

# THE ART TRUCK

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This guide is designed to prepare your students for a meaningful Art Truck experience. A basic understanding of the artists and key concepts addressed in their artwork 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, *Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove*, by artist **Céline Downen**, as well as three lesson plans that will help you reinforce important ideas in the classroom before or after your Art Truck visit. Two of the lesson plans can be easily adapted for students in grades K-12, while the final lesson is most appropriate for students in grades 7-12.

### Ask Your Students:

- What are the advantages of displaying artwork in a mobile exhibition?
- How can art help create community?
- How are humans interconnected with our natural environment?
- What makes a strong community?

# INTRODUCTION

## Q&A: INSTALLATION ART

The space in which we view artwork can influence the way we understand it. Normally, artwork is viewed in a museum. Here the context has changed. Rather than traveling to a gallery to see artworks, the gallery has the ability to travel to you. This section will help your students understand the nature of **installation art** in the context of this year's Art Truck installation, *Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove*.

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

### Q What is installation art?

**A** Installation art is created specifically for one location and is intended to transform perceptions of the space in which it is located. In the case of *Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove*, the installation transforms the Art Truck into a forest of memories and stories, both manmade and natural.

### 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. Installations are site specific; that is, they are conceived and created for a specific space. Another exhibition space would require the artist to re-think the materials, configuration, or even the message of the installation.

Unlike more traditional displays, installation art is meant to immerse the viewer in a transformed environment. However, installations can vary widely in the experience they present. For example, you may encounter a multitude of visual stimuli or the experience may be much subtler. You may be asked to participate or just observe. Often, experiences of installation art are focused on the viewer's interpretation, rather than solely on the artist's intention or materials.

Viewers of *Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove* enter a forest scene constructed from natural found-objects, prints of native flora and cyanotype murals. By immersing the viewer in the installation, *Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove* challenges the typical process of viewing art that happens in museums. When viewing

art in a museum, one usually remains cognizant of the museum space around them, which influences the way viewers perceive a work of art. In the Art Truck, viewers explore a forest made of aspen branches, prints and cyanotypes of native flora. Downen places the viewer in a microcosmic representation of Utah's aspen groves, asking them to acknowledge their presence within that natural community.

### Q Where do artists obtain their materials?

**A** Contemporary installation artists utilize a wide variety of materials depending on their concept. The artist may collect, create or purchase these materials. Keep in mind that an artist's materials often help communicate meaning.

In the case of *Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove*, as is the case for most of Downen's work, the artist's *gather-piece-stitch* approach defines her material collection process. Downen gathers objects from nature, using some as they are and using others to transform human-made materials, as in the case of her cyanotype murals. Downen's use of collected materials helps to further connect her work with the natural community she is a part of. By relying on her natural surroundings for sourcing materials, Downen's work becomes an example of the very human-nature connection her work aims to foster.

### 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. Other considerations that may impact the final result include safety, cost and time. For this installation, Downen created different aspects of the exhibition in advance before they were installed in the truck. In addition, the artist allowed the nature of the space itself to prompt changes and revisions in her original idea.

### Q Do installation artists assemble their work by themselves, or do they have assistance?

**A** Installations are sometimes so complex that they require a team to assist the artist. While Downen is responsible for the vision and final installation of this year's installation, her process involves other people, such as her children who are featured in the cyanotype murals. Downen's incorporation of other people in her artistic process is reflective of her concern with the connections between people in their communities.

### Q Should an installation be perceived as one artwork or many?

**A** It depends on the installation. In the case of *Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove*, the installation is a unified concept made up of multiple integrated features and should be perceived as one artwork.

### 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. Materials are thrown away, recycled, or re-used in future installations.

# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

### CÉLINE DOWNEN

Céline Downen pieces together community voices with elements of her natural surroundings to create a sense of place. Her artistic process can be summed up in three words: *gather-piece-stitch*. *Gather* represents the collecting of materials, *piece* is the various processes used, and *stitch* is the end result, or how everything comes to fruition. Trained as a photographer, Downen also explores mediums such as printmaking, book arts and sculpture.

Working with students in the Utah community, Downen has organized a multitude of creative workshops and exhibitions.

One such exhibition was held at UMOCA in 2017, titled *Beehive Works*. *Beehive Works* drew upon the beehive as a symbol of Utah as a basis for collaborative art-making workshops for youth. A 2016 work, *gather-piece-stitch: The Art of Place*, incorporated natural objects found by the artist and her two young sons, as well as materials produced by the community such as poems written by schoolchildren and objects with special histories. Both projects express themes typical of Downen's work, such as the strength found in collaboration and community, and the importance of the materials and processes she uses to make her finished art objects.

Downen's finished works are energized by their sense of history formed through the artist's use of memory-imbued found objects and collaborative construction. By transferring found objects to paper and transforming materials to form a three-dimensional space, Downen creates art that relies on the viewer's presence and active relationship with the space and objects there, as well as their own memories. Downen's incorporation of objects pre-loaded with histories and stories, such as the schoolchildren's poems, further connects her work to the communities around it. Downen's Art Truck installation, *Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove*, is no less concerned with the same ideas. Downen combines tree branches that represent Pando the Trembling Giant, an aspen grove in Utah that is actually one single organism, with images and cyanotypes of native flora. The resulting space asks viewers to engage with a microcosm of Utah's natural ecosystems and human communities.

Downen grew up in Salt Lake City and moved to Evanston, IL when she was 11. She graduated with a BA in Photography from Columbia College in 1996, returning to Utah in 2006. In 2016, she completed an MFA in Community-Based Art Education at the University of Utah. She has taught the course, *Art in the Community*, at the University of Utah and currently teaches art classes through the Utah Division of Arts and Museums. Downen was UMOCA's first Educator-In-Residence.



### LINKS

#### Céline Downen | *Beehive Works*

[www.utahmoca.org/portfolio/celinedownen\\_beehiveworks](http://www.utahmoca.org/portfolio/celinedownen_beehiveworks)

#### Céline Downen | *gather-piece-stitch: The Art of Place*

[artistsofutah.org/15Bytes/index.php/33882](http://artistsofutah.org/15Bytes/index.php/33882)

#### Céline Downen | Interview

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiCS0-CVxV0&t=0s&list=PLNFSR9Vnjat\\_4GLK\\_wl-EbWqsk2fVGtm&index=12](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiCS0-CVxV0&t=0s&list=PLNFSR9Vnjat_4GLK_wl-EbWqsk2fVGtm&index=12)



Details of artworks by Céline Downen

# INTRODUCTION

## THE ARTISTIC PROCESS

Framed within the context of this year’s Art Truck exhibition, the following discussion will help your students understand that the artistic process can be as important and meaningful as completed artwork. The creative process often includes creative thinking, research, experimentation, collaboration, choice of materials and manipulation of materials.

## INFLUENCES

Downen’s *gather-piece-stitch* method informs all of her work, whether it be via the collection of found objects or the “stitching” together of individual pieces made in collaborative settings. At its core, Downen’s work is influenced by both human and natural communities, as well as relationships between the two. The artist’s *gather-piece-stitch* approach can even be applied to her choice of media. Piecing media and processes together to create layers of history and memory within her works, Downen connects present and past, nature and people, forming stories of humans interwoven in their communities and environments.

*Salt, Sage, and the Aspen Grove* was inspired by Pando, or the Trembling Giant, a massive grove of Utah aspen trees that are actually a single organism. The aspen grove, as one organism consisting of thousands of trees, becomes a metaphor for community in general. Ultimately, *Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove* encourages its viewers to be more aware of their role in any community.

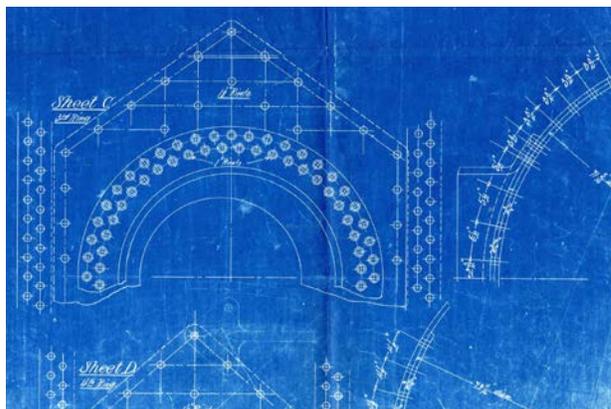
## MATERIALS & PROCESSES

*Salt, Sage and the Aspen Grove* is a multimedia work, combining cyanotypes, printed images, and found natural objects to form a single installation. Downen’s manipulation of found objects to form a three-dimensional space creates art that relies on the viewer’s presence and active relationship with the space and objects there, as well as their own memories. The artist’s incorporation of natural objects pre-loaded with histories and stories connects her work to the communities around it, both human and natural. This connection is strengthened with every viewer of the work who brings their own memories and histories to the space.

The legacy of the cyanotype process Downen utilizes in the installation further exemplifies connections between natural and human communities. The cyanotype was very popular for a short time after its invention in 1842, though it was rarely used for artistic images. The dualities of the historical usage of cyanotype—botany versus architecture, art versus utility—enhances the conflation of nature and human community in this installation.



From Photographs of British Algae



Cyanotype blueprint

## WHAT IS CYANOTYPE?



Portrait of Anna Atkins

Cyanotype is a photo printing process that uses chemicals containing iron and results in a cyan-blue print. Cyanotype is technically a photogram process, or a photo printing process that does not require the use of a camera. However, artists can expand the capabilities of the cyanotype by using cameras to create negatives that are then used to make cyanotype prints.

Cyanotype was discovered by John Herschel in 1842, who utilized the process for copying notes, diagrams and drawings. Anna Atkins, an English botanist, used the process to make detailed prints of her vast algae, seaweed and plant collections. These prints are thought to be the first images taken by a woman, and the book they are collected in, *Photographs of British Algae*, is thought to be the first book illustrated with photographic images rather than drawings or engravings. Though they were not created as artworks, Atkins’ prints with their beauty and drama certainly influence those who use the cyanotype process today, including Downen. Cyanotype was once rarely used for artistic purposes, but is now employed by many contemporary artists.

# LESSON 1

## SUN PRINT CYANOTYPES GRADES K-12

### INTENTIONS

Students create cyanotype prints from found objects. Prior to the print process, students find objects around their homes, neighborhoods, or on a group collecting trip to be used in their cyanotype prints. Discussing ways that objects can represent a place or an idea should help students make more informed and considered choices when choosing their objects. Cyanotype prints are a great way for students to learn about and consider the elements of space and shape in their artwork.

### GOALS

- To gain understanding of how to use negative and positive space as a compositional tool.
- To develop an appreciation for the artistic application of found objects.
- To develop ways of representing complex ideas through representational objects.
- To develop connections between students, their artworks and their environment.
- To gain knowledge of alternative photographic printing techniques.

### CONVERSATIONS

We can use the Elements of Art as tools to create a strong composition in any form of visual art. Understanding the effect of space on composition is helpful in communicating the intent of the artist when creating art and deciphering the intent of the artist when viewing art. Through understanding space and shape through the use of found objects, the practice of observing these elements in our surroundings becomes easier and can inform our future art practice. Experimenting with less common artistic processes such as cyanotype or the use of found objects can inspire us to evaluate the choices we make working in any media.

### ACTIVITY

1. Introduce activity to students prior to time scheduled for activity to allow time for the collection of objects. You can also let students find objects around the classroom or school, or go on an object-finding expedition together as a class!
2. Directions will vary by brand of cyanotype paper. Arrange objects (flat objects work best) on cyanotype paper in a space with low light.
3. Lay acrylic sheet (if provided with paper) over objects to secure students' compositions. If no acrylic layer is provided, or if non-flat objects are used, find a sunny area protected from the wind to protect students' compositions from disturbance during exposure.
4. Expose paper to the sun with objects in place for the length of time indicated by the instructions included with cyanotype paper, generally 2 - 8 minutes depending on time of day and sun conditions.
5. Remove objects from paper and bring inside, out of the strong light.
6. Immerse paper in tap water for the length of time indicated on package, generally 1 - 2 minutes. Add hydrogen peroxide to the water to deepen the blue of the prints if desired.
7. Remove and let dry. Places where objects were placed will remain white as the space that was exposed to the sun turns blue.

### Extension Connection to Natural Sciences | Grades 7-12

Use plant materials as objects for creating the cyanotype prints. After students have finished their prints, have them identify and label the plant species in their work. Further challenge students by instructing them to form cladograms or evolutionary trees out of the class's prints. Connect this activity to contemporary issues by turning the collection process into a hunt for invasive plant species!

### MATERIALS

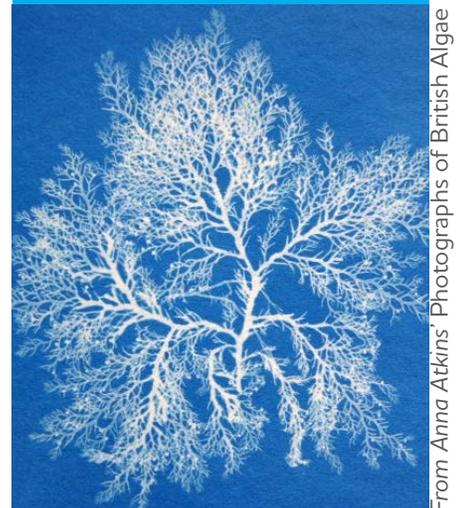
Cyanotype Paper (available at many arts and crafts stores—look for Nature Print® or Sunprint® brands)  
 Acrylic Sheets (optional)  
 Found Objects  
 Sunlight  
 Tap Water  
 Tub/Basin (used for submerging prints in tap water while processing)  
 Hydrogen Peroxide (optional)

### LINKS

**Anna Atkins | Botanical Prints**  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna\\_Atkins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Atkins)

**Christian Marclay | Musical Cyanotypes**  
[fraengelgallery.com/exhibitions/cyanotypes](https://fraengelgallery.com/exhibitions/cyanotypes)

**Barbara Kasten | Abstract Photograms**  
[barbarakasten.net/photogenic-painting](https://barbarakasten.net/photogenic-painting)



From Anna Atkins' Photographs of British Algae

# LESSON 2

## 'NATURE-HOOD' FOUND OBJECT COLLABORATIVE MAP GRADES K-12

### INTENTIONS

Students create maps from found objects. Students find objects around their homes, neighborhoods, or on a class trip to be used in a large map made up of each student's objects. Discussing ways that objects can represent a place or an idea should help students make more informed and considered choices when choosing their objects. Overall, the students come away from the activity with an artwork that represents something larger about their community, environment, or class through their found objects. This activity is also a great way for students to consider the potential of found objects, mixed media and collaboration.

### GOALS

- To develop an appreciation for mixed media as an art medium.
- To develop an appreciation for the use of found objects in art.
- To develop ways of representing complex ideas through representational objects.
- To develop connections between students, their artworks and their environment.
- To strengthen bonds between classmates.
- To discover unconventional or less common art-making processes.
- To connect art to other fields of study.

### ACTIVITY

Before the day of the project, students should bring an object from their neighborhood or home. Depending on the class curriculum, different guidelines can be set for the items students may bring. For example, in an environmental science class, students may consider bringing natural materials to create a "map" of the wildlife around them.

Each student should bring their object(s) on the day of the activity. The objects can represent an idea or place, or represent a larger organism or object (for example, a pinecone representing a pine tree near someone's home). If time allows, allow students to describe their objects to the class like a Show-and-Tell.

The structure of the map is up to the class, but using a printed or sketched map of the area where students live may be helpful in demonstrating patterns between the objects and the locations where they were collected. Have students arrange their objects on the map loosely based on the location where the objects were collected. Pens, markers, pencils and colored paper can be used to make connections between objects, mark places on the maps, and write labels. When the students are done creating their map, have them share their observations.

- *How is an object's meaning changed by new relationships to other objects? In what ways do we see objects differently when they are among other objects and information?*
- *Does a student's connection to their object change as they relate their choice to the choices of their classmates?*
- *What does the finished map express about the community and environment it represents?*
- *What does the finished map express about the class involved in creating it?*

### Extension Connection to English & Creative Writing

Ask students to prepare a short poem or story inspired by a particular place in their home or neighborhood, such as a sensory description or memory of the place. Have students place these poems or stories together to form a collaborative map (in a similar way as described above). How do students understand the meaning of this composite visual poem or story, beyond each of the individual pieces on their own?

### MATERIALS

Student Collected Found Objects

Mat Board/Wood Panel (serves as base of map)

Glue

Pens/Markers/Pencils

Assorted Colored Paper (optional)

### LINKS

**Qiu Zhijie | Personal Art Maps**

[www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/qiu-zhijie](http://www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/qiu-zhijie)

**Harrell Fletcher | Overlooked Objects**

[www.harrellfletcher.com/projects/296](http://www.harrellfletcher.com/projects/296)



From Harrell Fletcher's Hello There Friend

# LESSON 3

## STILL LIFE STORIES GRADES 7-12

### INTENTIONS

Students create still life arrangements out of found objects, mimicking the historical genre and its contemporary interpretations alike. Through collecting and arranging objects into still life artworks, students expand upon the meaning of objects that are important to them by observing (and creating) relationships between those objects and the objects contributed by other students. This gathering and assembling of objects mimics Céline Downen's *gather-piece-stitch* approach to art. In the end, students produce still life photographs representing ideas that are larger than their individual selection through a collaborative arrangement of objects.

### GOALS

- To develop an appreciation for the use of found objects in art.
- To better understand photography as an artistic tool that reflects a curated, subjective view rather than an objective process of documentation.
- To demonstrate the way art genres that seem historical (such as still lifes) can be reworked to express contemporary ideas or concerns.

### ACTIVITY

Students should be instructed to find objects at home, or on a collective gathering activity, prior to the day the lesson takes place. The objects they choose are up to each student, but if desired, a theme or category may be designated to create cohesion between objects or to relate the lesson to other content being studied in the class.

Students should work in large groups, or together as a class, to construct their still lifes by arranging objects together against a neutral background. If necessary, use large sheets of paper to construct artificial backgrounds behind the objects. Students can individually photograph their still lifes or decide collectively on a single photograph as a means of solidifying the assemblage of objects. After creating and photographing the still lifes, students can observe the relationships between objects in each still life and discuss these together as a class.

- *How is an object's meaning changed by new relationships to other objects? In what ways do we see the objects differently when they are among other objects and information?*
- *Does a student's connection to their object change as they relate their choice to the choices of their classmates?*
- *What does the finished still life express that the individual objects do not?*
- *Does the expressive impact of the objects placed together echo the meanings of the individual objects or reflect a wholly new meaning?*
- *Consider asking students why they chose their objects and how they decided to arrange them in the still life. Encourage students to respond to each other's decisions and rationales.*

### Extension Connection for Advanced Art Classes

Have students recreate their still lifes in drawing, painting or other media. This can help art students become more aware of their creative decisions as they adapt works made through collaboration into their own personal artworks.

### MATERIALS

Student Collected Found Objects

White or Colored Paper (to use as backgrounds)

Camera

### LINKS

#### What Are Still Lifes?

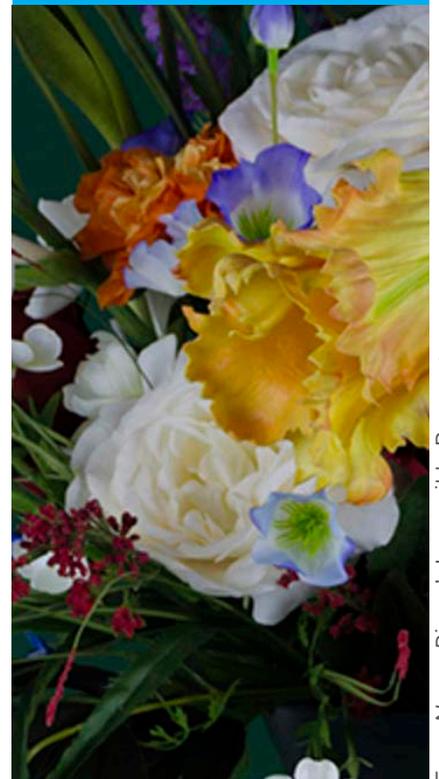
[www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/still-life](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/still-life)

#### Nancy Rivera | Contemporary Still Lifes

[www.utahmoca.org/portfolio/nancy-rivera-impossible](http://www.utahmoca.org/portfolio/nancy-rivera-impossible)

#### Mark Dion | Objects as Artifacts

[www.nytimes.com/2016/02/25/t-magazine/mark-dion-sculpture-tanya-bonakdar.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/25/t-magazine/mark-dion-sculpture-tanya-bonakdar.html)



From Nancy Rivera's Impossible Bouquets

# RESOURCES



## UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION CORE CURRICULUM

Fine Arts – Visual Arts  
Grades K-8 & Levels 1-3

### CREATE

- Students will generate artistic work by conceptualizing, organizing, and completing their artistic ideas. They will refine original work through persistence, reflection, and evaluation.

### RESPOND

- Students will understand, evaluate, and articulate how works of art convey meaning for the observer as well as the creator.

### PRESENT

- Students will analyze, interpret, refine and select artistic work for presentation. They will convey meaning in the manner in which the art is presented.

### CONNECT

- Students will relate artistic skills, ideas, and work with personal meaning and external context.

## TAG, WE'RE IT!

#UMOCA  
#ArtTruck  
@UtahMOCA

## HOW TO SCHEDULE A VISIT

The Utah Museum of Contemporary Art provides the Art Truck free-of-charge for a wide variety of educational and charitable purposes. To schedule an Art Truck visit, please contact Erin Hartley at:

[erin.hartley@  
utahmoca.org](mailto:erin.hartley@utahmoca.org)