

Norman Lundin: Inside/Outside

Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University
November 19, 2011 – January 22, 2012

Teachers Guide

This guide is to help teachers prepare students for a field trip to the exhibition, *Norman Lundin: Inside/Outside* and offer ideas for leading self-guided groups through the galleries. Teachers, however, will need to consider the level and needs of their students in adapting these materials and lessons.

Goals

- To introduce students to the work of Norman Lundin
- To examine the artist's style and technique
- To explore the relationship between form and expression in Lundin's work

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Discuss how the artist uses the parts of art and principles of art in his work
- Discuss how the artist creates the illusion of three-dimensional environments
- Discuss the expressive qualities of the work and how Lundin achieves them through his use of the parts of art and the principles of art

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INTRODUCTION

By John Olbrantz, The Maribeth Collins Director, Hallie Ford Museum of Art

Norman Lundin is a Seattle painter and professor emeritus from the University of Washington who creates exquisitely rendered drawings and paintings of still lifes and landscapes. Born in Los Angeles, California in 1938 and raised in Chicago, Illinois, he received his BA degree from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1961 and his MFA degree from the University of Cincinnati in 1963.

It was during his years in Chicago and Cincinnati that Lundin became interested in the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, and in 1963, was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to study Munch's work in Norway. The mood and psychological tension found in the Norwegian painter's work, and its contemporary manifestation in the films of the Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman, would have a profound impact on the development of his artwork.

In 1964 Lundin accepted a full-time teaching position at the University of Washington where he taught for the next 40 years. Like many artists of his generation, he responded to the artistic and societal pressures of the 1960s through his artwork. His work from this time period often focused on female figures set against dark, ominous backgrounds; howling dogs; social issues; and faces that stared uncertainly into space.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, however, Lundin became increasingly interested in purely formal issues. While he continued to focus on the human figure, his models became less important and specific. Gradually, the figure was replaced by bottles, chairs, tables, and ladders, although even these everyday objects became secondary as he began to explore issues of light, space, and atmosphere as the subject matter of his work.

Since the early 1980s, Lundin has become increasingly interested in what he calls "the behavior of light" and how it defines and gives character to interior and exterior spaces, whether they are quiet still lifes of paint cans and empty rooms or simple landscapes of country roads and frozen lakes. He intends his work to be seen as a theatrical stage and for light to be "the pusher, the mover, and the weight" that informs the void. As the artist has commented, "The less you have, the more important what is there becomes."

BEFORE THE MUSEUM VISIT

- If possible, visit the exhibition on your own beforehand.
- Use the image *The Music Room* and suggested discussion and activities, to introduce students to the work of Norman Lundin.
- Make sure students are aware of gallery etiquette.

Looking at *The Music Room*



Music Room
2008
Oil on canvas
37 x 67"
Courtesy of the artist and
Francine Seders Gallery,
Seattle Washington

Norman Lundin is interested in creating environments that engage and draw in the viewer. While his work may look like the result of direct observation of real objects, real interiors, or real landscapes, it is created mostly from memory – a combination of spaces he has worked in, objects found in many an artist’s studio, or landscapes he has driven through. With his interiors and still lifes, he chooses the spaces and the objects within not for their symbolic or autobiographical representation, but for their seeming ordinariness, something that the viewer may have seen before but that does not necessarily evoke intense emotions. By avoiding subject matter with strong associations, the emphasis of the work is not on the objects themselves, but the way they relate to each other, how they define the space they occupy, and the way light plays on their surfaces. At their essence, they are shapes in a formal composition; it is the artist’s skill in representing illusionistic space that creates what he refers to as “breathable air.” It is an atmosphere of quiet expression, of reverie or even vague melancholy or disquiet.

Suggested Discussion

What do you see in *The Music Room*?

- Briefly describe what you see here: your first impressions of subject matter, scene, mood and atmosphere.
- How has the artist used the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way a work is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis)?
 - Where does your eye go first? Why?
 - How does your eye move around the painting – is it led by color? By shape? By pattern? By size?
 - What techniques has the artist used to create the illusion of three-dimensional space and depth? (overlapping, scale, linear perspective, atmospheric perspective, etc.) Find specific examples.
 - Describe the color. Has the artist used it realistically? How does the color contribute to the atmosphere and mood?
 - How has the artist used light? Describe the quality of light – its intensity, whether it is directional or all over, does it create clear or soft outlines, etc. How does the light contribute to the atmosphere and mood?
 - Does this scene appear realistic? Dreamlike? Both? Explain.
- Describe again what you see here. Have your impressions of subject matter, scene, mood and atmosphere changed after spending more time with the work?

Suggested Activities (can also be used as a follow up to the Museum visit)

- **The formal challenge of spareness: A drawing exercise**

Norman Lundin likens creating a spare composition, particularly a single-object composition, to the cliché of the circus acrobat.

We all know there's a lot of work involved, but it looks so easy – except to other acrobats. When I'm teaching I often ask a beginning drawing class, "What do you think would be difficult to draw?" They usually name something very complicated or intricate that would require a lot of time and tedium. Then I say, "Well how about drawing a Styrofoam cup – nothing else – on a white sheet of paper?" The technical requirements aren't great, but the conceptual requirements are very high indeed."¹

Either during or after completing the exercise above, have students share their processes and the decisions they made.

- **Explore the artist's use of line, shape and form**

- Break down the objects and architecture into lines, shapes and forms. Project one of Lundin's images onto a large sheet of butcher paper, or place a piece of transparency over the image. As students point out the various lines, shapes (2-dimensional) and forms (3-dimensional), trace them onto the paper or the transparency. Remove the image and discuss Lundin's use of lines, shapes and forms to create the individual objects as well as the overall composition.
- Think about ways of creating perspective (overlapping, close vs. far away, the qualities of warm and cool colors, etc.) Using five flat shapes, all roughly the same size but different colors, create a balanced composition that suggests 3-d perspective -- objects existing in space. Now try it with five flat shapes of different sizes and different colors.

¹ Interview with Patricia Failing in *Norman Lundin: A Decade of Drawing and Painting*.

AT THE MUSEUM

- Review with students what is expected – their task and museum behavior.
- Be selective – don't try to look at or talk about everything in the exhibition.

- **Focus on the works of art. Encourage students to look closely at a work of art and consider the same discussion strategies they used with *The Music Room*:**
 - Briefly describe what you see here: your first impressions of subject matter, scene, mood and atmosphere.

 - How has the artist used the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis)?
 - Where does your eye go first? Why?
 - How does your eye move around the painting – is it led by color? By shape? By pattern? By size?
 - What techniques has the artist used to create the illusion of three-dimensional space and depth? (overlapping, scale, linear perspective, atmospheric perspective, etc.) Find specific examples.
 - Describe the color. – Has the artist used it realistically? How does the color contribute to the atmosphere and mood?
 - How has the artist used light? Describe the quality of light – its intensity, whether it is directional or all over, does it create clear or soft outlines, etc. How does the light contribute to the atmosphere and mood?
 - Does this scene appear realistic? Dreamlike? Both? Explain.

 - Describe again what you see here. Have your impressions of subject matter, scene, mood and atmosphere changed after spending more time with the work?

- **Compare and contrast the artist's approach to still lifes and interiors with his approach to landscape. How is it similar? How is it different?**

- **Find a work (or works) that illustrates the following statements from the artist. Discuss your reasons for choosing the work(s).**
 - I began to think that I'd like to have paintings that were not about the subject matter per se, but about volume and space, breathable air. Just as you cannot have something "short" without something "long" to compare it with, you can't have a "void" without an "object" for comparison. Of these two, I find that it's the void that interests me. And since a void is pretty fragile, if I want it to be the primary concern, I can't have objects that have a lot of emotional associations or they get all the attention. The objects are not there to be described; they are there to explain the space.²
 - [To me, "expression"] means the subjective aspect of the work, the psychological presence that goes beyond description of subject matter. It's a presence that's evoked by physical objects but is never literally there.³
 - The compositional problems when working at ninety degrees are different from those when working at oblique angles. Composing frontally is like moving things around on a stage where you're viewing at ninety degrees, more or less.... At ninety degrees you can move objects up and down, left and right and in and out. If they are on the same plane their weights and scale don't diminish the way they do when seen along a diagonal where the distant objects appear smaller than the objects in the foreground.

If you're looking at objects along a diagonal, well, things are going to go off the canvas—and often, you may need to introduce an element to slow them down – a vertical of some sort – or a counterbalance with a diagonal going to the left.⁴

² Interview with David Brody in *Norman Lundin: Selections from Three Decades of Drawing and Painting*.

³ Interview with Patricia Failing.

⁴ Interview with David Brody.

- **Create a cinquain (pronounced sincane: a five-line stanza) inspired by a work in the exhibition**

Structure your cinquain as follows:

Line 1: A noun (you may want to use the actual title of the artwork).

Line 2: Two adjectives which describe your noun.

Line 3: Three verbs which describe the noun.

Line 4: A short phrase about the noun.

Line 5: Repeat noun in Line 1.

RESOURCES

Johnson, Robert Flynn and Patricia Failing. *Norman Lundin: A Decade of Drawing and Painting*, University of Washington Press, 1990.

Brody, David, Bruce Guenther and Richard V. West. *Norman Lundin: Selections from Three Decades of Drawing and Painting*, University of Washington Press, 2006.

COMMON CURRICULUM GOALS

The suggested discussions and activities included in this packet can be used to support the following Common Curriculum Goals developed by the Oregon Department of Education. For specific benchmarks for your grade level check with your school district or the Oregon Public Education Network (O.P.E.N.)

www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=53

The Arts

Aesthetics and Criticism

- Use knowledge of technical, organizational and aesthetic elements to describe and analyze one's own art and the art of others.
- Respond to works of art, giving reasons for preferences.

Historical and Cultural Perspectives

- Identify both common and unique characteristics found in works of art from various time periods and cultures.
- Explain how a work of art reflects the artist's personal experience in a society or culture.

Language Arts

Writing

- Use a variety of written forms (e.g. journals, essays, short stories, poems, research papers) to express ideas and multiple media to create projects, presentations and publications.

Speaking and Listening

- Communicate knowledge of the topic, including relevant examples, facts, anecdotes and details.
- Demonstrate effective listening strategies.

Mathematics

Geometry

- Describe shapes and space.
- Compose and decompose two-and three-dimensional geometric shapes.

