

The background of the entire page is a detailed oil painting of a brown elk with large, dark antlers. The elk is standing in a forest, facing right, with its head slightly lowered. The forest floor is covered in fallen leaves and moss, and the background is filled with tall, thin trees and dense foliage.

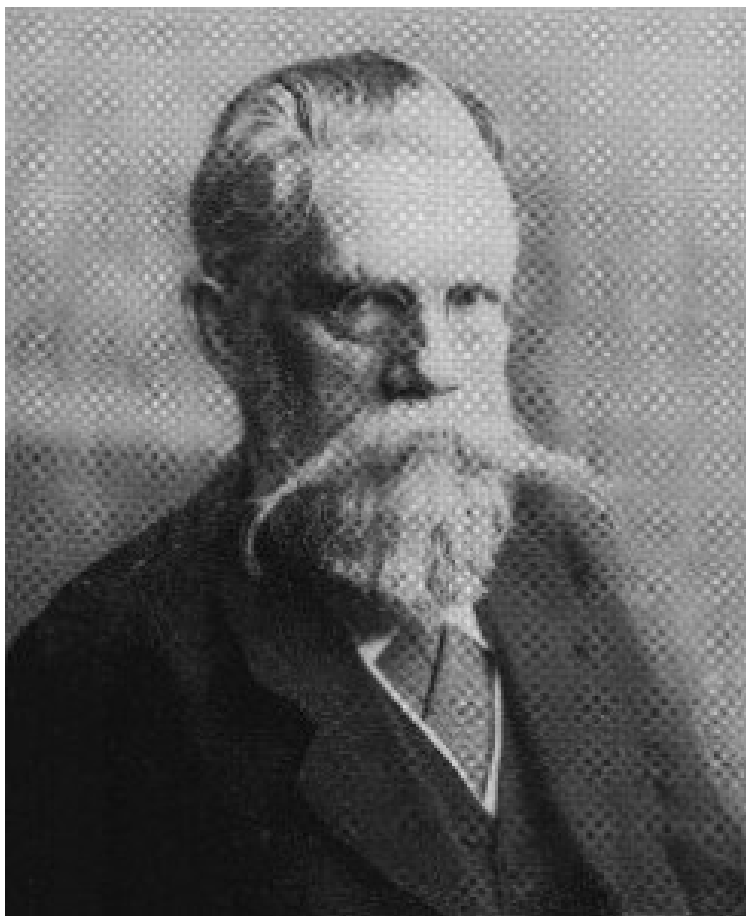
# SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

*Envisioning Wildlife and Wilderness with the Big Four*

Masterworks from the **Rijksmuseum Twenthe**  
and the **National Museum of Wildlife Art**

## EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE





## Teaching Richard Frieze

Although Richard Frieze was not the most well-known of the “Big Four”, he was regarded in his lifetime as one of the best wildlife artists in Germany. Frieze’s paintings acted as a bridge between Romantic wildlife artworks, which featured animals as actors in dramatic plays, and the wildlife artwork of his contemporaries that featured animals in their natural habitat.

In 1871, Richard Frieze moved to Berlin and quickly began traveling throughout Northern Europe. In 1877 Frieze began his studies at the Royal Academy of Art, where he would later become a professor, eventually leading to an invitation from Kaiser Wilhelm II to document his hunting excursions. Due to Frieze’s early successes, he was regularly invited back, joining the Kaiser on hunting expeditions. Frieze’s 1898 expedition of the Norwegian fjords, Svalbard archipelago, and Arctic Ocean allowed him to observe polar bears for the first time. After this expedition, Frieze shifted his artistic focus from dramatic Romantic portrayals to quietly capturing the beauty of nature.

Throughout his life, Frieze put emphasis on observing and depicting animals in their natural habitat, a distinct shift from the teachings of Paul Meyerheim at the Academy of Art. Viewers were transported into the middle of the action in Frieze’s work, giving them the vantage point of a hunter. Context clues, including animals tracks, were used throughout his work to direct the eye to the animal’s movement, and give the illusion of a hunter tracking the subject through the wilderness. Through mentorship and teaching, Frieze was able to stress the importance of depicting subjects in their natural environment on two of the other Big Four artists, Wilhelm Kuhnert and Carl Rungius.

**Born:** December 15, 1854 in Gusev, Russia

**Died:** June 29, 1918 in Bad Zwischenahn, Germany

**Studied:** Berlin’s Royal Academy of Art

**Themes:** wildlife, landscape, conservation



Richard Frieze, *Polar Bear and Eiders on the Coast*, n.d., oil on canvas, collection of the Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, Netherlands

## Museum Worthy?

Richard Frieze often painted red deer as a result of hunting trips with Kaiser Wilhelm II. In Germany, paintings featuring red deer became popular home decorations, leading art historians to classify them as “kitsch,” a German word meaning “worthless, trashy art.”

Explore the two works from Richard Frieze in this handout and select the one you find compelling or interesting. Imagine you are a Museum Curator trying to convince the museum to purchase it. Why is it important for the museum to have? How will the public benefit from seeing it on view? Why might it be important to the museum fifty to one hundred years from now? Read the biography of Richard Frieze in this packet to further support your argument.

Then, share your thinking with a partner or small group to see if you persuaded them!

## Art Observation: Values and Colors

Look at *Polar Bear and Eiders on the Coast* and investigate how Richard Frieze creates depth and contrast with lighter and darker shades. As a class, share your thoughts on how value (light and dark) and composition are used.

**Light and Dark:** Can you identify areas that are lighter and darker? How do these differences create contrast? Identify areas where Frieze creates contrast, even in an all-white animal!

**Polar Bear Focus:** How does the polar bear compare to the background? What values are used in its fur? Is it mostly light or dark?

Now, use your knowledge to create your own polar bear artwork! Try to use at least three different values with colored pencils or markers. When you are finished, create a gallery of artwork and go on a gallery walk as a class and talk about your masterpieces.



Richard Frieze, *Deer in a Forest Glade*, 1912, oil on canvas, JKM Collection, National Museum of Wildlife Art

# Teaching Wilhelm Kuhnert



**Born:** September 18, 1865, Opole, Poland

**Died:** February 11, 1926, Flims, Switzerland

**Studied:** Berlin's Royal Academy of Art

**Themes:** wildlife, predator-prey relationships, landscapes

Born in 1865, Wilhelm Kuhnert is credited as the member of the “Big Four” who made African landscape accessible to the masses of Europe. From a young age, he showed artistic talent, supporting himself as a portrait artist and calligrapher. At the age of seventeen, Kuhnert attended Berlin's Royal Academy of Art. While there, he was mentored by notable Big Four painter, Richard Frieze, and studied under Paul Meyerheim who was known for creating works of animals in circuses or zoos. After finishing his time at the academy, he set up a studio near the Berlin Zoo and continued utilizing animals there as models for his work.

Kuhnert was a soldier for the German East African government, which allowed him to be the first classically trained artist to travel to locations like Tanzania. Although Kuhnert didn't frequently travel, the trips he took typically spanned greater time and distance. On his first trip to Tanzania, he required 25 porters—people hired to carry luggage and other materials—to carry his tent, hunting guns, trade goods, and overwhelming amount of art supplies. He viewed creating artwork as a visual diary and found it important that his artwork convey ecological information including predator-prey relationships, social behavior of animals, and how seasons affected the savannah. This presentation transformed his paintings into a virtual safari for viewers.

Kuhnert's keen eye for observation and his skills as a large game hunter enabled him to paint animals in a believable manner, even if he had never seen them before. For example, his study large cat anatomy, specifically lions, allowed him to create paintings of tigers—an animal not native to any of his documented travel locations.



# Amani Nature Reserve

Established in 1997, the Amani Nature Reserve is a protected area in the Tanga Region of Tanzania. This area of Tanzania, as well as Kilimanjaro National Park, are spaces that Wilhelm Kuhnert visited frequently to observe animals including giraffes, black-backed jackals, and plains zebras.

The Amani Nature Reserve is home to the African violet, an important spiritual flower of the native Shambaa peoples. Shambaa peoples used the forest as a source of timber, firewood, and medicinal plants. They gathered plants, honey, and bush meat, and live birds to be used for trade.



Wilhelm Kuhnert, *Giraffes in Blooming Field, Ulanga, Tanzania*, n.d., oil on canvas, collection of the Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, Netherland



Wilhelm Kuhnert, *Elephants*, c. 1917, oil on canvas, JKM Collection, National Museum of Wildlife Art

## Who's There?

Wildlife paintings that feature the natural world without people give the illusion of land not yet touched by human beings. Wilhelm Kuhnert kept detailed hunting and art journals to share his feelings as he traveled and painted on safari.

Imagine you are Wilhelm Kuhnert, observing these giraffes in Tanzania. Consider the weather and terrain. What is the mood of the painting?

Write a detailed journal entry describing your day in the field. What are you wearing? Doing? Thinking about? What would you share with people who have never been to Tanzania before?

With a partner, share your journal entry to describe the scene in *Giraffes in Blooming Field, Ulanga, Tanzania*.

# Teaching Bruno Liljefors

“The wilderness in which I grew up has never lost its powerful appeal for me. It is an inexhaustible source of inspiration, and has exactly the same power over me now as when I, as a boy in the gunpowder shop at Ladugatan in Uppsala, filled my father’s account books with the strangest doodlings. In Nature, there is always new possibility, a new adventure to be had.”

—Bruno Liljefors, 1935 *Svenska Dagbladet* interview



**Born:** May 14, 1860, Uppsala, Sweden

**Died:** December 18, 1939, Stockholm, Sweden

**Studied:** Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm, Sweden

**Themes:** Predator-prey relationship, camouflage, Darwinism

Growing up in rural Uppsala, Sweden, Bruno Liljefors called his childhood a “frightful dream.” Due to cramped housing and poor living conditions, including an open air slaughterhouse nextdoor, Liljefors was a sickly child. Although he was unable to play and explore, he spent a large portion of his time drawing or creating caricatures from his bed. When he was six, it became clear he would be unable to join public school, which resulted in the hire of the local painter’s daughter as his private tutor.

In 1879, Bruno was accepted at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. After friend, fellow student, and mentor, Anders Zorn resigned from the Academy, Liljefors gained permission to do the same, following Zorn to study abroad in Germany in 1882. While in mainland Europe, he was exposed to French Impressionist techniques and composition strategies used in Japanese prints.

Unlike other members of the “Big Four”, Liljefors preferred to focus on places in and around Sweden where he lived among the subjects he was studying. Regardless of where he was, Liljefors was known for keeping a variety of animals with him, often using them as models. Aside from the sea birds, he enjoyed painting pine martens, foxes, and hares. As an avid hunter, Liljefors spent a large amount of time in the field hunting, observing, and even stalking animals that were the subjects of his work. Often he worked at dawn to capture the drama of the hunt during difficult lighting changes.



Bruno Liljefors, *Migrating Mute Swans*, 1925, oil on canvas, collection of the Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, Netherlands

## Poetry Perspectives

Take a few moments to observe *Migrating Mute Swans*. Then use the following questions to talk about what you noticed.

What do you notice about the swans in the painting? How does Liljefors use color and light to convey a mood? What emotions do you feel when looking at this painting?

Read [“Swan’s Elegy” by Jamie Manrique \(translated by Eugene Richie\)](#) and think about the imagery and emotions in the poem.

How does the poem relate to the painting? What themes of migration, beauty, or loss do you see in both the painting and the poem?

Create a small drawing inspired by the painting and the poem. You could add swans in flight, shapes or colors that represents the emotions in the poem, or depict migration with a place that you used to live in or visit.

## Swan Stories

Investigate Bruno Liljefors’ *Migrating Mute Swans* and listen to [Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Scott’s performance of “The Swan” by Saint-Saëns](#). Think about the mood that is represented in both.

Use the sentence starters below to create a story about the swans.

Think creatively about the adventures the swans might have.

“Once upon a time, there was a swan named \_\_\_\_.”

“One day, the swan decided to \_\_\_\_ (what adventure did it go on?)”

“Along the way, the swan met \_\_\_\_ (other animals or characters).”

Once you have written your story, add illustrations and share them in a small group or with the class. Make sure to use expressive voice and gestures to act out your story!

What was your favorite part of the story? How did the music and painting inspire what you wrote?

### Words to Know:

**imagery (noun):** a technique writers use to appeal to the reader’s senses by using descriptive and figurative language.

**migration (noun):** the movement of people or animals from one place to another that can be either temporary or permanent.

**camouflage (verb):** a defense mechanism used by plants and animals to hide their identity, location, and movement by changing their appearance to blend in with their surroundings.



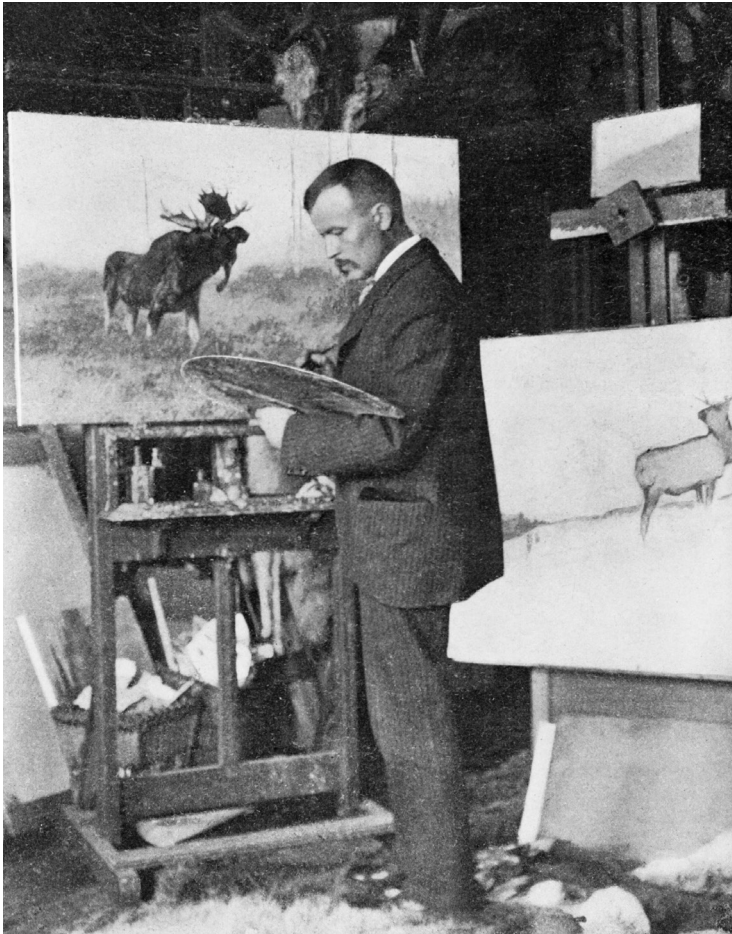
# Teaching Carl Rungius

Carl Rungius, although born and trained in Germany before immigrating to the United States, is often referred to as the the leading American wildlife artist.

Born to a family of artists, taxidermists, birders, and ministers, Rungius developed a passion for hunting and art at an early age. While he recieved drawing lessons from his father and grandfather, he idolized the work of fellow “Big Four” painter Richard Friesen and wanted to become a wildlife painter. His father, however, hoped he would become a minister. A compromise was made that allowed Rungius to continue his artistic studies if he also trained in a stable trade profession—house painting. Eventually, he attended Berlin’s Royal Academy of Art, studying alongside Wilhelm Kuhnert and idol Richard Friesen.

In 1894, an uncle who lived in Brooklyn, New York, invited Rungius to join him on a hunting trip in Maine. It was on this trip that he fell in love with the landscape and abundance of wild game in North America. After a brief trip back to Berlin, he officially returned to New York in 1897. Although he wasn’t initially taken seriously as an artist, he eventually became a member in many well-known art and conservation societies, including the Allied Artists of America, Society of American Painters and Sculptors, the Boone and Crockett Club, and the Campfire of America Club. Throughout his career he became friends with known conservationists including John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, and others.

Rungius’ artistic style was heavily influenced by Impressionist painters. He utilized large brush strokes, bold colors, and natural lighting. Intrigued by the drama of the natural world, he would often rely on wild game that had been hunted, allowing him to “pose” the animal in a hunting shed and study it from different angles and positions to replicate it as faithfully as possible.



**Born:** August 18, 1869, Berlin, Germany

**Died:** October 21, 1959, New York, New York

**Studied:** Berlin’s Royal Academy of Art

**Themes:** wildlife, landscape, conservation



# Banff National Park

Throughout his career, Carl Rungius called Banff National Park and the lands surrounding it his home—even setting up a studio called “The Paintbox” there!

Banff National Park was established in 1887 in the Rocky Mountains along the border of Alberta, British Columbia. Although Banff wasn’t recognized as protected land, land and waters of Banff have been used by Indigenous Peoples, including the Métis, for sustenance, ceremony, trade, and travel for millennia.

Each year, three to four million visitors travel to Banff National Park to see the beautiful mountain views, explore the hiking trails, and discover the wildlife living there. The park contains hundreds of archaeological sites including 416 aboriginal sites and 309 historic sites like Vermillion Lakes, where some of Canada’s earliest known human remains were discovered. Banff is home to dozens of animal species—elk (wapiti), moose, puma, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats—and more than 260 known birds species that live in the park or migrate there seasonally!

## Musical Connection - GOat SHEEP GOat

Musicians with Banff National Park created music to educate the public about visiting national parks and the wildlife they may see. Listen to GOat SHEEP GOat from Tangle Caron, Tyler McClure, Steve Jarand, and Laurie Schwartz to learn the difference between a mountain goat and a bighorn sheep. You will be an expert with tips from these mountain climbers!



Carl Rungius, *Old Baldface*, c. 1935, oil on canvas, JKM Collection, National Museum of Wildlife Art

## Science Connection - Mountains of Change

On the [Banff National Park virtual resource page](#), an online exhibit talks about one of the major features of the park—its beautiful mountain ranges! Explore the science-based exhibit and discover the impact of climate change on the mountains, how the parks service is responding, and how protected areas like Banff can find “natural solutions” to climate change.