

CURRICULUM PACKET

FALL 2006

JENNIFER BARTLETT: EARLY PLATE WORK

on view through December 10



COMING OF AGE: AMERICAN ART, 1850s TO 1950s

on view through January 7



Left: Jennifer Bartlett, *Rhapsody* (detail), enamel over grid silkscreened onto baked enamel on 987 steel plates. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Edward R. Broida, 2005.
Right: Asher B. Durand, *Study of a Wood Interior*, c.1850, oil on canvas mounted on panel, 16 3/4 x 24", museum collection.

ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Phillips Academy, Main Street, Andover, MA

Julie Bernson, Director of Education & Rebecca Spolarich, Education Fellow

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FREE GROUP TOURS for up to 55 students are available on a first-come, first-served basis:

TUESDAY-FRIDAY, 8AM-4PM

PUBLIC MUSEUM HOURS: TUESDAY-SATURDAY 10AM-5PM & SUNDAY 1-5PM

Admission to the museum is free!

Arranging a Museum Visit

This Curriculum Packet is designed to help you connect the Addison Gallery's exhibitions with your classroom curricula and the **Massachusetts Department of Education's Curriculum Frameworks**. Museum visits and related activities developed for this packet address numerous subject areas that are often cross-disciplinary and therefore can combine two or more frameworks.

The Addison Education Department is glad to assist you in matching exhibition content with the frameworks listed below or others you may wish to use. We can also help you organize your museum visit and pre- or post-visit activities to correspond with your grade level and current classroom topics in **English & language arts, sciences, history & social studies, politics, foreign languages, and the visual & performing arts**.

How to Arrange a Class Visit

- Decide which exhibition(s) is/are most relevant for your class or group to see based on this packet, viewing the exhibitions, and/or talking with education department staff.
- Select several possible dates and times to bring your class to the gallery. (Tuesdays through Fridays, 8 AM - 4 PM). Visits, ranging from 45 - 90 minutes, may be accompanied by an art making or creative writing activity. Up to 55 students can be accommodated in the museum at one time.
- At least two weeks in advance and preferably more, contact **Rebecca Spolarich** at (978) 749-4037 or **rspolarich@andover.edu** to schedule the visit and discuss ideas for guided tours and related activities that are particularly suited to your group.

How to prepare your class for a visit to the Addison

- Discuss the visit with your class before you come. This packet and a pre-visit to the museum can help you inform students about what they will see and do on their trip.
- Additional information about the artists and exhibitions is always available on request.
- In-class visits (usually including slide presentation and discussion) can sometimes be arranged.
- Mention that students will need to keep in mind: stay with the group, raise hands to ask or answer questions, no touching the artwork or the walls, no running, no food or gum.

What to expect when you are at the museum

- When you come in the front door of the gallery, we will greet you and direct students where to hang their coats and gather.
- After a brief introduction in the lobby, we will bring your students through the exhibition(s) of your choice. Students will be asked to discuss, interact with, and raise questions about the artwork that they see. We strongly encourage teachers to engage in the discussion to strengthen the connection between classroom and museum learning.
- If arranged in advance, the visit can conclude with an art making or writing activity.

Making the most of your visit

- Pre- and post-visit activities are the best way to get the most out of your museum visit.
- Project and discussion ideas provided in the Art & Writing Activities section of this packet will help you determine the best approach for the age level and subject of your class. (If this packet does not include information relevant to your class, we can help you make connections.)
- We are pleased to assist you in developing and executing extended projects that connect the classroom and the museum.

Jennifer Bartlett: Early Plate Work

Introduction

In the late 1960s, in a New York City art studio, a young artist leaned over a one-foot square metal plate and, with the tip of her paintbrush, carefully painted 2,304 dots onto its surface. But she did not do this just once; she did it hundreds of times during the first decade of her artistic career.

Scrupulous in her process yet adventurous in her designs, contemporary artist Jennifer Bartlett (b.1941) creates monumental paintings composed of grids and meticulously painted dots, shapes, and lines. Painting only with brightly-colored and glossy Testor's enamel model paints, her designs range from solid squares of color to intricately-pixelated drawings, to painterly nature scenes, to photorealistic landscapes – all confined to her standard “canvas:” a one-foot square metal plate covered in white enamel and stenciled with a grid.



Jennifer Bartlett (b.1941), *Rhapsody* (detail), 1975-76, enamel over grid silkscreened onto baked enamel on 987 steel plates, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Edward R. Broida, 2005.

Pattern and symbol abound in Bartlett's work, as she playfully explores the varied interpretations that images of trees, mountains, and houses can have when painted in myriad ways. Numbers and formulas also play an important role, as Bartlett relies on self-formulated rules and systems to direct the design of her plates. Finished plates are arranged on the wall in groups ranging from two squares to her epic masterpiece, *Rhapsody* (1975-1976) which numbers 987 plates and wraps 153 feet of wall space.

Completely encompassing the viewer, *Rhapsody* is both a visual odyssey and a perceptual puzzle of color, symbol, line, shape, and dot. Like a painting deconstructed into all the basic ingredients, *Rhapsody* illustrates a variety of styles and techniques from the highly representational to the minimally abstract.

What will students learn?

Bartlett's paintings offer an extraordinary visual experience for all.

- Students of the fine arts can explore various artistic techniques and compositional elements as modeled by the artist.
- Math students will find formulas, patterns, and the graph illustrated anew in Bartlett's meticulously-dotted grid series.
- Writers, musicians, and dancers may be inspired to create a free-verse poem, musical score, or choreographed movement.

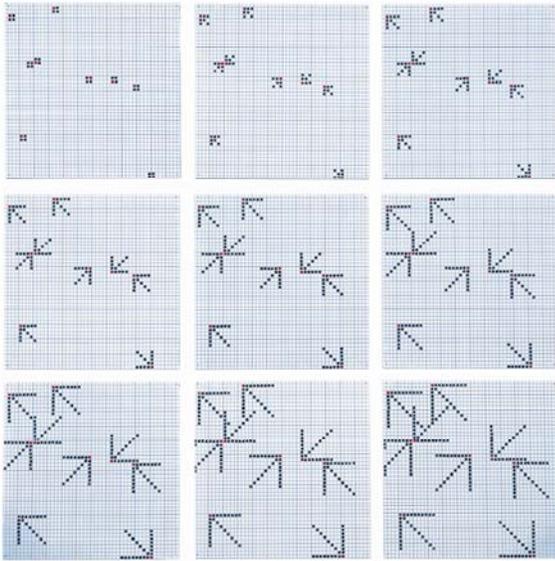
Read on to learn more about how Jennifer Bartlett's work can be meaningful to your students. → → → →



Installation view of *Rhapsody* at the Addison Gallery, 2006.

The Process

“What if?” This is a question Jennifer Bartlett asks herself often when scheming up ideas for new paintings. Both systematic and experimental in her approach to painting, Bartlett creates rules and patterns to direct her process, but modifies them as ideas pop up throughout. Considered to be a *conceptual* artist, Bartlett is unaware of what the final product will look like until the work is complete.



Jennifer Bartlett (b.1941), *Chicken Tracks*, 1973, enamel over grid silkscreened onto baked enamel on steel plates. Collection of Sally and Wynn Kramarsky

In this nine-plate work called *Chicken Tracks* (1973), Bartlett starts with a predetermined arrangement of arrow shapes and steadily applies more dots to each plate, increasing the size of the shapes by two dots as each plate progresses. Eventually, the space becomes cramped as the “chicken tracks” enlarge.

- What role do grids and numbers play in Bartlett’s designs? What math concepts does she incorporate in her work?
- *What if* you continued Bartlett’s pattern onto nine more plates? Experiment with dots and graph paper to see the result!
- Try starting with your own shape or symbol made up of dots and enlarge them according to Bartlett’s system.

Focus on *Rhapsody*

“When does a painting end? What if a painting is like a conversation between the elements in the painting?”

– Jennifer Bartlett (*Rhapsody*)

Step into a corner of the 987-panel *Rhapsody* and you will be engulfed in Bartlett’s bold catalogue of color, shape, and line. This single work requires the span of nine walls! In this sample corner featuring sixteen out of the 142 columns, we see squares containing solid blocks of color, plates covered with a tangle of lines, variously-sized triangles and circles, and assorted images of trees and houses.

- When Bartlett joined a square and triangle together, she recognized the very familiar form of a house. What shapes pop into mind when you think of TREE, MOUNTAIN, CLOUD, HOUSE, or OCEAN? In what ways can you combine squares, circles, and triangles to create variations on these images?



Installation view of *Rhapsody* at the Addison Gallery, 2006.

- Though seeming unpredictable in her shifts from columns of solid color to columns of detailed landscape scenes, what patterns can you find in Bartlett’s progress across *Rhapsody*?

Related Art & Writing Activities for the Museum or Classroom

1. Reflect on the meaning of the word, *rhapsody*. How does it relate to Jennifer Bartlett's painting? How can words, instead of images, model the same feelings and ideas? Write a poem that expresses the movement, mood, rhythm, and/or feeling of Bartlett's *Rhapsody*.
2. Bartlett's childhood spent near the coast of California inspired her interest in painting the ocean, which you can see in her various styles throughout *Rhapsody*. Select a place familiar and dear to you (a pond, the forest, city streets, etc.) on which to base a series of drawings, paintings, or photographs and/or about which to write a poem or story.
3. Just as stories come to an end, Jennifer Bartlett wondered if paintings had to do the same. Imagine that *Rhapsody* needed one more element to complete the work? Create another column or section of your own using artistic elements such as color, shape, and line in new ways.
4. Jennifer Bartlett liked using the dot as a basic compositional element. In fact, she once said, "When in doubt, dot." Take *dotting* to another level and experiment with it as the basis or supplement to your own artistic creation.
5. Like Jennifer Bartlett, create a set of rules to follow to make an artwork together as a class. Each student contributes one unique rule to a list, i.e. "Add two black squares." Not knowing the outcome but following the rules closely, the class can create a monumental work of their own! See what happens...
6. You can create designs with graph paper, too. Work individually or combine your sheets with classmates to create a wall-sized painting like *Rhapsody* with your own ideas and themes.
7. What is a painting made of? You can deconstruct a painting into its pieces like Bartlett did. Choose a painting in the museum or from a textbook and create a visual catalogue of its compositional elements with blank sheets of square paper or graph paper. Start with the color palette, basic shapes and types of lines, and then move onto separating the themes and symbols you find in the image.
8. Can you decode Bartlett's patterns? Look closely at the paintings, *Counting*, *Squaring*, and *Binary Combinations* and decipher the "formula" behind Bartlett's designs. Write a narrative that explains the system behind these works, or create a pattern of your own for your classmates to decode.

Coming of Age: American Art, 1850s to 1950s

Introduction

What distinguishes American art from European art? or from Asian, South American, or African art? Up until the mid-nineteenth century, American art shared much in common with European art, as American artists continued to look to Europe for artistic training as major metropolises like Rome and Paris



George Bellows, *The Circus*, 1912, oil on canvas, 33 7/8 x 44 in, museum collection.

maintained their status as the primary centers for arts academies, exhibitions, and arts criticism. Subjects, themes, and techniques began to diverge between the continents after 1850 with American artists mirroring revolutionary changes in their nation's physical, social, and cultural landscape. Innovations in science and technology introduced new forms of communication, architecture, and transportation to the country while industrialization and immigration transformed the economy and the population. As the United States advanced into the twentieth century and *came of age*, the changes wrought by modernization triggered American artists to explore new subjects and styles.

This assembly of major paintings and sculptures from the Addison collection serves to illustrate the work produced by artists during the defining years between the 1850s and the 1950s. Including a range of landscapes, still lifes, portraits, and abstract works, this exhibition not only offers a solid introduction to the development of nineteenth-century and modern art, but also reflects significant shifts in United States history through the eyes and hands of the artists of the time.

Coming of Age lends itself to the discussion of a variety of themes which may easily relate to your courses:

- MAN & NATURE – learn how nineteenth-century Americans felt about their natural landscape and how art inspired them to embrace nature and explore the frontier
- LIFESTYLES & PORTRAITS – images of people from all walks of life including fisherman, factory workers, children, academics, affluent society, and even circus performers relate the social climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
- ART & EXPRESSION – see how artists developed new ways to represent their world and their personal feelings and relationships with it
- ART & HISTORY – trace the ways industrialization, urbanization, and war influenced artists
- ARTISTS & WRITERS – explore the connections between art and literature: like writers, artists use compositional tools and effects to generate narrative, mood, tone, etc., and reflect literary themes and styles
- SCIENCE & ART – see how inventions such as the camera and the microscope and new technologies such as chrome and plastic influenced art making
- MODERN IDEAS – discover the ways in which artists responded to life after World War I and World War II with an array of new visual concepts such as surrealism, abstraction expressionism, and conceptual art

The following pages feature focused discussions around a handful of images from *Coming of Age*, all of which intend to simulate the teaching approach practiced by the Addison's Education staff. → → → →

American Landscape

Frederic E. Church (1826-1900) and Edward Hopper (1882-1967) lived sixty years apart, but were each fascinated with their contemporary American landscape, as different as these were from one another. As innovations in industry, railroad transportation, and urban development increased, the face of the nation changed rapidly. Church, painting during the mid-nineteenth century, is well known for his detailed natural landscapes of “untouched” places in and outside of the United States. Hopper, on the other hand, expressed an interest in painting urban and suburban places and their denizens. Paired together, *Mount Katahdin* (c. 1856) by Church and *Manhattan Bridge Loop* (1928) by Hopper illustrate the dramatic changes the American landscape underwent over a seventy-year period as well as the new techniques and styles developed by artists, often in reaction to these changes.



Frederic E. Church, *Mount Katahdin*, c. 1856, oil on canvas, 8 1/8 x 11 3/4 in., museum collection.



Edward Hopper, *Manhattan Bridge Loop*, 1928, oil on canvas, 35 x 60 in., museum collection.

- How could these paintings both be categorized as landscapes?
- What do these two paintings have in common?
- What kind of environment is depicted in each image? How do the artists represent their environments differently?
- What social and economic changes occurring in the United States between 1856 and 1928 may account for the noted differences between the subject and style of Frederic E. Church and Edward Hopper?

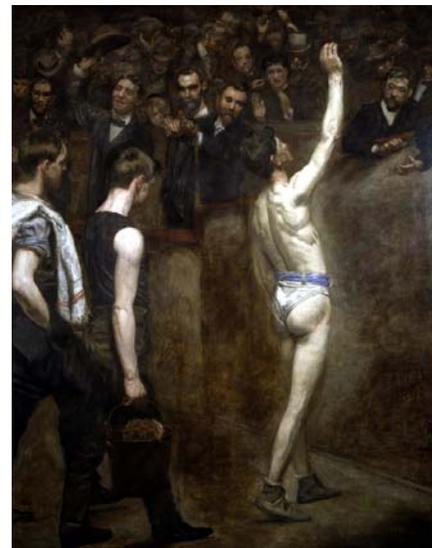
During the mid-1800s, artists like Frederic E. Church who were associated with the Hudson River School – a group of painters interested in depicting the stunning mountains, valleys, and rivers of upstate New York and the American West – inspired the country to recognize America’s natural beauties through dramatic and often monumentally-sized landscape scenes. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the rising increase in industry, the urbanization of cities, and the development of the western United States brought about changes in the ways artists saw and interpreted their environments. Soon, stunning mountain vistas were replaced by valleys of factories and towering skyscrapers. Some artists found beauty in the urban landscape, while others, such as Edward Hopper, began to look more critically at the social and environmental effects of the world around them.

American People

One of the major ways American artists learned to distinguish themselves from their European peers was to direct their attention toward the people and events which characterized everyday American life. Just as changes in landscape paintings reflected the physical changes of urbanization and industrialization, images of people reveal the developing class structure of the turn of the twentieth century.

Some painters expressed predilections for particular sorts of people in their work. Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) was especially fascinated by men of intellectual or athletic ability, completing numerous portraits of doctors, professors, rowers, and boxers. Teaching and working in Philadelphia, Eakins explored “underground” scenes frequented exclusively by men including boxing arenas.

In the painting *Salutat* (1898), Eakins directs our attention to a victorious moment in the career of the well-known Philadelphia prize fighter, Billy Smith. Rather than focusing on the more affluent men betting on Smith’s victory in the background, Eakins illuminates the working-class Smith in a dramatic but soft light, accentuating his sculpted physique and stoic character. No women are present, as this was an environment considered appropriate only for men. Smith raises his arm in modest acknowledgement to the crowd’s boisterous applause.



Thomas Cowperthwait Eakins, *Salutat*, 1898, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 in., museum collection.

- How has Eakins made an “underground” athlete into a hero?
- Why would a boxing match have been believed inappropriate for a woman to attend?
- Look closely at Smith’s neck – what do you notice about the change in skin tone? What might this suggest about Smith’s day job and his place in society as compared to the men in the audience?
- What relationship does Smith have with the two men to his left? What narrative might we write based on this picture?

During the early half of the twentieth century, women and African American artists – who had previously been marginalized – became more visible in the artist community. They lent new perspectives to the art world, as their differences in gender and race exposed them to different aspects of American life. Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), an African American artist from Harlem, New York, created scenes of local life using vibrant colors and bold shapes and lines. Painting at a time when artists were experimenting with expressionistic and abstract styles, Lawrence’s *Kibitzers* (1948) reflects the character of Harlem’s environs and the energy of contemporaneous developments in music such as jazz.



Jacob Lawrence, *Kibitzers*, 1948, egg tempera on masonite, 20 x 24 in., museum collection.

- How does Lawrence reference everyday occurrences unique to Harlem?
- Does Lawrence imbue his figures with the same heroic character as Eakins did his?
- How do both artists express the respect they feel towards their subjects?
- Compare the style of this painting to a type of music or poetry – what would it sound like?

Social History

This deeply encoded painting by John Sloan (1871-1951), *Sunday, Women Drying Their Hair* (1912), is a visual diary of many of the dramatic shifts in the social and physical environment of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. The setting is the smog-filled city of New York with three women leisurely drying their hair on Sunday, presumably their day off from work at the local mills. Sloan makes the rich head of hair of each woman a different color, indicating their probable immigration from different countries to work in the local mills. While withholding judgment, Sloan clearly indicates many of the cultural and environmental implications of the transformation of the United States from an agricultural to an industrialized nation in this seemingly quaint picture.



John Sloan, *Sunday, Women Drying Their Hair*, 1912, oil on canvas, 26 1/8 x 32 1/8 in., museum collection.

- Why do you think John Sloan portrayed only women in this picture?
- Where do these women live? Why do you think Sloan chose to show them on the roof of their building?
- Describe Sloan's painting style: what colors does he emphasize? What kind of brushstrokes does he use? How does Sloan's painting style support the mood of his subject?

John Sloan was considered as part of the Ashcan School, an art movement in the United States in the early years of the twentieth century that promoted the depiction of realistic urban scenes. Ashcan School artists, which included painters Robert Henri and George Luks also featured in this exhibition, showed working class people and the places where they lived in contrast to other schools of art interested in romanticizing their subjects and life in the United States. The work of the Ashcan School was both a truer reflection of the American city and a radical shift for artists as they seized the opportunity to create work based on what they saw in the world rather than on nationalistic ideals.

CONNECTING the EXHIBITIONS *Coming of Age & Jennifer Bartlett*

While visiting the museum with your students, the exhibition, *Jennifer Bartlett: Early Plate Work* can read like a fitting epilogue to *Coming of Age*, as Bartlett's paintings produced during the 1960s and '70s pick up where artists Jackson Pollock and Frank Stella left off in the 1950s. In addition, Bartlett's major work, *Rhapsody*, with its comprehensive catalogue of painting styles, may serve as a review of the various techniques employed by nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists. Examine the two excerpts below which identify a connection between the exhibitions:



Winslow Homer, *Eight Bells*, 1886, oil on canvas, 25 3/16 x 30 3/16 in., museum collection.



Installation view of *Rhapsody* at the Addison Gallery, 2006.

Winslow Homer (1836-1910), a realist painter renowned for his ability to elevate the commonplace to the momentous, spent much of his life residing in seaside towns. During that time, he observed the lifestyles of those most intimately involved with the sea such as the fishermen featured in the above painting, *Eight Bells* (1886). Homer places the viewer on the deck of the ship, steps away from the two figures. They seem to exist despite the tumult and drama of the sea and sky which the artist has defined with precise color and painterly brushstrokes.

Nearly 100 years after Homer painted *Eight Bells*, Jennifer Bartlett offers an alternative interpretation of the sea in the above segment of her painting, *Rhapsody* (1975-76). Referring to this section as “the ocean sequence,” Bartlett used fifty-four shades of blue to express her idea of the sea. Dotted as well as slathering paint onto the enamel plates, Bartlett mixes various painting techniques to apply color and separates each into distinct square units. A handful of brown squares hints at the color of the sea's sandy bottom.

- Compare and contrast the ways the two artists illustrate the ocean. Discuss subject, style, composition, and technique.
- What do these two paintings tell us about the artists and the time in which they lived?
- Do you think that Bartlett was influenced by Homer's work? If so, how?
- Which interpretation of the sea do you best relate to? Why? How would you paint the sea or another natural feature?

Art & Writing Activities for the Museum & Classroom

1. What does “coming of age” mean to you? After exploring the exhibition – and perhaps doing some additional lessons or research on American art and history – write an essay that narrates some of the important changes in American art between the 1850s and 1950s that reflect concurrent changes in the social, political, and physical landscape. Option: What changes in American life have occurred since 1950? How do you imagine these changes have affected the arts? Respond in essay form.
2. Like artists, writers also create a reflection of their time. Write a story, play, or poem that parallels one or more the changes in American culture that are reflected in the paintings and sculpture in the exhibition.
3. Create a visual timeline of the period from 1850 to 1960 to illustrate the major shifts in American aesthetic styles. Include some of the artists in the exhibition and add examples of American design, fashion, architecture, and other art forms.
4. Select two or three works of art from the exhibition that vary in date. (You may want to select works with the same subject, e.g. several images of the city, or different subjects, e.g. one representational and one abstract work.) Write an essay that compares the images using as much description as possible and analyzing why you think the works have different styles and/or subjects. Option: Instead of an essay, write an imagined dialogue between the artists as they compare and contrast their works.
5. What does a leaf or a human hair look like under a microscope? Make a drawing of a leaf, hair, or another small object that you can fit under a microscope. After drawing it, look at it under the microscope and draw it again noting how abstract the object becomes when looking at it close up.
6. Artists like Arthur Dove, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Frank Stella created abstract works that used something in the visual world as their starting point. Select a wall, building, or natural scene to draw or paint first with as much detail as you can see, and then again subtracting the detail and simplifying the lines, colors, and forms to create a more abstract image.
7. Choose a painting from *Coming of Age* and imitate the artist’s style when painting your own subject.
8. Select a painting from *Coming of Age* and a corresponding square in *Rhapsody* that have some similarities (color, style, subject, etc.). Write a description of the connections you see between the two.

Resources

Both *Jennifer Bartlett: Early Plate Work* and *Coming of Age: American Art, 1850s to 1950s* are accompanied by two catalogues written especially for the exhibitions and which contain helpful background information about the featured artists. Both are available at the Addison:

Agee, William C. and Susan C. Faxon. *Coming of Age: American Art, 1850s to 1950s*. (New Haven, CT: American Federation of the Arts in association with Yale University Press, 2006.)

Richardson, Brenda. *Jennifer Bartlett: Early Plate Work*. (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art and Yale University Press, 2006.)

Other books related to Jennifer Bartlett and about artists in *Coming of Age* are available at the Addison, local libraries, or bookstores. Contact us for suggestions.