

# San Jose Museum of Art

## Museum Visit Lesson Plan for Teachers

**Exhibition:** Nathan Oliveira

### **About the Exhibition:**

Nathan Oliveira is the most comprehensive retrospective to date of Oliveira's paintings, monoprints, drawings, watercolors, and sculpture. Known primarily as a painter and master printmaker, Oliveira has been active in the Bay Area for more than 40 years, and is regarded by many as a key figure in American art. He gained national recognition in the late 1950s as part of the young generation of postwar California figurative painters: Elmer Bischoff, Richard Diebenkorn, and David Park. Like his peers, Oliveira explored the human form by means of gestural painting, but his inclination was towards a darker, more brooding mood that calls to mind the spectral, wasteland figures of Giacometti. Comprising 45 paintings, 35 prints, and five sculptures, the exhibition will survey the range of his career, with special emphasis on his figurative period.

### **Objectives:**

- o Students will learn that Nathan Oliveira works in a variety of art media including oil on canvas, watercolor, sculpture, and printmaking.
- o Students will learn that Oliveira's expressionistic style was influenced by the European Expressionists of the 1940's and 1950's.
- o Students will learn that Oliveira's art is personal and expressive of his emotions.
- o Students will learn that this exhibition is divided into four themes:

**The Solitary Figure:** Figurative works that represent human forms in isolated states.

**Sites:** Inspired by pre-Columbian artifacts and his own visual fantasy, these works are diffused and hazy landscapes that elicit a sense of mystery.

**Windhovers:** As Oliveira's homage to nature, these portraits of birds were inspired by the kestrels, hawks and falcons he saw on his walks in the Stanford foothills.

**Stelae:** Works that recall the monolithic structures of ancient cultures like Egypt and New Guinea.

### **Vocabulary:**

**expressionistic** - An adjective used to describe artwork from any historical era that emphasizes emotion.

**figurative** - Realistic or at least recognizable painting or sculpture of a human subject, landscape, or inanimate object, although also sometimes used to refer to art that concentrates specifically on the human form.

### **Interdisciplinary Connections:**

**Language and Studio Arts:** The name for the Windhover series was inspired by a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins. This poem describes the beauty of a falcon's ability to fly and soar through the sky. Write a poem about your favorite animal or something you have seen in nature. Describe how the animal moves or where it lives. After you have finished your poem, draw or paint about what you wrote.

**Environmental Studies:** Oliveira painted birds he came in contact with while living and working at Stanford. Research kestrels and other wildlife common in the Bay Area. Are any of them endangered species?

Archaeology and Social Studies:

Part 1: The Site pieces, just as their name implies, suggest archaeological digs. What is archaeology and how does it help scientists learn about human kind's past?

Part 2: More specifically research Egyptian obelisks, or New Guinea tree carvings, or Chinese Han Dynasty tomb stelae or Stonehenge. For what purpose were they created and what did they reveal about the lives and lifestyles of ancient peoples? Can you compare these structures to anything you see in today's world?

**Art History** (for high school use)

Research the art of German expressionist Max Beckmann, who was one of Nathan Oliveira's teachers, or the art of Alberto Giacometti. Do you recognize their influence on Oliveira's works of art? What aspects of Beckmann/Giacometti's style did Oliveira choose NOT to incorporate into his work?