SEEING NATURE

LANDSCAPE MASTERWORKS FROM THE PAUL G. ALLEN FAMILY COLLECTION
Co-organized by the Seattle Art Museum, the Portland Art Museum, and the Paul G. Allen Family Collection, Seeing Nature: Landscape Masterworks from the Paul G. Allen Family Collection explores how American and European painters experience their surroundings. The exhibition includes thirty-nine works spanning 400 hundred years that present landscape painting from specific views of the world around us to expressions of artists' experiences.

Seeing Nature examines the many ways we interact with nature by encouraging us to think about how we experience the world through our five senses and how the details of a setting can tell a story or explore an idea. Each of these works highlights the human perception of the natural world.

The exhibition layout is loosely chronological, starting with works that demonstrate the power of landscape to locate the viewer in time and place—to record, explore, and understand the natural and built world. Beginning with European artists interpreting a city view, a piece of land, or a dramatic natural wonder, it ends with 20th century American and European painters bringing new perspectives to traditional landscape subjects.

This guide reviews the ways artists translate nature into paintings by looking closely at the world around them. Whether viewing a new location as a tourist or a familiar place as a local, these artists use a variety of tools that make us feel connected to, and inspired by, the world around us.

ABOUT THE WORK

LOOKING CLOSELY: VISITING A CITY

Venice, Italy was one of the most popular stops on the Grand Tour, a trip through southern Europe many northern Europeans took starting in the late 16th century as part of their education. The city was a favorite painting subject of the time, with collectors wanting to gather souvenirs of their travels or to celebrate the unique architecture and canals of the city. One of the earliest works in the exhibition is Canaletto’s The Grand Canal, Venice from 1738. Canaletto, himself from Venice, was one of the most popular painters of this place, creating realistic scenes of the sweeping canals and buildings. Although he painted with great detail, Canaletto chose specific views and played with perspective to create an impressive picture.

Focusing on a less famous part of Venice’s Grand Canal, Canaletto chose a sunny day to show the bustling waterway. Shadows to the left play off the detailed façades on the right, with gondolas connecting the two sides and drawing the viewer’s eye through the canal. The artist’s skill is also seen in the fore, middle, and background by the streaks of reflections in the water contrasting with the crisp line of the city’s architecture, and with the wisps of clouds in the blue sky.

Almost 150 years later, Venice was still a favorite view of painters and tourists. In 1874 the French artist Edouard Manet travelled to Venice for the second time. Manet had been to Venice in the 1850s to study Italian art, but did not paint the city until this later visit. Though he was a Realist painter, the way Manet played with brushwork to indicate light and movement greatly influenced Impressionist painters and other Modernist artists. In View in Venice—The Grand Canal, Manet used short brushstrokes to convey the light on the water of the canal and the buildings beside it. The perspective of being on the water, rather than above it, brings the viewer into the scene. Like Canaletto, Manet guides the viewer through the painting by contrasting the bright blue and white of the poles, and the white and pink of the buildings against the darker gondolas on the sides. This painting has the feel of one completed quickly, although the viewer can see where Manet altered the church in the painting, with an earlier version visible just behind.

Both Canaletto and Manet created an impression of a place, by looking closely at the world around them. While Canaletto used a larger scale and a variety of brushwork to illustrate a sweeping view of a busy canal, Manet’s careful study of light and movement focused on one particular experience in a corner of the city.

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Younger Students

- What is going on in each of these images?
  What do you see that makes you say that?
- How would you feel in these landscapes?
  Think about all of your senses.
- What is the same in these paintings?
  What is different? How do these differences
  create a different mood or feeling?
- Describe the brushstrokes in each painting.
  What do you think the artists were trying to show?
- Before photography, people often bought
  paintings or painted views when they were
  visiting a place. Do you like to take photographs
  on your vacations? What images
do you like to capture?

Additional Questions for Older Students

- These paintings were painted almost 150 years
  apart. How might an artist today depict this place?
- Talk about the different perspectives of
  these two paintings—looking from the water
  versus seeing the canal from above. What is
  in the fore, middle, and background? How do
  these differences in artistic choices change
  the feeling of the painting?
- Canaletto lived in Venice. Manet painted this
  work after only having been to Venice once before.
  How do you think these different experiences
  of the city might have impacted their paintings?
- What waterfront cities have you visited? If you
  were to paint that waterfront, what style would
  you use? Why?
ABOUT THE WORK

LOOKING CLOSELY: A VIEW OF THE FOREST

Artists use perspective to play with how we see the world. Gustav Klimt, a late-19th and early-20th century Austrian painter, is well-known for his lush portraits that bend reality into abstraction with his use of color, pattern, and shape. The painting of this birch forest does much the same for Klimt’s landscapes. This view is near Attersee, a lake in north central Austria, which was a frequent vacation spot of Klimt. Klimt would set out into the orchards, marshes, and forests surrounding the lake, looking through a telescope, opera glasses, or a homemade viewfinder (a square hole cut into a piece of cardboard). Birch Forest shows how this technique flattens the landscape and limits focus to very specific compositions. The viewer sees only an unending expanse of trees and leaves. Klimt has created a rich variety of textures in this landscape, with careful dabs and strokes of paint recreating the feel of the forest.

Birch Forest, 1903, Gustav Klimt, Austrian, 1862–1918, oil on canvas, 42 1/4 x 42 1/4 in., Paul G. Allen Family Collection.
LOOKING QUESTIONS

Younger Students

• What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
• How would you feel in this landscape? Think about all of your senses.
• What time of year is it? How can you tell?
• Have you ever been in a space that looked like this before? Where were you and what were you doing?
• Klimt liked to look through a viewfinder to focus. Make your own viewfinders! Close one eye, make a circle with your fingers and bring it up to your open eye. How does a viewfinder change what you see?

Additional Questions for Older Students

• What elements in this painting are realistic? What are abstract?
• How do you experience space in this painting?
• What do you see when you are far away from this painting? What do you see when you are close?
• Imagine the artist changes one thing about the painting. What would you have him do differently? How would this change the painting?
• How do you feel when you see the forest or park near where you live? What techniques might you use to create this feeling if you were trying to paint it?

ABOUT THE WORK

Birch Forest, 1903, Gustav Klimt, Austrian, 1862–1918, oil on canvas, 42 1/4 x 42 1/4 in., Paul G. Allen Family Collection.

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LOOKING CLOSELY: A GRAND LANDSCAPE

The British artist David Hockney moved to California in 1964. Known for large acrylic paintings that highlighted a stylized view of Southern California, with swimming pools, palm trees, and sunshine, Hockney started experimenting with photography in the mid-1970s. After a visit to the Grand Canyon in 1982, Hockney spent almost 20 years photographing and painting the canyon, playing with perspective and scale.

In that first visit to the Grand Canyon, Hockney took 60 photographs that could be laid out into a five-by-twelve grid that illustrated both the grandeur of the view as well as details in the smaller focused photographs. The artist created three different paintings from these photographs. The second one shown here creates one overall work with more than one focus, made up of individual panels that draw from the original photographs. Hockney's bold color choices mimic the extreme landscape and create a larger-than-life experience. Like other artists in the exhibition, Hockney played with perspective and viewpoint to help viewers recreate the experience of seeing nature.

The Grand Canyon, 1998, David Hockney, British, b. 1937, oil on canvas, 48 1/2 x 14 ft. 1 in. overall. Paul G. Allen Family Collection. © David Hockney
ABOUT THE WORK

The Grand Canyon, 1998, David Hockney, British, b. 1937, oil on canvas, 48 1/2 x 14 ft. 1 in. overall. Paul G. Allen Family Collection. © David Hockney

LOOKING QUESTIONS

Younger Students
• What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
• How would you feel in this landscape? Think about all of your senses.
• Does this look like a real or imaginary place? Why?
• How would you describe these colors? Why do you think the artist chose to use these colors? How do you feel when you look at these colors?
• What textures can you find? How does the artist create texture?
• Is there anything about this painting that is unusual to you? What and why?
• Have you been to the Grand Canyon? If so, what did it feel like? Did it look like this painting? Why or why not?

Additional Questions for Older Students
• Hockney based this large painting on 60 smaller photographs. What do you see in this work that might show this part of his process?
• Compare the perspective in this painting to that of the Canaletto and the Manet works shown earlier. How is Hockney using perspective differently? Compared in particular to the Canaletto, how is Hockney using perspective to create a large landscape?
• Do you think this painting is more realistic or less realistic than Klimt’s view of a forest? Why?
• Does this look contemporary to you? Why or why not?
• How is the artist using color in this painting?
• Grand Canyon National Park is next to indigenous territory—several Native American tribal nations have land within and/or neighboring the Grand Canyon National Park. How do you think Hockney’s experience as a tourist might impact his painting? How might indigenous peoples in the area see nature differently?
The artists in this exhibition explore the many ways we see the world around us and experiment with techniques to show a certain view of the world and evoke specific feelings. The art activity below will have students use one of these techniques to look closely at their own environment.

**MATERIALS**

- Pencils
- Ruler
- 8.5 x 11" cardstock, cut into quarters or toilet paper or paper towel rolls
- Scissors
- 8.5 x 11" white paper
- Clipboard
- Paint, water soluble oil pastels, markers, or colored pencils

**DESCRIPTION**

Look closely at the works by using the questions provided in this document in a class discussion.

Revisit Gustav Klimt’s *Birch Forest* and discuss how he used a telescope or viewfinder to focus his perspective. Create your own viewfinder. If using cardstock, give each student a piece and have students draw a 3 x 3 inch square in the middle. Cut out the square (this can be done ahead of time for younger students or students can share their viewfinders with a partner).

Take the class outside with their viewfinder, a clipboard with paper, and a pencil. Have students closely study the world around them using their viewfinders. Encourage them to think about their perspective and how they feel: Are they looking at the landscape as a local or as a tourist? Are they trying to highlight the details of the natural environment or recreate a powerful feeling? Have them sketch what they see through the viewfinder. Students can use viewfinders with magazine images of landscapes if they are unable to go outside or look out the window.

Back in the classroom, have students add color to their sketches using colored pencils, markers, paint, or water soluble oil pastels. Encourage students to think about their technique or how a specific artist might approach the work, reminding them of some of the works in the exhibition or other artists they have studied in class. What do they want to say with their image? Are they creating realistic views with natural colors or a more abstract view with fantastical colors? Are they combining techniques?

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ART ACTIVITY

STEP FIVE

Have students share their work with a partner, explaining how they used their viewfinder, which view of nature they chose and why, and how their color choices helped to create a specific work of art. For older students, have them write out an artist statement, outlining these choices. Display the works and statements around the room or have students present their works and statements to the class.

ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS

• Have students gather materials while outside to turn their drawings into found art collages. Think about experiencing nature through all of the five senses when collecting these materials. Have students group the objects by their common properties, including color, texture, hardness, and flexibility. What experience are they trying to recreate? How do these properties impact how they use the materials in their collages?
• Create a three-dimensional clay model. Instruct students to include the shape of the land, differences in the landscape, and any water features. Compare the two-dimensional drawing to the three-dimensional model. How does the different media allow a different landscape?
• Finish the project by taking a photograph or magazine image of a landscape, draw a grid on it, and project it onto a wall. Hang large butcher paper or poster board on the wall and assign each student a different square on the projected grid to trace and color to create a collaborative work. Encourage students to change the color, texture, or mood of the image.
• Have students create a drawing or painting of a world entirely of their imagination. How is this different than what they created from observing nature?

OLDER STUDENTS

• How is David Hockney’s painting similar to a panorama? What perspective is altered or lost in this process? Have students take square photos or a large panoramic photo with a phone and translate this into a large painting. They can choose to overlap the views in the larger work, or distort the edges like in the panoramic image. Ask students to pair up and share their work, thinking about how photography changes our perspective and how a photograph of a place is different from viewing it in real life.
• Have students research the history and present of the indigenous peoples of the Grand Canyon. How have these tribal nations responded to tourism in their homeland? How does photography draw tourists to the area? How have contemporary Native American artists represented this region in their work? What is similar or different between Hockney’s painting and Native artwork of the Grand Canyon?
• Have students research how Venice or the Grand Canyon has changed over the last several hundred years due to climate change. Then students create a drawing or painting with this new information imagining the scenes from the artworks in this guide several hundred years from now. What might be different or the same? What do you think the mood of the work would be? How might an artist show this mood?
• What might these paintings look like in rain or snow? Have students recreate one of the works of art as a different season. In particular, think about how weather impacts mood and how mood changes artistic choices.

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Abstract/Abstraction: Not representing any one particular object or form. Can have varying interpretations and does not necessarily reflect reality. In art, abstraction involves the artist starting with a visible object and taking elements from it, altering these elements into more simplified forms, or creating forms for non-visible things like sensations or emotions.

Background: In a picture, the farthest point seen or the area behind something.

Birch: A thin deciduous tree with peeling bark that grows in northern climates.

Canaletto (1697–1768): Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as Canaletto, was an Italian painter native to Venice, known most for his landscapes of the city.

Façade: The front face of a building.

Foreground: Objects that are the closest to the viewer in a picture plane.

Gondola: A flat-bottomed boat most common in Venice with two points at each end, propelled by a long oar.

Grand Canyon: A steep-sided canyon along the Colorado River in northern Arizona, stretching 277 miles long, up to 18 miles wide and a mile deep; known for its bands of red rocks and famous sunset views.

Grand Tour: The name for the travels in France and Italy that the upper class (primarily men) from northern Europe took as part of their education. Beginning in the late-16th and early-17th century, this practice would continue until the late-19th century and often included purchasing works of art to commemorate the experience.

David Hockney (b. 1937): British artist who moved to California in 1964. Known for large acrylic paintings that highlighted a stylized view of Southern California, he has worked in almost every media, including experimenting with photography and video.

Impressionism: Originating in Paris, an informal and changing group of 19th-century artists held independent exhibitions during the 1870s and 1880s to rebel against the established art practices popular at the time. These artists desired to create impressions of fleeting moments, with short, visible brushstrokes that emphasize capturing the light and mood of a particular scene. To do so, artists often painted outside.

Gustav Klimt (1862–1918): Austrian painter who was known for his more personal works based on allegories and portraits highly decorated with gold designs.

Edouard Manet (1832–1883): A French Realist painter who influenced the Impressionists with his paintings of modern life.

Middle ground: An area located between the closest and furthest objects in a picture plane.

Modernism: A broad term commonly applied to a style of art produced beginning in the late 19th century (roughly the 1860s–1880s) to around the 1960s. Although the specific dates are often contested by art historians, there is typically agreement that modern art was founded on several principles: a motivation towards originality, usually involving intolerance for traditional artistic conventions, like realism; art that had as much (or in some cases, more) to do with the mind as with the senses; and the belief that materials could contribute as much meaning to a work of art as subject matter (ex: rough brushstrokes to illustrate a violent or dramatic subject).

Panoramic: A picture or idea that represents a continuous view of a particular place or thought.

Perspective: In art, a method of creating realistic dimension on a flat surface through the illusion of space.

Realism: Beginning in French painting in the mid-19th century, a movement in art that attempted to realistically and faithfully capture contemporary life.

Venice: A city in northeastern Italy. Founded in the fifth century, Venice is made up of 118 islands and is connected by a series of canals (one of the largest, the Grand Canal, cuts through the center of the city). A major maritime power for most of its history, the city is known for its colorful, ornate architecture and special quality of light.
WASHINGTON STATE EDUCATION STANDARDS

ARTS

Arts 1
The student understands and applies arts knowledge and skills.

Arts 2
The student demonstrates thinking skills using artistic processes.

Arts 3
The student communicates through the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual).

SCIENCE

Science 1—Systems
The student knows and applies scientific concepts and principles to understand the properties, structures, and changes in physical, earth/space, and living systems.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Anchor Standards for Writing
Production and Distribution of Writing
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Text Types and Purposes
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge
7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening
Comprehension and Collaboration
1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

History/Social Studies: Grade 11-12
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
8. Evaluate an author’s premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.
NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

CREATING
Anchor Standard 1
Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2
Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3
Refine and complete artistic work.

CONNECTING
Anchor Standard 10
Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard 11
Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

RESPONDING
Anchor Standard 7
Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8
Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

Second Grade Structure and Properties of Matter 2-PS1-1
Plan and conduct an investigation to describe and classify different kinds of materials by their observable properties.

Earth’s System: Processes that Shape the Earth 2-ESS2-2
Develop a model to represent the shapes and kinds of land and bodies of water in an area.

Middle School Weather and Climate MS-ESS3-5
Ask questions to clarify evidence of the factors that have caused the rise in global temperatures over the past century.