

LESSON PLAN: Designs in Clay

By Amy Wunsch, November 2008

Key Idea

Historically, artists were primarily interested in art that imitated life. Artists and patrons favored representational recordings of people, places and things, with accurate use of perspective, proportion, color and value, etc. By the early 20th century, artists began exploring visual art that was based on abstracted forms or ideas where there were no recognizable figures or objects. Many artists such as Mondrian, Kandinsky, Malevich and Picasso flattened space and concentrated on the formal qualities of art to give meaning to their artworks: color, shape, lines, etc. Many contemporary artists continue this approach to art making and create their works using processes, media, art elements, and their own imaginations as the focus of their artworks.



Objectives

1. Students will be introduced to non-objective and abstract art. The students and instructor will also discuss the idea of a balanced composition, looking at ways that artists balance compositions with shapes, forms, symmetry or asymmetry, color, etc., and how a balanced composition can create unity within an artwork.
2. Students will be asked to look for symbols, shapes, forms, colors, etc. that express meaning as we view several artworks in the collection, and we'll consider:
 - a. Since non-objective artists do not copy the physical world, what other things might they be concerned about? (emotions, expressive qualities, quiet reflections, contemplation – things about our inner selves instead of the outer world).
 - b. What do hard, geometric edges suggest to you? What about soft, organic shapes? A pale, pastel yellow, or a bright, fire engine red? A straight line, or a diagonal line? A sphere, or a cone?
 - c. How does each artist create a balanced composition? Which artists rely more on color, line, or shapes to achieve this balance?
 - d. What symbols, colors, etc. were you able to associate with a feeling or event that you have experienced?
 - e. Why would an artist choose to express ideas in their artwork in a non-objective way?
3. The students will create a clay plate, and pay special attention to balancing their composition to create unity and meaning:

What kind of feeling, emotion, etc. will you try to convey in your artwork?
What forms and shapes will you use? How will color help you bring meaning to your piece? Will lines and textures be a part of your artwork?
Will your piece be symmetrically, asymmetrically, or radially balanced?

Vocabulary:

non-objective - term used to describe visual art which is not based on existing, observable forms, but rather on abstract or idealized forms, such as geometric, mathematical, imaginary, etc. Non-objective art came into existence in the early 20th century with theoretical accompaniment. Piet Mondrian is an example of an artist whose work is non-objective.

abstract - the modification of a natural form by simplification or distortion.

composition - the process of arranging the forms of two- and three-dimensional visual art into a unified whole, by means of elements and principles of design, such as line, shape, color, balance, contrast, space, etc., for purposes of formal clarity and artistic expression.

Materials Needed

Air dry clay (approx. $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 lb. per student)

Variety of colored inks

Variety of colored liquid acrylics, rubber eye dropper tops

Texture plates for stamping in to clay

Pieces of screening, rough sandpaper, wadded up foil, etc.

Rolling pins, one for each student

Clay tools, toothpicks, wooden dowels for incising lines, shapes

Styrofoam plates for supports

Wax paper for work surface

Tour Artwork Images



Jim Leedy (American, b. 1930)

Lakeside Plate, 1990

Stoneware, porcelain, glaze

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994.07

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



Peter Wilkin (American, b. 1960)

Roots, 2004

Ceramic

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.48

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



Susanne Stephenson (American, b. 1935)

Beach Edge, 1993

Ceramic

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993.02



Jun Kaneko (American, b. Japan, 1942)
All three *Untitled*, 1985
Ceramic
Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986.03, 04, and 05