

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: The Influence of Memory
Subject: Christopher Brown
Discipline: Visual Art (Painting)

SECTION I - OVERVIEW	2
EPISODE THEME	
SUBJECT	
CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS	
OBJECTIVE	
STORY SYNOPSIS	
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES	
INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES	
EQUIPMENT NEEDED	
MATERIALS NEEDED	
INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED	
SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT	3
CONTENT OVERVIEW	
THE BIG PICTURE	
RESOURCES – TEXTS.....	6
RESOURCES – WEB SITES	
VIDEO RESOURCES	
BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS	
SECTION III – VOCABULARY	7
SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK	8



Still image from SPARK story, May 2006.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

The Influence of Memory

SUBJECT

Christopher Brown

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

OBJECTIVE

Understand the development of personal works of art and their relationship to broader social themes and ideas, abstract concepts, and the history of art.

Develop basic observational drawing and/or painting skills.

Develop visual, written, listening and speaking skills through looking at, creating and talking about visual artworks.

Develop an expressive visual vocabulary with which to address personal and/or social themes and ideas.

Develop observational and representational skills by looking at and reproducing images of people, places and things accurately and thoughtfully.

STORY SYNOPSIS

Veteran Bay Area artist Christopher Brown paints scenes drawn from memory. For over thirty years, Brown's large canvases have been populated with

remembered figures, objects, and vistas that the artist continually reuses and recycles. Spark visits Brown in his Berkeley studio as he prepares for a one person show at San Francisco's John Berggruen Gallery.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing as a group
- Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance
- Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently
- Hands-on group projects in which students assist and support one another
- Critical reflection on personal expressions and how they are seen and received by others

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic - control of one's own body, control in handling objects

Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems

Logical-Mathematical - ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



See more information on [Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at www.kqed.org/spark/education.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

Veteran Bay Area artist Christopher Brown paints scenes drawn from memory. For over thirty years, Brown's large canvases have been populated with remembered figures, objects, and vistas that the artist continually reuses and recycles. While many of the images emanate from photographs that Brown has taken over the years, many reside only in the artist's own recollection. Spark visits Brown in his Berkeley studio as he prepares for a one person show at San Francisco's John Berggruen Gallery.

While Brown is primarily a figurative artist, many of his paintings involve formal examinations of relations of scale and depth. Space in Brown's canvases is often irrational, an almost dream-like landscape where scale and distance fail to cohere. Brown collages of memory images and photographic records that converge in irrational, even surrealistic juxtapositions, confounding representation and abstraction, and testing the boundaries between pictorial modes.

Brown obsessively works and reworks his images, painting over large areas of his canvases to redefine colors, objects, and distances. Spark catches Brown in his studio, hard at work on a large painting of building that will be the centerpiece of the Berggruen exhibition. Inspired by the artist's tenure in New York in the mid-1990s, the painting depicts an immense apartment block that entirely fills the canvas. Brown painstakingly fills in each of buildings' windows, continually changing the shading and color tones. Midway through his painting, Brown decides to fill a section of

the image with a photographically rendered stampede of horses that appear to charge from the picture surface toward the building, confusing the building's assertion of space and stability within the image.

The artist continues to work on the painting until the day of the show, where it is enthusiastically received by gallery owner and visitors alike. For Brown, exhibitions are rare moments when his normally solitary practice of making paintings gives way to social interactions, wherein his work is exposed to public view. The show is an opportunity for the painter to see his images anew, to experience his own expression reflected back at him.

Christopher Brown was born in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Brown received his B.F.A at the University of Illinois and his M.F.A at the University of California, Davis. He has shown his work in galleries across the United States and is represented in several museum collections including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, and the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

THE BIG PICTURE

Christopher Brown is one of several painters that emerged in the late 1970s and 80s that were part of a resurgence in painting at that period. Many of these painters, including David Salle, Julian Schnabel, Eric Fishl, and Italian painters Francesco Clemente and Sandro Chia, were considered part of a reaction against the Minimalist and Conceptual Art that found critical acclaim in

the 1960s and 70s. They were also distinguished from the more oppositional photo- and media-based practices of their contemporaries, such as Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, and Richard Prince. The critical debate that pitted these two practices against one another formed one of the central antagonisms in the art world of the 1980s.

Many of the artists associated with the resurgence of painting were based in New York and were working at least loosely within a style known as Neo-Expressionism. Where Minimalist and Conceptual art was typically restrained, systematic, intellectual, and aesthetically cool, Neo-Expressionism drew on the style of German Expressionism of the 1910s and was characterized by rough treatment of the medium, violent emotionalism, bright colors, and a tendency towards representations of the human form. The predominantly male Neo-Expressionists often explored themes of male heterosexuality, as well as their own characterizations as cultural provocateurs. Neo-Expressionism was strongly backed by many New York galleries, which aggressively marketed painting and enjoyed substantial success in the 1980s art boom. While the Neo-Expressionist reliance on past traditions often drew harsh criticism, in retrospect several of these painters have had long-lasting legacies, helping to bring painting back into the contemporary art scene in ways that are more analytical and ironically, conceptual.

Perhaps the best known of the Neo-Expressionists was Julian Schnabel, whose emotive, often heroic large scale portraits such as *Self-Portrait in Andy's Shadow* (1987) helped to push the rapid growth in the 1980s art market. Schnabel became famous for his practice of executing enormous images by painting on broken plates mounted on wooden supports. In his self-portrait, Schnabel pays homage to the

recently deceased Andy Warhol, whose date of death is recorded in the lower right hand corner of the painting.



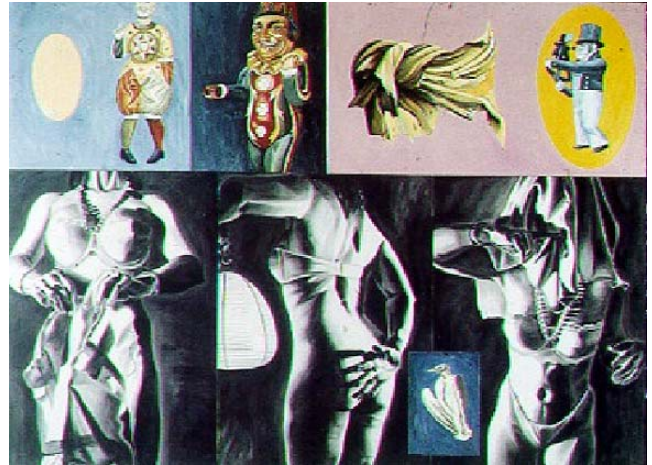
Julian Schnabel, *Self-Portrait in Andy's Shadow*, 1987.
<http://www.broadartfoundation.org/collection/schnabel.html>

Another of the more famous Neo-Expressionists was Eric Fischl, whose domestic scenes revealed the sordid underside of suburban life. In his work of the 1980s, Fischl returned over and over again to eroticized images of male adolescence. In 1981's *Bad Boy*, a nude female figure poses provocatively on a bed for the benefit of a young boy. The boy's naughtiness suggested in the title, however, has less to do with his voyeurism than the fact that he takes advantage of the situation to steal from the woman's purse. The title also plays on the reputation of Fischl and other Neo-Expressionists as the *enfants terribles* of the 80s art scene.



Eric Fischl, *Bad Boy*, 1981
<http://www.ericfischl.com/earlypaintings.htm>

Perhaps the most influential of the Neo-Expressionists is David Salle, who was the target of some of the most pointed critical attacks of the era. Salle's art was called cynical and calculating, and a blatant attempt at cashing in on a bloated market. To make matters worse, Salle developed a reputation as a firebrand, vocally and publicly taking on his critics. But in retrospect, Salle's paintings comprise some of the most interesting work of the era. Like Christopher Brown's work, Salle juxtaposes seemingly unrelated images culled from a variety of photographic sources. Unlike Brown, Salle often draws on a range of popular cultural and pornographic sources as in *Sextant in Dogtown* of 1987. While still paintings, images such as these speak to a world saturated in photographic media.



David Salle, *Sextant in Dogtown*, 1987.

<http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/MLS/syllabi/702/702-22.html>

RESOURCES – TEXTS

Bolton, Roy and Matthew Collins. *A Brief History of Painting: 2000 BC to AD 2000*, Carroll and Graf, 2004.

Brown, Christopher. *History and Memory: Paintings by Christopher Brown*, Fort Worth Art Museum, 1995.

Danto, Arthur, et al. *Eric Fischl: 1970-2000*, Monacelli Press, 2000.

Kardon, Janet. *David Salle*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

Pearlman, Alison. *Unpacking Art of the 1980s*, University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Schnabel, Julian. *Julian Schnabel*, Harry N. Abrams, 2003.

The Triumph of Painting [Saatchi Gallery catalogue], John Cape Press, 2005.

RESOURCES – WEBSITES

<http://www.berggruen.com/>

John Berggruen Gallery website, with bio, press, and other information on Christopher Brown

<http://www.ericfischl.com/>

Eric Fischl's official website with bio, images, and links

<http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/>

Website of the Saatchi Gallery, which has an impressive collection of contemporary painting

http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/movement_works_Neo_Expressionism_0.html

Page on Neo-Expressionism from the Guggenheim Museum

SECTION III – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Craft

An occupation, trade or pursuit requiring manual dexterity and the application of artistic skill

Exhilaration

Excitement, elation, joy, animation

Figurative

Relating to representation of the human figure in art, such as figure drawing

Intuitive

Instinctive, innate, spontaneous

Juxtapose

Put next to or beside, contrast

Manicure

Carefully managed, take great care with

Realism

In art, a specific concern for observable fact or reality, and a rejection of the visionary or expressive

Reconfigure

Rearrange, reorganize, reshape

Revamp

Revise, renovate, restore, do up

Style

A particular manner or technique by which something is done, created, or performed; a specific type of expression

SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

In the Manner of Christopher Brown

After viewing Christopher’s Brown’s work in the SPARK story, suggest that students take a short walk in woods or fields (if they are nearby) or in the local streets. Ask them to look for images that resonate with them in some way, and to think about the following questions:

- What images are repeatedly present? Are they images of trees, people, buildings etc.
- What specific elements do they see in each image? They should observe color, shadow, light and dark, as well as the sense of texture in the images
- What do these images signify to them – what do they evoke?

Ask students to share their observations and responses.

Encourage the group to photograph a selection of these images and then draw or paint what they have seen, reworking the photographs into a new image or reconfigured scene. They should draw on their memories as well as the photographs to create new images, and their artwork should reflect their observations and feelings, but not necessarily reproduce a realistic version of the original images.

Invite each student to introduce their work to the rest of the group, describing their process and the feelings they sought to express.

Close Looking Exercise

Ask students to look closely at Christopher Brown’s artwork as featured in the SPARK story. Freeze the frame on selected pieces to allow students to look

closely at the paintings, and then to work in pairs to respond to the following questions.

- What images are repeated in the paintings?
- How do these images come together?
- Does his use of scale and distance make sense? What effect does this create?
- Can they detect the way Christopher Brown “revamps” each piece i.e. continually changes it?
- How would they describe the color palette?
- How does Brown create a “sense of place” in his work?

Invite each pair to present their responses to these questions for the group as a whole to consider.

In the SPARK story Christopher Brown comments, “painting records your attitude in the making....” Discuss this statement with the group. How does his work reflect his attitude as he paints? Students may want to focus on one piece specifically in response to this point.

RELATED STANDARDS - VISUAL ARTS

Grades 9-12, Proficient

1.0 Artistic Perception Impact of Media Choice

1.5 Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work.

1.0 Artistic Perception

Analyze Art Elements and Principles of Design

1.3 Research and analyze the work of an artist and write about the artist’s distinctive style and its contribution to the meaning of the work.

Formal Analysis

9th-12th grades

This more complex activity takes the previous exercise one step further in emphasizing the material qualities of artwork, asking students to describe and engage with the formal qualities of a piece. (It may be appropriate to choose one of these activities since they both explore close looking, but at different levels of complexity.)

Ask students to choose one of Christopher Brown's paintings either from the SPARK story or by visiting http://www.askart.com/AskART/artists/search/Search_Repeat.aspx?searchtype=IMAGES&artist=34710

or

http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/brown_christopher.html

They can also consider visiting the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art to view his work or the solo show opening at San Francisco's John Berggruen Gallery -

<http://www.berggruen.com/>

Explain to students how to write a brief, but detailed formal analysis of the work they have chosen. They should then respond to the following questions:

- How would you describe the color, line, texture and composition of the piece?
- How would you describe the use of space and depth?
- How is the paint applied? Can you describe the brushstroke? Can you detect "revamping"?
- How would you describe the scale, and the effects of scale?
- What elements of the composition seem most important visually?
- What are the effects of the materials used by the artist?
- Is there a relationship between abstraction and figuration in this piece?

Students may need further guidance on the final question.

Figurative Art

Figurative art describes artwork – particularly paintings – which are representational, that is clearly derived from the "real world." The term "figurative art" is often taken to mean art which represents the human figure, animals, or objects but although this is usually the case, it is not necessarily so. Painting can

therefore be divided into categories of figurative and abstract art, the latter used synonymously for non-representational art, i.e. art which does not derive from figures or objects.

To further explore figurative art suggest that students compare Christopher Brown to Robert Bechtle, one of the founders of American Photorealism, a style of painting that rivals the detail and objectivity of the photograph. See SPARK story at <http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/profile.jsp?id=4813>

Ask students to write a 500 word essay comparing the two artists. In what ways are they similar and how are they different?

Comparing Styles

To help students explore artistic styles move on to compare paintings by artists working in other styles, showing slides from artists such as:

Jackson Pollock

(*Abstract Expressionism/Action Painting*)

Richard Diebenkorn (*California Figurative*)

Frida Khalo (*Mexican Surrealism*)

Helen Frankenthaler

(*Abstract Expressionism*)

Max Ernst (*Surrealism*)

Robert Downs (*Bay Area Abstract Expressionism*)

Ask students to write a 500 word essay comparing Christopher Brown with ONE other artist painting in a different style. Students can choose from the list above or select an artist of their choice.

RELATED STANDARDS -VISUAL ARTS

Grade 4 – Artistic Perception

Analyze Art Elements and Principles of Design

1.5 Describe and analyze the elements of art (color, shape/form, line, texture, space and value), emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

Grade 7 – 1.0 Artistic Perception

1.1 Describe the environment and selected works of art, using the elements of art and the principles of design.

Painting Memories

Invite students to sit quietly and dwell on memories that come to mind as they think about different times in their life. Encourage them to focus on memories that resonate strongly and produce powerful images in their mind's eye. Can they picture clearly people they have known, objects, places, vistas?

Suggest that students note down or sketch these images. Is there a central focus or theme? Do these images hang together or fragment with further reflection?

Using paper and pencil, guide students to begin to work on a landscape by making drawings of different elements of these memories. Reassure them that their images do not need to cohere into a rational scenario, but can echo the dreamlike landscapes of Christopher Brown or converge into the more surrealistic landscape of painters like Max Ernst.

When students have an array of images, set them working on a large sheet of paper, mapping out a composition. Invite them to begin painting when they are ready.

Ensure that in displaying the work, students have the opportunity to talk through their thoughts and feelings about their piece.

RELATED STANDARDS -VISUAL ARTS

Grade 8

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

4.2 Develop a theory about the artist's intent in a series of works of art, using reasoned statements to support personal opinions.

Grades 9-12, Advanced

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

4.2 Identify the intentions of artists creating contemporary works of art and explore the implications of those intentions.

5.0 *Connection, Relations & Applications*

5.2 Compare and contrast works of art, probing beyond the obvious and identifying psychological content found in the symbols and images.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/>