

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

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Discipline: Visual Art

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Still image from SPARK story, 2006.

## SECTION I - OVERVIEW

### SUBJECT

Tracey Snelling

### 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

Tracey Snelling's miniatures are little tributes to ordinary American settings. Her small-scale renderings of run-down, neglected and overlooked buildings cast a nostalgic look back at a landscape of handmade signs, ad hoc architecture and highway development that is rapidly disappearing. In "New American Landscape," Snelling takes Spark on a tour of her artistic process.

### 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

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to the art of diorama and Bay Area artist Tracey Snelling
- To provide context for the understanding of contemporary artists' interpretations of traditional American landscapes and subjects that are considered banal or "ordinary"
- To inspire students to create their own projects inspired by local culture and history

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Spark story about Tracey Snelling on VHS or DVD, or a computer with Internet access, streaming capability, navigation software, video projector, and speakers. Alternatively, the video can be downloaded for free from iTunes by searching for **KQED-Spark** in the iTunes store. Once downloaded, no internet connection is needed to play the video in your classroom. For help with iTunes, email us at [ArtsEd@KQED.org](mailto:ArtsEd@KQED.org).

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers
- Pencils, pens, and paper

### 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](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education).

## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

Tracey Snelling's miniatures are little tributes to ordinary American settings. Her small-scale renderings of run-down, neglected and overlooked buildings cast a nostalgic look back at a landscape of handmade signs, ad hoc architecture and highway development that is rapidly disappearing. In "New American Landscape," Snelling takes Spark on a tour of her artistic process.

Snelling's multimedia constructions boast a painstaking attention to detail, often combining electric light, still photography, moving images and sound. Drawing on imagery of small towns and desolate road stops, her landscapes eerily evoke the subtle moods of the places they represent. They resemble movie sets abandoned long after the film has been shot, inviting observers to project their own narratives onto them.

Spark follows Snelling as she installs her solo exhibition at the de Saisset Museum at the University of Santa Clara. The highlight of the show, which is entitled "Dark Detour," is a meticulously crafted miniature tenement complex, complete with peeling paint, clotheslines, and a looping soundtrack of television sounds, plumbing and barking dogs, along with moving images in some of the windows. The piece recreates for gallery visitors the voyeuristic experience of dense city living as they share in the sounds and sights that are central to apartment life.

Before experimenting with sculpture, Snelling worked primarily in photography, a medium that retains a central role in her process. Snelling's miniatures often begin with a photograph that she has taken or found. Once she has recreated the photograph's subject, Snelling photographs her miniatures in real-world settings, often creating surreal images depicting complex relationships between varying levels of representation.

Tracey Snelling earned a B.F.A. from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. In addition to her show at the de Saisset Museum, her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at the Mission 17 gallery in San Francisco, the Stephen Cohen Gallery in Los Angeles, and the Museum of Art and History in Santa Cruz as well as in group exhibitions at the Kala Art Institute in Berkeley, Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco and the Center on Contemporary Art in Seattle.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Snelling's work draws on a long history of urban and ex-urban landscape representation in American Art. Her fascination with the abandoned, even endangered landscape of American cities looks back to the work of many 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, including Edward Hopper, Robert Frank, and Robert Smithson, to name just a few.

The work of Edward Hopper documents a side of the urban life rarely represented in the art of his day. Hopper's paintings document late night scenes that subtly express loneliness, alienation, and even illicit activity. His iconic 1942 canvas *Nighthawks* shows a small group at an all-night diner. Sharply contrasting the garish light of the interior with the dark street outside, Hopper isolates the figures, who interact only minimally, underlining their alienation from mainstream American society. There is also something vaguely sinister about the scene, emphasized by the title, which suggests that the figures may be predators of some kind. Hopper identified Hemingway's short story *The Killers* as an influence in his work.



Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942, oil on canvas.  
<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/4/4a/Nighthawks.jpg>

Another artist that uncovered a side of American cities rarely represented in the art of his time was Robert Frank. Frank's iconic 1958 book of photographs *The Americans* featured scenes from across the country that, like Hopper's paintings, captured a sense of loneliness that seemed to permeate every facet of American culture. In one of the photos from *The Americans*, we see a young man, apparently alone in a bar. The bright desert sun shining in through the window into the dingy interior tells us that it's the middle of the day. The linoleum floor tiles are broken by the jukebox, where he stands, deciding what to play. Rather than capture the famous Vegas Strip that, by the 1950s, was already a major tourist destination, Frank has captured a place on the edge of town, in disrepair, destined to disappear.



Robert Frank, *Bar – Las Vegas, Nevada*, 1958  
[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/\\_CKzN7TT8hV0/TK5foNxNAMI/AAAAAAFTI/ICzWfhjH6oM/s1600/RobertFrank\\_Bar\\_LasVegas\\_Nevada.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_CKzN7TT8hV0/TK5foNxNAMI/AAAAAAFTI/ICzWfhjH6oM/s1600/RobertFrank_Bar_LasVegas_Nevada.jpg)

Much of the work of Robert Smithson also deals with overlooked American landscapes. Smithson grew up in New Jersey in the 1940s, and through he worked in New York, much of his art looks back to his roots. In his 1967 photo-essay, *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic*, Smithson leaves the hustle and bustle of New York, a world center of art and culture, to go to the periphery, the industrial and suburban landscape of Passaic, New Jersey, Smithson's home town. Smithson leads the reader on a tour of the "monuments" of New Jersey – abandoned industrial sites, parking lots, crumbling residential areas, and polluted rivers. In doing so, Smithson brings these literally marginal landscapes into the center of the art world.

## RESOURCES – TEXTS

Frank, Robert and Sarah Greenough. *Looking In: Robert Frank's The Americans – Expanded Edition*, National Gallery of Art, 2009.

Reynolds, Ann. *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*, MIT Press, 2004.

Smithson, Robert. Ed. Jack Flam. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, University of California Press, 1996.

Snelling, Tracey. *The Last Picture Show*, Stephen Cohan Gallery, 2004

Troyen, Carol, et al. *Edward Hopper*, MFA Publications, 2007

Wells, Walter. *Silent Theater: The Work of Edward Hopper*, Phaidon Press, 2007.

## RESOURCES – WEB SITES

Tracey Snelling's website:  
<http://traceysnelling.com/home.html>

Interview with Tracey Snelling on Hi Fructose:  
<http://hifructose.com/the-blog/1205-an-interview-with-tracey-snelling.html>

Wikipedia entry on Edward Hopper  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Hopper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Hopper)

Article about Robert Frank's work in American Suburb X  
<http://www.americansuburbx.com/2009/10/theory-photographer-in-beat-hipster.html>

Wikipedia about Robert Frank's *Americans*  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Americans\\_%28photography%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Americans_%28photography%29)

Official Robert Smithson website, maintained by James Cohan Gallery:  
<http://robertsmithson.com/>

Wikipedia entry about Robert Smithson:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Smithson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Smithson)

## VIDEO RESOURCES

Tracy Snelling – A 10 year Retrospective at Rena Branston Gallery. TRT: 4:19

[http://www.renabranstengallery.com/Snelling\\_Video\\_2010.html](http://www.renabranstengallery.com/Snelling_Video_2010.html)

## KQED VIDEO RESOURCES

For compare and contrast purposes, introduce students to other artists and exhibitions featured on KQED's Arts Programs Spark and Gallery Crawl.

[The Art of Diorama](#) on Gallery Crawl

[Bill Owens](#) on Spark

[Katherine Westerhout](#) on Spark

[Henry Wessel](#) on Spark

[Todd Hido](#) on Spark

## BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

Rena Bransten Gallery  
77 Geary Street (between Kearny and Grant Streets)  
San Francisco, CA 94108  
Gallery Hours:  
Tuesday through Friday: 10:30am to 5:30pm  
Saturday: 11:00am to 5:00pm  
PH: (415) 982-3292

## SECTION III – VOCABULARY

### DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND WORDS AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

**Desolate**

Isolated, bleak, deserted

**Encapsulate**

Sums up, captures

**Installation Art**

The combining of elements into a singular artwork that is located specifically in one place; an artwork that only exists in the place in which it was/is installed, and is not able to be relocated like a painting or a print.

**Medium**

Particular material or form used to create a work of art.

**Miniature**

Small or minute version of

**Mixed media**

Artwork in which more than one type of art material is used, for example a collage or work on canvas that combines paint, ink, photography, paper etc

**Narratives**

Stories, sequence of events

**Neglected**

Deserted, disused, uncared for

**Nostalgia**

Reminiscence or look back on, wistful

**Outskirts**

Edge of, border, fringes, environs

**Overlooked**

Ignored or disregarded

**Reclaim**

Repossess or recover

**Replica**

Copy, imitation, reproduction

**Seedy**

Squalid or sordid

**Sturdy**

Strong, powerful, well-built

**Surreal**

Derives from **Surrealism**, an early 20th-century movement in art and literature that sought to represent the subconscious mind by creating fantastic imagery, juxtaposing contradictory ideas and images, and exploring ways to free the imagination

**Tenement**

Apartment house, often public housing associated with crowded conditions

**Tribute**

Esteem, praise or acknowledge

**Universal**

Worldwide, common

**Voyeur**

Somebody who gains pleasure from watching secretly and maybe fascinated by watching sordid or distressing events or scenes

## SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINT

#### Finding the Story - Anyplace

Tracey Snelling's miniatures capture stories set in ordinary, forgotten American settings, on the outskirts of towns - anyplace. Her small-scale buildings offer a landscape of handmade signs, ad hoc architecture and highway development.

Play the **SPARK** story and freeze the frame on one or two of the images of her miniatures. In addition, stream the slideshow from the *Juxtapoz Magazine* website of Tracey Snelling's installations at the Rena Bransten Gallery, <http://origin.juxtapoz.com/tracey-snelling>. Ask students to look carefully at each image.

Assemble students in small groups and ask each group to select one image of a Tracey Snelling miniature to work with. Distribute several large sheets of paper. Starting with sheets of paper entitled *Setting*, explain that the setting is where and when the story takes place. Ask students to look carefully at how the artwork constructs a sense of place and encourage them to be very precise as they analyze the details in the artwork that convey the setting.

Move on to *Mood* and repeat the exercise. What do students feel as they peer into this world? What creates that feeling? For example what might make a place look and feel seedy? And what kinds of people might live here? What kinds of lives do they lead? Are there lights, voices or dogs barking? Is there a breeze or a specific smell? Does anyone live here?

Guide students to formulate their own questions as they look for clues. What suggests or prompts an answer to these questions? Try to encourage active viewing by prompting students to generate as many questions as possible.

Finally distribute sheets of paper and have the groups entitle this sheet *Story*. Ask each group to weave a narrative about the people or the building(s) in the installation. Invite each group to share their stories and explain in detail on what they based their ideas.

#### SPARKLER

\*Using a digital camera or cell phone camera, ask students to take a photograph of a place in their town, city or neighborhood that particularly speaks to them. They should be prepared to talk about their image in class and explain its appeal. It may be a place that evokes imaginings even though they know very little about it. Why is it appealing?

Suggest they free-write about their photograph summarizing its appeal, and use this written piece as a basis for their mini-presentation in class.



Tracey Snelling: Ten Year Retrospective  
Rena Bransten Gallery, December 2010 - January 2011 from <http://traceysnelling.com/home.html>

#### Signs of the Times

Tracey Snelling has a fondness for large, bold, neon signs above motels, gas stations, hotels, Taquerias, stores and mini-marts. They tend to be loud and lurid in color, playful and nostalgic, suggesting forgotten outposts from the sixties or seventies.



Tracey Snelling, installation detail  
 Rena Bransten Gallery, 2011  
 Photo courtesy Evan Pricco/Juxtapoz Magazine  
<http://origin.juxtapoz.com/tracey-snelling>

Send students out into their neighborhood to photograph signs in the spirit of Tracey Snelling. They can use their cell phone cameras or digital cameras – whatever is at hand.

If there is access to a color printer, ask students to upload the images onto a computer and to print out two of their favorite images. Assemble the photos as a collective collage on the classroom wall. If printing is too costly, create a slideshow of the images using [Flickr](#) or a photography program such as Picasa and project the slideshow onto a wall in the classroom for everyone to enjoy.

Alternatively or in addition, encourage students to create their own signs using art materials such as paint markers in brilliant and fluorescent shades or bold inks or crayons. If using paint markers, students will need to shake the pen for at least 30 seconds, uncap it and then press the nib gently on a thick piece of scrap paper. Using paint markers is more like drawing than painting, so markers are appropriate for fine details and lettering work.

Ask students to bring in a medium-sized, flat piece of smooth poster board, wood, metal or another plaque base for signage. Supply bases if suitable materials are available.

Encourage students to be bold and produce elaborate or dramatic signs with strong lettering, swirls, motifs, shapes and creative illustrations. They will also need to use paint markers to create interesting borders. When they are ready, suggest

students hang their signs collectively on the wall in the classroom.

Conclude the lesson by talking about signage - what do signs convey about a locality? Return to Tracey Snelling and compare students' photographs or artwork with the signs she constructed from memory.

### Who is Looking at Whom – Why?

Photography has been central to voyeuristic looking and the pervasive use of the camera, whether concealed or in the open, is part of contemporary culture.



Tracey Snelling, installation detail  
 Rena Bransten Gallery, 2011  
 Photo courtesy Evan Pricco/Juxtapoz Magazine  
<http://origin.juxtapoz.com/tracey-snelling>

Tracey Snelling invites this kind of observation. The doors are left open, the television is on and the lights are flickering. She wants us to peep through the windows and see what is going on, “to pull the viewers into experiencing life that they wouldn’t necessarily have access to in another space. The hope is that through this experience there is understanding.” From *Small is Beautiful: Tracey Snelling*, by Jiae Kim, May, 2010 at <http://www.thememagazine.com/stories/small-is-beautiful-tracey-snelling/>

- What elements in Tracey Snelling’s work invite understanding? Does she achieve this objective?
- Does she bring people together as the title of her piece *We Are One* suggests? (<http://www.thememagazine.com/stories/small-is-beautiful-tracey-snelling/>)
- Does her mode of inviting observation suggest darker narratives?

- Is her work optimistic and hopeful or dark and cynical – or neither?

### SPARKLER

\* Compare Tracey Snelling’s work to artists exhibiting at SFMOMA in the exhibit entitled: Exposed Voyeurism, Surveillance, and the Camera since 1870 at <http://www.sfmoma.org/exhibitions/408>.

How are these images similar and how are they different in terms of how we look or observe others and why?

#### RELATED STANDARDS -VISUAL ARTS

Grade 8

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

1.1 Use artistic terms when describing the intent and content of works of art.

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

4.3 Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.

4.4 Develop and apply a set of criteria as individuals or in groups to assess and critique works of art.

4.5 Present a reasoned argument about the artistic value of a work of art and respond to the arguments put forward by others within a classroom setting.

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.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

4.1 Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the interpretation of the meaning or message in a work of art.

#### RELATED STANDARDS - VISUAL ARTS

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.

1.0 Artistic Perception

6 Describe the use of the elements of art to express mood in one or more of their works of art.

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/standards/vpa>.