

LUCINDA PARKER

FORCE FIELDS

January 19–March 31, 2019

Hallie Ford Museum of Art
Willamette University

TEACHERS GUIDE



Lucinda Parker (American, born 1942), *Saraband*, 1993, acrylic on canvas, 96 x 96 inches, Willamette University Art Collection, Salem, Oregon, Maribeth Collins Art Acquisition Fund. Photo: Dale Peterson.

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INTRODUCTION

About the Teachers Guide:

This guide is to help teachers prepare students for a field trip to the exhibition, *Lucinda Parker: Force Fields* and to offer ways for them to engage students in the galleries. Teachers, however, will need to consider the level and needs of their students in adapting these materials and lessons.

About the Exhibition:

The exhibition *Lucinda Parker: Force Fields* presents nearly fifty works spanning some sixty years, beginning with paintings she made as a precocious artist in high school, continuing with work that she created as a student at the Museum School, and moving forward through the 1970s—her breakthrough decade as a major figure in Pacific Northwest modernism. In the last decades of the twentieth century, she nudged her art toward more complex references (to literature, music, mythology). In the twenty-first century, she puts her skills as an abstract painter to the task of rendering entire mountains in a rugged, post-cubist style.

Lucinda Parker: Force Fields has been supported by a major gift from The Harold & Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation and by general operating support grants from the City of Salem's Transient Occupancy Tax funds and the Oregon Arts Commission.

About the Artist by Roger Hull, exhibition curator

Born and raised in New England, Lucinda Parker arrived in Portland, Oregon, in 1960 at the age of eighteen to enroll in the joint degree program offered by Reed College and the Museum Art School (now Pacific Northwest College of Art). In 1969, after graduate study in New York, she and her husband settled permanently in Portland, where she launched her remarkable, nearly fifty-year career that continues to this day to be richly inventive, original, and often unpredictable as she explores new forms and themes.

An abstract modernist painter who in recent years has turned to nature-based imagery, Lucinda Parker comes to painting educated in both studio practice and the liberal arts; she fuses her knowledge of how to move paint around with her knowledge of literature, music, art tradition, myth, botany, and geology. It's a fearsome combination of skill and intellect that underlies Lucinda Parker's creation of paintings that are, in fact, force fields.

BEFORE THE MUSEUM VISIT

- If possible, visit the exhibition on your own beforehand.
- Use the image *Saraband* and the suggested discussion and activities to introduce students to the work of Lucinda Parker.
- Make sure students are aware of gallery etiquette.

Looking at *Saraband*



Saraband

1993

Acrylic on canvas

96 x 96 in.

Willamette University Art Collection, Salem, Oregon. Maribeth Collins Art Acquisition Fund

Just as in good music – rhythm, volume, repetition, and themes are the components of good art and can be used over and over without getting stale.

Lucinda Parker

Lucinda Parker is the daughter of an avid musician and herself a singer and lover of music. In the later 1980s, and especially the 1990s, she created a series of paintings with titles such as *Cadenza*, *Cantabile*, *Chaconne*, *Toccata*, *Arioso* – all terms from the realm of music and dance. Another is *Saraband*, an eight-foot-square, two-panel painting that in title and composition refers to a stylized dance and the music written for it, the saraband.

Saraband is essentially symmetrical, with a compositional balance side to side. Each of the two halves, separate vertical panels, is dominated by what Parker described as “the almond or point oval,” a fundamental form for Parker, seen alternately as pods, seeds, vulvae, and fish. “I try to be as furiously inventive as possible while focusing on this shape,” she said. “I paint into it, around it; it’s useful to tilt, twist, split in half, double, encircle. Think of it as the shape made by two circles rolling towards each other – where they overlap is the almond.”

In *Saraband*, curving and counter-curving archlike forms create the underlying ovals – and suggest the movement of the dance itself. Shapes in front of other shapes, along with the gestural marks that punctuate these shapes, create an interplay of figure and ground and the suggestion of three-dimensionality and depth.

Saraband’s palette is earthy and autumnal, yet animated – green, yellow, orange, and red, accented by passages of mixed black and white – while the surface is rugged, almost dry, with sections that have been scraped to reveal underlying colors. There is a sense of volume, space, and motion – all part of the dance – created by the tension between the monumental forms, the play of color, and the energetic surface work.

Suggested Discussion

- Without giving students the title of the work, show the image *Saraband*.
 - What do you see here?/What is going on in this painting? (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.”) Briefly describe your impressions of subject matter, 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)? Things to consider:
 - Where does your eye go first? Why?
 - How does your eye move around the painting – is it led by color, line, pattern, etc?
 - What shapes do you see? What kind of lines? How has the artist created form?
 - Describe the color.
 - Describe the texture.
 - How has the artist created rhythm, balance, and unity?
 - Discuss the following statement by Lucinda Parker as it relates to *Saraband*:

I've always felt that meaning rises up, through, within, and from behind the way paint goes down, the way darks and lights slide past each other, and from the overall juggling of balance and tension in the composition. I think of this process as corralling bundles of energy and setting them besides other bundles. I'm looking for a surprising amalgamation of working the surface, shifting, repainting, tilting, overlapping forms, implying volume and space and motion.

- Share the title of the painting, *Saraband*, with students. Discuss its meaning and if possible, watch the video of the dance being performed:

A saraband is a European court dance from the 17th and 18th centuries. The movements are slow and stately, and the music for the dance (also called a saraband) is performed in triple time with an accent on the second beat. It is derived from an earlier lively Spanish dance using castanets.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDgnsLPNw2w>

- Describe again what you see in *Saraband*. Have your impressions of subject matter, mood, and atmosphere changed? Do you see something new? Does the title influence your interpretation of the work? Explain.

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. Suggested discussions and activities are included.
- Focus on the works of art. Encourage students to look closely at each work of art and consider beginning with the visual scanning they used in the classroom.
 - Before reading the label, spend time looking at the work. Briefly describe what you see, and your first impressions of subject matter, 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)?
 - After reading the label, describe again what you see. Have your impressions of subject matter, mood, and atmosphere changed? Do you see something new? Does the title influence your interpretation of the work? Explain.
- Look at 3-4 works from different periods of Parker's career as a mature artist, from the late 1970s to her recent mountain paintings (the gallery is arranged chronologically). Compare and contrast, and explore how form and technique, as well as content and meaning have developed and evolved.
- **Form and Technique**
 - Look for examples of Parker's "corralling bundles of energy and setting them besides other bundles," as well as opposing forces in Parker's compositions:
 - curving and counter-curving
 - movement and stasis
 - representation and abstraction
 - Explore the evolution of Parker's use of medium and her handling of paint (surface texture, brushwork, etc.).
 - Consider/discuss the following statement as it relates to Parker's mountain paintings:

I've got all that equipment, that abstract judgment, that I had built up when I made abstract paintings – the assessment of shape, the overlap, the contrast, all that stuff you might not have if you never were an abstract painter.

- **Content and Meaning**

- Consider/discuss the following statements as they relate to Parker’s exploration of abstract images and meaning:

I want my shapes to evoke multiple identities, visual puns, as in leaf/vulva, bud/blade, feather/torpedo, seed/fish [so that] these paintings parallel nature.

To me, fish were still abstract painting. I could make the shape or color anywhere in a painting of a fish, and I could put it where I wanted. I had no constraints.

- Look for the following shapes and discuss how they relate to the above statements
 - Ovals (fish, seed pods, vulva, clouds)
 - Spirals (snakes, plant tendrils)
 - Triangles (stars, mountains)
- Explore the play of word and image in Parker’s titles and in the paintings themselves, and how, as Roger Hull notes, they “[lend meaning but also serve] alongside the other shapes and lines to enhance the composition.”
- Roger Hull states that, “[Parker] titled her works as a poet might title poetry.” Create a cinquain (pronounced sincane: a five-line stanza) inspired by one of the works 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 to describe the noun.
Line 3: Three verbs to describe the noun.
Line 4: A short phrase about the noun.
Line 5: Repeat noun in Line 1.

CONTENT STANDARDS

Visual Arts Standards

Anchor Standard 7: Responding—Perceive and analyze artistic work.

VA.7.RE1.5-8

VA.7.RE1.HS1-2

Anchor Standard 8: Responding—Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

VA.8.RE2.2-8

VA.1.RE2.HS1-2

RESOURCE

Hull, Roger, *Lucinda Parker: Force Fields*. Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University, Salem, OR, 2019

