

Family Guide

OKC
MOA OKLAHOMA CITY
MUSEUM
OF ART

Explore the exhibitions *George Nelson: Architect, Writer, Designer, Teacher* and *Jill Downen: COUNTERPARTS* with your child. Look closely at the artworks to see all the details included by each artist, but please remember to be careful and not touch the art or gallery walls. Parents, use the questions in bold to guide your children through the exhibitions.



George Nelson: Architect, Writer, Designer, Teacher celebrates the birth of this iconic American designer, who would have turned 100 in 2008. Organized by the Vitra Design Museum to commemorate this occasion, the exhibition is the first comprehensive retrospective of Nelson's work.

Jill Downen: COUNTERPARTS, the third installment of the NEW FRONTIERS Series for Contemporary Art, exhibits approximately ten architectural sculptures combining human anatomy with the constructed environment. Through her work, Downen invites viewers to reevaluate architectural space in relation to their body and encourages them to achieve a greater awareness of self in that space.





(LARGE) TENDON ON PALETTE, 2009

The pieces in the exhibit show the artist's touch and the transfer of energy from her own body. It is this direct imprint—from smoothing, sanding, scraping, chipping, and scaring—that gives the works a life of their own.

One way that Downen makes her sculptures is by first carving the forms and then covering them with a layer of plaster. What are other ways you could make a sculpture similar to this one?

At home, practice making your own miniature version of this work using air-dry clay, Model Magic, or floral foam and plaster.

PLUMB LINE WITH PLASTER, 2011

Plumb lines are tools used by construction workers to ensure that walls are true, or "plumb." Downen has a collection of plumb bobs, old and new, and uses them in her installations as anchors. This piece is a reference to something true against the movement, visual activity, and exchanging forces in the exhibit.

Is there something you collect? Is it two-dimensional, like a sticker, or three-dimensional like a marble? How could you turn that into a piece of art?

Jill Downen COUNTERPARTS

NEW FRONTIERS Series for Contemporary Art

Jill Downen was born in 1967 in Belleville, Illinois. She now lives and works in her studio in St. Louis, Missouri. Downen received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Kansas City Art Institute and her MFA from Washington University in St. Louis, where she was a Danforth Scholar. Since 2008, she has pursued her art practice full-time.



THRESHOLD, 2011

Downen's medium is plaster, or gypsum, and here she has poured nearly 800 pounds of it onto the floor. Additionally, she has evenly-flooded the 60-foot-long wall with light to create an area she describes as a void, a boundary line, or drop off. In this place, time slows down, giving the work a softness, quietness, and meditative quality.

How does this artwork make you feel—quiet, cold, nervous, happy, sad, or confused? Walk from one end of the work to the other, being careful to not step on the plaster. Look closely, do you see any skin-like qualities on the surface, such as folds or lines? Notice the texture of your skin. How is your skin different from someone else's?



SHELF WITH VARIOUS COMPONENTS, 2011

This unit is an arrangement of different sculptural elements that are part of this shelf installation but also function independently as fragments of something larger, ready to be joined or pieced together. For Downen, this is an unfolding palette of what's possible at this site. Her inspiration came from seeing similar arrangements of artifact fragments in the Louvre. According to Downen, "Something is under construction here, conceptually."

What do you see on the shelf? How could you imagine combining the pieces to form a new sculpture? Or, which pieces would you connect to another sculpture in the gallery? Do you have a shelf in your room? What types of things do you store on it?



ARCHITECTURAL CARTILAGE ON RACK, 2011

Downen has created this sculpture using flexible foam that allows the piece to change over time. The weight and softness of the material causes it to sag. The wooden supports for this piece honor carpenters and construction workers, who use natural materials in their craft. Downen says, "People are constantly fighting gravity. Architecture is the same... the way buildings sag and decay due to gravity and natural forces."

Think about buildings you see in your neighborhood and in town. Are they old or new? How can you tell? Where else can we see objects that sag or droop? Why do they do this?



George NELSON

Architect | Writer | Designer | Teacher
February 3–May 8, 2011



George Nelson (American, 1908-1986)—
Founding father of American modernism

Formally trained as an architect—he studied architecture at Yale—George Nelson simply called himself a “designer.” He was a furniture designer, industrial designer, interior designer, and exhibition designer. Also, he was a writer and editor for publications including *Fortune*, *Architectural Forum*, and *Life* magazine. Nelson spent close to 40 years collaborating with furniture manufacturer Herman Miller, and he started his own firm, George Nelson Associates, Inc.

Storagewall (seen at the top of the next page) was published in *Architectural Forum*, appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine, and filled a chapter of Nelson’s book *Tomorrow’s House*. This was the architect’s answer to getting rid of the unnecessary clutter that accumulated as a result of post-war prosperity. D.J. De Pree, owner of Herman Miller, saw this article and called a meeting with Nelson. This began a 25 year relationship, in which Nelson was a designer and design director, bringing his design “competitors” on board (Charles Eames, Isamu Noguchi, Alexander Girard, etc.).

Herman Miller 5 concepts:

1. What you make is important.
2. Design is an integral part of business.
3. The product must be honest.
4. You decide what you will make.
5. There is a market for good design.

An exhibition of the Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany.
This exhibition has been generously sponsored by Herman Miller.





THE HOME

From the mid-1930s through the late 1950s, Nelson's chief interests focused on the home: the industrial fabrication of housing, the layout of floor plans, and the furnishing of the home.

How many of each of these furniture pieces can you find in the exhibit? Write the numbers below.

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| ___ Cabinets | ___ Chairs |
| ___ Benches | ___ Sofas |
| ___ Tables | ___ Desks |

Search for all the different fabrics and materials you can find in the exhibit and check them as you go.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Naugahyde | <input type="checkbox"/> Steel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Polyester | <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leather | <input type="checkbox"/> Brass |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walnut | <input type="checkbox"/> Iron |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plywood | <input type="checkbox"/> Chrome |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rosewood | <input type="checkbox"/> Porcelain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teak | <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Birch | <input type="checkbox"/> Foam |



THE OFFICE

In his first collection of home furniture for Herman Miller, George Nelson presented an L-shaped desk that would come to typify the modern office: a unit combining all the necessary functions from a writing surface, space for a typewriter, and diverse storage elements.

Look for George Nelson's drawings of desks. Imagine how you would like your desk to look. What shape would it be? How tall would it be? Will you be sitting or standing? How many drawers will your desk have? Draw a picture of your desk.

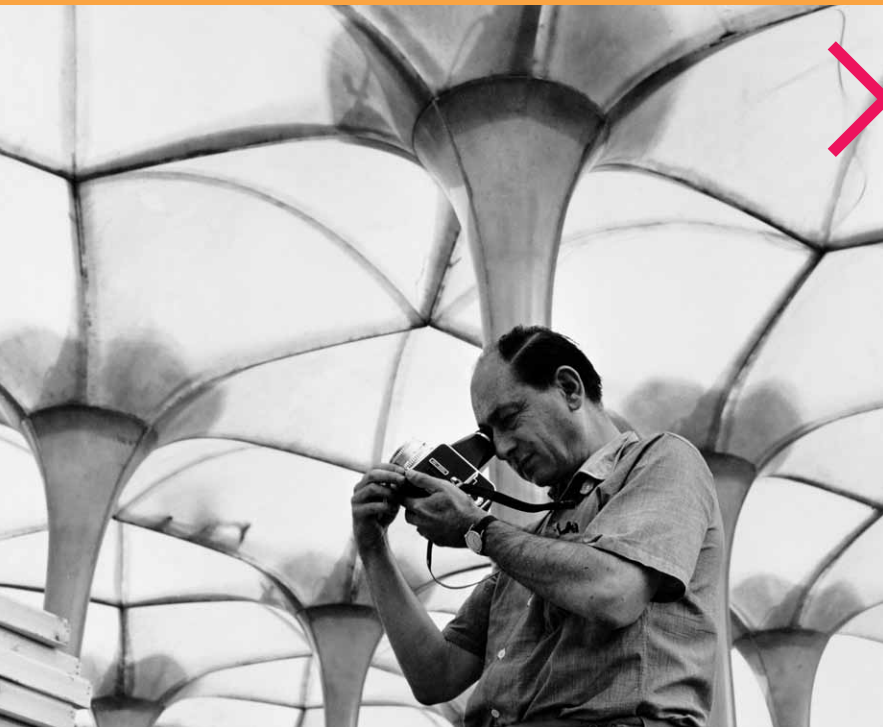
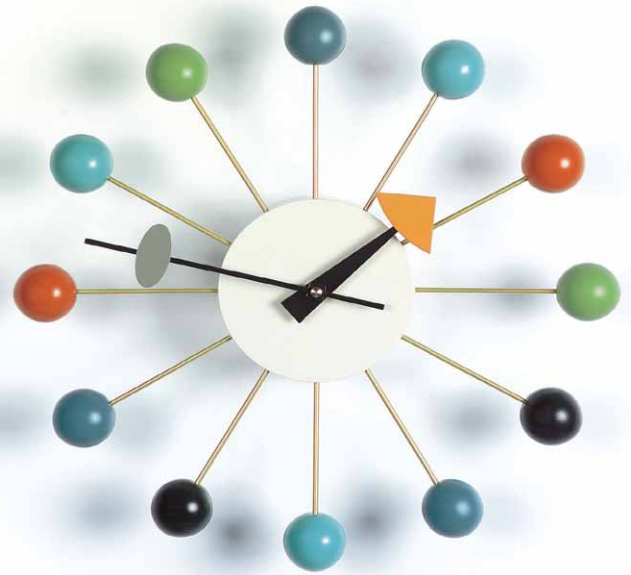


WHAT TIME IS IT?

The collaboration between George Nelson and the Howard Miller Clock Company began in 1947 and lasted more than 35 years. During this period, Nelson and his office developed over 130 clock models for Howard Miller. The design of the clock series was based on Nelson's insight that people told the time by viewing the position of a clock's hands, not by looking at the numbers. His second observation was that wall clocks in the age of the wristwatch were no longer about indicating the time, but served as "decorative elements in the furnishings of a room."

How many clocks can you find in the exhibition?

Can you tell what time it is on each one?



EXHIBITIONS

Exhibitions presented Nelson with an interesting opportunity to test out new techniques and materials on temporary constructions. Nelson planned and designed over 30 exhibitions.

Use the space below to design your own floor plan of the George Nelson gallery. Select pieces from the exhibition to include in your drawing. Think about the arrangement of the displays and how people will walk through the room.

At home, you can create your design using a shoe box, toy furniture, or pieces formed using modeling clay or paper.