

空 / *Emptiness*

Emily Carr and Lui Shou Kwan



Emily Carr
Grey, 1928-30
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



Lui Shou Kwan
Taiwan Landscape - Ali Shan, 1971
Ink, pigment on paper
Private Collection

TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE
WINTER 2018

Vancouver
Artgallery

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Vancouver Art Gallery

Teacher's Guide for School Programs

The exhibition 空/Emptiness: Emily Carr and Lui Shou Kwan presents a dialogue between the works of Emily Carr, the iconic West Coast Modernist, and the artist Lui Shou Kwan, founder of the New Ink Movement in Hong Kong. The exhibition looks across culture, geography and time to compare how the artists experimented with Modernist movements and spirituality through depictions of nature. It presents more than forty works representing a varied repertoire of techniques and styles.

DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of the exhibition 空/Emptiness: Emily Carr and Lui Shou Kwan. It also provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Vocabulary section.

The tour of 空/Emptiness: Emily Carr and Lui Shou Kwan has three main goals:

- to introduce students to the work of the artists Emily Carr and Lui Shou Kwan,
- to consider diverse artistic traditions and disciplines,
- to explore individual artworks within historical, social and cultural contexts.

THE EXHIBITION: *空/Emptiness: Emily Carr and Lui Shou Kwan*

空/Emptiness is a pairing of the Canadian Modernist Emily Carr with Lui Shou Kwan, founder of the New Ink Movement in Hong Kong. The exhibition is constructed through a comparison of the two artists, showing how each experimented with Modernist movements and spirituality through their respective depictions of nature.

Born in Victoria, BC, Emily Carr (1871–1945) is widely recognized for her paintings depicting the forested landscapes of British Columbia. Born in Guangzhou, China, Lui Shou Kwan (1919–1975) is a renowned painter in the traditional and modern styles of Chinese ink painting.

The scenery of the Pacific Northwest Coast forest was an essential subject of Carr's paintings, and similarly, Liu's landscapes cannot be separated from the islands of Hong Kong. The exhibition presents more than forty works representing the varied techniques and styles that each artist used to investigate the shapes, colours and rhythmic changes in nature. The works of Carr and Lui share a vision of the natural world as a spiritual dimension and a revelation that the work of painting can achieve a sense of mindfulness.

This exhibition is the eighth in a series of In Dialogue with Carr exhibitions organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Diana Freundl, Associate Curator, Asian Art.

ARTISTS' BACKGROUND

Emily Carr (1871–1945)

“There is something bigger than fact: the underlying spirit, all it stands for, the mood, the vastness, the wildness,” —Emily Carr, 1927

Born in Victoria, BC, Emily Carr is widely recognized for her paintings of the British Columbia landscape. Apart from a brief period of study in Europe, Carr spent most of her career living in Victoria. She was an avid reader and stayed informed on contemporary innovations in art production. Her works were strongly influenced by her explorations of Modernism in Europe, using bright colours and broken brushwork.

The works Carr produced during the 1930s are the most formal and conceptual of her career. They are visibly influenced by external sources, particularly her encounters with Lawren Harris, a founding member of the Group of Seven, and the Seattle artist Mark Tobey. While spirituality is said to have guided Carr’s practice throughout her career, her works from this period are particularly infused with amplified emotion. In the 1930s, Carr began devoting most of her attention to landscape, particularly the forest, as her subject. These paintings express her strong identification with the British Columbia landscape and her belief that a profound expression of spirituality could be found in nature. They are among her strongest and most forceful works, in which she developed her own Modernist style of rich, layered coloration and increasing abstraction.

Working with charcoal and oil on paper allowed Carr the freedom to experiment without the complication of colour. These drawings signal an important transition in her career, as she used the medium to address volume and space when depicting the landscape. Among her most symbolic and abstract works, the drawings produced during the early to mid-1930s provide examples of Carr’s exploration of the environment, while those from her later years illustrate her deep interest in uncovering the spiritual dimensions of the natural landscape.

In the late 1930s, as her health worsened, Carr began to focus more energy on writing, producing an important series of books. She died in 1945 in Victoria at the age of seventy-four, recognized as an artist and writer of major importance.

Lui Shou Kwan (1919–1975)

“The ultimate goal in Chinese painting is a homecoming to nature and the revelation of one’s true self... only when emptiness is created can the true and genuine reality be generated.” — Lui Shou Kwan, 1963

Born in Guangzhou, China, Lui Shou Kwan [呂壽琨] is renowned as a brush painter in the traditional and modern styles of Chinese ink painting, and widely recognized as the founder of the New Ink Movement in Hong Kong.

Lui’s father, Lui Ts’an Ming, a scholar of considerable reputation, owned an antique shop where Lui spent hours copying the paintings of historic and contemporary masters. His

involvement with the tradition of Chinese ink painting was not restricted to any artist, school or period.

In 1948, Lui moved to Hong Kong, where he remained until his passing in 1975. Relying on traditional techniques as his base and traditional styles as a reference, he was determined to connect Chinese painting with Modernist movements dominant in Europe and America. Though his style underwent a dramatic change during the 1960s, he remained faithful to traditional media—paper, brush and ink.

Throughout his career, Lui continually referred to both the classical Chinese ink tradition and Western Abstraction. He systematically explored and deconstructed their various elements—space, geometry, gesture, materials—and developed a distinctive body of work.

The New Ink Movement that Lui inspired became a driving force for reforming traditional Chinese painting, the impact of which can be felt to this day through his published teachings, his theories and the work of his former students.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: About the Artists (intermediate and secondary students)

Objective:

Students read, research and share information about the artists represented in the exhibition.

Materials:

- ❑ writing materials
- ❑ access to Internet. Some useful websites:
www.artcyclopedia.com
www.wikipedia.com
- ❑ Artist Information Sheet (page 8) and Student Worksheet (page 9)

Process:

1. Divide the students into small groups and assign an artist to each group.
2. Give each student a copy of the Student Worksheet (page 9) and ask them to transfer the information about their artist to the appropriate box.
3. Have students figure out what they need to know to complete the section on their artist, and search the Internet, either at home or at school. Older students can find more information; younger students, just the basics.
4. Ask each group to find/copy/sketch an artwork by each artist on a separate piece of paper.
5. Have each group present the information on their artist while the rest of the class adds the information to their worksheets.

Conclusion:

Discuss:

- What were some of the most interesting things that students learned or discovered?
- Which artist and/or kinds of artwork made students curious about seeing the actual work in the exhibition?
- Which artist, ways of working or ideas did the students want to find out more about?

Artist Information Sheet

Emily Carr (1871–1945)

- Born and died in Victoria, British Columbia
- Studied art in San Francisco, England and France, travelled through British Columbia
- Painted mostly forest landscapes
- Lived mostly alone, kept lots of animals
- Paintings were influenced by her spiritual beliefs
- Toward the end of her life wrote many books, which were well received
- Sketched outdoors using charcoal or thinned oil paint on paper
- Made final paintings in her studio using oil paint on canvas

Lui Shou Kwan (1919–1975)

- Born in Guangzhou, China
- Renowned brush painter in the traditional and modern styles of Chinese ink painting
- Widely recognized as the founder of the New Ink Movement in Hong Kong
- Continually referred to both the classical Chinese ink tradition and Western Abstraction
- Always used Chinese traditional materials—paper, brush and ink
- Brought Chinese painting into dialogue with Modernist movements dominant in Europe and America

Student Worksheet

	Emily Carr	Lui Shou Kwan
Personal Information		
Type of Art		
Known for		
Name of an Artwork		

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Sketch and Paint (all levels)

Objective:

Students are introduced to Carr's process of working by sketching outdoors and then, back in the classroom, creating a painting based on the sketch.

Discussion:

Emily Carr often created sketches for her landscapes out in nature, where she could study the colours and textures of the trees, foliage, lakes and sky, and observe the way light, wind and weather affected her subjects. She often began sketching in charcoal or thinned oil paint, and did the final work later, back in the studio. She would make oil paintings based on—but not exactly the same as—her sketches.

Emily Carr wrote the following passage in her book *Growing Pains*:

“Outdoor study was as different from studio study as eating is from drinking. Indoors we munched and chewed our subjects. Fingertips roamed objects feeling for bumps and depressions. We tested textures, observed contours. Sketching outdoors was a fluid process, half looking, half dreaming, awaiting invitation from the spirit of the subject to ‘come, meet me half way.’ Outdoor sketching was as much longing as labour. Atmosphere, space cannot be touched, bullied like the vegetables of still life or like the plaster casts. These space things asked to be felt not with fingertips but with one’s whole self.”

Materials:

For Part 1:

- drawing pads, or clipboards and sheets of paper
- pencil crayons, crayons or pastels

For Part 2:

- thicker paper for painting
- paint—preferably tempera or acrylic, but any available paint will work
- paintbrushes

Process:

Part 1:

1. Discuss Carr's two-step approach to her painting, and tell the students they are going to go outdoors and make a colour sketch as a precursor to a painting. Read them the above excerpt from *Growing Pains*.
2. Choose an outdoor area with some greenery and one or more trees. Have the students decide on a starting perspective; for example:
 - close up, with tree trunk or branches filling the page,
 - from a distance, including grass, trees and sky,
 - looking up into a single tree, including the top of the tree and an expanse of sky.
3. Have them look closely at the greens and yellows of the leaves, the browns and greys of the trunk and branches, and the blues and greys of the sky. Remind them that

landscape painters like Carr didn't use just one colour, but mixed and blended colours and shades to create rich, dense surfaces.

4. Have the students make a few colour sketches from different perspectives or angles, from close up and far away. Encourage them to fill the page with quick detail—broad strokes of colours, lines and shapes that include all the elements in their line of vision.

Part 2:

1. Back in the classroom, within a week after making the sketches, have the students look at their sketches and choose the one they would most like to make a painting from. What parts of their sketch do they want to leave in? What parts would they like to change? Does the composition feel balanced, or are there some areas they would like to add something to or remove something from? Would they like to combine elements from two drawings?
2. Have the students set up workspaces at their tables, where they can see their sketches and have access to paper, paint and brushes.
3. Have them paint their landscapes, encouraging them to fill the page, layering on and blending colours as they work.

Conclusion:

- Display the students' work: painting alongside sketch.
- Have them look at the work and talk about the similarities and differences in materials, locations, colours and composition.
- Discuss the process, how easy or hard it was to create the work, the differences between making the sketch and creating the painting.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Spiritscapes (intermediate levels)

Objective:

Students discuss spirituality and create a mixed-media work about their experience of nature.

Discussion:

In the exhibition *空/Emptiness: Emily Carr and Lui Shou Kwan*, the Chinese character in the title, *空* [kong], refers to a sense of space or time, empty awareness, or a direct experience of the immediate present moment. In the works of Carr and Lui there is a shared belief that nature and natural forms are a pathway to contemplation and creation. The two artists shared a vision of the natural world as a mystical dimension.

Emily Carr's deep spiritual connection with the nature of Vancouver Island is beautifully portrayed in her writings and paintings. She sought spirituality not in man-made structures or spaces, but in British Columbia's soaring rainforest. In her paintings, Carr wanted to express a power greater than herself, the pulse of the living universe, and a sense beyond the ordinary. The majestic beauty of the wilderness transported her into a realm where she found true peace in the mystery of all living things.

In Lui's landmark Zen Paintings of the 1960s, the recurring motif of the lotus flower symbolizes of eternal purity or *zen*. Lui's visualization of the state of enlightenment, as perceived through nature and the environment, can be seen throughout his work.

Materials:

- ❑ large sheets of paper
- ❑ variety of print materials presenting British Columbia—magazines, tourist brochures, maps, postcards, etc.
- ❑ markers in various colours, pencil crayons, glue, scissors

Process:

1. Discuss the concept of "spirituality" with the students, as an inner relationship to a greater power in the universe. The word often given to this greater power might be *nature, God, spirit, the universe or the creator*.
2. Emily Carr felt a sense of awe when seeing the expanses of trees in the forests of B.C. She believed that everything was connected and that this oneness could be felt in nature. Ask students to think of a time when they have experienced wonder and amazement. Ask them to think about their connection to nature. Ask them to think of the sun, air, water and earth.
3. Discuss the following quotes by Emily Carr with the students:

"Pictures should be inspired by nature, but made in the soul of the artist..."

"There is something bigger than fact: the underlying spirit, all it stands for, the mood, the vastness, the wildness."

"As I came through the mountains I longed so to cast off my earthly body and float away through the great pure spaces between the peaks..."

4. Have each student make an artwork that shows their personal perspective on nature, their connection to it and their sense or feeling while experiencing it.
5. Have students start with images cut out from magazines, tourist brochures, maps, etc.
6. Have them complete their image with coloured markers and pencil crayons. Add words or text from the materials or from the previous discussion.
7. Display the artworks.

Conclusion:

- How have students presented their ideas in different ways?
- Compare different versions of the students' perspectives on experiencing nature.
- Does spirituality mean different things to different people?

PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Scroll Paintings (all levels)

Objective:

Students create paintings inspired by traditional Chinese scroll painting.

Discussion:

Chinese painting has a rich history as an enduring art form and is well known throughout the world. Traditionally, Chinese painting is done on rice paper or thin silk, using a variety of brushes, Chinese ink and dye. Chinese painting covers a variety of subjects: portrait, landscape, flowers, birds, animals and insects.

Unlike Western paintings, which are hung on walls and continuously visible, most Chinese paintings are not meant to be on constant view but are brought out to be seen only from time to time. This occasional viewing has everything to do with format. A predominant format of Chinese painting is the scroll, a continuous roll of paper or silk, of varying length, on which an image has been painted, and which, when not being viewed, remains rolled up.

Materials:

- long-format white paper for painting (such as 12x18" paper cut into 6x18" sheets or smaller)
- pencils
- watercolour paints or tempera puck paints
- paintbrushes in a variety of sizes
- coloured construction paper (large, cut to size for mounting, with room for dowels)
- wooden sticks/dowels
- hot glue gun (to be used by teacher only)
- string

Process:

1. Discuss traditional Chinese scroll painting. Have students seen these paintings? What is typical subject matter? Have students look at examples on p. 16. What would an artist have to take into consideration when planning a scroll painting?
2. Provide each student with a long sheet of white paper for their painting.
3. Have students plan their painting with pencil first. The painting can be a landscape or nature scene.
4. Once students have completed their preliminary sketches, provide them with paints, brushes and water to complete their work.
5. While the paintings dry, have students choose a piece of construction paper to glue their painting to. (Ideally, the construction paper sheets are pre-cut.) Show students how to leave room for the wooden dowels on each end.
6. Have students take their work to a gluing station and attach a wooden dowel to the top and the bottom of each painting.
7. Have students tie string to each end of the top wooden dowel, for hanging.
8. Display the final works.

Conclusion:

Discuss:

- Are the final works similar to each other, or different? How so?
- Talk about the process. How easy or hard was it to draw on long-format paper?
- Was the experience of creating a scroll painting very different from creating a regular painting? How so?
- What did students have to take into consideration when planning their paintings?

Examples of Traditional Chinese Scroll Paintings



Examples of Student Work



PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Forest Forms (all levels)

Objective:

Students create an abstract forest collage focusing on shape, form and colour.

Discussion:

Bright colours and bold forms characterize many of Emily Carr's paintings. As she progressed as a painter, her works became increasingly abstract and simplified, particularly the trees in her paintings of BC forests. Over time, Carr began to simplify her colours as well. She did not attempt to portray her subject in a realistic manner; rather, she used the real world as inspiration for abstract, personal interpretations of her subjects.

Materials:

- construction paper, tissue paper and/or other paper in a variety of colours
- pencils
- scissors
- glue
- printer
- access to the Internet
- printed image of a landscape or one of Emily Carr's paintings

Process:

1. Discuss Emily Carr's style of painting and her use of simple shapes, forms and colour to represent landscapes.
2. Have students find or print an image of a Carr painting, *OR* an image of a Canadian landscape of their choice. If a print is not available, have students look at some works by Carr and then use their imagination to create a forest.
3. Encourage students to look at the painting or printed image as if it were a combination of simple shapes. What shapes do they see?
4. Provide students with a selection of paper in a variety of colours.
5. Have them draw out the major shapes they see on their chosen paper.
6. Have students show light and shadow by using papers with different shades of colour.
7. Have students glue shapes onto a background sheet of construction paper to create a bold and simplified landscape.
8. Display the work in the classroom.

Conclusion:

- Invite students to look at the work and talk about similarities and differences in colour, shapes and compositions.
- Have them discuss the process. How easy or hard was it to create the work? What are the differences between creating a shape collage, a painting and a landscape?
- How do the students perceive landscape and nature differently now?

Examples



PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Mindful Breathing (all levels)

Objective:

Students learn about mindfulness through a guided breathing activity.

Discussion:

Both Emily Carr and Lui Shou Kwan had an avid interest in spirituality, mindfulness and a connection to the essence and energy of nature. They explored this interest through their paintings and the environment.

Mindfulness, put in simple terms, means to pay attention, on purpose, to the present moment. Incorporating mindfulness into everyday classroom activity is becoming more and more common. A five- or ten-minute daily mindfulness practice can see students reduce stress and anxiety, increase concentration and engagement, sleep better, improve social skills, and develop problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Process:

1. Discuss mindfulness with students. Put simply, mindfulness is awareness. It is noticing our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and anything that is around us and happening right now.
2. Students can stand or sit for this activity.
3. *Optional:* Use a bell or chime to mark the beginning and end of this activity. Sound effects are also available on phone apps.
4. Ask students to start by placing both hands on their belly.
5. Have them close their eyes, or look down at their hands.
6. Guide students in taking three slow, deep breaths in and out to see if they can feel their hands being moved.
7. If you wish, count “1, 2, 3” for each breath in and “1, 2, 3” for each breath out, pausing slightly at the end of each exhale.
8. Encourage students to think about how the breath feels, answering the following questions silently, in their mind.
 - What is moving your hands? Is it the air filling your lungs?
 - Can you feel the air moving in through your nose?
 - Can you feel it moving out through your nose?
 - Does the air feel a little colder on the way in and warmer on the way out?
 - Can you hear your breath?
 - What does it sound like?
9. Take a few more moments to breathe mindfully in silence. To complete the activity, have students open their eyes.
10. For more mindfulness activities, visit the following website:
www.teachstarter.com/blog/classroom-mindfulness-activities-for-children/

Conclusion:

- Ask students how they felt during the activity.
- Was the breathing activity easy or challenging?
- How did they feel before they started the activity? After?

VOCABULARY

abstract/abstraction: a style of art that can be thought of in two ways:

- a) the artist begins with a recognizable subject and alters, distorts, manipulates or simplifies elements of it;
- b) the artist creates purely abstract forms that are unrecognizable and have no direct reference to external reality (also called non-representational art).

Mindfulness: a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations.

Modern/Modernist: a historical period of art practice—from 1850 to 1970—during which approaches to art embraced new ideas in science, political thought and many other areas. The Modernists rejected the restrictions of past art traditions and stressed innovation over all other values.

New Ink Movement: an art movement founded in the 1960s by Lui Shou Kwan in Hong Kong. It draws on traditional Chinese landscapes as well as Western aesthetics to create modern Zen-inspired abstractions using traditional Chinese ink on paper.

Spirituality: the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.

Zen: a mixture of Indian Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism. It began in China, spread to Korea and Japan, and has become popular in the West since the mid-twentieth century. The essence of Zen is attempting to understand the meaning of life directly, without being misled by logical thought or language. It emphasizes the value of meditation and intuition.

RESOURCES

Print:

Bennett, Bryan, and Constance P. Hall. *Discovering Canadian Art: Learning the Language*. Toronto: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1984.

Carr, Emily. *Beloved Land: The World of Emily Carr*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.

Hill, Lamoureux, Thom, et al. *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/National Gallery of Canada/Vancouver Art Gallery, 2006.

Rhodes, Richard. *A First Book of Canadian Art*. Toronto: Owl Books, 2001.

Thom, Ian. *Art BC: Masterworks from British Columbia*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery/Douglas & McIntyre, 2001.

Online:

www.artcyclopedia.com

www.artsask.ca

www.teachstarter.com

www.wikipedia.com

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