

CAROLINE KENT

What the stars can't tell us Educator Handout: Grades 7-12

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

What the stars can't tell us presents paintings and sculptures by Chicago-based artist and Illinois State University alumna (and former track athlete) [Caroline Kent](#). This exhibition encompasses two galleries: one featuring large-scale paintings created from 2015 through 2021, and another premiering a site-responsive installation conceived in relationship to the artist's simultaneous solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Derived from the title of one of Kent's paintings, the exhibition title references humanity's long-term reliance on the cosmos for navigation and timekeeping, while addressing how much of the universe remains invisible and unknown. It also alludes to the limitations that exist in conflict with our desire to know anything fully.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Caroline Kent received her M.F.A. from University of Minnesota and her B.S. from Illinois State University. The artist is represented by PATRON Gallery, Chicago; Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles; and Casey Kaplan, New York. Kent lives and works in Chicago. Her work is included in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; DePaul Art Museum, Chicago; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, among others. Her work has been exhibited at Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; California African American Museum, Los Angeles; and The Flag Art Foundation, New York, among others.

subjective frame

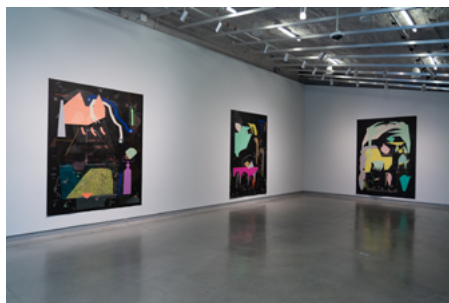
- Which [artwork](#) stands out most to you and why? Based on what you see, what do you think the work is about?
- What do you associate with the materials, shapes, colors, and objects in the exhibition?
- How does Kent's work make you feel? What about the work makes you feel this way?

cultural frame

- What themes can you find throughout the exhibition?
- How do the titles impact your understanding of the work?
- Identify historical, social, and cultural references you recognize within Kent's work and describe what you see that led you to make these connections.
- Consider ways in which your communication changes based on where you are, who you are with, and the context of the interaction. Knowing that Kent's practice is informed largely by the situational nature of communication, can you find references to this in her work?
- Research abstract art [movements](#) related to Kent's work, such as [Constructivism](#), [Hard-Edge Painting](#), and [Suprematism](#). Discuss ways Kent's work both references and diverges from theories and practices within these movements.
- What does Kent's work tell you about her as a person? As an artist?

structural frame

- Analyze the arrangement of artworks and objects throughout the exhibition. Why do you think the artist and curator chose to arrange the exhibition in this way? What relationships can you find between works in each gallery space?
- Consider the colors, variety of materials, the placement of objects, and the way works throughout the exhibition are displayed. How do these choices contribute to the meaning of the work?
- Kent recently began creating site-responsive installations based on the location of an exhibition. How did University Galleries' space inspire/influence some of Kent's creative decisions? What do you see that makes you say that?
- The large-scale paintings presented in this exhibition were created between 2015 and 2021. Analyze the similarities and differences between them and describe ways in which Kent's painting evolved during those 5 years.



Caroline Kent: *What the stars can't tell us*. Installation view at University Galleries of Illinois State University, 2021.

VOCABULARY

AMBIGUOUS

unclear or open to interpretation

CONTEMPORARY

something that belongs to the present or current time

CONTEXT

the situation in which something happens

FORMAL QUALITIES

refers to elements and principles of design such as line, shape, color, balance, movement, contrast, and unity

INSTALLATION

often large-scale mixed-media works created to fit a specific space

INTUITIVE

reacting based on what comes naturally in the moment

LEGEND

a key used to read symbols on maps, images, and objects

MOTIF

repeating shapes, images, designs, or patterns

SUBJECT MATTER

what is being depicted in an image or artwork

SUBJECTIVE

something that is open to interpretation; up to the viewer to decide

TRANSLATION

processing information through a different language, form, or system

THEME

recurring ideas, materials, or subject matter

EVENTS

- August 11 through December 14: Virtual and in-person curator-led exhibition tours are available for classes, community groups, and individuals by appointment. Contact galleries@IllinoisState.edu or (309) 438-5487 to schedule.
- August 11 through December 16: A painting by the late artist Jacqueline Richards, Caroline Kent's painting professor when she was a student at Illinois State University, will be on view at University Galleries in our *Spotlight on the Permanent Collection*.
- September (date and time to be announced): Artist lecture by Caroline Kent. Free and no reservations required.
- September 18, October 2, and November 13 from noon to 2:00 p.m.: Family art-making workshops related to Caroline Kent's exhibition. Materials and instruction provided by University Galleries' staff. Free and no reservations required.
- October 15: Gallery walk with alumna Caroline Kent. Meet the artist and hear her discuss works in the current exhibition. This event is scheduled in conjunction with Illinois State University's [Homecoming Week](#). Free and no reservations required.
- Educator resources, activities for children and youth, art lesson videos, and an exhibition tour video will be available on the exhibition [web page](#).

Additional events will be announced via University Galleries' [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#) accounts. Sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact galleries@IllinoisState.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to this exhibition.

ART-MAKING ACTIVITIES

- To develop her visual language, Kent would create paintings in quick succession and analyze them for repeating shapes, patterns, and marks. Inspired by this process, challenge students to create 20 intuitive drawings or paintings in one class session. Encourage students not to overthink the process and to let the marks flow freely. Prompt students to analyze their collection for recurring marks and motifs. Ask students to share what patterns emerged and what they learned about their own visual language and mark-making tendencies through this practice.
- Kent's practice is largely informed by both verbal and non-verbal communication methods. As a class, look for symbols and shapes that recur throughout Kent's [work](#). Analyze where and how they are placed within each piece, such as what they are next to or overlapping, the colors or patterns within or around them, and their size/scale. Imagine what each element might represent if they were words, sounds, or movements. Select two of Kent's artworks that use similar shapes in different ways. Prompt students to create a legend based on the shapes, colors, and marks. Then, encourage students to use their legend to decipher the two works through writing, talking, or acting out their interpretations. Ask students to discuss how their analyses were similar to or different from one another's.
- Translation is an underlying theme across Kent's work. Instead of focusing on what is lost through this process, Kent is more interested in what is gained. Analyze and discuss ways the artist has translated her own visual language through a variety of mediums, techniques, and installation processes. In what ways do these translations provide the viewer with a broader and more expansive experience than if they were in a single form or artwork? Direct students to create a composition with various shapes using a medium of their choice. Then, prompt students to create 3 other artworks using the same shapes but different mediums. Discuss ways this process expanded the possibilities and communicative potential of the original artwork.
- Consider the title of the exhibition, [What the stars can't tell us](#). Look for references to the cosmos and other navigational guides in Kent's large-scale paintings. Ask students to describe what they see that prompted their associations. When viewing [A slow turning of events](#), ask students to consider how the title informs their understanding of the work. What events do they think are being depicted? How do the shapes, colors, and composition inform their interpretations? Then, prompt students to create an artwork that maps a sequence of events—during or before their existence, or from an imagined future—using symbols that stand for people, places, and things in the narrative.
- As a class, listen to the Bad at Sports [interview](#) with Caroline Kent where she discusses work in the exhibition *LatinXAmerican* at the DePaul Art Museum, and [read](#) about her work as the impetus for performances by other creatives. Discuss how this information further contextualizes and builds upon the themes of communication and translation presented across Kent's practice. View this [drawing](#) of Kent's, exhibited in *LatinXAmerican* and engage students in acting out the ambiguous scenarios described in it. Invite students to individually create a drawing, painting, or sculpture with a title based on a vague interaction, like the descriptions in Kent's drawing. Then, collaboratively interpret one another's work through dance or performance.