

Nature Diptych with a Microscope

Featured Artwork

Prairie Grasses Series, Fall is a watercolor painting inspired by the grasses of the Great Plains during the fall. This painting is a part of Dienstbier's series focusing on prairie grasses throughout the seasons. While some may think of the prairie as brown and colorless during the fall, Dienstbier challenges this idea by painting a spray of vibrant colors. The blades of grass dance around one another, as if a gentle wind is blowing. Sprinkled throughout the painting are a handful of white flowers that have bloomed late in the season.

Dienstbier's painting resembles a diptych, which is a type of art that uses two pieces to form a pair. Often, the two pieces are connected in telling a story. Here, *Prairie Grasses Series, Fall* is connected in its composition across the two pieces. You can follow one blade of grass in the left picture, see how it stops at the edge, and pick up where it continues on in the right picture.

Learning Objectives

- Create two paintings or drawings of a nature specimen inspired by a diptych.
- Observe how your view of a nature specimen changes from looking at with and without a microscope.
- Discuss - What more can you discover about a nature specimen by looking at it from up close?

[Click here to zoom in](#) ↗



Karen Dienstbier, *Prairie Grasses Series, Fall*, 1985, watercolor on paper, gift of Richard A. Dienstbier.

About the Artist

Karen Dienstbier is a Nebraska-based artist who creates colorful and vibrant watercolor paintings. She is especially inspired by the flowers and landscapes of the natural world around her. To gather inspiration, Dienstbier finds beauty in slowing down to observe nature on her walks in the wilderness.

Art Activity

You will need...

- Plant specimen (flower, leaf, etc.)
- Watercolor paper (or medium weight paper)
- Watercolor paint
- Paintbrushes
- Colored pencils
- Mini microscope (or magnifying glass)
- Pencil



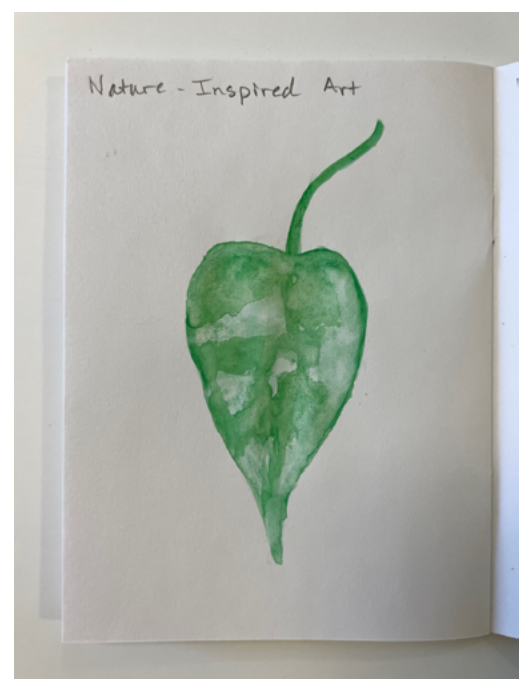
Instructions:

1 Go outside and find a nature specimen that you find unique and would like to paint. This could be a leaf, a twig, a flower, etc. Bring the nature specimen inside and gather all of your materials.



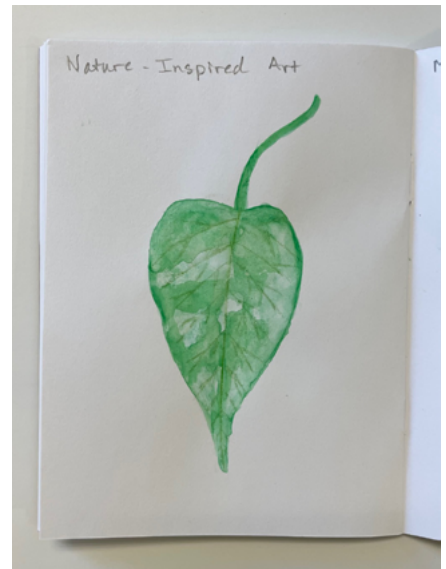
2 If you are using one sheet of paper, draw a line to divide the paper in half. The example here uses a small nature journaling notebook with thick paper to prevent the watercolor paint from soaking through.

3 At the top of one half of the paper, write "Nature-Inspired Art". Begin painting an interpretation of the nature specimen as you see it in front of you.



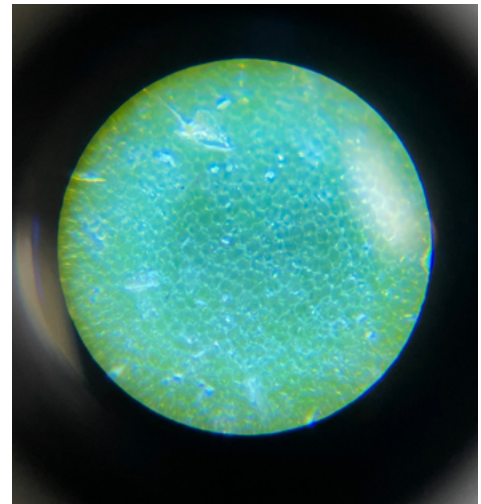
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Next, add any details. You can use colored pencil on top of dried watercolor paint to add shading, lines, etc. Colored pencil was used here to draw in the leaf veins.



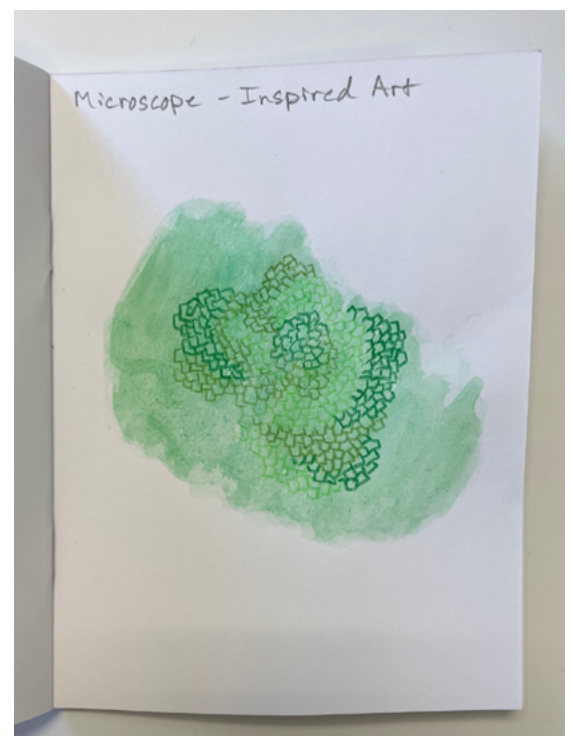
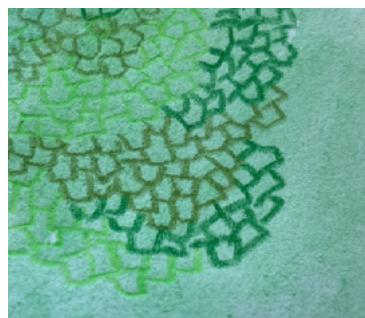
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Next, use a mini microscope (or magnifying glass) to study your nature specimen up close. If you are using the microscope, adjust the magnification settings until you get a clear image. The image on the right is a close up of the cell walls of the leaf, which have a hexagon shape and are green from chlorophyll.



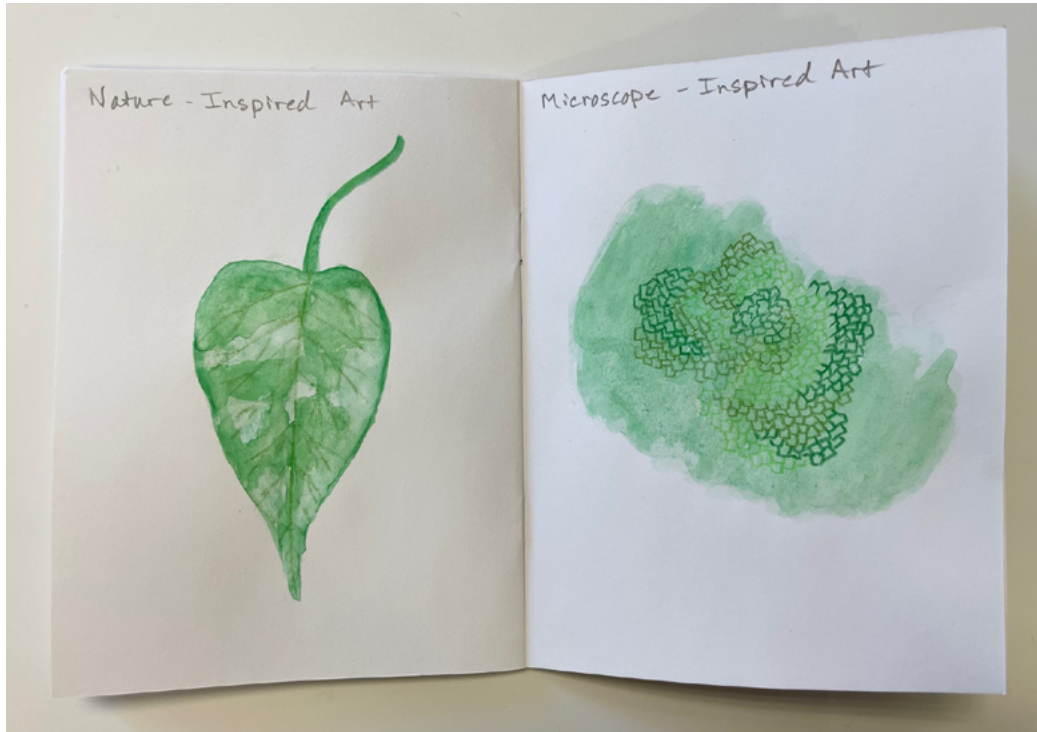
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On the other half of your paper, write "Microscope-Inspired Art". Paint or draw what you see through the microscope. This can be abstract and creative. Add any details with colored pencil, crayons, or markers. The example here is a wash of watercolor paint with many connected squares drawn in with colored pencil to represent the leaf cells.



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Compare your two paintings side by side. How do they form a pair (diptych)? How are they different? In what ways are they similar? Is one more abstract than the other?



Share!

Share your new creation with family and friends. Discuss your design inspiration and creative process with a partner.

Explore more!

If you created a diptych of a plant, try a different nature specimen next like a pinecone or twig. You can also experiment with different art materials such as colored pencils, crayons, or markers.