

Collection Conversations: Asher B. Durand & Alison Moritsugu

Ages: 8+ (Grades 3–12)

Materials needed: Paint (tempera or acrylic if available), paintbrush, and a painting surface of your choice. Paper always works, but consider a different object like a rock, a leaf, a shell, or even a bit of wood or a branch. Recycled objects are a second option. In addition, paper and pencil can be used for general landscape drawing at any time.

Duration: open-ended

Inspiration:

Left: Asher B. Durand (American, 1796–1886). *Landscape* (detail), n.d. Oil on canvas. Acquisition by exchange, 2000 ([2000.01](#)).

Right: Alison Moritsugu (American, b. 1962). *Untitled* (detail), 2009. Painted log. Gift of the artist, 2009 ([2009.05](#)).



Introduction

The Hudson River School wasn't an actual school. Instead, the name describes a group of nineteenth-century landscape artists in the United States who often painted locations in upstate New York and the Hudson River Valley. Eventually, this movement grew in number and scope, and artists painted locations throughout the American West. Hudson River School artists were inspired by and idealized nature in their works during a period of expansion, industrialization, and population growth. Observing changes to the landscape due to this growth and human activity, Hudson River School artists aimed to emphasize the natural beauty of the environment in their works. They were—and remain!—influential. Join us below to be part of conversation between artists across time.

- What's going on in these works?
- What makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Connect

Asher B. Durand was a New Jersey-born Hudson River School artist who trained as an engraver, or someone who cuts words and designs into wood, glass, or metal. Following an expedition to the Adirondack Mountains with his friend Thomas Cole, he dedicated himself to landscape painting. He is best known for painting realistic depictions of what he observed and felt while walking and exploring outside, as well as for the attention to light in his works. *Landscape* is an example of Durand's landscape painting style and subject matter. His composition is asymmetrical: In the foreground to the right is a path through the trees that makes the viewer feel they can step into; on the left in the background is a river and distant mountains.

Alison Moritsugu is a contemporary artist, born and raised in Hawaii and now living in upstate New York. Like Durand, Moritsugu also explores the relationship between humans and the environment. Even though Moritsugu is working 150 years later, her work *Untitled* continues a conversation that Hudson River School artists started with their viewers about how humans affect and change the environment. Instead of using a traditional surface like canvas or board, Moritsugu instead depicts landscapes on the sawed-off edges of logs. Navigating cracks in the wood and odd angles is part of her process, and she is interested in how to solve the problems she runs into while using such an unusual surface for her works.



Asher B. Durand (American, 1796–1886). *Landscape*, n.d. Oil on canvas. Acquisition by exchange, 2000 (2000.01).



Alison Moritsugu (American, b. 1962). *Untitled*, 2009. Painted log. Gift of the artist, 2009 (2009.05).

Think

- What about these two works is similar?
- What about these two works is different?
- Have you ever personally visited or been in a landscape like the one Asher B. Durand depicts? What do you remember about that experience? How did the space affect your senses (smell, taste, hearing, touch, and sight)?
- Why do you think Alison Moritsugu decided to paint a landscape on a log instead of on canvas? How does this affect the way you react to the painting?
- Imagine that these two artists are having a conversation about their work and their process. What do you think they might ask one another? What do you think they might say about each other's artworks?

Do

1. Brainstorm about a landscape that you love or that you visit often. What details are part of this space? Is it an area without evidence of human activity? Is it an area that contains buildings, roads, or other evidence of human life? Are there significant landforms or landmarks in this area? Do you want to depict this landscape during the day or at night? Do you have a specific time of year you want to show in the scene? Make notes on paper about these details and sketch the space.
2. If you are able to, take an expedition outside (like Durand) in a safe area and see if you can find an unusual surface for painting a version of the landscape you have been considering (like Moritsugu). If you are not able to go outside, can you locate something at home to paint or draw on that is not a typical piece of paper? Recycled objects like cans, cartons, or jars are a good option for this.
3. Experiment with painting on the unusual surface you have chosen. You can work from the sketch you made while brainstorming, or continue to sketch and plan out your composition based on the dimensions, texture, and other specific characteristics of your surface.

Reflect

How does it feel to translate your sketch onto an object? What challenges do you have to overcome as a painter in this process? Has the surface affected the way you decided to depict your scene? Have you had to make choices about areas to highlight and perhaps areas to leave out? Asher B. Durand and Alison Moritsugu made choices while creating their two very different versions of landscape paintings, but in their process they are looking for an answer to the same big questions: how has human behavior affected nature and the environment, past and present, and how can we as artists help people to think about and reflect on their own impact so we can make the best choices for the future?

Share

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

References

[Alison Moritsugu](#)

[The Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

Standards

Common Core Learning Standards

English Language Arts

Reading Informational Text:

Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4-8.1

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4-8.10

Foundational Reading Skills:

Phonics and Word Recognition: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.4-8.3

Fluency: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.4-8.4

Writing:

Texts Types and Purposes: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-8.1-2

Research to Build and Present Knowledge: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-8.7-9

Language:

Conventions of Standard English: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4-8.1-2

Knowledge of Language: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4-8.4-6

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4-8.4-6

Literacy in History and Social Studies

Reading:

Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1-3

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.10

National Core Arts Standards

Creating

Anchor Standard #1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #3. Refine and complete artistic work.

Performing, Presenting, Producing

Anchor Standard #4. Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Anchor Standard #5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Anchor Standard #6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Responding

Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard #8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard #9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard #10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard #11. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.