

FOURTH GRADE CURRICULUM MATERIALS

LACMA's Permanent Collection

THese curriculum materials examine the importance of the landscape and environment to California's artistic heritage. Six objects from the collection of Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) are highlighted. Representing a variety of artistic styles and media, the objects range in date from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary. In each of the selected works, the artist interprets the natural and built environment, reflecting both personal expressions and the beliefs of specific historical moments.

Discuss the term landscape and the students' perceptions – either from their travels or studies – of the natural scenery of California. What are some of the dominant features of the California landscape? In what ways has the human population altered the landscape?

Each of these six objects is accompanied by a description of the object and background information about the artist who created the work. Suggested activities for looking, thinking, and writing are included to assist students as they explore the artworks and related historical information. This curriculum was developed in alignment with Grade Four California State Content Standards for History-Social Science, Visual Arts, and English Language Arts. It is designed for classroom use and intended to stimulate critical thinking, support creative expression, and promote meaningful experiences with works of art.

This curriculum was written by Jennifer Miller, edited by the LACMA Education Department, and designed by Jenifer Shell and Eunice Lee for *Art Programs with the Community: LACMA On-Site*.

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Yosemite Valley

1875, WILLIAM KEITH

WILLIAM KEITH PRESENTS THE VIEWER with a grand panoramic view of Cathedral Rocks in Yosemite Valley, located by a bend in the Merced River. The elements of the composition are arranged to provide an unobstructed view and to create a balanced and cohesive painting. In *Yosemite Valley*, the river curves from the foreground to the middle ground of the painting. The fallen logs that extend into the water in the center of the foreground link the sandy banks and clusters of trees on the right and left of the composition. On the left bank, male and female figures on horseback are visible in the shallows of the river; behind them is a camp. A tent and a number of loosely painted figures are identifiable. The inclusion of these figures suggests the ideal that man and nature can exist in harmony. Keith gives greater attention to detail in his depiction of the trees and the reflection of the scenery in the water. Beyond the shaded valley, the sun highlights sections of Cathedral Rocks, adding a sense of grandeur to the majestic scene.

Yosemite Valley is a result of Keith's visit to Yosemite in 1875. Keith first visited Yosemite in 1868, and in 1872 he explored the hills beyond Yosemite with naturalist, conservationist, and fellow Scotsman John Muir (1838–1914), with whom he developed a lasting friendship. As with most of his landscape paintings, Keith painted this conventionally composed work in his studio from his field sketches.

- *Although this painting is based on the artist's direct observations of nature, he made a number of decisions when composing and creating this work. Discuss the types of choices artists might make as they interpret a scene from nature.*

Yosemite Valley is located in the Sierra Nevada. Native Americans first inhabited the area some four to ten thousand years ago. When Euro-American settlers came to the Yosemite region in the mid-nineteenth century, the valley was inhabited by the Southern Sierra Miwok. The Miwok tribe called Yosemite Valley *Ahwahnee*, or Place of gaping mouth, and they called themselves the *Ahwahneechee*. During the Gold Rush, miners disrupted the existence of the tribe, and the first group of tourists visited the valley in 1855. Works by nineteenth-century landscape artists helped influence Congress to set aside land in the Yosemite Valley not only for its preservation but also for the promotion of tourism. When President Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant in 1864, Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias became a public reserve to be supervised by the state; today they are part of Yosemite National Park.

Beginning in 1901, John Muir led the Sierra Club in an effort to preserve the Hetch Hetchy Valley, a part of Yosemite National Park, from being flooded to create a reservoir for San Francisco. Muir used Keith's rendering of Hetch Hetchy as part of his testimony before Congress. Although this crusade ultimately failed, the work of nineteenth and twentieth-century landscape painters and photographers has been instrumental in the establishment and preservation of the United States' national parks. California's national parks, including the glacier-carved canyon on Yosemite Valley, continue to be a popular subject for artists.

- *Yosemite Valley is sometimes referred to as the "Incomparable Valley." Based on Keith's painting, other images you may have seen of Yosemite Valley, or perhaps your personal observations, why might the term incomparable be used to describe this site? In what ways is it matchless, or beyond comparison?*



WILLIAM KEITH
(SCOTLAND, ACTIVE UNITED STATES, 1839–1911)
YOSEMITE VALLEY, 1875
OIL ON CANVAS, 40 5/16 x 72 1/2 IN.
A. T. JERGENS BEQUEST M.71.115
PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

Santa Clara Valley

CIRCA 1900, HAROLD PEELOR

IN THIS LANDSCAPE, HAROLD PEELOR REPRESENTS a view of Santa Clara Valley in which nature and commerce exist in balance. A highly detailed tree leaning toward the valley dominates much of the painting; a rabbit sits by its trunk in the shade. In the right foreground, a bush helps to balance the composition. The artist carefully details the grass, branches, and rocks in the foreground while the leaning tree directs the viewer's eye to the cultivated valley below. Sparse trees dot the fields painted in varying shades of brown and green, small buildings occasionally populate the fields, and a road bisects the valley and leads to the town in the distance. The mountain range that marks the edge of the valley is visible in the distance, softened by the blue of the sky and suffused with the red and yellow glow of the sun. The mountains appear shrouded in light and mist, enhancing the idealized portrayal of a landscape that is both beautiful and productive.

- *Look closely at Peelor's painting. Discuss the way the artist has organized the scene, his choice of details and colors, and describe the mood that is conveyed. What is your impression of the effect that civilization has had on nature from this scene?*

Born in New York, Harold Peelor moved to San Jose, California, in 1900, when he was in his forties and lived in the Santa Clara Valley for the remainder of his life. Peelor worked as a sign painter in a local bakery. This work is representative of his usual choice of subject matter for his paintings in which he depicts the towns in the San Jose area.

Santa Clara Valley can be discussed in the context of nineteenth-century American landscape tradition; idealized views of America's wilderness and pastoral scenes of the cultivated

landscape convey the idea that nature is a gift to be preserved. The concept of Manifest Destiny – the belief that America should expand its territory thus spreading freedom and democracy – is often expressed in nineteenth-century landscapes. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Western territories were the goal of this expansion. Peelor's landscape at the turn of the century conveys the beauty of the landscape marked by the progress of civilization.

Santa Clara Valley is south of the San Francisco Bay, situated between the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west and the Diablo Range to the east. The first known inhabitants of the valley were the Ohlone Indians. It was not until the eighteenth-century that a European power became a lasting presence in the valley. In 1769 the valley was named *Llano de los Robles* (Plain of the oaks) by José Francisco Ortega, who was scouting the region on behalf of the Spanish crown. When Father Junípero Serra came to present-day California and established a chain of Franciscan missions in the late eighteenth century, one of these missions was the Mission Santa Clara de Asis. Thus, the Santa Clara Valley was given its name when Serra consecrated the mission in 1777.

With the advent of the Gold Rush, San Jose, the first town in the region, became a supply city for the miners. The population grew rapidly after 1850, and the Santa Clara Valley became a great agricultural producer. Today Santa Clara Valley is popularly known as Silicon Valley because it became an important center for the development of technology industries in the 1970s.

- *Based on your own observations and experiences, discuss the positive and negative ways that civilization impacts the landscape.*



HAROLD G. PEELOR
(UNITED STATES, 1856–1940)
SANTA CLARA VALLEY, c. 1900
OIL ON CANVAS, 28¾ x 36 IN.

PURCHASED WITH FUNDS PROVIDED BY ROBERT AND KELLY DAY M.2002.12
PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

Point Lobos, Carmel

1914, F. CHILDE HASSAM

THIS IMPRESSIONIST LANDSCAPE BY F. CHILDE Hassam represents a scene from Point Lobos, located just south of Carmel in Monterey County on California's central coast. A cypress tree and foliage are depicted in the foreground, and the tree leans dramatically to the right as if buffeted continuously by the wind. Brushstrokes of blues, greens, and white comprise the water and the foam of the bay. The cliffs are painted with contrasting shades of grey, red, and occasional splashes of green foliage. The brilliance of these colors and the contrasting lights and darks evoke the play of light on the rocks and the ocean on a clear day, while the movement of the wind and water is captured by the artist's short, vigorous brushstrokes.

- *Looking carefully at the painting, describe the techniques Hassam uses to depict this scene. What ideas do you think his approach conveys about the landscape?*

Hassam is considered to be one of the greatest of the American impressionists. Born near Boston, Massachusetts, Hassam lived and worked for much of his life in New York and New England. He was exposed to the work of the French impressionists when he moved to Paris in 1886, where he studied art for three years. These artists attempted to capture on canvas a fleeting impression of a particular moment, favoring landscape subjects as well as scenes of contemporary life.

An absence of human activity is typical of California plein air (open air) painting, and this absence is notable in Point Lobos, Carmel. Early in the twentieth century when Hassam was already well established and highly regarded, he began traveling to the West Coast.

During his trip in 1914, Hassam visited the favorite painting spots of local California impressionist artists, and went with California landscape watercolorist Francis J. McComas (1874–1938) on a sketching trip to Carmel. Hassam painted relatively few California scenes throughout his career, likely no more than a dozen.

Although Hassam established his reputation at the beginning of his career with his depictions of modern urban life, he often painted rural scenes from various locations along the New England coast during the summers. There are also a number of similarities between Hassam's rendering of Carmel and his more numerous coastal scenes of Appledore in the Isles of Shoals, Maine. Both places have a rugged coastline, although the presence of the cypress tree in the foreground is a detail that points to the western locale represented in this painting.

This site depicted in Hassam's painting is now part of the Point Lobos State Reserve. The area is known for its unique and picturesque geography, and as a site rich in plant and animal life. The name comes from the offshore rocks at *Punta de los Lobos Marinos* (Point of the sea wolves), where the sound of the sea lions carries inland. Carmel-by-the-Sea was founded in 1903 by real estate developers who advertised it as an artist colony. After the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, Carmel attracted a number of artists and writers. The area continues to be an attractive subject for artists.

- *Think about places you have visited. If your objective was to represent a scene from nature, what site would you choose to depict and why? What would you want to convey about the place? As an artist, what choices — about colors, techniques, and composition, for example — would you make to convey those ideas?*



F. CHILDE HASSAM
(UNITED STATES, 1859–1935)
POINT LOBOS, CARMEL, 1914

OIL ON CANVAS, 28 5/16 X 36 3/16 IN.

MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM PRESTON HARRISON COLLECTION 29.18.2

PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

Freeway and Aqueduct

1957, RICHARD DIEBENKORN

RICHARD DIEBENKORN'S PAINTING *Freeway and Aqueduct*, depicts a landscape that has been shaped by the needs of civilization. The composition is characterized by the texture of rough, uneven brushstrokes and a palette comprised of mostly rich green, yellow, and brown of the California landscape. An aqueduct (a channel built to transport water from a remote location) dominates the left foreground of the painting. Vivid blue water flows through the concrete channel. The straight, pale swath of the freeway, as it runs from the right of the canvas to the right middle of the background, conveys the sense of a sharp recession into depth; this depth is punctuated by the black voids of the aqueduct.

The slopes of green that extend down from the freeway and into the distance suggest a hilly topography. The varying expanses of green provide the shape of the landscape, but the flat expanses of color also give the land a sculpted appearance. The blue sky in the background, the vibrancy of the water as it runs through the aqueduct, and the use of yellow tones to highlight the landscape give the impression of a sun-filled day. The artist's irregular brushstrokes, his layering of paint, and the angular planes of the composition reveal an expressive approach to interpreting the landscape.

- Discuss how the artist uses color to define the scene and convey a sense of space. What kind of mood do his color choices suggest?

Diebenkorn spent the majority of his life in California and is best known for his highly abstract landscapes. In the 1940s and 1950s he was associated with a group of San Francisco abstract expressionists.

Abstract expressionism can be described as a nonrepresentational or nonobjective (meaning that there is no relationship to objects in nature) movement or style in painting that emphasizes the artist's feeling, emotion, and process.

In 1955, Diebenkorn began to experiment with representational work, although he maintained his abstract expressionist brushstrokes. During this period the artist continued to use color to create form and applied free brushwork and expressionist handling of the paint to his explorations of landscape, still life, and figure compositions. *Freeway and Aqueduct* is an example of a landscape from what is often referred to as the artist's figurative period. His landscapes and cityscapes in the figurative mode frequently explored deep, recessive space.

In the post-World War II period, the media and the tourist industry marketed California as a site for recreation and the enjoyment of nature's beauty; painters who depicted a scenic California were appreciated. At the same time, California was experiencing a rapid growth and the need to expand its infrastructure to support the population. Transportation and water resources were vital components of this expansion, but the building of highways and aqueducts altered the landscape promoted by the popular media. Diebenkorn's *Freeway and Aqueduct* is legible as a landscape, but it is very different from popular scenes of California that were promoted at the time.

- Discuss what types of images the tourist industry might use to attract visitors to the natural beauty of California. How is Diebenkorn's image of the California landscape different?



RICHARD DIEBENKORN
(UNITED STATES, 1922–1993)
FREEWAY AND AQUEDUCT, 1957
OIL ON CANVAS, 23 ¼ X 28 IN.

GIFT OF WILLIAM AND REGINA FADIMAN M.86.68

© ESTATE OF RICHARD DIEBENKORN, PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

ffwsptffwsptffwspt

2000, INGRID CALAME

INGRID CALAME'S *ffwsptffwsptffwspt* IS COMPOSED of overlapping patches of opaque color. Reds, oranges, and golds contrast with different shades of blue. There are no distinct geometric shapes, no recognizable objects from the natural world. These lively pieces of color resemble accidental splatters and stains, but despite their overlapping, each color remains distinct, its boundaries clearly defined.

- *This painting contains colors in a variety of hues. Discuss different ways to describe the colors in the painting. Are there any colors you think are dominant?*

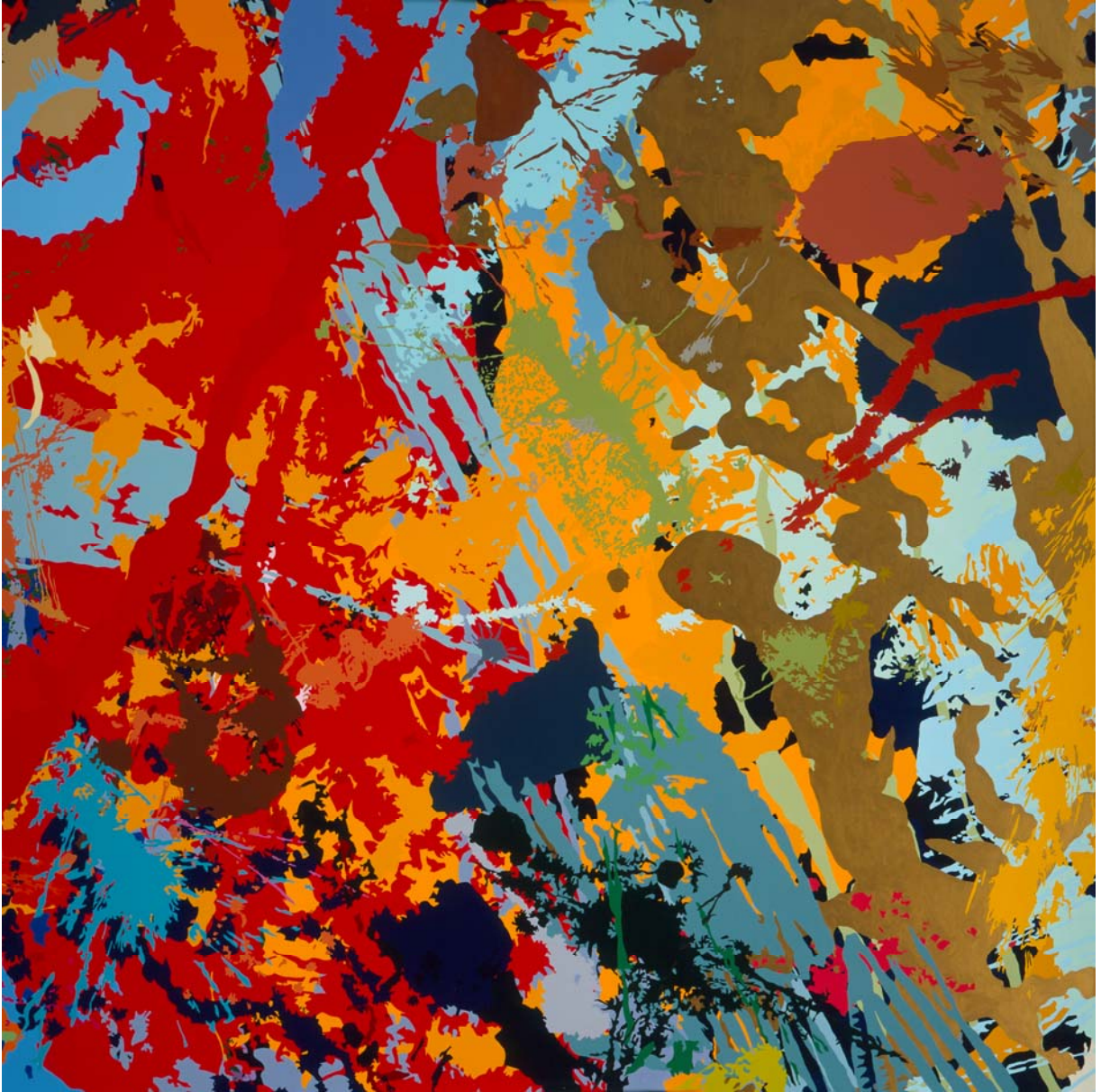
While a discussion of Calame's work could be based only on such formal qualities as the use of color, an explanation of her artistic process reveals additional layers of meaning. The artist finds and selects stains on the streets and sidewalks of New York, where she was born, and Los Angeles, where she currently lives and works. She then traces these stains onto transparent paper. The tracings are saved for later use and often become art themselves. She also documents the stains that she traces; the stains are measured and the date and location where the stains were found is recorded. Calame selects from her tracings and transfers them to Mylar or aluminum panels. The artist arranges the traces to create patterns that are visually interesting and fills in the shapes with enamel paint. The stains, reproduced life-size on her canvas, are transformed by color. She names her work with nonsense words that are supposed to onomatopoeically suggest ambient sounds heard in her studio. (Onomatopoeia is the formation of words in imitation of natural sounds, such as *hiss* and *buzz*.)

- *Now that you know the artist's process for creating the work, does this painting have a different meaning for you? Has your understanding of the work or your opinion of it changed?*

The stains that she records are left by the evaporation of liquids and other wastes – stains left by things like bubble gum, motor oil, and spilled juice. As Calame records the residue of pedestrian life and then transforms that residue into an abstraction, a narrative that may have been read into the stain is subsumed by Calame's conversion of it into opaque color and dense composition. Her work has been interpreted as a kind of mapping of the activities that take place on the city street, a kind of human landscape. Calame refers to her layering of traces as an invented "constellation." Her regrouping and layering of the traces of waste left behind by humans and their machines create abstractions with myriad associations.

- *Ingrid Calame's approach to interpreting her environment involves looking closely at some of the details of the world around her and then transforming those details in a new context. Imagination plays an important part in what she creates. Think about your community and look for some of the details that make up that environment. What unusual associations do you have to them? What are some of the details that you think are most interesting or meaningful? How might you visually represent those details and organize them into your own "constellation"?*

Art critics have a difficult time categorizing Calame's work. It has the appearance of abstract expressionism, but her process involves more thinking than personal expression and refers more to the outside world than it does to the inner feelings of the artist. The words *opaque* and *dense* are often used to describe her works; those words may also apply to the paintings' resistance to direct interpretation.



INGRID CALAME

(UNITED STATES, B. 1965)

FEWSPTFFWSPTFFWSPT, 2000

ENAMEL PAINT ON ALUMINUM, 72 x 72 x 1 IN.

PURCHASED WITH FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE MARVIN B. MEYER FAMILY

ENDOWMENT IN MEMORY OF NAN UHLMANN MEYER M.2001.9

© INGRID CALAME. PHOTO © 2010 MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

Angel's Flight

1931, MILLARD SHEETS

MILLARD SHEETS, A PASSIONATE OBSERVER of the culture and landscape of Southern California, painted this image of downtown Los Angeles during the Great Depression. The patterns and bright colors – common in his views of both the country and the city – emphasize the vibrant rhythms of this neighborhood rather than the struggles of the era.

In *Angel's Flight*, Sheets painted crowded Bunker Hill, which was a popular area with artists and working-class families during this time. Between 1920 and 1930, the population of Los Angeles had doubled, creating dense neighborhoods such as this. By using a bird's-eye view, Sheets exaggerated the sense of height to emphasize the steepness of the neighborhood hills and to create a more dynamic scene. Instead of painting a strictly documentary image, Sheets created a poetic and colorful representation of city life.

- *Imagine yourself as one of the figures in this scene. Is there a particular figure you would choose to be and why? What might you see, hear, smell, taste or touch?*

The title of the painting refers to a short cable railway, or funicular, which had opened in 1901 to carry pedestrians on 3rd Street up and down Bunker Hill. Yet, instead of showing the cable cars, Sheets focused on a series of stairways ascending the hill. While the city was in the

process of becoming a major center of industry, commerce, and culture at this time, Sheets chose to highlight the human element – people moving through their regular routine.

- *Ask students to consider where the artist was standing when he painted Angel's Flight. How would the image have changed had he been standing at the bottom of the hill? Also consider the artist's palette. How would the mood of the painting be different had he used different colors?*

Painting, designing, and teaching in Southern California from the 1920s through the 1960s, Sheets was an integral figure in the rapid cultural growth of the West Coast during these decades. From 1925 to 1929, he studied at the Chouinard School of Art (now California Institute of the Arts, or CalArts), an engaging scene for young L.A. artists. In 1932, he began his twenty-one year tenure as a professor at Scripps College, where he was responsible for building a flourishing art department. In the early 1950s he left Scripps to become director of the Los Angeles County Art Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design). And in 1952, he began working with Howard Ahmanson, then president of Home Savings and Loan, which resulted in Sheets designing more than fifty buildings, mosaics, and murals throughout Southern California – many of which are still in existence.



MILLARD SHEETS
(UNITED STATES, 1907–1989)
ANGEL'S FLIGHT, 1931

OIL ON CANVAS, 50¼ x 40 IN.

GIFT OF MRS. L. M. MAITLAND (32.17)

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