

LIFTING PATTERNS: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF PAUL ANTHONY SMITH

Inspired by *Paul Anthony Smith* on view October 5, 2019–January 19, 2020 at Joslyn Art Museum

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Grade Level 8th through 12th grades

OVERVIEW

Students will score and distress photographic surfaces featuring familiar or nostalgic images to create new meaning. By transforming iconic or recognizable cultural memes, students may interpose their own impressions, experiences, and beliefs on to those images and objects. Paul Anthony Smith uses these techniques to create what he calls picotage with images from cultural events from his native Jamaica.



Paul Anthony Smith (Jamaican, b. 1988),
Untitled, 7 Women, 2019, unique picotage
on inkjet print, colored pencil, spray paint
on museum board, © Paul Anthony Smith

ANTICIPATORY SET

We all have images, buildings, and icons that we associate with the places we are from—home. Provide some examples that your students will recognize. They are often captured on postcards, in magazines, and in calendars. Smith cuts patterns into photographs of his native Jamaica to emphasize certain parts of the image and create new meanings. Today we will transform pictures of familiar scenes and landmarks by cutting or scoring geometric patterns into them—and then picking those cuts. By adding our own marks to pictures of the places and icons, we will add our own meanings, making them our own.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Student will determine what places remind them of "home" and identify local icons to find in photographs.
- Students will design a pattern or matrix to overlay onto selected images.
- Students will practice and implement Smith's picotage technique using X-Acto knives.

RESOURCES:

- [Paul Anthony Smith @ Jack Shainman Gallery, The Two Percent, YouTube](#) (details Smith's technique)
- <https://paulanthonymsmith.net/> (artist's website)
- [An Artist Who Creates Joyful, Shimmering Images of West Indian Culture by Antwaun Sargent, The New York Times](#)
 - Preview all resources before sharing with students.

VOCABULARY:

- Picotage: A texture that is incorporated into the print of a fabric
- Score: To disrupt or scratch the surface of a material. In ceramics, this is done in order to join surfaces

MATERIALS:

- Colored pencils
- Rulers or straight edges (graphic rulers or any transparent rulers are perfect for this)
- Cutting matts
- X-Acto knives
- Paint markers or oil pastels (optional)
- Images of local landmarks and icons (postcards work great because they are bilayered)

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Provide students with images of their community. Appropriate images printed onto thick paper such as photo paper, postcards, magazine covers, and calendars work best because their layers can be pried apart with an X-Acto knife. If it is practical to do so, have students source their own images. This way they may choose images that are significant to them.
2. Watch the YouTube video included in resources and demonstrate Smith's picotage techniques as detailed in the video above. I have found that I get the most dramatic result from incising intersecting lines and lifting the section between the lines with the blade of an X-Acto knife. Smith achieves his unique effect by varying the direction of the flaps he raises.
 - a. If you have access to ceramic tools, you may want to show students the tools similar to what Smith uses to master his picking technique.
3. Instruct your students to practice their patterns and overlays on a picture made from the same material. Scoring and lifting flaps takes a bit of practice and it is good to have a practice piece because mistakes are hard to recover from in this medium.
4. For their final work, students will create their geometric patterns with colored pencils lightly applied then lift flaps to create a high contrast pattern within the bounds of the line created with colored pencils. Smith incorporates marks made with paint and paint sticks. If students finish early, they can complete their compositions with flourishes in paint marker and oil pastel.

CONTENT STANDARDS

[NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS](#)

[IOWA CORE STANDARDS](#)