

# **Teachers' Notes**

***Bright Colours, Big Canvas: Jack Bush***  
**An Introduction to Abstract Art for Grades 7 and 8**

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Produced by:  
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## Introduction

*Bright Colours, Big Canvas: Jack Bush*, on view at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre from 9 May to 25 October 2009, features an array of paintings by one of Canada's leading abstract artists. Jack Bush (1909-1977) used thin paint and large canvases to create vibrant explorations of form and colour. The exhibition, drawn from the Art Centre's collection, also includes seven works by artists who were inspired by Bush.

## Program

The exhibition *Bright Colours, Big Canvas: Jack Bush* provides the basis for an innovative art program specifically designed for an in-depth learning experience for students in Grade 7 and 8.

Through interactive discussion of original works of art and hands-on projects, led by an Artist/Educator, participants will gain an understanding of an important Canadian artist and expand their creative skills. They will:

- Discuss the similarities and differences between representational art and abstract art.
- Explore the connection between music and art.
- Learn about the work of Jack Bush and his contemporaries, through an excerpt from a film and gallery discussion.
- Experiment with compositional elements, leading to the creation of their own abstract or semi-abstract paintings.
- Expand their critical thinking and collaborative teamwork skills through group analysis and arrangement of the finished works.

## Description of Exhibition

Bush had a profound influence on abstract art in Canada, and particularly in Toronto. The exhibition highlights his paintings from the 1960s and 1970s. Though everyday things often incited Bush to paint, when brush came to canvas, the result was decidedly abstract, and far from his early landscapes. But this exhibition is not about artistic evolution; rather it is a celebration of the visually explosive mature period in the artist's oeuvre.

The exhibition also includes seven works by artists who were inspired by Bush's example. These artists – David Bolduc, Alex Cameron, Paul Fournier, K.M. Graham, Milly Ristvedt, Daniel Solomon and Carol Sutton – made their own explorations of colour and paint on a grand scale.

## Curriculum Connections

**Visual Arts:** Students will:

- Describe how the repetition of elements is used to create rhythm.
- Describe how the elements of design are used to create the area of emphasis in a work of art.
- Organize their works of art to create specific effects, using at least two of the principles of design.
- Explain how the principles of design are used to organize a work, communicate feelings, and convey ideas, using appropriate vocabulary and terminology.

**Music:** Students will:

- Communicate their thoughts and feelings about the music they hear, using language and a variety of art forms and media.

## Before the Visit

The following are suggested discussion topics to help prepare your students for their visit.

### Collecting Original Works of Art

Discuss the nature of a public art gallery with your class. We collect, conduct research on, preserve and display original works of art for the benefit of people visiting today and in the future.

*Bright Colours, Big Canvas: Jack Bush* is a selection from the Art Centre's collection of important Canadian works of art. Talk with your students about developing a collection:

- What is involved in deciding what should be included in a collection?
- Does anyone in your class collect anything? Stamps? Hockey cards? Songs on an iPod? Books?
- How do they decide what to include in their collections?

## What is Abstract Art?

Since the program's focus is looking at, learning about and creating abstract art, we suggest that the class review the definition of abstract art before your visit.

A simple, common definition of abstract art is *not realistic*. However, many artists take a figure or landscape and simplify it, exaggerate it, or stylize it in some way. They are not trying to imitate nature, but to use it as a stimulus. Colour, line, and form are more important to them than the details of the actual subject matter. They want to give a sense or feel for the subject rather than an exact replication.

Non-objective art and non-representational art are loosely related terms. Some different movements of Abstract art include: Modernism, Pop Art, Op Art, Abstract Expressionism, and Post-Painterly Abstraction. Within the broad Post-Painterly Abstraction group was a sub-group called Colour Field: Jack Bush belongs here.

## Resources

### Films

#### *Contemporary Trends* (1984)

Describes the American art scene in the 1940s when painters in New York developed Abstract Expressionism. Among the artists represented are Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko. Also discusses and examines 20th century Minimal, Pop, Conceptual and Photorealist movements.  
VL4650, 1984, Teacher Resource Centre, Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University.

#### *Driven to Abstraction: Canadian Abstract Art and the Turbulent '50s* (1992, 32 minutes)

Using newsreel footage from the fifties, and archival interviews with artists, this video production juxtaposes major events of the time with comments from Canadian artists speaking about their explorations into the field of abstraction. We hear the views of Montréal artists associated with Automatism, and of those opposed to it. Artists from Toronto, the Prairies and Vancouver also discuss various aspects of abstract art in the fifties in Canada. Among the artists heard from in this film are: Fernand Leduc, Paul-Émile Borduas, Jack Bush, Marcelle Ferron, Jack Shadbolt, Gordon Smith, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Harold Town, Rita Letendre, Paterson Ewen, Ron Bloore and Takyo Tanobe. Directed by George Mully, produced by Anne Newlands, George Mully Production Agency, National Gallery of Canada.  
VL 1274 1992, Teacher Resource Centre, Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University.

#### *I Can Make Art Like Marcelle Ferron* (2006, 10 minutes)

Marcelle Ferron was a Québec-born painter and stained glass maker, and a dominant figure in contemporary art in Québec and Canada. Frequent stays in a dull, dark hospital room due to a childhood illness left her with a passion for light and colour that is evident in her abstract painting and modern stained glass creations. In this film students are exposed to contemporary abstract art and discover Ferron's luminous world. Inspired by her extraordinary art, they create their own works, experimenting

with the texture and transparency of cellophane and paint. Directed by Jane Churchill, produced by Tamara Lynch, Production Agency, National Film Board of Canada. NX180.C45 I23 2006 VHS pt.004, Faculty of Education Library, Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University, Video Collection - Floor 2.

*Modern and Abstract Painting in Canada* (1991, 36 minutes)

This video compilation consists of two videos respectively entitled *Modern Art in Canada - The Beginnings*, 18 min., and *The Painter Speaks - Canadian Abstract Painters*, 18 min. Looking at works of art from 1900 through the 1930s, the first video examines the influence of the European avant-garde on some Canadian artists who contributed to modern art development in Canada. The second video is composed of archival radio, television and film footage that shows Canadian artists discussing the roots of their interest in abstraction, as well as their individual approaches to it. Directed by George Mully Production Agency, National Gallery of Canada. ND245 .M63 1991 VHS, Faculty of Education Library, Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University, Video Collection - Floor 2.

*Visual Design: Elements and Principles* (1989, 20 minutes)

This video describes the visual organization of abstract elements including arrangement, pattern and composition. It also highlights the use of line, space and form, shape and size, scale, light and value, texture and colour. VL3952, 1989, Teacher Resource Centre, Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University.

*What's This? Understanding Contemporary Art* (1996, 28 minutes)

An introduction to the richness and diversity of the National Gallery of Canada's contemporary art collection, this video features works by Canadian and international artists from the 1970s through to the present. This film is organized into nine sections and highlights paintings, sculptures, installations and photographs. Beginning with the question "What is contemporary art?" the video addresses fundamental questions about contemporary art: Why does it look so simple? How should we look at it? This video provides personal insights into why artists create and looks at the wide range of materials they use and the effects that photography and new technologies have on their work. *What's This?* also examines the role that language and history have played in shaping the art of Canada's First Nations. Directed by Chris Mullington, produced by Sheila Petzold, Production Agency National Gallery of Canada, The Television Factory. VL 5427 1998, Teacher Resource Centre, Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University.

## Books

Lynch, John. *How to Make Mobiles*. New York, NY: Studio Publications in association with Crowell, 1970.

Inside the book you will find photographs of and information on how to build mid-century modern mobiles based on artist Alexander Calder's designs. NB212 .L9 1970 Faculty of Education Library, Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University.

Moszynska, Anna. *Abstract Art*. London, UK: Thames and Hudson, reprint 1990.

The author explains how abstract art originated and evolved, discusses major abstract artists and movements, and looks at the current revival of abstract painting.  
N6494 .A2 M69 1990t Stauffer Library - Art Collection, Queen's University.

Raimondo, Joyce. *What's the Big Idea? Activities and Adventures in Abstract Art*. New York, NY: Watson-Guptill, 2008.

This fifth book in the Art Explorer series provides an introduction to the world of abstract art, with examples from the great abstract artists such as Picasso and Matisse. The book is filled with wonderful lessons and excellent activities to demonstrate the different styles of abstract art and how to recreate similar work. Raimondo's focus is to introduce, but not to encourage, exact replicas and to use the sample artwork as a springboard for aspiring artists to create their own masterpieces. Students use their imagination, lines, colors, and shapes to produce abstract art.  
N6494.A2 R28 2008 Faculty of Education Library, Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University.

Venezia, Mike. *Jackson Pollock*. Chicago, IL: Children's Press, 1994.

This book provides an entertaining and humorous introduction to the famous Abstract Expressionist artist, Jackson Pollock. Full-colour reproductions of the actual paintings are enhanced by Venezia's clever illustrations and story line.  
759.13.V44, KITS Teacher Resource Centre, Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen's University.

## Websites

Alex Cameron

**<http://web.mac.com/alexcameronstudios/iWeb/Site/Alex%20Cameron.html>**

Home page of Canadian artist who was Jack Bush's assistant for many years. One of his works is included in the exhibition.

The Art History Archive on Canadian Art

**<http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/canadian/Jack-Bush.html>**

Overview of the artist and his work with a chronological listing of his paintings.

Art is Fun

**[www.art-is-fun.com/understanding-abstract-art.html](http://www.art-is-fun.com/understanding-abstract-art.html)**

This site includes interesting information on the definition of abstract art and provides many visual examples. It also discusses the use of colour in abstract art.

Ask Art – the Artists' Blue Book

**[www.askart.com/AskART/B/jack\\_hamilton\\_bush/jack\\_hamilton\\_bush.aspx](http://www.askart.com/AskART/B/jack_hamilton_bush/jack_hamilton_bush.aspx)**

The Artists' Blue Book provides biographical information, book references auction records and thirty-nine images of Bush's paintings.

The Canadian Encyclopedia

**[www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0001127](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0001127)**

Here is a short overview of Bush including two colour images.

CyberMuse  
**cybermuse.gallery.ca**

This the art education research site of the National Gallery of Canada.

Empty Easel

**www.emptyeasel.com/2007/01/10/what-is-abstract-art-and-how-should-we-look-at-it/**

Using the *Bull Profile Series* by Roy Lichtenstein this site illustrates the transformation of a representational art work to an abstract one.

The Virtual Museum of Canada – Teacher’s Centre

**www.virtualmuseum.ca/edu**

This section can be used by teachers or students, in English or French. It includes digital learning resources, lesson plans and an interactive virtual classroom.

## **After the Gallery Visit: Extending into the Classroom**

During the school program students discussed abstract art and created a related painting. They were also introduced to how works of art can represent and correspond to musical notes and melodies. In this follow-up project, students can take the concepts they have learned about the elements of design and apply them to creating a design based on their favourite song or album. This could take the form of a CD/DVD cover or webpage.

1. Students will listen to their chosen piece of music and sketch the shapes, lines, colours and repeated images that come to mind when they are listening. This will provide the inspiration for the abstract component of the project.
2. They will also create a representational or realistic image that evokes the theme of the music.
3. The finished work of art will incorporate a representational image on one side juxtaposed with an abstract image on the other. For the CD or DVD cover these can act as the front and back cover. For other applications the two images can be either be arranged vertically (side by side) or horizontally (one on top of the other)
4. Works of art can be scanned on a computer (or photocopied from the original) and then printed to the required size, or copied over into the appropriate file or webpage.
5. As an option the images of all the students could be combined together to make a music-inspired abstract quilt. In this case it would be preferable to have the sizes of the works of art all the same, for example the cover of a CD case, 12.3 centimetres x 12.3 centimetres (5 x 5 inches).
6. If possible some of the music pieces could be played for the rest of the class while looking at the corresponding works of art.
7. Students can discuss how the elements of design (i.e. colour, line, shape) are incorporated into the works of art.
8. As a further cross-curricular connection students could write a paragraph explaining the link between their images and the music.