



Hung-Kwai Chan, *Colors and Strokes*, 1982

INTRODUCTION

Abstract art can appear like objects and places that viewers recognize, but it might not represent anything specific. An artwork that uses exaggerated colors, shapes, and lines to represent actual objects and places is called abstract. However, when an artist doesn't aim to depict anything beyond the elements of art such as color and line, it is referred to as non-representational (an extreme type of abstract art). This may leave the viewer stumped trying to figure out what it means. However, abstract art *doesn't* necessarily have a singular meaning or message. The work might be intended to evoke an emotion, or to encourage the viewer to focus on color, line, and material as meaningful in their own right. Sol Lewitt, a prominent artist of the 1960s whose art was non-representational, spoke to this notion when he said, "A drawing of a person is not a real person, but a drawing of a line is a real line." Artist Hung-Kwai Chan believes there is a strong correlation between abstract art and Chinese calligraphy because of their dependency on lines. Calligraphy can be considered abstract because the characters don't visually resemble the thing they reference.

ARTIST BIO

Hung-Kwai Chan (b. 1958) grew up both in Hong Kong and San Francisco, and the culture of each location informed his creative inspirations. Though his interest in art came at a young age, Hung-Kwai (his family name) did not always consider it as a profession. It was not until after he received an undergraduate degree in accounting that Hung-Kwai returned to Brigham Young University to complete his Master of Fine Arts. He established himself as an accounting manager before turning to art full time.

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Hung-Kwai Chan works with oil paints, charcoal, pastels, and other mediums. His art ranges from figural to non-representational, and though his subject matter changes often, Hung-Kwai's loose, expressive style is a common thread throughout his work. Another mark of his art is his use of bold colors. The artist's goal is to evoke emotion by speaking through a visual language, rather than creating a naturalistic representation of the world.

ARTWORK

Colors and Strokes draws inspiration from the Abstract Expressionist movement and Chinese calligraphy. Here, the individual brushstrokes and layering of paint are not the means to an end, they are the final product. Although the painting might look impulsive, Hung-Kwai Chan describes the work as very calculated. Additionally, Hung-Kwai discreetly included the Chinese characters representing "heaven" (天) and "emperor" (皇) into this work.

GOALS

Students will be able to:

- 1 Identify formal elements of the painting (such as colors, shapes, and lines) and discuss the associations and feelings they create
- 2 Understand the difference between representational, abstract, and non-representational art
- 3 Identify the significance of Chinese calligraphy within Chinese culture
- 4 Respond to a work of art through poetry
- 5 Create their own abstract artwork

LOOK AND DISCUSS

- What is the first word that comes to your mind when you see this artwork? Next, describe this painting in a sentence. Then, look closely at the image for 60 seconds and describe it again in a paragraph. What else do you find that you had not noticed initially? If you could again describe the painting in one word, what would it be?
- Creative comparisons: If this work were a type of music, what might it sound like? If this work were a type of food or candy, what would it taste like? If this work were an animal, what would it look like?
- The artist focuses on color and line, rather than depicting actual objects. What types of lines can you identify in the painting? How many different colors can you name?
- Hung-Kwai Chan discreetly included the Chinese characters representing "heaven" (天) and "emperor" (皇) into this work. Can you find them?

CONTINUE THE STORY

Chinese calligraphy is an art form with a rich history and thousands of years of evolution, dating back to 1600 BCE. In China, calligraphy and painting emerged around the same time, but calligraphy was elevated early on and considered a form of fine art. Its significance in Chinese culture cannot be overstated, as it serves many different purposes: it is the basis of language, a form of visual art, and even a moral compass to strive by. It corresponds directly to the Chinese concept of morality as learning the artform requires extreme dedication (there are over 50,000 characters in total). The limited number of tools used in calligraphy can result in a multitude of effects, depending on how they are used. A traditional calligraphy brush has a flexible tip that allows for fluid and dynamic strokes, but the pressure applied, speed, angle, and amount of ink are elements that students must diligently practice. Every line is intentional; mastering control over movement is part of capturing the essence of the written subject matter.

- Scan this QR code to learn about Chinese calligraphy and Abstract Expressionism.
- What similarities do you see between Chinese calligraphy and Abstract Expressionism?



ACTIVITY #1: COLOR POETRY

Materials: Pencils, paper

Subject Areas: Visual Arts, English Language Arts

Duration: 30 minutes

Read the poem "Colors Passing Through Us" by Marge Piercy (you can find it on Google). Reflect on the colors in the painting *Colors and Strokes*. Pick one color in the painting that you like and write a short poem about it. What does that color look like, smell like, feel like if you were to touch it, or remind you of? How does it make you feel? Arrange the smaller poems into a larger class poem.

UTAH STATE VISUAL ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS

Strand: Create (V.R)

Students will understand, evaluate and articulate how works of art convey meaning for the observer as well as the creator.

Strand: Connect (V.CO)

Students will relate artistic skills, ideas, and work with personal meaning and external context.

ACTIVITY #2: CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY

Materials: Paper, any available art supplies (colored pencils, crayons, markers, watercolors, oil pastels)

Subject Areas: Visual Arts

Duration: 30 minutes

Scan this QR code to review a list of Chinese characters, and pick one word from the list to depict. Rather than making a realistic depiction of the word you choose, simply use color and line to represent the concept. If you would like, incorporate the Chinese character into the work.

UTAH STATE VISUAL ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS

Strand: Create (V.CR)

Students will generate artistic work by conceptualizing, organizing, and completing their artistic ideas. They will refine original work through persistence, reflection, and evaluation.

Strand: Create (V.R)

Students will understand, evaluate and articulate how works of art convey meaning for the observer as well as the creator.

Strand: Connect (V.CO)

Students will relate artistic skills, ideas, and work with personal meaning and external context.



ASSESSMENT

Assessment for this lesson may include gauging student understanding of new vocabulary, such as abstract, non-representational art, and calligraphy. The activity "Color Poetry" can be used to assess students' critical thinking and writing skills. The activity "Chinese Calligraphy" allows students to expand their creative imagination.

