



Organic Artifacts of Earth

Mr. Brian Testa

L1: Cranium: Skull Art

Testa (Italian) – head; skull; brain

Background Information

Around the Earth, Skull Art is found throughout and before human history.

Many Indigenous Cultures view death as a part of daily life, “At the time of death, our original mother, Mother Earth, who nourishes our bodies, reclaims our physical form” (Longboat, 2005).

The use of Skulls as and within artwork, originated before the Spanish colonization of the Americas.

Death is a daily part of life that is celebrated instead of mourned, shunned or seen as taboo.

Ancient Aztec Culture



Source: Universitätsbibliothek Rostock - FAMSI.

The deity *Tezcatlipoca*
depicted in the ***Codex Borgia***.



Source: Museo Nacional de Antropología

The ***Sun Stone***, depicting the five eras of
Aztec mythical history, with calendric
images.

Collaborative Mini Project:
Re-create an Aztec symbol
using contemporary
materials.

Creative Investigation

Zoom Into an 'Aztec Calendar'



Aztec Art & Architecture

The Aztecs were themselves appreciative of fine art and they collected pieces from across their empire to be brought back to Tenochtitlan and often ceremonially buried.

Aztec art depicted all manner of subjects but especially popular were animals, plants and gods, particularly those related to fertility and agriculture.

The Skull is seen as a symbol of Rebirth. Worship of Death is seen as an integral part of life.

Mosaic Mask of Tezcatlipoca

- **Title:** Series: The Turquoise Mosaics
- **Description:** Human skull covered with turquoise and lignite mosaic held in place with pine resin adhesive.
- **Technique:** polished; painted; mosaic
- **Production Date:** 1400 – 1521 C.E.
- **Findspot:** Excavated: Mexico
- **Culture:** Aztec (*Mexica*); Mixtec



Source: Trustees of the British Museum

Mosaic Mask of Tezcatlipoca

The work is believed to represent the god Tezcatlipoca, or 'Smoking Mirror', one of four powerful creator deities.

The name of the work refers to the material with which he was associated, obsidian.

Obsidian was used by pre-Hispanic peoples to make mirrors, which were used for rituals and prophecies.

Cultural Connections & Traditions

The *Day of the Dead* or Día de Muertos celebration stems from indigenous traditions understanding the **cyclical** nature of life, crops and a celebration of life.

Contemporary celebrations, particularly those outside of Mexico incorporate elements of Catholic holidays such as “all saints” and “all souls” days.

*Traditions connected with the holiday include building home altars called ofrendas, honoring the deceased using **Calaveras**, Aztec Marigolds (National Geographic Society, 2012).*



Photo By, Ellen Fields: “Catrinas”
Source: National Geographic

Calaveras

Calavera (Spanish) – skull

The “calavera” is usually an ornately decorated representation of a skull, often featuring flowers, animals, and other decorations.

“During the holiday, this imagery is seen everywhere, from Ofrendas, to paper crafts, and even to cartoons on newspapers” (Cereal Ventures).



Source: Cereal Ventures

Creative Investigation

Colorful Calaveras for
the Day of the Dead



La Calavera Catrina

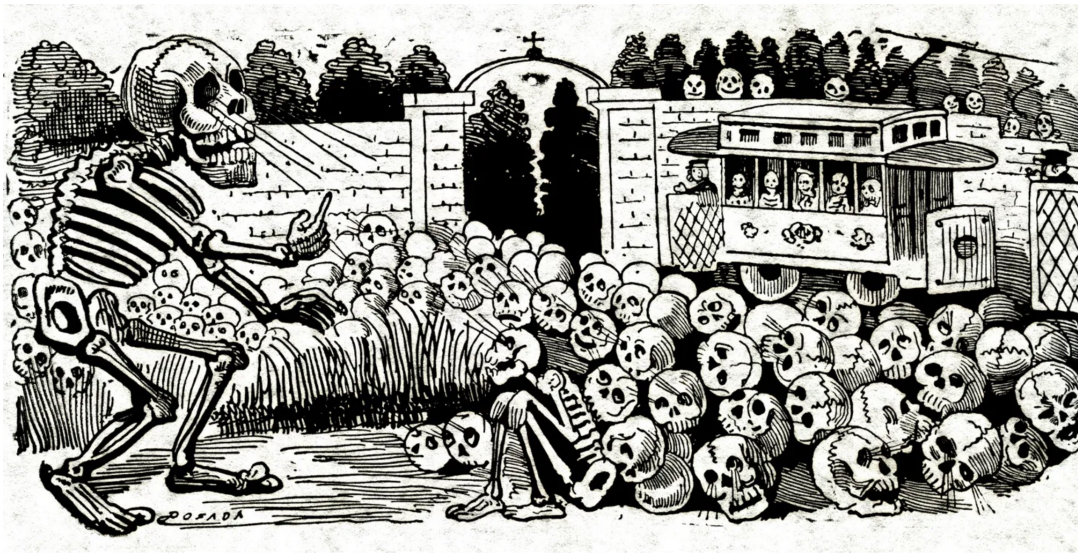
- **Title:** La Calavera Catrina
- **Artist:** José Guadalupe Posada
- **Description:** Zinc Etching
- **Technique:** Lithography
- **Production Date:** 1910–1913
- **Origin:** Mexico

La Catrina was created as part of a series of satirical lithographs that addressed political and societal issues and were published for the masses in the Mexican press (Bridges, 2020).



Source: The Grace Museum

Artist: José Guadalupe Posada



Source: Library of Congress

Grand Electric Skull Gran Calavera Eléctrica,
(1900-1913).



Source: Library of Congress

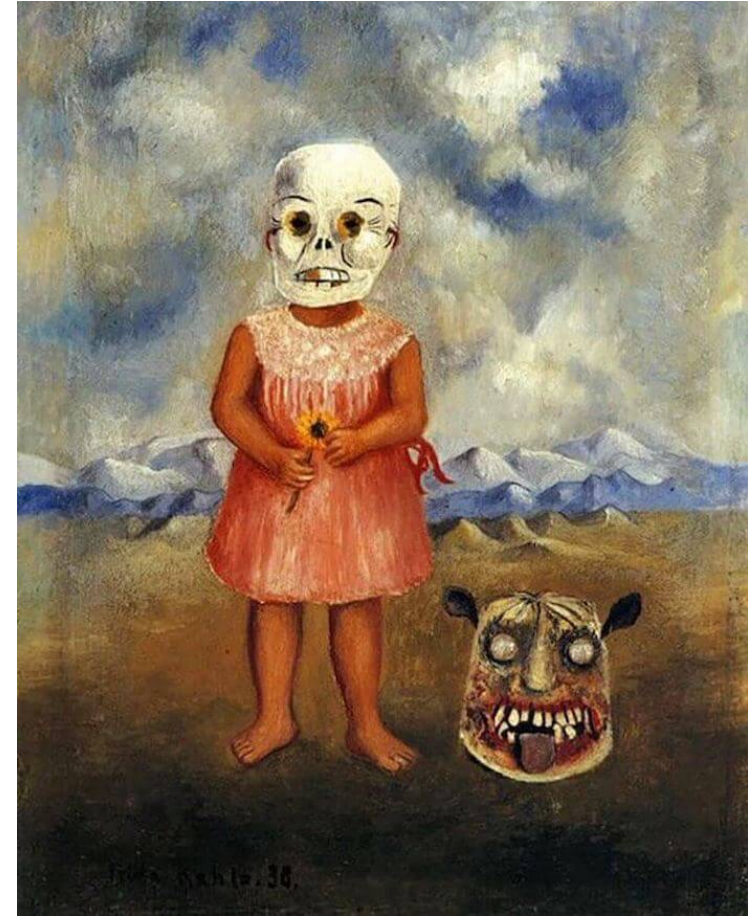
Calavera Oaxaqueña', (1903).

Mini Project:

Create Your own Political
Cartoon, Anime, or
Illustration.

Girl with Death Mask

- **Title:** Girl with Death Mask
- **Artist:** Frida Kahlo
- **Description:** Oil Paint
- **Technique:** Painting
- **Production Date:** 1938
- **Origin:** Mexico



Source: FridaKahlo.org

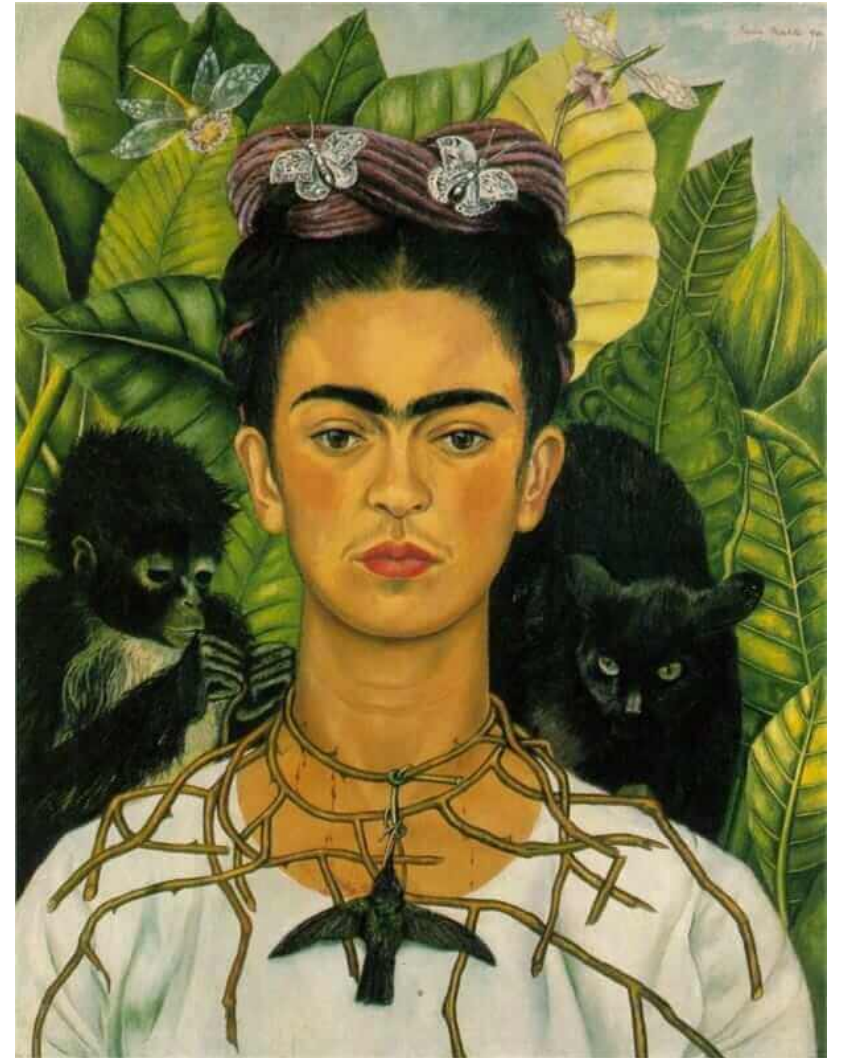
This painting depicted a little girl, which is believed to be Frida herself at the age of four, was wearing a skull mask. By her feet there is a carved wooden tiger mask (FridaKahlo.org).

Artist: Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo is remembered for her self-portraits, pain and passion, and bold, vibrant colors.

She is celebrated in Mexico for her attention to Mexican and indigenous culture and by feminists for her depiction of the female experience and form.

Pre-Columbian artifacts were common both in the Kahlo/Rivera home.



Source: [FridaKahlo.org](https://www.fridakahlo.org)

Creative Investigation

Frida Kahlo's Work:
Animated



Sueño de una Tarde Dominical en la Alameda Central

- **Title:** Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park
- **Artist:** Diego Rivera
- **Description:** Fresco
- **Technique:** Mural
- **Production Date:** 1947
- **Origin:** Mexico



Source: Sotheby's

In this vast mural, the space is filled with characters who define Mexico's complex and turbulent history, shown promenading through Alameda central park (Sotheby's, 2019).

Creative Investigation

Diego Rivera's Dream
of a Sunday
Afternoon, a
Surrealist Tableau of
Mexican History



For the Love of God

- **Title:** For the Love of God
- **Artist:** Damien Hirst
- **Description:** Platinum, Diamond, Human Teeth
- **Technique:** Lapidary, VVS Pavé
- **Production Date:** 2007
- **Origin:** England

Hirst stated the idea for the work came from an Aztec turquoise skull at the British Museum. (Steinmetz, 2009).



Source: DamienHirst.com

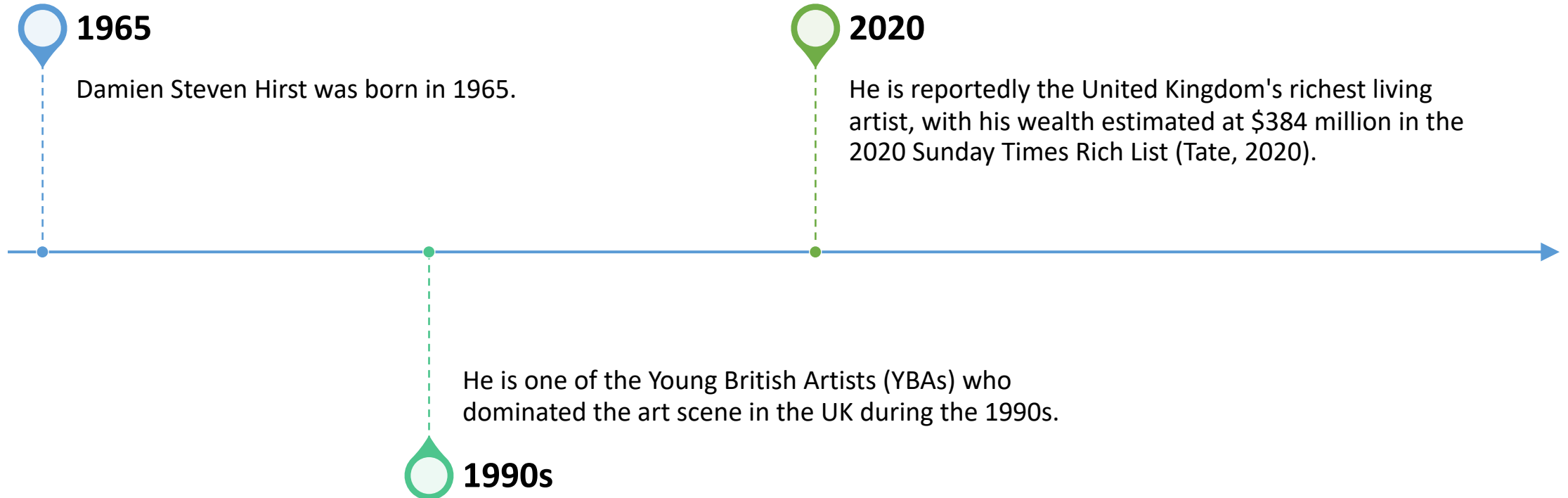
For the Love of God (Continued)

The skull from which the work, *For the Love of God*, was cast was radiocarbon dated to as early as 1720 C.E.

The title of the work is said to have come from a phrase the artist's mother would often say.

Financed by means of an investment of \$28 million of the artist's own money the work is reputed to have sold for \$100 million, paid in cash. (Steinmetz, 2009).

Artist: Damien Hirst



Final Project

Cranium: Skull Art

Part I: Create & Reflect!

- Using any media, medium or material: Create an original work of art using symbols, ideas and imagery from this lesson.
- Reflect on your artmaking throughout the process and write an Artist Statement summarizing the work and how it relates to contemporary ideas, or events.

Part II: Research & Learn.

Choose one of the Following topics to explore:

- Prehistory, Aztec Artifacts
- Photographer, Ellen Fields
- Artist, José Guadalupe Posada
- Artist, Frida Kahlo
- Artist, Diego Rivera
- Artist, Damien Hirst

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L2: Mother Earth

Terra (Roman Mythology) – The Roman earth Goddess.

Background Information

Landscape, is the depiction of natural scenery such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers, and forests, especially where the main subject is a wide view—with its elements arranged into a coherent composition.

This type of painting may or may not include man-made structures as well as people.

Landscape as an independent genre did not emerge in the Western tradition until the Renaissance in the 16th century (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Georgia O'Keeffe at "291", 1917. Platinum print.

Artist: Georgia O'Keeffe

Born: November 15, 1887. O'Keeffe grew up on a farm near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.

In the summer of 1929, O'Keeffe made the first of many trips to northern New Mexico. For the next two decades she spent most summers living and working in New Mexico.

O'Keeffe's work was inspired by the vast open landscapes of New Mexico, combined with Native American and Hispanic cultures.



Source: okeeffemuseum.org

Documentary

Georgia
O'Keeffe



O'Keeffe's Landscapes



Source: The Burnett Foundation

***Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico /
Out Back of Marie's II 1930,***



Source: Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso University

***Rust Red Hills 1930, oil on canvas,
40.6 x 76.2 cm***

Frankenthaler in her East 83rd Street studio, New York, 1969

Artist: Helen Frankenthaler

Her career spanned six decades, has long been recognized as one of the great American artists of the twentieth century.

She was eminent among the second generation of postwar American abstract painters and is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting.

Through her invention of the soak-stain technique, she expanded the possibilities of abstract painting, while at times referencing figuration and landscape in unique ways.



Source: Getty Images

SFMOMA Short

Helen

Frankenthaler

Transcends

Abstract

Expressionism



Frankenthaler's Landscapes



Source: Gagosian.com, Photo: Rob McKeever

***Fable*, 1961 Oil and charcoal on unsized, unprimed canvas 94 ½ x 99 in.**



Source: Gagosian.com, Photo: Rob McKeever

***Untitled*, 1958 Oil and charcoal on primed canvas, 78 5/8 x 83 ¼ in.**

Installation Video

Helen
Frankenthaler:
Imagining
landscapes Exhibit



Source: Gagosian.com

Mini Project:

Plein-Air Gestural Sketches

Artist: Faith Ringgold

Faith Ringgold was born 1930 in Harlem, New York, is a painter, mixed media sculptor, performance artist, writer, teacher and lecturer.

During the early 1960's Ringgold traveled in Europe. She created her first political paintings, The American People Series from 1963 to 1967 and had her first and second one-person exhibitions at the Spectrum Gallery in New York.

In the early 1970's Ringgold began making tankas (inspired by a Tibetan art form of paintings framed in richly brocaded fabrics), soft sculptures and masks.

Faith Ringgold, 1993



Source: faithringgold.com

CBS Sunday Morning

Faith Ringgold's
Art of
Fearlessness and
Joy



Ringgold's Landscapes



Source: faithringgold.com

Coming to Jones Road #5: A Long and Lonely Night, 2000

Acrylic on canvas with fabric border, 76 x 52 1/2 in.



Source: faithringgold.com

Coming to Jones Road #4: Under A Blood Red Sky, 2000

Acrylic on canvas with fabric borders, 78 1/2 x 52 1/2 in.

Kay WalkingStick, 1997

Artist: Kay WalkingStick

Kay WalkingStick was born in 1935. Her work focuses on the American Landscape and its metaphorical significances, not only to Native Americans but also to all citizenry.

The landscape sustains us physically and spiritually. It is our beautiful corner of the cosmos.

My present paintings of mountains and sea are vistas of memory — our America the beautiful. They are meant to glorify our land and honor those people who first lived upon it (WalkingStick, 2015).



Source: kaywalkingstick.com

Documentary

"Hear My Voice"

Artist Profile: Kay

WalkingStick



WalkingStick's Landscapes



Source: americanindian.si.edu

***New Mexico Desert*, 2011.**
Oil on wood panel, 40 x 80 x 2 in.



Source: americanindian.si.edu

***Venere Alpina*, 1997.**
Oil on canvas (left), steel mesh over acrylic,
wax, and plastic stones (right), 32 x 64 in.

Extensive Investigation:

Using Drawing, Writing or Poetry investigate the life and perspective, behind the brush-strokes of one or more of the included Artists.

Artists:

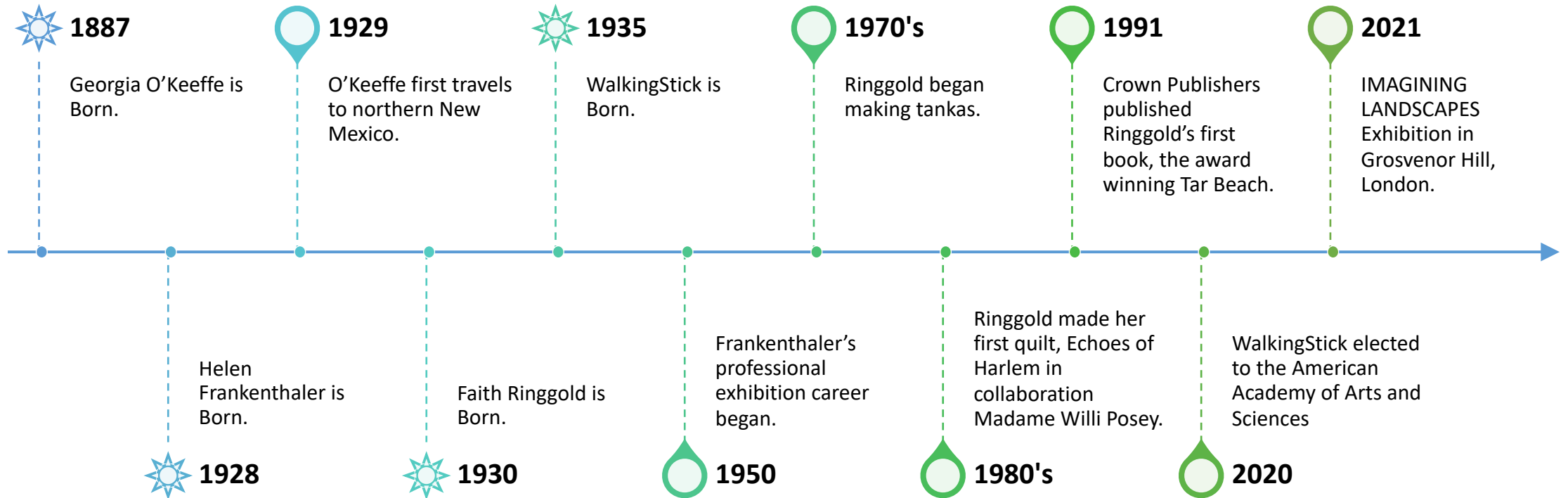
Georgia O'Keeffe

Helen Frankenthaler

Faith Ringgold

Kay WalkingStick

Timeline of Selected Events



Final Project: *Mother Earth*

Create & Reflect

1. Using any media, medium or material: Create an original work of art capturing the landscape of Earth.
2. Reflect on your artmaking throughout the process, by photographing your work and write a short Artist Statement summarizing the work.

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L3: Find Trash & Plant Art

Background Information

Land Art or earth art is art that is made directly in the landscape, sculpting the land itself into earthworks or making structures in the landscape using natural materials such as rocks or twigs (Tate).

Artworks are documented using photographs and maps which the artist could exhibit in a gallery.

Land artists also made land art in the gallery by bringing in material from the landscape and using it to create indoor installations.

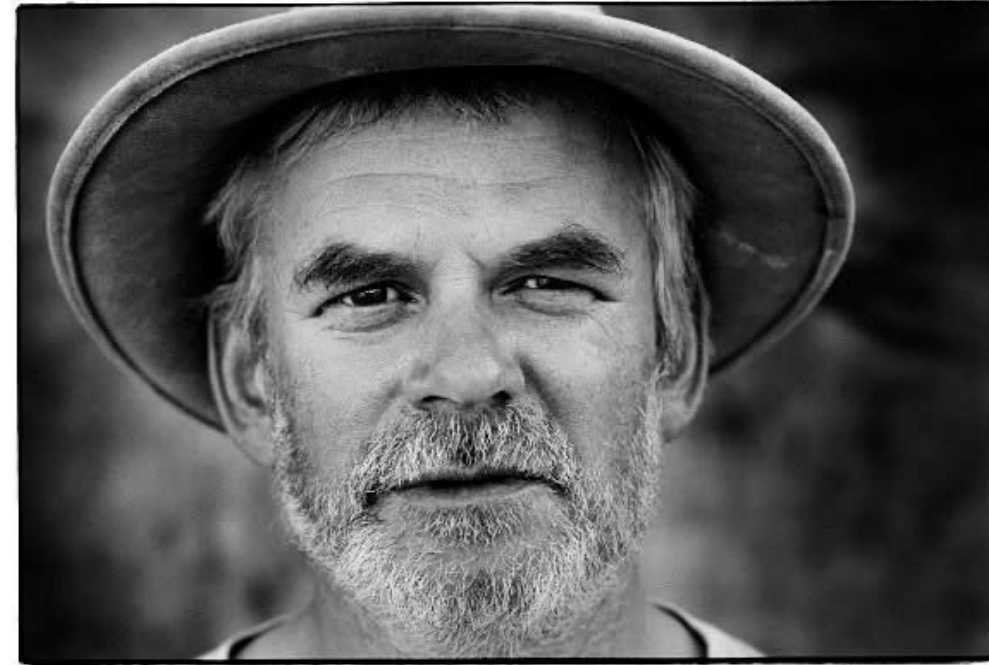
Artist: Andy Goldsworthy

Andy Goldsworthy is a British artist known for his site-specific installations involving natural materials and the passage of time. He works as both sculptor and photographer.

Goldsworthy crafts his installations out of rocks, ice, leaves, or branches, cognizant that the landscape will change, then carefully documents the ephemeral collaborations with nature through photography.

“It's just about life and the need to understand that a lot of things in life do not last.”

Andy Goldsworthy, Photograph



Source: National Gallery of Art.

Creative Investigation

Storm King Park
Autumn Works



Goldsworthy's work



Source: Artnet.com

Springtime, 2012

Chromogenic print, 15.7 x 15.7 in.



Source: Artnet.com

Untitled (Stacked Snow Cone), 1989

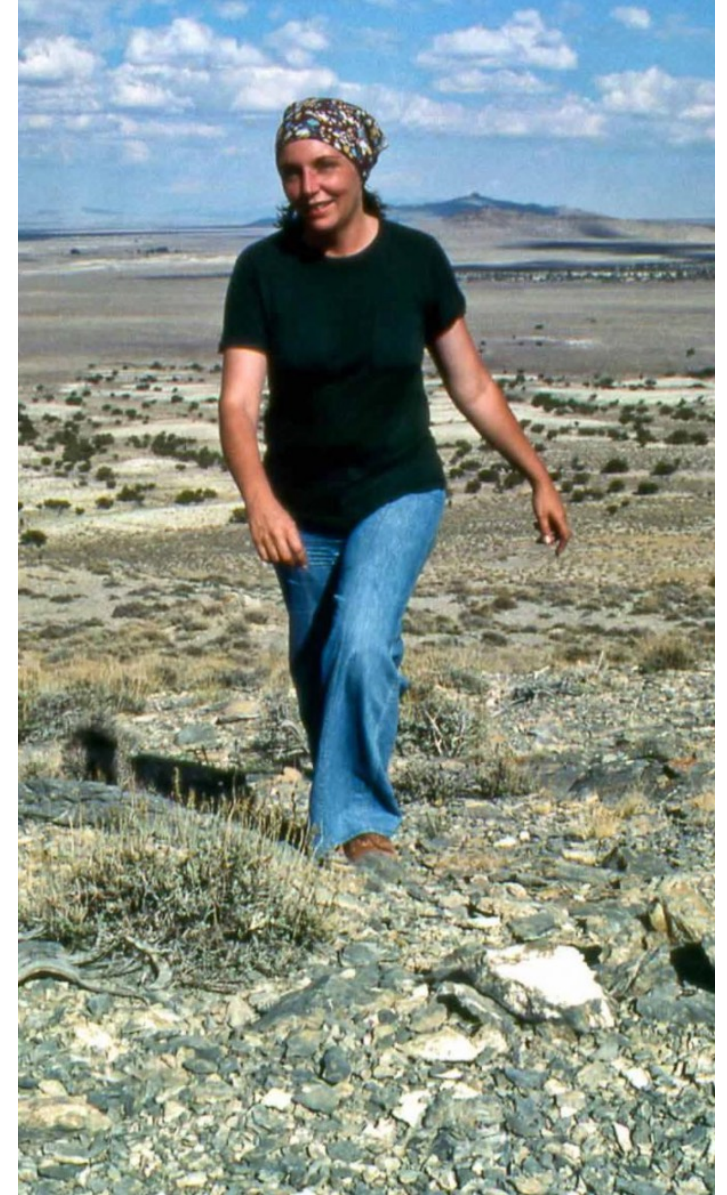
C-print, 39.4 x 29.5 in.

Artist: Nancy Holt

Nancy Holt (April 5, 1938 – February 8, 2014) was a member of the earth, land, and conceptual art movements.

Holt recalibrated the limits of art. She expanded the places where art could be found and embraced the new media of her time.(Holt Smithsonian Foundation).

“As soon as I got to the desert, I connected with the place. Before that, the only other place that I had felt in touch with in the same way was the Pine Barrens in southern New Jersey, which only begins to approach that kind of Western spaciousness.”



Big Ideas

Nancy Holt, Sun
Tunnels



Holt's Work



Source: holtsmithsonfoundation.org

Along the Niagara River, 1974

Artpark, Lewiston, NY, USA

Concrete, earth, water, (28 x 62 ft)



Source: holtsmithsonfoundation.org

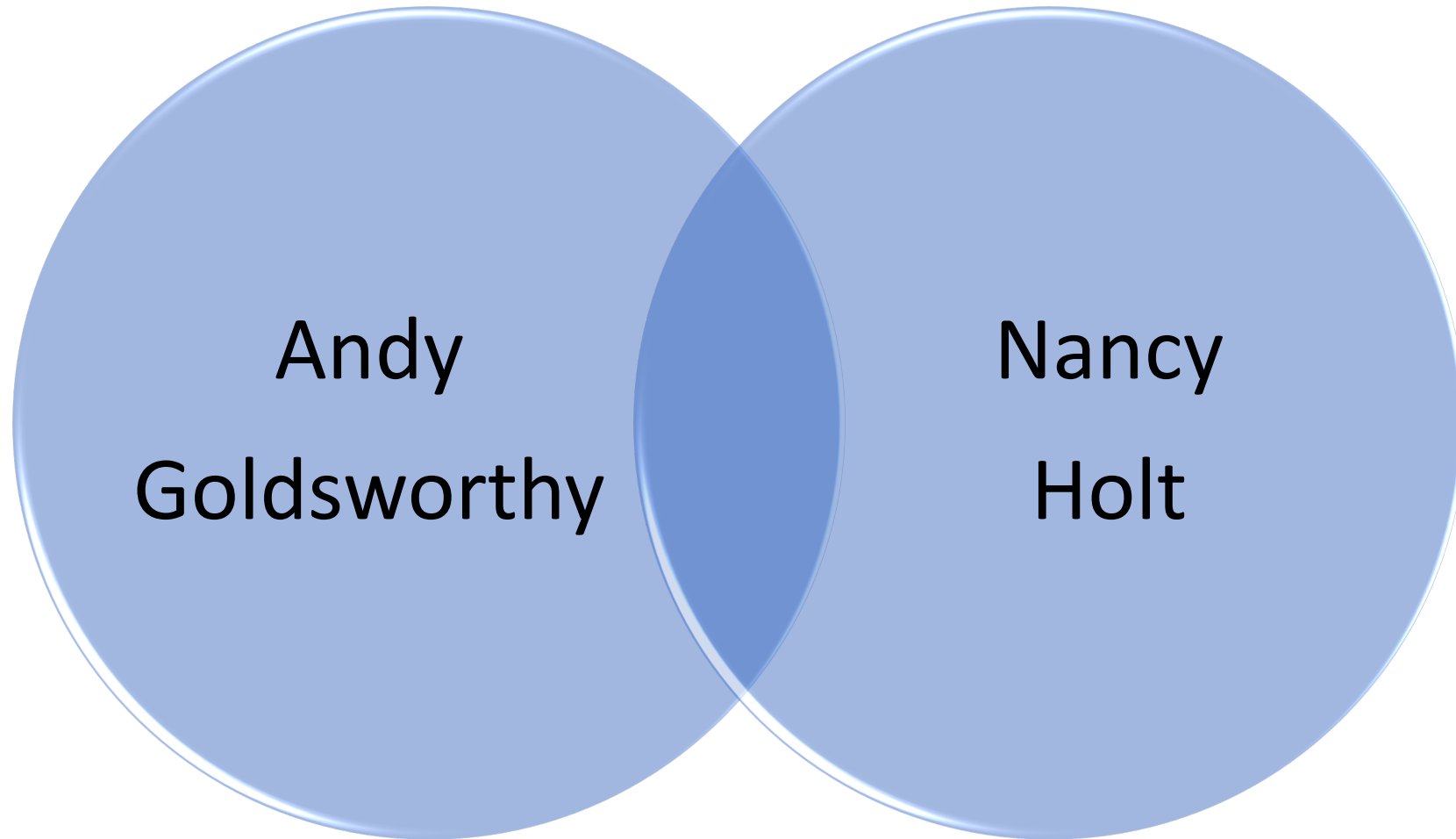
Dark Star Park, 1979-84

Rosslyn, Arlington County, Virginia

Gunitied concrete, stone masonry, asphalt, steel, water, earth, gravel, grass, plants, willow oak

Overall area: Two-thirds of an acre

Compare & Contrast



Art Walk:
Tune-in to Nature.

Artist: Maya Lin

Born in 1959 in Athens, Ohio, Maya Lin catapulted into the public eye when, as a senior at Yale University, she submitted the winning design in a national competition for a Vietnam Veterans Memorial to be built in Washington, DC.

“As the child of immigrants, you have that sense of ‘Where are you? Where’s home?’ And trying to make a home.” (Lin).

She draws inspiration for her sculpture and architecture from culturally diverse sources, including Japanese gardens, Hopewell Indian earthen mounds, and works by American earthworks artists of the 1960s and 1970s (Art21).

Maya Lin, Photograph



Source: Art21.com

Storm King Wavefield



Source: Storm King Art Center

Maya Lin, 2007-08

Earth and Grass, 240,000 Sq. Ft (11 Acre Site)

Storm King Wavefield is the largest and last in a series of three of Lin's wavefields, The other two are in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Miami, Florida.

Viewed from above, the undulating swells of earth forming *Storm King Wavefield* appear to naturally rise from and roll along the grassy terrain.

NY Times at Storm King

Maya Lin's
"Wave Field"



Creative Investigation:

Using Cardboard and other recycled materials create a “recycled landscape”, puzzle, or map of world.

Artist: Beverly Buchanan

Beverly Buchanan (1940–2015) explored the relationship between memory—personal, historical, and geographical and place (Brooklyn Museum).

“... a lot of my pieces have the word 'ruins' in their titles because I think that tells you this object has been through a lot and survived—that's the idea behind the sculptures...it's like, 'Here I am; I'm still here!' ” (Buchanan, 1982).

Engaging with the most vanguard movements of her time, including Land Art, Post-Minimalism, and feminism, she linked political and social consciousness to the formal aesthetics of abstraction.

Beverly Buchanan, Postcard, 1977



Source: Brooklyn Museum

Buchanan's Work



Source: brooklynmuseum.org

***Untitled (Slab Works 1)*, 1978-80.**

Black and white photograph of cast concrete sculptures with acrylic paint, 8 ½ x 11 in.



Source: brooklynmuseum.org

***Wall Fragments*, 1978.**

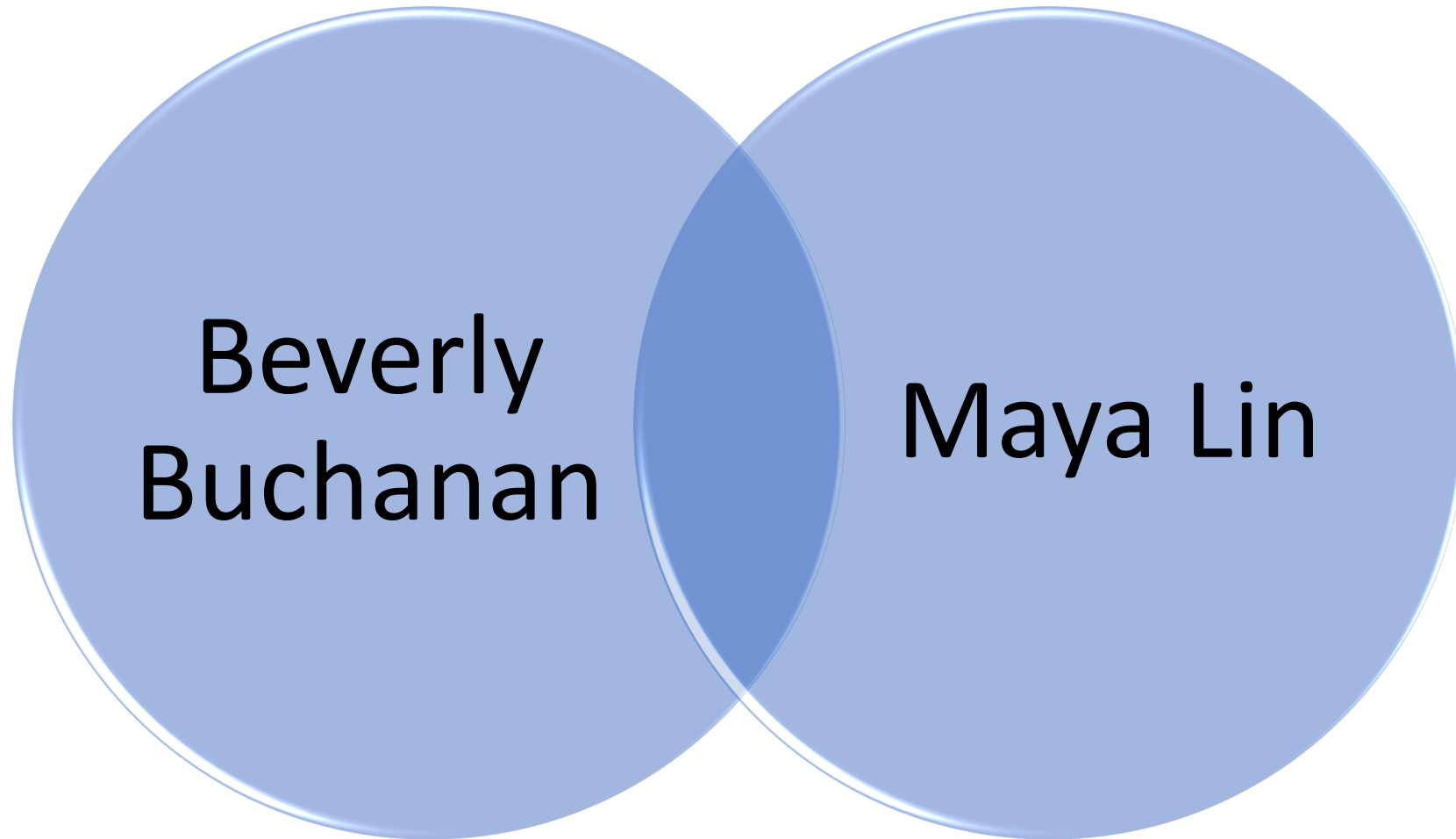
Three-part cast concrete sculpture with acrylic paint

The Columbus Museum Staff Pick, 2020

Beverly
Buchanan's
"Sculpture House"



Compare & Contrast



Artists:

Andy Goldsworthy

Nancy Holt

Maya Lin

Beverly Buchanan

Final Project: *Mother Earth*

Create, Photograph & Reflect

1. Create a work of art using found naturalistic materials such as twigs, sticks, leaves, pinecones, acorns, flowers, moss, grass, etc. (No Cattails / Typha).
2. Photograph your work, ***before***, ***during*** and ***after*** the process of artmaking.
3. Write a short Artist Statement summarizing the work, and your process.

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