

ARTIST ROOMS

VIJA CELMINS

RESOURCE PACK



ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Vija Celmins is one of the most widely acclaimed artists working today, with a career spanning six decades from the early 1960s. The ARTIST ROOMS collection currently holds thirty-four works on paper by Celmins dating from 1974 until 2010. It includes unique graphite, charcoal and eraser drawings such as *Untitled (Galaxy-Desert)* 1974 and *Web #1* 1999, as well as prints which employ intaglio, lithographic and relief processes.

The ARTIST ROOMS collection of works by Vija Celmins is one of the largest museum collections in the world. Other significant works are held in the USA by LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), MoMA (the Museum of Modern Art, New York), the Whitney Museum (New York), SFMoMA (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) and Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas.

This resource is designed to aid teachers and students using the ARTIST ROOMS Vija Celmins collection. The resource focuses on specific works and themes and suggests areas of discussion, activities and links to other artists in the collection.

For schools, the work of Vija Celmins presents a good opportunity to explore cross-curricula learning. The themes in Celmins work can be linked to curricula areas such as English, expressive arts, health and wellbeing, social studies, citizenship and science.

A glossary at the back of the resource provides further information on key words, terms and people associated with Celmins and related themes.

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VIJA CELMINS

Vija Celmins was born in Riga, Latvia in 1938. Her family fled to the Stuttgart region in the west of Germany in 1944 before eventually leaving Germany for the USA in 1948. After a short time in New York they settled in Indianapolis, Indiana. Celmins studied painting at the John Herron School of Art in Indianapolis between 1955 and 1962. During this period she regularly visited New York to see the work of the Abstract Expressionists such as Willem de Kooning.

In 1961 she received a Fellowship to Yale University Summer Session where she met a strong community of students and artists including Chuck Close and Brice Marden. She then attended UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) where she explored a variety of styles. After graduating from UCLA she found inspiration in the everyday objects in her studio – including a hot plate, a desk lamp, a fan, and a heater – painting them with minimal colour, using tonal gradations of grey.

In 1966 Celmins had her first solo exhibition at the David Stuart Galleries, Los Angeles. The exhibition included her first paintings based on photographs.

The photographs, found in books and magazines, included a number of violent images such as warplanes, burning houses, guns and riots. These works are often associated with her childhood in Latvia and Germany during the Second World War¹ and were produced during the height of the Vietnam War.² In the mid-1960s and early 1970s Celmins also made a number of sculptures of everyday objects such as *Pencil* 1968–70 and *Comb* 1969–70 (LACMA, Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

In 1968 Celmins dropped painting for drawing and began working from pictures of the ocean, a motif she would return to throughout her career. At around the same time she began to use photographs of deserts and skies as her subject matter. In 1973 she had an exhibition of her ocean drawings at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art, New York and the following year began to incorporate the diptych format into her work. In drawings such as *Untitled (Galaxy-Desert)* 1974 she brought together the desert landscape and the night sky. These drawings associated two images of nature on different scales and taken from different points of view.

Over a five year period, from 1977 until 1982, Celmins worked on a series of sculpture entitled *To Fix the Image in Memory*. These sculptures combine found stones and bronze casts of them, which have been painted in acrylic to appear identical to the original, prompting the viewer to consider the nature of reality.

In 1979 Celmins had her first retrospective exhibition *Vija Celmins: A Survey Exhibition*, originating at the Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, which later travelled to Chicago, New York and Washington. In 1980 Celmins first collaborated with Gemini G.E.L. – an artists printmaking and sculpture workshop in Los Angeles – where she later did a series of intaglio prints including *Constellation Uccello*, *Concentric Bearings* and *Alliance*. That same year she received a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1981 she relocated to New York, where she continues to live and work.

In the early 1990s Celmins began to incorporate the spider's web into her work and in 1992 she had a major retrospective organised by Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art, which travelled to Los Angeles, New York and Seattle. Celmins has continued her serial exploration of natural forms to the present day through a variety of media including oil paint, charcoal, pencil drawing, printmaking, and sculpture.

Celmins' other major solo exhibitions include *Vija Celmins* at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris 1995; *The Prints of Vija Celmins* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2002; *Vija Celmins: Television and Disaster, 1964–68*, at the Menil Collection, Houston 2010; *Desert, Sea, and Stars* at Museum Ludwig, Cologne 2011 and *Vija Celmins; Double Reality* at The Latvian National Art Museum, Riga, 2014.

[1] See Jonas Storz, 'Going from One Place to Another' in *Vija Celmins: Dessins = Drawings*, exhibition catalogue, Centre Pompidou, Paris 2006, p.20. Celmins is quoted as saying: 'I began dealing with some images out of my childhood'.

[2] Celmins herself would participate in one of the earliest mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War, the 'Artists Tower of Protest' erected in Los Angeles in 1966.

FOUND IMAGES

*I'M NOT A VERY CONFESSIONAL ARTIST, YOU KNOW. I DON'T EVER REVEAL WHAT I'M FEELING IN MY WORK, OR WHAT I THINK ABOUT THE PRESIDENT. I USE NATURE. I USE FOUND IMAGES.*³

– Vija Celmins

As a young girl in her newly settled home in Indianapolis, Indiana, Celmins began collecting images from comic books and picture playing cards. Highlighting the importance of imagery from this early age the artist later reflected: 'I had stacks of comics because I had sort of taught myself how to read, because I couldn't speak English. I only spoke Latvian, really.'⁴

Celmins began using found photography as her source material in the mid-1960s, during the period when she was also engaged in making sculpture based on everyday functional objects. These sculptures are striking in their resemblance to actual objects and employ the Surrealist method of changing the size and scale.

The found or common object – with its origins in Marcel Duchamp and his readymades from the 1910s – was a popular subject in Pop Art, at its peak during the 1960s. Duchamp's work saw something of a revival during this period, particularly for artists such as

Richard Hamilton and Andy Warhol.⁵ Celmins' work from this period is often mentioned in relation to Pop, because of her use of found photographs as source material but Celmins' work is far removed from the brash consumerism that seemed to typify Pop Art.⁶ She looked to the object paintings of Magritte and Giorgio Morandi for inspiration. Her early object paintings and interest in scientific imagery led to her drawings and prints of seas, night skies and deserts, with their extraordinary surfaces and physical presence.

Images of lunar surfaces, galaxies, planets, oceans, falling planes and nuclear experiments allude to a sense of great space and drama. Celmins first worked from photographs and clippings of planets and lunar surfaces during a period when official images first appeared in the media. The late 1960s saw the culmination of the great 'space race' between the Soviet Union and the USA with the landmark Apollo 11 moon landing on July 20, 1969.

Discussion

Read the following quote from Vija Celmins and discuss in relation to her use of found images. 'The photograph is an alternate subject, another layer that creates distance. And distance creates an opportunity to view the work more slowly and to explore your relationship to it. I treat the photograph as an object, to scan and re-make in my art.'⁷

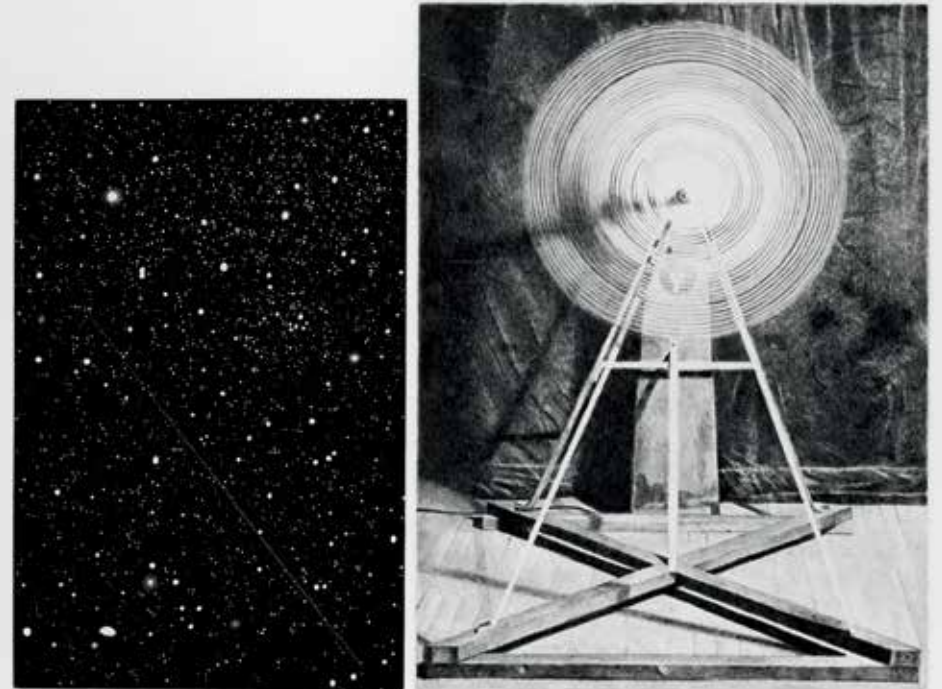
Activity

Choose your own readymade using an image of an everyday object.

Think about whether the object has any significance for you and if that matters. Think about how you might alter the readymade.

Artist Link

The German artist Gerhard Richter (b. 1932) also painted directly from photographs he found in magazines. While Richter also painted from photographs of skies and war planes, his found source material also included family photographs.



Vija Celmins *Concentric Bearings A* 1984 (detail)

[3] Betsy Sussler, *Interview with Vija Celmins*, The Museum of Modern Art, October 18, 2011, https://www.moma.org/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_celmins.pdf, p. 29, accessed, 1 April 2014.

[4] *Ibid.*, p.6.

[5] Celmins referred to Duchamp in the *Concentric Bearings* series using a photograph of his optical illusion device *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)* 1920 as source material.

[6] Celmins work was included in the publication *Pop Art* because of her interest in everyday objects. Edited by Lucy Lippard it was first published in 1966.

[7] William S. Bartman (Ed.), *Vija Celmins interviewed by Chuck Close*, New York, 1991, p.12.



Vija Celmins *Alliance* 1983

THE NATURAL WORLD

THE IMAGES ARE NOT FROM OBSERVATIONS OF NATURE, BUT ARE 'FOUND IMAGES' FROM OLD MAGAZINES, BOOKS AND PHOTOS. THUS THEY ARE ALREADY FLATTENED AND A STEP REMOVED FROM NATURE. MY WORK LIES BETWEEN INTIMACY AND DISTANCE.⁸

– Vija Celmins

Celmins' body of work is part of an engagement with the natural world evident throughout the history of art. Giotto's *The Lamentation* c.1305 from the Arena Chapel in Prado with its deep blue skies is a painting which made a strong impression on Celmins as she traveled around Europe as a student.⁹ In Celmins' work however, the subject matter is secondary – her primary interest is that of making. She once said: 'I could never do portraits, or things that are too psychologically alive in the real world.'¹⁰

Celmins takes details from images of nature's surfaces and skies, but removes horizons or any central point of reference. She explores the representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. Speaking of her earliest works based on photographs of the ocean she has said: '...when I started doing the oceans, I made a few decisions. One decision was that I was going to go back to more of an abstract kind of work where I mapped out the image on the surface of my painting uniting the two closely'.¹¹

Images of the ocean first appeared in Celmins' work in 1968, with a series of graphite pencil on paper drawings that experimented with variations in the density and tone of graphite. Speaking of its reappearance across many works and various decades, Celmins noted: 'The ocean image is one that is part of me and that I try to do every now and then with a new sensibility or process'.¹² In *Ocean Surface Woodcut* 1992 the ocean image is based on one of a group of photographs of the Pacific Ocean, taken by the artist near her studio in California in the late 1960s.

In the extensive group of prints by Celmins in ARTIST ROOMS there are two other works that utilise the ocean motif: *Drypoint – Ocean Surface* 1983 and *Ocean Surface Wood Engraving* 2000. Its likely that the same source photographs from the 1960s, were used as the starting point for each of these printed images. Celmins took the photographs from the end of the pier where the vast ocean filled the camera's viewfinder.

[8] Vija Celmins, *Vija Celmins ARTIST ROOMS Tate Britain Display*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/display/vija-celmins>, accessed 1 April 2014.

[9] Celmins would also encounter the work of Diego Velázquez on her travels. His sombre palette and would likewise become one her early influences.

[10] Betsy Sussler, *Interview with Vija Celmins*, The Museum of Modern Art, October 18, 2011, https://www.moma.org/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_celmins.pdf, p. 60, accessed, 1 April 2014.

[11] *Ibid.* p.22.

[12] Samantha Rippner, *The Prints of Vija Celmins*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2002, p.30.

Discussion

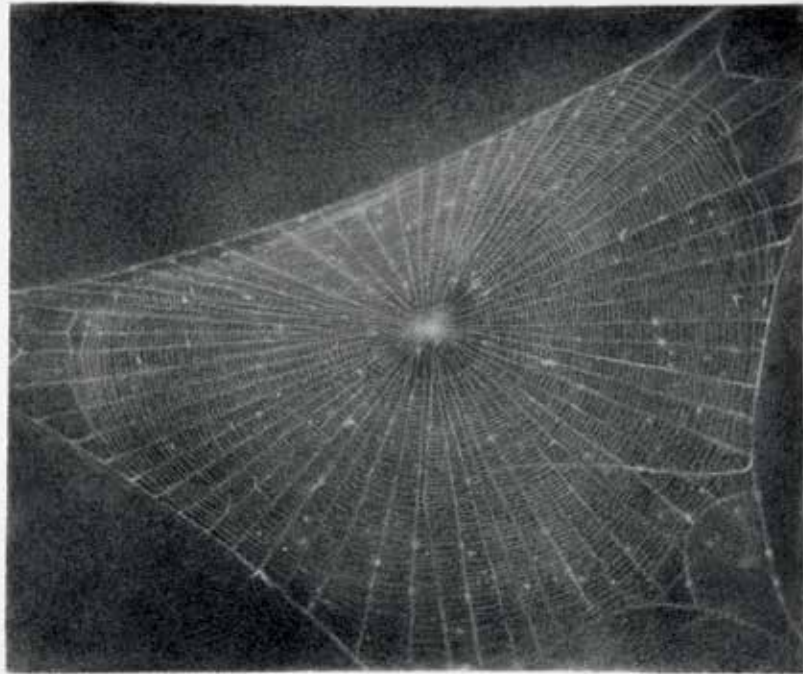
Read the following quote from Celmins and discuss its relation to her source material and the finished artwork: 'I use an image that has a lot of associations with it, which I put in this very cold, scientific kind of no style manner that I like in my work... you know, just the facts as complicated as they are.'¹³

Activity

Collect images from magazines and newspapers to create a collage of images. Think about how you might place the images together, what unifies the images and how you might crop them.

Artist Link

British artist Richard Long (b. 1945) explores the body in relation to the natural environment, creating artworks inspired by and documenting his solitary walks.



Vija Celmins *Web #1* 1999

[13] Susan Sollins, *Art: 21: art in the twenty-first century*, Vol. 2, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2003, p.170. Quote revised by the artist Wednesday 11 June 2014, New York.

IMAGE AND SCALE

*MAYBE I IDENTIFY WITH THE SPIDER. I'M THE KIND OF PERSON WHO WORKS ON SOMETHING FOREVER AND THEN WORKS ON THE SAME IMAGE AGAIN THE NEXT DAY.*¹⁴

– Vija Celmins

For Celmins a work of art doesn't represent anything but itself. Through the photographic source material of oceans, night skies and deserts she relentlessly explores the image and the richness of its variation. As subjects they are united by their depiction of boundless nature and suggestion of the infinite. Speaking of her use of these images Celmins stated: 'I was so turned on by these scientific images, and I just couldn't help but redo them'.¹⁵

In her prints such as *Alliance* 1983 Celmins began making double-plate images just as she had previously made double image drawings (see *Untitled (Galaxy-Desert)* 1974). The juxtaposition of the images creates a dialogue between the night sky and another kind of spatial exploration on the picture plane, such as an engineers drawing of a ship or a desert floor. The placement of the image on the support is of crucial importance to Celmins because 'the images tend to run on and on, they have to be carefully ended'.¹⁶ In her printmaking the area of white paper increased so that the image became more concentrated. Celmins has said:

'My feeling about the size of the borders has a corresponding effect on how one perceives the image.'¹⁷

Viewing Celmins' works based on photographs of spider webs offers a different sense of perspective to the night skies and deserts. The spider webs are viewed relatively at the same angle and scale as they might be in nature. The web however – like the night sky and desert floor – acts as a kind of map as it describes a surface. The effect of seeing these works together invites the viewer to consider not just perspective but proportion and scale.

Like the desert, lunar surface and galaxies Celmins has explored the spider's web serially. The writer and curator Elita Ansonne relates the spider's web to the night skies and that 'with each work Celmins presents a different feeling and a different image, as if each were a new galaxy'.¹⁸ *Web #1* 1999 is one of five spider web works by Celmins in *ARTIST ROOMS*, the remaining four of which are examples of the artist's wide-ranging printmaking practice, produced and published two years after *Web #1*.

[14] Samantha Rippner, *The Prints of Vija Celmins*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2002, p.30.

[15] Betsy Sussler, *Interview with Vija Celmins*, The Museum of Modern Art, October 18, 2011, https://www.moma.org/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_celmins.pdf, p. 29, accessed, 1 April 2014.

[16] Samantha Rippner, *The Prints of Vija Celmins*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2002, p.14.

[17] *Ibid.*, p.15.

[18] Elita Ansonne, *Vija Celmins Double Reality*, Latvian National Museum of Art, 2014, p.113.



Vija Celmins *Untitled (Desert-Galaxy)* 1974

Discussion

Think about other artists who depict the natural world such as J.M.W. Turner and discuss how their work differs from Celmins' in approach and subject.

Activity

Ocean Surface Woodcut 1992 is a type of relief print. The process involves a drawing being cut into the wood surface so that the incisions translate in reverse and seen as the un-inked white lines of the print. You can create your own relief print substituting wood

for lino or polystyrene remembering to remove the areas you want to appear white, inking and then pressing the surface with a sheet of paper.

Artist Link

The American artist Agnes Martin (1912–2004) is known for her paintings which are made up of horizontal bands of colour, separated by faint hand-drawn pencil lines. Martin, like Celmins, had a love of the surface and accounted for every inch of it with her vigorous grids.



Vija Celmins *Ocean Surface Woodcut* 1992 (detail)

PROCESSES AND MATERIALS

*AS I WAS WORKING WITH THE PENCIL, I GOT INTO SOME OF THE QUALITIES OF THE PENCIL ITSELF. THAT'S HOW THE GALAXIES DEVELOPED.*¹⁹

– Vija Celmins

During the course of her career Celmins has created sculptures, paintings, drawings and prints. Her painstakingly rendered works focus on a narrow range of subjects and are limited to a restricted monotone palette.²⁰ The rigour with which Celmins executes her work is evident throughout her process from the selection of paper and material, the decision of scale and the choice of source material. Her artistic process involves masking out a desired area within a photograph and then replicating what she has framed using a grey-scale palette, inspired by the actual black-and-white photographs from which the work was developed.

In 1968 Celmins stopped painting in favour of drawing in graphite, later saying '...when I started doing graphite I got really into it...I was obsessed. I pushed the limits of the pencil to hold the image and make for strong work'.²¹ She spent the next few years drawing intense single images with no composition before she started putting images together on a single sheet of paper. *Untitled (Desert-Galaxy)* 1974 is an early example of these double images, which sees Celmins return to the recurring motifs of the desert landscape and the night sky.²²

Celmins returned to painting in 1983 feeling she had exhausted graphite and taken drawing as far as she could go. In 1994 she returned to drawing with a series of night skies but instead of graphite her materials were now charcoal and eraser. In drawings such as *Night Sky #19* Celmins builds on the surface of the paper using the charcoal and removes areas with various types of eraser, eventually exposing the paper. The white areas reveal the radiating strands of the web of stars in the night sky: 'I like to see the paper, because the paper is a player'.²³

Printmaking has also been an important part of Celmins artistic output and she has worked with print media since the early 1960s. The 1980s were a particularly productive period for the artist when she worked on series such as *Concentric Bearings*, *Alliance* and *Constellation Uncello* made at Gemini, G.E.L. in Los Angeles. Celmins works in traditional intaglio (see *Alliance* 1983), lithographic (see *Untitled Portfolio: Galaxy* 1975), and relief processes (see *Ocean Surface Woodcut* 1992) to make her prints.

[19] Susan Sollins, *Art: 21: art in the twenty-first century*, Vol. 2, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2003, p.171.

[20] Her earliest paintings have little evident colour and she quickly eliminated all colour due to its decorative associations.

[21] Betsy Sussler, *Interview with Vija Celmins*, The Museum of Modern Art, October 18, 2011, https://www.moma.org/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_celmins.pdf, p. 28, accessed, 1 April 2014. Quotation revised by artist Wednesday 11 June 2014, New York.

[22] When working with graphite Celmins first coats the paper with acrylic to create a layer on the paper and reinforce the graphite.

[23] Betsy Sussler, *Interview with Vija Celmins*, The Museum of Modern Art, October 18, 2011, https://www.moma.org/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_celmins.pdf, p. 36, accessed, 1 April 2014.



Vija Celmins *Night Sky #19* 1999

Discussion

Celmins has said that her galaxy paintings and drawings developed out of using the pencil. Look at drawings such as *Untitled (Desert-Galaxy)* 1974 and discuss how a subject might develop through a medium.

Activity

Use some charcoal to create a drawing working in reverse to reveal the white of the paper. Think about the distinct

characteristics of the media when your applying it and what that effect that has on the finished image.

Artist Link

American artist Jasper Johns (b. 1930) was a major influence on Celmins. Johns is best known for his use of commonplace images such as flags or numbers. He is a painter and printmaker, working in lithographs, etchings, screenprints, and embossed paper and lead reliefs.

MEMORY

THERE WAS A LITTLE PERIOD WHERE I THINK, IN SOME STRANGE, INTUITIVE WAY, I SORT OF DEALT WITH THE MEMORIES OF WAR.²⁴

– Vija Celmins

Celmins began collecting photographs and buying books containing imagery of the Second World War in Los Angeles in the mid-1960s. Some of these images of warplanes were subjects for paintings such as *German Plane* 1966 (Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas). Although Celmins' work is generally not autobiographical she has conceded that many of these works are related to her early childhood memories in Latvia of the Second World War. Reflecting on these childhood memories she revealed: '...it was a good time of great stress, mostly because there was so much noise and chaos. And my biggest fear was being left somewhere and not finding my parents'.²⁵

During the late 1960s Celmins also made paintings from photographs of smoking guns, automobile crashes and explosions. Writing in the catalogue for her retrospective at Institute of Contemporary Arts, Philadelphia Dave Hickey suggested that Celmins' shift from imagery of war and violence to the ocean, desert and sky, paralleled a shift in her 'personal life from the status of a refugee to a nomad –

a nomad who could find her bearings from the infinitesimal reference points that nature offers'.²⁶

House #2 1965 is among Celmins earliest sculptural work and relates to her wartime childhood experiences. Here Celmins painted fires and plane crashes on the outside of the dollshouse. The sculpture is given additional pertinence by the knowledge that Celmins' father was a builder of houses and the political backdrop in the 1960s included escalating protests against the Vietnam War. Discussing her early sculptural works and making specific reference to *House #2* (one of her favourite pieces from the time) Celmins has said: 'I have to admit that there is a psychological component to the work'.²⁷

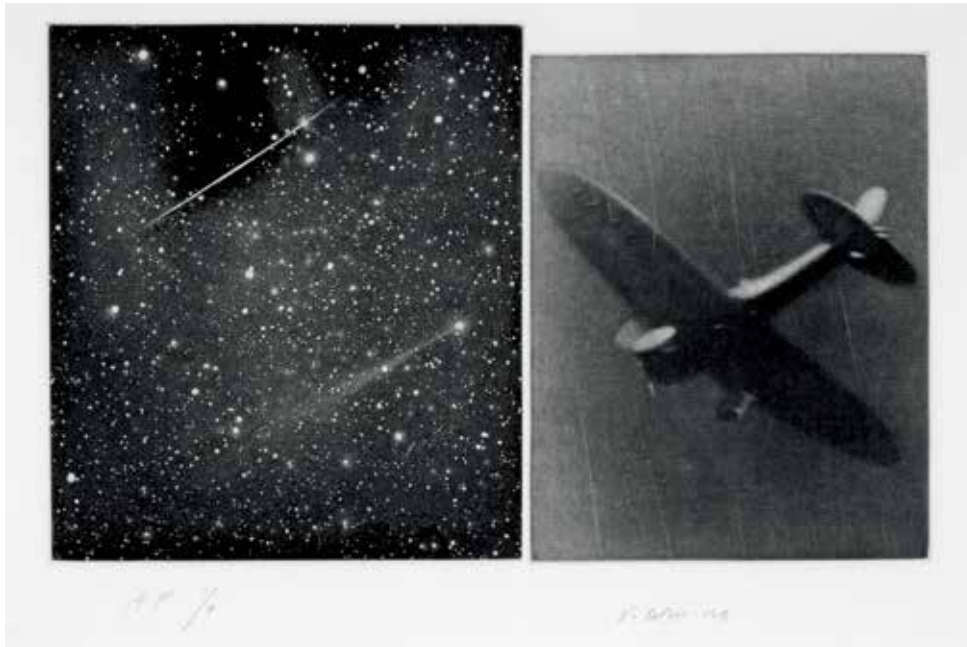
The warplane is also present in the *Concentric Bearings* series 1984. These prints are an important series, which Celmins produced with the Gemini G.E.L. print workshop in Los Angeles. In *Concentric Bearings B* 1984 an image of a falling plane being shot at is placed next to Celmins' image of stars shooting in the night sky.

[24] Betsy Sussler, *Interview with Vija Celmins*, The Museum of Modern Art, October 18, 2011, https://www.moma.org/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_celmins.pdf, p. 4, accessed, 1 April 2014.

[25] *Ibid.* p.2.

[26] Jonas Storsve and others, *Vija Celmins: Dessins = Drawings*, exhibition catalogue, Centre Pompidou, Paris 2006, pp.23-4.

[27] William S. Bartman (Ed.), *Vija Celmins interviewed by Chuck Close*, New York, 1991, p.20.



Vija Celmins *Concentric Bearings B* 1984 (detail)

Discussion

Think about images, sounds and smells which remind you of your childhood. Discuss them in a group and identify common memories and senses that inform your memory.

Activity

Gather historical information, such as photographs, drawings, letters etc from your family archive and use it as the basis of a collaborative

piece exploring an aspect of history. This may be connected to personal histories or the social, cultural and political history of your community. Consider the possibilities of creating new, collaborative stories that can be expressed not only through art but also through music, performance, dance or drama.

Artist Link

The American artist Robert Therrien (b.1947) references childhood memories. He transforms elements from everyday life into works of art that evoke classical archetypes.

TIME

THE REASON I THINK I DO IMAGES THAT REQUIRE SO MUCH TIME IS THAT I FEEL THE PHYSICAL WORK ITSELF LETS SOME OTHER THING THAT CAME THROUGH, LETTING SOMETHING UNCONSCIOUSLY SEEP THROUGH, SOME SUBTLETY THAT MY BRAIN WAS NOT CAPABLE OF FIGURING OUT...²⁸

– Vija Celmins

While there is a cosmic sense of time about Celmins elemental subject matter, it also allows the artist to approach space and light in a singular way. The subjects allow the artist to explore the relationship between deep space and the flat plane of the picture's surface.

Influenced by Ad Reinhardt's *Twelve Rules for a New Academy* 1953, Celmins started to consciously strip away elements in her art and rejected gesture and composing. Returning again and again to ocean views, lunar surfaces and star fields Celmins depicts vast expanses and creates depth through her investigation of the image and her chosen material. Most of her images, like *Web #1* 1999, are painted or drawn very close to the edge of the surface she is working on and seem to extend beyond the canvas and into the space occupied by the viewer.

The focal point is the small compressed image in front of you; the illusion of space from the image stays on it. As the artist describes it, the image is 'pinned down, in your mind it wants to expand out. Reality (the art) makes it stay where it is on the wall. 'MADE, INVENTED – IT

IS NOT THE IMAGE EXPERIENCED IN LIFE, BUT IN ANOTHER REALITY.'²⁹

Although Celmins has been associated with several art movements during her career – including Pop Art, Minimalism and, to a lesser extent, Conceptual Art – she seems always to have operated outside the dominant trends of the day. The rigour and the intuitive nature of her process has restricted the volume of her creative output and in turn limited displays of her work. Pop artists in particular were known for their speedy production but Celmins works at her own pace and has likened herself to the spider for its precise and industrious constructions.

Shooting stars, turning planets and rippling oceans suggest movement and the passing of time in Celmins' images. In the 1980s when Celmins was particularly engaged in printmaking she made the *Concentric Bearings* series, which explored images of 'turning space'.³⁰ In the work *Jupiter Moon – Constellation* 1983 from the same period as the *Concentric Bearings* series Celmins pairs one of Jupiter's moons with a negative image of the night sky.

[28] Susan Sollins, *Art: 21: art in the twenty-first century*, Vol. 2, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2003, p.162. Quotation revised by artist Wednesday 11 June 2014, New York.

[29] Correspondence with the artist, 13 May 2014.

[30] Celmins refers to turning space in relation the *Concentric Bearings* series. See Samantha Rippner, *The Prints of Vija Celmins*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2002, p.35.

Discussion

Discuss the following quote from Celmins in relation to time: 'The image stays where it has been placed so rigorously and attentively. The original photographic source is from another space we have lived in but is transferred by the making into another space.'³¹

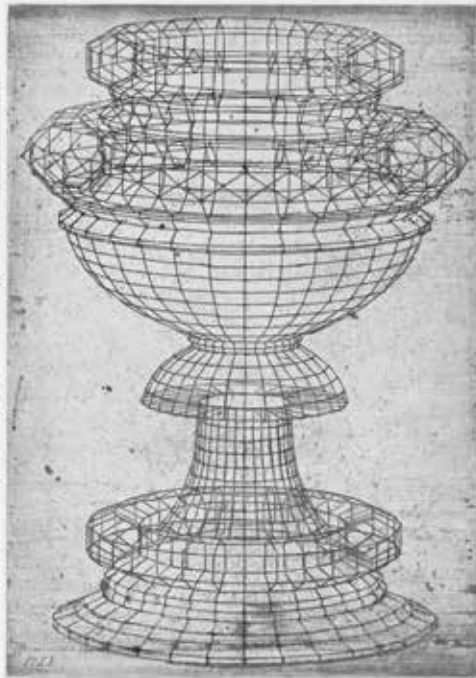
Activity

The Earth orbits the Sun once a year and the Moon takes approximately twenty-eight days to orbit the Earth.

Using their age, ask the children to calculate the answers to the following question: How many times have they travelled around the Sun?

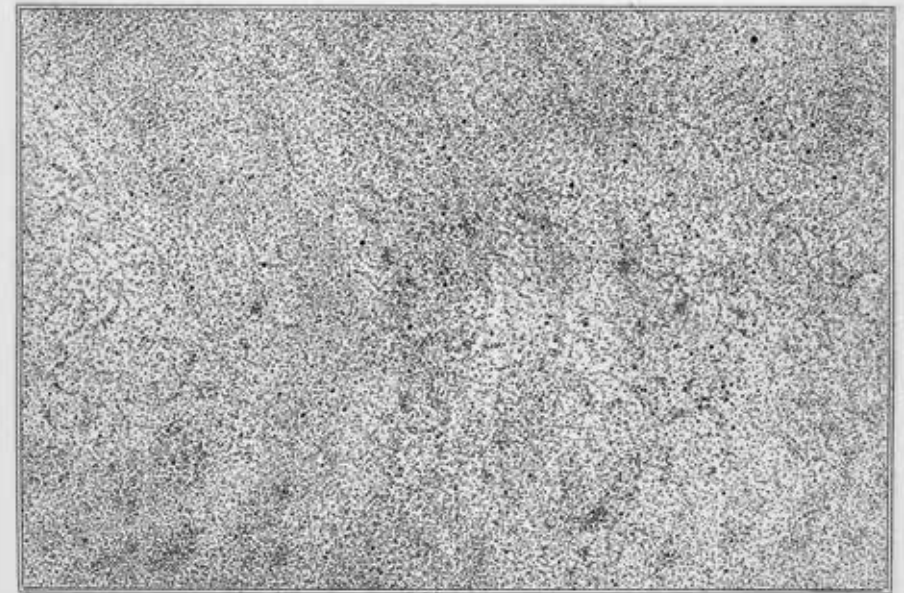
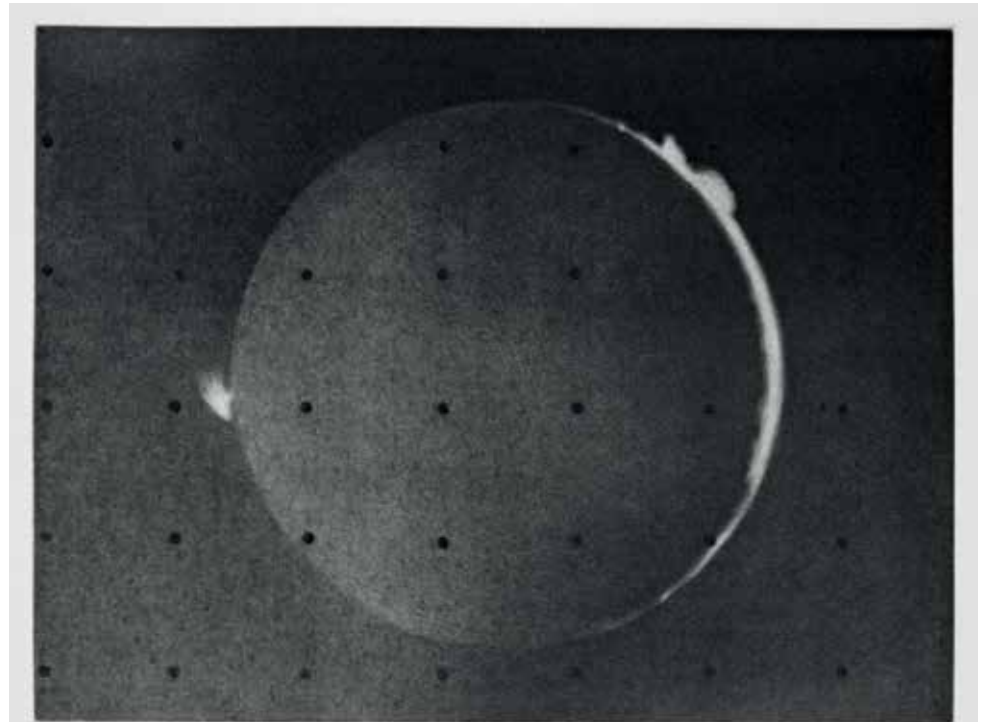
Artist Link

American artist Andy Warhol (1928–87) is perhaps best known for his Pop inspired paintings but started as a graphic artist before moving towards more 'instant' methods of production such as photography, film and screenprinting.



Vija Celmins *Constellation* – Uccello 1983 (detail)

[31] Samantha Rippner, *The Prints of Vija Celmins*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2002.p.16.



Vija Celmins *Jupiter Moon – Constellation* 1983 (detail)

FURTHER READING

Websites

ARTIST ROOMS:

<http://www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/artistrooms/>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/artist-rooms>

<http://www.artistrooms.org/>

ARTIST ROOMS on Tour:

<http://www.artfund.org/what-to-see/artist-rooms>

McKee Gallery

<http://mckeegallery.com/artists/vija-celmins/>

Art Institute of Chicago

<http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/artist/Celmins%2C+Vija>

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

<http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artists/898/artwork>

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City

<http://whitney.org/Collection/VijaCelmins>

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana

<http://www.imamuseum.org/collections/artist/celmins-vija>

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas – key works

<http://themodern.org/collection/artists/Celmins>

Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles – key works

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/167457>

Philadelphia Museum of Art

<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/86458.html>

Walker Art Center, Minnesota

<http://www.walkerart.org/collections/artists/vija-celmins>

Digital Resources

<http://www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/artists/vija-celmins>

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/vija-celmins>

<http://www.c4gallery.com/artist/database/vija-celmins/vija-celmins.html>

<http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/99>

Further Reading

William S. Bartman (ed.), *Vija Celmins, Interviewed by Chuck Close*, New York, 1992.

Vija Celmins and Eliot Weinberger, *The Stars, Museum of Modern Art*, New York, 2005.

Julia Friedrich and Kasper König (eds.), *Vija Celmins: Desert, Sea & Stars*, exhibition catalogue, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2011.

Susan C. Larson, *Vija Celmins: A Survey Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue, Newport Harbor Museum, Newport Beach, 1980.

Lane Relvea, Robert Gober and Briony Fer, *Vija Celmins*, London, 2004.

Samantha Rippner, *The Prints of Vija Celmins*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2002.

Franklin Sirmans and Michelle White, *Vija Celmins: Television and Disaster 1964-1966*, Yale University Press, New Haven; London, 2010.

Jonas Storsve and others, *Vija Celmins: Dessins = Drawings*, exhibition catalogue, Centre Pompidou, Paris 2006.

Jan Tannenbaum, *Vija Celmins*, exhibition catalogue, Institute of Contemporary Arts, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1992.

GLOSSARY

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

An art movement characterised by experimental, non-representational painting originating in the USA in the 1940s, marked by free, gestural technique, a preference for dramatically large canvases, and a desire to give spontaneous expression to the unconscious.

COMA BERENICES

A constellation of stars visible in the Earth's night sky. Celmins used photographs of the Coma Berenices for the lithograph *Untitled Portfolio: Galaxy 1975* and *Untitled (Desert-Galaxy) 1974* from the ARTIST ROOMS collection.

CHUCK CLOSE

American artist (b.1940) best known for his large-scale photorealist portraits, composed of tiny airbrush bursts, thumbprints, or looping multi-colour brushstrokes. Close befriended Celmins while they studied together at Yale Summer School of Music and Art, Connecticut, 1961.

DIPTYCH

Traditionally in art a diptych is any object with two flat panels attached at a hinge. The diptych was a common format in Renaissance painting and depicted subjects ranging from secular portraiture to religious stories. More recently diptychs in art have not necessarily been physically attached. Many modern artists such as Joseph Beuys and Francis Bacon have used paired images. In Celmins' diptych's

such as *Untitled (Desert-Galaxy) 1974* the artist presents two individual drawings side by side on the same sheet of paper. The artist has also employed the triptych device which brings together three images in one artwork.

MARCEL DUCHAMP

French artist (1887–1968), associated with Dada. Duchamp rejected 'retinal art' in the early 1910s. He emigrated to the USA in 1915 and was a major influence on artists emerging in the mid-1950s until the present day. He is sometimes referred to as the 'father of conceptual art'.

GEMINI G.E.L.

Gemini G.E.L. (Graphic Editions Limited) is an artists' workshop and publisher of limited edition prints and sculptures in Los Angeles. It was founded in 1966 and the workshop has collaborated with artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, Willem de Kooning, Claes Oldenburg, and Ed Ruscha, among many others, to create editioned multiples in media including lithography, etching, screenprinting, woodcut and a wide variety of sculptural materials.

GIOTTO DI BONDONE

Italian painter and architect (c.1266–1337), known as Giotto, from Florence in the late Middle Ages. He is generally considered the first in a line of great artists who contributed to the Italian Renaissance. Among his works is *The Lamentation* c.1305 in the Arena Chapel in Padua, Veneto, Italy.

INTAGLIO

Intaglio is from the family of printing and printmaking techniques in which the image is incised into a surface, and the incised line or sunken area holds the ink. It is the direct opposite of a relief print.

WILLEM DE KOONING

American artist (1904-97) associated with Abstract Expressionism. He was part of a group of artists that came to be known as the New York School. Although de Kooning was considered to be an Abstract Expressionist he depicted the human figure throughout his painting.

JASPER JOHNS

American artist (b. 1930), forerunner of Pop Art, who works primarily in painting and printmaking. Johns' influence on Celmins can be seen in her early paintings of ordinary objects such as a heater, a lamp and a television set.

LITHOGRAPHY

A method of printing originally based on the principle that oil and water do not mix. Printing is from a stone (lithographic limestone) or a metal plate with a smooth surface. It was invented in 1796 by German author and actor Alois Senefelder as a cheap method of publishing theatrical works. Lithography can be used to print text or artwork onto paper or other suitable material.

LUCY LIPPARD

An American writer, art critic and curator (born 1937) best known as being among the first writers to recognise the dematerialisation at work in conceptual art and was an early champion of feminist art. She included Celmins in an early chronology of Pop Art in 1966.

RENÉ MAGRITTE

Belgian artist (1898-1967) who was a major figure in the Surrealist movement. His primary role was as a painter, and he frequently delved into mystical concepts and the disconnection between objects, people, and their meanings. Celmins paid homage to Magritte in her early sculpture *Untitled (Comb)* 1970.

BRICE MARDEN

American artist (b.1938) often associated with Minimalism and best known for his subtle explorations of colour, texture, and form. Marden befriended Celmins while they studied together at Yale Summer School of Music and Art, Connecticut, 1961.

AGNES MARTIN

American artist (1912-2004) often associated with Minimalism though she preferred to be associated with the Abstract Expressionists. Martin was referred to as a Minimalist because of her spare paintings and drawings, which featured large grids drawn by hand in ink or graphite on paper or canvas.

MINIMAL ART

An art movement from the late 1960s. Minimalist artists typically made works in simple geometric shapes based on the square and the rectangle. Many minimal works explore the properties of their materials, which were often industrial.

GIORGIO MORANDI

Italian artist (1890-1964) known for his still-life groupings of bottles, pots, and occasional landscapes. Through his simple and repetitive motifs and

economical use of colour and surface, Morandi is considered an important forerunner of Minimalism.

JACKSON POLLOCK

American artist (1912-56) known for his completely abstract 'all-over' style to which was given the name Abstract Expressionism. His involvement with gestural painting culminated in his use from 1947 of a technique of dripping trails of paint onto a canvas laid flat on the floor.

POP ART

An art movement that emerged in the mid-1950s in Britain and in the late 1950s in the USA. Pop Art presented a challenge to the traditions of fine art by including found imagery from popular culture such as advertising, news, etc. Celmins' early paintings were often associated with Pop Art because of her use of found mass-produced images.

AD REINHARDT

American abstract painter (1913-67) associated with the Abstract Expressionist movement. In 1953 we published the text 'Twelve Rules for the New Academy'. The twelve rules challenged accepted forms of representation and became an inspiration for Celmins.

RELIEF PRINTING

A printmaking process where protruding surface faces of the printing plate or block are inked; recessed areas are ink free. Printing the image is therefore a relatively simple matter of inking the face of the matrix and bringing it in firm contact with the paper. A printing-press may not be needed as the back of the paper can be rubbed or pressed by hand with a simple tool such as a brayer or roller.

SURREALISM

An avant-garde art movement that began in the early 1920s. The movement was launched in Paris by French poet André Breton with the publication of his Manifesto of Surrealism. The aim of surrealism was to reveal the unconscious and reconcile it with rational life. Surrealism also aimed at social and political revolution and for a time was affiliated to the Communist party. Celmins' early sculptures are often associated with Surrealism because of their exaggerated scale.

DIEGO VELÁZQUEZ

One of the great European painters (1599-1660) of the Baroque era. His paintings include landscapes, portraits, mythological and religious subjects and scenes from common life. He often used a sombre palette and was one of Celmins' early influences.

PAOLO UCCELLO

An Italian Renaissance painter and a mathematician (1397-1475) who was notable for his pioneering work on visual perspective in art. In the work *Constellation - Uccello* 1983 Celmins brings together own image of the night sky and a found image of a drawing by Uccello.

VIETNAM WAR

A prolonged conflict (1959-75) between nationalist forces attempting to unify the country of Vietnam under a communist government and the United States attempting to prevent the spread of communism. The involvement of the United States escalated in the mid-1960s with deployment of the first ground troops. The war sparked mass protests and many artists including Celmins demonstrated against the war.

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