

Iowa Master Artists in the Twenty-first Century: Online Lesson

Goals: To introduce contemporary Iowa artists
To explore themes, ideas, topics, and media

Title: Magical Realism: Combining Fiction and Non-Fiction

Artists: Susan Chrysler White

Concept: Her exotic, ornate paintings, installations and sculptures immerse the viewer in an environment that pulls us into a magical world that seems both natural and imaginary. In some works her memories of hanging chandeliers and masses of migrating Monarch butterflies inspire the images we see. She often refers to places she has visited and the people she has met and experiences that she has shared with family and friends. These inspirations are combined and portrayed through layers of color. Abstract decorative elements suggest a different story depending on the life experiences of the viewer. The words voluptuous, vibrant, exuberant, and powerful have all been used to describe her work. In this lesson older students will explore both visual and literary examples of combinatory, creative thinking in both process and product. (Source: PBS <http://www.pbs.org/art21/education.html>)

Level: Grades 9 – 12 advanced students

Themes: Abstraction, OP and POP art, Real vs. Imaginary, Excess, Movement

NATIONAL STANDARDS:

1. Media, techniques & processes
2. Knowledge of structure and functions
3. Choosing and evaluating subject matter, symbols & ideas
4. Understanding visual arts in relation to history & cultures
5. Making connections between visual arts & other disciplines

IOWA STANDARDS:

1. Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
2. Using knowledge of structures (art elements, principles of design) and functions
3. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
4. Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
5. Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and work of others
6. Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Objectives

- Students will research how conceptions of history, nature, religion, philosophy, and personal experience are embedded in visual art forms.
- Students will look at the art of Susan Chrysler White to observe influences of Abstract Expressionism, OP, POP, religion, and feminism.

- Students will look critically at the non-traditional processes White uses to create illusions, inventions, and ambiguity of appearance in her paintings and installations.
- Students will create their own works of art that integrate both past and present, stillness and movement, real and imaginary into a single work of art.

Materials and Resources

Iowa Master Artists DVD (IPTV Web Site, AEAs)

Susan Chrysler White interview and clip - <http://www.iptv.org/video/detail.cfm/409>

Website - <http://susanchryslerwhite.com/>

Additional Web Sites

Art: 21 Web Site

- [Collodion Process](#) —Sally Mann interview & clip
- [Building Surfaces](#) —Vija Celmins interview & clip

Prints or slides of OP, POP, and Abstract Expressionist works

Classroom Materials

- Acrylic or Tempera paint
- Acrylic painting materials and supplies
- Support (heavy paper, canvas board, stretched canvas, etc)
- Tracing paper for transfer printing and/or decoupage techniques

Activities

1) Real and Imaginary Visions: Combinatory Thinking

Show the Iowa master Artists video interview with Susan Chrysler White. Hand out a copy of White's artist's statement on the first page of her website (<http://susanchryslerwhite.com/>). Discuss with students how White's work combines real and imaginary. Have students identify some of the real and fictional elements that might be represented in her works. □□

Option: The term **Magical Realism** refers to a literary genre that creates a heightened sense of reality in which the paranormal and psychological realms are conflated with the more realistic realm of the everyday. Almost an exaggeration of the real, these narratives immerse the reader in the possibility that the real world and the imagined world could exist simultaneously. Novels such as *“One Hundred Years of Solitude”* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and *“Beloved”* by Toni Morrison use the magical realms of non-fiction interchangeably with the more realistic realms of fiction interchangeably. The popular trilogy by Phillip Pullman (The Golden Compass, The Subtle Knife, The Amber Spyglass) is examples of teen literature in this theme. In collaboration with Language Arts instructors compare the work of Susan Chrysler White with examples of Magical Realist literature. How does each work of visual art or creative writing employ the

abstract and the real and how do they relate to the terms fiction and non-fiction? Have students create a list of real events or specific memories from their past. Have them create a second list of fictional memories or ideas for stories they would like to write that involve the supernatural, the imaginary, make-believe, or science fiction. Ask students to choose one idea from each column and create a concept for a visual story that combines the two types of memories.

(Time: One 45-minute session)

2) Design a Combinatory Motif

Make a four by four grid on scratch paper. At the left draw four symbols that represent aspects of the idea of “real” that you have chosen from your list. Across the top of the grid draw four symbols that represent the idea of “imaginary” that you have chosen from your list. In each of the intersecting squares combine the two intersecting images into a new drawing. You will choose the most interesting of these as the compositional motif that you will use as a decorative repeat pattern in your final painting.

(Time: One or two 45-minute sessions)

3) Practice a Combinatory Process

Ask students to plan how they will execute their final work. Encourage them to use more than one tool and process to apply color to the support. Perhaps view the video again; watching the several ways White makes contact with the support/canvas. Note that White sometimes pours thinned paint, sometimes squeezes out linear blobs onto tracing paper then folds, presses and prints the bilaterally symmetrical motifs onto the support, sometimes decoupages, and rarely uses a brush. She uses thick paint, thinned paint and sometimes just clear gel medium. This process is likely to produce a many-layered composition and thus benefits from drying time in between sessions. Hair dryers help to hasten the drying process during a class session.

(Time: Three 45-minute sessions)

Critical Questions:

- How does art illustrate the connections between humans and memory?
- How are conceptions of history, nature, religion, philosophy, and personal experience embedded in art forms?
- What are the relationships between process and product? Between Real and imaginary?
- What are the ways that art serves as a form of communication and as moral education?
- How do particular artists engage in the issues and movements like feminism?
- How do the visual images we create today reflect current issues, concerns, and agendas? Or are they “just” decorative?

Reflection and Evaluation:

- Have students demonstrated an understanding of how conceptions of history, nature, religion, philosophy, and personal experience are embedded in visual art forms?

- Have students demonstrated an understanding of the influences of Abstract Expressionism, OP, POP, religion, and feminism, on contemporary artists?
- Have students created a work that has integrated two concepts into one recurring motif and used combinatory processes in the execution of the work?

Credits:

Much of the above is taken from PBS.org Art 21 Educational Materials
(<http://www.pbs.org/art21/education/.html>)