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Parts of this guide are adapted from the original essay "End of the Range: Charlotte Skinner in the Eastern Sierra," by Kolin L. Perry, M.Ed. Langson IMCA thanks Perry for his scholarship.



UCI Jack & Shanaz Langson Institute & Museum of California Art

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Note to Teachers

UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art (Langson IMCA) is a rich resource for educators and students grades 3–12, and offers school visits, programs, digital tools, and activities that contribute to the development of critical thinking, empathy, and curiosity about art and culture. School visits offer the opportunity for students to develop their skills of observation and interpretation of art, to build knowledge independently and with one another, and to cultivate an interest in artistic making. This Teacher Resource Guide includes essays, artist biographies, strategies for integrating the exhibition into an interdisciplinary curriculum, discussion questions, methods for teaching with objects, a vocabulary list (words marked in **bold**), and activities focused on four works included in *End of the Range: Charlotte Skinner in the Eastern Sierra*.

About the Exhibition

End of the Range: Charlotte Skinner in the Eastern Sierra explores the work and life of Charlotte Butler Skinner (1879–1963), an artist renowned for vibrant depictions of California's Sierra Nevada and the desert country of Owens Valley. Organized by the Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, the exhibition illuminates Skinner's artistic evolution through approximately forty paintings and drawings created by the artist over a thirty-year period. Works from Langson IMCA's permanent collection give further insight into Skinner's mentors and circle of artist friends, including Aaron Edward Kilpatrick, Rinaldo Cuneo, and William Wendt, some of whom visited her residence in Lone Pine, California, in search of creative inspiration. Other artists on view include Arthur F. Mathews, Elsie Palmer Payne, Gottardo Piazzoni, and Helen Forbes.

This presentation illustrates and contextualizes Skinner's profound connection to the landscape of Lone Pine and reflects her unwavering commitment to her craft and the Lone Pine community. Skinner was a strong advocate for education in visual art in Owens Valley and offered painting and drawing lessons to local children. She also collected handcrafted baskets that she acquired from **Timbisha Shoshone** weavers living near Lone Pine. Some of these baskets are on view in the exhibition. Examining Skinner's journey from San Francisco to Lone Pine, *End of the Range* highlights the captivating beauty and artistic significance of the Eastern Sierra and reveals Skinner's enduring legacy as a pioneer of California **landscape painting**.

This exhibition was organized by the Nevada Museum of Art, Reno. It was generously supported by John A. White Jr. in memory of Charlotte Skinner's grandson, James Skinner.

Featured Works

Charlotte Skinner, *Untitled*, 1906 Charlotte Skinner, *The Inyos*, 1927 Charlotte Skinner, *Spring, Silver City, Nevada,* undated Gottardo Piazzoni (1872–1945), *Moon Over Green Trees, Green Brae*, 1910

See full listings below for medium, dimensions, and collection information.

Learn More

To schedule a school visit, please contact the Education Department by email (imca@uci.edu) or phone (949–476-0924) or register online at imca.uci.edu.



William Lyle Skinner [attributed], *Charlotte Skinner Painting in the Owens Valley*, date unknown, Photograph, 4×3 in. Collection of Steve and Mary Mizroch; courtesy Joel B. Garzoli Fine Art

About the Artist

Charlotte Butler Skinner (1879–1963) was an artist and educator who lived in the Eastern Sierra of California from 1905 to 1933. She spent her early life in San Francisco, immersing herself in a community of artists working and exhibiting there. After moving to the relatively remote community of

Lone Pine, California, her home on Brewery Street became an escape from the Bay Area for artists and friends seeking community among the company of other artists.

Born in 1879, she studied at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art and the California School of Design—institutions later

Skinner painted landscapes depicting Owens Valley and embraced printmaking and art education.

combined as the San Francisco Art Institute—where she studied with Arthur Frank Matthews, Gottardo Piazzoni, and others. There she also met fellow student William (Bill) Lyle Skinner. The two were married in 1905 and moved to the Skinner family's home in Lone Pine, California, where she would reside for almost thirty years.

During her time in Lone Pine, Skinner painted landscapes depicting Owens Valley and embraced printmaking and art education. She was one of the few visual artists working in the Owens Valley in this period, and her life's work was devoted to documenting, preserving, and sharing her intimate familiarity with the unique landscape of the Eastern Sierra.

Skinner showed her artistic work extensively throughout her life, including at the Stanford Art Gallery (1930), Portland Art Museum (1933), the Nevada Art Gallery (1952), and the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum (1956), often alongside members of her artistic community.

After a brief move to Eugene, Oregon, in 1933, the Skinners moved in 1935 to Morro Bay, California, where Skinner continued to make art. She participated in local exhibitions, founded community arts organizations, and throughout her life opened her home to those who wished to view her studio, artwork, and extensive Native American basketry collection.



Charlotte Skinner, *Untitled*, 1906, oil on board, $9 \times 16\frac{1}{2}$ in. Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art. Bequest of John A. White Jr. in memory of Charlotte Skinner's grandson, James Skinner

About the Artwork: Charlotte Skinner, Untitled, 1906

Following her marriage to Bill Skinner in 1905, the couple moved to the town of Lone Pine in Owens Valley, a vertical stretch of dry, arid land along the California-Nevada border. Lone Pine sits between the Inyo Mountains to the east and the Sierra Nevada to the west, and is home to Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the contiguous United States, and Death Valley, the lowest point in North America. The Owens River runs parallel to the two mountain ranges and empties south of Lone Pine into Owens Lake, at the time a lush area.

Skinner became enamored with her new home in Lone Pine. She was inspired by its majestic landscape and admired the ancestral traditions of the region's **Indigenous** people. Completed in 1906, this untitled oil painting is Skinner's first depicting her new home in Lone Pine and portrays Owens Lake, a short distance from the Skinner home. It contains elements that would characterize her extensive body of work: vibrant greens, blues, and earth tones, and close attention to the rugged contours of the Eastern Sierra.

A few years after Skinner's arrival, construction began on the Los Angeles Aqueduct, which conveyed water from the Owens River to the city. The river and its lake had provided for a verdant environment that had sustained regional Indigenous communities for centuries and had allowed later settlers to grow fruit and other crops. Completed in 1913, the 200-mile aqueduct diverted water from the region to Los Angeles and had a devastating impact on the Owens Valley watershed and ecosystem, changing it permanently.

The relation between Owens Valley locals and the City of Los Angeles was deeply contentious. Many residents of the valley felt their livelihoods were being taken from them. Some went to work as engineers and builders of the aqueduct to provide for their families, while others sold their homes and land and left the area altogether. The Skinner family, for example, was forced to move to Reward, California, after their neighbor sold their land to the aqueduct project, effectively cutting off their water supply.

Painted soon after her arrival from San Francisco, Skinner's untitled painting precedes this tumult, and depicts Owens Lake abundant with water. This painting is therefore both an exploration of the artist's environment and a record of a landscape that no longer exists.

Charlotte Skinner moved to the Owens Valley in 1905 and completed this painting of the nearby Owens Lake during her first year in her new home. She did not give it a title. Ask students to suggest a title for this work and to explain why ascribed that title to it.

Ask students to imagine stepping into this painting. What would it be like to be there? Ask them to explore it with their senses: What would they hear? Smell? Feel? Encourage them to describe the parts of the painting that suggest these sensory experiences.

Provide each student with a blank sheet of $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ -inch paper. Ask them to hold the paper horizontally and draw a $3 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ -inch rectangle in the center of the page that represents the dimensions of Skinner's painting. Encourage students to create a schematic diagram of the painting inside the rectangle, spending more time on the areas of the artwork that attract their attention. Ask them to write things they discover in the margins around the drawing, connecting their notes to their discoveries with arrows. The group then shares their findings.

A Focus on Place

Considering her life's work, Skinner remarked, "My work has been exclusively of the Sierra Nevada and the Desert Country of Owens Valley." This quote and her work make clear that Skinner was inspired by the terrain surrounding her home.

Many artists paint a particular place repeatedly. Some examples include:

—Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), best known for his landscape series One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (now Tokyo, Japan)

—Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), who painted the French town of Pontoise in every season

<u>—Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940), who found endless fascination in a park</u> viewed from his Paris apartment window

<u>—Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), who created more than sixty paintings of</u> Mont Sainte-Victoire

—Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), who focused the last decades of her life on capturing New Mexico's landscape

—Charles E. Burchfield (1893–1967), who found inspiration in the streets, railroad yards, and surrounding countryside of Buffalo, New York

Divide your students into groups and have them select an artist and research the place they depicted and the artworks they created. Each group then presents their findings to the class.

Then each student can envision a place important to them, with which they have a deep bond. It might be a place they experience daily—sitting under a tree, the view out their bedroom window—or one they remember from the past.

Challenge students to draw, paint, or write about that place in a way that conveys a vivid vision of it and the sensations it holds. Their goal is to create an artwork—in whatever medium—that will allow their classmates to understand their bond with this special place.

Water: A Dwindling Resource

Water is a resource vital to life. Having the water in your home shut off abruptly, as happened to the Skinner family in the early 20th century, may seem like a distant possibility. But in 2023, residents of Rio Verde Foothills, Arizona, had their water turned off by the City of Scottsdale.

The scarcity of water, especially in the southwest region of the United States, is an ongoing environmental concern. In 2023, the *New York Times* published a series of articles documenting the scope of the problem. <u>One</u> article in the series focuses specifically on California.

Ask more advanced students (high school level) to read the article and discuss what measures might be taken, both individually and governmentally, to protect this precious resource. Younger students can discuss what they can do to conserve this precious resource.

Activities



Charlotte Skinner, The Inyos, 1927, oil on board, 20 × 24 in. Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art. Bequest of John A. White Jr. in memory of Charlotte Skinner's grandson, James Skinner

About the Artwork: Charlotte Skinner, The Inyos, 1927

Skinner painted many scenes visible within walking distance of her homestead, including the Owens River and Lake, silhouettes of mountains, and cottonwood groves in irrigated valleys. This oil painting depicts the Invo Mountains on the north edge of Lone Pine.

Though Skinner experimented with non-representational or abstract painting, The Inyos is a straightforward representation of her subject and

contrasts the mountains' warm brown and red surfaces with the vivid yellow sagebrush and stream on the floor of the Owens Valley.

The artist Maynard Dixon, Skinner's longtime friend, painted *Inyo Range at* Sunset (Lone Pine) from a similar vantage in 1919. Though the perspective was almost identical, Dixon used a smaller range of colors to form large shapes that unified the mountain's planar surfaces.

Dixon visited Lone Pine regularly with

her collecting after her move to Lone Pine. his wife, the noted photographer Dorothea Lange, and focused his paintings

Skinner was an avid collector

baskets. She began collecting

San Francisco but expanded

of Native American woven

them while still living in

on local scenes and residents. Where other artists focused on the Sierra Nevada mountains, Dixon preferred painting the Inyo Mountains and surrounding desert.

Skinner was an avid collector of Native American woven baskets. She began collecting them while still living in San Francisco but expanded her collecting after her move to Lone Pine, where she was introduced to the work of Timbisha Shoshone and Northern Paiute weavers, who lived near Lone Pine Creek in the Owens Valley. By the time of her passing, Skinner had amassed over one hundred Native American baskets including vessels by weavers of Washoe, Maidu, Pomo, and Yurok/Karuk ancestry.

Charlotte Skinner

The Inyos

Skinner and her friend Maynard Dixon (1875–1946) painted an almost identical view of the Inyo Mountains. It is always interesting to see how different artists depict the same subject. Compare and contrast how each artist treated this majestic landscape by listing the things they share and then by looking for differences between the two paintings.



Maynard Dixon, Inyo Range at Sunset (Lone Pine), 1919, 16 × 20 in., oil on canvas. Private collection.

Skinner showed her paintings extensively and gained accolades for her inspired depictions of the Owens Valley. In many instances she signed her work "C.B. Skinner," rather use than use her given name, Charlotte. Many women artists in the early 20th century felt that concealing their gender might help further their careers. Ask students to discuss why a woman artist might decide to conceal their gender. Have the students research women's rights in the early 20th century. What has changed since then and what work still needs to be done?

View and Discuss

Native American Basket Weaving in California

Skinner was an avid collector of Native American baskets and displayed them prominently in her home. Such baskets were originally used for eating, gathering, sorting, and cooking, during ceremonies, and even to carry children. Weaving skills are passed down to continue ties to Native culture and traditions, and, today, basket-making is recognized as an art form.

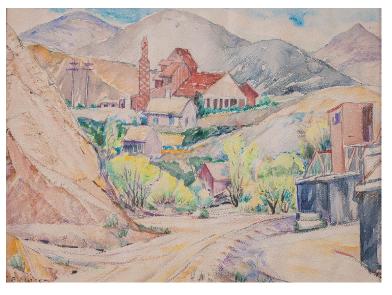
Although becoming an accomplished basket weaver can take years, the basic concepts of weaving can be introduced even to young children. Here is <u>one example of a lesson plan</u> from the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture intended for K–2 students. For older students, too, making a simple woven container will yield a sense of accomplishment and develop an appreciation for the skills needed to produce these useful objects.

Friends of the Inyo

Inyo County, which includes the Owens River Valley, has been the homeland of the Mono, Coso, Timbisha, and Kwaiisu peoples for thousands of years. Its recent settler history also includes mines, railroads, ranches, and farms. This history is still evident in the culture, livelihoods, and family trees of the county's current residents. To learn more about the efforts being made to preserve and protect the environment of this region, visit the website Friends of the Inyo and read their most recent newsletter <u>The Juniper</u>.

About the Artwork





Charlotte Skinner, *Spring, Silver City, Nevada*, undated, watercolor on paper, 12 × 15³⁄₄ in. Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art. Bequest of John A. White Jr. in memory of Charlotte Skinner's grandson, James Skinner

About the Artwork: Charlotte Skinner, *Spring, Silver City, Nevada*, undated

Skinner and members of her family would frequently travel hours to the edges of the Owens Valley, the High Sierra, and nearby Nevada, and she made several paintings depicting Laurel Mountain and Convict Lake, near Mammoth Lakes; Mount Tom, outside of Bishop, California; Palm Springs, California; and Silver City, Nevada.

Mining was the Owens Valley's predominant industry in the early 1900s, and it shaped the careers and lifestyle of the Skinner family, which

Mining was the Owens Valley's predominant industry in the early 1900s, and it shaped the careers and lifestyle of the Skinner family, which jointly owned three mines outside of Lone Pine jointly owned three mines outside of Lone Pine and nearby in Darwin Hills that produced silver, zinc, and lead. For a time, these were known as the largest producers of lead and silver in California.

Charlotte Skinner was active in the administration of the mines and brought painting supplies with her on visits to these sites to create new work. She could not, however, carry with her on these desert excursions the weighty tools and materials

for oil painting—canvases, an easel, paints. Instead, she carried **watercolors** and paper, which she used for **plein air painting**.

In her watercolors, Skinner recorded mining infrastructure, including the mines themselves, worker housing, roads and pathways, and aerial ropeways used to transport ore. These elements, however, appear miniature in comparison to the mountains that tower around them.

Skinner's oil paintings often seem to express the majestic nature of her surroundings. Rendered in watercolor, *Spring, Silver City, Nevada*, seems more documentary—as if she aims to provide the viewer with a more direct view onto the plan of a working mine.

Ask students to consider *Spring, Silver City, Nevada*, and to write five adjectives to describe the scene. Then have them do the same for one of Skinner's oil paintings. How are the lists similar or different from each other?

Ask students which setting they would prefer to visit and to discuss why they made that choice.

Experimenting with Watercolors

Watercolor paint can be a rewarding medium, but it can also be unpredictable. Pigment and water often do what they like, and watercolors have the reputation of being difficult to learn. Give your students an opportunity to experiment with this exciting, if tricky, medium.

By contrast with other paint mediums, watercolors are accessible and have fewer barriers to getting started. The basics include:

-a brush (Size 8 Round is a good option)

- -watercolor paper (other kinds of paper won't hold the wet paint)
- -watercolor paints (student watercolor sets are fine)

—two containers of water (one for mixing the paint, the other for rinsing the brush)

- -a plastic tray or paper plate for mixing colors
- -a rag or paper towels to clean up

First forays into watercolor can be purely experimental.

- -How does the paint react differently on dry and wet paper?
- —How can colors/pigments be mixed?
- -What happens when you layer two or three colors?
- -How many different types of marks can be made with a single brush?

The idea is to play. Make dots, swirls, and lines. Learn what watercolor can, and can't, do.

Mining in California

California was nicknamed the "Golden State" in the 19th century, soon after gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in Coloma in 1848, provoking thousands of prospectors to make their way west.

Unlike California's Indigenous people, these gold miners had little connection with the place and viewed it as a site for extracting wealth. This mentality had great environmental and cultural costs. California remains today one of the top five mineral-producing states in the US.

It is estimated that there are around 47,000 abandoned mines spread throughout every county in California. Abandoned Mine Lands, or AMLs, are lands, waters, and surrounding watersheds where mining has stopped and mining-related excavations, structures, equipment, and wastes have been left behind. <u>AMLs are a nationwide problem and can pose serious</u> threats to human health, public safety, and the environment.

Mining has been important to California's history, growth, and economy, and continues to this day. To get a better understanding of this complicated industry, ask students to research its history and find an aspect to investigate. Online resources are listed at the end of this guide.

Activities



Gottardo Piazzoni, Moon Over Green Trees, Green Brae, 1910, oil on board, 6×81 /4 in. The Buck Collection

About the Artwork: Gottardo Piazzoni, *Moon Over Green Trees, Green Brae*, 1910

Gottardo Piazzoni (1872–1945), an artist of Italian heritage born in Switzerland, moved to California as a teenager and later became one of Charlotte Skinner's most influential mentors and friends. While studying with Piazzoni in San Francisco, Skinner met mining engineer and sculptor William Lyle Skinner, who would become her husband. Shortly after their marriage, the newlyweds moved to the Skinner family home in Lone Pine,

California. Knowing of their impending departure from the Bay Area, Piazzoni gave the couple a small painting depicting a scene of San Francisco to commemorate their friendship.

Piazzoni specialized in landscapes painted in a muted palette. Most scholars count Piazzoni among the **Tonalists**—a Piazzoni used colors that were simple and elegant, and his works usually depicted only a few elements, such as earth, sea, and sky.

style of painting that emerged in 1880s America that emphasized a limited range of colors and evoked music and contemplation. He was one of the main exponents of this style in California. Piazzoni used colors that were simple and elegant, and his works usually depicted only a few elements, such as earth, sea, and sky. He used figures sparingly, usually for symbolic purposes, and typically gave his works poetic or philosophical titles.

His artistic disposition led him to seek out particular effects of light, and he took special interest in depicting moonrises, the viewing of which became a family ritual. Venturing up a hill, the family would cheer the appearance of the moon, and Piazzoni knew the exact time for each moonrise and kept precise records. He was able to portray the essential qualities of a scene and achieve a strong mood using only minimal descriptive details.

Divided into bands depicting earth, trees, and a moonlit sky, *Moon Over Green Trees, Green Brae* is an excellent example of Piazzoni's style.

Gottardo Piazzoni

The painting's horizontal composition and muted colors provide a sense of calm and quietude and encourage the viewer to immerse themselves in its atmosphere. The painting's location is Greenbrae, California, beloved for its scenic views of the San Francisco Bay, Corte Madera Creek, and Mount Tamalpais.

Piazzoni's best-known work may be the fourteen murals he painted for the former headquarters of the San Francisco Public Library, ten completed in 1932, and the remaining four painted in 1945—though not installed until the 1970s. After public debate and lawsuits in the late 1990s, the ten principal murals can now be seen at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco, while the other four are installed permanently at Monterey Museum of Art.

Ask students to observe Piazzoni's painting for a full minute. Invite them to imagine entering the painting and visiting this place, not only with their eyes but with all their senses.

Ask them to describe the place in detail. What do they notice?

What smells might be in the air? What suggests those scents? What is the temperature? What sounds would they hear? Is there a breeze or is the air still and quiet? What time do you think it is, and what makes you say that? What season of the year might it be, and what clues suggest that? What are five adjectives they would use to describe this place?

Remind students that there are no definitive answers to these questions, but that they should look for evidence in the painting to support their conjectures.

Discuss why an artist might choose to depict a landscape at night. What are some of the positives and negatives that might be associated with choosing to paint a nighttime scene?

Gottardo Piazzoni

The Nocturne in Art and Music

A **nocturne** is a painting of a night scene. The word can also refer to a piece of music that has been inspired by, or that conjures up the images and feelings of, nighttime. The word itself is French for "nocturnal," meaning occurring or active at night. <u>Many well-known classical composers have written nocturnes</u>, including Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849), Claude Debussy (1862–1918), Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) and Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943).

After viewing Piazzoni's painting carefully, ask students to find a piece of music available online, from any time-period, that they think would complement the painting and enhance its mood. Students can play their selections in class while the image of the painting is projected. Have students vote on which selection complements Piazzoni's work best.

Your Own Nocturne

Tonalist artists explored the nocturnal realm extensively in their work. <u>Painting the moonlit landscape has challenged artists for centuries</u>, but in the last decades of the 19th century, they faced a new problem. The electrical illumination of cities, and growing <u>light pollution</u>, made contemplative moonlit scenes more rare, and perhaps more sought after in art because of that. Some well-known artists who have explored the night landscape or nocturne include:

–Jean-François Millet, *Starry Night*, 1850/1865

–James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket*, 1875

-Vincent van Gogh, The Starry Night, 1889

-Albert Pinkham Ryder, Seacoast in Moonlight, 1890

-Yvonne Jacquette, Empire State Building II, 2009

It may be impractical to ask students to create a landscape lit by the full moon. However, creating an artwork in low light can be a learning experience. Some alternatives include:

—Set up a still life in the classroom. Turn off the ceiling lights and use a single bulb "clamp lamp" to provide illumination. Have students draw and then discuss the experience.

—Have students create a landscape at twilight when light is disappearing from the sky.

—Ask students to create a landscape using gray or black paper or tinted canvas as a ground.

—Have students use scratchboards to create a night scene. <u>See this site for</u> more information.

Phases of the Moon

Most of us are aware of the daily rising and setting of the sun, but ask what phase the moon is in and many of us will draw a blank. There are several videos on the web that explain the waxing and waning of the moon and the science behind it.

Activities

Vocabulary

Indigenous Members of the original inhabitants of a place, especially before the arrival of colonists or settlers.

Landscape Painting A form of picture-making devoted to depicting the natural, urban, or industrial environment in itself, rather than as a backdrop for portraits or storytelling.

Nocturne A romantic or dreamy composition in music or art that suggests nighttime, in painting usually characterized by diffused light, hazy tones, and muted color.

Plein Air Painting Paintings made or sketched outdoors that aim to represent the changing effects of light and air—an activity often associated with 19th-century French Impressionism.

Timbisha Shoshone A federally recognized tribe indigenous to Death Valley, Owens Valley, and Panamint Valley, California. The Timbisha people were displaced from their ancestral lands for most of the 20th century. Protests in the 1990s led the US government in 2000 to afford them a permanent land base within Death Valley National Monument.

Tonalism An American artistic style popular between 1880 and 1915 that used a limited set of gentle, closely-related colors to emulate music, evoke emotions, inspire contemplation, and suggest cosmic harmony.

Watercolor A paint medium in which finely-ground dry pigment is mixed with water to create transparent color solutions, usually applied to paper by brush. Watercolors dry quickly and their transparency allows for the improvisational layering of colors. End of the Range Vocabulary

Resources

Charlotte Butler Skinner

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