

Richmond Art Gallery  
**SCHOOL ART PROGRAM**  
TEACHERS' GUIDE



AES+F, *Last Riot* (detail), video still, 2005-07 © AES+F

# LAST RIOT

## AES + F

February 4, 2011 – April 3, 2011

Guide prepared by: Melanie Devoy  
RAG School Program Coordinator / Instructor

# THE EXHIBITION: BACKGROUND

## AES+F

**AES+F** is an artist collective based in Moscow, whose name was created by using the initials of the artists, Tatiana Arzamasova, Lev Evzovich, Evgeny Svyatsky, and Vladimir Fridkes. They explain that *“the name was just a play on our collective way of producing art: we are a union of very different people who all work together and all discuss things.”* (AES+F, 2008, *The Art Newspaper*) Much of their work incorporates the seductive aesthetics of advertising and design, which draws on the artists’ previous backgrounds and education.

**Tatiana Arzamasova** and **Lev Evzovich** are both graduates of the State Architectural Institute, and have both participated in conceptual architecture exhibitions throughout Europe. Arzamasova was awarded the Grand-Prix in the OISTT/UNESCO competition “The Touring Theatre” in Stockholm. Evzovitch has worked as a designer and director of animated film.

**Evgeny Svyatsky** graduated from the Book Design Faculty of the Moscow Printing Institute, and has worked as a designer in publishing and advertising. He has participated in international poster competitions and exhibitions of book illustration and graphic design.

Prior to joining the group in 1995, **Vladimir Fridkes** worked as a high fashion photographer for publications such as Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar, Elle, Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan, and Sunday Times Style. He has participated in the Moscow Photo Biennale, and the Fashion and Style in Photography Festival, and in Art Moscow in 2001.

With such a wide range of experiences and skills, it is not surprising that AES+F work with a variety of materials and techniques, from large-scale video installations to more traditional media such as painting, photography, and sculpture.

*“We just use any techniques according to the ideas of the project so we can use very traditional bronze sculptures and porcelain and also digitally manipulated video and prints. They are all tools.”* (AES+F, 2008, *The Art Newspaper*)

In addition to their versatile use of artistic mediums, AES+F draw their inspiration from a variety of diverse sources, and specifically the work *Last Riot* draws from art history, virtual reality, computer animation, video games, cinema, and fashion photography.

## LAST RIOT

*Last Riot* consists of a 3-channel HD video installation, accompanied by two large-format video stills. The video depicts bleak, computer-generated landscapes populated by youths and children who seem to have stepped off the pages of fashion advertisements. This is the end of the world, where natural and man-made disasters are a backdrop for the meaningless struggle the youths engage in. They pantomime bloodless acts of aggression, and yet are themselves devoid of emotion. The look of the video and especially the poses of the young subjects draws heavily from art historical sources.

*"We wanted to make compositions reminiscent of Mannerist and Baroque painting and especially Caravaggio but also to construct a virtual world which refers to contemporary virtual culture and virtual reality and all these kinds of computer games, video games and Hollywood movies . . . We feel that contemporary visual culture is very similar to that of the Baroque: everything is extremely expressive, figurative and very visual and founded on images and at the same time very decadent."* (AES+F, 2008, *The Art Newspaper*)



*Narcissus*



*Entombment*



*Judith Beheading Holofernes*

Many of the poses and compositions directly relate to specific paintings or sculptures, such as *Narcissus* (1597-99) by Caravaggio, *Entombment* (1525-28) by Jacopo Pontormo, and *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1620) by Artemisia Gentileschi. A characteristic feature of **Baroque** and **Mannerist** art is the complex compositions of figures. The subjects are entwined together in struggle, or draped over each other, and their faces depict deeply emotional states. Artwork from this period employs dramatic lighting called **chiaroscuro**, which contrasts very light areas with extremely dark shadows, which puts **emphasis** on the subjects and the action.

While AES+F have recreated these arrangements in *Last Riot*, their subjects are instead completely dispassionate and detached from their struggles. This is violence without context or morality, which is a feature in many contemporary video games and movies where the enemy is fictional, immoral acts are irrelevant, and war is being sold as “militainment.” Video games such as *America’s Army* target youth by making war appealing, and use a narrative of “good versus evil” as a rationalization for war. AES+F deliberately withhold this justification in *Last Riot*, and state that “...it is also not clear who is the good guy and who is the bad guy and it is very important to us that it should not be clear.” (AES+F, 2008, *The Art Newspaper*)

## ARTIST STATEMENT

The virtual world generated by the real world of the twentieth century is growing exponentially, like an organism in a Petri dish. Crossing its own borders in to new zones, it absorbs its founders and mutates in to something absolutely new. In this new world real wars look like a game on [www.americasarmy.com](http://www.americasarmy.com). Prison torture appears more like the sadistic exercises of modern-day valkyries. Technologies and materials transform the artificial environment in to a fantasy landscape of a new epoch. This paradise is a mutated world where time is frozen and the past is neighbor to the future. Its inhabitants are devoid of gender, becoming more like angels. This is a world where the severe, the vague or the erotic imagination appears natural in the artificial unsteadiness of 3D perspective. The heroes of the new epoch have only one identity, that of participants in the last riot. Each fights both self and the other, there’s no longer any difference between victim and aggressor, male and female. This world celebrates the end of ideology, history and ethics.

# IN THE GALLERY: WHAT YOU WILL DO

## TOUR

As students are led through the exhibition, we will discuss the background of the artists who make up AES+F and deconstruct the meanings of their work by looking at the cultural references the artists are using, including:

- Art History
- Fashion Photography & Advertising
- Video Games & Virtual Reality

The tour will focus on exploring and describing images, responding to artworks, and interpreting responses to artworks by:

- Introducing students to works by some of the great masters of the Baroque and Mannerist periods, and discussing how their work has influenced contemporary culture and the artists in the creation of *Last Riot*.
- Introducing the basics of developing visual literacy (composition, shapes, etc.).
- Discussing the depiction of youth and violence in the media and in video games.
- Encouraging students to think critically about media.
- Discussing the role of the artist in relation to society.

## EXHIBITION BASED WORKSHOPS

### Preschool & Kindergarten: Painting Textures

Using a variety of stamping, painting, and printing techniques, students will explore colours and textures to create a large colourful painting of a landscape or background. Cut out figures or animals can be collaged on later to place within their colourful landscape.

### Primary & Intermediate Grades: Video Game Landscape Paintings

Landscapes in video games are a combination of reality and surreal imagery. Using references from video games, landscape photos, and art history, students will paint their own imaginary landscape. Students will learn the techniques artists employ to create depth in a two-dimensional image, including the use of colour, scale, and perspective. Time permitting, students will add stenciled or cut-out figures to their landscapes.

***The students' paintings will need time to dry, and will be ready to be picked up the day after the workshop.***

# PRE-VISIT PREPARATION: KEY CONCEPTS

## PRE-K TO PRIMARY

A **landscape** is a work of art that depicts scenery such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers and forests. Most landscapes depict a **horizon line**, which is a level line where the water or land seems to end and the sky begins. Placement of the horizon line is determined by the **viewpoint** of the artist, whether they are viewing the scene from above, straight on, or low down.

## INTERMEDIATE-SECONDARY

Teachers: please come by the gallery and view the exhibition yourself ahead of time, or view the imagery and clips from the video from the following sources.

AES+F	<a href="http://www.aes-group.org/last_riot.asp">http://www.aes-group.org/last_riot.asp</a>
Richmond Art Gallery	<a href="http://www.richmondartgallery.org/aesf.php">http://www.richmondartgallery.org/aesf.php</a>
Last Riot Video Segment	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7TbvFyabrg">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7TbvFyabrg</a>

AES+F draw upon many art historical sources to create the digital landscapes of their video *Last Riot*, as do many contemporary artists, including video game artists. The Landscape genre was especially important to **Romantic** artists, who had a heightened interest in nature, and used their landscapes to express emotion and the imagination. Both painters and video game artists created depth using the following techniques:

- Creating a distinct **foreground, middle ground, and background**.
- Changes in **scale** between objects that are close to us and objects that are far away.
- **Overlapping** objects close to the viewer in front of features in the distance
- Objects in the distance are less distinct, and are lighter than objects closer up.



*Einsamer Baum*, (1822) by Caspar David Friedrich



*The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (screenshot) © Bethesda Softworks

## POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: PRE-K & PRIMARY

The class will add three figures to their landscape, one in the **foreground**, one in the **middle ground**, and one in the **background**. Explain to students that the illusion of 3-dimensions is created in 2-dimensional art using **scale**, which is how big something is compared to another object. Looking at the landscape painting *Roman Campagna* (1843) by Thomas Cole (or another suitable painting or photo) point out to students that the tallest columns on the left hand side of the picture are in the **foreground**, which is the part of the painting closest to the viewer. The columns in the middle are in the **middle ground**, and the tiny columns on the right are in the **background**, or the part of the painting farthest away from the viewer.

The columns are the same size in reality, but the artist has used **scale** to make it look like some of the columns are close, and some far away. This is why objects are BIG in the foreground, medium sized in the middle ground, and tiny in the background.



*Roman Campagna* (1843) Thomas Cole

On a separate piece of paper, have students draw three figures or objects, such as a house, a tree, an animal, or a person. Each drawing is to be a different **scale**, so one object will be big, one medium sized, and one small. Students can add colour with crayons, felt pens, or paint, and then cut out their figures. Each figure will be glued on to their landscape painting, the big one in the foreground, the medium sized one in the middle ground, and the small one in the background. Display the finished artwork and discuss how the different sizes make the figures look either closer or farther away.

Source for larger digital copy of image:

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cole\\_Thomas\\_Roman\\_Campagne\\_1843.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cole_Thomas_Roman_Campagne_1843.jpg)

## POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: INTERMEDIATE-SECONDARY

AES+F are making a commentary that art historical images, especially from the Baroque and Mannerist period, have a very similar visual style to the images we see today in popular culture, especially advertising. Compare the following images (or others of your choosing) and discuss with the class the similarities and differences.



Portrait of a Young Man (1540) Agnolo Bronzino

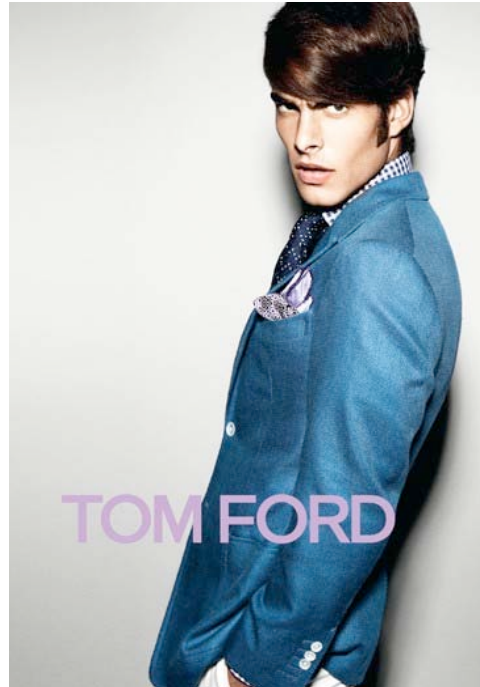


Image © Tom Ford 2009

Questions to consider:

- What do you see that is similar about these images? What looks different? Things to look at:
  - Lighting
  - Colour
  - Composition
- Does the lighting **emphasize** one part of the image? Why do you think this is done?
- What poses are the subjects in? Why do you think they are posed this way?
- What emotions do they have on their faces? Why do you think they are not smiling?
- What kind of person is the man in each image? What is their personality like? (serious, relaxed, silly, strong, weak, cool, worried, confident etc.)
- What kind of life do you think they lead? (Important, have money, read books, have taste, style, etc.)



# GLOSSARY

Artist Collective	Two or more artists working together to produce artworks.
Baroque	A term that describes European Art and Architecture from the late 16 <sup>th</sup> century to the early 18 <sup>th</sup> century. It is characterized by dramatic subjects, emotion, rich colour, and intense light and dark shadows. Artists to look at: Caravaggio, Guido Reni, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Peter-Paul Rubens, Artemisia Gentileschi, Nicolas Poussin.
Chiaroscuro	A term derived from Italian to describe the high contrast lighting effects used by baroque painters, from <i>chiaro</i> , meaning 'clear, bright,' and <i>oscuro</i> meaning 'dark, obscure.'
Composition	The placement or arrangement of visual elements in a work of art, as distinct from the subject of a work.
Emphasis	Developing points of interest to pull the viewer's eye to important parts of the artwork.
Genre	A category of art marked by a distinctive style, subject matter, content, or form. For example, landscapes, self-portraits, and still life are each a different art genre.
Landscape	A genre of art whose primary focus is the natural environment. Artists to look at: Thomas Cole, Joseph Mallord William Turner, John Constable, Caspar David Friedrich,
Mannerism	A term that describes European art from the late Renaissance (1520s) to the Baroque period (1580s). Mannerist artists sought to push the limits of the realism of the renaissance, and produced work that was more exaggerated and stylized. Artists to look at: Michelangelo, Raphael, Jacopo Pontormo, Agnolo Bronzino.
Romanticism	A European artistic movement of the late 18 <sup>th</sup> century which is characterized by a heightened interest in nature, on the expression of emotion and imagination, and rebellion against established social rules and conventions. Artists to look at: Théodore Géricault, Eugene Delacroix, Francisco Goya.
Scale	Refers to relative size, or how objects relate or compare to one another.
Texture	The surface quality of an object. It is the way something actually feels, or looks like it feels when touched.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

### Art & Art History

Vancouver Biennale <http://vblearn.ca/lesson-plans>  
Lesson plans for artwork in the Vancouver Biennale

Web gallery of art <http://www.wga.hu/>  
Searchable database of European art and sculpture from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century

ArtLex Art Dictionary <http://www.artlex.com>  
Comprehensive dictionary of art terminology and art movements

Art History Net <http://www.arthistory.net/>  
Information on artists, mediums, styles and movements

### Media Literacy

Association for Media Literacy <http://www.aml.ca/resources>  
Lesson plans, discussion topics & ideas

The Media Awareness Network <http://www.media-awareness.ca>  
Searchable lesson library for teachers by grade, topic, and provincial learning outcomes

Centre for Media Literacy <http://www.medialit.org>  
Resources and media literacy kits available for purchase (American site)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Young People's Image World: Media Literacy for the Digital Age

A discussion with Dr. Stuart R. Poyntz, Ph.D.

Saturday, March 5 from 1:00-2:00 at Richmond Art Gallery

This discussion looks at the impact of digital media on youth culture. How does imagery from television, film, video games, and fashion magazines impact our youth? How do we navigate our children and ourselves through the bombardment of violent and sexualized images that we are exposed to on a daily basis?

Family Sunday

4th Sunday of the Month, 1:00 – 4:00 pm, Free

It's fun, fabulous and free, thanks to RBC Foundation. Join us in the Gallery for a family art activity that relates to the current exhibition.