



Framing the Landscape

Exploring ideas from Nancy Holt's Sun Tunnels

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Educator Resources and Lesson Plans

Spring 2016

Sun Tunnels, Nancy Holt



Nancy Holt is most widely known for her large-scale artwork *Sun Tunnels* (located in Lucin, UT); however, she has created works in public places all over the world. The artist's interest in light, perspective, time, and space certainly influenced her photographs, films, sculpture, and installation art, but perhaps it is most magnificently illustrated in her Land art. Land art emerged in the 1960s, coinciding with a growing ecology movement

in the United States, which asked people to become more aware of the impact they can have on the natural environment. Land art changed the way people thought of art; not only did it take art out of the gallery and museum, but it also took art out of the market. Many Land art sites are located in remote, uninhabited regions. We are lucky that such an influential work of art is within a day's drive from the UMFA.

Sun Tunnels consists of four massive concrete tunnels, each eighteen feet long and nine feet in diameter, laid out in the desert in an open X configuration. On the solstices, the tunnels frame the sun as it passes the horizon at sunrise and sunset. In the top of each tunnel, Holt drilled small holes to form the constellations of Draco, Perseus, Columba, and Capricorn. These holes, and the tunnels themselves, act as frames or lenses through which the visitor can view the surrounding sky and landscape of the Great Basin Desert.

Nancy Holt, American (1938-2014)

Sun Tunnels, 1976

Reinforced concrete tunnels

Each tunnel: 9' diameter, 18' long

Located in West Desert, Utah, US

image courtesy of the Center for Land

Use Interpretation

Another very important artwork, *Spiral Jetty*, is located on the north shore of Great Salt Lake at Rozel Point. It is maybe a better-known example of the genre and probably more-often visited, because its location is not quite as remote as *Sun Tunnels*. *Spiral Jetty* creator Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt were married until Smithson's untimely death in 1973, around the time Holt started working on *Sun Tunnels*.

Framing the Landscape: Exploring ideas from Nancy Holt's Sun Tunnels

Virginia Catherall

Objectives

Using *Sun Tunnels* as inspiration, students will:

- Students will learn about Land art by looking at images of *Sun Tunnels*.
- Students will understand how *Sun Tunnels* helps mediate an experience in the landscape through focused looking.
- Students will create their own way of looking at constellations that are used in *Sun Tunnels*.
- Students will focus a composition on a sun print.

Intended Audiences/Grade Levels Grades 4-6 but can be altered for younger or older

State Core Links (see State Core Links at the end of this lesson plan)

Duration 1 hour

Materials

Images of *Sun Tunnels*

Constellation viewers:

- Cardboard tubes
- Paper to decorate outside of tube
- Markers
- Glue sticks
- Constellation templates for Draco, Capricorn, Columba, and Perseus (see additional resources at the end of the lesson)
- Rubber bands
- Small-hole paper punches

Sun Prints:

- Light sensitive papers such as sun prints or photograms
- Light masks for the paper with a circle cut out
- Access to natural material for the photograms
- Water to wash the photogram papers

Vocabulary/Key Terms

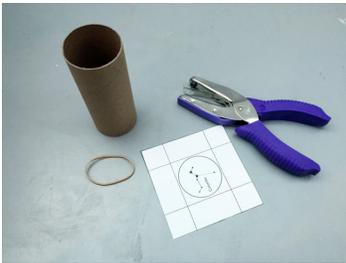
- Constellation** a group of stars forming a pattern that is named after its apparent form or identified with a mythological figure.
- Compose** to arrange something artistically
- Focus** a center of activity or interest
- Land art** a style of art that uses land or is made on the land
- Perspective** drawing a scene so that objects in it seem to have depth and distance

Activity

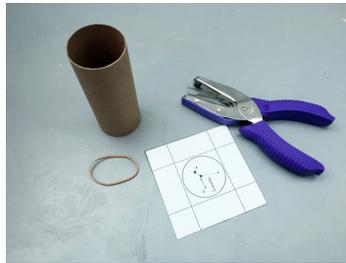
Create a Constellation Viewer

Show the students an image of Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* and discuss how and why she made this work of art. Questions to ask: What is Land art? Why is it in such a remote location? Why is the art called *Sun Tunnels*? What do you see when you look through the tunnels (show multiple viewpoint images of the work of art)? Why would Holt drill holes in the shape of constellations on the side of the tunnels? How do you think the artwork would look if you were standing right next to it instead of looking at a picture? How does the landscape change when you see it through the tunnel? Remember that *Sun Tunnels* is all about experiencing the artwork by walking around it and looking through the tunnels and pictures cannot capture the experience.

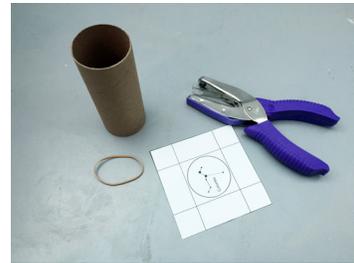
The four constellations that Holt chose to drill into the tunnels are Capricorn, Columba, Perseus, and Draco. A constellation is a group of stars forming a recognizable pattern that is traditionally named after its apparent form or identified with a mythological figure. The Constellation Viewer activity involves a tunnel that views one of these constellations at the end.



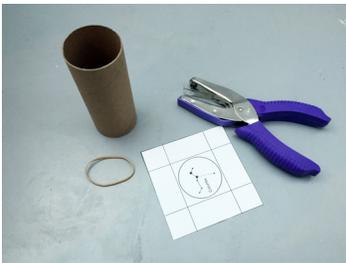
First gather all supplies



Fold on dotted lines



to make a square



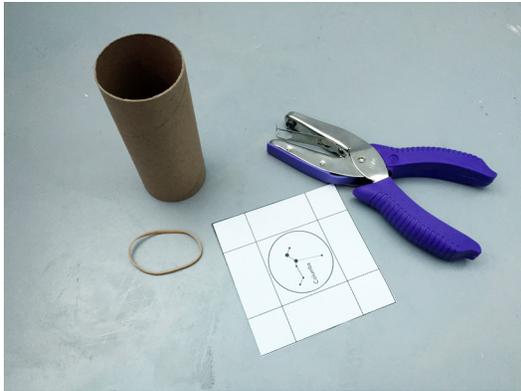
Punch the stars



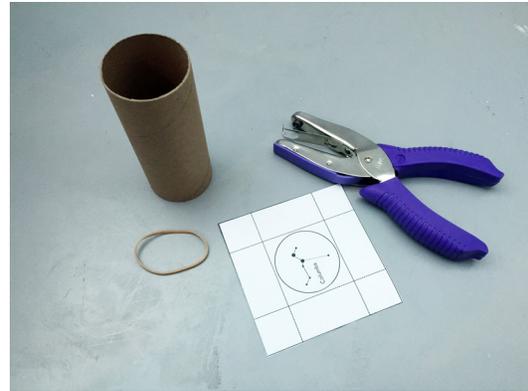
Unfold the paper



secure with a rubber band



Look inside to see the constellation



Decorate the outside of the viewer

Now that they know what the constellation looks like, challenge the students to look for these constellations at night in the sky. What other constellations can they find? Look up some names and locations in an astronomy book.

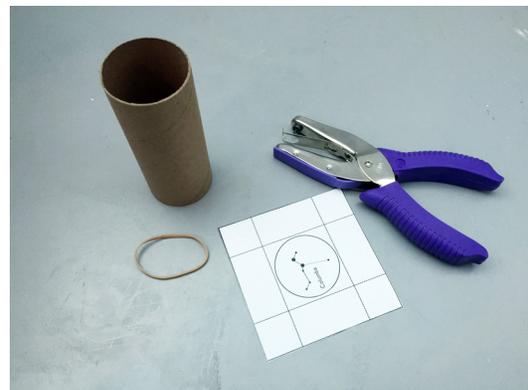
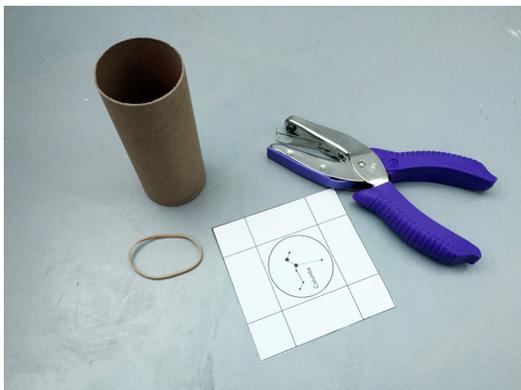
Alternate: The constellations that Americans name come from the Ancient Greeks. Look up what other cultures have called these same constellations of stars. Why do different cultures name the constellations differently?

Create a sun print

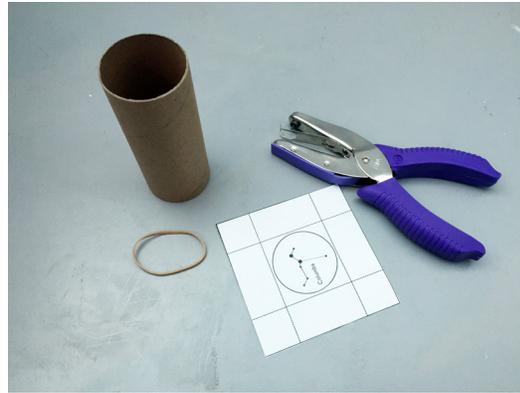
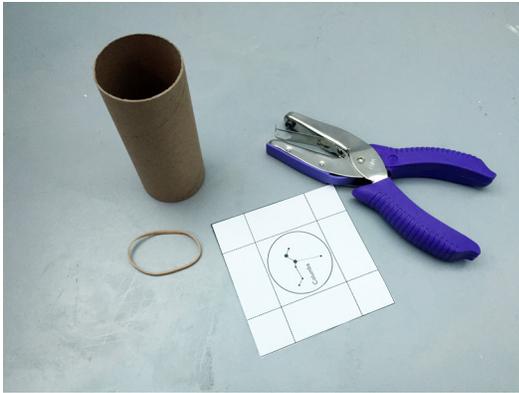
Explain to the students that we will play with focusing a composition just like Nancy Holt did with *Sun Tunnels*.

First go outside to find natural material the students would like to put on a sun print to “photograph” the shadows of the objects. Think about how their composition will work with certain material. Leaves can be soft edged or jagged, pinecones will have many prickly lines, grass can make sweeping lines. The students should gather the material they want to put on their photogram.

Use a light sensitive paper like a sun print or photogram, but before the students pull out the paper to begin exposing it, they should arrange their composition on a piece of regular paper because in bright sunlight, there is not much time to arrange before the paper is exposed.



Pull out the paper and quickly compose the natural material on the photogram. Allow it to be exposed to sunlight. When it is done, wash the paper quickly in a bucket of water to wash off the light sensitive chemicals. Allow the paper to dry.



The students will now make a second photogram, this time composing their material within a circle. Place a piece of cardboard “mask” with a circle cut out over the paper and the student will arrange within the circle. Expose the paper the same way as the unmasked photogram and then wash clean.

Compare the two compositions. How are they different? What did students do differently with the second composition and why? How did the focused circle change what they decided to do?

Method(s) for Assessment

Teacher assessment: Did the students understand that constellations are a constructed symbol to help make meaning of the world? Was there questioning, discussion, and interaction happening while they were making their art?

Peer to peer presentation: Have students explain to peers why they chose the composition for their sun print. How did the limited window affect how they chose to arrange the natural material?

State Core Links

Fine Arts

*Standard 1 (Making):*The student will explore and refine the application of media, techniques, and artistic processes.

Objective 1 Explore a variety of art materials while learning new techniques and processes.

*Standard 2 (Perceiving):*The student will analyze, reflect on, and apply the structures of art.

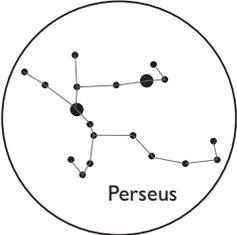
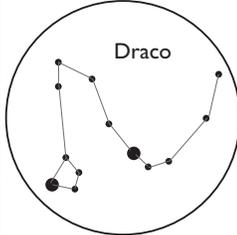
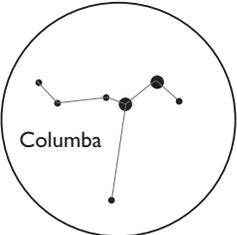
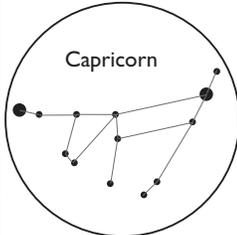
Objective 1 Analyze and reflect on works of art by their elements and principles.

Objective 2 Create works of art using the elements and principles.

Additional Resources

- Sun Tunnels information from UMFA http://umfa.utah.edu/suntunnels_selfguide
- Center for Land Use Interpretation <http://clui.org/ludb/site/sun-tunnels>
- Utah.com <http://utah.com/wendover/sun-tunnels>

Constellation Templates

	 <p>Perseus</p>			 <p>Draco</p>	
	 <p>Columba</p>			 <p>Capricorn</p>	