

# DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University  
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## Agnes School Program, Nocturne

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### SPEAKERS

Sophia Ceccucci, Anna Douglas

### KEYWORDS

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### TRANSCRIPT

**Sophia:** Hello, and welcome to the Agnes Etherington Art Centre. The Agnes is an art gallery located in Kingston, Ontario, on Queen's University campus. My name is Sophia.

**Anna:** And I'm Anna. And we're going to be your docents today.

Docents are people who lead tours at art galleries and museums. We're sorry that you can't be here in person. We're excited to take you on a tour of the exhibition Nocturne.

**Sophia:** Often the title of an exhibition gives us a hint about what we are going to see. Does anyone know what the word nocturne means?

Let's make a guess by looking at the art. Take a look around this room. What do you notice about the works?

Do they share similar colours? I can see lots of blues and blacks.

What about the subject? The subject is the main idea that's represented in an artwork. I see the moon in several paintings.

Nocturne means of the night. All the works in this exhibition are about the night or the hours around it, such as sunset and sunrise. What are some descriptive words or feelings that come to mind when you think of the night? You might describe the night as dark, quiet, relaxing, exciting, and maybe even spooky.

For thousands of years artists have been inspired by the night. The things they see and do at night, and the emotions they feel.

Today we're going to take a trip through the night and look at how a few different artists have captured this time in their art.

We will start in the evening, when the sun is going down, but people are still moving about. Then we'll move on to the quiet parts of the night, when some people are sleeping and dreaming, and

others are wandering around in the quiet darkness. Next, we'll come to the early morning, when the workday begins for some. Finally, we'll arrive at sunrise, when bright and beautiful colours return to the sky.

**Anna:** The sun is setting behind a large hill, and with the changing light we start to notice new things.

This watercolour is by an artist named John Stanley Walsh. Take a long look at this painting. What do you notice about it?

What do you think is happening in it?

I first notice the colours. The bright oranges and yellows in the centre of the painting stand out from the bluish-grey parts.

The artist has used a type of paint called watercolour to make this painting. One of the distinctive things about this type of paint is that it can make hazy and soft washes of colour. Do you notice in this painting that there are no hard and straight lines? Everything looks flowy and watery.

When you look up close, the details in this painting aren't very precise. But from far away we can guess what things are based on their shape, colour, and their relation to other objects.

Do you see the trees in the painting?

There, on the right side of the island. I can tell there are trees because of their round shape and their deep green colour. When you look up close, they're not very detailed. It looks like a green splotch with little brushstrokes to represent tree trunks.

When things are painted so they look far away, you don't need to include lots of details. The artist didn't need to paint individual leaves for us to know they are trees. He just needed to create an impression of trees with shape and colour.

What else do you recognize in this painting?

Do you notice the water around the island? How can you tell it is water?

One reason is its blue colour. But another reason is that we can see things reflected in it, like the trees and the lights on the island.

This painting is called "Expo 67 At Night". Expo 67 was a big fair held in Montreal, and it celebrated 100 years of Canada being a country.

Have you ever been to a carnival or a fair? If you could step inside this painting, what do you imagine you would hear, smell, and taste?

The artist chose to paint this scene at night for a reason. He was inspired by the carnival like lights and dazzling colours best seen from a distance in the evening.

Watercolour was a good choice of materials. The flowing brushstrokes and glowing colours make the scene feel like an exciting dream.

Now that the night is here, and as people head off to bed, we're going to talk about the dreamier side of night.

**Sophia:** This print is called "Bird Dream Forewarning Blizzard." And it's by an Inuit artist named Tudlik.

Inuit live mostly in the northern regions of Canada. Their homeland is known as Inuit Nunangat, which describes the land, water, and ice of the people.

I mentioned this type of art is called a print. Print making is a way to make art like painting or drawing.

Making a print is similar to using a rubber stamp. You use one object to make an impression on a piece of paper.

In this print we can see a human figure, maybe it's the artist. Standing or maybe floating beside the human is a bird shaped spirit. See its beak and wings?

Based on the name of this print, "Bird Dream Forewarning Blizzard," we know that Tudlik found a inspiration for this artwork in dreams.

When we go to sleep at night we dream, even if we can't always remember them in the morning.

In our dreams we can see and feel things in our mind. Depending on what you dream about, dreams can be realistic, magical, confusing, or even scary. Do you usually remember your dreams?

Throughout history and in many cultures around the world people have believed that dreams have meaning. That we can learn something about ourselves or the world if we interpret or try to understand them.

In Inuit culture dream sharing has an important history. Many believe you can communicate with the spirits through dreams. Some people also believe that dreams can give us information about the future.

Bird dreams, like the one Tudlik illustrated in this print, predict that bad weather, such as a blizzard, is coming.

Have you ever dreamt of something that came true later?

**Anna:** We use the phrase, in the dead of night, to describe the quietest and darkest part of the night. That's when our next work of art is set.

In the first two artworks we've seen that the artist can be inspired by real life events, like Expo 67, and their dreams.

Artists can also be inspired by other types of art, such as poetry. That is what we're going to explore next.

This print is by an artist named Cecil Buller. It's called "Skyscrapers". The artist was inspired to make this print by a very old poem called, "The Song of Solomon." I'm going to read a section of that poem. As you listen, take a long look at the image.

I will rise now and go about the city,  
in the streets and in the squares;  
I will seek him whom my soul loves.  
I sought him, but found him not.  
The watchmen found me  
as they went about in the city.  
"Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"  
Scarcely had I passed them  
when I found him whom my soul loves.  
I held him, and would not let him go...

When I read the poem, could you imagine what was happening in your mind? Did it change the way you look at this image?

What do you notice in this print?

One thing that stands out to me is it's black and white. These shades exaggerate the colourless nighttime world.

The poem mentions walking through a city at night. Notice how the skyscrapers look like they're towering above you, into the inky night sky, where the moon and stars are twinkling. It makes me feel very small.

Some building look brighter than others. The more white lines there are, the brighter they look. Perhaps it's the moon that's casting a light on the buildings.

Take a look at the two people hugging in the bottom corner. In the poem there's a line, "When I found him whom my soul loves, I held him and would not let him go." I think that's the exact moment this print is depicting.

There are white lines around the people. It makes them look like they're glowing. Maybe the glowing is supposed to represent their feelings. They're happy because they are together. That would be very poetic.

**Sophia:** Now we're moving on through the night. It's early morning and still dark outside. But some people are getting up to start work. Do you have chores or tasks you help with around your home? This painting is named, "Milking Cows." If you live on a farm, milking the cows might be one of your chores, and you have to get up really early to do this.

This painting is by an artist named William Kurelek. It is part of a series of several paintings, each showing what it was like to live in rural western Canada as a Ukrainian immigrant. Kurelek was inspired to paint this artwork by memories of his childhood, growing up on a dairy farm. In the painting we can see a young boy and his father completing the task of milking the cows together.

The father is holding the milking machine he's just used as he carefully pours the fresh milk into a pail. We can see the cows in their stalls behind him.

A few lucky cats have been given a share of the fresh, warm milk. The cat closest to the door is looking around as if he's saying, "close the door, it's cold outside".

We can see the boy walking off with two very full pails of milk. With his hands full, he's using his foot to kick the barn door closed behind him.

Imagine that you are the boy in this painting. What do you imagine he's feeling in this moment? I think he must feel freezing. Looking at this painting makes me shiver. How does this painting make us feel cold?

One way is the subject of the painting. It's a winter scene at night. I can see there's snow and fallen icicles on the ground. And I can see the boy's breath in the air. It also looks like it's windy. There are white wisps of snow blowing through the barn door. All these things remind me of times I've been cold in the winter and I can remember that feeling.

The artist has also made this painting feel cold with the colours he's used. Colours can be described as being warm or cool. The blue outside, the boy's blue overalls, and his green coat are all cool colours.

The yellow hay on the barn floor, the father's red coat, and his yellow trousers make the barn look warmer and more welcoming than the outside. Red and yellow are warm colours.

The contrast of the warm colours in the barn makes the cool colours of the outside feel even colder. Well, I feel pretty chilly now, so we're going to move on to a painting that feels much warmer. It depicts the end of the night, sunrise.

**Anna:** This painting is called, "Sunrise." It is by an artist named Otto Reinhold Jacobi. It's quite different from all the other works of art we've looked at today. Do you notice there are no people, animals, or buildings in this painting?

We call this type of painting a romantic landscape. When we say romantic here, we don't necessarily mean love. It's romantic because it communicates a strong feeling or mood.

The artist didn't want us to think this is a real place. Instead, he just wanted this painting to make us feel a certain way.

The sunrise is a symbol of hope and renewal. And you might feel those things by looking at this painting.

What are some of other words you might use to describe how this painting makes you feel? When you're looking at a landscape, something that people often talk about is a sense of depth or perspective.

Perspective is the way an artist can represent space. Making a landscape look three-dimensional. Like we can walk into it, even though it's on a flat, two-dimensional surface like paper or canvas. We can see that Jacobi painted this work with perspective, because some parts of the painting look close-up and some look far away.

There are a couple of ways that the artist has done this. One way is through the detail he's painted. Generally, things that look closer have more detail, and their colours look realistic. This is called atmospheric perspective.

Here I can see lots of little brush marks that represent individual leaves. So this part looks relatively close. If you look in the centre of the painting, in the background, there's a large hill. We can't see any details here, just the outline of the hill against the sky. The less detail there is, the further away something is supposed to look. You can also notice as the details get less sharp, the colours look hazier, and less realistic. The trees that look closest to us are green. Yet the hill in the distance, which must also have green trees on it, looks pink.

The artist also used a technique called diminishing perspective.

That means objects that are supposed to be farther away are painted smaller. For example, the big hill in the background only takes up a small part of the canvas, much smaller than the hills that look close. However, we know it's supposed to be big.

It looks like the sun is about to rise above that big hill. Imagine what the painting would look like if Jacobi painted it just 10 minutes later.

Now the sun has risen again, and we've reached the end of our tour. Today we watched from afar as people had an exciting evening at the fair. We interpreted dreams. Explored poetry in the dead of

night. We woke up in the chilly, early morning to milk cows. And then we watched a beautiful sunrise.

**Sophia:** I hope you've enjoyed exploring the night through these artists eyes and learning about what's inspired them.

What's your favourite part of the night?