

TECHNOLOGY

SUBJECT: VISUAL ARTS, GRADES 6–12

INTRODUCTION >

In the 1960's and 1970's, artists from Southern California experimented with high-tech industrial materials and new technologies. The use of industrial materials and finishes was a reflection of post-World War II Southern California. The aerospace industry influenced the production of remarkable new materials. In addition, the landscape was being transformed by cars and the sprawling interstate highway system. In the 60s, Southern California represented the newness of postwar paradise, and plastics and resins captured the slickness, intense color, and commercial landscape of that environment. The use of new materials evoked essential Southern California elements: sunsets, neon signage, ocean and desert landscapes, and wide boulevards. Car culture and commercial manufacturing made Southern California an important site for artists who experimented with industrial materials. Larry Bell used optical coatings, a product of aerospace technology that was readily available in Los Angeles. John McCracken looked at car colors and surfaces, and his first plank sculptures were constructed from plywood sprayed with car lacquers. Similarly, Robert Irwin's work had a "hot-rod aesthetic." As a teenager growing up in Los Angeles, he spent hours polishing surfaces on his cars in places where no one would ever see them, and he devoted the same precision and attention to his artwork. The new materials of custom car culture, surfing, the aerospace industry, and the plastics industry inspired these Southern California artists. The exhibition *Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface* was on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego from September 25, 2011-January 22, 2012 in La Jolla and will remain on view through summer 2012 Downtown. It is a part of the Getty Foundation's Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980, in which more than 60 art institutions are jointly mounting exhibitions on postwar Southern California art. In these lessons, students will examine and discuss *Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface* and create their own works that use new, nontraditional materials as an artistic medium.

OBJECTIVES >

Students will be able to:

1. Identify and analyze an artwork's color, form, surface, and effects on its surroundings.
2. Analyze an artist's process, goals, and purposes.
3. Express their opinion of a work and defend their opinion.
4. Apply their knowledge by creating their own works that use new, nontraditional materials as an artistic medium.



Larry Bell, untitled, 1964. Coated glass with chrome-plated brass frame, 14¼ x 14¼ x 14½ in. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Museum purchase. © Larry Bell. Photo: Philipp Scholz Ritterman.

PRE-PROJECT CLASS DISCUSSION >

Begin by showing works from *Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface*. Allow students up to one minute to observe carefully and quietly before beginning the conversation.

1. Visual Inquiry Questions: Exploring What You See

- Begin with a specific question about the students' first impressions of the work. For example, "What is the first thing you notice about this work?"
- Follow with formal qualities of the work such as composition, materials, scale, color, etc.: "What images, materials, symbols, or texts do you recognize?"
- Integrate factual information about process, composition, and materials with student responses. Follow up by asking "How do the work's materials or form suggest what the work might be about?" and "Why do you think the artist chose to use these images/materials/symbols/texts?"

2. Interpretive Inquiry Questions: Exploring Meaning

- Provide factual information about the work including title, date, and background information about the work. Allow students to consider and integrate the information you have shared: "How does this work relate to that concept?" Guide students to form their own interpretations and to support these interpretations with visual evidence: "What do you see that makes you say that?"
- Share a quote about the work. Ask students: "What does the artist or art critic mean when he/she says..."
- Share information on the artist's overall practice. Encourage students to make connections to the larger world and to other social contexts, and to connect ideas to the overall theme of the exhibition.



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John McCracken, *Blue Block in Three Parts*, 1966. Lacquer, polyester resin, Fiberglass, and plywood, 33 x 40 x 33 in. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Museum purchase with funds from Ansley I. Graham Trust, Los Angeles. © Estate of John McCracken. Photo: Philipp Scholtz Ritterman.



Robert Irwin, untitled, 1969. Acrylic lacquer on formed acrylic plastic, 53 in. diameter x 3 in. deep. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Museum purchase. © Robert Irwin/ Artists Rights Society, New York. Photo: Philipp Scholz Rittermann.



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ARTIST INFORMATION >

Larry Bell (American, born 1939) started as a painter, but paintings soon gave way to pictorial volumes. In Bell's untitled 1964 cube, a solid ellipse inside a transparent ellipse may stay flat and still. Also, though, pictorial illusion and parallax can occur: "As your eye moved," Bell noticed, "the ellipse divided into combinations of interlocking shapes."¹ The solid and transparent ellipses call to mind foreshortened circles, two intersecting discs tipped half within the cube and half without. From one position, the left edge of each form extends backward. From another, their right edges seem to tilt away, or it could be the solid shape's right edge and the transparent form's left edge that recede. "Which side was forward, which side was back?" Bell mused. "By putting a thinner ellipse, say 25 degrees, with the same major axis inside the 40-degree ellipse, you created a spatial or visual flip-flop."² The discs appear to breach the cubic foot of actual interior space. This is a puzzling phenomenon, a pictorial depth coextensive with real depth. If you crouch down and face the cube from a certain distance, your reflection appears that same distance beyond the glass or even inside it. In some spots the inner faces of the panes reflect the glass opposite it, and that area the glass opposite it, and so on. As light rebounds around the interior, it expands the space you see to well beyond the material confines of the object. As Bell put it, "A jungle of beautiful things . . . happened within."³

John McCracken (American, 1934–2011) is best known for his geometric sculptures (cubes, pyramids, and planks) that are finished with polyester resin, Fiberglas, and/or lacquer. A work such as McCracken's *Blue Block in Three Parts*, 1966, appears from some angles to be a blunt form, while from other points of view it mirrors its surroundings and seems less like a solid object. On the topic of this combination of color and form, McCracken has said, "I have always considered that my work primarily uses pure form to speak with. At the same time you have to make form out of something so I use color. And, since I want sensuousness, and touchability—mentally speaking—in my work, I also use the polished surface. The polished surfaces (I dont know if I knew this when I first used them) give a seeming transparency and illusoriness, a not-there-ness, to the work."⁴

In the late 1950s, Robert Irwin (American, born 1928) was making large paintings that were very much in dialogue with Abstract Expressionism. He describes these works as "rich and large and exciting to do,"⁵ but considered them "unresolved" and became interested in eliminating the appearance of imagery from the work. He stopped painting on canvas and began to make discs in acrylic. The discs are slightly convex, bisected by a two-inch metallic gray horizontal "cut." To further accentuate their curvature, they are mounted on posts that hold them 20 inches out from the wall. If one focuses steadily on the middle of the band, at a certain point all the surrounding detail will disappear or seem to fade into a featureless and indeterminate field. The discs appear to merge into light and shadow. As Irwin describes them, these works are "locked into their own shadows, achieving the effect of a painting with no formal beginning or end."⁶

TECHNOLOGY OF OUR TIME PROJECT > GRADES 6-8

SUMMARY >

Students will create their own works that use new, nontraditional materials as an artistic medium.

MATERIALS >

For the brainstorming session with your students you will need materials such as paper, pencils, and colored pencils. Following the brainstorming session outlined below, gather the nontraditional materials students listed to create their project.

PROJECT PROCEDURE >

1. Ask students to record a list of new technology materials and tools that they could use to create a work of art, for example digital video, photocopiers, digital cameras, Photoshop, etc.
2. Discuss with students the ways that these Southern California artists experimented with high-tech industrial materials and new technologies. These artists have pushed the new materials of custom car culture, surfing, the aerospace industry, and the plastics industry beyond their original functions.
3. Have students brainstorm how they could use the new technology materials and tools from their list to stretch their functions beyond their traditional uses to create a work of art.
4. Individually or in groups, ask students to choose one new technology material or tool from their list.
5. Have the students visualize an artwork that they can make with their materials. Students may want to sketch in pencil, colored pencils, and/or markers.
6. Give students time to create a work of art based on the qualities of their chosen material.

Students should consider how their final work should be documented and/or displayed.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY >

As part of your lesson, allow for a fifteen minute reflection. Pass out index cards and ask your students to write an object label, which includes a title, year, artist name, materials, dimensions, and a short description of the work. Ask students to get into small groups and describe the work to their classmates using the visual and interpretive methodologies used previously when looking at the *Phenomenal* artworks.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY >

Have students do internet research on one of the following contemporary artists: Maria Nordman, Tara Donovan, Olafur Eliasson, Kimsooja, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, or Spencer Finch. Instruct student to create a “zine” using images and text. You can have students create a digital “zine”, or allow students to print their research and then cut and glue their images and text onto a sheet of construction paper.



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CALIFORNIA VISUAL ARTS CONTENT STANDARDS

PROFICIENT

- 1.1 Identify and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze, and write about visual aspects in the environment and in works of art, including their own.
- 1.3 Research and analyze the work of an artist and write about the artist's distinctive style and its contribution to the meaning of the work.
- 1.4 Analyze and describe how the composition of a work of art is affected by the use of a particular principle of design.
- 1.5 Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work.
- 2.1 Solve a visual arts problem that involves the effective use of the elements of art and the principles of design.
- 2.3 Develop and refine skill in the manipulation of digital imagery (either still or video).
- 3.2 Identify and describe the role and influence of new technologies on contemporary works of art.
- 3.3 Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.
- 3.4 Discuss the purposes of art in selected contemporary cultures.
- 4.1 Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the interpretation of the meaning or message in a work of art.
- 4.3 Formulate and support a position regarding the aesthetic value of a specific work of art and change or defend that position after considering the views of others.
- 4.4 Articulate the process and rationale for refining and reworking one of their own works of art.
- 4.5 Employ the conventions of art criticism in writing and speaking about works of art.

ADVANCED

- 1.1 Analyze and discuss complex ideas, such as distortion, color theory, arbitrary color, scale, expressive content, and real versus virtual in works of art.
- 1.2 Discuss a series of their original works of art, using the appropriate vocabulary of art.
- 1.3 Analyze their works of art as to personal direction and style.
- 1.6 Describe the use of the elements of art to express mood in one or more of their works of art.
- 1.8 Analyze the works of a well-known artist as to the art media selected and the effect of that selection on the artist's style.
- 2.1 Create original works of art of increasing complexity and skill in a variety of media that reflect their feelings and points of view.
- 2.2 Plan and create works of art that reflect complex ideas, such as distortion, color theory, arbitrary color, scale, expressive content, and real versus virtual.
- 2.4 Demonstrate in their own works of art a personal style and an advanced proficiency in communicating an idea, theme, or emotion.
- 2.5 Use innovative visual metaphors in creating works of art.
- 2.6 Present a universal concept in a multimedia work of art that demonstrates knowledge of technology skills.
- 3.1 Identify contemporary styles and discuss the diverse social, economic, and political developments reflected in the works of art examined.
- 3.2 Identify contemporary artists worldwide who have achieved regional, national, or international recognition and discuss ways in which their work reflects, plays a role in, and influences present-day culture.
- 4.1 Describe the relationship involving the art maker (artist), the making (process), the artwork (product), and the viewer.
- 4.2 Identify the intentions of artists creating contemporary works of art and explore the implications of those intentions.
- 4.4 Apply various art-related theoretical perspectives to their own works of art and the work of others in classroom critiques.

- 4.5 Construct a rationale for the validity of a specific work of art falls outside their own conceptions of art.
- 5.1 Speculate on how advances in technology might change the definition and function of the visual arts.
- 5.2 Compare and contrast works of art, probing beyond the obvious and identifying psychological content found in the symbols and images.
- 5.4 Investigate and report on the essential features of modern or emerging technologies that affect or will affect visual artists and the definition of the visual arts.

RESOURCES

- Visual Arts Standards www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/vamain.asp
- Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego www.mcasd.org
- Larry Bell www.larrybell.com

WORKS CITED

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6. Irwin cited in Hanor. "The Material of Immateriality." *Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface* Ed. Robin Clark. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011. 147.

Technology Lesson Plan was developed by MCASD Education staff and Summer Intern Monica Garls.

Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface is part of Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980. This unprecedented collaboration, initiated by the Getty, brings together more than sixty cultural institutions from across Southern California for six months beginning October 2011 to tell the story of the birth of the Los Angeles art scene and how it became a major new force in the art world.

Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.



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