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Professor Cohen
10 Ways to Know Nature
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“The History of Art: Humans”

[Transition Music]

Olivia: (breathing heavily) Okay, we’ve been walking for three miles. Are we almost here? This better be good.

Molly: (breathing heavily) Yeah look it’s right up there! We are just going to go inside it’s going to awesome and you’re really going to like it.

Olivia: Really? I hope so. I mean at least it will be cold in there.

[Short Pause] [Cave Sounds Begin]

Olivia: So we are in the random cave in Lascaux, France... god knows anyone knows where that is. I would much rather but in Paris but I am trying this for you. So can you tell me where these paintings are?

Molly: Maybe you should stand up and look around....

Olivia: Oh! Oh that’s pretty cool! What are those, bulls?

Molly: So we are looking at some nice bulls that were painted in 25,000 BCE painted by cave men and...

Olivia: Wait! 25,000 BCE? How are they still in tact?

Molly: Well not many people travel in caves so they have literally been in tact for so long. Plus they were made out of charcoal and natural materials so there is not much wind or anything to really disrupt them.

Olivia: How did they even get up there?

Molly: So a lot of people don’t know this but cavemen actually built scaffolding to reach the ceiling and they also found, when people were exploring these caves, they found

lanterns that were actually used to help them see. So they are actually more advanced than you might have thought.

[Short Pause]

Molly: Olivia....?

Olivia: Oh, oh sorry. I am just looking around it seems that there is so much history here.

Molly: Well yeah. This is where the history of art is fabled to have begun.

Olivia: Really? Right here? Right where we are standing?

Molly: Yep.

Olivia: Wow..

[Transition Music] [Cave Sounds Fade Out]

Molly: Hey guys thanks for joining us this week. As always, this is Molly...

Olivia: And this is Olivia!

Molly: And today will be talking about art and nature. What do you think they have in common?

Olivia: I don't know Molly. What do you think?

Molly: I don't know lets find out!

Molly: The Hall of Bulls and other caves is where art is believed to have started. Through this art man was connected to nature. What we are wondering, and what we will discuss during this show, is whether or not that connection has been strengthened or weakened through the evolution of art.

Olivia: So let me ask you this: Who knew nature better, modern photographers or cave men? How did they express their understanding of nature?

[Transition Music]

Olivia: When thinking of nature and art, one thing that immediately comes to mind is definitely the landscape paintings of the mid 19th century. Famous artists of that time included Thomas Cole and Frederic Edwin Church. They were both part of the Hudson River School, which was a group of artists dedicated to portraying their surroundings and beyond. This was a transnational movement. They had landscapes anywhere from the Hudson River Valley to the Dutch countryside. These oil paintings were often on huge canvases, some even up to 10 feet long.

Molly: Okay so they must have been outside painting for a long time right.

Olivia: ...No... Some of these painters never even saw the landscape they painted, they just based it off of their imagination and other religious influences.

Molly: Oh they must have had pretty wild imaginations.

Olivia: Yeah definitely. In these paintings, there is often sublime imagery meant to show the divinity of nature.

Molly: So it seems these artists wanted to portray the ideal nature rather than how nature is realistically.

Olivia: Yeah I think that too but it seems that as time progressed the artists' depiction of nature became less idealized and more realistic, but I mean it's so hard to say that...

Molly: Because you can't speak generally about art.

Olivia: Yeah I mean it goes in so many different directions and styles.

Molly: Took the words right out of my mouth.

[City Sounds Begin] [Soft Background Music Begins When Speaking Begins]

Molly: Well we have left France completely and now...

Olivia: And now we are hitting the streets of Easton, Pennsylvania to find reactions of strangers to this hyperrealist work.

Molly: We are going to see if it blows their mind because it blew my mind. Did it blow your mind?

Olivia: It definitely blew my mind!

Reaction of “Pedestrian”
[Fade Background Music and City Sounds Out]

Molly: Hyperrealists are perfectionists to say the least. Their works look like photographs, it’s almost impossible to tell the difference between art and real life.

Olivia: Wait, don’t most of them base their work off of photographs?

Molly: Yes! So they don’t have to spend long hours studying their subjects before painting it, but they definitely have to study the photographs.

Olivia: Right, so you could say they are two levels away from interacting with nature. But I mean honestly it must take so much skill.

Molly: Oh yeah. So cave painters, they drew on walls, and landscape artists painted on canvases, but hyperrealists base paint or sculpt their works based on photographs that are based on nature.

[Transition Music]

Olivia: Finally onto our last topic that brings us to the present.

Molly: And what is that?

Olivia: Modern Environmental Art Molly, get with it!

Molly: My bad I guess I got caught up in the hyperrealist stuff. I haven’t really been paying attention lately.

Olivia: And that is the goal of the environmental artists!

Molly: Um what?

Olivia: The modern artists use the natural landscape as their canvas to advocate for current environmental problems to try and get people to pay attention to them.

Molly: Oh Okay! I think I heard about some guy who does that. Like Adam Silverworth or something... ?

Olivia: Close, close, it's Andy Goldsworthy. He is a popular environmental artist. He used the land around him to emphasize the importance of being connection with nature. This is something he believes that society has lost. Whether his work is temporary or permanent, it is constantly interacting with the changing environment.

Molly: If his work is temporary how does he share it with the public?

Olivia: He uses photography and film

Molly: So his art is all about the impermanence of nature but he uses technology to make it permanent. That's pretty cool.

Olivia: Yeah well I mean not everyone can visit the specific location of his sculptures so this technology is a benefit that let say cave painters didn't have. If someone wanted to visit the cave painter's art, they would literally have to go to the cave.

Molly: Right that was actually the problem. In 1963 they shut down the Hall of Bulls and actually took 20 years to build a replica nearby. That is what tourists visit they can't actually go to the real Hall of Bulls because so many people were trafficking though there that they were destroying the works.

Olivia: So technology can really connect us to the past and keep it alive for future generations.

Molly: It's actually really amazing. We can see something that was done one year ago or we could see something that was done 27,000 years ago like that is such a crazy expanse of time to actually be able to witness.

[Transition Music Plays Throughout Rest of Podcast]

Molly: So lets try and figure out our main question

Olivia: What was that again I forgot. I have been getting caught up in all of this history and nature.

Molly: Well we basically have been talking about it the whole time. Who was more connected to nature, cave painters or landscape artists, hyperrealists or modern environmental artists?

Olivia: Oh crap, I really thought that we were going to be answer this but with all of this new information and the more we talk about it, the more I can't come to a conclusion.

Molly: I think that is the point. All artists know nature whether it is a rough 2D sketch of a bull on a wall or a shocking realistic painting of a woman in a bathtub. Each artist understands their subject on a personal level.

Olivia: Yeah all of these artists knew their individual subjects and aspects of nature well, even if they didn't reflect every single aspect of nature in their work.

Molly: That is a good point. So there really isn't a definitive answer to this question. These artists all understood nature to the same extent but just chose to represent it differently. This brings to mind a really good quote by Lee Price, a hyperrealist, which seems to embody this idea...

[Short Pause]

“Lee Price”: I don't believe there is much of a difference between the conceptual, the abstract, and the figurative. They are different modes of communication, but in the end you get to the same place. It seems to me that all art is about taking an idea and making it concrete.

[Short Pause]

Olivia: Wow she really sums it up nicely, better than I could ever.

Molly: That actually really makes me think, could you say that all humans are nature then?

Olivia: Yeah, that seems like a fair claim.

Molly: And so if all humans are nature, any connection with a human would be a connection to nature.

Olivia: And isn't that all we do?

Molly: Well that's what this is right now. So I guess we can say that this podcast is art?

Olivia: I think we should leave that one up to the audience....

[Transition Music and Fade Out of Podcast]