

TEACHERS' GUIDE

for elementary grades

Vision Machine: Marianne Nicolson & Etienne Zack and Cao Fei: Simulus



Etienne Zack, Refractor, oil on linen, 2012, Courtesy of the artist and Equinox Gallery

DEAR TEACHERS

This guide has been developed for elementary teachers as a classroom resource in relation to the exhibitions, *Vision Machine: Marianne Nicolson & Etienne Zack* and *Cao Fei: Simulus*, which can be visited at the Surrey Art Gallery from April 7 to June 10, 2012. The guide contains information about the exhibition and activities that will help you prepare for and follow-up your visit to the Gallery. Engaging in the activities before and/or after your visit will reinforce the ideas and processes explored in the exhibition, and provide continuity between the gallery visit and classroom. The activities require a minimum of materials and are adaptable to different grade levels. Activities are also adaptable to other materials. The guide also contains curriculum links, vocabulary, and resource sections.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITIONS

VISION MACHINE: MARIANNE NICOLSON AND ETIENNE ZACK

April 7 – June 10, 2012

The cast shadows of supernatural figures of the Pacific Northwest rise against an Athabaskan landscape dominated by smoke stacks and shimmering tailings ponds. A vast cityscape of vibrantly-hued architectural ruins appears as if under a giant electron microscope. The relationships between cultural history and scientific vision, economy and environment, immersive three-dimensional space and the flatness of pictures are all central to the newest works of Victoria-based Kwakwaka'wakw artist Marianne Nicolson and LA-based Canadian artist Etienne Zack. Surrey Art Gallery's exhibition *Vision Machine* premieres two of Zack's largest painted canvasses to date, and the latest variation of Nicolson's enveloping etched glass shadow machines.

Vision Machine's two acclaimed artists revel in the traditions of theatrical display and breaking down the picture frame's boundaries by combining optical effects from the past and future. Nicolson describes her latest work as addressing "vision and perception, in particular, the differences in cultural perception regarding resource management, economy, and the massive resource extraction of oil from Canada's tar-sands." Zack explains that his new paintings are "a way to explore picture making to activate and pry open different pictorial, cultural, and historical forces in order to experience them yet again in idiosyncratic ways." Both artists take the optical machinery of an earlier time (such as prisms and magic lanterns) and the outmoded electronic technologies of the recent past (like overhead projectors and videotape cassettes) back into the sensual worlds of painting and sculpture.

CAO FEI: SIMULUS

April 7 – June 10, 2012

Our computer age has produced many online interactive worlds which mirror the real world in which we live. Over the past decade these virtual places have been increasingly infiltrated by

practicing visual artists who now occupy these virtual spaces to present their art, perform new identities, and generate alternative forms of living. The exhibition *Simulus*, by Cao Fei, one of China's acclaimed 21st century generation of artists, presents an interactive game environment, and video generated in the simulated online environment *Second Life*. The flash game installation *Apocalypse Tomorrow* (2011) presents an expansive seascape where the viewer-player must avoid and interact with continuously surfacing obstacles made up of familiar architectural forms and monuments from China's recent past. *RMB City Planning* (2007) is a large-scale video projection depicting a fictional city collaged together from existing cities and media icons in turn-of-the-millennium China.

Jordan Strom, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

MARIANNE NICOLSON

Born in Comox in 1969, Marianne Nicolson is a member of the Dzawada'enuxw Tribe of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation. Currently based in Victoria, Nicolson's multimedia work has been featured in important group exhibitions of contemporary Canadian art including, *A Travelling Exhibition: Work by Eleven Indigenous Canadian Artists* (Open Space, 2011), and *Borderzones* (UBC's Museum of Anthropology, 2010). Her solo exhibitions such as *The Return of Abundance* (Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2007), and *The House of Ghosts* (Vancouver Art Gallery, 2008) often engage language through innovative installations of projected light and reworked traditional cultural forms.



Marianne Nicolson, Ni'nulamgila le'e Banistida `Tisala (Foolmakers in the Setting Sun), glasswork detail, 2012, Courtesy of the artist and Equinox Gallery

ETIENNE ZACK

Born in Montreal in 1976, Etienne Zack has been based on the west coast for the past decade, partly in Vancouver and partly in Los Angeles. Zack has exhibited his art at many of Canada's premiere contemporary art museums, including a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Montreal in 2010. His paintings have been shown in numerous international galleries including venues in London, New York, Madrid, and Vienna. Zack was the 2005 winner of the RBC Painting Competition, and the 2008 City of Montreal's Pierre-Ayot prize. His work will be featured in Oh Canada, the largest-to-date survey of contemporary Canadian art outside of Canada, presented later this spring at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

CAO FEI

Born in Guangzhou, China, in 1978, Cao Fei now lives and works in Beijing. Her work reflects the fluidity of a world in which cultures have mixed and diverged in rapid evolution. Applying various artistic strategies to capture individuals' longings and the ways in which they imagine themselves, Cao Fei reveals the discrepancy between reality and dream, and the discontent and disillusionment of China's younger generation. Cao Fei's work has appeared in solo exhibitions at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand (2010), the Serpentine Gallery, London (2008); Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California (2007); Museum Het Domein, Sittard, Netherlands (2006); and Para Site Art Space, Hong Kong (2006). She has participated in Utopia Matters, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2010); New Museum Triennial (2009); Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (2008); and Prospect.1 New Orleans (2008).

ABOUT THE SURREY ART GALLERY

Surrey Art Gallery is the second largest public art gallery in the Metro Vancouver region. Internationally recognized, the Gallery showcases diverse artistic practices including digital and audio art by local, national, and international artists. The Surrey Art Gallery's mission is to engage the public in an ongoing dialogue about issues and ideas that affect our numerous communities as expressed through contemporary art, and to provide opportunities for the public to interact with artists and the artistic process.

To receive announcements about exhibitions and related events, sign up for e-bulletins at www.surrey.ca/arts.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS FOR SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Participating in a guided tour, studio workshop, or self-guided tour in conjunction with the exhibitions supports British Columbia Visual Arts Prescribed Learning Outcomes for elementary grades as outlined below. The exhibition can be used as a touchstone for discussion relating to themes and concepts addressed in a variety of curriculum areas.

VISUAL ARTS PRESCRIBED LEARNING OUTCOMES

It is expected that students will:

Kindergarten to Grade 1

- identify a variety of image sources, their own and others
- describe the many forms that images take
- demonstrate an awareness that images come from a variety of contexts
- demonstrate recognition of the expressive qualities of individual visual elements

Grade 2 to 3

- suggest purposes for a variety of images
- demonstrate an awareness of a variety of reasons why people make and use art
- identify the expressive qualities of individual visual elements
- demonstrate an awareness that materials, tools, equipment and processes can be used to create particular effects

Grade 4

- identify image development and design strategies
- compare images developed for particular purposes
- identify the characteristics of materials, tools, equipment and processes used to create particular effects
- demonstrate an awareness that there are various types of artists in the community

Grade 5

- compare the relationship between form and purpose in a variety of images
- identify aspects of selected images that indicate the social, historical, or cultural context in which they were created
- compare a variety of works that emphasize particular elements and principles
- analyse the use of materials, tools, equipment and processes in a variety of artworks

Grade 6

- demonstrate knowledge of image-development and design strategies used by artists for a variety of purposes
- demonstrate an awareness that images influence and are influenced by their social, historical, and cultural contexts
- identify images that emphasize particular elements (including space) and principles (including rhythm)
- analyse the use of materials, tools, equipment and processes in a variety of artworks

Grade 7

- analyse image-development and design strategies used by various artists for a variety of purposes
- demonstrate an understanding of the influence of social, historical, and cultural contexts on artists and their images
- analyse how the elements and principles are used to create effects and convey mood and meaning in images
- evaluate the use of materials, tools, equipment and processes in a variety of artworks

SUGGESTED PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: VISION MACHINE

Description

In this activity, students will conceive of and design their own vision machine as they consider key themes explored by the artists in the Vision Machine exhibition.

Discussion

Inform students that they will be visiting the Vision Machine exhibition at the Surrey Art Gallery. In a guided tour, students will view and discuss works by two artists: Marianne Nicolson and Etienne Zack. Their work, though very different, investigates similar themes and ideas. Zack creates elaborate large-scale paintings of imaginary machines and environments. Nicolson's main work in the exhibition, Ni'nu'amgila le'e Banistida `Tisala (Foolmakers in the Setting Sun), is an intricate etched glass shadow machine which expresses an Indigenous perspective regarding environmental issues. Both artists explore the themes of vision and perspective by referencing and repurposing old and new technologies associated with the science of optics (of or relating to the eye or vision; or relating to optical equipment). The French cultural thinker Paul Virilio has referred to the automation of vision in the modern era as humanity's collective "vision machine."

Ask students to consider the themes of "vision" and "perspective". Write responses on the whiteboard. Sample questions: What is vision? Are there different kinds of vision? Can you see without using your eyes? What is sight? What is an image? Can we see images without the presence of light? What is perspective? When individuals look at the same image, do they all see the same thing? Why or why not? What kinds of tools and equipment help us to see? (i.e. glasses, contact lenses, binoculars, telescopes) What technologies or machines use light to create, reflect, refract or project images? (i.e. prisms, mirrors, glass windows, cameras, film, video, overhead and digital projectors, flashlights, spotlights, television and computer monitors)

Provide the following instructions to students:

Challenge: Using either drawing or collage, invent an imaginary Vision Machine.

Rules:

1. Your vision machine must enable viewers to see things in a new way, or from a different perspective.
2. You have an unlimited budget (you can use / combine any materials you can think of).
3. You must incorporate at least three components that the artist's have repurposed in the creation of their vision machines. Choose from: a prism; a glass wall; a frame; a computer monitor; shadows; fire; a magic lantern; a supernatural being; fluorescent light bulbs; a candle; a spotlight; a window; specimen slides; a yellow ball; bricks; spear; a phoenix or griffin; a dressmaker's mannequin; a palm tree; a swimming pool.

Materials

Three sheets of paper per student; pencils with erasers; collage materials (magazines, images from the internet); glue sticks; scissors.

Process

1. Provide each student with the instructions above.
2. Have students use one paper to sketch rough / preliminary ideas for the design of their vision machine.
3. When they have worked out their design, they can use the second paper for a more detailed drawing or collage. Collage images can be obtained from magazines or the internet.
4. Students can use the third paper to write step-by-step instructions regarding the operation of the vision machine. Ensure students sign and date the design.

Conclusion

Students can take turns presenting their Vision Machine design. If these machines were actually produced, which ones would work? Which would not work? Why? How would the various machines enable users to “see” the world in new ways?

When the students visit the exhibition, have them search for and find the components from the artist’s work they incorporated into their own design.



Etienne Zack, Experience, oil on canvas, 2009, Courtesy of the artist and Equinox Gallery, Photo by Guy L'Heureux

SUGGESTED POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: SECOND LIFE ELEMENTARY

Description

In this activity students will reflect on their experience of the Cao Fei: Simulus exhibition as they work together to envision an ideal elementary school community that might exist in a parallel online virtual reality.

Discussion

Engage students in a discussion about their experience of the Cao Fei: Simulus exhibition. What did they find interesting and surprising about the exhibition? Ask students about what they remember about the city that Cao Fei created in the videos *RMB City Planning* and in *Live in RMB City*. *RMB City* itself is a fantastical online city that has been created through Second Life. Second Life is an online community that takes the form of a computer-based simulated environment where multiple individuals can create online personas (called avatars), environments and situations modeled on reality. *RMB City* is intended as a virtual space for its participants to try out different roles and identities, perform scenarios, enact conversations, and test out solutions to problems confronted in the real world. Cao Fei created this fictional world based on existing turn-of-the-millennium cities in China. Have any of the students been to China? Had students heard about Second Life before visiting the exhibition? Do they know of online interactive communities for young people? (i.e. Club Penguin, Webkinz World) Have any students joined these online communities? What were / are the names of their avatars (characters)? Had students considered virtual reality communities as an art form before? Or as a place where artists could create and present their work for others to experience? If they viewed the *Live in RMB City* video, have students recall Cao Fei's avatar, China Tracy. China Tracy's character was personified as a guide, philosopher, and tourist. Ask students: If you were to imagine an avatar for yourself, how would it be different from the real you? If you could create a virtual world, how would it be different from the real world?

In this activity, students will work together to conceive of their own idealized virtual school community – “Second Life Elementary”.

Materials

Paper; pencils; markers or pencil crayons.

Process

1. Use the white board to brainstorm with the students about what would make an ideal school. Consider the current school environment. Encourage the students to think critically about the school culture and physical environment. What do they like about it? What don't they like? In what ways is the school not a perfect place? How could it be a

VOCABULARY

AVATAR: In computing, an avatar is the graphical representation of the user or the user's alter ego or character. It may take either a three-dimensional form, as in games or virtual worlds, or a two-dimensional form as an icon in Internet forums and other online communities.

CONTEMPORARY ART: Art that belongs to the present day. A contemporary artist is an artist who is alive today and who makes works of art to be shown in galleries and public spaces.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA ART: Electronic art is a form of art that makes use of electronic media or, more broadly, refers to technology and/or electronic media. It is related to information art, new media art, video art, digital art, interactive art, internet art, and electronic music.

MAGIC LANTERN: A simple form of image projector used for showing photographic slides.

MULTIMEDIA: Using more than one medium of expression or communication.

OPTICS: Relating to the eye or vision; relating to the science of optics or optical equipment.

SCALE: The ratio between the size of something and a representation of it.

URBAN LANDSCAPE: The urban equivalent of a landscape; the traits, patterns and structure of a city's specific geographic area.

VIRTUAL WORLD: An online community that takes the form of a computer-based simulated environment.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Cao Fei

www.caofei.com

Marianne Nicolson

www.viu.ca/art/visitingartist/nicolson.asp

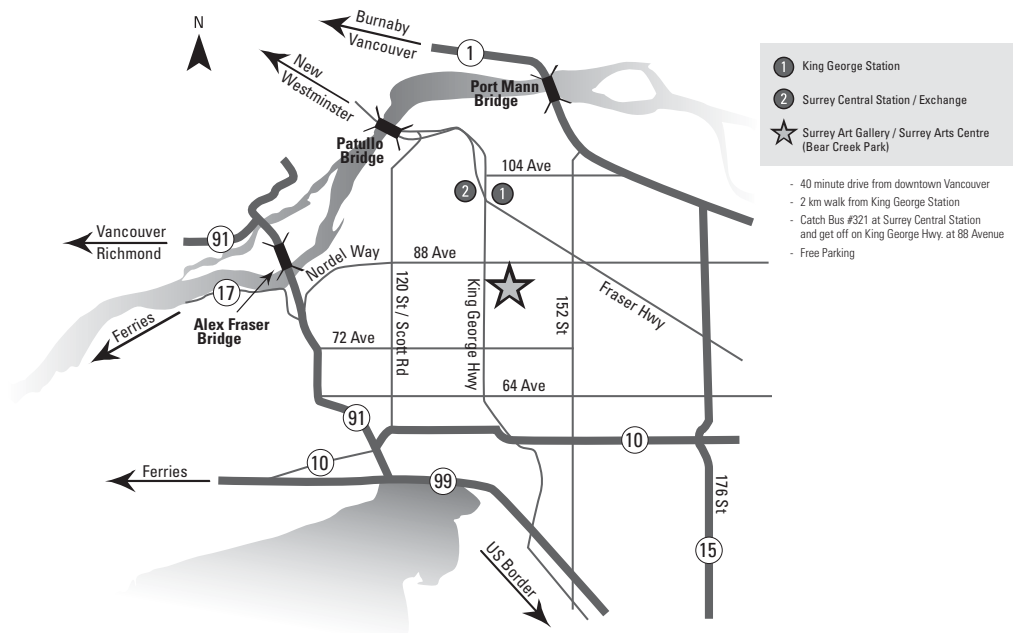
Etienne Zack

www.etiennezack.com

TEACHER GUIDE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Teacher Guide prepared by Pamela Tarlow-Calder, Surrey Art Gallery Interpretive Programmer, with the assistance of Ingrid Kolt, Curator of Education and Public Programs, Surrey Art Gallery. Exhibition description prepared by Jordan Strom, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections.

SURREY ART GALLERY INFORMATION



13750 – 88 Avenue – Surrey, BC
 604-501-5566 / artgallery@surrey.ca
www.surrey.ca/arts



Gallery hours:
 Mon & Fri: 9am – 5pm
 Tues, Wed & Thurs: 9am – 9pm
 Sat: 10am – 5pm
 Sun: Noon – 5pm
 Closed holidays / Admission by donation

To receive updates about exhibitions and related programs, sign up for e-bulletins at www.surrey.ca/arts



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