

LESSON ONE: Materials and Process



IMAGE FIVE: Juan Gris. Spanish, 1887–1927. *Breakfast*. 1914. Gouache, oil, and crayon on cut-and-pasted printed paper on canvas with oil and crayon, 31 7/8 x 23 1/2" (80.9 x 59.7 cm). Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest. © 2008 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



IMAGE SIX: Romare Bearden. American, 1911–1988. *The Dove*. 1964. Cut-and-pasted printed paper, gouache, pencil, and colored pencil on board, 13 3/8 x 18 3/4" (33.8 x 47.5 cm). Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund, 1971. © 2008 Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y.

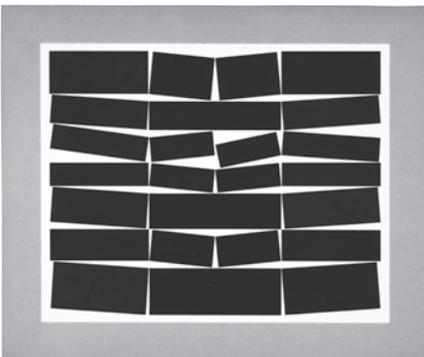


IMAGE SEVEN: Hélio Oiticica. Brazilian, 1937–1980. *Metaesquema No. 348*. 1958. Gouache on board, 18 1/8 x 22 3/4" (46 x 58 cm). Purchased with funds given by Maria de Lourdes Egydio Villela, 1998. © 2008 Projeto Hélio Oiticica

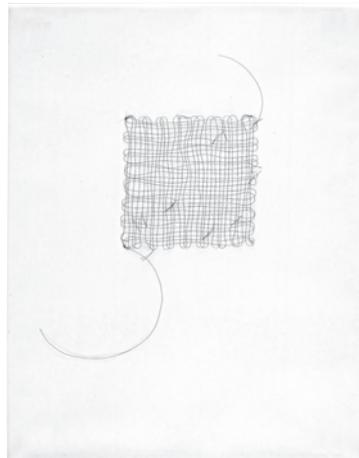


IMAGE EIGHT: Mona Hatoum. British of Palestinian origin, born in Beirut, Lebanon, 1952. *Untitled (hair grid with knots 3)*. 2001. Human hair with hair spray tied to transparent paper, 14 1/8 x 11" (35.9 x 27.9 cm). Purchase, 2002. © 2008 Mona Hatoum

INTRODUCTION

This lesson examines the variety of materials an artist may use when making a drawing and considers how the choice of material impacts the ideas the artwork communicates to the viewer.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will consider different materials and how they are used in drawings.
- Students will consider the different processes used by artists to create works of art.
- Students will compare and contrast two pairs of drawings and consider how the materials and processes used in each affect how they view and interpret the works.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

If your students have not completed the drawing exercises suggested in the Setting the Scene activity *Make Your Mark*, take a few minutes to do one or two of them as a group. If your students have completed the exercises, ask them to take a few moments to consider the process they went through for each exercise. Then give your students collage materials (printed and/or colored paper, magazines, and newspapers), and ask them to create a collage using these materials in a limited period of time. Afterward, ask your students to compare the experience of the drawing exercises with creating a collage. Did they find it more or less difficult? Why? Were there advantages to working with existing images, such as the ones found in magazines and newspapers? What were the disadvantages? Ask your students to think about their ideal material for creating art. What is it, and why?

Tell your students that during this lesson they should consider the effect of the artists' choice of material on the images.

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- Show your students *Breakfast (Image Five)*, by Juan Gris. After they have had a few minutes to look at the work, ask them what they think is going on in the image. Be sure to have your students support their ideas with visual evidence. In many ways, this is an everyday scene, but not everything in the image seems quite right. Tell your students the title of the work, and ask them what elements from an everyday breakfast they see. What in the image makes this scene unusual?
- Ask your students if they can tell how this drawing was made by looking at it. What do they see that supports their ideas?

Gris applied cut-and-pasted printed paper in a process called *papier-collé* (French for “pasted paper”) and then painted and drew over the papers to create this image. *Papier-collé*, or collage, a method of applying overlapping papers to a support, was created in 1912 by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. Gris used pieces of paper with wood grain printed on them to represent the wooden table, wallpaper pieces to form the wallpaper behind the table, and a fragment of a newspaper to represent a newspaper on the breakfast table.

While these elements help the viewer see concrete elements in the scene, the impact of the layering of the paper throughout creates disjuncture in the work, as if viewers are seeing the table from many different perspectives at once.

- Now show your students *The Dove (Image Six)*, by Romare Bearden, made fifty years after *Breakfast*. Ask your students to describe what is happening in this scene. Where does it take place? What are the people doing? Can your students tell by looking how this image was made?

Like Gris, Bearden used cut-and-pasted printed paper. He also drew over the paper, as Gris did.

- Ask your students to form pairs and create a list of similarities between these two images, which at first appear to be very different. When they are done, ask them to share their lists.

Bearden described *The Dove* as “an assemblage of countless such summer evenings in Harlem—and in other urban areas.”⁷

- Students may notice that while both images depict everyday scenes, they also both have elements that are slightly jarring. Your students already discussed some of those elements in *Breakfast*; ask them if they notice anything in *The Dove* that seems out of place or that looks unusual. If so, what impact does that have on their overall experience of looking at the image? How would this image be different if it were a drawing made with just paper and pencil?

Both Gris and Bearden used a variety of materials to construct their images of everyday scenes. Papier-collé helped Gris communicate a sense of disjuncture and Bearden convey the communal yet sometimes chaotic feel of a neighborhood evening, which may not have been possible with more traditional drawing materials.

- The next two images were made using different materials. Ask your students to keep thinking about how the artist’s choice of materials and processes affects the viewer.
- Show your students *Metaesquema No. 348 (Image Seven)*, by Hélio Oiticica. After they have had a minute to look, ask them to write a paragraph describing the work as completely as they can. Give your students three to five minutes to write, and tell them they must keep writing until the time is up.

This work, part of a series Oiticica worked on in 1957 and 1958, consists of gouache on board. Some art historians see the *Metaesquemas* series—which Oiticica finally abandoned for more innovative forms of art, including performance art—as the beginning of an important characteristic of all his work: a willingness to experiment. A participant in a number of different artistic movements in Brazil, Oiticica was a Neo-concretist at the time this drawing was made. Neo-concretists believed in total freedom from the existing conventions of artmaking. They also believed that by abandoning the picture frame (or the sculpture base) they could envelop the viewer in the work and the artwork would become part of the world. Curator Fernando Cocchiarale wrote that Oiticica’s work at this time can be seen as “a search for new relations between art and life, an ethical-esthetic confluence.”⁸ In this work, space is flattened and background and form blend together, challenging the boundaries between the picture plane and the outside world.

- Ask your students to share some of their written descriptions. Ask them to consider a formal analysis of the work if it is not evident in their descriptions. How are line, color, shape, and movement used in this work? Share some information about the goals of the Neo-concrete movement with your students. Ask them if they feel involved in this work, as Oiticica intended. Why, or why not?

7. Romare Bearden, artist’s questionnaire, 1971. Department of Drawings archives, The Museum of Modern Art.

8. Fernando Cocchiarale, *Grupo Frente 1955–56 Metaesquemas 1957–58* (exhibition brochure) (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Joel Edelstein Arte Contemporanea, 1996).

- Now show your students *Untitled (hair grid with knots 3)* (Image Eight), by Mona Hatoum. Remind your students that *Metaesquema No. 348* was made with gouache on board, and tell them that Hatoum made *Untitled (hair grid with knots 3)* by weaving her own hair on a small loom then transferring it to tracing paper. Ask your students to compare and contrast these two works, and keep a list of their observations on the board. Ask your students to consider formal elements of drawing such as **line, composition, shape, and color**. Start with similarities and then move to differences.

Hatoum was born in Beirut, but she moved to London when she was twenty-three to escape civil war. Because of her own experiences coming to terms with living in another culture, she is interested in issues related to displacement and the creation of identity. She works with a variety of materials and processes that challenge conventional ideas about artmaking.

- Oiticica's and Hatoum's works deal more with ideas that are important to them than with the representation of a specific time or place. One visual similarity your students may have noticed in comparing these two works is the use of a grid as the primary structure. Ask your students to compare the grids in the two works. How is the way Oiticica created his different from the way Hatoum has created hers? Students may notice that Oiticica's grid is made of solid shapes while Hatoum's is made of very thin lines. Ask your students where they see grids in daily life. What can a grid represent? What is the effect of slightly disjointed grids such as the ones created by Oiticica and Hatoum?
- Each of the artists discussed in this lesson engages the viewer through materials and process to communicate an abstract idea. Have your students think back to the introductory conversation. Now that they have been introduced to materials beyond paper, pencil, and collage, do they want to reconsider their ideal art material?

ACTIVITIES

Abstract It

Have your students make an abstract drawing that reveals multiple perspectives. To do this, break your students into groups of four or five and ask each group to create a small still life. Students can use objects that are available in the classroom and/or contribute objects of their own. Have the students form a circle around the still lifes, and give each student a piece of paper and a pencil. Then give them time to draw the still life from their own individual angles. These can be relatively quick sketches. When the time is up, distribute one larger sheet of paper to each group. Then have each student tear his or her drawing into four pieces. Tell your students to combine the pieces on the larger sheet of paper in order to create one image that shows the still life from many different angles. Tape or glue the pieces in place once the group has reached consensus about the image.

Ask your students to share their images and to discuss the process of working as a group to make a drawing. What was challenging about it? What was easy?

Do It Yourself

Gather a variety of art materials, some traditional, some experimental, for use in the classroom. You may want to ask your students to bring in some materials of their own. Allow your students to spend time experimenting with different materials, then ask them to write about the process of experimentation. Did their experimentation give them inspiration for a finished artwork? Did they notice that certain types of materials lend themselves to artwork about certain subject matter, or to more abstract or more representational artwork? Have your students share their writing.