

Harry Widman: Image, Myth and Modernism
January 31 – March 29, 2009
Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University

Teachers Guide

This guide is to help teachers prepare students for a field trip to the exhibition, *Harry Widman: Image, Myth and Modernism* 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 Harry Widman through his “Image Inventions”
- To explore the idea of “meaningful shape” in abstract painting through Widman’s Image Inventions: Poet, Magician, Oracle and Navigator
- To examine the artist’s process and technique in developing his images
- To explore the language arts as they relate to Widman’s work

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the recurring images of the Magician, the Oracle and the Navigator in Widman’s work
- Discuss how Widman creates meaning through abstract form in his Image Inventions
- Discuss the artist’s process and technique vis á vis the development and evolution of the Image Inventions
- Discuss the influences of language and writing in Widman’s work

Preparing for the Museum visit:

- If possible, visit the exhibition on your own beforehand.
- Using the images (print out transparencies or sets for students, create a bulletin board, etc.) and information in the teacher packet, create a pre-tour lesson plan for the classroom to support and complement the gallery experience. If you are unable to use images in the classroom, the suggested discussions can be used to create a Museum activity or tour.
- Create a tour or activity
 - Build on the goals and objectives from this packet, as well as concepts students have discussed in the classroom.
 - Have a specific focus, i.e. subject matter; art elements; etc.
 - Be selective – don't try to look at or talk about everything in the exhibition.
 - Include a simple task to keep students focused.
- Make sure students are aware of gallery etiquette.

At the Museum:

- Review with students what is expected – their task and museum behavior.
- Focus on the works of art. Emphasize looking and discovery through visual scanning (a guide is included in this packet). If you are unsure where to begin, a good way to start is by asking, “What is happening in this picture?” Follow with questions that will help students back up their observations: “What do you see that makes you say that?” or “Show us what you have found.”
- Balance telling about a work and letting students react to a work.
- Use open-ended questions to guide students' looking and to focus their thinking on certain topics and concepts.
- Slow down and give students a chance to process.
- Respect all responses and deal with them.
- Be aware of students' interest spans (usually about 45 to 50 minutes) and comfort.

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INTRODUCTION

The exhibition *Harry Widman: Image, Myth, and Modernism* is a sixty-year retrospective of the artist's work, from early portraits and landscape abstractions to his most recent figurative works that address Greek myth, universal archetypes, and the follies and vulnerabilities of humans. The emphasis of the exhibition, and the focus of this teacher packet, is a body of work that Widman created over a span of some forty years, each a variation of the artist's signature image: a centered, abstract form which the artist referred to as Image Inventions. These mysterious icons, with their potential to convey personal and universal meaning, are central to Widman's mature work. The conception and development of this visual language can be traced through the works featured in the packet, as well as in the artist's own statements and reflections gleaned through journal entries and interviews.

BIOGRAPHY

Harry Widman was born in New Jersey and grew up in Cliffside Park, across the Hudson River from Manhattan. A skilled athlete in high school, he also was an avid reader and a promising artist from an early age. He earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting at Syracuse University in 1951, served in the military in Germany, lived and worked in New York for a brief time, and came West in 1954 to earn his Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of Oregon.

Upon completing his graduate work in 1956, Widman taught for several years in the University's extension program in Southern Oregon. He and his wife lived in Roseburg, and from there he commuted to Coos Bay, Bandon, Port Orford, and Grants Pass to teach art classes.

In 1960, the Widmans moved from Roseburg to Salem, where they were the resident overseers of historic Bush House, owned by the Salem Art Association. In 1961, Widman and his family relocated once again, this time to Portland, where Widman began his long teaching career at the Museum Art School (Now Pacific Northwest College of Art) and established himself as one of Oregon's leading modern painters. Now retired, Widman continues to paint and make collages and sculptures in his Portland studio as he approaches the age of eighty.

IMAGE INVENTIONS: Poet, Magician, Oracle and Navigator

(Text excerpted and adapted from the exhibition catalogue, *Harry Widman: Image, Myth and Modernism*, by Roger Hull)

As an artist engaged with twentieth-century modernism, Harry Widman believes that art, both figurative and abstract, can express meaning beyond the particulars of a person, region or place. The landscape abstractions that he created in the early 1960s are classic modern paintings in the tradition of Cezanne and closer to home, his mentor, Oregon artist David McCosh. As such, they are expressionistic variants of Impressionism, and the bookish, introspective, searching Widman wanted something different, something more, something that in the early 1960s he could not quite get hold of.

For Widman, the potential and limitation of these early paintings resided in the intersection of abstraction with nature. As he wrote in 1962, “I wish to keep away from compositional landscape impression in some of my work. In these particular works, I would like the symbolic content to be of primary importance. This is quite difficult, since any work that is completely nonobjective becomes easily suggestive of natural forms. Stylization would be one answer, Cubism for example, or my own use of small regular units, etc.” In the next sentence, he described a different sort of image: “The realm of objects against, or floating in, a common ground or space seems to be a classic answer. The objects become symbolic with little reference to the world of landscape; of course, the ground suggests air if not handled carefully.” In this entry, Widman was describing three years ahead the imagery for which he became best known, his Image Inventions.

The concept of an invented image, organic but with no specific references to landscape or other recognizable forms, has remained central to Widman’s imagination and iconography. Inspired by the work of such artists as Joan Miró, Wassily Kandinsky, Arshile Gorky, and Robert Motherwell, Widman creates Image Inventions, works that are abstract but with the potential to convey personal and universal meanings.

For his Image Inventions, Widman often uses the term *imago ignota*, by which he means an image beyond knowing, beyond the realm of ordinary and practical understanding. His inventions are ultimately of the realm of the imagination, far from the world of the verifiable and concrete meanings. Widman intends that his paintings be richly evocative but ultimately inconclusive, open to individual interpretation. He is interested in the parallels between painting and poetry; a life time reader of poems and other literature, he writes lines of poetry, his own and others, to interpret or cast light on particular paintings.

Widman’s Image Inventions created from the late 1960s through the 1980s fall into several categories: Poet, Magician, Oracle and Navigator. He considers all of these to be variations of the “journeying spirit,” an entity of inquiry, exploration, seeking and discovery.

Meaningful Shape



Memorial Image #3

1967

Mixed media and watercolor on paper

Collection of the Artist

Widman developed his first Image Invention, a moon shape, in the Memorial Image series of five works combining watercolor and drawing that he created in 1966 and 1967. Recalling this series, he said: “There was a watercolor that I did back in the sixties where I did a kind of moon shape, a half-moon shape. I wasn’t thinking about the moon at the time; it was a painting where I put together an image, somewhat flattened, somewhat abstracted, with a shape, and it convinced me that the shape was of importance, really of importance. It became an emblem. It’s as if there was an emblem that represented me.... It took on much more meaning than I intended at first. The meaning at first was just being a design, compositional, a functional thing. This is where Robert Motherwell comes in. What Motherwell did [in his series, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*] was place an abstract unit on a canvas that represented human feelings and human ideas, and what he did was connect it to the Spanish Revolution.¹ It’s as if...the significance of the meaning comes to mind when you see it. It’s like putting [a] statement, not language literally, but a language statement, connecting it, uniting it with an image, with an abstracted image, and making it understandable, giving it significance for that reason.”

¹For images and information on Motherwell’s series, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*. See http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/abex/ho_65.247.htm
http://www.albrightknox.org/ArtStart/Motherwell_t.html

Poet



Homage to the Poet
1966
Graphite on paper
Collection of the Artist

In 1966, Harry Widman created a large drawing entitled *Homage to the Poet* and wrote at the bottom of the composition: “One of the first Image Inventions.” Related to the Memorial Image series, *Homage to the Poet* is a landmark work in the artist’s development and sets forth many of the fundamental elements of Widman’s mature art. It is here, in no uncertain terms, that he entered “the realm of objects against, or floating in, a common ground or space,” where the forms become symbolic and expressive with little reference to the world of landscape. In this drawing floats the prototype for Widman’s Magician, Oracle and Navigator, which are some of the key variations of his iconic image of the mover, the transformer, the traveling agent of inquiry, the probe. Of no particular identifiable form but suggesting a banner, kite, or windblown rag or leaf, the central shape in *Homage to the Poet* is enclosed by a meandering line that is concave in places and convex in others, coming to sharp points in four locations. This sauntering contour suggests a mountain range along the top, the edge of a lake along the bottom, the prow of a ship along the right, the shape of a soaring bat along the left. A transformation image, it is all of these things and none of them. It is the *imago ignota*, unknowable but infinitely suggestive.

The art historical origins of this drawing reside in the modernist tradition of fluid forms that Widman loves: The early twentieth-century abstractions of Wassily Kandinsky, the automatic and biomorphic vocabulary of the automatist Surrealists like Joan Miró, and the spontaneous but carefully modulated inventions of Arshile Gorky. This lineage is clearly evident in *Homage to the Poet* and is present, in highly individualistic terms, in much of Widman’s work from the 1960s to the early twenty-first century. He confiscates and transforms the lyric, non-Cubist strain of modern painting, tempering the accidental nature of automatism² with his own process of “study” – slow and systematic working and reworking of the composition.

² A process of making a work of art mechanically, randomly, or by unconscious free association.

In the drawing *Homage to the Poet*, the central *imago* and its satellite at the lower right are worked with methodical hatching that fills the shapes with parallel lines batched in parcels positioned in subtly shifting angles. The ground of the composition is enlivened with a lighter, airier version of the same kind of regularized but ever-shifting line-work. The resulting texture stabilizes the field, giving it tangibility (of a freely textured plaster wall, say) that *relates* to the atmospheric effect but as an artistic surface rather than an illusionistic space. Widman is dealing with his concern, anticipated three years earlier, that “the ground suggests air if not handled carefully.”

Further evidence of Widman’s desire for control yet willingness to relinquish it in *Homage to the Poet* is seen in the contrasting ways the top and bottom of the composition are drawn. At the top, a freely rendered line enters from the upper left, speeds across the composition to create a sort of free-form bird shape before joining the *imago*, becoming its kite-string, its tail, its fluttering umbilical cord. Everything is free and unfettered. As he had written earlier, “I trace a line that reveals all the idiosyncrasy of myself. It runs unchecked and makes itself through me.”

At the bottom of the composition is a precisely drawn horizontal rectangle that stabilizes and implicitly comments on the meandering hilarity above. Attached to the left end of this box is another rectangle enclosing a four-lobed amoebic form, a miniature *imago* captured within a frame. It is subject to the authority of the ruled line, and is an impulse contained and presented as a specimen. Taken as a whole, this drawing grapples with issues central to Widman’s needs as an artist: it embodies both spontaneity and reflection, improvisation yet study, a sensibility and sympathy for nature without recourse to landscape. Most importantly, it affords an image of enormous metaphoric potential that – as he completed the drawing – Widman could probably only begin to imagine. In titling the work *Homage to the Poet* he was literally linking his artwork to his love of poetry. This was to be the first of a number of poet homages that Widman created; the drawing presents the two aspects of creativity that he knew necessary for both the writer and painter: the freely soaring spirit with far-flung strings and ever morphing contours on the one hand, the rational discipline of the repeated mark, the measured box, and the fully worked surface, on the other.

Magician



Against the Grid

c. 1987

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art

Gift of the Artist

In the early 1970s, the Magician joined the Poet as an image and idea in Widman's new abstract iconography, becoming a form that he explored again and again over the years. The Magician has sometimes been described as a leaf or a butterfly, organic comparisons that Widman does not seem to mind. The Magician is two-lobed or two-winged, with a stem or body at the top. "I cannot recall the specifics of where the magician shape came from," Widman said in 2003. "I don't really remember it being a leaf. But it satisfied me because here was a shape that could take on much more meaning than those very hard-edged shapes, and it wasn't that far from a spade shape or a club shape in playing cards, which was another thing I certainly looked at, or a rug medallion shape. But those remain very limited to me in potential meaning."

In any event, "the magician was a big floral shape that floated or seemed to float.... Later on, after I had done it for a while, I would think about the Canadian flag and the great maple leaf, and realize, 'Oh my gosh, is that what I did?' I also saw this image as having – depending on exactly how I shaped it, specifically how I shaped it – different identities to some extent.

"I came to realize that the edge of the image really determines a great deal about its relationship to the ground and its potential for space, about the reading of it, as to what it is, about the interaction." He perfected "the broken surface, the surface that is mottled, the surface where the color variation is a constant variation over the surface." It is used to activate the Magician form, setting it to quivering and also subtly modeling it into something more three-dimensional than a silhouette.

The Magician, Widman says, "was hard to draw. It was more complex than it seemed to be and the fact that I had to work on it was good, because it gave a little uniqueness in each case." *Against the Grid* is a culminating example. The Magician, set against a freely painted pattern of colorful rectangles, is boldly painted red and blue and outlined

with sketchy black strokes that turn the lobes into fluttering wings. Widman commented on the painting in his poem also entitled “Against the Grid”:

Homage to Gorky, Kandinsky, Klee...
And primarily to the great magician
Miró.
Those ancient modernists...

Miró as magician; the artist as magician. Widman described himself in his journal as “the acrobat, the magician, the athlete.” Magicians enthrall and transform. They also mislead and deceive. Like artists, they exist in a reality of their own knowing and making, detached to one degree or another from the conventions of ordinary perception and life. Above all, the magician is an active agent; for Widman, he is agile and muscular like the acrobat and the athlete. In painting his Magician again and again, Widman explored a wandering, soaring, curious, isolated spirit that had something to do with artists in general and a lot to do with himself.

Oracle



Homage to Kenneth Patchen
1977
Oil on canvas
Collection of the Artist

Although Widman painted the Magician until the 1990s, “maybe I got tired of [the Magician]. I think I felt it was limited.” A new form that possibly resorted from [his idea- and form-generating] process of tearing paper into shapes was the Oracle, which materialized frequently in Widman’s work of the later 1970s and 1980s. Related to the Poet but replacing the four pointed star with a new Image Invention, the Oracle is a six-limbed shape also related to the Magician but with more lobes and appendages – a four-leaf clover with a couple of extra parts.

The merging of the Poet homages and Oracle can be seen in *Homage for Kenneth Patchen*. The painting includes text from Patchen’s poem, “A Temple,” with this title printed in block letters at the upper left lobe of the Oracle. Along the top edge of the painting Widman has written in script the first line of the poem (“To leave the earth was my wish, and no will stayed my rising”) and along the left and right sides the concluding lines (“‘Put your hand in mine. We will seek God together.’ And I answered, ‘It is your father who is lost, not mine.’ Then the sky filled with tears of blood and snakes sang”). At the lower left are inscribed the words “ORACLE for Kenneth Patchen.” (Widman created several works, including a sculpture also included in the exhibition, in honor of the American poet, novelist, and painter Kenneth Patchen. He wrote in his journal: “I read the *Journal of Albion Moonlight* by Kenneth Patchen. I didn’t know such emotional reality could be communicated in writings. This is a ‘document’ of extreme power. Patchen takes his place among my private heroes – heroes of the soul.”)

An oracle, by definition, can be the site of a significant utterance, the utterance itself, or the utterer of the message, a divinity. It is a site, saying, or sayer. Widman’s extensive reading of mythology familiarized him with such oracles as those of Apollo at Delphi, Hercules at Athens, Venus at Paphos, maybe even Pan in Arcadia. In creating an Oracle for Kenneth Patchen, Widman blurs his intentions: Is the revered Patchen an oracle of modern times, or is Widman’s Image Invention (and thus Widman himself, the artist)

acting as oracle on behalf of Patchen, who died in 1972, five years before Widman painted his oracle?

Of the over one hundred works Widman sold through the Fountain Gallery of Art in the course of his fourteen years affiliated with the gallery (1972-1986) fully a quarter were Magicians and Oracles. Works with these images, created as large oil paintings, watercolors on paper, and mixed-media/collages, were exhibited regularly in group and one-person exhibitions and entered private, civic and corporate collections in Portland and Seattle. Additional Magician and Oracle paintings were among the twenty works that Widman lost in the Fountain Gallery fire of February 1977. The forms of the Magician and the Oracle came to be understood as iconic of Widman. Viewers still think of the centralized, decorative patterned leaf or butterfly form as the quintessential Widman image.

Navigator



Traversing the Red Field

1986

Oil on Canvas

Collection of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art

Gift of the Artist

The Magician and the Oracle, by nature, navigate. They move about. Otherwise, how would they arrive before us in paintings to perform magic or utter prophecies? But the Magician and Oracle (and also the Poet) are hovering presences. They pause before us even though we realize they've been on the wing and will be again. The Navigator, on the other hand, is an image of swift motion, a speeding entity perpetually traveling. "The Navigator, I love that title," Widman said in a 2003 interview, "to this day I love it, because it suggests something that becomes a little personal. The navigator is the traveler, you and I and everybody else, navigating their way through. When I came upon that title, I said, 'Yes, this is really what I want. This is a title that has multiple meanings.'" I like that image very much, in part because of that title and its meaningfulness. I've done several very good paintings of the navigator, in fact, without a doubt, a couple of my best paintings."

As a form, the Navigator is less symmetrical and less plant-like than the Magician and Oracle. We think less of leaves with stems or butterflies with wings than of something more ragged, perhaps a wild, scrawny sky-wolf or sky-dog that is lean, muscled and tough. In *Traversing the Red Field*, this creature is scumbled in blue against a red ground. The same red is used for marking on the Navigator's blue body, suggesting that it is transparent, aerial. Different from the Magician or Oracle, the Navigator's form is open, reaching, grasping and ready to engage. The Magician, Oracle and even the Poet are self-contained, but the Navigator is speeding toward some sort of touching down and linking up, some sort of coupling. Visually, it is one-half of the equation and the excitement stems from this aura of expectancy, of culmination imminent but deferred. That fact is part of these paintings' arresting nature: the Navigator remains the centrally placed *imago ignota*, but it is centered in our field of vision only through the magic of painting. In fact, the Navigator is passing us by for a destination elsewhere. It is leaping toward a favored thing or crucial idea.

Traversing the Field embodies many of Widman's ideas and formal strategies. Typically for Widman, it is a work that is both aggressive and subtle, bold in its centralized emblematic presentation of the blue navigator and delicate in its working of the paint textures, the litheness of the meandering black line, and the gentleness of the *pentimenti* (half-erased visual notations that linger in the atmosphere of the red ground as evidence of processes prior or preliminary). The work is typical of Widman in its combination of formality (a centered primary element set within a border three layers wide) and freedom: the blue Navigator hurtles through a red universe, opening its appendages to all it may encounter, embracing the void and whatever may be adrift there. There is a tension to this piece, and in all of Widman's best work that results from understanding the Invented Image, the *imago ignota*, as both stationary and dynamic, emblem and organism, as a centered motif and an active agent, as a design element and a probe into the unknown.

Traversing the Red Field is also characteristic of Widman's work in its use of color – the red ground enlivened with dashes of redder reds, aquamarine blues and greens, ochers and tans, and the three-part border of aqua and darker greens tingling against the red they try to contain. The paintwork is delicate and supple, as the red of the ground invades the blue of the Navigator or the inner rim of the border flirts with the core of red. Colors are vital, textures are rich, composition is direct, strong, simple. Widman is a master of mark-making. His line is alive. The black line flows along the bottom of the red ground, rising and falling to form a hummock and then shooting up and falling back three times to form two sharp waves and a rounded one before gliding down into the ocean foam of the inner border. This line, a sort of line of life and of artistic self, is a frequent lithe and elastic element in the art of Harry Widman.



The Navigator
1990
Mixed media on paper
Collection of Christopher and Susanne Shotola-Hardt

Inspired by the collages of Robert Motherwell that he saw in New York in the 1950s, Widman has made mixed media paper works ever since. Often, Widman's late collages are more comprehensively mixed media than simply collage. Torn and cut papers are typically combined with painting and drawing in charcoal, graphite, or ink.

The Navigator collage, which combines paper, tape, stencils, ink and paint, was created as a finished work intended for exhibition. However others are studies for paintings. Widman uses collage as an idea- and form-generating process, arriving at many of his Image Inventions by tearing papers into free forms. Furthermore, most of his large-scale paintings created in the 1980s and early 1990s, including the Navigator, "have come out

of collage,” Widman says. “There is a collage maquette, so to speak, for each one of those. They are very rough, not something you would show in a gallery.” For Widman, some of his most original Image Inventions are the result of discoveries arrived at by chance while experimenting with shapes and forms in the processes of collage.

Whether as product or process, collage has been central to Widman’s creative work for sixty years. In the course of the interviews that Sarah Munro and Robert Shotola conducted in 2003, Widman spoke of the importance of collage as he tired of the Magician image, began to work his new invention of the Oracle, and proceeded with imagining the Navigator (as well as later Image Inventions of the Runner, Dog and Raft, which are also featured in the exhibition):

I had been doing collage for years and years, but I moved very seriously into collage, and I started to do a lot of collage, and I began discovering images, and the problem then, and it was an ironic one, was that suddenly there were images everywhere that it seemed to me I could use. I could take a piece of paper, and I could tear it and put it down. I could add another piece over the top, and suddenly I started to have another image. In other words, the process, the collage process, allowed me to get to things that previous to that had to be drawn. The drawing process...moves alphabetically, if you will, from A to B to C to D and so on. In other words, once you are into the drawing mode, the drawing begins to carry you in a direction, and of course you could decide not to go there, but the fact is, you go there. The collage method is an absolute surprise from minute to minute. You have something down, it looks pretty good, but not good enough. You don’t know quite what you are going to do with it so you tear off a piece from something else, and you have these other pieces over here. So you say, “Well, let’s see what happens if I do this, not so good; let’s see what happens if I do that. Whoa, look at that, now.” In other words, it’s an experience and it’s exciting in itself with a limitless potential in terms of invention. Now of course you have to stop somewhere and sometime, but...it became a key way for me to do things.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION

- Discuss how form and meaning, issues central to Widman's concerns as an artist, are reflected in the development and evolution of the Image Inventions.
- Discuss the following statement written by Widman in 1962:

I wish to keep away from compositional landscape impression in some of my work. In these particular works, I would like the symbolic content to be of primary importance. This is quite difficult, since any work that is completely nonobjective becomes easily suggestive of natural forms....The realm of objects against, or floating in, a common ground or space seems to be a classic answer. The objects become symbolic with little reference to the world of landscape; of course, the ground suggests air if not handled carefully.

Has Widman resolved the issue of symbolic and expressive content without "reference to the world of landscape" in his Image Inventions? Give examples.

- Discuss Widman's statement about his Image Inventions:

[S]ome of those invented shapes took on significance in themselves, they became something, they went way beyond a decorative unit. The moon shape was the first of those, where suddenly I said to myself, this shape idea doesn't have to be treated with this flat, hard manner, this has potential...this could become an organic image that has some life. So then that became the goal, and that became my painting.

Widman's goal is to transform a flat shape into "an organic image that has some life." How has he achieved this in the Image Inventions? Give examples.

- Exhibition curator, Roger Hull states that "Widman intends that his paintings be richly evocative but ultimately inconclusive, open to individual interpretation."
 - What role does Widman's use of language play in your own interpretation? Would the work be as successful without it? Why or why not?
 - Discuss the relationship between the Image Inventions and their individual titles (Poet, Magician, Oracle, Navigator). Are the shapes evocative of the titles in any way or do they appear randomly assigned by the artist to take on meaning irrespective of their evocative qualities? Is this important to the success of the work? Why or why not?

- Roger Hull claims that the Magician and Oracle are hovering presences, seen in a moment of pause, while the Navigator is a rapidly moving entity on its way to some unseen destination. Compare and contrast the Magician and the Navigator. Do you agree with this interpretation? Why or why not? If they are in motion, how does Widman activate these shapes -- make the Navigator appear on the move or the Magician (and the Oracle) appear to hover?
- Widman sees his Image Inventions (not just in the central image but in the meandering line that is so often present in these works) as personal and universal metaphors, especially for the creative spirit. Discuss how this idea is reflected in the Image Inventions, and in accompanying statements by Widman and Roger Hull. Is he successful in creating works that intertwine personal and universal meaning? Why or why not?

Memorial Image #3

“I wasn’t thinking about the moon at the time; it was a painting where I put together an image, somewhat flattened, somewhat abstracted, with a shape, and it convinced me that the shape was of importance, really of importance. It became an emblem. It’s as if there was an emblem that represented me....”

Homage to the Poet

“I trace a line that reveals all the idiosyncrasy of myself. It runs unchecked and makes itself through me.”

Against the Grid (Magician)

Widman described himself in his journal as “the acrobat, the magician, the athlete.” Magicians enthrall and transform. They also mislead and deceive. Like artists, they exist in a reality of their own knowing and making, detached to one degree or another from the conventions of ordinary perception and life. Above all, the magician is an active agent; for Widman, he is agile and muscular like the acrobat and the athlete.

Oracle for Kenneth Patchen

In creating an Oracle for Kenneth Patchen, Widman blurs his intentions: Is the revered Patchen an oracle of modern times, or is Widman’s Image Invention (and thus Widman himself, the artist) acting as oracle on behalf of Patchen, who died in 1972, five years before Widman painted his oracle?

Traversing the Red Field (Navigator)

“The Navigator, I love that title,” Widman said in a 2003 interview, “to this day I love it, because it suggests something that becomes a little personal. The navigator is the traveler, you and I and everybody else, navigating their way through.”

- Discuss Roger Hull's statement, "Widman's best art lies in the space between order and spontaneity, control and freedom, idea and action" and how it relates to the following:
 - creative process and technique
 - line, color, form and texture
 - composition

RESOURCE

Hull, Roger, *Harry Widman: Image, Myth and Modernism*.

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

Reading

- Connect reading selections to other texts, experiences, issues and events.

Speaking and Listening

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

Media and Technology

- Acquire information from print, visual and electronic sources, including the Internet.

VISUAL SCANNING

Scanning is meant to guide the viewer in looking at a work of art. To avoid tedium, one may choose not to use all six points during each scanning.

1. SUBJECT

Subject is usually a good starting place, but should one of the other points “speak” to the viewer first, by all means, begin there.

What is the subject of the work?

What objects can be identified or recognized?

If there is no imagery, the formal qualities may be the subject (line, shape, color, etc.)

2. COMPOSITION

Identify the formal qualities (line, color, shape, form, etc.)

How are these formal qualities organized?

repetition

contrast

balance

movement

scale

unity

visual rhythm

3. TECHNIQUE & MEDIUM

How was the work made? (painting, sculpture, collage, weaving, etc.)

Does the particular technique contribute to the total? How?

4. EXPRESSION

What is the role of cultural conventions?

What is the mood or emotional content?

What is the message or meaning?

What has the artist done to “send” the message?

5. CONTEXT (STYLES)

How is the work a product of a particular culture?

Where and how does the work fit into history?

6. CRITIQUE

Has the artist succeeded in expressing thoughts, emotions, and ideas? How?

Viewer’s response: like or dislike. Why?

How can a work that one dislikes still be a valid statement of the artist?











