

## **Framing Modern Art: It's Elementary!**

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### **Overview**

Growing up in the twenty-first century is a different experience, compared to growing up in the mid-twentieth century. As an elementary art teacher, I know that art instruction in elementary schools has grown by leaps and bounds! The once a month visit from the art teacher, with her trace, cut and paste construction paper activity has become a more substantial and meaningful twenty-first century experience for today's students. National and State standards for teaching art have been defined and refined. Students receive weekly instruction in visual art, providing them with access to a wide variety of art making experiences, exposure to many materials, a rich vocabulary, knowledge of artists and their works, technology support, and more! I am eager to be able to delve into the concept of Modernism in art and communicating it in a way that will make sense to elementary aged students, using the collection of the Bechtler Museum of Art in Charlotte, NC.

### **Rationale**

#### My School District

I am an elementary art teacher in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District. Located in Charlotte, North Carolina, CMS is a diverse urban school district with 176 schools serving over 136,000 students. Approximately 51% of students in the school district are economically disadvantaged. Our student population consists of (approximately) 4.1% American Indian/multiracial, 4.9% Asian, 41.2% African-American, 15.9% Hispanic, 33.5% White

#### My School

Currently, I teach at Rama Road Elementary, located in a suburban, middle class community in South-East Charlotte. The student population contains nearly 580 Pre-k - 5 students. Our culturally and ethnically diverse student body is comprised of 49% African-

American students, 23% Hispanic students, 18% Caucasian students, 6.2% Multi-Race students, and 3% Asian students. 81% of students receive free or reduced lunch subsidies from the Federal Government. Rama Road is also experiencing a growing Limited English Proficient (LEP) subgroup, which currently includes 20% of the student population. The Rama Road faculty includes 46 certified teachers (all highly qualified) and 14 instructional assistants. Twenty-three of the forty-six certified teachers have earned a Master's Degree (50%). Thirteen of these teachers are Nationally Board Certified. Rama Road is a Title I Targeted Assistance School (TAS).

To enhance student learning, Rama Road has fostered many valuable and effective partnerships with other community groups and organizations. Country Day private school sends seventy-five juniors and seniors to Rama one day each week to serve as "Bigs" to at-risk "Littles" in grades K-5. Sardis Presbyterian Church tutors ten to fifteen Hispanic first and second grade students at the church once each week. Sardis also has purchased or donated numerous school supplies, coats, backpacks, and books for the school. Sardis Presbyterian's most recent purchase includes a Smart Board for our media center. Volunteers from the church tutor after school one day a week, serve as "lunch buddy" tutors and mentors, and volunteer in the office area, media center and classrooms. Providence Baptist Church tutors ten to fifteen students weekly. The Kiwanis Club sponsors a "Terrific Kids" program at Rama where fifteen third through fifth grade students are recognized each month for outstanding character. The Kiwanis also purchases personal dictionaries for each third grade student. A faith-based organization, Have Life Ministries, sponsors a free after school tutoring program for at-risk students (LIFE Academy).

### My Childhood Art Experiences

As an art teacher, I have the pleasure of making visual art a far more creative, enjoyable and meaningful learning experience than I had as an elementary student. I grew up in a small, mostly working-class community in the Midwest. My school had no racial diversity and many students were the grandchildren of southern and eastern European immigrants. Art class for me, as an elementary student, was a monthly visit from the art teacher in our classroom. She showed a finished construction paper object, usually with a seasonal or holiday theme. We traced shapes, cut them and glued them together as shown. Conformity was encouraged. An artist friend from those days told me, in recent years, that she once glued her shapes in her own unique, creative way, much to the

displeasure of the art teacher. We laughed, knowing how much things have changed, for the better!

### My Experiences with Modernism

I grew up in the midst of Modernism, yet I was not aware of it. Today, students have more resources with which to learn about Modern art. There are more museums; mass media and technological resources are available in the classroom. Teaching methods have improved in the arts.

My own introduction to Modern Art occurred during my high school art classes. I recall having great difficulty keeping straight the names of various movements and being able to link images to the appropriate movement. We viewed and discussed many works of art, the artists and their styles. Confused or not, much of what I know and remember about twentieth century art was the result of this high school experience. Over the years, college, visiting museums, galleries, independent reading, and teaching students has provided greater clarity. But I must credit this seminar, "Redefining Modernism," for helping me to better understand this period of art history.

### Objectives

My goal is to make sense of Modern Art for my kindergarten through fifth grade students through role play, discussion, art-making activities and a field trip to the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art for fourth and fifth grade students. Students will know and be able to explain differences in art of the Old Masters and art of Modernists. Students will be able to use the vocabulary of the elements of art and principles of design to describe Modern Art. Art-making activities will directly relate to the Bechtler collection. After completing this unit of study, students in grades four and five will be able to see the art that inspired their project activities.

### Defining Modern Art

The beginnings of Modern Art date back to the nineteenth century and the Impressionists. Artists began veering away from Realism and the element of space in a painting began to flatten. Traditional realistic art of the Old Masters was concerned with creating an illusion of three-dimensionality. The French Impressionists of the second half of the nineteenth century began the break in tradition. Capturing a moment of light and color

was more important than the realistic rendering of the subject. In the twentieth century, many artists became Social Realists, in America mostly because of the Great Depression. Artists wanted their paintings to reflect the lives of everyday people and they embraced radical ideas, such as Communism. The improvement in the economy and the aftermath of World War II brought about a change in philosophy. Communist leaders in countries such as Russia mandated that Social Realism was the only acceptable style of art. Communism lost its attractiveness to artists and they turned toward Abstraction. Artists wanted artistic freedom. The new styles focused attention on American artists. The center of the art world shifted away from Paris to New York.

For the art critic Clement Greenberg, Modern Art was flat and abstract. A canvas is flat and art should not be trying to make it look like it is not flat. For Greenberg's contemporary and rival Harold Rosenberg, Modern Art was a creative event of the artist interacting with the canvas. Abstract Expressionism was an American phenomenon, representing the freedom of artists from any restraints.

### The Role of the Art Critic in Defining Modernism

The art world is very much influenced by art critics. When teaching, students will often ask how an artist became famous, or why a certain painting is famous, or why a certain style is considered art. A critic who has great influence and a wide audience via the media can impact the success of an artist, an art exhibition, or a whole movement. One such prominent critic was Clement Greenberg. His strong opinions may have created controversy, but in reading some of his writings I have a better understanding of Modernism. Greenberg credits the philosopher Kant as the founder of some aspects of Modernist criticism. Kant was the first to criticize the concept or method of criticism itself. Translating that concept into art and specifically, painting, it would be using characteristic methods of painting to criticize painting, thus improving painting, as I understand Greenberg. It's a self-criticism of criticizing art. Can this concept be easily understood by most elementary-aged students? I believe so, with age-appropriate vocabulary and visual comparison. Further, Greenberg said that each art had to decide it's worthiness within its own realm; self-criticism. He noted that, "Modernism used art to call attention to art." Greenberg pointed out that the Old Masters felt the flatness of a canvas made their skill in creating the illusion of three-dimensional space made their art successful. An Old Master painting shows an illusion of three-dimensionality on a flat surface. Modernists were under no such illusions. The image looks flat because it is flat. Old Master art has sculptural illusion of three dimensions. Modernist art has no such

optical illusion. The illusion of an Old Master painting allows the viewer to believe he or she could step into the painting and its three-dimensionality. A Modernist painting allows the viewer's eye to enter the painting to explore its space, but the sense that one can enter a spatial environment is not present.

A second noteworthy critic, Harold Rosenberg, had a different approach to Modernism. Rosenberg believed that Abstract Expressionism in the mid-twentieth century was more of a creative act, the artist interacting with the canvas, than just imagery based on form. Rosenberg and Greenberg both began writing for minor magazines that catered to intellectuals. Rosenberg's essay "The American Action Painters" brought him recognition and established his importance as an art critic.

Explaining Modern Art and Art Critics to elementary students

For the students at my school, I must simplify Modernism in a way that can be understood, combined with specific activities, will result in meaningful student learning and creativity. Simply stated, Modernist art is flat. It may or may not have an obvious subject.

My approach to explaining Modern Art and the influence of art critics will focus on elements of art and principles of design. I will use simple words, simple comparisons and examples of Realism and Abstraction, along with famous artists who represent Old Master Realism and Modern Art. I will make use of available technology, including presentation software, my classroom LCD projector and the internet. Phrases such as "It looks real," "It doesn't look like anything," "It has bright colors," "I see shapes," "It looks real like a photograph," will help students in classroom discussions. Within the realm of a movement such as Abstract Expressionism versus Realism, students will be able to identify the appearance of depth or distance, or the lack of it. Terms such as composition, space, scale, mood, subject, when explained and understood by students will facilitate their ability to make sense of Modern Art.

Art critics, such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, are people who study art and explain who the artists are, what is good or bad art, what the art means and why an artist and his or her art work is important. Critics may not agree with each other, and we may not agree with critics, but they have a lot of influence on our culture. Students will be able to see the difference between color field abstract art and action paintings.

Dividing works into “team Greenberg” and “team Rosenberg” will clarify the differences in the philosophies of the two critics.

Teachers are often prompted to teach students that art tells a story. In the Modernist view, art does not have to tell a story. Art can just be line, shape, color, value, texture and nothing more. One does not have to know the artist’s intent of the painting beyond the art elements and design principles.

The various styles of Modern Art are like neighborhoods in the same city, or like special interest clubs. The idea of a manifesto, a written work of a group’s ideals and beliefs will be explored by fourth and fifth graders, as a way to distinguish various modern art movements. We will explore the concept of a manifesto as a whole group guided writing activity. Once students are comfortable with this concept as a whole group, they will be able to break off into smaller groups to create an art manifesto.

Students often think of art in terms of Realism. Formally trained artists begin in a realistic style, as did the artists of the mid-twentieth century. I will explain to students that the Abstract Expressionist artists began this way. They were concerned about people affected by the Great Depression. Historical events of that time caused artists to turn away from Social Realism to explore less realistic styles of painting. With the influence of the art critics, Greenberg and Rosenberg, artists followed one philosophy or the other. Some artists focused on color and shape, with no reference to figures. Others focused on action, movement and references to figures. After about ten years there were more changes in Modern Art and other styles became the focus of Modern Art.

#### Getting to Know the Bechtler Family

The Bechtler Museum opened in January of 2010. I was unfamiliar with the Bechtler family prior to January. Who are the Bechtlers? Hans and Elizabeth (Bessie) Bechtler lived in Switzerland. Hans studied engineering in Switzerland and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He met his wife at a party after a ski outing. She came from a family who collected art. In addition she was interested in music. Walter Bechtler, brother of Hans, also had an interest in art and encouraged Hans to visit museums and galleries. They began purchasing art in 1950. Some of the art works were displayed in their homes, while other pieces were installed in their business offices.

As a married couple, Hans and Bessie began to acquire a variety of art works, often including artists' preliminary sketches. They were interested in both famous and emerging artists, especially those who were avant-garde. They wanted to know the artists, as well as their works. The Bechtlers were fond of entertaining and their parties included artists whose work they admired. Art work filled the Bechtler home. The two Bechtler children grew up in a home filled with art, music and artists. They lived with art that many only experience in an art museum. Imagine sitting on furniture designed by Alberto Giacometti, or walking on a rug designed by Joan Miro!

Hans was fortunate to have started and maintained successful businesses focused on air conditioning and air filtration. The financial rewards allowed him and Bessie to amass a collection of three thousand works of art. Their son, Andreas, and daughter, Dany, both developed a love and appreciation of art. The Bechtler children assumed responsibility for the art collection upon the passing of Hans and Bessie. The art was divided equally between brother and sister, leaving each with fifteen hundred works each. The art works now belonging to son Andreas were the impetus to create the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art. But one may wonder, why Charlotte, North Carolina?

The Bechtler family lived in Charlotte at one time, and this is now the home of Andreas. The desire to share this art collection with the public sparked the idea for building a museum to house the art works. Hans Bechtler brought his business to Charlotte in 1960, dividing their lives between Charlotte and Switzerland. Andreas now lives here, so it made sense to build the museum in Charlotte.

In the heart of uptown Charlotte, North Carolina, the building itself is quite striking, and a work of art in its own right. Bechtler family friend, Italian architect Mario Botta was chosen to design the museum building. It is a four story building with a large basement storage area for the bulk of the collection not on display in the galleries. The largest gallery space is the fourth floor, designed as a cantilever on the street side of the museum.

## **Strategies**

To create a meaningful curriculum for elementary students, I will use the knowledge I have gradually accumulated over forty years, combining it with what I am learning in my seminar at the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art. Students in each grade level, kindergarten through the fifth grade will participate in the activities that I design.

Though we are “reframing” modernism in our seminar, I will have to define, or fame it before I can truly reframe for them. To understand what it is to be a collector or art, students will have to look at a group of art works, decide which they would want to collect, and respond verbally. The colors or shapes may be appealing, or the work may evoke imaginative connections to nature, for example.

To better understand the role of the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art and its inspiration for this curriculum unit, I will spend time and create activities to acquaint students with the Bechtler family and their passion for the arts. The Bechtlers each became a subject of Modernist art works, when Andy Warhol created contemporary portraits of them. Assuming roles of art collectors, students will be able to evaluate works of art and identify their own tastes and preferences within this experience. The choices made by the Bechtlers, now part of this museum, provide the basis for the art-making activities for my students.

As I share information with students about the Bechtler family and how the museum came to be, students will be able to apply character traits, such as respect for art and artists; responsibility, in caring for and preservation of the art works. As parents, Hans and Bessie Bechtler raised their children in an environment surrounded by art and artists, thereby instilling in them the same character traits of respect and caring. Further, in the realm of character traits, the trait of sharing is exemplified in Andreas Bechtler, who chose to share his inherited art works with the public in this beautiful facility.

The North Carolina Standard Course of Study for Visual Arts defines the concepts for creating a meaningful visual art curriculum. The activities included in my art curriculum are designed to address these skills, and are inspired by pieces in the Bechtler collection. These activities will be created in the realm of both two- and three-dimensional art projects. Many of the works selected to be the basis for an art making activity will be a two-fold activity; one a two-dimensional activity, the second, a three-dimensional activity. Students will be using language arts skills to communicate verbally and in written form during their focus on Modernism. Content related vocabulary is essential to meaningful understanding of visual art.

In order to stay within the parameters of this curriculum unit, my focus will be grades three through five, though it is my intention to include all of my students in the study of Modernism. Some of the activities are designated for specific grade levels; however, many may be adapted to work for any elementary grade. The art making projects are designed to address the art elements and design principles, as well as the North Carolina



Standard Course of Study for Visual Arts. Some projects have both a two- and three-dimensional component. Work will be completed on an individual basis, in small groups and as a whole group. Projects connect to prior knowledge and emphasize cross-curricular links. With the cooperation of our media specialist and technology coordinator, students will make use of books and internet resources. Bechtler Museum visits are available for fourth and fifth grade students. We will access the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art web site and make use of video presentation programs. Students may create podcasts as a way to share ideas and reflections. Classes may share their Bechtler-inspired art works on an art class Wiki. If possible I will make use of student-produced video for children to talk about their experiences. Sharing knowledge and activities with a far-away school via Skype would further enrich this learning experience for Rama Road Elementary students.

I spent time in the Bechtler Museum looking at the works in the galleries, and read about the works in the Bechtler Museum catalog. From these sources I chose artists who will be the foundation of the activities I will provide for my students.

There are several works by Sam Francis in the Bechtler collection. As a college student, I became aware of Francis and his art. During a trip to New York, I saw the work of Sam Francis at the Museum of Modern Art, when I encountered *Big Red*. I so attracted to this painting that I returned to look at it several times during that visit. I know that students will enjoy the opportunity to work with paint and experience the ‘drip and flow’ of the medium.

I will begin the introduction of Modernism by acquainting all students with pictures of the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art building and its location, relative to our school. Students will next learn about the family behind the museum, in order to understand how the museum came to be. Before moving on to art work-specific inspired projects, students will complete activities that will allow them to compare and contrast Modern Art and Old Master art. Students will role-play as art collectors as a way to comprehend how the Bechtler family amassed a collection of art large enough to create a museum. Some art activities have both a two-dimensional and three-dimensional project interpretation of a specific piece from the museum. The curriculum is fluid and adjustable in order to take advantage of the wealth of inspiration found at the Bechtler Museum!

Classroom Activities

Throughout this unit, students will be looking at both traditional and modern art using art reproduction posters from my classroom inventory, as well as images via presentation software. We will talk about collecting art, art critics and choose vocabulary that will allow each student to describe modern art. With the cooperation with the Rama Road Technology teacher, students will be able to visit the Bechtler web site, where they may collect information and view art works

*The Museum Building: What is a cantilever?*

To understand a cantilever design in building, students will use three dimensional materials to create a structure with an element that appears to be projected or suspended in space. Students will experience how a structure must counterbalance the projection in order to be stable.

*Be an Art Collector*

We will discuss where an art collector may go to purchase art. We will determine other ways a collector may learn of an artist or art work (reading publications or using the internet). We will talk about the Bechtler family and how they went about acquiring their art collection. We will discuss Hans Bechtler's education in the United States, that his education allowed him to be fortunate enough to have successful businesses. His success allowed him to have the means to purchase art.

We will identify which character traits apply to the act of collecting, inheriting art and creating a museum for the public.

Students will be able to understand purposeful collecting of art works through role-playing in this activity. I will use art reproductions from my classroom inventory, displayed in the classroom. There will be a variety of styles and time periods represented which should appeal to varying tastes. Pieces will have a number for identification and a price attached. The prices will be adjusted to fit the grade level math skills. Students will have a budget. Fifth grade students should be able to use math calculations to determine how to use the budgeted funds. To help students identify modern art works, I will use examples of Bechtler paintings available on the web and find a traditional realist counterpart for comparison. Students will be introduced to art critics—Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg—whose ideas about Modernism will be presented in student-friendly language that compares the critics side by side. The concepts that art

does not have to tell a story, the painting surface is flat, and art does not have to try to create a false illusion of three dimensions will appeal to any student who says, “I can’t draw,” meaning, I can’t draw realistically. For students who draw with ease, Modernism feeds the creative spirit.

*What is a critic and what are differences in Realism and Modern Art?*

It is said that art tells a story. It can, but according to Clement Greenberg, Modern Art does not have to tell a story. Students will learn that Clement Greenberg was a man who wrote about art. He had ideas about art. He influenced artists and others with his writings. Artists became well known because of him. He helped people understand why Modern Art was real art. To help students find meaning in Modern Art, we will examine examples of traditional and modern side by side. We will do this as a whole class guided activity, using side by side comparisons of two works of art projected on a screen. We will practice the process with several pairs of art works. We will analyze how the artists use line, color, shape, texture, space, and subject matter. We will answer some questions: Is there anything in the painting that you may easily recognize? What are some ways you can talk about this picture? What can you say about the color? Is it warm or cool? Is it light or dark? Is it bright or dull? Does it have lots of colors or only a few colors? Does the painting have any lines you can identify? What kinds of shapes do you see? (geometric? free-form?) Does the painting look like it has texture or pattern?

*Jean Tinguely and the Elements of Art*

The Bechtler Museum has a large collection of works by Jean Tinguely. Some of the Tinguely works are currently on display in the museum. According to the Museum catalog, “Tinguely turned everything he touched into art, even when he wrote a business letter.” Tinguely’s works included moving sculptures and works on paper. Circles or circular shapes are prevalent in the work currently on exhibit at the Bechtler Museum His paintings are colorful with shapes, writing, pattern and movement, all things that will fascinate young students.

I will introduce students to Tinguely through a video slide presentation. We will examine and talk about his painting *Albatross* in terms of the shape and color, the pattern, rhythm and movement. Students will create a work on paper with drawing and paint media. The subject will be circles and the goal will be to create free-form circular shapes that show spontaneity and movement, vivid color, combining paint and drawing media.

*Tinguely: Shape Becomes Form*

Students will re-interpret *Albatross* as a three-dimensional art work. We will use the circle subject, making spherical forms using plaster-infused gauze. Our goal will be to create the same sense of rhythm and movement in a sculptural form, creating a balance of color, line and texture throughout the form.

*Alexander Calder: Shape and Color*

Hans and Bessie Bechtler collected a number of works by Alexander Calder. Among those works is a tapestry, *Glacier with Coloured Petals*. Students will enjoy his use of simple shapes and primary colors. To introduce Calder, students will view a sampling of his works in a video slide presentation, with the focus on *Glacier with Coloured Petals*. Since students may be unfamiliar with the term glacier, we will look at pictures of glaciers. This will allow students to connect the shape in Calder's tapestry with pictorial image of the glacier. I will give students the opportunity to compare and contrast landscapes by presenting an image of *Snowdonia* by Sidney Richard Percy, a British landscape painter of the early eighteenth century.

For their art-making activity, students will create a paper collage image that will mirror the primary color scheme with black and white. Students will be able to work on cutting skills, the creation of simple organic shapes, with the emphasis on elements of line, shape, and color; and design principles of pattern and balance.

One of my college professors of painting frequently used the expression, "push paint." What a Modernist thought for young students! One of our activities will allow students to do just that.

*Sam Francis: Runs, Drips, no Errors*

I will introduce my students to Sam Francis, a California painter who lived in Paris in the mid-twentieth century. I will share with students my favorite Francis painting, *Big Red*, from the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Currently, the Bechtler Museum has paintings of Sam Francis exhibited. *As for Appearance II*, is a small work painted in the early 1960s, and was acquired by Andreas Bechtler, son of Hans and Bessie. Its organic forms and splattering of paint are pure form and color. Students learn to categorize

shapes in art. In their regular classroom setting, students are taught the named-- or geometric shapes. Learning to create organic, or free-form, shapes is an important activity, in that students tend to think of shapes in terms of the named geometric shapes. The work of Sam Francis emphasizes organic shapes and expressive color. We will explore the expressive use of color and organic shape in a small painting (9 x 12 inches) and follow up with a second larger painting proportional to the size of *Big Red* (24 x 14 ½ inches).

### *Thunderbird and Sculptural Form of Niki de Saint Phalle*

*The Firebird*, a sculpture by Niki de Saint Phalle, sits on the sidewalk near the entrance of the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art. It is a focal point, making it easy to find the museum, with its mirrored mosaic surface and its sheer size. People of all ages are attracted to this sculpture. The artist often used birds as a subject for her art work. Students will use this as a topic for a clay sculpture, using white, low-fire ceramic clay. We will focus on form as an element of art, the vocabulary of sculpture, specifically additive techniques. Students will use additive techniques to join clay pieces, creating a bird-like form that will be balanced to stand. We will study options for surface decoration of the piece when fired.

### *Joan Miro: Unusual Pigments*

Following the theme of organic shape, expressive color and animal imagery, second graders will focus on the work of Joan Miro. The organic shapes, bright colors and child-like images capture the attention of young students. Hans and Bessie Bechter were not only collectors of art works, but they developed close friendships with artists. Miro was one of those artists. While dining with Hans Bechtler and others, Miro spontaneously began to draw in a book, using whatever drawing tools were handy, including wine and food condiments.

Students will delight in having an opportunity to use color that does not come from paint, pencil, marker or crayon. A video slide presentation will allow students to see works of Miro and compare them to works of Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, whose work in the nineteenth century represents traditional realism. After looking at samples of work by Miro, students will identify lines, shapes, colors and motifs that are common to the examples. Students will use lines and shapes to create a figurative image. Color pigments will include concentrated orange juice, ketchup, mustard, tomato sauce, and tea.

### *Alexander Calder: Creating and Binding a Book*

Students will get to know Alexander Calder through his works in the Bechtler collection. The Bechtler Museum has a number of Calder's works in a variety of media. We will look at examples of Calder's art in video slide presentation format. Art elements of line, color, shape; design principles of movement, unity and balance will be emphasized. Students will be able to identify elements and principles in his works and apply these to their own work. Students will also be able to make comparisons of Calder's work to that of Jean Tinguely and Joan Miro.

Students will create a bound book with four sheets of paper, folded in half, sewn on the fold, for a total of 16 pages. We'll create a cover and design end pages. Each page of the book will have collage images that echo the style and colors of Calder. The content of the book will reflect the four seasons. Students will be writing captions or a rhyming passage to go with each image.

### *Figurative Soft Sculpture*

Every year, fourth grade students at my school complete a soft sculpture fabric doll. With this focus on Modernism, students will be able to adapt the color and whimsy of work by Niki de Saint Phalle in this project. Students will use a pre-sewn muslin doll shape for the sculpture. Using a checklist, tasks will be completed, beginning with a pencil sketch on paper, progressing through drawing on the fabric, coloring with markers, stuffing the doll, and sewing the opening. The final details are hot glued to the doll on a school day dedicated to having all classes come to the art classroom to choose trimmings to be attached by adult volunteers.

### *Picasso: A Cubist style Portrait Painting*

Among the fifteen hundred works of art in the Bechtler Museum collection are three works by Pablo Picasso. Fourth grade students are both amused and fascinated by Picasso's portraits in the Cubist style. *Femme au Chapeau*, a print, and *Peintre et son modele*, a tapestry, will serve as sources for a Cubist portrait experience. The tapestry is interesting, in that Nelson Rockefeller financed the production of these tapestries. For twelve years Picasso and Rockefeller chose one painting per year to be reproduced. An

edition of three tapestries was produced for each painting, under the supervision of Picasso. Students will draw and paint a Cubist style portrait.

### *Picasso Interpreted in a Clay Relief*

As Picasso reproduced *Peintre et son modele* as a tapestry, students will reinterpret their paintings as a low-relief clay piece, concentrating on using cut clay slab pieces to build up a relief image. Students will be able to make a transition into a three-dimensional image, exploring art elements of space and form.

### *Writing: Art as the topic*

Students in the fourth grade focus on writing, as this is a year where their writing skills are tested by the state of North Carolina. We will learn about art critics Clement Greenburg and Harold Rosenberg, who had differing views on the essence of Modernism. We will use a side-by-side comparison of their views and we will look at artists whose work they supported. Students will decide whose position they prefer, expressing an opinion in writing.

### *Printmaking: Imagery Inspired by the School of Paris*

At the time of this writing, The Bechtler Museum of Modern Art is showing an exhibit entitled "School of Paris, European Abstraction, Post World War II" This show features works by seven artists, including Alfred Manessier and Gustave Singier. We will view examples of these artists, analyzing them in terms of color, shape and texture and style. To put these artists in historical context, we will read a brief biography and identify events in our country that were going on at the same time. Since Manessier's prints show an influence of Asian art, we will discuss the cultural atmosphere in the United States following World War II, as it relates Manessier. We will research American artists/printmakers of the same era, in order to find similarities and differences in their work.

Students will create two plates of an abstract image of shapes that relate to the style of images by Singier and Manessier. Students will use poster board, textural fabrics and fibers to create the relief images. Students will learn to properly roll printmaker's ink on the plates and make a series of double image prints in a variety of colors.

### *Clay Sculpture: Interpreting a Two-Dimensional Image from the School of Paris*

A three-dimensional adaptation of the printmaking image will allow students to develop spatial thinking. We will define low and high relief aspects of sculptural form. Students will use a slab of white low-fire clay. The surface will be built up through an additive process of building forms from shapes and attaching them to the slab. In addition, students may use a subtractive process by etching lines and shapes into the piece.

### *Painting: Mark Tobey*

The Bechtler collection contains paintings by Mark Tobey, an American Abstract Expressionist. A painting project will focus on Abstract Expressionism with Tobey's works for reference. Students will enjoy the interaction with the paint and paper, with the process accompanied by music. With images available from the Bechtler Museum, we will look at these, *Pacific Drift*, and *Extensions of Time*, and other Tobey works, comparing them to the work of Jackson Pollock, contrasting them to the work of color field painters, such as Mark Rothko. Prior to beginning this painting, students will be familiar with art critics Greenberg and Rosenberg. They will identify this work as an action painting. We will decide whether Tobey's work is aligned more with the philosophy of Greenberg or Rosenberg. Students will be able to identify the art elements and design principles evident in Tobey's paintings.

### *Group Effort: Create a Style, Ideas and a Manifesto*

Students will collaborate in small table groups for this activity. There are many Modern art styles and groups. Some artists belonged to more than one group. The student groups will choose four styles to look up during their weekly technology class. They will collect basic information, such as the dates the group was active, names of artists who were part of the group, and the country where the artists lived and worked

After studying the numerous movements, styles and "isms" of the twentieth century, student groups will collaborate to create a style name, develop beliefs and ideas about art and write a short manifesto to state their position. They will work together to create an art work that represents their movement and philosophy.

### Field Trip to the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art



After looking at images of art works, including some from the Bechtler Museum, students will have a greater appreciation of what they learned when they see the actual works in the museum. The Bechtler Museum offers field trip opportunities for fourth and fifth grade students. I will arrange for student groups to visit the museum.

I want students to be able to see the art works that were the basis for the projects that they completed in the classroom.

### **Outcome**

At the end of our study of Modernism, students will know how to identify modern art in terms of purpose and use of art elements. They will know about the Bechtler family and their art collection

Students should be able to describe, explain, analyze, compare/contrast, and understand where Modernism fits within the chronology of art history. They will know that art can tell a story, but that it does not have to tell a story. They will have an increased art vocabulary that will facilitate describing any work of art. They will gain insight into modern art movements through the experience of hands-on activities. Looking at modern art will result in the ability to articulate a response to the work, describing the art elements and pointing out design principles. Students will be able to find the Bechtler web site and know that they can visit most museums via the internet. Fourth and fifth grade students will visit the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, where they will see the art and architecture they studied in the classroom.

My curriculum is a fluid set of learning activities that may take on additional activities as the work in the museum is changes or as special exhibits change. The activities may be adapted to any grade level. Changes to activities and strategies will be made as needed, depending on the needs of the students.

### **Resources and Supplies for Learning Activities**

Web site: [www.bechtler.org](http://www.bechtler.org)

Bos, Harriet P. , John Boyer, and Michael Godfrey. *Bechtler Museum of Modern Art*. Charlotte, NC: Belk Printing Technologies, 2009.

This is the Bechtler Museum catalog. All activities are based on the Bechtler art collection.

### **Art Making Projects**

*The Museum Building: What is a cantilever?*

Materials:

Wood blocks, Lego® type blocks, small styro cubes and cut foam core board, glue, straight pins, toothpicks

Vocabulary:

Structure, cantilever, balance, counter-balance, form, space

Students may work alone, in pairs or groups (up to four). The key to success is that the structure is balanced and stable.

*Be an Art Collector*

Students will learn that people buy art work that they like. Students will make judgments about art and use counting skills to “purchase” art works.

Materials:

Art reproductions from classroom inventory with a number, a price attached and an envelope for “money”, Paper “money” in units of ones for third grade (and younger grades), A paper to write down the number of the painting to be purchased

Vocabulary:

Subject, line, shape, color, texture, collector, gallery, studio

Students will assemble on a floor mat for a discussion of what it means to collect something. Ask if anyone collects things, such as dolls, baseball cards, pencils, for example. Artists like to sell their work. They might sell from their studio, from an art gallery or from the internet. Many people enjoy art and want to buy it for their home or work place. Some people have extra money to use for special interests they may have. Some people like to buy art work.

Each student will be given “money” to be used to buy paintings that are available. There is a number on each painting for identification, plus the price in dollars. The prices will be single digit numbers. Students may walk around the room to look at each painting.

Upon making a choice, the money needed to buy the painting will be placed in the envelope and the student will take the picture back to their seat at the table. Students may be able to buy more than one painting. Once students are either out of money, or decide they are satisfied with their choices, we will stop to discuss the choices. Each student will explain what influenced the decision. Was it the subject? The color? The shapes? Nothing specific, but it just was appealing? Where would you hang this painting in your home?

*What is a critic and what are differences in Realism and Modern Art*

Materials/resources:

Images of art, art posters, art transparencies, or LCD projector and video slide software (i.e. PowerPoint®), chart paper or other paper for recording information to show comparison.

Questions to ask:

Is there anything in the painting that you may easily recognize? What are some ways you can talk about this picture? What can you say about the color? Is it warm or cool? Is it light or dark? Is it bright or dull? Does it have lots of colors or only a few colors? Does the painting have any lines you can identify? What kinds of shapes do you see? (geometric? free-form?) Does the painting look like it has texture or pattern?

Guide students through this process. These and other questions may be produced in document form and this activity may be used for a small group activity as a review or follow-up activity.

*Jean Tinguely and the Elements of Art*

The Bechtler Museum of Modern Art has a large number of works by Jean Tinguely. Students will look at examples of his work, including *Albatross*. Our focus will be on direct painting using circles as the subject. Students will paint circular shapes. When the paint is dry, students will add drawing and writing to the painting.

Materials:

18x24" white paper, Tempera paint, brushes, containers for the paint, newspapers, oil pastels

Vocabulary:

Shape, color, pattern, rhythm, movement

After a demonstration for students, they will paint circular shapes on the paper without first drawing with a pencil. This will create a sense of spontaneity and movement. Any incidental drips will add to the sense of movement. In the next class meeting, we will again look at *Albatross* and other Tinguely works before resuming work on the painting. Students will use oil pastels to draw circles, lines, writing and small circle shapes throughout the paper. Emphasize rhythm and movement. We will compare the paintings to those of Tinguely to assess whether we captured the spirit of Tinguely.

*Tinguely: Shape Becomes Form*

How would Tinguely's concept of colorful, rhythmic circles look in three dimensions?

Materials:

Balloons, blown up to about 5-6" in diameter, plaster gauze strips, but in 3" pieces, water in bowls, newspapers, string, 12-15" lengths, paint, glitter, glue, florist wire (18 gauge), jewelry pliers

Vocabulary:

Sculpture, three-dimensional, form, overlap

Spread newspapers on work area at table. Put a water bowl within reach of two students. Caution students to keep the plaster gauze dry, away from the water. Each student will make 1-3 forms. Tape a piece of string to the balloon. Take one piece of gauze dip in water, remove within a few seconds, let drip in bowl, place on the balloon. Pieces must overlap each other. Continue the wetting and placing of the gauze until the balloon is completely covered. The string end that is taped to the balloon should be covered and the remainder of the string should be outside the form. Repeat this process for each balloon. In the second class meeting, use tempera paint to add color to the sculpture. On dry paint, glitter, yarn, feathers, or sequins may be attached with liquid glue. For a three unit piece, cut one length of floral wire in half. Use the pliers to create a loop at each end of each piece. Bend one piece slightly. Wrap the other wire around the middle of the first wire. One half of the second wire will be bent vertically to be the hanger; the other half will stay in a horizontal direction to hold one of the spheres. Tie the strings of the sculptures to the loops in the wire ends.

*Alexander Calder: Shape and Color*

Cut paper collage. This project is based on Calder's *Glacier with Coloured Petals*

Materials:

12x18" paper, white, plus choice of a second color, 9x12" paper, choice of two colors, Scissors, glue sticks or white liquid glue, Markers, Power Point with reproductions of Calder works and photographs of glaciers

Vocabulary: line, shape, collage, free-form, geometric, color, primary colors

Use the white color for the base paper. Cut a "glacier" shape from the second large paper. Cut oval-type or circular-type shape from the smaller papers. Glue the papers to the white paper. Use markers to create a parallel line pattern that follow the edges of the shapes.

*Sam Francis: Runs, Drips, no Errors*

Students will look at work by Sam Francis using Power Point and the classroom LCD projector. Students will be describing the color in terms of its brightness, looking for pattern, visual texture, defining shapes by category (geometric or free-form). How do the runs and drips of his painting suggest movement? Students will create a painting.

Materials:

9x12 white paper, Watercolor paint or watered down tempera, brushes, water containers, Salt, Paper towel or plastic wrap

Students will wet the paper, paint into the wet surface with freeform shapes. Sprinkle salt on the wet paint. Visual texture may be added by using scrunched paper towel or plastic wrap.

*Thunderbird and Sculptural Form of Niki de Saint Phalle*

#### Materials:

Low fire clay, cone 06, white or red, a piece 2x2x3 inches (approximately), Clay tools, Bowls of clay slip, Power Point presentation of images, work of Niki de Saint Phalle from the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, samples of realistic sculpture of similar subject matter (figurative, bird)

#### Vocabulary:

Form, sculpture, clay, score, slip

Show the images to students and provide biographical information about Niki de Saint Phalle. Ask students to identify similarities in the realistic sculpture and the modernist sculpture of Niki de Saint Phalle. Discuss how they are different. Show students how to twist the clay piece to make two parts.

Students will create a standing abstract bird form. Roll or form the clay into a thick log. Create a U shape with the clay and flatten the ends. This makes the base. Divide the remaining clay into two pieces. Form a cylinder/log and flatten one end. Take the clay tool and create textural lines in the clay (score marks) at the flat end. Make marks on the base form where the cylinder will be attached. Apply slip to each marked piece and join the clay. Rub the clay to eliminate the line separating the two pieces. Work the clay to form a head by pinching and squeezing the clay. Use the clay that remains to form wings. Tap the edges of the wings where they are to be attached to the body of the work. On this flat surface, make score marks and rub slip over the marks. Score mark the body where the wings will attach. Join the pieces and rub out the lines between the clay pieces. Use the clay tools to create details on the bird. Student initials will be marked on the bottom of the sculpture.

#### *Joan Miro: Unusual Pigments*

For this painting activity, students will compare and contrast Old Master Corot paintings with the work of Joan Miro. Students will analyze Miro in terms of shape and color. Students will use simple shapes and line to draw a flat figure. Many of Miro's shapes are "almost" geometric. Students have often thought that a child made Miro's pictures. His style is easy to compare to student work. This project will make use of non-traditional pigments suggested below. Make the shape outlines with a black crayon over a light pencil sketch.

#### Materials:

Power Point slides of Corot and Miro figurative works, 12x16" white paper, black crayon, Paint brushes, sketch paper, pigments: mustard, ketchup, fruit juice concentrate, Kool-Aid, tea, coffee, Color pencils. Cornstarch may be used as a thickener. It's best to experiment with these materials before using them in the classroom.

#### Vocabulary:

Figurative, shape, color, pigment

### *A Calder Style Book*

The Bechtler Museum has a number of works by Alexander Calder. We will look at examples of Calder's art, as well as *Fetes* from the Bechtler collection. Students will create a bound book with four sheets of paper, folded in half, sewn on the fold, for a total of 16 pages. We'll create a cover and design end pages. Each page of the book will have collage images that echo the style and colors of Calder. The content of the book will reflect the four seasons. Students will be writing captions or a rhyming passage to go with each image.

Materials:

White paper, four sheets per students, 8x18", Sketch paper, Embroidery floss, sewing needles, Template for sewing holes, push pins, Color papers, construction and tissue, assorted sizes for cutting shapes, Glue sticks (or liquid white glue), Pencils, scissors, Cardboard for book covers (chip board, recycled cereal box cardboard, or railroad board), Fabric or paste paper for book cover, Printed gift wrap paper for end sheets

Vocabulary:

Template, collage, binding, organic, line, color, shape

This activity will take four to six class sessions (40 minutes) to complete. To assemble the book, the pages will be creased and bound. Students will plan for each two page spread, using the sketching paper. With color papers, create a two page spread. Allow the glue to dry before closing the pages. The cover pieces should be cut slightly larger than the pages (cut 8 1/2" x 9 1/2"). Cut the cover material in one piece, allowing for 1/2 inch to be folded over to the inside. The end sheets will cover the edges of the cover material.

### *Figurative stuffed sculpture*

I will apply a Modernist theme to a soft sculpture doll project that fourth grade students have made every year. This particular began in the 1990s by the former art teacher at Rama Road Elementary. Students look forward to this activity every year. The fabric for the doll is sewn prior to the beginning of the project. Students plan the design, sketch the design on the fabric, outline with black pen, color with markers, then stuff and hand sew the opening. Near the end of the school year, a full day is dedicated to the embellishing of these dolls.

Materials:

Unbleached muslin, allow about 5/8 yd. per student, Poster board doll template, Sketch sheet on copy paper with outline of the doll, Checklist for each student with step by step tasks, Pencils, black ink pens, markers or fabric markers, Polyester stuffing and stuffing sticks (or long handled 1" paint brushes), Straight pins, sewing needles, thread, Assorted

finishing trims: doll hair, fabrics, beads, ribbon, trims, buttons, fake fur, craft doll hats, etc., Hot glue guns for adult use

Vocabulary: soft sculpture, form, three-dimensional, whip stitch, seam

With close to 100 fourth grade students, adult volunteers are necessary to make this activity run smoothly. Prepare a length of muslin to make ten dolls. Recruit parents or volunteers who are willing to sew the doll fabric. Trace the doll template. Sew a ¼ inch seam before cutting. Leave an opening where indicated on the pattern. Clip the seam allowance where needed and turn inside out. The fabric is ready for the students.

Use a pencil to draw the face of the doll. Draw over the pencil lines with black pen. Draw the body design, both front and back with pencil. Draw over these lines with black pen. Use color markers on the muslin. Stuff the doll, beginning with the feet and the hands. Stuff the head and arms, the legs and the body. Three straight pins will hold the opening for hand sewing. Students will use a whip stitch to sew the opening. The extras (trimmings, etc.) are hot-glued to the dolls. Adult volunteers do this. All dolls are finished and a day is designated for students to come to the art room with their doll. The materials available to be glued are set out on art tables. Students choose materials and take them to the glue table, where the students tell the glue person where to attach the trimmings. We normally do this near the end of the school year. A substitute teacher travels to classes for art instruction on that day.

*Picasso Cubist portraits*

*Femme au Chapeau* will be featured, along with other Picasso Cubist portraits. Students will study the flatness of these portraits and his technique of showing mixed views of facial features.

Materials:

12x18" white paper, Power Point slides of Picasso portraits, Sketching paper, pencils, Crayons, Watercolor paints, brushes, water in containers, Newspapers

Vocabulary:

Cubism, portrait, shape, line, space

After looking at the two Bechtler Museum examples of Picasso, students will view other examples of Cubist portraits. Students will describe differences observed when comparing Picasso portraits with the Andy Warhol portraits of the Bechtler family. Students will begin with practice sketches. Show students how to draw a profile of a face. Encourage students to change the position and orientation of facial features, as Picasso did. The project will use crayon resist technique with watercolor paint. Students will lightly draw on the project paper. Draw over the sketch lines with crayon, making the marks heavy. Paint the portrait and background with watercolor paints.

*Printmaking: Imagery Inspired by the School of Paris*

Students will be producing an edition of relief prints from two printing plates. Students will learn proper inking technique, how to operate the print press, strategies for manipulating color, how a print differs from a painting or drawing, how relief prints differ from other printmaking methods.

Materials:

Printmaking ink and brayers, Plexiglas for rolling ink, Paper, white and colors, Spray bottle with water, Towel for blotting paper, Poster board, Liquid glue, Scissors, Sketch paper, Power Point slides showing work of Manessier, Singier, and Pierre Soulages from the Bechtler collection Vocabulary:

Print, brayer, relief, abstract, registration, collagraph, edition

Students will sketch a composition of lines and shapes, not to duplicate Manessier and Singier, but to create an abstract image that takes from the style of their work. The printmaking plate will be made of poster board. The layers of shapes will be cut from poster board and textural fabric, such as nylon net or burlap. Fiber, such as thin yarn, string, or thread will create linear elements. Once the collage is finished, it will be sealed with latex paint. A second collage will be made with the same materials and a slightly different composition. The print process will involve printing both collages on the same paper, but in different colors. An edition of five prints will be completed using different color combinations.

*Clay Sculpture: Interpreting a Two-Dimensional Image from the School of Paris*

The base of the work will be a slab, suggested size, five by eight inches. Build up the surface by attaching a cut slab pieces. Score the cut piece and the area on the base slab where the piece will be attached. Brush on slip, attach the clay piece. Another option is to create a shape with sides. Attach the side edges to the slab. This method creates an air space. An opening must be made to allow hot air to escape during firing. A hole or holes may function as a decorative element on the front of the piece, or a hole may be made on the back of the piece. After bisque firing, the sculptures will be glazed and fired a second time.

Materials:

Low fire (cone 05 or 06) white or red clay, rolled into slabs, Clay tools, Clay slip in bowls, brushes, ceramic glazes

Vocabulary:

Slab, form, score, slip,

*Painting: Mark Tobey*

Materials:

Paper, 18x24", Acrylic paint, watered down, Paint brushes, rinse water in cups, Instrumental music (on CD) with a rhythm, Oil pastels



Vocabulary:

Paint wash, rhythm, movement, unity, visual texture

Students will paint a wash over the paper and allow it to dry. A second layer of paint will be added using brush strokes, paint drips, or fingertip marks. The rhythm of the music fits well with Rosenberg's definition of Abstract Expressionism art being an event. The final step will be mark-making with the oil pastels.

*Group Effort: Create a Style, Ideas and a Manifesto*

With information gathered in the computer lab, small groups of three to four students will brainstorm a group name, collaborate in creating an image and write about their ideas.

Materials:

Note cards with names of Modernist art styles, Paper and pencils for writing, Tempera paints, brushes, water, 18x24" paper

Vocabulary:

Manifesto, philosophy, style, movement, timeline

### **Notes**