



Paola Pivi: Come Check It Out, Contemporary Calgary, 2024–2025

Seeing and Sharing Through Art: A Year of Piloting with Students 2024-25

by Contemporary Calgary Art Studio Education Team

Contemporary Calgary Art Studio is grateful for the opportunity to guide students as they explore the world of art, as a pilot site for the Campus Calgary / Open Minds program. Exploring art is a way for students to also explore themselves and their connections to the world around them. In this past year of site piloting, we were glad to work with Mrs. Gomez's class from Hugh A. Bennett School as we discussed the big question: *What can art teach us about empathy and understanding others?*

We began with *Wish You Were Here* by Indigenous artist Lauren Crazybull as a starting point for our land acknowledgment. The artwork shares the story of an artist tracing her ancestors, searching for identity, and navigating feelings of expectation and loss. Through close investigation, the students talked about the meaning of identity, expressed their appreciation for the land, and reflected on the emotions present in the work.



Lauren Crazybull, Wish You Were Here, Contemporary Calgary, 2025

We visited the immersive exhibition *Hummingbird Guided Meditation* by Miruna Drăgan and Maggie Tiesenhausen. The students stepped into the hummingbird's world and imagined how the bird might see and move through its surroundings. Afterwards, they wrote sandwich poems imagining a day in the life of a hummingbird. We followed this with a walk along the Bow River, observing the Contemporary Calgary building from a distance, talking about its history and architectural style, and discussing the public art we encountered along the way. This became a chance for the students to see that art is not limited to galleries; it can appear in many forms throughout everyday life. They collected small natural objects like branches, leaves, and pinecones, which they later used to decorate the papier-mâché hummingbird nests they made in the workshop. In making hummingbird nests, they connected art with nature and nature with art.



Miruna Drăgan & Maggie Tiesenhausen, Hummingbird Guided Meditation, Contemporary Calgary, 2025

Our art exploration continued with *Witness*, a large survey exhibition by Black Canadian artist June Clark. The students moved through the artist's memories and saw her experiences from childhood to adulthood: warm family moments, difficult realities, struggle, resistance, gratitude, calmness, and the feelings that come with everyday life. They later created small fabric prints to express the images and moments that stood out to them.



June Clark, Witness, Contemporary Calgary, 2025

We also added a Brush Calligraphy workshop to the week. Our facilitator talked about how writing with a brush can calm you down and lift you up at the same time. The students started wondering who first invented written characters, what a single stroke can express, and how good it feels when you finally get one line just right. They showed each other their favourite strokes, and the studio felt calm and lively at the same time.



Throughout the week, we used the observation of lentil seeds to connect each day. The students watched them slowly sprout, recorded their observations, and discussed how something so small can link so many parts of life. On the final day, we planted the seeds together. Our observations of a seemingly simple lentil became a way to appreciate both community and the gifts the land can give us.



In addition to exploring the artworks, the students also learned about the gallery itself. Our CEO, David, shared stories about Contemporary Calgary and the history of the building. The students talked with gallery attendants to hear what a typical workday in the gallery is like. At the end of the week each young artist created a self-portrait and wrote an artist label for it, then they gave their first artist talk in the Dome!



Contemporary Calgary continues to bring together artworks and conversations that speak to the moment we are living in. Though exhibitions will keep changing, what we do stays the same: we use art to understand ourselves and the world better, express what matters to us and to stay connected along the way.

Campus Calgary / Open Minds works with organizations that want to host field study experiences, bringing classes into community experiences, building connections for students, teachers, and volunteers. CC/OM has formalized many of the piloting structures for new sites, ensuring that the foundational pieces of the program are at the heart of all experiences.

Contemporary Calgary Art Studio coordinators worked with the CC/OM Operations Team, teachers, and their on-site personnel to create meaningful site-based experiences, connected to the class's big question, for a personalized experience.