Joslyn Art Museum
Comprehensive Study Lesson Plan
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MODERN GRAPHICS

Focus: Stuart Davis, American Painting

Objectives – Students will:
• Create an artwork experimenting with intuitive mark making while learning about abstraction, exploring text in art, and developing a personal iconography.
• Respond to the changes Davis made to the original 1932 version and share thoughts regarding why he altered it.
• Present their contemporary addition to American Painting.
• Connect with what they feel is "American" today and compare with what Davis considered when he created American Painting.

Suggested Materials: Stuart Davis teaching poster, pens, India ink (black & colors), heavy & scratch papers, pencils, variety of art supplies

Vocabulary: abstraction, art movements, composition, iconography, intuitive, jazz, symbol

Procedure:
• Engage: Isolate sections of American Painting (any version), distribute, and have students write a story about their section. Put the sections together and share stories. Ask students to think about where they connect with the painting?

• Art Talk 1: Show students the 1932 version of American Painting and take an inventory of the graphics that changed when Davis reworked it after World War II. Have a discussion as to why students think Davis made the changes. Consider sharing the third version of it – a new painting created later called Tropes de Teens.

• Art Talk 2: Have students research the art movements prior to Davis' high point in his career. Then discuss how Dada, Cubism, Synthetic Cubism, Proto Pop, etc. all contributed to his design style.

• History: Who was Stuart Davis? Refer to resources in the Teacher Support Materials for additional information. [Link]

• Aesthetics: Jazz. A true American art form and favorite symbol of modern America for Davis. Discuss his love for jazz and how it is reflected in American Painting. Play Duke Ellington's "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)". Ask students why they think Davis added the text to the composition. What does the line mean to them today? For older students, take note of how there are three and four groupings of elements in it, and discuss how that relates to the timing in some jazz compositions.

• Production: Absolutely Abstraction. Encourage students to explore ideas of abstraction, text in art, intuitive mark making, and personal iconography using pen and India ink. Refer to the workshop presented by Kim Reid Kuhn at Thursdays for Teachers.
• Close: What is the American thread? Using the Davis teaching poster, ask students to create one graphic that is their symbol for America today. You can have the whole class layer on their graphics or take a photo of each student’s “updated” American Painting using those photos to “trace” the American thread.

Extensions:
• Cultural Connections: Break students into small groups and assign each group a decade. Their task is to research the significant experiences from the decade to create a collage version of the American Painting for each time span.

• Fine Arts: Create a visual timeline capturing events and experiences in the last ten years. Then have students imagine how feelings would change ten years from now. What words would be added to their artwork?

• Language Arts: Research the words from American Painting’s time span, 1932–1951. Study a variety of paintings by Davis and focus on his word selection. Is there a common theme? Debate why he selects one word or another. Consider looking up how words impacted other art movements. Talk about how words evolve.

• Math: For younger students, use American Painting to start to identify shapes what lead to the bigger picture. For older students, look at angles having them determine the type of angles. How do the angles tell us what the line or shape symbolizes?

• Science: Technology. Identify significant evolutions during American Painting’s time span, 1932–1951. Compare and contrast with today’s significant technological advances. What do we do the same or different?

Academic Standards & additional resources:
Available on online version at www.joslyn.org/education/teachers/thursdays-for-teachers
[select Lesson Plans, then Modern & Contemporary]

About the Artwork:
Stuart Davis came of age as an Ashcan School acolyte in the Robert Henri circle. A fluent draftsman, sensitive colorist, and keen observer, he was initially fascinated by New York City’s varied architecture and bustling street life. Davis changed direction in 1913 after participating in the Armory Show, the pivotal exhibition that provided many Americans with their first significant experience of European Modern art. Convinced that American art could combine vernacular themes and new methods of pictorial construction, Davis invented a personal form of Cubism — bright, improvisatory, and composed of lines and planar facets describing the sights, objects, and sounds that captured the excitement of this country’s technological age. His passion for jazz music, an American invention, became a particular influence on his art. Throughout his career Davis made variations upon the themes in his many paintings, drawings, and murals, always managing to incorporate fresh tone, texture, color, shape, and energy.

An enigmatic composite of images, American Painting sums up Davis’ multifaceted career. It contains references to many things that stood for the new, now, and national, which for Davis included skyscrapers, racing planes, even cartoon characters — all innovations introduced or popularized in his lifetime. Duke Ellington’s lyrics “It don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing” appear in the upper left corner. As originally submitted to the first Whitney Biennial exhibition in 1932, American Painting (pictured to the right) was partly a response to Regionalism, which the leftist-leaning Davis found unacceptably provincial and conservative. His disagreements with Thomas Hart Benton, also working in New York at this time, were both public and increasingly personal.

Always the experimentalist, Davis returned to work on this canvas in the 1940s and 50s, painting at what has been described as a glacial pace. The added overlay of color blocks and word shapes, as he called them, illustrates Davis’ later sensibilities, in which references to life’s fast pace were less specific and more symphonic — full of color, syncopated rhythms, key phrases, and repeated motifs.
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Objectives and Procedure created by teachers participating in UNO Service Learning Academy Seminar  
Extensions created by Mary Lou Alfieri, Josie Langbehn, Kristy Lee, Carter Leeka, and Rachel Gibson

2nd Semester – Modern Art

Focus: Stuart Davis and American Painting

Objectives:
- Students will take a challenging work of art and learn to decipher it through themes and symbolism.
- Students will be able to graphically represent a given time period or topic by creating a drawing in the style of Davis’s American Painting.
- Students will analyze the painting and relate the work to the US during that time period.
- Students will be able to recreate the artwork using only scraps and junk while reflecting on who they are personally.

Instructional Strategies that Strongly Affect Student Achievement – Robert J. Marzano

- 01 Identifying similarities and differences
- 02 Summarizing and note taking
- 03 Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
- 04 Homework and practice
- 05 Nonlinguistic representations
- 06 Cooperative learning
- 07 Setting goals and providing feedback
- 08 Generating and testing hypotheses
- 09 Activating prior knowledge

Resources: Check out the Teacher Support Materials online, and http://www.joslyn.org/education/teachers for additional resources

Suggested Materials: Davis teaching poster, images, drawing tools and paper, straws, tape, cardboard or chipboard, scraps and junk, glue or adhesives.

Vocabulary: abstraction, airplane, decibel, expression, Fibonacci numbers, interpretation, jazz, juxtaposition, lyrics, metaphorical, naturalistic perception, pilot, progressive, symbol, and three-dimensional

Procedure:
- **Engage**: Puzzling Painting. Take a reproduction of Davis's American Painting and create a puzzle for students to put together. Do not show students the completed image they must create. Students should not worry about creating the actual image rather using the pieces to perhaps create a new painting. Refer to Engage in Teacher Support Materials for a detailed description for a teacher activity.

- **Art Talk**: What’s the Story? Show students American Painting and discuss “what story is this painting telling?” Then students should select a topic to visually represent in the style of Davis. Refer to Art Talk in Teacher Support Materials for more details.

- **History**: Who was Stuart Davis and what are some historic connections to his artwork American Painting? Refer to the talk by Spencer Wigmore at the April 2012 Thursdays for Teachers. Also refer to the teaching poster and additional information in Teacher Support Materials.
• **Aesthetics:** Show students *American Painting* and have them give their own interpretation of the painting. After learning more about the history of the time period. Then using the final version, discuss hidden themes. Refer to Aesthetics in the Teacher Support Materials for more details.

• **Production 1:** Show students the black and white version of *American Painting*. Have them select items that symbolize them, and then they should recreate the pictures using the random materials (scraps and junk) you provide. Refer to Production in the Teacher Support Materials for more details.

• **Production 2:** Davis intentionally wanted his paintings to read as flat. What would happen to the painting if it became three-dimensional? Hand out *American Painting* (printed on cardstock) and have students cut up the image. Then using cardboard or chipboard, students should create bases at varying heights for the pieces. Discuss why students chose to have certain elements recede or pop.

• **Close:** Hand out copies of the black and white version of *American Painting*. Have students add a colorful layer reflecting themes and symbols from today. Then share their stories.

Extensions:

• **Cultural Connections:** Davis’s thoughts about *American Painting* progressed and changed as a result of events in his life and in America over the course of 20 years. (Food, music, WWII, records, fashion, appliances, etc.) What is progressive in our lives? Make lists on the board to compare and contrast.

• **Fine Arts:** Have students create an ongoing piece of art. They should start and complete a simple drawing or vignette of something that is important to them at that particular day or time. Each following day the student will add or subtract from the piece, creating an evolving piece of art. Students will begin to realize what was once important or significant no longer is due to the passing of time. [Optional: Use this idea for a collaborative class mural that all students work on erasing and changing their own section as needed.]

• **Language Arts 1:** Show students the black and white earlier version of Davis’s *American Painting* and focus on the man with a top hat in the in the lower right corner. It is thought to be Dr. Jekyll (tie into the movie that was released at that time) or Mr. Jiggs (a popular cartoon at the time). Show images of both and discuss. Then high school students could read Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; while middle school and elementary students may compare this duality in cartoons (i.e. Tom and Jerry). Refer to Webology in Teacher Support Materials for images.

• **Language Arts 2:** In the *American Painting*, Davis liked to use one word as a statement (see any, erasure and no). Students each bring a picture from home, they must write one word statement to summarize their photo. They must capture the emotion or what was going on during the time the photo was taken. Share with the class.

• **Math:** Davis was influenced by jazz and wrote “It don’t mean a thing if it aint’ got that swing” on *American Painting*. Talk about Fibonacci numbers. For high school students, share the Ken Burns jazz videos. For middle school students, use Dave Brubeck jazz music to explain Fibonacci. Elementary students can pick out multiples of four, or groups of four.

• **Science:** Discuss recorded sound, which became available during WWII and study the technology used to make it available to the general public. Then study the sounds of jazz and decibels, by making a pan flute using 10 straws and tape. Students should make 10 noises.