

Connections Between Issues of the Post-Frontier Era and Representations of Land at the Spencer Museum of Art

Objectives of the assignment

1. Students will visit the Spencer Museum of Art as a class and explore the Western art collection with a member of the museum staff, with a focus on 19th-century landscapes.
2. Students will consider how works of art connect with course issues of the post-frontier era, struggles to create regional identity, notions of the past, the varieties of racial and ethnic experience, political culture, and the possibilities of the land.
3. Students will engage with questions to guide their looking and analysis of the works of art.

Specifics of the assignment

1) Students will visit the Spencer Museum of Art and explore the Western art collection with a member of the museum staff.

2) During the visit, students will select one work of art and respond to the following questions:

1. What are some distinctive features of the artwork and its representation of land that you notice first?
2. How do particular elements of the work contribute to these features? You might consider issues of scale (of the artwork and what is represented), color, texture, use of light and dark, use or representation of space (including foreground, middle and background), or contrasts among other elements.
3. How does the work evoke notions of time? Present, past, nostalgia, memory, a particular moment, or a sense of timelessness?
4. What kinds of relationships between humans and the land are conveyed? How are these relationships conveyed and what are the connections? Who is present (either through direct representation or implication)? Who are the people that are possibly intended to view this work, or who does this work of art serve? Who belongs to this land and/or how does this land belong to a particular person, group of people, and/or some other entity?
5. Whose perspectives are conveyed, and how?

6. What perhaps might be absent or missing from view and the story or stories conveyed?
7. What sorts of emotions might be evoked? How and for whom?
8. How might this work relate to issues of religion/spirituality, politics, economics, or perhaps to other media (popular press, literature, other arts)?

Works of art associated with the assignment

The works of art selected for this assignment are suggestions based on previous class visits. It is possible that some objects may not be on view in a given semester. With sufficient advance notice, it is possible that objects that are not on view may be able to be displayed in the Stephen H. Goddard Study Center or Jack & Lavon Brosseau Center for Learning. Contact Kate Meyer (kmm0045@ku.edu) for availability and scheduling of the Study Center and Center for Learning.

You can also search the Spencer Museum of Art website (www.spencerart.ku.edu) for works that are currently on view by clicking on Art>Collection>Search, and then clicking on Collection at the top left to access the advanced search tool. The last text box gives you the option to search only for works on view. For additional help selecting works of art on view for your class visit, contact Celka Straughn, the Andrew W. Mellon Director of Public Practice, Education, and Research, at straughn@ku.edu, or the Academic Coordinator at academic@ku.edu.

Adapting the assignment

While this assignment is designed as a guided class visit in the galleries, it can also be adapted as:

- ✓ a guided class visit
- ✓ independent student work
- ✓ a long-term project
- ✓ a multi-visit assignment

And could take place in:

- ✓ the Stephen H. Goddard Study Center
- ✓ the Jack & Lavon Brosseau Center for Learning
- ✓ a special exhibition
- ✓ the galleries