Course Developer: Jordon Schranz

The history of mixed media is rich with examples of artists discovering their unique creative voices through innovative swirling of materials and techniques. In this course, we'll dig through some of those artists and explore the techniques for ourselves! I love these evocative exercises, and I think they'll really help you unlock new potential in your art and design work!

Course Lecture

ILL 333: Mixed Media Exploration

Exploring abstraction and mixed media can unleash your unique creative vision, as with the timeless work of Jean-Michel Basquiat

Time to get messy and have some art making fun!

In this course, we'll explore, experiment, and expand our ability to conceptualize and develop compelling and innovative images.

How will we do it? Through a mix of media, of course! We'll draw on a wide range of technologies: digital compositing, traditional drawing and/or painting techniques, collage, and other art making strategies.

Along the way, we'll explore a rich history of mixed media, surveying movements and artists who expressed themselves in mediums and techniques that went beyond visual recreation to capture a more abstract view of the world.

Lecture Topics

In this lecture, we will discuss the important role of the following topics in your research and creative work:

- **What Is Mixed Media?** (#1) We'll define mixed media, distinguishing it from multimedia and exploring collage and appropriation as fundamental techniques.

- **Early Examples of Mixed Media.** (#2) In a wide-reaching survey of 20th and 21st century artists, we'll look at movements and major players in early mixed media, including Cubism, Surrealism, and Dada.

- **Expressive Mark Making.** (#3) Moving from early mixed media to contemporary modes and movements, we'll explore Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Postmodernism.

What is Mixed Media?

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Mixed Media Exploration. This course is meant to be an introductory survey of mixed media approaches in image making and should not be considered

an exhaustive list in terms of materials or methods. You should feel encouraged to investigate and experiment in whichever direction your creativity takes you when creating your own work.

In this lecture, I am going to highlight some particularly evocative works by major artists of the 20th and 21st century. As we look at the works together, I will discuss art theory, aesthetics, and methodology: what the work means, how the artist made the work, and how it fits into artistic movements of the time.

Note

Art movements: Many artists do not work in isolation but in larger movements and communities.

Also in this lecture you will find several videos of great artists discussing (and showing you) their processes. These videos can be very inspirational, as many of them will contain technical details and ways of thinking about art making that you might not have yet imagined.

In our creative brief, you will find that all exercises and discussions are related to ideas we discuss in this lecture. As you read the lecture, takes notes on artists and techniques that you want to research further. Look for subjects or approaches that might take your work in an interesting new direction.

The artists and movements described could each warrant their own course, and I strongly encourage you to do further research outside of this course. If you are able to view any of the art works we discuss in person, please do so!

DEFINING MIXED MEDIA

So let's begin by asking the question: what *is* mixed media? **Mixed media** refers to the use of more than one medium or material in the making of a work of art.

That can mean a lot of things.

It can mean a combination of dry or wet drawing mediums, such as combining ink with watercolor, or pencil with crayon.

Francis Picabia, "Transparence - Tête et Cheval", (c. 1930), ink, gouache, and watercolor on paper, 30 3/8 x 23 1/4 in. © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

It can also mean the use of found print images, cut up and rearranged, to create a new image from one's imagination.
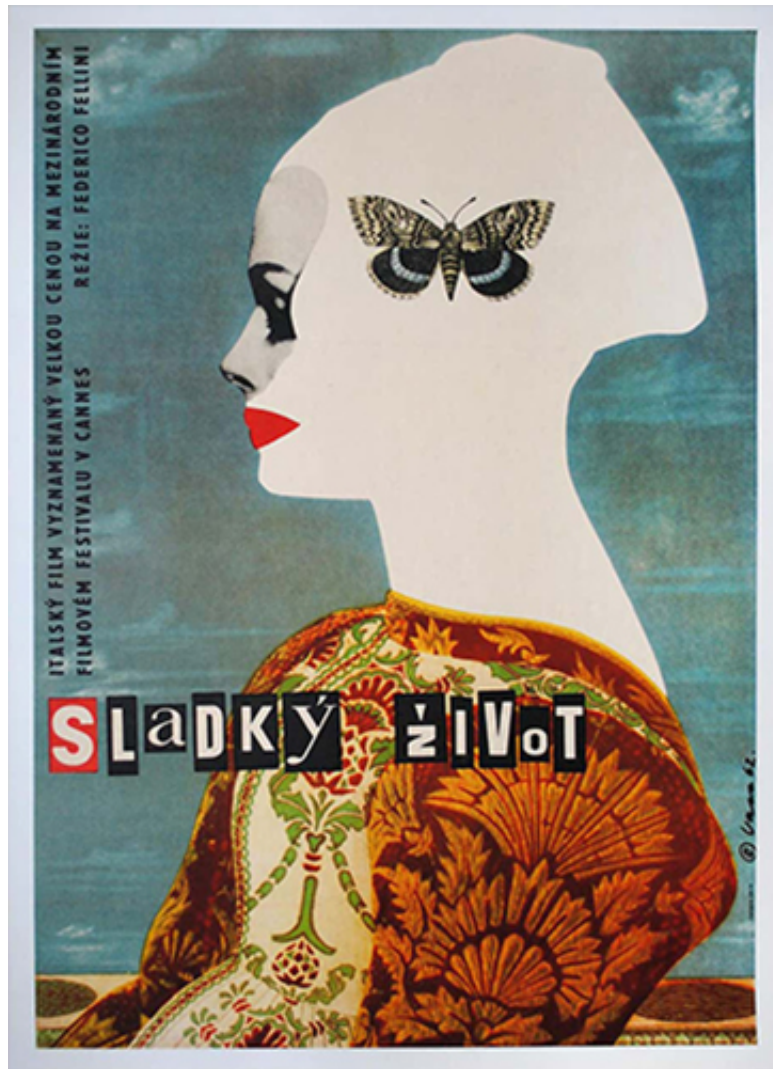
It can also mean the combining of physical objects, like chunks of ceramic tile and rope, into a painting.

Anselm Kiefer, "Osiris und Isis (Osiris and Isis)',
1985-1987, oil and acrylic emulsion with
additional three-dimensional media, 149 1/2 x
221 x 9 1/2 in. © Anselm Kiefer - Fair Use

It can even be as simple as combining marker pen messages and photocopies to make a flyer for an upcoming performance.

Winston Smith, Dead Kennedys Flyer (DK Girl
with Possum), 1984, mixed media © 2021
Winston Smith - Fair Use

What is Multimedia, (or what is not mixed media)? Mixed media is sometimes confused with multimedia. **Multimedia** refers to art that combines multiple forms of time-based media; such as video, film, performance, installation, and/or sound art.

COLLAGE

One of the main forms of mixed media is collage. **Collage** refers to both the type of

art, and the process of creating the art. It is a technique in which different materials are assembled to create a new image. Any material can be used to create a collage.

The Tate Museum in London, England describes collage as:

> ...both the technique and the resulting work of art in which pieces of paper, photographs, fabric and other ephemera are arranged and stuck down onto a supporting surface (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/collage)

Collage was a popular method of creating art among 20th century artists. Artists part of the Cubist, Surrealist, Dada, and Pop Art movements all used or were influenced by collage.

APPROPRIATION

One aspect of collage is the appropriation of found objects or existing materials. Appropriation in art and art history refers to the practice of intentionally borrowing, copying, and altering pre-existing objects or images to be re-contextualized into a new work of art.

An example of appropriation can be seen in the work of Barbara Kruger, who both appropriated the photograph in her piece "Blind Idealism is deadly" and also the general aesthetic, as the piece mimics a style that was commonly found in the advertisements of its day.

Barbara Kruger, "Blind Idealism is deadly", circa 2000, offset lithograph printed in colors, 23 3/5 × 16 1/10 in © 2021 Barbara Kruger - Fair Use

Depending on the situation, one person's appropriation might be another person's theft of intellectual property, so it's important to be aware of copyright laws in your country to make sure you are using found materials appropriately in your work. Appropriation might be allowed in certain circumstances, or it might require a specific amount of alteration to the original material before the new work is considered a unique creative work of its own.

Early Examples of Mixed Media

CUBISM

One of the first examples of mixed media was found in the work of **Cubism**. Cubism was an art style developed in the early 20th century which attempted to fracture the picture plane through the expressive use of linear perspective. The Cubists broke the rules of linear perspective by emphasizing the flatness of the picture plane and creating highly ambiguous figure/ground relationships.

The artists Pablo Picasso and George Braque are perhaps the two best-known proponents of Cubism. They often incorporated mixed media into their works, as they strove to break free of the confines of naturalistic representation.

One of the first forms of mixed media used by Braque and Picasso was **papier collé**. Papier collé is a form of collage incorporating the use of cut paper. It is sometimes viewed as a form of drawing due to its emphasis of contour edge and positive/negative space relationships.

Despite the abstract nature of "Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, Guitar and Newspaper", by Pablo Picasso, the recognizable shape of the guitar, cut from paper, is still recognizable.

Pablo Picasso, "Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass,
Guitar and Newspaper", 1913, printed papers
and ink on paper, 18 2/5 x 24 3/5 in. ©
Succession Picasso/DACS 2021 - Fair Use

Contemporary multi-media artist Kara Walker
(https://walkerart.org/collections/artists/kara-walker) has incorporated papier collé
in the creation of often politically-charged, room-size tableaux made of black cut-
paper silhouettes. Her work explores historical narrative of slavery in the United
States of America, and the interconnectivity between race, gender, sexuality,
violence, and identity.

Click or swipe through the following slides of Kara Walker's work.

Kara Walker installing "The End of Uncle Tom and the
Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven" (1995)
©2021 Walker Art Center - Fair Use

Another iteration of mixed media pioneered by Pablo Picasso was assemblage.
Assemblage refers to a 3-dimensional construct made from assembled various,
often unrelated objects.

If you study Pablo Picasso's assemblage "Still Life," you can gain insight into the
Cubist methodology used in his paintings and drawings, as the abstracted subject
appears to paradoxically both expand into space, and simultaneously flatten.
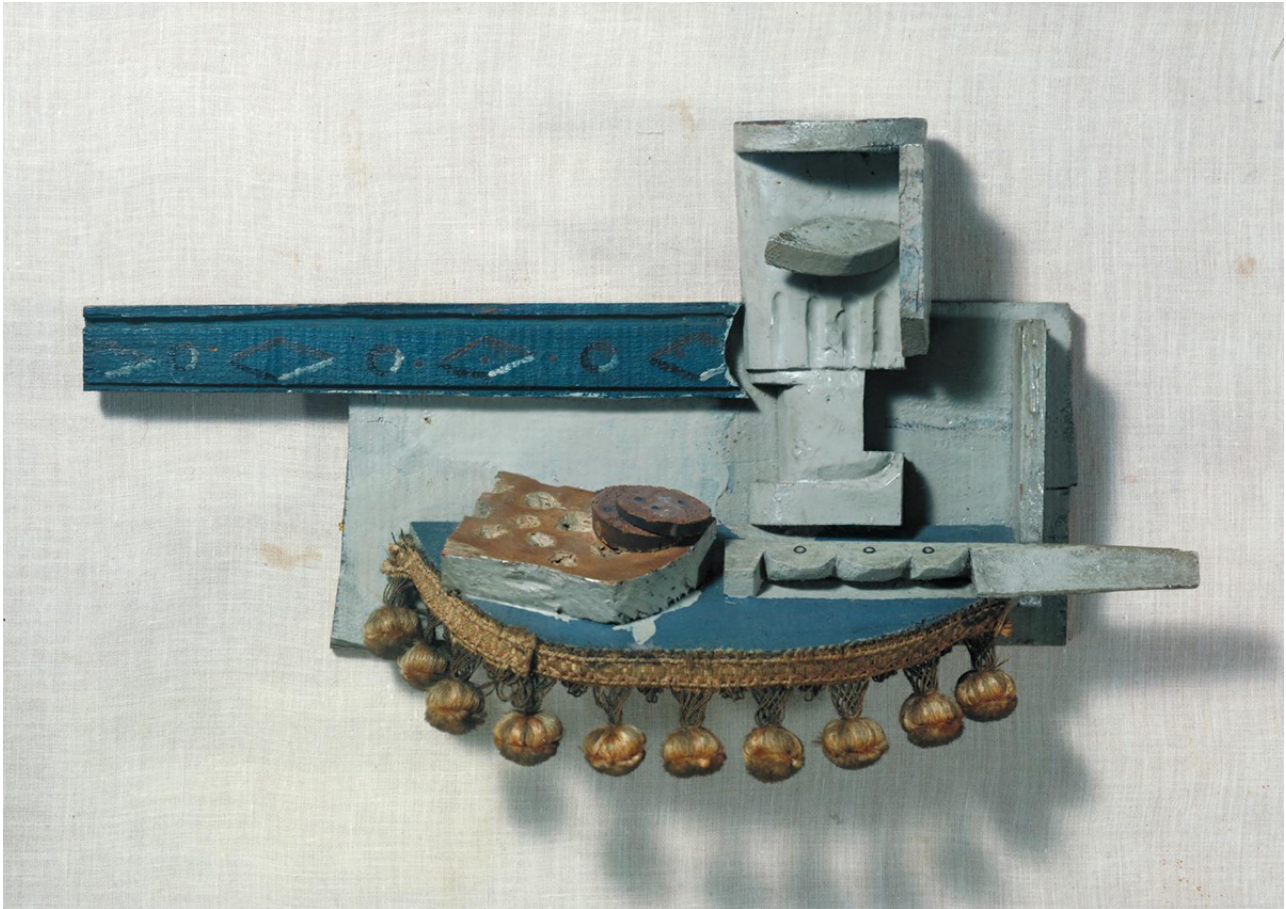
Pablo Picasso, "Still Life", 1914, painted wood
and upholstery fringe, 10 x 18 in. © Succession
Picasso/DACS 2021 - Fair Use

Contemporary artist Bernard Pras (https://www.artistaday.com/?p=19348)
(http://www.facteurcheval.com/en/expositions/bernard-pras.html) creates
anamorphic installations made of found objects through a process of assemblage.
When viewed from a certain vantage point, the assemblage "158 Facteur Cheval"
appears as a portrait of the late postal worker and self-taught artist Ferdinand
Cheval. When seen in the round (from all angles), the installation reveals itself to be
a seemingly random assortment of discarded items.

Bernard Pras, "158 Facteur Cheval (Postman Cheval)", 2014, mixed-media © Bernard Pras - Fair Use

Here is a video walk-through of Bernard Pras's work from La Drôme Tourisme:


SURREALISM

Collage was later adapted by artists aligned with **Surrealism,** an early 20th century art movement heavily influenced by the then newly-developed study of psychology, particularly the interpretation of dreams. Surrealism was for many practitioners an attempt to access the subconscious mind through making art. A few of the artists often associated with Surrealism include Max Ernst, René Magritte, Yves Tanguy, Salvador Dalí, and Joan Miró.

Important

Surrealism is not a synonym for "weird." The Surrealists were a movement of artists with carefully defined philosophies, techniques, and goals.

The use of collage provided the Surrealists an intermediary between the deliberateness of the conscious mind and the unpremeditated nature of chance. Traditional mediums would often be collaged with photographic imagery, found objects, and unorthodox materials such as glass, wood, or sand.

Multiple strategies were employed by the Surrealists in an attempt to achieve **automatism**, the creation of art without conscious thought. These Surrealists wanted intuition to be the driving force behind their choice of subject matter and method of creation, leading to strange and dream-like imagery as seen in this example by Joan Miró.
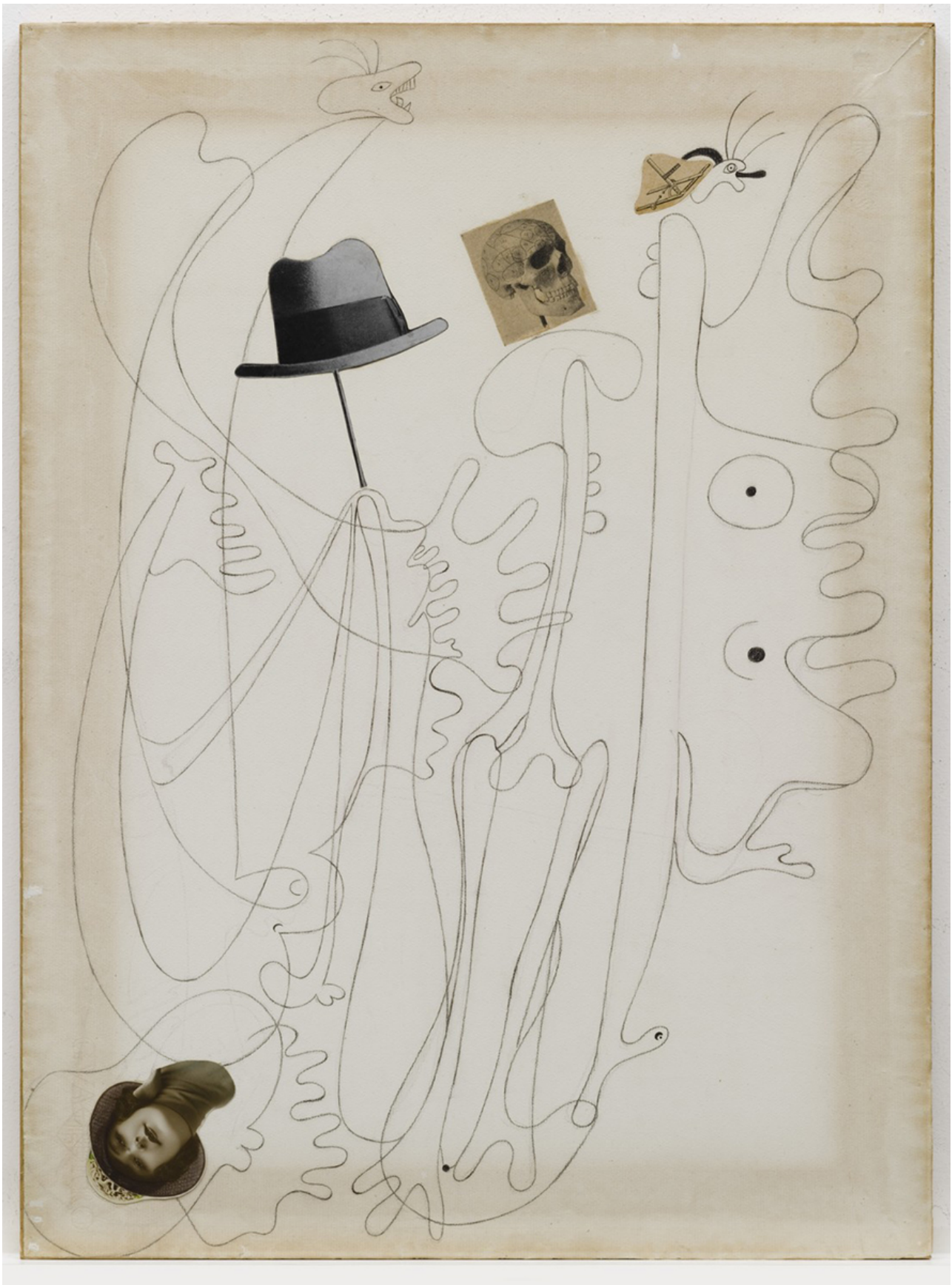
Joan Miró, "Untitled (Drawing-Collage)", 1933,
charcoal and cut-and-pasted painted paper and

Joan Miró would also use collage as subject matter to be reinterpreted for future paintings. Miró would assemble collages consisting of cut-out images of mechanically manufactured objects and devices from commercial catalogs, chosen for the abstract shapes and forms that they represented, rather than the literal depiction of the objects illustrated.

He would then interpret these collages, translating and transforming them via the subconscious mind, into large, fantastical landscapes inhabited with distorted, biomorphic forms and fields of atmospheric color.

Click on or swipe this slideshow to see examples of Juan Miró's work.
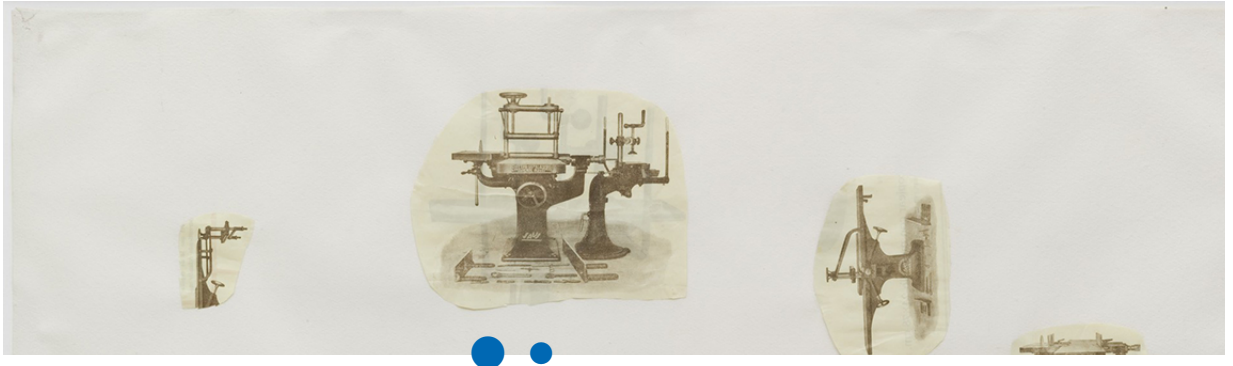
Known for creating similarly Surrealist-inspired collages, Arturo Herrera (http://www.artnet.com/artists/arturo-herrera/3) is a contemporary artist whose work is open-ended and provocative in nature, often appropriating innocent imagery, such as Disney-like characters, and blending them with sexual and violent themes.

Click on or swipe this slideshow to see examples of Herrera's work.

If you are interested in seeing more, you can view a [virtual gallery of more of Arturo Hererra's collages from the 1990s hosted by the Dia Art Foundation (https://awp.diaart.org/herrera/main.html)](https://awp.diaart.org/herrera/main.html).

DADA

Another early 20th century art movement that often overlapped with Surrealism and incorporated the use of collage and assemblage was **Dada**. Dada was an attempt to create an art form that was almost anti-art. Its purpose was political. Dada artists would choose methods that were subversive to traditional aesthetics. A few of the major proponents of Dadaism were the artists Jean Arp, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Kurt Schwitters.

One anti-art strategy for the Dadaists was the idea of creating art mechanically. The Dada artists [Hannah Höch (https://nmwa.org/art/artists/hannah-hoch/)](https://nmwa.org/art/artists/hannah-hoch/) and [Raoul Hausmann (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/raoul-hausmann-1254)](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/raoul-hausmann-1254) created

photomontages, creating collages using only images taken from photographic sources such as printed magazines and newspapers, catalogs, or snap shots.

Photomontage appealed to the Dada artist because it lacked any evidence of visible drawing and expressive mark making. Photomontage was also thought to be a populist art, insofar as an academic training (such as a mastery of linear perspective or life drawing) was not required to create it.

Click on or swipe this slideshow to see examples of Hannah Höch's work.

A contemporary example of photomontage can be found in the illustration work of Lincoln Agnew (https://marlenaagency.com/Lincoln-Agnew/).

Click on or swipe this slideshow to see examples of Agnew's work.

Examples of photomontage are commonly found in the media and on the Internet in the work of illustrators and other commercial artists thanks to the invention of digital editing tools. If you've taken a Sessions Photoshop course, you're doubtless familiar with use of Photoshop to create digital photomontages.

Décollage, literally the French word for take or "lift-off," is another mixed media art making process; but unlike collage, which involves the assemblage of various elements, décollage is created through the tearing and removal of pieces of an existing image, typically plastered advertisements and posters found on the walls in urban areas.

Décollage is an art-making process most commonly associated with artists of the nouveau réalisme (new realism) movement, including François Dufrene, Jacques Villeglé, Mimmo Rotella, and Raymond Hains.

Jacques Villeglé, "Rues Desprez et Vercingétorix (La Femme)", 1966, poster on fabric, 98 3/4 x 88 1/4 in. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Contemporary artist Mark Bradford uses décollage, along with collage, to create large, often mural-sized abstract works.

Mark Bradford, "Los Moscos", 2004, mixed
media on canvas, 125 x 125 in. © Mark Bradford
- Fair Use

Watch Mark Bradford discuss the art-making process he undertook in the creation of "Pickett's Charge," a series of eight monumental collages-on-canvases that were commissioned and installed in the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C.:

Mark Bradford on painting with paper- Hirshhorn Museum

Expressive Mark Making

Along with investigations into the combining of multiple mediums in a single work of art, the early 20th century also saw an exploration of more expressive uses of traditional materials by artists. This would take on many forms, ranging from grotesque caricatures, to sublime and abstract landscapes of pure color.

EXPRESSIONISM

The **Expressionists,** a group of artists originating at the beginning of the 20th century in Austria and Germany (including Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Egon Schiele, and Max Beckmann amongst others), sought to depict the world as it felt, rather than how it looked.

Click on or swipe this slideshow to see examples of Expressionist work.

In contrast to the more traditional attempts to capture a subject as naturalistically as possible, the figures and scenes in Expressionist artworks, taking inspiration from the artwork of non-western, African and Oceanic cultures, were often distorted and disfigured. Materials, color, and value were applied aggressively, revealing the physical and expressive mark of the maker.

Note

While most art is "expressive," we're using the term here in contrast with representation.

The non-traditional and liberal tendencies of the Expressionists made them a popular political target. Prior to World War II, Adolph Hitler declared the practitioners of Expressionism, and their work, as degenerate and in opposition to the classical inspired values of "Great German Art." Both the art and artists were persecuted, resulting in the Die Ausstellung "Entartete Kunst" or "Degenerate Art" Exhibition, consisting of over 650 confiscated works.

The influences of Expressionism and Surrealism continued to inspire the works of many other artists in the 20th century, post World War II. Venturing beyond the

traditional use of paint and paintbrushes in the creation of their works, artists such as Jean Dubuffet, Francis Bacon, and Alberto Giacometti expanded into innovative and increasingly physical methods of expressive mark making in order to reveal the artist's subjective and emotional interpretation of their subjects.

Artists would use use knives and other makeshift tools to scrape and scratch into the surface of paintings, at times combining paint with non-traditional materials such as sand. They applied their materials, including the paint itself, almost sculpturally, creating a 3-dimensional sense of relief on the painting's surface.

Click or swipe through the following slides to see these artists' work.
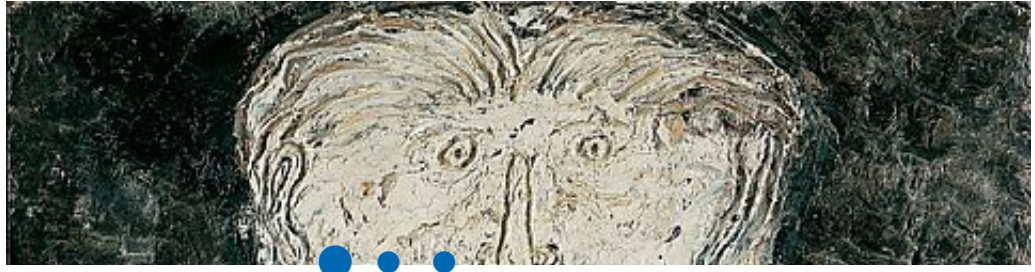
Expressionism saw a resurgence as an international movement in the 1970s, in a style known as Neo Expressionism, which included artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Julian Schnabel, Anselm Kiefer, and Elizabeth Murray.

Basquiat, whose works are often viewed in the context of early hip hop and punk culture, first achieved fame as a member of the graffiti artist duo SAMO in New York City's Lower East Side. From there, he quickly rose in status as a recognized painter, becoming the youngest artist to exhibit as part of the Whitney Biannual in New York City at age 22, and becoming a known compatriot of Andy Warhol. His work married elements of figuration and abstraction, blending elements of drawing, painting, and poetry together in works that were often political in nature.

Jean-Michel Basquiat, "Untitled", 1981, acrylic
and oil stick on canvas, 81 x 69 1/4 in. © The
Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat - Fair Use

He often assembled works of recycled and repurposed materials, combining diverse

mediums such as oil stick, crayons, and spray paint into a hectic and improvisational mark-making method, taking inspiration from the sampling and remixing found in hip hop.

In the following Ted-Ed video, Jordana Moore Saggese discusses "the chaotic brilliance of artist Jean-Michel Basquiat." Watch the video to learn more about Basquiat's method and process.

The chaotic brilliance of artist Jean-Michel Basquiat - Jordana Moore S…

▶

You can also watch Jean-Michel Basquiat discuss his work and his collaboration with Andy Warhol in his own words:

SotA in HD - Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat - 1986

▶

ABSTRACTION

While some artists strove to depict an exaggerated and distorted view of the figures and objects of their environments, others chose to move away from the depiction of recognizable imagery, focusing instead on the non-objective and expressive qualities of color and line and shape.

Considered the pioneer of abstraction, Wasily Kandinsky, a Russian painter and art theorist, invented his own theories of abstraction using music as a model.

[In a short piece on Kandinsky for the Museum of Modern Art, Natalie Dupêcher explains some of those theories: (https://www.moma.org/artists/2981#fn:2)](https://www.moma.org/artists/2981#fn:2)

> Kandinsky believed that the most advanced art would awaken "emotions that we cannot put into words." For him, abstraction provided a vehicle for direct expression, circumventing language. He believed that color and form possessed their own affective power, acting on the viewer independently of images and objects. "Color is a means of exerting direct influence upon the soul," he wrote in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. "Color is a keyboard. The eye is the hammer. The soul is the piano, with its many strings."

Wasily Kandinsky, "Study for Improvisation V", 1910, oil on pulpboard, 27 3/5 × 27 1/2 in. Public Domain - Fair Use

Kandinsky's arrival to non-objective abstraction came about from a process of evolution and discovery. What first began as formal abstractions of landscapes and figures, inspired by the bold used of color and direct application of paint rendered in the depiction of nature by the Impressionists, was transformed into lyrical and fluid abstract forms more characteristic of the rhythm and dynamics found in a musical

score than a reflection of nature.

These forms were Kandinsky's attempt to achieve a state he referred to as pure painting, turning away from the earthly world and and aligning with the divine spirit. He often associated his work with the abstract qualities of music, considering colors and shapes of having their own sound.

tip!

Try your own turning away from the earthly world by immersing your creative space in unique sensory input!

Click or swipe through the following slides to see examples of Kandinsky's work.
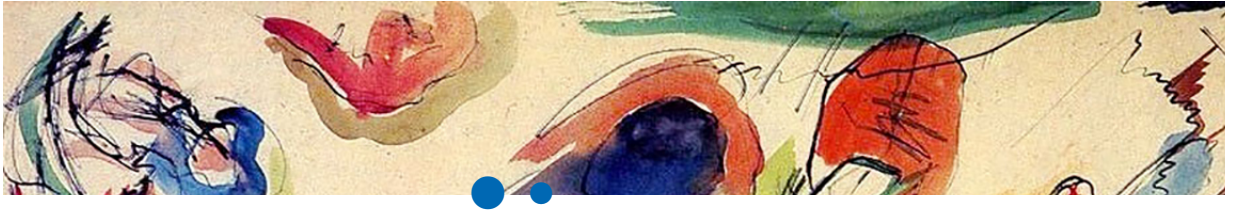
Despite the spontaneous appearance of the painting "Composition VII" from 1913, Kandinsky arrived at the composition through conscious planning. He had created no fewer than [30 sketches in watercolors and oil paints (https://www.wassilykandinsky.net/work-36.php)](https://www.wassilykandinsky.net/work-36.php) before embarking on the final piece.

The final stylistic mode that Kandinsky worked within was that of a geometric form of abstraction, balancing hard lines and atmospheric regions of color to create intricate and delicately balanced abstract compositions. The shift from the gestural mark to the more refined sharpened contours and simplified shapes shows the influences of the Russian [Constructivists (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/constructivism)](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/constructivism) and of his time teaching color theory at the [Bauhaus school (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/b/bauhaus)](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/b/bauhaus) in Germany before the Second World War.
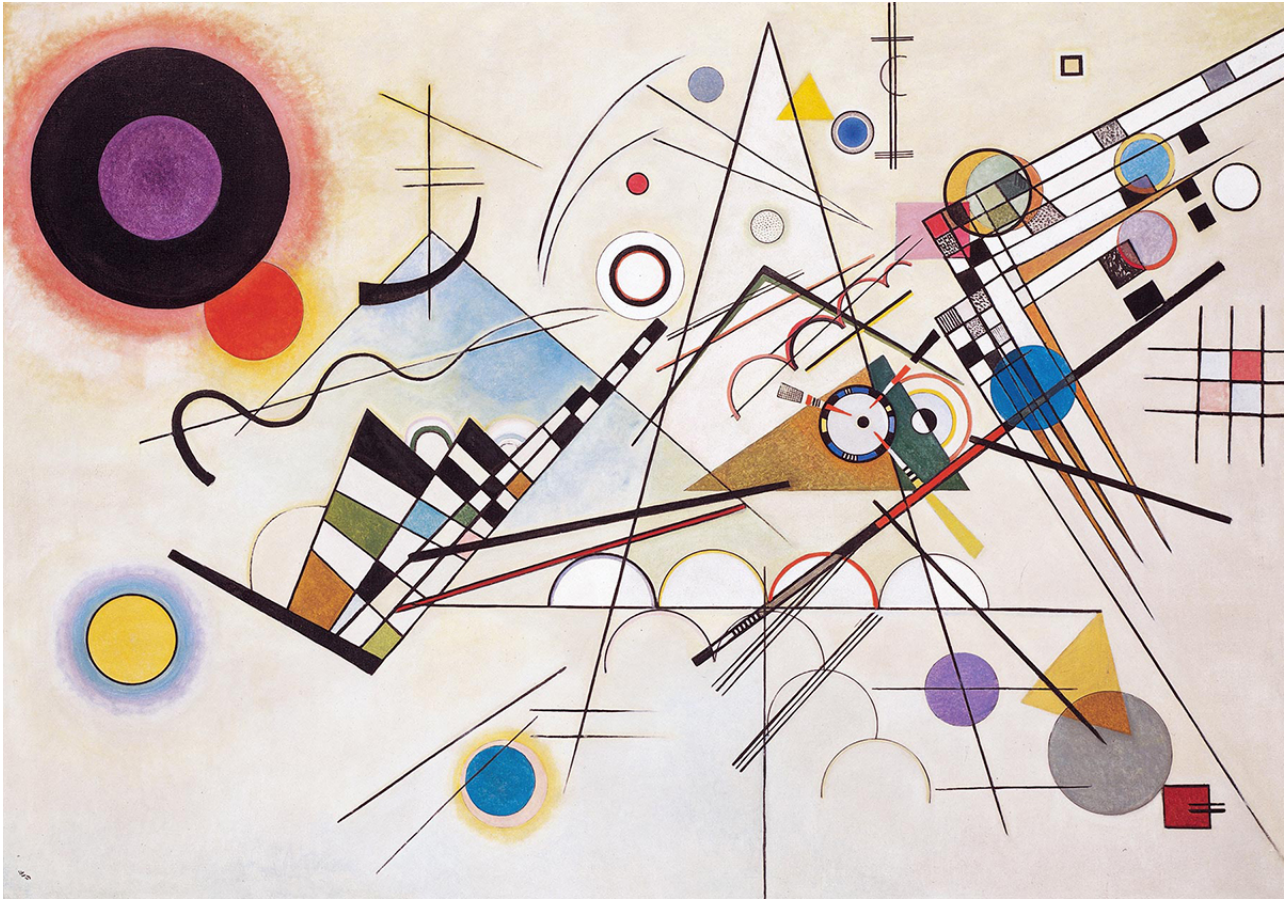
Wasily Kandinsky, "Composition VIII", 1923, oil on canvas, 55 × 79 in. Public Domain - Fair Use

This use of simple geometric shapes and lines was the result of what Kandinsky believed to be the omission of all unnecessary details, retaining only the necessary information, the subject rendered as its most pure emotive form.

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

Another artist and teacher inspired by nature and following the path of abstraction was Hans Hofmann. Hofmann was also interested in the process of abstraction, and the elimination of what he considered unnecessary details, simplifying the subject into what he believed to be its purest form: "the square, the cube, the cylinder, the sphere." (https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_3439_300010626.pdf)

Hofmann believed that ["every creative work of art requires elimination and simplification" and "simplification results from a realization of what is essential." (https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_3439_300010626.pdf)](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_3439_300010626.pdf)

Click on or swipe this slideshow to see examples of Hofmann's work.
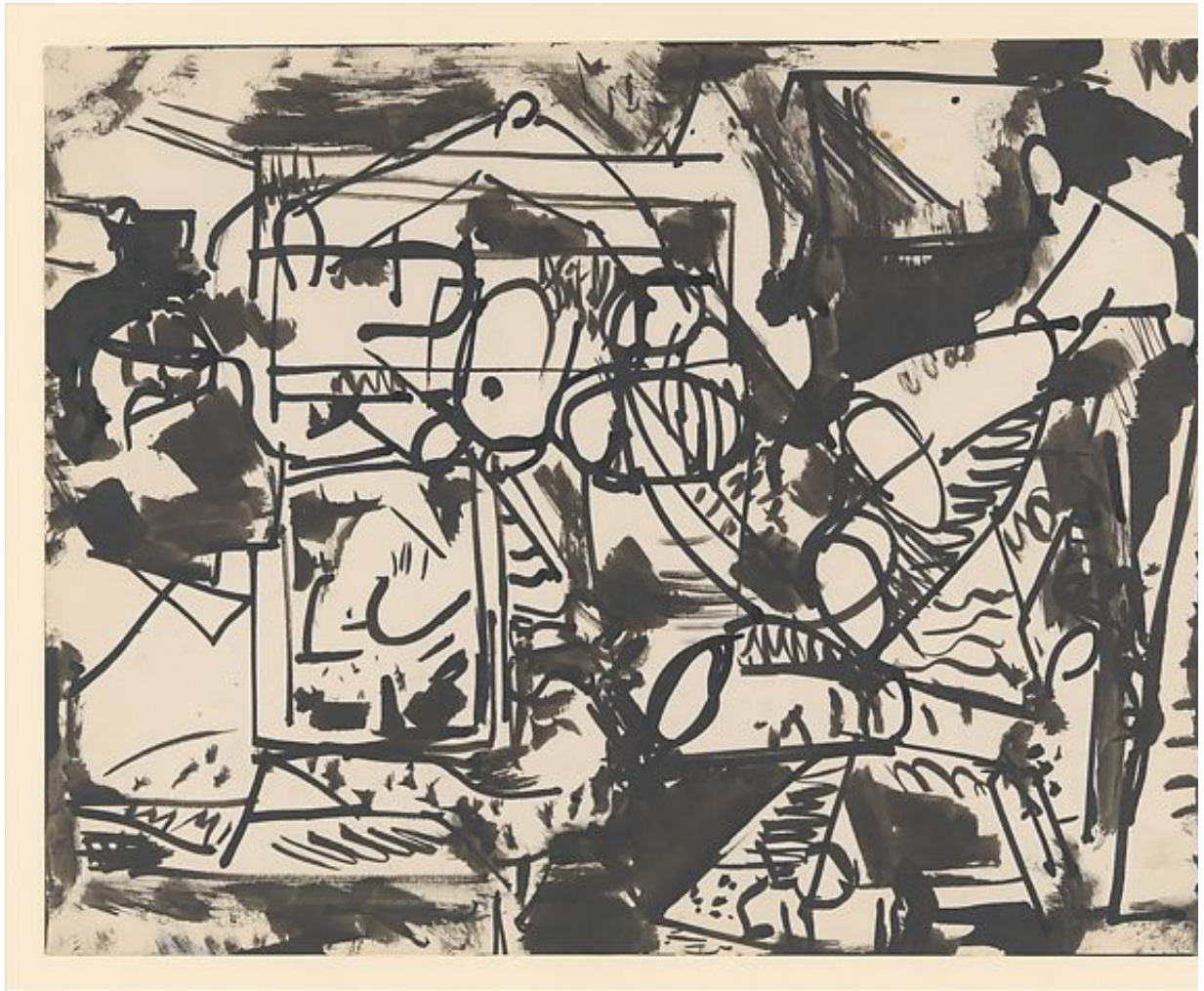
Hans Hofmann, "Untitled", 1935, ink on paper, 11 x 8 5/8 in. © 2021 Renate, Hans & Maria Hofmann Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York - Fair Use

Inspired by the employment of intuition by the Surrealists, Hofmann developed a form of abstraction focused on the translation of nature through the lens of human

experience. His work was very much an emotional reaction to both nature and to the act of painting itself.

In an interview with Elaine de Kooning for *Artnews* in 1950, Hofmann explained what he wanted out of the painting process:

> "At the time of making a picture, I want not to know what I am doing; a picture should me made with feeling, not with knowing."

In his 1963 book on Hans Hofmann, William Chapin Seitz quoted Hofmann elaborating on these ideas:

> "Creation is dominated by three absolutely different factors: First, nature, which works upon us by its laws; second, the artist, who creates a spiritual contact with nature and his materials; third, the medium of expression through which the artist translates his inner world. Of those three components only one, the medium, is material."

Hofmann's work led to an emphasis on gesture, material, and color. The physicality and diversity of the mark making, much like the Expressionists prior to him, became a subject in and of itself.

Integrating different forms of mark making, working wet into wet and allowing for drips, paint could exist within the pictorial space without being tethered to existing or recognizable forms. The mark was its own form, possessing color, shape, and value. The way these marks interacted with one another created their own reality.

Hans Hofmann, "Ambush", 1944, oil on paper,
24 x 19 1/8 in. © 2021 Renate, Hans & Maria
Hofmann Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York - Fair Use

Hofmann's work evolved into compositions composed of brightly colored square shapes juxtaposed against fields of color and gestural mark making, creating a sense of visual tension he referred to as push-and-pull.

Push-and-pull refers to the phenomenon where colors whose hues are analogous to one another (adjacent on a color wheel) and of a similar brightness appear to pull together. Colors whose hues are further apart on the spectrum (closer to being complementary or contrasting in value) will appear to push away from one another, creating a sense of visual tension and a fluctuating feeling of space.

Hans Hofmann, "The Golden Wall", 1961, oil on canvas, 60 × 72 1/4 in. © 2021 Renate, Hans & Maria Hofmann Trust / Artists Rights Society

The subjective use of hard and soft edges and the seemingly paradoxical use of overlapping edges places the emphasis on color to define the spatial relationships in the piece. There is a cancellation of all linear perspective. Instead the emphasis is placed on the flatness of the surface, and the use of juxtaposed colors to create a push-and-pull effect within the picture plane.

Or, in the words of the painter Hans Hofmann "in nature, light creates the color. In the picture, color creates the light." *(Readings in American Art*, by Barbara Rose, 1900-1975.)

Important

This Hans Hofmann quote about color and light is a key gateway into understanding the difference between expressive and representational art!

Hans Hofmann, "Memoria in Aeternum", 1962,
oil on canvas, 84 x 72 1/8 in. © 2021 Renate,
Hans & Maria Hofmann Trust / Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York - Fair Use

You can see the influence of Hans Hofmann on the abstract works of Lee Krasner, Franz Kline, and Richard Diebenkorn. Each of these artists plays within the paradoxical space between abstraction and representation.


Lee Krasner, "Re-Echo", 1957, oil on canvas, 59 x 58 in. © 2021 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York - Fair Use

Lee Krasner was a student of Hans Hofmann before beginning her own career. In this example of her student work below, you can see her taking to heart Hofmann's instructions to render the figure into its simplest forms: the square, cube, cylinder, and sphere.

Lee Krasner, "Seated Nude", 1940, charcoal on paper, 25 x 18 7/8 in. © 2021 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York - Fair Use

Franz Kline used a process beginning with the creation of improvised abstract sketches in ink on found pieces of paper. Inspired by the immediacy and fluidity found in the calligraphy of ideogrammatic languages, (e.g. Japanese, or Chinese), these small works captured the energy of their inception through the directness of the mark making.
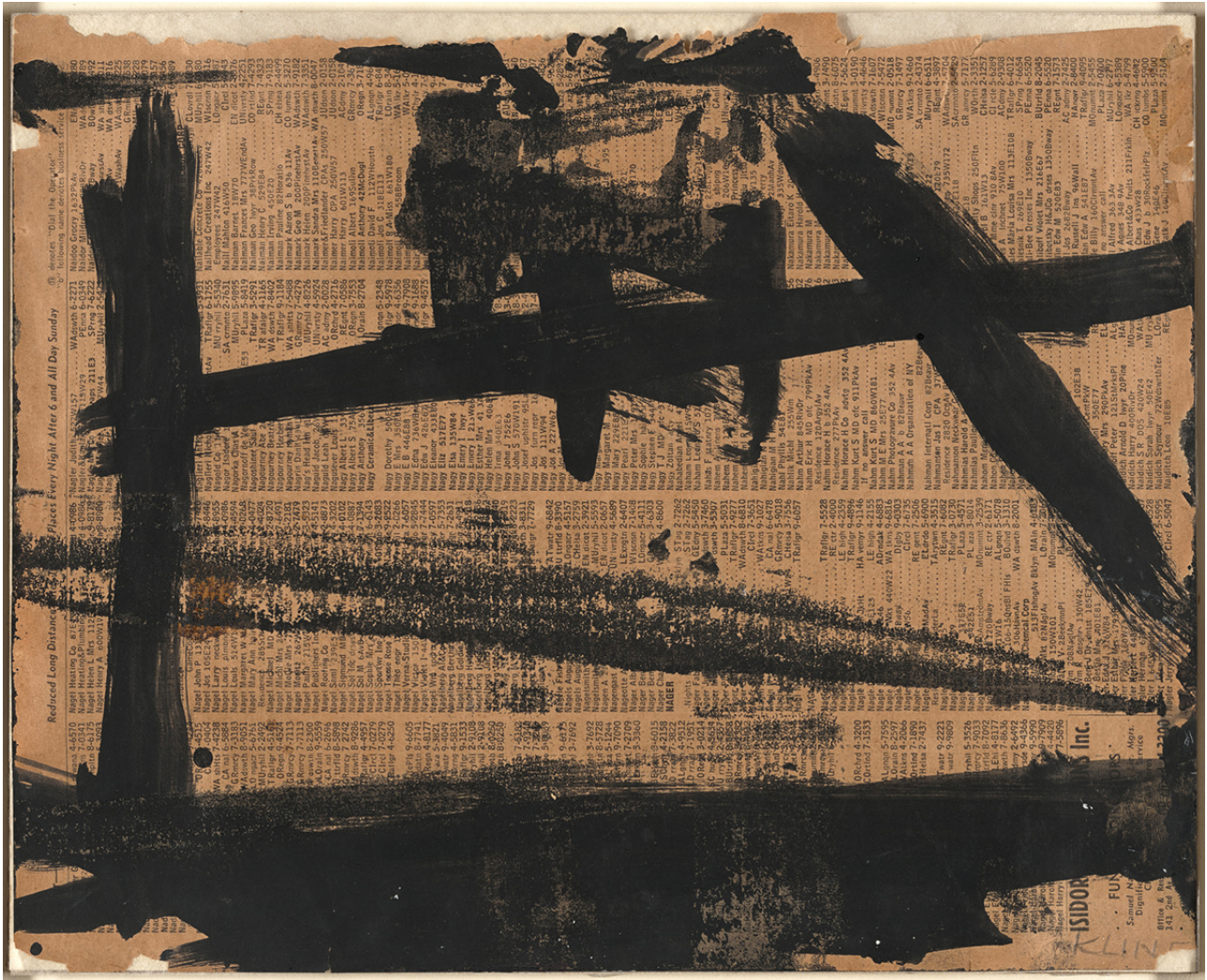
Franz Kline, "Drawing related to Painting No. 2",
1954, ink on printed paper, 8 7/8 × 11 in. © 2021
The Franz Kline Estate / Artists Rights Society
(ARS), New York - Fair Use

Kline would then use these sketches as the basis for larger, wall-sized paintings. The size of these works has a visceral affect on the viewer. The scaled up, improvised gestures of the small sketches take on an outsized appearance, suggesting interpretations as landscapes, architecture, and at times, the figure.

Franz Kline, "Painting Number 2", 1954, oil on canvas, 80 1/2" x 8' 11 in. © 2021 The Franz Kline Estate / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York - Fair Use

Richard Diebenkorn (https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80422?artist_id=1539&page=1&sov_referrer=artist) was also inspired by the notion of abstracting nature into its simplest forms.

Richard Diebenkorn, "Seascape", 1962,

The Diebenkorn piece below is from a series of abstract works that references Ocean Park, the beach landscape near his California studio. These works exist in a space between the geometric and the gestural. Planes of thin washes of color and scratched surfaces appear to shift in space as the result of the ambiguity of figure/ground relationships and push-pull phenomenon of color.

Richard Diebenkorn, "Ocean Park 115", 1979, oil
on canvas, 100 x 81 in. © 2021 Richard
Diebenkorn - Fair Use

Another contemporary artist following in the tradition of gestural abstraction and the physical application of paint and color in the translating of a subject is the painter Cecily Brown (https://www.artsy.net/artist/cecily-brown).

Brown creates vivid, atmospheric depictions of fragmented bodies, often in erotic positions, that are depicted among swells of color and gesture. Employing energetic brushwork and a sensual use of paint, her work draws on a wide-range of art historical references; from 17th-century French Classicism to Abstract Expressionism.

Other abstract artists of the era, encouraged by the art critic [Clement Greenberg and his theory of Formalism (https://www.artsy.net/article/matthew-who-is-clement-greenberg-what-is-formalism)](https://www.artsy.net/article/matthew-who-is-clement-greenberg-what-is-formalism), abandoned the notion of working from nature as subject, and instead began to make paintings intended to function purely on formal properties.

Formalism is the study of art based solely on analysis of form: the way a work of art is made and what it looks like. The approach to materials becomes the content of the work; the unique mark of the artist's hand functions as a signifier of style. Often the work functions as a record of what, due to the sheer physicality involved, could be considered performance.

Known for his large, gestural and atmospheric abstractions, Jackson Pollock came to be the epitome of this new theory of Formalism. Upon his first encounter with Pollock in his studio, Hans Hofmann commented on Pollock's lack of observable subject:

> ["Hofmann looks around at the younger artist's works, he notes that there are no still lifes or models, and asks, 'Do you work from nature?' Pollock responds, 'I am nature.'" (http://www.hanshofmann.org/1940-1949)](http://www.hanshofmann.org/1940-1949)

Jackson Pollock, "One: Number 31, 1950", 1950, oil and enamel paint on canvas, 106" x 209 5/8 in. © 2021 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York - Fair Use

In order to eliminate any reference to natural shapes, Pollock would apply the paint without directly touching the surface of the painting, instead opting for dipping sticks into cans of house paint and then using the sticks to control the direction and density of his drips.

Applying the paint in this way eliminated both the presence of contour and value in the works, leaving them as purely subjective and abstract forms of their own making.

tip!

Experiment with your own techniques of applying paint without touching the surface! Try different hand techniques as well as spray bottles, cans, and other distant implements.

Hans Namuth, "Jackson Pollock", 1951, gelatin
silver print, 19.62 x 18 in. © Hans Namuth Estate
- Fair Use

Watch Jackson Pollock demonstrating his technique in this documentary from Hans Namuth, shot in 1950:

"Jackson Pollock 51" by Hans Namuth (1951)

We should also note the immense size of some of Pollock's works. Pieces like the above example, "One: Number 31, 1950", stretch over 17 feet wide, fully encompassing the center of vision of the viewer. The experience of physically interacting with a work of that scale cannot be communicated accurately through reproduction.

Another artist who epitomized the theory of Formalism was Mark Rothko, who created large, figure-sized works consisting of softened and translucent layers of fields of color. These works, like Pollock's, need to be experienced in person to fully achieve their desired effect. When viewing a work by Rothko, one is affected both physically and psychologically by the subtle push-and-pull of the hovering fields of color.

Mark Rothko, "Untitled", 1968, synthetic polymer
paint on paper, 17 7/8 x 23 7/8 in. © 2021 Kate
Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists

POP ART

With the rise of mass consumerism and popular media, artists began to look toward the world of television, movies, tabloids, and advertisements for subject matter. The **Pop Art** movement, which began in the United States in the 1950s, appropriated both materials and imagery that originated in popular culture and mass media. Members of the Pop Art movement include Roy Lichtenstein, David Hockney, James Rosenquist, and Andy Warhol.

In 1957, Pop Art artist Richard Hamilton listed the "characteristics of pop art" in a letter to his friends, the architects Peter and Alison Smithson:

> "Pop Art is: Popular (designed for a mass audience), Transient (short-term solution), Expendable (easily forgotten), Low cost, Mass produced, Young (aimed at youth), Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, Big business"

Artists of the Pop Art movement had an ironic response to the purity of abstraction and the sanctity attributed to the hand of the artist, approaching art instead as something to be mocked and commodified.

Roy Lichtenstein created large scale works, equal to the wall-size works of the Abstract Expressionist, that upon first glance appear to be pages from a giant comic strip.
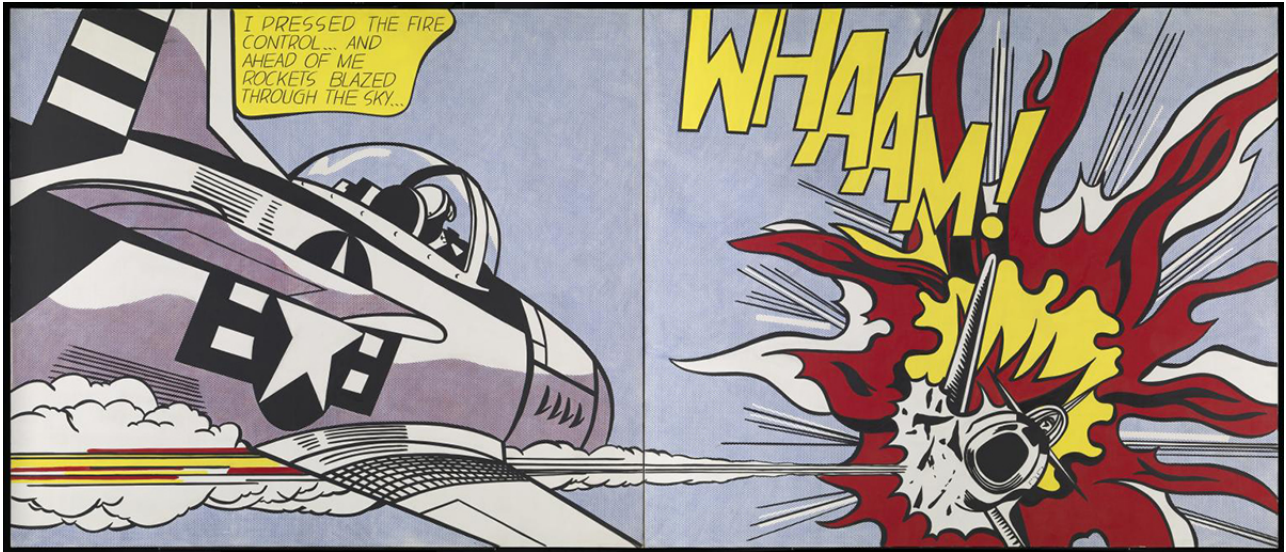
Roy Lichtenstein, "Whaam!" 1963, acrylic paint and oil paint on canvas, 68 × 160 in. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein

Lichtenstein would paint in a style that mimicked the appearance of commercial printing, including the hand-painting of what appeared to be Ben-Day dots. Instead of the grand, expressionistic gesture of abstraction, the hand of the artist instead was used as a form of translation, like a visual filter.
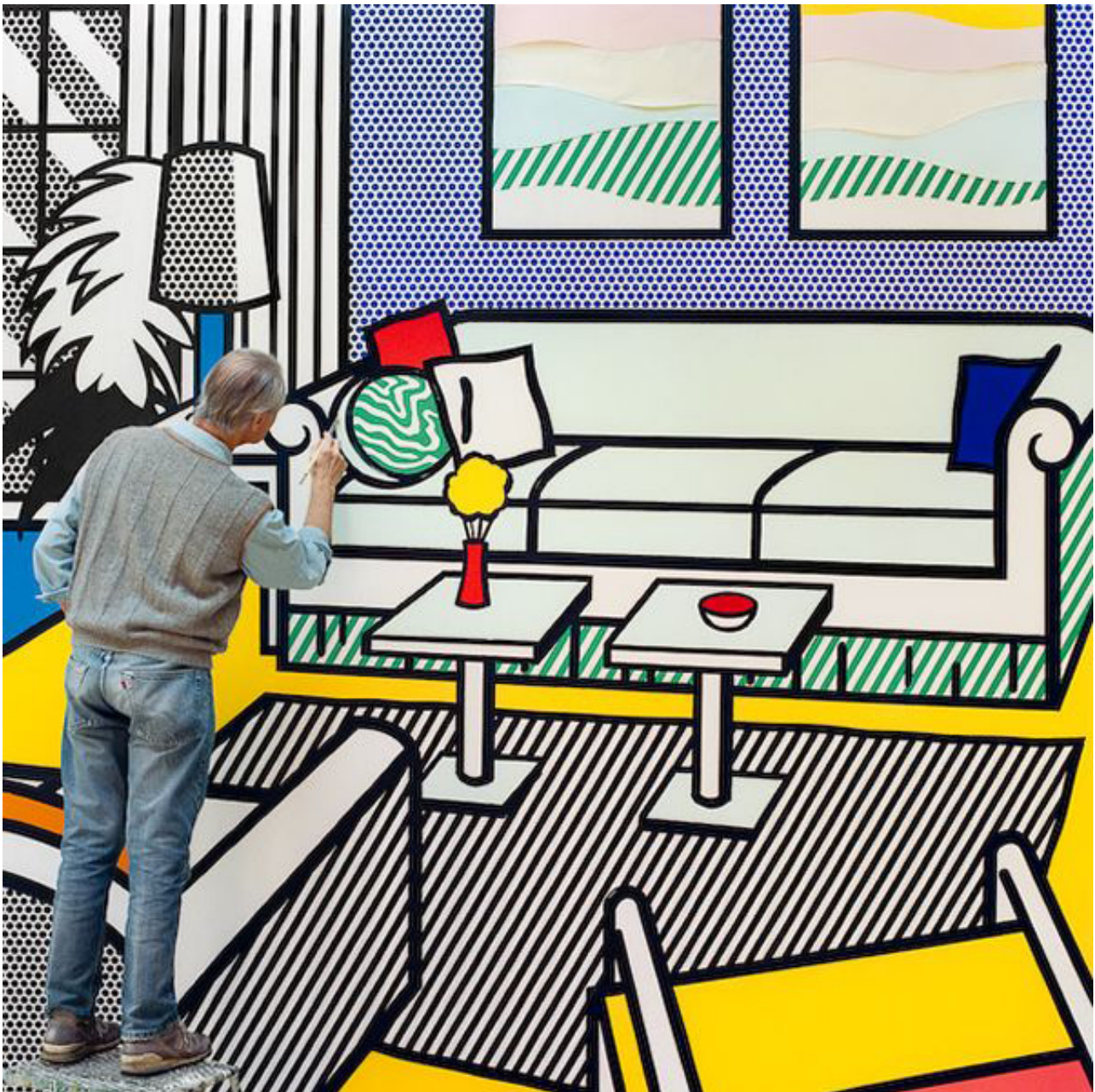
"Roy in Yellow Interior"`, 1991, from the series
Inside Roy Lichtenstein's Studio © Laurie
Lambrecht, 1990-1992

Artist Andy Warhol considered the directness and expressiveness of the artist's hand found in the works of the Abstract Expressionists and chose to filter it through the mechanical method of silk-screening, a process more commonly associated with commercial packaging and printed advertisements.

Andy Warhol, "Marilyn Diptych", 1962, silkscreen ink and acrylic paint on 2 canvases, (each panel) 81 x 57 in. © 2021 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Licensed by DACS, London - Fair Use

Warhol's choice to appropriate images of celebrities and commercial goods from popular culture and reproduce them mechanically erased the uniqueness of the artist's hand. What portions might appear as moments of expressionistic mark making are often the result of accidents that occurred during the silk-screening process.

Contemporary artist Laura Owens follows in the tradition of blurring the line between mechanical reproduction and the expressive hand of the artist. Her large, mixed media works are created using a swirl of materials and methods, ranging from the thick, almost sculptural applications of impasto paint to the addition of found objects like pieces of felt or bicycle wheels.

Click or swipe through the following slides of Owens's work.

Laura Owens, "Untitled" 2013, acrylic, flashe, and oil stick on canvas, 137 3/8 x 119 7/8 in. © Laura Owens - Fair Use

Watch Laura Owens give a tour of her Los Angeles studio:

Laura Owens LA Studio Tour

POSTMODERNISM

Beginning in the later half of the 20th century, artists began to turn away in mass from the manifestos and doctrines of Modernism. Artists instead adapted a more fluid use of technique and style, often combing clashing aesthetics and materials in the creation of a single work. Influences of Cubism, Surrealism, Dada, Expressionism, Abstraction, and Pop Art could potentially all be detected simultaneously in a single Postmodernist work.

Note

Postmodernism has taken on many definitions in all arenas of art, but most of these definitions share the key characteristic of dissolving boundaries.

One of the most significant German artists to emerge during this time was [Sigmar](#)

[Polke (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/sigmar-polke-2213/sigmar-polke-invention-and-experimentation)](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/sigmar-polke-2213/sigmar-polke-invention-and-experimentation). Polke made art from a long list of materials ranging from painting, drawing, and film, to potatoes, snail juice, and meteor dust.

Polke's work often took on a fantastical appearance with seemingly disparate elements whimsically layered and combined, as materials and images were often chosen for their symbolism just as likely as for their formal qualities.

Click or swipe through the following slides of Polke's work.

In Polke's work, an exploration of the subconscious akin to the Surrealists is confronted by the world of the psychedelic culture of the 1960s. There is a synergy between the physicality of the frantic mark-making and dripped paint and the appropriated commercial imagery of comic books and photographic reproductions.

Watch this video from the Tate museum documenting Polke's creative use of materials and mixed media in the creation of his work:

Sigmar Polke | TateShots

A contemporary mixed media artist working in a similar vein is Rita Ackermann (https://www.artsy.net/artist/rita-ackermann). Ackermann first achieved recognition for her depictions of almond-eyed girls idling in states of undress, a Gauguin-like take on New York's 1990s downtown culture.

Ackerman's paintings, drawings, and collages combine elements of Neo-Expressionism with figure drawing, deploying spray paint and oil stick atop printed

paper and acrylic to yield congested, often chaotic surfaces. Contour is used as both an expressive gesture and as an element of figurative representation, as her works are often populated by cartoonish figures that seem to fade in and out of existence.

Click on or swipe this slideshow to see examples of Ackerman's work.

Watch this video of Rita Ackermann working in her studio to see her process in action:

Rita Ackermann: In the Studio

Rita Ackermann, "BQE-SMASH IV", 2008, spray paint, oil stick, pastry cement, chalk, oil, modeling paste on printed paper 36 x 47 in. © Rita Ackermann

FROM MIX

That's a lot represent a comprehensive look at any of the movements, techniques, or artists discussed. Rather, I hope to encourage you to see this wide array of experimentation as a springboard for your own creative growth. Take chances with your art. Mix things together! Make mistakes!

A unique creative voice is always both a sponge and a fountain: you have to soak in what came before you to discover what you have to contribute.

As you move on to the creative brief, I urge you to follow your instincts. Definitely pursue art and methods that excite you. Don't try to imitate, but think of yourself in conversation. What would your art say next? And don't limit yourself to what excites you: if some of these artists or techniques repel you, follow that as well! That is another kind of powerful energy that can inspire something great in conversation.

We're lucky to live in a time where so much great art is available to us through the Internet. Explore, respond, and have fun mixing and mashing and discovering your

creative voice!

In Review / Summary

We explored the following topics:

- The definition of mixed media, as distinguished from multimedia, including collage and appropriation as fundamental techniques.

- Early examples of 20th and 21st century mixed media, including Cubism, Surrealism, and Dada.

- Expressive mark making as it leads up to contemporary movements, including Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Postmodernism.

CLICK NEXT TO CONTINUE