

Aerial Cityscapes Inspired by John Hartman: Mixed-media Paintings

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TOPICS: Depicting a city from an aerial perspective; Using the rule of thirds in planning a composition; Creating an acrylic painting using a limited colour palette

SUBJECT(S): Visual Arts **GRADE(S):** 8-12

UNIT DURATION: 3 lessons

OVERVIEW & CULMINATING TASK: In this unit students will explore the works of Canadian artist John Hartman and his approach to painting cities using an aerial perspective. Students will create an acrylic painting using map imagery, the rule of thirds, and a limited colour palette.

John Hartman was born in 1950 in Midland, Ontario, and studied Fine Arts at McMaster University. He established his reputation with the exhibition *Painting the Bay* at the McMichael Canadian Collection in 1993. The exhibition featured large-scale paintings of Georgian Bay, aerial views of the landscape, painted with thick, juicy paint. In the skies Hartman painted stories about the places depicted. Hartman continued to experiment with works that combined figurative, narrative and landscape imagery. He received national exposure with the exhibition and book *Big North*, which toured Canada between 1999 and 2002. Hartman's path of painting the intimate and intertwined relationship between people and place took a turn in 2003 when he began to paint aerial views of cities as living organisms. These paintings made up the exhibition and book *Cities*, which toured Canada and internationally from 2007 to 2009.

BIG IDEAS (What students will understand):

- The visual arts use a unique sensory language for creating and communicating. (Visual Arts 9)
- Artistic works offer unique aesthetic experiences in a variety of contexts. (Art Studio 11)

CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES (What students will do):

- Intentionally select and combine materials, processes, and technologies to convey ideas



John Hartman, *Vancouver*, 2011, oil on linen, 60 x 60 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

- Describe and analyze, using discipline-specific language, how artists use materials, technologies, processes, and environments in 2D art making

CONCEPTS & CONTENT (What students will know):

- Image development strategies
- Materials, techniques, and technologies for visual art
- Elements of visual art; principles of design

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) (What students will keep considering):

- How can you depict a city from an aerial perspective using both accurate visual references and imagined and abstracted elements?
- How can you express ideas about cities in a painting that incorporates both real and imagined elements?

FIRST PEOPLES' PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING:

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES:

- digital image of John Hartman's painting *Vancouver* (see end of document)
- digital projector/computer
- access to printer (students to print aerial views of their neighbourhood using Google Maps or Google Earth)
- student sketchbooks
- pencils
- pencil crayons
- scissors
- acrylic paints in burnt umber, raw sienna, yellow ochre, titanium white, and primary colours
- water pots
- brushes
- palettes
- palette knives
- stretched canvas or canvas board approximately 24" x 20" (1 per student)

VOCABULARY:

point of view, impasto, artistic license, rule of thirds, underpainting, collage, en plein air, abstraction, colour palette

RESOURCES & REFERENCES:

- John Hartman artwork and bio: <http://www.johnhartman.ca>
- Book featuring artists who incorporate maps into their artwork: *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography* (2010) by Katharine Harmon and Gayle Clemans, Princeton Architectural Press
- Art terms glossary: <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/>

ADAPTATIONS & MODIFICATIONS:

Students with hand function difficulties may carry out the assignment using a computer and design software such as Adobe Photoshop.

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES (Teacher Action/Student Action):

LESSON #1 (intro and sketching):

- Introduce the students to John Hartman's artwork and share with them a variety of images of his paintings of cities, which can be viewed here: <http://www.johnhartman.ca>. Project image of John Hartman's painting

Vancouver (see end of document for large image). Pose the following discussion questions:

- How has John Hartman portrayed these cities?
- What changes has he made to these cities, compared to portraying them in a realistic way?
- Describe Hartman's use of colour.
- Describe Hartman's use of paint.
- View with students an aerial view of Vancouver using Google Earth or Google Maps. Compare the online imagery to Hartman's painting *Vancouver*:
 - What kinds of artistic license has Hartman taken in depicting Vancouver from an aerial perspective?
 - Why do you think he has made these alterations?
 - What impressions of the city does he give?
 - What are the most dominant colours in the palette that Hartman has used? Why do you think he has chosen these colours?
 - How has John Hartman used the rule of thirds to create his composition?
- If possible, take a walking field trip to a location where students are able to view a bird's eye perspective of the city or neighbourhood.
- Have the students create pencil sketches of the view. Students should select 3 colours to add to their sketches using pencil crayons.

LESSON #2 (printing aerial images of neighbourhoods and planning compositions):

- Have students look up and print a section of their neighbourhood using Google Earth or Google Maps. The view should include a river, a body of water, or another interesting land form.
- Discuss with the students the possible alterations that they could make to the neighbourhood view that they have printed. Ask students: What about this image can be changed? What can be abstracted?
- Have students brainstorm 3 colours that best represent the character of their neighbourhood.
- Have students create 2 thumbnail sketches of their compositions in their sketchbooks. Students should consider the rule of thirds when planning their compositions and should experiment with adding their 3 dominant colours to their sketches using pencil crayons.
- Have students discuss their sketches in small groups. Classmates should provide feedback on the sketches and assist each other in selecting the composition to use for the final painting.

- Once students have planned and chosen their compositions they can redraw their image on 20" x 24" canvas board or stretched canvas.

LESSON #3 (applying painted and collaged elements):

- Once the compositions have been sketched onto painting surfaces, demonstrate how to underpaint using thin, transparent washes of colour.
- In their underpainting, students should establish the dark sections of their compositions with burnt umber and raw sienna. Students can then add yellow ochre and titanium white.
- Once students complete their underpainting they can build up paint layers with thicker paint and true colours.
- Lastly, students can use impasto (a thick application of paint that does not attempt to look smooth) to add texture and detail to their paintings. Students can apply thick paint using palette knives.
- Students can also collage sections of their printed maps onto their paintings.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

After Lesson #2 have students write in their sketchbooks about the composition they chose to use for their final artwork. Have students address the following questions:

- What 3 colours have you chosen to emphasize in your final composition? Why have you chosen these colours?
- How have you made use of the rule of thirds to compose your image?

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

Set up an exhibit of finished student works and facilitate a group critique. Have students write an artist statement to explain their concept and some of the formal art elements used in their work.

EXTENSIONS & POSSIBLE CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:

Have students research and present on contemporary artists who incorporate maps into their artwork. Refer to the following book:

The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography (2010) by Katharine Harmon and Gayle Clemans

Try the same exercise but use other media such as water colours, printmaking, or pure collage. Photograph a section of the finished painting and change it using Photoshop techniques.



AFK RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

Looking for more art lesson ideas? Looking for ways to connect art to other areas of the curriculum? Visit the AFK Resources page to find lesson plans for all grade levels!

<http://tiny.cc/AFKResources>



John Hartman, *Vancouver*, 2011, oil on linen, 60 x 60 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.