

 EVERSON MUSEUM OF ART

EDUCATOR PACKET

Miriam Beerman: Eloquent Pain(t)

September 16, 2006 – January 7, 2007



Miriam Beerman, *December (In Memory)*, 1992, Oil, mixed media on canvas, Collection of the artist.

Introduction

The Everson Museum of Art presents *Miriam Beerman: Eloquent Pain(t)* (September 16, 2006 – January 7, 2007). *Eloquent Pain(t)* surveys the paintings, collages and artist books created by Miriam Beerman since her 1990 retrospective held at the New Jersey State Museum. Beerman draws inspiration for her richly textured, expressively colored paintings and collages from poetry and from the history of human suffering. Beerman presents brutal events and suffering through her unique painting style, utilizing a distinct impasto application involving layers of thick paint. From 1990 on, her paintings feature brighter, luminescent colors that seem to juxtapose tragedy but are eerily suitable and are drastically different from her earlier works, which incorporated dark, subdued colors often applied in thin washes. After opening at the Everson, the exhibition will travel to the Queensborough Art Gallery.

Our Objectives

The EMA provides this packet to help educators adapt these exhibition offerings to individual curriculum needs. In addition, this packet should enable each instructor to maximize the benefits of a guided tour of the exhibits. We hope that the benefits will be evident in your students' level of participation during and after their museum visit, as well as in your students' ability to transfer the information they learn from these exhibits to other projects.

Overview of Contents

This packet includes information, vocabulary and projects that will help you teach students about Miriam Beerman's work and the events and ideas that influenced her. It is hoped that you will find this packet to be a useful resource in relating Beerman's work and artistic practice to work your students are doing in class. Emphasis is placed on observation and discussion, along with suggestions for related projects that address New York State Learning Standards in the Visual and English Language Arts. This packet includes a DVD of Beerman discussing her artist books and creative process and a cd with images of the Beerman's work and studio. We encourage you to visit the Everson Museum of Art with your students so that they may see the work in person, and to make use of the photographs on the cd.

Visual Thinking Strategies

The EMA utilizes the inquiry based, student-centered Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) curriculum in many of its tours and school-museum collaborations. We encourage educators to use VTS in the classroom to enable students to discuss works of art on their own terms, based on what they see and what they decide is interesting and important. A more comprehensive explanation of VTS can be found at the Visual Understanding in Education website, which we encourage you to visit at www.VUE.org. The role of the teacher as facilitator in this process is crucial to its success. If you would like to know more about VTS or are interested in receiving training, please call the Education Department at 474.6064. When scheduling a class tour, please consider requesting a VTS tour.

At the end of this packet is a one-page survey. Please take a minute to fill it out and add any additional comments you may have regarding the usefulness of this packet. We rely on your feedback to best serve your needs.

Biography

Expressionist artist Miriam Beerman was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1923, and has now been creating art for over 60 years. Her formal artistic training began when she studied painting under John Frazier (American, 1899-1966) at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), earning a BFA degree in 1945. Frazier, one of the most beloved instructors and directors in the school's history, instilled in Beerman a fondness for paint and working in an abstract style. After RISD, Beerman had a brief stint at the Art Students League in New York. At the League, Yasuo Kuniyoshi (American, b. Japan, 1893-1953) provided Beerman with the objective teaching style under which she flourished—a learning experience focused on mastering materials, not how or what to create. Kuniyoshi was known for his paintings and drawings of solemn, contemplative images in somber colors and filled with symbolism. His figural compositions featured poignant images of human suffering brought on by World War II. Beerman continued her artistic training with a foray into printmaking instruction during a year of study with Abstract Expressionist Adja Yunkus (American, b. Russia, 1900-1983) at the New School for Social Research.

From 1954 to 1956, Beerman received two consecutive Fulbright Scholarships to study in Paris under Stanley William Hayter (British, 1901-1988). Hayter, part of the Parisian avant-garde, was someone whose work and intellect Beerman greatly admired. However, she found his studio, Atelier 17, too unruly and aggressive to foster her creativity. Instead, for the first year Beerman worked in her small hotel room. At the start of her second year, she befriended another American artist and they shared a spacious apartment/studio. The building, once occupied by Picasso, was ideal for painting, with large walls and abundant natural light from a wall of windows. As part of the scholarship, Beerman was required to have her work critiqued monthly by French art historian Marcel Brion (1895-1984). Brion, an avid writer on various periods of art history, from the Italian Renaissance and Dutch Baroque to German Romanticism and French Expressionism, encouraged Beerman's process of painting on paper.

After Paris, Beerman returned to the United States, moving to Long Island to teach art classes. Teaching afforded the artist her independence and time to build on the individual artistic voice she created while in Paris. Within a few years, her purely Abstract Expressionist quality morphed into Expressionist figurative work with a heavy surface quality that more consistently addressed worldly events.

During the 1960s and 70s, Beerman's personal life evolved—she married, moved to Brooklyn and gave birth to a son—while she continued to develop her somber images of figures and animals and solidified her characteristic style of abstract brushwork, textured surface and dark colors. These formative years brought about today's larger than life canvases that demand to be seen, pondered and remembered. After 13 years in Brooklyn, Beerman and her family moved to Montclair, New Jersey. Within a year, her husband unexpectedly died. Beerman's work continued in much the same vein—giving form and faces to the primal scream of

humanity. In an interview for an exhibition brochure (*Miriam Beerman: Witches, Demons & Metamorphoses*, Montclair State College), Beerman emphatically stated, “There are some who feel they have to bear witness, and I happen to be one of them.”

With a firm grasp of her personal approach to art-making, Beerman has continued to achieve great milestones and receive numerous honors. In 1971, her work formed the first female solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. To date, Beerman’s work has been recognized for its brilliance in 31 solo exhibitions. Additionally, she was awarded residency fellowships in Ossabaw Island, Georgia (1978); Burston Graphic Center, Jerusalem, Israel (1980); Cassis, France (1980); Virginia Center for Creative Arts (yearly, 1984-1998, 2000-2002); Banf Center, Alberta, Canada (1987). Additional honors include, New Jersey State Council on the Arts Grants (1978, 1983, 1987); Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant Award (1994); and, Pollack-Krasner Foundation Grant (2000).

Beerman is almost obsessive in her chosen subject matter; for over 40 years she has thought about the trials and atrocities of humankind and reacted to them by creating paintings, drawings, artists books and collages. Canvases have layers of paint; collages and artists books have layers of torn drawings, pages of text and impressive draftsmanship.

Beyond the subject matter, the viewer finds a pictorial world of texture, symbolism and fluid lines, in summation, a strange glow of beautiful sympathy for humanity. In addition to the Everson Museum of Art’s collection, examples of Beerman’s work are represented in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Newark Museum, New Jersey State Museum at Trenton, Whitney Museum of American Art, National Museum of Women in the Arts and Corcoran Museum of Art.

Marisa J. Pascucci, Co-Curator, *Miriam Beerman: Eloquent Pain(t)*

Background

Miriam Beerman & the Holocaust: Art as Expression

“Much of my artistic life has been spent painting images which some find unpleasant or ugly, for the work is meant to reflect disturbing aspects of our time. How can one avoid seeing the world’s injustices? They weigh on my mind and body, very often leaving me in much physical as well as mental pain. So through my works I expel some of the evil.” -Miriam Beerman

Miriam Beerman grew up in the United States and had no immediate relatives who were affected by the Holocaust. Despite this, Beerman feels an urge to express the pain of Holocaust victims – and victims of brutality more globally – in her artwork.

It is important to recognize that although Beerman’s work frequently refers to the Holocaust for subject matter, as reflected in the titles and subjects of her paintings, these paintings are not intended to be direct illustrations of the Holocaust. In her art, Beerman seeks to convey the horror of violence wherever it might occur, from Hiroshima to Vietnam. The activities in this

packet provide suggestions for ways your students may be inspired to create their own expressionist art.

If you work with middle- and high-school students, you may choose to explicitly address the content of Beerman's work in your classroom discussion. Students may recognize references to the Holocaust in the titles of Beerman's work or in some of her imagery (crematoria, piles of shoes, etc.). You may wish to tie your discussion of Beerman's work into the Social Studies curriculum or into an English Language Arts unit on books such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* or Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Discussion topics might include:

- Have students research art created by Holocaust survivors such as Samuel Bak, Alice Lok Cahana, Yehuda Bacon, and David Olère. How do these survivors use art to deal with their experience? What differences do you see between their art and the artwork of empathizers and children of Holocaust survivors, such as Miriam Beerman, Pearl Hirshfield and Art Speigelman? Students may want to visit the Legacy Project (<http://www.legacy-project.org/>), which presents art work in response to many of the tragedies of our time.
- After the Holocaust, many writers and artists felt that it was impossible to make art. Famously, philosopher Theodor Adorno wrote that: "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric," and survivor and poet Elie Wiesel wrote: "How is one to speak of it? How is one not to speak of it?" How might art about the Holocaust risk turning horror into an aesthetic experience? Do students think that artists should continue to use the Holocaust as inspiration for, and subject of, art?
- Have students research monuments and memorials to the Holocaust. What questions do artists confront in constructing memorials to an historical event of this scale? What choices have different artists made in constructing memorials?

For younger children, we encourage you to look at Beerman's work *without* explicitly discussing the Holocaust, which would not be an age-appropriate subject area. Visual Thinking Strategies discussions of the paintings can help children articulate their reactions to the work. Different students may see very different things in the paintings – keep asking: "What do you see that makes you say that?" If students bring up sadness in relationship to the work, ask how they deal with feeling sad. Perhaps they talk to a friend or parent – perhaps they want to be active – or perhaps they write or make art?

In order to facilitate the viewing of Beerman's work in the art classroom, we have included in this educator packet the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's guidelines for teaching the Holocaust and a timeline of the Holocaust, as well as a glossary of terms which might come up during a classroom discussion of Miriam Beerman's work.

Glossary:

Anti-Semitism – Hatred of Jews (Semites). Although the term “antisemitism” was coined in 1879, persecution of Jews had been prevalent throughout Europe for centuries before the Nazi period.

Auschwitz – A concentration, labor, and death camp, Deportees went through a “selection” process in which those deemed too old, young, or frail to work were gassed immediately. Prisoners were told that they were going into showers – actually gas chambers. After bodies had been cleared of gold fillings and any other valuables, they were burnt in crematoria. Approximately 1.1 million Jews and 200,000 other victims were sent to Auschwitz.

Concentration Camps – The first concentration camps in Germany were established in 1933 soon after Hitler’s rise to power. They were used to detain large numbers of political opponents. The term “concentration camp” is used to describe a detention facility in which people are held without regard to legal norms. After the outbreak of World War II, these camps became sites where political prisoners and “undesirables” were put to death, either directly or through hard labor and malnourishment. Some of the more well-known concentration camps include Dachau, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen and Sachsenhausen.

Crematorium – The chimneys of the crematoria used to burn corpses in the camps serve as icons of the Holocaust and appear in Beerman’s paintings.

Death Camps – These extermination camps were created specifically to murder millions of Jews as part of the Nazi’s “final solution.” Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka were primary death camps.

Final Solution – The systematic murder of the Jews – through gassing, shooting, and starvation – during the Holocaust was termed the “final solution” to the “Jewish question.” Two-thirds of the Jews living in Europe in 1939 lost their lives through Hitler’s “final solution.”

Genocide – The term “genocide” refers to acts committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. The term was created specifically in response to the Nazi attempt to wipe out the Jewish population of Europe.

Ghetto – The word “ghetto” is derived from the name of the Jewish quarter in Venice. During World War II, enclosed ghettos within cities were used to separate Jews from non-Jews and control and contain them. Conditions in the ghettos were often miserable, with rampant over-crowding, hunger, and cold. Beginning in late 1941, the Germans began to liquidate the ghettos, deporting residents to death camps or killing them in mass graves.

Holocaust – The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. "Holocaust" is a word of Greek origin meaning "sacrifice by fire." The Nazis believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews, deemed "inferior," were "life unworthy of life." During the era of the Holocaust, the Nazis also targeted other groups because of their perceived "racial inferiority": Roma (Gypsies), the handicapped, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

In 1933, the Jewish population of Europe stood at over nine million. Most European Jews lived in countries that the Third Reich would occupy or influence during World War II. By 1945, close to two out of every three European Jews had been killed. Although Jews were the primary victims of Nazi racism, other victims included tens of thousands of Roma (Gypsies). At least 200,000 mentally or physically disabled people were murdered in the Euthanasia Program. As Nazi tyranny spread across Europe, the Nazis persecuted and murdered millions of other people. More than three million Soviet prisoners of war were murdered or died of starvation, disease, neglect, or maltreatment. The Germans targeted the non-Jewish Polish intelligentsia for killing, and deported millions of Polish and Soviet citizens for forced labor in Germany or in occupied Poland. From the earliest years of the Nazi regime, homosexuals and others deemed to be behaving in a socially unacceptable way were persecuted. Thousands of political dissidents (including Communists, Socialists, and trade unionists) and religious dissidents (such as Jehovah's Witnesses) were also targeted. Many of these individuals died as a result of incarceration and maltreatment.

Before beginning the war in 1939, the Nazis established concentration camps to imprison Jews, Roma, other victims of ethnic and racial hatred, and political opponents of Nazism. During the war years, the Nazis and their collaborators created ghettos, transit camps, and forced-labor camps. Following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units) carried out mass-murder operations against Jews, Roma, and Soviet state and Communist party officials. More than a million Jewish men, women, and children were murdered by these units. Between 1942 and 1944, Nazi Germany deported millions more Jews from the occupied territories to extermination camps, where they murdered them in specially developed killing facilities.

In the final months of the war, SS guards forced camp inmates on death marches in an attempt to prevent the Allied liberation of large numbers of prisoners. As Allied forces moved across Europe in a series of offensives on Germany, they began to encounter and liberate concentration camp prisoners, many of whom had survived the death marches. World War II ended in Europe with the unconditional surrender of German armed forces in the west on May 7 and in the east on May 9, 1945. *Excerpted from the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust (<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/>).*

Lodz – Several of Beerman’s paintings and collages refer to the Lodz ghetto. The city of Lodz (pronounced Ludj), located in Central Poland, had a Jewish population of almost 230,000 prior to the Second World War. In September 1939, the Nazis captured Lodz. Six days later, they forced businesses to stay open and synagogues to close on Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days in the Jewish religious calendar. The Nazis then forced all of the Jews of Lodz to live in an enclosed area of the city behind barbed wire fences. By May 1, 1940 the ghetto of Lodz was sealed, and Jews were forbidden to leave. The Nazis controlled the ghetto through Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, a Jew, who believed that he was ruling a new Jewish state and sought to appease the Nazis by complying with their orders, to the point of sending his fellow Jews to the death camps. Residents of Lodz were forced to live in extremely cramped conditions – with an average of 3.5 people per room – and to do hard manual labor to earn meager rations of food and coal and wood for heat and cooking. Many died from cold and hunger or from typhus and dysentery due to the unsanitary living conditions. Children, the elderly, and others unable to work were deported to the Chelmo death camp in 1942. The remaining workers were forced to make German munitions until 1944, when the ghetto was liquidated and the residents sent to Auschwitz to be killed. When the Russian army liberated Lodz on January 19, 1945, only 877 ghetto residents remained. See the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum website for more information and photographs of the Lodz ghetto.

Nazi – A member of the Nazi (National Socialist German Worker’s Party) organization. Under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, the Nazi Party controlled all aspects of German life.

Oświęcim (aush-vyen-chem) – The Polish name for the Auschwitz death camp.

Showers – The “showers” were the gas chambers where millions of victims were put to death. Prisoners were told that they were going to be disinfected before entering the camps and packed into the chambers. The doors were locked from outside, and poison gas was dispensed through the “showerheads.” Bodies were removed from the chamber, all valuables were removed from the corpses, and the bodies were burned or buried in mass graves. Originally the gas used was carbon monoxide, and the persons killed were prisoners no longer capable of working and those deemed by the Nazis to be “mercy killings,” i.e. the disabled and mentally ill. Once the “final solution” began to be implemented, the gas chambers were used for all prisoners, and Zyklon B began to be used as it killed faster.

Third Reich – The term used by the Nazis to describe their regime. The First Reich was the medieval Holy Roman Empire, and the Second Reich referred to the German Empire from 1871 -1918.

Many excellent resources for teaching about the Holocaust are available to teachers on the internet. These websites are listed in the references section at the end of this packet.

LESSON 1: Reflecting on Injustice: An Artist Book

Target Grade Level: Middle/High School (with Elementary adaptation)

NYS Learning Standards Addressed:

- Visual Arts Standard 1: Creating, performing and participating in the arts
- Visual Arts Standard 3: Responding to and analyzing works of art
- English Language Arts Standard: Language for literary response and expression
- Social Studies Standard 5: ...exploring democracy and the roles, rights and responsibilities of citizenship, including avenues of participation

Goals:

- To explore examples of written text (found or personally created), which relate to and express global or personal injustice.
 - Elementary Adaptation: explore times when students have been treated unfairly, had feelings hurt, felt a sense of loss, felt scared
- To learn the technical skills involved in creating an accordion artist book
- To fill the pages of the artist book with text and images around specific theme of social injustice using *automatism*

Materials: (Collect and store ahead of time)

- Card stock paper
- Tape
- Glue
- Scissors
- Pen & ink
- Found objects: photos, magazine/newspaper clippings, fabric, etc.
- Paint or oil pastels

Process:

Injustice

1. The quality or fact of being unjust; inequity.
2. Violation of the rights of others; unjust or unfair action or treatment.
3. An unjust or unfair act; wrong.

“I am reminded constantly of the world’s injustice. It weighs upon my mind and body.”

Quote from Miriam Beerman, artist statement

Some poems and texts have had a lasting impact on Miriam Beerman. She integrates several lines or entire poems by particular poets and writers, including her own written thoughts, into the pages of her artist books, along with drawings, paintings and collages.

The inspiration for many of Beerman's artist books comes from a variety of sources, including poetry, literature, world events and personal experiences. Instead of pre-planning the pages of each artist book, Beerman uses an artistic process called **Automatism**, where an attempt is made to suppress conscious thought and let images and text flow freely from the subconscious.

Activity Introduction:

- Read and discuss the poems, *3 Sentences Beginning with the Letter S* and *Washing the Corpse* (hand out)
- View and discuss the DVD, *An Interview with Miriam Beerman (Artist Books)*. What connections do you see between the poems and her books?
- Read and discuss poems by teens from *poetry zone* (hand out). What kind of personal or social injustices do these poems address?

Activity Steps:

- Brainstorm historical and contemporary examples of injustice.
- Identify an injustice about which you feel strongly.
- Research on Internet (or write your own) poems, song lyrics, favorite authors and/or quotes from books, quotes from historical or contemporary thinkers (Martin Luther king, "I have a dream," etc.) that relate to chosen personal or global injustice.
- Brainstorm: How would you describe the common elements of a book? (pages enclosed between a front and back cover, pages contain text and/or images and other graphics, can be color or black and white, often have a narrative-beginning, middle, end, have an author)
- Create an Accordion Fold Book (teacher guided with handout) – determine number of desired pages (will be creating front and back cover)
- Incorporate the texts with images, etc. to fill the pages of your artist book around your chosen theme using an **automatic** approach. Do not think about composition, making it look "pretty," or any other formal concerns. Instead, create as though you were "brainstorming" thoughts on to the page. Production option:

To fit better into class time allotted, give students a designated period of time each day to complete 1 or 2 pages over several days.

Suggested reading: *Rethinking Globalization, Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*. (2002). Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson. A Rethinking Schools Publication.

Lesson 2: Poetry as Artistic Inspiration

“Literary ideas inspire me, but they become infused and are, so to speak, an organic part of the process... because the visual senses are involved here, the work has to appeal on that level, which means that words cannot become a substitute...” –Miriam Beerman

Target Grade Level: Middle/High School

NYS Learning Standards Addressed:

- The Arts Standard 1: Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts
- The Arts Standard 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art
- English Language Arts Standard 2: Language for Literary Response and Expression
- English Language Arts Standard 4: Language for Social Interaction

Goals:

- To explore the relationships between visual art and poetry over time.
- To recognize how visual language communicates emotion and utilize it in a work of art.
- To create original works of art inspired by poetry
- To learn about poetry as an art form

Materials:

Photocopies (one per student) of “But the Sunflower” and “Early in the Morning”
Overhead or LCD projector to show *And Outside Finches Singing*
Sketchpads
Colored pencils
Watercolor paints and brushes
Acrylic paints and brushes
Pastels

Process:

This activity begins by examining the relationships between poetry and art in Miriam Beerman’s work, and then moves to using poetry as the inspiration for student work. The intent is for students not simply to illustrate the poem, but rather, as Beerman does, to integrate their own experiences and responses to the poem into a separate work of art. The poem provided in this lesson, Li-Young Lee’s “Early in the Morning,” describes family rituals from the perspective of an adult child observing his parents. To help students engage with Lee’s poem, they will read the poem on multiple occasions at different times of day, allowing the poem to sink into and resonate with their own

experiences. A series of questions prompts students to think about ritualized experiences in their lives and express them artistically. You may choose to assign an artistic medium for this project or to allow students to choose the medium they feel best suits their response to the poem.

“Early in the Morning” works well as a poem to inspire art-making because it:

- Provides a rich array of sensual images
- Uses both concrete and figurative language
- Offers an opportunity for students to evoke and engage with their own personal experience across a range of cultural backgrounds
- Uses accessible language for middle and high school students
- Does not depend on extensive historical or literary allusions

Keep these guidelines in mind if you choose to use other or additional poems to inspire student art work.

1. Give each student a copy of Nelly Sachs’ poem “But the Sunflower.” Show Miriam Beerman’s painting *And Outside Finches Singing*, whose title is derived from Sachs’ poem. Have two different students read the poem aloud so that students can hear the verbal rhythms and punctuation of the poem. If possible, have students discuss the poem in English class, or conduct this lesson while students are studying poetry in English class. Have students analyze the poem in class before looking at the painting in the art room. A useful guide to analyzing poetry can be found at <http://projects.uwc.utexas.edu/handouts/files/PoetryAnalysis.pdf>. Looking at the poem and the painting together, discuss the following questions.

- How would you describe the mood of the poem? Of the painting? What do you read/see that makes you say that?
- What smells/sights/sounds/tastes/touch sensations does this poem evoke for you? Where in the poem do you find these senses evoked? What types of physical places are described in the poem? What ironic contrasts does the poet draw?
- How do you see these sensual images, physical places, and contrasts expressed in Beerman’s painting?
- How would you describe the relationship between the poem and the painting? How does the painting *illustrate* the poem, *interpret* it, or take *inspiration* from it? What leads you to this opinion?

2. After discussing the relationship between poetry and Beerman’s art, let students know that they will be creating a work of art based on a poem – Li-Young Lee’s “Early in the Morning.” Give each student a copy of the poem and have two students read the poem aloud.

3. In sketchbooks, ask students to think about/write down their thoughts in response to the following questions:

- How did you feel after reading/hearing this poem?
- What images from the poem spoke to you most powerfully? Why?
- Choose three colors (colored pencils or watercolors) in response to the poem and the emotions it made you feel. What about the poem caused you to choose these colors? How will you use the pencils or watercolors to express these emotions?

For the remainder of the class period, have students sketch or paint in their sketchbooks in response to the poem, using this limited color palette. Ask students to read this poem again before they go to sleep at night and first thing in the morning when they wake up. Before the next class meeting, have students develop their reactions to the poem using the response worksheet in this packet.

4. In the next class meeting, have students create a work of art based on their associations with Li-Young Lee's poem, as articulated in the response worksheet. This project will be inspired by Lee's poem, but not illustrative of it.

Language Arts Extension Activity: Continue to consider the relationship between art and poetry by examining poems inspired by works of art. The following web sites offer a selection of *ekphrastic* (works of art based on other works of art, most often used to describe poetry written in response to visual art) poems and images to explore with your students.

<http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/titlepage.html>

http://www.people.virginia.edu/~djr4r/anth_poems.html

<http://www.dwpoet.com/poetassign.html>

When looking at these poems and their corresponding images, consider the following questions:

- Sometimes the poet takes the role of an imaginary participant in the world of the painting or sculpture, while other times the poem shows us the poet looking at the art work and commenting on it as art, or relating it to his or her own life. Where does this poet "stand" relative to the art work?
- How does the poem describe the art work? Does it matter if the work is named in the poem or not? What kind of language does the poet use to describe the art-work? How is it similar to/different from the language a visual artist might use?
- How do you think the poet feels about the art-work or the artist who created it? What do you see in the poem that makes you say that?
- How do you see the art-work differently having read the poem?

On a visit to the Everson, have your students choose one work of art to use as the inspiration for a poem. Or, devise a collaboration between a creative writing class and an art class in which art students create art in response to other students' poetry and then poetry students write poems in response to student artwork!

EARLY IN THE MORNING by LI-YOUNG LEE

What sounds does the poet describe? What kinds of sounds do you hear in the words of the poem as it is read aloud?

What visual images do you take away from the poem?

What kinds of lines, shapes, and patterns do the words and sounds of the poem bring to your mind?

What smells and tastes do you imagine as you read the poem?

What physical sensations does the narrator of the poem describe?

Who is the narrator of the poem? Whose thoughts and feelings is he describing?

What are your family's morning rituals? What sights/sounds/sensations/tastes/smells say "morning" to you? *(Do you hear the water of your mother's shower running before you get out of bed? Do you feel the hot water on your skin every morning? Smell coffee brewing or the scent of your sister's hairspray?)*

What are your family's evening rituals? What sounds do you hear as you are falling asleep at night?

What is the last thing that happens in your home before everyone goes to bed?

What does the light look like when you wake up in the morning? In the evening?

What emotions do you feel after spending some time with this poem?

Lesson 3: Analyzing 20th Century Art

New York State Standards Addressed:

- Standard 1 Creating, Performing, and Participating in The Arts
- Standard 2 Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources
- Standard 3 Responding To and Analyzing Works of Art
- Standard 4 Understanding The Cultural Dimensions & Contributions of the Arts

Goals:

- Students will explore cultural influences on artists and their work.
- Students will create a painting that reflects diverse cultural influences.

Context of Lesson:

Art does not exist in a void. It is a visual representation of a particular time period and the philosophies influencing that era. The 20th century was a time of great upheavals—2 world wars, the use of the atomic bomb, the Holocaust, continuing conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, and China. Huge technological and medical gains were made. Changes in family structure, religious beliefs, and values also characterize the last century.

Miriam Beerman is an artist of her times. She draws inspiration from world events, poetry, mythology, philosophy, religion, and the human psyche. Her works reflect the aesthetic and cultural changes of the 20th century. An examination of some of the philosophies influencing her work will help the viewer to better understand the artist and her place in history.

Activities:

- Students will look at and discuss works by Miriam Beerman.
- Students will read short descriptions of philosophical, religious, and artistic movements of the 20th century.
- Students will work in groups to identify ways these ideas may have influenced the artist and her work.
- Students will create a painting that reflects two of the artistic, philosophical, or religious movements they have explored.

Activity #1:

Choose one or two Beerman images for a classroom discussion. Use an open-ended discussion method such as Visual Thinking Strategies. Ask questions like:

What's going on in this picture?

What do you see that makes you say that?

What more can you find?

What questions would you have for the artist if she were here?

Activity #2:

- Hand out short descriptions of religious, philosophical, and artistic movements of the 20th century (provided in this packet).
- Assign students to groups of 2-4. Have students read through the descriptions. Assist them with any difficult words or ideas.
- Have each group identify at least two movements which may have influenced Beerman's work, and justify their conjectures with specific references to the artwork and descriptions. Group may report orally or in writing.

Activity #3:

- Students or teacher will choose a subject for a painting.
- Students will identify at least two philosophical, religious, or artistic movements that they would like to convey to the viewer through their painting.
- Students will paint their subject –choosing the media that best fits their movement.
- Students will write an artist statement explaining the relationship between the selected movements, media, and their painting.

Assessing the Outcomes:

Teachers may create a rubric or anecdotally report on the following areas:

- Student participation in classroom discussion (Activity #1)
- Group work: written or oral response to movement and its influence on artist (Activity #2)
- Creation of painting (Activity #3)
- Artist statement (Activity #4)

Note: These activities may be used with any 20th century artist. Providing examples of paintings for each art movement could be helpful.

Short Descriptions of Selected Philosophical and Religious Ideas

Deism:

- Religious movement that originated in 17th and 18th century Europe and North America and continues mostly similar in form today. Deism is a religious philosophy and methodology that asserts the existence of God/Higher Power. It holds that the proper source of religion comes from the exercise of human reason, the observation of the natural world and the utilization of personal experience with emphasis on individual freedom of thought. Deists reject divine revelation and holy books.

Judaism:

- A religion developed among the ancient Hebrews and characterized by belief in one transcendent God who has revealed himself to Abraham, Moses, and the Hebrew prophets and by a religious life in accordance with Scriptures and rabbinic tradition.
- Jews believe that there is a God who created people for a reason

Christianity:

- A religion derived from Jesus Christ, based on the Bible as sacred scripture, and professed by Eastern, Roman Catholic, and Protestant bodies.
- Christians believe in the intercessory work of Christ
- They believe they can have an personal relationship with God
- Christians believe that there is a God who created people for a reason.

Islam:

- The religious faith of Muslims including belief in Allah as the sole deity and Muhammad as his prophet.
- Muslims believe that there is a God who created people for a reason.

Buddhism:

- A religion of eastern and central Asia growing out of the teaching of Gautama Buddha that suffering is inherent in life and that one can be liberated from it by mental and moral self-purification.

Hinduism:

- The dominant religion of India that emphasizes dharma (an individual's duty fulfilled by observance of custom or law) with its resulting ritual and social observances and often mystical contemplation and ascetic practices.

Humanism:

- Devoted to the humanities,
- Doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interest or values
- Rejects supernaturalism
- Stresses individual dignity and worth
- Self-realization through reason
- Broad category of active ethical philosophies that affirm the dignity and worth of all people, based on the ability to determine right and wrong by appeal to universal human qualities—particularly rationalism.

- Humanism entails a commitment to the search for truth and morality through human means in support of human interests.

Existentialism:

- The underlying concepts are:
 - Humankind has a free will
 - Life is a series of choices, creating stress
 - Few decisions are without any negative consequences.
 - Some things are irrational or absurd, without explanation
 - If one makes a decision, he or she must follow through
- “Condemned to be free”—responsibility is the dark side of freedom. When individuals realize that they are completely responsible for their decisions, action, and beliefs they are overcome with anxiety--angst.
- Common factor beyond the concepts above is despair.
- 20th Century philosophy
- analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong or good or bad.
- Humans are not good.
- We are best when we struggle against our nature.
- Nietzsche: Do humans need pain? Does suffering make us stronger?
- Believe in living—living your life and making specific choices defines who you are. It is our responsibility to live.
- “Existentialism is about being a saint without God; being your own hero, without all the sanction and support of religion or society.” Anita Brookner
- Sartre: “There is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is...man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.”

Nihilism:

- literally *belief in nothing* As a philosophical position, nihilism is the view that the world, and especially human existence, is without meaning, purpose, comprehensible truth, or essential value.
- a viewpoint that traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that existence is senseless and useless
- denied any objective ground of truths and especially moral truth
- conditions in the social order are so bad as to make destruction desirable for its own sake independent of any constructive program, e.g. 19th century Russian revolutionaries, using terrorism and assassination
- 1700’s—*nihilism* was a term that originally characterized *Rationalism* as the opposite of faith and revelation
- Nihilist paradox: if it is true that truth does not exist, the statement “truth does not exist” is in itself *not* a truth, thereby proving itself incorrect.

Modernism:

- Modernism represents a response to the social crisis created by “modernity”—a sense of despair due to the loss of tradition and the breakdown of shared religion and meaning.
- accommodates traditional religious teaching to contemporary thought and especially devalues supernatural elements

Post-Modernism:

- reaction to modernism,
- return to traditional materials and forms or by ironic self-reference and absurdity (literature)
- radical reappraisal of modern assumptions about culture, identity, history, or language
- Postmodernism finds strength and reasons to celebrate varied and unique human relationships (as opposed to the defeatism of Nihilism).
- Communicating the self—what we know is complicated when we try to share knowledge or wisdom. Each time we communicate, some loss of meaning is risked. We communicate via images, sounds, and touch. For most of us, what we think is converted to a form of “unspoken speech” in our minds. This means we can only understand and explain things in some form of spoken word. Philosophers dealing with ideas of deconstruction and postmodern linguistics have come to appreciate the limits of language and the social implications of words. Our ideas are shaped by existing language.

Short Descriptions of Selected 19th and 20th Century Art Movements**Impressionism:**

- believed that art should record visual impressions left by actual experience
- A theory of practice in painting especially among French painters of about 1870 of depicting the natural appearances of objects by means of dabs or strokes of primary unmixed colors in order to simulate actual reflected light.
- Examples: Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Pissarro, Manet

Post-Impressionism:

- Term is useful for describing the many different artists who reacted to Impressionism in the last 15 years of the nineteenth century. They include George Seurat (pointillism), Van Gogh (realism/impressionism/expressionism), Paul Gauguin (expressionism, native art), and Paul Cezanne (form, structure), as well as Matisse, Henri Rousseau, the Fauves, Kirchner, Georges Rouault, and James Ensor
- Post-impressionist artists rejected what they considered the formlessness and triviality, the superficiality and lack of permanence of Impressionism.

Expressionism:

- “The expressionist, from Van Gogh to Nolde, works in a métier which at the same time comforts and affronts. The need is to communicate feelings; frequently rooted in pain, anxiety, anguish, even despair. Most of us prefer not to confront these states of mind unless we have to: hence the response to an expressionist painting is sometimes awe, sometimes revulsion. Yet mankind has a desperate need to face the truth.” Koenig

- Expressionists strove to reveal an inner, emotional reality

Modernism:

- “Modernist” artists tended to be intellectuals and to see themselves as the priests of a new religion that would fill the gap created by the modern skepticism, secularism, and materialism. They believed in the healing power of the artist in society, in the power of art to change the world and discover and express spiritual meaning in a changed environment. As a result they tended to create “high” (not “popular”) art and to speak to an elite culture rather than to the masses. They believed that art should be difficult, challenging the audience to higher thought. They were interested in the unity and perfection of the work of art, strove for “purity” in language and technique, coining the terms “more with less” and “form follows function.”

Futurism:

- Futurism: Sought to destroy the past, promote technological elements of the future with an intent to bludgeon the public with shock effects. Futurism was a response to the backwards-looking, conservative society of early 20th century Italy.
- Celebrated the dynamism of great cities, the energy and destructive force of modern inventions. The hectic, deafening chaos of a mechanized world would destroy the old morality, the old society, the outmoded human product. They saw the cycle of death and rebirth repeated in men’s entanglement with the machine, with electric power and kinetic force.

Surrealism:

- The principles, ideals, or practice of producing fantastic or incongruous imagery or effects in art by the means of unnatural or irrational juxtapositions and combinations.

Dadaism:

- Anti-art movement, which lasted from 1916-1923 (WWI), sometimes using found objects in a manner similar to *found poetry* and labeling them art, thus undermining ideas of what art is and what it can be. At other times Dadaists paid attention to aesthetic guidelines only so they could be avoided, attempting to render their works devoid of meaning and aesthetic value. This tendency toward devaluation of art has led many to claim that Dada was essentially a nihilist movement, emphasizing destruction without creation.

Abstract Expressionism:

- Movement of abstract painting that emerged in NYC during the mid-1940’s and attained singular prominence in American art in the following decade; also called action painting and the NY school.
- It was the first important school in American painting to declare its independence from European styles and to influence the development of art abroad. Archile Gorky first gave impetus to the movement. His paintings, derived at first from the art of Picasso, Miro, and surrealism, became more personally expressive.

- Emphasized attention to surface qualities—brushstroke, texture, the use of huge canvases, approach to space in which all parts of the canvas play an equally vital role in the total work, harnessing of accidents that occurred during painting, glorification of the act of painting itself as a means of visual communication, and the attempt to transfer pure emotion directly onto the canvas. Its essential energy transmitted an enduring excitement to the American art scene.
- Abstract expressionists transmit complexities of emotion to the physical object. Their work is intuitive and emotional.
- Painting movement in which artists typically applied paint rapidly, and with force to their huge canvases in an effort to show feelings and emotions, painting gesturally, non-geometrically, sometimes applying paint with large brushes, sometimes dripping or even throwing it onto the canvas. Their work is characterized by a strong dependence on what appears to be accident and chance, but which can be actually highly planned. Not all work is abstract, nor was all work expressive, but it was generally believed that spontaneity of the artists' approach to their work would draw from and release the creativity of their unconscious minds. The expressive method of painting was often considered as important as the painting itself.
- Artists: Hoffman, Gottlieb, Rothko, DeKooning, Pollock, Guston, Motherwell, Frankenthaler

Postmodernism:

- Cool, ironic, and accepting of fragmentation of contemporary existence
- Concentrates on surfaces rather than depth
- Blurs distinctions between high and low culture
- Challenges a wide variety of traditional cultural values
- Most specific and meaningful when related to architecture (1960's-1990's)
- Much contested term used to signify a change in Western thought and consciousness, and an end to the goals and ideals of "modernism"—much like "post-Impressions" signified the end of Impressionism.
- All versions of postmodernism are profoundly aware of the past, which they appropriate freely. Postmodernism reflects the excess of culture and information available to humans living in the "information age," where we are bombarded with images and ideas from the past. Instead of "making it new," postmodern artists seem to feel that everything has already been done and all that is left is to recycle old ideas and techniques in new ways.
- Artists: Frank Gehry, Bill Viola, Xu Bing

EARLY IN THE MORNING by LI-YOUNG LEE

While the long grain is softening
in the water, gurgling
over a low stove flame, before
the salted Winter Vegetable is sliced
for breakfast, before the birds,
my mother glides an ivory comb
through her hair, heavy
and black as calligrapher's ink.

She sits at the foot of the bed.
My father watches, listens for
the music of comb
against hair.

My mother combs,
pulls her hair back
tight, rolls it
around two fingers, pins it
in a bun to the back of her head.
For half a hundred years she has done this.
My father likes to see it like this.
He says it is kempt.

But I know
it is because of the way
my mother's hair falls
when he pulls the pins out.
Easily, like the curtains
when they untie them in the evening.

- Li-Young Lee

BUT THE SUNFLOWER by NELLY SACHS

But the sunflower
That ignites the walls
From the floor raises
Those speaking with the soul
In the dark

already torches for another world
with hair growing even beyond death---

And outside, finches singing
and time walking in glory
colorful
and the flower growing
to man's heart

Evil ripens into the casks
black grape---infamous---
already pressed into wine---

Note: Nelly Leonie Sachs (b. Dec. 10, 1891, Berlin, Germany--d. May 12, 1970, Stockholm, Sweden) was a poet and dramatist who is best known for her writing conveying the Holocaust's impact on the Jewish people. Born to an upper-middle class Jewish family in Berlin, she and her mother fled Nazi Germany for Sweden in 1940. Only her connection with Swedish novelist Selma Lagerlöf and intervention by the Swedish royal family saved her from the fate of many other German Jews and allowed her to escape Germany and avoid the concentration camps.

Three Sentences Beginning with S

by Halvard Johnson

Such are the morning wonders of the world that, when each day we look on them anew, expecting that they at any moment will revert to form—the same old same old—fearing that at any instant we will wander into tropes of vision blundered into yesterday, the day before yesterday, and, yes, the day before that, hoping against hope that something new would eventuate, but ending the day on a note of despair nonetheless, those fragmentary vistas that open themselves up unto us do something for us that redeems the day at least in part.

So wild is the world that the wildness within us escapes our notice until the moment that it breaks forth into the open, spilling out upon the floor at our feet, pooling there briefly and then seeping into the carpet, and even through the carpet, working its way into the crevices between the floorboards beneath and into the joints of the subflooring below those, mixing with dust and dirt and debris, coagulating into unrecognizable shapes and forms that will forever escape our notice and that some future archaeologist might one day take a sample of into a laboratory, place it there beneath some microscope we can only dream to know the power of, peer down at it and then announce to those watching over his shoulder, or what might pass for a shoulder, "Ah, yes. Some bleeders lived here.

Sleep comes to us softly and without question in the night, whispering to us of deeper sleeps to come and deeper snows that heap themselves up upon the snows of yesteryear, echoing the whiteness of the clouds above, below the black of far-flung space, where even on those rare and isolate planets that will support some things we might call life such whiteness lies beyond the scope of any creature's wildest midnight dreaming.

Washing the Corpse

Poem by Rainer Maria Rilke

They had grown used to him. Yet when
the kitchen lamp arrived and burned restlessly
in the dark draft, the unknown one became
completely unknown. They washed his neck,

and in that they knew nothing of his story,
they fabricated snatches together,
all the while washing. One coughed
and left the heavy sponge full of vinegar

on the face. Then it was time for the second
to take a pause. Out of the hard brush,
drops fell to the ground; while his cramped
gray hand wished to prove to the entire
house that he no longer needed water.

And this he proved. They took up their work
again with more haste, as if caught off guard,
now with a cough, so that on the wallpaper
their bent-over shadows wound and rolled

themselves into a mute pattern as in a net,
until their washing had come to an end.
The night coming through the curtainless windows
was merciless. And one without a name lay
there, bare and cleansed, and gave commands.

References

Miriam Beerman:

Bacon, Hannelore, Miriam Beerman and Gert Schiff. *Primal Ground: Miriam Beerman, Works from 1983 to 1987*. Montclair: Montclair Art Museum, 1988.

www.miriambeerman.com

Artist Books

<http://artistbooks.com/>

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

<http://www.goshen.edu/~gwenjm/bookarts/index.htm> (a history of artist books)

<http://www.rethinkingschools.org/> (ideas about teaching for social justice)

Holocaust:

The following organizations offer extensive online Holocaust education materials for educators.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – www.ushmm.org

Facing History and Ourselves – www.facinghistory.org

Learning about the Holocaust through Art – <http://art.holocaust-education.net/>

Witness and Legacy – website of a SUNY Albany exhibition of Holocaust-related art. Useful for exploring other artists whose work draws on the Holocaust as subject and motivation. <http://www.albany.edu/museum/wwwmuseum/holo/>

Holocaust Resource Center and Archives – features extensive links, resources for teachers, and an online exhibition of “memory quilts” made by survivors. <http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/hrca/>

A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust – Extensive resources for educators. This section of the teacher's guide focuses on art of the Holocaust, as well as the Nazi crackdown on “degenerate art” and art in response to the Holocaust.

<http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/arts/art.htm>

Legacy Project - <http://www.legacy-project.org/>

Copies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's education cd-rom, *Teaching about the Holocaust* are available to borrow from the Educator Resource Center.

Poetry:

<http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/titlepage.html>

http://www.people.virginia.edu/~djr4r/anth_poems.html

<http://www.dwpoe.com/poetassign.html>

<http://projects.uwc.utexas.edu/handouts/files/PoetryAnalysis.pdf>

<http://www.puddinghouse.com/ekphrastic.htm>

<http://calamity.wordherders.net/archives/000422.html>

<http://saysomethingwonderful.blogspot.com/2005/05/teaching-tips-ekphrastic-poetry.html>

<http://wwwf.countryday.net/FacStf/us/hammondk/Ekprasis/>

<http://tinyurl.com/h6gyf> (pdf file of excellent ekphrastic poetry lesson plan)

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/foolingwithwords/main_revise.html

IMAGE LIST

And Outside Finches Singing, 1996.
Oil on canvas, bag, donkey leg bone.
Collection of the artist.

December (In Memory), 1992.
Oil, mixed media on canvas.
Collection of the artist.

Duende, 1993
Oil on canvas, bag crayons, donkey leg
bone
Collection of the artist.

Existenz, 1997
Oil on canvas, mirror shard
Collection of the artist.

Ghetto Documents Drawing, 1999
Acrylic, mixed media on paper
Collection of the artist

Ghetto Documents Drawing, 1999
Acrylic, mixed media on paper
Collection of the artist

Ghost 1, 1993
Oil and wax on linen
Collection of the artist.

Ghost 2
Studio wall collage
Collection and studio of the artist

Note From Lodz, 1999
Collage, paper, acrylic and mixed media
Collection of the artist.

Nothing Has Changed, 1999
Oil on canvas
Collection of the artist.

Oswiecim, 1999
Oil, collage on canvas
Collection of the artist.

Shower I, 1994
Oil, mixed media on canvas
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton

Shower II, 1997
Oil and mixed media on linen
Collection of the artist.

Winding Sheet, 2005
Oil on linen
Collection of the artist.