

El Anatsui Acrylic Tapestry

Use classroom paint waste to create
a malleable mesh collage!

El Anatsui is a Ghanaian sculptor who lives and works in Nigeria. He makes large-scale forms from discarded bottle caps and wrappers woven together with copper wire. In speaking about his choice of materials Anatsui said, "Art grows out of each particular situation, and I believe that artists are better off working with whatever their environment throws up." Each piece is made to be malleable, and can be altered each time it is presented. His work cascades down the wall, sometimes even spilling onto the floor. Despite being made of hard metal and plastic, his work looks soft and luscious, like flowing tapestries. As art writer and critic Roberta Smith wrote, these works "evoke lace but also chain mail; quilts but also animal hides; garments but also mosaic, not to mention the rich ceremonial cloths of numerous cultures. Their drapes and folds have a voluptuous sculptural presence, but also an undeniably glamorous bravado."

So, let's make use of what the art classroom environment often throws up — excess acrylic paint!

In this project, wire mesh provides a support for dried acrylic paint film in much the same way. Once dry, the piece can be shaped and reshaped or even connected to another piece to create a giant collaborative classroom installation!

In keeping with the spirit of Anatsui's use of discarded materials and his desire to "draw connections between consumption, waste, and the environment," students can use acrylic paint that would otherwise be thrown away at the end of a class. Acrylic paint is made to be flexible and strong, both on and off a canvas. Excess paint left to dry on a smooth plastic surface such as a plastic sheet protector can easily be peeled off and used to create a beautiful new piece of art.

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

Modification for grades K-2 Substitute burlap for wire mesh. Shape burlap by coating in gel medium and place over object covered in plastic to release when dry. Apply dried acrylic pieces with gel medium.

Preparation

1. Cut wire mesh into 20" x 10" rectangles.
2. View images of artwork by El Anatsui. Discuss how unused materials can be saved for another piece of art.



Materials (required)

Blickrylic Student Acrylics, assorted colors and sizes (00711-); need approximately three half gallons to share across classroom

Blickrylic Mediums, Gel Medium 16 oz (00711-1007); share one bottle across class

Amaco Wireform Mesh, Diamond Mesh 20" x 10 ft (33408-2850); share two rolls across class

Plastic Page Protectors, available at any office supply store

Optional Materials

Creativity Street Craft Sticks, package of 150 (60401-1500)

Utrecht Acrylic Mediums, Iridescent Tinting Medium 16 oz (02029-1056)

Pumice Stone Gel, 16 oz (01765-1141)

Golden Acrylic Gel Mediums, 16 oz Clear Granular Gel (00628-1356)

Big Kid Bead Assortment, 1 lb (60792-1001)

Blick Copper Wire, 24 Gauge 100 ft (33415-1024)

Natural Burlap, 46" x 1 yd (63202-1436)

Princeton Catalyst Wedges and Contours, (03422-)

Recycled plastic and paper wrappers

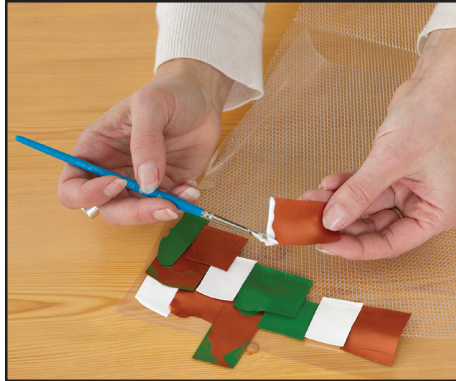




Step 1: Spread acrylic paint evenly.



Step 2: Cut dried acrylic paint into pieces.



Step 3: Apply gel medium and adhere to wire mesh.

Process

1. Spread a generous amount of Blickrylic Student Acrylics or other remnant acrylic paints onto a plastic sheet protector or other non-stick surface such as Baker's Parchment Paper or even a plastic shopping bag. It is best to have something ridged underneath the plastic so the sheets can be easily moved to dry and labeled with names. Corrugated cardboard or chipboard works well. Use a palette knife or cardboard scrap to spread the paint evenly. Design ideas are endless!
 - Use multiple colors on one sheet and swirl together with a craft stick or a wide-toothed comb to make interesting patterns and marbled effects.
 - Use a squeeze bottle to draw a design; after it dries another color can be added in a thick layer.
 - Sprinkle glitter, sequins, yarn scraps, dried flowers, confetti, or sand after smoothing out the paint.
 - Use Blickrylic Gel Medium to make colors transparent.
2. Allow the paint to dry completely. Drying time will vary depending on the thickness of the paint, temperature, and humidity. Allow at least 24 hours. Decrease time by placing in a sunny location or in front of a fan. Once paint is completely dry, the paint will peel off easily in one sheet. The plastic sheets may be reused.
3. Cut the dried acrylic into irregular rectangles in a variety of sizes. Note: if pieces are stored for later use they should not be stacked, as they may stick to each other. Pieces may be stored inside of a sheet protector, and the sheets can then be stacked.
4. Brush gel medium in a line on the reverse side, at the top of the acrylic piece.
5. Beginning at the bottom and moving to the right, place acrylic onto the wire mesh.
6. Continue up the wire mesh, staggering each row.

Options

- Collect recycled materials such as plastic wrappers and bottles to cut up and add.
- Use wire to add beads or other objects.



National Core Arts Standards – Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Responding

Anchor Standard 8: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.