

# ***Emily Carr & Landon Mackenzie: Woodchopper and the Monkey***



Landon Mackenzie  
*Woo II (after Carr)*, 2014  
oil on linen  
Courtesy of the Artist

## **TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE FALL 2014**

**Vancouver**  
Artgallery

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# Vancouver Art Gallery

## Teacher's Guide for School Programs

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In the exhibition *Emily Carr & Landon Mackenzie: Woodchopper and the Monkey*, a series of connections between one of British Columbia's most significant historical artists, Emily Carr, and the contemporary BC artist Landon Mackenzie are presented. The exhibition includes works that span Mackenzie's career alongside a selection of paintings by Carr chosen specifically by Mackenzie for this exhibition. The paintings displayed highlight differences in Carr's and Mackenzie's approaches to image making, but also draw attention to similarities in their respective practices.

### DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of the exhibition *Emily Carr & Landon Mackenzie: Woodchopper and the Monkey*. It also provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Vocabulary section.

The tour of *Emily Carr & Landon Mackenzie* has three main goals:

- to introduce students to the work of the artists Emily Carr and Landon Mackenzie,
- to consider diverse artistic traditions and disciplines,
- to explore individual artworks within historical, social and cultural contexts.

## THE EXHIBITION: *Emily Carr & Landon Mackenzie: Woodchopper and the Monkey*

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The exhibition *Emily Carr & Landon Mackenzie: Woodchopper and the Monkey* presents a dialogue between the works of the iconic West Coast modernist Emily Carr and the acclaimed Vancouver artist Landon Mackenzie. For this exhibition, Mackenzie has chosen a selection of works by Carr that represent parallels and differences in their respective lives and artistic practices.

Over the past thirty years Landon Mackenzie has produced an impressive body of paintings that feature place, myth and memory to consider the ways in which we situate ourselves in the world. Her works explore a variety of painting styles ranging from figuration to abstraction, which differs significantly from Carr's consistent and recognizable style and colour palette. Although there are differences in their painterly vocabulary, the artists share common points as well. For example, both artists began their training during historical moments of radical shifts in visual art: Carr at the onset of Modernism and Mackenzie at the beginning of Postmodernism. Also, there is a shared interest in landscape painting as a way to examine the question of representation and expression in art. Both artists have lived in a European-based culture that has systematically displaced the region's original inhabitants, and both have struggled as women in a tradition largely defined by male artists.

*Emily Carr & Landon Mackenzie: Woodchopper and the Monkey* is an exhibition comprising fifty paintings in three sections. Taking its title from images in the two artists' work, the exhibition situates the woodchopper as a metaphorical female figure who "clears the path" for those to come and the monkey as a symbol of Carr's unique character and artistic expression.

## ARTISTS' BACKGROUND

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### Emily Carr (1871–1945)

Born in Victoria in 1871, Carr decided as a child that she was going to be an artist. She set herself on a path of learning that took her to California, England and France. On her return to Canada she travelled into the northern parts of British Columbia to paint First Nations subjects and later into the forests of Vancouver Island to capture the landscape. She led an unconventional life for the times, never married, and supported herself through a series of efforts such as raising dogs, running a boarding house, making pottery and giving art lessons. Under-appreciated as an artist, she achieved some measure of success only toward the end of her life, most significantly as a writer. She produced a series of books including *Klee Wyck*, a collection of stories based on her experiences with First Nations people, which won the Governor General's Award for Literature in 1941. She died in Victoria in 1945.

During her time in France (1910–12), Carr was strongly influenced by the then new styles of Post-Impressionism and Fauvism. She returned to Canada excited about her new-found skills, which included the use of bright colours and broken brushstrokes—for which she was ridiculed and dismissed as a bad artist. Her paintings of First Nations villages in the North were further rejected as not being “true documentary.” In 1927, however, Carr was invited to participate in the Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art at the National Gallery of Canada. It was there that she met members of the Group of Seven and decided to return to painting after a long period of not painting at all. Carr began to paint the forests of British Columbia with renewed ambition. These are among her strongest and most forceful works, in which she developed her own Modernist style of rich, layered coloration and increasing abstraction.

### Landon Mackenzie (b. 1954)

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Landon Mackenzie is a Canadian artist living in Vancouver, where she is also a professor at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. She is nationally known for her characteristically large paintings that have been featured in several shows at the National Gallery of Canada and the Vancouver Art Gallery. Her work has also been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art and in more than ninety exhibitions across Canada and internationally.

In her large abstract paintings, she explores ideas about the physical and social geography of Canada, Canadian heritage and the Canadian identity. While she is interested in place, Mackenzie is less concerned with real images of places and more with ideas, myths and memories related to place. She is also interested in brain and neural mapping in relationship to the mapping of our physical environment. Her work often crosses or straddles the borders between abstract and representational art.

She began her education at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) in Halifax (1972–1975), and earned her MFA at Concordia University (1976–1979). She has received numerous awards and grants, including the Third Biennale of Quebec Painting (1981), and was also the recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal for her service to Canada in Visual Art. Mackenzie was the first to achieve the rank of full professor with the establishment of Emily Carr University (formerly known as Emily Carr Institute) in 2008.

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: About the Artists (intermediate and secondary students)

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### Objective:

Students read, research and share information about the artists represented in the exhibition.

### Materials:

- ❑ writing materials
- ❑ Internet. Some useful websites:
  - [www.artcyclopedia.com](http://www.artcyclopedia.com)
  - [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)
  - [www.ccca.ca/artists/\[name of artist\]](http://www.ccca.ca/artists/[name of artist])
- ❑ Artist Information Sheet (page 7) and Student Worksheet (page 8)

### Process:

1. Divide the students into small groups and assign an artist to each group.
2. Give each student a copy of the Student Worksheet (page 8) and ask them to transfer the information about their artist to the appropriate box.
3. Have students figure out what they need to know to complete the section on their artist, and search the Internet, either at home or at school. Older students can find more information; younger students, just the basics.
4. Ask each group to find/copy/sketch a piece of work by each artist on a separate piece of paper.
5. Have each group present the information on their artist while the rest of the class adds the information to their worksheets.

### Conclusion:

#### Discuss:

- What were some of the most interesting things that students learned or discovered?
- Which artist and/or kinds of artwork made students curious about seeing the actual work in the exhibition?
- Which artist, ways of working or ideas did the students want to find out more about?

# Artist Information Sheet

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## **Emily Carr**

- Born and died in Victoria, British Columbia
- Studied art in San Francisco, England and France, travelled through British Columbia visiting First Nations villages
- Lived mostly alone, kept lots of animals
- Wrote many books toward the end of her life, which were well received
- Painted First Nations villages and totem poles, and forest landscapes
- Sketched outdoors using thinned oil paint on paper, made final paintings in her studio using oil paint on canvas

## **Landon Mackenzie**

- Born in Boston, Massachusetts, lives in Vancouver
- Studied in Nova Scotia and Montreal
- First person to receive the rank of full professor at Emily Carr University
- Known for large-scale abstract paintings
- Uses her imagination to paint landscapes and cosmic spaces
- Paints in both abstract and representational styles
- Received the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal for her service to Canada in Visual Art

## Student Worksheet

	Emily Carr	Landon Mackenzie
Personal Information		
Type of Art		
Known for		
Name of an Artwork		

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Sketch and Paint (all levels)

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### Objective:

Students are introduced to Carr's process of working by sketching outdoors and then, back in the classroom, creating a painting based on the sketch.

### Discussion:

Emily Carr often created sketches for her landscapes out in nature, where she could study the colours and textures of the trees, foliage, lakes and sky, and observe the way light, wind and weather affected her subjects. She often began sketching in charcoal or thinned oil paint, and did the final work later, back in the studio. She would make oil paintings based on—but not exactly the same as—her sketches.

Emily Carr wrote the following passage in her book *Growing Pains*:

“Outdoor study was as different from studio study as eating is from drinking. Indoors we munched and chewed our subjects. Fingertips roamed objects feeling for bumps and depressions. We tested textures, observed contours. Sketching outdoors was a fluid process, half looking, half dreaming, awaiting invitation from the spirit of the subject to ‘come, meet me half way.’ Outdoor sketching was as much longing as labour. Atmosphere, space cannot be touched, bullied like the vegetables of still life or like the plaster casts. These space things asked to be felt not with fingertips but with one’s whole self.”

### Materials:

For Part 1:

- drawing pads, or clipboards and sheets of paper
- coloured pencils, crayons or pastels

For Part 2:

- thicker paper for painting
- paint—preferably tempera or acrylic, but any available paint will work
- paintbrushes

### Process:

Part 1:

1. Discuss Carr's two-step approach to her painting, and tell the students they are going to go outdoors and make a colour sketch as a precursor to a painting. Read them the above excerpt from *Growing Pains*.
2. Choose an outdoor area with some greenery and one or more trees. Have the students decide on a starting perspective; for example:
  - close up, with tree trunk or branches filling the page,
  - from a distance, including grass, trees and sky,
  - looking up, including the top of the tree and an expanse of sky, a single tree.

3. Have them look closely at the greens and yellows of the leaves, the browns and greys of the trunk and branches, and the blues and greys of the sky. Remind them that landscape painters like Carr didn't use just one colour, but mixed and blended colours and shades to create rich, dense surfaces.
4. Have the students make a few colour sketches from different perspectives or angles, from close up and far away. Encourage them to fill the page with quick detail—broad strokes of colours, lines and shapes that include all the elements in their line of vision.

**Part 2:**

1. Back in the classroom, within a week after making the sketches, have the students look at their sketches and choose the one they would most like to make a painting from. What parts of their sketch do they want to leave in? What parts would they like to change? Does the composition feel balanced, or are there some areas they would like to add something to or remove something from? Would they like to combine elements from two drawings?
2. Have the students set up workspaces at their tables, where they can see their sketches and have access to paper, paint and brushes.
3. Have them paint their landscapes, encouraging them to fill the page, layering on and blending colours as they work.

**Conclusion:**

- Display the students' work: painting alongside sketch.
- Have them look at the work and talk about the similarities and differences in materials, locations, colours and composition.
- Discuss the process, how easy or hard it was to create the work, the differences between making the sketch and creating the painting.

## PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Create Your Space (all levels)

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### Objective:

Students create an imaginary universe that reflects their lives and personalities.

### Discussion:

*“I don’t want to work outdoors. I’ve always made landscapes from looking into imaginative space.”* (Landon Mackenzie, 1996)

In many of her works, Landon Mackenzie rejects traditional representations of landscape in favour of a more intuitive approach based on memory and personal history. Similarly, her paintings that consider neuroscience, human biology, the universe and the cosmos at large are also imagined spaces. For example, in her work “North Star/Neurostar” the artist evokes a night sky with flashes of light and lines of bright colour symbolizing the human body and brain combined with universal motifs.

### Materials:

- ❑ watercolour paper or other thick paper for paints
- ❑ watercolours or any translucent water-based paint
- ❑ pastels or wax crayons
- ❑ rulers and stencils with various geometric shapes—squares, circles, triangles

### Process:

1. Discuss the cosmos and space. What do students know about space, the solar system and galaxies? Introduce the word *cosmos* and provide the following definition: *the universe seen as a well-ordered whole or system.*
2. Ask the students to imagine a solar system and universe of their own. What would it look like? Would there be planets? Stars? What else? How would they personalize it? (Stars or planets could represent family members, etc.)
3. Show students examples of Landon Mackenzie’s works for inspiration (page 12). Encourage students to work in their own style as much as possible.
4. Use pastels/crayons, rulers and stencils to draw stars and planets and anything they want to include in their galaxy. If stencils are not available, students can draw shapes freehand.
5. Encourage students to create a universe unique to them and their life. Ask students to fill the page.
6. Once they have finished drawing their universe, remove the pastels/crayons.
7. Provide students with watercolour paints. Have students paint overtop the pastel/crayon to create a background for their universe. This will produce a resist effect.
8. Display the works.
9. See examples of Landon Mackenzie’s works on the following page.

### Conclusion:

- Ask students to talk about their work and explain their universe.
- What does the universe include? How does it reflect them and their lives?
- How are the students’ final works similar or different?



*Simulator Neurostar*, Landon Mackenzie, 2012



*Neurostar*, Landon Mackenzie, 2012

## PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Fantastical Animals (all levels)

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### Objective:

Students explore the idea of identity and symbolism by creating an imagined hybrid creature.

### Discussion:

Both Carr's and Mackenzie's works show an interest in animals. Throughout her life, Carr loved animals and owned many pets, among them her pet monkey Woo, who she included in her paintings. In Mackenzie's works, however, hybrid animals are invented and are neither domestic nor wild. For example, in her painting *Vanquished* there are four-legged creatures based on the caribou and wolves of the Canadian North. In many cases, these animal images function as subtle symbols for her own identity and its relationship to both her human and her natural environment.

### Materials:

- 2 sheets of drawing paper for each student
- coloured pencils or markers
- construction paper for mounting

### Process:

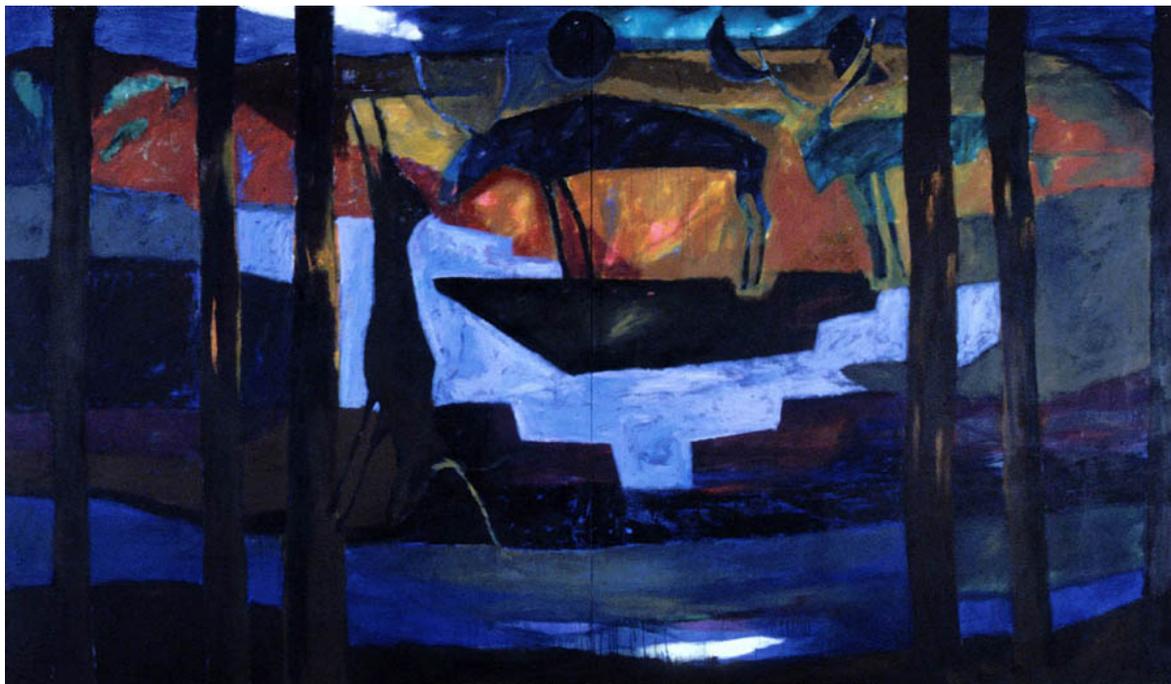
1. Ask students to think of two animals that represent different aspects of their personalities and lives.
2. Once they have chosen their animals, have them think about combining features of their animals to create one fantastical animal. What would it look like? What would it eat? Where would it live?
3. Have students draw their fantastical animal on a sheet of paper. Have them fill the page and colour it in.
4. Have students use the other sheet of paper to write about their animal. What is the animal called? What does it eat? Where does it live? Other characteristics?
5. Glue both sheets onto construction paper, side by side.
6. Display the final work.

### Conclusion:

- Ask students to explain their fantastical animal to the class and how it represents who they are.
- Are students familiar with any other fantastical animals or creatures in stories, fairy tales, movies?
- Why do fantastical creatures exist (e.g., dragons, unicorns)?
- If they could be one of the fantastical animals created by their classmates, which one would they be? Why?



*Lost River Series, no 12, Landon Mackenzie, 1981*



*Cluny IV, Landon Mackenzie, 1983*

## PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Forest Forms (primary and intermediate grades)

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### **Objective:**

Students create an abstract forest collage focusing on shape, form and colour.

### **Discussion:**

Bright colours and bold forms characterize many of Emily Carr's paintings. As she progressed as a painter, her works became increasingly abstract and simplified, particularly the trees in her paintings of BC forests. Over time, Carr began to simplify her colours as well. She did not attempt to portray her subject in a realistic manner; rather, she used the real world as inspiration for abstract, personal interpretations of her subjects.

### **Materials:**

- construction paper in a variety of colours
- pencils
- scissors
- glue
- printer
- access to the Internet
- printed image of a landscape or one of Emily Carr's paintings

### **Process:**

1. Discuss Carr's style of painting and her use of simple shapes, forms and colour to represent landscapes.
2. Have students find or print an image of a Carr painting OR an image of a Canadian landscape of their choice. If printer is not available, have students look at some works by Carr and then use their imagination to create a forest.
3. Encourage students to look at the painting or printed image as if it were a combination of simple shapes. What shapes do they see?
4. Provide students with a selection of construction paper in a variety of colours.
5. Have them draw out the major shapes they see onto the chosen colours of construction paper.
6. Ask students to show light and shadow by using different shades of colour.
7. Have students glue shapes onto a background sheet of construction paper to create a bold and simplified landscape.
8. Display work in the classroom.

### **Conclusion:**

- Have students look at the work and talk about the similarities and differences in colour shapes and compositions.
- Discuss the process: how easy or hard it was to create the work, and the differences between creating a shape collage, a painting and a landscape.
- How do students perceive landscape and nature differently now?

## VOCABULARY

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**abstract/abstraction:** a style of art that can be thought of in two ways:

- a) the artist begins with a recognizable subject and alters, distorts, manipulates or simplifies elements of it;
- b) the artist creates purely abstract forms that are unrecognizable and have no direct reference to external reality (also called non-representational art).

**contemporary:** created in the last thirty years. Most contemporary artists are living artists.

**Fauvism:** a name (meaning “wild beasts”) for an art movement that originated in France at the end of the nineteenth century. Fauvists were concerned with creating fresh and spontaneous images, and used brilliant colours in an arbitrary and decorative way.

**figuration:** the act of representing subjects with figures.

**landscape:** artwork in which the subject is a view of the exterior physical world. Traditionally, landscapes have been paintings or drawings depicting natural scenes and are often concerned with light, space and setting.

**Modern/Modernist:** a historical period of art practice—from 1850 to 1970—during which approaches to art embraced new ideas in science, political thought and many other areas. The Modernists rejected the restrictions of past art traditions and stressed innovation over all other values.

**Post-Impressionism:** a genre of painting that grew directly out of Impressionism, but rejected its limitations. Artists continued to use vivid colours, thick paint and real-life subject matter, but were more inclined to emphasize geometric forms, to distort form for expressive effect and to use unnatural or arbitrary colour.

**Postmodern:** any of a number of trends or movements in the arts and literature developing in the 1970s in reaction to or rejection of the dogma, principles and/or practices of established Modernism.

**representational:** art in which the subject matter is recognizable, although it may not be realistically depicted.

## RESOURCES

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### **Print:**

Bennett, Bryan, and Constance P. Hall. *Discovering Canadian Art: Learning the Language*. Toronto: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1984.

Carr, Emily. *Beloved Land: The World of Emily Carr*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.

Hill, Lamoureux, Thom, et al. *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/National Gallery of Canada/Vancouver Art Gallery, 2006.

Laurence, Robin. *Beloved Land: The World of Emily Carr*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.

Rhodes, Richard. *A First Book of Canadian Art*. Toronto: Owl Books, 2001.

Thom, Ian. *Art BC: Masterworks from British Columbia*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery/Douglas & McIntyre, 2001.

### **Online:**

[www.artcyclopedia.com](http://www.artcyclopedia.com)

[www.artsask.ca](http://www.artsask.ca)

[www.gallery.ca](http://www.gallery.ca)

<http://www.landonmackenzie.com>

[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

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