

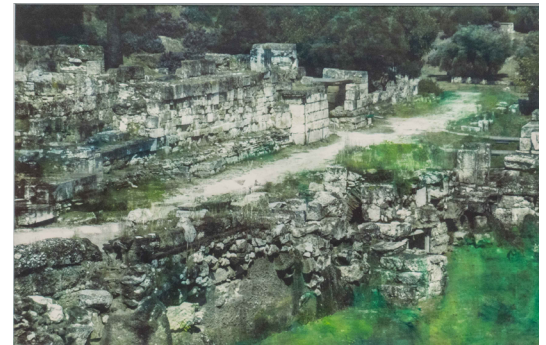
# Witnesses

## Chris Welsby and James Welling

Educator Handout: Grades K-6

### ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

*Witnesses* combines recent work by two artists, the photographer James Welling and the filmmaker Chris Welsby. Throughout the exhibition, images of the natural world and of human-made structures abandoned within it have been processed or changed in ways that alter a viewer's simple delight in what is being represented. Plant studies, landscapes, and views of weed-eaten structures are corrupted in these artworks by slight but consuming indications of each artist's method. Borrowing its title from a quote by the 18th-century German playwright Friedrich Schiller, the exhibition deals with the modern problem of a lost oneness with nature, and with the difficulties in trying to regain it.



James Welling, *Athens. Sacred Way to Eleusis*. 2021, Oil on laser print. Courtesy of the artist. Photo credit: Jade Nguyen.

### ABOUT THE ARTISTS

[James Welling](#) (b. 1951) is a photographer. Since the 1970s, he has explored the creative possibilities of photography while also maintaining a sensitivity to the medium and the history of photography. Associated in the 1980s with the [Pictures Generation](#), his work explores the constructed nature of images. His work has been exhibited widely, including in a 2009 exhibition about that movement at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY) and, in 2000, in a career-spanning survey exhibition organized by the Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus, OH). He was Professor in the Department of Art at the University of California, Los Angeles from 1995 to 2016, and currently teaches at Princeton University in the Visual Art Program. He lives in New York City.

[Chris Welsby](#) (b. 1948) is a filmmaker. For more than 50 years, he has been making films, videos, and moving image installations focused on themes of environment and ecology. His work has been shown widely, including in screenings at Light Cone (Paris, France), Doc Films (Chicago, IL), Anthology Film Archives (New York, NY), and the National Film Theatre (London, UK), as well as in exhibitions at the Tate Gallery (London, UK), the Serpentine Gallery (London, UK), the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, France), and the Musée du Louvre (Paris, France). He retired in 2012 from Vancouver's Simon Fraser University, where he had taught in the School for the Contemporary Arts since 1989. He lives on Gabriola Island, off the coast of British Columbia.

### VOCABULARY

- **Cyanotype:** a camera-less photographic process that produces an image using the light of the sun.
- **Composition:** the arrangement of elements in an artwork.
- **Contrast:** the differences between two things—such as light and dark, thick and thin, focused and blurry. Contrast can be used to emphasize specific areas or subjects in an artwork.
- **Emphasize:** to make something stand out from its surroundings.
- **Medium:** refers to the type of art (such as video, photography, or printmaking), as well as the materials an artwork is made from (such as ink, film, or a digital file).<sup>1</sup>
- **Printmaking:** the process of transferring an image from one surface to another.
- **Photolithography:** a printmaking process in which a photograph is printed onto stone, plastic, metal, or paper. The surface is then wetted with water and either oil paint or printmaking ink is applied to the wet surface. The oil-based medium sticks to areas where the photographic image was printed, while the water repels the oil from depositing around the image. The plate is then printed or transferred onto another surface.<sup>2</sup>
- **Subject:** that which is depicted in an artwork—such as people, places, or things.
- **Theme:** recurring ideas, mediums, or subject matter—such as nature, architecture, or digital media.

<sup>1</sup>Tate (n.d.). *Art Term: Medium*. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/medium>.

<sup>2</sup>For a photolithography demonstration by James Welling, see 57:00 - 1:02:00 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDwcgPJokIM>.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

RESPONDING: VA:Re7.2-Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Select and analyze one photograph by James Welling and one video by Chris Welsby presented in [Witnesses](#).

- Describe what you see in Welling's photograph and Welsby's video.
- What similarities can you find between the two works? How are they different from one another?
- How do the works make you feel?
- What do you think the works are about based on your observations?

Afterwards, discuss ways that the **theme** of humans and nature appears in both artists' work.

CREATING: VA:Cr2.1-Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Welsby's videos prompt close looking at details in nature, such as plants growing over an [abandoned car](#) in the woods, while Welling's photographs highlight [crumbling human-made structures](#) in nature. Inspired by these two **themes**, engage students in collaboratively documenting areas where nature and human-made structures meet.

1. Prompt students to look for areas where plants, insects, rocks, and soil meet human-made structures in their immediate surroundings—such as weeds growing through cracks in the concrete, or a beetle on a swing or slide.
2. Encourage students to document their **subjects** from multiple perspectives using both video and photography. Welsby often places his camera either within or onto a plant to record the movement of the wind in the surrounding foliage. Suggest this method to students for documenting their chosen location.
3. Welling digitally edits his photographs, altering the color, **contrast**, and **composition**. Consider guiding students in digitally altering their photographs to **emphasize** specific areas or **subjects**.

Afterwards, view students' photos and videos as a class. Then, use the following prompts to reflect:

- Describe details you observed while documenting and viewing the photos and videos of your chosen **subjects**. How did spending sustained time with your **subjects** impact what you noticed and how you feel about them?
- What similarities and differences did you find between your and your classmates' series?

2

CONNECTING: VA:CN10-Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

James Welling combined photographic and printmaking processes to create works featured in *Witnesses*. After digitally editing his photographs, he printed them onto a plastic surface. He then added details using a **printmaking** process called **photolithography**.

- Select [exhibited](#) works by Welling to analyze as a class.
- Ask students to describe what they see in the images. What changes do they think Welling made through digital editing? What do they think was added using photolithography? What **themes** do they notice within these works?

Inspired by Welling's use of multiple **mediums** and techniques, guide students through the process of creating multimedia cyanotype images.

1. Demonstrate the process of creating a [cyanotype](#). Use a combination of found objects and drawn or printed images on a transparent surface.
2. Prompt students to select an aspect of home, school, or community life as the **theme** for their project. Then, have them gather objects and images related to their chosen **theme**. Have students use a black marker to draw on a transparent surface—such as a sandwich bag or an acrylic sheet—or print images onto transparencies.
3. Guide students in the process of creating **cyanotypes** using their objects and images. Similar to Welling's process of layering images through digital editing, encourage students to layer objects and images on top of one another when creating their **cyanotypes**.
4. While students' **cyanotypes** dry, introduce them to a variety of [oil pastel techniques](#). Like Welling's process of adding details to his images using **photolithography**, encourage students to use additive and subtractive oil pastel techniques to **emphasize** details in their cyanotypes.

**Extension activity:** Introduce students to lithography using the [kitchen-lithography](#) method.

- Educator resources are available on the exhibition [webpage](#).

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