

*I Had an Interesting French Artist to See Me
This Summer:*

Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen in British Columbia



**TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE
FALL 2016**

Vancouver
Artgallery

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Vancouver Art Gallery

Teacher's Guide for School Programs

I Had an Interesting French Artist to See Me This Summer: Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen in British Columbia is the first exhibition pairing Modernist painters Wolfgang Paalen and Emily Carr. It tells the story of how the artists met in Victoria, BC, in 1939. During this time, the creative vision of both artists expanded in reaction to the majestic landscape of British Columbia and the monumental art of the Northwest Coast First Nations. The exhibition presents early works, additional archival materials and the innovative later work of both Carr and Paalen as they moved toward their transcendent visions.

DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of *I Had an Interesting French Artist to See Me This Summer: Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen in British Columbia*. 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 *I Had an Interesting French Artist to See Me This Summer: Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen in British Columbia* has three main goals:

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

THE EXHIBITION: *I Had an Interesting French Artist to See Me This Summer: Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen in British Columbia*

In the summer of 1939, the Austrian-born Surrealist artist Wolfgang Paalen (1905–1959) left Paris and journeyed to Alaska and British Columbia to experience First Nations culture. In Victoria, BC, he was introduced to Emily Carr (1871–1945) and her paintings of the forests and the monumental art of the Northwest Coast. The exhibition *I Had an Interesting French Artist to See Me This Summer: Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen in British Columbia* tells the story of how these two Modernist painters met in Victoria in 1939.

Paalen's journey, and his meetings with Carr, opened the door to new possibilities in contemporary art. The creative vision of both artists expanded in response to the majestic landscape of British Columbia and the awe-inspiring art of the Northwest Coast First Nations. Paalen renounced Surrealism, believing that science and art could be brought together to transform contemporary ideas by integrating the "enormous treasure of Amerindian forms into the consciousness of modern art." Between Wolfgang Paalen and Emily Carr, a story emerges of two Modernist artists struggling to make sense of the world and to create art that expressed their transcendent visions.

The curator of this project, Colin Browne, has explored new territory with his outstanding research into the eventful meetings between Carr and Paalen. The exhibition presents early works, additional archival materials and later works of both artists, assembled from public and private collections.

ARTISTS' BACKGROUND

Emily Carr (1871–1945)

Born in 1871, Emily Carr was one of the most important British Columbia artists of her generation, best known for her work documenting the villages and totem poles of First Nations peoples of BC, and for her paintings of the forests of Vancouver Island.

Carr studied art in San Francisco, London and then France, where she was introduced to outdoor sketching along with new approaches to art making. In 1912, after her return to Canada, she travelled north, visiting First Nations villages on the Skeena River and Haida Gwaii, and she produced her first major canvases of First Nations subject matter. In these works, influenced by her explorations of Modernism in Europe, she used bright colours and broken brushwork. Carr offered these works for sale to the provincial government, which rejected the work on the grounds that it was not “documentary”—it was, in essence, too abstract, too specifically an artist’s vision. Dejected, she returned to Victoria to make a living by running a boarding house, raising sheepdogs, making pottery and giving art lessons. Between 1913 and 1927, Carr produced very little painting.

In 1927, Carr’s work was included in the exhibition West Coast Art: Native and Modern at the National Gallery in Ottawa. This event was her introduction to other artists, particularly members of the Group of Seven, who recognized the quality of her work. 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.

In the late 1930s, as her health worsened, Carr began to focus more energy on writing, producing an important series of books. They included *Klee Wyck*, a book of stories based on her experiences with First Nations people, which won the Governor General’s Award for Literature in 1941. She died in 1945 in Victoria at the age of seventy-four, recognized as an artist and writer of major importance.

Wolfgang Paalen (1907–1959)

Born in Vienna, Austria, to a wealthy businessman and an actress, Wolfgang Paalen became a highly influential figure in the culture of the Modernist movements of the twentieth century. He was a painter, sculptor and theorist who joined the Abstraction-Création group in 1934 and the Surrealists in 1935. Paalen invented *fumage*, a technique for generating evocative patterns with the smoke and soot of a lit candle or lamp. His oil paintings merged dreamlike abstract spaces with forms reminiscent of humans and strange plants.

In 1939 he fled the Nazi uprising in Europe and moved to Mexico City, where he and many other poets and intellectuals were greeted enthusiastically. That same year he travelled to British Columbia to pursue his interest in First Nations art. Paalen was a creative artist, and eventually rejected official Surrealism, which he felt was oppressive. In 1942 he launched the art journal DYN, in which he wrote about his liberation from the intense Surrealist movement while in Mexico, and elaborated on his own theories of art and philosophy. *DYN* was an opinion, poetry and fine art magazine that also emphasized the importance of ethnic art and native peoples. His work significantly informed Abstract Expressionism, and his periodical was highly influential among painters of that time.

Paalen died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound at the age of fifty-four in Taxco, Mexico. His works can be found in institutions around the world, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the State Museum of Berlin.

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
- ❑ Internet. Some useful websites:
 - www.artcyclopedia.com
 - www.wikipedia.com
 - [www.ccca.ca/artists/\[name of artist\]](http://www.ccca.ca/artists/[name of artist])
- ❑ Artist Information Sheet (p. 7) and Student Worksheet (p. 8)

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 (p. 8) 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 a piece of work 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

- Born and died in Victoria, British Columbia
- Studied art in San Francisco, England and France, travelled through British Columbia visiting First Nations villages
- Lived mostly alone, kept lots of animals
- Wrote many books toward the end of her life, which were well received
- Painted First Nations villages and totem poles, and forest landscapes
- Sketched outdoors using thinned oil paint on paper, made final paintings in her studio using oil paint on canvas

Wolfgang Paalen

- Born in Vienna, Austria; died in Taxco, Mexico
- Was a painter, sculptor and theorist
- Was a member of the Abstract-Création and Surrealist groups
- Invented *fumage*, a technique for generating evocative patterns with the smoke and soot of a lit candle or lamp
- Was interested in and inspired by First Nations art
- Founded his own counter-surrealist art journal called *DYN*

Student Worksheet

	Emily Carr	Wolfgang Paalen
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
- coloured pencils, 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, including the top of the tree and an expanse of sky, a single tree.
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, and encourage 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- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Curves, Loops and Lines (all levels)

Objective:

Students create abstract drawings by filling in free-form lines.

Discussion:

Paalen's multilayered abstract paintings combine elements of Surrealism with the artist's visualizations of cosmic forces. In his works, simultaneously exploding and merging linear forms are overlaid with curves and arcs, vortices and dashed brushstrokes. Recognizable objects and shapes nearly disappear into the overall composition of lines and energetic spirals, pushing the boundaries of pictorial logic. Paintings such as *Messengers from Three Poles* (1949) are dominated by numerous parabolas that merge with circles and arcs throughout the painting.

Materials:

- ❑ thick white paper or watercolour paper
- ❑ coloured pencils, markers, watercolours or any translucent water-based paint
- ❑ black sharpies or other permanent-ink pens

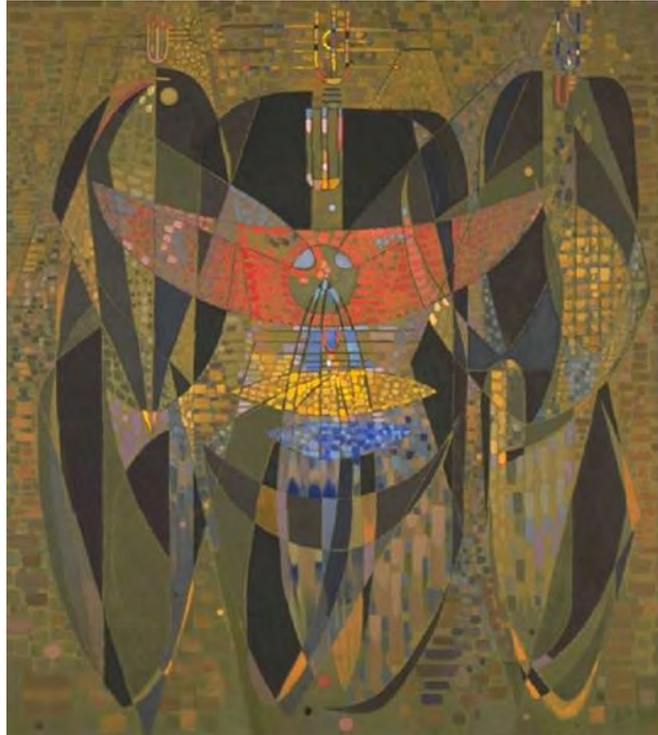
Process:

1. Start by asking students if they've ever made abstract drawings using only shapes, lines and colours without anything representational or realistic.
2. Explain the process for the activity. Students will draw curved lines and circular forms freely, without lifting their pens, and then fill in some or all of the spaces with colours. Examples are provided on p. 13.
3. Demonstrate the process of drawing free-form loops and curves on the board or a large piece of paper. Colour in some or all of the spaces.
4. Once students understand the process, have them make their own drawings.
5. Emphasize that they should fill the paper and make large enough spaces to colour. No small, tiny loops or shapes.
6. Provide students with paper and black pens to make their free-form curves, loops and lines.
7. Have them use paints, coloured pencils or markers to fill in the spaces.
8. Encourage students to add patterns and to vary colours and tones in the spaces.
9. Display the works.

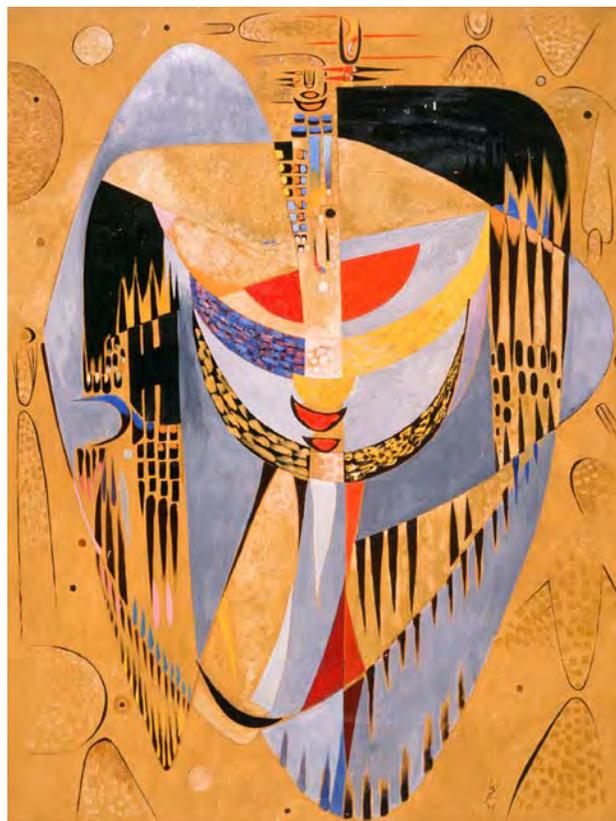
Conclusion:

- Ask students about the process. Did they enjoy it? Was it challenging? In what ways?
- How are the students' final works similar or different?
- What did they learn from the process?

Examples of works by Wolfgang Paalen

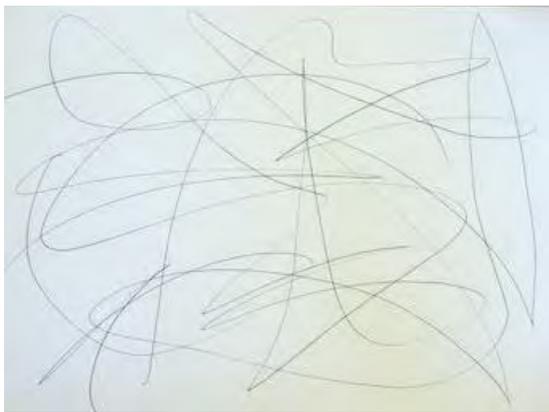
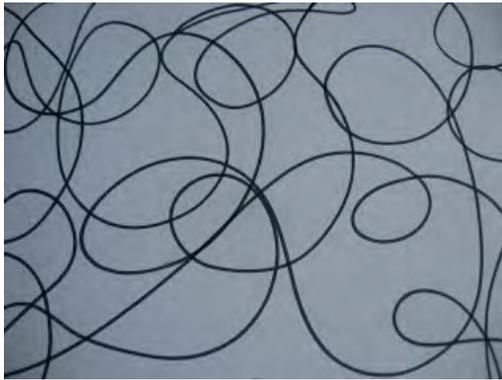


Messengers from Three Poles (1949)



Messagers des trois poles (1949)

Examples of Student Work (all levels)



PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Carr vs. Paalen (all levels)

Objective:

Students look closely and find differences and similarities in works by Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen.

Discussion:

Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen were deeply moved and astonished by nature and the great beauty and profundity of Northwest Coast art. Both artists believed indigenous art was about transformation, which influenced their work greatly. They were also interested in capturing the cosmic energy that they believed existed in all living things, and in expressing this energy in their paintings. In spite of these shared interests, however, their styles differed greatly. Where Carr's gestures and colours are often subdued and limited in palette, Paalen's are vibrating and diverse.

Materials:

- Student Worksheet, p. 15
- pencils

Process:

1. Have students look at *Strangled by Growth* by Emily Carr, and *Bella Bella* by Wolfgang Paalen (p. 15).
2. Ask students to compare and contrast the two paintings using the Student Worksheet (p. 15).
3. Divide students into groups of four to share their findings.

Conclusion:

- Which painting do the students prefer? Why?
- Were students surprised by any of the differences or similarities observed by their classmates?
- What might each painting tell the viewer about the artist who painted it?

Student Worksheet

Name: _____

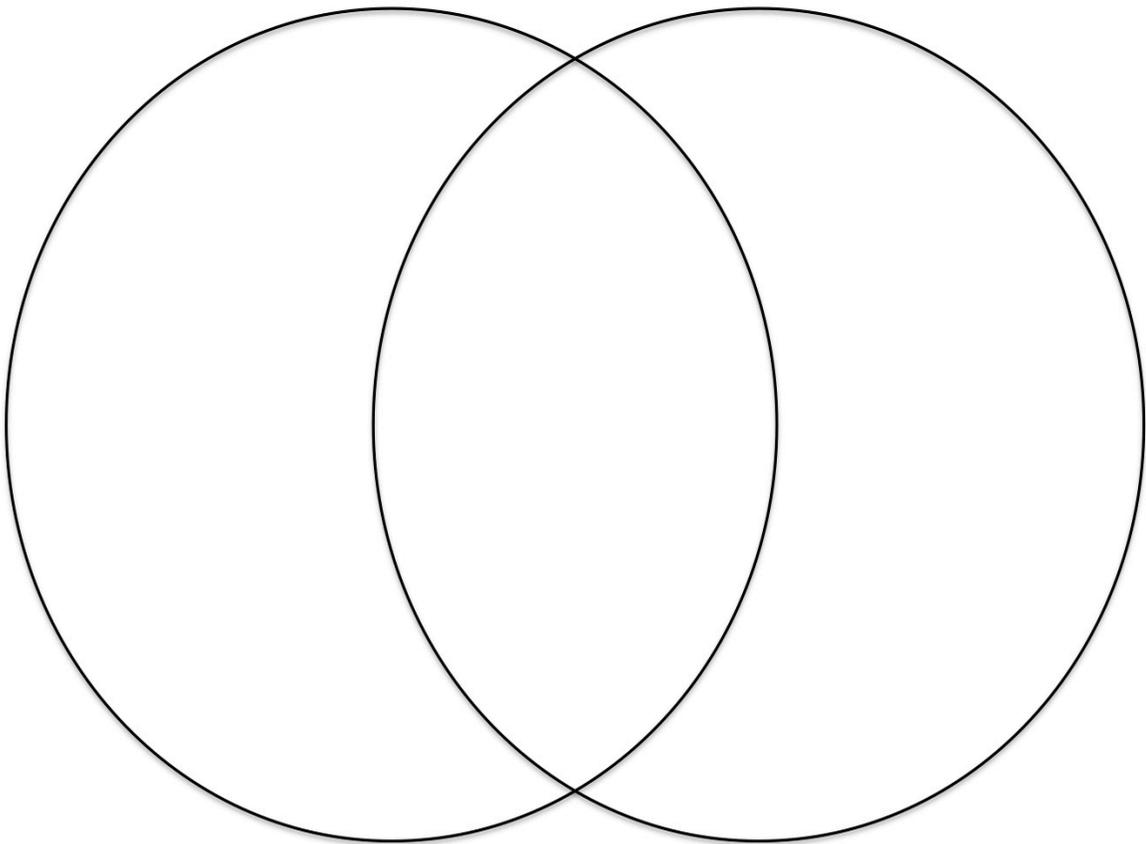
Use the Venn diagram to compare the works of art by Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen. Elements of the paintings that are similar go in the overlapping area in the centre.



Wolfgang Paalen, *Bella Bella*, 1941-42



Emily Carr, *Strangled by Growth*, 1931



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

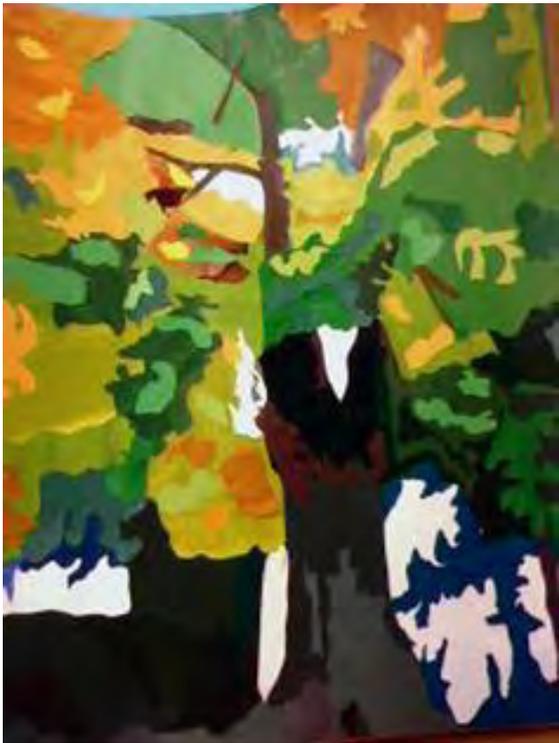
Process:

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 of Student Work (all levels)



PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Pattern Techniques (primary and intermediate)

Objective:

Students experiment with an artistic technique to create patterns and abstract designs.

Discussion:

Wolfgang Paalen is credited with inventing the Surrealist technique of *fumage*, drawing on canvas with random and temporary patterns of smoke from candles or lamps. He would often move his paper or canvas back and forth without looking so as to remove intentionality from his work. Some of his paintings from the 1930s, such as *Combat des Princes Saturniens III* (1939), were biomorphic abstractions created with *fumage*. These early experiments, rooted in European Surrealism, led to innovative *fumage* paintings that transform almost completely into mosaics of spontaneous marks.

In addition to *fumage*, there are many artistic techniques for creating random patterns. One example, perhaps less hazardous for students, is marbling.

Materials:

- ❑ thick white paper
- ❑ shaving cream
- ❑ trays, disposable plates or aluminum baking trays
- ❑ food colouring in various colours
- ❑ toothpicks or chopsticks
- ❑ rulers or spatulas (to remove excess shaving cream from print)
- ❑ **Optional:** black sharpies or other pens

Process:

1. Discuss Paalen's *fumage* technique. Show students examples on p. 19, or on the Internet. Explain the process.
2. Ask students if they know of any other artistic techniques that create patterns, such as marbling, using sponges, decalomania (symmetrical mirror-image painting created by folding painted paper in half), splatter painting, etc.
3. Introduce the students to marbling. For step-by-step instructions, see below, and www.artbarblog.com/create/diy-marbled-paper/ OR Google "marbling with shaving cream."
4. Spread shaving cream onto a tray. Scatter a few drops of food colouring onto the shaving cream. Use toothpicks to swirl the colours into each other. Once the marbling design is achieved, carefully place white paper on top and gently pat down to create a print. Lift the paper off and place it flat on the table. Smoothly but firmly scrape excess shaving cream off the paper with a ruler or spatula. The marbling design should appear clearly on the paper and will dry in a short time. It is best not to use too much food colouring or to swirl colours too hard or too long. It is a good idea to test the activity yourself before having students do it.
5. **Optional:** Once the activity is complete and the works have dried, have students trace over some of the marbling forms with black pens to create a creature-like figure inspired by Paalen's works.
6. Display the final work in the classroom.

Conclusion:

- Have students look at the prints and talk about the similarities and differences in colours and patterns.
- Discuss the process: how easy or hard was it?
- Did the work turn out as they expected?

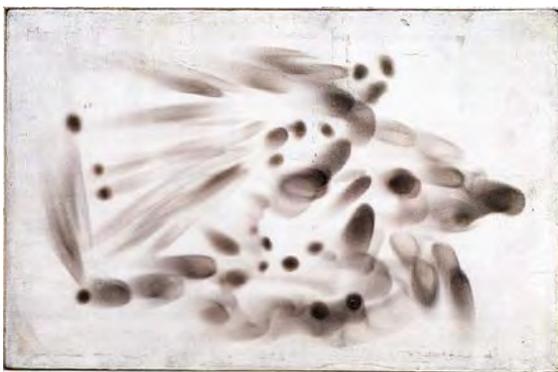
Examples of *Fumage* by Wolfgang Paalen



Combat des Princes Saturniens III (1939)



Ciel de Pieuvre (1938)

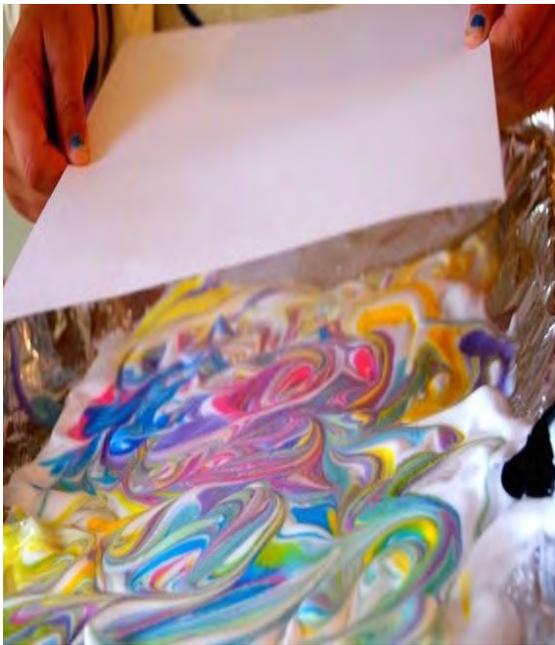


Untitled—Fumage (1938)



Untitled—Fumage (1940)

Marbling Technique



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).

Abstraction-Création: an association of abstract artists set up in Paris in 1931, with the aim of promoting abstract art through group exhibitions to counteract the influence of the Surrealist group led by André Breton.

contemporary: created in the last thirty years. Most contemporary artists are living artists.

DYN: an art magazine founded by the Austrian-Mexican surrealist Wolfgang Paalen, published in Mexico City and distributed in New York, Paris and London between 1942 and 1944. Only six issues were produced.

First Nations: aboriginal cultures of Canada. There are currently 634 recognized First Nations governments or bands across Canada, roughly half of which are in Ontario and British Columbia.

fumage: a surrealist art technique created and popularized by Wolfgang Paalen in which the smoke of a candle or kerosene lamp is applied to paper or canvas. Salvador Dalí later used the technique in his paintings, calling the technique "sfumato."

landscape: artwork in which the subject is a view of the exterior physical world. Traditionally, landscapes have been paintings or drawings depicting natural scenes and are often concerned with light, space and setting.

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.

Surrealism: a cultural movement that began in the early 1920s, best known for its visual artworks and writings. Artists painted unnerving, illogical scenes with photographic precision, created strange creatures from everyday objects and developed painting techniques that allowed the unconscious to express itself and/or an idea or concept.

RESOURCES

Print:

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

Browne, Colin. *I Had an Interesting French Artist to See Me This Summer: Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen in British Columbia*. Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2016.

Carr, Emily; foreword by Robin Laurence. *Beloved Land: The World of Emily Carr*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.

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

Online:

www.artcyclopedia.com

www.artsask.ca

www.gallery.ca

www.notimeforflashcards.com

<https://shepaintsred.com>

www.wikipedia.com

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