moss doesn’t grow on rolling stones...a vision of nature
by Brian Burkhardt

PURPOSE OF THIS PACKET:
To provide K-12 teachers with background information on the exhibition and suggested age appropriate applications for exploring the concepts, meaning, and artistic intent of the work exhibited, before, during, and after the museum visit.

CURRICULAR UNIT TOPIC:
Examining the relationships between humans and plants, animals and insects. The Focus of this educational packet and curricular unit is to observe, question, explore, create and reflect.

EXPLORE:
Students will be asked to consider the question “what if...?” as it applies to this exhibition. They will explore the background of the artist and how that contributes to his art work. They will be encouraged to research the vocabulary words and related aspects of the exhibit.

CREATE:
Students will be given time to practice sketching and drawing, and will create their own plants, insects and animals and their environments.

OBSERVE:
Students will observe the art work of Brian Burkhardt. They will notice the plants, animals and insects that he constructs and their environments; the life cycles he portrays; the materials he uses to create the art work; and the way in which he presents it all.

QUESTION:
Students will have an opportunity to read, write, sketch, listen to teachers and museum educators, and, then, to come up with questions about the natural world depicted, and the concepts behind the art work. Students will question the materials and techniques used and their own responses to the art work in the exhibition.

REFLECT:
Students will evaluate their final art products with other students from their classes and with teachers and museum educators. They will be given feedback on the art work and the concepts behind the making of the art work.

After this process, each person will then write an essay about their process of making art and the concepts behind the work. This portion of the museum experience can be carried out in the student’s home school and classroom.
INTRODUCTION

In this museum experience students will view the art work of artist Brian Burkhardt. Brian Burkhardt (American, b. 1971) is a former organic farmer turned artist who is inspired by a concern for the environment, botany, and the creative process. The centerpiece of moss doesn’t grow on rolling stones...a vision of nature by Brian Burkhardt is Dome, a geodesic structure made from wood, aluminum and screening that serves as his studio and in which he created all the works in the exhibition.

His work is rooted in a love of hybridization and adaptation. Mimicking the manmade “natural order” of the world, his created specimens are titled in Latin and are often presented under the pristine glass of a natural history museum.

Rooted in the question “what if...?” his work explores the symbiotic relationships between humans, animals and plants, examining how plants, flowers and insects adapt to changes in contemporary environments. Interestingly, he uses unusual materials to create his work. Most of the materials can be found in places like Home Depot, or Michael’s craft stores, or in the dumpster.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

At the start of the twenty-first century our society is faced with many issues, and often those dilemmas have global ramifications for the natural environment.

Problems we face in relation to technological inventions that may alter the course of the evolution of species, including the human species, are problems which the artist Brian Burkhardt chooses to address his work.

Artists working in the vein of the Art and Ecology movement have been tackling these issues for decades. They share a common desire to improve the current ecological situation and to curtail the wanton technological despoilation of the environment.

The work of Brian Burkhardt engages the human interaction with flora and fauna. His process is deeply rooted in his training as both an artist and organic farmer, from his earlier days. He has a unique approach that engages many aspects of human intervention in the environment with thought provoking implications for the future of the species.

~ Megan McShane (2008), Editor

Brian Burkhardt: Ecological Mimesis
LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the work of artist Brian Burkhardt. They will learn about his artistic techniques, skills and style.

They will learn about why he came to be an artist and how his background relates to the art work he makes. They will explore the connections between his art work and science, farming, environmental studies and more.

Students and teachers will consider the concepts behind his art and what those concepts mean to viewers. They will explore ideas generated as the result of viewing his work. They will sketch and draw Burkhardt’s imagined plants and animals, and develop word lists that describe what they see and how they feel about this work. They may write short paragraphs in response to worksheet questions about the exhibit.

In the Shelton Studio, students will explore materials and ideas related to studying the plants and animals. They may work 2-dimensionally or 3-dimensionally, using their notes, word lists and sketches as reference. While doing this they will think about connections and relationships they have with the natural world.

Students and teachers may research and engage in conversations about the work of Burkhardt before arriving at the art museum, using the vocabulary word list attached to this lesson as the beginning of their investigative process. Additional information and materials may be found as the result of web-searching the artist. They may begin conversations about how humans interact with the natural world and learn about areas of science that study the relationships between plants and animals and people. Older students might consider the writings of science fiction authors, and the art work in movies like Star Wars and Star Trek. These conversations will hopefully lay the groundwork for future opportunities to pursue research into and discussion about the intersections between art and science.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

The following questions will help students better understand Brian Burkhardt’s work, and will help begin to make connections between the studies of art and sciences.

GRADES K-6

- What is the subject of this art work?
- Are the plants and animals in this exhibit real or imaginary?
- How can you tell?
- How does the artist make the plants and animals seem real?
- Why do you think he wants us to believe that they are real?
- Do you think humans influence the way plants and animals live?
- How do we learn more about the relationships between plants and animals and people?
- Is this exhibit art or science? Why?

GRADES 7-12

- What does this art make you think about?
- Is this work plausible? In other words, does it seem possible for plants and animals like this to exist? Why or why not?
- How does this work make you think about our environment and our role in the natural world?
- Do you agree or disagree with the artist, who believes we have a responsibility to pay attention to the plants and animals in our world. Why or why not?
- Do you think the fact that Burkhardt was an organic farmer influences the work he makes? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How can artists serve as a “voice” for those who cannot speak?
- How are the study of art and science the same? Different?
ART QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Does this work look real or not?
- What makes it look that way?
- What materials does the artist use to create his art work?
- Why do you think the artist uses materials that are so “un-natural” to create work that appears so realistic? Do you think he does this on purpose?
- How important are the materials to the meaning of his work?
- What artistic devices does the artist use (patterns, repetition, etc.)?
- What artistic skills does the artist need in order to create this work?
- What other skills or knowledge does the artist need?

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

In order to prepare students for their museum visit and extend learning possibilities, we suggest teachers and students consider the following activities:

- Students read about and research organic farming.
- Students study science to learn about the relationships between plants and animals and people.
- Students make their own terrarium and observe what takes place every day.
- Students read Science Fiction stories.
- Students view movies such as Star Wars and Star Trek, focusing on the art and characters created to support the story lines.
- Students and teachers visit hardware stores and craft stores to explore the different and unusual materials available to make art.

PREREQUISITE SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE

Museum educators will work with teachers to ensure that all projects are age and skills appropriate.

Teachers may select words from the following vocabulary word list for students to look up and understand:

- sculpture
- 2-dimensional
- 3-dimensional
- realistic
- patterns
- repetition
- organic farming
- nature
- environment
- sciences dealing with the study of our world:
  - biology, botany, ecology, etc.
- geodesic
- hybridization
- adaptation
- symbiotic
- relationship
- mimicry

Brian Burkhardt (American, b. 1971), Succulent Para Aquacactus (detail), 2007, polymer clay, spray foam, Styrofoam, vellum, hot glue, wire, acrylic paint, dusting, powders, gelatin capsules, epoxy resin, glass frosting spray, spray paint, scenic snowflakes, shellac, laser transfer paper, ground foam, foam board epoxy, acrylic dome, MDF, spray paint, a small metal vent, 32 x 32 x 12 inches
moss doesn’t grow on rolling stones...a vision of nature

Brian Burkhardt, *Shopping Cart*, abandoned shopping cart, mixed media, 48 x 36 x 75 inches, Installation view of Shopping Cart at the UW Art Museum.

**MUSEUM ACTIVITIES**

These activities are suggestions. Museum educators will work with teachers to carefully tailor all classes to their students’ needs, in support of classroom goals and district and state education standards.

**PART 1**
**TIME FRAME: 30 - 45 MINUTES**
**(IN THE GALLERIES)**
- Students will closely observe the art work of Brian Burkhardt.
- Students may be given a worksheet so they can respond in writing or drawing to the work they see by recording their observations and their own thoughts about the work.
- Students will create word lists that help them remember the way the art looks or describes the way they feel about the work.
- Students will discuss what they see with museum educators.
- They learn more about the artist and why he creates this art work.
- Students will think about the connections between art and science exhibited here. They may discuss organic farming, consider environmental issues that are important to them, define vocabulary words and provide examples in the natural world that fit the definitions.
- They will consider the question “what if...?” as it applies to the specimens exhibited here.
- Students will consider the question “what if...?” as it applies to an environmental issue that is important to them.

**PART 2**
**TIME FRAME: 45 - 60 MINUTES**
**(IN THE SHELTON STUDIO)**
The following projects may be considered individually, or combined, or museum educators will work with teachers to develop specific projects which support ongoing classroom work.
- Students will explore artistic devices that are also found in nature, and in other areas of study, such as patterns and repetition. They will create their own plant or insect incorporating similar artistic devices.
- Students will create their own environment for plants and animals, considering life cycles, water and sunlight requirements, the need for safety and more.
- Students will apply the question “what if...?” to an environmental situation of their choice, then construct a hypothesis for solving the situation. They will create a visual representation of their solution.
**POST VISIT ACTIVITIES**

We have found that students achieve maximum benefit from a museum visit when time is scheduled for post-visit activities. Here are some suggestions:

- Students might “research” the plant or animal they created in the Shelton Studio, writing a report that describes the entity’s life cycle, responses to environmental stimulations and more, using scientific writing style and research processes.
- Students may research methods of organic farming and compare and contrast that with other farming approaches.
- Students might create their own terrarium or aquarium and observe, record and research changes over time.
- Students may research artists and scientists whose work deals with environmental issues and studies, and pull together a presentation on their findings, using a variety of technological approaches (e.g. web searches, Power Point presentations).
- Students may write their own science fiction story about animals or plants who experience mutation, mimicry, symbiotic relationships and more and who use these devices as the means for resolving a problem.
- Students might visually create the “setting” for their story, using a variety of artistic approaches, both 2-d and 3-d, and incorporating unusual and found materials in their art work.

**SUGGESTED CURRICULUM USE**

The study of *moss doesn’t grow on rolling stones . . . a vision of nature* by Brian Burkhardt, and its cultural, artistic, historic, scientific, and environmental aspects will tie to multiple curricular areas including: the arts, math, sciences, history, English, reading and writing, agricultural studies, debate and philosophy. Museum staff will work with teachers to address specific Wyoming Teaching Standards and to align museum projects and studies with ongoing classroom curricular units and lessons.

---

Brian Burkhardt (American, b. 1971), *Dome*, 2008, wood, galvanized aluminum, batten tape, greenhouse plastic, staples, MDF, screening, metal clips, 12 x 12 x 10 ft
SOME RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- http://bburkhardt.com/
- http://www.youtube.com/
  watch?v=M2zFudlWU14
- http://www.youtube.com/
  watch?v=9I7CnbBa4Wk
- http://ofrf.org/index.html
- Research on the life cycles and characteristics of plants, insects, and animals.
- Research on current environmental issues: newspapers, science digests and student readers, hunting and fishing magazines, agriculture and organic farming brochures, etc.
- Contacts with Game and Fish Biologists and County Extension Offices
- Subject search online for appropriate age-level books. Examples include:
  - Caterpillars, Bugs & Butterflies, Mel Boring, North Word Books, 1996
  - Bugs Are Insects, Anne Rockwell, Let’s Read and Find Out (Harper Collins), 2001
  - Life Cycles, Maria L. Chang, Scholastic, Inc., 1998

MATERIALS TO BE SUPPLIED TO EACH STUDENT

Materials for selected Shelton Studio projects are provided by the art museum.

ASSESSMENT & DOCUMENTATION

In order to ensure that our museum tour program is meeting the needs of teachers and students, we may ask that participants help us assess the activities and learning that take place.

Examples of evaluation tools include:
1. Students will self-assess using a quick survey that asks them to consider their response to the gallery discussions and explorations, and their studio experience,
2. Teachers will assess the overall visit by completing a quick-survey that asks for their observation and assessment of students’ experiences, as well as assessment of the overall process of the museum visit.
3. Museum educators will record their observations and assessments.
4. When studio time permits, we will ask students to briefly discuss their art completed in the Shelton Studio.
5. Museum staff may take photographs of students and teachers to document the learning taking place and the work produced during a museum visit. These are available to teachers upon written request for use in teaching and student portfolios.