

Environment and Art Tour Outline

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Intro:

- Environment = all that's around us: built and natural environments
- Today we'll focus in the natural environment
- Looking at artists' relationship with nature in different times and places
- Nature inspires and challenges artists and is a source of materials for making art
- Invite you to consider your own relationship with nature – it can be complicated – from shoveling snow in the winter to visiting a beach in the summer.
- Also going to use a thinking routine that encourages us to consider the relevance/"so what" to what we discuss:
 - Why is it important for the globe?
 - Why is it important for my/a community?
 - Why is it important to me?

TRANSITION: we'll start with some objects that are selections directly from nature. They can be considered framing nature. As we walk up the stairs, notice the rocks outside the window, what we'll look at is related to those.

- [stop by scholar's studio and garden to show more rocks and the studio, where scholar's rocks would have been displayed]

G220 Scholars Rocks case

- These are examples from the 1700's and 1800's but rocks like these were collected for display as early as the Song Dynasty (late 900s to late 1200s)
- The educated elite collected them as objects of meditation and inspiration
- Do you collect any natural objects? If so, what? What is appealing about them to you?
- Let's look at these as a group. What are some of the visual traits that these have in common?
 - Hope they point out: vertical/balanced, holes, look like mountains
- We saw the large outdoor stones, those were the ideal – limestone from a special lake – lots of holes
- People actually CARVED rocks to look like those – the vertical red one (98.81.2) is carved, not naturally formed! Many, if not most, scholars rocks were "helped" with some extra shaping by a person.
- Notice the horizontal rocks – these are "mountain" views – one close up and one distant – could bring a mountain into your study if you didn't have a view of one.
- Connects with the Taoist ideals/beliefs in the balance of nature
- Thinking back on that notion of people enhancing or "improving" on nature, how does that larger idea connect with/impact the earth as a whole?



TRANSITION: So, these objects were collected as a way to appreciate, or frame, nature. Next we'll see the work of an artist that wanted to rival nature.

G305 An Arrangement with Flowers, 19th century, Georgius Jacobus Van Os (83.7)



- What did you envision when I said an artist was rivaling nature?
- This might be a little smaller than anticipated, but it's a very fine work.
- Let's look and examine what seems realistic and what's perhaps idealized. What do you see?
- Georgius Van Os was from a family of painters (dad, brother, sister)
- He did things differently from his dad, though. Os painted from real flowers and painted in season
- And this is also part of a larger trend of Dutch flower paintings – started in the 1600's and went through the 1800s
- Central tulip – “tulipmania” of the 1630's
- Tulips came to Europe from Turkey in 1500s
- Tulips became a hot commodity, more valuable than gold
- The market crashed in the 1630's and never recovered
- Striped were valued – didn't know then that these are due to a virus
- Can propagate tulips with seeds or bulbs – the virus only transfers via bulb. It takes 6-7 years for a plant to mature to produce bulbs – a long investment
- Think about a natural good as a luxury and status item – how does that impact/connect with your community or a community like one that was dependent on this trade?

TRANSITION: This was an artist who wanted to rival nature, paint something better than nature. Next we'll see the work of an artist whose father was a farmer, and who had an economic view of nature.

G322 The Mill Stream, Montclair, New Jersey, c. 1888, George Inness (2000.236)



- Before we dive in, let's see what this image communicates to us, today. That may be different than what the artist intended or how people saw it when it was made, which is okay. So, what message does this image convey to you?
- Inness was called the father of American landscape painting
- This is a later work, more soft and fuzzy
- The label says, “At the time, however, the printing plant on the stream's bank was viewed as a wonderful technological advancement, even a “civilizing” enhancement of the natural landscape.”

- This may not have been the message that Inness had in mind
- Inness was a Georgist. Georgism is an economic philosophy that believes that a person should own the profits from what they make with their labor, and that this shouldn't be taxed. However, the land belongs to everyone and the government should tax that.
 - Natural resources and opportunities should belong to all.
- How does this information change your view of this work? How/why?
- What are the implications/impact for the earth, a community, and you as an individual?

TRANSITION: So this artist had an economic view of nature, now we'll see an object that uses nature as an expression of power.

G250 Tusk, 1775-1777

Edo (56.33)

- This would have been part of an ancestral altar made by an Oba (the king in Benin society) (now southwest Nigeria)
- Altar would honor the Oba's father and grandfather
- Oba controlled ivory – a precious resource – he determined who could use it
- This tusk was commissioned by a military commander, the ezomo
- Hist. of Ivory and colonialization – decimated the elephant population
- 1485 – Portuguese Arrive
- 1897- British try to negotiate an ivory trade deal. Things did not go well. The Benin killed 7 of the British party. The British retaliated with the “Punitive Expedition” – killed more than 200,000 people, and burnt the capitol to the ground. Burt the palace where many objects were looted – many Benin objects in museums today are from that Expedition.
- Colonial trade wiped out N. African elephants: in 1900 there were an estimated 10 million elephants, by 1989 there were an estimated 600,000.
- In1989 the trade in ivory was banned, and the elephant population started to rebound
- BUT in1999 and 2008 CITES (Conference on International Trade of Endangered Species) allowed the sale of some stores of ivory to China and Japan and this opened the door for illegal trading once more.
- What impact does this have on the world, your community, you as an individual?



TRANSITION: Here we've seen a natural object as a symbol of power, next we'll see an artwork that brings nature indoors.

G257 MAEP Alison Hiltner, It is Yesterday

- Explore the rooms, read the labels and then let's come back together.
- What was your experience? What is this communicating to you?
 - Personally. I find it interesting this this piece which puts us in direct connection with living organisms is the most sterile and removed.



- Did you interact with the artwork? How does it feel to be part of this ecosystem?
- Think about the other ecosystems you are a part of. What impact do you have there?
- How can you minimize that impact?
- What is a local connection for the impact of work like this?

Thanks for exploring all these aspects of the natural world with me today. I hope you continue to consider these issues and questions and you explore Mia and other museums.