

WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

# Educator's Guide

*Location, Location, Location*

November 3 – December 11, 2009



Elementary, Middle, and High School Levels

**WILLIAMS  
COLLEGE  
MUSEUM  
OF ART**

encounterart.

**Cover image:**

**Alec Soth**

*Falls 26*, 2005

chromogenic print

40 x 50 in. (image)

49 1/8 x 59 1/8 x 2 5/8 in. (framed)

**Guide developed by**

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# Overview

We look forward to your visit at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA). We hope this information will help you to integrate your museum experience with your classroom lessons.

## The Tour:

Your group will tour several exhibitions that explore place: **A Strong Impression: William Morris Hunt's Niagara**, **Alec Soth: NIAGARA**, **Media Field: Niagara (optional)**, and **Along a Long Line**—a selection of paintings created by contemporary artist **Mike Glier** in disparate locations around the world.

**Location** tours will explore the rich and complex cultural identity of a single location, Niagara Falls, as manifested in myriad visual representations ranging from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century. The monumental 1878 oil painting *Niagara Falls* by **William Morris Hunt** will take center stage, as students consider this powerful rendering of the Falls. Groups will explore the artistic techniques used by Hunt to capture the sensations and the spirit of the Falls with immediacy and drama. As students examine Hunt's other sketches of the Falls, as well as the work of other artists, they will see the Falls from many perspectives. Looking at nineteenth-century prints, photographs, and cultural objects, a broader sense of the cultural and historical context of Niagara will emerge. Students will consider different points of view as they imagine what the Falls meant to different people at different times. How would the Falls have been seen through the eyes of a nineteenth-century European? A Native American? A honeymooner? A mill owner? An artist? What challenges do artists face in depicting the Falls?

For centuries, Niagara Falls has become an icon representing the United States to itself and the rest of the world, and the Falls have often been idealized and romanticized by artists. Unlike scores of other artists who have depicted Niagara in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, contemporary photographer **Alec Soth** confronts what many other artists have chosen to leave out—the evidence of tourism and industrial sprawl that has built up around the Falls since the early 1800s. His work juxtaposes the beauty of the Falls with less idyllic views of spare, outdated motels and lonely parking lots, all depicted in lush, large-format color images. This exhibition conveys the often over-looked contradictions and complexities inherent in this place. Students will discuss the moods evoked by Soth's photographs. They will consider why he would choose these unexpected subjects, and what his work says about the state of Niagara today.

While the Niagara exhibitions provide many perspectives on one location, **Mike Glier's** work will provide the opportunity to investigate how different locations can influence the work of a single artist. We'll compare paintings from the arctic, the tropics, and locales in between. We will look for connections between place and color palette, and search for signature shapes or motifs from each destination.

Tours for grades PreK- 2 feature Storytime tour stops that engage students in age-appropriate stories and discussions that connect to the artwork and tour topics in fun and meaningful ways. As always, this tour includes hands-on art-making experiences in the galleries.

The **Location** pre- and post-visit activities are designed to be integrated with art, social studies, English, and science curricula. Educators can adapt these project suggestions to their students' level. Activities are designed with the national and Massachusetts state standards in mind; educators who would like assistance in matching standards to their projects are invited to contact us.

Should you have any questions or wish to share with us any of the creative work your students complete using this education material, we would love to hear from you. **Additionally, please let us know ahead of time about any specific themes or areas of content you'd like us to address in the tour.** You can contact the Education Office at 413-597-2038 or by emailing Joann.Harnden@williams.edu.

### **Before and After Your Visit:**

To help you use this material in your teaching, this guide contains:

- Introduction to the exhibition
- Background information
- Connections to English, social studies, science, and art curricula & standards
- Pre & post-visit activity suggestions

If you have any questions, concerns, or would like to share creative suggestions, please don't hesitate to contact us. Please let us know if there are any particular areas of interest or special needs to be accommodated during your visit.

Contact the Education Office at (413) 597-2038 or e-mail Joann Harnden, Coordinator of Education Programs, at Joann.Harnden@williams.edu.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITIONS

## **A Strong Impression: William Morris Hunt's Niagara**

This exhibition provides a view into the artistic process and cultural context of the museum's painting, *Niagara Falls* (1878) by William Morris Hunt (1824–1879). Hunt, the great Boston portrait painter, traveled to Niagara Falls for a rest cure in 1878 and was so taken by the natural wonder that he sent for his painting supplies. While at the Falls, he received a commission to paint several murals for the New York State Capitol Assembly Chamber, for which he proposed Niagara as a subject. The museum's painting, possibly a presentation piece, and the subject as a whole were ultimately rejected. Due to Hunt's untimely death a year later, the Niagara series proved to be one of his last projects.

Hunt's studies in oil, pastel, and charcoal are the remaining evidence that explains this unique subject within his oeuvre. These works can be grouped into scenes of the American Falls, the Horseshoe Falls (from the Canadian side), and the Rapids. Books, travel guides, maps, stereographs, and early views of Niagara included in this exhibition give a sense of the imagery of the Falls around this time and how artists grappled with depicting a mammoth subject, which grew in stature after the popular reception of Frederic Edwin Church's (1826–1900) painting *Niagara* (1857).

In the museum's monumental painting of the Horseshoe Falls, Hunt was directly confronting Frederic Edwin Church's iconic painting *Niagara* from several decades earlier. Church and Hunt had very different approaches to the same view of the Falls. Church's use of precise detail created a picture of the Romantic sublime, meant to recreate the sensation of being at one with God and nature. Hunt, who trained as a sculptor with Antoine-Louis Barye (1796–1875) in Paris, built up his Niagara with sculptural and textural layers of paint and, perhaps not unintentionally, deleted Church's symbolically charged rainbow. Hunt's landscapes of the 1870s convey the essentials of the scene with the loose brushwork and generalized forms typical of oil sketches. He felt that nature should be interpreted rather than recorded, noting that "The mission of art is to represent nature not to imitate her." In this Hunt's ideas accorded closely with the transcendentalist beliefs of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), a relative of Hunt through marriage. Emerson wrote that "a strong impression gives the power to paint it," a sentiment that wholly fits Hunt's series at Niagara and epitomizes his desire for directness with nature and

simplicity in capturing it. These pictures can be seen as the culmination of Hunt's career, as he was challenging, and working within, a tradition of nineteenth-century views of Niagara.

*A Strong Impression* was organized by Kathryn Price, Associate Curator at WCMA, with assistance from Williams College undergraduates Ethan Buchsbaum '10, Natalie Diaz '09, Liz Kantack '09, and graduate student in art history Amy Bridgeman '11.

[Source: Excerpts from curatorial wall text and brochure.]

### **Alec Soth: NIAGARA**

Unlike scores of artists who have depicted Niagara in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including William Morris Hunt, photographer Alec Soth confronts what these artists chose to leave out. In his *NIAGARA* series, he reveals the evidence of tourism and industrial sprawl that has built up around the Falls since the early 1800s. Whereas the Canadian side of the Falls has embraced commercialism with the tourist in mind, the American side suffers from high unemployment rates and environmental issues, including the Love Canal toxic waste disaster in the late 1970s.

Soth created this series during seven trips in 2004 and 2005 to the American and Canadian sides of Niagara Falls. His photographs capture various motifs related to a culture of romance and passion that have long been associated with the Falls as a honeymoon destination—young couples, run-down motels, and pawn shop wedding rings. Using a large-format camera, he creates lushly detailed photographs that often belie the bittersweet subject matter—the “aftermath of passion,” as Soth describes it.

Here, Soth places nature almost as an afterthought. His photographs present a glimpse of a world not visible to the nearly twenty million tourists who visit the Falls each year – another world seemingly at odds with the myths of power and freedom. As Soth says, “When I took pictures in Niagara...I wasn't really documenting those places. There is so much I left out. Niagara has millions of happy vacationing families and I didn't photograph a single one. I created my own Niagara...”

[Source: Curatorial wall text]

Alec Soth: NiAGARA was organized by Kathryn Price, Associate Curator at WCMA, with assistance from Williams College undergraduates Ethan Buchsbaum '10, Natalie Diaz '09, Liz Kantack '09, and graduate student in art history Amy Bridgeman '11.

### **Mike Glier: Along a Long Line**

According to Mike Glier, "landscape has become an urgent subject." In response, he has developed three *plein air* painting projects, *Latitude*, *Along a Long Line*, and *Antipodes*, each of which combines life study and abstraction to recount the color, light, and motif of many places. In the most general terms this tri-part painting project is an attempt to describe the uniqueness of individual places while maintaining a global perspective. Although the improvisational painting process remains constant within these three projects, the location for each series shifts. For *Latitude*, the artist stays in one place for an extended period to paint the changes of season as the earth shifts on its axis. For *Along a Long Line*, Glier travels along the 70th line of longitude to four locations between the Arctic Circle and the equator to paint the changes of region. For *Antipodes*, he travels to locations that are on opposite points of the globe to paint a comparison. Glier has also compiled a collection of photographs, blog entries, and stories from his journey. Selections from all four locations in the project *Along a Long Line* will be featured in the Fall 2009 WCMA exhibition.

This exhibition was organized by Director Lisa Corrin and Curator of the Collection Vivian Patterson.

[Source: Adapted from Artist Statement from artist's website:

<<http://www.williams.edu/Art/glier/>>]

### **Media Field: Niagara** [Run time: 9 min.]

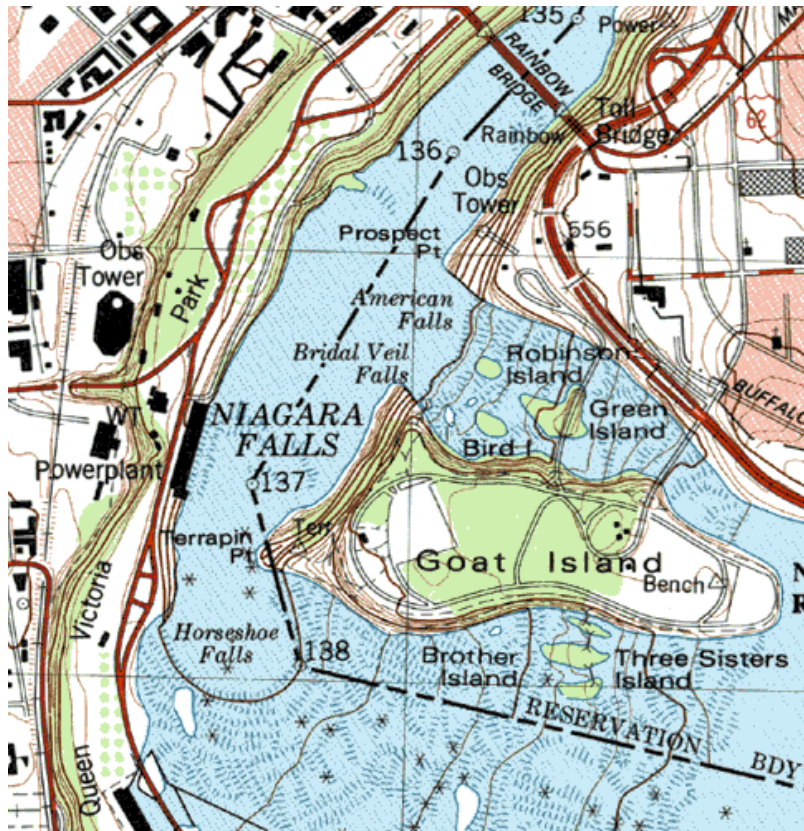
*The Falls in Film* offers a fast-flowing sample of Niagara's everlasting existence on the silver screen. This collection of film and television clips features a selection from film history (from 1896 to October 2009), technology (Kinetoscope to IMAX), and genres (film noir to sitcom). However divergent the dates, techniques, and themes may be, there remains one constant: Niagara Falls as a source of visual inspiration for filmmakers. On film, the Falls represent unrelenting force, majestic captivation, and romantic idealism.

This exhibition was organized by James Rosenow, Graduate Student in the History of Art, Class of 2010.

[Source: Excerpts from curatorial wall text]

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## BACKGROUND ON NIAGARA FALLS



Niagara Falls is comprised of three waterfalls situated along the border between New York and Canada: the American Falls, Horseshoe Falls, and the Bridal Veil Falls. Although it is not the tallest waterfall in the world (not even the tallest in New York State), nor the widest, nor the greatest in power (Niagara is sixth in the world for volume), it may feel especially powerful because of the great volume (600,000 gallons per second) combined with the narrow width. One-fifth of the world's fresh water continuously rushes through Niagara River. From the first written descriptions and depictions by Europeans in the seventeenth century, the Falls has embodied, in the minds of Americans and of those abroad, the uncultivated wilderness of the American landscape and of the unharnessed potential of power for industry. It has been recognized for its ability to inspire fear, wonder, and awe. It has long been associated with passion, whether it be zeal of a religious, patriotic, environmental, or romantic sort. The two most frequent subjects in early American art were George Washington and Niagara Falls. It has appeared on maps, postcards,

railway timetables, china, T-shirts, cereal boxes, cracker tins, cans of spray starch, Indian beadwork, NY State license plates, and more.

Niagara's lingering reputation still draws couples seeking big romance, and yet, it houses an economically depressed and bare downtown on the New York side, reeling from the aftermath of the industrial boom of the mid-twentieth century, which has left a legacy of toxic landfills, polluted water, and closed factories. Meanwhile, the Canadian side of the Falls features an over-the-top, family-friendly, pre-packaged entertainment extravaganza of chain restaurants, amusement parks, and casinos that does not, in fact, have much to do with the Falls at all. Many people who vacation among the Canadian attractions never actually visit the Falls during their stay.

### **Geological History**

Niagara Falls is part of a much larger land formation called the Niagara Escarpment (enormous cliff), which has origins dating back some 430 to 450 million years ago. During this time, it was covered beneath a large ancient sea, which lay in a saucer-shaped depression in the state of Michigan (the Michigan Basin). Rivers flowing into this sea carried sand and clay, which were deposited as sediment. The sea flourished and became rich with plant and animal life, which eventually died, and over time became compressed into many layers of sedimentary rocks as fossils. Due to disturbances in the Earth's crust, the ancient sea grew shallower and, over the next million years, it withdrew, leaving the earth's surface exposed. Rivers and streams began carving out the body of the plain, creating valleys and ridges. Then a series of four Ice Ages, occurring within the past two million years, covered North America with thick ice sheets. In time, the glaciers began to retreat, eroding away the soft layers of the Escarpment and leaving the hard dolomite limestone exposed at its surface. The great ice sheets also widened the valley's floor, making its sides more steep and creating caves and cliffs. Still today, ice, wind, and water continue to erode the rock that makes up the Escarpment, changing its face in an unending process.

[Source: [Tour Niagara](http://www.tourniagara.com/geologynature/niagara-escarpment/geology-history-of-the-niagara-escarpment/) <<http://www.tourniagara.com/geologynature/niagara-escarpment/geology-history-of-the-niagara-escarpment/>>]

### **Early Records**

The oldest mention of the Falls in print appears in Samuel de Champlain's maps of the early 1600s. Father Louis Hennepin, a Flemish priest who accompanied LaSalle to the falls in 1678, was

the first European to see the Falls. His descriptions of the Falls were published in the late seventeenth century. "Louis Hennepin fills his account with a sense of awestruck terror. The journey is treacherous and the cataract itself terrifying. The precipice he calls 'horrible,' the water in the Falls he sees foaming and boiling 'in the most hideous manner imaginable,' the noise of it all is 'outrageous, more terrible than that of Thunder.' In short, he declares, 'when one stands near the Fall, and looks down into this most dreadful Gulph, one is seized with Horror, and the Head turns round, so that one cannot look long or steadfastly upon it'" (Strand, 17).

Hennepin also notes that the area was heavily populated by Native Americans, but he makes no note of their myths or customs. Champlain notes that the inhabitants of the Niagara frontier around 1600 were Indians called Onguiaronon or "People of Thundering Waters." The name Niagara is derived from a European misunderstood pronunciation of the Native word. The Onguiaronon were one of several Iroquoian tribes of the area called "Neutrals" by the French because of their neutrality in the wars between the Algonquians of the Great Lakes region and the Iroquois Confederacy. Sometime around 1650 the Senecas, who saw themselves as the guardians of the waterways, are said to have killed the last of the Onguiaronon men and adopted the remaining women and children, as was the custom. Much of the Onguiaronon population had already been decimated by European diseases.

The stone buildings of **Fort Niagara** were built before the American Revolution by the French, later captured by the British, and finally taken over by the United States. Located 13 miles outside of the present-day town of Niagara Falls, its key position at the mouth of the Niagara River and Lake Ontario made it valuable to those who wanted to control the trade routes to the Great Lakes. Re-enactments of a soldier's life at the fort occur during the summer tourist season.

### **Early 1800s**

In the 1820s, the new Erie Canal brought tourists to the Niagara area, including honeymooners. From the 1820s to the 1840s, two brothers named Peter and Augustus Porter acquired land along the Niagara River. They built water-powered mills and factories, and constructed visitor amenities such as walkways, observation towers, and refreshment stands. Hotels, ballrooms, billiard halls, and other entertainments began sprouting up, and more developed from there, including souvenir and curiosity shops, fountains, dancing pavilions, museums, art galleries, signs, and tollbooths.

### **Mid-1800s**

In 1859 the national rift over slavery was ever-present in the cultural consciousness. In this year, "The Great Blondin," an accomplished French aerialist, chose Niagara Falls as the location to stage his popular dare-devil performances. "His two summers at Niagara held America captive with suspense as he made more than a dozen crossings from the American to the Canadian side of the Niagara Gorge, walking on a tight-rope, and then back again. He did somersaults and headstands, drank champagne and cooked omelets, all on the tiny, swaying rope" (Strand, 111). He even carried his manager across the Falls on his back, twice.

Perhaps Blondin's daredevil antics drew such crowds because they were pure escapist entertainment, but they can also be read as striking a deeper resonance with the national conflict. "Descriptions of Blondin's act hardly make it sound relaxing. Thousands of people crammed the gorge rim and stood paralyzed with anxiety every time he crossed. Women screamed, wept and fainted; men swore and clenched their fists. The performances may have been an instance of mass projection-- Americans transferring their anxiety from the nation's peril to the aerialist's..." (Strand, 122). Author Ginger Strand argues that Blondin's actions were politically motivated and pointed directly at the current controversy over slavery. The Niagara region was one of four main underground railroad routes into Canada. The 1855 Railway Suspension Bridge over the Niagara River was a well-known crossing point. When Blondin "crossed with a sack on his head, he looked like a fugitive being dragged back to slavery." When he crossed with his manager on his back, he was very close to the Suspension bridge over which Harriet Tubman "carried" many fugitives. The most powerfully suggestive performance was his crossing of the tightrope wearing an iron collar, chains, handcuffs and shackles" (Strand, 123).

### **Late 1800s**

Frederick Law Olmsted and friends founded the "Free Niagara" movement, with the goal of freeing the natural features of the Falls from industrial and commercial distractions, as well as making access to the Falls free to the public. The result was a sort of redistricting of the Falls; mills, factories, shops and entertainment venues were removed from the immediate vicinity of the Falls, followed by the establishment of neighborhoods of new industrial and commercial entities slightly farther away. Olmsted's vision for Niagara did not mean that nature should be untouched by human hands—the Free Niagara plans also included a host of "improvements" on the natural features such as a protective roof on the Cave of the Winds, walls of rubble to

prevent riverbank erosion, planting trees, and adding restrooms, lights, elevators, and platforms where visitors could perch for closer views.

Hydroelectric power technology was developed around the same time as the new industrial district created by the Free Niagara plan. The industries that began to arrive could take advantage of Niagara's cheap power. Taking the place of earlier paper plants and sawmills, these were producers of aluminum, silicon, chromium, tungsten, molybdenum, carbon-titanium, and electrochemical manufacturers, creating far more toxic by-products than their predecessors.

### **Early 1900s**

By the 1920s, Niagara's inexpensive hydroelectric power was being harnessed for the manufacture of products like chemicals, abrasives, graphite, electrodes and anodes, dry cell batteries, a wide range of iron-alloys, and sodium hydroxide. "Sodium hydroxide production creates vast amounts of the byproduct chlorine, and new industries sprang up to utilize that waste such as the chlorination of drinking water, and the invention of chlorinated chemicals including pesticides, plasticizers, fire retardants, chlorinated solvents, and chlorinated organics like PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls—used in electrical transformers) and mirex (a highly toxic flame retardant and insecticide). Chlorinated chemicals are toxic and nearly impossible to remove from the environment once dispersed. There was very little environmental regulation in place at this time, so chemical waste was commonly dumped in the Niagara River, spread on empty lots of land, or poured into wells near factories (Strand 174-5).

At this time, dire warnings were issued that the Falls was eroding away the rock bed to a dangerous extent, and diversion of greater quantities of water was advocated, both for use by industries and to "save the Falls!"

### **Mid-1900s**

In the Niagara Diversion Treaty of 1950, the United States and Canada agreed to an equal share of hydroelectric power from Niagara Falls. The Treaty stipulates that the Falls will never fall below 50,000 cubic feet of water per second, between 8 am and 10 pm, April 1-September 15 (tourist season). That is about half the natural volume of the Falls, though it still looks about the same as it did originally because of a massive engineering projects undertaken by the Army Corps of engineers in the 1960s. An International Control Works dam was built in the river just above the Falls. The dam is comprised of eighteen sluice gates that open and close independently,

allowing for precise regulation of the volume of water fed to every area of the Falls. They added weirs (dams under the water) near the brink of the Falls to raise the water level and create the illusion of greater volume. At one point, the engineers “shut off” or diverted all of the water, leaving the Falls a completely dry rock face, so that they could excavate huge areas of rock, blast off jagged areas of overhanging rock, reshape the river bank, and add fill to create more “natural” feeling slopes. This type of reshaping continued through the late 1970s, including the driving of metal rods into the rock to prevent rock slippage.

Beginning in the late 1950s, families in the Love Canal neighborhood began describing strange symptoms like burned skin when their children played in certain areas of their school playground. A chemical company, which had dumped waste on the land and into the unfinished canal sections, had donated the land. By the late 1970s the area was designated a Superfund site and the families were evacuated.

In addition, radioactive material involved in the production of the nuclear bombs developed for WWII ended up in the already-polluted landfills of Niagara, with factory workers often handling radioactive materials unprotected and transporting and leaving the materials un-encapsulated (not knowing what they were). Because these landfills were used unofficially for so many years by so many companies, without government oversight or regulation, and because they continue to be used actively by waste management companies today, it is quite difficult to know what toxic materials are there, what has infiltrated the water and soil, who has put it there, and how to access and remediate the problems.

### **Late 1900s - Today**

The Falls continues to provide hydro-electric power. The Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant is a very large dam built into the face of the Niagara Gorge four and a half miles downstream from the Falls. “The Moses plant collects all of the diverted water on the American side in a huge reservoir and runs it through thirteen turbines in the main plant and twelve more in” a supplementary plant, “producing, at top capacity, 2.4 million kilowatts of nonstop electricity. (The average household today uses about 1,000 watts of electricity. About 7 percent of the U.S. electricity supply comes from hydropower.) After several unsuccessful attempts at urban renewal and being by-passed by a major highway development, the downtown of Niagara ,on the American side of the Falls, struggles with empty store-fronts and economic challenges.

## Waterfall Terms

Brink- The top of a waterfall. Also referred to as the Crest.

Current- A term used to describe the movement of water in a stream.

Face- The vertical surface of a cliff. In this case, the rock surface where the water is falling. Also known as Cliff Face.

Gorge- A deep, narrow ravine or canyon, often with vertical walls, usually with a watercourse running through it.

Plunge Pool- A pool at the base of a waterfall formed by hydraulic erosion.

Rapids- A section of a stream where the current has a moderate velocity, the surface is broken by extruding rocks and debris that produce frothy "whitewater", and the gradient of the stream remains shallow. Rapids can occur in a river before and/or after the waterfall.

[Source: Waterfall Database: <http://www.worldwaterfalldatabase.com/glossary.php>]

## Sources

Strand, Ginger. *Inventing Niagara*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2008.

### Tour Niagara

<http://www.tourniagara.com/geologynature/niagara-escarpment/geology-history-of-the-niagara-escarpment/>

### Waterfall Database

<http://www.worldwaterfalldatabase.com/glossary.php>

## William Morris Hunt

William Morris Hunt (1824–1879) was born in Brattleboro, Vermont to a family of prominent landowners. He attended Harvard, but withdrew in his Junior year. When his father, a congressman, died of cholera, his mother took him and his brothers to Europe, where William

stayed for over ten years. He studied with Couture in Paris, and then with Jean-Francois Millet, from whom he learned the principles of the Barbizon school. Upon his return to the United States in 1855, Hunt became a leading collector and promoter or advocate of the Barbizon painters, particularly Millet. The Barbizon painters like Millet, Corot, and Daubigny sought to capture the transitory effects of weather and light, focusing on their own direct impressions of nature. The style was characterized by compositions that minimized pictorial depth, featured unblended brushstrokes rather than careful detail, and depicted the work of common people in the natural world. Despite the influence of the naturalistic Barbizon landscapes, Hunt became Boston's leading portrait painter and teacher in Boston. He established art schools in Newport, Rhode Island, Brattleboro, Vermont, Faial Island in the Azores, and Boston, Massachusetts. In 1872, his studio burned during the Great Boston Fire, destroying many of the Millet paintings he collected in France, along with many of his well-known works such as *The Belated Kid*, *Girl at the Fountain*, and *Hurdy-Gurdy Boy*. In his later work, he returned to landscapes. In 1878, he published his *Talks on Art*, providing advice to art students and aspiring artists.

In 1878, Hunt visited Niagara for a vacation, not intending to work, but he was so inspired by the Falls that he called for his paints to be sent to him from Boston. He stayed in the area for a month, producing charcoal drawings, pastels, and several oil sketches. When he returned to his studio, he completed two large-scale oils (the two biggest easel paintings he ever created): one is a view of the Horseshoe Falls from the Canadian side (in WCMA's collection); the other is a view from the American side, which was completed in 1879 and is in the collection of the MFA, Boston. He proposed including a view of Niagara Falls in murals he had been commissioned to create for the Senate chamber of the State Capital in Albany, but the idea was rejected and a more allegorical treatment requested. Hunt completed the murals, but they were soon lost due to deterioration of the stone panels they were painted on. He influenced the work of later artists such as Winslow Homer, Childe Hassam, and John Joseph Enneking. In 1879, he drowned on the Isle of Shoals, New Hampshire in somewhat mysterious circumstances; it is unknown whether the drowning was accidental or a suicide.

### **Alec Soth**

Soth often photographs during what he calls "the blue hour," between late afternoon and early evening; he captures a dreamy sadness. This beautiful but impossible dream of high passion, of the ultimate icon of a romantic destination, hovers ghostlike in vivid colors reflected in pools of water and shiny surfaces amid the prosaic reality of the motels and parking lots of Niagara. He

thinks of motifs he would like to capture first and then places his list on the steering wheel of his car as he drives around.

Soth takes his time to set up his large-format camera, thoughtfully composing and framing the images to include particular colors and shapes, and avoiding elements that might distract from the mood he seeks to capture. According to Soth, color and shape are the basic visual “materials” that he is working with. A full day of work might result in one or two images. He works with 8” x10” film, which can achieve crisper detail. He scans the color negatives digitally, and then creates two sizes of prints for each image: one 40” x 50” and one other size (varies depending on the image).

-[Source: Adapted from artist’s statement at <http://inmotion.magnumphotos.com/essay/niagara>]

**Mike Glier: *Along a Long Line***

Landscape is vital and human survival within its mass is always in question, but more so because of accelerating environmental changes. Compelled by the pleasure and politics of working within this urgent scene, I set out with a French easel to record a quarter turn around the earth. This exhibition, *Along a Long Line*, is the record of the year-long trip.

The journey began in the summer of 2007 with a visit to Pangnirtung, Canada, an Inuit village on the Arctic tundra. In the fall, I traveled due south to the equatorial rain forest of Ecuador and settled near the Jatun Sacha Reserve on the Napo River, a 6,177 acre ecological preserve with one of the world’s most diverse collections of plant, animal, and insect species. Then in the winter of the new year, I went north to St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, of which 14,000 acres has been designated by the United Nations as part of the biosphere reserve network. The trip concluded in the urban landscape of New York City.

I set out to make a series of paintings “en plein air” (outside), but returned from the trip with 50 oil paintings on aluminum panels, a collection of stories, and 3,000 photographs, which have been collected into a book entitled, *Along a Long Line*.

I hope this project creates more compassion for the living world and that this sensitivity translates into improved environmental policy. But as vehicles for social change, *plein air* paintings and artist’s books are absurdly mismatched to the task of consciousness-raising in a digitized, global

environment. Although I have doubts about the effectiveness of any of this, I do believe that many individual actions can add up to a seismic shift in global thinking.

[Source: Artist's statement]

"Since I am a draftsman, I like the idea of making a journey that inscribes a very long line. I wish that the line could have been straighter, but logistics demanded that I chose sites with the adequate infrastructure and the political stability to support the project. More important than drawing a long line, however, was the idea of visualizing the earth as a shared space, sectioned by scientific measure rather than by political boundaries.... I set out not only to see new things, but also to test my responses. Would I be inspired, cowed, or bored? And how would the intimate act of studio painting be affected by taking it out into unfamiliar landscapes? Would it all be too much and end in a muddle of pigments, or by confronting a different set of challenges, would I find something new? I set myself up to be uncomfortable, just a little uncomfortable, like using a rough sponge to abrade the skin to become more sensitive. During this year of travel I lived for nine weeks in each of four places. The chosen locations are dotted equally along this great imaginary line and represent different types of ecosystems..."

[Source: Along a Long Line]

Paintings from the *Along a Long Line* series describe four regions that fall on either side of 74°00W line of longitude, which passes through Glier's studio in Hoosick New York, as well as New York City.

**The itinerary for *Along a Long Line* was as follows:**

**June-August, 2007: Pangnirtung, Baffin Island, Canada (63°45N, 68°31W).**

Pangnirtung is a small Inuit town on a fjord of Cumberland Sound, just below the Arctic Circle.

Biome: Tundra (type: arctic tundra)

*Tundra is the coldest of all the biomes, noted for its frost-molded landscapes, extremely low temperatures, little precipitation, poor nutrients, and short growing seasons. Dead organic material functions as a nutrient pool.*

**October-December, 2007: San Cudo, Ecuador, (0°59S, 77°49W).**

The Jatun Satcha Reserve, near San Cudo, is a 2500 hectare ecological preserve on the Napo River, administered as a research station by the Jatun Sacha Foundation, the forest shelters one

of the world's most diverse collections of plant, animal and insect species.

Biome: Forest (type: tropical forest)

*Tropical forests are characterized by the greatest diversity of species. They occur near the equator. One of the major characteristics of tropical forests is their distinct seasonality: winter is absent, and only two seasons are present (rainy and dry). The length of daylight is 12 hours and varies little.*

**January-February, 2008: St. John, Virgin Islands (18°20N, 64°50W).**

On the island of St. John is the 14,000 acre Virgin Islands National Park, which has been designated by the United Nations as a part of the biosphere reserve network.

Biome: Marine (type: Coral Reef); also tropical forest.

*Coral reefs are widely distributed in warm shallow waters. They can be found as barriers along continents (e.g., the Great Barrier Reef off Australia), fringing islands, and atolls. Naturally, the dominant organisms in coral reefs are corals. Besides corals, the fauna include several species of microorganisms, invertebrates, fishes, sea urchins, octopuses, and sea stars.*

**April-May, 2008: New York City, New York (40°43N, 74°00W).**

Biome: Temperate Forest / Urban.

*Temperate forests occur in eastern North America, northeastern Asia, and western and central Europe. Well-defined seasons with a distinct winter characterize this forest biome. Moderate climate and a growing season of 140-200 days during 4-6 frost-free months distinguish temperate forests.*

[Source: University of California Museum of Paleontology: The World's Biomes  
<<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/exhibits/biomes/index.php>>]

# Making Connections

## **Social Studies**

Exploration of Mike Glier's paintings of the arctic, the Ecuadorian rainforest, and points in-between will connect with classroom study of world geography and map skills, including using latitude and longitude to find locations. During the tour, students will also learn about the evolution of a particular place over time and consider the identity of that place from multiple perspectives. Discussion of primary source documents and artifacts, such as nineteenth-century photographs, periodicals, and Niagara souvenirs will provide a window into the visual and material culture, as well as trends and ideas, of the time period.

## **English Language Arts**

After looking at images of locations of interests to them, and exploring the various points of view represented, students will select one image for a focused sketching and writing exercise. Students will imagine what it would be like to be in this particular location in person, using detailed descriptive language to capture the feelings, thoughts, and sensations conveyed by the artwork. This exercise will encourage students to speculate about artistic choices and their own responses as viewers.

## **Art**

These exhibitions provide many provocative juxtapositions of artists treating the same subject, but operating in different media, with different styles, and from different viewpoints. Students can follow in William Morris Hunt's footsteps as he sketches various views of the Falls, contemplating the choices he makes along the way. They can evaluate which views of the Falls they find most compelling and why. Comparisons can be made among the effects that can be achieved with charcoal, pastel, oil paint, printmaking media, and photography. In Mike Glier's work, the influence of place on color palette and motifs of shape can be traced. Yet, the essential questions throughout the tour remain the same: How can artists capture the spirit and the sensations of a particular place? What does that place signify? Students will have opportunities to engage with the artwork through art-making in the galleries.

## **Environmental Studies**

For those learning about biomes and ecosystems, Mike Glier's exhibition showcases one artist's interpretation of the unique characteristics of disparate ecosystems, while keeping an eye

toward a global perspective. The location tour will also delve into the complex history of a single place—Niagara, with opportunities to touch upon the formation, history, and continuing evolution of the Falls, as well as the impact of nineteenth and twentieth century land use.

## STANDARDS

The following list presents examples of Massachusetts standards that relate to the material and activities covered in the **Location, Location, Location** tour.

### Visual Arts Standards

- 1 Methods, Materials, and Techniques. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the methods, materials, and techniques unique to the visual arts.
2. Elements and Principles of Design. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the elements and principles of design.
- 3 Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression. Students will demonstrate their powers of observation, abstraction, invention, and expression in a variety of media, materials, and techniques.
- 5 Critical Response. Students will describe and analyze their own work and the work of others using appropriate visual arts vocabulary. When appropriate, students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation.
- 6 Purposes and Meanings in the Arts: Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theater, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings.
- 8 Concepts of Style, Stylistic Influence, and Stylistic Change. Students will demonstrate their understanding of styles, stylistic influence, and stylistic change by identifying when and where art works were created, and by analyzing characteristic features of art works from various historical periods, cultures, and genres.

- 9 Inventions, Technologies, and the Arts. Students will describe and analyze how performing and visual artists use and have used materials, inventions, and technologies in their work.

## English/Language Arts

- 1 Students will use agreed-upon rules for informal and formal discussions in small and large groups.
- 2 Students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute their own information or ideas in group discussions or interviews in order to acquire new knowledge.
- 20 Students will write for different audiences and purposes.

## History and Social Science

### PreK – K Concepts and Skills

- 2 Use correctly words and phrases related to chronology and time (*now, long ago, before, after; morning, afternoon, night; today, tomorrow, yesterday; last or next week, month, year; and present, past, and future tenses of verbs*). (H)
- 3 Use correctly the word *because* in the context of stories of personal experiences. (H)
- 4 Use correctly words and phrases that indicate location and direction, such as *up, down, near, far, left, right, straight, back, behind, and in front of*. (G)

### Grade 2 Concepts and Skills

- 2 Use correctly words and phrases related to time (*now, in the past, in the future*), changing historical periods (*other times, other places*), and causation (*because, reasons*). (H)

### Grade 3 Concepts and Skills

- 1 Explain the meaning of time periods or dates in historical narratives (*decade, century, 1600s, 1776*) and use them correctly in speaking and writing. (H)
- 2 Observe visual sources such as historic paintings, photographs, or illustrations that accompany historical narratives, and describe details such as clothing, setting, or action. (H)

- 3 Observe and describe local or regional historic artifacts and sites and generate questions about their function, construction, and significance. (H)

#### **Grade 4 Concepts and Skills**

##### **History and Geography**

- 1 Use map and globe skills to determine absolute locations (latitude and longitude) of places studied. (G)

Optional Standards for Caribbean Islands—use a map to locate islands

#### **Grade 5**

- 4 Use maps and globes to identify absolute locations (latitude and longitude). (G)

#### **Grade 6**

- 2 Use geographic terms correctly, such as *delta, glacier, location, settlement, region, natural resource, human resource, mountain, hill, plain, plateau, river, island, isthmus, peninsula, erosion, climate, drought, monsoon, hurricane, ocean and wind currents, tropics, rain forest, tundra, desert, continent, region, country, nation, and urbanization*. (G)

#### **Grades 8-12 Concepts and Skills**

- 7 Show connections, causal and otherwise, between particular historical events and ideas and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments. (H, G, C, E)
- 8 Interpret the past within its own historical context rather than in terms of present-day norms and values. (H, E, C)

#### **U.S. History II Learning Standards**

- USII.2** Explain the important consequences of the Industrial Revolution. (H, E)

#### **Math, Science & Technology Standards**

##### **PreK-2: Earth and Space Strand**

- 1 Recognize that water, rocks, soil, and living organisms are found on the earth's surface.

##### **PreK-2: Life Science**

- 6 Recognize that people and other animals interact with the environment through their senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

##### **Grades 3-5: Earth and Space Strand**

- 12** Give examples of how the surface of the earth changes due to slow processes such as erosion and weathering, and rapid processes such as landslides, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes.

**Grades 6 – 8: Earth and Space Strand**

- 6** Describe and give examples of ways in which the earth's surface is built up and torn down by natural processes, including deposition of sediments, rock formation, erosion, and weathering.
- 3.1** Explain how physical and chemical weathering leads to erosion and the formation of soils and sediments, and creates various types of landscapes. Give examples that show the effects of physical and chemical weathering on the environment.

# PREPARING FOR A VISIT

## Preparation and Discussion

- Review the description of the exhibition and background material.
- Consider the possible curriculum connections and provide your students with relevant background before your visit.
- Inform students of what they will see and do at the museum, introducing key concepts through class discussion and/or activities.

# PRE & POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

## Literacy Connections

*Grades PreK-2*

For young students, reading picture books about Niagara Falls before a visit to the museum will help students to understand the cultural context of Niagara Falls. Reading books ahead of time also provides an excellent opportunity to review key vocabulary. In addition to the books on Niagara listed below, Dr. Seuss's classic Oh, the Places You'll Go! can be used to introduce students to the general tour theme of place and travel.

### **The Following Books Are Available Through the Central/Western Massachusetts Library System:**

#### **Non-Fiction**

Bauer, Marion Dane. Niagara Falls (Wonders of America Series). Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2006.

De Capua, Sarah E. Niagara Falls. Scholastic Library Publishing, 2002.

Klingel, Cynthia Fitterer. Niagara Falls. MN: Child's World [2000] c.2001.

Tieck, Sarah. Niagara Falls. MN: ABDO Publishing Company, 2008.

#### **Fiction**

Field Trip to Niagara Falls (Geronimo Stilton Series). NY: Scholastic, [2006] c.2005.

# PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

## *Along a Long Line*

Grades 3 – 12

During your **Location** tour, you will see paintings by Mike Glier from a series called *Along a Long Line*. Glier traveled to four regions that fall on either side of 74°00W line of longitude, which passes through the artist's studio in Hoosick New York, as well as New York City. Students will compare and contrast the ways in which a single artist depicts these four places, and they will consider how the unique characteristics of each place shaped this artist's work.

### Objectives

- to familiarize students with locating points on a map using latitude and longitude.
- to locate the four regions that students will see represented in Mike Glier's paintings during the tour.
- to predict what each of these regions might look like.

### Standards

Visual Art 3, ELA 1.

History and Social Science Concepts & Skills Gr. 4:1, Gr. 5:4, Gr. 6:2.

### Materials

A world map with lines and degrees of latitude and longitude demarcated

Colored pencils (optional)

### Procedure

1. Introduce students to Mike Glier's project.
2. Ask students to locate on the map the four regions featured in Glier's project, using the latitude and longitude coordinates provided:

#### **The itinerary for *Along a Long Line* was as follows:**

Pangnirtung, Baffin Island, Canada (63°45N, 68°31W)

San Cudo, Ecuador, (0°59S, 77°49W)

St. John, Virgin Islands (18°20N, 64°50W)

New York City, New York (40°43N, 74°00W)

3. Ask students to predict what each of these places would be like. What sights, sounds, colors, smells, and textures would they encounter? What might the landscape look like? What about temperature, humidity, or weather? What do they think the paintings representing each place will look like? How will they differ from place to place?
  
4. Since all of these places are located near the same line of longitude, what would they have in common?

## Location Study

## Adaptable to All Grades

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Students write, draw, and discuss their observations of a place within your school community. They will consider what the place looks and feels like from different physical vantage points and consider how the place might mean different things to different people.

### Objectives

- to explore the history of a familiar place in your school community.
- to use observation, description writing, and drawing or photography skills to capture the feelings, sensations, and stories behind this location.
- to consider how different people might have differing perspectives on this place.
- to pinpoint colors, shapes, and motifs that capture the impression of a place.

### Standards

Visual Art 2, 3. ELA 1, 19.

### Materials

Pencil and paper

### Procedure

1. Select a place on your school grounds commonly used by all students (ie., the cafeteria).
2. Ask students what impressions they associate with this place:

Smells	Feelings	Pace
Sounds	Stories	Amount of space
Colors	Textures	
Tastes	Temperature	



You may wish to have students write down their thoughts first and then share. With younger students, it might be helpful to simply discuss orally, bringing up one prompt at a time.

3. Have students draw and/or photograph the place from different points of view. Discuss how the impression of the space changes depending on your perspective.

4. Ask students to select one small, but significant area or detail of the place to draw. Students can write about and discuss: What is significant about this small area? In what ways does it represent the whole place?

5. What could this place mean to different people? For example, what would these people say about your school cafeteria:

a chef

a nutritionist

an architect

an environmentalist

a grandmother

an accountant

a farmer

a graduate of your school

### **Further Exploration**

Research the history of this place. How has it changed over time. What was in this place ten, fifty, one hundred, two hundred, one thousand, even one million years ago?

# POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

## A Sense of Place

Middle & High School

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Students meditate upon a familiar place—a room at home, at school, an area of the playground, etc. They identify key visual elements that represent that place. They consider what emotions or associations they have with that place, and create an abstract image to convey those ideas.

### Objectives

- to identify signature lines, shapes, and colors of a familiar place.
- to develop an abstracted design based on observed elements of the environment.
- to consider how to convey a mood or emotion connected to a place.

### Standards

Visual Art 1, 2, 3

### Materials

Paper and colored drawing media (pencils, markers, or pastels)

### Procedure

1. Select your place. Conduct a sensory inventory, listing all of the colors, shapes, and types of lines you see there, as well as sounds, smells, temperatures, and textures. What feelings or memories do you associate with this place? Why?
2. Circle the 3 most important colors. Circle the 2 most important shapes and the most important type of line. These may be the ones that appear the most, or they may be the largest, or the ones that best connect with your memories and feelings.
3. Use those visual elements to create a picture that tells us about your place, using only color, line, and shape without trying to make it look like the place. Don't try to draw trees, buildings, or desks. Just let your picture be a combination of lines, colors, and shapes that give the feeling of your place.

# Explorations in Writing

Grades 2 - 12

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Students in elementary grades brainstorm a word bank of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs related to Niagara Falls, and then develop a haiku inspired by the Falls. Middle and high school students write a fictitious diary entry from the perspective of one of the figures in the *Harper's* magazine illustration *Niagara Seen Through Many Eyes*.

## Objectives

- to further explore themes introduced during the museum visit through creative writing.

## Standards

ELA 5, 14, 15, 19, 20

## Materials

Niagara images for reference

*Harper's* magazine image included below

William Morris Hunt's *Niagara Falls* available at: <http://contentdm.williams.edu/wcma>

Pencil and paper

## Procedure

### Elementary

1. As a class, brainstorm lists of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs related to Niagara Falls. Keep track of student suggestions on chart paper so that the resulting word bank can be saved for student reference.
2. Introduce the term *haiku*. Explain that haikus are traditional Japanese poems that often contain imagery about a place or a season. Read the example below with students. Haiku does not follow a rhyme scheme, but consists of three units or lines, with the lines having 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively.

### **Example:**

A mountain village

Under the piled-up snow

The sound of water.

-Masaoka Shiki

3. Students develop their own haikus inspired by Niagara Falls, referring to the class word bank as needed.

#### Middle & High School

1. Provide photocopies or project the *Harper's* image for the class. Review the group discussion of the image during the museum visit. Ask students to select one point of view (artist, geologist, Native American, etc.) as their focus for a creative writing exercise.

2. Students should write a fictitious diary entry from their selected point of view. The entry should describe:

- How did the person get to the Falls?
- What did it look like to them?
- What did it sound like? Smell like?
- What was he or she thinking while standing by the Falls?
- What did it make them wonder?
- Why did they go there?
- What is he or she hoping will happen in the future?
- What did he or she think of the other visitors?
- What was the person thinking as he/she left the Falls?



NIAGARA SEEN WITH DIFFERENT EYES.—[SEE POEM ON PAGE 696.]

# A Sense of Place

Grades 3 - 12

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## Goals

- to experiment with oil pastels, colored pencils, or markers.
- to make choices about color, line, shape, and composition to represent a place.
- to consider the impact of repetition, direction, and emphasis (three of the principals of design) and experiment with them to create an original design.

## Standards

Visual Art 1, 2, 3.

## Materials

Images of various places from magazines

Pastels, colored pencils, or markers

Drawing paper

View-finders (sheet of blank paper with a small square window)

## Procedure

- Each student selects a magazine image that they would like to work with.
- Students can lay a view-finder over their magazine images, moving the view-finder around, to find the section of the image that they would like to focus on. They should be looking for an area that captures the colors, shapes, and feeling of the place.
- Elementary school students can use the viewfinder to zoom in on a small part of the picture. Guide students to think about why they chose that part of your picture. Did they like the colors? Shapes? Patterns? Does it have important details about the place? Students can use a pencil to mark the square, then cut it out and paste it onto their drawing paper, thinking about placing the cutout strategically. Using pastels, colored pencils, or markers, they can then create their own full-page drawings that repeat the colors and shapes of their cutouts. They can change the size and direction of those repeated parts, as well as playing with contrast and texture. Ask students to think about the overall mood or feeling of their place.

- Middle & High School students can use pastels to draw on their drawing paper the design that they see through their window, thinking strategically about the placement. They can then repeat the colors, lines, and shapes in varying sizes and directions to complete a full-page drawing. Encourage them to plan on having one focal area, and to think about ways to vary texture and contrast to emphasize that area. Ask students to think about the overall mood or feeling of their place.

# Recommended Resources

## Books

Glier, Mike. *Along a Long Line*. Lenox, MA: Hard Press Editions, 2009.

Hunt, William Morris. *Talks on Art*. Originally published Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1887.  
Available as a free download on Google Books at <http://books.google.com/>.

Strand, Ginger. *Inventing Niagara*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2008.

## Web Sites

[Alec Soth Photography](#)

[www.alecsoth.com/](http://www.alecsoth.com/)

[Mike Glier: Artist's Web Site](#)

[www.williams.edu/Art/glier/](http://www.williams.edu/Art/glier/)

[Niagara Falls Alive](#)

[www.niagarafallsalive.com/old\\_fort\\_niagara.htm](http://www.niagarafallsalive.com/old_fort_niagara.htm)

[Tour Niagara](#)

[www.tourniagara.com/geologynature/niagara-escarpment/geology-history-of-the-niagara-escarpment/](http://www.tourniagara.com/geologynature/niagara-escarpment/geology-history-of-the-niagara-escarpment/)

[University of California Museum of Paleontology: The World's Biomes](#)

[www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/exhibits/biomes/index.php](http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/exhibits/biomes/index.php)

[Waterfall Database](#)

[www.worldwaterfalldatabase.com/glossary.php](http://www.worldwaterfalldatabase.com/glossary.php)

# Education Programs

At the Williams College Museum of Art, our Education Programs strive to instill in visitors a love of art and an appreciation for all that a museum can offer.

As a teaching museum, we are committed to finding innovative approaches to teaching and learning through art—making connections across disciplines, building literacy skills, and encouraging the exchange of ideas.

Our programs engage participants in active experiences with art and investigate art history, artistic practices, and the issues that artwork raises. We are always available to discuss ways to tailor our programs and provide support to help you make the most out of your experience with us.

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