



REAL AND IMAGINED **LEARNING RESOURCE**

INTERPRETING THE MICHIGAN LANDSCAPE



INTRODUCTION

The landscape of Michigan is unique and varied, sculpted by glaciers thousands of years ago and altered by humans over centuries through various agricultural, urban, and industrial practices. The state is divided into two large peninsulas totaling nearly 60,000 square miles, bordered by four Great Lakes, giving it the longest freshwater coastline in the United States. These two landforms are marked by rolling hills, mountains, fields, forests, dunes, urban centers, and numerous lakes, rivers, and marshes. This incredible amount of land and water, cast across a geologically diverse area, has continued to serve as fertile ground for artistic interpretation of the place many call home.

This exhibition, drawn from the collection at Grand Valley State University, features over 30 artists from the last 150 years. These artists have spent time directly engaging with the Michigan landscape and creating works that reflect their experience. Many have been drawn outside because of the dramatic seasonal changes that impact the color, density, and atmosphere of Michigan throughout the year. Others have sought to portray the intersection of the natural world and human development, focusing on urban centers and evidence of our impact that divides, shapes, and alters the landscape.

Some of these works are realistic depictions earnestly relaying what the artist sees. Certain pieces are imaginative creations with isolated and exaggerated colors, lines, and shapes that focus our attention on different qualities of the land or blur our perception. Viewed as a whole, these works inform and illuminate our understanding of artistic engagement with landscape. They remind us that the lure of Michigan's landscape continues to captivate and inspire new generations of artists.

As you explore this exhibition, which artwork represents your Michigan landscape?



Jeanne Rockett, *Calm Morning*, acrylic on canvas, circa 2008,
Gift of Virginia Gearhart, In Honor of Her Father, 2011.73.1

CLOSE LOOKING

Challenge yourself to look at this artwork for sixty seconds. Allow your eyes to move over the entire artwork, starting from the center. On a piece of paper, record all the details and elements that you notice, and any questions you might have.

- What is happening in this landscape?
- Is there movement in this artwork? If so, where do you see it?
- What kinds of artistic techniques does Alynn Guerra use? Where do you see them?
- What message do you think the artist is trying to share? Why?

Alynn Guerra is concerned with the Anthropocene, or how humankind and our activities are impacting our environment, such as climate change, species extinction, and shrinking ecosystems. With this new information, does it change your interpretation of this artwork?

“When considering climate change or environmental disruption, we frequently envision oil spills, hurricanes, landslides, and extreme weather; however, the influence of our presence on this planet can be observed in countless examples all around us.

My prints depict my perspective on the Anthropocene, reflecting on small details often overlooked, such as robins unable to find worms due to drought or unexpected snowfall, birds constructing nests with man-made materials like tape and bottle caps, the barren nights; without fireflies, without stars and without the chirping of crickets.” - **Alynn Guerra**

(Larger image available on page 8)



Alynn Guerra, *Downtown*, print, 2009, GVSU Collection, 2014.97.3

(Larger image available on page 9)



Geoffrey Holstad, *Mandan, MI (Ghost Town)*, mixed media, 2008, GVSU Collection, 2008.506.1

GEOFFERY HOLSTAD, *MANDAN, MICHIGAN, GHOST TOWN*

- There is a lot of negative space in this artwork. Why do you think the artist chose to leave so much of the paper blank?
- What is left out of this artwork?
- If you could fill in the empty space, what would you add to this artwork?
- What is the figure saying?
- How do you think the figure feels?
- What is the mood of the overall artwork? Why do you think that?

"In this body of work I seek to reflect a model of ecological sustainability as seen in the past, in examples of simple homes and simple living. This odd juxtaposition between what we need for environmental reform creates a forum in which we can assess the growing need for a more local economy. While understanding our current global scale, Northern Michigan serves as a model in which this livelihood seems feasible in bits and pieces, as framed by history." - **Geoffrey Holstad**



Mathias J. Alten, *Michigan Summer Woods*, oil on canvas, 1916,
Gift of George H. and Barbara Gordon,, 1998.601.1

MEDITATION WITH MATHIAS

Step into the calm of Michigan Summer Woods by artist Mathias Alten. If possible, dim the lights and encourage visitors to get comfortable.

Allow your eyes to wander over the painting while taking deep, slow breaths.

What would you hear in these peaceful woods? Is there a stream nearby, or birds singing?

Imagine sitting beneath the trees.

How does the ground feel? The sunshine? Is there a breeze?

Breathe deeply and imagine the scents of summer inside the forest.

(Larger image available on page 10)

Activities

Additional Options for Meditation with Mathias:

- Guide your visitors through this experience. You could play a meditative soundtrack of birdsong and guide them through box breathing. Encourage visitors to focus on the artwork and allow their minds to drift.
- Dim the lights. Using a soft voice, describe the painting in detail. Encourage visitors to close their eyes and imagine themselves inside the painting.
- Practice meditative drawing through contour line drawing in the gallery. Remind visitors that meditative drawing is about the process, not perfection.
- In a classroom, project an image of the painting, play music, and allow visitors to practice meditative art-making with charcoal, pastels, or watercolors.

Programming:

Abstract Rainbow Landscape Activity: Inspired by Armand Merizon's *Untitled (Abstract Rainbow)*, explore how to make an image of a landscape into an abstract artwork.

Paint Like Bob Ross: There are a lot of many images of trees in *Real and Imagined*. Have a Bob Ross party and paint some happy little trees!

Mindfulness in the Museum: Inspired by Meditation with Mathias, host a mindful moment in the gallery. Potential activities include yoga, naptime, guided meditation, and a sound bath.

En Plein Air: Host an en plein air painting activity! Many landscape artists, including Mathias Alten, created their landscape paintings outside.

MICHIGAN ARTISTS

Many of the artists in this exhibition live in Michigan. For your convenience, here is a list of their websites in case you would like to invite an artist to your museum or gallery.

Alynn Guerra: <https://www.redhydrantpress.com/>

Ladislav Hanka: <https://www.ladislavhanka.com/>

Dellas Henke: <https://www.dellashenke.com/>

Stephen Duren: <https://stephenduren.com/>

Mariel Versluis: <https://kcad.ferris.edu/programs/faculty/versluis-mariel.html> / <https://www.instagram.com/mariel.versluis.studio/>

Jane Everhart: <https://www.instagram.com/janeeverhart/?hl=en>

Deborah Reid Jenkins: <https://www.debrareidjenkins.com/>

Jeanne Rockett: <http://jeannerockett.com/>

Nathan Abramowski: <https://www.rediscoveringthegrand.com/>
nateabramowski

Jason D. Rutter: <https://www.rediscoveringthegrand.com/jasonrutter>



Debra Reid Jenkins, *Greens Lake, Beaver Island*, soft pastel, 2000, GVSU Collection, 2002.435.1





