

**Curriculum for “The Guitar: Art, Artists and Artisans”
On exhibit February 12, 2010 - May 09, 2010**



The Gibson “Tribute to the 20th Century” Guitar

About the Artist

Bruce J. Kunkel is the son of Wallace M. Kunkel, author, educator and fine woodworker. His father instilled in him at an early age a love of music and art and involved Bruce in the creation of his 18th-century furniture masterpieces. Recognizing his eye for design and drawing skills, the elder Kunkel encouraged his son in the direction of the fine arts.

His interest in music combined with his fine arts and woodworking background naturally led him to instrument making. He became intrigued by the sound and visual appearance of the 5-string banjo. At age 12 he built his first banjo from plans he found in a magazine. Growing up in rural New Jersey, banjo players were practically non-existent so Bruce taught himself to play. As a high school student, he took banjo lessons from Roger Siminoff. Years later he would build his first F5 mandolin with the aid of Siminoff’s book *Constructing a Bluegrass Mandolin*.

Bruce studied fine arts and art history with Vernon Maxim and Art McCluskey at Montclair High School. He received a scholarship to the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts Honors program under the direction of Chapman Kelley. He attended North Texas State University where he studied music and the school of Visual Arts in New York majoring in painting and sculpture.

After starting his own woodworking business producing high-end furniture and one-of-a-kind instruments, Bruce was hired to produce art pieces for Gibson’s Guitar Company Custom Shop. He created several “Tribute” guitars, and one-of-a-kind art pieces, that have been retained by the company in a permanent collection.

About the Guitar

The “Tribute to the 20th Century” is commonly referred to as a million dollar guitar because of the intensity of the artwork and their uniqueness. Bruce spent six months designing and creating the piece which is a veritable pictorial history book displaying 135 separate images of people and events.

The iconic imagery on this Super 400 portrays the history of America over the past 100 years. A time line on the reverse, beginning with immigrants on Ellis Island and ending with Y2K, offers a myriad of images depicting the evolution of America’s pop culture. Inlays, gold-plated hardware and gem stones complete this masterpiece.

Bruce considers his time at Gibson to have been a unique opportunity dedicated to exploring all aspects of “The Art Guitar.” It gave him a



**Tribute to the 20th Century
Gibson Super 400
Artist, Bruce J. Kunkel
2000**

huge insight into fine guitar making as a designer, maker, artist and research historian. Guitar making is a trade to which Bruce is well suited. It involves disciplines that he has spent a lifetime developing: fine woodworking, joinery, woodcarving, design, inlay and musicianship.

Activity Ideas

Art—The artist of this piece created a collage of people, activities and events. Have students create their own collage; include people who have influenced them, events that they feel are important or will have a lasting effect in their lifetime. Students should share with others the reasons for the selections and why they were important to include.

Social Studies— Option 1: Have students write and illustrate a timeline depicting each period on the guitar. Students may work in groups or independently. Each group or student should select a specific number of dates/events or interesting facts to research from one of the decades shown. Combine the different timelines into sequential order and have students discuss and explain why they included their selections.

Option 2: Identify as many of the illustrated moments in history as possible. Research and explain their importance, significance and impact on society from a local, national and international level. Have students select one event they feel had the most profound effect (good or bad) on today's culture. Explain why they have chosen each event.

Option 3: Identify as many of the individuals on the guitar as possible. Have each student select an individual to research. What are they famous for? Did their actions affect later generations? How have they affected people's lives today?

Language Arts— Research and listen to speeches given by some of the individuals illustrated (John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr.) What kind of response did the speeches incur? Why did they have an impact? Have students recite portions of the speeches. Further, encourage them to create a background and wear clothing reflecting the time period.

Science— Research and explain how a guitar works. What creates the sound heard? How does the thickness of the strings affect the sound? What does changing the tension of the strings do?