Interpretive Guide & Hands-on Activities

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program 2011-2013

Abstract Thinking
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

The Interpretive Guide

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present your community with a selection from its Travelling Exhibition Program. This is one of several exhibitions distributed by The Art Gallery of Alberta as part of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. This Interpretive Guide has been specifically designed to complement the exhibition you are now hosting. The suggested topics for discussion and accompanying activities can act as a guide to increase your viewers' enjoyment and to assist you in developing programs to complement the exhibition. Questions and activities have been included at both elementary and advanced levels for younger and older visitors.

At the Elementary School Level the Alberta Art Curriculum includes four components to provide students with a variety of experiences. These are:
- **Reflection**: Responses to visual forms in nature, designed objects and artworks
- **Depiction**: Development of imagery based on notions of realism
- **Composition**: Organization of images and their qualities in the creation of visual art
- **Expression**: Use of art materials as a vehicle for expressing statements

The Secondary Level focuses on three major components of visual learning. These are:
- **Drawings**: Examining the ways we record visual information and discoveries
- **Encounters**: Meeting and responding to visual imagery
- **Composition**: Analyzing the ways images are put together to create meaning

The activities in the Interpretive Guide address one or more of the above components and are generally suited for adaptation to a range of grade levels. As well, this guide contains coloured images of the artworks in the exhibition which can be used for review and discussion at any time. Please be aware that copyright restrictions apply to unauthorized use or reproduction of artists' images.

The Travelling Exhibition Program, funded by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, is designed to bring you closer to Alberta’s artists and collections. We welcome your comments and suggestions and invite you to contact:

**Shane Golby**, Manager/Curator
Travelling Exhibition Program
Ph: 780.428.3830; Fax: 780.421.0479
Email: shane.golby@youraga.ca

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**This package contains:**
- Curatorial Statement
- Visual Inventory - list of works
- Visual Inventory - images
- Artist Biographies
- **Talking Art**
  - Curriculum Connections/Art Across the Curriculum
  - Art History, Art Styles and Processes

**Visual Learning and Art Projects**
- What is Visual Learning?
- Elements of Composition/
- Reading Pictures Tours
- Exhibition Related Art Projects
- Glossary
- Credits
- The AFA and AGA

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AFA Travelling Exhibition Program, Edmonton, AB Ph: 780.428.3830 Fax: 780.421.0479 youraga.ca
Abstract Thinking

Of all the arts, abstract painting is the most difficult. It demands that you know how to draw well, that you have a heightened sensitivity for composition and for colours, and that you be a true poet. This last is essential.
Wassily Kandinsky

According to Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) the fourth and most complex stage in human cognitive development is characterized by the development of abstract thinking. Defined as a level of learning about things that is removed from the facts of the 'here and now' and from specific examples of the things or concepts being thought about, abstract thinking involves the ability to reflect on events, ideas and perceived analogies and relationships that others may not see and to apply these reflections to hypothetical situations to solve problems and test solutions.

This definition of abstract thinking is an apt description for the process of abstraction as expressed in the visual arts. Beginning in the late 19th and continuing throughout the 20th century the sources of inspiration for many artists shifted from the external world to their personal internal visions and to concerns with the actual material of paint and the act of painting or sculpting rather than the story a painting or sculpture told. From the 1960s to the mid 1980s the spotlight on art production in Edmonton was on formalist abstract art production. Supported and promoted by the Edmonton Art Gallery, the University of Alberta, and the commercial galleries, this relatively cohesive spirit in art making effectively put Edmonton on the national and international art stage during these decades.

While abstraction was championed by the Edmonton art establishment, however, many viewers were left scratching their heads, wondering what it was all about. The exhibition Abstract Thinking confronts this perplexity ‘head on’. Featuring the paintings and drawings of Edmonton artists Allen Ball, Jim Corrigan, Scott Cumberland, Nicole Galellis, and Ruby J. Mah, this exhibition examines some of the aims and inspirations behind abstract art production, and the processes used by these artists, in order to gain an understanding of abstraction itself.

Abstraction continues to be an energetic and open-ended exploration for many visual artists throughout Alberta. Through the art works presented in this exhibition viewers are invited to investigate the origins of this genre of artistic expression, the various manifestations of this practice throughout the 20th century, and some of the contemporary directions abstraction in the visual arts, specifically as this concerns two-dimensional work, embraces.
Allen Ball  
*Introduction*, 2007  
Oil enamel paint, varnish and wax on linoleum on plywood  
24 inches X 24 inches  
Collection of the artist

Allen Ball  
*Nurse’s Song*, 2006  
Oil enamel paint, varnish and wax on linoleum on plywood  
24 inches X 24 inches  
Collection of the artist

Allen Ball  
*The Divine Image*, 2006  
Oil enamel paint, varnish and wax on linoleum on plywood  
24 inches X 24 inches  
Collection of the artist

Allen Ball  
*The Chimney Sweeper*, 2006  
Oil enamel paint, varnish and wax on linoleum on plywood  
24 inches X 24 inches  
Collection of the artist

Jim Corrigan  
Two Studies for Green and Dark Green, 2010  
Acrylic, graphite, varnish on board  
16 7/8 inches X 13 7/8 inches  
Courtesy of Lando Gallery

Jim Corrigan  
*Rathrevor Beach, 7pm, July 24/08*, 2008  
Watercolour and graphite on paper  
4 inches X 4 inches  
Collection of the artist

Jim Corrigan  
*Study for Rathrevor Beach, 2010/2011*  
Acrylic, graphite and coloured pencil, varnish on board  
23 1/8 inches X 23 1/8 inches  
Courtesy of Lando Gallery

Scott Cumberland  
*Sweet Sweet Drawing # 44*, 2010  
Charcoal on paper  
16 1/2 inches X 22 1/2 inches  
Collection of the artist

Scott Cumberland  
*Sweet Sweet Drawing # 51*, 2010  
Charcoal on paper  
6 inches X 8 inches  
Collection of the artist

Scott Cumberland  
*Sweet Sweet Drawing # 62*, 2011  
Charcoal on paper  
6 inches X 8 inches  
Collection of the artist

Jim Corrigan  
*Buffalo Pound Lake, August 9/07*, 2007  
Watercolour and graphite on paper  
4 inches X 4 inches  
Collection of the artist

Jim Corrigan  
*Study for Buffalo Pound Lake, 2010*  
Acrylic, graphite, varnish on board  
13 7/8 inches X 13 7/8 inches  
Courtesy of Lando Gallery

Jim Corrigan  
*Green and Dark Green, September 21/03*, 2003  
Watercolour and graphite on paper  
2 7/8 inches X 5 3/4 inches  
Collection of the artist
### Visual Inventory - List of Works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scott Cumberland</th>
<th>Ruby J. Mah</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glam Rock: Greatest Hits, 2010</strong></td>
<td><strong>Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!, 2010</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 feet X 3 feet</td>
<td>12 inches X 12 inches</td>
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<td><strong>Caught, 2010</strong></td>
<td><strong>Flamingoes and Mustard both Bite, 2011</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 inches X 30 inches</td>
<td>15 1/8 inches X 15 1/8 inches</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bombast, 2010</strong></td>
<td><strong>I Must Sugar My Hair, 2011</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pencil crayon on paper</td>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 inches X 25 inches</td>
<td>24 inches X 24 inches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pencil crayon on paper</td>
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<tr>
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**Total Works:**

- **24 - 2 Dimensional works**
- **20 framed pieces**
Allen Ball

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Oil enamel paint, varnish and wax on linoleum on plywood
Collection of the artist

Allen Ball

*Nurses Song*, 2006
Oil enamel paint, varnish and wax on linoleum on plywood
Collection of the artist
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Visual Inventory - Images

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Ruby J. Mah
I Must Sugar My Hair, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of Lando Gallery
Allen Ball

Over the past 15 years, the majority of my work is constituted by project-based series that arise from discreet conceptual and discursive concerns, particularly relating to subjectivity and representation. My artistic practice is grounded in local and immediate contexts with a particular interest in public art projects that actively make art apparent beyond the confines of the gallery system and within the spaces that people live. As the creation of art is a social process intrinsic to the human condition, I am interested in public art projects that make art accessible within the community through the placement of art in sites of everyday interactions and, on the other hand, through programs that remove people from the position of the spectator and place them into the role of producer.

My work deals with a wide range of conceptual ideas that are filtered through the lens of personal experience and grounded in the history and development of painting. William Blake: Songs of Innocence, which I began in 2005 and recently completed, is a series of 20 paintings that explores William Blake’s deceptively simple yet profoundly lyrical, Songs of Innocence. I have intentionally avoided a direct interpretation of the very well known plates that accompany the poems. Instead, I have attempted to re-read these works through my own understanding of Blake’s words. The paintings are intentionally unframed to mark their status as objects in the world, since framing devices establish boundaries between individual paintings and their surroundings. Without the borders that framing provides, the paintings reveal themselves unadorned and open to heteroglossic interpretation.

The richly symbolic nature of Blake’s poems lends itself to a purely personal and intuitive response. I have a deep and long-standing interest in visual culture outside of the Western canon of art. Although I do not consider myself an abstract painter, in these works, abstraction of various provenances converge and overlap in these works. At the heart of this project is a critique of modernist abstraction, since using abstraction in a purely decorative and symbolic reading of Blake’s poetic imagery is an idea that is an anathema to modernist thought and practice.

I also recently completed a tour of duty at Operation CALUMET at El Gorah in Northern Sinai as part of the Canadian Forces Artist Program. The sites and events that I documented during my tour form the basis for my current project, a series of twenty, six by four foot paintings entitled Painting in a State of Exception.

A vital part of my artistic practice is my active and committed involvement with a diverse range of community-based arts programs and organizations. I have worked over the long-term to establish and to foster productive relationships, contexts, and organizational supports both within and for the local arts community. Simultaneously, I have achieved an extensive and, I believe, significant exhibition record for over a decade, and I am represented in local, provincial, national and international collections.
Jim Corrigan

Jim Corrigan was born in Red Deer, Alberta, in 1955. He studied at Red Deer College, Manchester Polytechnic School of Art in England, and painting at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where he received a Master of Visual Arts Degree in 1981. He has worked with Collections Services at the University of Alberta since 1981, and has been the curator of the Art Collection since 1997.

His work is represented in such public collections as the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Glenbow Museum and Archives in Calgary and the Art Gallery of Alberta, and such corporate collections as the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce as well as private collections in Canada and the United States.

Scott Cumberland - Artist Statement

As an artist, born and raised in Saskatchewan, I am keenly aware of the space and flatness which are indicative of the prairies of Western Canada. We negotiate the space created by the flatness of the open prairies, aware of where we’re going and where we’ve been. This space allows us to truly examine and become highly attuned to all that exists around us. It is as though the flatness of the prairies has contributed to a contemplative space that slows us down and allows us time to truly appreciate our surroundings, not unlike the space created by the flatness of modern abstraction.

Modern abstraction painters moved away from sculptural illusion; an illusion that depicts volume within and on a flat surface and one that alludes to a deeper space. As Clement Greenberg states in his paper Modernist Painting, “realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art: Modernism used art to call attention to art”. As with the prairies, I believe the space created by the flattened planes in modernist painting allows the viewer’s gaze to slow, therefore affording the viewer time to explore the art created through the formal elements and the medium. As an artist aware of the history of western modern abstraction, the question arises as to how I intend to deal with the flattened space of modernism.

It is not until we leave something behind, that we truly realize what we had. In the case of the prairies one may not understand or appreciate the wonders of the flatness and contemplative space, until it is left for another destination. The experience of a new destination assists in contextualizing earlier experiences and knowledge. I propose the same theory can be applied to Modernist abstraction. In order to fully understand and appreciate the complexities of modernism, it must be put into context.

In my current body of work, as with the flatness of the prairies, I am attempting to put the flattened space of modernist painting into context. Through the language of modernism, I introduce the very element that modernism moved away from, sculptural illusionism and deeper space. It is my intention to allow sculptural illusion, in the form of a ribbon, to interact with the flattened space and the materiality of the medium, which in turn acknowledges and
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Artist Biographies/Statements

celebrates the flatness of the painted surface. My goal by pairing two opposite concepts, flat and volume, is to provide context. This context can be found in the space somewhere in between two absolutes.

Nicole Galellis

Nicole Galellis first studied painting at the University of Alberta and then transferred to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 2002. Since returning to Edmonton she has been teaching at the Art Gallery of Alberta, Harcourt House Gallery, and the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts. Writing about her work Galellis states:

*These paintings reference the history of abstraction, but also embrace elements from my everyday surroundings: cartoons, graffiti, ornament, tattoos, medical illustrations and nature. I distort and layer these sources, creating abstractions that are more evocative than descriptive, moving in many directions simultaneously. By embracing the candy-colours of urban life and a wide array of influences, a sense of vitality permeates these canvases. They optimistically assert the possibilities of abstract painting and help the viewer to see the familiar anew.*

Ruby J. Mah

Ruby J. Mah received her Master of Fine Arts in Painting from the University of Alberta in 1999. She attended the Emma Lake Artists Workshop led by William Perehudoff, Harold Feist, Douglas Haynes and Joseph Drapell in 1988.

She has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions across Canada and her works are part of many public, corporate and private collections.
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Talking Art

CONTENTS:

- Curriculum Connections
- What is Abstract Art? An Introduction
- The History of Abstraction: A Survey
  - Abstract Expressionism
  - Modernism according to Clement Greenberg: a summary
  - Colour Field Painting
  - Op Art
- Abstract Painting in Edmonton: A Brief History
- Abstract Thinking - Artist interviews
- Selected works from Songs of Innocence by William Blake

Nicole Galellis
Foliate Frill, 2011
Acrylic, polyurethane on board
Collection of the artist
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Art Curriculum Connections

The following curricular connections taken from the Alberta Learning Program of Studies provides a brief overview of the key topics that can be addressed through viewing and discussing the exhibition Abstract Thinking. Through the art projects included in this exhibition guide students will be provided the opportunity for a variety of learning experiences.

ART CONNECTIONS K-6

REFLECTION
Students will notice commonalities within classes of natural objects or forms.
i. Natural forms display patterns and make patterns.
Students will interpret artworks literally.
i. An artwork tells us something about its subject matter and the artist who made it.
ii. Colour variation is built on three basic colours.
iii. All aspects of an artwork contribute to the story it tells.

DEPICTION
Students will modify forms by abstraction, distortion and other transformations.
i. Shapes can be abstracted or reduced to their essence.
Students will perfect forms and develop more realistic treatments.
i. Shapes can suggest movement or stability.
ii. Images can be portrayed in varying degrees of realism.

COMPOSITION
Students will create unity through density and rhythm.
i. Families of shapes, and shapes inside or beside shapes, create harmony.
ii. Repetition of qualities such as colour, texture and tone produce rhythm and balance.
Students will create emphasis by the treatment of forms and qualities.
i. The centre of interest can be made prominent by contrasting its size, shape, colour or texture from the other parts of the composition.
ii. Details, accents and outlines will enhance the dominant area or thing.

EXPRESSION
Students will express a feeling or a message.
i. Feelings and moods can be interpreted visually.
Students will use media and techniques, with an emphasis on more indirect complex procedures and effects in drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, fabric arts, photography and technographic arts.
i. Abstract or simplify a form.
ii. Continue to paint, using experimental methods including without a brush.
ART CONNECTIONS 7-9

DRAWINGS
Students will examine and simplify basic shapes and spaces.
i. Shapes may be organic or geometric.
ii. Lines can vary in direction, location, quality, emphasis, movement and mood.
Students will use expressiveness in their use of elements in the making of images.
i. The subjective perception of the individual student affects the way he/she expresses action and direction.
ii. Mood and feeling as perceived by the individual student can be expressed in colour drawings.

COMPOSITIONS
Students will investigate the effects of controlling form, colour and space in response to selected visual problems.
Students will experiment with the principles of dominance, emphasis and concentration in the creation of compositions.

ENCOUNTERS
Students will consider the natural environment as a source of imagery through time and across cultures.
i. Images of nature change through time and across cultures.

ART 10-20-30

DRAWINGS
Students will develop and refine drawing skills and styles.
i. A change in drawing techniques can express a different point of view about the same subject matter.
ii. Natural forms can be used as sources of abstract images and designs.
Students will use the vocabulary and techniques of art criticism to interpret and evaluate both their own works and the works of others.
i. Understanding styles or artistic movements related to visual studies is part of developing critical abilities.

COMPOSITIONS
Students will experiment with various representational formats.
i. Various materials alter representational formats and processes used in achieving certain intended effects.
Students will be conscious of the emotional impact that is caused and shaped by a work of art.
i. Image making is a personal experience created from ideas and fantasies.
Students will use non-traditional approaches to create compositions in both two and three dimensions.
Art Curriculum Connections continued

i. The use of non-traditional media affects the development of a two- or three-dimensional object.
ii. Chance occurrences or accidental outcomes can influence the making of a work of art.

ENCOUNTERS
Students will investigate the process of abstracting form from a source in order to create objects and images.

i. Artists simplify, exaggerate and rearrange parts of objects in their depictions of images.
ii. Artists select from natural forms in order to develop decorative motifs.

Students will recognize that while the sources of images are universal, the formation of an image is influenced by the artist's choice of medium, the time and the culture.

i. Different periods of history yield different interpretations of the same subject or theme.

Scott Cunningham
Caught, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
Collection of the artist
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Cross Curricular Connections

This exhibition is an excellent source for using art as a means of investigating topics addressed in other subject areas. The theme of the exhibition, and the works within it, are especially relevant as a spring-board for addressing aspects of the Science, Language Arts and Social Studies program of studies. The following is an overview of cross-curricular connections which may be addressed through viewing and discussing the exhibition Abstract Thinking.

ELEMENTARY SCIENCE

1–5 Students will identify and evaluate methods for creating colour and for applying colours to different materials.
   i. Identify colours in a variety of natural and manufactured objects.
   ii. Compare and contrast colours, using terms such as lighter than, darker than, more blue, brighter than.
   iii. Order a group of coloured objects, based on a given colour criterion.
   iv. Predict and describe changes in colour that result from the mixing of primary colours and from mixing a primary colour with white or with black.
   v. Create a colour that matches a given sample, by mixing the appropriate amounts of two primary colours.
   vi. Distinguish colours that are transparent from those that are not. Students should recognize that some coloured liquids and gels can be seen through and are thus transparent and that other colours are opaque.
   vii. Compare the effect of different thicknesses of paint. Students should recognize that a very thin layer of paint, or a paint that has been watered down, may be partly transparent.
   viii. Compare the adherence of a paint to different surfaces; e.g., different forms of papers, fabrics and plastics.

LANGUAGE ARTS

K.4 Create Original Texts Students will draw, record or tell about ideas and experiences. Students will talk about and explain the meaning of their own pictures and print.

1.2 Respond to Texts Students will participate in shared listening, reading and viewing experiences, using oral, print and other media texts from a variety of cultural traditions and genres, such as poems and storytelling.

2.3 Understand Forms, Elements and Techniques Students will discuss ways that visual images convey meaning in print and other media texts.

2.4 Create Original Texts Students will add descriptive words to elaborate on ideas and create particular effects in oral, print and other media texts.

6.2 Create Original Texts Students will experiment with sentence patterns, imagery and exaggeration to create mood and mental images.

6.2 Create Original Texts Students will discuss how detail is used to enhance character, setting, action and mood in oral, print and other media texts.
6.4 Create Original Texts Students will use literary devices, such as imagery and figurative language, to create particular effects.

LANGUAGE ARTS 10-20-30

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to:
–comprehend literature and other texts in oral, print, visual and multimedia forms, and respond personally, critically and creatively.
–create oral, print, visual and multimedia texts, and enhance the clarity and artistry of communication.

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to comprehend literature and other texts in oral, print, visual and multimedia forms, and respond personally, critically and creatively.
–Construct meaning from text and context
–Discern and analyze context
–Understand and interpret content
–Engage prior knowledge
–Respond to a variety of print and nonprint texts
–Connect self, text, culture and milieu
–Appreciate the effectiveness and artistry of print and nonprint texts

SOCIAL STUDIES

Dimensions of Thinking
S.1 Students will develop skills of critical thinking and creative thinking:
–evaluate ideas and information from multiple sources
–determine relationships among multiple and varied sources of information

S.2 Students will develop skills of historical thinking:
–analyze multiple historical and contemporary perspectives within and across cultures

S.8 Students will demonstrate skills of oral, written and visual literacy:
–communicate effectively to express a point of view in a variety of situations
–use skills of formal and informal discussion and/or debate to persuasively express informed viewpoints on an issue
–ask respectful and relevant questions of others to clarify viewpoints
–listen respectfully to others
What is Abstract Art? An Introduction

Of all the arts, abstract painting is the most difficult. It demands that you know how to draw well, that you have a heightened sensitivity for composition and for colours, and that you be a true poet. This last is essential.

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)

Abstract Art is a term applied to 20th century styles in reaction against the traditional European view of art as the imitation of nature. Abstraction stresses the formal or elemental structure of a work.

Like all painting, abstract painting is not a unified practice. Rather, the term ‘abstraction’ covers two main, distinct tendencies. The first involves the reduction of natural appearances to simplified forms. Reduction may lead to the depiction of the essential or generic forms of things by eliminating particular and accidental variations. Reduction can also involve the creation of art which works away from the individual and particular with a view to creating an independent construct of shapes and colours having aesthetic appeal in their own right.

The second tendency in abstraction involves the construction of art objects from non-representational basic forms. These objects are not created by abstracting from natural appearances but by building up with non-representational shapes and patterns. In other words, in this mode, abstract works are ones without a recognisable subject and do not relate to anything external or try to ‘look like something’. Instead, the colour and form (and often the materials and support) are the subject of the abstract painting. As expressed by the artist Theo van Doesburg in 1930:

...nothing is more real than a line, a colour, a surface.

Whatever the tendency in abstraction, it is characteristic of most modes of abstraction that they abandon or subordinate the traditional function of art to portray perceptible reality and emphasize its function to create a new reality for the viewer’s perception. As described by Roald Nasgaard in his work Abstract Painting in Canada:

Jim Corrigan
Study for Buffalo Pound Lake, 2010
Acrylic, graphite, varnish on board
Courtesy of Lando Gallery

Scott Cunningham
Sweet Sweet Drawing #51, 2010
Charcoal on paper
Collection of the artist

Scott Cunningham
Sweet Sweet Drawing #62, 2010
Charcoal on paper
Collection of the artist
Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) is usually credited with making the first entirely non-representational painting in 1910. The history of abstraction in the visual arts, however, begins before Kandinsky in the later decades of the 19th century with the work of French Impressionist artists such as Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne and Georges Seurat. While the work of these artists was grounded in visible reality, their methods of working and artistic concerns began the process of breaking down the academic restrictions concerning what was acceptable subject matter in art, how art works were produced and, most importantly, challenged the perception of what a painting actually was.

Radicals in their time, early Impressionists broke the rules of academic painting. They began by giving colours, freely brushed, primacy over line. They also took the act of painting out of the studio and into the modern world. Painting realistic scenes of modern life, they portrayed overall visual effects instead of details. They used short “broken” brush strokes of mixed and pure unmixed colour, not smoothly blended or shades as was customary, in order to achieve the effect of intense colour vibration.

The vibrant colour used by the Impressionist artists was adopted by their successors, the Fauve artists. The Fauves were modern artists whose works emphasized painterly qualities and strong colour over the representational or realistic values retained by the Impressionists. This group, which basically operated from 1905 to 1907, was led by Henri Matisse and André Derain.
The paintings of the Fauve artists were characterised by seemingly wild brush work and strident colours and, in their focus on colour over line and drawing, the subjects of their paintings came to be characterized by a high degree of simplification and abstraction.

While the Impressionists and Fauve artists are the direct ancestors of the abstract movement in 20th century art, the real ancestor of modern abstraction was Pablo Picasso. Picasso used primitive art from Africa and Oceania as a ‘battering ram’ against the classical conception of beauty. Picasso made his first cubist paintings, such as Les Demoiselles d’Avignon, based on Cézanne’s idea that all depiction of nature can be reduced to three solids: cube, sphere and cone. Together with Georges Braque, Picasso continued his experiments and invented facet or analytical cubism. As expressed in the Portrait of Ambroise Vollard, Picasso created works which can no longer be read as images of the external world but as worlds of their own. Facet cubism, however, was still not pure abstraction as, though fragmented and
redefined, the images preserved remnants of Renaissance principles of perspective as space lies behind the picture plane and has no visible limits. By 1911 Picasso and Georges Braque developed what is known as Synthetic Cubism which introduced collage into art making. Through this process these artists introduced a whole new concept of space into art making.

In synthetic cubism, the picture plane lies in front of the picture plane. This re-definition of space, so different from the Renaissance principle of three-dimensional illusion that had dominated academic teaching for centuries, would have a profound effect on the development of abstraction in art and was a true landmark in the history of painting.

Influenced by the practices of Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism, artists gradually developed the idea that colour, line, form and texture could be the actual subjects of a painting and form the essential characteristics of art. Adhering to this, Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian developed the first pure abstract works in 20th century art.
For both Kandinsky and Mondrian, abstraction was a search for truths behind appearances, expressed in a pure visual vocabulary stripped of representational references.

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) was born in Moscow. Originally trained in law and economics, Kandinsky started painting at the age of 30 and, in 1896, moved to Germany to study art full-time. After a brief return to Russia (1914-1921) Kandinsky returned to Germany where he taught at the Bauhaus school of art and architecture until it was closed by the Nazis in 1933. He then moved to France where he remained for the rest of his life.

Kandinsky’s creation of purely abstract work followed a long period of development and maturation of theoretical thought based on his personal artistic experience. At first influenced by both pointillism and the Fauve artists, by 1922 geometrical elements had taken on increasing importance in his paintings. Kandinsky was also extremely influenced by music as he considered music abstract by nature as it does not try to represent the exterior world but rather to express in an immediate way the inner feelings of the human soul. He was also influenced by the theories of Theosophy expressed by H.P. Blavatsky. These theories, which had a tremendous influence on many artists during the 1920s, postulated that creation was a geometrical progression beginning with a single point. Kandinsky’s mature paintings focus on geometric forms and the use of colour as something autonomous and apart from a visual description of an object or other form and through relinquishing outer appearances he hoped to more directly communicate feelings to the viewer.

The most radical abstractionist of the early 20th century was Piet Mondrian (1872-1944). Born in Amersfoort, the Netherlands, Mondrian began his career as a primary teacher. While teaching he also practiced painting and these early works, while definitely representational in nature, show the influence various artistic movements such as pointillism and fauvism had on him. Mondrian’s art, like Kandinsky’s, was also strongly influenced by the theosophical movement and his work from 1908 to the end of his life involved a search for the spiritual knowledge expressed by theosophist theory.

In 1911 Mondrian moved to Paris and came under the influence of Picasso’s cubism. While cubist influences can be seen in his works from 1911 to 1914, however, unlike the Cubists Mondrian attempted to reconcile his painting with his spiritual pursuits. In this pursuit he began to simplify elements in his paintings further than the cubists had done until he had developed a completely non-representational, geometric style. In this work Mondrian did not strive for pure lyrical emotion as Kandinsky did. Rather, his goal was pure reality defined as equilibrium achieved through the balance of unequal but equivalent oppositions. By 1919 Mondrian began producing the grid-based paintings for which he became renowned and this subject motivated his art practice for the rest of his life.
Modern art was introduced to the United States with the New York Armory Show in 1913 and through the arrival of European artists who moved to the U.S. during World War I and World War II. After World War II the U.S. became the focal point of a number of new artistic movements, the first of which was **Abstract Expressionism**. This movement, also known as **Action Painting**, made its impact felt throughout the world during the 1950s. Represented most clearly in the work of **Jackson Pollock** (1912-1956), the essence of Abstract Expressionism may be summed up as imageless, anti-formal, improvisatory, dynamic, energetic, free in technique, and meant to stimulate vision rather than gratify established conventions of good taste. In this movement, emphasis was placed on the physical act of painting and the 'existential' attitude that the artist 'grasped authentic being' through the act of creating rather than through a finished product.

The idea of the unconscious mind was extremely important to Pollock. Undergoing Jungian analysis, he attempted to communicate directly from the depths of his psyche. To do so he developed his own method of painting. Partly derived from the automatic drawing methods of the French Surrealists of the 1920s and Kandishky’s non-representational Expressionism, Pollock created his works by mainly pouring and splattering his colours instead of applying them with a brush.

Pollock’s technique may also have resulted from a belief that paint itself was not a passive substance to be manipulated but a storehouse of pent-up forces to be released.

Any actual shapes visible in his paintings are largely determined by the internal dynamics of the paint and his process where the viscosity of the paint, the speed and direction of its impact on the canvas, and its interaction with other layers of pigment worked together to create the image.

Pollock’s most famous paintings were made during his ‘drip period’ between 1947 and 1950. In creating these works he used hardened brushes, sticks, and even basting syringes as paint applicators. The 'drip' technique allowed Pollock to achieve a more immediate means of creating art and in the process of making paintings in this way he moved away from figurative representation and challenged the Western tradition of using easel and brush.
The History of Abstraction: A Survey con’t

Abstract Expressionism continued

Jackson Pollock’s radical approach to painting revolutionized the potential for all contemporary art that followed him. His move away from easel paintings and conventionality was a liberating signal to the artists of his era and to all who came after. Artists realized that Pollock’s process essentially blasted artmaking beyond any prior boundaries and expanded and developed the definitions and possibilities available to artists for the creation of new works of art.

Today painters do not have to go to a subject matter outside of themselves. Most modern painters work from a different source. They work from within.

Jackson Pollock

After the 1950s Action Painting gradually lost its dominant position and a number of other ‘isms’ came to the fore. Among these were Colour-Field painting, Hard-edge painting, Geometric Abstraction, Minimal art, Lyrical Abstraction, Pop art, Op art and various other movements. In the second half of the 20th century the process of abstraction was most persuasively argued through the art criticism of the New York art critic, Clement Greenberg. Greenberg’s 1960 essay ‘Modernist Painting’ expressed that the history of modernism was the story of a process where each of the arts slowly purged itself of everything that was not particular to it. By the early 1960s abstract painting was defined by what it was not: abstract is not figurative, not narrative, not illusionist, not literary etc. Flatness was a key Greenbergian concept whereby he argued that abstract artists emphasized the two-dimensionality of the picture plane and situated their pictures, not as magic windows into another world, but as real things ‘in the same kind of space as that in which our bodies move.’

Despite the variety of movements and theoretical programs of the later 20th century, abstraction has remained a force into the 21st and its main themes of the transcendental, the contemplative, the timeless, and the idea of art as object - of a painting as a handmade material and physically real - have continued to influence the production of many contemporary artists.
Modernism according to Clement Greenberg

Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) was an influential American art critic closely associated with Modern art in the United States and Canada. He helped to articulate a concept of medium specificity and championed abstraction in the visual arts. In 1940, in an influential piece in Partisan Review, Greenberg argued that the value of art was located in its form, which is inseparable from its content. In his first essay on modernism, written in 1960, Greenberg gave what has been described as what may be the most elegant definition of modernism in existence. In the essay Greenberg defined modernism as:

...the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.

According to Greenberg’s essay, all the arts, in order to not be devalued in society, had to demonstrate that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in their own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity. As a result, what had to be exhibited was not only that which was unique and irreducible in art in general, but also that which was unique and irreducible in each particular art.

In this process it quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. In criticizing itself, it became art’s task to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Through this each art would be rendered “pure” and in this “purity” it would find the guarantee of its standards of quality.

In painting, the limitations that constitute the medium of painting - the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment - were traditionally treated as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. In an Old Master painting, for example, one tends to see what is in the painting before one sees the picture - the paint itself, the works format - itself. Traditionally artists attempted to create an illusion of space in depth that the viewer could imagine oneself walking into. Modernism in painting reversed this. Through stressing the flatness of the surface, the flatness of the picture plane being the only thing unique and exclusive to pictorial art, Modernist artists created a situation where the viewer sees a Modernist picture as a picture first. In a modernist painting, the illusion created can only be seen into and can only be traveled through, literally or figuratively, with the eye. In other words, the painting is an object itself, not merely a vehicle for a story or an illusion.

Modernism in the visual arts is closely linked to the concept of formalism. Formalism is the concept that a work’s artistic value is entirely determined by its form - the way it is made, its purely visual aspects, and its medium. Formalism emphasizes compositional elements such as colour, line, shape and texture rather than realism, context and content. In visual art, formalism posits that everything necessary to comprehending a work of art is contained within the work of art. In formalist theory, the focus is on the aesthetic experience gained from the piece.
Abstraction in the visual arts has taken many forms over the 20th century. One of these, and a style which has influenced the work of Jim Corrigan in the exhibition Abstract Thinking, is Colour Field Painting.

Colour Field painting emerged in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s. Inspired by European modernism and closely related to Abstract Expressionism, colour field painting is characterized primarily by large fields of flat, solid colour spread across or stained into the canvas (or board, in the work of Jim Corrigan), creating areas of unbroken surface and a flat picture plane. The movement places less emphasis on gesture, brushstrokes and action in favour of an overall consistency of form and process.

The use of large opened fields of expressive colour applied in generous painterly portions, accompanied by loose drawing, was first seen in the early 20th century works of Henri Matisse and Joan Miró. These artists, along with Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian directly influenced the Abstract Expressionists, the Colour Field painters and the Lyrical Abstractionists. During the late 1950s and 1960s Colour Field painters emerged in Great Britain, Canada, Washington, D.C. and the West Coast of the United States. Using formats of stripes, targets, simple geometric patterns and references to landscape imagery and to nature these artists began to break away stylistically from abstract expressionism; experimenting with new ways of making pictures; and new ways of handling paint and colour. The artists associated with the Colour Field movement moved away from the violence and anxiety of Action Painting toward a new and ‘calmer’ language of colour.

An important distinction that made colour field painting different from abstract expressionism was the paint handling. Colour Field painters revolutionized the way paint could be effectively applied as they sought to rid art of superfluous rhetoric. In this aim they used greatly reduced formats with drawing essentially simplified to repetitive and regulated systems, basic references to nature, and a highly articulated and psychological use of colour. In general these painters eliminated overt recognizable imagery and sought to present each painting as one unified, cohesive, monolithic image often with series of related types. Unlike the emotional energy and gestural surface marks and paint handling of abstract expressionists, colour field painters sought to efface individual marks in favour of large, flat, stained and soaked areas of colour.
One of the reasons for the success of the colour field movement was the technique of staining. In this method artists would dilute their paint in containers, making a fluid liquid and then pour it onto raw unprimed canvas. The paint could also be brushed on or rolled on or thrown on and would spread into the fabric of the canvas and artists would often draw shapes and areas as they stained. Many artists, such as Helen Frankenthaler, found that pouring and staining opened the door to innovations and revolutionary methods of drawing and expressing meaning in new ways.

Colour field became a viable way of painting at exactly the time that acrylic paint, the new plastic paint, came into being. Oil paints, which have a medium quite different, are not water based and so leave a slick of oil around the edge of a colour whereas acrylic paints stop at their own edge. Acrylics were first made commercially in the 1950s with water soluble artist quality acrylic paints becoming commercially available in the early 1960s. These proved to be ideally suited for stain painting as water soluble acrylics made diluted colours sink and hold fast into raw canvas.
Op Art

Another style of abstraction developed during the 20th century, and one expressed in the work of Allen Ball in the exhibition Abstract Thinking, is Op Art.

Op art, also known as optical art, is a style of visual art that makes use of optical illusions. It is a method of painting concerned with the interaction between illusion and picture plane, between understanding and seeing. Op art works are abstract and when the viewer looks at them, the impression is given of movement, hidden images, flashing and vibration, patterns, or alternatively of swelling or warping.

Op art is derived from the constructivist practices of the Bauhaus School in Germany. When the Bauhaus was forced to close by the Nazis in 1933, many of its instructors fled to the United States, helping to foster the development of Modernism in North America.

Op art is a perceptual experience related to how vision functions. It is a dynamic visual art, stemming from a discordant figure-ground relationship that causes the two planes to be in a tense and contradictory juxtaposition. Op art is created in two primary ways. The first, and best known method, is the creation of effects through the use of pattern and line. The lines often create after-images of certain colours due to how the retina receives and processes light. Colour Op art works are dominated by the same concerns of figure-ground movement, but they have the added element of contrasting colours which have different effects on the eye. The juxtaposition of two highly contrasting colours provokes a sense of depth in illusionistic three-dimensional space so that it appears as if the architectural shape is invading or retreating from the viewers’ space.
The full impact of New York abstraction was not felt in the Canadian West until the 1950s. These influences were first expressed at the Emma Lake Workshops and Regina in the 1950s, then Saskatoon in the 1960s, and finally in Edmonton in the mid to late 1960s and the 1970s. The affect was to put the prairies on ‘the map’ of Canadian art and marked the first time in Canada’s cultural history that artwork from the prairie region was deemed worthy of national attention.

The push of the Edmonton abstract art scene to the forefront of national attention was the result of a number of factors which came together in the late 60s and early 70s. The first of these was the construction of the new Edmonton Art Gallery (replaced by the new Art Gallery of Alberta in 2010) in 1968 and the directorship of the gallery by Terry Fenton (director: 1972-1987) and the gallery’s chief curator Karen Wilken (1971-1978). The EAG under Fenton and Wilken was eager to nurture a coherent art scene that coalesced with its own views on art. In 1973 Fenton invited New York artist Michael Steiner to appear at the EAG to jury an exhibition of abstract art and lead a workshop. At this very popular event Steiner encouraged local artists to be freer with materials and methods of paint application. Steiner’s visit was followed by frequent visits to Edmonton by New York art critic Clement Greenberg and other American abstract artists which reinforced this direction.

A second factor which led to the flowering of abstraction in the city was the revitalization of the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta. A number of new instructors trained in England, the United States and elsewhere began their teaching careers at the U of A in the late 1960s and their influence, coupled with the curatorial interests of the EAG, would have a major influence on a younger generation of Edmonton artists. Among these important instructors were artists such as Graham Peacock, Phil Darrah, Ann Clarke, Douglas Haynes, and David Cantine. Many of these artists, influenced by the work of the Americans Jules Olitski and Larry Poons, began putting an emphasis on the physical qualities and surface activity of paint itself, applied in a relatively all-over manner.
The process of these artists was aided by the on-going transformation of acrylic paint technology. Because of Olitski, the use of acrylic gel became ubiquitous as the sign of advanced modernist painting. Gel permitted painters both to reiterate the flatness of the surface and to build up a substantial surface texture where literal depth and relation to the surface remained transparently visible. The addition of a number of additives to acrylic paint and gel also made a huge variety of paint colours available for these artists to choose from.

Final factors which fostered the proliferation of abstract art in Edmonton during the 70s and 80s were the Commercial Galleries and corporate clients who supported the sophisticated New York style and the fact that a number of local artists were generally interested in the practice of abstraction.

In the 1980s the predominence of formalist abstraction on the Edmonton scene ended and abstract artists were re-positioned on the margins of the art world. According to some, however, this marginalization has had its positive aspects. First, it has led to more distinctive styles. Abstract artists now use recent developments in contemporary art like metaphor and external references which give the practitioners the freedom to abandon the self-referential and a strict ‘art for art’s sake’ attitude. Edmonton’s abstract painting is no longer simply a tale about ‘close-valued, subtle colour compositions and heavy textured surfaces’ but an open-ended exploration of abstract concerns.

Secondly, being placed on the side-lines of the art world has ‘forced’ Edmonton’s abstract artists to look for or develop other venues to support their work. In 1993 twenty-two Edmonton artists formed the Edmonton Contemporary Artists Society (ECAS) in order to create new exhibition opportunities and to show art in whose presence the viewer ‘...has an experience rather than an idea...art that should move you emotionally.” (Abstract Painting in Canada, pg. 308) As expressed by Mary-Beth Laviolette, ‘...persistent throughout this apparently non-objective art is a strong current of romantic energy where a work is defined as ‘an expression of feeling and personality...essentially the product of an independent vision’. (An Alberta Art Chronicle, pg. 165)
Allen Ball received a Bachelor of Arts Honors Degree from Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in London in 1984 followed by a Masters of Visual Arts from the University of Alberta. Camberwell School is a very academic school, figuratively and spatially based. For the first two years of his undergraduate degree the program of studies was all drawing based on accurate representation. This very academic training, however, was then followed by a freedom for students to do what they wanted. All of Ball’s artwork is related to this training. His aim as an artist is to make works that are loaded with meaning but he also gives himself the freedom to use the media, materials, and approach best suited to tell his ‘story’ at the time. As stated by the artist, he ‘...wants art-making to be interesting. He doesn’t want to do just one thing in one way.’

In his practice Ball works on ‘projects’ or series and uses the means of artmaking suitable for the project in hand. His artworks in the exhibition Abstract Thinking are inspired by William Blake’s collection of poems entitled Songs of Innocence, first published in 1789. In this project Ball created one painting for each poem in Blake’s series. In his art pieces Ball’s aim was to capture the imagery, mood, and allusions within the poems. In these pieces the artist states that he was after an ‘emblematic’ idea and that this could only be realized through abstraction and that abstraction allowed an openness that figurative work sometimes lacks. Ball's combination of his early academic training with a freedom to experiment is also evident in these pieces through his chosen ‘canvas’. In these works he started with ‘realistically’ patterned old linoleum and then ‘abstracted’ this pattern in his interpretation of each poem.

In many of his projects or individual pieces within a series, Ball follows a strategy combining both strict rules concerning the process followed in painting with a freedom to see what happens as the work progresses. In his ‘Cross Series’ from 2009, for example, he limited his palette to black, red and white. Anything that was this colour on the original linoleum ‘canvas’ was left as it was whereas all other areas were painted over with his chosen colours.
Jim Corrigan describes himself as ‘...a victim of (his) time and place.’ He grew up on a farm west of Red Deer and began his art studies at Red Deer College. After receiving his diploma from the college he moved to England where he attended the Manchester Polytechnic School of Art where he received a very traditional, product-based education. Finally, he moved to Edmonton where he did his Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts, studying under such instructors as David Cantine and Robert Sinclair. At this time the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Alberta was dominated by instructors who, in one form or another, were practitioners of modernist abstraction. A further influence on Corrigan was the work of British artist Ben Nicholson (1894-1982) whose austere geometric paintings were among the most influential abstract works in British art. Corrigan graduated with his Masters of Fine Arts in 1981.

One of the aspects Corrigan admired in the work of Cantine, Sinclair and Nicholson was the ability of these artists to move back and forth between ‘realism’ and abstraction. Cantine’s abstract circle paintings, for example, are based on an arrangement of apples and their shadows. The works of Sinclair and Nicholson, on the other hand, are based on the landscape.

For Jim Corrigan, like many artists in Alberta, the main source of inspiration for his work also comes from the land. As he has indicated, however, while he starts with the land, and in his most recent work is working in situ, the actual painting may go in any direction. Rather than creating a reproduction of what he sees, Corrigan ‘boils’ the scene before him down to where geometry and certain elements such as shapes or colours dominate. For this artist, painting involves finding the language that will define a scene and create order out of the morass of ‘stuff’ going on around and before him. In other words, Corrigan distills his imagery down to a minimalist expression which, for him, says something fundamental about the land and painting itself.
Corrigan has been described as ‘a rarity’ in Edmonton’s abstract scene, especially as that scene was interpreted from the 1970s to 1990s. As described by curator Liz Wylie:

*Jim Corrigan is a rarity in Edmonton because he is a painter working with an abstract vocabulary that is not part of the city’s abstract mainstream.* (Mary-Beth Laviolette, *An Alberta Art Chronicle: adventures in recent & contemporary art*, pg. 47)

While his works are very open-ended in how they can be interpreted, they adhere to the art maxim of saying as much as one can with as little as possible. His minimalist works have been described as analytical, cool, and spare, and in this demonstrate the influence of some of his instructors and a decidedly different approach to abstraction than that seen in the work of many other artists working with abstraction in Edmonton.
Scott Cumberland received his Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon in 2003. In his undergrad the major influences of his work were William Perehudof, Johnathan Forrest, and Otto Rodgers. As Saskatoon has the same Modern Art History as Edmonton, Scott decided to transfer to Edmonton to do his Masters Degree and graduated with his MFA in 2007. He presently teaches at the University of Alberta, at Augustana College in Camrose, and at Grant MacEwan University in Edmonton.

During his undergrad program Scott focused on representational drawing and figurative drawing. For one assignment he explored cubist ideas and became very interested in cubist concepts of space and form. This interest resulted in changes to his work, first leading to figurative abstraction followed by non-objective abstraction and then figure-ground abstraction.

While his artistic beginnings were in representation, Scott enjoys the ‘freedom’ of abstraction. In abstraction he is not locked in to a tangible subject matter but is free to ‘play around’ with formal elements. As he has expressed:

*I like to have fun; I like to draw; I like to make these energetic sweeps and see where they go.*

In his work Cumberland references modernist abstraction and Clement Greenberg with his adherence to material flatness and the separation of painting from other artistic forms. At the same time, however, he also tries to subvert this heritage by creating an illusion of depth and form in his work rather than pursuing an all-over aesthetic which creates one object and which is the aim of many Modernist abstract artists.

Cumberland’s approach to each work varies. Sometimes he will lay down a solid colour and then place multiple layers of wet paint overtop. He then draws into the paint with modified sticks or squeegees, mixing the colours and revealing the layers underneath. Finally he goes back in to fine tune his image, attempting in this process to acknowledge modernist abstraction while exploring other elements like space and volume. His overall process is organic in nature. While he may begin with an idea, his overall process is one of experimentation and a response to what happens on the canvas, creating works which celebrate movement and where there are no absolutes.
Nicole Gallelis studied at the University of Alberta under such professors as Phil Darrah and Graham Peacock. After two years at the University of Alberta, which had a very modernist approach, she transferred to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NASCAD) which had a more conceptual approach.

While at NASCAD Nicole painted still-lifes but she was not happy with the backgrounds in her works so started looking for patterning in the back to reflect the realism of the foreground. This led to the layering of images in her work and the development of an abstract vocabulary of shapes/colours and processes to begin a work. Nicole likes abstraction because it’s about ‘abstract thinking’ and trying to deal with the layers of complexity in the world. While she sees herself linked to modernism in trying to capture something that may not be part of the visible world and in capturing thoughts and feelings, she also wants to rebel against Modernist Abstract thinking or the Modernist sensibility which, she states, is all about materials, the flatness of the surface, and a rejection of the ‘world’. In her art work, which in its organic shapes may reference the female body, ornamentation, patterning, or nature, she strives to ‘open the doors’ and allow people to connect to the work in ways beyond the elements.

In creating a painting Nicole tries to pick colours that might be considered ‘gaudy’ or a bit jarring. She uses colour to push viewers in different directions of thought. Pink, for example, is often considered a feminine colour and so makes the viewer think of the female body whereas the tone of green she often uses may be considered ‘radioactive’.

Nicole Gallelis
*Bombast*, 2010
Pencil crayon on paper
Collection of the artist
Ruby J. Mah received both her BFA and MFA in Fine Arts from the University of Alberta. Starting as a figurative sculptor and painter, she gradually moved into abstraction and came to enjoy the freedom it offered as there weren’t the same boundaries as those set up by figurative work. While her work is abstract, however, it is drawn from ‘reality’. As the artist states, everything is fodder for her paintings. Ideas from literature, found objects, emotions, colours, lines, shapes and a myriad of other ‘things’ serve as the initial sources of inspiration for her paintings. In her work she takes a detail of reality and focuses on it and explores it in an abstract fashion.

In approaching her painting, Ruby works in an experimental and spontaneous manner. While she may go in to the work with an idea, this idea is not fixed. Instead, she reacts to what happens with the paint and mark making and the work thus takes on an organic life of its own. In describing her ‘process’ she states that she likes to push the boundaries and see what she can get out of the paint and it is this freedom and experimentation that drives her work.

Ruby has primarily worked in two styles over the past ten years. Since graduation she has actively pursued works that are mixed-media collage in nature. Through these works her primary goal was to express things that straight acrylic painting didn’t. Through the addition of found objects in her work she was also investigating how one could use things that weren’t art to make art. Over the past year or so she has returned to straight acrylic painting, wanting to take the things she learned in her mixed-media works and, through paint alone, try to achieve similar results.

Ruby’s works are often based on prose or poetry. One series of mixed-media pieces, for example, are based on the poem Tintern Abbey by William Wordsworth. Her latest pieces are based on Down the Rabbit Hole of Alice in Wonderland. Her works, however, are not literal or even abstract interpretations of the poems or story. As she described it, the link between the text source and her paintings is very tenuous. Instead of interpreting the source she pulls something from the story line, a phrase, or some other element within the text and uses it to ‘jump start’ a visual idea. For Ruby, abstraction involves a quest to represent the spiritual rather than the actual literal object or source.
Ruby J. Mah - Artist Statement

Through the elements of painting I have been trying to incorporate things of concern to me. Coming from an oriental heritage but born in a western culture I have dealt with the dichotomy of oriental/occidental elements all my life. My work has been greatly influenced by oriental calligraphy and spiritualism intermeshed at the same time with western painting principles.

The process of painting, the moment of painting, is an important action for me as I consider my paintings to be active, not passive. I regard the essence of the act of painting as the reflection and active involvement of *ch'i* which can best be described as the spiritual energy that forms all life and matter. This universal life energy deeply evokes our material existence and is reflected in our physical sense of being. Surface texture, colour and composition are all used as tools to express this spirituality. These are common bonds to the physicality of nature itself which I use as a source of reference and meditation. Drawing on my foundations of painting and sculpture I try to encompass the subtle concerns of the traditional values of calligraphy and spirituality into a contemporary art form that still preserves the sensuality of colour, tactile quality and honesty of the acrylic paint and materials used.

Like *yin and yang*, it is a challenge to maintain the balance between east and west yet remain true to both issues of dimensionality. Although the essence of eastern influences is strong, I try to ensure that my paintings are valid in the formal context of contemporary western painting.

The series *Down The Rabbit Hole* came about during the collage of a rabbit, a whimsical project that jump started me thinking about the complexities of perception. As I worked on the image, there came the decision to add or discard elements which brought about the question of which was the true image of the rabbit. Is true reality the one we live or the one we may dream? We can slip from one reality to another fairly easily whether through drug inducement or mental illness. The more gentle form of this shift is through imagination.

As in all things in life there is darkness within the light; that's what makes life rich. Crossovers exist, intermingling with the matrix of events. *Down The Rabbit Hole* typifies the nuances of life. We wear many skins in our lifetime, shedding and donning as needed, much like I added or discarded layers to the image. Our existence sits on the edge; a mere ripple can set a series of events in motion. Some we can control, many we cannot. It is a rollercoaster ride of adventure and chaos. Whether grounded or freefall, life is a journey composed of artificiality combined with reality. Is it merely smoke and mirrors that veil the nuances of perception? It is left to us to discover, or maybe just accept what the fates have in store.

Perhaps that is why *Alice in Wonderland* fascinates me so much. It is not just fantasy but a reflection of the world at large. We not only meet people in our lives like the characters in *Alice* but are often surrounded by them. We have just never thought to analyze them.

Which is the true reality, Alice sitting on the grass by her sister or Alice following the White Rabbit into a reality where anything can happen and often does? The story is not all whimsy but
Abstract Thinking: Artist Interviews

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has an edge of darkness to it. It is this darkness or edge that specifically has given me fodder for my painting. Abstraction is based on reality but it is a step, sometimes several steps, removed from either the literal image or reality itself. The perception of reality is what gives me, as a painter, the freedom and meaning to explore. It allows me to open the door to many alternate realities and the reality of who I am.

Ruby J. Mah
The Queen of Hearts, She Made Some Tarts
Reflections by Ruby J. Mah

I was thinking about the complexities of human nature when I started this painting, of how often people run rampant over others in order to get their way or try to control a situation so they always come out on top. Often they don’t really have power but self esteem is invariably tied into the aspect of power over others or control.

The Queen of Hearts strikes fear into the hearts of her subjects but her threats are nearly always empty, running out of steam soon after they leave her mouth. She is a Queen who rules without compassion but through intimidation, a bully. Some people we deal with in real life are like the Queen of Hearts. Those astute and with fortitude stand their ground and survive.

The paint skins I incorporated into my work were one of the first elements I chose partly because I was enamoured with their shape which reminded me of wings and freedom, which in turn referenced the dichotomy of their implication to the personality of the Queen of Hearts. From there, the colours I initially chose were from a subconscious gut level. In perspective though, according to colour theory, reds indicate energy and the passion of emotions. I balanced it with the greens because green is a colour that soothes and calms the heat of emotion which is why institutions are so often painted green.

In retrospective all choices made are instinctual and subjective because decisions in painting are based on many factors; eg. Life experiences, personal likes and dislikes, colour palette preferences, interpretations of subject matter etc...

I don’t think of these factors when I’m painting but since I was asked to analyze my work from the ground up, this is the basis of my dissection in regards to my painting practice. I don’t have a rock solid image of the work in my head. I have an idea, a feeling or a general image that I choose to work towards. All of the above elements meld together to allow me as the artist to paint that inner vision that I see.
Introduction

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"
So I piped with a merry cheer,
"Piper, pipe that song again;"
So I piped: he wept to hear.

"Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;
Sing thy songs of happy cheer;"
So I sung the same again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book, that all may read."
So he vanish'd from my sight,
And I pluck'd a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs,
Every child may joy to hear.

The Divine Image

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
All pray in their distress;
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is God, our father dear,
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is Man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, turk, or jew;
Where Mercy, Love, & Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.
The Chimney Sweeper

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry "weep! weep! weep! weep!"
So your chimney I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curl’d like a lamb’s back, was shav’d: so I said
“Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head’s bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,
Were all of them lock’d up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open’d the coffins & set them free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father, & never want joy,

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags & our brushes to work,
Tho the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm,
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.
Nurse’s Song

When the voices of children are heard on the green
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast
And everything else is still.

“There come home, my children, the sun is gone down
And the dews of night arise;
Come, come, leave off play, and let us away
Till the morning appears in the skies.”

“No, no, let us play, for it is yet day
And we cannot go to sleep;
Besides, in the sky the little birds fly
And the hills are all cover’d with sheep.”

“Well, well, go & play till the light fades away
And then go home to bed.”
The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh’d
And all the hills echoed.
Visual Learning and Hands-On Activities

Jim Corrigan
Buffalo Pound Lake, August 9th/07
Watercolour and graphite on paper
Collection of the artist

Jim Corrigan
Green and Dark Green, September 21/03
Watercolour and graphite on paper
Collection of the artist

Jim Corrigan
Rathnrevor Beach, 7 pm, July 24/08
Watercolour and graphite on paper
Collection of the artist
What is Visual Learning?

All art has many sides to it. The artist makes the works for people to experience. They in turn can make discoveries about both the work and the artist that help them learn and give them pleasure for a long time.

How we look at an object determines what we come to know about it. We remember information about an object far better when we are able to see (and handle) objects rather than by only reading about them. This investigation through observation (looking) is very important to understanding how objects fit into our world in the past and in the present and will help viewers reach a considered response to what they see. The following is a six-step method to looking at, and understanding, a work of art.

**STEP 1: INITIAL, INTUITIVE RESPONSE** The first 'gut level' response to a visual presentation. What do you see and what do you think of it?

**STEP 2: DESCRIPTION** Naming facts - a visual inventory of the elements of design.

*Questions to Guide Inquiry:*
- What colours do you see? What shapes are most noticeable?
- What objects are most apparent? Describe the lines in the work.

**STEP 3: ANALYSIS** Exploring how the parts relate to each other.

*Questions to Guide Inquiry:*
- What proportions can you see? eg. What percentage of the work is background? Foreground? Land? Sky? Why are there these differences? What effect do these differences create?
- What parts seem closest to you? Farthest away? How does the artist give this impression?

**STEP 4: INTERPRETATION** Exploring what the work might mean or be about

*Questions to Guide Inquiry:*
- How does this work make you feel? Why?
- What word would best describe the mood of this work?
- What is this painting/photograph/sculpture about?
- Is the artist trying to tell a story? What might be the story in this work?

**STEP 5: INFORMATION** Looking beyond the work for information that may further understanding.

*Questions to Guide Inquiry:*
- What is the artist’s name? When did he/she live?
- What art style and medium does the artist use?
- What artist’s work is this artist interested in?
- What art was being made at the same time as this artist was working?
- What was happening in history at the time this artist was working?
- What social/political/economic/cultural issues is this artist interested in?

**STEP 6: PERSONALIZATION** What do I think about this work? (Reaching a considered response).

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Elements and Principles of Design Tour

The following pages provide definitions and examples of the elements and principles of art that are used by artists in the images found in the exhibition *ABSTRACT THINKING.*

The elements of art are components of a work of art that can be isolated and defined. They are the building blocks used to create a work of art.

*Use this tour to better understand the purpose of the artist's choices!*

**LINE!**

**SHAPE!**

**COLOUR!**

**TEXTURE!**

**SPACE!**
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Elements and Principles of Design Tour

**LINE:** An element of art that is used to define shape, contours and outlines. It is also used to suggest mass and volume.

See: *Nurse’s Song* by Allen Ball

What types of lines are there? How can you describe a line? What are some of the characteristics of a line?

- **Width:** thick, thin, tapering, uneven
- **Length:** long, short, continuous, broken
- **Feeling:** sharp, jagged, graceful, smooth
- **Focus:** sharp, blurry, fuzzy, choppy
- **Direction:** horizontal, vertical, diagonal, curving, perpendicular, oblique, parallel, radial, zigzag

Now, describe the lines you see in this image. Follow the lines in the air with your finger. What quality do the lines have? Are they thick or thin?

The bold straight horizontal and vertical lines catch our attention. They are joined together to create a maze-like pattern that we want to follow with our eyes. The continuity, width and sharpness of the line brings these lines into the foreground of the painting.

What direction do lines appear to be going? How are the lines similar and different from each other?

Lines form sharp verticals, horizontals and diagonals that create a strong sense of illusion and depth. They are juxtaposed with very different feeling organic lines in the background that form a floral pattern.

Line can also be a word used in the composition meaning the direction the viewer’s eye travels when looking at a picture. How does line in these images help your eye travel within the composition?

The continuous line leads our eye throughout the entire composition of the painting. The contrasting rounded, fuzzy lines, by contrast allow our eyes to settle on these areas for a time before being transported back along the path of the line forming the maze.

---

Allen Ball
*Nurses Song*, 2006
Oil enamel paint, varnish and wax on linoleum on plywood
Collection of the artist
SHAPE: When a line crosses itself or intersects with another line to enclose a space it creates a shape. Shape is two-dimensional. It has height and width but no depth.


What kind of shapes can you think of?
Geometric: circles, squares, rectangles and triangles. We see them in architecture and manufactured items.
Organic shapes: a leaf, seashell, flower. We see them in nature with characteristics that are freeflowing, informal and irregular. Static shapes: shapes that appear stable and resting.
Dynamic shapes: Shapes that appear moving and active.

What shapes do you see in this image? What shapes are positive and negative?
We see a circle and we see a cross. There are repeated shapes as well within these works to form larger shapes. These areas form positive shapes while all the space in between form the negative shapes.

Would you describe these shapes as organic or geometric?
We recognize these shapes as geometric shapes; they have a more mathematical than organic design.

What quality do the shapes have? Does the quality of the shapes contribute to the meaning or story suggested in the work?
The shapes are immediately recognizable as symbols within our environment. The repeated circles reference the London subway system and the cross references the church or religion. They will ultimately form ideas and suggestions as to what these works may be about as well as the inspiration for their production.

Allen Ball
The Divine Image, 2006
Oil enamel paint, varnish and wax on linoleum on plywood
Collection of the artist
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Elements and Principles of Design Tour

**COLOUR:** Colour comes from light that is reflected off objects. Colour has three main characteristics: Hue, or its name (red, blue, etc.) Value: (how light or dark the colour is) and Intensity (how bright or dull the colour is)

See: Rococo Ripe, 2011 by Nicole Galellis

What are primary colours? Do you see any? Point to them in the painting. What secondary colours do you see? Do you see any white added to colour to form a tint or black to form a shade?

Colour is made of primary colours, red, blue and yellow. Secondary colours are created from primary colours and include green, orange and purple. We see primary colours yellow and blue and secondary colour, orange.

Pink is created by adding white to create a tint and black is added to blue to form a shade.

Where is your eye directed to first? Why? Are there any colours that stand out more than others?

Warm colours tend to stand out more than cool colours and therefore within this work, the yellow, pink and orange direct our attention. The yellow and pink also take up similar amounts of space within the composition, creating tension.

What are complementary colours? How have they been used to draw attention?

Complementary colours are those across from each other on the colour wheel and are placed next to each other to create the most contrast. In Rococo Ripe, orange contrasts with the great pool of blue surrounding it. The dull orange hidden within the overlapping horizontal blue lines also creates an interesting dynamic of complementary colour and gives interest to the background area of the painting.

What do the colours used in the artwork remind you of?

Based on individual responses, everyone will connect to the work in different ways ‘opening the doors’ to create meaning.

Nicole Galellis
Rococo Ripe, 2011
Acrylic, polyurethane on board
Collection of the artist
TEXTURE: Texture is the surface quality of an object that can be seen or felt. Texture can also be implied on a two-dimensional surface.

See: Glam Rock: Greatest Hits, 2010 by Scott Cumberland

What is texture? How do you describe how something feels? What are the two kinds of texture you can think of in artwork?
Texture can be real, like the actual texture of an object. Texture can be rough, smooth, hard, soft, glossy, etc. Texture can also be implied. This happens when a two-dimensional piece of art is made to look like a certain texture.

Look at the work by Scott Cumberland. What do you see in these images?
It is our instinct to want to immediately be able to “see” something in the work and recognize an object or place that can help us identify with the artwork. In this work, however, we may struggle because what we see is colour, line, pattern and texture.

Allow your eyes to “feel” the different areas within the work and explain the textures.
Some areas of paint may feel slippery and smooth, some areas gritty and rough, others bumpy or scaly.

How was this work created? What makes you think this?
Based on the controlled, directional strokes we might guess a hand held tool was used to create the work. The width of the ribbon-like marks might also give us clues as to the size of the tool used.

What do you think this work is about?
Because we don’t see anything immediately recognizable, this work may be about the physical presence of the paint and the nature in which it was created.
**SPACE:** The area between and around objects. It can also refer to the feeling of depth in a two-dimensional artwork.

See: Study for Buffalo Pound Lake, 2009 by Jim Corrigan

What is space? What dimensions does it have? Space includes the background, middleground and foreground. It can refer to the distances or areas around, between or within components of a piece. It may have two dimensions (length and width) or three dimensions including height or depth.

What may be represented in this work? How do you know this? What is being represented is a landscape looking at the title, Study for Buffalo Pound Lake. We can reference the horizontal lines in the image to be the horizon line dividing land and water or water and sky.

Space can be positive or negative. What would you say is the positive space in this work? What is the negative space and why? The positive space represents the subject matter and the negative space represents the open space around it. Within this painting we might say the positive space is represented by the yellow, green and blue rectangles seen on the upper half of the work. The negative space would be the area surrounding it and provides balance to the positive space. Areas of a picture that contain “nothing” are important visual elements that provide balance in the work and should always be considered as important as the positive elements.

Do you think there is space in this work? If so, how has the artist created a sense of space? Space may be created by the dividing horizontal lines that divide the composition. Jim Corrigan has also used the rule of thirds, where a picture is divided into three sections vertically or horizontally that represent places to position important visual elements. Moving a horizon in a landscape to the position of one third is often more effective than placing it in the middle, but it could also be placed near the bottom creating tension in the artwork.

What else besides the way the composition is divided may create tension or challenge our idea of a traditional landscape? How does it do this? The placement of objects and the change in paint thickness challenges us to not think of this work as a traditional landscape. We usually find a more detailed representation of objects near the bottom of the composition to make us think the objects are closer to us. In Study for Buffalo Pound Lake, there is a grouping of more detailed shapes near the top of the composition that brings our focus into the background. This area of focus creates a strong contrast and balance with the large area of thinly applied paint in the foreground that represents the lake.
A design principle that is extremely important in the exhibition Abstract Thinking is RHYTHM.

**RHYTHM:** Is created when one or more elements of design are used repeatedly to create a feeling of organized movement. Variety is essential to keep rhythm exciting and active and to move the viewer around the artwork.

See: *The Queen of Hearts She Made Some Tarts*, 2010 by Ruby Mah

**Do you think artwork can have rhythm? Why do you think this?**
*If rhythm is the repetition of elements such as line, shape, colour, texture, artwork can most definitely have rhythm. Rhythm can create a sense of movement, and can establish pattern and texture. There are many different kinds of rhythm, often defined by the feeling it evokes when looking at it.*

**How does a sheet of music show rhythm? Can this same concept apply to visual art?**
*If there are few notes and they are far apart we know the piece of music is very slow without even having the notes played on an instrument. By contrast, if there are many notes very close together we know the music is fast. Knowing this, we can assume that if a painting were to show rhythm and have a sound, the same concepts would apply.*

**What is it in the artwork that you would substitute for the musical notes on a sheet of music?**
*An artist creates movement and rhythm in an illustration by repeating colours, shapes, lines or textures.*

**Does your eye jump rapidly or glide smoothly?**
*Our eyes tend to jump rapidly throughout the work. One reason that may cause this is the contrast of colour present. Mah may have used the complementary colours red and green that when placed next to each other create the highest contrast, allowing for rapid movement across the artwork.*
How has Ruby Mah created rhythm in her artwork? Describe the type of rhythm you might hear with your ears. Describe what you hear based on what you’re seeing to support your answer.

By repeating colour, shapes, markmaking and textures, Ruby Mah has created a rhythm that allows the viewer to easily move around the work. Assuming that you’ve picked up on a rhythm in music before, take what you heard with your ears and try to translate that to something you’d see with your eyes. Rhythm, in art, is a visual beat.

A pattern has rhythm, but not all rhythm is patterned. For example, the colours of a piece can convey rhythm, by making your eyes travel from one component to another. The markmaking can produce rhythm by implying movement.

The rhythm we might hear with our ears may be chaotic and loud because of the repetition of elements within the small canvas. There is little area for the viewer to rest between colours, shapes and textures.

Rhythm in artwork can create a mood. What mood do you think is created in this artwork?

The mood may be energetic or intense based on the rhythm we can find within this work.
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Reading Pictures Program

Grades 4-12/adults

Objectives:

The purposes of this program are to:

1/ Introduce participants to Art and what artists do – this includes examinations of art styles; art elements; the possible aims and meaning(s) in an art work and how to deduce those meanings and aims.

2/ Introduce visitors to the current exhibition – the aim of the exhibition and the kind of exhibition/artwork found.  - the artist(s) - his/her background(s)
   - his/her place in art history

3/ Engage participants in a deeper investigation of artworks.

Teacher/Facilitator Introduction to Program:

This program is called Reading Pictures. What do you think this might involve?

-generate as many ideas as possible concerning what viewers might think ‘Reading Pictures’ might involve or what this phrase might mean.

Before we can ‘read’ art, however, we should have some understanding what we’re talking about.

What is Art? If you had to define this term, how would you define it?

Art can be defined as creative expression - and artistic practice is an aspect and expression of a peoples’ culture or the artist’s identity.

The discipline of Art, or the creation of a piece of art, however, is much more than simple ‘creative expression’ by an ‘artist’ or an isolated component of culture.

How many of you would describe yourselves as artists?

You may not believe it, but everyday you engage in some sort of artistic endeavor.

How many of you got up this morning and thought about what you were going to wear today? Why did you choose the clothes you did? Why do you wear your hair that way? How many of you have tattoos or plan to get a tattoo some day? What kind of tattoo would you choose? Why.....? How many of you own digital cameras or have cameras on cell phones? How many of you take pictures and e-mail them to other people?
Art is all around us and we are all involved in artistic endeavors to some degree. The photographs we take, the colour and styles of the clothes we wear, the ways we build and decorate our homes, gardens and public buildings, the style of our cell phones or the vehicles we drive, the images we see and are attracted to in advertising or the text or symbols on our bumper stickers – all of these things (and 9 billion others) utilize artistic principles. They say something about our personal selves and reflect upon and influence the economic, political, cultural, historical and geographic concerns of our society.

Art, therefore, is not just something some people in a society do – it is something that affects and informs everyone within a society.

Today we’re going to look at art - paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures – and see what art can tell us about the world we live in – both the past, the present and possibly the future – and what art can tell us about ourselves.

Art is a language like any other and it can be read.

Art can be read in two ways. It can be looked at intuitively – what do you see? What do you like or not like? How does it make you feel and why? – or it can be read formally by looking at what are called the Elements of Design – the tools artists use or consider when creating a piece of work.

What do you think is meant by the elements of design? What does an artist use to create a work of art?

Today we’re going to examine how to read art – we’re going to see how art can affect us emotionally... and how an artist can inform us about our world, and ourselves, through what he or she creates.

**Tour Program:**

–Proceed to one of the works in the exhibition and discuss the following:
  a) The nature of the work - what kind of work is it and what exhibition is it a part of?
  b) Examine the work itself – What do visitors see?
     – How do you initially feel about what you see? Why do you feel this way? What do you like? What don’t you like? Why?
     –What is the work made of?
     –How would you describe the style? What does this mean?
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Reading Pictures Program continued

–What is the compositional structure? How are the shapes and colours etc. arranged? Why are they arranged this way?
–How does the work make them feel? What is the mood of the work? What gives them this idea? Discuss the element(s) of design which are emphasized in the work in question.
–What might the artist be trying to do in the work? What might the artist be saying or what might the work ‘mean’?

c) Summarize the information.

• At each work chosen, go through the same or similar process, linking the work to the type of exhibition it is a part of. Also, with each stop, discuss a different Element of Design and develop participants visual learning skills.

At the 1st stop, determine with the participants the most important Element of Design used and focus the discussion on how this element works within the art work. Do the same with each subsequent art work and make sure to cover all the elements of design on the tour.

Stop #1: LINE
Stop #2: SHAPE
Stop #3: COLOUR
Stop #4: TEXTURE
Stop #5: SPACE
Stop #6: ALL TOGETHER – How do the elements work together to create a certain mood or story? What would you say is the mood of this work? Why? What is the story or meaning or meaning of this work? Why?

Work sheet activity – 30 minutes
• Divide participants into groups of two or three to each do this activity. Give them 30 minutes to complete the questions then bring them all together and have each group present one of their pieces to the entire group.

Presentations – 30 minutes
• Each group to present on one of their chosen works.

Visual Learning Activity Worksheet * Photocopy the following worksheet so each participant has their own copy.
Visual Learning Worksheet

Instructions: Choose two very different pieces of artwork in the exhibition and answer the following questions in as much detail as you can.

1. What is the title of the work and who created it?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

2. What do you see and what do you think of it? (What is your initial reaction to the work?) Why do you feel this way?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

3. What colours do you see and how does the use of colour affect the way you ‘read’ the work? Why do you think the artist chose these colours – or lack of colour – for this presentation?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

4. What shapes and objects do you notice most? Why?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

5. How are the shapes/objects arranged or composed? How does this affect your feelings towards or about the work? What feeling does this composition give to the work?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

6. How would you describe the mood of this work? (How does it make you feel?) What do you see that makes you describe the mood in this way?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

7. What do you think the artist’s purpose was in creating this work? What ‘story’ might he or she be telling? What aspects of the artwork give you this idea?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

8. What do you think about this work after answering the above questions? Has your opinion of the work changed in any way? Why do you feel this way?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

9. How might this work relate to your own life experiences? Have you ever been in a similar situation/place and how did being there make you feel?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
In teaching art, game-playing can enhance learning. If students are engaged in learning, through a variety of methods, then it goes beyond game-playing. Through game-playing we are trying to get students to use higher-order thinking skills by getting them to be active participants in learning. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, which follows, is as applicable to teaching art as any other discipline.

1. knowledge: recall of facts
2. comprehension: participation in a discussion
3. application: applying abstract information in practical situations
4. analysis: separating an entity into its parts
5. synthesis: creating a new whole from many parts, as in developing a complex work of art
6. evaluation: making judgements on criteria

A scavenger hunt based on art works is a fun and engaging way to get students of any age to really look at the art works and begin to discern what the artist(s) is/are doing in the works. The simple template provided, however, would be most suitable for grade 1-3 students.

Instruction:
Using the exhibition works provided, give students a list of things they should search for that are in the particular works of art. The students could work with a partner or in teams. Include a blank for the name of the artwork, the name of the artist, and the year the work was created. Following the hunt, gather students together in the exhibition area and check the answers and discuss the particular works in more detail.

Sample List:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scavenger Hunt Item</th>
<th>Title of Artwork</th>
<th>Name of Artist</th>
<th>Year Work Created</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>someone wearing a hat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a specific animal</td>
<td></td>
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<td>a bright red object</td>
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<td>a night scene</td>
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<td>a house</td>
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*This activity was adapted from A Survival Kit for the Elementary/Middle School Art Teacher by Helen D. Hume.*
# An Art-full Scavenger Hunt Template

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<th>Scavenger Hunt Item</th>
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AFA Travelling Exhibition Program, Edmonton, AB. Ph: 780.428.3830 Fax: 780.421.0479  youraga.ca
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Abstract Art Projects: An Introduction

To abstract something means to simplify or distort it in some way. In art, abstraction involves the taking away, simplification or distortion of the elements of line, shape, colour and texture. Abstraction allows the artist to express inner feelings, sensations, and ideas through the process of art making in ways that realism may not allow for. Abstraction reveals the practice of art making and offers an openness of meaning which, in turn, allows more interaction between the art object and the viewer.

Abstractions come in many variations. An abstract image can be grounded in an object, or it can give visual form to something nonvisual, like emotions or sensations.

Ways in which artists have abstracted their images or objects are:

- by recreating and enlarging everyday objects in a crude industrial material
- by manipulation and re-exposing images to the forces of nature
- by simplifying shapes and limiting variations of colour
- by representing, enlarging and neutralizing images
- by the presentation and the transformation of familiar objects
- by monumentalizing a found object into an anonymous background and by exaggerating the detail

The art projects which follow investigate many of these methods of abstraction and many of the projects are directly related to works in the exhibition Abstract Thinking.
Objectives:

Through the studio activity students will:

1/ experiment with the mixing of colours and the effects created by overlapping of colours
2/ experiment with the movement of colour to create a design

Materials:

- 50cm lengths of string (three or more strips for each student)
- tempera paint in a tray or shallow dish
- paper

Methodology:

1. Distribute two pieces of paper and at least three strings to each student.
2. Have students drop one end of first string into one colour of paint, keeping hold of the dry end.
3. Have students pull the string out of the paint and lay it onto paper until the paint-covered string is on the paper and the dry end of the string is over the edge of the paper.
4. Have students lay a clean piece of paper over top the first piece of paper.
5. Have students press down on the paper covering and pull the paint string out.
6. Have students remove the paper covering to see the results and then have them repeat the process with a new coloured string over the first design.

* for a different design, drag the strings around the paper before pulling them off.
1. Mix different colors of watercolor paint. Make them quite watery. Paint them in patches close to each other.

2. Before the paint has dried, cut a piece of plastic foodwrap larger than your painting. Then, lay it over the paint.

3. Use your fingers to move the paint under the foodwrap, to make patterns and blend the colors together.
To get a speckled effect like this, sprinkle sea salt onto the wet paint when you’re filling in the patterns. Brush the salt off when it's dry.

4. Leave the foodwrap on top of the paint and let the paint dry completely. Then, carefully peel off the foodwrap.

5. Use watercolor paints to fill in lots of the patterns left by the foodwrap. Leave a space around each shape.

6. Continue filling in the patterns using some strong colors and some paler ones. Leave some of the patterns unfilled.
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Take A Line for a Walk K-6

**Background:**
A line is an element of art that is used to define shape, contours and outlines. It is also used to suggest mass and volume.

**Materials:**
12-inch x 18-inch white drawing paper or watercolour paper
black crayons or sharpies
coloured crayons or pencils
watercolour paints and brushes

**Procedure:**
1. What are some of the characteristics of a line? What types of lines are there? How can you describe a line?
   - Width: thick, thin, tapering, uneven
   - Length: long, short, continuous, broken
   - Feeling: sharp, jagged, graceful, smooth
   - Focus: sharp, blurry, fuzzy, choppy
   - Direction: horizontal, vertical, diagonal, curving, perpendicular, oblique, parallel, radial, zigzag

2. Look at the work by Nicole Galellis. Now, describe the lines you see in this image. Follow the lines in the air with your finger. What quality do the lines have? Are they thick or thin? Draw imaginary lines in the air. Add sounds to the lines as you draw them.

3. Hand out paper and black crayons. Explain to students they are going to take their crayon on a wonderful adventure all over the paper. They can start on any edge and curl, twirl, curve, zig-zag on the paper until you say “Stop!”. Students should freeze and end their lines keeping their crayon on the paper. Don’t extend this section of the lesson for too long to avoid crowded lines and messy work.

4. Have students carefully fill in areas where the lines have created shapes with colour. Demonstrate a variety of lines and marks they could use such as dots, hatching, cross-hatching, etc.

5. Finish the artwork by adding watercolour to selected areas or overlapping the wax crayon to create a resist.

http://artlessonsforkids.wordpress.com/2008/12/03/lines-go-walking-in-kindergarten/
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Listen and Draw K-6

Objectives
Students will follow one set of directions and produce very different and unique works of abstract art.

Vocabulary
- shapes, unique, images
- listen, sound, different/similar
- colour, curve, straight line
- identify, triangle, square
- circle, imagine, arrange
- design

Supplies
- construction paper (light colours)
- markers (fine and thick tip)
- crayons, pencil crayons or pastels can be substituted

Procedure
- Teacher will give directions to students on how to proceed with their drawings.
- Students will draw what they hear and be encouraged not to look at others' work in the process.
- Students should be encouraged to listen carefully to the directions given.
- Teachers can use the following prompts or make up their own.

For younger students:
1. Draw four straight lines from one edge of your paper to the other.
2. Draw five circles anywhere on your paper.
3. Draw one curved line that starts at one edge of your paper and ends somewhere in the middle of your paper.
4. Colour in two of the circles any colour you like.
5. Fill in three areas of your paper however you like. i.e lines, squiggles, etc.

For older students:
1. Draw four straight lines from one edge of the paper to the other.
2. Draw two or more straight lines from one edge of your paper to the other—only this time make sure the lines cross over the lines you have already drawn.
3. Draw five circles, any size, anywhere on your paper.
4. Draw two curved lines beginning at the edge of the paper and ending up somewhere in the middle of the paper.
5. Fill in three of the five circles.
6. Fill in four areas of your paper however you would like.

*Add more challenging vocabulary such as organic and geometric shapes, warm and cool colours, etc.*

http://www.kinderart.com/drawing.html
Abstract Art inspired by Wassily Kandinsky K-6

**Background:**

Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian artist from the late 1800s, was inspired by the loose painting style of the Impressionists and ended up pioneering the abstract art movement. This project is a copy of one of his most popular paintings, and can easily be adapted for larger or smaller classrooms. It is an excellent project to practice basic cutting and gluing skills and can be easily adapted for larger classrooms to create murals.

**Materials:**

glue stick, pair of scissors, pencil

**Instructions:**

Hand out a sheet of black construction paper.

Tip: If you have only a little time to do this project, consider making the paper size small than the regular 12” x 18”. It’ll go much faster and the effect will be the same.

1. To reduce the amount of paper waste with this project (we all know that the kids will cut the tiniest circle from the middle of the largest piece of paper), you’ll need to provide paper in stages.
2. Give each student a plastic container with a 5” diameter (yoghurt, salsa, sour cream containers).
3. Have students trace and cut out 6 circles. Provide paper that is just the size for the container.
4. Glue the circles onto the black paper.
5. Do the same but use a small plastic cup and smaller pieces of paper. Have them cut out 6 medium sized circles. Glue the medium circles to the large circles.

*Note: Talk about contrasting colours to avoid having yellow medium circles glued to yellow large circles.

6. Repeat steps, but this time, the kids can use the scraps of paper from steps one and two to make smaller and smaller circles.
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Where the Elements Are K-6

Abstraction in the visual arts was expressed in other genre besides painting. Throughout the 1960s to the present abstraction was also an important aim amongst many print-makers and sculptors as well. From the 1960s to 1980s Edmonton sculptors became internationally famous for their ‘heavy metal’ abstract sculptures. Because of the nature of such work, sculpture could not be featured in the Travelling Exhibition Abstract Thinking. The project Where the Elements Are, however, allows students to experience abstraction in a sculptural form and to engage in a practice which still has currency today.

Theme:
What’s it like to be a line? How does ‘red’ make you feel? And how does a triangle move? Move into paintings and around sculptures to where the elements are and then take a trip to the studio for some ‘constructive’ art making.

Set up & studio hints:
Keep in mind that little eyes and fingers are distracted easily! To ensure the class receives all necessary instructions, minimal objects on the table is best. After the instructions are given, grown-up helpers can distribute pencils (names on the back of everything!), a base paper to work on / write name on and the small wooden pieces.

Supplies

- Pencils
- Water containers
- Mixed cut wood pieces
- White glue and popsicle sticks
- Paint containingers and tempera paint
- Brushes

Objectives:
Through the studio project the students will:
1. Discuss the differences between paintings and sculptures
2. Discuss the elements of design: line, shape, colour and texture
3. Discuss the changes colour can have on a sculpture
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Where the Elements Are continued

Key Concepts:
- abstract
- mood
- focus

Procedure:
On the board write the words Line, Shape, Colour, Texture and Warm Colours (red, yellow, orange) and Cool Colours (blue, green purple) for later discussion
Divide the students into groups of four or five for easy access to materials

1. Discuss the formal elements of line, shape, colour and texture - how each can have different moods, speeds (eg. a zig-zag line appears ‘faster’ than a wavy line), sense of direction, emphasis (eg. a warm colour like orange appears to ‘stand out’ more than a cool colour like green) etc.

2. Discuss the concept of mood or feeling - create a list with students of different moods and have students choose a mood that they will try to create in an abstract wood sculpture.

3. Distribute a selection of small wood pieces. These should be in a variety of sizes and shapes
* explain to the class that they can choose 5-7 pieces only. Explain the process of careful looking and careful selection to relate to mood they have chosen.
- After students have chosen their wood pieces, encourage assembling, re-assembling and trying at least 3 different constructions before they start to glue their pieces together.


The Elements of Design
AGA File Photo
5. When the majority of students have their sculpture glued distribute the tempera paint, rinse water, and brushes.

Stop all activity and **demo colour mixing to students. Also, discuss the careful application of paint. Focus on the idea of colour to enhance mood and movement**

Discuss the concept of focus - the main thing seen. What do students want a viewer to see first in their sculpture? Where do students want the viewer to begin looking?

6. Have students paint their sculptures relating colour choice(s) to both mood and focus.

7. When sculptures are all completed have a critique - have students choose a sculpture that is not their own and discuss 2 things they like about it:
   - talk about the physical structure in describing words such as tall, thin, flat, bumpy
   - talk about the colour used in describing words such as dark, bright, cool, hot etc.
   - talk about the mood of the sculpture: dark, sad, happy, loud, quiet etc.
Observing and Thinking Creatively

What color do you associate with excitement? If you wanted to express the idea of loneliness or sadness, what shapes and patterns would you choose? Expressing feelings and mood in art is a kind of abstract art. It can help us increase our ability to understand and communicate ideas and emotions.

One style of abstract art can be created by listening to music and then painting the mood of the music. Colors, shapes, textures, pattern, rhythm, space, and line all contribute to the mood of an artwork. If you wanted to express a warm, happy mood, you might choose to cover your paper with yellow and orange shapes arranged so that they were touching each other. A single tiny splotch of blue against a blank white background might communicate loneliness.

Look at the student artworks in this lesson, and guess what kind of music was playing when each of them was painted.

In this lesson, you will use a process of association to create four different artworks. You will listen to four different kinds of music, and then paint the colors, rhythms, and shapes that your imagination associates or links with each musical piece.
Instructions for Creating Art

1. With your teacher and classmates, select four different kinds of music. You might consider listening to a ballad, rock music, music with a fast tempo, and music with a slow tempo. Whatever you choose should not have lyrics, because words would suggest images to you.

2. Divide an 18" × 24" piece of art paper into four equal squares, or use four separate, smaller sheets of paper. Place tape on both the horizontal and vertical dividing lines to prevent your paintings from running into each other.

3. Close your eyes and listen to one of the music selections, letting colors and images flash through your mind. Then begin to paint, keeping in tempo with the music whether it is fast or slow, smooth or rhythmic. Paint rhythm and sound, not pictures of realistic objects. Try to create a texture that fits the music. Is it smooth, rough, or bumpy? What shapes and lines do you imagine for this music? Repeat this process with the other musical selections.

4. Write the title of each piece of music on the back of each artwork, along with the title of your painting. Display them with others in your class. Are any of the paintings similar?

---

Art Materials

- 18" × 24" or small sheets of paper
- Cellophane tape
- Watercolors or tempera paints
- Various sizes and shapes of brushes
- Mixing tray
- Fine felt-tip markers
- Container of water
- Newspaper (to cover work area)

Learning Outcomes

1. What does *association* mean?

2. Describe how you showed the rhythm, beat, or mood of the music in your artworks.

3. Choose your best work and tell how it expresses a piece of music.
Observing and Thinking Creatively

Abstract art usually uses bright colors, sharp edges, geometric shapes, and interesting contrasts to create a mood. Sometimes abstract art simply shows an artist’s emotional response to an object or idea. Details may be minimized, proportions distorted, and unusual color schemes used. Nonobjective art occurs when abstraction departs completely from realism.

Henri Matisse was a French artist who enjoyed changing the usual form of an object. His versions emphasized the pure idea of the object, and are a type of abstract art. To create the cutouts for the snail shown here, he first picked up a real snail and examined it closely. Then he drew it from every angle possible, noting its texture, color, and construction.

Observe the cut out paper shapes Matisse used in his snail of many colors. Can you see how the simple blue rectangle represents the foot of the snail? Notice which parts of a snail Matisse omitted, and which parts he thought were essential.

In this lesson, you will create an abstract cutout design of an object.
Instructions for Creating Art

1. Choose an object with an interesting shape and study it. Sketch it from several angles. Examine how it is built. Does it have a center? What basic shapes compose it? Observe the texture and colors of your object.

2. Now draw the general outer shape of your object. What idea does it give you? Next, draw only the inside parts of your object, without any outside lines. Think about what color reminds you of the feeling or idea of the object. Notice curved and straight lines, light and dark values, and small and large shapes.

3. When you find a shape that seems to capture the idea of your object, practice distorting or changing it to make a more pure, simple shape.

4. Choose one or more colors for your shape, and cut it out of colored paper. Mount the shapes on a sheet of a different color, and display your abstract cutout design. Can your classmates guess what the real object was?

Art Materials

- Pencil and eraser
- Colored construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue or paste

Learning Outcomes

1. Name two ways of making abstract art.
2. Describe how you distorted the shape you made of an object.
3. What parts of your object did you leave out of your cutout design? How did you decide which parts to keep and which parts to omit?
Abstract Mondrian Map Art 7-9

**Background**
Student look at the work of Piet Mondrian to create a Mondrian-like artwork that focus on organic shape and primary colours. Students use a map to explore Mondrian’s ideas in a unique way. Students copy the lines in a section of the map, excluding numbers and letters. They are then asked to combine Mondrian’s ideas with their map drawing.

**Materials:** (There are many different options for materials that can be used for this project.)
Option #1: Black sharpie, acrylic paint or watercolour
Option #2: Black glue or squeeze paint with tempera paint or acrylics.
Option #3: Black acrylic paint with oil pastels.
Option #4: Black oil pastel lines with watercolour.
Option #5: White glue on black construction paper with oil pastel.
Option #6: Black sharpie or ink with tissue paper or collage. Students cut to fit shapes.

**Vocabulary:**
primary colour
geometric
organic
abstract
non-objective
focus
Piet Mondrian

**Procedure:**
1. Review primary colours and present works by Mondrian. Discuss the meaning of abstract art and non-objective art. Look at maps of local regions and review how to read the map. Demonstrate how to simplify and focus on interesting areas of the map.
2. Students start with an interesting area of a map. Draw the main lines using pencil onto a large drawing paper or watercolour paper.
3. Go over the lines with pen or paint.
4. Colour in selected areas with choice of media, repeating colours for balance and unity but leaving some areas white.
American artist Jackson Pollock created a style of painting called *action painting*. In his method, Pollock used items other than brushes to create his work. Usually he laid the canvas on the floor and moved quickly around and into the work, dripping paint from cans with holes in the bottom. Sometimes he would just throw the paint at the canvas.

Pollock’s style of painting is also called *Abstract Expressionism*. Artists who paint this way are not interested in making pictures that look real. Rather, they care more about expressing their feelings and emotions, and to do this they use the art elements of colour, value, shape, line and texture as ends in themselves. While Pollock was interested in the finished product, he thought the process of making the painting was also an important part of his work.

Pollock’s method of artmaking had a tremendous influence on artists who followed him, providing artists with a freedom of expression and in the use of materials and processes never experienced before. This influence is seen in the work of Scott Cumberland and other artists in the exhibition *Abstract Thinking*. While Cumberland does use brushes to complete his work, he begins his paintings by using specially adapted squeegees to lay on and reveal colours.

In the following project students will experiment with action painting and the use of other materials besides brushes to create an abstract piece of art.

**Materials:**

- old bed sheet
- liquid acrylics or watercolours
- acrylic matte medium
- newspapers or a plastic painter’s tarp
- variety of painting tools
Methodology:

1/ Prepare your painting tools - look for things such as empty plastic glue bottles with nozzles, liquid dishwashing detergent bottles, mustard dispenser’s medicine droppers, turkey basters etc. You can also poke holes in the bottoms of empty food cans or use sticks and dowel rods. Any container or object which will hold paint will do, so use your imagination.
2/ Fill each container with a different colour of acrylic paint
3/ Lay newspaper or a plastic painter’s tarp on the floor or large open area
4/ Tear a large bedsheets in half and use half for your canvas - lay this on the tarp or newspaper and weight the corners with weights such as bricks, rocks etc.
5/ Apply the first colour of paint by moving around and into your canvas.
6/ Apply the next colour and so on until the painting is completed.

Tips and Ideas:

- Students could paint to music, noticing how different kinds of music affect their moods, the colours they choose, and the rhythm of their painting
- This is an excellent group activity because students can take turns painting. After everyone has had an opportunity to apply a colour or layer of paint, each student can take one area of the canvas to add his or her own touch to the work. When everyone is finished and the painting is dry, it can be cut apart and the sections given to each student. These smaller canvases can be dry mounted or framed individually.

credit: http://www.kid-at-art.com/htdoc/lesson27.html
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The Essence of Poetry 7-12

The artworks of both Allen Ball and Ruby Mah exhibited in the exhibition Abstract Thinking are inspired by, and derive their form from, poetry or other forms of literature. Allen Ball’s works are based on the artist’s meticulous reading of the poetry series Songs of Innocence, written by English artist and poet William Blake and published in 1794. Blake is considered a seminal figure in the history of both poetry and the visual arts of the Romantic Age and has been described as one of the greatest British artists.

In creating his paintings Allen Ball was careful to avoid looking at Blake’s own illustrations of the poems, believing they would unduly influence his own interpretations. Rather, he read and re-read the poems many times, searching for his own interpretations of the text. While all the works are abstracted, some of the images used are more literal than others.

Some of the artwork of Ruby Mah, seen in the exhibition Abstract Thinking, is also based on literary sources.

In the hands-on project Essence of Poetry students will be invited to
a) find, read, choose a favourite poem
b) Part 1: interpret the poem in a literal fashion (* refer to the poem The Shepherd and its illustration by William Blake and the following art activity)
c) Part 2: discern the mood, focus on an allusion (allusions) within the chosen poem, focus on specific imagery within the poem and interpret the idea (s) in an abstracted manner using only the formal elements of colour, line or shape.
* refer to artwork by Allen Ball/Ruby Mah for guidance/inspiration.
The Shepherd
by William Blake

How sweet is the shepherd’s sweet lot!
From the morn to the evening he strays;
He shall follow his sheep all the day,
And his tongue shall be filled with praise.

For he hears the lambs’ innocent call,
And he hears the ewe’s tender reply;
He is watchful while they are in peace,
For they know when their shepherd is nigh.

from Songs of Innocence

The Little Boy Lost
by William Blake

“Father! father! where are you going?
O do not walk so fast.
Speak, father, speak to your little boy,
Or else I shall be lost.”

The night was dark, no father was there;
The child was wet with dew;
The mire was deep, & the child did weep,
And away the vapour flew

from Songs of Innocence
Allen Ball
*The Shepherd* inspired by *Songs of Innocence and Experience*,
William Blake 1794
Collection of the artist

Allen Ball
*Little Boy Lost* inspired by *Songs of Innocence and Experience*,
William Blake 1794
Collection of the artist
The Essence of Poetry: Poem Illustrations

**Observing and Thinking Creatively**

The poems and illustrations shown here are the work of two very popular writers who also illustrate their own work. Arnold Lobel may be best known for his Frog and Toad series. He was raised by grandparents in New York, and says he was a lonely, rather unhappy child whose favorite activity was watching “Kukla, Fran, and Ollie” on TV. His wife Anita is also an artist. Lobel has the ability to create comic characters with just a few simple lines and pictures. What makes this poem and illustration seem humorous?

Shel Silverstein’s poetry anthologies *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *A Light in the Attic* include very unusual, humorous subjects. He writes about a girl who will not take the garbage out, a boy who has a hot dog for a pet, a dentist who disappears while working on an alligator’s teeth, and other whimsical topics. What is funny about the “Anteater” shown here? Silverstein’s line drawings are done in black and white.

Both Lobel and Silverstein are illustrators. They provide pictures and details that help the reader understand and visualize characters in their poem stories.

In this lesson, you will write and illustrate some humorous poems of your own.

---

**Although he didn’t like the taste,**

George brushed his teeth with pickle paste.

Not ever was his mouth so clean,

Not ever were his teeth so green.

ANTEATER

"A genuine anteater,"
The pet man told my dad.
Turned out, it was an aunt eater,
And now my uncle's mad!

Instructions for Creating Art

1. Think of a subject for your poem. You might write about a brother or sister, a pet, or you may make up a character. Your poem may be a simple four-line rhyme, like those in the lesson, or it may be longer. Write two or three poems.

2. Now decide how you will illustrate your poems. What features will you emphasize on your characters? Arnold Lobel drew three colored pictures to illustrate his poem about pickle toothpaste, but Shel Silverstein did a single line drawing. Which style fits the poems you have written? Make practice sketches of your illustrations before you do the final ones.

3. Carefully print each poem on a separate sheet of white paper. Then draw your illustrations. Color them if you wish.

4. When you have completed your poem illustrations, bind them into a book with others from your class.

Art Materials

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<tr>
<th>Colored markers or pencils, oil pastels, crayons, or chalk</th>
<th>Drawing paper</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pencil and eraser</td>
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Learning Outcomes

1. What does an illustrator do?

2. Describe how you illustrated the poems you wrote.

3. Choose the poem illustration from the lesson you like best, and tell what you like about it.
Op Art (for Optical Art) became widely popular during the 1960s. The movement, invented by British artist Bridget Riley, has influenced the works of many abstract artists and is seen in the work of Allen Ball in the exhibition Abstract Thinking. Usually distinguished by repetition of shapes, patterns, and colour that seem to vibrate or move, Op Art plays tricks upon the visual perception of viewers. Because the success of this art relies upon the use of geometry and measurement, Op Art is highly suited for meaningful connections between the visual arts and math. Such optical illusions also use scientific concepts.

Bridget Riley
Cataract 3, 1967

Objectives:

Students will:
- carefully consider characteristics that define Op Art
- make meaningful connections between the visual arts and mathematics

Materials:

- 12 X 18 inch sheets of construction paper
- pencils
- rulers
- scissors
- glue

Methodology:

The production of the art piece is based upon the simple concept of repeating colour and line pattern. The completed design will appear to include four colours although only three have been used. The design begins with a quarter-size geometric that progressively enlarges until it no longer fits onto the sheet of paper. It is imperative to follow the repeating pattern, maintain the same width of all frames, and take care that the edges of each frame are parallel.

1/ Provide an assortment of dark and light colours of 12 x 18 inch construction paper
2/ Ask students to select two colours from the dark range and one colour from the light range
3/ Label one of the dark colours “A”, the other dark colour “B”, and the light colour “C”. Write these letters very small in one corner of each paper. The letters will assist students in a repeating pattern.
4/ Instruct students to follow a repeating pattern of colour. It is a good idea to write the pattern
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It’s an Illusion: Investigating Op Art con’t

in a place where students can continually refer to it.
The pattern is: A-B-A-B-A-B-C
           B-A-B-A-B-A-C
           A-B-A-B-A-B-C
           B-A-B-A-B-A-C and so on
The most successful optical illusions will conclude with a dark colour and use the light colour at least three times.
5/ Start with paper “A” and cut a small geometric shape from one corner. The shape should be small enough to fit onto the face of a quarter or smaller.
6/ Next, use paper “B”. Place the geometric shape near one corner of paper “B”. Glue the geometric shape to paper “B”.
7/ Measure and mark a 1/8 inch wide frame completely around the shape. The frame should be the exact shape as the original design.
8/ Cut out the shape
9/ Repeat this measure-glue-measure-cut process, alternating between papers “A” and “B” until the original shape has been repeated six times (three times for each dark colour)
10/ Use paper “C” - the light colour - to complete the first repeating colour set.
11/ After colour “C” has been used, return to the dark colours, but reverse the pattern to B-A-B-A-B-A. By reversing the pattern, paper “C” will be framed on both its edges by paper ‘B’.
12/ Continue gluing and cutting the B-A pattern until each dark colour is alternately repeated three times then glue the design onto colour “C”.
13/ Reverse the pattern again to A-B-A-B-A-B-C.
14/ Conclude the design with the B-A pattern, continuing until it will no longer fit onto the sheets of dark colours.

Closing

Ask students to explain how their optical illusions cause the viewer to see four colours.
How do the optical illusion created by artists use scientific concepts?

credit: Pamela Geiger Stephens, SchoolArts, April, 2003
Hard Edge Painting 9-12

Background
Hard-edge Painting is a term first used in the 1950s to distinguish styles of painting in which shapes are precisely defined by sharp edges, in contrast to the usually blurred or soft edges in Abstract Expressionist paintings. A recent innovation that originated in New York and was adopted by certain contemporary painters. Forms are depicted with precise, geometric lines and edges. Among the most well known artists using this technique include Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland.

Procedure:
1. Present a variety of fonts/type faces and discuss lettering. Present a number of abstract works that use a hard edge technique. Present works of art with text.
2. Using note cards, cut out a 1-inch square in the middle for a viewfinder.
3. In magazines, find a section of an ad lettering you like.
4. Use the view finder to find a balanced arrangement.
5. Transfer design by quadrants onto a pre-cut square of large cardboard about 30-inches x 30-inches.

Extensions: Digital Manipulations
Create a composition using a digital photograph of finished painting.
1. Photograph finished work
2. Sharpen contrast
3. Enlarge canvas size
4. Copy and paste– rotate
5. Enhance hue and saturation

Kenneth Noland
Trans Shift
Acrylic on canvas 254 x 288,3 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Student example http://www.princetonal.com/groups/iad/les-sons/middle/HardEdgeMS.html

Materials:
1-inch viewfinders (card stock) brushes
masking tape magazines
pencils tempera paint or latex paint
poster board or matboard rulers
Optional: computer photo software
Ruby J. Mah
*Flamingoes and Mustard both Bite*, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of Lando Gallery
Glossary

Abstract art: Abstract art is defined as art that has no reference to any figurative reality. In its wider definition, the term describes art that depicts real forms in a simplified or rather reduced way– keeping only an illusion of the original natural subject.

Abstract Expressionism: First used to describe some of Kandinsky’s early abstract paintings but the phrase is more usually associated with painters working in New York in the 1940s and 1950s such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. Its distinguishing features are (a) self expression on a grand scale and (b) using the language of abstraction.

Action painting: Involves dripping, dribbling or throwing paint onto the surface of the canvas, as a way of mediating the workings of the unconscious mind in an unplanned way. Jackson Pollock is the best-known example.

Colour field painting: The application of colour across the entire canvas which when viewed close-to, gives the impression of being engulfed in a ‘field’ of colour. Some New York artists from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s were its most famous practitioners. Also seen in the work of Jim Corrigan, an artist in the exhibition Abstract Thinking.

Complementary colour: Colours that are directly opposite each other on the colour wheel (for example, blue and orange. These colours when placed next to each other produce the highest contrast.

Composition: The arrangement of lines, colours and form so as to achieve a unified whole; the resulting state or product is referred to as a composition.

Conceptual art: Where the ideas or concepts involved in the artwork take precedence over the traditional aesthetic and material concerns.

Contemporary artists: Those whose peak of activity can be situated somewhere between the 1970s (the advent of postmodernism) and the present day.

Cool colours: Blues, greens, and purples are considered cool colours. In aerial perspective cool colours are said to move away from you, or appear more distant.

Cross-hatching: Overlapping parallel sets of lines in drawing to indicate lights and darks.

Cubism: An artistic movement in the early 20th century characterized by the depiction of natural forms as geometric structures of planes.

Elements of Design: The basic components which make up any visual image. These are line, shape, colour, texture, and space.

Exhibition: A public display of art objects including painting, sculpture, prints, installation, etc.

Fauvism: An art movement launched in 1905 whose work is characterized by bright and non-natural colours and simple forms.
Glossary, continued

**Formalism:** In art theory, formalism is the concept that a work’s artistic value is entirely determined by its form—the way it is made, its purely visual aspects, and its medium. Formalism emphasizes compositional elements such as colour, line, shape and texture rather than realism, context, and content.

**Geometric shapes:** Any shape or form having more mathematical than organic design. Examples of geometric shapes include: spheres, cones, cubes, squares, circles, triangles.

**Hard-edge painting:** American painting of the late 1950s and 60s, with surfaces treated as a single flat unit of colour with hard or sharp edges: as distinct from the lumpy, asymmetrical, random gestures of Abstract Expressionists. Best-known practitioners Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland.

**Impressionism:** An art movement of the 19th century and is about capturing fast, fleeting moments with colour, light and surface.

**Medium:** The material or technique used by an artist to produce a work of art.

**Non-objective art:** Artworks having no recognizable subject matter (not recognizable as such things as houses, trees, people, etc.) Also known as non-representational art.

**Op Art:** A genre of abstract art that uses geometric shapes and vivid colours to create optical illusions, such as an illusion of movement. A style of abstraction developed during the 20th century, expressed in the work of Allen Ball, an artist in the exhibition Abstract Thinking.

**Organic shapes:** An irregular shape; refers to shapes or forms having irregular edges or objects resembling things existing in nature.

**Pattern:** A principle of art, a pattern means the repetition of an element in a work. An artist achieves a pattern through the use of colour, line, shape or texture.

**Pointillism:** Pointillism is a technique of painting in which small, distinct dots of pure colour are applied in patterns to form an image. Georges Seurat developed the technique in 1886, branching from Impressionism.

**Positive shapes:** Are the objects themselves. They are surrounded in a painting by what are called the negative shapes.

**Primary colours:** The three colours from which all other colours are derived - red, yellow and blue.

**Realism:** Realism in the visual arts and literature is the depiction of subjects as they appear in everyday life, without embellishment or interpretation.
Representational art: Art with an immediately recognisable subject, depicted (or ‘represented’) in ways which seek to resemble a figure, landscape or object; also called ‘figurative’ art and contrasted with Abstraction.

Rhythm: A principle of art indicating movement by the repetition of elements. Rhythm can make an artwork seem active.

Rule of Thirds: The basic principle that the key elements or objects in a composition should fall on one of 2 lines that divide the composition in thirds. The viewers’ eye should fall on one of these lines where both a horizontal and a vertical line come to rest.

Theosophy: A late nineteenth-century philosophical movement that combines a variety of belief systems to seek an underlying universal harmony. In art, the use of geometrical forms was seen to exemplify this harmony in its purest form.

Value: The range of lightness or darkness in a colour; the relationships of tone in a painting.

Warm colours: Yellows and reds of the colour spectrum, associated with fire, heat and sun.
SPECIAL THANKS TO:

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Art Gallery of Alberta
Participating artists

SOURCE MATERIALS:

Abstract Painting in Canada, Roald Nasgaard, Douglas & McIntryre, Vancouver/Toronto, 2007, pp. 9-17; 287-316
The Oxford Companion to Art, Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 2-4
Modern Art - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_art
Clement Greenbert - Modernist Painting - http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html
Modern Art - http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Modernist+art
Abstract Art - http://painting.about.com/od/abstractart/a/abstract_art.htm
Douglas Haynes: 25 years - The Edmonton Art Gallery, Leslie Dawn, 2000
Formalism (art) - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formalism_(art)
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program
Credits continued

The Raven - http://www.heise.de/ix/raven/Literature/Lore/TheRaven.html
St. George's Cross - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_George%27s_Cross

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Shane Golby – Program Manager/ Curator
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Alix Walsh – TREX Administrative Assistant

Front Cover Images:

**Left:** Allen Ball, *The Divine Image*, 2008, Oil enamel paint, varnish and wax on linoleum on plywood, Collection of the artist

**Top Right:** Ruby J. Mah, *The Queen of Hearts, She Made Some Tarts*, 2010, Acrylic, acrylic paint skins on canvas, Courtesy of Lando Gallery

**Bottom Right:** Scott Cumberland, *Sweet Sweet Drawing # 62*, 2010, Charcoal on paper, Collection of the artist