Joseph Stella (1877 – 1946)

Flowers, Italy (1931)
Oil on Canvas, 75" X 75" - Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona

Art Style: Abstract, Surreal
Art Terms: Symmetry, Color (Warm and Cool)
Activity: Symmetrical Garden Painting
Medium: Tempera Paint

Meet the Artist

- Joseph Stella was born in Italy in 1877, but emigrated to become an American citizen when he was 18.
- He briefly studied Pharmacology and Medicine before switching to study Art at the Art Students League and also the New York School of Art.
- Early on, he painted images of the workers who surrounded him in New York – immigrants, miners, and steel workers. He sold many of these paintings.
- In 1909 he returned to Europe and was exposed to many art movements, such as Cubism and Futurism.
- He travelled to many places during his life, but always returned to his home in New York City.
- He is best known for his art work in Futurism (a modern art movement that focuses on the technology and movement of the machine age of the early 1900s) but he experimented with many different styles of art.
- The painting (*Flowers, Italy*) can be seen by the students if they visit the Phoenix Art Museum in downtown Phoenix.

About the Artwork

Flowers, Italy (1931) is an abstract painting. The flowers, while beautiful and wildly colorful, could not exist – as presented – in reality. The painting is a symmetrically balanced composition (one that is visually divided in half vertically, with each side balancing the other in color and size of elements, although the details differ). The flowers are painted in warm reds and oranges against a cool background of blues and greens.

Art Style

Abstract
- A style of art that doesn't represent or imitate things as they would actually be found in nature.

Surreal
- A style that is based on the artist dreams. Paintings are filled with familiar objects which are painted to look strange or mysterious.

Art Terms

Symmetry
- Occurs when one side of the piece of art balances out or mirrors the other.

Color (Warm and Cool)
- Warm colors come forward toward the eye and cool colors recede or fall into the distance. Think of the sun for **warm colors** – Red, Pink, Yellow, Orange. Think of distant hills or a snowy day for **cool colors** – Green, Blue, Violet.

Questions about *Flowers, Italy*

- Where are the **cool colors** in the painting?
- Where are the **warm colors** in the painting?
- How does the artist balance the painting to give it a sense of **symmetry**?
- How is the painting different from what you would see in nature; what makes it **abstract**?

Activity

Symmetrical Garden Painting - Tempera Paint

Supplies

White drawing paper – 9" x 12"
Tempera paints – 5 to 6 colors representing warm and cool colors
Paint trays
Water cups or bowls
Paintbrushes
Pencils
Paper towels (located by the sink)

Directions

1. Have students write their name and room # on the back of the paper.
2. Orient the paper in a horizontal position and instruct the students to fold in half vertically (left side over right side). You will need to demonstrate as some students might not have their paper in the correct orientation.
3. Tell the students that their own painting will be symmetrically balanced – like the one by Joseph Stella.
4. Have students paint their own abstract garden, using the colors provided, on the left (or right) side of the unfolded paper. Encourage students to use their imagination and create exotic, colorful flowers and plants, bugs, birds, etc.
5. Next, have them create a mirror-like image on the opposite side of their paper. They do not have to copy exactly, but need to create a symmetrically balanced painting using color and similar shapes and/or designs. For example, they may have a large red flower on one side. In order to balance their painting, they need to place a similarly sized, warm colored flower on the opposite side, in roughly the same location.
6. When the students are done have them title their artwork. Write the title on a label sticker and place it on the back of their work.