Biodiversity Laboratory
Humans and Nature in Art

Human perceptions of the natural world have been influenced by culture, and may fine artists have captured these perceptions in their artwork. This week we will be visiting the Colby Museum of Art to investigate how artists have depicted the natural world around us during different periods of time and in different types of media. We will have an orientation to this exercise in the lab classroom, then move to the galleries of the museum where Lauren Lessing, Mirken Curator of Education, will give an informational tour of some particularly impressive pieces in the collection.

The tour will include the following works of art:

- Portraits of landowners (Joseph Badger, John Singleton Copley, Henry Reaburn, Frederick Spencer)
- The Trapper, 1870, Winslow Homer, American (1836-1910)
- Junius Brutus Stearns, 1847, Hannah Duston Killing the Indians
- John Marin Collection (focus on Maine and NYC)
- Rackstraw Downes, Garbage Arriving at Freshkills, New York, 1990
- Robert Polidori, Classrooms in Pripyat, near Chernobyl (from the series, Zones of Exclusion), 2001

We will regroup after the tour and discuss impressions. As you see each piece of art, look closely to get a feel for what the artist was trying to capture, and consider the following questions.

--How have human attitudes toward nature changed over the time period covered by the pieces viewed?

--What are the different kinds of human relationships with nature?

--Some of the pieces have an element of time included, to depict changes in landscape or structure. Consider how these changes integrate with natural cycles on Earth.

--Which of these pieces captured your attention or imagination? What element do you think was important in standing out?