

The Poetics of Space



Ron Terada
Entering City of Vancouver, 2002
steel, vinyl, wood, paint, light fixture, light bulb
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery
Gift of Phil Lind

TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE SPRING 2015

Vancouver
Artgallery

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Vancouver Art Gallery

Teacher's Guide for School Programs

The exhibition *The Poetics of Space* features both historical and contemporary artworks, combining unique choices from the Vancouver Art Gallery's collection with a few select loans. Together the works demonstrate the countless ways that artists contemplate space—from its optical perceptions, to its emotional impact, to its geographical or topographical limits. Ultimately the exhibition reveals the many ways in which artists have depicted and defined space over time.

DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of the exhibition *The Poetics of Space*. It also provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Vocabulary section.

The tour of *The Poetics of Space* has three main goals:

- to introduce students to a variety of ways artists investigate and represent space,
- to consider diverse historical and contemporary artistic traditions and disciplines,
- to explore individual artworks in terms of ideas, materials, techniques and inspiration.

THE EXHIBITION: *The Poetics of Space*

The exhibition *The Poetics of Space* investigates the symbolic meaning of space as it applies to ideas of perception, memory, intimacy and experience. Most of the works included in the exhibition are part of the Gallery's permanent collection, including several being exhibited for the first time; others are strategic loans that generate a dialogue with works already in the Gallery's holdings.

The first section of the exhibition, "Fracturing of Form," examines the ways in which artists have historically struggled to convey a sense of mass or depth on a two-dimensional plane. This section begins by considering the early twentieth century, during which traditional depictions of space in painting were replaced with approaches that were more fractured and far more abstract. A key figure in this transition to abstraction was Paul Cézanne (whose work can be seen on the ground floor exhibition *Cezanne and the Modern*). He was one of the first artists to build up a painted landscape with geometric blocks of colour, breaking away from the traditional modes of perspective that had been used to present images of nature. In Canada, Emily Carr, Lawren Harris, B.C. Binning and other West Coast Modernists adapted European and British influences to artistic representations of British Columbia subject matter. Many of their methods of fracturing the picture plane have been re-interpreted by contemporary artists from today's perspective.

The second section of the exhibition "Psychic Weight of the Domestic" introduces elements of intimacy and memory, featuring works about houses and homes that impart their mysteries and histories. The exhibition concludes with the section "Mapping of Space" which highlights works made by artists who use various methods to map or define space—some through performative actions, others through investigations of social use, still others through depictions of signs that register spatial borders. In its totality, this exhibition offers numerous ways to consider how we experience, create and contain space.

This exhibition is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Daina Augaitis, Chief Curator/Associate Director, and Emmy Lee Wall, Assistant Curator.

ARTISTS' BACKGROUND

The following background information highlights some of the artists whose work may be explored in the school tour.

Rebecca Belmore (1839–1906)

Born in Upsala, Ontario, Rebecca Belmore is an artist currently living in Vancouver, BC. She attended the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto and is internationally recognized for her performance and installation art. Since 1987, her multi-disciplinary work has addressed history, place and identity through the media of sculpture, installation, video and performance. Her practice often positions the artist's body and voice as direct counterpoints to stereotypes about First Nations people and highlights unresolved issues of social justice. Belmore's work has appeared in numerous exhibitions both nationally and internationally including two solo touring exhibitions. In 2005, Belmore was the first Aboriginal woman to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale. Her work has also been featured at the Havana Biennial and Biennale of Sydney, among other national and international venues. Belmore is the recipient of numerous prizes and awards, including the 2009 Hnatyshyn Foundation Visual Arts Award.

B.C. Binning (1909–1976)

B.C. Binning was born in Alberta and lived in Vancouver for most of his life. As a boy he spent much of his time visiting his grandfather's architectural offices, and when he moved to the West Coast he was on the water much of the time, boating and fishing; both pastimes influenced him as an artist. He had planned on becoming an architect, but during an extended illness he began to draw and turned his attention to the study of art instead. After attending the Vancouver School of Art, he travelled with his wife to England and the USA to pursue his studies in art. In 1955 he became head of the Department of Fine Arts at the University of British Columbia and curator of its gallery, a position he held for many years. Binning's subject matter was clearly influenced by his passions. Over the years, even as his work became increasingly abstract, he returned repeatedly to images of the sea and marine life. His lyrical compositions, informed by his love of architecture, always retained balance, harmony and order. He is represented by several paintings in the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. He lived in Vancouver until his death.

Roland Brener (1942–2006)

Roland Brener was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1942 and moved to Canada in 1974. He completed his artistic training at St. Martin's School of Art, London, England, in 1965, after studying with Anthony Caro. Brener enjoyed a number of teaching positions in England and the United States before being named Associate Professor at the University of Victoria in 1974. He retired from the faculty there in 1997 and continued his full-time studio practice in Victoria until his death in 2006.

Brener's early practice grew from the minimalist innovations of his contemporaries at St. Martin's. During the 1980s his work began to incorporate consumer items, most often toys, and he experimented with kinetic sculpture driven by electronic motors or computers. In his later work he used the computer as a design tool to produce fantastical distortions of everyday images and objects that were then fabricated in wood or synthetic materials. Roland Brener was one of the most distinguished sculptors and art educators in Canada, and his work is represented in most major public collections in the country, including the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. He also represented Canada at the Biennial Internacional de São Paulo in 1987 and the Venice Biennale in 1988.

Beatrice Lennie (1905–1987)

Born in Nelson, BC, in 1905, Beatrice Lennie was one of very few women sculptors in Canada during the 1930s and '40s. Lennie studied painting and drawing with Frederick Varley and Jock Macdonald at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts (now Emily Carr University). She continued her studies by taking advanced life modelling and carving courses at the California School of Fine Arts, where she studied with Diego Rivera, the well-known Mexican muralist. When she returned to Vancouver, she devoted her time to teaching at the BC College of Art. For ten years she was director of the Children's Saturday Morning Classes at Vancouver Art Gallery. She also taught sculpture, theatre arts and puppetry with the Extension Department of the University of British Columbia for several summers. In the mid-1930s, Lennie worked with students making masks and puppets for local theatre productions at the Beatrice Lennie School of Sculpture, which she founded. Furthering her commitment to theatre and public art in Vancouver, Lennie worked on several public art commissions, including a wall relief in the Hotel Vancouver and an entranceway for the Shaughnessy Military Hospital.

Glenn Lewis (b. 1935)

Born in 1935, Glenn Lewis graduated from the Vancouver School of Art (now Emily Carr University) with honours in painting, drawing and ceramics. He received a teaching certificate from the University of British Columbia in 1959 and studied ceramics under Bernard Leach in St. Ives, Cornwall, England. Lewis has worked in video, performance, film, ceramics, photography, sculpture and writing. He was an active member of the avant-garde art scene in Vancouver during the 1960s, producing work that blurred the boundaries between media, and between viewer and artist. He has taught widely, including ceramics and art teaching methods in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia (1964–1967), media workshops at the National Film Board in Vancouver (1968–1970) and ceramics, sculpture and drawing in the Fine Arts Department at the University of British Columbia (1971–1974).

Alex Morrison (b. 1971)

Born in Redruth, UK, Alex Morrison is a Vancouver-based artist who currently lives and works in Brussels, Belgium. His practice spans a variety of media in work that examines the relationships between urban and domestic space, memory and the struggle for subjective identity. His art draws from both his own biography and a number of twentieth-century movements relating to design and architecture.

Widely exhibited in Canada, the United States, England and Germany, Morrison's artwork was included in the 17th Biennale of Sydney (2010). His work has been shown in a number of solo exhibitions, as well as group exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art.

Ron Tran (b. 1972)

Born in Saigon, Vietnam, Ron Tran lives and works in Vancouver, where he studied Integrated Media Arts at Emily Carr University. He works across various media, from performance to sculpture, photography, video and installation. His practice explores the ways that chance and coincidence influence daily life, and delves into interactions with strangers and objects in unfamiliar or overlooked places. A common theme in Tran's work is his thoughtful, even reverent treatment of the mundane or ordinary. Tran's work has comprised a series of solo exhibitions, and has been part of numerous group exhibitions in Canada, the United States and England. His work was also included in the Berlin Biennale in 2010.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: About the Artists (intermediate and secondary students)

Objective:

Students read, research and share information about some of the artists represented in *Poetics of Space*.

Materials:

- writing materials
- Internet.
Some useful websites:
<http://canadianart.ca>
www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca
www.wikipedia.com
- Artist Information Sheet (p. 8), Student Worksheet (p. 9)

Process:

1. Divide the students into seven groups. Cut up the Artist Information Sheet (p. 8) and assign one artist to each group.
2. Give each group a copy of the Student Worksheet (p. 9), and ask them to transfer the information about their artist to the appropriate box.
3. Have students figure out what they need to know to complete the section on their artist, and find it on the Internet, either at home or at school. Older students can find more information; younger students, just the basics.
4. Ask each group to find/copy/sketch a piece of work by their artist on a separate piece of paper. Do not label with the artist's name or any other information.
5. Have each group present the information on their artist while the rest of the class adds the information to their worksheets.
6. After the presentations, lay out the images, and have the class guess which image is by which artist.

Conclusion:

Discuss:

- What were some of the most interesting things that students learned or discovered?
- Which artists and/or kinds of artwork made students curious about seeing the actual work in the exhibition?
- Are there any artists, ways of working or ideas that the students would like to know more about?

Artist Information Sheet

Rebecca Belmore

- Born in Upsala, Ontario, lives in Vancouver
- Internationally recognized for her performance and installation art
- Her work addresses history, place and identity
- She was the first First Nations woman to represent Canada in the Venice Biennale

B.C. Binning

- Born in Alberta, lived in Vancouver most of his life
- Planned on becoming an architect, but began to draw during an extended illness
- Travelled to England and the USA to study art
- His work was influenced by his interest in sea and marine life as well as architecture
- Worked in an abstract style

Roland Brener

- Born in South Africa in 1942, moved to Vancouver in 1974
- Studied art in London, England
- Used consumer items, wood, metal and synthetic materials in his sculptures
- One of the most distinguished sculptors and art educators in Canada
- His work is represented in most major public art collections in Canada

Beatrice Lennie

- Born in Nelson, BC
- One of very few women sculptors in Canada during the 1930s and '40s
- Taught art at the BC College of Art, UBC and the Vancouver Art Gallery
- Made masks and puppets as well as sculptures and paintings
- Worked on several public art commissions, including a wall relief in Hotel Vancouver

Glenn Lewis

- Vancouver artist
- Studied art at the Vancouver School of Art (now Emily Carr University)
- Works in video, performance, film, ceramics, photography, sculpture and writing
- Was an active member of the avant-garde art scene in Vancouver in the 1960s

Alex Morrison

- Born in Redruth, UK, based in Vancouver
- His work examines relationships between urban and domestic space
- Ideas come from his personal life and twentieth-century design and architecture movements
- His work has been widely exhibited in Canada, the USA, England and Germany

Ron Tran

- Born in Saigon, Vietnam, lives and works in Vancouver
- Studied at Emily Carr University
- Works in photography, sculpture, performance, video and installation
- His work explores the ways that chance and coincidence influence daily life

Student Worksheet

	Personal Information	Type of Art	Known for	An Artwork
Rebecca Belmore				
B.C. Binning				
Roland Brener				
Beatrice Lennie				
Glenn Lewis				
Alex Morrison				
Ron Tran				

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Real to Unreal (all levels)

Objective:

Students look at ways of constructing a non-realistic, abstract or imaginary space or landscape as a way to think about perspective.

Discussion:

Artists as far back as Paul Cézanne broke down the picture plane, flattening and rearranging space through the use of shape, colour and brushstroke, so that the viewer might find space compressed and flattened, or see multiple viewpoints simultaneously. Similarly, Emily Carr, who was influenced by Post-Impressionist painters such as Cézanne, also abstracted her landscape paintings by using highly stylized and geometric forms. Lawren Harris, another Canadian artist whose work is also featured in the exhibition, painted purely abstract works depicting spaces that do not truly exist in place and time.

Materials:

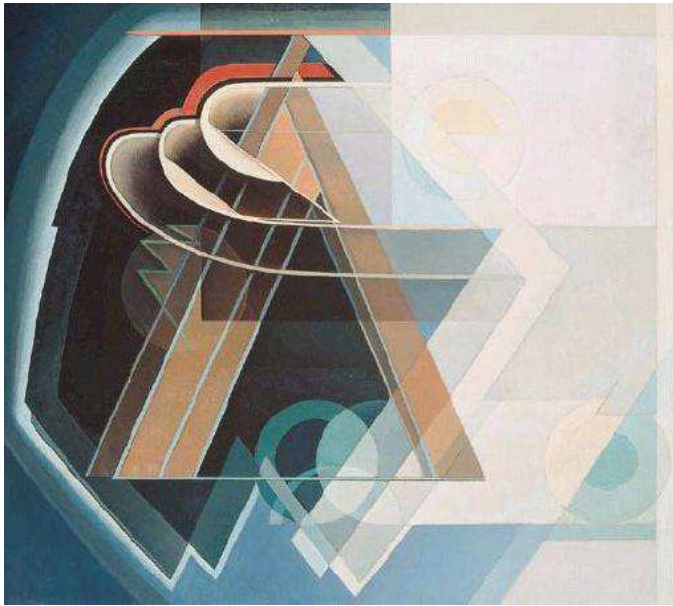
- magazines that can be cut up, coloured scrap paper
- white paper for background
- scissors, glue

Process:

1. Discuss how some artists, such as Paul Cézanne and Emily Carr change landscapes to make them look less realistic. Show the class images of their work (see example of following page).
2. Discuss how some artists such as Lawren Harris create purely abstract paintings of spaces that do not exist in reality. Show the class images of Harris' abstract work (see example of following page).
3. Ask students to think of ways to construct a space or landscape in an abstract way.
4. Have the students work individually or in small groups to create an imaginary collaged space or landscape.
5. Have students cut out images from magazines and construct their space or landscape.
6. Encourage them to fill the page, layering images as they work.
7. Display the students' work.

Conclusion:

- Have the class discuss the ideas presented by the varying perspectives and materials.
- Have them look at the works and talk about similarities and differences in styles, perspectives, colours and composition.
- Ask them what choices they made about space and perspective.
- Ask them whether viewers perceive the space in the way that the artists intended.



Lawren Harris, *Abstract No. 7*, 1939



Emily Carr, *Untitled*, 1928



Example of activity: Imaginary Space



Example of activity: Abstract Landscape

PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Define with Signs (all levels)

Objective:

Students create signs that define a space in their home.

Discussion:

Ron Terada, a Vancouver artist whose work is included in the exhibition, investigates space through *Entering City of Vancouver*, a replica of a highway sign that defines a spatial border. In his art practice, Terada engages with themes of signage and text-based artworks in public spaces. Other works have adapted gallery signage, posters and brochures.

Materials:

- thick white paper
- markers, pencil crayons or pastels
- letter stencils

Process:

1. Discuss signs with the students. What is a sign? Why do signs exist? What kinds of signs have they seen before? What are some signs that define a space or place?
2. Show the students a few examples of signs that define a space or place. Examples may include do-not-enter signs, restroom signs, exit signs, nut-free-zone signs, city signs, no-cell-phone signs etc.
3. Have students think about a space or place in their home that they would like to create a sign for.
4. Have them start by planning their sign with a pencil on scratch paper. Stencils may be used for lettering.
5. Once they have planned their sign, have students start the final work on thick paper, sketching it out with pencil and then gradually adding colour.
6. Encourage students to fill the page.
7. Display the signs. See examples on the following page.

Conclusion:

Discuss:

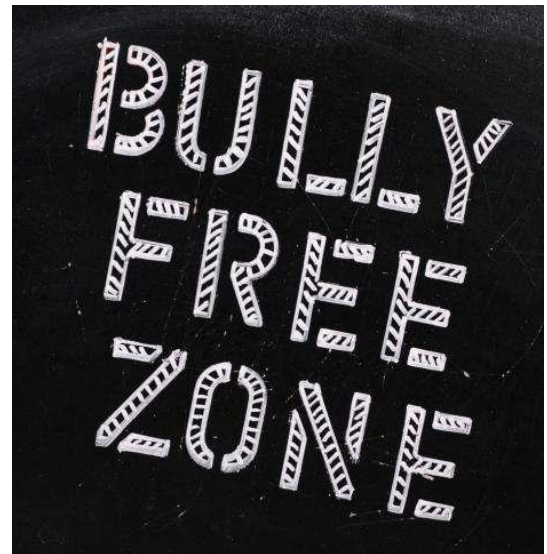
- How are the students' signs similar, and how are they different?
- How might their signs change the way the space or place is perceived or experienced?
- What signs would they post in their school or classroom?



Ron Terada



Example of activity



Example of activity

PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Mapping Mind Journeys (primary and intermediate levels)

Objective:

Students use maps and other materials to create an imagined journey through a familiar place.

Discussion:

Starting in the late 1960s, the Canadian artist Bill Vazan made journeys in Montreal and Toronto, and later across Canada and around the world, and documented them in sequences of photographs, maps and notes. In these works, he focuses on particular aspects of his journeys and symbolically eliminates distance and time. Landon Mackenzie, also featured in this exhibition, maps journeys both real and imagined. In several of her large-scale paintings from the early 1990s to 2009, she layered research notes, annotated maps, archival texts and documentation of her investigations and explorations of geographic regions. She is particularly interested in current research on the brain and neural mapping, in relationship to the mapping of our physical environment.

Materials:

- maps of Vancouver (readily available online for printing)
- large sheets of white paper OR large construction paper
- scissors, glue
- pastels, crayons or markers
- optional: images from magazines, stickers, sparkles, construction paper, etc.

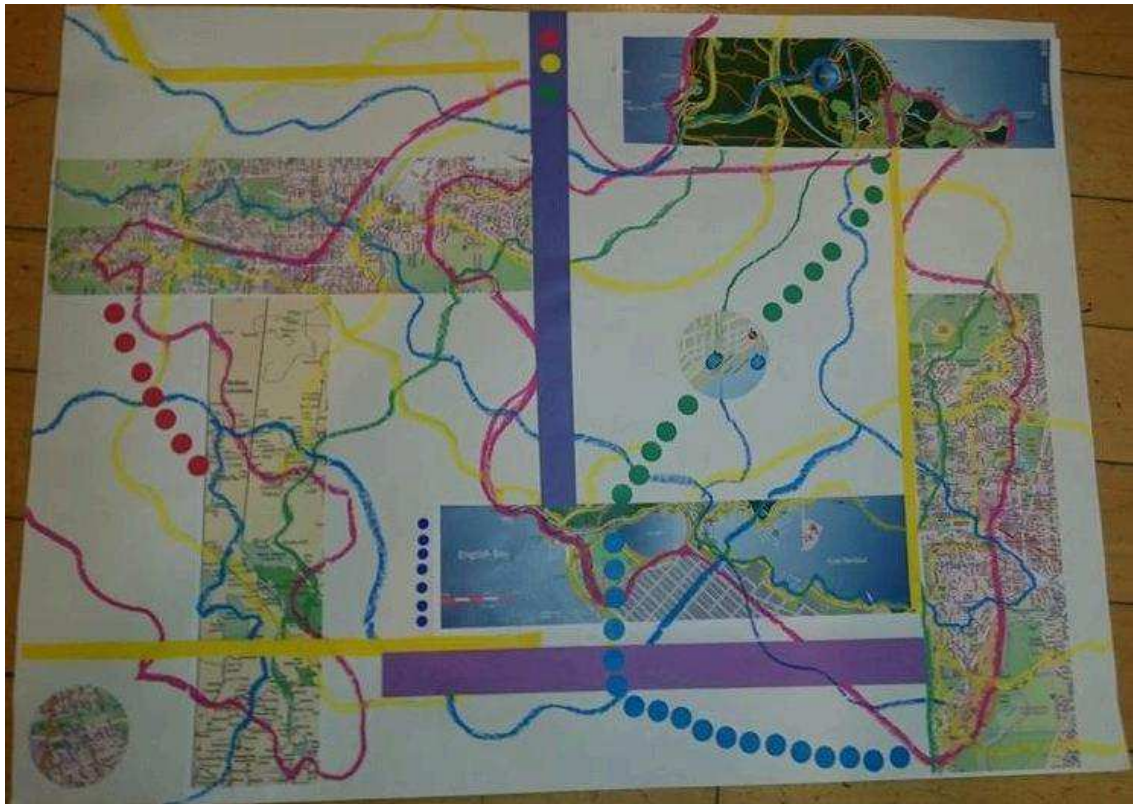
Process:

1. Discuss maps with the students. Why do we have maps? Why and how are they used? Point out how maps are used to find specific places or routes, but also to record, document and show journeys.
2. Discuss journeys with students. What is a journey? What are some journeys they've taken? Can we take a journey in our mind? How so?
3. Have students print maps of Vancouver, or provide each student with one.
4. Ask students look at the map and find places they have been and places they would like to go. Ask them to think about taking an imaginary journey through the city of Vancouver.
5. Have the students cut up their maps into whatever shapes they choose.
6. Provide students with large background paper and have them glue their cut-up maps onto this paper in random patterns.
7. Provide students with pastels, crayons or markers.
8. Have them extend existing lines and draw new ones to show routes they have travelled and journeys they would like to take.
9. Encourage students to fill in blank spaces with creative patterns, signs and drawings of things they might see along the way.
10. Students can add optional collage elements, such as stickers, construction paper and magazine images.
11. Display the map collages. See example on following page.

Conclusion:

Discuss:

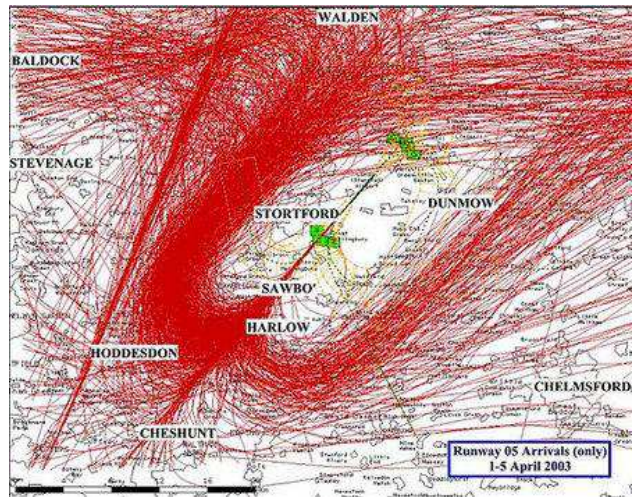
- Have students explain their work. How did they map their journeys?
- Are the final works similar to each other, or different? How so?
- Discuss the process, how easy or hard it was to create physical journeys and mind journeys.



Example of activity



Landon Mackenzie, *Houbart's Hope; Tracing One Warm Line*, 2001–2004



Bill Vazan, *Runway 05 Arrivals (only), 1–5 April, 2003, 2003*

VOCABULARY

abstract/abstraction: a style of art that can be thought of in two ways:

- a) the artist begins with a recognizable subject and alters, distorts, manipulates or simplifies elements of it;
- b) the artist creates purely abstract forms that are unrecognizable and have no direct reference to external reality (also called non-representational art).

contemporary: created in the last thirty years. Most contemporary artists are living artists.

installation: art that is created from a wide range of materials and installed in a specific environment. An installation may be temporary or permanent.

landscape: artwork in which the subject is a view of the exterior physical world. Traditionally, landscapes have been paintings or drawings depicting natural scenes and are often concerned with light, space and setting.

minimalism/minimalist: Minimalism describes movements in various forms of art and design, especially visual art and music, where the work is set out to expose the essence or identity of a subject through eliminating all non-essential forms, features or concepts. Initially minimal art appeared in New York in the 1960s as artists moved toward geometric abstraction.

Modern/Modernist: a historical period of art practice—from 1850 to 1970—during which approaches to art embraced new ideas in science, political thought and many other areas. The Modernists rejected the restrictions of past art traditions and stressed innovation over all other values.

performance art: works in any of a variety of media that are performed before a live audience. The performance itself, rather than a specific object, constitutes the artwork. Documentation is often an important part of the performance.

Post-Impressionism: a genre of painting that grew directly out of Impressionism, but rejected its limitations. Artists continued to use vivid colours, thick paint and real-life subject matter, but were more inclined to emphasize geometric forms, to distort form for expressive effect and to use unnatural or arbitrary colour.

RESOURCES

Print:

Murray, Joan. *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999.

Tippett, Maria. *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992.

Online:

www.artcyclopedia.com

<http://canadianart.ca>

<http://www.contemporaryartgallery.ca>

www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca

www.wikipedia.com

<http://vancouverartinthesixties.com>

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