



LET'S LOOK & LEARN

TAKING FLIGHT: WHERE THERE'S IMAGINATION THERE'S A WAY



NATIONAL STANDARDS

The activities in this educational resource address the following National Standards for Arts Education, Visual Art Content Standards.

1. Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.
2. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.
3. Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of [the students'] work and the work of others.
4. Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines.

The Flight I

Margo Selski, 2002

oil, varnish, and bee's wax on canvas

ABOUT THE ART

The Media

Margo Selski created this painting using the media of oil paint, varnish, and bee's wax. Selski has developed a process to make her paintings look yellow, cracked, and aged. She uses bee's wax purchased from the farmer's market because it has a rich, yellow consistency. She coats the surface of the painting with the bee's wax and melts it to a smooth matte sheen. Next she puts the painting in a large restaurant freezer to allow the wax to cool and harden. When the wax is hard she gently pushes the back of the canvas so the wax cracks, then rubs paint into the cracks. She again melts the wax so the painting becomes smooth with the "cracks" visible from under the surface of the wax.

The Painting

Margo Selski uses **symbolism** and her **imagination** to create paintings that tell a story. Just like the children's stories she still admires, the characters in Selski's paintings have desires, fears and lots of adventure. There is usually a message or moral to the story. Each painting is like a chapter in an ongoing narrative for which Selski herself doesn't always know the ending until she paints it.

Her painting, *The Flight I*, is part of a series of visual narratives in which a hen woman is on a quest, looking to accomplish something while facing her worst fears. As a young girl Selski was inspired by a version of the Little Red Hen story about a hen who gets caught by a fox and put into a sack. The hen must use her imagination and creativity to get out of trouble. In this painting, the hen woman has invented a pulley and rope system to "fly" above her fears. Why do you think she included the cityscape with the World Trade Center Twin Towers in her painting?

The Creative Process

As part of her creative process, Selski writes in an **artist journal** where she records ideas for the images and themes in her paintings. Before she began *The Flight I*, Selski's imagination took flight as she wrote the following scenario in her artist journal:

"It is a fact that hens unfortunately cannot fly. My hen woman is in training to learn how to fly. She is practicing flying attached to a pulley system. Because the hen woman is a...nervous character this training procedure is her way of gently training herself to be comfortable seeing a variety of landmarks below. This way, if and when she gets the hang of flying, she will be less likely to have a fear of heights."

Selski has been influenced by the 20th century art movement, **Surrealism**, and 15th - 17th century northern European artists Petrus Christus and Johannes Vermeer. She says she likes certain painting styles because, "They caught my attention." She has learned that if something she sees attracts her there is always a good reason to use it in her art, even if she doesn't discover the reason until later.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Margo Selski is a contemporary artist who lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota. She has a Master of Fine Arts degree in drawing and painting from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. She also has a Master of Arts degree with K-12 certification in Dance, Drama, and Visual Art from the State University of New York at Brockport. She taught elementary art for seven years and believes a good curriculum teaches art for art's sake.

Artist Statement

As a kid I spent hours by myself or with girlfriends playing make-believe with small plastic figurines and animals. Now as an adult, I do most of my imagining inside my head! The Flying Hen Woman is just one of many made-up characters, which I continue to play inside my own imagination. I am a visual storyteller, using imaginary creatures and places to tell stories dealing with my feelings, wants, and desires. I offer to you my imagination, a combination of my thoughts, make-believe characters, and stories from my childhood. It is that place where I can deal with feelings, and desires.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

This painting tells a story by using references to art history and images that have meaning. Let's look closely at these artistic devices as we explore their connections with other subject areas.

Discussion

In the Little Red Hen story, the hen's imagination helps get her out of trouble. Have you ever used your imagination to invent solutions to a problem? What do you think are the desires and fears of the 'hen woman' in the painting? How is she using her imagination to get what she needs and overcome her fears? Resources: *The Little Red Hen* by Paul Galdone, New York: Clarion Books, 1973. *Henny-Penny* by Jane Wattenberg, New York: Scholastic Press, 2000. Traditional folktales of Chicken Little, Henny-Penny, and The Little Red Hen.

Art Connection

Start an artist journal to explore your imagination. Do you have wishes and needs or has something attracted your attention lately and you are wondering why? Are there obstacles or fears you would need to overcome to get what you want? Use words, images, and your imagination to explore ideas and solutions.

Biology

Did you know the ancestor of chickens, the wild red jungle fowl, was able to fly? Today's chickens still have many of the major physical adaptations to flight, however because of selective breeding they have adapted to living on the ground.

Art Connection

Research chickens and record information in your artist journal. What ways have chickens been selectively bred for living on the ground and why? Compare and contrast the physical adaptations of chickens and birds that can fly. Make simple drawings in your artist journal that combine your research and ideas from your imagination.

Physical Science

The chicken woman has used her intelligence and imagination to devise a way to fly by using a pulley system. In *The Flight I*, a cord is attached to two pulleys in the sky, which allows the hen woman to move through space.

Art Connection

Create a pulley system using string and spools or objects from home and your classroom. Use your imagination to create a use for the pulley system. Create a device to help solve a personal problem. Note your ideas in your artist journal.

Art History

Selski borrowed images and ideas from the Surrealist movement and 15 - 16 century northern European artists Petrus Christus and Johannes Vermeer. The Surrealist influence is seen in Selski's dream-like scene and odd combinations of images. Her choice of colors, use of **perspective** (i.e. the checkerboard floor), the ruff collar, and the hen's face shown in three quarter pose demonstrate the northern European influence. Resources: *The Mirror of the Artist* by Craig Harbison, New Jersey: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 1995. *Gardner's Art Through the Ages, Tenth Edition*, edited by Christopher P. Klein, Orlando: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996.

Art Connection

Find examples of Surrealist art and works by Christus and Vermeer. Look at the images, colors, and use of perspective and compare them to *The Flight I*. Investigate images and ideas from these artworks or works of art from other eras in art history that you find interesting. Record in your artist journal.

Math

Northern European artists of the 15th - 17th century used linear perspective to represent three-dimensional space on a flat surface. The squared grid, as seen in the checkerboard floor of *The Flight I*, is a good example of how linear perspective works.

Art Connection

Create a pattern using color and simple geometric shapes. Using one-point linear perspective and a horizon line, create a checkerboard grid "landscape" and apply your pattern to the squares. Resource: *Drawing One Point Perspective* by Harold Olejatz, www.olejatz.com/arted/perspective.

Literature

Selski enjoys using word play and visual puns to add meaning to her artwork. Sometimes she paints images that have double meanings; such as the "comb" one would expect to find on a chicken's head rather than in its claws. Selski has also provided us with a visual pun by combining the image of a "chicken" with a Greek phrase which means "to fly." What might this visual pun have to do with the fear of flying?

Art Connection

Make up a list of compound words that have double meaning in your artist journal.

Examples are: shoe horn, fruit fly, egg head. Write a short story in your artist journal using one of the compound words from your list and illustrate your story idea. Or, create a visual pun like the one mentioned above (hint: "chicken to fly") and write a story using both images and words.

Visual Art Production

Use the information and ideas you have recorded in your artist journal to create an artwork. Follow up your art-making experience with a class discussion about the art-making process and your resulting artwork. Exhibit your artwork for the school, parents, and community and take pride in your accomplishments!



VOCABULARY

ARTIST JOURNAL

A book artists use to explore their ideas, feelings, and record their research. The journal might include drawings, words, quotes, photographs, or found objects.

The journal can be used to pose questions about art and/or life, to work out solutions, and to provide a means to inspire artwork.

IMAGINATION

The ability to form mental images of things or events. The ability to confront and deal with reality by using the creative power of the mind and deal resourcefully with unusual problems.

PERSPECTIVE

The technique of representing three-dimensional objects and depth relationships on a two-dimensional surface.

SURREALISM

A 20th century movement in art and literature that attempts to express the working of the subconscious. Surrealism is characterized by fantastic images with strange juxtapositions used to represent unconscious thoughts and dreams. Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte, and Joan Miro are major Surrealist artists.

SYMBOLISM

The practice of representing things by means of attributing meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships. For example, the color red may suggest passionate emotions, or animals' characteristics can signify a trait such as a bull stock market or a person who is "catty."

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