



Inspired by *River of Their Passing* by artist Emily McIlroy, displayed as part of *All is a Circle Within Me*, exhibited fall 2024 at the Holter MOA

### River of Their Passing Artist Explanation

In the worldview of the Yup'ik people of Alaska, migrating salmon that have died after spawning leave their "canoes" on the banks of lakes and rivers so that their spirits may travel overland back to the sea. The imagery in *River of Their Passing* draws on this conceptualization, and then envisages the flesh of another migrating species, that of the caribou, assisting the salmon spirits in their terrestrial journey home. From this perspective, the bodies of the caribou become an alternate boat for the spirits of the salmon, alluding not only to an ongoing and unbroken circle of time, but also suggesting the co-mingling and interpenetration of the material and the spiritual, the corporeal and the incorporeal. *River of Their Passing* images an existence in which there is no real division between past, present and future, and in which there is no separation between the world of the living and the world beyond.

With art, we have permission to rip something apart and make something new from it. Use torn paper, in the style of Emily McIlroy, to create a vessel to carry feelings, thoughts, whatever you would like, forward.

### Torn Paper Art

#### Materials:

Paper to be torn  
Glue stick  
Small foam pieces or cut-up sponge  
Matboard for backing

### Lesson Plan:

1. There are 2 ways to start: with destruction or conception.  
Destruction: start tearing paper. You can make big rips or carefully considered tears. Once you feel like you have enough material gathered, start to look for shapes in your torn paper. Is there a piece you really like that reminds you of a handle? Maybe a piece that looks like a dorsal fin? By looking for shapes in the material we have torn, we are allowing our minds' eyes to start to create and imagine a future for our vessel. If you feel strongly pulled to a shape, start to build your vessel around it.  
Conception: Start by laying out your paper. Think about what it is that you would like to create. Are you looking to create a vessel in the shape of something utilitarian or everyday? A vase or pitcher? Maybe a cup? Or are you looking to create a vessel along

an animalistic sense? The shed skin of a snake, the discarded sheath of a bison horn? Something universal? A vessel in the form of a lantern or shooting star?



# HOLTER MUSEUM of ART

## *All is a Circle Within Me* Exhibition Connection

Once you've decided on your vessel, begin to tear your paper. You can take big rips or carefully considered tears. If parts of your vessel need precision, use scissors or an exacto knife. Remember that the process is meant to encourage creative construction and problem-solving through letting go of perfect control. If you find yourself trying to perfect part of the design, take a step back or pause for a mindful breath before continuing.

2. Practice arranging your torn and cut pieces of paper. Maybe a torn piece that looks good in one spot looks even better when used in another location. Be open to trying different paper arrangements for your design. Glue small pieces of foam to the back of paper and then to the surface of the mattboard to "float" your design. Play with layering paper in multi-dimensions with the use of foam "floats". When you feel settled on an arrangement, you can begin to glue down pieces to your mattboard.

### Variations:

Prepare your own paper for use in this project. You will need larger pieces of blank paper and ink, paint, or another liquid based medium to transfer the design. Try letting paint pool and run across the design in an abstract form. Once the paper has dried, begin the process outlined above.

### Further connections

<https://www.emilymcilroy.com/>

<https://holtermuseum.org/exhibitions/all-is-a-circle-within-me/>

<https://www.britannica.com/list/7-unique-burial-rituals-across-the-world>

<https://theconversation.com/death-and-dying-how-different-cultures-deal-with-grief-and-mourning-197299>

This lesson plan was originally written for **Survivors of Suicide Loss** at the Montana State Capital November 2024.

### Resources for grief:

<https://afsp.org/international-survivors-of-suicide-loss-day/>

<https://good-grief.org/resources/>