Exploring Trees in Nature

Time: 15–30 minutes

Difficulty level: Easy

Messy level: Medium

Inspired by the exhibition *Hockney – Van Gogh: The Joy of Nature*, on view through June 20, 2021, this activity invites you to head outside and create pastel prints featuring the unique and beautiful patterns of your neighborhood's tree trunks.

Above: Vincent van Gogh, *Tree Trunks in the Grass*, 1890, oil on canvas, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands

To view a hi-res image of the work, visit the **MFAH website**.

Investigate the Work of Art!

1. Look at the two trees on the left side of the painting. What types of lines did Vincent van Gogh use to paint these trunks in the foreground?
2. What is the overall color palette of the painting?
3. The trees closest to the foreground of the painting have a lot of detail and the ones at the back do not have much detail at all. This creates a sense of depth and varies the amount of detail. Why would an artist do that?

Gather These Materials

- Paper
- Chalk pastels
- Scissors
- White glue
- Tissue paper
- Cotton swabs or blending stump

Step-by-Step Artist Instructions

1. Take a look outside in your neighborhood, in a spot where there are trees. Can you find a tree with bark that forms interesting patterns?

2. Place a piece of paper against the trunk and hold it there (or have someone hold it for you).

3. Rub a chalk pastel stick over the paper until the imprint of the bark appears on the paper. Repeat this with two different colors. The colors will be layered over one another.

4. Cut out a tree-trunk shape from this imprint.

5. On a separate blank piece of paper, use your pastels to color the paper light green where the grass will be and light blue where the sky will be. Use a tissue paper to blend the pastel.

6. Now, use pastels to draw a field of grass and flowers over the base color you used in step 5.

7. Glue the cutout tree onto the field of grass.

8. Finish by drawing small flowers and plant details around the bottom of the tree trunk to connect it with the field of grass and flowers.