

Wire and Watercolor Forms



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Learn how a **line** becomes a **shape** that transitions to a **form** in this simple abstract sculpture-making process.

Scientists have devoted much research to the human mind's understanding of spatial visualization and reasoning. Thinking in 3D seems to correlate with being able to grasp mathematic concepts, visualize ideas, and solve complex problems.

Three-dimensional art displays height, width, and depth — visual spatial concepts that fill a physical space and can be viewed from all sides and angles. Two-dimensional works of art — paintings and drawings — are observed only in terms of height and width.

When modeling a 3D object, a designer might begin with a 2D sketch or an armature. Lines that join to form shapes that can then be interpreted as dimensional forms. A sculpture can have a solid, "closed" form where the art is complete within its own shape (think of traditional figure sculpture or the giant head sculptures of Jaume Plensa). Or, it may interact with surrounding space in a more "open" manner. Artist Henry Moore, who revolutionized form in modern sculpture, was known to have said "a hole can have as much shape and meaning as a solid mass."

Developing sculptors will be able to grasp concepts of 3D art when they bend wires into lines, twist them into shapes, then cover them with paper to make open, expressive forms. This process takes advantage of the starch found in rice paper to make crisp, rigid, paintable paper sculpture .

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

Materials (required)

Aitoh Hanshi Paper, 9.5" x 13.25", 7-lb, pkg of 100 sheets (09658-1001); share one pkg across class

Blick Armature and Sculpture Wire, 12-gauge, 350-ft spool (33401-1014); share one spool across class

Mini Long-Nose Pliers, 5" (33083-1010); share one between two students

Blick White Blue, 4-oz (23882-1004); mix with water to share across classroom

LaCons Flip Top Hinged Lid Containers, 3-oz (04955-0000); share one between two students

Chroma Liquid Washable Watercolor, 8.4 oz bottles, choice of colors (86338-); share 4-6 bottles across class

Blick Scholastic Wonder White Brush, round, size 10 (05857-1010); need one per student

Optional Materials

Blick Liquid Watercolor, 8-oz bottles, metallic colors (00369-); share 1-2 bottles across class



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Preparation

1. Cut aluminum wire cut into 20" pieces (30 per 50-ft roll). Each student will need a minimum of three pieces.
2. Create a mixture of water and white glue: two parts water to one part glue. Place in small, snap-lid containers to distribute across classroom.

Process

1. Begin by manipulating the wire into expressive lines. Use pliers, if desired, to form bends, angles, curves, curls, etc. Lines will be mostly two-dimensional. Create at least three wire lines.
2. Transform the lines into shapes by joining. A shape is still mostly two-dimensional and made from closed lines. Use pliers to crimp the end of a wire onto another at any point. Some wire ends may remain loose.
3. Once the wires are joined, bend and twist them to create a three-dimensional form. It's best to think of it as an abstract form, with width, height, and depth. Explore spatial relations of the wires, moving them in and out, and position them so that the form is freestanding.
4. Tear a sheet of rice paper into fourths. Each piece can be torn, further, but it is best to begin with larger pieces and strips. Crumple pieces prior to using to make them more pliable.
5. Using a brush, apply water and glue mixture lightly across strip. It does not need to be saturated. Place it between two wires, wrapping the ends and smoothing it to itself. The first few strips may not cling to the wire, but subsequent pieces of paper will help to hold it in place.

Rice paper has a natural starch that will stiffen when dry, so it's okay for it to sag and fit a little loosely over the wire—it will firm up.



Step 1: Bend sections of wire into expressive lines featuring curves, loops, and/or angles.



Step 2: Arrange wires so that they intersect and join using bending or pliers. Cover with rice paper brushed with glue to make a three-dimensional form.



Step 3: After paper has dried and hardened, paint the sculpture using liquid watercolor.

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Process, continued

5. Continue adding strips and pieces of rice paper. Move the wire form as you work, looking at the sculpture from all sides, including top and bottom. Apply paper from all angles. As more paper is added, decisions will need to be made about which area will be covered by the paper and where to allow open spaces to remain.
6. Once the sculpture has a balance between covered and open areas and it is considered complete, set aside and allow it to dry overnight. Dry time can be reduced by placing in front of a fan or in a sunny location.
7. Clean glue from brushes with warm water and brush soap.
7. The sculpture will be crisp and solid once dry. Wires can still be adjusted to make sure it balances and stands well.
8. Add color to the form using liquid watercolor over the paper areas — it will absorb into the textures and layers quickly. As an alternative, acrylic colors could also be applied to rice paper.

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.