

Growing Our Own Artists

An art lesson from Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton

MNA Founder Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton (MRFC) was also an artist and a champion of art education. In 1931 she wrote "We must grow our own artists. The material is here awaiting encouragement and cultivation." The art prompts here are inspired by lessons she designed.

Observation

"Teaching the child to observe for himself is of first importance. Many of us go through life 'blind' because of a lack of this early training." MRFC

Color

Go on a rainbow scavenger hunt, looking for places where each color is used (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet). Then do the same thing in nature.

Form

"As the child learns to notice everything about him, it should be called to his attention that each object in nature has its own particular form." MRFC

Look for the shapes within paintings or the general shapes of objects. Can you find something that is a circle? An oval? How about triangles, squares, and rectangles? Some objects combine several shapes. Try drawing something just as a combination of shapes.

Follow-up activity: At home, cut colored paper into shapes, use them to glue onto paper to make a scene.



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Copy work – to learn principles of composition

Choose a painting. Quickly sketch out a small copy of the painting. Don't worry about the details; just try to get the basic shapes and proportions.

As you draw, look for vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines, as well as geometric shapes. Notice the space between things.

Add shading to darken areas of your sketch to match the painting. Consider the relationship of objects in space as you sketch.

Draw what you imagine

Let stories inspire you to create. Develop your own visual vocabulary.

"We can do much to stimulate his already busy imagination by the reading and telling of stories. Such stories should at first be adapted to the child's background... These stories he can illustrate upon the sand table, by building miniature scenes, paper houses and trees, figures and animals of clay, from his own experience and according to his own imagination."



Pottery Mound: Germination
By Delbridge Honanie and Michael Kabotie

Technique

"We must train him in the use of tools with which to express his impressions of the world about him. And while he is learning, to 'see' his world and to attempt to record his impressions with the tools and materials we have given him." MRFC

Emotional mark-making: Think about how lines suggest ideas, emotions, and movement.

Draw what might represent a quiet line, an angry line, and a dancing line.

Draw gentle, cold, calm, and screeching lines.

What other kinds of lines might you draw?

Take a line for a walk: Find a starting point on your paper and begin drawing. Let your line wander freely around the page for one minute, then return your line to the starting point.

Tones and shading

Find a piece of art that is done with only one or two colors in different shades, such as the Hopi weaver by MRFC.

Why do you think she chose not to use more color?

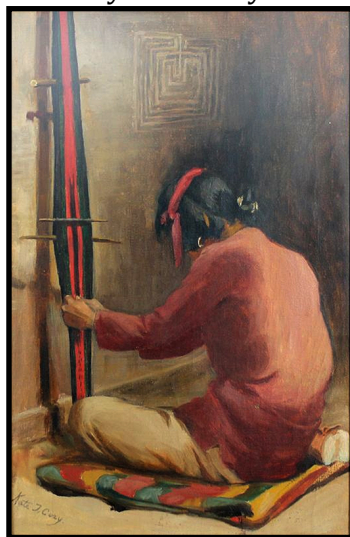
What is accomplished by shading that might be lost with color?

If you were to color this picture in, what colors would you use?

Compare it to the painting of a Hopi Weaver by Kate Cory.



Bv Marv-Russell Ferrell Colton



Bv Kate Cory

Composition - the arrangement of visual elements.

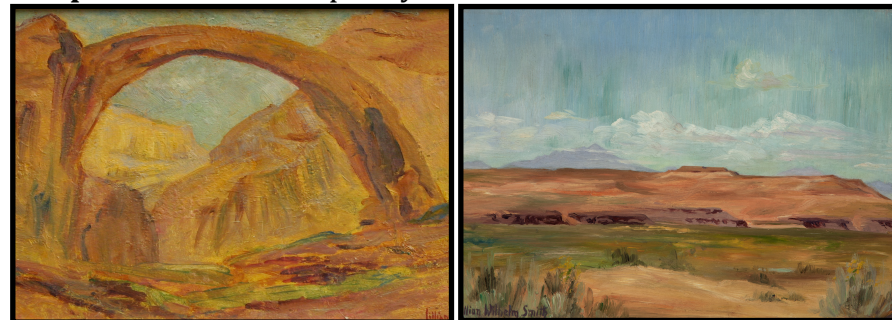
Find a landscape painting and look at how it is framed
Where is the horizon line?

How much is sky? How much is land?

How do those choices change the focus of the painting?

Why did the artist make that choice?

Compare these landscapes by Lillian Wilhelm Smith:



Frame your view

Artists sometimes use a "finder" to help them frame a composition they want to draw. Cut out the rectangle below to create a paper frame that you can use as a finder. Hold the finder up at arms length and look through it to find a nice composition. You can use this finder to look at art in the museum and reframe the compositions. How many new compositions can you find within a bigger piece of art, such as the "Journey to Balance"?

Cut out this grey center

← Keep the black frame →

Look through the window of the
finder to frame compositions