

**Art Masterpiece: *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*
by Charles Demuth**



Pronounced: Charles Day-MOOTH

Keywords: Cubist-Realist, Value, Symbol, Depth & Shapes

Activity: Metallic Number/Letter Drawing

Meet the Artist and His Art:

- Charles Demuth was born in 1883 and grew up in Pennsylvania. Due to many illnesses, his childhood was a lonely one and he learned to enjoy his own company. This isolation allowed him to use his imagination and develop his creativity.

- Eventually, he received official art training at a local university and decided to travel to learn more about art. He developed a style later titled Cubist-Realist.
 - A Cubist artist arranges their artwork using geometric shapes (circles, squares, triangles, etc.) in various colors and textures.
 - A Realist artist paints their subject as they naturally appear.
 - He combined these 2 art styles in a very unusual and bold way. He liked to take an "ordinary and unattractive object and make it a work of art."
- He used many symbols in his art.
 - A **symbol** is an object, shape or color that has special meaning.
- His artwork also displays value, which gives contrast to his subjects.
 - **Value** is the lightness or darkness of a color.
- Demuth traveled extensively and found friends that appreciated his artwork. He was well received by the New York art community. After a lifetime of illnesses, including diabetes, he died in 1935 at the age of 53. In his lifetime, Demuth created over a thousand works of art!

This piece of artwork, *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, was inspired by a poem by William Carlos Williams:

The Great Figure

*Among the rain and lights
I saw the figure 5 in gold
on a red
fire truck*

*moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs,
siren howls
and wheels rumbling through the dark city*

Possible Questions:

- What is the poem about, and how do you think Demuth incorporated that into his painting? (A moving fire truck racing to an emergency.)
- In the painting, the number 5's appear to be moving towards the audience, why do you think he did this? (This was his way of making it appear to have depth and movement.)
- Do you see anything else in the picture that is written? What is it? (The name of the poet is written in different places, and his and the poet's initials are intermingled within the painting.)
- How many values (different intensity of a color) can you find in the gold, red, and/or black?
- The number 5 is made up of both straight lines and curved lines. Can you name another number that is like that as well? (the number 2)
- Do you think the painting fits the poem?
- Think of the painting as if it had the title "I Saw a Fire Truck". Does that change how you see the painting?
- Would you give the painting a different title?

Activity: Metallic Number/Letter Drawing

- 1) Have students write their name on the back of their paper. Have them pick one letter or number they like (their initial or favorite number). Draw it large in the center of the paper. Then draw the same number or letter two or three times more (but smaller) in the middle ground and in the background.
- 2) Add interest to the background by using geometric shapes, including diagonal and horizontal lines.
- 3) Pass out the gold and silver sharpies, and color the number/letter with a gold or silver sharpie marker. Fill it in with the sharpie marker so it is bold on the page.
- 4) The next step is to color in the background. **Crayons are to be used on the white paper or black paper, and gel markers are for the black paper only.** Pass out the crayons and/or gel markers, and have

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the students color the background with warm colors (red, yellow, orange) in the parts they want to stand out, and cool colors (blue, purple, green) in the parts they want to blend into the background.

Materials:

- Black or white construction paper, 9 x 12-inch
- Pencils
- Gold or silver Sharpie markers
- Crayons for coloring on white paper (can also be used on black paper)
- Crayola Gel Markers (for coloring on black construction paper only)

Artwork Examples:

