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## Art Masterpiece: *Orion Leaving Space Station,\** by Robert McCall

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**Keywords:** “Futurescape,” vantage point, foreground/background, realistic/Realism

**Grade(s):** 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>

**Activity:** “Futurescape” with chalk pastels

*\*Alternate “futurescapes” by Robert McCall can be substituted.*



Artist's Website: [www.mccallstudios.com](http://www.mccallstudios.com). There is a great one-minute video on this site, under “Resources.”

### About the Art:

- Robert McCall was born in Columbus, Ohio in 1919.
- As a boy he was fascinated with things that fly. He remembers looking through a telescope at moon craters and being blown away. He loved aircrafts and adventure stories and would sketch pictures to illustrate them in his spare time.
- After high school, he won a scholarship to an art college and then worked at *Life* magazine, illustrating for a series on futuristic space travel.
- Afterward, he was asked by the National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA) to render an illustrated history of their efforts. Air and Space travel has been the focus of McCall's work for 40 years.
- Famous for his depictions and knowledge of space travel, McCall was asked to do a series of postage stamps regarding America's space history.
- He also worked as a consultant on the movies, *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979). McCall created the movie poster for

*2001: A Space Odyssey* which was inspiring to Star Wars creators Steven Spielberg and George Lucas.

- In 1970, Robert visited Arizona with his wife (who is also an artist), Louise. They fell in love with Arizona and moved to Paradise Valley. Many of his futuristic paintings are set in the Arizona desert.
- Along with air and space flight, McCall also paints the future as he imagines it. Much of his art (especially the murals) are “futurescapes”, large pictures that reflect human beings building a clean, beautiful new world with the help of futuristic technology. Another reoccurring theme in his art shows a natural environment (like the Arizona desert) intertwined with elements of the future.
- Some of his futurescape murals can be found at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, Disney’s Epcot Center, NASA and the Challenger Space Center right here in Arizona. The Challenger Space Center features over 400 works of art by Robert McCall.
- Robert McCall died on February 26, 2010.

### **Possible Questions:**

1. What do you see in this painting?
2. It’s like a landscape, except it’s in outer space. What do you think this should be called? (Maybe a space-scape?)
3. What is in the *background*? What is in the *foreground*? Explain that the foreground is the opposite of background and means what is in the “front” of the artwork and background is in the “back” of the artwork.
4. Would you ever see a scene like this? Even though it’s an imaginary scene, it’s very realistic. It looks like it could really happen.
5. Where did the artist come up with this subject? (From his imagination.)
6. Where does it look like the artist would be when he painted this picture? (Also in outer space. Maybe in another space ship looking out the window?) This is called a *vantage point*, which means the position that the viewer is seeing the image from.

**Activity:** Making a “Futurescape” with chalk pastels

**Materials Needed:**

- Black (or dark blue) construction paper (9" X 13"), one per student
- Chalk pastels, one set per student
- Aerosol hairspray, whatever is cheapest. (Not a pump-style hairspray.)  
Approximately one can per classroom

**Process:**

1. If you didn't do this as part of the artist discussion, show the students the one minute video (under "Resources" tab) on the artist's website:  
[www.mccallstudios.com](http://www.mccallstudios.com).
2. Tell the children they will be using their own imaginations and making "futurescapes". Explain that they will be using chalk pastels, which are like colored chalk. They are very dusty and smear around easily. To have the best success, students should think about what outer space scene they would like to do. Will it be a rocket? Will it be an alien planet? Will there be an alien on it? Will there be a spaceship? What will it look like? Will there be stars? Other planets? Moons?
3. Have them sketch their space scape in pencil. Remind them that this is just a quick sketch to get the general image down. Don't include lots of details because it is hard to do detail with chalk pastels. They don't even have to sketch with a pencil first, if they'd rather start right away with the chalk pastels.
4. Give the students a few minutes to think and sketch. Then stop them and explain that chalk pastels can be tricky. They will make a beautiful, bold colorful contrast to the black construction paper. They WILL smear. (Students may want to roll up their sleeves, if they have long sleeved shirts on.) The best way to use chalk pastels is to start at the TOP of the paper and work down to the bottom, so they don't drag their arms and hands across their artwork too often. Chalk pastels DON'T do details. For example, if they draw an alien, they might be able to draw the eyes. They won't be able to draw eyelashes.
5. Remind them to write their names on their artwork.
6. When students finish, take their artwork (or have them take it) outdoors. Lightly but thoroughly spray their art with the hairspray. The hairspray will

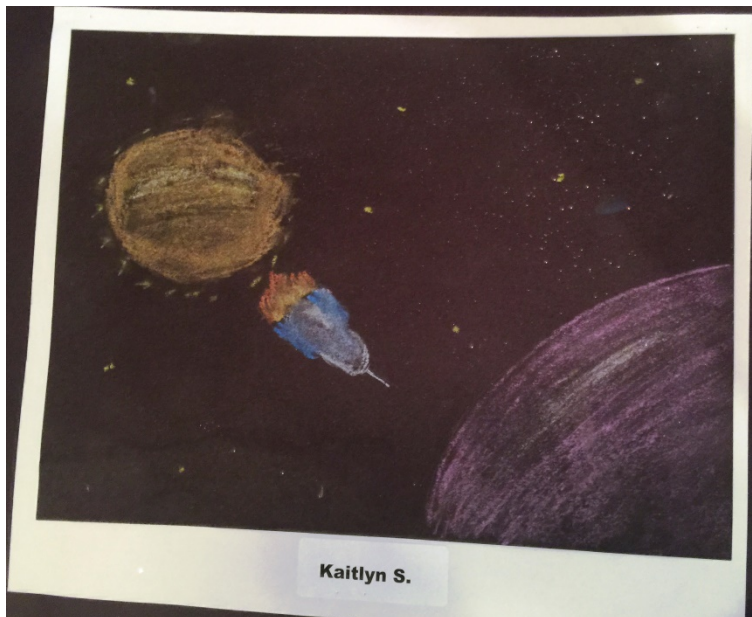
act as a fixative, which will help the chalk to stay put and not smear. (It still will smear, just not as much.)

7. Display and enjoy!

**Examples:**







## Parent Notes:

In addition to being America's visual space historian, Robert McCall worked on movies like *2001: A Space Odyssey*; *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*; and *The Black Hole*. His artwork appears in many museums, including the Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum, both in Washington, D.C., and the Challenger Space Center here in Arizona.



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## Art Masterpiece - Robert T. McCall



One of the joys of being an artist is the freedom to create one's own world, and through the use of brushes and paints, to explore that world and participate in adventures of the mind that the real world could not possibly provide. Like the real world, these excursions of the imagination are fraught with inaccuracies of perception...it is rare that one glimpses through the veil of time even a hint of tomorrow's reality, nor does it seem important to me, whether one's perceptions are right or wrong...the pleasure is in making the predictions and doing the work.

Today we live a world filled with awesome possibilities, both good and bad. The rush of technology is so rapid; to stay abreast of it has become more and more difficult. Our understanding of the physical universe continues to grow and astonish us with its marvelous complexity.

To be an artist in these times of explosive change is, for me, a privilege and a challenge. My goal is to document in my drawings and paintings a small part of this changing world and to anticipate in my work, the future that lies ahead.

*Robert T. McCall*