

## LESSON PLAN: Abstract Art

By Heather Lamanno Lough, June 2012

*Learn about abstract art and transform lines into 3-D forms, creating a string sculpture (completed in a 2-day lesson).*

### **Key Idea:**

In a discussion on the difference between abstract and representational art, emphasize the freedom that abstract work gives viewer; they really need to use their imaginations. Although artwork is not always identifiable, artists may have gotten ideas and inspiration for work from personal feelings and life experiences. Rather than imitate their subject's natural appearance, some artists purposefully change it. They stretch or bend forms, break up shapes, and give objects unlikely textures or colors. Works of art that reframe or redefine nature for expressive effect are called abstract.



### **Objectives:**

Practice Activity: This project is best when paired with another lesson that needs only partial class time to finish. The first portion of the string sculpture can be done in the studio the day before the tour, and the second part of the project can be completed after the tour, for example.

1. The students will discuss the definition of abstraction and the two types of abstract art work they will be seeing on tour (abstract art where there are no recognizable images and designs and patterns are emphasized and abstract art where there is a recognizable subject matter that has been distorted or exaggerated).
2. Students will go on an instructor-led tour of the museum and campus to view and discuss art works that will illustrate the two types of abstraction. We will take a look at how an artist might use texture, shapes and shading to make parts of a 2-dimensional artwork look 3-D. Size contrast, shading, thickness/opacity and overlapping are all illusion techniques.
3. The studio project involves balloons, string, and flour paste combined to create an abstract sculpture.  
DAY ONE: Before the studio portion, cover studio tables completely with newspaper. Pre-mix flour mixture to the consistency of pancake batter (about 1 cup of flour to 1/2 cup water). Each student should have their own bucket. Provide a variety of colored and textured string. Pre-cut string to short lengths, about the length of a student's arm; the string needs to be long enough to wrap around the balloon and overlap itself at least once. There should be ample string cut, and each student should have their own portion of string in their work area before starting. Balloons ranging from small to medium size should be inflated before the beginning of the project. Have various shapes available for students to choose from. The balloons may be taped down to the work area, but will not always stay. There should be at least one volunteer at each table to assist students, making sure that the wet string is overlapping to create layers that will hold together once dry. This volunteer can also transport finished works to the drying table. The instructor should provide a demonstration emphasizing the importance of building layers. Have wet paper towels available for each student to wipe their hands during the process as necessary. At another table, have ample tape strips and string available, along with a volunteer ready to accept finished works as they become available. Cover this table with newspaper as well, so that works may be carefully set down if needed when tying string on the end. Tie a string to finished balloons and tape to the side of the table to hang dry overnight. Write the name

of the student on the tape to later identify work. Cover the floor under hanging balloons. Provide a small bucket of water and plenty of paper towels so that volunteers can rinse their hands as needed. Encourage students to cover/complete more than one small balloon, but some students might only want to complete one.

**DAY TWO:** Pass out the dried sculptures to students. Have volunteers cut a small hole in the balloon near the tied opening (this part is fun, and a little noisy!). Instruct the students to decide how/where to attach individual string sculptures together if they completed more than one balloon. Assist students in securing these parts together with pipe cleaner. Have additional chenille stems and colored wire available to adorn the sculpture with different curls, shapes, and whatever they imagine to continue the sculpture into space. Instruct students build off each added element, holding the sculpture up periodically to evaluate overall shape. If the hanging string is left intact or added in another location chosen by student, the sculptures make fantastic mobiles.

### **Materials Needed**

Pre-inflated balloons in various shapes and sizes	Flour
Pre-cut string and yarn in various colors and textures	Small buckets
Aprons	Paper towels
Tape	Pipe Cleaner
Newspaper	Colored wire
	Large beads (optional)

### **Vocabulary:**

#### **Representational**

**abstraction:** changing a form (often one found in nature) by simplifying, distorting or transforming it.

#### **3-Dimensional**

#### **Shape/ Form**

#### **Line**

#### **Negative Space**

**Hands-on tour props:** glitter socks for Nick Cave, stretched mini-canvas, pictures of Elizabeth Murray's other works, pictures of Henning's still life and portrait, string for line activity on the floor

### **Evaluation:**

Each student will discuss his/her work before the class, led by the following questions:

Even though we used the same materials, our works all look different, don't they?

Let's look at how each of us combined the parts of our sculptures and how they hang in space.

Ask the children: what part of the process was your favorite part?

What challenges did you face? Were you surprised by the outcome?

How do your choices affect the overall feel of these different sculptures?

Do any of these pieces have characteristics similar to what we saw on our tour?

Did everyone have a good time on our museum tour? What was your favorite part?



**Elizabeth Murray** (American, b. 1940, d. 2007)

*Landing*, 1999

Oil on four canvases

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999.06

Gift of JCCC Gallery Associates



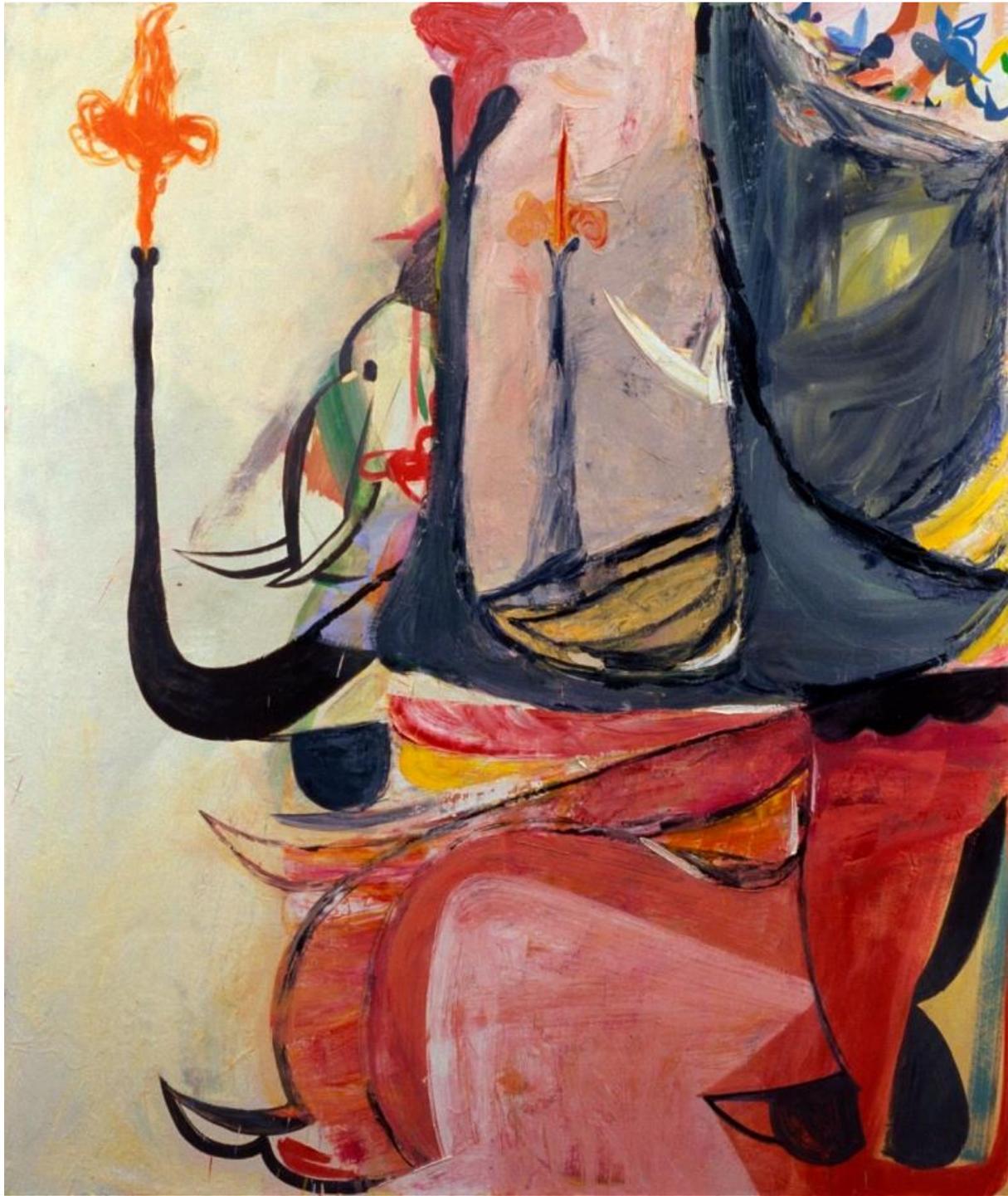
**Louise Bourgeois** (French American, b. 1911- d.2010)

*Woman with Packages*, 1949 (cast 1996)

Bronze, no. 6/6

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996.02

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Jules and Doris Stein Foundation



**Amy Sillman** (American, b. 1966)

*Elephant*, 2005

Oil on canvas

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.30

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



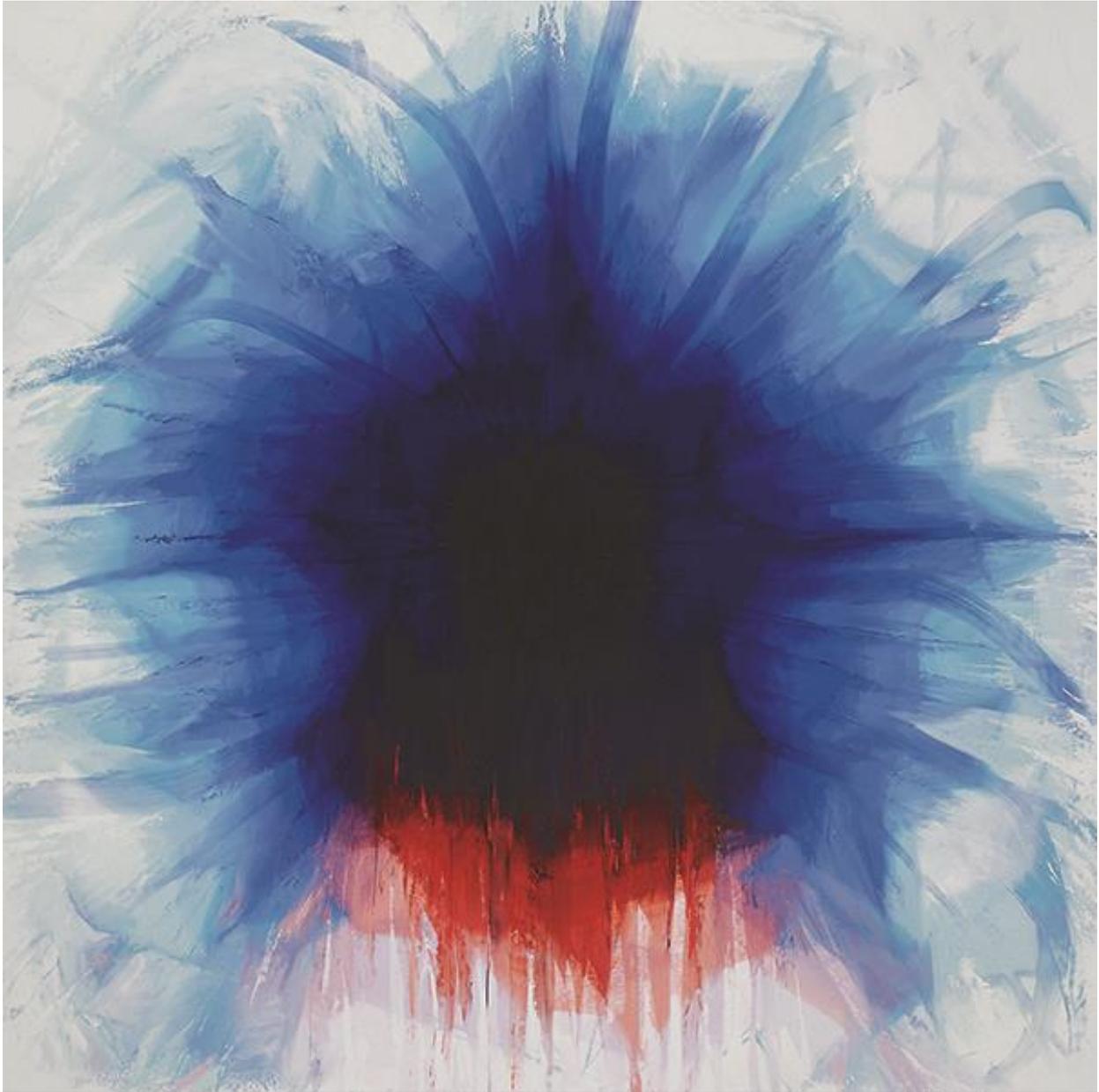
**Amy Myers** (American, b. 1965)

*Chroma Zoma Bubble Chamber*, 2006

Graphite, colored pencil, pastel on paper

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006.43

Acquired with funds provided by JCCC and Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



**Marc Handelman** (American, b. 1975)

*Miasma (2)*, 2006

Oil on canvas

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006.66

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



**Andrzej Zielinski** (American, b. 1976)  
*Yellow Industrial Paper Shredder*, 2009-2010  
Acrylic on panel  
Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010.47



**Carroll Dunham** (American, b. 1949)

*Featureless (Two)*, 2005

Acrylic on canvas

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.71

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



**Anton Henning** (German, b. 1964)

*Interieur No. 362*, 2006

Oil on canvas

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007.28

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation