



TEACHERS' GUIDE

January 19 – February 28, 2008

Jim Breukelman – *Between Hope and Politics:
Photographs of the PacifiCat Project*

Donna Szoke – *Reasonable and Senseless*

Ricarda McDonald – *Spatial Nebulosity*



Jim Breukelman, *PacifiCat Project #1*
2000, Digital C-print

This guide is designed for teachers as a preparation and follow-up of the **School Art Workshop** at the Richmond Art Gallery, or for those who wish to use our online resources in their own classrooms.



Donna Szoke, *Reasonable and Senseless* (detail)
2005-6, multi-channel video installation

Included is background information on the artists, suggested points for discussion, a pre-visit activity, a lesson plan adaptable to the specific needs of your students, and resources for further exploration.

More images and information on our exhibitions and programs are available at www.richmondartgallery.org



Ricarda McDonald, *Telespace 6*
2007, Digitally manipulated photograph

If you have any questions or comments regarding your School Art Workshop, please contact:

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ABOUT THE RICHMOND ART GALLERY

The Richmond Art Gallery is a non-profit organization, which means we are not in the business of selling art like a commercial gallery would be. Our mandate is to exhibit and collect contemporary art, showing art for visitor's enjoyment and learning. Our educational programs complement the exhibitions to help develop visual literacy and educate visitors about contemporary art practices.

What is a contemporary Art Gallery?

Contemporary art is artistic work from the present era that uses the current practices and styles of art. The works shown in our Gallery are by local, national, and international artists that have been made within the past 10 years.

Where does the art come from?

Every year, many artists submit applications to the Gallery to exhibit their work. Applications include images and written statements about the artist's work and what they propose to show in the Gallery.

A jury made up of our Exhibition Committee and Director/Curator go through artist applications and select works they believe would fit into the Richmond Art Gallery based on our Curatorial Mandate. The Curatorial Mandate of the Richmond Art Gallery is to mount exhibitions of local, Canadian and international stature of interest to our local community and of importance to the contemporary art community across Canada.

Why is the Gallery different from the last time I was here?

The Gallery changes its art exhibitions every 5-6 weeks. This means we can see many different artists' works throughout the year, so that there is always something new to see in the Richmond Art Gallery!

Why is that art?

This is a common question heard in a contemporary Art Gallery, because the work is new and different than the usual artwork you see in Art Museums. Contemporary artists respond to the world they live in, just like artists have always done in the past. Sometimes, we cannot immediately understand what the artist is trying to communicate because we have not explored the subject in that way before. Yet this is what makes art so exciting, it opens up our eyes and mind to new images and ideas!

The best way to learn and enjoy your Art Gallery experience is to slow down, relax, and be open to ideas. Ask "what do I see?" or "what do I think is happening here?" while looking at an artwork. Look for clues to discover what an artist is trying to say or do. If you need more information, ask! Ask Gallery staff and read the text panels on the walls for more information about the exhibition. Most importantly, be curious and have fun exploring contemporary art!

SCHOOL ART PROGRAM INFORMATION

The School Art Program has been developed for students and teachers to experience the contemporary arts in Richmond. The goal of the program is to educate students about contemporary art, practice art skills, and to develop visual literacy. We do this by:

- Viewing and talking about works of art in the Gallery
- Learning vocabulary relevant to the visual arts
- Discussing the context of artworks
- Creating art projects related to the exhibition and tour

Pre-Workshop Information

Fee – Cost is \$90 per class, or \$75 per Pre-School group. Maximum 33 students. Fee is payable on the day of your workshop at the Cultural Centre front desk.

Schedule – The RAG School Art Workshop is 1 ½ hours in total, or 1 hour for Pre-School groups. The Gallery tour will last approximately 20-30 minutes (10-15 minutes for Pre-School), and 1 hour working on a hands-on exhibition related art activity.

Parking - Free parking is available at the Richmond Cultural Centre parking lot, or if full you can try parking across the street at Richmond Centre Mall.

Washrooms / Accessibility: The Gallery is completely wheelchair accessible. Washrooms are located in the Cultural Centre rotunda behind the front desk, and there is one unisex stall in the art studio.

While in the Gallery : Gallery Rules

Please remind students that appropriate behaviour is expected in the Gallery. Each artwork is an original piece of art that it is our job to display AND protect. It is important for **all** visitors to remember these rules of the Gallery:

- **No touching!** Please stay at least 12 inches away from the artwork or from sculpture stands. Please keep 12 inches away from artworks on the floor as well.
- **No running or yelling in the Gallery.** Please be respectful of the Gallery space and very careful around the artworks.
- **No photos of the art please. Artwork is copyrighted** by the artist and may not be photographed. Photos are permitted in the art studio only.
- **No food or drink** is permitted in the Gallery.
- During the workshops, please do not touch other's artworks. It is important for each young artist to work on their art by themselves.

After Your Workshop – Picking up Artworks

Most art projects take at least one day to dry. Please arrange for pick-up of paintings or prints at a later date. Artworks are packaged up with your school name and workshop date on the package. Please pick up your artwork packages from the Programming Room any time the Gallery is open, from Mon-Thurs, 10am - 6pm and Sat-Sun, 10am – 5pm. If the Gallery is closed for installation, please ask the Cultural Centre front desk to call Kathy to bring your works out for you.

IN THE GALLERY : WHAT YOU WILL SEE

Jim Breukelman is a Canadian photographer who has been exhibiting across Canada for over four decades. He started up the Fine Art Photography department at the Emily Carr Institute in 1967 (then called the Vancouver School of Art), and continued to teach there until his retirement in 2000. During that time he has had a significant influence on the development of artists and photographic art in Vancouver. For this exhibition, Breukelman will be showing some of his large-scale photographs from a photo essay documenting the construction of the PacifiCat ferries built for the BC Ferry Corporation.

The PacifiCats were three custom-designed high-speed ferries built between 1995-2000 in BC shipyards by the Provincial Government. Their purpose was to provide faster ferry service between Vancouver Island and Vancouver, as well as to help with BC's struggling shipbuilding industry. This project soon became known as the "Fast Ferry Fiasco" as the ferries were plagued with problems: the construction costs went hundreds of millions of dollars over budget, high gas consumption made them costly to run, the engines would frequently break down, and the wake created by the ferries was damaging local shore lines. In the end, the government decided to stop using them, sold them off, and they now sit idle in North Vancouver docks.

Breukelman documented the process of construction for a year and a half with detailed photographs emphasizing the beauty he saw in the complex architectural design and overwhelming size of the construction. While documenting something that was very political, the artist focuses on composition: space, balance, light, focal point, rhythm, form, and shape. The images are a play between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary, drawing the viewer in with complex details and compelling us to develop a narrative or story about each work. People are not the focus in his photography, yet evidence of human activity is everywhere. The photographs are reminiscent of a theatrical set-up, with scenes of frozen workers set within an environment of massive machinery and construction. By working in a series Breukelman delves deeply into the subject matter and relationships between the images start to form, adding to the development of a visual narrative.

Donna Szoke is a Vancouver-based artist who exhibits internationally, working in video, installation, drawing, and collaborative projects. For her project *reasonable and senseless*, she uses 20 monitors placed closely together so that they can be viewed simultaneously. On each monitor a short video plays a disaster resulting from mishandling of technology, which the artist has taken from both fictional and documentary footage from the Prelinger Archive. As each scene plays, a smoky disaster occurs. The smoke serves as a tool for the artist to manipulate, transforming the smoke into a letter. As each technological disaster occurs, another letter is formed and eventually we read the title of the project, *reasonable and senseless*. The phrase refers to the "reasonable" pursuit of progress and the "senseless" disasters that have or can occur through this pursuit. Szoke's images are spectacles, using this tactic to grab our attention and leave us wondering what is happening. However, by forcing the viewer to view 20 screens at once, we must stay with them over time to decipher the narrative.

Ricarda McDonald is an artist based in North Vancouver who works in photography and new media. The series of digitally manipulated photographs for this exhibition are of people in public spaces using a cell phone. The images have a collage-like quality, with pieces cut out, coloured, or layered to emphasize specific elements within the picture. The series depicts a progression of the phone users' awareness of their surroundings, altering the photographs to bring our focus onto the spaces that have lost their place in the phone users' consciousness. By doing so, we start to notice the peculiar behaviours associated with cell phone use in public spaces. Cell phones and technology are promoted as a way to connect with people, yet as evidenced in McDonald's photos, it often seems to do just the opposite.

BACKGROUND: PHOTOGRAPHY THEN AND NOW

Before photography was invented, painting, drawing and etchings were the only way to visually record events. Portraits and events were presented realistically by artists who attempted to capture a moment in time or a likeness of a specific person. However, this type of art was not considered to be an authentic depiction, as artists often attempted to evoke an emotional response to their pictures. Elements of drama were purposely included in paintings of war, portraits were always flattering to the person portrayed, and landscapes were shown in pristine conditions. Once photography was invented in the early 19th century, it was viewed as the death of painting as a photograph could instantly depict an absolute likeness. However, artists quickly realized that just as a painting or drawing could be manipulated, so can photographs.

While photography does add authenticity and is often seen as the 'true' documentation of an event, there are many ways a photograph can be manipulated. Some of the ways this can be done is by selecting a specific viewpoint that omits or includes only certain elements in a scene, by using a picture out of context, or by posing subjects to depict a certain idea. Photography does have the capacity to capture a moment in time, to reproduce images in considerable detail, and to draw attention to certain elements or situations we might not otherwise be aware of. However, one must always question how the photograph was taken when considering if it is a "true" documentation of an event.

USING NARRATIVE

A narrative in art visually tells a story or relays information about an event. Techniques used in telling a story visually include portraying a dramatic moment of an event, displaying a series of still images that read like a storyboard one must follow, or including titles or actual text with the images. Photography lends itself naturally to creating a narrative. When we see a photograph of a place or person, our immediate response is "who is that?" or "where is that?" Because a photograph is of a "real" place or person, as opposed to a drawing or painting that may be of an imagined subject, we are immediately curious to see something or someone we recognize. A viewer's curiosity about the subject or setting is what helps develop a narrative in art, our imaginations "fill in the blanks" to create a story about what we are seeing. Many artists use this knowledge of how a narrative is formed to create their own stories.

CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY IN VANCOUVER

Over the past two decades Vancouver has become internationally renowned for contemporary photo-based work, particularly the "Vancouver School" of photo conceptualism that includes artists Roy Arden, Stan Douglas, Rodney Graham, Ken Lum, Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, and others. The "Vancouver School" emerged in the 1960's and 1970's is characterized by large format photographic prints, often depicting a highly staged and/or theatrical scene in elaborate detail. However, these works are not necessarily depicting a specific event or person but create a narrative that is open to interpretation. It was during this time that Jim Bruekelman was teaching photography in Vancouver, and had a big influence on the artists working in Vancouver. Since then, the "Vancouver School" has had a big influence on emerging artists in Canada, particularly in the realm of photography and video.

As you look at the photographs and video works included in this show, can you decipher the narrative? How has each artist constructed their images to tell a story?

GLOSSARY OF ART TERMS

Conceptual Art: Art movement that started in the 1960's, where the art is intended to convey an idea or concept. Often this type of work rejects the idea of making an art object as a commodity, but rather focuses on the process, analysis or idea behind a work of art.

Contemporary Art: Artwork that is produced in this current time, generally considered to be artworks made from 1970 to the present. Contemporary art is a very broad term, including artworks made in almost any medium and incorporating many different themes and ideas.

Documentary: A work such as a film or video presenting political, social, or historical subject matter in a factual and informative manner, and often including actual news films or interviews.

Documentation: Textual, photographic, and/or video information that describes a work of art or image, recording its physical characteristics.

Medium: The material or technique used by the artist to make an artwork. For example, paint is the medium used in a painting.

Minimalism: An art movement and style of the early 20th century stressing the idea of reducing a work of art to the minimum number of art elements (colour, texture, line, etc.).

Modernism: An art movement of the late 19th and early 20th century characterized by the deliberate departure from traditional art forms, styles and materials. Modernism is a broad term encompassing many different artistic styles of the time, but generally refers to artists with an interest in exploring new materials, portraying emotions, dreams and imagination rather than realism, using the art elements (i.e. line, colour, etc) as the basis of an artwork, and requiring the viewer to take a more active role in interpreting the artwork.

Narrative: A narrative is a story, and a narrative in art uses visuals to tell a story. Narratives often develop from a series of images, as seen in storyboards, photography essays, and video.

New Media: Artwork that uses newly developed electronic technologies such as video, sound, computer software, or projections. Sometimes also called multi-media.

Photo conceptualism or Photo-conceptualism: An artistic movement that arose in the 1960's and 1970's in Vancouver, characterized by large-format photographs often depicting a highly detailed and elaborately staged scene.

Traditional Art: Artwork that often portrays things in a rather realistic way, for example portrait painting or landscape art, or using traditional materials such as paint, sculpture, or printmaking.

Video Art: An art form that emerged in the 1960's, when artists began to explore the possibilities of video as an art medium. Video art differs from film or videos seen on television, as there does not necessarily need to be a narrative or definitive beginning, middle and end. Often video artists experiment with sound, video imagery, and how the work is viewed (i.e. projected or on different screens). Some notable artists working in video are: Paul Wong, Sara Diamond, Kate Craig, Vera Frenkel, Bill Viola, Gillian Wearing, Fiona Tan, Douglas Gordon, Matthew Barney, Gilbert and George.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY : ELEMENTS OF ART AND DESIGN

Objective:

- Students will learn how art and design elements are used in image composition.

Materials:

- Photographs from books, magazines, or online (recommended photographers to look at: Edward Burtynsky, Andreas Gursky, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Jeff Wall, Candida Hofer)

Procedure:

Discuss the elements and principles of art and design with students. Go over each element and principle, using the following questions to discuss each one with pictures you have on hand. This will be a good introduction to when they are viewing photographs in the Gallery.

ANALYZING THE ART ELEMENTS – Describing What You See

Colour

- What colours do you see? Does the artist use more of one colour than another?

Lines

- What kinds of lines are used or depicted (straight, wavy, diagonal, thick, thin, etc.)?

Shapes/Forms

- What shapes do you see? Do some shapes look more 3-d (forms)?

Textures

- What sort of textures do you see?

Space

- Do you see shallow space, deep space, close-up, far away? Do some things look farther away and some look closer or is everything in the same distance?

Value

- What kinds of values are used (dark, light, medium)? Does this picture have more lighter or darker values, or is it a balance of both?

ANALYZING THE PRINCIPLES OF ART – Describing How the Elements Have Been Used

Balance

- What kind is used: symmetrical, asymmetrical, calm or chaos? Is everything focused on the center, or to one side, or all over?

Emphasis

- What is the center of interest? What do you think draws your eye to that spot?

Proportion and Scale

- What relationships are there? (Large to small, light to dark) Are there different sizes of things in the picture?

Movement

- Is everything still or is there movement? How did the artist show movement or action?

Rhythm, Repetition, and Pattern

- Do you notice any element being repeated throughout the picture? Are there any patterns being used? Does the repetition create any sense of rhythm or harmony?

Variety

- Do you see any variety in colours, lines, shapes, textures, and size? Does this make your eye focus on a certain part of the picture more than others?

IN THE GALLERY : WHAT YOU WILL DO

All tours and workshops are adapted for the grade level of your students.

TOUR:

As students are led through the exhibit, we will discuss the artists and their particular style of working. We will also look at the exhibition as a whole and how the artists' works relate to one another.

The tour will focus on:

- Introducing students to the various art materials and techniques the artists have used.
- Encouraging students to think about subject matter and inspiration for creating art, and the ways artists express an idea or emotion.
- Discussing historical art forms and how this influences contemporary artists.
- Introducing students to the ways artists plan out a composition in an artwork.
- Discussing the art elements and principles of line, colour, shape, form, texture, repetition, perspective, and balance and how they are used in artworks.

EXHIBITION-BASED WORKSHOPS:

Printmaking with Line:

Explore line, repetition and architectural details by using a simple printmaking method. Using the works of Jim Breukelman as inspiration, students will create architectural images or cityscapes using basic design principles of repetition, balance, and variety. Various lines and arcs can be made by stamping objects into printing inks, then using them to print. By repeating these simple lines, detailed architectural images can be developed. Students will learn about using perspective, geometry, and basic design elements of composition.

***printed images will need one day to dry and must be picked up at a later date**

Mixed-Media Drawings – City Silhouettes:

Similar to the works of Ricarda McDonald, students will portray images of modern city life and the use of technology in our everyday lives. Images of local landscapes and cityscapes will be photocopied onto drawing paper, which can then be added to with stencils, collage, and various drawing materials. Images and stencils of people, automobiles, cell-phones, and animals can be added into their landscapes to create a layered mixed-media drawing.

POST – VISIT ACTIVITY: FAUX PHOTOS

Adaptable to grades 1-12

Objectives:

- Understand how artists can manipulate an image to create a new meaning.
- Use the elements and principles of art and design to create a new artwork.
- Understand and use narrative in a work of art.

Materials:

- Magazine images for collage
- Scissors
- Glue
- Paper for collage background
- Visual resources – various photographs from artists, magazine ads, and nature magazines or calendars.

Procedure:

Students are shown a variety of photographs. Include photographs that are constructed (i.e. advertisements) and those that are more of a documentation (i.e. National Geographic images). Discuss the differences and similarities between these types of photos. How can you tell if the images are “real” or constructed? What sort of clues are given in the images as to whether these are staged or not?

As a class or in small groups have students focus on one photo. What is the narrative or story they see in this photograph? Can they come up with a story or part of a story just from one image? Discuss the different narratives students came up with and how they perceived this information from an image.

Students will use some of the techniques you discussed as a group to construct their own narrative with photographs. Using magazine photographs as collage materials, students will cut and paste their own images combining landscapes, people, animals and objects to create a complete narrative in one image. These can be realistic, dream-like, or any other style you choose (you can also tie this in to other subject matter you are currently studying, such as a historical event, specific animals, or a certain place).

Students may include text in the form of a title or sentence to accompany their narrative.

Conclusion:

Discuss the process and observe how each student’s artwork turned out. How did people approach this project? Are some finished projects more ‘realistic’ or more ‘surreal’?

Extensions:

Try more transformations as a group project for larger artworks or classroom installations.

RESOURCES

ONLINE:

ArtLex: Art Dictionary - <http://www.artlex.com/>

Big Learning Photography for Kids - <http://www.biglearning.org/treasure-photography-for-kids.htm>

Jim Breukelman – <http://www.state-gallery.com/artists/breukelman.html>

Edward Burtynsky - <http://www.edwardburtynsky.com/>
Canadian photographer who documents landscapes transformed by industry.

EyeCon Art: A Brief History of Photography - <http://www.eyeconart.net/history/photography.htm>

“Fast Ferry Scandal” on Wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fast_Ferry_Scandal

Andreas Gursky at White Cube - <http://www.whitecube.com/artists/gursky/>
German photographer who documents contemporary life

Ricarda McDonald – http://www.s4dac.org/shows/2001/artitudes/mcdonald_ricarda.html

PacifiCats - http://www.geocities.com/ferries_bc/pacificats.html

Donna Szoke – <http://donnaszoke.com/>

“The Vancouver School: Canadian Bred Photo-Conceptualism”. CBC Radio 3 Archive - http://archive.cbcradio3.com/issues/2003_02_21/index.cfm?Page=18

Video Art in Canada - <http://videoart.virtualmuseum.ca/index.php>

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