

## Summer Fridays: Exploring the Work of Richard Mayhew

**Inspiration:** Richard Mayhew (American, b. 1924). *Friday*, 1982. Oil on canvas. Gift of Dr. Thomas A. Mathews, 1987 ([87.16.1](#)).

**Ages:** 5+ (through adult)

**Duration:** Open-ended

**Materials:** Paper and pencil (or artistic medium of your choice).

**Introduction:** The basic definition of “landscape art” is “the depiction of natural scenery.” As a major genre in artistic traditions across the world, landscape art has evolved over time from what can be considered an “objective” rendering to often a more “subjective” one. Artists like Richard Mayhew have experimented with and infused individualistic identity into the genre in unique ways, expanding the definition of landscape art in general.



## Look

Take a close look at *Friday*.

- What's going on in this work?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

## Think

- Is the landscape Mayhew depicts in *Friday* familiar or unfamiliar to you? Why or why not?
- What part of the composition is your eye drawn to first?
- How does the artist's choice of color affect your emotions and mood when viewing this work?
- How does the artist's use of the [artistic elements of form and value](#) in the work influence your reaction to it?
- If you could only use verbs/action words to describe the painting, what words would you choose? Why?

## Connect

Richard Mayhew (b. 1924) grew up in Amityville, New York, and now resides in California. He is of African American and Native American descent. His mother was African American and Cherokee, and his father was African American and Shinnecock.

The Shinnecock people are indigenous to Long Island, and the artist's paternal grandmother taught him about the Shinnecock peoples' spiritual relationship with and connection to the earth when he was a child. As a young man, he also observed working artists on Long Island, traveled to museums in New York City to study paintings in detail, and eventually began to create his own works of art.

Mayhew moved to NYC in the 1950s and continued his formal studies at the Brooklyn Museum, Pratt Institute, and Columbia University. He was also heavily influenced by the Abstract Expressionist movement and by jazz music. Along with other African American artists, he was a member of Spiral, a collective formed in response to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Mayhew's paintings take a unique and very personal approach to depicting landscapes—he doesn't paint actual scenes or places, but instead renders imaginary landscapes on canvas that are moody, emotional, emphasize his deeply felt spiritual connection to the land, and often make use of vibrant and unusual color choices. His landscapes take the deeply internal—spirituality, personal identity, and emotion—and make them visible externally on canvas.

## Do

1. For several minutes, brainstorm elements that make up your identity. These elements may include your heritage, your character traits, your profession, your relationships, your interests, or activities you spend time doing. You can note these elements in writing to use as reference.
2. Using the medium of your choice, begin to sketch out a landscape version of yourself. What natural features can you use to depict parts of yourself that are not necessarily physical or visible to others?
3. Experiment with [color](#) choices that can emphasize mood, emotion, personality, or actions.
4. Experiment with [texture](#), [line](#), [form](#), and [space](#) in your composition until you feel it conveys your personal connections to your imaginary landscape.

## Reflect

What were the challenges in depicting a personal characteristic using a natural form or forms? What did you discover about yourself and your emotions or state of mind while going through this process? Did the activity change the way you view natural features or landscapes in real life, and if so, how?

## Share

Take a photo of your work and post it to Instagram using the hashtags #RichardMayhew #MuseumFromHome, and tag @HudsonRiverMuseum.