

Arp, Art & Intuition

Can art be random and happen by chance?
Or, must it follow rules and be well-planned?

(art + literature)

A pioneer of abstract art in the early 20th century, Jean (aka Hans) Arp was one of the first artists to be recognized for making intuition, randomness, and chance part of his work. One of the founders of the Dada movement, and an important figure in Surrealism, Arp reinvented the artistic process. The traditional course an artist would follow required training, skill development, planning of each piece, and full control over the final product. Arp was highly educated in art, but purposefully sought to remove himself as much as possible from preliminary planning and process so that his art was a product of chance and spontaneity.

Jean Arp highly influenced abstract art as it progressed into the next century. Contemporary artist Reggie Laurent explains how intuition is part of his painting process: "The shapes I paint are random and flow off my brush effortlessly as if they are a language I can write proficiently, but don't totally understand. I don't 'plan' my paintings. I allow them to evolve and speak to me as I go along."

Paralleling the transformation of visual art in Jean Arp's time, literature also experienced a comparable movement. Spontaneous writing, stream-of-consciousness, sound poetry, and literary surrealism evolved from similar ideals.

This project is an exercise in intuitive drawing and writing. Students will experience a different approach to art-making than planning and controlling, a deviation from process and rules. For some, it may be a liberating exercise. For others, it may just be a small step outside the comfort zone to experience what possibilities may exist.

GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Squeeze glue into a bowl and add a small amount of water to make it easy to stir. This mixture can be prepared ahead of time and placed in air-tight containers.



Materials (required)

Elmer's Glue-All, 7.63 oz bottle (23887-1007); share one across class

Maysville Cotton Warp, Black, 800 yd spool, 8 oz (62800-2050); share one across class

Blick Deluxe White Posterboard, White on One Side, 14-ply, 22" x 28" (13104-1102); share one among six students

Optional materials for adding color and design:

Faber-Castell Grip Watercolor EcoPencils, set of 24 (22076-1024)

Faber-Castell Tempera Paint, 8 oz bottles (00087-)

Faber-Castell DuoTip Washable Markers, set of 24 (22314-0249)

Faber-Castell Grip Oil Pastels, set of 24 (21931-1024)

Faber-Castell Red Line Metallic Pencils, set of 12 (20552-1012)

Optional materials:

Crescent 14-Ply Black Posterboard, 22" x 28" (13113-2002)

Fiskars Gel Pens, 48-pen classroom set (22528-1048)

Maysville Cotton Warp, White, 800 yd spool, 8 oz (62800-1040); share one across class



Preparation, continued

2. Cut posterboard into approximately 9" x 11" pieces.

Process

1. Cut lengths of cotton string 12" to 30" long. Place them in the glue mixture and allow them to become saturated.
2. Remove one string at a time and gently run fingers over it (while holding it over the container) to remove excess glue and avoid drips.
3. Allow the string to fall onto the board in a wandering line. Once it has touched the surface, try not to move it or control its shape.
4. Continue with more pieces of string, allowing them to overlap and go beyond the edge of the board. Allow to dry.
5. The board is now a puzzle-like composition, with lines formed by the strings and open spaces between them. Using a fine-line permanent marker and a stream-of-consciousness approach, write words along the lines and in the spaces. Do not be concerned with grammar, punctuation, or even proper spelling — just write down the thoughts as they occur. NOTE: precede this activity with necessary parameters, such as "no profanity."
6. Along with words, students will fill the spaces with colors, textures, patterns or small illustrations. Provide a variety of materials such as colored pencils, tempera paint, markers, pastels, etc. Encourage students to look for shapes formed by the lines and what images they might represent, then draw that. Do not be concerned with accuracy and try not to view the artwork as a whole — just concentrate on filling one shape at a time. Try not to look to outside influences or search for ideas anywhere other than in one's own mind.

Options

1. For a dramatic look, begin with a piece of black board and use white string.



Step 1: Dip string in a mixture of glue and water and allow it to fall on the board in a wandering line.



Step 2: Use a "stream of consciousness" approach to add words and thoughts.



Step 3: Fill spaces with colors, textures, designs, and small illustrations using a variety of media.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1.2: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Enduring Understanding: Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals.