ARTISTS AND PLACE

Teacher Guide for the Winter 2012 Exhibitions

John Marin: Modernism at Midcentury
January 28 through April 1, 2012

Land, Sea, Sky: Contemporary Art in Maine
January 28 through March 18, 2012

Paintings from the Addison Collection
January 14 through April 8, 2012

Addison Gallery of American Art
Phillips Academy, Andover, MA

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FREE GROUP VISIT HOURS BY APPOINTMENT:
Tuesday–Friday 8am–4pm

FREE PUBLIC MUSEUM HOURS:
Tuesday–Saturday 10am–5pm & Sunday 1pm–5pm

TEACHER RESOURCES, WORKSHOPS,
& EXHIBITION INFORMATION:
www.addisongallery.org
Artists and Place

What connections can be made between John Marin's paintings and the places that inspired them?

John Marin (1870–1953), like many American artists of the early twentieth century, painted in the countrysides and cities of Europe, learning and honing his craft. It is his landscapes of the United States, however, for which the artist is best known. Marin's dedicated study of his own environments—particularly New York City and the Maine coast—are inspirations for the exhibition John Marin: Modernism at Midcentury.

Marin's early paintings of structured and pointed Manhattan views reveal his cubist roots, while the fluidity of his coastal paintings reveal an ever-increasing tendency toward abstraction (figs. 1-3). Marin worked at various locations in Maine from 1914, but marked shifts in his paintings appeared in 1933 when he purchased a summer home on Cape Split, a peninsula east of Mt. Desert Island. His house being “so close to the water I almost feel at times that I am on a boat,” prompted the development of a painting style to effectively convey his views and experiences of the unruly and unpredictable sea.

Having focused primarily on watercolor up to 1933, Marin began exploring oil paints after his move to Cape Split. The juicy paints allowed for more gestural brushwork and expressive colors and freed his compositions and hand to deeply focus on the meeting of sea and land. While Marin spent summers in these coastal areas until his death in 1953, he continued to live the remainder of the year in Cliffside, New Jersey, which offered access to both the nearby Ramapo Hills and New York City.

Having grown up in New Jersey, John Marin was intimately familiar with the New York skyline visible across the Hudson River and had spent considerable time on the lively streets of lower Manhattan. His view of Radio City Music Hall from above reveals the fragmented style he developed to capture the frenetic urban environment (fig. 18).

Marin became similarly familiar with his surroundings in Maine, closely observing the land, weather, and sea and continually innovating his painting techniques to correspond to his experience. His paintings of the rugged and invigorating coast are personal views of an isolated and individual terrain. Together with the New York paintings, the exhibition John Marin: Modernism at Midcentury reveals the concentrated relationship between an American artist and his environment.

How do representational and abstracted landscapes reflect artists’ inspirations and intentions?

The Hudson River School painters of the nineteenth century developed their precise painting methods to depict the majestic beauty and rich potential of the American landscape. Heightened detail, majestic views, and dramatic atmospheric conditions produced awe-inspiring scenes of newly developed lands from the Hudson River Valley in New York to the far reaches of the West. In the gallery of Paintings from the Permanent Collection, Martin Johnson Heade’s (1819–1904) tiny hummingbird feeding on apple blossoms in brilliant detail against a dramatic sky alludes to the presence of the divine in nature while chronicling an astute scientific observation (fig. 5).

In the early twentieth century, John Marin abstracted his observations to express a more personal view of his experiences and to foster sensations – rather than specific ideas – in his viewers (figs. 1–4). The multitude of intersecting lines and planes of his New York scenes convey the hubbub and fragmentation of this dense urban center (fig. 18). Marin adapted the painting style of his Maine scenes to the energy of the rugged natural environment (cover). His late oil paintings from Cape Split featured increasingly larger and more organic forms that provide a palpable feeling of the fierce waves crashing against the rugged shore. The continuous movement of the water, air, and atmosphere became the very subject of his Maine landscapes.

How are contemporary artists influenced by historical styles and trajectories?

The exhibition Land, Sea, and Sky: Contemporary Art in Maine demonstrates the ways in which many contemporary artists draw their influences from art historical traditions and innovations. In varying degrees the artists hold on to identifiable figures and forms while also abstracting colors, light, and space to express their individual experience of place. Like the Hudson River School painters, Michael H. Lewis (b. 1941) heightens his light and color for spiritual effect, yet also simplifies detail to create a timeless and universal landscape (fig. 6).

**ACTIVITY IDEA** Depicting Scenes & Sensations

Find a scenic location close to school or home. Spend some time observing the landscape and feeling the atmosphere. What do you see and feel? Pay attention to all the details, such as the light, weather, air, smells, sounds, and movement. Consider what materials would most effectively represent your experience of this place. Take your materials back to your location and make a picture on site. **Option:** Repeat this again on another day when the conditions are different and inspire new materials and techniques.
Contemporary Perspectives

How have artists’ approaches to painting the Maine landscape changed over time?

John Marin’s work provides a very personal expression of one artist’s experience of two distinct environments. The nine artists featured in Land, Sea, and Sky: Contemporary Art in Maine present varied perspectives on one of Marin’s primary muses: Maine.

Like Marin, each of the contemporary artists have been inspired by the Maine landscape they know well using their deep connections with the state as artistic muse. As a complement to John Marin: Modernism at Midcentury, which demonstrates the experience and innovation of one artist, Land, Sea, and Sky presents a broad range of artists with varying interpretations of their particular Maine experiences. Their paintings in various mediums move from naturalistic to abstracted and from pristine to interrupted views of the land and sea.

Terry Hilt’s (b. 1953) watercolor and acrylic paintings of the coastline (fig. 7) are reminiscent of the energized colors and brushwork of John Marin and the scenic yet tempestuous views of Winslow Homer (1836-1910) as seen in the exhibition Paintings from the Permanent Collection. Hilt’s perspective is from the uninhabitable, craggy coastline, while Homer brings us into the dramatic narratives of those living by or on the seas (figs. 12-14).

How does the landscape show evidence of civilization?

Dennis Pinette’s (b. 1951) oil painting of a glowing industrial complex (fig. 8) pictures the development along the Maine shoreline, offering another type of human interaction with the sea. Katherine Bradford (b. 1942) reveals the tourist side of Maine’s jagged, glacier-formed coastline (fig. 9). Her inlet appears calm and controlled, allowing for easy navigation of a passenger ferry.

The playful realism of Alan Bray’s (b. 1946) casein paintings reveal his connection to less familiar locations of inland Maine (fig. 10). His aerial perspectives on vast fields and forests offer views that are magical and yet potentially unnerving for those unfamiliar with navigating in dense nature and remote environments.

Fig. 7: Terry Hilt, Schoodic Point at Noon, 2011, watercolor, acrylic, and wax resist, 20 1/2 x 29 in., courtesy of Aucocisco Galleries, Portland, ME.; Fig. 8: Dennis Pinette, Burning Complex, 1999, oil on rag mounted on linen, 37 x 29 in., private collection, photo credit: courtesy of the artist.; Fig. 9: Katherine Bradford, Island Ferry, 2011, oil on canvas, 12 x 9 in., courtesy of Aucocisco Galleries, Portland, ME.; Fig. 10: Alan Bray, Brief Divergence, 2009, casein on panel, 14 x 19 in., courtesy of Aucocisco Galleries, Portland, ME.
How role do figures play in landscape paintings?

Most of John Marin’s paintings of New York City and Cape Split, Maine noticeably lack people. In the Maine paintings, the dearth of figures denotes uninhabited - and perhaps uninhabitable - environments along the rugged coastline. The narrative is created through expressive manipulation of watercolor and oil paint to represent the active points of intersection between the land and sea, the continual movement of the waves, and the forms and colors Marin sees in these views (figs. 1-4). In the New York paintings, it is the energy of the intersecting lines of the buildings and streets that create the urban narrative.

In George Bellows’s (1882-1925) circus painting, it is people that create the atmosphere of the scene - crowded, close together, with clothing and limbs overlapping - impressing upon the viewer the thrill and buzz of the circus at night (fig. 11). The sea of men, women, and children glowing in soft light and the bustling activity of the circus performances are set against the still, dark night sky.

Winslow Homer spent much of his career studying and painting the drama of humans and the sea, including the fishermen of Gloucester, Massachusetts (fig. 12) and later the coast of Prout’s Neck, Maine (fig. 13). Homer often used fishermen as key characters in the allegorical narratives that unfold on his canvases. The confident figures weather the extreme conditions that nature bestows and successfully navigate with their nineteenth century tools and their sheer fortitude to their next destination.

**ACTIVITY IDEA: Poetry of Place**

Visual artists use paints and pencils to express their vision of a place, while writers use descriptive language and creative grammar. Sit in a place that is special to you and experience it with all of your senses. Write a poem that expresses the mood of that place. Consider developing new words that convey the uniqueness of the place.

**Option for the museum:** Select an artwork on view and write a list of adjectives that come to mind. Write a poem using your word list and any others that come to mind.
ACTIVITY IDEA  Stories of the Sea
Using the library, the internet, films, and other sources, research mythologies of ancient cultures including Mayan, Greek, Roman, Viking, pagan, etc. What role does the ocean or water play in the myths? Make note of the qualities or adjectives used to describe water, the names of the water creatures or gods and their characteristics, and the relationship between water creatures and humans. Write and/or illustrate your own contemporary myth using the sea as a primary character.

Making Connections with History and Literature: Sea as Motif

What can references to the sea in art and literature across time tell us about changing cultural and national ideologies?

Just as John Marin’s work speaks to the tradition of the relationship between humans and the sea through his depictions of the Maine coast, artists, writers, poets, and musicians have long turned to the landscape that surrounds them to inform their work, whether as studies of environment or using the landscape as an allegory or metaphor.

The sea has been embedded in the literary canon since Homer’s Odyssey, in which the sea is the setting for wandering and exploration. Shakespeare’s The Tempest is awash with references to water, while the storm itself represents control. Just as Shakespeare writes of storms at sea as a symbol of power and mastery over ones environment, in the early twentieth century Winslow Homer employed the sea to narrate struggles between humans and nature (figs. 12, 14). The anxiety created by the power and vastness of the sea appears in stark contrast to mid-nineteenth-century painter Fitz Henry Lane’s (1804-1865) New England scene of a calm harbor at low-tide with resting fishing boats (fig. 15).

From the earliest days of the nationhood of the United States, the sea represented a break from England and Europe, creating a physical schism symbolizing the break in ideals and politics. In the early nineteenth century, the novels of James Fenimore Cooper depicted the sea as grand and awesome, a place of beauty and of terror, capable of both calm serenity and of untamed violence. Later in century, Walt Whitman’s poetry utilized the sea motif to reflect the vitality and growth of the still young nation recovering from civil war.

Just as Cooper wrote of the harsh realities faced and surmounted by sailors, artist William Bradford (1823-1892) documented his expedition to Greenland in 1869 with the explorer Dr. Isaac Israel Hayes. Portraying the search for another frontier, this glowing, romanticized scene depicts both the awesomeness of unexplored lands and the life-threatening reality for the ship and crew caught in the ice (fig. 16).

Fig. 14: Winslow Homer, Kissing the Moon, 1904, 30 1/4 x 40 in., oil on canvas, bequest of Candace C. Stimson, 1946.19, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA; Fig. 15: Fitz Henry Lane, Fishing Boats at Low Tide, c. 1850s, 12 x 18 in., oil on canvas mounted on masonite, museum purchase, 1943.33, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA; Fig. 16: William Bradford, Caught in the Ice Floes (Melville Bay/Greenland Coast), after 1870, 21 3/4 x 35 3/4 in., oil on canvas, museum purchase, 1949.27, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA.
ACTIVITY IDEA Imaging Your Community

What are the atmosphere, the vibe, the character, the purpose of your community? How might you represent these ideas through visuals, words, music, or drama? Would you use literal, abstract, allegorical, or symbolic images? Make a picture, a poem, a story, a play, and/or a song that artistically captures the spirit of the environment in which you live.

Making Connections with History and Literature: Reflections on the Changing Landscape

What does the changing landscape indicate about the cultural and political shifts in attitudes toward the land and nature?

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Transcontinental Rail Road enabled movement of the population across the country and the ideals of Manifest Destiny and the Industrial Revolution began to alter the American landscape. Artists variously depicted the majesty of untouched nature and interactions between humans and the land as a form of nationalistic expression. Alvan Fisher (1792–1863) represents both the promise and dangers of westward migration in his oil painting of a small caravan of wagons and horses moving across a hilly landscape toward the mountains in the distant sunset. The inviting pink hues of the sun setting in the West are countered by the small but ominous gravestone in the foreground of the scene (fig. 17).

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How does industrialization and the rise of the city affect artists’ depictions of their immediate environments?

As cities and towns blossomed in the early twentieth century, artists developed new painting styles to depict these environments filled with the new geometry of urban buildings and streets, and the movement and energy of people, vehicles, and activities. John Marin exploited the fluidity of watercolor and the tilted planes of cubism to portray his dynamic view of the top of the brand new Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan (fig. 18).

Edward Hopper (1882–1967), on the other hand, uses dense colors and heavy shadows in oil to depict his scene of the alienation of the city, where one can feel alone even within this vast industrial capital (fig. 19). As quiet and serene as Alvan Fisher’s western landscape, Hopper’s Manhattan predicts the potential for isolation and economic hardship amidst the great promise of the American dream.
Classroom Resources

BOOKS ON ART AND ARTISTS

A catalogue of the Addison's permanent collection including over 300 works. Available free of charge to educators – please inquire.

Published in connection with an Addison Gallery exhibition of landscape paintings from the collection.

The exhibition catalogue published for the current John Marin exhibition.

Explores the artist's artistic study of his hometown through prints, paintings, and photographs.

CHILDREN’S BOOKS ON ART AND ARTISTS

A biography of Winslow Homer illustrated by his artwork in letter format.

An inquiry-based look at how artists depict the weather.

A guide to looking at artwork about people, places, and more abstracted ideas. A good introduction for young students to the ideas of landscapes and abstraction.

ART WEBSITES

Provides images and information on many of the artists in the *Land, Sea, and Sky* exhibition.

Online database features nearly all of the 17,000 works in the Addison collection and offers downloadable jpgs for class presentations and projects.

SELECTED LITERARY CONNECTIONS

*Moby Dick* - Herman Melville
The Tempest - William Shakespeare
“Sea-Drift” - Walt Whitman
Leaves of Grass – Walt Whitman
The Odyssey - Homer
“A Vision of the Sea” - Percy Bysshe Shelley
The Pilot- James Fenimore Cooper
The Open Boat- Stephen Crane
The Perfect Storm- Sebastian Junger
Walden – Henry David Thoreau