in love with the painting process, regardless of outcome. Watercolour has become Angela's way of interpreting her world, expressing her connection to the beauty of the Peace Region, and the lessons she has learned through watercolour have filled her life with meaning and significance. Angela lives with her husband and three teenagers on an acreage overlooking Dawson Creek, British Columbia. Her art and classes can be found online at AngelaFehr.com.

Artist Statement

As an artist, I have a calling to notice. I stand, feet rooted to the earth, eyes scanning horizon. Am I only a witness? Do I fit in this place? Is there a gap between land and sky where the onlooker lives, or can an artist touch the sky and earth and knit the two together?

Nature informs both my subject and my process. As a watercolorist I marry water with color to create my work, understanding that I am working alongside a medium that must be allowed to flow, to evolve and my responses are as immediate as the flick of a brush. Any original intention must be released if the painting turns in a new direction, and this brings me into a relationship and intimacy with my chosen medium that is dangerously vulnerable and continually new.



Angela Fehr
Does it Begin Where It Ends
2022
Watercolour and graphite
Collection of the Artist

ARTIST TALK VIDEO

Artist Talk with Esther Hoflick, Elizabeth Hutchinson & Angela Fehr talking about their style of work, influences and inspiration used to create the works "Touching The Sky."

Scan to watch the Artist Talk video

ARTWORK

Clockwise from top left

Esther Hoflick
Solemnity
2021

Oil emulsion, Carbothello, soft pastel and graphite on plaster on Styrofoam.
Collection of the Artist

Esther Hoflick
Spell for Healing a Fracture
2022

Oil emulsion, coloured pencil and graphite on plaster on Styrofoam.
Collection of the Artist

Esther Hoflick
Standing Flashback
2022

Oil Emulsion, pearlescent powder, coloured pencil, soft pastel, Carbothello and graphite on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

Esther Hoflick
Tendency
2021

Oil Emulsion, pearlescent powder, coloured pencil, soft pastel, Carbothello and graphite on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

Clockwise from top left

Esther Hoflick
In Tune With Others
2021-22

Oil Emulsion, soft pastel and graphite on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

Esther Hoflick
Internal Return
2022

Oil Emulsion, Carbothello and graphite on plaster on styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

Esther Hoflick
Introception
2022

Oil emulsion, graphite and coloured pencil on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

Esther Hoflick
Never mind
2021

Graphite and Carbothello, on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

ARTWORK

Clockwise from top left

Esther Hoflick
Anchor
2021

Oil emulsion on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

Esther Hoflick
Assuage to Begin
2022

Oil emulsion, coloured pencil, graphite and wax on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

Esther Hoflick
Cherry Blossoms
2021

Oil emulsion, graphite, coloured pencil, soft pastel and dry pigment on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

Angela Fehr
Does it Begin Where It Ends
2022
Watercolour and graphite
Collection of the Artist

Angela Fehr
Landlines
2020
Watercolour
Collection of the Artist

Angela Fehr
Receding Waters
2020
Watercolour
Collection of the Artist

Angela Fehr
Peace Valley Sentinels
2022
Watercolour
Collection of the Artist

ARTWORK

Clockwise from top left

Elizabeth Hutchinson
Nostalgia I
2022
Mixed media on paper
Collection of the Artist

Elizabeth Hutchinson
Nostalgia II
2022
Mixed media on paper
Collection of the Artist

Elizabeth Hutchinson
Nostalgia III
2022
Mixed Media on Paper
Collection of the Artist

Elizabeth Hutchinson
Nostalgia IIII
2022
Mixed media on paper
Collection of the Artist

CRATE LISTING

Crate #1

Didactic Panels & Labels

1 – Elizabeth Hutchinson, Nostalgia III
2 – Esther Hoflick, Internal Return
3 – Elizabeth Hutchinson, Nostalgia IIII
4 – Esther Hoflick, In Tune With Others
5 – Esther Hoflick, Spell for Healing a Fracture
6 – Esther Hoflick, Assuage to Begin
7 – Esther Hoflick, Tendency
8 – Esther Hoflick, Anchor
9 – Esther Hoflick, Cherry Blossoms

Crate #2

10 – Angela Fehr, Dose it Begin Where it Ends
11 – Angela Fehr, Land Lines
12 – Angela Fehr, Peace Valley Sentinels
13 – Elizabeth Hutchinson, Nostalgia II
14 – Elizabeth Hutchinson, Nostalgia I
15 – Esther Hoflick, Never mind
16 – Angela Fehr, Receding Waters
17 – Esther Hoflick, Solemnity
18 – Esther Hoflick, Introception
19 - Esther Hoflick, Standing Flashback

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
Jamie-Lee Cormier – TREX Curator, 780.357.7483
Region 1, AFA Travelling Exhibitions

Touching the Sky

EDUCATION GUIDE

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HOW TO LOOK AT ARTWORK

Based on the Four Stages of Criticism

Age Levels:
K-Grade 3: Do stage 1 and possibly stage 2
Grades 4-6: Do stage 1, 2 and possibly 3
Grades 7-12: Do all four stages

Stage 1: Description

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

- List or describe all that you see. Hint: Start with what you know.
- Describe the subject. What is this a picture of? Landscape, nature, people, animals, flowers, still life, etc.
- Describe the materials used to make this art (medium/materials): Is it an acrylic or watercolor painting? Drawing? Photograph?
- Describe the type of lines. What kind of shapes are used? Natural or geometric? Is there any texture to the surface of the artwork (rough/smooth//dry/wet). Does the work have areas (values) of dark and light?

For Grades 10-12: Describe the style of work. Is it realistic or abstract? Does it have a theme or subject? Can you describe a style that it resembles? For example, Impressionism, Expressionism, Surrealist.

Stage 2: Analysis - Observing Relationships

How is this artwork (composition) arranged?

- List and describe the principles of design (movement, contrast, unity, balance, emphasis, rhythm, scale and space).
- Are there contrasts of light and dark colors?
- Are colors or shapes repeated to create unity or rhythm? Is there a sense of motion?
- Do the objects seem to be close up and in a shallow space or move far back to create deep space and distance?
- Is there one object that stands out and is more emphasized than other objects?

For Grades 10-12:
- Does the artist use complimentary colors against each other to create balance?
- What type of balance is it (symmetrical or asymmetrical)?

Stage 3: Interpretation

What meaning or reasons did the artist have in making this artwork?

This stage is a statement to help make sense of all the observations made in previous stages. It is the most difficult, yet most creative stage. It is the process that makes connections between the artwork and the viewer's personal experiences.

- What do you think this work is about?
- What mood or feeling do you get from this work?
- Why did the artist create this work?
- What do you think the artist thinks or feels about their world?
- Give an explanation of the work or describe the problem the artist is trying to solve. Remember there are no right or wrong answers in the interpretation. Each viewer will bring their own ideas and life experience into their explanations.

Stage 4: Final Conclusion About the Work

What do I think or feel about this work?

Decide what you like or dislike about the work. This is purely subjective, however the decision should be backed with valid explanations and possible ideas as to how the artist could have changed it to make it better.

- Do you like the work? Why or why not?
- What are the strengths about this work?
- What are the weaknesses and how would you change them?
- Has your impression of the work changed after observing and analyzing the piece?

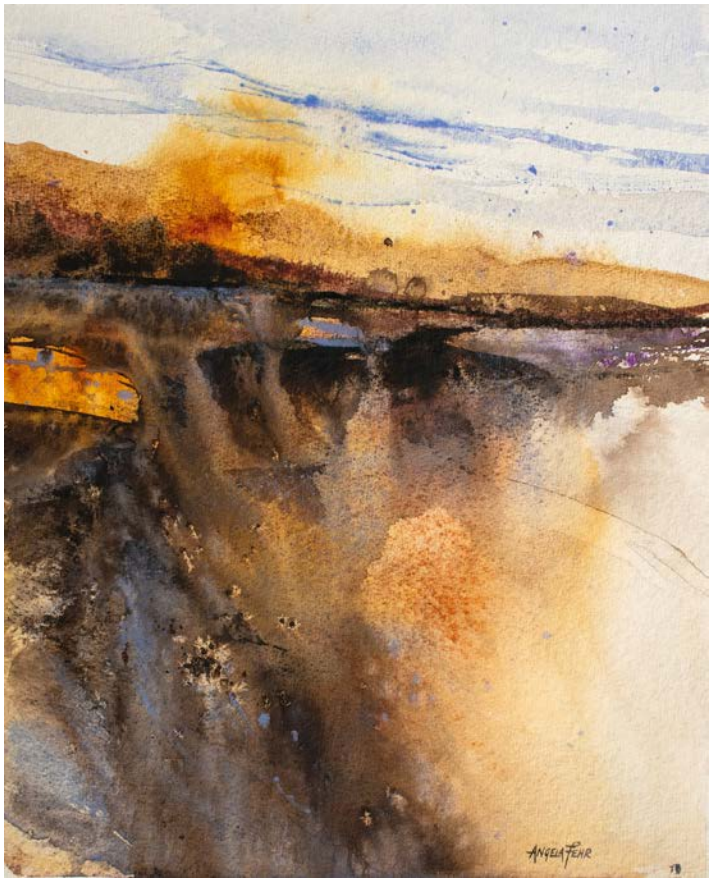
EDUCATOR'S GUIDED TOUR

Touching the Sky features artworks of three artists, Angela Fehr, Esther Hoflick, and Elizabeth Hutchinson, from Dawson Creek and Grande Prairie, Alberta. Through landscape paintings, their work investigates the relationships we form with the physical world. We have a tendency to view ourselves as separate from our environment, not realizing the impact it has on shaping our daily lives not only through visuals, but sensations, emotions, spirituality, and time. These artists explore these embodied experiences and complex connections to see how we engage with the world around us.

Guided by intuition and wonder, Angela Fehr's landscapes are vibrant with colour and filled with sweeping, gestural marks. Her paintings are deeply personal, drawing upon and exploring her place in the world. The artist paints with her heart and her feelings and emotions flow freely into the work.

Angela's paintings evolve from careful observation of the world around her. This allows the artist to truly take in a moment, to be fully present and in turn imbues her work with a sense of warmth and earnestness. While inspired by the landscapes that surrounds her, Angela's work is not bound to the source material. Rather than being concerned with representing exactly what she sees, the artist lets go and embraces the spontaneous and unpredictable nature of working with water. The painting is a dance between artist and medium, reacting to and recognizing new opportunities. Her work often features generous swaths of bold colour intermingling delicately and familiar scenery that invite the viewer to pause and leisurely take in the work.

In "Receding Waters" you can see the freedom of the paint and water to flow through the work creating a dramatic downwards pull of dark colour. This gives the illusion of water pouring over the edge of a bank. The darkness gives the artwork a depth and heaviness compared to the soft background and rolling clouds. Perhaps, as the title suggests, this is the aftermath of heavy rains or a flood. The fierce storm has given way to gentle blue skies and provides a sense of hope and optimism despite the possible destruction.



Angela Fehr
Receding Waters
2020
Watercolour
Collection of the Artist

How do we relate to our environment? How is our perception influenced by the world around us? Is the internal separated from the external? Does the environment have autonomy or agency to act independently of how we perceive it? These are some of the questions and themes Esther Hoflick contemplates through her paintings. Generally, Euro-Western thinking has structured the world around humans and into distinct binaries where things may interact, but ultimately remain separate; humans versus the environment, conscious versus subconscious, dreams versus awake, and internal versus external. The artist examines these binaries through a new perspective, filtering these thoughts through new materialist philosophies and Theosophical histories. Essentially, it encourages the exploration and understanding of the autonomy of the physical world and suggests that everything is connected and cannot be separated from each other.

New materialist theory, or new materialism, looks to challenge the inherent views where humans have been considered the most important element of existence while matter, anything non-human or other-than-human, is considered passive and lacking meaning. This anthropocentric way of thinking, where everything is viewed and interpreted through human experience and values, gives way to new thinking centred around matter. It considers that matter is inherently dynamic and meaningful and rejects the idea of humans as being separate from the physical world. Instead, it's a complicated and interwoven relationship and matter has its own active force and agency to act beyond human intentions.

Theosophy is an occult spiritualist movement that originated in the 19th century that emphasizes mystical experience. It mixed various elements from different religious, philosophical, and occultist ideas like Hinduism with ancient Greek philosophy and modern science. While there were no strictly defined principles or doctrine, it was generally believed that enlightened individuals could perceive the truth beyond science's capabilities and the hidden meaning in sacred texts. The study and inspiration from Theosophy is personal to the artist as she is the great granddaughter of a theosophist. Historically, painting is tied to Theosophy as it inspired artists to paint in a simplified or abstract way.

To consider the perception of ourselves within external space and how we connect to our physical world in relation to these complex ideas and relationships, Esther creates ambiguous landscapes that teeter on the edge between abstraction and representation. They often feature a combination of the human form with soft, organic shapes contrasted with inorganic shapes of hard edges and lines. Painting on plaster, she uses assorted materials like coloured pencil, graphite and an oil emulsion to produce a variety of colours, textures and striking marks. Plaster also gives the artist the ability to scrape or sand the surface in order to remove marks or create delicate transitions between images and layers of colour. There's a back and forth between the artist and materials. She allows the composition to reveal itself throughout the process and works with the materials instead of trying to control them or reach a preconceived outcome. The unusual shapes of the paintings contribute an organic and inimitable quality to the works.

continued...

EDUCATOR'S GUIDED TOUR

In "Solemnity", you can see how the artist creates a rich multilayered narrative for the viewer to discover. Your eyes are immediately drawn to the centre of the piece where it appears there are three figures, two are standing and the middle figure is possibly kneeling. Beside them is what looks like a box with a floating ring of alternating colours. It feels mysterious, maybe even spiritual and you can see how the artist has scratched the surface to make the colours beside the box appear almost translucent and ethereal, adding to the mystique. If you look closer at the figures you can see they each have varying intensities in colour and solidity. The one closest to the box is the most vibrant, standing firmly with arm pointing away and seems distinct from the others with some sort of headpiece. Perhaps they are the most resolute in their beliefs, turning those away who are unsure. The dark haze of red surrounding them creates a feeling of intensity and seriousness in the scene.

Since childhood, Elizabeth Hutchinson has been enthralled with the beauty and subtleties of nature. Growing up on the Atlantic coast, she keenly observed the world around her while her imagination sparked wonder and awe. This fascination with the natural world and how we connect with nature is a continual theme throughout the artist's work.

This exhibition showcases a series of four artworks from the artist centered around the idea of nostalgia. Nostalgia can be defined as a wistful desire to return in thought or in fact to a former time in one's life, to one's home or homeland. For Elizabeth, she recreates the dearly loved landscapes of New Brunswick where she grew up. To visualize these memories, the artist embraced the use of watercolour as its surprising and unpredictable nature straddles the line between realism and abstraction as well as memory and imagination. These expressive works not only encapsulate the artist's memory of the landscape, but also the ephemeral qualities of the smell of the earth, the feeling of wind, and the sounds of long grass rustling.

Esther Hoflick
Solemnity
2021

Oil emulsion, Carbothello, soft pastel and graphite on plaster on Styrofoam
Collection of the Artist

The series is unified through a subtle colour palette that give the works an overall tranquil feel. The almost hazy quality seems to emphasize that these landscapes are a distant memory of the artist. The soft billowing forms of the water, land and sky blend into each other and create a sense that these elements are inseparable from one another. The landscapes are punctuated with zips of bright colour and visceral line work. These lines help cultivate a sense of movement and energy while guiding your eye through the work. Each of these works offers a different aspect of thoughts and sensations for the viewer to consider. "Nostalgia III" for instance, with the softened background and subdued colours evokes a gentle rainstorm and elicits the smell of rain. It feels like the scene is draped in fog with water gently collecting in the fore and middle of the landscape.

Touching the Sky explores a central theme of how we relate to and connect to our environment and in turn how it transforms us. The collection of these artworks demonstrates the various ways we can represent and embody that experience in art. The artists' works offer a moment of solace, a time to contemplate our existence and connection to all things. There's a beautiful, reciprocal process that happens between artist and viewer. Just as the artist needed time to engage with and respond to the medium to discover the work so, too must the viewer take time to discover what they're perceiving. To appreciate the complexity and nuance of the paintings, the viewer must be fully present, willing to let the work unfold before them. By doing so, they will look at the world through another's eyes and perhaps learn something new about themselves.

Elizabeth Hutchinson
Nostalgia III
2022
Mixed Media on Paper
Collection of the Artist

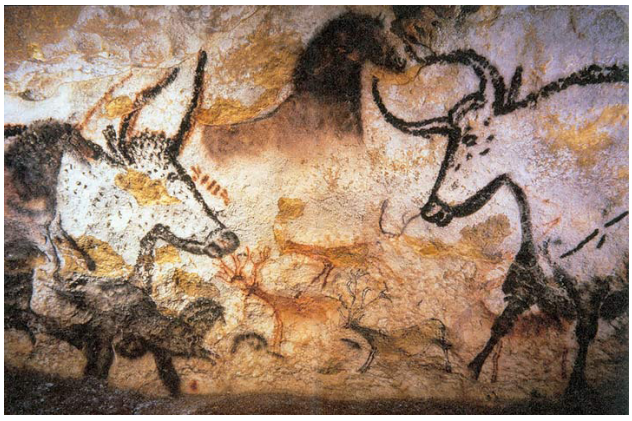
A Brief Glimpse of Watercolour History

Watercolour painting is a popular medium today, appreciated for its expressive and spontaneous nature. Compared to all the mediums for painting, watercolour offers an inner glow or luminous quality that can't be matched. This is because watercolour is semi-transparent, allowing for the white of the paper to come through and give the impression of light reflecting from within. Artworks also have a sense of resolve and vitality due to the character of working with water. Artists must be decisive in their brushstrokes while welcoming the uncertainty. Jennifer Higgie, describing what it's like to work with watercolour said "I soon discovered that to labour over a watercolour is to ruin it: it's a medium of brevity – it doesn't let you faff about or change your mind. Unlike oil paint – which, being slow to dry, can be endlessly reworked, or a pencil mark, which can be rubbed out – watercolour cannot be corrected." This seemingly simple medium that we know today was used by artists for hundreds of years, but the origin of the medium dates to prehistoric times.

Watercolour paint consists of dry pigment powder mixed with a binder that dissolves in water. The binder helps the pigment adhere to the paper and typically gum arabic is used. Also called acacia gum, it is made from the sap of the Acacia senegal tree found in tropical Africa and is used in the production of many different items ranging from foods to things like paint, cement, and glue.

Since watercolour is simply a water-based pigment, the first surviving examples of this painting method goes all the way back to the Paleolithic ages where prehistoric humans painted on cave walls. They used pigments ground from minerals and charcoal along with various tools to create artworks like you see in the famous Lascaux Cave paintings in southwestern France. They are estimated to be around 15,000 to 17,000 years old.

Ancient Egyptians also used watercolours to paint their papyrus scrolls and decorate public spaces and tombs. They typically used naturally occurring pigments but discovered by mixing some natural ingredients together and heating them to a high temperature, they could create a brilliant blue colour that we call Egyptian blue.



Watercolour painting flourished in ancient Eastern cultures like China and Japan, with Chinese painting as one of the oldest continuous artistic traditions in the world. Around 4,000 B.C., traditional Chinese painting developed in relation with other crafts, like pottery, and consisted of decorative patterns. It wasn't until nearly 3,600 years later that representational paintings emerged on silk where artists started to paint the world around them. By 100 A.D. they invented hand-made paper and paintings prominently focused on religious themes. By the fourth century, landscape paintings had taken hold and were considered the greatest of subjects to paint and are still highly regarded today.

In Europe, water-based paints weren't widely used until paper started to be produced on the continent. Fabriano, a company still in business today, was one of the first papermakers established in 1276 in Italy. Initially these paints were used by monks to create highly decorated illuminated manuscripts during the Middle Ages. It was during the Renaissance, however, that the medium started to catch the attention of other artists thanks to German painter Albrecht Dürer. He is generally considered the first master of watercolour as he developed new techniques that highlighted the transparent and luminous qualities of the paint in his studies of animals and plants for other artworks. His paintings inspired the opening of a school to learn watercolour painting in Germany. Watercolour would become popular for illustrating wildlife and plants, creating studies and preparatory sketches, and rendering maps, but the merits of the medium weren't seriously considered in Europe for another few hundred years.

Watercolour emerged as a serious artistic endeavour in Europe with paintings rivaling oil artworks during the Golden Age of watercolour. This time period is typically associated with Britain during the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century. Advancements in paper and paint quality and commercial availability helped propel the medium forward. In 1780, William Reeves invented small, hard cakes that could be dipped in water to create paint. Previously, artists had to grind natural pigments to create colour, or they could buy the paint in liquid form. Moist watercolours in metal tubes were introduced in 1846 by Winsor & Newton and British manufacturers raised the standard of quality of paints by using super fine pigment ground by machines to create consistent colours. By the 1850s, different types of high quality paper with a variety of textures and surfaces were produced that could readily withstand the watery medium.

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At the start of the Golden Age, tinted drawings were quite popular consisting of monochromatic topographical drawings and eventually landscapes. This rigid style of painting and lack of colour would give rise to the "Romantic" style developed around 1800 to break free from these conventions. Artists often tried to capture the ephemeral qualities and energy of a scene rather than a true likeness and featured expressive brushwork and strong colour. Due to the medium's inherent luminous qualities, it was adept at capturing the effects of light compared to other mediums. Artists also looked to paint serious subject matters, increasing the size of their paintings to compete with revered oil paintings. This expressive style would later inspire and influence the work of early Impressionists.

Watercolour became popular in the United States in the 19th century and continued its rise in popularity throughout the 20th century with artists from different art movements across the globe. Today you'll find amateur and expert artists alike delighting in the use of watercolour. The versatility of the medium allows for experimentation and can create stunning visuals filled with emotion and wonder that words fail to describe. The spontaneity gives artists a chance to follow their intuition and to create an artwork in conversation with the medium.

"It's a medium that encourages daydreaming; if you let it, it will lead you to unexpected places. When all of a sudden it comes together, it's like capturing sunlight." – Jennifer Higgie

The Impacts of Nature on Our Wellbeing

The modern age has largely cultivated a disconnect between nature and ourselves for many Western cultures. With technological advances and our increasingly busy lives, we have become further removed from our natural world. No longer do we live according to the cycles and rhythms occurring around us. The sun sets and with the flick of a switch we have light to illuminate our evenings and power to charge our electronics. Seasons come and go and yet our diets remain unrestricted, not to mention our access to exotic foods, thanks to global networks of supply.

Our urban centres are full of concrete and stone, transforming areas to prioritize functionality for transportation and construction. The occasional plants or trees are mainly for decorative purposes, like our perfectly manicured lawns, and typically the species come from different regions or countries. Large, wild animals aren't welcome, the dangers too great to pass through safely. And then we have our contradictory beliefs about nature. Our national parks are meant to keep nature pristine by limiting the impacts of humans on the landscape. We are seen as harmful to the environment, a violation of the natural order. Meanwhile, if we deem something economically beneficial, we exhaust the natural resource, obliterating the landscape for our benefit. Both models of thinking keep us separated from nature and as something to be controlled. We have designed our spaces with these ideas in mind, being isolated from nature as if it has no bearing on us. However, that is not the case at all.

Research has shown that urban areas compared to rural towns have 38% more instances of mental disorders, especially mood disorder like depression and anxiety. Many scientific studies have concluded that being in nature has positive effects on our physical and mental health. Spending time in green spaces, such as parks or the wilderness, can lower stress, boost our mood, increase happiness, and reduce the risk of certain mental disorders like depression. Some may think that these benefits can be derived from exercise alone, but a recent study from Stanford asked participants to either walk 90 minutes through a nature path or through the city. Those that walked through nature had better increased benefits than those that walked only through the city. It also appears that children exposed to nature throughout childhood where they can go out and play, through green spaces in their neighbourhoods and at schools, have reduced risk of mental and mood disorders later in life.

> "There is an awakening underway today to many of the values of nature and the risks and costs of its loss" – Gretchen Daily

Why does nature have such a positive effect on our moods and happiness? One theory is that it helps stop us from over-rumination, which is when we excessively think about negative experiences and feelings that can lead to depression. Natural settings provide an interactive distraction through enjoyable sights, sounds, and smells and can help stop us from over-ruminating. Another theory focuses on our connection. It appears that "people who feel that their self-concept is intertwined with nature report being a bit happier" indicates Dr. John Zelenski.

Being in nature can also enhance cognitive abilities by slowing down our busy brains. It helps improve our working memory, our ability to adapt our thinking and behaviours in reaction to our environment and increases attention span and impulse control. Nature has also shown to be restorative. It can increase our focus and energy while stimulating creative thinking. One study indicated it can reduce symptoms of ADHD. Being in nature is particularly important for children's cognitive development and helps with developing self-control behaviours. Several hypotheses might explain why our brain is better when surrounded by nature. One suggests that since our ancestors relied on the environment for survival and evolved in a natural setting, that we instinctually want to connect with nature. Others believe it may be due to how it lowers stress levels or because of its restorative properties promoting the ability to focus.

Nature also has the profound effect of helping us feel connected, not only to each other, but also the environment. It helps us see ourselves as part of a bigger picture, giving us a sense of purpose and meaning, while increasing our empathy. One study showed how trees and green spaces around public housing increased the feeling of community and belonging for residents, lowered levels of crime and aggression, and residents were more likely to offer help and support to each other. Other research surprisingly showed how even seeing videos of nature enhanced feelings of cooperation and connection to the environment. College students were assigned to watch either a video about nature or architecture and then played a fishing game. The students who watched the nature video showed higher signs of cooperation with others and were more likely to make better decisions that would help sustain the fish population rather than deplete the resource. This feeling of connection seems to stem from the areas of the brain associated with love and empathy activating when viewing nature versus urban scenes activating areas

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associated with fear and anxiety. A further possible explanation has to do with the emotion of awe. Awe is defined as an overwhelming feeling of reverence or admiration as a result of experiencing something that is grand, sublime, or extremely powerful. Some believe that awe can provoke feelings of generosity. What better way to evoke the feeling of awe than observing the magnificent scenes of nature?

While these studies have focused significantly on green spaces, researchers are expanding to look at areas that include water, like river and ocean views, also referred to as blue spaces. It seems that these blue spaces may have a slight edge over green spaces when it comes to restorative effects for the mind and body. Also, the "quality" of nature is an important factor. Wild areas, like our national parks that are protected from development and are preserved, are reported to induce greater feelings of connection and revitalizing effects on the mind and body compared to urban green spaces. Increased biodiversity with a greater variety of plants and animals had better outcomes of reducing anxiety and improving mood than less biodiverse landscapes. So how much time do you need in nature to gain the benefits mentioned? Research indicates a minimum of two hours spread throughout the week.

As more research becomes available and the acceptance of knowledge from other cultures and worldviews, Western understandings are evolving about our relationship and deeply personal connection to the natural world. Our architecture is progressing, accommodating larger windows for better views and providing access to trees and green spaces. City policies are moving to incorporate more parks in urban areas. As Richard Louv said "nature is not only nice to have, but it's a have-to-have for physical health and cognitive functioning." While our focus is slowly shifting to include nature in our daily lives, professor Peter H. Kahn worries that we are only focusing on experiencing this connection visually. Kahn indicates "that's important, but an impoverished view of what it means to interact with the natural world. We need to deepen the forms of interaction with nature and make it more immersive."

The next time you're in nature, try to fully embody the experience by noticing all of your senses. Close your eyes and let everything wash over you, the smells, sounds, and feelings. Everything you experience at any moment has an impact on how you feel, not only emotionally, but physically. We are not separate from nature, but simply a small interwoven piece capable of affecting and being affected by our environment.

Perhaps that's why artists have been so drawn to painting landscapes throughout the ages. Being immersed in nature, inspired by its awe and beauty, we can begin to imagine how they might have felt during those moments. Something kindled a longing to share what they were experiencing, their artwork an extension of their emotions. They've captured a part of ourselves and an ancient connection we have seemed to forgotten in our modern age.

Dürer and Turner, Innovators of European Watercolour Paintings

Watercolour painting has a long and rich history throughout the world. The medium was a staple in Asian art very early on but was predominantly used as a sketching or preparatory medium until the 18th and 19th century in Europe. Eventually, European artists started to recognize the unique qualities watercolour could achieve in a painting, a natural liveliness and luminous effect unmatched by other mediums. Their experimentation and transformation of the medium pushed boundaries and conventions, advancing watercolour as a medium to be considered for its own merits. Let's look at two artists who helped shape what we recognize today as watercolour painting.

Considered one of the greatest German Renaissance artists, Albrecht Dürer was a painter and printmaker who is often regarded the first master of watercolour painting in Europe. Born in Nuremburg as one of eighteen children in 1471, Dürer showed artistic talent at an early age. The son of a successful goldsmith, he apprenticed under his father and learned basic skills of drawing and metalworking. At the age of thirteen, he created a skilled silverpoint self-portrait that is believed to be the youngest self-portrait of a European master to survive to this day. In 1485, Dürer became an apprentice for four years under Nuremberg's prominent painter and woodcut illustrator Michael Wohlgemuth, before travelling abroad to places like the Netherlands and Italy, learning about different methods and techniques that influenced his artistic style.

His intricate and extensively detailed woodcuts brought fame and fortune to the artist throughout his life. For example, after his death in 1528, he left his wife Agnes an estate roughly ten times the annual salary of the mayor of Nuremberg. Dürer noticed the expressive potential of watercolour and its ability to add vitality to wildlife and botanical studies. The artist used watercolour as studies for his oil paintings and to create incredibly lifelike and meticulous paintings of animals and plants that stand out as masterpieces now. Arguably, his most famous watercolour work is Young Hare painted in 1502 where precise brushstrokes capture the delicate and luscious fur in such incredible detail. The ability to replicate the hare with such perfection and without the use of taxidermy has stumped admirers of the work. Dürer truly was a master of the natural world, his keen observations faithfully depicting intricate details while managing to maintain the spirit of the subject. The artist commanded the medium unlike any before, his paintings spurring the popularity of watercolour to paint wildlife and plants. His work would also influence the opening of a school in Germany to learn watercolour painting led by the artist Hans Bol.

The next influential artist from Europe was a few hundred years later and is considered among Britain's most prestigious painters. Joseph Mallord William Turner, also known as JMW Turner, left a legacy of more than 30,000 works on paper, 550 oil paintings, and 2000 watercolour paintings. Known for paintings in the Romantic style, his work featured expressive and imaginative landscapes that emphasized light and colour and subjects that expressed grand emotions, often of turbulent marine scenes. While his acclaim is still mostly focused on his oil paintings, his innovative watercolour paintings are highly regarded and helped shape his style of painting. He is often considered the father of watercolour landscape painting.

Born in 1775 in London, Turner had very minimal formal schooling as a child but showed great artistic promise with the encouragement of his father. By the age of thirteen he sold his drawings to patrons of his father, a wig-maker and barber, and was admitted to The Royal Academy of Arts when he was only fourteen years old. The following year he had the opportunity to share his work in the Royal Academy Exhibition. Turner found early success working as an architectural draftsman, painting background scenery for plays, and selling topographical watercolour paintings that provided steady income to support his arts education and helped develop his technical skills in painting. The artist also traveled extensively through Britain and Europe, following the routine through most of his career to travel in the summers and work in his studio in the winter. During these travels he filled hundreds of sketchbooks with drawings and watercolour paintings, laying the visual foundations for his broad and unique visual vocabulary.

Turner's initial watercolour paintings were exhibited at the Academy until 1796. He then began exhibiting his oil artworks that were faithful reproductions of the landscape reflecting his classical arts training. Over the years, however, he developed a loose and controversial style of landscape painting with the intent of expressing the emotion and vitality of a place. The artist held a great regard for landscape works, believing they could communicate a variety of meanings and themes. His watercolour works became popular during his career and he also used them as studies for his oil paintings. The unpredictable nature of the medium and his willingness to experiment pushed the advancement of his style, developing rough brushstrokes and forms verging on the edge of abstraction to capture the ephemeral nature of light and colour. His artistic peers remarked that Turner "appeared to paint with his eyes and nose as well as his hand" and his artworks both captivated and divided critics. Turner's innovations in technique, use of colour, and style would have an enduring influence, later inspiring the French Impressionists and is considered a precursor to modernist abstraction.

In 1851, Turner passed away in Chelsea at the age of 76. It is said that in the moment of his death, the artist was illuminated with a flash of sunlight, a worthy end for the masterful painter of natural light. In his will, Turner gave a large collection of his artworks to the nation with most of the collection currently housed in the museum Tate Britain. The artist was laid to rest at St. Paul's Cathedral with a £1,000 marble statue, paid from the artist's fortune, installed in the cathedral as part of his legacy.

Dürer and Turner have an enduring legacy and their contributions to art are still a source of inspiration today. These master painters broke conventions and laid not only the foundations for pushing the boundaries of watercolour, but also for art and visual representation itself. Their skillful utilization of the medium and experimentation with its expressive and luminous qualities expanded the potential of what watercolour can achieve.

Watercolour Techniques

Overview

Create a watercolor from a photo that means something to you. Students will engage in learning about watercolour and how this very popular medium can create fluid movement and interesting mark making. In the water colour works of Angela Fehr, you can she the fluidity of watercolour as she paints landscapes from images taken in the Peace Region. As a watercolorist she marries water with color to create her work, understanding that she is working alongside a medium that must be allowed to flow, to evolve and her responses are as immediate as the flick of a brush.

Objectives

Practice the different techniques you can achieve with watercolor.

Experiment

Practice blending colours

Materials

Photo to work from

Watercolour paper

Painters Tape

Watercolour paints

Brushes

Water

Paper towel

Scan to view the Workshop Video

Watercolour Landscape

Overview

Create a watercolor from a photo that means something to you. Students will engage in learning about watercolour and how this very popular medium can create fluid movement and interesting mark making. In the water colour works of Angela Fehr, you can she the fluidity of watercolour as she paints landscapes from images taken in the Peace Region. As a watercolorist she marries water with color to create her work, understanding that she is working alongside a medium that must be allowed to flow, to evolve and her responses are as immediate as the flick of a brush.

Materials

Photo to work from

Watercolour paper

Painters Tape

Watercolour paints

Brushes

Water

Paper towel

Objectives

Learn how to view a landscape from an artist's perspective

Practice the different techniques you can achieve with watercolor.

Learn about composition in a photo

Practice blending colours

Watercolour Landscape Instructions

Step 1

Choose a landscape photo you would like to work from. You can use the sunset photo we choose to us or pick something else. Just try and choose a simplistic image to work from. If it is a nice fall or sprint day, you could go outside and paint from the landscape in front of you.

Step 2

Tape your watercolour paper to the table or onto cardboard.

Step 3

If your image is a landscape with a horizon line, use the tape to mask off the horizon line.

Step 4

Fill in your sky, use the water on paper technique here to give some nice blending of the colours. Also, if you wanted to add clouds, you can do the paper towel blotting effect to create some beautiful clouds or sun beams.

Step 5

Wait for the upper area to dry and remove your taped horizon line. Start adding in your lower half of the landscape. Whether it is the water or a stream, beach or farmers field. Think about the techniques from the first activity and if you can use any of them in this part of your painting.

Step 6

Once the paint is dry, slowly remove the tape.

Mixed Media Workshop
with Elizabeth Hutchinson

Overview

In this workshop you will learn the different techniques to create a Mixed Media Watercolour with artist, Elizabeth Hutchinson. She will explore 4 different interpretations of the same landscape. Talking about the feeling and movement which you can create with this medium. Elizabeth's paintings explore our relationship with place and concepts of belonging. They become recollections of sensation; the feeling of wind, the rustle of long grass, the smell of earth.

Objectives

Build creative confidence through process, movement and expressing feelings through artmaking

Engage in creative thinking and self-expression

Explore a variety of materials

Materials

Photo(s) to work from

Pencil & Eraser

Watercolour paper

Board

Painters tape

Paper towel

Watercolor paints & brushes

Chalk pastels

Pencil crayons

Scan to view the Workshop Video

Plaster Memory

Overview

Engage students in creating a story using their memory, it can be one large memory of camping, or it can be a combination of small memories which make up a larger story. Inspired by Esther Hoflicks artwork, take a closer look at her pieces. She thinks of the paintings as objects in the world and so place the works in conversations amongst themselves and with the space around them.

Objectives

Learn about using images from your memory

Create a mixed-media piece

Learn about composition and removing marks

Materials

Cardboard

Scissors

Plaster

Putty Knife or Large Popsicle Stick

Pencil

Paint & Brushes

Oil Pastels

String

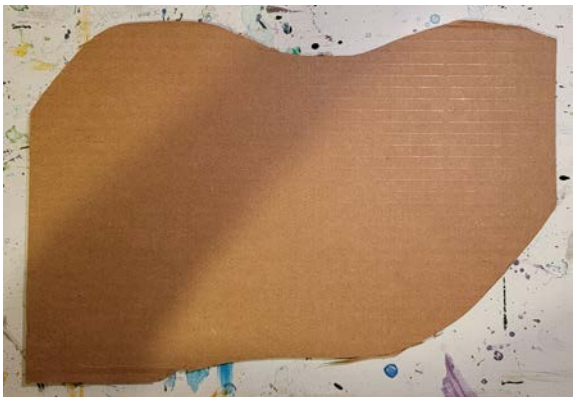
Stapler

Tools: Stick, Sandpaper or Eraser

Instructions

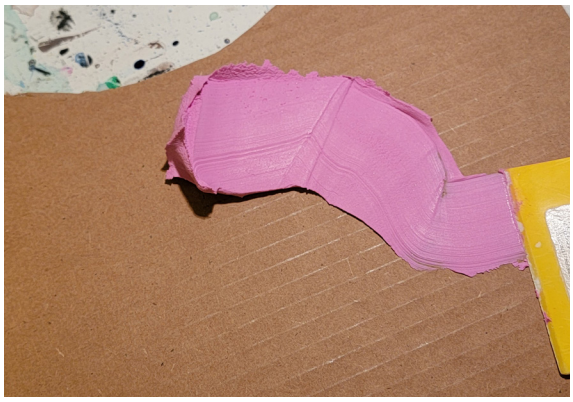
Step 1

Cut your piece of cardboard into your desired shape.



Step 2

Spread plaster over the cardboard.
Let dry overnight.



Instructions continued

Step 3

Use a pencil to start sketching out your memory. Once you have your image(s) sketched on there and are happy with the composition, you can start adding some paint.

Step 4

Lightly start adding and some other mediums if you wish, like chalk pastel or coloured pencils. Blend these mediums into the plaster with your finger to soften the lines.

Step 5

You may choose to go back and forth between the mediums as a way of experimenting.

Step 6

Use the tools to start taking away marks you made, this will give the piece an aged look and create more depth.

Step 7

Use the string to make a hook to hang the artwork from. *see image

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