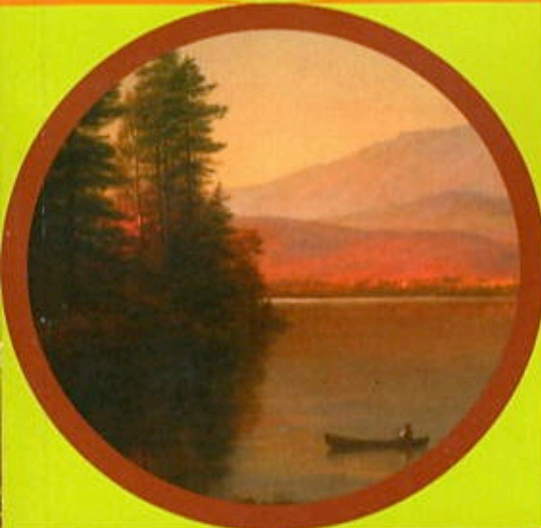
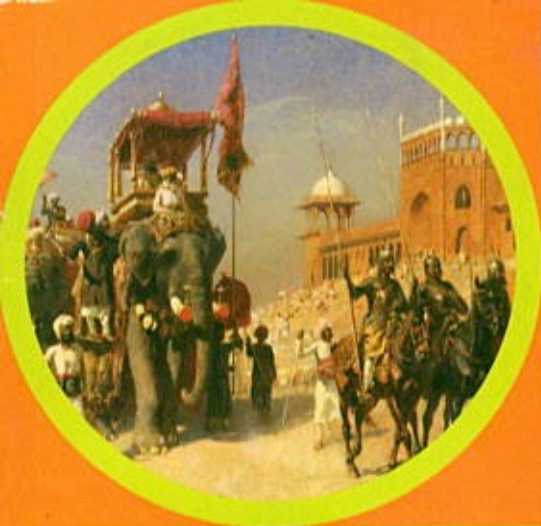


Look at ME

Reading Art and Stories with the Portland Museum of Art





Janice Kasper (United States, born 1950), *Driving North at Night*, circa 1995, oil on canvas, 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine. Anonymous gift, 2004.6. Photo by Meyersphoto.com.

The Poetry of Night

Lesson

9

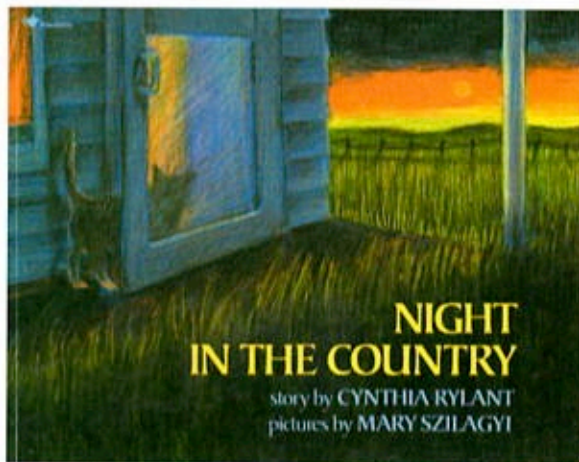
Lessons by Cathy Murray Grigsby and Pamela Anderson, Stevens Brook Elementary School, Bridgton, Maine

The bird's eye view of this Maine landscape provides viewers with a feeling of movement and action as we are plunged down a dark road from the woods, through farmland, past a mill, and into a city in the distance. The flattened space marked by the purple mountains and green hills at the top of the picture plane contrasts with the deep recessive space created by the road with its bright double yellow lines and drastically smaller details. The moose emerging from the trees to cross the road in the foreground looms large in comparison to the much smaller farmhouse (with a tiny dog howling at the moon) just down the hill. The scene is lit by bright moonlight, and the haloed moon and stars dance across the dark blue and purple sky. A small white airplane adds to the sense of travel and movement. The sharp yellow lines, tubular hay bales, and piles of cut logs create dynamic patterns and rhythms that help to move our eye further and further into the scene.

Janice Kasper's love for Maine and for animals is evident in this fanciful yet evocative painting. Raised in Connecticut, Kasper studied painting at the University of Connecticut at Storrs and at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Now living outside of Belfast, Kasper is disturbed by the encroaching suburbanization of rural Maine, a process she first witnessed in Connecticut. This is seen in *Driving North at Night* as one travels from the wooded landscape to ever increasing signs of human activity, from the farmhouse to the mill to the city. Kasper does not, however, show the details of the city or the effects of industrialization and pollution. Instead, the disparate elements of man and nature seem to coexist somewhat harmoniously. Kasper's emphasis on Maine scenes has been described as portraying "the real Maine" yet they retain a mystical aura because they are often nighttime scenes where the elements and perspectives are slightly askew. She balances a feeling of joy and nostalgia with a sense of unease and foreboding. Her delightful paintings of nature and animals serve as passionate statements against deforestation, hunting for sport, and man's encroachment on nature, but Kasper manages to balance poetry and outrage in a dreamlike way in her paintings. Everything appears calm and quiet, but really there is a battle being waged between man and nature, and in Kasper's eyes, nature is the clear winner.

Kasper's interest in animals and nature has been a constant presence in her art. As a student at the University of Connecticut, she became tired of always drawing and painting the human figure, and so she used the resources of the agricultural school to draw the farm animals found on campus. Kasper sums up her painting, "My work is directly related to my growing concern over the protection of wildlife and wild lands in Maine. Having grown up in rural Connecticut I witnessed as a child how quickly rural areas can be turned into suburban areas. Presently I can see the start of suburbanization in Maine. This growth in housing and population has a direct effect on the animals that inhabit this land. Through my work I hope to make the viewer aware of these changes before any permanent harm is done. I am trying to resist being dictatorial so my work is often tempered with humor. I also keep forward in my mind that although the message is important the work should firstly be read as an artfully painted surface."

In these lessons, students explore the mood and feeling of nighttime through Kasper's *Driving North at Night* and by reading *Night in the Country* by Cynthia Rylant. They will express their discoveries of nature and animals through writing creative poetry and painting their own nighttime landscapes.



Night in the Country by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Mary Szilagyi, Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 1986.

GREAT AND

CREATURES

ECOLOGY, "BIODIVERSITY," "ECOSYSTEM"—these words are mainstays of the conservation movement in America. Today, youngsters sing "Habitat, habitat, got to have a habitat" in classrooms, and at least one institution of higher learning, Maine's own College of the Atlantic, offers a bachelor of arts degree in human ecology. Thanks to writer-scientists like Bernd Heinrich and E.O. Wilson, our awe of nature grows all the time.

Some of the credit for our heightened awareness of the natural world must be given to artists. Every year painters, printmakers, sculptors, and artisans across the country and the world celebrate the soaring eagle, the swift cheetah, the mighty bear. Museums, societies, guilds, and the like support the exhibition and publication of this work, all of which serves to remind us of the beauty of wild animals—and the often pressing need to preserve them.

Maine is home to many remarkable *animaliers*, or animal artists. The four featured here—Janice Kasper, Father Paul Plante, Gina Sawin, and Rebecca Goodale—pay special heed to the call of the Maine wild. Their art celebrates the inhabitants of a kingdom we humans often have trouble sharing.

MB&H Contributing Editor Carl Little wrote the introduction to *Painting Maine: The Borrowed Views* of Connie Hayes. His most recent book is *The Art of Monhegan Island*.



JANICE KASPER
Joining Message to Art

"MY WORK," WRITES painter Janice Kasper of Swanville, "is directly related to my growing concern over the protection of wildlife and wild lands in Maine." Growing up in the Connecticut countryside, she witnessed how quickly rural lands can become suburban—a fate she sees increasingly befalling parts of her adopted state. She also recognizes the effects this sprawl has on the animals that inhabit the land.

Kasper attempts to make her viewers aware of these changes, though she often balances what she terms the "dictatorial" side of some of her images with humor—often, it should be noted, a dark humor. *Cows or Condos*, 1988, for example, shows seaside farmland with cows on one side of the painting and a developer's flagged stakes on the other.

