

Space Search

Learn about Pollock's "action painting," then seek out and explore positive and negative spaces.

In the mid-20th century, artist Jackson Pollock became renowned for abstract expressionist artwork that was dubbed "action painting" because of the motion he used while creating them. Pollock did not use a traditional brush or even touch the canvas. His paintings, as many historians have pointed out, were created by gravity applied from above the surface with tools such as sticks, hardened brushes, a basting syringe, or a paint can with a hole in it. Splashing, dripping, and pouring liquid paint across giant canvases, his movements were recorded by photographer Hans Namuth in one of the first art videos.

"New needs need new techniques" said Pollock. Living in an age where technology and culture were rapidly changing, he felt that traditional art techniques and materials could not express the modern world.

Action painting is a fun way to make abstract art and a great way to initiate a lesson on the element of space in art. Not only does the paint create relational space between layers of drips and splashes, it also creates positive and negative spaces between the paper and the paint. Define these spaces with ink lines to bring out each shape and detail.

GRADES 1-5 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

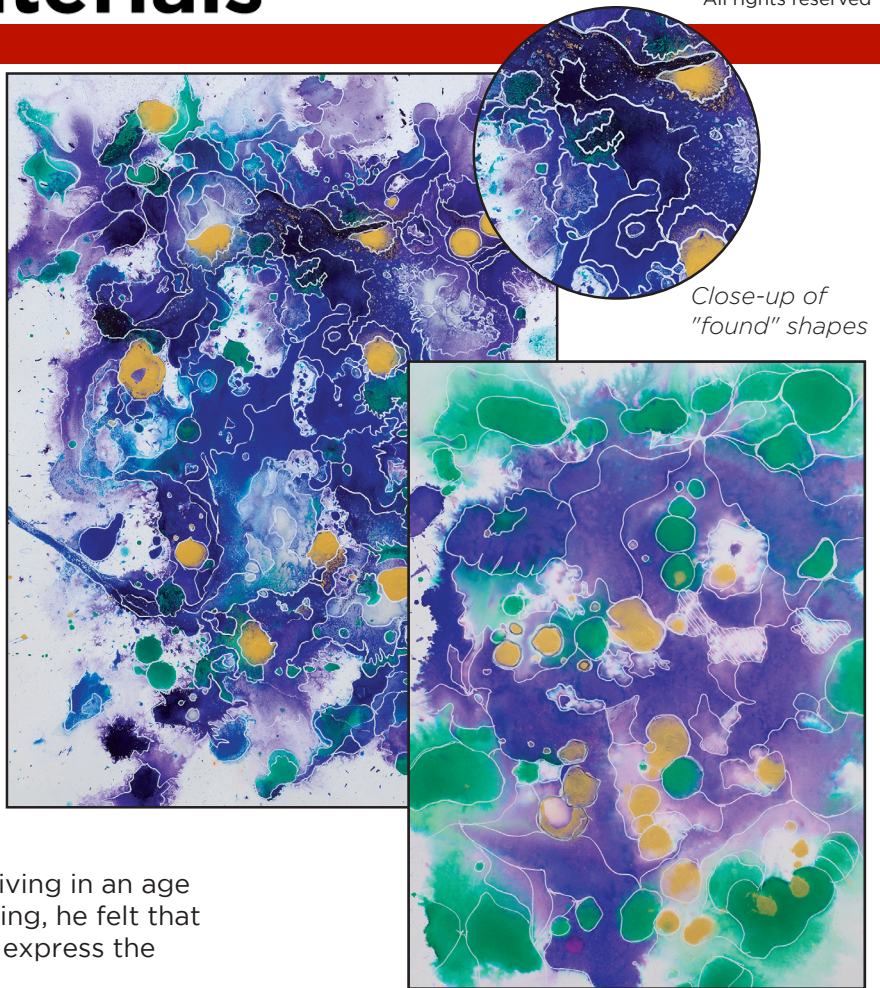
Preparation

1. Pollock was one of the first artists to extensively use synthetic, resin-based paints in place of oil-based artists' colors. For this project, any classroom paint may be used (watercolor, tempera, gouache, acrylic) and should be thinned with water to a pourable consistency. Prepare the paint in small cups or squeeze bottles prior to painting.

Pollock also used paint in different consistencies to produce a variety of effects in a single painting. Sometimes he diluted the paint to the point that it spread out like a puddle. Other times, it was thick enough to create drops and lines that landed on the canvas and didn't move, remaining dimensional when dry.

Process

1. For best results, place watercolor paper on a piece of scrap cardboard or painting cloth to protect floor area from any paint that may spill over. Or, create paintings outdoors.
2. Using dropper bottles, squeeze bottles, or paint poured from a small



Close-up of
"found" shapes

Materials (required)

Blick Watercolor Paper, 15" x 22", 140 lb cold press (10008-1028); one sheet per student

Paint for Action Painting, recommended:

Talens Ecoline Liquid Watercolor, assorted colors, 30 ml dropper bottle (01670-); share five to six bottles across class

Talens Art Creation Gouache, Set of 12, (00894-1129); share three sets across class

Yasutomo Gel Xtreme Pen, 0.7 mm White (21850-1020) or 0.5 mm Black (21850-2020)

Holbein Watercolor Atomizer Bottle, 2 oz (02912-1003); share one among three students

Plastic Squeeze Bottle, 2 oz (04916-1003)

Droppers, pkg of 5 (04958-0000)

Materials (optional)

Speedball Crow Quill Dip Pen and Nibs, (20862-2029)



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Process, continued

cup, drip paint across the paper. Spritz the paint with water so that it runs and spreads to fill the paper. Repeat the process with at least one more color. Aim for a variety of textures, as Pollock did — from wet areas that spread to drops of color that remain dimensional. Allow the paint to dry.

3. Study shapes formed by the dripped paint and trace outlines with an opaque white gel pen. Edges are formed by color and value changes. Some shapes may overlap and some may be very small. Try to find each one, working from one side of the sheet to the other.

Some shapes may appear to represent recognizable objects, such as leaves, flowers, or faces. Add details to develop these, if desired.

4. Glue the paper to a mounting board or frame with a pre-cut matboard for a finished look.

Options

- Dip pens and opaque ink, paint markers, or black permanent ink lines may also be used to outline shapes.

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.

Connecting

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

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

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Step 1: Drip paint onto paper by pouring or using a dropper.



Step 2: Spritz with water to help paint to blend and flow. Repeat drips if desired.



Step 3: After paint dries, find shapes and trace their outline with an opaque gel pen.