

DES MOINES ART CENTER

Educators Guide Permanent Collection Tours 2007-08 Des Moines Art Center

Created Fall 2007
By Jennifer Cooley
Museum Education Department

Information and images included with this guide may not be manipulated or used in any other format.

Disclaimer: Not all of these artworks will be covered on your tour or will be on public view at the time of your tour.

Table of Contents	Page
1. Information about the CD-ROM	2
2. Goals for student tours	2
3. Rules of the Des Moines Art Center	2
4. Understanding labels	3
5. Descriptions and questions relating to each color image on the CD-ROM	3
6. Suggested art activities related to artworks on the CD-ROM	11

Information about this CD-ROM

- Each building image and artwork listed in this Word document corresponds to a color image also found on this CD-ROM.
- The artist, title, and year of each artwork are listed in bold. This information is followed by the credit line (a credit line tells how the artwork became part of the Art Center's collections).
- A brief description of the building or artwork is provided, followed by questions.

Goals for Student Tours

- Introduce students to art museums
- Help students make sense of art by engaging in discussion about art
- Create inspiring connections between art and life
- Teach visual analysis
- Foster and promote creativity
- Encourage on-going participation with the Des Moines Art Center

Rules of the Des Moines Art Center

- No touching the art, pedestals, or walls
- Stay on the grey carpet in the galleries
- Watch out for toe lines on the floor – some are wood, some are metal
- Stay with your group and use low voices
- Leave large bags and coats in the coat room or on the bus
- Only pencils can be used, no pens
- No gum, food, or drinks
- No photography of any kind
- Guards, dressed in black shirts and khaki pants, are posted in every gallery
- Please turn off cell phones for the duration of the tour

Understanding labels

Each artwork at the Des Moines Art Center, or any art museum, has a label next to it. The label provides important information about the artwork.

Name of Artist→	Marsden Hartley American 1877-1943	← Nationality and Lifetime
Title and Date → of artwork	<i>Mont Saint Victoire</i> , 1927 Oil on canvas	←What the artwork is made from
How or from → whom the museum acquired the work	Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Bohlen, 1958.63	← Museum I.D. number: <i>Mont Saint Victoire</i> was the 63 rd work of art added to the Art Center's Permanent Collections in 1958

Architects of the Des Moines Art Center

BUILDING IMAGE 1 - Eliel Saarinen

This building opened in 1948. The outside is covered in Lannon stone (a form of limestone). Originally, the U-shaped building contained a lobby, galleries, auditorium, and studio classrooms. Everything except for the auditorium is still in its original location.

BUILDING IMAGE 2 - I.M. Pei

In 1968 the first addition was added to the Art Center. It is made out of concrete that has a rough finish created from a technique called bushhammering. I.M. Pei designed a building that enclosed Saarinen's U-shaped building. This wing holds large paintings and sculptures. In addition, the auditorium was moved to the lower level of this structure.

BUILDING IMAGE 3 - Richard Meier

In 1985 the second addition was added to the Art Center. This addition was added to the north part of Saarinen's building. The outside is covered in white porcelain-coated metal panels. This addition added much needed gallery space as well as storage space for artwork not on public view.

Select artwork from the Des Moines Art Center's Permanent Collections

IMAGE 1 – Marc Chagall, *Les Amoureux (The Lovers)*, 1926

Des Moines Art Center; Mildred M. Bohlen Collection, 1983.12

During his long career as an artist, Marc would often create paintings with similar themes, like: imagery relating to his Russian-Jewish heritage, images of people performing everyday tasks, and especially people expressing love for one another. In *The Lovers*, a young couple shyly embraces and touches one another, oblivious to the world around them. The flying figure in the background is another repeated theme in his artwork. According to Marc it is a symbol of love, "The image of weightlessness...carries with it a poetic charge of overwhelming simplicity and power."

- Notice where Marc placed the couple in the painting, why do you think he placed them there? Why do you think Marc placed the flying figure above the couple?
- Look at the couple and then look at all the other objects in the painting, what do you notice about the scale (size) of the other objects? Why do you think Marc made the objects that size?
- Look in the background of this painting, why do you think Marc placed a large window behind the couple?

IMAGE 2 – Peter Halley, *Fire in the Sky*, 1993

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Purchased with funds from the Edmundson Art Foundation, Inc. and partial gift of Gagosian Gallery and the artist, 1993.10

Although this painting may seem very abstract, with the use of bold colors and geometric shapes, it makes reference to the urban landscape. Peter's inspiration came from his house, "I was working alone at home, listening to the radio, turning on electric lights, being able to turn on the faucet, flush the toilet, talk on the telephone, turn on the air conditioner. I began to become obsessed with the idea that all of these natural things – air, light, noise, or speech were being piped in. I began to think of conduits." He sees the large red square in the painting as a "cell" (like a house) with the "conduits" connected to the cell, bringing in the necessary utilities (electricity, telephone, cable, etc).

- Notice the two background colors (green and brown), what do you think the two colors and two parts of the painting could symbolize? What makes you say that?
- What do you think each of the conduits could be bringing to the cell? What makes you say that?

*Art activity associated with this artwork, see page 11 of this document

IMAGE 3 – Marsden Hartley, *Mont Saint Victoire*, 1927

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Bohlen, 1958.63

Marsden was born in the state of Maine but he traveled to Europe quite frequently throughout his life. During these trips he met with other artists and learned different art techniques, like: color mixing, brushwork, abstraction, realism, combination of interesting shapes, etc. During his career, he struggled with finding a balance between various influences and his own personal style. Marsden painted this landscape while he was in the Aix-en-Provence in France.

Additional teaching opportunity: Paul Cezanne also painted this mountain. Google Cezanne to find paintings part of his *Mount Saint Victoire* series. Have your students compare and contrast the different artworks. Discuss which artworks they like better and why.

- Notice the colors used in this painting, why do you think Marsden used these colors? Are these colors that you would use in a landscape? Why or why not?
- Describe the brushstrokes used in this painting. Why do you think Marsden used this type of brushstroke rather than long, sweeping brushstrokes or jagged dabs of color? Why do you think he chose to show his brushstrokes to the viewer?
- Think about the different influences that are part of your life and artwork. How do you find your personal style in your art?

IMAGE 4 – Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1976-77

Purchased with funds from the Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1987.7

Donald was one of the first artists who did not include a base for his sculptures; rather he preferred his sculptures to sit directly on the floor, like *Untitled*. This allows the artwork to become part of the room, much like the floor and the walls. Donald frequently used metal for his sculptures, like *Untitled*, because he liked that the material allowed him to be very precise with issues like measurement and placement. With his metal sculptures, he didn't add any unnecessary decorations because adornments would have taken away from the beauty of the natural material.

- Describe how the boxes would look if they were placed on a 3-foot high base. Which would you like better: the boxes on the floor or on a base? Why? If the boxes were placed on a base, would you notice the floor? Why or why not?
- What if these boxes were painted red or made from cardboard? Describe how changing the color or art material would change the way you look at the boxes.
- Why do you think some artists do not title (or name) their artworks?

IMAGE 5 – Henri Matisse, *Dame à la robe blanche (Woman in White)*, 1946

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of Elizabeth Bates and John Cowles, 1959.40

Henri loved to use many colors in his artwork, like in this painting you can see purple, red, blue, black, white, and brown-orange. Additionally, he used repeated shapes and lines. Toward the end of his life, Henri periodically needed assistance from a nurse. The woman in the painting bears a strong resemblance that nurse who later became Sister Jacques.

Additional teaching opportunity: Henri once stated, “What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which might be...like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue.” Google other artwork by Matisse to show your students and discuss the quote with them. Do your students think that Matisse achieved his dream? Why or why not?

- What shape is repeated in this painting? Look closely at the artwork; where else can you see that repeated shape?
- What does that repeated shape signify? Does the significance of the shape relate to person who is the subject of the painting? Why or why not?

IMAGE 6 – Carl Milles, *Man and Pegasus*, 1949

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Purchased with funds from Florence Call Cowles, 1949.151

When Eliel Saarinen built the Des Moines Art Center he arranged for Carl’s sculpture, *Man and Pegasus*, to be placed in the reflecting pool. This sculpture is part of an edition of six – that means there are six other sculptures that look just like this one around the world, located in such places as Des Moines, India, and Sweden. This sculpture is based on the Greek myth of Pegasus and Bellerophon. Pegasus is the flying horse and Bellerophon is the man.

- In the Greek myth, Bellerophon falls off Pegasus and tumbles to earth. Do you think that is an accurate description of this sculpture? What makes you say that?
- Carl said that “I visualize...[Bellerophon] flying independently [from Pegasus]...both animal and man having expressions of longing for something, we don’t know what.” How does Carl show that Bellerophon is flying independently of Pegasus?
- What could Pegasus and Bellerophon be longing for? What makes you say that?

IMAGE 7 – Joan Miró, *Femmes, Oiseau, Etoiles (Women, Bird, Stars)*, 1942

Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1966.2

Throughout his art career, Joan was influenced by many different things, such as artworks and artists of his native Spain, Catalan folk art, and theater. In this painting the abstracted figures are fanciful and playful, flat and brightly colored, painted against a flat and uncomplicated background. Joan created a series of paintings that were based on this triad of women, birds, and stars.

- Can you find the women, bird, and stars? Remember, because this is an abstract artwork the women, birds, or stars don't have to look like people or animals in your everyday life. Why did you identify those parts of the painting?

IMAGE 8 – Maurice Prendergast, *Autumn, New Hampshire*, 1912

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of Mrs. Charles Prendergast, 1984.23

This painting is a good example of Maurice's interest in making a statement with the color of his paint rather than the subject matter of the artwork. The painting's dazzling, tapestry-like surface pattern of saturated oranges, purples, and red is accented throughout by contrasting blues and green.

Additional teaching opportunity: Compare and contrast this painting with Marsden Hartley's *Mont Saint Victoire*. Notice the colors, brushstrokes, natural setting, foreground, and background. Ask if any students have lived outside of Iowa. Have those students describe the landscape of where they used to live. Are there any similarities to the Iowa landscape? What are the differences?

- Without mentioning the title of the artwork, ask what season is captured in this painting. What makes you say that? Why do you think Maurice choose this season?
- Describe this landscape. What kind of jobs do you think the people of this town have? What makes you say that?

IMAGE 9 – Gerhard Richter, *Landschaft (Landscape)*, 1985

Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1994.337

This painting fits into the category of Photorealism, which means the subject matter of the painting is based upon a photograph or the photographic vision of reality. Gerhard takes his own photographs then uses the photos as a source of inspiration for his paintings. Many of Gerhard's landscapes have a sense of unhappiness or the unknown. He said, "My art has always something to do with my life and how I deal with it." This painting must have had special meaning for Gerhard, because he kept it in his personal collection for ten years before selling it.

Additional teaching opportunity: Compare and contrast the brush strokes and colors used in this painting to Marsden Hartley's painting *Mont Saint Victoire*. How would each painting be different if the colors and brushstrokes were switched?

- Think about the idea that many of Gerhard's landscape paintings have a sense of the unknown. Describe this painting. Can you determine what is in the foreground and background?
- Is there a sense of sadness in this painting? What makes you say that?
- What time of day is it in this painting? What makes you say that?

IMAGE 10 – Mark Rothko, *Light Over Gray*, 1956

Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1975.15

Mark was known for being a color-field painter, color-field painters' use blocks or "fields" of colors as their main visual elements. In this painting, two indistinct rectangles hover over a deep red background. The shapes are isolated from one another, and seem to represent many possible dualities, such as the earth and sky or light and dark. In this painting Mark used what seems like three colors; however, within those three colors are many shades. The uneven pulsating colors seem to project and recede, giving the impression of movement. Although the painting is large (67 ¾ x 50 inches), the imprecise spaces and color variations give the viewer a feeling of closeness with the artwork.

- Look closely at the three color fields, how many different shade of color are in each field? Why do you think he used such a variety of different shades?
- What do you associate with the two rectangles of color? What makes you say that?

*Art activity associated with this artwork, see page 12 of this document

IMAGE 11 – H.C. Westerman, *Phantom in a Wooden Garden*, 1970

Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1976.89

H.C. studied art at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. At the same time he began working as a carpenter; wood soon became his preferred material and he applied considerable woodworking skills to his sculptures. In this sculpture, the phantom is the figure in the center. The phantom is placed on a checkerboard base with three objects behind it: a cactus, a double-arching tree, and an architectural column with a globe atop.

- Look at the phantom and the position of its body. What do you think the phantom is doing? What makes you say that?
- Why do you think H.C. placed the garden on a wooden checkerboard base and included the globe? What does that tell us about his carpenter or woodworking skills?

IMAGE 12 – Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Plinth)*, 1995-96

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Purchased with fund from the Edmundson Art Foundation, Inc., 1997.6

Rachel uses her artwork to show people the spaces in their lives that they typically take for granted or forget about. She has cast the space beneath chairs, the inside of closets, and an entire abandoned house, as well as more personal objects such as mattresses and bathtubs. *Untitled (Plinth)* is a cast of the empty space beneath a mortuary table. As in this sculpture, she often uses materials like rubber or resin that create a glowing, tactile quality. These materials often possess a softness and warmth that traditional media such as bronze or marble do not, but are unfamiliar enough to retain a sense of mystery.

- Think about your room, what space(s) do you forget about or take for granted? Describe the shapes of those spaces.
- Notice the color of Rachel's sculpture. How would it be different if it were black? What about red? Why do you think Rachel selected this color?

IMAGE 13 – Christopher Wilmarth, *Blue Release*, 1972-73

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Purchased with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Edmundson Art Foundation, Inc., 1975.77

Christopher lived in New York City where he became a cabinetmaker. He initially created sculptures out of wood and glass. Later, he stopped using wood and turned to steel and glass. He also experimented with glass; he discovered that by acid-etching glass he could make it smoky and translucent, and bring out its natural blue or green color. Christopher was also influenced by the shapes of buildings in New York City and the shadows the buildings created. He also likes to imply window-like “forms” in his sculptures.

Additional teaching opportunity: Compare and contrast this artwork to Donald Judd’s *Untitled* sculpture. Notice both are placed directly on the floor and use metal as a material. How are the artworks similar and different?

- Why do you think Christopher wanted the glass to be a smoky blue-green color rather than clear? How would clear glass change this sculpture?
- Think about the downtown area of Des Moines – can you make any connections between the buildings downtown to this sculpture? What makes you say that?

Suggested Art Activities

These art activities are related to artworks in this Educators Guide. The activities can be tailored for all ages.

IMAGE 2 – Peter Halley, *Fire in the Sky*, 1993

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Purchased with funds from the Edmundson Art Foundation, Inc. and partial gift of Gagosian Gallery and the artist, 1993.10

Urban Landscapes

Materials Needed:

- Colored pencils or paint, multiple colors
- Paper

Directions:

1. After viewing and discussing Peter’s artwork, have the students think about their urban landscape.
2. Ask your students to describe their place of residence. Do they live in a house, apartment, duplex, tepee, etc? What shape or how many levels is their place of residence? How many people live in their place of residence? What utilities do they have coming into their place of residence? What color would represent each of those utilities? Are the utilities entering their place of residence in straight lines, or some other type of line?
3. Instruct the students to create their “cell” or home, like Peter did (although it doesn’t have to be a square like Peter’s). Then have the students add the “conduits” in the shapes and colors that they think best represent their utilities.

Discussion:

- Have the students look at their classmates’ Urban Landscapes. Do they look similar or different? Was there a common shape or color used for the “cell”? What about the “conduits”?
- Why did the students choose the specific shapes for the “cell” and “conduits” and why did they choose the colors they did?

Additional Teaching Opportunity:

- If you’ve done a traditional landscape project and still have those in the classroom, have your students compare and contrast their different landscapes. Which do they prefer and why?
- Of the two types of landscapes, which do they think better represents the place where they live?

IMAGE 10 – Mark Rothko, *Light Over Gray*, 1956

Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1975.15

Color-field Paintings

Materials Needed:

- Paint, multiple colors
- Different sized brushes
- Heavy paper, small and large size

Directions:

1. After viewing and discussing Mark's painting, ask your students if they think it would be easy to create a painting like this one – this painting may look deceptively simple. Prepare a lesson about tinting and shading and review it with your students.
2. Have your students make several thumbnail (small) compositions using various sized fields, limited color combinations, and similar horizontal and vertical lines. Once done, have each student select his/her most successful thumbnail composition.
3. Give the students large sheets of heavy paper and ask them to create their color-field painting based on their most successful thumbnail composition. Remember to have each student title his/her artwork.

Discussion:

- How easy or difficult was it to create a color-field painting? Discuss the challenges as a class.
- Were the students able to create a feeling of movement based upon their color combinations?