

Farming in the Dust Bowl:

Carol Bromley Meeres

EDUCATION GUIDE

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HOW TO LOOK AT ART

Using the Four Stages of Criticism

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

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

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

STAGE 1: DESCRIPTION

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

Note: In this stage, we list or describe all of the formal (or visual) elements in the image. Any connections to our imagination or emotions will be explored in Stages 3 and 4.

» Describe the subject: What do we see in this image? (Landscape, architecture, people, animals, interiors, still life, portraiture, etc.)

» Describe the medium (materials): What did the artist use to make this work? Oil paint, acrylic paint, pastels, photography, textiles, charcoal woodblock prints, etc.)

» Discuss the Elements of Art (Lines, Shape, Forms, Space, Colour, and Texture--Adapted from the J.Paul Getty Museum Education)

› **Line is a mark that has a greater length than it does width. Lines can have many characteristics. For example, a line can be: horizontal, parallel, vertical, diagonal, straight, wavy, curvy, flowy, thick, thin, wispy, tapering, long, broken etc.**

Often there are many varieties of lines in an artwork. What are some of the different kinds of lines you can see?

› **A Shape is a closed line. Shapes can be geometric, such as rectangles and ovals, or they can be organic, natural, free-formed shapes. Shapes can be tall or wide; big or small; and often help to describe distance and height in an artwork.**

What are some of the different kinds of shapes that you can see?

› **Forms are three-dimensional shapes that describe length, width, and depth. Spheres, cubes, cones and cylinders are examples of forms.**

What are some of the different kinds of forms that you can see?

▶ STAGE 1: DESCRIPTION (Continued)

› Space is the area between and around objects. Often, the space around objects in artworks is called negative space. Space can also refer to the feeling of depth in a piece. Real space is three-dimensional, while in visual art, space is what we use to describe the illusion of depth.

Describe how space is being used in the artworks. Is there a feeling or illusion of depth being created?

› Colour is light reflected off of objects. Colour has 3 main characteristics.
Hue (the name of the colour—blue, green, yellow, etc.), Value (how light or dark the colour is), and Intensity (how bright or dull the colour is)
Primary Colours (Red, Blue, and Yellow) are the only true colours. All other colours are mixes of primary colours.
Secondary Colours (Orange, Green, Purple) Are two primary colours mixed together.
Complimentary Colours are colours that are located directly across from each other on the colour wheel. For example, red + green, or yellow + purple.

What are some of the different kinds of colours used in the artwork? What kinds of characteristics do they have?

› Texture is the surface quality that can be seen and felt. Texture can have many characteristics. For example, it can be rough or smooth, soft, hard, uneven, flat, bumpy, pointy, etc. Textures do not always feel the way they look. For example, a painting of tree bark may look rough, but the actual surface of the canvas is smooth and flat.

What are some of the different kinds of textures you can see in the artwork?

▶ STAGE 2: ANALYSIS – OBSERVING RELATIONSHIPS

How is this artwork (composition) arranged?

Note: For this stage, we use the Principles of Design (Balance, Emphasis, Movement, Pattern, Proportion, Unity--Adapted from the J. Paul Getty Museum Education). With younger students, it may be more effective to discuss the work without first teaching these terms, and instead provide the terms as you discuss different relationships in the work.

» Balance is the distribution of the visual weight of objects, colours, textures and space. If a piece is symmetrical, the elements are similar on both sides of the painting. If it is asymmetrical—the sides are different but still balance each other. If it is radial, the elements are arranged around a central point and are often similar.

What kind of balance does this artwork have?

» Emphasis is the part of the composition that catches our attention. This is often created using contrast (in size, colour, textures, shape, etc.)

Is there an object or area that stands out more than others?

» Movement is the path our eyes take through the work of art. This movement is often directed using lines, edges, shapes, colour.

How does your eye move through the piece? What elements are directing it?

HOW TO LOOK AT ART continued

Using the Four Stages of Criticism

STAGE 2: (Continued)

- » **Pattern is the repeating of an object or symbol across the work of art.**

What kinds of patterns do we see in the artwork?

- » **Proportion is the feeling of unity created when all parts (sizes, amounts or number) relate well with each other.**

How is proportion being created in this artwork? What elements are being used?

- » **Unity is the feeling of harmony between all parts of the work of art, which creates a sense of completeness. This is often done using many of the Principles of Design we have looked at already.**

Does this piece feel unified to you? What elements are (or aren't) contributing to making it feel unified?

STAGE 3: INTERPRETATION

What are some of the meanings this work may have?

Note: In this stage, we imagine the meaning(s) behind the technical choices and content that we have observed in the first two stages. This stage can be challenging, because the meaning is often unclear, and it is up to us to use our own knowledge, imaginations, and experiences to formulate the meaning of the work. For this reason, interpretation requires creativity, empathy, and courage. There are no right or wrong answers in interpretation; each viewer's experiences will provide a different insight into the work's potential meanings. For educators, instead of approaching students' interpretations as correct or incorrect, it can be helpful to ask the student to explain their conclusion, and then allow others to share why they feel the same or differently about the ideas that are presented.

- » How does this work make you feel? Why?
- » What mood(s) do you get from this work? Why?
- » Is there a narrative or story being told by the artwork?
 - » If so, what elements are being used to help tell this story?
- » Does this artwork relate to the time period it was made in?
- » Is the artwork commenting on a challenge, style, concept, or trend in art?
- » Is the artwork commenting on a challenge, trend, concept, or moment in our world or history?
- » What do you think the artwork is about?



STAGE 4: JUDGEMENT – CONCLUSION ABOUT WORK

What do you think or feel about this work?

Note: In this stage, we decide what we like or dislike about the work. This decision is subjective, but an explanation for the decisions should be provided. The judgement stage is an important opportunity to practice using art vocabulary and connect to our observations from Stages 1 - 3.

- » Do you like the work? Why or why not?
- » Do you agree with some of the meanings behind the work?
- » What are some of the formal (visual) strengths and weaknesses of the work?
- » Did your initial opinion change or stay the same after analyzing the work?
 - » If it did, how did it change?
- » Does this artwork change how you feel/think about the exhibition as a whole? Why or why not?

EDUCATOR'S GUIDED TOUR

Looming dust storms. Grasshopper swarms in the thousands. Drought and devastation. Families shuffling along in horse-drawn automobiles with all their belongings. Far from being scenes from some fantasy story, this was the historical reality of people in the Canadian and American plains during the period known as the Dust Bowl. This agricultural and environmental crisis, which resulted from a range of social, economic, and climatic issues, is famous for its haunting and spectacular images, and the stories of both ruin and resilience on the part of the common people who lived through it.



Carol Bromley
Meeres
WHEAT IS KING
2019
Encaustic

In the early-twentieth century before the 1930s, the majority of people on the Canadian Prairies were farmers. The Canadian government had advertised all over the world for people to come to the Prairie West, to settle on the land that had been taken from Indigenous peoples by the Canadian government during Treaty-making and subsequent land acquisitions. This settler-colonial system was designed to disadvantage Indigenous peoples, and ensure that settlement occurred as quickly as possible. Most of these settler-farmers who homesteaded on the Prairies eventually relied on one crop: wheat. As such, many farms during this period were monocultures – that is, one type of crop. Wheat farming was encouraged by government authorities, as it was sold around the world (especially to Britain and the United States). The common phrase “Wheat is King” referred both to how many farms relied on wheat, as well as its sheer economic impact.

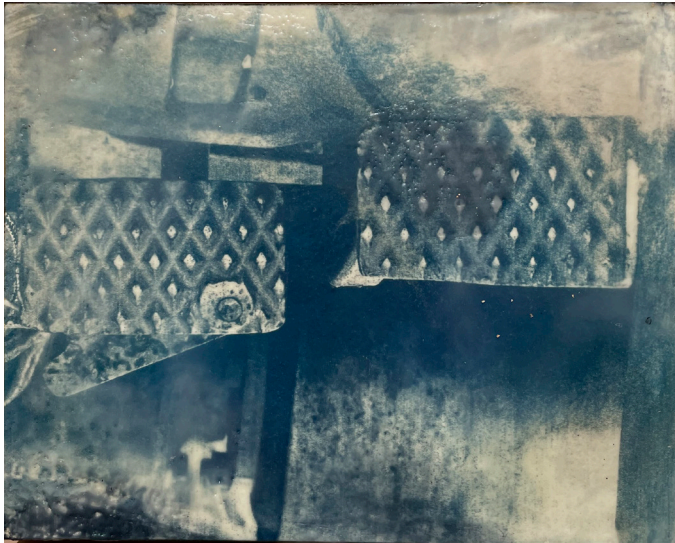
The Prairies were dotted with thousands of grain elevators, located on the networks of railroads that snaked across the landscape, which transported the grain to markets elsewhere. These farmers were often taken advantage of, however, as promises of land quality and of transportation were greatly exaggerated, especially in the southern dry belt. In southwestern Saskatchewan, for example, farmers frequently had to haul their grain over 60 km to get it to a grain elevator!

Easy access to credit during this time also proved to be a further issue, as farmers frequently ended up deeper and deeper in debt as they purchased equipment and materials to build up their farms. This was a period where farm machinery was becoming a more common part of life, and farmers faced increasing pressure to buy such equipment. For many, dependence on animals moved to dependence on machinery. These purchases could be expensive.



Carol Bromley Meeres
GRAIN ELEVATOR
2021, Toned Cyanotype

Carol Bromley
Meeres
HARD WORK 2
2021
Toned Cyanotype
Encaustic



People invested their entire livelihoods into their farms, buying up ever more equipment and animals in hopes of ensuring successful harvests. But because of farming practices that relied on wheat-based monocultures, a failure to properly manage the topsoil over years of cultivation, and the climate of the dry lands that were being put under the plough, the soil loosened and started a devastating chain reaction that culminated in the agricultural disaster of the 1930s.

The Great Depression lasted from 1929 to 1939, and while the Dust Bowl lasted for most of the 1930s, it needs to be emphasized that the Depression and the Dust Bowl were two different events. Much of the southern part of the Canadian Prairies is quite dry land. Nonetheless, the desire on the part of government officials to put this land under cultivation misled thousands to take up homesteads in this area without knowledge of effective dryland farming techniques. When this land was farmed, the soil would be pulverized and crumble until it was almost like sand, at which point many would abandon their farms. Great, endless fields of dehydrated, brown-ish soil stretched into the distance, unable to produce anything but dust, such that they became merely the ghosts of farms. This phenomenon occurred especially in what was known as the "dry belt," an area in southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan that was especially hard hit by this drought, and which had experienced difficulties in farming even before the Depression. Historian Curtis McManus notes in the book *Happyland* that between 1917 and 1924 about 30,000 people left the plains in southwest Saskatchewan alone, due to drought and difficult farming. Many more would leave the Prairies once the 1930s hit.

As such, problems with dry land farming plagued thousands of people before the 1930s. But in that decade these long-standing problems became a total disaster. The 1930s are often referred to as the "Dirty Thirties," and for good reason. Among the most well-known images from this decade were the towering dust storms, a frightening part of life during this time. While some dust storms occurred before the Depression, the famous monumental storms of the 1930s began on the Canadian Prairies in 1931, and returned throughout subsequent summers. Soil would blow in massive gusts, billowing over the land in a harsh torrent, making travel difficult and often confining people indoors during them. This led people to refer to them as "black blizzards," and indeed, much like a blizzard these storms could be so severe that visibility would be reduced to only a few feet. Mothers were known to place lamps near their window to help guide their children home from school during them. When the winds subsided and the dust finally settled in great dunes, significant parts of the Prairies looked like a desert.



Carol Bromley Meeres
DIRTY 30S
2021
Inkjet photo, Encaustic



Carol Bromley Meeres, KEEPING THE DUST OUT,
2021, Encaustic and Mixed Media



Carol Bromley Meeres, NEVER DONE,
2021, Inkjet Photo and Encaustic

Other problems affected farmers. While the dust itself was devastating to crops, the drought that it caused led to ideal conditions for grasshoppers. Other insects were a problem for Prairie farmers, but the grasshopper was by far the most notorious. Born from their beds in the abandoned farms across Alberta and Saskatchewan, these grasshoppers swept across the Prairies, eating crops down to their stems, devouring gardens, and – so many accounts say – even consuming clothes hung outside to dry. Weeds and plant disease, particularly stem rust, only made the already desperate situation even worse. Because many fields were monocultures (again, usually wheat), plant diseases and weeds easily spread, and could utterly devastate them. One indication of how bad things were across the Prairies is the fact that farmers began to cut Russian thistle to feed their starving livestock; Russian thistle was usually considered a weed. The grasshoppers and weeds, combined with the drought and dust storms, are images that pervade the history of the Dust Bowl.

It was no easy task to keep the dust out of the home. Prairie mothers had a variety of methods to cope with it, placing cups upside down to prevent dirt from collecting in them, or hanging wet cloth on window sills and over the doorways to try to trap it. This was not always possible, though, considering how much farm women did – feeding animals, washing clothes, fixing things, sewing, maintaining the gardens. Gardens were always an important source of food, but during the Depression, they were crucial to ensure a family could weather these difficult times. Women were also often employed as schoolteachers, where a similar struggle occurred to keep the schoolhouse free of dust. Teachers often arrived early to sweep up, came up with inventive ways to keep dust from collecting in their lunch, and worked with inadequate facilities to manage the schoolhouse, for there was virtually no money for improvements at this time. But no matter how thorough one was, it seemed impossible to ensure the dust did not seep in one way or another.

Dealing with such difficulties, it is no wonder that many families simply abandoned their farms. Many of these people, who saw their entire livelihoods lost, simply hauled their belongings – along with perhaps a few farm animals – in a wagon or vehicle, in search of a better life elsewhere. Historian Gerald Friesen estimates that as many as 250,000 people left the Canadian Prairies altogether between 1931 and 1941, and within Alberta and Saskatchewan, many people abandoned the dry belt for the more northerly parkland. By 1936, nearly 14,000 abandoned farms were reported on the census between Alberta and Saskatchewan.



Carol Bromley Meeres,
FORSAKEN
2021
Inkjet Photo and
Encaustic

A sight that became fairly common amidst these great movements of people were "Bennett Buggies." Named for Prime Minister R. B. Bennett, who many Canadians blamed for the depths to which the Depression sank, the Bennet Buggy was an automobile that had its engine removed so that it could be more easily pulled by horses. Given how expensive gasoline became for those impoverished during the 1930s, many chose to convert their cars in this manner.

This movement in population negatively impacted the Indigenous peoples in the north. In both Alberta and Saskatchewan, traditional hunting territories were encroached upon, and this impacted the hunting, fishing, and trapping done by the region's Indigenous population. In the south, Indigenous communities had long noticed the difficulties of attempting agriculture in the dry belt. By the Depression, Indigenous peoples had several generations' adjustment to an agricultural life following the end of the bison hunt.



Carol Bromley Meeres, ARRIVING (EUROPEAN SETTLERS), 2021, Inkjet Photo and Encaustic

Some leaders joined farmer's unions and organizations, such as the United Farmers of Alberta, and many of the initial members of the Indian Association of Alberta (IAA), founded in 1939, were also farmers. But even with this expertise, the dry belt was no less difficult. In the early 1920s, there were years of extremely dry conditions, with crop failures and emaciated cattle being reported in the Blood reserve near Calgary, for example. And certainly, a difficulty Indigenous people faced that settlers did not was the Indian Agent, who had a significant, and at-times iron-fisted, authority of the lives of Indigenous peoples during these years.

The worst of the Dust Bowl is usually said to have come to an end with the heavy rains of 1938. The jubilation was certainly famous, and became the subject of many tall tales. One oft-repeated story was told of a four-year-old child who, upon seeing rain, ran into their house in terror at this unknown aspect of nature. However, it was not just the rain that helped end the Dust Bowl, but the agricultural scientist. Many of these scientists worked under the auspices of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA), which was founded in 1935 to combat the debilitating drought. Their solutions to the problem of soil drifting were adopted in a widespread fashion beginning in the late 1930s. Among the major problems they identified were weeds, which consumed moisture in summerfallow (that is, cropland left without planting in order to conserve moisture and nutrients), and they also encouraged farmers to use a shallower edge for carving furrows. Farmers, having had their lands virtually ruined, keenly listened to the advice of these scientists, who toured the Prairies to provide these solutions as widely as possible.

This advice came too late for many. Barry Broadfoot referred to the Depression as “ten lost years,” which is what it was for people whose livelihoods simply disappeared in the dust storms of the southern Prairies. A new phase in farming – and especially a trend towards “mega-farms” – would characterize the post-Depression years, as many abandoned farms were bought up and consolidated, or people sold off their family farms. But one is surprised at the happiness many people maintained, one way or another, during this decade. Many people described a strong sense of community and mutual support that the experience of the Dust Bowl generated, a time where one had to live with little and make do with what they had. Whatever one’s experience, however, those who lived through it were lastingly affected. The Dust Bowl was, above all, a clear breaking point in the Prairie settler project: nothing beforehand could have prepared people for it, and nothing was the same afterwards.



Carol Bromley Meeres, EMILY AND HORACE, HOMESTEADERS, 2019, Encaustic



Carol Bromley Meeres, HOMESTEADING, 2021, Inkjet Photo and Encaustic

Books

Broadfoot, Barry. *Ten Lost Years 1929–1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1997.

Drees, Laurie Meijer. *The Indian Association of Alberta: A History of Political Action*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002.

Friesen, Gerald. *The Canadian Prairies: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

Jones, David C. *Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2002.

McManus, Curtis. *Happyland: A History of the “Dirty Thirties” in Saskatchewan, 1914–1937*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011.

Potyandi, Barry. *In Palliser’s Triangle: Living in the Grasslands, 1850–1930*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 1995.

Shepherd, George. *West of Yesterday*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1965.
Strikwerda, Eric. *The Wages of Relief: Cities and the Unemployed in Prairie Canada 1929–39*. Edmonton: AU Press, 2013.

Online Resources

Climate and Change, University of Saskatchewan. Accessed May 14, 2021. <http://climateandchange.usask.ca/index.html>

Rethinking the Dust Bowl, 1830–1941, University of Saskatchewan. Accessed June 24, 2021. <https://hgis.usask.ca/projects/dust-bowl.php>

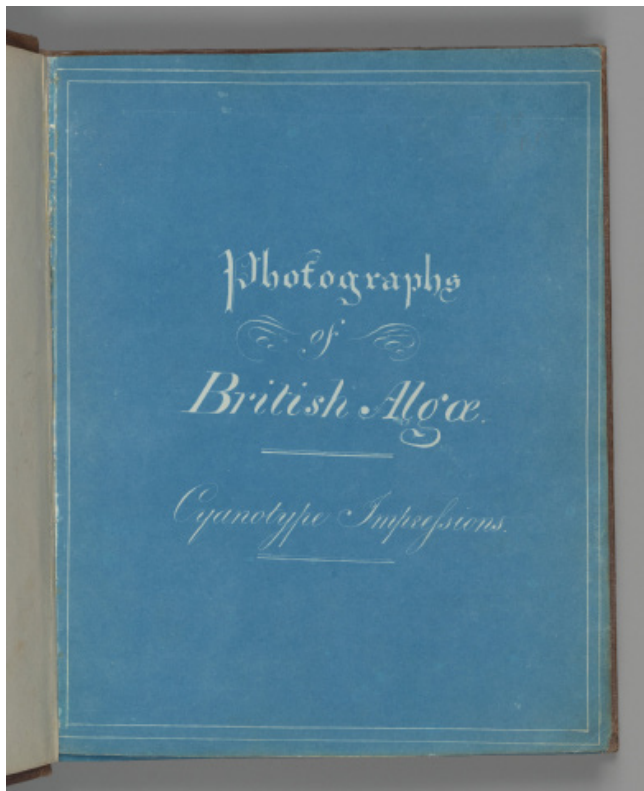
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Connor J. Thompson is a PhD student in History at the University of Alberta. In 2017, as an undergraduate, Thompson was awarded the U of A’s Prairie History Medal and S. W. Field Prize.

A CLOSER LOOK AT...

Cyanotypes and Anna Atkins

Named after their brilliant blue colour (cyan), cyanotypes are an early photographic technique from the 19th century. The process was invented in 1842 by British mathematician, astronomer and chemist Sir John Herschel. While photography had fairly recently been introduced to the broader public, there did not yet exist a way to reproduce photographs in colour. Cyanotypes offered one of the first kinds of photographic processes that included colour. Herschel discovered the cyanotype process after trying numerous experiments to reproduce his diagrams, drawings, and scientific notes. Part of what made cyanotypes ideal for this task is that they were fairly easy to produce, and they did not require extensive equipment or materials. The cyanotype process is the result of exposing a surface treated with iron salts to UV light. The areas of the print with greater opacity will turn dark blue, in contrast to the areas that receive more exposure, which will turn a much lighter blue. This is also why sometimes cyanotypes are referred to as "sun prints" or "sun drawing." Herschel's usage of cyanotypes as a technique to replicate technical and scientific diagrams or notations is what led to the term "blueprints," which is still used to describe reproductions of architectural diagrams and plans.



Anna Atkins, *Photographs of British Algæ*, 1843-53 and Anna Atkins, *Ceramium Rubrum*, ca. 1853, Cyanotype, From *Photographs of British Algæ*, 1843-53, Gilman Collection, Purchase, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift, through Joyce and Robert Menschel, 2005, Metropolitan Museum, New York, Creative Commons, CC0.

While Herschel primarily used cyanotypes to make blueprints, botanist Anna Atkins was one of the first to demonstrate how cyanotypes could be used as a scientific photographic medium. Born in England in 1799, Atkins was friends with Herschel, and began to apply his cyanotype process to her work on British algae specimens in 1843. She saw the potential significance of the cyanotype process for science, writing that many of the specimens "are so minute that accurate drawings of them are very difficult to make," meaning that the cyanotype process offered a new method of accurate recording.



Anna Atkins, *Alaria esculenta* (1849) and *Ulva latissima* (1853), from *Photographs of British Algae, 1843–53*. Cyanotypes. Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, Public Domain.

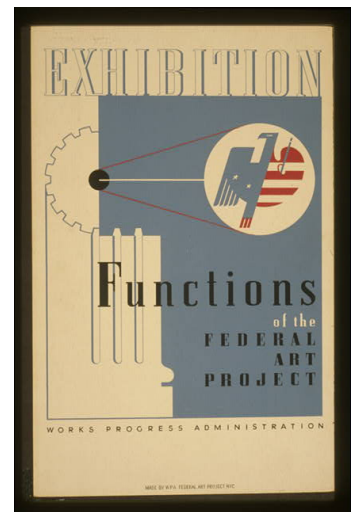
That year she produced the first scientific book to be illustrated entirely with light sensitive materials, 'Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions.' In doing so, Atkins established herself as a photographer, and contributed a major work to science and scientific documentation methods. She produced several photographic botanical books over the course of her lifetime, and she continued to refine the cyanotype process in terms of its capacity for detail and exposure time. For many years Atkins work was forgotten in both the photographic and scientific community, owing partially to a mis-interpretation of her initials (A.A.) as "anonymous amateur," in addition to her position as a women in the then very male dominated fields of photography and science. Recently, her work is being recognized once more, and she is considered to be one of the first female photographers.

Dorothea Lange and Art during the Great Depression

Spanning approximately the years 1929 – 1939, the Great Depression was a period of economic crisis across the globe. It began in the United States on October 24, 1929, when the stock market crashed in an event known as “Black Thursday.” The repercussions of the crash were massive and impacted almost every job sector. It resulted in a large upswing in unemployment, homelessness, and an overall decreased standard of living for many individuals. In the United States, in response to this crisis, newly elected President Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched the “New Deal,” a series of economic and social stimulus initiatives intended to turn the economy around. It is important to note that these programs did not equally support all Americans, as many Black and Indigenous people, for example, were deemed ineligible for many relief programs.

These programs were formally run by the federal Works Project Administration (WPA), and included many branches dedicated to supporting artists and cultural workers, such as the Federal Art Project. Through the Federal Art Project, Roosevelt hoped that he would not only support artists through the Depression, but that arts and culture would become a vital component of rebuilding the country. As a result, a rich tapestry of public artworks, murals, community art pieces, and cultural initiatives emerged during this period.

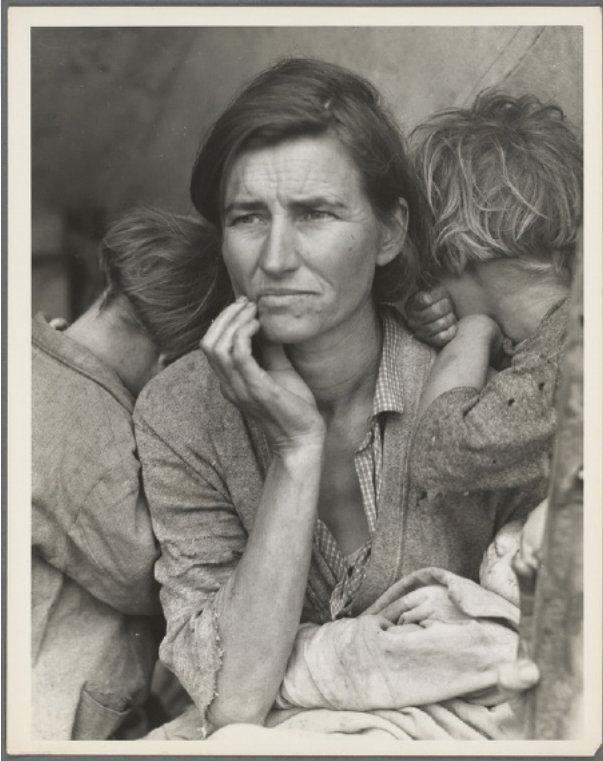
Alongside this more direct approach to supporting the arts, the WPA also employed artists in other branches, such as the Farm Security Administration (FSA). The FSA was created to help support rural farmers, especially those living through the dust bowl. From 1935-1944, the FSA ran a program that highlighted the struggles of farmers and rural workers during the dust bowl. The photographs produced from this program remain incredibly influential and notable, especially the work of Dorothea Lange.



Above: Jerome Henry Rothstein, *Exhibition Functions of the Federal Art Project*, Poster, 1936-39, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, WPA Poster Collection, Public domain.

Below: Sculpture workshop in New York sponsored by the Federal Art Project, ca. 1940. Federal Art Project, Photographic Division collection, circa 1920-1965. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.





Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother, Nipomo California, 1936, Gelatin Silver Print, New York Public Library, Public Domain, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/639b2760-2289-0132-a9cd-58d385a7bbd0>

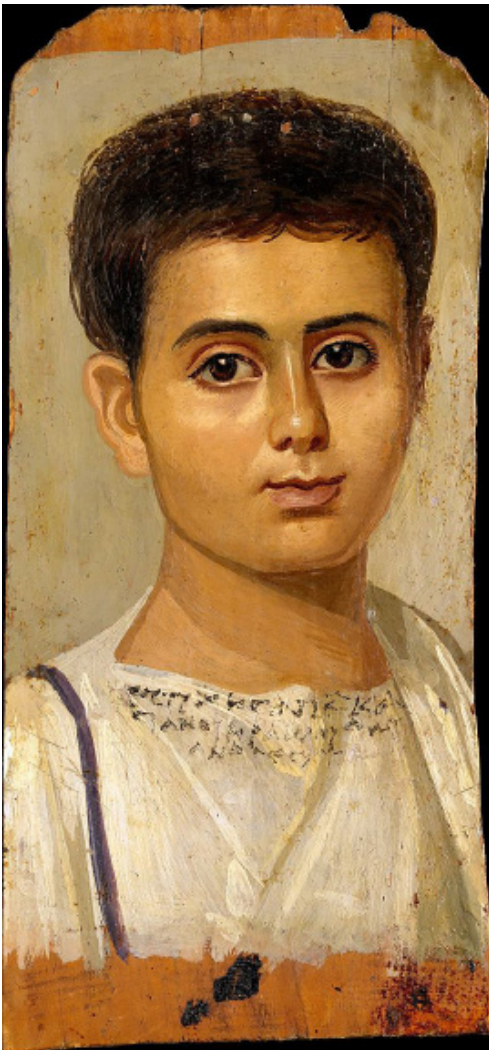
Indeed, Lange's photograph Migrant Mother, March 1936, which depicts an image of Californian pea picker Florence Owens Thompson and her children, is arguably one of the images most commonly associated with the Great Depression. While Florence Owens Thompson was only 32 at the time of the photo, the image captures an individual whose face, body posture, and eyes carry the weight and anxiety of someone much older. Lange's ability to capture portraits that encapsulate the depth of the impact of the Great Depression, particularly on migrant farmers and rural workers, as well as their resilience to these hardships, is part of what made her work so impactful.

However, documentary photography has a very complicated history, in part due to the privileged position of the photographer in contrast to their subjects or subject matter. Lange's work is no exception to this power dynamic, as several accounts from some of her subjects—including Florence Owens—have stated that Lange misrepresented their situation or their words. These important critiques of Lange are a reminder that documentary photography is not objective, regardless of how closely associated Lange's work has become to the memory of the Great Depression.

Born on May 26, 1895, Lange was an incredibly ambitious person and photographer, especially during a time period when many women were discouraged away from their ambitions and from pursuing documentary photography. Before the Great Depression, Lange ran a very successful portrait studio in San Francisco. However, when the economic hardships began, Lange began to venture out of her studio to photograph breadlines and talk to migrant workers, often publishing her photographs alongside captions from the workers that drew attention to their plight. For the rest of her life, Lange believed that she could use photography as a medium for social change, and often resisted letting her photographs be labelled as artwork because she believed that this distracted from the social role of the images. This belief is emphasized by the fact that when Lange was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1941 for her achievements in photography, she left the fellowship midway through to document the forced internment of Japanese Americans following the attack on Pearl Harbor. The continued legacy of Lange's work is a testament to its power, as well as the potential role artworks can have in the face of social and cultural hardship.

Encaustic Painting and Jasper Johns

Encaustic—which comes from the Greek word enkaustikos, to “burn in”—is a painting technique that uses hot wax mixed with resin to create layers of paint, and sometimes incorporates collage, and stencil. Each layer is fused with a further application of heat. The result is an incredibly tactile, and almost sculptural, painting, as the layers of wax create textural body and allow for a variety of opacities to be played with in the pigments and the layers. Encaustic painting has an incredibly rich history, with examples of encaustic work being produced as early as the first century BC in Ancient Egypt, where encaustic portraits were used to paint the portraits of mummies that were affixed to sarcophagi. These portraits, which have become known as Fayum portraits after the geographic area where many of them were discovered, continue to hold their pigments and shape today—a testament to the longevity of the encaustic medium.



Artist Unknown, Portrait of the Boy Eutyches, A.D. 100-150, Encaustic on Wood, Paint, Gift of Edward S Harkness, 1918, Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, Creative Commons, CC0 Public Domain

Due to its durability, and its capacity to repel water, encaustic techniques were also used to seal large ships in Ancient Greece. From these beginnings, encaustic painting came in and out of popularity, with many examples of encaustic in Ancient Rome and then increasingly fewer works after the fall of the Roman Empire due to the rise of Tempura painting, which had both a more accessible technique, as well as more economic materials. While encaustic painting was still practiced, it wasn't until the 18th Century that encaustic painting began to rise in prominence within artistic circles once more.

In the 20th Century, one of the North American artists whose practice frequently incorporated encaustic painting is Jasper Johns. Jasper Johns was born in 1930 in Augusta, Georgia in the United States. He grew up predominantly in South Carolina, until he moved to New York City in 1948 to pursue a career as a fulltime artist. He became close friends with fellow artist Robert Rauschenberg, composer John Cage, and choreographer Merce Cunningham. The four of them would become some of the central artists at the heart of movements coming out of American Abstract Expressionism, including Conceptual Art, Pop Art, and Minimalism.

Abstract Expressionism, which was characterized by work by artists such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothco, emphasized spontaneity, physicality, and individualism through free-hand gestural movements, a focus on the materials (such as the flatness of the canvas and the pigments used), and a focus on open expression and individual interpretation rather than a fixed meaning or concept.

By contrast, Jasper Johns was interested in how meaning was made through examining objects or symbols that were very familiar to many people, but which had meanings that could change drastically depending on context or subjective interpretations. In order to explore these questions, Johns' work is very carefully constructed—both in terms of the subjects he selected as well as the materials and techniques used to make the artwork. A strong example of these interests in Jasper Johns' practice can be found in his well-known work *Flag*, 1954-55. *Flag* is an encaustic piece, that also has elements of collage, and painting. The work depicts the American flag, and through the wax layers, snippets of newspapers from the year 1954 can be seen, helping to place the flag at a specific moment in time.

The materials, the image, and the technique are all very carefully planned, shifting the emphasis away from the gestural expression and towards unpacking the meaning or significance of the image. Jasper Johns specifically chose the flag because its meaning is very contingent on context, and the kinds of questions that are asked of the work are very dependent on who encounters the work. For example, is the person seeing it American? Does someone encountering the work during the Cold War see it differently than someone who encounters it during the Vietnam War? What does it mean to reproduce a national symbol in the form of a collage/encaustic piece? These are just a few of the queries that could be asked upon encountering *Flag*, making the piece an engaging and thought-provoking work for a variety of people. The work makes use of the unique layering capacity of encaustic painting to emphasize this multitude of interpretations, and the historical weight of the flag as a symbol.

Sun Drawing

For this activity, you can view a workshop video with Carol Bromley Meeres on the Cyanotype (Sun Drawing) process on the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie's Website under Art At Home:

<https://aggp.ca/art-at-home-details/meet-the-artist-cyanotype-process-with-carol-bromley-meeres/>

Purpose

- » Experiment with creating one of the oldest forms of photography -- Sun Drawing (Cyanotypes)

Objectives

- » Learn new creative techniques
- » Experiment with composition and balance
- » Learn about creating depth through tones
- » Engage abstract thinking skills

Materials

- » Sun printing paper
- » Water
- » Variety of materials to place on top (feathers, plants, semi-transparent papers, shapes etc) It is always good to have a variety of textures and transparencies to choose from
- » A flat surface in the sunlight

Motivation

- » This activity allows students to engage with one of the main techniques, cyanotypes, in the exhibition in a fun, and accessible manner. Through playing with different textures and shapes, students will also experiment with different visual elements like balance, composition, and depth.



In process cyanotypes by Carol Bromley Meeres.

Project

- 1 » Begin with one sheet of sun print paper. Students can pick a variety of objects and textures to lay on top of the sun print paper in whatever pattern or composition that they would like. When exposed to light, the outlines of the objects will be left. Depending on the opacity of the object, the outline will be more intense, or soft (if semi-transparent).
- 2 » From here, line up the papers with their composition in the sun for 15 minutes.
- 3 » Once removed from the sun, run the print under water until the water is clear.
- 4 » Let the prints dry. Students can talk about what kinds of textures and outlines were created with different objects, and further experiment by making more prints.



In process cyanotypes by Carol Bromley Meeres with different toning methods, including coffee and tea staining.

Food Plates

Purpose

- » Create a playful visual representation of some of the produce items students eat to make a "food plate."

Objectives

- » Work with creating basic shapes
- » Practice tactile skills
- » Learn about composition
- » Identify fruit and vegetables
- » Learn about ecology

Materials

- » Blue and Brown Paint
- » Paper plates
- » Glue
- » Scissors
- » Brown Yarn
- » Construction paper in a variety of colours

Motivation

- » This activity is intended to encourage students to think about what kinds of vegetables and fruit they eat, and engage in a conversation about where these come from. In making their food plate, they are practicing their visual language skills by identifying the shapes and textures of the produce.



Project

- 1 » Begin by painting two thirds of the paper plate brown, and one third of the paper plate blue for the sky and the soil.



- 2 » From here, make small cuts down both sides of the soil portion of the plate. The closer the cuts are together, the more places for yarn there will be to form layers.
- 3 » Once the cuts are made, thread the brown yarn horizontally around the plate, using the cuts as a way to hold the yarn in place.
- 4 » Then students will begin cutting out their fruit and vegetables using the construction paper, and assembling them with glue as needed. Once they are assembled, they can be "planted" in the soil by threading them vertically through the yarn.
- 5 » After they are assembled, students can identify what produce they picked, and talk about where it came from.



Tissue Landscapes

Purpose

- » Using "Forsaken" by Carol Bromley Meeres as an inspiration, students will learn about opacity and layering through creating a landscape out of tissue collage.

Objectives

- » Learn about depth and opacity
- » Practice abstract thinking skills
- » Practice composition and perspective
- » Learn about collage

Materials

- » Mod Podge or similar material
- » Several sheets of different coloured tissue paper
- » Scissors
- » Foam brush
- » Construction Paper
- » Paper

Motivation

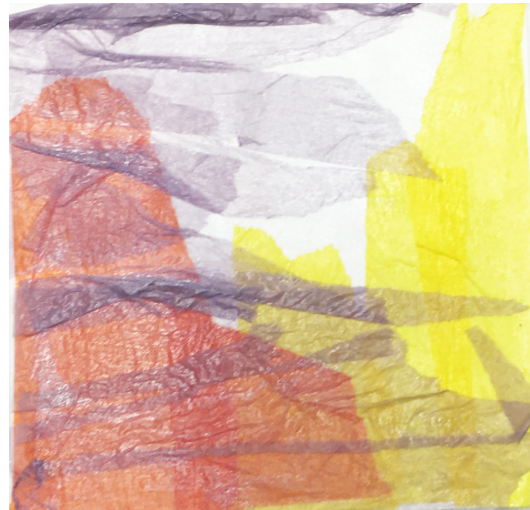
- » This activity encourages students to learn about mixed media collage, and experiment with how layering multiple materials with various textures and opacities creates composition, narrative, and visual effects. Through experimenting with these materials to create an imaginative landscape, students will learn about some of the main techniques used by the artist Carol Bromley Meeres.



Carol Bromley Meeres,
FORSAKEN
2021
Inkjet Photo and Encaustic

Project

- 1 » Begin with a blank sheet of paper.
- 2 » Start tearing pieces of tissue paper and glueing them to the paper using the foam brush and the mod podge as a binding mechanism. Encourage students to try different techniques, such as bunching or folding the tissue paper, or layering several colours to see how the colour and opacity changes.
- 3 » Continue adding in tissue paper in textures and layers until the landscape is almost done. As a final touch, students can add in some solid elements using construction paper.
- 4 » Once the students are done, the pieces should be left to dry. Afterwards they can revisit the works in the exhibition, and discuss how some of their techniques reflect how pieces in the show were made.



Tea and Coffee Stained Portraits

Purpose:

- » Using the work "Never Done" by Carol Bromley Meeres as an inspiration, students will create their own photo portrait with a poem using coffee or tea staining techniques

Objectives

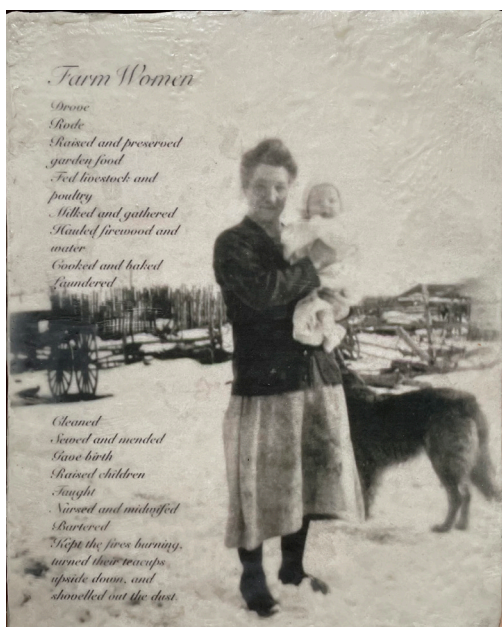
- » Engage creative writing skills
- » Learn new techniques
- » Learn about colour tones
- » Create a mixed-media piece

Materials

- » Coffee grounds or several bags of black tea
- » A bin large enough to submerge a piece of paper in flat
- » Water
- » Pencil, marker, or pens
- » printed photographs

Motivation

- » Students will engage in creating a personalized portrait of someone that is important to them, using a poem and the technique of tea/coffee staining to create a mixed-media artwork. Afterwards, students can present their portraits, and talk about why they chose this person, what they portrait says about them, and how they used different techniques to create texture and tone.



Carol Bromley Meeres, NEVER DONE,
2021, Inkjet Photo and Encaustic

Project

1

Begin by asking students to bring a photograph of someone important to them (printed onto paper -- not the original photograph).

2

Set out two large bins, one for coffee and one for tea. Brew several cups of strong coffee, and pour into the first bin (there needs to be enough to submerge the sheets of paper). Using at least 6 tea bags, brew a similar amount of very strong tea to pour into the second bin. The tea bags and coffee grounds can be reserved for students to experiment with for further texture and tone variety.

3

Students will then submerge their photographs in either the tea or coffee for a minimum of 5 minutes. When removed, students can add coffee grounds to parts of the paper to add texture (they will be brushed off when dry), or selectively add darkened tea stain areas by applying tea bags to specific areas of the print.

4

While students are waiting to submerge their print, or waiting for their print to dry, they can write a poem about the person they have chosen.

5

Once the prints are dry, students can write their poem on the photograph. Depending on what composition they would like, they can choose to write it vertically, horizontally, in a pattern, etc. To make the process easier, students can begin by writing the poem in pencil, and then go over the letters in marker, pen or their medium of choosing once they are happy with the placement of the poem.

Scavenger Hunt

Modified from Shane Golby's adaptation of Helen D. Hume's A Survival Kit for the Elementary/Middle School Art Teacher

Purpose

- » To find specific objects, details, and characteristics in works of art.

Objectives

- » Begin to identify discrete elements of works of art
- » Develop visual literacy and communication
- » Engage Abstract Problem Solving skills
- » Gain comfort exploring different elements of an exhibition space

Materials

- » Pencils
- » Print-outs of the Scavenger Hunt Sheet

Motivation

- » A game that is especially well suited to grades 1 - 6 but can be adjusted for most ages. In this activity viewers will engage in a fun game that encourages the independent exploration of art, memory, and problem solving skills. After the scavenger hunt sheets are completed, the group can gather and check their responses as a team and discuss the exhibition.

Project

1

- » Using the artworks in the exhibition, create a list of objects/ characteristics/titles that participants should look for that are in the works of art. This activity can be adjusted to be done in teams, partners, or independently. Include a blank name spot for the name of the artwork, the name of the artist, and the year the work was created.

2

- » Sample Scavenger Hunt List (full template on the next page):

Scavenger Hunt Item	Title of Artwork	Name of Artist	Year Work Created
A blue flower			
A dark grey squirrel			
An old house			
A windy scene			
Dark brown water			

Art Activities

[illegible]

RESOURCES

Cyanotype:

<https://www.gallery.ca/magazine/your-collection/the-cyanotypes-of-pioneering-photographer-anna-atkins>
<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/1507/anna-atkins-british-1799-1871/>
<https://www.moma.org/artists/231>
<https://www.hnoc.org/virtual/daguerreotype-digital/cyanotype-process>
<https://www.alternativephotography.com/cyanotype-history-john-herschels-invention/>
https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/pdf/atlas_cyanotype.pdf

Encaustic:

<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/jasper-johns-what-is-encaustic-painting>
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/john/hd_john.htm
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78805>

History of Photography:

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ap80/hd_ap80.htm
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ap90/hd_ap90.htm
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cncp/hd_cncp.htm
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dagu/hd_dagu.htm
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https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phbh/hd_phbh.htm
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phev/hd_phev.htm
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phef/hd_phef.htm

History of the Dust Bowl:

<https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/dust-bowl>

<https://www.cbc.ca/history/EPISCONTENTSE1EP13CH1PA2LE.html>

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/are-great-plains-headed-another-dust-bowl-180976117/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1936/05/letters-from-the-dust-bowl/308897/>

<https://activehistory.ca/2016/11/dusting-off-the-history-of-drought-on-the-canadian-prairies-in-the-1930s/>

<http://climateandchange.usask.ca>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MANDATE

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

The purposes of the foundation are:

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

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

- ▶ REGION 1 – Northwest Alberta

Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie



- ▶ REGION 2 – Northeast and North Central Alberta

Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton



- ▶ REGION 3 – Southwest Alberta

Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary



- ▶ REGION 4 – Southeast Alberta

Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat



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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements:

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

The TREX program is generously supported by:

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



Thank you for your dedication and support!

ABOUT THE ART GALLERY OF GRANDE PRAIRIE

ART GALLERY
of GRANDE PRAIRIE

Free Admission
aggp.ca

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

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

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



The Traveling Exhibition Program (Trex) Region 1: Northwest Alberta
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Lawyers for the journey ahead