

Art Masterpiece: CASE, Lesson 3 (January)

Jackson Pollock (1912 – 1956)

Autumn Rhythm (1950)

Enamel on canvas, 17' 3" x 8' 9" - The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

Art Style: Abstract Expressionism

Art Terms: Movement, Positive Space, Negative Space

Activity: Drip Painting

Medium: Tempera Paint



Meet the Artist

- Jackson Pollock was born in Cody, Wyoming in 1912, but he grew up in Arizona and California.
- From 1928-1930, Pollock attended the Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles, and in 1930, he moved to New York City to study at the Art Students League.
- Pollock was greatly influenced by the rhythmic use of paint and large-scale art of his teacher, Thomas Hart Benton, who was an American scene painter and muralist.
- When Pollock joined the workshop of David Siqueiros, a famous Mexican mural painter, he was inspired to experiment with different types of liquid paint.
- During the early forties, Pollock's work grew increasingly abstract.
- In 1947, Pollock created his first drip paintings. He would tack a large unstretched canvas to the floor and walk around it while pouring, dripping, and flinging paint onto the canvas. Pollock referred to this style of painting as "Action Painting."
- His Action Paintings showed his emotions and recorded his movement and energy as he worked. Walking around the canvas and applying paint from all four sides gave Pollock the sense that he was "in" the painting.
- In this style of painting, also known as Abstract Expressionism, Pollock did not seek to create recognizable subject matter but rather, he used a spontaneous painting technique to express his feelings and inner consciousness.
- Jackson Pollock died in a car accident in 1956. He was 44 years old. Pollock is remembered best for his drip paintings, but during his lifetime he continually experimented with new modes and techniques.

About the Artwork

Pollock had created his first “drip” painting in 1947, the product of a radical new approach to paint handling. With *Autumn Rhythm*, made in October of 1950, the artist is at the height of his powers. In this nonrepresentational picture, thinned paint was applied to unprimed, unstretched canvas that lay flat on the floor rather than propped on an easel. Poured, dripped, dribbled, scumbled, flicked, and splattered, the pigment was applied in the most unorthodox means. The artist also used sticks, trowels, knives – in short, anything but the traditional painter's implements – to build up dense, lyrical compositions comprised of intricate skeins of line. There's no central point of focus, no hierarchy of elements in this all-over composition in which every bit of the surface is equally significant. The artist worked with the canvas flat on the floor, constantly moving all around it while applying the paint and working from all four sides.

Size is significant: *Autumn Rhythm* is 207 inches wide. It assumes the scale of an environment, enveloping both for the artist as he created it and for viewers who confront it. The work is a record of its process of coming-into-being. Its dynamic visual rhythms and sensations – buoyant, heavy, graceful, arcing, swirling, pooling lines of color – are direct evidence of the very physical choreography of applying the paint with the artist's new methods. Spontaneity was a critical element. But lack of premeditation should not be confused with ceding control; as Pollock stated, “**I can control the flow of paint: there is no accident.**”

Art Style

Abstract Expressionism

- A type of art in which the artist expresses himself purely through the use of form and color.
- The artist's brush strokes, the visible evidence of the process of creating the painting, together with the use of color, are the subject of the painting.

Combination of two art styles: Abstract and Expressionism.

Expressionism: Artists try to express certain feelings about something. They are more concerned with having their art express a feeling than in making the art look realistic.

Abstract: Artists feel that paintings do not have to show only things that are recognizable. In their paintings they do not try to show people, animals or places exactly as they appeared in the real world. They mainly use color and shape in their paintings to show emotions.

Art Terms

Movement

- The arrangement of the parts of a design to create a sense of motion by using lines that cause the eye to move over the work.

Positive Space

- The space of a work of art that is filled with something such as lines, shapes, colors or designs.

Negative Space

- The empty space surrounding shapes or forms in a work of art.

Questions about *Autumn Rhythm*

- What do you see? Anything identifiable? (abstract art – emphasis on line and color – no recognizable subject matter)
- What size do you think the actual painting is? (17' 3" x 8' 9" – Show the students the image of the man standing by the painting in the museum for scale reference)
- What title would you give this painting? (Real title: *Autumn Rhythm* – colors suggest this.)
- How do you think Jackson Pollock created this painting? (point out the large canvas size and how he would walk around and apply paint to all four sides – show *additional support photos)
- Examine the varying thickness of some of the lines in the painting and how the lines “move.”
- How does this painting make you feel? Do you like it? Why or why not?

Activity

Drip Painting – Tempera Paint

Supplies

Gray construction paper – 9" x 12"

Tempera paint – black, white, brown, yellow

(pour paint sparingly, you can always add more if needed)

Paint cups (small paper cups)

Popsicle sticks (one per paint cup)

Pencils

Paper towels (located by the sink)

*Additional support material – photo printouts

****Art Guide Notes****

It might help to have 2 students share paint cups. Each cup needs to have its own popsicle stick. Have them hold the cups over the paper when using the popsicle sticks to drip the paint. This will help from getting paint drips all over the table. Please pour any remaining paint back into the bottles.

Directions

1. Have students write their name and room # on the back of the paper.
2. Explain that they will be creating their own “drip painting”.
3. The students will use popsicle sticks dipped in various paint colors to drizzle and drip paint onto their paper. The popsicle sticks should not touch the paper and the paint should not be flicked onto the paper.
4. Remind students not to “double dip” the popsicle sticks into different colors.
5. Encourage the students to experiment with thin and thick lines. (They will get thick lines if they move the stick slowly over the paper and thinner lines if they move fast.)
6. Remind the students about positive and negative space.
7. The students should focus on the feelings they are creating with the movement of the drips.
8. 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.

***Additional Support Material**

8 ½” x 11” printouts of these images will be available in the supply bin.

You can project the images on the pull down screen one of two ways: use the overhead projector and printouts in the supply bin or the teacher can bring up the images located on the school computer.

*Pollock working in his studio



*Visual reference to show just how large some of his paintings are

