Provocative Questions

• How is our response to an artwork affected by how and where it is displayed?
• Can the artist’s creative process be as important as the finished work?
• How do science and ecology influence contemporary art?

This guide is designed to prepare your students for a meaningful Art Truck experience. A basic understanding of the artist, her style, and aesthetic approaches prior to the Art Truck’s visit will heighten your students’ enthusiasm and greatly enhance their appreciation of this unique opportunity.

Included in this guide is an introduction to this year’s Art Truck exhibit by artist Calder Kamin, as well as three lesson plans that will help your students navigate through the Art Truck. These lessons explore themes of ecology, biodiversity, synanthropes, physical environments, and architecture. All three lessons are designed so that you can adapt them to students in grades K-12.
Q: What is installation art?
A: Installation art is often created specifically for one location, has three-dimensional components, and is intended to transform perceptions of the space in which it is located.

Q: How is the installation experience different from the traditional art museum experience?
A: The visitor cannot view the same work at a later time in a different location. Once the installation is taken down, it will never again be re-constructed in exactly the same way. Why? Because installations are site specific; that is, they are conceived and created for a specific exhibition space. Another exhibition space would require the artist to re-think the materials, configuration, and even the message of the installation.

In addition, unlike more traditional displays, installation art is meant to immerse the viewer in a transformed environment that evokes our emotions and senses. Installations can vary widely in the experience they present. For example you may encounter a multitude of visual stimuli into a fictional world, or the experience may be subtler in its change to a particular environment. You may be asked to participate, or just observe. Installations can include an array of materials from found objects to new media including video or sound. Often experiences of installation art are focused on the viewer’s interpretation of the experience, rather than solely on the artist’s intention or materials.

For example, in this particular truck installation the viewer is called upon to examine their understanding of synanthropic relationships (relationships between humans and the animals that thrive due to human impact) and the effect they can have on animals around them. Calder Kamin uses digital painting, audio, trash, and the visual language of advertising to explore the relationships between humans and synanthropic animals. These varied processes provide the viewer with multiple points of entry to develop an understanding of Calder’s work.

Q: Do artists know exactly what their installations are going to look like before they arrive at the exhibition site?
A: They usually have a general idea, but often the pieces evolve as the artist begins to work within the actual exhibition space. Often, the nature of the space itself will prompt changes and revisions in the artist’s original conception. For instance, Calder made several alterations to her installation based on the opportunities presented by an old vegetable truck. Given the educational component of her art, work spaces were installed in the truck so that students can participate through hands-on activities while experiencing the rest of the installation. Other considerations included safety, cost and meeting time lines.

Q: Do artists assemble their work by themselves, or do they have assistance?
A: Installations are sometimes so multifaceted and complex, they require a fabrication team to assist the artist.

Q: Should an installation be perceived as one artwork or many?
A: It depends on the installation. In the case of this Art Truck installation the inside and outside of the truck work in conjunction with one another to communicate different aspects of the artist’s exploration.

Q: What happens to the installation art after the exhibition is over?
A: Unlike traditional works of art, installations are disassembled when their time is done. Some of the materials are thrown away. Others are recycled. Yet other materials are re-used in future installations.

Q: Where do artists obtain their materials?
A: Contemporary installation artists utilize a wide variety of materials depending on their concept. These can include everyday ordinary objects, personal belongings, recycled materials, technological gadgets, or fabricated objects. The artist may collect, create or purchase these materials. Keep in mind that an artist’s materials often communicate meaning, and sometimes the way in which they gather materials can be a meaningful part of the artwork, too.
CALDER KAMIN

Calder Kamin is an artist from Kansas City, MO whose public projects and other artworks investigate the complicated relationships between humans and animals in urban environments. She holds a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute and currently works at KCAI as an Academic and Career Advisor.

Calder is drawn to the contradictory aspects of the relationships between humans, other animals, and the built environment. She says, “I am interested in synanthropes—animals that thrive due to mankind’s impact on biodiversity. Urbanization has been detrimental to many species, but it has also accelerated adaptations in some animals living amongst humans.” From dogs to pigeons to cockroaches, these creatures have learned to live with us. How can we better learn to live with them?

Calder’s art asks us to re-examine our understanding of these relationships, but it also provides an opportunity for both artist and viewer to become active participants in forming new kinds of relationships with other creatures. For example, the project, Impact Proof, consists of vinyl decals in the shape of birds placed on windows that prevent real birds from colliding into the windows. Visitors to the Art Truck can aid their avian neighbors by creating an Impact Proof decal using one of Calder’s stencil designs.

INFLUENCES

Calder’s work is influenced by many different sources, from visual artists to authors, scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers. Her ideas often begin from what she reads, but the internet is the pivotal tool in her research process. Early influences include artists such as Patricia Piccinini, Lee Bontecou, and Takashi Murakami. However, reading Temple Grandin’s Animals in Translation marked a significant turning point in Calder’s art. As resources for informational graphic design, Calder reads the books of Edward Tufte and studies National Geographic magazines. She continues to find inspiration in the contemporary art of Andrea Zittel and Eduardo Kac.

LINKS

- Patricia Piccinini—multimedia artist: www.patriciapiccinini.net
- Lee Bontecou—sculptor and printmaker:
- Takashi Murakami—painter, sculptor, and commercial media artist:
  www.takashimurakami.com
- Temple Grandin—author, Animals in Translation: www.templegrandin.com
- Edward Tufte—statistician and expert on informational graphics:
  www.edwardtufte.com
- National Geographic—resource for examples of infographics:
  ngm.nationalgeographic.com
- Slavoj Zizek—philosopher and cultural critic: www.iep.utm.edu/zizek
- Andrea Zittel—sculptor and installation artist: www.zittel.org
- Eduardo Kac—multimedia, communications and biological artist:
  www.ekac.org

DISCUSSION TOPIC

Our growing cities and towns have changed not only the landscape around us, but also our relationship to the animals that inhabit it. Skyscrapers are built higher and higher so that we can now live and work in the air space of birds. Suburbs extend further into areas that were once considered wild. A new relationship has formed, one that has both positive and negative effects on urban wildlife. One where humans see and understand the difference between things that are natural vs. man-made, but animals cannot make that distinction.

The windows in high-rise buildings reflect the sky around them and extend it beyond the glass, causing birds to fly directly into those closed windows causing injury or death. On the other hand, the trash we discard becomes building material for birds’ nests. Birds even use cigarette butts to fight off parasites in their nests. Simply put, animals have adapted to humans and not the other way around. Calder explores these issues in her practice by focusing on synanthropic animals, domesticated pets, architecture, and changes in perceptions of nature from past to present.

What is the definition of a synanthrope?

What types of animals are considered urban wildlife? How many of these animals do you see near you home or school? Do you see more than others? Why do you think that is?

What is ecology?

What is biodiversity? How have humans influenced it?
INTRODUCTION
About the Art and the Artist

THE ARTISTIC PROCESS
The following discussion will help your students understand that the artistic process – research, creative thinking, collaboration, choice of materials, and manipulation of these materials – can be as important and meaningful as the completed work.

Research
The work of many artists often spans multiple disciplines, extending into areas such as science or social activism. Calder’s work reflects her investigation into subjects such as ecology, biodiversity, waste, urban environments, and social responsibility. Her artistic process for a given project may include at-home research, exploration of her own environment, or close observation of animals’ behavior. Contemporary life and our access to information offers up a never-ending source of ideas, processes and artistic identities that are open for sampling, recycling and exchange.

Media
Just as a poet carefully chooses their words to create meaning, an artist carefully chooses their materials (or media) to convey ideas and thoughts. For this exhibit, the artist has used a variety of resources and materials, including an audio component, graphic design, the visual language of advertising, and reusable waste to express her ideas.

What other materials do you see in the truck? Why do you think Calder chose those materials? How do those materials fit into Calder’s ideas about waste and recycling/repurposing?

What do you notice about the materials used on the outside of the truck? What type of imagery do you see on the outside of the truck? What is a mandala? From what culture does it originate? How does the truck mandala relate to the artist’s concept for the rest of her exhibition?

Mobile Gallery
The space in which we view a work of art can influence the way we see it. Normally, artwork is viewed in a museum setting. Here the context has been changed. Rather than traveling to a gallery to see artworks, the gallery has the ability to travel to you.

How is viewing art in a truck different from visiting a museum? Does it change the way you see and understand the art?

What are some advantages to having an art exhibition in a truck? What difficulties might there be with creating a gallery in a truck rather than a museum?
INTENTIONS
Students will explore the intersections of conservation, art, and technology while learning careful observation and data collecting skills.

BACKDROP
Have you ever heard the term “citizen scientist”? Anyone can assist scientific research by sharing the observations of nature through crowd sourcing, which extends data collecting capabilities for researchers. Calder is fascinated by the inclusive collaboration growing between technology and conservation. She participates in the Audubon Christmas Bird Count in January, The Great Backyard Bird Count online, and can identify new species using the iBird app on her iPhone.

CONVERSATIONS
What birds do you usually see in your neighborhood or near your school? Do they have different sizes, shapes, and colors? Do they make different sounds? Where do these birds make their homes? Do they live close to people or further away? What kinds of things do they eat? Have you ever seen birds interacting with trash or using it in their nests? Has a bird ever exhibited behavior that surprised you? If you were a bird, what would you see flying over your school or neighborhood?

ACTIVITY
Using Calder’s illustrated survey of Utah birds, take your students on an urban bird-scouting adventure near your school. Alternately, send the survey home with students to be completed individually in their own backyard. Typically, birds will be more plentiful in the early morning of late afternoon. Explain to your students they will be able to see more birds if they stay quiet and move slowly. You could also have students sit down as they observe.

Encourage students to look for clues, pay attention to sounds, and think about where birds might be found and why. Have students closely observe details to be able to determine the species of bird. How big is the bird? Does it have a long or short beak? What colors are its tail feathers? Have students circle the birds that they see or list the name of a bird not found on the survey.

Collect the surveys from the students and, if necessary, help them enter the data onto the Audubon Society’s eBird website using the Art Truck’s eBird account. Use eBird to follow data collected by others in Salt Lake City and further discuss students’ observations. Visual analysis of the survey information will be shared for the duration of Calder’s exhibition, provided by eBird.

MATERIALS
Bird Survey*, clipboard, and pencils.

*Download at www.utahmoca.org/art-truck or email elly.baldwin@utahmoca.org

Art Truck e-Bird Account info:
ebird.org
User Name: ArtTruck
Password: ACOMHATU

LINKS:
Websites–
National Audubon Society: birds.audubon.org
National Geographic: Backyard Birding animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birding
INTENTIONS
Students will explore the ecological impact of public sculpture by creating a work of art that functions as a nest-building supply station for birds.

BACKDROP
A synanthrope is an animal that thrives in a man-made environment. Birds cannot distinguish between what is natural and what is man-made, and often trash appears in nests built in cities and suburban areas. Calder’s Synanthrope Stations are ceramic pods that contain nest building materials for birds in the form of collected trash. Calder states, “research shows that Synanthropic animals take advantage of the colors, insular properties, and longevity of plastics. Many birds benefit from synthetic over natural nesting materials.”

CONVERSATIONS
How might you compare the function of The Synanthrope Station to a convenience store for humans?
If you were an animal, would you be able to tell the difference between environments that are man-made and those that are natural? Why or why not?
What are some ways that you can reuse trash?
Do you think that society effectively manages waste?
Do you think societal standards for cleanliness affect how we reuse or recycle?

ACTIVITY
Have students bring an empty rinsed plastic beverage bottle (such as a milk jug or soda bottle) to class. Using the plastic container and scissors, have the students form the basic form of their sculpture. Ask students to think about where they are going to place their sculpture and how that might affect its form.

As a class or as an individual homework assignment the night before, have students collect pieces of trash to add to the sculptures. Students should think about aesthetics (for example what colors or textures they prefer) as well as practicality (what might be useful for the bird in building a nest). Keep safety and cleanliness in mind when advising students on what trash is acceptable.

Cut trash into strips to weave into the sculptures. When finished, students should place their sculptures outside where birds might search for nest-building materials, either at school or at home. Monitor the sculptures to see if the project is successful and discuss.

MATERIALS
Rinsed plastic beverage bottles, gloves for collecting trash, collected clean trash, and scissors.

LINKS:
Artist-Brian Jungen: nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/jungen
Artist-Yuken Teruya: www.yukenteruyastudio.com
Artist-Chakaia Booker: www.chakaiabooker.com
LESSON 3
Create Your Own Public Service Announcement (PSA)

INTENTIONS
Students will research a chosen topic and study advertisements in order to think critically about an issue and create their own public service announcement.

BACKDROP
Calder studies examples of advertisements as well as infographics found in National Geographic magazines, and uses similar language and imagery in her public service announcements. The language of advertising allows Calder to convey complexities within the animal-human relationships she explores in a way that allows the viewer to easily digest the information through simple-to-understand images and minimal text. The viewer is encouraged to ask questions about the topics being investigated in each PSA. In addition, the ambiguity of the message is cause for further investigation and research on the part of the viewer.

CONVERSATIONS
How do advertisers/advertisements use imagery and language to influence decision-making and the desirability of their products? 
What other tactics do advertisers use? 
What is subversive advertising? 
How are you personally influenced by advertisements? 
How do you feel about advertising?

ACTIVITY
Have students research a topic that interests them. Their topics could be limited to biodiversity, or they could extend into other areas such as health, food, or technology. Students should look for information that complicates their topic, sheds new light on the commonplace, or provides a contradiction to be further explored.

Provide examples of advertisements for students to explore and have them think about the advertisements they encounter every day. Have the students consider what kind of language and imagery they will use in their own advertisement and why. Should the language be direct or subtle? Academic or slang?

Using paper and colored pencils or pens, have students craft their own PSA related to their research. Alternately, students can create their PSA entirely on the computer if resources are available.

MATERIALS
Research materials (internet, books and magazines), colored paper, colored pencils or pens.

LINKS:
Artist-Barbara Kruger: www.spruethmagers.com/artists/barbara_kruger
Artist-Josephine Meckseper: www.parrishart.org/exhibitions/platform-josephine-meckseper#UheTeyPQuc
Website-Above the Influence: www.abovetheinfluence.com
IMPACT PROOF
Window collisions (along with cat killings) do the most damage to bird populations. Impact Proof is a public project consisting of vinyl cut decals in the shape of birds that prevent window strikes. Typically, birds cannot determine where open sky ends and a building begins because windows reflect the sky. Calder explains, “when a bird encounters a window decal it will change it’s course to prevent from entering, what it perceives, as another animals airspace.” Visitors to the Art Truck can help save birds’ lives by using one of Calder’s stencils to create their own paper window decal or by purchasing one of the original vinyl decals through UMOCA’s Art Shop.

THE SYNANTHROPE STATION
A synanthrope is an animal that thrives in a man-made environment. Birds cannot distinguish between what is natural and what is man-made, and often trash appears in nests built in cities and suburban areas. Calder’s Synanthrope Stations are ceramic pods that contain nest building materials for birds in the form of collected trash. Calder states, “research shows that Synanthropic animals take advantage of the colors, insular properties, and longevity of plastics. Many birds benefit from synthetic over natural nesting materials.” The ability of birds to quickly adapt to their changing environment in this way can serve as inspiration for creatively solving our own waste issues.
PSA
Calder’s Public Service Announcements address our relationships with the animals that live closest to us by calling attention to inconsistencies within those relationships. In “Squab, it’s what used to be for dinner,” Calder contrasts the societal view of street pigeons as dirty pests with the reality of pigeon as a source of food. Domesticated pigeons were widely raised for their meat before the proliferation of the chicken industry in the United States, and many still eat pigeon today. “Kuddly Killer” questions the creature comfort of cat ownership at the expense of birds’ lives (one billion birds are killed each year by pet cats). “Cigarettes, bad for you, good for birds” presents the contradiction that cigarettes could be both healthy and unhealthy. While smoking is harmful for humans, the cigarette butts that birds find and use in their nests contain a chemical that kills parasites and keeps baby birds healthier.

LOVE LISTENING STATIONS
The Love Listening Stations are an interactive installation of two sets of headphones disguised as dog ears, playing audio of different dog-owners talking ‘baby talk’ to their pets, and illustrating the curious relationship that some dog owners have with their furry companions.
After visiting the Art Truck, students and their families can make a record of art in unexpected places through photography, drawing, and writing.

Ask them to share their discoveries with us by sending ideas, comments, and images to: elly.baldwin@utahmoca.org.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY FUN

After visiting the Art Truck, students and their families can make a record of art in unexpected places through photography, drawing, and writing.

Ask them to share their discoveries with us by sending ideas, comments, and images to: elly.baldwin@utahmoca.org.