
Art Masterpiece: *FLOWERS, ITALY* By Joseph Stella



Oil on Canvas, 1931
74 ¾" x 74 ¾"

Collection of the Phoenix Art Museum

Keywords: Surrealism, Balance & Symmetry

Grade: 4th - 5th

Activity: Surreal Still Life Drawing

Definitions:

Form of Art: Surrealism. "Sur" means beyond, so surrealism means "beyond realism". Surrealism is a major artistic movement where artists attempted to represent the world as seen by the unconscious mind. These artworks were inspired by dreams and imagination and usually contained scenes that were very fantasy-like and unreal. Surrealism depicts bizarre images of objects that may be based in reality but the artist has changed them so they look more dream-like.

Balance: a principle of design. The arrangement of the elements in a work of art (including size and number of objects) that helps achieve a sense of equality and stability.

Symmetry: objects are arranged the same way on both sides, but not necessarily identical.

Meet The Artist:

- Joseph Stella was born in Italy in 1877, came to New York City when he was 18. As a boy, he had a natural ability to draw but decided to study medicine. He later attended art school and began to earn money for his drawings of immigrants, miners and steel workers.

- During his life, Stella traveled extensively throughout the world but always returned to New York, which he considered home.
- Stella experimented with different art styles – realism, abstraction and surrealism. He is most known for his American Futurist paintings and his interpretation of modern 20th century life.

About the Artwork:

- **Flowers, Italy** is a large brightly painted canvas with warm orange, red and yellow hues that occupy the foreground, and cool blue and green tones that rest in the background. A myriad of exotic flowers, leaves, tendrils, stems, hidden birds and forms that may suggest faces and figures embellish the artwork and entice the viewer. The density of the foliage creates a horizon line that is accented by a row of large white flowers. The formal arrangement is **symmetrical** – each side balances the other in color and size of elements, but the details differ.
- The painting is a lush, exotic abstraction with strong contrasts in form and color. Stella's complex development of animal and figural imagery creates an intriguing and delightful experience for the viewer.
- **Flowers, Italy** is on display at the Phoenix Art Museum.

Possible Questions:

- Describe what you see in this painting?
- Is this a realistic painting? Why/why not? What makes it surreal? (The images look dreamlike, somewhat realistic but in an irrational, fantasy setting).
- Ask the students to point out specifically where the artist has used warm colors as oppose to the cool colors.
- Ask the students to find repeated lines, shapes and colors. Are the flowers and vegetation repeated? Are the varieties of plant life identical on both sides?
- Do you see any animal life (birds, fish, and insects)?
- Do you see a pattern? (Horizontal line of white flowers, red flowers, and then white again on the bottom). The horizontal lines give a feeling of peacefulness.
- Does the painting look balanced? (all the objects are harmoniously arranged).
- How does Stella achieve uniformity in this painting? (use of repeated shapes and colors). The repeated shapes and colors also create balance and visual rhythm.
- If you were to fold this painting in half vertically would it be identical on each side? (no, but at first glance you may say "yes") Have the students explore this.

Activity: Still Life Drawing

Materials Needed: Templates printed on light blue copy paper imprinted with half the floral stencil, pencils, oil pastels, glue
Dark blue construction paper - for mounting.

Quick Demonstration: Under the classroom document camera show students how pastels are special media. They look like crayons but have much more artistic capabilities. Show how colors go on richly and if layered you can create new color. Show how to blend the pastels by layering. (white over blue, etc.) Instruct the students NOT to use their fingers to blend!

Process:

1. Explain to the students that they are to complete the other half of the floral picture using symmetrical balance. But, just like the artist Stella, they do not have to draw exactly what they see onto the other half. It should balance with the other side.
2. Use pencils to complete the vase shape.
3. Add stems and flowers to create a vase of flowers that looks balanced on each side of the paper. Demonstrate that each side should have the same number and approximately the same size flowers to create a balanced look. However, it should not be identical.
4. Instruct them to keep drawing on BOTH sides of the paper by adding details such as a flying bumble-bee, creeping caterpillars. They need to keep the design balanced on each side – but does not need to look identical. If you add a ladybug on one side then add a butterfly on the other side. Etc.
5. Color in with oil pastels.
6. Here is the FUN part. Encourage the students as they add color to use their imagination to create SURREAL looking flowers. Fantasy flowers in outstanding colors and patterns. If it looks like a flower you would see in a real flower shop then you need to make it more SURREAL. Better than life!
7. Students can also experiment with the oil pastels. Light/Heavy application and with layering colors to create a new color.
8. Students can embellish the vase with design too.
9. Ask students to look at their artwork and check for symmetry. Once completed....
10. Mount on blue construction paper.
11. Sign the artwork.



Step 1. Complete the drawing



Step 2. Add Color.

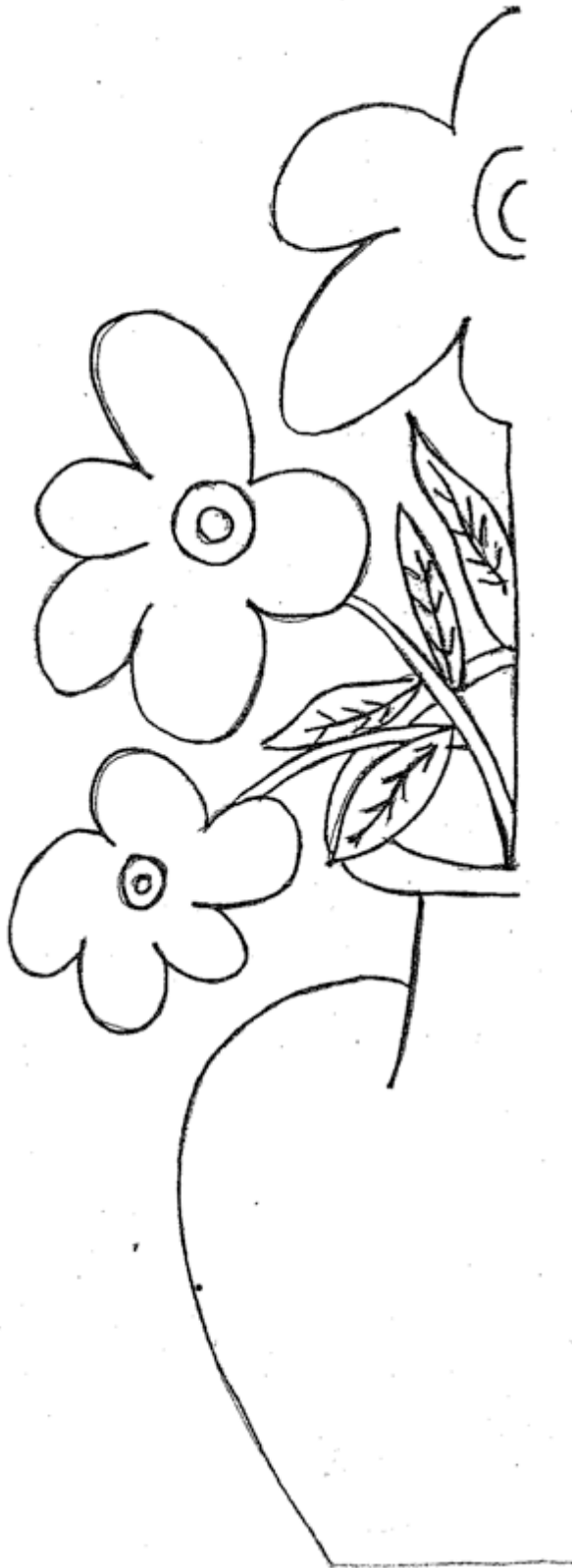


Coordinator: Construction paper add-ons can be added but time is usually too tight for this extra. Your choice.



Student Sample.

Chandler Unified School District Art Masterpiece



Parent Letter

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Brief info about the project : Students first completed the still-life by drawing the other half of this vase of flowers. They were to work to achieve balance on each side. They used oil pastels to add strong contrasts in form and color.

Picture of artwork



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