



FUTURE GEOGRAPHIES

ART IN THE CENTURY OF CLIMATE CHANGE

TEACHER STUDY GUIDE
FALL 2026

Vancouver
Artgallery

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"Artists are not scientists, nor are they journalists, but they have a role to play in asking questions about our future on this planet. In this century shaped by climate change, that act of imagining is both a necessity and a form of resistance."

—Eva Respini, Interim Co-CEO & Curator at Large, Vancouver Art Gallery

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Cover: Visitor discovers Teresita Fernandez, *Island Universe*, 2023, in *Future Geographies: Art in the Century of Climate Change*, July 2026, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

Above: Installation view of Andrew Dadson, *House Plants*, 2017, in *Future Geographies: Art in the Century of Climate Change*, exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, May 14, 2026 to January 10, 2027, Photo Vancouver Art Gallery

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PROGRAMS

As the environmental crisis accelerates, contemporary artists have taken up the mantle of addressing our planet's precarious present and uncertain future. *Future Geographies: Art in the Century of Climate Change* features artists from different generations and geographies who have varying cultural and material practices. The exhibition considers how art can help catalyze our understanding of, and imaginative responses to, the world that we inhabit. Topics addressed in the exhibition include deforestation, water pollution, extraction and traditional Indigenous environmental knowledge. Artworks in a variety of mediums—from large-scale video to living sculptures—reflect on our future on this planet, highlighting the interconnections between humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects. Focusing on art made in the past twenty-five years, this exhibition emphasizes a sense of urgency and offers students a snapshot of the diversity of artmaking today.

DEAR TEACHER

This teaching guide will assist you in preparing for your class tour of the exhibition *Future Geographies: Art in the Century of Climate Change*. It provides activities to facilitate discussion before and after your visit. Engaging in the suggested activities will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require very few materials and can be easily adapted to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Glossary section.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Future Geographies: Art in the Century of Climate Change takes place on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

FUTURE GEOGRAPHIES: ART IN THE CENTURY OF CLIMATE CHANGE HAS 3 MAIN GOALS:

1

TO INTRODUCE

STUDENTS TO THE ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION

2

TO CONSIDER

THE ROLE ARTISTS PLAY IN ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT
OUR PLANET'S FUTURE

3

TO EXPLORE

INDIVIDUAL ARTWORKS IN THE CONTEXT OF
MATERIALS, PROCESS AND IDEAS



Installation view of Huma Bhabha, *Lifetime*, 2013, and Rose B. Simpson, *Copilot A*, 2023, in Future Geographies Art in the Century of Climate Change, exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, May 14, 2026 to January 10, 2027. Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

GLOSSARY

ACTIVISM | ACTIVIST Direct, vigorous action in support of, or in opposition to, one side of a controversy, particularly with respect to social, political or environmental issues.

BIRD'S EYE VIEW A view from a high angle that allows a person to see a large area, as seen by a bird in flight; also an overall or cursory look at something.

CLIMATE CHANGE The long-term changes in the Earth's climate that are warming the atmosphere, ocean and land. Climate change is affecting the balance of ecosystems that support life and biodiversity and impacting health. It is also causing more extreme weather events, such as more frequent and more intense hurricanes, floods, heatwaves and droughts, and leads to sea level rise and coastal erosion as a result of ocean warming, melting of glaciers and loss of ice sheets.

COLONIAL(ISM) | COLONIZATION A process that occurs when settlers arrive at a place in order to establish political control over it. Colonization "is done by creating new governing systems and ways of living, being and doing that make the ways of those who were there before, inferior. This creates unequal relationships between the colonizer and the Indigenous people."¹

CONCEPTUAL ART The idea or concept is more important than the finished art object. It emerged as an art movement in the 1960s, and the term usually refers to art made from the mid-1960s to the present.

COSMOLOGY The study of the origin, evolution and eventual fate of the universe. It is a body of beliefs based on creation and the destiny of humanity.

FORMLINE The connected patterns of painted or carved positive space that create and define Northwest Coast art. The thickness of formlines alter, usually as they bend around a corner, which introduces tension and release in traditional design.

INSTALLATION A mixed-media artwork construction, often designed for a specific place or for a temporary period of time.

INUIT The Indigenous People who traditionally inhabit the Arctic regions of what is now Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and Siberia.

¹ Monica Gray Smith, *Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation* (Victoria BC: Orca, 2017), 144

LANDSCAPE Artwork of which the primary focus is natural scenery, such as mountains, forests, cliffs, trees, rivers, valleys, etc. Traditionally, landscapes have been paintings or drawings depicting natural scenes and are often concerned with light, space and setting.

MOTIF A decorative design or pattern that is a distinctive feature or dominant idea of an artwork.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY An artist's practice that combines a variety of disciplines (for example, sculpture, installation and sound).

OVOID One of the basic shapes of traditional Northwest Coast art. Ovoids are building blocks that form visual centres from which design patterns or movements flow or emanate. They are thickest on the top, thinner on each side and thinnest on the bottom. They can change orientation, but their characteristics remain the same. Ovoids are used to represent joints, eye sockets or non-specific anatomical parts that help create the flow of the overall design.

POP ART Art based on modern popular culture and the mass media, especially as a critical or ironic comment on traditional fine art values.

TAXIDERMY The art of making animals look alive even after they have died. It is a way of preparing, stuffing and/or mounting an animal for display or study.

UNCEDDED A term for a relationship between the Government of Canada and Indigenous Peoples when no treaties have been established. In general, "unceded" means the lands and waters of the Indigenous Peoples were never surrendered and were taken without permission.

PRE- AND POST-TOUR ACTIVITIES

GRADES 2-12

GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

Pre-Tour Activity

CONNECTED LANDSCAPES

Pre- or Post-Tour Activity

HOPE FROM BEYOND

Pre- or Post-Tour Activity

ALTERED LANDSCAPES

Pre- or Post-Tour Activity

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY



OBJECTIVE

Students are introduced to the lives, artistic process and works of artists in the exhibition *Future Geographies: Art in the Century of Climate Change*.

MATERIALS

- Writing materials
- Access to Internet
- Artist Information Sheet (p. 12–13) and the Student Worksheet (p. 14)

PROCESS

- Divide the class into small groups.
- Give each group one of the categories from the Artist Information Sheet (p. 12–13).
- Give each student a copy of the Student Worksheet (p.) and ask them to consider what they need to find out to complete their section.
- Have them conduct research using the internet, either at home or at school.

- Ask each group to find and describe a piece of work by the artist and add it to the space provided on the worksheet.
- Have each group present their information while the rest of the students fill in their worksheets.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the following:

- What are some of the most interesting things students learned or discovered?
- Which pieces are students curious about seeing in the exhibition?
- Does one of the artist's work connect to or resonate with the students' lives? Why or why not?
- What else are students interested in finding out about the artists?

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT'D

SHUVINAI ASHOONA

"I'm such a little person beside such a big universe."

Shuvinai Ashoona is an artist from Kinngait, Nunavut, and is part of Canada's Inuit culture. She comes from a large family of artists. Before settling in Kinngait, she had a nomadic childhood that she happily remembers, filled with hunting, fishing, clamming, boating and camping, which is reflected in many of her drawings today. She creates her work at Kinngait Studios, where she learned by watching and working alongside her elders, rather than attending a formal art school. Inspired by films, comic books and television, she creates her intuitive drawings using pen and ink, pencil crayons and markers. Ashoona's drawings are filled with her memories of the Arctic, historical stories she's heard from her elders, and the daily realities of life in Kinngait, which she combines with worlds from her imagination, creating her unique take on Northern life. Her detailed drawings contain stories within stories, including motifs such as globes, bird eggs, and human-animal hybrid creatures. There are unexpected twists, surprises and observations in her drawings, and many feature a bird's-eye view. Ashoona has overturned expectations of what Inuit art looks like by producing art that responds to the complex impact of a century of colonial influence in the Arctic.

ANDREA BOWERS

"I'm passionate about, and I find hope in, the work that activists are doing. I think about building community as a medium, like paint. I think of dialogue as paint or clay or sculptures."

Andrea Bowers is an artist and activist living in Los Angeles, California, who refuses to give up hope for a healthier planet that values the rights of women and nature. Bowers takes inspiration from activist protests, creating textured paintings on recycled cardboard,

colourful pencil drawings, neon sculptures, and videos that tell the stories of communities fighting for social change and honour their courage. Bowers is an ally of frontline activists, earning trust through collaboration and long-term engagement. In 2012, Bowers was arrested for tree-sitting, a nonviolent form of environmental protest in which activists used their bodies as shields to protect old-growth forests in Northern California. She created a sculpture made from vintage chairs and repurposed wood planks that resemble the suspended platforms used during that protest. Adorned with animals and messages, the brightly coloured chairs combine the joy of swinging with the serious mission of saving the planet, offering a hopeful vision of what people can build together.

NICHOLAS GALANIN

"Art has been my profound mentor...teaching lessons connected to land."

Nicholas Galanin is a multidisciplinary artist from Sitka, Alaska, with Tlingit and Unangax' heritage. He uses his skills in totem carving and jewelry making to explore Indigenous identity and culture. His work includes sculpture, installation, photography, video and textiles, challenging stereotypes and reclaiming Indigenous storytelling. Galanin focuses on how colonial institutions like museums handle Indigenous knowledge, particularly through taxidermy animals. Colonialism is a process that occurs when settlers arrive at a place in order to establish political control over the land and people. He highlights the connection between the impact of colonialism upon Indigenous Peoples and issues such as species extinction and environmental loss. A mentor to young artists, his influence is felt in both the Indigenous community and the art world. In addition to visual art, he also creates music under the name Silver Jackson, blending Indigenous sounds with modern styles and addressing important issues about Indigenous culture and the effects of colonialism.

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT'D

BRIAN JUNGEN

“I like using things that people recognize—that they see around them every day.”

Brian Jungen was born on his family farm near Fort St. John, British Columbia. His father was Swiss-born, and his mother was Dane-zaa from Doig River First Nation. He finds inspiration in his family’s ranching and hunting background, as well as his Dane-zaa heritage, when disassembling and recombining consumer goods to create unexpected hybrid sculptures and installations. One of his main ideas as a conceptual artist is transformation. He credits the Dane-zaa side of his family for his resourcefulness, noting that, as a kid, he would watch his relatives recycle household objects to extend their usefulness: “It was a kind of salvaging born out of practical and economic necessity, and it greatly influenced how I see the world as an artist.” He has created many works involving animals, highlighting the interdependence between humans and other species and the relationship between aesthetic form and function. Jungen’s art shares his concern for the environment and profound commitment to Indigenous ways of knowing and making.

JEAN SHIN

“I’m not interested in ‘waste’ as much as showing the transformation and potential the used and discarded have through our reframing, care, and labor.”

Jean Shin is a Korean American artist who was born in Seoul and moved to the United States at age six. In high school, she was encouraged to paint and, in her final year, won a full scholarship to Pratt Institute, an important art school in the United States. Her sculptures, videos and large-scale installations are made from castoff materials such as worn shoes, broken umbrellas and discarded technology including obsolete phones, which she collects from friends, family and the community.

She researches the history and environmental impact of these objects, then carefully takes them apart and rebuilds them into artworks made up of hundreds or even thousands of similar items. These pieces invite viewers to think about the stories behind everyday things and their impact on the environment. Through her work, Shin sparks conversations about material consumption, collective identity and how we connect as a community.

LAWRENCE PAUL YUXWELUPTUN

“These paintings are history paintings, and when you look into these paintings, you are looking into a mirror. The environment, land title, being Native in this country, it’s all there.”

Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun is a Vancouver-based artist of Tsartlip (Coast Salish) and Okanagan descent. Yuxweluptun is Salish for “man of many masks,” a name given to the artist during his initiation into the Sxwaxwe Society at the age of fourteen. Yuxweluptun is a political activist and he has chosen art as his way to give voice to his political concerns. He sees himself as a history painter whose art is about putting Indigenous people and issues in stories about modern day life. He does this with figurative and abstract works that are full of striking and vibrant colour, combining Coast Salish cosmology, traditional Northwest Coast formlines and ovoids, and elements of European landscape painting and Pop Art. Inspired by historical events, documents, treaties and his own personal experiences, Yuxweluptun’s art is very much about creating discussions and awareness regarding Indigenous issues and culture and the destruction of the natural world. He believes that art can create discussion between people from different cultures and belief systems.

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT'D

ARTIST INFORMATION SHEET

SHUVINAI ASHOONA

- Artist from Kinngait, Nunavut, and part of Canada's Inuit culture
- Learned to draw by watching her elders and working alongside them
- Inspired by films, comic books, television, stories told by elders, childhood memories and everyday life in the Arctic
- Known for intuitive drawings using pen and ink, pencil crayons and markers
- Has created her own unique motifs, including globes, eggs and human-animal hybrid creatures

ANDREA BOWERS

- Artist and activist from Los Angeles, California
- Continues to remain hopeful for a healthier planet that values the rights of women and nature
- Known for artworks that tell the stories of communities fighting for social change
- Was arrested for tree-sitting to protect old-growth forests in Northern California
- Draws inspiration from activist protests

NICHOLAS GALANIN

- Artist of Tlingit and Unangax̂ heritage who lives in Sheet'ka (Sitka), Alaska
- Art practice includes sculpture, installation, photography, video and textiles
- Known for addressing issues around Indigenous culture and effects of colonialism
- A dedicated mentor who works with young artists in his community
- Uses taxidermy animals as a metaphor for how Indigenous cultures are represented in museums

BRIAN JUNGEN

- Born on his family farm in Fort St. John, BC, to Swiss father and Dane-zaa mother
- Conceptual artist
- Credits his Dane-zaa heritage for his resourcefulness using recycled materials
- Makes sculptures and installations using everyday things like Nike shoes and golf bags
- His work draws attention to a concern for the environment and a profound commitment to Indigenous ways of knowing and making

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT'D

ARTIST INFORMATION SHEET CONT'D

JEAN SHIN

- Korean American artist
- Known for creating sculptures, videos and large-scale installations made from castoff materials
- Researches the history and environmental impact of discarded everyday objects collected from family, friends and community
- Invites viewers to think about the stories behind everyday things and their impact on the environment
- Her work sparks conversations about material consumption, collective identity and how we connect as a community

▪ LAWRENCE PAUL YUXWELUPTUN

- Vancouver-based artist of Tsartlip (Coast Salish) and Okanagan descent
- Political activist
- His large-scale, intensely coloured canvases combine Northwest Coast traditional art with Western art forms such as abstraction
- Yuxweluptun is Salish for “man of many masks,” a name given to him during his initiation into the Sxwaixwe Society
- His work is about creating discussions and awareness regarding Indigenous issues and culture, and the destruction of the natural environment

GRADES 4–12 | GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

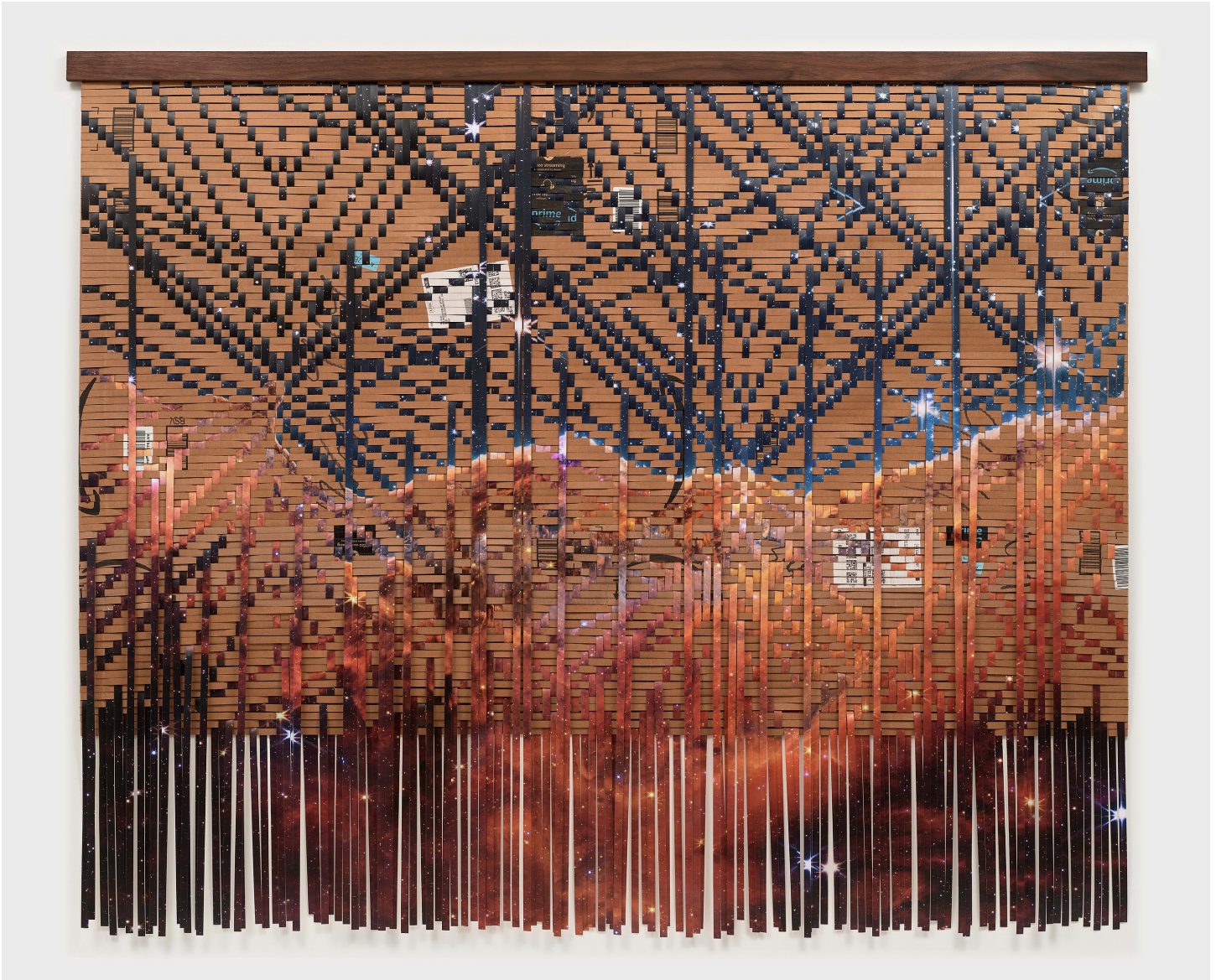
PRE-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT'D

STUDENT WORKSHEET (FILL IN THE CHART WITH THE FOLLOWING)

	PERSONAL INFORMATION	INTERESTING FACT	KNOWN FOR	AN ARTWORK
SHUVINAI ASHOONA				
ANDREA BOWERS				
NICHOLAS GALANIN				
BRIAN JUNGEN				
JEAN SHIN				
LAWERENCE PAUL YUXWELUPTUN				

GRADES 2–12 | CONNECTED LANDSCAPES

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY CLARISSA TOSSIN



“Humans are part of an ecosystem called nature and not separate from it, my recent work grapples with the uncertainties and anxieties generated by the environmental crisis.”

–Clarissa Tossin

GRADES 2–12 | CONNECTED LANDSCAPES

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT'D

OBJECTIVE

Explore the connection between what we use and throw away, the environment and the future.

DISCUSSION

Clarissa Tossin is a multidisciplinary artist from Porto Alegre, Brazil, now based in Los Angeles, California. Her work explores climate change, how companies use resources, and the ongoing effects of colonial history. She began using Amazon packaging in her art to highlight how the name "Amazon" refers both to the online retailer and the Amazon rainforest. Tossin noticed that, when they hear the word "Amazon," many people in North America think of Amazon.com before they think of the rainforest that plays a vital role in our planet's health. Her art also draws on themes from colonial history, like the navigation maps made by European explorers centuries ago. She wants to link these old maps, which continue to shape our understanding of the world, with today's space exploration. Just as explorers once searched for resources to bring home, some people now hope that space exploration and finding resources elsewhere will solve Earth's problems. This worries Tossin because it repeats a pattern of consumption that damages the environment. Her artwork *Future Geography: Cosmic Cliffs* (2023) combines images of distant star clusters and planets from NASA with used Amazon boxes. She weaves them together using Amazonian basket-making traditions, connecting the idea of exploring space with the waste we produce. The title of the exhibition is drawn from Tossin's artwork, suggesting how new possibilities might arise from the rubble of global waste. *Future Geography: Cosmic Cliffs* encourages us to think about how our habits, like buying and throwing things away, affect our future and the planet's health. Tossin believes it is important to show how everything is connected: not just people and cultures but also the Earth and our daily lives. Her art questions the belief that progress and consumption are always positive and invites us to see how everything is linked. Tossin wants us to reflect on our relationship with the environment and consider how art can help us imagine a better future for everyone.

MATERIALS

- Blank index cards
- 8.5 × 11" paper for mounting
- Markers, crayons, coloured pencils or paint
- Scissors
- Glue

PROCESS

- Look closely at Clarissa Tossin's artwork. What do you see? How has weaving transformed the Amazon packaging and images from space?
- Clarissa Tossin noticed that many people think of Amazon.com before the Amazon Rainforest. How do you think online orders, packaging and single-use choices connect back to our environment or the rainforest? As a class, write your ideas on the board.
- What are some items you or your family purchase online or from Amazon.com that come in throwaway packaging? As a class, create another list of the items on the board.
- What connections can you make between the two lists on the board? Do any of the connections surprise you? Why or why not?
- On your first index card, draw an item chosen from the list of things purchased online or on Amazon.com. Draw the image large enough to fill the index card. Colour in your item and the background.
- On the second index card, create an image from the environment list. Fill the card with colour.
- Choose one of your drawings. Create a fold at the top of the card that is approximately ½". Unfold, and you will have a crease line.
- Using scissors, cut the index card into strips only to the crease line. Do not cut over the line.
- Place some glue on the back of your crease line and glue the card to an 8.5 × 11" sheet so that your picture is facing up.
- Using your scissors, cut a strip from your second picture from top to bottom. Cut the strip off completely.

GRADES 2–12 | CONNECTED LANDSCAPES

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY CONT'D

- Weave the strip into the first card. Choose a weaving pattern.
- Glue the edges of the strip you wove into the first card.
- Repeat these three steps, cutting a strip from the second card, weaving it into the first card, then gluing down the edges, until complete.
- If you run out of room to weave, cut the second card into strips and create a border around your weaving.
- Create a title for your weaving that refers to the connections you made between the item and the environment.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the following:

- Clarissa Tossin's weaving encourages us to think about how our habits, like buying and throwing things away, affect our future and the planet's health. After creating your own weaving, making connections between the environment and purchasing items, will you think about your habits differently? Why or why not?
- What surprised you when creating your weaving? What did you find challenging?
- As a class, share some of the connections you made in your weavings. Does this change the way you think about your relationship with the environment? Why or why not?
- As a class, make one more list together. Based on the weaving connections created in class, what are some things you can do to imagine a better future for everyone?



Student artwork

GRADES 2–12 | HOPE FROM BEYOND

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY HUMA BHABHA



**“Science fiction and
archaeology are
avenues to explore
the past and future
while allowing me
to reflect on the
present.”**

—Huma Bhabha

GRADES 2–12 | HOPE FROM BEYOND

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY HUMA BHABHA

OBJECTIVE

Examine Huma Bhabha's sculpture *Lifetime* (2013) as a symbol of hope and transformation to create a short story.

DISCUSSION

Huma Bhabha is a sculptor who creates hybrid creatures from found materials such as Styrofoam, cork, wire and wood. Memory, war, places and the idea of visitors from other worlds inspire her art. Growing up in the desert city of Karachi, Pakistan, Bhabha found beauty in the ancient ruins and the construction materials used for the new buildings that surrounded her home. Her sculpture *Lifetime* is a hybrid creature made from cork, wood, Styrofoam, acrylic paint and oil sticks. In much of her work, she draws upon a variety of influences, including horror movies, science fiction and ancient stories. *Lifetime* appears both ancient, as if unearthed from a distant past, and futuristic, like an alien visiting Earth. She often finds that her creative process involves responding to the materials she collects, transforming what would typically be discarded and stopping the items from harming the environment. By transforming discarded objects into thought-provoking sculptures, she encourages us to reflect on important issues in our world today and on the hope for a more peaceful future.

MATERIALS

- Paper
- pencil or pen

PROCESS

- As a class, look closely at Huma Bhabha's sculpture *Lifetime* (2013). How has the artist transformed found materials to create the sculpture?
- If you could give this sculpture a name, what would it be and why? Why do you think Huma Bhabha titled it *Lifetime*? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Huma Bhabha is inspired by science fiction and ancient stories. Do you think this creature comes from the past or future? What do you see that makes you say that?

- Where do you think this creature comes from? What does it bring that could help humanity today? How can it inspire hope for a better future for us?
- On a piece of paper, complete these sentences:
 - The creature's name is _____.
 - It comes from _____.
 - It has come to the present day because _____.
 - It wants humans to know _____.
 - It has the ability to help solve _____.
- On a new sheet of paper, write a short story using your answers that shares a message of hope with *Lifetime*.
- When you are finished, you may want to create a drawing to go with your story.
- Share your story with the class.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the following:

- What did you enjoy about creating your story?
- What was easy or hard about creating your story?
- What elements of Huma Bhabha's sculpture did you consider or use in your story?
- What similarities and differences did you notice in the stories?

GRADES 6–12 | ALTERED LANDSCAPES

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY EDWARD BURTYNSKY



"My photographs reflect the impact of humanity, not its absence. They are pictures of our footprint, and the diminishment of nature that results"

—Edward Burtynsky

OBJECTIVE

Create an artwork from an aerial perspective that conveys a message about our relationship to the environment.

DISCUSSION

Edward Burtynsky is a Canadian photographer who documents the effects of human activity on the world. His

large-scale landscape images showcase how industry reshapes the global environment. Growing up in St. Catharines, Ontario, near the General Motors plant where his father worked, he was surrounded from an early age by images of manufacturing, extraction and industrial sprawl—scenes that would inspire his lifelong focus on people's impact on the planet. He encourages us to think differently

Edward Burtynsky, *Oil Spill #14, Marsh Islands, Gulf of Mexico*, June 24, 2010, chromogenic print, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of the Artist, VAG 2013.30.24

GRADES 6–12 | ALTERED LANDSCAPES

PRE- OR POST-TOUR ACTIVITY | INSPIRED BY EDWARD BURTYNSKY

about what landscape images can be. He often creates bird's eye views of the landscape, using elevated platforms, natural topography and, more recently, helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. In 2010, after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill released 5 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, Burtynsky photographed the spill from 7,000 feet to highlight the damage it caused, turning the harm into abstract painterly forms. His work *Oil Spill #14, Marsh Islands, Gulf of Mexico, June 24, 2010*, is both beautiful and unsettling.

Burtynsky has described his work as a way to provoke reflection and responsibility, using beauty as an entry point into difficult conversations about sustainability, overconsumption and the urgent need for ecological balance. His work highlights the challenges in today's world in a nonjudgmental way. He notes that companies must decide whether to allow him onto their properties to take his photographs. Many companies agree, he suggests, because his images "can be read in multiple ways. So, you could have the same image in a boardroom and, frankly, the image could also be used for a poster campaign for an environmental group." Burtynsky says his photographs are meant to be metaphors for the dilemma of our modern existence. While we want to enjoy a good life, our choices can harm the planet. Burtynsky's photographs invite us to confront the complex relationship between human progress and environmental responsibility, urging us to consider the legacy we leave behind.

MATERIALS

- Phone camera or drawing paper
- Colour pencils, crayons or markers

PROCESS

- As a class, look closely at Edward Burtynsky's *Oil Spill #14, Marsh Islands, Gulf of Mexico, June 24, 2010*. What do you see? What do you think about when you look at it? How does the bird's eye view perspective contribute to the overall effect of the image?
- Burtynsky has said his images can be read in multiple ways. When looking at this photograph, do you agree? Why or why not?

- How is the relationship between humans and water evoked in this photograph? How have humans changed this landscape?
- When you hear the term landscape, what comes to mind? How is Edward Burtynsky challenging the traditional idea of landscape in this photograph?
- Take a walk around your neighbourhood or school and observe the landscape. Like Burtynsky, where do you see examples of human activity on the landscape? For example, a plant that has broken through a crack in the sidewalk or beaten down grass where people have made a path. Are manicured lawns, a candy wrapper on the ground or a row of street lights on a neighbourhood street evidence of where humans have changed the landscape? What do you notice?
- Document your discovery using a phone camera or sketching pencil and paper. Like Burtynsky, experiment with a bird's eye view to create an abstract landscape image the viewer may not have seen before.
- What story does your image tell? More specifically, what story does your image tell about the effects that humans have had on your neighbourhood or school?
- If you want, write a short paragraph to go with your image.
- Display your artworks in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Discuss the following:

- What did you take into consideration while planning and creating your image?
- Which elements did you consider from Edward Burtynsky's photograph?
- What similarities and differences did you notice in the images shared?
- Do you look at the impact of humans in your neighbourhood or school differently now? Why or why not?
- After completing this project, do you feel art is a powerful tool for activism? Why or why not?

FURTHER LEARNING

TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCES

BOOKS

Artis, Zanagee, and Olivia Greenspan. *A Kids Book about Climate Change*. DK Children, 2024.

Bertling, Joy G. *Art Education for a Sustainable Planet: Embracing Ecopedagogy in K-12 Classrooms*. Teachers College Press, 2023.

Sneiderman, Josh, and Erin Twamley. *Climate Change: The Science Behind Melting Glaciers and Warming Oceans with Hands-On Science Activities*. Global Publisher Series, 2020.

Solnit, Rebecca, and Thelma Young Lutunatabua. *It's Not Too Late*. Blackstone Publishing, 2023.

ONLINE RESOURCE

British Columbia Teachers' Federation. "Climate Change Connections in the B.C. Curriculum—Kindergarten–Grade 3." *BCTF Learning Resources*. Accessed September 15, 2026. <https://www.bctf.ca/classroom-resources/details/climate-change-connections-in-the-b.c.-curriculum--kindergarten---grade-3>

THANK YOU

TO OUR SCHOOL PROGRAMS SPONSORS

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Add exhibition credit line: *Future Geographies: Art in the Century of Climate Change* is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Eva Respini, Interim Co-CEO & Curator at Large, with Andrea Valentine-Lewis, Curatorial Assistant

Major Partner:



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