

CAROLINE KENT

What the stars can't tell us Educator Handout: Grades K-6

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

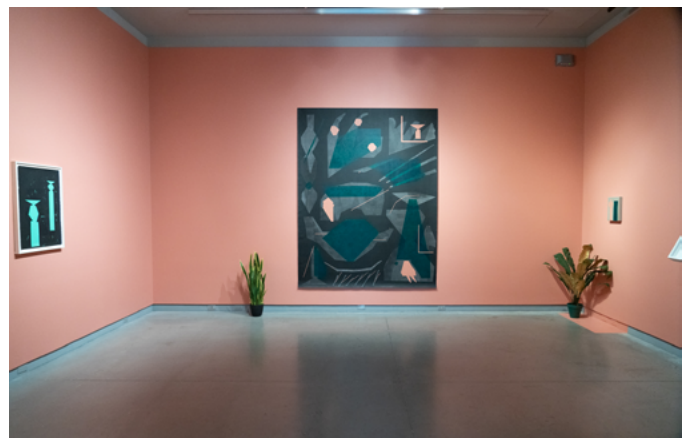
- Which [artwork](#) stands out most to you and why? Based on what you see, what do you think the work is about?
- What places and spaces does Kent's work remind you of and why? Consider the materials, the scale of the work, and the arrangement of objects and images you see throughout the exhibition.
- How does Kent's work make you feel? What about the work makes you feel this way?

structural frame

- Analyze the formal elements within Kent's work. Look for repeated shapes, colors, and motifs and describe how they are used in different ways throughout the exhibition.
- Why do you think Kent uses black for the background in her [paintings](#)? How does this context affect how the shapes, lines, and colors interact with one another and how you "read" the work?
- Analyze Kent's use of 2D and 3D elements throughout the exhibition. Describe how they are arranged and how they interact with one another. Why do you think Kent chose to arrange them in this way? What do you think she wanted to communicate to the viewer? What do you see that makes you think this?

cultural frame

- How do the titles impact your understanding of the work?
- Much of Kent's work is influenced by ways humans interact and communicate with one another. Search for and describe references you see to methods of communication in her work.
- What does Kent's work tell you about her as a person? As an artist?



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

COMPOSITION

arrangement of visual elements

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

LEGEND

a key to reading symbols on maps, images, or 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

SYMBOL

an image or object that stands for an idea or a feeling such as a peace sign or a red light

THEME

recurring ideas, materials, or subject matter

TRANSLATION

processing information through a different language, form, or system

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 gallery@IllinoisState.edu or (309) 438-5487 to schedule.
- 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 gallery@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

- As a class, analyze one of Kent's [paintings](#). Ask students to imagine what the painting would sound like or say if each shape, color, and mark represented a sound, word, or action. Collaboratively design a legend for each color, shape, and mark in the painting. Then, encourage students to act out what the painting is saying or describing. Consider having students create their own painting using shapes, colors, and marks that are meaningful to them and analyze one another's work as they did with Kent's.
- Analyze the shapes, colors, and marks in Kent's [paintings](#) and discuss how they interact with the black background. Ask students to imagine how a white background would alter the work and their interpretations of it. Provide students with one white and one black piece of paper, along with a variety of colored construction paper. Instruct students to cut out shapes from the construction paper and create two identical compositions on their black and white pieces of paper. Then, engage students in comparing their two works. How does the background alter the feeling of the work? Do the colors stand out more on one background than the other? Which background do they prefer and why?
- As a class, explore the [exhibition](#) in search of themes present in Kent's work. Then, share that communication and translation are essential themes Kent examines through her practice. After time spent in Romania while in the [Peace Corps](#)—where she learned to navigate a language that was not her own—Kent reflected on the ways in which humans communicate, including understandings and misunderstandings that occur through these interactions. As a class, analyze and attempt to translate Kent's use of symbols, shapes, and colors as a means of visual communication, like a written language. Ask students to share if there was a time they struggled to communicate through written or spoken language and if they found alternative ways to convey the information. Discuss the benefits and limitations of different forms of communication. Then, prompt students to individually or collaboratively design a language and create a painting or collage using this language. Encourage students to translate one another's work through writing, talking, and acting out their interpretations. Ask students to share what methods were easiest for them to communicate their understanding of their classmates' work and why.
- Kent describes the ambiguous shapes in her work as being on the cusp of something recognizable or on the verge of becoming something else. As a class, look for shapes that look like something familiar and discuss what the shapes could have been or what they might be becoming. Direct students to work in small groups to brainstorm a list of items or objects. Then, prompt them to individually select two things from their list and design a shape that combines both in a way that neither are recognizable; as if one is morphing into the other. Consider aligning this project with a unit on metamorphosis.
- 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. Look for shapes, colors, and motifs that recur throughout Kent's work and discuss ways the artist has translated her own visual language through a variety of mediums, techniques, and installation processes. How do these variations provide the viewer with a richer experience than if they were in a single form or artwork? Direct students to create a composition with various shapes using one medium. Then, prompt students to create 2-3 other artworks using the same shapes but different mediums. Ask students to share what they learned about the shapes and their relationships to one another through the process of translation.