

# Educator Resource:

## Judy Major-Girardin, *Shallows*.

Cambridge Art Galleries, Queen's Square, May 4 to August 11. Curated by Alix Vox.

### Themes

Ecology - Sustainability - Tactile Material Engagement

### The Artist

Judy Major-Girardin is Professor Emerita from the School of the Arts at McMaster University where she taught for thirty-nine years. She lives in Cambridge Ontario and has served as Co-Chair of the Cambridge Sculpture Garden since 2005.

Her studio work includes an integrated practise of painting, printmaking, drawing, artist books, and hanging fiber-based works that raise awareness for the preservation and celebration of wetland environments. Employing environmentally responsible studio practices is central to her work.

### Shallows

Shallows is an exhibition focused on imagery derived from wetland habitats. Judy Major-Girardin formed a connection with wetlands growing up on a farm near Point Pelee National Park and working in the Visitor Centre at the park for many summers.

She says, "Wetlands are unique places with environmental, spiritual, health, cultural, and social significance. They are rich biodiverse environments that team with life and provide an ever changing and evolving source of beauty. In these times of water and climate crisis, they play a major role in water filtration, flood mitigation, soil stabilization, nutrient cycling, groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration and habitat for a diverse range of species, and plants (including medicinal and food sources) as well as providing vital fire suppression."

Major-Girardin creates her artwork based on research done through environmental readings, on-site drawing, underwater photography, sound recordings in wetland areas and through discussions with environmentally minded people. Shallows offers a way to reflect on wetlands through a poetic approach by creating a space that acts as a metaphor for water.

The artist chose her materials and methods because of their impact visually as well as the connections between sewing and mending, healing and transformation. The way the artwork is made creates an analogy for repair of the wetlands themselves. As Judy Major-Girardin explains, “There has been a wealth of scientific data on environmental concerns throughout my lifetime with many different strategies for raising awareness.”

The message here is not saturated with scientific data, nor does it prescribe any specific environmental action. It presents a quiet, visual experience intended to envelop the viewer in a space conducive to personal reflection, and caring about a habitat that is rapidly and quietly disappearing, despite its significance to our own survival.

## **Curriculum Connections**

Math Grade 6, 7, 8

C1. Patterns and Relationships

Science Grade 6, 7, 7

D1. Relating Science and Technology to Our Changing World

D2. Exploring and Understanding Concepts

E1. Relating Science and Technology to Our Changing World

E2. Exploring and Understanding Concepts

Science Grade 9-12

B1. Relating Science to Technology Society, and the Environment

B2. Developing Skills of Investigation and Communication

Visual Art Grade 6, 7, 8

D1. Creating and Presenting

D2. Reflecting, Responding, and Analyzing

D3. Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

Visual Art Grade 9 – 12

A1. The Creative Process

A2. The Elements and Principles of Design

## Activity Grades 6 - 12

For this activity, pick a plant or animal that lives in your local ecosystem. Research what life cycle your chosen living being goes through. For example, the growth of a frog from egg, tadpole, froglet to frog.

Using the life cycle as inspiration, create a series of sketches that depict your plant or animal.

Next, you will use the fabric and sewing techniques of Judy Major-Girardin to create an artwork informed by your scientific and artistic research.

The final artwork should include elements of the life cycle you have looked into, but does not need to illustrate it directly.

You can draw inspiration from the surrounding ecology, symbiotic relationships, the impact climate change has had on your subject, etc.

Like in Major-Girardin's work, your artwork can suggest an atmosphere or feeling with colour and texture in combination with representations of your subject.

### Materials

- Backing - Mesh Canvas
- Open weave fabric swatches
- Blunt needle
- Bright coloured thread
- Scissors

### Instructions

1. Tack sew one piece of fabric onto the backing (grid) covering the whole surface. Using small stitches all over the surface will attach the piece of fabric to the back.
2. Cut and arrange fabric pieces to fit onto your artwork. Add in fabric from home! Open weave and thin fabric will work best.

### Key Words

**Analogy:** a comparison made between things that may be unlike each other but share some similarities. Often used to communicate or explain a point. For example, from the movie Forrest Gump, "Life is like a box of chocolates—you never know what you're gonna get." (Credit: Oxford English Dictionary)

**Biodiversity:** Biodiversity refers to the variety of living species on Earth, including plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi. While Earth's biodiversity is so rich that many species have yet to be discovered, many species are being threatened with extinction due to human activities, putting the Earth's magnificent biodiversity at risk (Credit: National Geographic Society).

**Climate crisis:** A term used instead of climate change to reflect the urgency of the current impacts. No corner of the globe is immune from the devastating consequences of climate change. Rising temperatures are fueling environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict, and terrorism. Sea levels are rising, the Arctic is melting, coral reefs are dying, oceans are acidifying, and forests are burning. It is clear that business as usual is

not good enough. As the infinite cost of climate change reaches irreversible highs, now is the time for bold collective action (Credit: United Nations)

### **Reading List**

Beresford-Kroege, Diana. *To Speak for the Trees: My Life's Journey from Ancient Celtic Wisdom to a Healing Vision of the Forest.*

Chadwick, Douglas H. *Four-Fifths a Grizzly: A New Perspective on Nature That Just Might Save Us All.*

Charney, Noah. *These Trees Tell a Story: The Art of Reading Landscapes.*

Eklöf, Johan. *Darkness Manifesto: On Light Pollution, Night Ecology, and the Ancient Rhythms that Sustain Life.*

Goldfarb, Ben. *Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet.*

Hugo, Nancy R. *Seeing Trees: Discover the Extraordinary Secrets of Everyday Trees.*

Lee, Jessica J. *Two Trees Make a Forest: In Search of My Family's Past Among Taiwan's Mountains and Coasts.*

Lewis, Daniel. *Twelve Trees: Deep Roots of Our Future.*

Proulx, Annie. *Fen, Bog & Swamp: A Short History of Peatland Destruction and Its Role in the Climate Crisis.*

Sheldrake, Merlin. *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, & Shape Our Future.*

**Expand your gallery experience! All titles are available to borrow at Idea Exchange.**

### **Artist's Picks**

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring: The Classic that Launched the Environmental Movement.*

Dugan, Patrick. *Guide to Wetlands: An Illustrated Guide to the Ecology and Conservation of the World's Wetlands.*

Louv, Richard. *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder.*

McDonough William & Michael Braungart. *Cradle to Grave: Remaking the Way We Make Things.*

Nichols, Wallace. *Blue Mind: The Surprising Science That Shows How Being Near, In, On or Under Water Can Make You Happier, Healthier, More Connected, and Better at What You Do.*

Proulx, Annie. *Fen Bog & Swamp: A short History of Peatland Destruction and Its Role in the Climate Crisis.*

Suzuki, David. *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering our Place in Nature.*