

# ART IS FUNDAMENTAL

## Mendel Art Gallery School Hands-on Tours 2006–2007

### Activity Sheet

The **SCHOOL HANDS-ON TOURS** poster features great artwork for classroom use!  
Here are some activity ideas:

#### **ROLAND KEEVIL** (1884–1963)

was born in England and moved to Saskatchewan in 1906. He became a full-time painter in Saskatoon after he retired from a career in real estate.

A self-taught artist, he is known for his jewel-like paintings of western landscapes, urban gardens, and the Bessborough Hotel.

Roland Keevil, THE BESSBOROUGH AT DAWN, 1954  
Oil on canvas board  
Mendel Art Gallery Permanent Collection



#### **Activity #1:** Building Depth in a Painting

Keevil's method of composing a painting involved a type of grid that holds the highly detailed parts in place. He would first place a horizon line, and then construct the painting in layers either from this line or from the ground up. In *THE BESSBOROUGH AT DAWN*, observe how the river and the opposite shore as well as the hotel appear piled into space. This has the effect of flattening out the image. Keevil doesn't achieve deep space in his painting by modelling the forms realistically using light and dark, but instead overlaps the shapes. Notice the big trees in the foreground overlapping the vista beyond. While the shadows seem somewhat arbitrary, they do help to create some sense of depth, along with advancing and receding colours. He applies his paint colours in a direct manner, placing bright, unmodulated colours side by side.

Ask students to construct a landscape practicing Keevil's approach of layering and overlapping shapes. They may choose to start from the horizon line, or from the ground up. Stacking elements in this manner is like building a wall with bricks. Oil pastels are bright and fun to use for this exercise. After applying pastels to the paper, they can be rubbed with

fingers to achieve soft blending. Colours can be easily layered. Scratching through oil pastel with a fingernail or a twig can make fine lines—the colour underneath will peek through.

### **Activity #2: My Paradise**

Keevil loved gardening, and saw Saskatoon as a kind of exaggerated garden city—a paradise. Ask students to choose a building they know, perhaps their school, and depict it in a garden paradise by exaggerating the greenery around it. How does this change the way the building is perceived?

### **Activity #3: Using Viewfinders**

Sometimes the thought of drawing or painting a large landscape or urbanscape can seem overwhelming. If students hold up a “viewfinder” and peer through it, they can isolate the more interesting parts of the landscape. A viewfinder can be made by cutting a window into a small piece of paper, or by peering through an empty slide holder, a cardboard tube, or anything with a small opening. Practice holding it at different distances from the face, blocking out more or less of the scene.

Keevil made some quick sketches of scenes while he viewed them, and upon his return to his kitchen studio, relied heavily on his memories to complete his paintings. While students use the viewfinders outdoors, ask them to make quick sketches for more detailed work indoors. How does memory fill in the gaps, enhance a scene, and alter the original experience?

### **Activity #4: The Space Between Objects**

One way to incorporate trees into a scene is to start with the background and add the trees on top of it. A more interesting way to start is to make the big trees in the foreground, and then fill in the background elements between the trees. This way, the space between the objects (negative space) becomes as interesting as the objects themselves. The sky is another important negative space. Skies create mood and reflect weather conditions and time of day.

Ask students to draw any scene by first sketching the main parts with pencil, then adding colour with their choice of media. Pay attention to the negative space between the leaves, branches, trees, and buildings. Also notice the subtle, visual changes in the sky. If the picture includes water, be sure to reflect the clouds on its surface. Generally, light colours advance and dark colours recede. Highlights and shadows can create interest and add depth. Keevil adds many small brush marks to all of his shapes. See if the students can think of different ways to create texture by marking the surfaces of their shapes.