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## EXPRESSIVE GEOMETRY

*New Museum Educator Resources* provide families and educators with activities to learn about contemporary art and ideas at home and in learning spaces for kids and teenagers.



Sculptures from left to right: *Rainbow Pickett* (1965/2021); *Trinity* (1965/2021)

**Judy Chicago** (b. July 20, 1939, Chicago, Illinois)

### KEY WORDS

- **geometry**: different types of lines and shapes, including triangles, squares and circles, as well as irregular and organic shapes
  - **abstract**: art composed of colors and shapes that does not represent a person, place, or thing
  - **expression**: a way to share how we feel. We can use art to express our feelings at a specific moment, choosing colors and shapes to show that we're happy, angry, excited, scared, or joyful.
  - **composition**: the arrangement of visual elements, including shapes, lines, and colors, in an artwork
  - **overlap**: layering one or more elements over each other
  - **pattern**: repetition of one or more visual elements
  - **negative space**: the space in between drawn or painted elements in an artwork
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## START WITH ART: JUDY CHICAGO



Paintings from left to right: *Through the Flower* (1973), *Let it All Hang Out* (1975), *Heaven Is for White Men Only* (1973), *Through the Flower 2* (1973).

Judy Chicago created these abstract and geometric paintings in 1973 and 1975 by spraying acrylic paint on canvas. Let's take a closer look:

1. What shapes and colors do you notice?
2. How did Chicago arrange the shapes and lines in her paintings? Do you notice any crisscrossed or overlapping shapes?
3. What kinds of patterns do the shapes and lines form?
4. What new shapes are formed by the spaces in between shapes?
5. How do you feel when you look at these paintings? What mood or feeling do colors and shapes convey?

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### MAKE ART FOR KIDS

Let's make stamps of shapes and use these to create **abstract, geometric patterns** that express how we feel.

#### Materials

- Pre-cut foam shapes and foam sheets
- If you don't have pre-cut foam or foam sheets, try to find a foam tray or container from your recycling.
- Pencils
- Scissors
- Glue
- Drawing paper
- Ink pads, or acrylic or tempera paint
- Brushes and small cups of water if using paint

## Making

1. Chicago uses different types of shapes and lines to create her paintings, often choosing circles to represent feminine bodies. What shapes can you use to express how you feel and/or who you are?
2. Continue layering shapes. You might even make more than one composition, experimenting with color and form to express how you feel.
3. To change colors, wash your brush and the surface of the stamp before switching to new paint.
4. If you don't have ink pads, use a brush to apply a layer of paint onto your foam squares, and then stamp it on paper, rotating and overlapping as you go.
5. If you have an ink pad, take your foam squares, press the raised shape or pencil-drawing onto the ink pad, and stamp it onto a piece of paper. Repeat this step to make a pattern. You can rotate the direction and angle of the shapes, overlapping as you ink and stamp new shapes.
6. If you don't have foam sheets or shapes, use a pencil to draw one or more shapes on the flatter side of a foam tray from recycling. Then cut out around the drawn shapes, leaving a border. The indentation of the pencil will act like a stamp.
7. Glue the pre-cut shapes and hand cut shapes onto a foam sheet, and then cut around the outside, creating a square bigger than the cut shape.
8. If you have pre-cut foam shapes, select ones you like and use those, adding them to shapes you create.
9. Practice drawing your shapes on paper. When you have some you like, draw them again on the foam sheets, and use scissors to cut them out.

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## MAKE ART FOR TEENS

Let's make stencils of shapes, and use these to create an **abstract, geometric composition** that expresses how we feel and/or who we are.

### Materials

- Heavyweight paper or cardstock
- Pencils
- Scissors
- Construction or drawing paper
- Markers, paint, or other coloring media
- Removable tape, scotch tape, or masking tape
- Optional: ruler

### Making

1. Chicago uses different types of shapes and lines to create her paintings, choosing specific shapes, like circles, to represent the experience of being a woman, and to raise the visibility of women in art. What shapes can you use to express different aspects of your identity?
2. Draw some shapes on paper. These can include logos and symbols in addition to geometric shapes. When you have shapes you like, draw them again on card stock.
3. Use scissors to cut out the shapes, trying to keep the negative space or paper around the shapes intact. You can now use the cut shapes, or the negative space of the cardstock, as stencils.

4. Place one of your stencils on top of a new sheet of drawing paper. Tape down the stencil edges or use one hand to hold it in place while the other hand traces the shape.
5. Continue moving the stencils around the paper, making a composition. Similar to how Chicago overlapped shapes and lines, you can layer shapes on top of each other, creating new shapes.
6. Consider how the negative space (space between shapes) creates additional shapes. Use these as part of your personal expression.
7. Once you've finished adding shapes, apply color using the medium of your choice—markers, watercolor, tempera or acrylic paint, oil pastels, or colored pencils.
8. As you add color, think about how colors can represent your mood, personality traits, and other aspects of identity.

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## REFLECTION

- What story does your artwork convey about your mood, personality and other aspects of identity?
- What do you notice about the negative space in your artwork? Negative space is the empty space in between drawn or painted elements in an artwork
- Does it also help tell a story?
- How did seeing Chicago's abstract, geometric paintings influence your artistic choices? For instance, how did you employ layering to create new shapes?

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Images: "Judy Chicago,: Herstory" installation views, New Museum, New York. Photos: Dario Lasagni