



Nature in Art SPRING 2009

Please return this activity when finished.



WELCOME TO THE SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART!

This activity will help you look closely at five works of art from three different exhibitions and learn how artists transform nature into works of art. Follow the directions and look closely at the works of art. Talk to your family and friends about what you see and about your answers to the questions. Please remember not to touch the works of art. When you finish, return this guide to the Information Desk so that others may use it.

The first exhibition you will visit is *Trees and Other Ramifications* in the Central Court.

Look for the large work of art called **Structure of Thought 15** by Mike and Doug Starn [2008.0313]

Does this image appear still and static or dynamic and lively?

Where do you see subtle hues and shadings between light and dark?

Think about the title—*Structure of Thought*. Although this is an image of a tree, what does the title seem to suggest?

The darkness of the tree branches and the lightness of the sky present a strong contrast, doesn't it? What kind of mood does this create?



Mike Starn and Doug Starn / born 1961, Absecon, New Jersey, United States / active United States / *Structure of Thought 15*, 2001–2005 / ink jet print, Thai mulberry paper, Gampi and tissue papers, wax, encaustic, varnish / Museum purchase: Helen Foresman Spencer Art Acquisition Fund, 2008.0313

This print, by identical twins Mike and Doug Starn, features the Camperdown Elm, a beloved landmark in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York City. The tree was planted in 1872 and has grown into a wonderfully large and beautiful specimen. Camperdown Elm is also called “weeping elm” because its branches droop low toward the ground. Depicted from underneath its canopy, however, the artists capture the complex branching structure and give the tree a monumental appearance. The title suggests a reference to brain activity and neurons.



ONE

Next, look for the print **Tree Planting Group** by Grant Wood [1986.0041]

Look closely at this print. What is going on?

In this image we see people planting a tree. What do you think their relationships are? Look closer and use clues in the painting to support your idea.

Describe the landscape surrounding this group of people. Where do you think they are?

Are you familiar with the expression "putting down one's root"? Do you think this painting also have a symbolic meaning similar to this expression?



Grant Wood
1891–1942
born near Anamosa, Iowa,
United States; died Iowa
City, Iowa, United States
Tree Planting Group, 1937
lithograph
Gift of Curtis Besinger,
1986.0041

The artist, Grant Wood, is one of the American Regionalist artists whose work reflects the values and traditions of the Midwest. This scene relates to Wood's 1932 painting *Arbor Day*, which is now featured on the Iowa quarter. This print depicts a teacher and students planting a tree in front of a schoolhouse, perhaps symbolizing the laying of the foundation of education.

Now, take the elevator to the fourth floor. Walk straight ahead as you exit the elevator and through the 17th & 18th Century Gallery. Turn right and into the South Balcony Gallery, where you will find objects from the South Pole region in the exhibition *Climate Change at the Poles*.



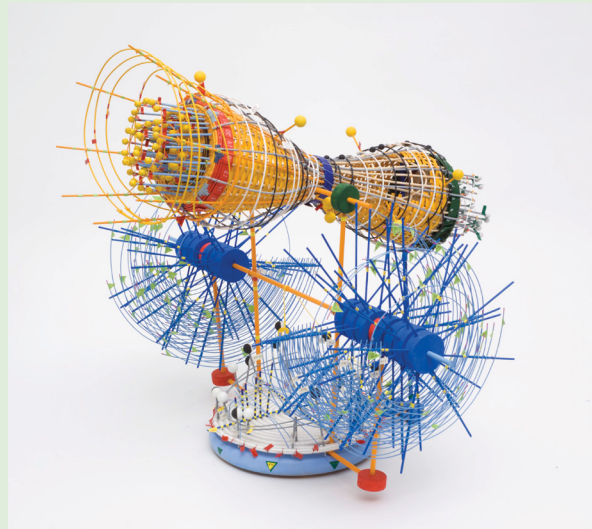
Look for the colorful object by artist Nathalie Miebach.

Look closely at the construction of this object. What do you think its make of?

Is this a symmetrical or asymmetrical design? How does the artist balance the different elements in this sculpture?

Where do you see astronomical symbols in this object? What do you think these symbols have to do with the function of this sculpture?

Read the title of this piece—**Antarctic Surveyor II—Tracking Solar & Lunar Transitions**. What clues does it give you as to the function?



Nathalie Miebach / born 1972, Zeven, Germany / active United States
Antarctic Surveyor II – Tracking Solar & Lunar Transitions, 2008 / reed, wood, data
Collection of the Artist, Courtesy Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA

This piece is a work of art as well as a functional device that tracks the paths of sun and moon during Antarctica's transitional period from the first glimpse of sunlight on Aug 22 to 24-hour daylight on October 24. If you are in Antarctica during this period of time, you can use this device to determine the time remaining until total daylight occurs, by centering either the sun or moon through the wooden, yellow circle, pulling the yellow rope, and reading the angle of the sun/moon along the thicker, orange, side pillars.



Next, move into the Kress Gallery to find the exhibition *A Tradition Redefined: Modern and Contemporary Chinese Ink Paintings from the Chu-tsing Li Collection 1950–2000*.

The Kress Gallery is just through the door behind Antarctic Surveyor piece.

Look for work by artist Liu Guosong called **High Noon**.

Abstraction: Any art that does not represent observable aspects of nature or transforms visible forms into a pattern resembling something other than the original model.

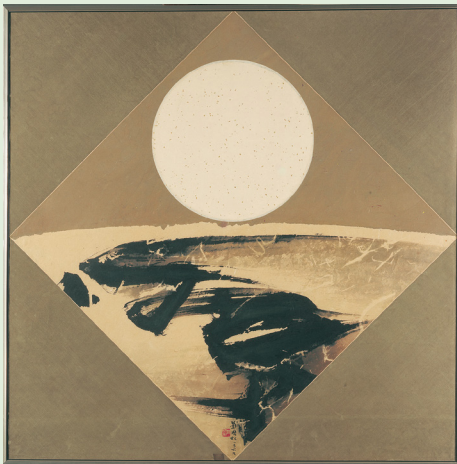
What catches your eye first in this work of art? What do you think it represents?

There are geometric as well as organic shapes in this painting. Can you find one example of each?

How would you describe the texture

of this painting? Look closer. Can you tell how the artist created the texture?

Do you think this is an abstract painting? Read the definition of “abstraction” below and discuss why you think this work is or is not an abstract painting.



Liu Guosong 劉國松, born 1932
High Noon 日正當中, 1969
ink, color, and collage on paper
Collection of Chu-tsing Li

The circular shape is the main focus of this piece. Its shape, when positioned above the curvature of the foreground shape, suggests it to be some kind of astronomical body. From the title *High Noon* we learned that it represents the sun. This painting resembles the first images of Earth taken from space. The artist was indeed inspired by photos taken by astronauts of the 1968 Apollo 8 mission, that first to put humans into lunar orbit. The artist used ink, color and collage on paper to give the work texture.

Now look for the painting by artist Xia Yifu called *Green Mountains*.

Describe the different colors you see in this painting. What mood do these colors create?

How is space represented in this painting? Can you identify fore-, middle- and backgrounds?

Do you find the artist's treatment of space realistic? That is, do you find the foreground objects are closer to you and the mountain peaks are farther away from you? How did the artist achieve this spatial illusion?



Xia Yifu, 夏一夫 born 1925 / *Green Mountains*
青綠的山, probably 1990s / ink and color
on paper / Collection of Chu-tsing Li

The treatment of space in this painting is a distinctly different from the more traditional and subjective representation of space in many other paintings in this exhibition. You may find it more realistic because it is an example of a landscape depicted from a single view point, also known as "one-point perspective." Notice how the composition resembles a bird's-eye-view photograph taken from an aircraft. It is an example of how the advancement of modern technology changes the ways artists perceives and depicts nature.



Today you have looked at different ways artists transform nature into works of art. Nature has been one of the most enduring inspirations for artists since the dawn of civilization. Please think about how nature is important to you, how the changing environment impacts your life, and what you can do to treasure and protect nature.

Thank you for visiting the Spencer today, and don't forget to return this guide to Information Desk so that other people may use it.

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