

MAY 24, 2019–JANUARY 12, 2020

ARTISTIC LICENSE

SIX TAKES ON THE GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Teacher Resource Unit

Artistic License: Six Takes on the Guggenheim Collection, the first artist-curated exhibition mounted at the Guggenheim, occupies the entire rotunda and celebrates the museum's extensive holdings of twentieth-century modern and contemporary art. Curated by six contemporary artists who each have helped to shape the Guggenheim's history with their own pivotal solo shows—Cai Guo-Qiang, Paul Chan, Jenny Holzer, Julie Mehretu, Richard Prince, and Carrie Mae Weems—the presentation brings together collection highlights and rarely seen works from the turn of the century to 1980. *Artistic License* features nearly three hundred paintings, sculptures, works on paper, and installations, some never before exhibited, that engage with the cultural discourses of their time—from the utopian aspirations of early modernism to the formal explorations of mid-century abstraction to the sociopolitical debates of the 1960s and '70s. On view during the sixtieth anniversary of the Guggenheim's iconic Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building, the exhibition honors the museum's artist-centric ethos, furthers its commitment to art as a force for upending expectations and expanding perspectives, and offers a critical examination of its collection.

Artistic License: Six Takes on the Guggenheim Collection is made possible by



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Artistic License is organized with the artists by Nancy Spector, Artistic Director and Jennifer and David Stockman Chief Curator, supported by Ylinka Barotto, Assistant Curator, with Tracey Bashkoff, Director of Collections and Senior Curator, and Joan Young, Director, Curatorial Affairs.

This Resource Unit focuses on works and ideas examined in *Artistic License* and provides techniques for exploring both the visual arts and other areas of the curriculum. This guide is available on the museum's website at guggenheim.org/artscurriculum with images that can be downloaded or projected for classroom use. The images may be used for educational purposes only and are not licensed for commercial applications of any kind. Before bringing your class to the Guggenheim, we invite you to visit the exhibition, read this guide, browse our website, and decide which aspects of the exhibition are most relevant to your students. For more information on scheduling a visit for your students, go to guggenheim.org/group-info or call 212 423 3637.

About the Six Takes:

Drawing on their own influences, practices, and concerns, each of the artist-curators selected thematically, conceptually, or formally relevant works to show on one of the six ramps in the museum's rotunda, creating distinctive sections and new readings of the collection:

Cai Guo-Qiang: *Non-Brand* 非品牌 **High Gallery and Rotunda Level 1**

Curated by Cai Guo-Qiang (b. 1957, Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China), this presentation explores the primordial passion that ignites the creation of art. It examines early figurative and otherwise unpredictable paintings and works on paper by artists known for their abstract or conceptual practices. Featured artworks include Vasily Kandinsky's *Munich* (*München*, ca. 1901–02), Piet Mondrian's *Chrysanthemum* (1908–09), Mark Rothko's *Untitled (Still-Life with Rope, Hammer and Trowel)* (ca. 1937), and works on paper by Hilla Rebay, who was also the Guggenheim's first director. In addition to exhibiting such "unbranded" works by renowned figures as well as pieces by artists who did not enter the art-historical canon, Cai shows examples of his own early figurative painting. On the occasion of *Artistic License*, he produced gunpowder paintings that pay homage to certain iconic abstract canvases in the Guggenheim's collection. These new works comment on Cai's own trademark style, wittingly revealing the complicity of artists, curators, and museums in the exhibition of "brands" that are so sought after by visitors.

Cai draws upon Eastern philosophy and contemporary social issues as the conceptual basis of his art. Through a site-specific approaches, he aims to respond to the history of local cultures. Taking the shape of explosions and installations, his work is imbued with a force that transcends the two-dimensional plane in order to engage with society and nature. *Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe* (2008), his solo exhibition at the Guggenheim, revealed his nuanced explorations of art's relationship to the cosmos and his methodological approach, which attempts, through visible means, to represent the unseen world.

Paul Chan: *Sex, Water, Salvation, or What Is a Bather?*

Rotunda Level 2

This presentation investigates the theme of bathers in Western art history, as well as attendant ideas about water, relationships between pleasure and the human body, and exile in the canon of twentieth-century art. Chan's selections range from Fernand Léger's late painting *Starfish* (*L'Étoile de mer*, 1942) to Lawrence Weiner's Conceptual works of the 1970s, Willem de Kooning's canvas . . . *Whose Name Was Writ in Water* (1975), and Laurie Simmons's photographs of dollhouse-scale bathroom scenes from the 1970s.

Paul Chan (b. 1973, Hong Kong) is known for a diverse practice that includes animated video projections, drawings, and sculptures, as well as for founding the experimental publishing house Badlands Unlimited. The artist's 2015 solo exhibition at the Guggenheim, *The Hugo Boss Prize 2014: Paul Chan, Nonprojections for New Lovers*, presented an installation that reimaged the notion of the moving image.

Jenny Holzer: *Good Artists*

Rotunda Level 6

This presentation illuminates the gender disparity within and exclusion of women from the art-historical canon. Holzer selected works made exclusively by female artists, including Lee Bontecou's relief *Untitled* (1966), Louise Nevelson's monumental wall sculpture *Luminous Zag: Night* (1971), Adrian Piper's performative self-portrait *The Mythic Being: Smoke* (1974), and a selection of Chryssa's canvases and neon works from the 1960s and '70s.

For much of her career, Jenny Holzer (b. 1950, Gallipolis, Ohio) has used language to deconstruct how meaning is created in our patriarchal, consumer-oriented society. The artist's 1989–90 retrospective at the Guggenheim featured an LED sign that wound its way around the outer surface of the parapet in the museum's rotunda, creating a dizzying electronic arcade of aphorisms and declarations comprising all of her work to date.

Julie Mehretu: *Cry Gold and See Black*

Rotunda Level 4

This presentation reflects on how trauma, displacement, and anxiety in the decades during and after World War II found expression across cultural boundaries and in a wide range of art. Selected works include the paintings *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (March 1962) by Francis Bacon, *Will to Power* (*Volonté de puissance*, January 1946) by Jean Dubuffet, and *Years of Fear* (1941) by Matta (Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren), as well as Romare Bearden's gelatin silver print *Evening 9:10, 461 Lenox Avenue* (1964) and David Hammons's body print *Close Your Eyes and See Black* (1969), a recent acquisition.

Julie Mehretu (b. 1970, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) is best known for her large-scale paintings, drawings, and prints that layer and integrate abstract forms with architectural imagery. Her work is inspired by the energy, topography, and sensibility of global urban landscapes, modernism, and political unrest and revolution, and it explores the intersections of power, history, and dystopia. Her Guggenheim exhibition, *Julie Mehretu: Grey Area* (2010), featured paintings commissioned by the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin.

Richard Prince: *Four Paintings Looking Right*

Rotunda Level 3

This presentation investigates the uncannily coherent formal qualities of the Guggenheim's international holdings of abstract painting and sculpture from the 1940s and '50s, questioning, ultimately, how taste is formed. Selections from the museum's collection by Martin Barré, Conrad Marca-Relli, Georges Mathieu, Kenzo Okada, and Judit Reigl, among others, are presented. In addition, Prince is lending two canvases by Stuart Sutcliffe (an early member of the Beatles), whose work both emulated and influenced the abstract style of his time, and an unattributed Jackson Pollock painting formerly in the collection of the artist and collector Mercedes Matter, a close friend of Pollock's.

Richard Prince (b. 1949, Canal Zone, Panama), one of the most renowned members of the Pictures Generation, pioneered the use of appropriation in his early photo-based works and "Monochromatic Joke" paintings to comment upon the way desire is created and perpetuated in the mass media. His survey exhibition at the Guggenheim, *Richard Prince: Spiritual America* (2007–08), showcased this critical early chapter in his career and his subsequent forays into the history of twentieth-century painting and pulp imagery.

Carrie Mae Weems: *What Could Have Been*

Rotunda Level 5

This presentation focuses on the formal and metaphoric resonances of a strictly black-and-white palette across different decades, mediums, and genres, presenting it as a conduit to expose inherent biases of museum collections focused on the Western art-historical canon. Highlighted works include Joseph Beuys's installation *Virgin (Jungfrau)*, April 4, 1979; Franz Kline's *Painting No. 7* (1952); Mark Rothko's *Untitled (Black on Gray)* (1969/70); examples from Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas Series*, which she began in 1973; and Martin Puryear's sculpture *Bask* (1976).

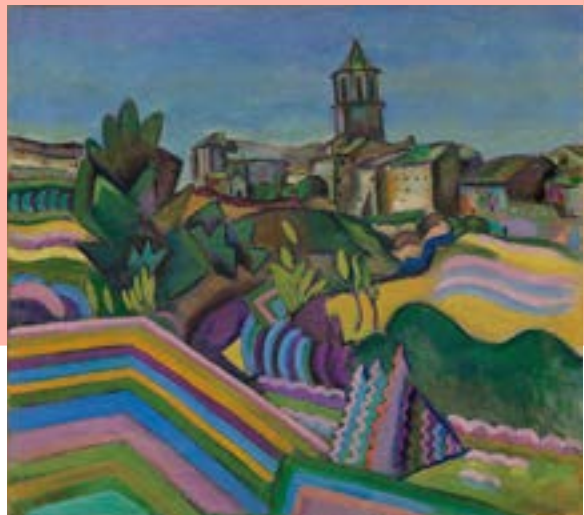
In her artistic practice, Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953, Portland, Oregon) interrogates systems that construct power, race, gender, and class in visual representation. The Guggenheim's 2014 survey exhibition *Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video* traced the evolution of Weems's career, from her early documentary and autobiographical photographic series to the conceptual and philosophically complex works that have placed her at the forefront of contemporary art.

When I stand in front of a canvas, I never know what I'm going to do—and nobody is more surprised than I at what comes out. —Joan Miró¹

◀ CAI GUO-QIANG SELECTS JOAN MIRÓ'S *PRADES, THE VILLAGE*, SUMMER 1917 ▶

Drawing on his own interests, Cai Guo-Qiang explores the passion that ignites the creation of art. He selected early figurative works by individuals who later became known for their abstract or Conceptual approaches. Cai chose more than sixty works from the museum's collection, displaying them alongside examples of his own early representational paintings made while he was an art student in China. The pieces are installed salon-style in the Guggenheim's High Gallery. Joan Miró's *Prades, the Village* (*Prades, el poble*, summer 1917) is among the selection. Painted when the artist was only twenty-four years old, the work is an unusual figurative example from Miró's oeuvre.

Miró was born in 1893 in Barcelona. The son of a goldsmith, Miró grew up in a commerce-oriented family. When he was fourteen, his parents sent him to school to learn skills that would help develop the family business. Miró simultaneously enrolled himself at the local art academy. Although he was briefly employed as a clerk, he yearned to be a painter. It was only



Joan Miró, *Prades, the Village* (*Prades, el poble*), summer 1917. Oil on canvas, 65 x 72.6 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 69.1894 © 2019 Successió Miró/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

after Miró became seriously ill that his father allowed him to resume his art studies. Between 1907 and 1918 he experimented with various styles and used the landscapes of the Catalan villages of Mont-roig, Cambrils, Siurana, and Prades as inspiration for his work. Catalonia, the artist's homeland in northeast Spain, would continue to influence his art throughout his life.²

Miró produced *Prades, the Village* during these formative years. In the painting, he combined several techniques, including the sharply defined angles and the flattened perspective related to **Cubism** and the unnatural intense colors of **Fauvism**. The composition features the tower of Santa Maria Church, which is located in the center of the mountainous town of Prades.

In 1920 Miró made his first trip to Paris, where he met Pablo Picasso. From then on Miró divided his time between Paris and Mont-roig. In Paris he associated with the best-known contemporary artists, and in Catalonia he spent time among the nature and the landscapes of his youth.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Prades, the Village*

- ▶ Have students look at the painting for two minutes. Then have them turn away from it. Make a collective list of all the things they can remember. Then have them view the painting again. What did they miss?
- ▶ Ask students to take a series of imaginary journeys into this painting's landscape. How might a bird traverse it? A rabbit? A horse? A snake? How many possible routes were students able to find?
- ▶ Within this work, Miró combined several different approaches to painting. Some components seem to be invented from the artist's imagination. Other parts appear to be observed from the world around him. Are there also aspects of this work that seem to combine observation and imagination?

Have each student divide a sheet of paper into three columns: (1) Invented, (2) Observed, and (3) Combination. When they are finished, create a collaborative list and see if students agree or disagree on how to categorize the various aspects of this work.

- ▶ In the center of the Catalan village of Prades stands the Gothic Santa Maria Church. Compare the photograph of the building with Miró's interpretation. What do they have in common? How do they differ?



Santa Maria Church, Prades, Spain. Photo: Stockfresh

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- **A Special Landscape**

The mountainous region of Catalonia especially attracted Miró. Have students think about a landscape that has importance for them and discuss what about it has personal significance. Then challenge each student to create an image that not only conveys what the landscape looks like but also the special meaning it has for them. After they are done, have students title the work and write a short essay that describes the place and their relationship to it.

- **Architecture Personalized**

In *Prades, the Village*, Miró includes the recognizable profile of Santa Maria Church. For this activity, make a low-contrast 11-by-17-inch black-and-white printout of your school building. Provide each student with a copy and have them add colors, forms, and other details that express their personal vision of this familiar architectural form.

- **Learning about Catalonia**

Miró felt a strong affinity to Catalonia, the land of his youth to which he returned throughout his life. We see references to Catalonia in both his paintings and politics. Coming of age amid the Catalan independence movement, Miró held a deep-rooted hope for its political autonomy. Although he would move to Paris, he maintained his identity as a Catalan and as a freedom fighter.³

Catalonia has a unique history. Although part of Spain, it has its own distinctive culture that dates back to the ninth century. Ask students to investigate the region's history and its ongoing fight for independence.⁴

- **Art Styles and Influences**

As a young artist, Miró was inspired by other painters, including Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh, and by several stylistic movements that were primarily centered in France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, and, later in his career, Surrealism. Have students research these artists and movements and ask them to find evidence of these influences in Miró's painting *Prades, the Village*.

- **Miró's Evolving Style**

Miró completed *Prades, the Village* when he was in his twenties. Have students research the works listed below, which are more mature works by Miró from the museum's collection that can be found by searching by their titles on guggenheim.org. Ask them to compare and contrast those works with *Prades, the Village*. What differences do they find? Are there also similarities?

The Tilled Field (La terre labourée), 1923–24

Landscape (The Hare) (Paysage [Le lièvre]), 1927

Dutch Interior II (Intérieur hollandaise), 1928

Painting (Peinture), 1953

*I go on my bicycle down to the beach and search for a new image of the landscape. . . .
When I see a puddle, I stare into it. Later, I don't paint a puddle, but the image it calls up
within me. —Willem de Kooning⁵*

< PAUL CHAN SELECTS WILLEM DE KOONING'S ... WHOSE NAME WAS WRIT IN WATER, 1975 >

For the Guggenheim exhibition, Paul Chan developed his theme around the meanings of water, migration, and exile in order to reconsider the context and history of “the bather” in twentieth-century art. The figure of the bather is a common trope in art history, appearing in examples across time periods and cultures, from ancient Greek sculptures to early modernist paintings. Using a research question—What is a bather?—Chan explored how this concept has appeared in various works, including photographs, Conceptual text-based art, and twentieth-century paintings. One of the works Chan selected is Willem de Kooning's painting . . . *Whose Name Was Writ in Water* (1975). While this work does not literally represent a person bathing, it relates to water and migration, two of Chan's chief research concerns.

Willem de Kooning was born in 1904 in Rotterdam, Netherlands. At the age of twenty-two, de Kooning immigrated to the United States by sneaking onto a shipping freighter as a stowaway.⁶ When he arrived, de Kooning settled briefly in Hoboken, New Jersey, and worked for the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project. In the 1940s he began to gain recognition for his early nonrepresentational works and by the 1950s was considered a central figure of Abstract Expressionism. Throughout his career, de Kooning continued to gain acclaim for his abstractions and inventive depictions of women and landscapes.



Willem de Kooning, . . . *Whose Name Was Writ in Water*, 1975. Oil on canvas, 195 x 223 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 80.2738 © 2019 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

While de Kooning lived in New York City, his work often referenced the urban environment. Later, when the artist moved to the beach town of East Hampton, New York, water became a favorite subject. De Kooning was particularly inspired by the movement of waves and light on the shore. He said: “I got into painting in the atmosphere I wanted to be in. It was like the reflection of light. I reflected upon the reflections of water, like the fishermen do.”⁷ Every day De Kooning rode his bike along the shoreline and drew from the scenes he observed, creating fluid compositions reminiscent of the rolling ocean.⁸ In . . . *Whose Name Was Writ in Water*, de Kooning's watery brushstrokes fill the canvas.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: . . . *Whose Name Was Writ in Water*

- ▶ After students initially observe the painting, encourage them to come up with one word to describe it to a friend who has never seen it before. Ask each student to share their word. What words were similar or different? Why did they choose these words?
- ▶ When he made this work, de Kooning was inspired by living near the ocean. Ask students if they can find any similarities between the painting and nature. What about the painting might remind them of the ocean? Do they visit any places in nature that inspire them?
- ▶ Encourage students to think more about the artist's process by having them imagine and act out what painting this work might have looked like. Ask them to identify one or two brushstrokes and try tracing de Kooning's movement. Ask students to pretend they have their own imaginary paintbrush: Can they trace one single line throughout the painting? What did they notice about this process?
- ▶ The painting's title comes from an epigraph on the tomb of the nineteenth-century British poet John Keats. De Kooning titled his painting after visiting Keats's grave in Rome. Keats, who died from tuberculosis at twenty-five, asked friends to leave his name off his tombstone, instead outfitting his grave with a unique inscription: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." With high school groups, share the title's backstory. What do they think about the title's meaning? Why do they think de Kooning chose this title?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- **Word-Association Poem**

De Kooning gained inspiration from being near the beach in East Hampton, New York. He used these experiences to create many of the abstract works he made in the late 1960s and '70s. What personal associations do students have with water? What role has water played in their lives?

After students have discussed these questions with a partner, have them generate a list of five nouns, five adjectives, and five verbs they associate with the word "water." Then ask them to incorporate a selection of these words into an original haiku exploring these associations. A haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry that contains just three lines and does not necessarily need to rhyme. The first and last lines have five syllables, and the middle line has seven. Have students experiment with this traditional five-seven-five construction, drawing from the word bank they created. Ask them to use any leftover words to title their work.

- **Taking Another Perspective**

When de Kooning described his process of viewing the ocean, he said he watched the water "like the fishermen do." Ask students to think about who else might look at the ocean in a unique way. (Answers include a surfer, a boat captain, and even a fish!) Have students write a diary entry from this person's or animal's perspective. What does this character notice about the ocean? Why are they observing it?

- **Capturing the Water**

Artists are sometimes defined by specific terms or genres, but they often work in many different ways throughout their career. De Kooning became known for being an Abstract Expressionist even though some of his artwork was inspired by urban scenery and natural landscapes.

Have students spend time observing . . . *Whose Name Was Writ in Water*. How does this painting resemble water? Ask them to focus on one area of the work that most reminds them of an aspect of water. Then have them draw this detail of this painting with a pencil, capturing what most evokes the qualities they identified. Encourage them to focus on the lines and shapes de Kooning used.

After completing their sketch, students can use their drawing as a starting point for their own abstracted painting of water. Ask them to think about what types of colors, textures, and lines might best express water in their unique work.

But when I fell in love with black, it contained all color. It wasn't a negation of color. It was an acceptance. Because black encompasses all colors. Black is the most aristocratic color of all. . . . You can be quiet and it contains the whole thing. There is no color that will give you the feeling of totality. Of peace. Of greatness. Of quietness. Of excitement. I have seen things that were transformed into black, that took on just greatness. I don't know a lesser word. —Louise Nevelson⁹

◀ JENNY HOLZER SELECTS LOUISE NEVELSON'S, *LUMINOUS ZAG: NIGHT*, 1971 ▶



Louise Nevelson, *Luminous Zag: Night*, 1971. Painted wood, 105 boxes, 304.8 x 490.2 x 27.3 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Singer 77.2325 © 2019 Estate of Louise Nevelson/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Jenny Holzer has chosen from the Guggenheim's collection over fifty works made by female artists to line the top ramp of the museum's rotunda. One selection, Louise Nevelson's *Luminous Zag: Night* (1971), is 10 feet tall and over 16 feet wide. It consists of 105 boxes filled with rows of saw-toothed wooden pieces, all painted with a matte black paint. The work's play of vertical and horizontal zigzags creates a complicated rhythmic pattern suggesting a musical composition.

Louise Nevelson was born Leah Berliawsky in 1899 in Kiev. By 1905 her family had emigrated to the United States and settled in Rockland, Maine. Her parents believed that education

was for everyone, and Louise, her two sisters, and her brother "had the same opportunities that anyone had."¹⁰

In 1920 she married Charles Nevelson, a wealthy ship owner, and moved to New York City, where she spent the rest of her life making art.¹¹ Nevelson collected **found objects** from the city's sidewalks and brought them back to her apartment to create **assemblages**. In her compositions, individual pieces may appear simple, but the work becomes powerful when the parts are brought together and viewed as a whole.

On a trip to Quiriguá, a pre-Columbian archeological site in Guatemala, Nevelson became inspired by the **stelae**, stoic monuments that are made of limestone and depict figures in low relief.¹² Her large wall assemblages, which recall the stela's tall stone shafts, are similarly monochromatic and also use shape and line to create shadow and depth.

Nevelson pushed boundaries in her career. She produced larger-scale works that incorporate weather-resistant materials, such as metal, that allowed her work to be displayed not only in galleries but also in public spaces. Louise Nevelson Plaza in Lower Manhattan, for example, features several of her sculptures, allowing more viewers to encounter her artwork.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Luminous Zag: Night*

- ▶ Give students two minutes to closely observe *Luminous Zag: Night*. Ask them to carefully search for details others might not see. After looking closely, students should turn to a neighbor and share what they noticed. In a larger group, have students discuss why they were drawn to certain shapes and aspects of the composition.
- ▶ *Luminous Zag: Night* can be thought of almost like a musical rhythm. The individual shapes, angles, and found objects have a movement that dances and encourages viewers to explore the surface. Have students follow a line in the composition and imagine it as music. Ask them to use their bodies to produce a rhythmic sound that represents the shape they noticed in the work. Then have students create a composition by sharing their rhythmic sounds in a circle, or allow one student to be the conductor and call upon classmates in different orders to make various compositions.
- ▶ *Luminous Zag: Night* contains 105 individual boxes. Give each student a printout of the work and have them write about one specific box using descriptive language to describe the lines, forms, and textures they see. When finished writing, student should draw the same box they wrote about. Next have them trade papers and circle all boxes in the work that match their classmate's written description and drawing. What do the descriptions of the boxes size and shape say about Nevelson's signature artistic style?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- **Pre-Columbian Inspiration**

Nevelson was inspired by pre-Columbian stelae.¹³ Have students explore these resources on Maya stelae: Khan Academy's article on stelae and de Young Museum's interactive on stelae.¹⁴ Next give students printouts of Nevelson's *End of Day—Nightscape IV* (1973)¹⁵ and *Mirror Image 1* (1969).¹⁶ Encourage students to look for similarities and differences between the stelae and Nevelson's assemblages. Have them write about aspects of the ruins that may have inspired Nevelson.

- **The Color Black**

Share printouts of Nevelson's *Black Wall* (1959),¹⁷ *Sky Cathedral* (1958)¹⁸ and *Black Zag I* (1968).¹⁹ Ask students to look closely at these pieces and make a list of any emotions or feelings the works elicit. Next, as a group, discuss the role of the color black in Nevelson's work. After some conversation, share the quote that begins this section and ask students if hearing the artist's perspective changes their initial thoughts about the color black. Do they agree or disagree with Nevelson's assessment of black?

- **Compare and Contrast**

Nevelson's *White Vertical Water* (1972)²⁰ and *Luminous Zag: Night* are similar in size but different in many ways. Share printouts of both works and have students make a Venn diagram to compare them. Students then should use the Venn diagram as an outline to write an essay about the works describing their similarities and differences in form, line, shape, and color.

- **Found-Object Assemblage**

Have students watch "Louise Nevelson: A Conversation with Six Artists"²¹ and then collect variously sized found objects from their home, such as buttons, puzzle pieces, beans, beads, pieces of wood, game pieces, and household recyclables. Every student will need a shoebox or wooden crate to explore making different compositions using their found objects. Remind students to create a sense of balance in terms of size and shape and to think about creating a symmetrical or asymmetrical composition. Once they decide on a composition, students should glue each piece in place. When the glue has dried, have students completely paint their assemblage in a solid color. Show these works individually or group together multiple boxes to produce a Nevelson-inspired installation.

*I am interested only in the unknown
and I work for my own astonishment.*
—Roberto Matta²²

◀ JULIE MEHRETU SELECTS MATTA'S YEARS OF FEAR, 1941 ▶

As part of her section, titled “Cry Gold and See Black,” Julie Mehretu chose *Years of Fear* (1941), a painting by Matta (Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren) in the Guggenheim’s collection. This powerful canvas echoes Mehretu’s curatorial interest in how trauma, displacement, and anxiety is reflected in many artworks created during times of war.

Born in 1911 into an upper-middle-class home in Santiago, Matta had a strict Catholic upbringing. After studying architecture and interior design in Chile, Matta traveled to Spain, where he met artists André Breton and Salvador Dalí. Shortly after this introduction, Matta joined the Surrealist movement, in 1937. In 1939 he moved to New York City to escape World War II and to pursue his art career. Matta continued to produce Surrealist art and contributed to the advancement of the style by integrating social and political ideas into his work. His innovative approach also helped to shape the beginning of Abstract Expressionism.

Painted while jarring events were unfolding in Europe, *Years of Fear* evokes feelings and



Matta (Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren), *Years of Fear*, 1941.
Oil on canvas, 111.8 x 142.2 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
72.1991 © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

themes associated with war, such as anxiety, chaos, and destruction. Matta often used natural landscapes as foundations for his works but then manipulated these scenes. Inspired by film, literature, and a desire to illustrate events that were beyond the conscious mind, he produced cosmic, fantastical, and dreamlike compositions. Matta developed a technique that involved using rags, sponges, and brushes to build up pigment on the canvas, then selectively rubbing away layers to uncover new forms.

With its distorted imagery and contrasting textures, *Years of Fear* suggests tension between two opposing forces, and the dark, gloomy cloud in the upper right recalls an explosion. The painting's blurred and warped composition exemplifies Matta's Surrealist style and his effort to represent intangible, subconscious states.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Years of Fear*

- ▶ Give students two minutes to silently view the work and then ask them what they notice. As a group, generate a list of words in response to the painting.
- ▶ After generating a list of words, prompt students to look closer by posing the following questions:

How does your eye move throughout the piece?

What sounds do you think you might hear if you placed yourself in this painting?

What textures did the artist include?

What emotions does this artwork provoke?

What do you think is happening in this work?

- ▶ Provide the students with historical context for the work: Matta painted it in 1941, amid the destruction of World War II, and titled it *Years of Fear*. Ask the class, “In what ways do you think he depicts the fear and anxiety of this time period?” Encourage students to reference specific areas of the work.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- **Creating a Soundscape**

Invite students to individually choose one detail in the artwork and identify a sound that expresses it. Come back together as a group and collaboratively create a song by going around the room so that each student shares their sound, one after the next. Record these sounds then play them back to the class while viewing the artwork. As a group, discuss the sounds and how they relate to the painting.

- **Looking Closely**

Discuss with students how Matta mixes elements of reality and fantasy in *Years of Fear*'s many details. Some parts of this painting appear to be more realistic than others. Ask students, “Which details provoke real-world associations and which seem more dreamlike or imaginary?”

To help navigate students navigate the painting, have them use a viewfinder and identify a single shape or detail. Ask them to sketch it on cardstock using colored pencils or oil pastels. Then, lay out all the students' artwork and facilitate a gallery walk where they view each other's creations. Invite students to explain why they chose certain details and to discuss together as a group.

- **Exploring Textures**

Matta incorporates multiple textures in *Years of Fear*. Have students create their own piece of artwork and title it *Years of _____*, each filling in the blank as they wish. As the educator, provide various materials with interesting textures, such as are sandpaper, Wikki Stix®, cardboard, art sticks, pipe cleaners, slick sticks, and colored pencils.

*A medium is adopted by an artist to express himself more clearly in a particular way. . . .
Collage for me is not study, diversion or experiment. Instead, it has become my painting form.*
—Conrad Marca-Relli²³

◀ RICHARD PRINCE SELECTS CONRAD MARCA-RELLI'S *WARRIOR*, 1956 ▶

For his presentation, Richard Prince selected works from the 1940s and '50s with common compositional elements in order to explore and question how taste is formed. These works, most of which came from the museum's collection, will hang on the third ramp of the rotunda.

One of Prince's choices is *Warrior* (1953), an oil and canvas collage by Conrad Marca-Relli. Marca-Relli began as painter and shifted to using collage in 1952, while traveling throughout Mexico. The artist stated that he decided to work in collage to better represent sunlight on adobe houses—a story that has been mythologized in art history. He may have changed his medium, however, due to a lack of paint. Marca-Relli was one of the first artists to create large, monumental collages.²⁴ He later became a respected member of the New York school, but this early work is less known. It does, however, showcase compositional elements similar to other works from the era.

Born Corrado di Marcarelli in 1913 to Italian immigrant parents in Boston, Marca-Relli showed early signs of artistic ability. His father, a journalist, moved the family nomadically between the United States and Europe for most of Marca-Relli's childhood. When he was thirteen, his family settled in New York City. Though his family was supportive of his chosen career, he was largely self-taught, only studying for a year at the Cooper Union before leaving to

establish a studio and gaining employment with the Works Progress Administration. This period influenced his career, introducing him to a community of like-minded artists who exposed him to ideas about modernism.²⁵

Warrior uses a muted, two-tone palette, in colors reminiscent of unpainted canvases. There seems to be figural elements in the piece, and small overlapping shapes create the illusion of movement. The collage evokes an overwhelming sense of urgency, drawing the viewer's eye from the bottom of the composition toward a focal point just above the center and then directing it outward on both sides.



Conrad Marca-Relli, *Warrior*, 1953.
Oil and canvas collage on canvas, 215.9 x 127 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 57.1458
© Archivio Marca-Relli, Parma

VIEW + DISCUSS

Before students view the artwork, tell them they are about to view a work titled *Warrior*. What do they imagine they will see?

Show: *Warrior*

- ▶ How did the artwork compare to their imagined versions? Is it similar to or different from their expectations?
- ▶ Ask students how the artists might have created this work. Have them outline the steps they think he took to produce the collage.
- ▶ Ask students what they think is happening in this work. What is the subject of the painting?
- ▶ Remind students that Marca-Relli was originally interested in painting. Show the students an earlier work by the artist, such as *Untitled* (ca. 1940).²⁶ How does *Warrior* reflect his earlier interest in painting? Compare and contrast the style and technique of the two works.
- ▶ Have students discuss the two works with partners. Ask: What compositional elements do they share? Explain that Marca-Relli was interested in surreal carnival scenes, architecture, and cityscapes. How can we see this reflected in both works?
- ▶ In his section of the exhibition, Richard Prince questions why the majority of artworks created worldwide in the 1940s and '50s share compositional elements. Ask students to look at other works from the period and identify shared formal qualities.

Examples:

Kenzo Okada, *Solstice*, March 1954²⁷

Afro, *Night Flight (Volo di notte)*, 1957²⁸

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

• Schools of Abstract Expressionism

Under the broader umbrella of Abstract Expressionism, there are two distinct classes of artists. First, the Action painters used monumental canvases and larger-than-life mark-making techniques to create works about energy and expression. The second group, the Color Field painters, produced large blocks of solid colors in simple and organized compositions.²⁹ Have your students choose an emotion and represent it in both styles of Abstract Expressionism. Discuss students' artworks afterwards—how were they able to depict one emotion in two ways? How does expressing their feelings in each style of Abstract Expressionism enhance their experience? Did creating these works this way reinforce their understanding of the two types of painting?

• Influences

Throughout his career, Marca-Relli maintained strong ties to his Italian heritage, drawing inspiration from Italian Renaissance art of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, Surrealism of the 1920s, and other twentieth-century artists, such as Alberto Burri and Giorgio de Chirico. Even after he joined the Abstract Expressionist movement, he always retained elements of earlier influences. Show your students examples of these artists and movements. Can they find evidence of these sources in *Warrior*?

Examples:

Giorgio de Chirico, *The Disquieting Muses*, 1916³⁰

Alberto Burri, *Untitled*, 1952³¹

• Marca-Relli's Medium Choices

Marca-Relli completed *Warrior* in the early to mid portion of his career, after the shift from painting to his signature medium, collage. Ask students to discuss what might make an artist completely change their choice of medium. Next, challenge students to research some of Marca-Relli's later collaged works and compare and contrast those works with *Warrior*. How did Marca-Relli's change in medium affect his work? Are there any similarities between early and later collages? What materials did he choose to use?

When conceiving this work, Marca-Relli focused on a persona, the character of a *Warrior*. Ask students to think of a persona or theme they would like to represent in the style of Marca-Relli. Have them choose a 12-by-18-inch sheet of paper as a base color, and two 12-by-18-inch sheets in different colors as their collage materials. How did the limitations of their color palette change the way they were able to communicate their persona or theme? Discuss what this tells them about Marca-Relli, as he used a limited palette for *Warrior*.

Memory is a real crucial key to where the work comes from, like a genesis, or some kind of seed, or origin. The process of working, for me, releases it, and a lot of the time, by working, by labor, by physically developing something and changing it and manipulating it, I think there's something that gets folded back into the work. It's like cooking.—Martin Puryear³²

◀ CARRIE MAE WEEMS SELECTS MARTIN PURYEAR'S *BASK*, 1976 ▶

Carrie Mae Weems's presentation, titled *What Could Have Been*, focuses on how artists have used strictly black-and-white palette in different ways. She chose works from various decades, mediums, and genres in order to show the inherent biases of museums whose collections focus on the Western canon. Martin Puryear's sculpture *Bask* (1976) is one of her selections.

Born the oldest of seven children in 1941 in Washington, D.C., Puryear constructed things from a young age. He was trained in woodworking by his father, and in college studied how to build guitars, canoes, and furniture. Between 1964 and '66 he served in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone, where he taught English, French, biology, and art. While there,

he learned skills from local carpenters. Puryear also spent two years at the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts in Stockholm. In Sweden, as he had done in Africa, he took the opportunity to investigate popular, local craft traditions. Puryear's preference for using unadulterated materials and clearly visible methods of construction was evident even at this time.

After returning to the United States, Puryear studied at Yale University, earning an MFA in 1971. While the unitary forms of **Minimalism** influenced him, he rejected both its strict geometry and its industrial fabrication. Instead, he further immersed himself in the methods of carpenters, coopers, and patternmakers.

In the mid- to late 1970s, many of Puryear's sculptures reflected his interest in traditional boatbuilding methods. *Bask* (1976), a low-lying floor piece in black-stained pine, features a gently swelling center that tapers at both ends. Its subtle curvature is achieved through the use of a technique called "**strip planking**," typically used to construct the hulls of ships. It reveals the influence of Minimalism but has a human touch. "My methods are related to trades in the vernacular realm," Puryear said. "I use ordinary ways of making things."³³



Martin Puryear, *Bask*, 1976. Stained pine, 30.5 x 372.7 x 55.9 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Exxon Corporation
Purchase Award 78.2430 © Martin Puryear

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Bask*

- ▶ Take time for you students to look carefully at this work—at first it looks very simple, but it is also mysterious and ambiguous. Then ask them to complete this sentence: Martin Puryear’s sculpture *Bask* reminds me of a _____. How many different associations can your students come up with? As they list them, ask students to explain their thought processes.
- ▶ According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, the verb “bask” means “to lie or relax in a pleasant warmth or atmosphere.” Puryear has likened the titles of his sculptures to poetry: “I think they should open up the imagination rather than shut it down.”³⁴ Have students spend time looking at the sculpture then discuss their ideas about how the title might connect to the work.
- ▶ Puryear decided to stain this sculpture black. How does the color affect its impact? Imagine it finished in another color. How would that change your response to the work?
- ▶ It is difficult to get a sense of an artist’s oeuvre by viewing only a single object. Look online for other pieces by Puryear. How is *Bask* representative of his work? How is it different and unique?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- **Connecting to Craft**

Puryear transforms mundane and utilitarian materials—wood, stone, and metal—into sculptures that explore issues of history, culture, and identity. He is also committed to manual skills and traditional building methods that offer an alternative to our increasingly digital world.³⁵ He stated, “I’m interested in trades like boat building and sheet-metal work that locate compound planes in space and build them in space.”³⁶ To create *Bask*, Puryear adapted a technique used in shipbuilding called “strip planking.” To see how this approach is typically used, students can watch the short video “Building a Kayak: Strip-Planking the Hull.”³⁷ Then they should discuss how the video helps them understand how Puryear created *Bask*.

- **Building a Maquette**

A “maquette” is a small preliminary model frequently used by sculptors to help envision how a full-scale work will look. There are many ways to create a maquette. Clay, cardboard, balsa wood, metal foil, reed, twine, and wire are just a few of the myriad materials that can be used.

Informed by Puryear’s *Bask*, students should create a maquette (at the scale of one inch equaling one foot) for a new abstract sculpture. Using foam core or cardboard to delineate the walls of the museum or gallery space, they should then decide how to display their work. Tell students that although traditional sculptures are often displayed on pedestals, contemporary artists often show their work in more varied and dynamic ways. Have them add a correctly scaled figure to the model to suggest the relationship between the viewer, sculpture, and the exhibition space. How are their works installed? Have students present their completed plans and explain how they made their decisions.³⁸

- **Working with Tools**

Puryear first learned woodworking from his father, but in today’s evermore digital world, mastering tools and making things with one’s hands is receding in many places as a hobby and skill. Discuss this trend with your students and have them research its causes and effects. Do they think this trend is problematic or not? How many of your students would like to learn more about working with tools? Is there a place in your school or community for those who are interested?

JOAN MIRÓ**Websites**

Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, <https://www.fmirobcn.org/en/>.

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Videos

Miró, Tate Modern, London, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/miro>.

Joan Miró, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87okJMet8qo>.

WILLEM DE KOONING**Websites**

The Willem de Kooning Foundation, <https://www.dekooning.org/>.

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LOUISE NEVELSON**Websites**

Louise Nevelson Foundation, <http://www.louisenevelsonfoundation.org/>.

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Video

Martin Puryear, *Big Bling*, https://art21.org/artist/martin-puryear/?gclid=EALalQobChMI3PumkeqW4QIVjODICh1bsAIDEAA YASAAEgKIKPD_BwE.

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

A New York City–based art movement (also called the New York school) of the mid-twentieth century that was generally nonrepresentational, primarily concerned with the assertion of the individual through the act of painting, and characterized by “gestural brush-strokes or mark-making, and the impression of spontaneity” (tate.org)

ACTION PAINTING

Abstract Expressionism marked especially by the use of spontaneous techniques (such as dribbling, splattering, or smearing)

ASSEMBLAGE

An artistic composition made from scraps, junk, and odds and ends (as of paper, cloth, wood, stone, or metal)

BIOMORPHIC

Related to, derived from, or incorporating the forms of living beings—used especially of primitive and abstract art

CUBISM

A painting style, developed between 1907 and 1914 by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, in which objects are represented as cubes and other geometric forms

FAUVISM

A painting style that was named in 1905 for the French term for “wild boars” and that was characterized by often jarring uses of color and broad brushstrokes

FOUND OBJECT

A natural or discarded object found by chance and held to have aesthetic value

MAQUETTE

A usually small preliminary model (as of a sculpture or a building) (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary)

MINIMALISM

Painting or sculpture made with an extreme economy of means and reduced to the essentials of geometric abstraction (guggenheim.org)

SALON-STYLE

An approach to hanging artworks that places multiple pictures in groups (alongside, above, and below each other) rather than separating them (cartermuseum.org)

STELA

A carved or inscribed stone slab or pillar used for commemorative purposes

STRIP PLANKING

A process used in shipbuilding in which many narrow strips of wood are carefully pieced together and secured around an interior form, to create a smooth outside shell

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

A U.S. government program (1935–43; renamed Works Projects Administration in 1939) established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as part of the New Deal that created millions of jobs for unemployed people during the Great Depression, mainly in building and the arts (Oxford Learners Dictionaries)

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- ⁹ Diana MacKown, *Dawns and Dusks* (New York: Scribner, 1976), p. 126.
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- ¹¹ "Sculptor Louise Nevelson Dies in New York at 88," *Washington Post*, April 19, 1988.
- ¹² Laurie Wilson, *Louise Nevelson: Light and Shadow* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2016), p. 186. See also Jennifer Blessing, "Louise Nevelson, *Luminous Zag: Night*," Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3225>.
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- ¹⁶ "Louise Nevelson, *Mirror Image 1*, 1969," Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, <https://www.mfah.org/art/detail/923>.
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- ²² "Roberto Matta," *artnet*, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/roberto-matta/165>.
- ²³ Conrad Marca-Relli, "Studio Talk: Collage Transformed; Interview with Conrad Marca-Relli," interview by Bernard Chaet, *Arts Magazine* 33 (June 1959): 64.
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* All online sources without specific publication dates listed were accessed April 2019.