

Art Masterpiece: Blue Atmosphere, 1963 by Helen Frankenthaler



Pronunciation: Helen Frankenthaler (Frank-en-tall-er)

Keywords: Abstract Expressionism, color, mood

Grade: Kinder - 1st

Project: Tissue Paper Bleed - Abstract

Definitions:

Color – an element of art. The primary colors are red, blue, and yellow. Every color, except white, can be created from various blending of these three colors.

Mood: the feeling or emotion suggested or created in the viewer by a work of art.

Abstract Expressionism - A style of art in which shapes, designs, textures and colors are represented in a way that may look unrealistic but emphasizes moods or feelings. (This is advanced for this age but briefly mention so they understand it is not a realistic style but one of simple shapes and color.)

Meet the Artist: (5 min)

- Born, 1928 in New York City.
- Frankenthaler had wealthy parents and the opportunity to go to good schools. In high school she was able to travel and she took some of her classes in Mexico.
- As a young woman she met famous artist, Jackson Pollock, who was very inspirational to her. His style of painting was to splatter paint on a canvas that was on the floor (show example of Pollock's work if possible). Helen didn't copy Pollock's style but she did develop her own.

- She was thought of as a pioneer and the first artist to use “soak and stain” method. Helen thinned her paint, and used a non-primed canvas, which let the color soak in. She would pour the paint onto the canvas instead of using a brush and leave the splatter marks and drips to show the process of her work.
- Frankenthaler and Pollock’s work are considered Abstract Expressionism. Abstract means there are no recognizable, natural shapes in the artwork and Expressionism means that the artist was trying to “express” his or her feelings by the way that they painted.
- Helen experimented in other forms of art like sculpture and illustrations for books. She also taught art at universities like, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.
- Frankenthaler Received a Lifetime Achievement Award 10 years ago and has had countless one-woman exhibitions.

Abstract Expressionism (also known as “action painting”) contain these aspects:

- Artists apply paint to usually large canvases rapidly with force and using big gestures
- Artists try to transfer their feelings and emotions onto the canvas-by the way they paint (Example: action painting like Pollock or soak and stain like Frankenthaler) and through the use of color.
- Non-objective-abstract art with no objects or even geometric shapes
- Artwork appears to look accidental but is really planned out by the artist
- The expressive manner in which the artist painted the artwork was often considered as important as the painting itself.

Discussion: (10 min)

- What do you see? Color and shapes
 - Do the shapes look like anything (clouds?)?
 - Does it look like the artist used a brush - why or why not?
 - How do you think she created this piece of art?
 - Do you think she planned where she poured the paint?
 - Do these colors make you feel one way or another?
 - Do you see shapes on top of one another? (she painted, let dry and then painted on top)
 - Does this change the color?
 - Does the painting make you feel a certain way?
- If you wanted to paint LOVE without using an object like a heart what color would you use?
How about ANGER? HAPPINESS? SADNESS? NERVOUSNESS? EMBARRASSMENT,
GUILT, SHYNESS, PRIDE ETC.
- Why do you think she called it Blue Atmosphere?

Project:

Tissue paper abstract - students create their own non-objective, abstract expressionism piece.

Supplies needed:

12 x 18" white construction paper (1 per student)

sheets of tissue paper to be cut or torn - be sure you are using tissue paper that "bleeds"

scissors

paintbrushes

Water cups

Optional: black construction paper for mounting and glue

Advance Preparation:

Cut large tissue sheets into smaller squares of tissue (approximately 4"x4" squares).

Mini Lesson: (5min) Color Theory

Review the three primary colors Red, Blue, Yellow and the recipes to make the Secondary colors Purple, Orange and Green. Write these on the white-board.

Next,...

Discuss the connection between emotions and warm and cool colors. What are examples of warm colors (red, orange, yellow) what are examples of cool colors (green, blue, purple). Warm colors usually communicate intense emotions happy, excited, mad, while cool colors are quieter, peaceful and make one feel calm and rested.

Have the kids take a moment to think about what emotions they want their art to communicate and think about the colors associated with those emotions.

Process: (30-40min)

- Before beginning the project, mount the parent letter to the back of the black mounting paper.
- Conduct the Mini-Lesson. See above.
- Have each student select an abstract idea or emotion. Examples: Happy, sad, scared, silly, freedom, confusion, happiness, anger, etc.
- Students should try to depict their idea in an abstract manner using only color and composition. This is hard for them to understand, many will try to create a picture of something concrete. You may have to go over the instructions several times.
- Select colors of tissue that reflect the emotion of your piece. Carefully plan out the shapes and lay cut or torn tissue pieces out on their desk or the paper.
- Paint an area of the paper with water. Lay tissue on the wet paper and brush over it with water. DO NOT REMOVE but keep layering with sheets of tissue onto the paper. Fill most of the paper.
- Encourage overlapping of primary colors to create the secondary colors.
- Remind students that some areas can be left void of color.
- Study your abstract. Does it need more color? Repeat process till the desired effect, emotion, is created.

- If possible, let the piece dry before removing the tissue. The colors should have bled and mixed on the paper. If time does not permit, tissue can be removed wet but it is a messy endeavor!
- When they are done, have them title their piece and mount it to the black paper (this can be done before the tissue is completely dry).
- Artwork will need to be thoroughly dry before it's placed in portfolios.

Clean Up: Thoroughly wash brushes and store brushes upright. Collect usable dry tissue scraps and place them back into the tissue bag for other classes to use.



Parent Letter

Brief info about the artist: Helen Frankenthaler

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Brief info about the project: In today’s lesson the students learned about the style of art known as ABSTRACT. They discussed how mood can be created by the colors they choose. They each created an abstract design using a tissue paper bleed technique.

Picture of artwork



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