

Joe Feddersen: Vital Signs
January 30 – March 28, 2008
Hallie Ford Museum of Art
Willamette University

Teachers Guide

This guide is to help teachers prepare students for a field trip to the exhibition, *Joe Feddersen: Vital Signs* 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 Joe Feddersen and its roots in both the traditional weaving of his Plateau ancestors and modern abstract art.
- To explore how artists respond to the land through the use of patterns and abstracted forms inspired by nature and the man-made environment.
- To examine the shapes – complex and simple, regular and irregular – found in man-made objects and in nature.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify traditional and contemporary designs and patterns in Feddersen's work.
- Discuss the origins of Feddersen's design and their relationship to the artist's physical and cultural environment as well as his training in mid-20th-century modernism.
- Recognize that shapes and patterns are all around us in the natural and man-made environment.

Preparing for the tour:

- If possible, visit the exhibition on your own beforehand.
- Using the images (print out transparencies for projection or color copies for each student) and information in the teacher packet, create a pre-and/or post-tour lesson plan for the classroom to support and complement the gallery experience. If you are unable to use the images, the Suggested Discussions can be used in the galleries.
- Create a tour
 - 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; technique; 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 general 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 question to guide student 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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BIOGRAPHY: Joe Feddersen

Joe Feddersen was born in 1953, in Omak, Washington, just off the Colville Indian Reservation. His mother was Okanagan and Lakes from Penticton, Canada; his father was the son of German immigrants. The traditional territory of Feddersen's mother's people spanned the present-day US-Canadian border, and he grew up traveling the region with his family to camp, hunt and fish and to visit relatives across the reservation and in Canada.

Considered one of the finest printmakers in the Northwest, Feddersen studied with influential artists Glen Alps and Michael Spafford at the University of Washington, where he received his B.F.A. in 1983. He went on to receive an M.F.A. at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1989, where his mentor was noted Native American sculptor Truman Lowe (Winnebago).

Over the course of his career, Feddersen has had over 30 one-person exhibitions, and been represented in over 125 group exhibitions since 1982. He received an Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art (2001) and was included in the *12 Artists: Continuum* exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York (2003). His works are included in museums throughout the United States, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. and New York; the Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, Indiana; and Tacoma Art Museum, among many others. His work is also part of prestigious collections, including Microsoft Corporation, Seattle; the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the United States Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

Feddersen served as a member of the art faculty at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, from 1989 to 2009. He now lives in Omak, Washington, where he has a studio.

INTRODUCTION: Vital Signs

My work investigates sign and cultural identity. This inquiry merges basic elements of basket designs from my ancestral home, the inland Plateau region of the Columbia Basin, with urban imagery to speak to perceptions of land.

Joe Feddersen

The word sign has many definitions: a mark or marks that convey meaning, such as a design or pattern; a trace or a vestige; or something that provides direction or tells us “you are here.” These various definitions come together in Joe Feddersen’s art, which explores the “vital signs” that are embedded in his cultural heritage and the land that is his home. These signs are his touch points, and keeping them alive, he observes, “is what a healthy person does when he recalls his past.”

Feddersen has said that his work “deals with the importance of how people respond to their environment, often embedding in simple pattern the innate connection to place.” His Plateau Indian ancestors wove abstract interpretations (triangles, parallelograms, intersecting lines, etc.) into their baskets based on the environment around them and their relationship with the land – designs and patterns with names like “mountain,” or “salmon gill.” Just as these ancestors “spoke to the land in the patterns of the baskets,” Feddersen interprets the urbanscape and landscape that surround him, the signs that tell him, “you are here.” This may include natural markers that have existed since time immemorial, such as the mountains evoked by earlier generations of Plateau artists that lived on the same land, but also the signs that are part of Feddersen’s contemporary landscape, such as the high voltage towers and chain link fences that are the reality of modern life.

Feddersen’s use of abstract design shows a continuation of the artistic heritage of his people, but just as important it reflects his artistic training in mid-20th century modernism. The viewer has two ways to access the work: through a coolly intellectual modernist reading based on color, line and abstract geometric form, or through knowledge, both personal and tribal, of a visual language based on responses to living in a particular place.

IMAGES



Artist unknown
Cornhusk bag (front and back view)
Plateau, ca 1900
Cornhusk, hide, thread
21 ½ x 17 in.
Collection of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art,
The Bill Rhoades Collection, a Gift in Memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades



Artist Unknown
Salmon Gill Design Basket
Klickitat Style, ca 1900
Cedar root, beargrass, leather hide
15 ¾ X 12 ½ in.
Hallie Ford Museum of Art
Lent by Bill Rhoades in Memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades

salmon gill

salmon gill

Joe Feddersen's work pays homage to, and explores, the tradition of abstract graphic design in baskets and bags created by his Plateau Indian ancestors. Many of the geometric patterns found on weavings such as the cornhusk bag and Klickitat-style basket above are abstract interpretations, or evocations, of the artists' environments. This can be a particular place, a natural form or phenomena, animals and the marks they leave behind, etc. While the same design may appear on a number of weavings made by individual artists from different tribes or even different regions, they may have different names. For instance, a design called "mountain" can be a simple triangle, a complicated zigzag, or a diamond pattern, depending on the artist or where it was made.

In many cases, the names of geometric patterns on a particular bag or basket are unknown to us because we do not know who made it, or exactly where it was made. This is true of the design names for the front and back of the cornhusk bag above, but the diamond shape with the cross in the center is a very common Plateau design and the cross often references the morning star. The slanting triangle pattern on the back of the bag is almost identical to one found on a bag made by a weaver who lived northwest of the Plateau region. This design has been identified as representing lodges, but whether the example above, which was made by an artist who lived in another region, is also called “lodes” has not been determined.

The design on the Klickitat-style basket above has been identified as “salmon gill.” The artist has woven a stylized interpretation of the fan-shaped gill and transformed an irregular form from nature into a regular geometric pattern. That we can recognize the source, that the artist was able to render the essence of the salmon gill, illustrates the artist’s familiarity with the subject matter and the importance of salmon in the everyday lives of the Plateau people. It also exemplifies Feddersen’s observation that “[embedded] in simple pattern is the innate connection to place.”

Suggested Discussion:

- Discuss the geometric patterns used by traditional Plateau weavers as abstract interpretations of the world around them. Abstract means that natural forms and objects are not rendered in a naturalistic or representational way, but are simplified or distorted to some extent, often in an attempt to convey the essence of the form or object.
- Weavers create designs that are in part determined by the grid formed by the warp (vertical) and weft (horizontal) strands. Discuss how they transform a three-dimensional object that is irregular, round, or curved to the grid. Have students create a design based on a 3-d object using graph paper. Try translating an irregular, round or curved object onto the grid design.
- **At the Museum:** In the Grand Ronde Gallery, look at the designs on the baskets and bags. What do you think they might represent? Why? Think about how your interpretations may reflect *your* way life, where *you* live and how *you* relate to your environment. How might this be different from the weaver who created it?



Joe Feddersen
Glyph #6
2001
Unique linocut
11 x 9 ¾ in
Courtesy of the Artist and Froelick Gallery, Portland, Oregon

I wanted to do something that is about printmaking. At the same time, I wanted to do something about home.

Joe Feddersen

In works like *Glyph #6*, Joe Feddersen explores the qualities of printmaking, especially the way the medium lends itself to layering form and color. He also pays homage to, and continues the tradition of, the abstract geometry of Plateau basket designs. Like his ancestors, Feddersen references “home,” in his use of triangles, zigzags, etc. that evoke particular natural forms or phenomena. By layering shape and color, he has created visual relationships that cause the eye to shift between the negative and positive spaces – shapes move forward and recede. These shapes can be recognized as design elements like “mountain,” by those who are familiar with them, but the work can also be read and enjoyed as a non-representational, formal composition made up of shape and color. Even Feddersen’s use of color gradation can be viewed in two ways: as an exploration of the formal qualities of color (value, tints and shades) and color theory (the way warm colors advance and cool colors recede); or in a more representational, evocative way suggesting the quality of light that is particular to the place he calls home.

Suggested Discussion:

- What shapes do you see? Which is the positive space? Which is the negative space? How does Feddersen’s use of color affect the way you see the shapes?
- Compare the designs in *Glyph #6* to those in the cornhusk bag and Klickitat-style basket above. How are they similar? How are they different? Do you “read” the designs the same way? Why or why not?
- Discuss *Glyph #6* as it relates to his statement, *I wanted to do something that is about printmaking. At the same time, I wanted to do something about home.*



Joe Feddersen
Scaffolding
2004
Woven waxed linen
5 ½ x 4 x 4 in
Courtesy of the Artist and Froelick Gallery, Portland, Oregon

scaffolding

The shapes in *Glyph #6* reference traditional geometric designs, which are in turn abstract interpretations of forms found in the environment. It would appear, at first look, that this is also true of the basket above. Indeed, it is similar to the traditional designs we saw in the cornhusk bag. However, the basket above presents geometric designs that are not abstracted but actually found in the environment – specifically the man-made environment. After reading the title of the basket, *Scaffolding*, we immediately recognize it. The designs still reference the land, but it is the land where contemporary Native people live, and it reflects the reality of the human/environment relationship today.

Suggested Discussion

- Without giving the title, discuss the design in *Scaffolding* as an abstract representation of natural forms and what it may represent. Then provide students with the title, *Scaffolding*. Discuss how this changes how they see the design.
- Discuss Feddersen's use of designs based on the man-made environment in relation to the designs created by traditional Plateau weavers. How are they similar? How are they different?

LESSON PLAN: *Shape Hunt! Discover Geometry in the World Around Us* *

Suggested Grades: Adaptable for K-8

Essential Question

- What shapes – complex and simple, regular and irregular – can we find in man-made objects and in nature?

Brief Description

This activity will encourage students to begin to think like artists and like mathematicians, noticing that shapes are a part of all they see in our everyday world. In order to create great artwork, artists must be great observers. Similarly, budding mathematicians will learn, understand, and appreciate some of the basics of geometry all the more as they realize how integral it is to everything they see.

Background

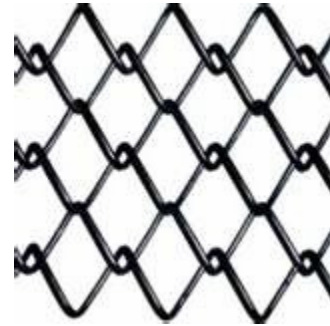
Artist Joe Feddersen finds inspiration in the shapes and patterns of everyday life. A quick glance at Feddersen's basket may make you think of traditional Plateau Indian weaving patterns, but take a second look and you may find that it reminds you of a common item in our urban landscape – and the title of this piece confirms that is in fact a representation of the *Scaffolding* that we see surrounding buildings under construction. This lesson prepares students to pinpoint shapes in our surroundings.

Lesson

- Start by showing students some basic shapes. Draw on the board or present cutouts of squares, circles, triangles, or more complex shapes as appropriate. Brainstorm: “We’ve been learning more about these shapes in math, but have you noticed how much of the world around us is built out of shapes like this? Where in nature might you find this shape? Where on a city street, or in your home?” Develop a list for each shape.
- Using an overhead projector, images projected onto a dry-erase board, laminated poster-size images, or another format that will allow you to draw on top of an image, look together at photographs of the natural and urban landscape. Some examples are shared below; you may also want to take pictures around your school, local park, or other areas familiar to students.
 - Ask students to identify and name the shapes, or describe the patterns, they see in the photographs. This is an opportunity for students to use all the math vocabulary they’ve been learning, whether that means circles and stars or spheres, decagons, and isosceles trapezoids.
 - As each student identifies a shape in a photograph, ask him or her to come up and trace the shape on the image.

* This lesson plan is included in *The Shape of Things: Educator Curriculum Guide*, written by the Tacoma Art Museum Education Department for the exhibition and adapted for the Hallie Ford Museum of Art venue. Thanks to TAM Director of Education, Courtney Vowels for sharing this resource.

Shapes and Patterns in the Urban Landscape



Shapes and Patterns in the Natural Landscape



- Where else can you find shapes in the world around us? Students now seek out their own examples for a “show & tell of shapes.” Ask students to find shape examples on the way to and from school, in their homes, when they go to sports practice or to the movies, etc. Depending upon teacher preference and school resources, students might take digital photos of the shapes they find; they might sketch them or keep a list; for smaller items they might even bring the object in to present to the class, or for larger but nearby items the class might take a mini-field trip. Challenge students to discover the hardest-to-find or most surprising shapes they can.
- How do you translate the shapes you see in the world onto a two-dimensional surface like a piece of paper or a canvas? Now that students have found shape examples in the world around them, look again at the work of Joe Feddersen and the baskets and bags made by Plateau Indian weavers. Do artists always represent exactly what they see? Or do they often choose a few key shapes and details, sometimes exaggerating or abstracting them to make their artwork more dramatic, or to express their particular point of view? Bring this question back to students’ own presentations of the shapes they found in nature: If they were creating a painting, how would they represent that pine tree using the isosceles triangle they noticed or the many hexagons they saw making up that beehive?
- After the class has discussed some examples of how students might use their own shape hunt in the creation of a work of art, try it out in practice. Provide a selection of drawing/coloring supplies based on what is available in the classroom (whether that is a pencil and a notebook, markers and construction paper, or paints and watercolor paper) and allow students time to play with the materials, creating their own landscapes and abstract pieces based on the shapes they found in the environment.
- Ask students to share and discuss their examples. Students may also compare and contrast: Who used a circle, or a square, or a trapezoid in their creation? How similar or different do two pieces using the same shapes look?

Extensions and Alternate Activities

- **Shapely Collage:** Using their own photos and sketches and/or images they cut out from magazines and newspapers, ask students to create a collage of the shapes they've found out in the world. Collages might be organized by type of shape and include text to present information, might be a narrative of their shape hunt, or might just be constructed to be aesthetically pleasing.
- **Hide & Seek with Shapes:** For early learners, you might search for readily recognized cutouts before moving on to shapes in nature. While students are out of the classroom, hide colorful, simple shapes cut from foam or poster board around the room. There should be more than one of each shape, but not the same amount of each shape. Ask each student to find five pieces and join the class on the carpet. Students can then sort their shapes into piles. Can you figure out which shape there is the most of, and of which there is the fewest? Variations might focus on one particular shape and its iterations—circles of varying sizes, or different types of quadrilaterals – or you might extend this activity by creating charts comparing the number of shapes you've sorted.
- **Shape Rubbings:** Prepare textured shape pieces – purchase stencils or cut shapes from sandpaper, thick lace, etc. – and a colorful, easy-to-use, broad-tipped drawing material (crayons used on their sides with the paper wrapper peeled off work well). Use masking or painter's tape to help students affix the textured shapes to a table or clipboard in their desired arrangement in order to make the shapes and patterns underneath appear on the paper. Once students have mastered this technique with cut-out shapes/stencils, send them out into the world to find natural or man-made shapes that may be used for rubbings. These items might be large- or small-scale: Manhole covers, mouse pads, coasters and wall surfaces are some examples.
- **Made to Fit:** Engineers, designers, and others must know how to calculate the volume, surface area, and other attributes of a variety of shapes in order to create items and to fit those items to various space constraints. For older students, this provides a real-world opportunity to use some of the formulas they've been learning. Invite students to imagine themselves as architects, industrial designers, etc. and to identify ways that knowledge of shapes is integral to these jobs. Have you ever built anything, and what kind of measurements did you need in order to do so? What kind of shapes do you find in a house, or even just one room of a house, and how would you determine what size to make those shapes in order to fit together properly and to fit properly in the space? For instance, how would you determine the amount of material to purchase for stuffing a pillow, the number of springs to fit in a mattress, the size of bed that would work best in a room – and whether it will fit through the door – or the amount and size of wallpaper needed to cover one wall? There are an endless number of these questions and endless ways to implement hands-on projects to discover the answers. Consider asking students to create their own items – life-size or to scale – that make use of their growing understanding of the concepts of volume and area.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Arts (Benchmarks 1, 2, 3 and HS)

Create, Present and Perform

- Create Present and Perform works of art.
- Apply the use of ideas, techniques and problem solving to the creative process and analyze the influence that choices have on the result.
- Express idea, moods and feelings through the arts and evaluate how well a work of art expresses one's intent.

Aesthetics and Criticism

- Apply critical analysis to works of art.

Historical and Cultural Perspectives

- Understand how events and conditions influence the arts.
- Distinguish works of art from different societies, time periods and cultures.
- Understand how the arts can reflect the environment and personal experiences within a society or culture and apply to one's own work.
- Understand the place of the arts within, and their influences on, society.

Mathematics

K.2 Geometry: Describe shapes and space.

1.3 Geometry: Compose and decompose two-and three-dimensional geometric shapes.

2.3 Measurement: Develop an understanding of linear measurement and facility in measuring.

3.1 Number and Operations: Develop an understanding of fractions and fraction equivalence.

3.3 Geometry and Measurement: Describe and analyze properties of two-dimensional shapes, including perimeters.

4.3 Measurement: Develop an understanding of area and determine the areas of two-dimensional shapes.

5.3 Geometry, Measurement and Algebra: Describe and relate two-dimensional shapes to three-dimensional shapes and analyze their properties, including volume and surface area.

6.2 Number and Operations and Probability: Connect ratio, rate and percent to multiplication and division.

7.2 Measurement and Geometry: Develop an understanding of and use formulas to determine surface area and volume.

8.3 Geometry and Measurement: Analyze two-and three-dimensional spaces and figures by using distance and angle.

H.1G Geometry: Apply properties of two-dimensional figures.

H.2G Geometry: Apply properties of three-dimensional solids.

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, prints, weaving, etc.)

Does the particular technique contribute to the total? How?

4. EXPRESSION

What is the role of cultural conventions? (Native American, for example)

What is the mood or emotional content?

What is the message or meaning?

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

5. CONTEXT

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?









