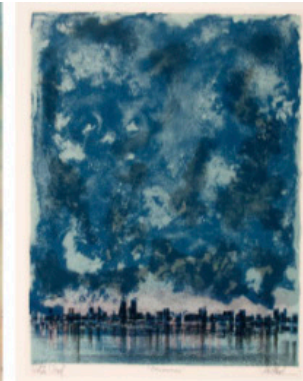


E-Museum Teaching Guide
Atmospheric



Mike Goode, Kate Holohan
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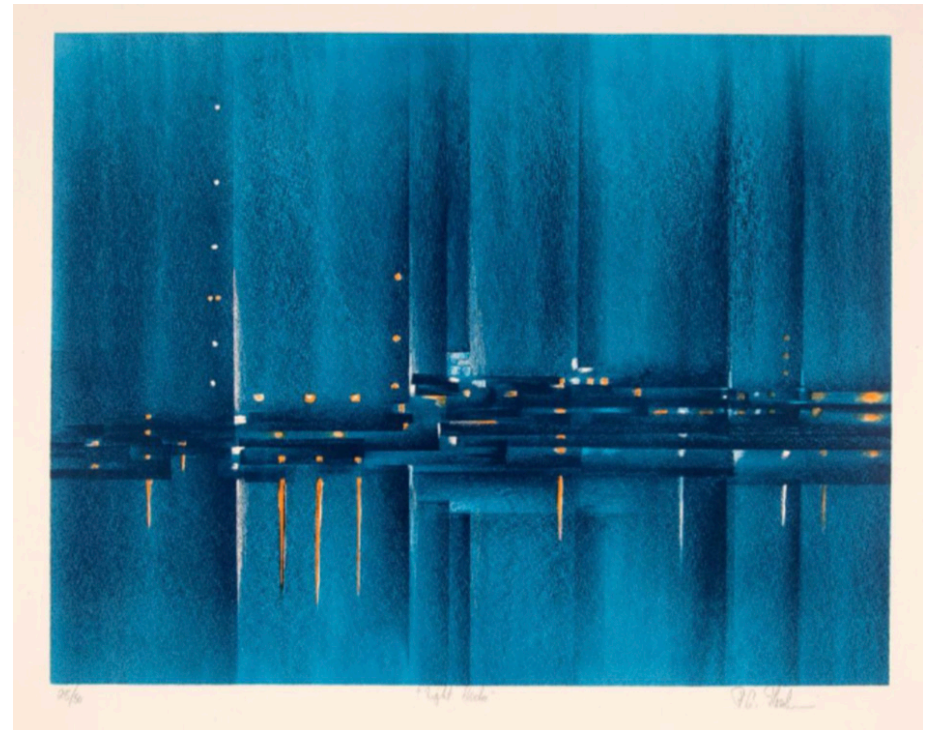
Introduction

As a medium for light and sound, air is integral to how animals perceive form and depth, and aesthetic experiences thus often hinge on air becoming newly noticeable, whether through a sunset, a landscape painting, or a musician taking a breath. Noticing the air also amounts to becoming newly conscious ecologically, not least of all because we often notice the air during times of environmental stress—moments when someone or something cannot breathe, or when a lifetime of breathing has produced cancer, or when the air outside carries the smell of burning, or when particulate matter makes the air hard to see through (and sunsets also more lovely), or when atmospheric pressure drops, or when airborne disease produces fear of air indoors. As the twenty-first century unfolds, people have taken greater ecological notice of air, as we live in an age of intensifying weather events, of more frequent wildfires, of heightened incidence of smog-related respiratory disease, of new deadly viruses that spread by breathing, and of rising global temperatures. Whereas images of smokestacks belching smoke into the air once produced talk of localized pollution and ugliness, the same images can feel today like existential threats, as the invisible but rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere change global climate in ways that threaten life on the planet as we know it.

The “Atmospheric” e-museum showcases artworks in the university’s collection that make air visible or palpable as a medium for sound, temperature, respiration, and light effects. It is at once a museum of weather and climate, of pollution and dust, of health and disease, of extinction and of beauty. With few exceptions, the works in the museum can be classified as landscape art. Every work of landscape art necessarily represents some kind of air and atmospheric conditions, but the works in this e-museum have been chosen because they visualize, draw attention to, or render palpable these conditions in different and interesting ways. We invite you to identify some of these differences and to think critically about them. How do any of these pieces shape feelings towards, evoke aesthetic responses to, or encourage stances towards

certain air conditions, properties, and qualities? To what extent does the significance of any of these works change when considered in relation to modern atmospheric and climatic histories, including intensifying planetary warming, weather events and cycles, industrial pollution, and ozone depletion?

Keywords: *air, atmosphere, light, climate, climate change, weather, clouds, wind, storms, snow, ice, warming, temperature, times of day, seasons, air quality, breathing, pollution, smog, smoke, dust, desertification, landscape*



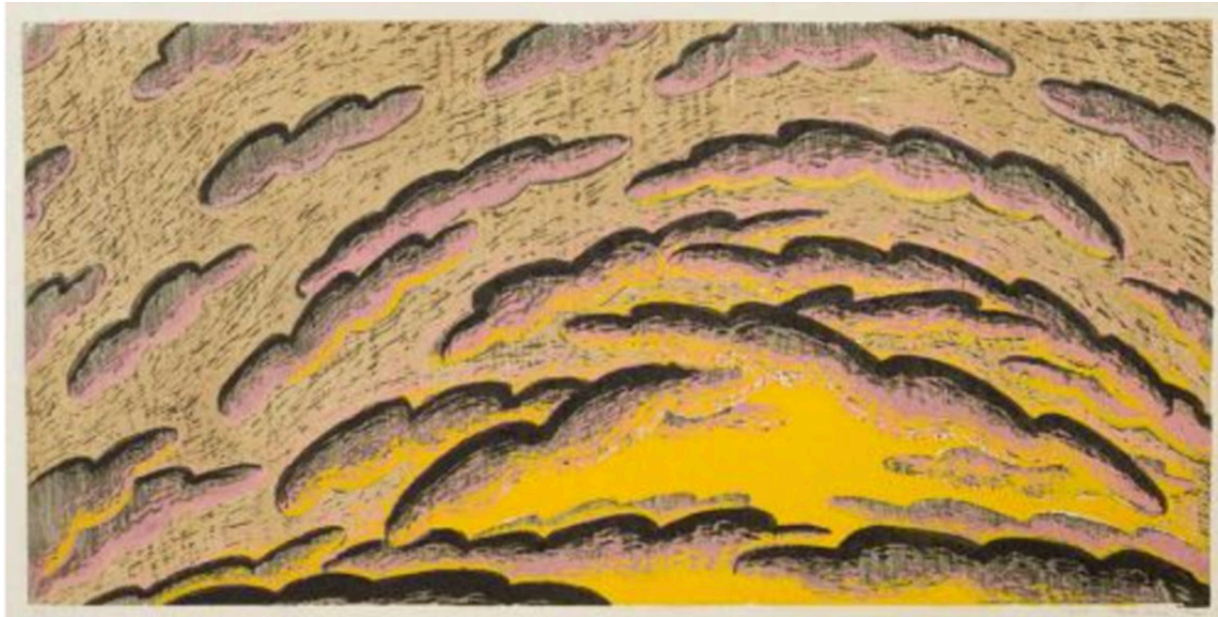
[Night Harbor](#), Richard Florsheim [Object 1967.73]

Teaching Strategies: General Questions

Individually and collectively, the works in the e-museum can help students think critically about how different artworks:

- Make air or atmosphere visible
- Make weather conditions visible
- Make air pollution or particulate matter visible
- Represent how air or atmosphere relate to nonhuman elements of an ecosystem or scene
- Highlight and comment on human beings' relationship to air or atmosphere
- Alter the viewer's sense of ecological being or habitat (and to what ends) by making air visible
- Locate aesthetic experience in air or atmospheric conditions
- Use air or atmospheric conditions to foster certain reactions or feelings

Each of these bulleted points can easily be converted into a general discussion prompt for a specific artwork by prefacing it with the phrase “Does this artwork...?” or “How does this artwork...?”



Dusk, Louisa Chase [Object 2019.0070]

Ecological and Cultural History

Introducing specific ecological history related to weather patterns, air conditions, or climate, especially in relation to places referenced by individual artworks, can transform how students experience the work and provoke thoughtful discussion of how its significance might have changed over time. Two examples:

Early nineteenth-century British painter J.M.W. Turner's small [watercolor study of a seascape](#) [Object 1981.0002] dates to a significant era in Britain's climate history (based on subject matter, it dates to after 1799, when Turner first began executing drawings of clouds; based on style, it likely dates to the 1810s or 1820s). Turner and his contemporary, the British painter John Constable, are widely credited with being the European painters who first "discovered" clouds. Whereas previous generations of landscape painters typically rendered the sky as a vertical plane, with imaginary clouds, Turner and Constable painted many studies of clouds from life and made clouds integral to creating a sense of perspectival depth in a painting.

Turner's interest in clouds coincided climatically with the tail end of the half-millennium event known as the "Little Ice Age," a period of extended global cooling that, in Turner's lifetime, had an especially deleterious effect on British harvests in the 1790s and 1810s (the latter exacerbated by volcanic eruptions). His interest in clouds also deepened after encountering Luke Howard's *Essay on Modifications of Clouds* (1803), a key text for modern atmospheric science. When Howard, a British businessman who painted watercolors of clouds as a hobby, noticed regularities between cloud's appearances and the climatic conditions that immediately preceded and followed them, he rightly determined that cloud types could therefore be used to predict the weather hours—occasionally even days—in advance. His *Essay on Modifications of Clouds* instituted the system for naming clouds that still remains in use today (stratus, cumulus, nimbus, cirrus, cumulonimbus, and so forth).

Ask your students how the significance of Turner's seascape changes when considered in relation to climate history and meteorological

history. Discuss how making the atmosphere and the idea of weather patterns more integral to a landscape painting could alter how a viewer experiences the non-atmospheric components of the painting. How might it contribute to a sense of narrative? How might it shape the viewer's affective response? What kind of narrative and/or affective response do they ascribe to this atmospheric painting?



[\[Seascape\]](#), Joseph Mallord William Turner [Object 1981.0002]

Ecological and Cultural History cont.

American photographer Pete Turner's photograph [Dust Storm, 1970](#), [Object 2004.0065.2] captures a lone umbrella thorn acacia tree in a savanna in Africa, where Turner traveled and photographed extensively throughout the late twentieth century. Umbrella thorn acacias, often simply called acacias, are fast-growing trees commonly found throughout Northern and Eastern Africa. They are capable of surviving even in areas with arid climates, droughts, heavy winds, saline winds, high temperatures, and sandy soils. Considered a sustainable resource, acacia trees are valuable to humans primarily for their durable wood and for the production of acacia gum.

Sandstorms in the Sahara and dust storms on African savannas, like the one that Turner's photograph captures, have long been common climatic occurrences, created by heavy winds interacting with arid or drought-stricken regions that have flat topographies. Such storms have become more frequent and intense since the time that Turner took his photograph, however, because of global climate change and deforestation. Sandstorms and dust storms are not just symptoms of desertification but also leading causes of it, as they degrade arable lands through wind erosion and deposit large quantities of fine dust elsewhere, sometimes thousands of miles away. As events that inject significant amounts of particulate matter into the atmosphere, they also contribute to respiratory problems in wild animal populations, livestock, and humans. Though a scourge of many northern African communities and cities for generations, African dust storms have become a more global concern in recent years, following annual atmospheric migrations of larger-than-usual quantities of Saharan dust into Europe and North America. In 2023, the UN General Assembly officially recognized sand and dust storms as phenomena that negatively impact the majority of the UN's official "Sustainable Development Goals."

Have your students discuss what ecological awareness they see Turner's photograph producing between its viewers and dust storms. How would

they characterize the photograph's aesthetic effects, and how do those effects impact how they answer this question? How might the significance of the photograph alter if its location were specified? What about if its date were the present year? What about if it were instead titled "Acacia Tree, 1970"? What about if its subject was a different species of tree? What about an animal? A human being?



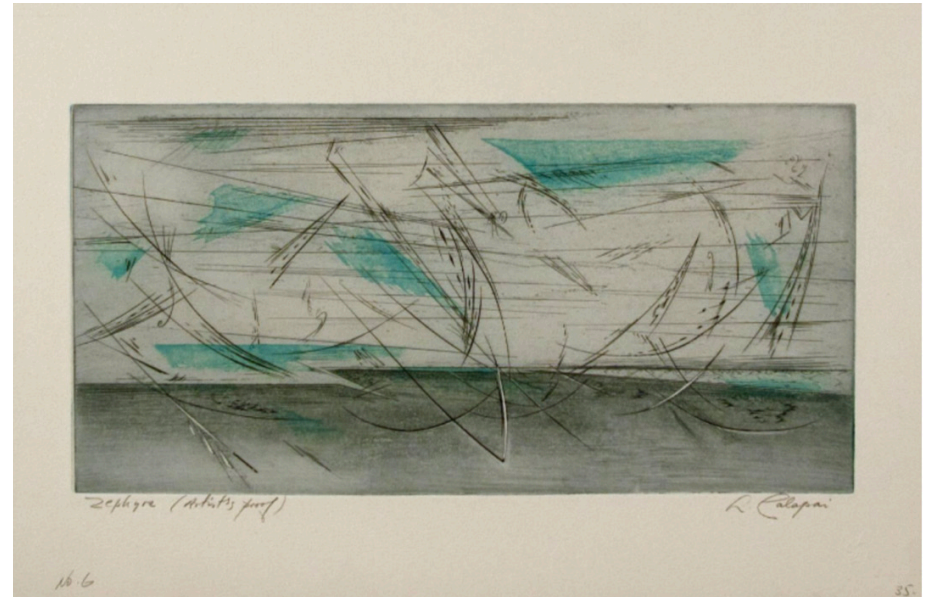
[Dust Storm, 1970](#), Pete Turner [Object 2004.0065.2]

Artist, Artistic Process, and Audience

You can also ask your students more directed questions based on biographical information about the artist, information about the methods and techniques used in creating the artwork, or information about the audiences for which a given artwork was created. For example:

Though twentieth-century American painter and printmaker Letterio Calapai gained fame as a realist, his print [Zephyrs](#) [Object 1993.020] dates to his emerging interest in abstraction and expressionism in the 1950s and 1960s. Population increases and industrial developments in the 1960s were part of the “Great Acceleration” period which climate historians now retrospectively identify as a key inflection point in the history of global warming’s intensification. However, as is the case today, regional weather patterns could still produce extended unseasonably cold periods. Though it is not clear when in 1964 Calapai created *Zephyrs*, he was living in New York City that year, and the winter of 1963-64 was unusually harsh. High temperatures rose above average only three times, and snowfall levels broke records, capped off by a massive late-season storm on March 9-10 that meteorologists dubbed “The Crown of Winter Storm.” The term zephyr, which can mean either “westerly breeze” or “gentle breeze,” came into English from ancient Greek, where it referred to Zephyrus, the mythological god of winds from the West. Based on prevailing climatic patterns in Ancient Greece, light, westerly breezes were harbingers of spring and thus associated with renewal, germination, fecundity, and growth. Such associations with westerly winds can be traced over time through a variety of European cultural traditions, including in the British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley’s famous early nineteenth-century “Ode to the West Wind,” a poem that Calapai likely knew (Calapai produced a different print in 1964, *Ozymandias*, that took its name from another famous Shelley poem). As is the case with most geographical latitudes between 30° and 60°N, New York City’s prevailing winds are westerly.

Have students discuss to what extent an image like *Zephyrs*, which seems to reference no particular chronological moment in climate history or



[Zephyrs](#), Letterio Calapai [Object 1993.020]

particular topographical locale, potentially changes in significance if read as a response to atmospheric conditions or weather patterns in a particular time and place. What associations with, or feelings about, a zephyr does the print create, and what elements in the print do you see creating them? What other terms are there for different kinds of winds, and what associations get built into them culturally? Note that, in European tradition, westerly winds’ mythological associations with renewal and growth have also problematically contributed to associations of Western cultures with “progress.” How do other ideas about winds shape how cultures see themselves?

Artist, Artistic Process, and Audience cont.

American printmaker and painter Robert Kipniss's [Reappearing](#) [Object 2015.0198] is one of many mezzotints he has produced that depict, at close or medium-close visual range, tree trunks or branches at night, dusk, or dawn. Known primarily for his lithographs and mezzotints, Kipniss uses those media to create small-scale works that capture subtle light transitions in intimate spaces that show clear traces of human presence but are devoid of human figures: smalltown backyards, alleys, driveways, parks, small interior rooms whose windows have views of backyards, and so forth. Nearly every Kipniss print integrates trees and/or leaves into its composition; many include spare, A-frame buildings. The compositions are inspired by drawings, photographs, and memories that Kipniss has of specific locations he has lived or visited, often in the Midwest (though he is now based out of the Hudson River Valley in New York).

Kipniss began his artistic career by writing poetry, before shifting to the visual arts. Nevertheless, through emphasis on solitary experiences, silent pauses, and subtle atmospheric changes, he imbues prints with a lyric poetic quality, and he has been commissioned at different points as an illustrator for editions of poems by introspective poets like Rainer Maria Rilke and Emily Dickinson. To create the atmospheric effects and the complex but narrow tonal range that give Kipniss mezzotints their distinctive—almost soft—look, Kipniss has developed his own meticulous set of processes for building up and reworking ink on industrially honed copper printing plates.

Based on the idea that being is necessarily an ecological thing because it involves being enmeshed in a complex set of relations with other things, discuss Kipniss's mezzotints as ecological expressions. What kinds of ecological relations and experiences do they foreground? To what end?

How would you characterize the “atmosphere” they create and the feelings they evoke? In what ways do they also depict “atmosphere” in a climatic or material sense? How politically significant or insignificant do you regard their attention to atmosphere in an era of global warming? What case would you make for their significance?



[Reappearing](#), Robert Kipniss [Object 2015.0198]

Visual Analysis

Any of the above approaches can be combined with more targeted questions about elements of form, composition, color, or style, based on student contributions to discussion. For example:

- How does the artist's chosen medium (painting, print, photograph, drawing, sculpture, etc) and material (paint, wood, metal, ceramic, etc.) shape your experience of the artwork and the ideas it communicates? Why might the artist have chosen this particular medium or materials?
- How do the style and colors of the artwork factor into your experience of it as an image that codes the atmospheric effects it captures positively (or negatively)? How might a different style or a different color scheme for the same general composition have produced a different affective experience than the one you're articulating? To what extent would you characterize its colors as "natural" or "unnatural" in context, and how does that matter to your response?
- What decisions do you see the artist making about what to include and not to include in the composition? What about the angle or perspective they adopt in the image? In the case of photographs, why might the artist have chosen to collapse (zoom) or expand (wide-angle) the depth of field in the image? How do these compositional choices contribute to your sense of what the photo is depicting, conveying, or commenting on? What elements of the composition seem beyond the artist's control? How do they contribute to your sense of what the artwork is depicting, conveying, or commenting on?
- What formal elements of this work contribute to how it makes air or atmosphere visible? What words would you use to describe these elements, and are they positive or negative ones? Why those words? What impact do these specific visual forms have on the way you are interpreting this work's relation to the atmospheric events or experiences it references?
- What seems most abstract about the work, and how do you interpret that decision on the part of the artist? What seems most representational about it, and how do you interpret that decision?



Martinique, André Kertész [Object 2018.0267]

Pairings and Groupings

Many of the works in the “Atmospheric” e-museum make for critically provocative pairings or groups. Some of our suggested groupings for discussion include:

- **Glow/luminescence:** George F. Higgins’s oil painting [Autumn in New England](#) [Object 1975.030]; an unidentified late 19th-century artist’s [photograph of a landscape with trees](#) [Object 1981.3401.09]; Peter Jogo’s mezzotint [Fox Hollow II](#) [Object 2012.0022]; Richard Florsheim’s lithograph [Night Harbor](#) [Object 1967.732]; Richard Wardle’s screenprint [Green Light](#) [Object 1994.095]; William H. Hays’s linocut [Twilight Village](#) [Object 2017.0714]; Tom Baril’s photograph [Lumahai Beach #3](#) [Object 2011.0138.01]; Pete Turner’s photographs [Dust Storm, 1970](#) [Object 2004.0065.2] and [Sand Dune and Tree](#), 1995 [Object 2004.0065.5]; and Frederic Whitaker’s watercolor [Sunset Glow](#) [Object 2000.0034]; and Barbara Hepworth’s screenprint [High Tide](#) [Object 1980.23]
- **Wind and air currents:** John Von Wicht’s lithograph [Vibrations on the Silent Air](#) [Object 1969.520]; Karl Schrag’s prints [Evening Mists – Dancing](#) [Object 1990.080] and [Storm Dance – Fish and Leaves](#) [Object 1990.035]; George Schreiber’s lithograph [Spring Storm](#) [Object 1968.044]; Letterio Calapai’s print [Zephyrs](#) [Object 1993.020]; Martha Margulis’s painting [Wind Song II](#) [Object 1980.1]; and Richard Koppe’s oil painting [North Wind](#) [Object 1965.0471]
- **Windswept trees:** Leopold Hugo’s photographs of [a Torrey pine in the evening](#) [Object 1981.1765] and [cypress trees bending in the wind](#) [Object 1981.1605]; Pete Turner’s photographs [Dust Storm, 1970](#) [Object 2004.0065.2] and [Sand Dune and Tree](#) [Object 2004.0065.5]; Martha Margulis’s painting [Wind Song II](#) [Object 1980.1]; Floyd Leslie Thompson’s print [Breezy Day](#) [Object 2012.0020]; and Robert Kipniss’s drypoint [Flying Leaves](#) [Object 2015.0195]
- **Cloudscapes:** J.M.W. Turner’s watercolor [Seascape](#) [Object 1981.0002]; Hyde Solomon’s painting [Cloudscape](#) [Object 1973.167]; Boris Artzybasheff’s painting [Landscape and sky](#) [Object 2015.0687]; E. Loyal Field’s oil painting [The North Field](#) [Object 1979.0032]; Louisa Chase’s woodcut [Dusk](#) [Object 2019.0070]; Gordon F. Muck’s acrylic painting [Abstract landscape](#) [Object 1995.0018]; Richard Florsheim’s lithographs [Opalescence](#) [Object 1977.171] and [Dawn](#) [Object 1967.744]; Michael A. Smith’s photograph [Clouds, New Jersey](#) [Object 2007.0033]; Laure Albin-Guillot’s photograph [Ciel de montagnes](#) [Object 2021.0299]; Ralph Gibson’s photograph [Clouds](#) [Object 1984.806A]; André Kertész’s photograph [Martinique](#) [Object 2018.0267]; and Nick Brandt’s photograph [Road to Factory with Zebra](#) [Object 2022.0089]
- **Storms:** Anders Zorn’s etching [Storm](#) [Object 1966.2186]; Harry Wickey’s etching [Storm at Night](#) [Object 1966.2464]; Louisa Chase’s woodcut [Cloudburst](#) [Object 2019.0078]; Karl Schrag’s print [Storm Dance – Fish and Leaves](#) [Object 1990.035]; Gabor Peterdi’s print [Storm](#) [1969.2090]; Pete Turner’s photograph [Dust Storm, 1970](#) [Object 2004.0065.2]; and Seong Moy’s woodcut [Spring Rain](#) [Object 1963.0111]
- **Before and after the storm:** Grant Wood’s lithograph [Approaching Storm](#) [Object 1968.050]; George Schreiber’s lithograph [Spring Storm](#) [Object 1968.044]; Mary Nimmo Moran’s print [Tween the Gloaming and the Mirk When the Kye Comes Hame](#) [Object 2011.0177]; Johan Elders’s photograph [After the Snow](#) [Object 1965.0029E]; Al Blaustein’s print [Threatening Sky](#) [Object 2001.0031]; Mark Klett’s photograph [Storm Clouds over Eastern Idaho, near Craters of the Moon](#) [Object 1990.165.2]; Nick Brandt’s photograph [Road to Factory with Zebra](#) [Object 2022.0089]; and Karl Schrag’s [First Sunlight After Rain](#) [Object 1970.672]

Pairings and Groupings cont.

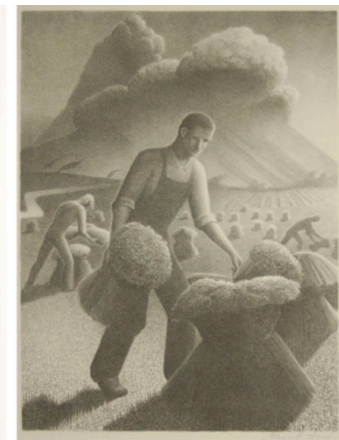
- **Cold:** Richard Koppé's painting [North Wind](#) [Object 1965.0471]; Tsuchiya Koitsu's woodblock print [Maruyama Park](#) [Object 1994.213]; Uehara Koren's woodblock print [Winter landscape](#) [Object 1995.1101]; Gordon F. Muck's painting [Winter landscape](#) [Object 1995.0020]; Michael A. Smith's photograph [Leaf Under Ice, New Jersey](#) [Object 2007.0031]; Boris Margo's cellocut [From Winter Nights](#) [Object 1967.1913]; Gabor Peterdi's etching [Blooming Ice](#) [Object 1969.2126]
- **Sand/dust/particulate matter:** Pete Turner's photograph [Dust Storm, 1970](#) [Object 2004.0065.2]; Herb Jackson's lithograph [Sand Dust](#) [Object 1984.258]; John Von Wicht's lithograph [Vibrations on the Silent Air](#) [Object 1969.520]; Richard Florsheim's lithograph [Opalescence](#) [Object 1977.171]; and Shu-Min Tung Kaldis's lithograph [Matter](#) [Object 2004.0038.08]
- **Reflections:** Kenneth Leech's lithograph [Still Waters](#) [Object 1995.0168]; C. Williams's oil painting [Nature's Mirror on the Thames](#) [Object 1968.179]; William H. Hays's linocut [Moonlight Coast](#) [Object 2017.0711]; Richard Florsheim's [Night Harbor](#) [Object 1967.732]; and Boris Margo's cellocut [Across the River](#) [Object 1967.1926]
- **Abstraction:** Jim Forsberg's oil painting [Nocturne](#) [Object 1962.016]; John Von Wicht's lithograph [Vibrations on the Silent Air](#) [Object 1969.520]; Gordon F. Muck's painting [Abstract landscape](#) [Object 1995.0018]; Gabor Peterdi's prints [Storm](#) [1969.2090] and [Blooming Ice](#) [Object 1969.2126]; Richard Koppé's oil painting [North Wind](#) [Object 1965.0471]; and Boris Margo's cellocut [From Winter Nights](#) [Object 1967.1913]
- **Daylight:** Jacob Hendricus Maris's oil painting of a [landscape with a windmill](#) [Object 0040.042]; C. Williams's oil painting [Nature's Mirror on the Thames](#) [Object 1968.179]; George F. Higgins's oil painting [Autumn in New England](#) [Object 1975.030]; Annabel Maunsell's print [Landscape, road](#) [Object 1995.0350]; Franco Fontana's photograph [Landscape Paesaggio](#) [Object 1986.573]
- **Moonlight:** William H. Hays's linocut [Moonlight Coast](#) [Object 2017.0711]; Jim Forsberg's oil painting [Nocturne](#) [Object 1962.016]; Robert Kipniss's mezzotint [Reappearing](#) [Object 2015.0198]; Lew Graham's oil painting [Night Moon](#) [Object 2013.0170]; and Charles Coiner's oil painting [Moonlit Water](#) [Object 2003.0042]



[Tween the Gloaming and the Mirk When the Kye Comes Home](#), Mary Nimmo Moran [Object 2011.0177]



[Spring Storm](#), George Schreiber [Object 1968.044]



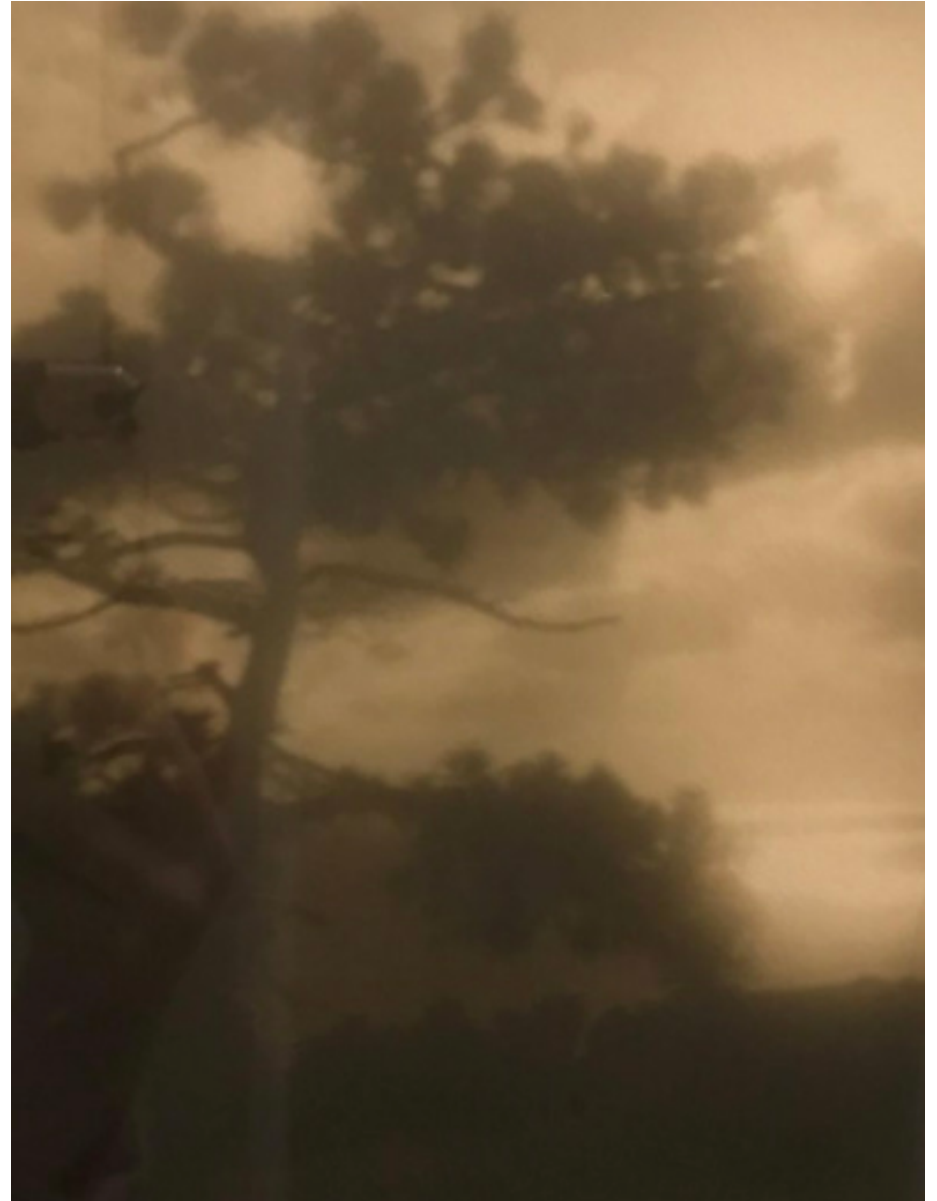
[Approaching Storm](#), Grant Wood [Object 1968.050]

Assignments and Further Resources

For general assignments related to this and other e-museums, consult “Art, Ecology and Climate E-Museums: A Teaching Guide.” You can access the guide via the Project’s webpage (under the “Learn” pulldown menu on the Syracuse University Art Museum’s website).

For an ecological history relevant to Leopold Hugo's untitled photograph [\[Solitary torrey pine\]](#) [Object 1981.1765], in this e-museum, consult the Art, Ecology, and Climate Project teaching guide for “The Anthropocene” e-museum, which can be accessed via the Project’s webpage.

For images that more directly evoke or depict air quality, see other Ecology and Climate E-Museums, including “Extraction,” “Pollution and Contamination,” and “Power and Energy.”



[\[Solitary torrey pine\]](#), Leopold Hugo [Object 1981.1765]

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