



A Guide for
Understanding
the Exhibition



GALLERY

The Gallery at
Tempe Center for the Arts
700 W. Rio Salado Parkway
Tempe, AZ 85281



The word “retro” describes things like clothes, cars and music that reflect styles and design elements from the past. Artists are often asked, *where do you get your ideas?* While the creative spark is different for every individual, this exhibition explores the inspirations and art making processes of ten Arizona-based artists.

Through personal retrospection, these artists give us a glimpse into how they individually absorb, filter and react to art and ideas from the past.

For Educators: The Gallery at TCA offers a wide variety of FREE educational resources including admission, tours, artist workshops and online curriculum. Learn more at: tempecenterforthearts.com/TCAGallery

Dear Reader:

We hope this guide will provide you with some easy-to-use tools to enhance your experiences with visual art. Over the years, we’ve noticed that people can be both attracted to and intimidated by art at the same time. We’ve found that asking questions that start “informal conversations” is one of the best ways to put people at ease.

Sure, some art is beautiful and easy to approach, while other art can be challenging and not so easy to digest. Just like a book, visual art can be appealing, serious and yes, even ugly. Some art confirms, celebrates and expands how we understand ourselves. Other art opens pathways through which we can explore other viewpoints. You as a viewer (reader) also bring a variety of thoughts and personal preferences into the experience. With practice and some new tools on your belt, you’ll find that those seemingly complicated layers of meaning and context can be peeled back and explored. It’s just knowing where to look and why.

We would also like to thank the Retro Reaction artists for letting us utilize some of their artworks for this guide.

Sincerely,

Mary Erickson, Ph.D. (TCA Docent) & Michelle Nichols Dock (Visual Arts Curator)

Inquiry Strategy with Tactical Questions

The following 4-question strategy is an easy to use tool for investigating the layers of context and meaning in visual art.

What Can I See? Facts about the artwork.

- Subject Matter
- Design Elements & Principles
- Technical Features
- Function
- Reproduction versus Original
- Care/Condition



What Else Can I Learn? Contextual facts.

- Artists' Lives
- Physical Environments
- Cultural Context
- Artworlds (Art Experience)



What Does It Mean? Conclusions about meanings.

Conclusions about meanings.

- Personal & Cultural Viewpoints
- Artists' Intentions
- Art Specialists' Understandings



How Does It Compare? Conclusions about connections among artworks.

Conclusions about connections among artworks.

- Style
- Art Influence (From Other Art)
- Themes



Hints for Asking Good Questions

Hints for a well-rounded conversation: You'll often learn more from open-ended questions than close-ended questions.

A **closed-ended question** is answered with a one-word response such as yes or no or another single word. *Example:* Is this an oil or acrylic painting?

Closed-ended questions start with verbs like “Is? Do? and Can?”

An **open-ended question** requires more explanation.

Example: How is painting in oil different from painting with acrylics?

Open-ended questions start with “Why? and How?”

Some words can be used for **both types of questions** such as:

What?

Who?

Where?

When?

Both open and close-ended questions are valuable. The construction and phrasing of a question shapes the kind of information you can expect to receive.

For Practice: Write down 3 open-ended questions. Pretend you are meeting someone for the first time. You need to ask questions to get to know that person better.

a _____

b _____

c _____

What Can I See?

Tips for looking carefully at an Artwork



Subject Matter: Some artworks have subject matter and others do not. Subject matter refers to anything real or imaginary that is shown in an artwork (such as people, places and things).

Elements of Design: Traditional elements in Western art include: (“D” represents “dimensional.”)

2D Elements

line
shape
value (light and dark)
color

3D Elements

form or mass
space
texture

4D Elements/Time

sequence
duration

Design Principles: Ways artists organize elements of design to create interesting and unified compositions. Some Traditional Principles include:

Balance	Variation	Focal Point	Pattern
Harmony	Repetition	Movement	Transition
Emphasis/Focal Point	Rhythm	Direction	Proportion
Contrast			

Technical Features: Careful viewing of an artwork usually reveals evidence of how it was made. (Indicators might include art making tools, materials and processes.)

Function: Artists make artworks that serve a great many functions such as:

Capturing the beauty of nature	Memorializing an important event
Celebrating or criticizing a person, event or group	Exploring visual possibilities
Sharing a vision	Promoting a belief or cause
Celebrating the artist's heritage	Making the ordinary extraordinary
Stimulating action	Many more

What Can I See?

Practice looking carefully at an Artwork



Reproduction Vs Original: Some reproductions can look pretty different from the originals. Common differences between originals and reproductions are:

Size	Colors	Surface Texture	Luminosity
Angle of View	Lighting	Other	

Care/Condition: The condition of artworks can deteriorate over time for many reasons, among them:

Perishable or fragile materials
Matting, mounting, or framing
Accidents

Damage in storage
Temperature and humidity
Vandalism

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “what you see.”



1. What details indicate that the orange figure is a fish? What animal is riding the fish? What is he doing? [SUBJECT MATTER]

2. Where is the clay flattened into thin sheets? How do you imagine the fish's scales were formed? [TECHNIQUE]

3. Kazuma Sambe repeated elements to create many patterns on this sculpture. Where do you see: repeated wavy edges, radiating ridges, c-shaped curls and parallel ridges? [DESIGN]

4. Ceramics has a long tradition of being made into useful objects like cups and bowls. Imagine the best setting for this artwork? A museum? A cultural center? A restaurant? A home? Now, what function could this piece serve in each possible location? Explain [FUNCTION].

Kazuma Sambe, *Extravagant Flavor, Secret Recipe II*, ceramic and mixed media wall piece

Now You Try! *What Can I See?*



Kazuma Sambe
Red Label or Green Label, ceramics

Look at this next piece by Sambe List 3 quick descriptions about what you see:

(Example: “large sculpture, depicts a woman and is made of bronze.”)

a _____

b _____

c _____

Now, based on your observations, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork.

a _____

b _____

c _____

What Can I Learn?

Tips for investigating an Artist's Background



Artist's Life: The personal lives of artists can affect their work, including such factors as:

Family

Work

Education

Travel

Personal life experiences

Other

Physical Environment: The physical world, both natural and human made) can inspire their work:

Natural environment (plants, animals, climate, landforms, etc.)

Constructed environment (buildings, roads, bridges, vehicles, furniture, consumer goods, etc.)

Culture: Artists can draw ideas for their work from their cultures:

Values and beliefs

Hobbies and entertainment

Politics

Economic situation

Language

Heritage and/or ethnicity

Other

Art Experience (Artworld): Artists get ideas and support from other people involved in art, through:

Art education/Apprenticeships

Insights from specialists in the art form (ceramics , painting, etc.)

Representation by art galleries

Contact with art patrons and collectors

Acknowledgement through art awards, prizes, grants, commissions.

Art included in museum collections

What Can I Learn?

Practice investigating an Artist's Background

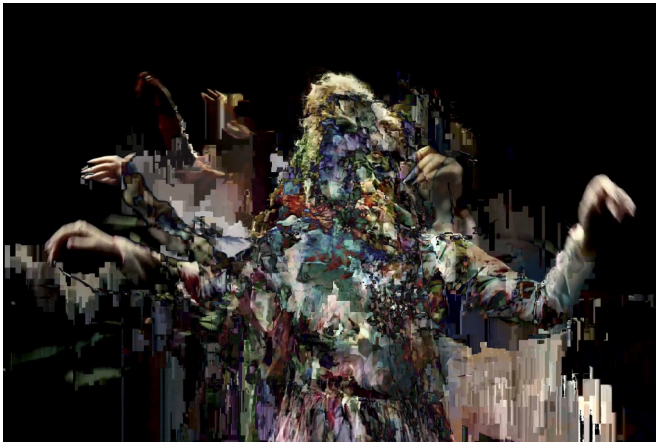


Rembrandt Quiballo was born in the city of Manila in the Philippines. The People Power Revolution led to social and political unrest there, compelling his family to leave the country. For a brief period of time, as a young child, Quiballo lived in two of the most socially and politically divergent countries in the world, Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands. His family would eventually immigrate to the United States in search of greater opportunity and better education.

He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting and a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy from the University of Arizona and a Master of Fine Arts degree in photography from Arizona State University. His works have been exhibited nationally and internationally in cities such as Albuquerque, Chicago, New York City, Cairo, Egypt and Berlin, Germany.

Quiballo's work currently explores the use of the moving image and mass media and its effects on social and political history. Many of his artistic influences include modern and contemporary artists interested in shifting perceptions of social and popular culture. One of Quiballo's favorite works of art is a piece by American artist Nancy Burson titled *Warhead I* (1982) which digitally blends Cold War era leaders' faces into a single digital portrait. Quiballo especially likes how she utilized science, mathematics and facial recognition software to morph together these leaders' faces based on the number of nuclear warheads each country possessed at the time: Ronald Reagan/USA (55%), Leonid Brezhnev/Soviet Union (45%), Margaret Thatcher/UK (less than 1%), François Mitterrand/France (less than 1%) and Deng Xiaoping/China (less than 1%).

See Nancy Burson artwork at: www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/266955



Rembrandt Quiballo, *Tarantula*, digital print

Quiballo has lived in diverse physical environments from his early childhood in tropical Manila, to the temperate Netherlands, to the very different deserts of Saudi Arabia and Arizona. However, wherever he has lived, he has found himself surrounded by mass media and the "overwhelming effect of visual images we are bombarded with on a daily basis."

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about "what I can learn."

1. Where has Rembrandt Quiballo experienced life in a monarchy and in a democracy? Where has he encountered revolutionary upheaval and capitalism? [LIFE & CULTURE]
2. Quiballo has earned degrees in both painting and photography. What features of his current work seem to draw on each of these art areas? [ART EXPERIENCE]
3. What unescapable social phenomenon has Quiballo experienced across the globe? [ENVIRONMENT]

Now You Try! **What Else I Can Learn?**



Brainstorm and list 5 interesting facts about Rembrandt Quiballo's background. *You may want to consult pg. 9 and/or a media article and/or Internet references about the artist.)

a _____

b _____

c _____

d _____

e _____



Rembrandt Quiballo, *Pop Artifact*, digital print

Now, based on your research, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork/artist.

a _____

b _____

c _____

What Does It Mean?

Tips for interpreting an Artwork



Artist's Intention: Artists decide how they want their artworks to look. Their intentions may be:

Personal or private	Traditional	Practical	Boundary breaking
Unconventional	Evolving	Emotional	Spontaneous
Experimental	Deliberate		
Focused on collector, patron, funder or other viewer			Other

Art Specialists' Understandings: The considered opinions of art specialists (experts) direct viewers' attention to aspects of artworks that they judge to be worthy of that attention. Art specialists may include:

Artists	Art Teachers	Museum Curators	Art Critics
Art Historians	Master Craftspeople	Ceremonial Leaders	Guild Members
Tribal elders	Others		

Cultural Understandings: A viewer's cultural understanding draws upon a set of ideas, beliefs and standards shared broadly within a culture. These are learned, not by special effort and instruction, but simply through growing up as a member of a culture. Unexamined expectations might include:

High price	Obvious meaning	Difficult to make	Easily recognizable
Familiar	Other		

Your Own Viewpoint: Your responses to artworks are affected by:

conscious thoughts	unconscious reactions	personal preferences
careful viewing	thoughtful reflection	relevant information
free association	previous art experience	and more

What Does It Mean?

Practice interpreting an Artwork



Fausto Fernandez, *Quetzalcoatl*, mixed media painting

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “what it means.”

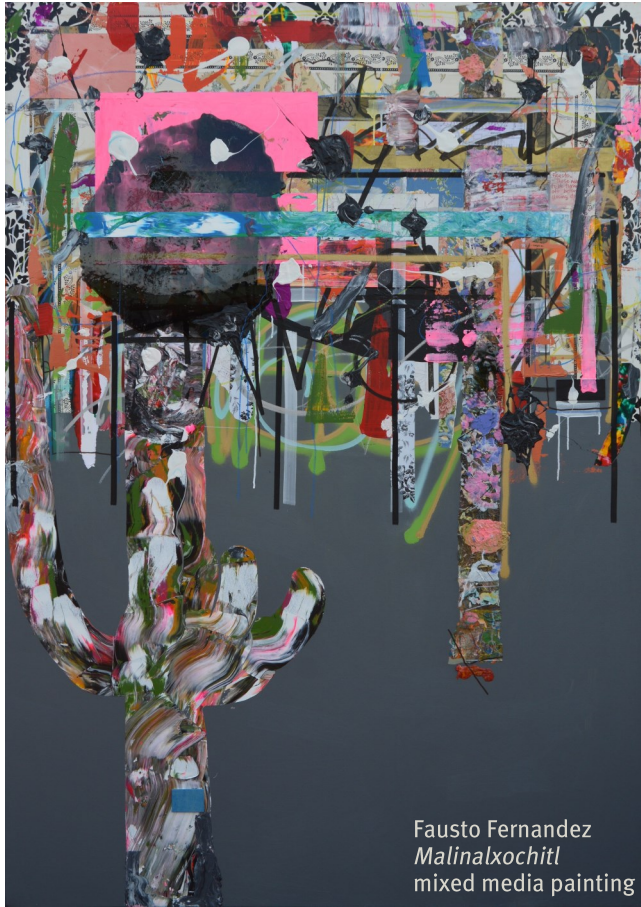
1. What do you think Fernandez was trying to do when he applied paint on top of the wallpaper and diagrams in *Quetzalcoatl*? [ARTIST’S INTENTION]
2. How do the curator’s comments affect how you perceive and make sense of *Quetzalcoatl*? [ART SPECIALIST’S UNDERSTANDING]
3. How might viewers’ diverse interests, experiences, ages and cultural backgrounds affect interpretation of *Quetzalcoatl*? [CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING]

Fausto Fernandez grew up along the border of Mexico and the US (Juarez, Mexico and El Paso TX.). His work explores how individuals within society communicate and express themselves not limited by their cultural environment.

Writing about his work in the *Retro Reaction* exhibition, Fernandez states “I use wallpaper and instructional materials such as architectural drawings and maps. I consider instructions as metaphors to rituals in society that provide us direction in our lives. I borrow from the art of the past [including pop art and abstract expressionism]. Pop artists consistently look for mundane objects and ... present them in a different way. [Abstract expressionist] paintings consist of ‘action and gesture’ resulting in an emotional and painterly display.”

Michelle Nichols Dock, curator of *Retro Reaction* writes “One of the things I find interesting about Fausto’s current series is a mixing of the old and the new. His painting style includes elements of expressionistic brush strokes, abstracted forms, mixed media collage and a few pop art-like graphics here and there. His piece, ‘*Quetzalcoatl*’ takes on layers of possible meanings, especially because the title is so important. Fausto depicts a recognizable black and white American space shuttle launching a satellite off into the darkness- filling the void with colorful shapes and patterns. Another curator once referred to Fausto’s use of florals and bright colors as symbols of the colorful vitality of Mexico. The title, ‘*Quetzalcoatl*’, certainly refers to the ancient Aztec god of the earth and sky, who was also known as a patron of knowledge, religion and the arts. But Fausto leaves the door open for possible interpretations. I’m still pondering the work and its overall meaning.”

Now You Try! What Does It Mean?



Look at this work by Fausto Fernandez. Brainstorm and list 5 ideas about what the artwork is about.

a _____

b _____

c _____

d _____

e _____

Now, based on your interpretation, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork.

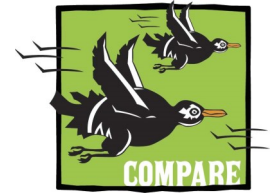
a _____

b _____

c _____

How Do They Compare?

Tips for gathering insights by comparing Artworks



Style: Style is a set of distinctive qualities ("family resemblance") that are shared by more than one artwork. Artists develop their own style and incorporate aspects of the styles of artists from their own or other times and cultures.

Artist's style

Style of art movement or period

Cultural style

Art Influence: Most artists are influenced by artists who worked before them, though some self-taught artists, called “outsider artists,” work in isolation, largely unaware of the work of other artists. Art influences can include:

Technical and aesthetic achievements by other artists

Other artists' ideas, innovations, commitments

Traditional or historical art ideas to follow, extend or break away from

Theme: Some broad, cross-cultural themes have been the focus of many artists throughout history and across the globe:

People and nature

Cultural pride

Conquest

Overcoming obstacles

Strength of family

Love

Fantasy

Social order

Harmony

Chaos

Revisiting history

Heroic adventure

Religious devotion

Status

Many more

How Do They Compare?

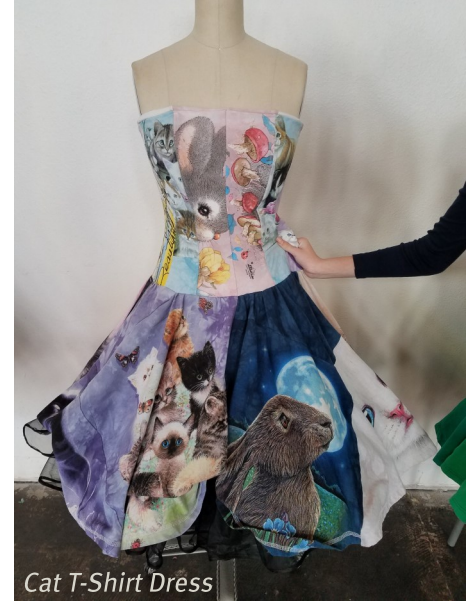
Practice gathering insights by comparing Fashion Designs by Angela Johnson



Breast Cancer T-Shirt Ballgown



Star Wars T-Shirt Coat



Cat T-Shirt Dress



Angela Johnson is an Arizona clothing designer committed to eco-friendly fashion. She states that she “gravitates towards graphics that are corny and even shocking and provocative.” Her influences include the work of other artists and designers who use pop culture and campy images. Among her influences is the work of the famous pop artist, Andy Warhol, who brought attention to everyday products by using marketing images in his art.

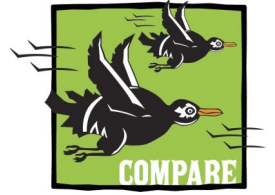
Johnson describes her garments as “eco-friendly, unique, comfortable, washable, versatile and fun.” She writes that her “dresses and sport coats/blazers ... are one-of-a-kind creations

because they are each made with different recycled t-shirts.” She uses the fabric of 25 or more t-shirts to create each finished gown, “incorporating highly tailored shaping details such as darts and boning” for which the t-shirts were never engineered. She writes “there is beauty in the transformation from utilitarian tee to girlie confection: a resourceful frivolity.”

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “how they compare.”

1. What characteristics (fabric, design, color, garment structure, etc.) do you see in more than one of Johnson’s creations? How would you describe her style? [STYLE]
2. How has pop culture and/or pop art influenced Johnson’s work? [ART INFLUENCE]
3. How do Johnson’s fashion designs reflect the theme of the *Retro Reaction* exhibition? [THEME]

Now You Try! How Do They Compare?



Angela Johnson
Fantasy T-Shirt
Ballgown

List 3 highlights (your favorite visual features and/or information) about the gown.

**Now, compare these highlights with other pieces by Johnson (pg. 15).
List 2 similarities among the artworks:**

List 2 differences among the artworks:

Now, based on your comparisons, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about these fashion designs.

a

b

c

Follow Up Activity: *Something Old, Something New*

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to develop and support an interpretation of an artwork.

(VA.RE.8.HS1: Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts)

Students will be able to effectively combine deliberate collage processes with spontaneous painting processes. *(VA.CR2.HS1a: Engage in making works of art or design both spontaneously and deliberately)*

VIEWING ACTIVITY: Divide students into groups. Assign one *Retro Reaction* artist in this guide to each small group. With larger classes, several groups can focus on each artist. Ask each group to read about the artist and analyze how and why the artist created something new by taking old things and ideas a part and reassembling them. Ask each group to collaborate on writing a short interpretive paragraph about a specific artwork by the artist. Ask them to use their conclusions about the artist to interpret how and why the artwork is both “something old and something new.”

MAKING ACTIVITY: The artists in the exhibition sometimes look and react to art and ideas from the past to find inspiration. Like the *Retro Reaction* artists, students will be seeking ideas and inspiration for their own art making by looking at work by Fausto Fernandez.

Direct students’ attention towards Fernandez’s process of cutting apart and reassembled various types of paper (wallpaper, diagrams, maps) to make mixed media paintings. As students cut paper, they should carefully organize and reorganize the pieces in various ways before gluing. They may also wish to experiment with paint application before and after collaging.

Remind students that even though the *Retro Reaction* artists were inspired by other art and ideas, the artworks they create are unique and reflect their own interests, concerns and styles. As an example, just because Angela Johnson likes Andy Warhol, doesn’t mean her fashion designs look just like his work. For this activity, students should look to their own interests and concerns for themes, while still being influenced by Fernandez’s unique way of collaging together imagery and repurposed materials that would have otherwise been discarded into a landfill.

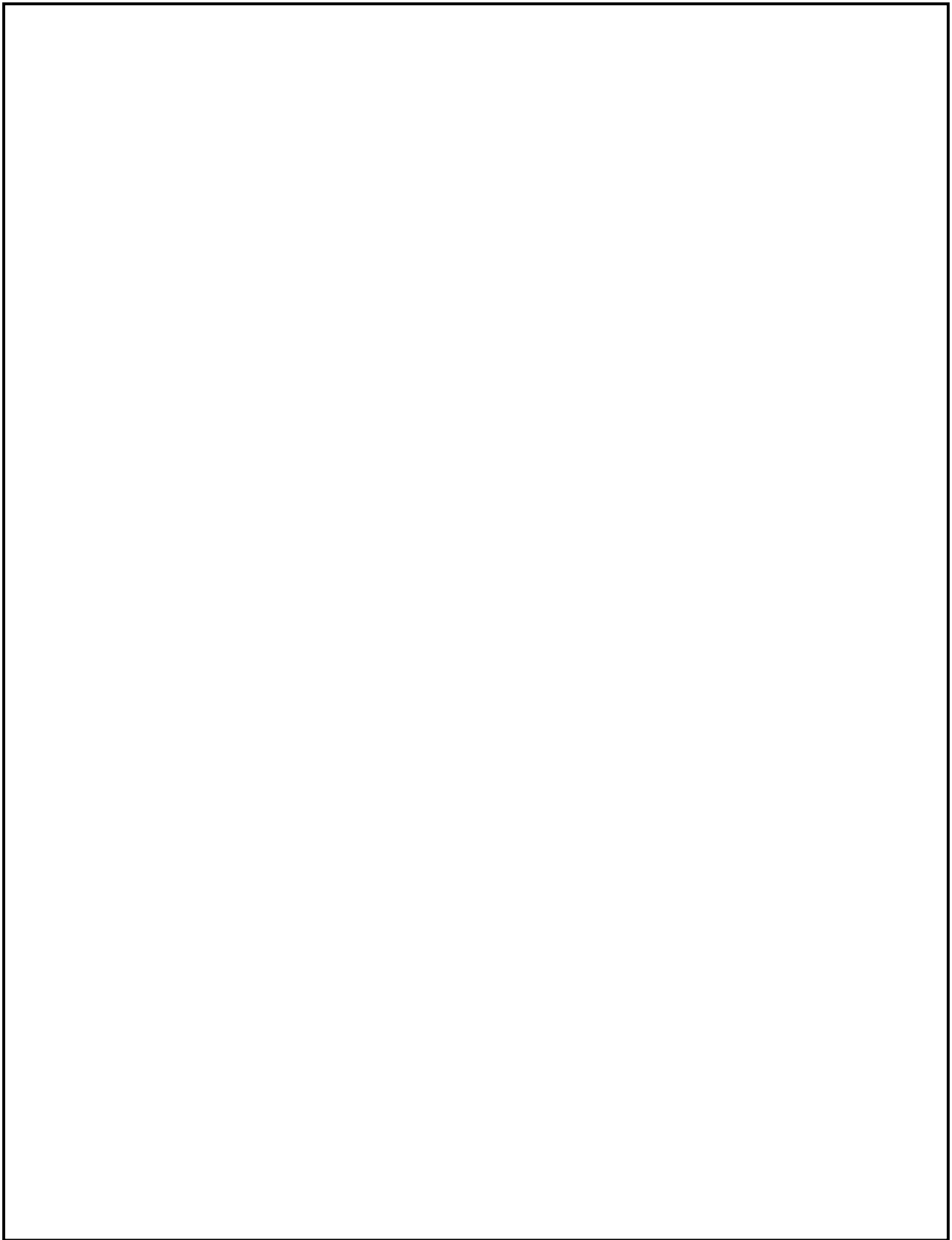
Distribute scissors, construction paper, glue sticks, tempera or acrylic paint and brushes. Ask students to bring or provide a variety of magazines or printouts from the Internet to be cut up.



Activity Sample:
*Impressions of
Forests and
Canyons*



Activity Sample:
*Chopped,
Sliced
and Diced*



Title of my work: _____

My theme: _____

Areas of influence from Fausto Fernandez: _____