

**Nature as Symbol**  
**designed for 6 grade (but maybe adapted to other grades)**

This lesson incorporates two works of art from the *Cardinal Points* exhibition on display in the Baum Gallery, UCA campus in Fall 2009.

1. Laura Anderson Barbata (1958)

Born in Mexico City, Mexico; resides in New York, New York, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela

*Desplazamiento temporal* de la serie "*Huellas del infinito/infinidad de huellas*"

**Temporal Displacement** from the series "**Traces of Infinity/Infinity of Traces**"

1999

Seven color photographs

Image: 10 3/8 x 13 3/8

Frame: 19 1/8 x 21 5/8 x 1 1/2

2. María Martínez-Cañas (1960)

Born in Havana, Cuba; resides in Miami, Florida

*Hortus XI*

2001

Gelatin silver print

Image: 40 1/8 x 35 3/8

Frame: 41 3/8 x 36 7/8 x 2

**Enduring Ideas of the Unit:**

Nature has played an important role in art across time and culture.

Artists use nature imagery symbolically to express ideas that are important to them.

**Lesson Objectives:**

Students will be able to identify clues in works of art (*Temporal Displacement* and *Hortus XI*) that express multiple layers of meanings.

Students will create original works of art that use nature as a subject to communicate personal ideas.

**Arkansas State Frameworks:**

Foundations

Identify 3-D form in 2-D work using the elements of space (VA. 5.6.2)

Demonstrate texturing techniques to enhance artwork (VA.5.6.4)

Investigate various perspective techniques (VA.5.6.5)

Demonstrate knowledge of complex patterns which occur in the environment and in works of art (VA.5.6.7)

Demonstrate an understanding for the various purposes for creating art. (VA.5.6.15)  
Demonstrate responsibility, conservation, and proper and safe use of tools, materials, and equipment. (VA.5.6.16)

#### Creative Processes

Experiment with spatial relationships (VA.6.6.4)

Produce artwork using various alternative and traditional techniques and media  
(VA.6.6.9)

Produce artwork that involves problem solving (VA.6.6.10)

Select subject matter, symbols, and/or ideas to communicate meaning (VA.6.6.11)

Create artwork that communicates personal observations and life experiences  
(VA.6.6.13)

#### Reflections and Responses

Reflect upon historical connections between the artwork of self and others (VA.7.6.1)

Apply methods of art criticism (VA.7.6.4)

Participate in the process of exhibiting artwork (VA.7.6.6)

#### **Vocabulary:**

Temporal – pertaining to time; concerned with worldly affairs; enduring for a short time.

Displacement – the act of changing the place; having taken the place of.

Venezuela- a country on the southeast coast of South America (for more information see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuela>). Venezuela is currently under the controversial leadership of President Hugo Chavez.

Venezuelan Amazon- southern most part of Venezuela. Nearly 70,000 square miles and includes rain forests, hundreds of rivers, and tropical grasslands.

Delphinium- a perennial flowering plant also known as larkspur. See:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delphinium>

Infinity- unbounded space, time, or quantity

*Hortus*- Latin for garden

Cuba- is an island country in the Caribbean. Cuba is 90 miles from the tip of Key West, Florida. See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba>

Fidel Castro- one of the primary leaders of the Cuban Revolution. He has been the Cuban leader since 1959, resigning in February 2008, and is currently the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba. See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidel\\_Castro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidel_Castro)

Puerto Rico – officially called the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. It is an unincorporated territory of the United States located in the northeastern Caribbean. It includes several islands. San Juan, Puerto Rico is 1,033 miles from Miami, Florida.

See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puerto\\_Rico](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puerto_Rico) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Territories\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Territories_of_the_United_States)

### **Contextual information**

Laura Anderson Barbara was born in Mexico City, Mexico in 1958 and currently lives and works in New York and Mexico. She creates works of art by herself as well as a part of group and community projects. *Temporal Displacement* is part one photograph in a series of seven color photographs titled: *Traces of Infinity*. *Temporal Displacement* is a photograph of a landscape installation created in Bronx, New York. She created a path of delphinium petals and paper, and then interrupted it with a double-sided mirror.

She has spent much time in the Amazon of Venezuela where she is involved in collaborative art projects in Yanomami villages. The Yanomami are an indigenous, or native, people with their own customs and language. They are a semi-nomadic tribe who live deep in the rain forest.

For more information see Laura Anderson Barbara's website:  
<http://lauraandersonbarbata.com/work/media/photography/4.php>

María Martínez-Cañas was born in Havana, Cuba in 1960. She was raised in Puerto Rico, because her family fled the Fidel Castro regime in 1960. In 1978 she moved to the United States to study art in Philadelphia, and later Chicago. She currently lives in Miami, Florida.

She has produced several series that involve garden imagery. The *Horus* series includes eleven images. For this series she photographed illustrations from an old botanical encyclopedia and then reassembled and printed fragments of her negatives into a collaged composition. For more information see María Martínez-Cañas' website:  
<http://www.mariamartinez-canas.com/images/hortus/index.html>

### **Art Analysis**

Included below are three activities to consider for guiding students to look closely at each work of art and to form their own connections and interpretations. These activities are important motivational strategies prior to students making their own original works of art.

#### Activity 1:

1. Project digital images of *Temporal Displacement* and *Hortus XI*.
2. Distribute small, paper lunch sacks each containing an object with a unique physical texture, such a leaf, rock, wood, etc.
3. Students will feel the textures in the bags without looking.

4. Have student describe the physical textures without identifying the object by name.
5. Ask students to locate visual textures in the works of art that correspond to the texture in their bags.
6. Discuss similarities and differences in visual and tactile textures.

#### Activity 2

1. Project digital images of *Temporal Displacement* and *Hortus XI*.
2. Ask students to choose one of the artworks and imagine what it would say if the work of art could talk.
3. Have students write a “statement” the work would make verbally.
4. Ask students to justify their statements with visual clues from the artwork.

#### Activity 3:

1. Project digital images of *Temporal Displacement* and *Hortus XI*.
2. Distribute a small sticky note to each student.
3. Have students write one word that describes the work of art.
4. Stick the words near the work of art.
5. Read the words aloud while students look at the work of art.
6. Discuss, compare and contrast. Which words are surprising or change the way you view the art?

Following the above activities provide students with some brief contextual information, such as title of art, artists’ names and background and the process of artmaking. Other possibly discussion questions that include contextual information and personal connections:

1. Both of these artists have lived and worked in different countries, speaking both Spanish and English. Have you ever visited or lived in another country? Have you ever moved to a place where you did not know anyone? Describe those experiences.
2. Humans have always had close ties to nature. What are some of your experiences, likes, and dislikes with nature?
3. What are some of the art/design choices these artists had to make, such as color, placement, subject matter, etc? How are they effective choices?
4. How might the use of mirrors express “infinity”?
5. How do the titles suggest meaning?
6. What does the artwork remind you of?
7. Why do you think these artists created these works?

### **Personal Artmaking**

Project digital of images of *Temporal Displacement* and *Hortus XI* for reference as you guide your students to begin reflecting and brainstorming ideas for their personal artmaking.

Neither of these focused artists, Laura Anderson Barbara or María Martínez-Cañas, used their photography to simply record nature. Anderson Barbara staged her “landscape” much like a theater set and Martínez-Cañas reassembled her photo negative fragments into one collaged-type whole. What did nature suggest for each of these artists? A cherished memory to be memorialize? A symbol of the artists’ ever-changing landscape or life journey? Was nature portrayed as beautiful, fragile, decaying, vibrant, etc?

This lesson asks students to utilize nature to express an idea personal to them. They will produce a 2-dimensional work in the media of your or their choosing.

The students will be asked to consider the following questions concerning their personal understanding and experience of nature.

Content:

1. What qualities of nature have personal meaning to you? (e.g., nature is a comfort to me; nature is powerful and unpredictable)
2. Identify specific time(s) and place(s) that suggest those qualities of nature to you. (e.g., quiet walks outside in the evening on nature trails in the fall; a thunderstorm that came suddenly across the lake one summer evening)

Design:

3. What colors would suggest those qualities? What textures?
4. Consider the art element-space. To express the qualities you identified in #1, would you have an illusion of deep or shallow space in your artwork? Would you have large or small areas of negative space?

Media:

5. Review your answers to the above questions. What media will best support your ideas? Values in pencil? Rich colors of oil pastel? Subtle watercolor? How about combinations such as incorporating prints or rubbings of leaves, rocks, or other natural objects; or your own photograph fragments intermixed within your drawing or painting?