



THROUGH THOSE
TREES

THROUGH THOSE TREES

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program
Curated by Becca Taylor © 2020 Alberta Society of Artists

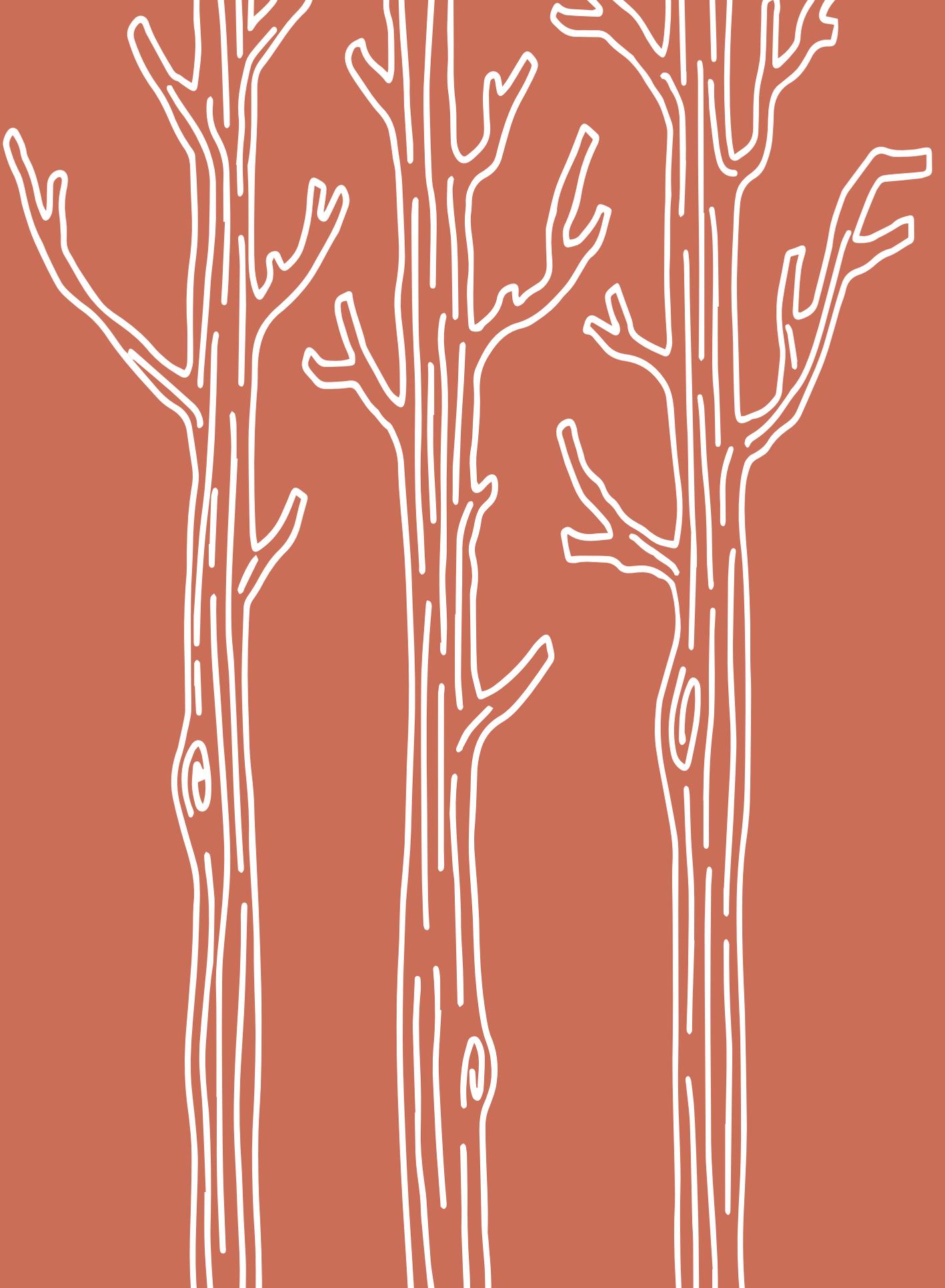




TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT	5
EXHIBITION STATEMENT	7
CURATOR BECCA TAYLOR	9
ARTIST HALIE FINNEY	11
LIST OF IMAGES	13
EDUCATION GUIDE	19
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	20
ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	21
BEGINNER LESSON	23
INTERMEDIATE LESSON	29
ADVANCED LESSON	35
VOCABULARY	41
RESOURCES	44
CREDITS	45

Cover image

Away he goes
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint on
transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Left image

He found this buttercup
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint on
transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist

ABOUT

The Travelling Exhibition Program (TRES)

Since 1980, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial travelling exhibition program. The TRES program strives to ensure every Albertan is provided with an opportunity to enjoy fully developed exhibitions in schools, libraries, healthcare centres, and smaller rural institutions and galleries throughout the province.

The TRES program assists in making both the AFA's extensive art collection and the artwork of contemporary Alberta artists available to Albertans. Four regional organizations coordinate the program for the AFA:

REGION ONE – Northwest: The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie

REGION TWO – Northeast / North Central: The Art Gallery of Alberta

REGION THREE – Southwest: The Alberta Society of Artists

REGION FOUR – Southeast: The Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA)

Beginning in 1972, the Alberta Art Collection was proposed as an opportunity to support and encourage Alberta artists by purchasing original works, as well as creating a legacy collection for the people of Alberta.

As a crown agency of the Government of Alberta, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act was later established in 1991 with a mandate to support the arts in Alberta. This mandate is accomplished by providing persons and organizations with the opportunity to participate in the arts in Alberta; fostering and promoting the enjoyment of works of art by Alberta artists; collecting, preserving and displaying works of art by Alberta artists; and encouraging artists resident in Alberta to continue their work.

The Alberta Society of Artists (ASA)

The Alberta Society of Artists is a large part of Alberta's visual arts history, through its members, its exhibitions and other initiatives. The ASA was founded in 1931, making it the oldest society of juried professional artists in the province.

The ASA is an active membership of professional visual artists who strive for excellence. Through exhibition, education and communication the society increases public awareness of the visual arts.

The ASA is contracted by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to develop and circulate the TREX exhibitions to communities throughout southwest Alberta.



EXHIBITION STATEMENT

Each region has an oral narrative and is host to the evidence of events that have happened throughout time. The land shifts with each generation—growing old, dying and is reborn—while communities develop and grow. Some people are lucky to hear stories that have become linked to a specific region or landscape. Some people are lucky to explore those same areas. Our ancestors had a similar relationship to those regions and landscapes—to gather, explore, rally, work, live and survive. We coexist, just in separate times. The narrative shifts and is shaped by the community, generation to generation, keeping the legacy alive and creating a mythological idealization of what occurred at one time on this land. The narrative changes slightly each time it is told.

Through those trees is a solo exhibition by artist Halie Finney that features her most recent work. The artist explores generations of her Métis family's narratives within the Lesser Slave Lake region where Finney grew up. Her kin shared the same region. Each generation developed their own narratives as they witnessed births, life and death within the region and the changing landscape. In her work, Finney develops characters to recreate and reimagine happenings within her community and the surrounding land. Her characters link life and death, animate and inanimate to tell and imagine fictional and nonfictional narratives of her and her family's lives.

Halie Finney is known for her illustrative narratives and development of characters that reflect stories, memories and people in her home community. Her narratives create a folklore, as she develops stories within the mediums of installation, film and performance. Finney's retelling of local narratives and memories grow into a magical exploration of life with nonlinear timelines and interconnected stories. She honours her deep-rooted family relationship to the region by building and exploring local histories and narratives. In this exhibition, the artist's playful approach to illustration and layering imagery through transparencies creates dimensional, interconnected sagas for the characters. Finney's work reflects narratives familiar to her and the locale in which she grew up with the use of imagery common in many different regions of rural living. With this approach, Finney allows the audience to link their own narratives with the work. *Through those trees* explores what and how it means to live, work, grow up in or be connected to a rural landscape in Alberta.

–Becca Taylor, Curator



CURATOR BECCA TAYLOR

BIOGRAPHY

Becca Taylor is an artist and curator of Cree, Scottish and Irish descent. Her curatorial practice involves investigations of Indigenous community building, food sovereignty and Indigenous feminisms. She was awarded the Aboriginal curator-in-residence, from the Canada Council for the Arts in 2015. In 2018, Taylor co-curated the 4th iteration of La Biennale d'art contemporain autochtone (BACA) / Contemporary Native Art Biennial with Niki Little, entitled *níchiwamiskwém | nimidet | my sister | ma sœur*.¹ In 2018, she was awarded the Dr. Joane Cardinal-Schubert Curatorial Fellowship for Indigenous Curators through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Becca is currently the acting Director of the Ociciwan Contemporary Art Centre in Edmonton, Alberta, which opened in early 2020.

¹ "2018 Theme," Contemporary Native Art Biennial (BACA) – 4th edition, *níchiwamiskwém | nimidet | my sister | ma sœur*, accessed August 7, 2020, <https://www.baca.ca/en/2018-theme/>.



Image courtesy Becca Taylor

ARTIST HALIE FINNEY

ARTIST STATEMENT

As a multidisciplinary artist, I understand my Métis heritage through my family's experiences and memories of the Lesser Slave Lake region, where generations of my family have resided.

My mother and grandparents were all raised in the same hamlet and all are familiar with the same landmarks, but each of their experiences with these landmarks is varied. Family members can recount independent memories, describing the same road, the same bridge, the same hill—but maybe the road was less busy, the bridge was stronger, the hill was bigger—in one recollection over another. Sometimes, when a story is told by a family member it is revealed that “there used to be a trail that cut through those trees,” or that “the schoolhouse was just right over there.” In this way, the land is like a body that never dies, aging and changing over time. To mourn a person is also to mourn the landscape that shaped them. I compare the differences between each of my family's memories of a particular place as a way to show the liminality between generations and the constant but ever-changing landscape that they all shared.

Through a cast of characters, I revise concepts from personal stories to tell disjointed narratives on sheets of layered transparencies. Each moment depicted draws from both the past and present and from fiction and reality. These stories are fluid and loose like a memory—forming a fantasy-like copy of somewhere beloved, where the past keeps passing while everything stays the same.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Halie Finney is an emerging Métis artist based in Edmonton, Alberta. She received a bachelor of fine arts in drawing in 2017 from the Alberta University of Art and Design (formerly Alberta College of Art and Design). She also graduated from MacEwan University in 2014 with a diploma in fine arts.

Born and raised in the Lesser Slave Lake region of Alberta, Finney holds a strong connection to the area. She understands her Métis heritage through memories told to her by generations of her family who still reside there and through the characteristics of her home's landscape and lifestyle. Finney has created a mythology of characters living in a simplified storybook-like version of her hometown. The band of characters play out nonlinear, idiosyncratic narratives that are expressed through animations, costumes, drawings, paintings, performances and other objects.



Image courtesy Halie Finney

LIST OF IMAGES



There, in the leaves

Halie Finney

2020

Acrylic ink and acrylic paint
on transparencies and paper

25.4 x 25.4 cm

Courtesy of the artist



I see him through Grandma's window

Halie Finney

2020

Acrylic ink and acrylic paint on
transparencies and paper

25.4 x 25.4 cm

Courtesy of the artist



He's having a one-person picnic
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint on
transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Away he goes
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint
on transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist



He found this buttercup
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint
on transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist



We watch him gather wood
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint on
transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist



He made this fire for us
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint
on transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist



He's gone but I know he was here
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint on
transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist



He used to sit behind the trailer
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint on
transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist



We all miss you
Halie Finney
2020
Acrylic ink and acrylic paint on
transparencies and paper
25.4 x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist

EDUCATION GUIDE

This education guide is comprised of activities to move the audience through the various themes presented in *Through those trees*. The content of the exhibition and the following lesson plans have been carefully developed and designed to enhance the curriculum set by Alberta Education. The guide includes questions for discussion, vocabulary and activities designed for the level of ability, understanding and complexity of the participants:

Beginner – participants who are just beginning their exploration of art.

Intermediate – participants who have some experience looking at and creating art.

Advanced – participants who have much experience looking at and creating art.

Throughout the Education Guide, you will find key concepts, words and terms emphasized that can be found in the Vocabulary section.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Below are questions that are intended to prompt meaningful discussion about the content presented in *Through those trees*. The questions can be selected and the vocabulary altered to suit the appropriate age level.

When Hailey Finney created these artworks, why do you think she wanted to use layers, instead of painting everything on one surface?

Look closely at the layers present in the artworks, what do you notice is somewhat hidden or obscured? What do you notice is in plain view?

Spend time reading each of the artwork titles. Can you identify a narrative present in them? Do you think you could identify a main character? Who do you think the artist might be referring to in the titles that reference "he" or "him?"

When you look at the artworks all together, which colours do the artworks share? What visual effect does a consistent colour palette have on the series?

If you were to look at these artworks and tell a story to a friend, what story might you tell them?

*In the artworks titled *There, in the leaves* and *He's having a one-person picnic*, there is a very obvious bear present. In a few of the other artworks, the bear is present but not as easy to spot. Can you identify all of the artworks that the bear is present in?*

Do these artworks remind you of any stories you have heard before?

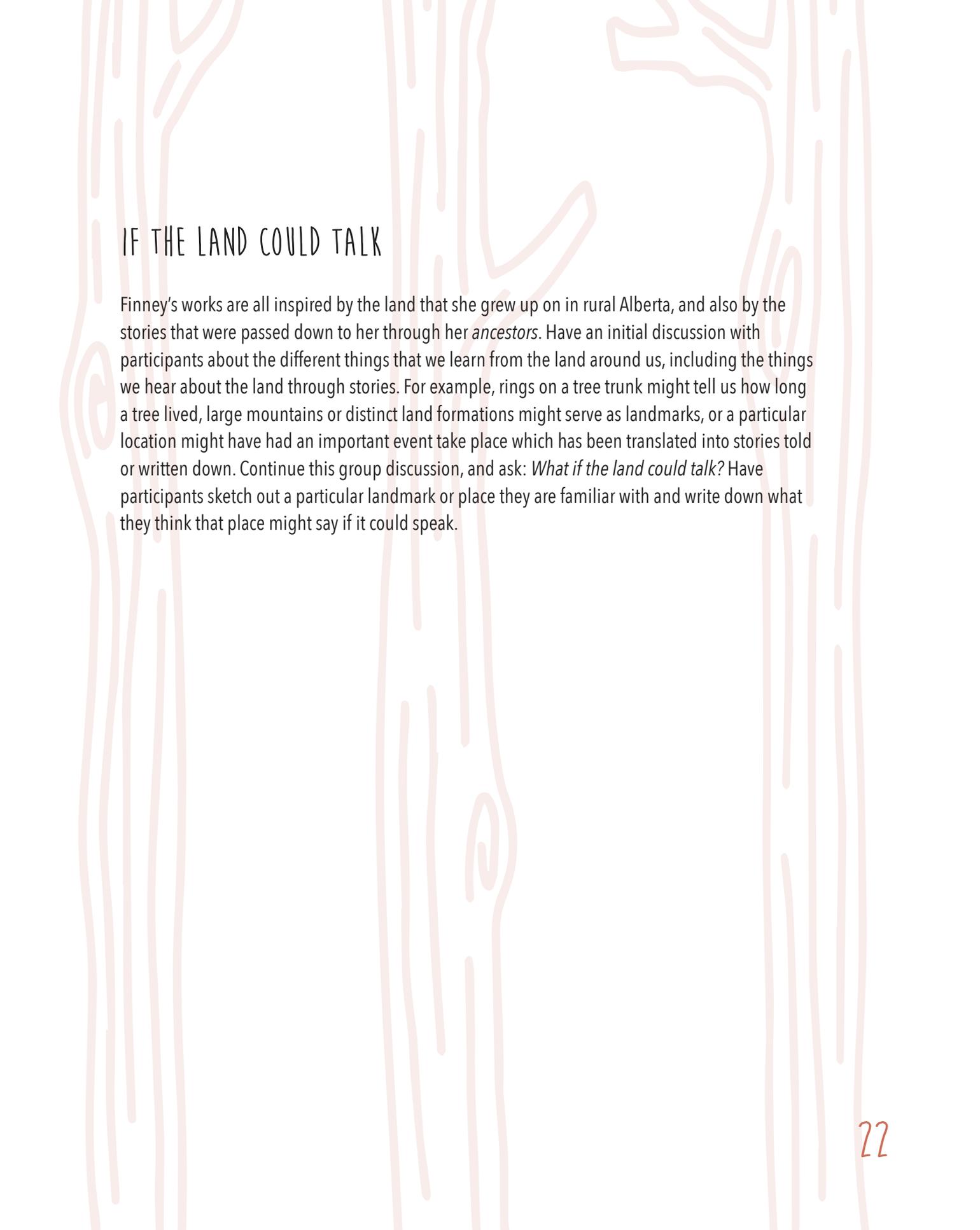
ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

STORYTIME PUPPETS

Host an animal puppet crafting activity for participants to create either a bear (as in Halie Finney's series) or another familiar animal that the participant can imagine a story about. The puppets can be created using basic materials such as cardstock cutouts taped to popsicle sticks, toilet paper rolls cut and painted into animal shapes, or paper bags with animal faces drawn on and paper ears attached using glue or staples. Have participants interact with each other as if their animal puppets were talking to one another.

SPYING THROUGH THE TREES

Have participants spend at least five minutes studying the works in *Through those trees* and instruct them to pay attention to the details in each artwork. Afterward, sit in a circle with participants and have one person begin the game. Have the first player note something specific they spotted in one of the artworks and hint out loud to the group what they saw. They could start with the famous phrase, "eye spy with my little eye, something that is..." and complete the sentence with a descriptive adjective like, "...something that is... yellow." If the "something" is, for example, the yellow curtains in the work *I see him through Grandma's window*, then participants take turns to try to guess the "something" by naming or pointing to details in the artworks. With many of the colours being similar in each of the different artworks, it may take some time until someone guesses the detail in question, but once it has been guessed another participant can start a new round by "spying" a new detail.



IF THE LAND COULD TALK

Finney's works are all inspired by the land that she grew up on in rural Alberta, and also by the stories that were passed down to her through her *ancestors*. Have an initial discussion with participants about the different things that we learn from the land around us, including the things we hear about the land through stories. For example, rings on a tree trunk might tell us how long a tree lived, large mountains or distinct land formations might serve as landmarks, or a particular location might have had an important event take place which has been translated into stories told or written down. Continue this group discussion, and ask: *What if the land could talk?* Have participants sketch out a particular landmark or place they are familiar with and write down what they think that place might say if it could speak.

BEGINNER LESSON PLAN

LAYERED COLOUR AND LINE POSTCARDS

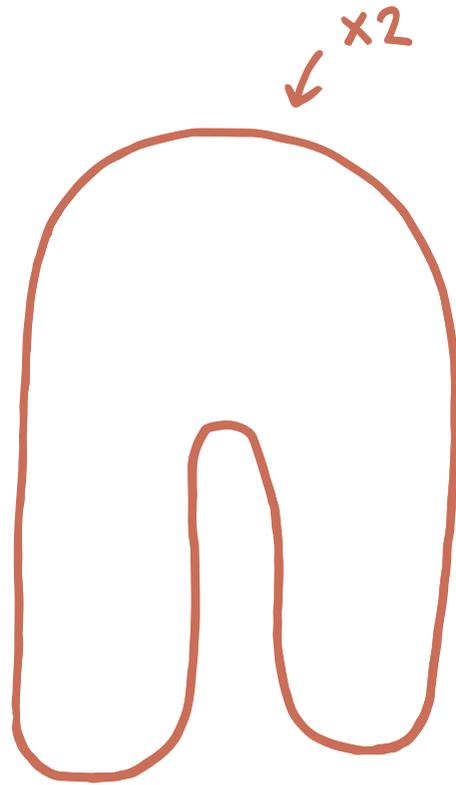
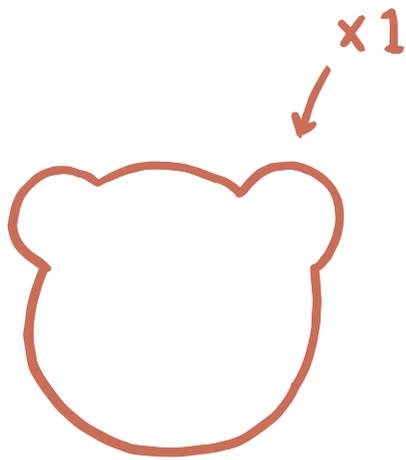
Colour and line are incredibly important in the development of Finney's characters and environments. The artist selects very specific hues to create artworks that are not meant to be *hyperrealistic*, but are rather *whimsical*, imaginative and rendered with Finney's distinctive, bold line-style. In *Through those trees*, specifically, bright colours and bold lines are complemented by a third technique called *layering* to create more *depth* in the works. All three of these techniques—colour, line and layers—will be explored in this lesson plan.

MATERIALS

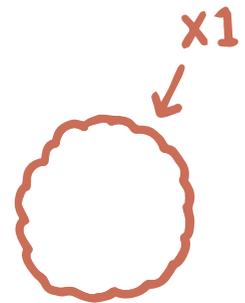
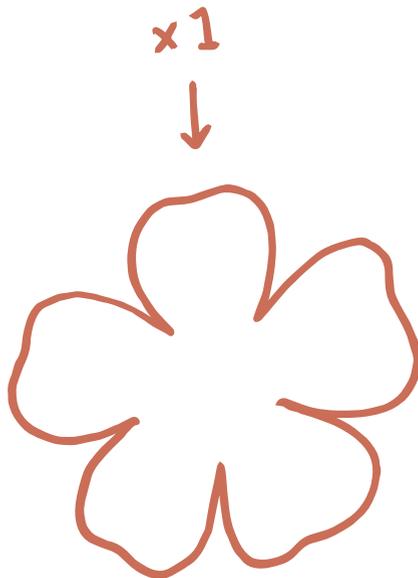
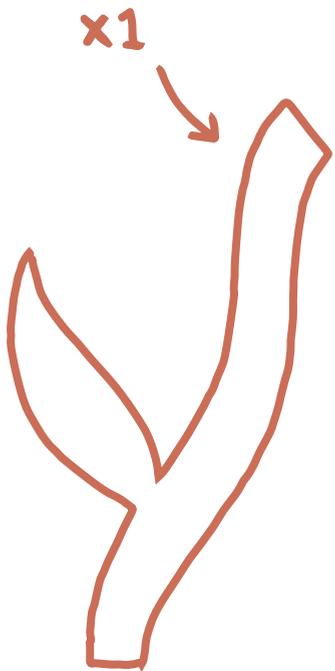
Scanner and printer for printing the templates, basic printer paper, white cardstock paper, acrylic paints, paintbrushes, pencils, scissors, permanent markers, corrugated cardboard and glue sticks.

PREPARATION

Scan and print out the templates of the bear and the buttercup cutouts (opposite page) onto regular printer paper and offer a basic demonstration about colour and lines using a *colour wheel* and discussing *line weight*. Show a completed example of the project so that participants will be able to see how the different components of the activity will come together in the end.



TEMPLATES



INSTRUCTIONS

- Step 1 Provide each participant with 4 sheets of cardstock measured at 4 x 6 inches each.
- Step 2 Have participants decide if they would like to make a bear postcard or a buttercup postcard (see Templates). Once decided, participants can cut out their templates.
- Step 3 On the first sheet of cardstock, paint a solid colour for a background using the acrylic paints and paintbrushes and let dry.
- Step 4 Cut out one of each template shape provided on the basic printer paper (from the Preparation section of this activity), then trace the shapes onto the second, third and fourth sheet of cardstock using a pencil. Once the shapes have been traced, cut them out from the cardstock.
- Step 5 Paint each shape one solid colour and let the sheet dry.
- Step 6 Once all paint is dry, participants can draw on top of the paint with permanent markers. Experiment with bold black lines, or subtle contrasts like dark red or blue marker on top of lighter hues of blue or red paint. Participants can try to imitate the repetitive mark-making seen in Halie Finney's artworks.
- Step 7 Cut small sections of corrugated cardboard (1/2 x 1/2-inch squares will do) and glue these onto the backs of the three layers prepared for the postcard.
- Step 8 Assemble the layers.

THE BEAR

- (1) Lay the cardstock down in portrait orientation and glue one set of legs roughly in the centre to the background (these will be the bear's hind legs).
- (2) Glue the second set of legs (his front legs) atop his hind legs but position them so that you can see all four of the bear's paws.
- (3) Glue the bear's head to the second layer of legs.

THE BUTTERCUP

- (1) Lay the cardstock down in portrait orientation and glue the stem to the background in the centre of the page.
- (2) Glue the flower petals to the stem at the top.
- (3) Glue the flower centre to the middle of the petals.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What did you learn about colour, line, and layering as you completed this activity?

Before you completed this activity, was it easier or harder to notice the different layers in Halie Finney's artworks?

How does layering create depth in an artwork?



VARIATION

Many simple shapes can be layered up to create different types of animals, plants or even landscapes using this lesson plan.

INTERMEDIATE LESSON PLAN

ANTHROPOMORPHIZED DIORAMAS

In Halie Finney's art practice, she finds playful ways to incorporate storytelling—often including animals performing human-like activities in the narrative. In this lesson plan, participants will develop a short story that incorporates an *anthropomorphized* animal in some way, and they will depict one scene from their narrative visually by making a two-dimensionally layered diorama.

There are endless ways to create a diorama; however, all the different approaches seem to share a curiosity and wonder toward capturing the world in miniature. Observe Finney's artworks closely and consider how the layers in her two-dimensional paintings could be separated into layers for a diorama.

MATERIALS

Sketchbooks, pencils, shoebox, ruler, assorted colours of cardstock and construction paper, scissors, markers or paint, adhesive (spray adhesive, tape, white glue and glue sticks), blank sheet of paper*, bone folder*, X-Acto knife, and a cutting mat.

*optional material



PREPARATION

Ideally, read a few favourite illustrated children's books together. A few recommended books related to themes found in Halie Finney's work can be found in the Resources section of the catalogue. Reading books together will help participants to engage their imaginations and will provide them with some storytelling building blocks. Afterward, review the basic parts of a story—beginning, middle and end—and provide participants with a time limit to develop their own short stories. Once each participant has a story in mind, they can begin sketching ideas for the layout of their dioramas. It may be helpful to review the terms *background* and *foreground* before they sketch out their plans.



INSTRUCTIONS

The following instructions will be for developing a woodland diorama, but the steps can be altered to suit a variety of different narrative scenes.

- Step 1 Measure the inside of the shoebox. Use these dimensions to cut out cardstock or construction paper that will cover the bottom, back and sides of the box. This will serve as the background for the diorama.
- Step 2 Before adhering the background into the box, draw or paint on additional background details. In the woodlands example, see added trees. Let dry prior to gluing into the shoebox.
- Step 3 Attach the background paper to the back and sides of the shoebox with a glue stick or spray adhesive (do not use too much glue, as large quantities can make the paper bubble). When the background paper is positioned correctly in the box, rub the entire area so that it sticks evenly to the shoebox sides. If participants are worried about rubbing away any painted or drawn details, they can place a blank sheet of paper over the top of each surface prior to rubbing the surface to press down the glue.
- Step 4 Use a bone folder or the front of a fingernail to press in corners when gluing the background paper into the shoebox.
- Step 5 Draw and cut out any foreground parts of the scene from cardstock using a pencil, an X-Acto knife and a cutting board. In the woodland diorama example on the following pages, see the cut-out trees, stump, grass and bear. When cutting out the foreground pieces, leave enough room at the bottom of the cut pieces so that half an inch can be folded backward as an attachment tab.
- Step 6 Attach the foreground elements of the scene to the base using an adhesive, staggering the layers so they provide depth.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How were you able to visualize a scene from the narrative you developed? Was it challenging to translate a scene from your written story into a diorama?

How does visual art compliment a story?

What is the hardest part about telling a story? What is the easiest part?

How did you develop a character for your story?

What other ways could you craft a diorama to represent a scene visually?

VARIATION

Cut out the foreground and background shapes from old books, magazines or newspapers and collage the diorama details, or develop a diorama using layers of transparent plastic, permanent markers and clear tape, similar to the way that Halie Finney creates her two-dimensional artworks.

ADVANCED LESSON PLAN

PAPIER MÂCHÉ CHARACTER MASKS

Occasionally Halie Finney likes to bring her characters to life by making costumes of them using masks made out of papier mâché. *Papier mâché* has been used since ancient times to make lots of objects—all using crushed up bits of paper and some sort of paste to hold the form together.² In this lesson plan, participants will explore one method of papier mâché to make their own animal character masks.

MATERIALS

Surface covering, tracing paper*, pencils, pencil crayons, sketchbooks, scissors, sturdy cardboard, newspaper, masking tape, plastic bags*, papier-mâché paste (see recipe below), large bowl, large sturdy stick, duct tape* or wood glue*, acrylic paints and paintbrushes.

*Optional material

Papier-mâché paste recipe: 1-part water to 1-part flour. Whisk together in a bowl.

PREPARATION

Review the terms *form* and *armature* before getting started and lay down a surface covering as this project can get messy! Next, look at pictures of different kinds of animals and ask participants to identify the various shapes and forms that make up their faces. For example, *does the animal have a short and round snout like an otter? Or a long snout like a brown bear? What shapes or forms will need to be added on to make the ears?* If it helps, participants can trace the shapes over printed images of their chosen animal using tracing paper and pencils.

² "The Art and Craft of Papier Mâché | The History of Papier Mâché," *MyLearning*, Leeds Museums and Galleries: Lotherton, accessed June 8, 2020, <https://www.mylearning.org/stories/the-art-and-craft-of-papier-mch-/1009>.



INSTRUCTIONS

- Step 1 Use pencils, pencil crayons and sketchbooks to plan the forms and colours of the papier-mâché character masks.
- Step 2 Cut out the basic shape of the animal face in cardboard to the desired size of the mask. This will become the base of the papier-mâché armature.
- Step 3 Create the form of the animal face on the armature by taping balled up newspaper to the cardboard base. Optionally, participants can tape plastic bags over the crumpled newspaper to create a smooth surface layer and to give a more structured form to the armature.
- Step 4 Dip strips of newspaper in the papier-mâché paste bowl and apply to the entire surface of the mask armature (front and back).
- Step 5 Let dry, and then repeat step 4 two more times to create a stronger mask surface. Allow to dry completely before continuing to step 6.
- Step 6 Once the mask is dry and the surface is strong (you should be able to knock on it without it denting), participants can optionally attach a stick handle to the mask using wood glue or duct tape so it can be held up in front of their face.
- Step 7 Use acrylic paints and brushes to add colour and detail to the animal character mask and if desired, give it a name!





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What did you learn about form and shape when developing your masks?

If you were to sculpt an entire body for your animal character, what other forms and shapes would you have to use?

What were the challenges you came up against when using the papier-mâché technique? What advantages did the technique have?

What other objects do you think you could make with papier mâché?

After creating a mask of one of your own imagined animal characters, does it bring the character to life for you?



VARIATIONS

Experiment with other papier mâché sculpting techniques...

Challenge participants to blend up newspaper into smaller bits of paper pulp, and then mould it with paste into a sculpture using only hands and modelling tools. Use papier mâché to create textures or sculpted patterns on other surfaces like cardboard or canvas. Or, make moulds for masks using air-dry clay. The possibilities with papier mâché are endless!

VOCABULARY

Ancestor - a person, typically one more remote than a grandparent, from whom one is descended.

Anthropomorphize - attribute human characteristics or behaviour to (a god, animal or object).

Armature - an open framework on which a sculpture is moulded with clay or similar material.

Background - the part of a painting representing what lies behind objects in the foreground. [See foreground].

Colour palette - a palette of different colours of paint, especially as used by an artist; (now usually in extended use) a range or selection of colours from which one can choose.

Colour wheel - a circular diagram of the spectrum used to show the relationships between the colours.

Composition - the artistic arrangement of the parts of a picture.

Depth - the apparent existence of three dimensions in a picture or other two-dimensional representation.

Diorama - a model representing a scene with three-dimensional figures, either in miniature or as a large-scale museum exhibit.

Foreground - the part of a scene or representation that is nearest to and in front of the spectator.

Form - the shape and structure of something as distinguished from its material.

Hue - the attribute of colours that permits them to be classed as red, yellow, green, blue or an intermediate between any contiguous pair of these colours.

Hyperrealism - another word for *photorealism* : a style of painting flourishing in the 1970s, especially in the U.S., England and France, and depicting commonplace scenes or ordinary people, with a meticulously detailed realism, flat images, and barely discernible brushwork that suggests and often is based on or incorporates an actual photograph.

Landmark - a conspicuous object on land that marks a locality.

Layer(s) - something lying over or under something else; a level or tier.

Layering - the action of arranging something in layers.

Line-weight - the relative thickness of a drawn rule or painted brushstroke.

Narrative - a story or account of events, experiences or the like, whether true or fictitious.

Narrative arc - sometimes simply called "arc" or "story arc," narrative arc refers to the chronological construction of plot in a novel or story. Typically, a narrative arc looks something like a pyramid, made up of the following components: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution.

Papier mâché - a substance made of pulped paper or paper pulp mixed with glue and other materials or of layers of paper glued and pressed together, moulded when moist to form various articles, and becoming hard and strong when dry.

Perspective - the technique or process of representing on a plane or curved surface the spatial relation of objects as they might appear to the eye; specifically : representation in a drawing or painting of parallel lines as converging in order to give the illusion of depth and distance.

Scene - the place where an incident in real life or fiction occurs or occurred.

Shape - the external form, contours or outline of someone or something.

Story - a narrative, either true or fictitious, in prose or verse, designed to interest, amuse or instruct the hearer or reader; tale.

Style - a way of painting, writing, composing, building and so forth, characteristic of a particular period, place, person or movement.

Whimsical - playfully quaint or fanciful, especially in an appealing and amusing way.

[Vocabulary definitions are simplified and/or paraphrased; spelling is Canadianized for print purposes.]

VOCABULARY SOURCES

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CREDITS

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Artist – Halie Finney

Curator – Becca Taylor

Editor – Caralee Hubbell

Education – Ashley Slemming and Halie Finney

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Framing – Kathy and Dave Foxcroft

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