

SCHOLASTIC

ART

Henri Matisse

working with shapes

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COVER: Henri Matisse (1869-1954). *The Fall of Icarus*, 1943. Cut paper. 13 3/4" x 10 1/2". Collection Tériade, Paris, France. All Matisse works in this issue © 1997 Artists Rights Society, NY, NY.

SCHOLASTIC
ART

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sculpting

“What I am after, above all, is expression.” — Henri Matisse



“The sensation of flight released in me helps to guide the scissors in my hand.”—Henri Matisse

Odalisque with a Turkish Chair, 1928. Oil on canvas. 23 5/8" x 28 3/4". Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris.



with scissors

Henri Matisse (on-REE ma-TICE), one of the greatest artists of this century, began as a lawyer. Born in 1869 in a small French town, Matisse showed little interest in art at school. His father—a well-to-do shopkeeper—sent him to law school. Matisse had already started working in a law office when he suddenly became ill. His mother brought Matisse a small paint box to help him pass the time. He tried some sketches and, as he later said, “I suddenly came to life. Somehow I knew I had found my true path.” In a few months, with his father’s warning “you’ll starve!” ringing in his ears, Matisse gave up law and left for Paris to study art.

For an artist, Paris in the 1890s was the most exciting city in the world. Matisse was affected by all the art he saw—the light-filled paintings of the Impressionists, the intense, personal visions of Van Gogh (van GO), Gauguin (go-GAN), and Cézanne (say-ZAN). He painted day and night, using the bright colors of the Impressionists. But “mere color sensations” weren’t enough for Matisse. He thought paintings should have structure, which, for him, meant the arrangement of *shapes* and the *spaces* between them. He wanted, “to capture the essential character of things.”

In all the figure paintings he did during the first 45 years of his life, Matisse reduced his shapes and flattened his colors in order to express the essence of his subject. In his last years, the artist simplified his art even further. He began cutting out paper shapes and arranging them into compositions.

Compare Matisse’s early painted figure (left) with a cutout figure (right) he did at the end of his life. The painted figure is the focal point of an entire composition. The objects around her are as important as she is. The shapes are **simplified**, the colors **flat**, the **patterns** in her clothes **repeat** those in the background. The cutout has been reduced to its essence—one shape; one color. Floating freely in space, folding in on itself, this blue figure is completely self-contained. It is a figure, but it also comes very close to being a purely abstract shape. This cutout figure is a universal shape that could stand for all human figures.

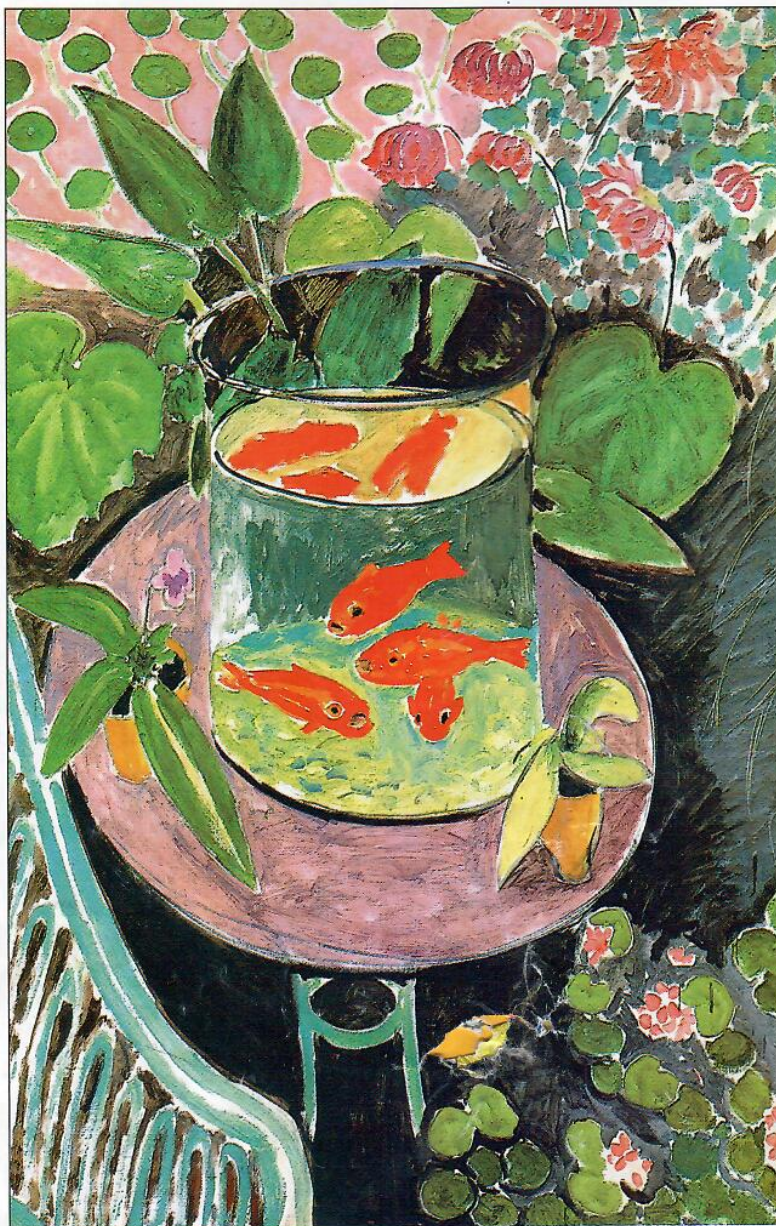


“Finally I have found the most direct way to express myself—the paper cutout.”—Henri Matisse

Blue Nude, 1952. Cut paper. 41 3/4" x 30 3/4". Beyeler Collection, Basel.

Nature Transformed

“My terrible operation has completely renewed me.” —Henri Matisse



In January 1941, when he was 72, Matisse had a major operation that nearly ended his life. The artist never fully recovered and he was not able to paint. So he turned to drawing and to a technique he had used years before to design large murals. Lying on his back in bed, he used a piece of charcoal tied to a stick and sketched his ideas on the wall above him. Working with sheets of paper painted in bright colors, Matisse used scissors to cut out shape after shape. His assistants would then arrange

“I don’t paint nature. I paint the feelings nature produces in me.”
—Henri Matisse

Goldfish, 1912. Oil on canvas. 57 1/2" x 38 1/8". Pushkin Museum, Moscow. Scale/Art Resource. NY, NY.

the shapes according to his directions. These cutouts, as they were called, “grew” on the floor, walls, and ceiling of Matisse’s rooms. In this way the artist was able to cre-

“What I have tried to express for years as a painter I can now express with the simplest cutout.”—Henri Matisse

Chinese Fish, 1951. Cut paper. 75 3/4" x 35 7/8".
Collection Vicci Sperry.

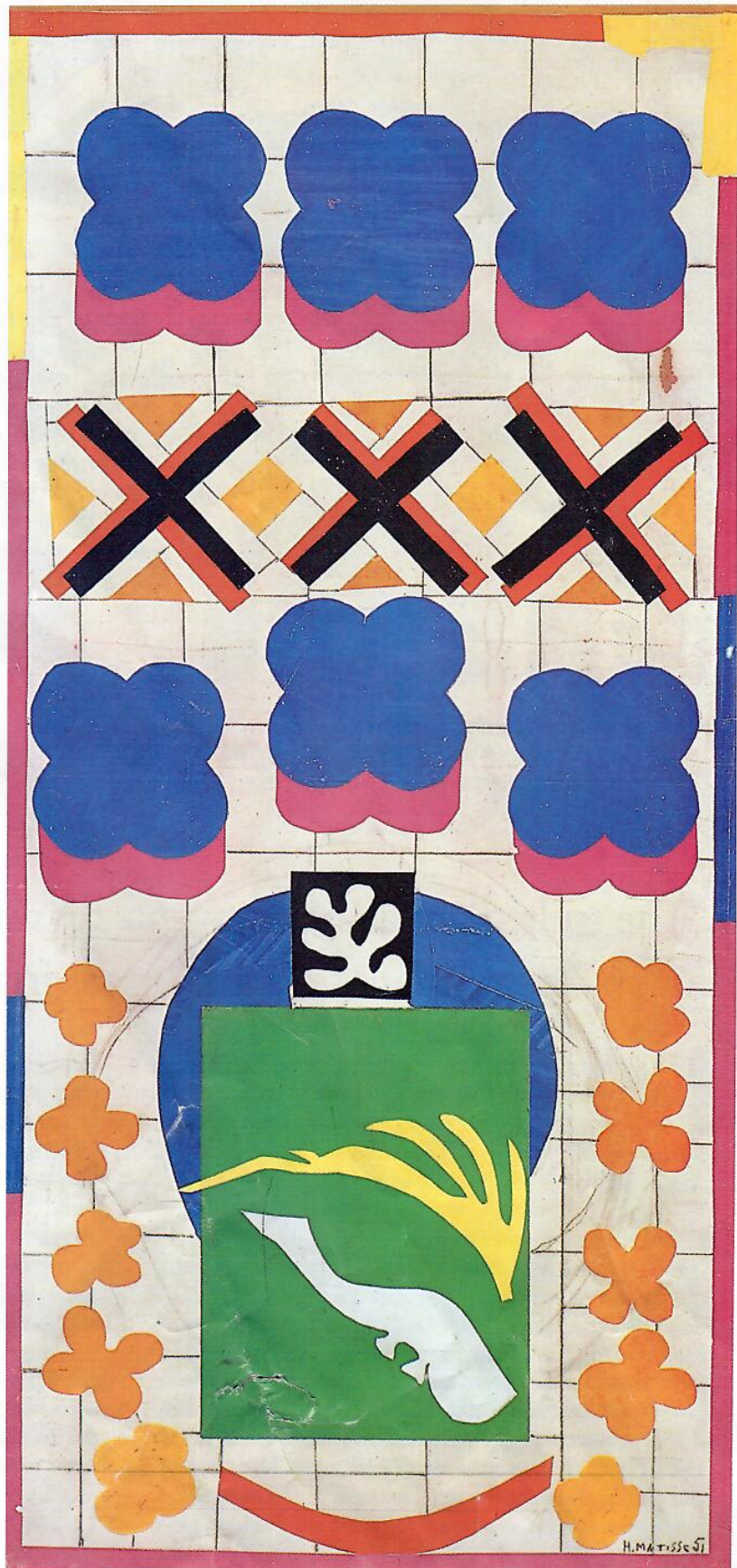
ate his own environment. “Thanks to my new art, I have a lush garden all around me. And I am never alone,” he said.

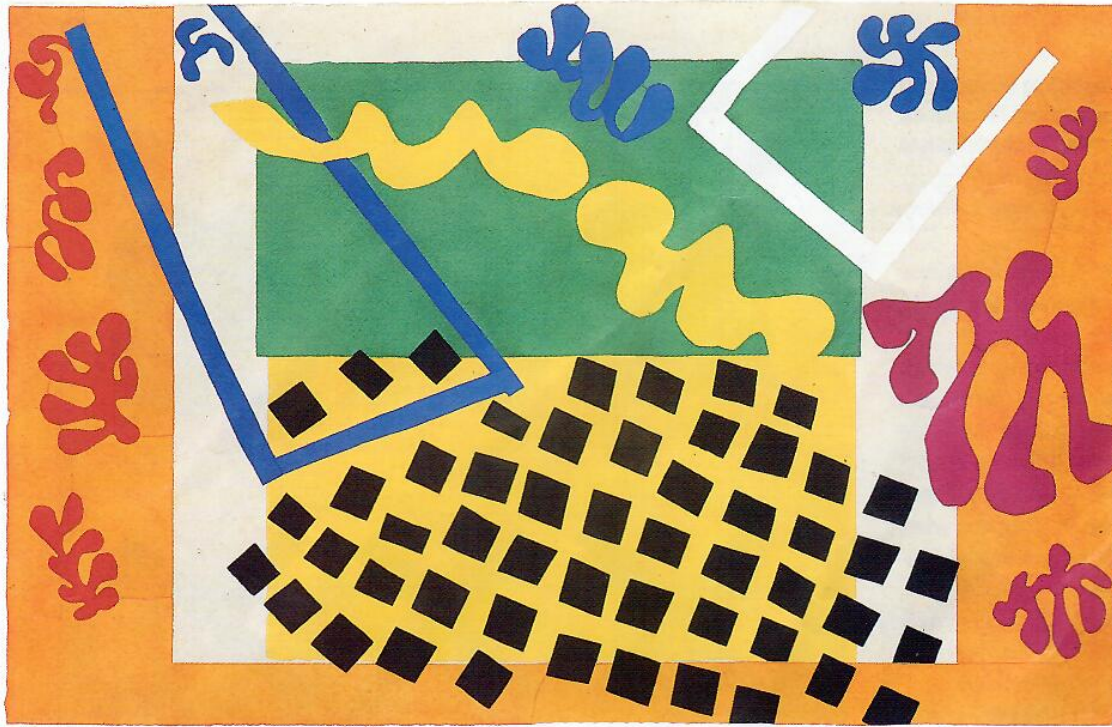
Matisse’s paper cutouts summed up an entire lifetime in art. In all his previous works the artist had tried to simplify, putting down his subject’s most basic qualities. When he discovered an object’s “essence,” he created a “sign” or a shape he felt expressed it. Over the years, Matisse repeated certain themes over and over. At the beginning of his career, around 1912, the artist had done a number of paintings featuring a bowl of goldfish. Forty years later, he created a cutout based on the same scene.

To paint *Goldfish* (left), Matisse worked from actual objects he saw in front of him. The shapes in *Chinese Fish* (right) are from the artist’s imagination. As Matisse was cutting out the shapes he used in this work, the scene with the goldfish bowl he had painted so long ago was probably in his mind. In this cutout, Matisse has transformed an experience from his past into a nearly abstract image made up entirely of shapes. If you compare the cutout to the painting, you can follow the artist’s creative process. The green rectangle at the bottom was inspired by the memory of the fish tank. Negative fish-like shapes are set into it. The purple circle represents the table and the repeated pink and purple shapes stand for begonias, the flowers in the painting.

Matisse wanted *Chinese Fish* and the other works he did at the end of his life to surround the viewer, like an environment. In 1951, he designed an entire chapel located in the small town of Vence (Vonce) in southern France. He created stained-glass windows, murals, the altar, even special garments for the priests. *Chinese Fish*, done in the same year, was also meant to be a stained-glass window. Over six feet tall, the repeated squares of white paper were to be grids of glass to let in white light. The geometric background sets off the bright organic shapes and the black diagonal crosses.

Because of his health, it became increasingly difficult for Matisse to work even in cut paper. In spite of this, he did some of his largest and most famous cutouts in the two years before his death in 1954, at the age of 85.





The Codomas brothers were famous trapeze artists who performed in the early 20th century. Can you find their trapezes? And can you pick out their two bright yellow forms, swinging high out over the black shapes representing the safety net spread below them?

The Codomas, Plate XI from Jazz. 16 5/8" x 25 5/8".

Shapes from the

“The truly original artist invents his own signs,” Henri Matisse said. He created a new visual language using images from the circus.

In 1943, Matisse was having a hard time trying to paint. The Second World War was raging around him. He was afraid that the city of Nice (neese) in southern France where he was living, might be bombed any day. And he was still feeling very weak from his surgery. So he moved out of the city and began trying to work on a new project, a book he had planned to write and illustrate.

Having been very close to death, Matisse wanted to use this project to sum up all his ideas on art. To do this, he decided to visualize some of his favorite childhood memories—circuses, music halls, faraway places—and the sounds of jazz that he had first heard in Paris as a young man. Matisse was going to use his new cut-paper technique to create the shapes to be reproduced in this book. He was planning to call it *The Circus*. So he started creating shapes, picking them up and putting them down again. He began to feel that he was playing with his pieces of paper the way a jazz musician plays with notes, trying them this way and that, until he has the

arrangement he wants. So, although most of the subjects featured in the 20 prints that make up Matisse’s book are images from the circus, he decided to change the title to *Jazz*.

Matisse created his cutout shapes spontaneously, cutting into the paper, letting the scissors go where his memory took them. Some of his shapes are fairly easy to recognize, like the figures of the sword swallower (above center) and the clown (above right). But can you find another clown in the work above left? (It’s the purple shape on the right side of the work, according to Matisse).

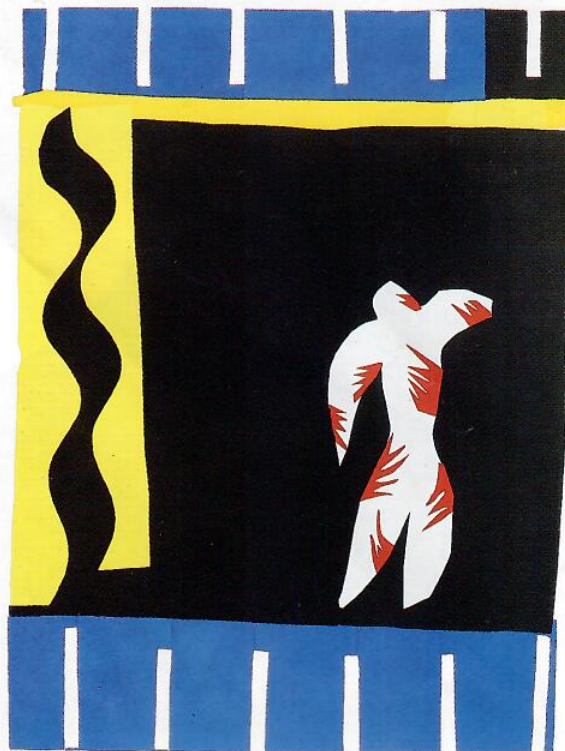
Matisse often compared his role as artist to that of a circus performer—a juggler, an acrobat, a tightrope walker. Some of these works—the knife thrower and his target (below, right), the swimmer and her audience (pages 8-9), and the trapeze artists (above left)—refer to Matisse’s feelings about the relationship of the artist and his model.

Sometimes the medium an artist uses determines the form of the work. Because Matisse used sheets of cut paper, the



The Sword Swallower has filled his mouth with geometric rectangles. Can you find the swords? Compare their twisted, curving shapes with the shape on the left in *The Knife Thrower* (below).

The Sword Swallower, Plate XIII from *Jazz*. 16 5/8" x 25 5/8".



Matisse thought that the artist should take risks. *The Clown* makes people laugh but he also faces danger, as you can see from the flame-like shapes that surround him.

The Clown, Plate I from *Jazz*. 16 5/8" x 25 5/8".

the past

when he created

shapes in his cutouts are very distinctive. The cutouts shown here express the **rectangular** shape of the paper. The shapes that stand for people and plants are **organic** (curved); the backgrounds are **geometric**. Rectangles hold many of these works together by acting as **framing devices** for the curved forms. Creating **positive shapes** in cut paper automatically produces **negative shapes**, like the "cut away" shape over the heart of the knife thrower's human target. A sheet of paper can be cut and pulled apart, and the **space between** will form a new shape (see the yellow area on the left side of *The Clown*.) And Matisse wasted none of his shapes since, if he couldn't use them in one work, he saved them and put them in another. (The red flame-like shapes in *The Clown* are cutaways saved from other images like the figure on the cover.)

All cutouts on this page courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Lila Acheson Wallace, 1983.



The red, active shape of *The Knife Thrower* contrasts with the soft, pale shape of his target. Matisse uses the cutaway shape of one of the flowers surrounding the figures to express that "the target's heart is like a flower because she is sure the knife will miss her."

The Knife Thrower, Plate XV from *Jazz*. 16 5/8" x 25 5/8".

SCHOLASTIC

ART

MASTERPIECE
OF THE
MONTH #3

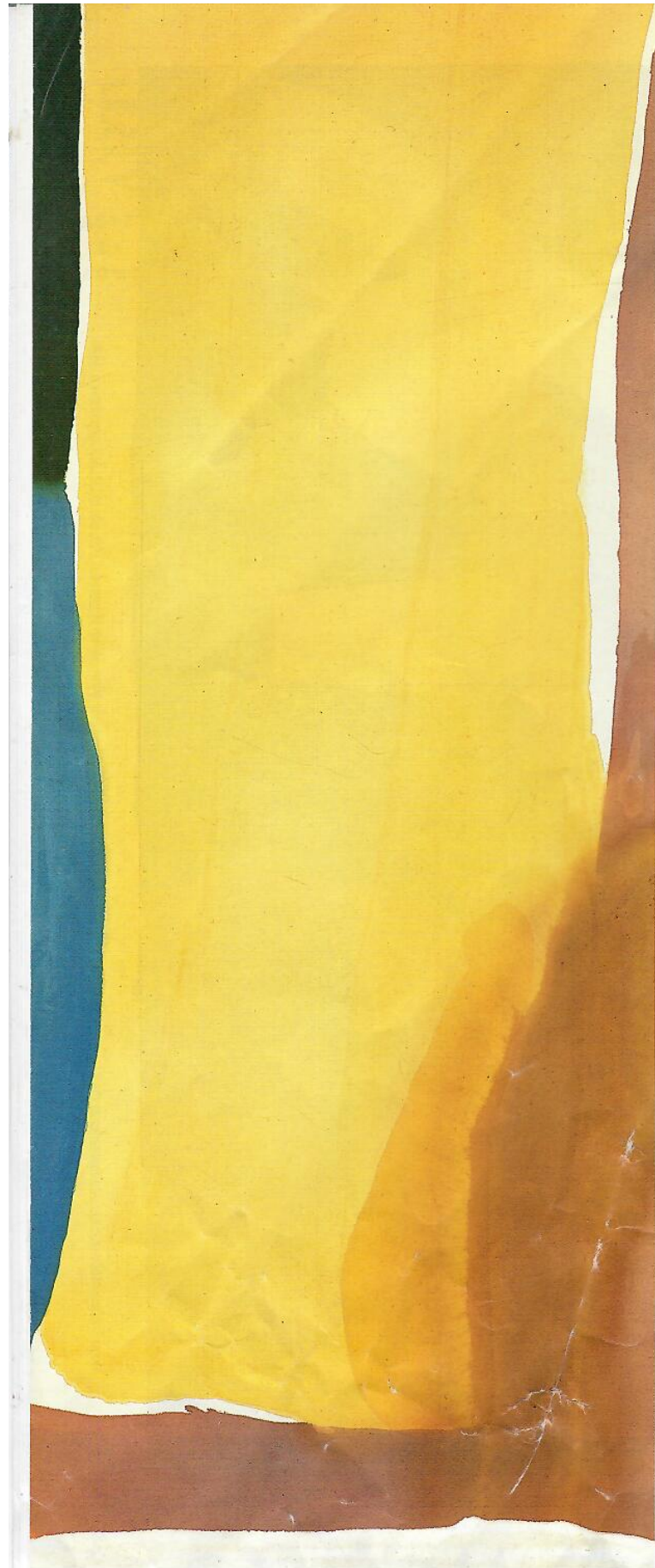


The swimmer in the ac



uqrium by HENRI MATISSE

Henri Matisse (1869-1954). *The Swimmer in the Aquarium*, Plate XI I from *Jazz*. 16 5/8" x 25 5/8". Cut paper. the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Lila Acheson Wallace, 1983.



ART SPOTLIGHT

WORKING WITH SHAPES

How have each of these artists used shapes to express their own visions of the world?

< *Natural Shapes*

The paintings of contemporary American Helen Frankenthaler, like *Wales* (left), may at first seem to be completely **abstract**. But they almost always suggest the presence of a landscape. **Layers of color** form mysterious **shapes** that suggest very real places and moods.

During a time in the early 1950s, when most American painters were working abstractly, Frankenthaler developed a new painting technique known as “soak-stain.” She diluted oil paints and poured them onto raw canvases, creating two-

dimensional shapes that “bled” into one another.

Although her paintings are done spontaneously, Frankenthaler, like Matisse, believes that **composition**—shapes and the way they are arranged—is just as important as color. “Color alone is just decoration,” she says. “You might as well be making a shower curtain.”

In *Wales*, a huge yellow rectangle, its jagged edges resembling torn paper, suggests a soaring expanse where the boundaries between land and sky are blurred.

“As I looked out the window in the morning, all the shapes I saw were connected in my mind with states of feeling.”—Helen Frankenthaler

Helen Frankenthaler, b. 1928. *Wales*, 1966. Acrylic on canvas. 113 1/4" x 45". National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.



< Eternal Shapes

American realist William Bailey arranges carefully planned groups of ordinary objects into compositions that suggest classic Italian townscapes. In this still-life (left), Bailey invites the viewer to reflect on what is timeless in a constantly changing world.

The realistic modeling of Bailey's sculpted, highly simplified objects forces us to remember just how important these items are in our lives. The artist has turned bowls, cups, vases, eggs

into elemental shapes—ovals, triangles, circles, cylinders. It is difficult to imagine that any of the pitchers or jars in this painting has ever been used.

The placement of these objects is also far from random. They are lined up formally and presented in a cold, clinical light. The stark brown backdrop serves to fix, or imprison, the objects on a table in an imaginary room so that all the viewer notices is their shape.

"I paint objects I see every day. But I don't put them in a contemporary setting. I want them to be seen as shapes."—William Bailey

William Bailey. *Via Invernale*, 1995. Tempera. 16 1/2' x 20'. Andre Emmerich Gallery, NY, NY.

∨ Shapes That Tell a Story

Both Henri Matisse and early 20th-century African-American artist William Johnson used flat colors and stylized shapes to create their emotional images. Matisse simplified his curved, organic figures in order

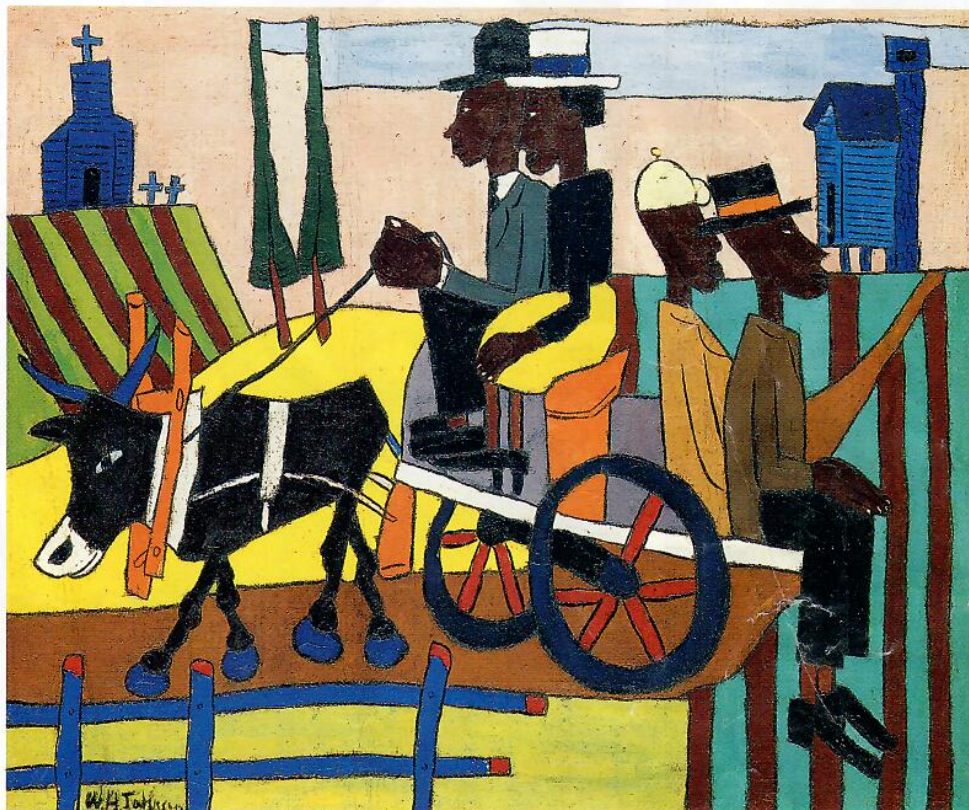
to express universal truths. But Johnson's gaunt, stick-like figures depict a harsher reality.

Johnson wanted his images to communicate the difficult conditions experienced by blacks in rural areas of the South. Born in

1901, Johnson left his native South Carolina at 17 to study painting in New York City. He later traveled throughout Europe and North Africa. And the more he traveled, the more he was drawn back to the land-

scapes and experiences he had known as a boy. Upon returning to the U.S. at the outbreak of World War II, Johnson said, "My aim is to express the traditions I grew up with. They have been passed from generation to generation and they are now concentrated in me."

Both American and African influences are reflected in the shapes Johnson used to create one of his best-known works, *Going to Church* (left). The angular forms, geometric shapes, and contrasting color stripes combine the patterns used in African fabrics and African-American quilts. The figures' thin vertical shapes anchor them to their background. Their legs echo the patterns of the fields. It is clear that these upright people, stacked in a flat and limited landscape, still retain their dignity in the face of great cruelty and hardship.

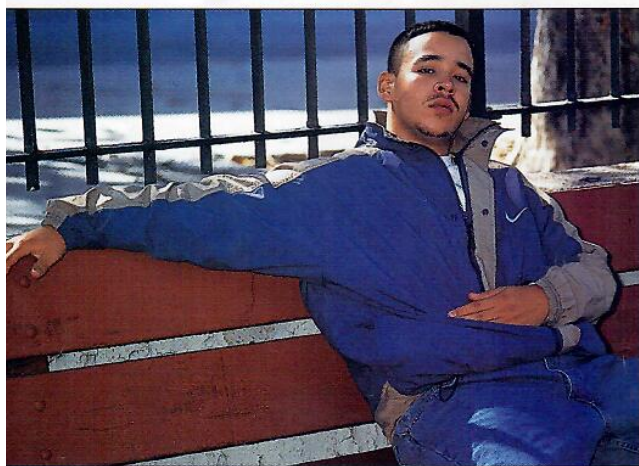


"I am not afraid to exaggerate a form if it will give character to the painting."—William H. Johnson

William H. Johnson. *Going to Church*, 1940-41. Oil. 38 1/8' x 45 1/2'. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian. Washington, DC. Art Resource.

Daniel Alvarez

CREATING HIS OWN WORLD



Just as Matisse used cutout shapes to create his own environment, Scholastic Art Award winner Daniel Alvarez creates his own jungles of painted shapes. "Art calms me down," he says. "It gives me time to think and allows me to express myself. No one knows how I feel, but they do when they look at my paintings."

Daniel did this work at John V. Lindsey High School in New York City. He plans to go to Manhattan Community College, where he'll take business classes, photography and painting "so I can keep pursuing my art."

We select our Artist of the Month only from among Scholastic Art Award winners.

In order to enter, ask your teacher to write for entry deadlines and rules books to: The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999.

Scholastic Art magazine does not have a separate competition.

■ **When did you first get started in art?**

When I was young, I would draw and doodle and stuff. But I never painted. I only took my first art class a couple of years ago. It was mandatory to get out of high school. My high school art teacher was a beautiful painter. She explained to me that a painter doesn't always have the skills to make a great painting. He works his way up and discovers his talents as he does. She looked at my first painting, said I had a little talent and I should keep going with it. And I did.

■ **How did you come to create this award-winning painting?**

One day during the summer, I went over to the school because I was bored. My art

teacher had a class going on and she asked me to come in. She asked everyone to draw whatever was on their mind. I drew the jungle. I was trying to get away from the city at the time. I had just come back from Puerto Rico. My family is from there. I had gotten back to my roots and I guess I missed it. The people were nice. It wasn't a place about violence. It was peaceful. I had seen the tropics there—the jungle and the flowers—and that put me in the mood to paint what I did.

■ **Where did you get your idea -- birds on each side and a flower in the middle?**

I don't know. First came the jungle, then the flowers, then there were birds on each side staring at the flower. It just

came out. My teacher was amazed. Everyone was drawing beaches, girls and men. I was drawing the jungle. She said I have a crazy mind; that I was crazy in an original creative way. She liked that I wasn't doing what everyone else was.

■ **Why did you do two panels?**

I thought I would be able to improve my first painting, so I did another one. But to tell you the truth, it was like each one had its own feeling. When I put both of them together to choose which I liked best, I decided to keep both. I felt they were meant to go together.

■ **What were you trying to express in your work?**

Peacefulness. A lot of peacefulness. The image I painted

seems very calm to me. I think birds are the most soothing animals on earth. That's why I drew them. It's the opposite of the kind of life everyone around me lives in this city. It's real calm.

■ **How did you actually do your painting?**

First I knew I wanted to paint a jungle. But I didn't know what I would put in the jungle yet. I wanted to use a lot of deep, dark greens. For the flowers I wanted a lot of red. I also used yellow-green to lighten up the painting. I wanted blue, white, and black for the birds.

Once I knew all this, I started drawing on the canvas. I sketched in the jungle, but I didn't draw the birds or flowers yet. I still didn't know where I

wanted them. I painted the jungle, but when I was done I felt something was missing. The painting was too dark. I waited for it to dry, then I decided to draw one big beautiful flower in the middle of the jungle. I liked it so much I drew more. After that I added birds staring at the flower.

I felt the painting was still too dark so I started mixing in light colors. I used yellows and pinks to lighten up the red in the flowers. I threw in a lot of white to lighten the birds so they'd look more exotic. That was it for the first painting.

I wanted to bring more energy to the second painting—to make it look more fluorescent. I sprayed it with a coat of acrylic that makes colors shine. It was beautiful.

■ **Was there anything that you learned about art as a result of doing this painting?**

Yeah. I learned art can be anything. Everyone has their own definition of beauty. That's what makes everyone and their point of view special.

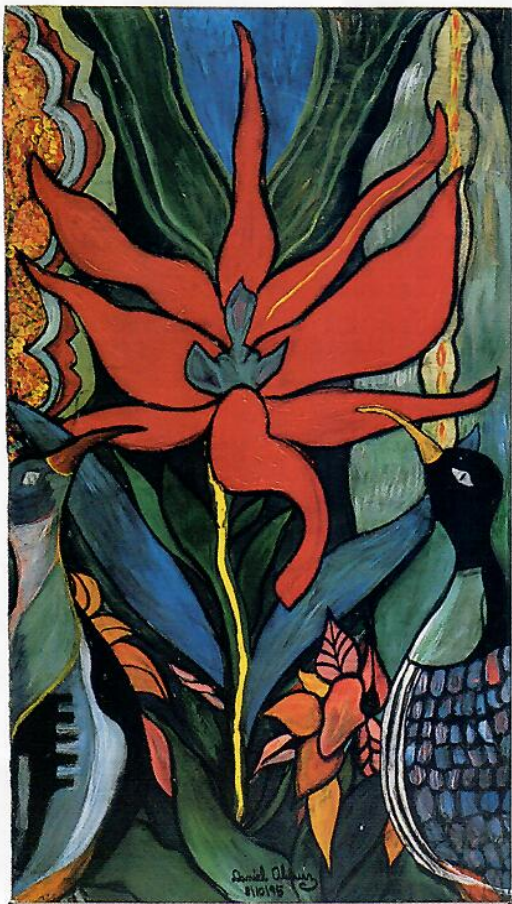
■ **What advice do you have for other students who are aspiring artists?**

If you love art, keep going with

it. You never know where it will lead you. When I started this painting, I didn't plan on winning an award.

When you're creating art, you never know what you can do. Sometimes you've just got to surprise yourself. Always have fun with what you do. Go with your inner emotions, whatever they are. Even if they're different from everybody else's.

“When I did this work I was trying to get away from the city. I had just come back from Puerto Rico. It wasn't a place about violence. It was peaceful.”



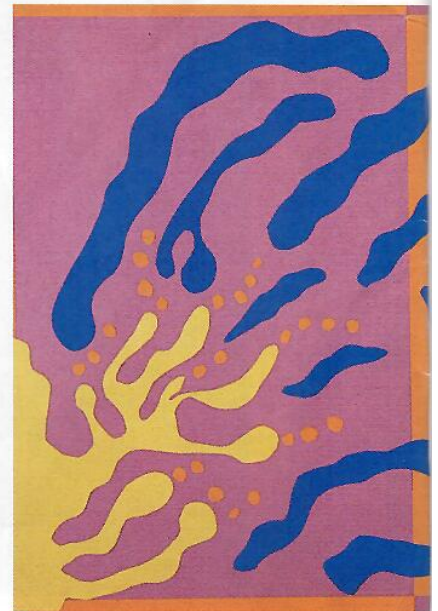
CREATING A CUTOUT

Transform everyday shapes into Matisse-like cutouts.



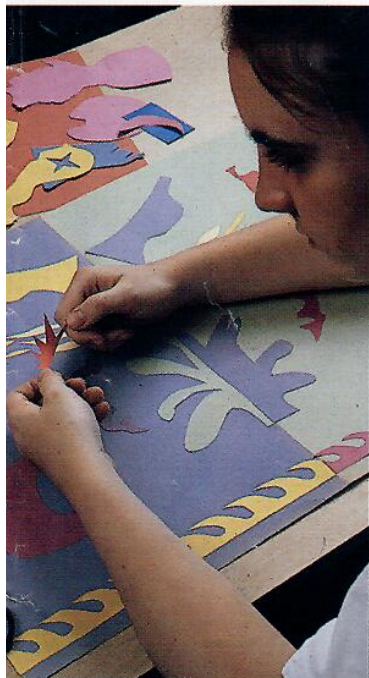
“Close your eyes, visualize the picture, then go to work,” were the words Henri Matisse used to describe the process of creating a cutout. Matisse didn’t begin making cutouts until he was in his 70s. So when he first picked up his scissors, the artist had a lifetime of images to draw on. In order to capture the “essential character of things,” Matisse made his shapes as basic and descriptive as possible.

In this workshop, you’ll also simplify shapes to capture their essence. And, just as Matisse did at the beginning of his career, you’ll start by simplifying images from the real world.



Materials

- Colored construction paper (9" x 12", 12" x 18", 18" x 24") and/or roll Kraft paper
- Elmer's Glue-All
- School pencil
- Sharp scissors
- Variety of plants (real or plastic) and/or mechanical objects
- Illustrations of land and aquatic plants from library and magazine sources (or photocopies of the illustrations)



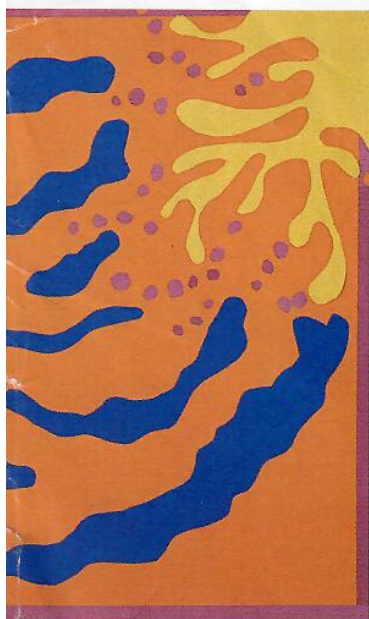
Starting Out

Decide on a theme for your composition and then pick out objects that will illustrate your concept. Select objects with distinctive shapes that can be simplified and stylized. You can use natural (organic) shapes—aquatic plants, house plants, (real or plastic), human and animal figures, fish (real or from photos), sun, moon, stars, or mechanical (geometric) objects from school (bike wheels, chairs, band instruments). You can combine different kinds of imagery as long as it relates in some way.

Step 2

Determine the final size of your cutout. Limit the number of colors you use to keep your composition unified. Piece together colored construction paper to use as a background. You may vary background or keep it all one color.

Paying attention to outside edges, lightly draw simplified shapes on pieces of construction paper. Eliminate unnecessary details; simplify images to the point of abstraction. Use leftover scraps for smaller images. Begin cutting out shapes. Save "cutaway" areas and group according to color. Dis-



Some Solutions

In which of the works on these two pages did the artist base the composition around **one large shape**? Who has **repeated the same shape** in different colors? Which cutout features a number of **diagonal shapes**? Can you find a **positive and a negative image** in any of these works? Do any of these cutouts seem to resemble "real" objects or natural scenes such as figures, plants, landscapes, the ocean floor? Which compositions appear to be **pure abstractions**? In any of these compositions, are the shapes arranged **symmetrically** (exactly the same on each side)? How many are **asymmetrical** (different on each side but visually balanced)?



Prepared by Ned J. Nesti, Jr., Art Instructor, Morrison (IL) High School.
Photos by Larry Gregory
Drawings by Allyson A. West (left); (above) Benjamin J. Boyles; Justin B. Boyles; Chris Paul Reed; Nicholas R. Bonheur.

card pieces you will not use. (Other students may wish to select pieces from this group for use in their compositions.)

Step 3

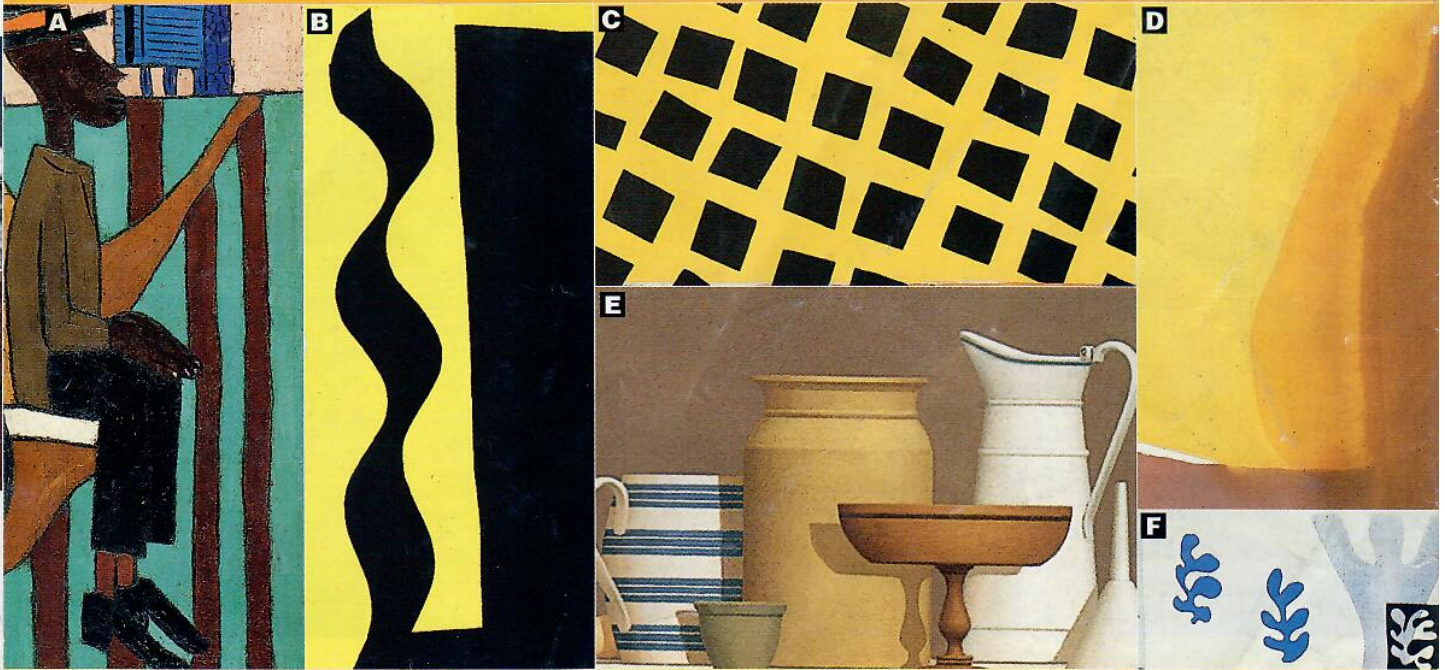
Organize shapes into a balanced, visually interesting composition. Combine **large shapes** with **small ones**; con-

trast **light and dark shapes**; use **curved shapes** with **straight ones**. You may **repeat** the same shape; **overlap** shapes or surround them with space so they appear to **float**. You can **crop parts** or use the **entire shape**. Try combining the **positive shape** you have cut out with its **negative cutaway area**.

Credits for page 16: William H. Johnson, *Going to Church* (detail), 1940-41. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian, Washington, DC. Art Resource; Henri Matisse (1869-1954). *The Clown* (detail), Plate I from *Jazz*. Metropolitan Museum of Art; Henri Matisse, *The Codomas* (detail), Plate XI from *Jazz*. Metropolitan Museum of Art.; Helen Frankenthaler, b. 1928. *Wales* (detail), 1966. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.; William Bailey. *Via Invermale* (detail), Andre Emmerich Gallery, NY, NY; Henri Matisse, *The Knife Thrower* (detail), Plate XV from *Jazz*. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

WORKING WITH SHAPES

These shapes were all used in this issue. Can you recognize them?



1. Which of the following terms could be used to describe the shapes above? Fill in the corresponding letter (or letters; shapes can have more than one of these characteristics. For example, A, B, and C all contain *repeated* shapes).

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repeated shapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Overlapping shapes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Floating shapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Shapes with black outlines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abstract shapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic shapes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Painted shapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Cutout shapes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organic shapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Angular shapes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flat shapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Modeled shapes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shapes with hard edges | <input type="checkbox"/> Stylized shapes |

2. Which image has positive/negative versions of the same shape? _____

3. In which image do the shapes dissolve into each other? _____

4. Which shape was made by cutting and pulling apart one piece of paper? _____

5. Can you name the artist who created each image?

A _____ D _____

B _____ E _____

C _____ F _____

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