



Beyond the Canvas

Unit Focus

You are going to read a visual arts article about abstract expressionism.

As You Read:

Think about how Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko were alike and different.

After You Read:

Use information from the article to write a compare-and-contrast essay about the painters' styles and paintings.

Lesson Checklist

Check off each task after you complete it.

- Learn Vocabulary
- Read the Visual Arts Article: *Beyond the Canvas*
- Answer Questions About the Visual Arts Article
- Organize Information
- Write a Compare-and-Contrast Essay
- Evaluate Your Writing

UNIT
1

Beyond the Canvas

Learn Vocabulary

Read the word and its definition.
Then write the vocabulary word on the line.

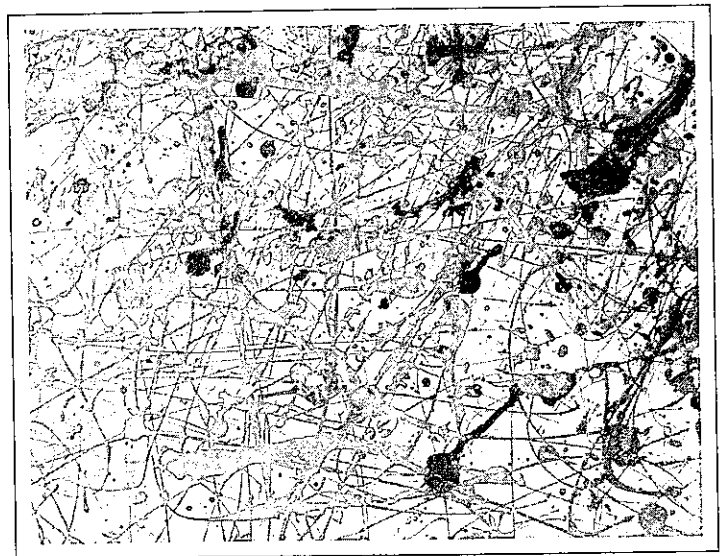
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|----------------------|--|-------|
| 1. abstract | not showing exactness or reality; unformed | _____ |
| 2. canvas | cloth material that is stretched over a wood frame for paintings | _____ |
| 3. complex | difficult or complicated | _____ |
| 4. duplicate | to make an exact copy of | _____ |
| 5. easel | a frame that is used to hold a canvas while one paints | _____ |
| 6. fields | large areas on a canvas that have been drawn on or painted | _____ |
| 7. geometric | relating to shapes such as straight lines, squares, or circles | _____ |
| 8. techniques | the unique ways in which one works that are specific to the worker or artist | _____ |

Beyond the Canvas

Abstract expressionism is a style of art that began in New York City in the mid-1900s, just after World War II. Abstract expressionism was a totally new idea in the art world that got its name because it's a combination of abstract art and expressionist art. The art is called abstract because it does not show something that is familiar to us, such as a person or a bowl of fruit.

Abstract expressionism tries to express emotions, feelings, or thoughts, and the usual techniques of painting are not used in this type of art. For example, paint can be applied to a canvas with tools other than brushes. Canvases are often so large that they are placed on the floor instead of on an easel. Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko were two American artists who painted in the style of abstract expressionism. Their results, however, were very different. Pollock was known for his wild action paintings, and Rothko was known for his huge fields of color.

Action painting is about the process of making a painting. Jackson Pollock is known as the first action painter. Pollock would place a canvas on the floor instead of using an easel. He was known to use gallons of house paint straight from the cans and to apply the paint by using a stick. He poured, dripped, drizzled, and splashed paint onto each canvas. Pollock used a lot of energy and the weight of his body to paint.



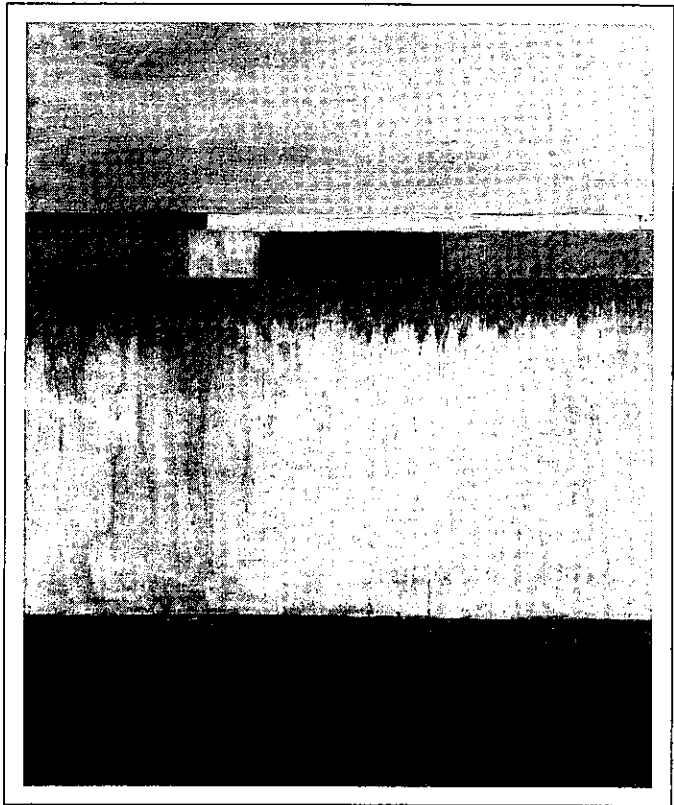
An example of an abstract painting showing action

He would paint from all four edges of a canvas. He wanted to be in the painting—to have the viewers of his paintings feel the action he used when he made them. Pollock was successful, because a viewer's eyes are always moving when looking at one of his works. There is never just one focus. Although Pollock's paintings may seem random, his drips were all carefully planned.

Color field painting is not about the process of making a painting—it's about showing feelings. Mark Rothko's paintings do not show people or objects. Instead, the artist used large fields of bold, solid colors on huge, flat canvases. The colors were layered and the shapes were geometric, though the edges were a bit blurred. Rothko believed that these shapes were the best way to show his deep feelings.

He believed that the large areas of color let viewers feel more than think. Rothko wanted viewers to stand so close to a painting of his that they would feel surrounded by the color—actually feel part of the painting itself. He also wanted viewers to feel the emotion he felt as he made the painting.

Although the paintings of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko might appear very simple, they are truly complex. Even though their techniques can be copied, no one can duplicate the artists' secret motives, moves, or emotions.



An example of color field painting



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Answer Questions

Read and answer each question.

1. Which of the following would be considered an abstract expressionist painting?
 - (A) one that shows no objects
 - (B) one that shows four family members
 - (C) one that shows bananas and oranges
2. Jackson Pollock put his canvases on the floor because he wanted _____.
 - (A) to sit on the floor while painting
 - (B) viewers to see the painting from above
 - (C) to easily paint from all directions
3. Which of these did Mark Rothko use to show his deep feelings?
 - (A) squiggles and drips
 - (B) geometric shapes
 - (C) unusual canvases
4. Pollock most wanted viewers to feel his _____.
 - (A) emotions
 - (B) desires
 - (C) actions
5. How do you think people felt about abstract expressionism when it first started? Why?

6. Do you prefer Pollock's or Rothko's painting style? Why?

Organize Information

Read the art article again. Then write information in the Venn diagram that tells how the styles and paintings of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko are alike and different.

