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Attached to Bontecou



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Build a better understanding of attachment techniques while emulating the sculptural work of artist Lee Bontecou.

Attachment techniques are a key concept in engineering, carpentry, architecture, and sculpture. They are the basis of any 3D construction. Every single human-made object, big or small, uses some type of attachment technique!

Young or inexperienced sculptors need to understand attachment techniques in order to create durable, lasting artwork.

American artist Lee Bontecou was a master of attachment techniques and is considered a pioneer in relief sculpture. In the mid-1950s and 1960s, she took leftover items from industry and war – such as steel sheets and rods, fabric, conveyor belts, and airplane propellers – and turned them into reliefs that hung on the wall. She attached the various items through welding, which could be considered a fancy way of gluing. And while good glue is important, what really makes a stable sculpture is choosing the right way to glue it together. Each material and item in Bontecou's sculptures had to be thoroughly considered and attached with intent.

To create a successful sculpture, one must know not just the methods of attachment but how to use each method appropriately and situationally. For example, while both the L bracket and tabs can be used to create a wall-like structure, the tabs will create a stronger hold that stays perfectly vertical. The L bracket is better employed when there is additional support, such as by meeting another upright piece at a corner or using gussets. To gain a better understanding, make a miniature representation of each method listed below using paper or cardstock. You now have an attachment technique cheat sheet to use when building your sculpture!

Create a cardboard sculpture in the style of Bontecou, showing knowledge of appropriate attachment techniques.

The challenge in creating this piece is that each attachment technique must be used at least once and in a meaningful way. Before cutting into materials, use Blickrylic to paint the surface black. When dry, cut desired shapes and begin building. When the relief sculpture is completely dry, brush Blickrylic metallic colors over the surface and edges of the piece to recreate the industrial patina look of Bontecou's sculptures.

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

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Materials (required)

Maped Advanced Gel Scissors, 8 1/4", (57659-1008); need one per student

Blick Artist Tape, Black, 3/4" x 60 yds, (24156-1075); share one roll between four students

Blick Stainless Steel Ruler, 18", (56009-1018); share one between two students

Aleene's Quick Dry Tacky Glue, 4 oz, (23884-1104); share one bottle between two students

Blickrylic Student Acrylic Paints, 16 oz, Assorted Colors including Metallic Brass (00711-9076), Metallic Copper (00711-9516), Metallic Gold (00711-9086), Metallic Silver (00711-9326); share at least two colors across class

Blickrylic Student Acrylic Paints, 64oz, Mars Black, (00711-2048); share one across class

Suggested materials for construction:

Utrecht Corrugated Cardboard, 30" x 40", (13900-3040)

All-Purpose Chipboard, 28" x 44", 14-ply, (13115-2226)

Pacon Railroad Board, Black, 6 Ply, 22" x 28", (13105-2102)

Pacon UCreate Plastic Posterboard, Black, 22" x 28", (13155-2022)

Preparation

- 1. Discuss the life and work of Lee Bontecou. Show images of her work and discuss how components may have been attached.
- 2. Cut 24 15" x 15" pieces from 6 sheets of Utrecht Corrugated Cardboard. Each student will need one piece to serve as the base for their construction.

Flange

A flange is a projecting flat rim, collar, or rib on an object that serves to strengthen or attach. To attach a cylindrical object to a flat surface, one must first create a flange. Make small vertical cuts around the base of a cardboard or paper tube. Be sure to make the cuts close together to preserve the curve of the tube. The exact number and width of the cut tabs will depend on the circumference of the tube. Fold the tabs out at a 90-degree angle to attach the tube to a flat surface.

Tape can also be used to create a flange attachment. Use short strips of tape vertically around the base of the tube to be attached. The tape should hang off the base by at least 1/2", fold the tape outward at a 90-degree angle, just like you would with the cut notches, and attach to a surface.



A flange attachment can be hidden by folding the tabs toward the inside of the tube as opposed to out. This does not create as strong of an attachment but will conceal the attachment method used.

L Brace

Just as the name implies, the L brace is shaped like a capital "L". Use a study ruler placed on top of the cardboard or paper to create a straight folded line. When working with cardboard, it is best to go with the direction of the corrugation for a sharp folded line. Thicker materials may require an incision: use a ruler as a straight edge and cut about 1/4th of the depth of the material, then fold the material so that the incised side is on the outside bend of the fold. L brace attachments are great for creating walls, though the walls may lean over time without additional support.



Tab

Tab construction builds on the concept of the L brace, with one basic change: the base is split in different directions to create more stability. Cut two slits, evenly spaced along the length of the cardboard or paper that also measure the same length. Fold the three tabs in alternating directions, creating three points of attachment that can be glued or taped to another surface. This is perfect for creating walls that will not lean.

Gusset

A gusset is a triangle brace attachment that strengthens the angle of a structure. To make a gusset, cut at least two cardboard triangles of the same size. Glue or tape the edge of the triangles to the surface of the cardboard wall you want to attach. Be sure the bottom edges line up and are flush. Then glue the structure to the base. This can also be done with paper, but it is a bit more complicated. Since there is no "edge" to the side of a piece of paper, folded tab attachments will need to be used as well. Gussets can make a great wall but are best used on walls that are not attached at a standard 90-degrees, as the triangles can be cut at any angle to attach.



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Notch Insert

A notch is a slit or cut made at the edge of a material. Two pieces of notched material can be joined at right angles by sliding the notches together, creating an "X" shaped structure that will stand upright. trouble moving, the wires may need to be trimmed. A good rule of thumb is that the wing pieces should be about half an inch shorter than the main center piece. Refine the piece and trim where needed. Washi tape can be used to extend the wires to the wings and add flexibility, if needed. Bends in the wire can be sharpened with pliers.



Tab Insert

A tab is a piece of material that protrudes from the base material. To make a tab, first cut two vertical notches at the base of the material. Cut a straight line, from the side stopping at the vertical slit. Repeat on the other side. It is important the lines are straight and even on both sides. Cut a slit in the base material the width of the tab or slightly larger. Insert the tab into the slit.





Lash/Wrap

Two pieces of material with similar diameters or widths can be attached using a rubber band. Simply stack the materials together and pull the top piece out at an angle, creating an "X" shape. Wind the rubber band over the center, looping though the opposite side, then go back and forth until the band is tight. This can also be done with yarn or string.



Sew

Use string or yarn to attach two pieces of material together with sewing. Use a pushpin to make holes at regular intervals along the edge of a piece. Do the same for the piece to be attached, making sure the holes line up with the spacing of the holes in the first piece. Use a blunt needle threaded with string or yarn with a knot tied at the base of the long end. Start by going up and through one piece and down through the hole in the other piece. Repeat until the end of the material. This is called a whip stitch and is the most basic form of sewing.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

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

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

Presenting

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for

Connecting

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



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ATTACHMENT TECHNIQUES



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Tab: Tab construction builds on the concept of the L brace, with one basic change: the base is split in different directions to create more stability.



Notch Insert: Two pieces of notched material can be joined at right angles by sliding the notches together, creating an "X" shaped structure that will stand upright.



Gusset: A gusset is a triangle brace attachment that strengthens the angle of a structure.



Tab Insert: A tab is a piece of material that protrudes from the base material. To attach a tab to another material, cut a slit and insert the tab.



Lash/Wrap: Two pieces of material with similar diameters or widths can be attached using a rubber band, string, or yarn.



Sew: Use string or yarn and a needle to attach two pieces of material together with sewing.