

SCHOLASTIC

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ART

Miriam Schapiro
WORKING WITH SHAPES



COVER: Miriam Schapiro © b.1923. *Free Fall*, 1985. Paper and acrylic on paper. 64" x 90"
 Courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, NY, NY.

SCHOLASTIC

ART

Maurice R. Robinson, founder of Scholastic, Inc., 1895-1982

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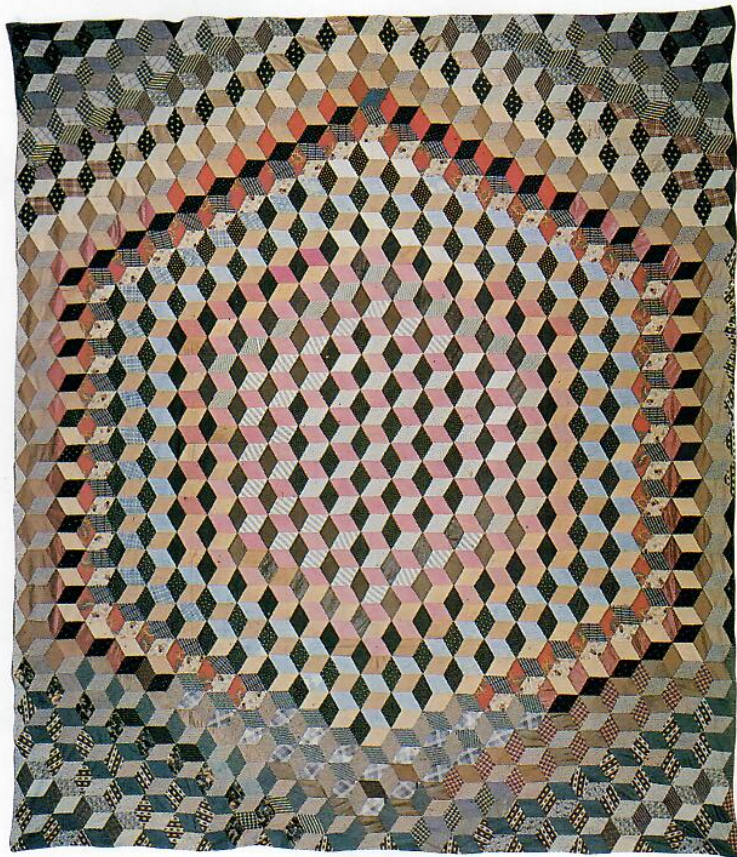
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THE POWER OF Cloth

"The collage elements in my paintings are the needlework of departed and forgotten women." — MIRIAM SCHAPIRO



Works of art like the quilt shown above have been created for generations by anonymous women artists.

Anonymous. *Baby Blocks*, c.1860. Pieced quilt top. 102" x 88" Private Collection.



The large work above was made in 1985 by Miriam Schapiro, a highly trained sophisticated contemporary artist. The quilt (left), was made over 100 years ago by a woman whose name we do not even know. The heart was done with custom-made fabrics, while the quilt was made from scraps of material the artist could afford to cut up and reuse. The heart was made to hang on a wall and look beautiful; the quilt, to put on a bed and keep people warm.

Yet the two works have a lot in common. Both use small bits of cloth to create a repeat pattern that produces a striking visual effect. Both are *abstract*, stressing *pattern* rather than a particular realistic image. And both come out of women's long tradition of sewing, embroidering, and household tasks.

The similarities between the works are no accident. Miriam Schapiro, the creator of *Heartland* (above), began her artistic life working in more conventional forms. Born in 1923 in Toronto, Canada, Schapiro moved to New York City in the 1950s to paint. In 1972, she began a collaboration with Judy Chicago, a feminist artist who was interested in incorporating women's images into her art.

Schapiro started working with patterned fabric and began creating a kind of collage

that incorporated women's experiences and traditions with craft techniques women have used for centuries such as sewing, embroidering, crocheting, and quilting. By using this style, which she called "femmeage," Schapiro was

trying to reconnect herself to earlier women artists who used their artistic talents for household products. She also wanted her viewers to see that women have always had artistic ability, even though the forms it has taken have not always been recognized.

That artistic ability is seen in the quilt (left), made in 1860. It consists of tiny geometric shapes, since straight edges were easiest to piece together. The *diamond shapes* are repeated at three different angles and the *contrasting values* give the impression of rows of three-dimensional blocks.

In *Heartland*, Miriam Schapiro has added "hearts and flowers" to a traditional "Baby Block" quilt pattern. By making this work nearly 8 feet square, Schapiro has created a monumental, heroic piece based on work previously considered merely "decorative." By the late 1970s, this kind of *pattern painting*—done by Miriam Schapiro and other artists, both male and female—had become a recognized art form.

Miriam Schapiro, who made the work above, has said, "I was trained to be an artist by men, but I learned how to express myself from women."

Heartland, 1985. 85" x 94" Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, FL. Photo courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, NY, NY. Miriam Schapiro ©





"How does an artist shape her own persona?" —MIRIAM SCHAPIRO

Personal Shapes

Miriam Schapiro transforms small, traditionally "feminine" shapes by enlarging them to enormous proportions.

A Mayan Garden, 1984. Acrylic and fabric on canvas. 48" x 96". Corporate Collection. Courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, NY, NY. Miriam Schapiro ©

When Miriam Schapiro started using her art to express her life as a woman, she began a journey through many artistic styles. In the 1980s, she created a new kind of collage incorporating both painting and

"found objects" (objects made for a separate purpose, but later used as part of an artistic work). True to both her feminist concerns and her artistic training, Schapiro, in her new work, combined an eye for abstract form with images of daily life, domestic objects, and women artists.

One of Miriam Schapiro's favorite shapes is the heart. Paintings like *Heartland* suggest valentines, candy boxes, and "quiet girls sitting at home waiting for suitors." In *A Mayan Garden* (above), Schapiro transforms another traditionally "female" shape—a fan—thought of as a delicate "prop" women use to flirt with men. In both works, Schapiro uses flower images and geometric patterns to set up a complex visual counterpoint which contrasts with the huge, simple shapes of the heart and fan. The artist encourages us to ask what might lurk beneath the surface of these shapes, what contradictory layers might exist

in relationships we take for granted.

Another important image in Schapiro's work is that of the woman artist. *The Poet* (right) shows a woman artist confined within a space that suggests the stylized shape of a house. The woman's figure is part of a colorful folk costume that fills the picture. We can see outstretched arms, a body, and a long skirt—but no head. Images of female domestic life—houses, cups, teapots, and flowers—fill the space where the woman's head should be.

Like Schapiro's other work, *The Poet* offers contradictory, sometimes disturbing messages. Is the woman full of vitality, filling her space with creative energy? Or is she confined and constricted without feet, hands, or a head to think and speak with? Do the colorful images of cups and flowers make "home" pleasant? Or do they symbolize a life in which women are expected to pour tea and arrange flowers, rather than write poetry (or paint pictures)?

Miriam Schapiro has said,
"All of my work is autobio-
graphical. It is about the
desires and yearnings of a
woman who decided a long
time ago to be a painter."

The Poet, 1982. Acrylic and fabric on canvas,
106' x 72'. Courtesy Steinbaum Krauss
Gallery, NY, NY. Miriam Schapiro ©



MASTERPIECE
OF
THE MONTH

Preview



This giant outdoor sculpture is made up of flat, simplified, stylized shapes.

Anna and David. 1987. Painted stainless steel and aluminum. 35' x 31' x 9". Commissioned by J. W. Kaempfer, Jr. for office building in Rosslyn, Va. Courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, NY, NY. Miriam Schapiro ©

Beyond Collage

Schapiro's explorations as an artist lead her continually to try new things. So, in 1986, at the

age of 64, she began a career as a sculptor. Her first work, *Anna and David* (left), is 35 feet tall and weighs 22,000 pounds. It's as though the dancers the artist has always featured in her collages had so much energy they burst out of the frame and into three dimensions.

In *I'm Dancin' as Fast as I Can* (pages 8-9), for example, Schapiro uses paint and fabric to create a collage centered around a dancing woman. This woman has great energy, but her movements are frantic and her body is breaking into fragments. One side is still connected to a traditional female stereotype—the ballerina on the right—who is frozen in a jump leading nowhere. The other side struggles to follow the male tap dancer on the left. He confidently walks out of the frame, suggesting his power and freedom. Behind him he drags a whole tradition of high art—the portraits of great male artists such as Rembrandt, Goya, Cézanne, and Van Gogh.

Not all of Schapiro's dancing figures are in such conflict. As the title suggests, *High Steppin' Strutter II* (above, right) is one of a series of playful, dancing figures. The figure's energy is so great, she looks as though her raised foot will kick right through the frame. A closer look shows that this woman is an artist. She holds her palette high above her head and every line, shape, and color in her body celebrates her work.

The dancing figures of *Anna and David* (left) have the power and solidity of sculpture, but they, too, seem to be leaping into the air with exuberance and joy. Originally depicted in a Schapiro painting, the figures became a sculpture when art collector Joey Kaempfer tried unsuccessfully to buy the painting. After he learned that it had been sold, he asked Schapiro to make the figures into a huge sculpture for his office building in the Wash-



Schapiro conveys this figure's emotion entirely through shape.

High Steppin' Strutter II, 1985. Acrylic and paper on paper, 80" x 54". Collection J. W. Kaempfer, Jr. Courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, N.Y., N.Y. Miriam Schapiro ©

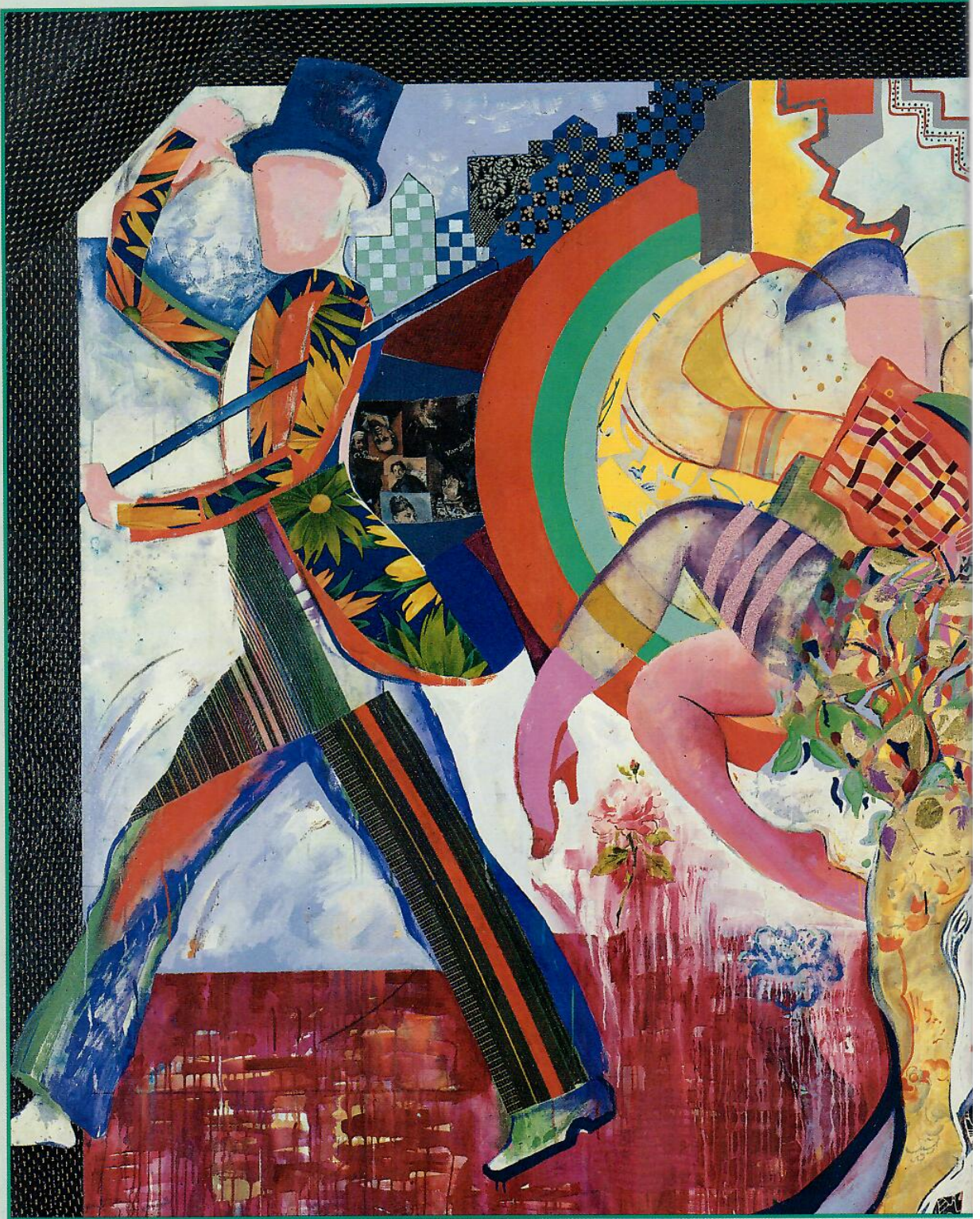
ington, D.C. suburb of Rosslyn, Virginia.

Some critics consider these figures to be self-portraits, expressing Schapiro's own sense of pleasure in her work and her continuing sense of connection with others.

Schapiro's connections to other artists are continually revealed in her work. In *I'm Dancin' as Fast as I Can*, for example, the shapes of the dancing women resemble cutout figures done by 20th-century French artist Henri Matisse (see page 11). The fragmented shapes at the top were inspired by Spanish artist Pablo Picasso's cubist work. The curved shapes in the center refer to the paintings of French artist Sonia Delaunay (see page 10). Thus, Schapiro acknowledges her debt to both male and female artists, both of whose work helped to shape and inspire her own.

"I was trained by men to be an artist, but I learned from women how to be expressive."

—MIRIAM SCHAPIRO



MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH #6

Miriam Schapiro, b. 1923

Miriam Schapiro



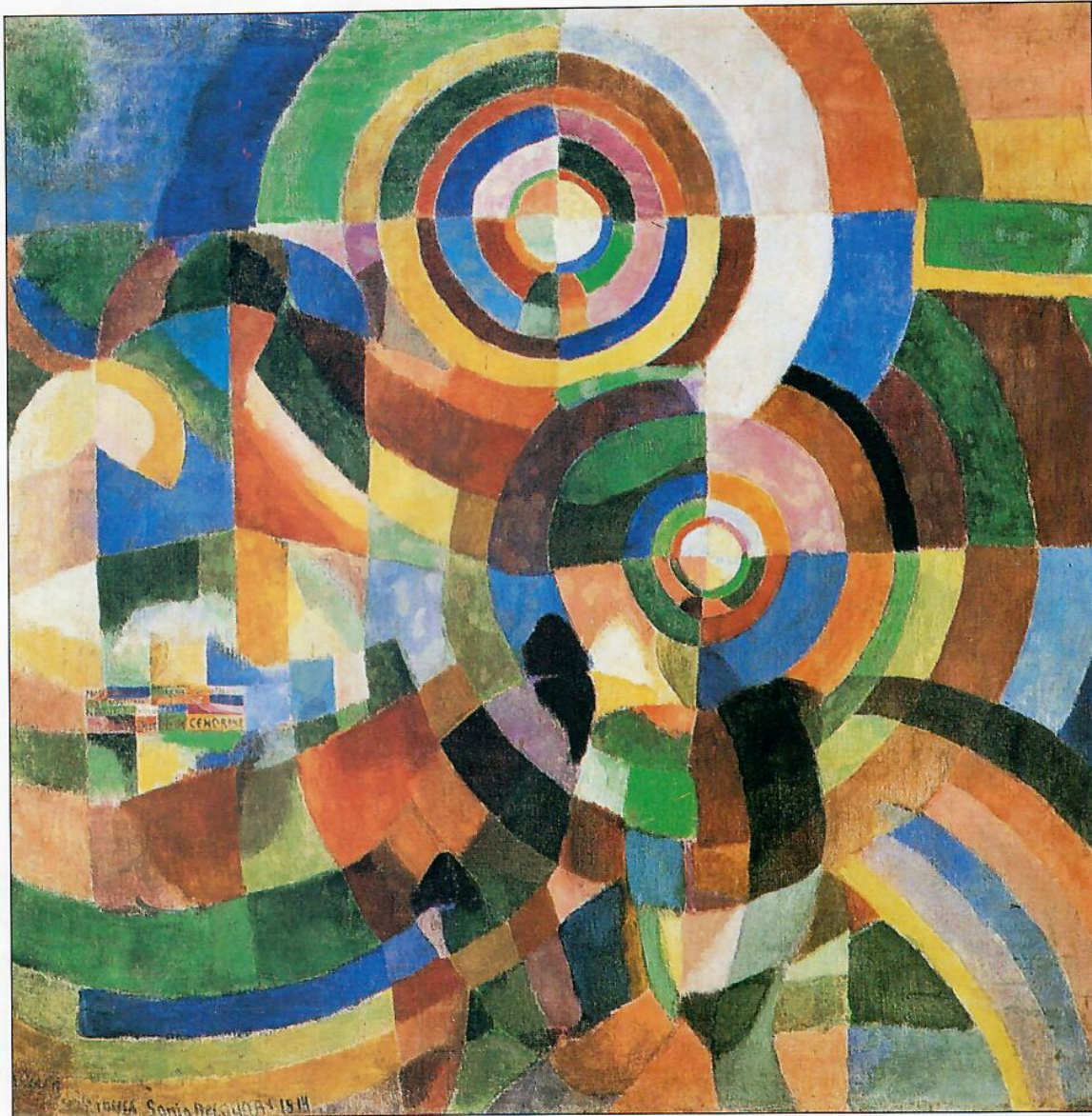
I'm Dancin' as Fast as I Can, 1986. Acrylic and fabric on canvas. 90" x 144" Collection Dr. and Mrs. Steinbaum. Courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, NY, NY. Miriam Schapiro ©

apiro

I'M DANCIN'
AS FAST AS I CAN

WORKING WITH SHAPE

Three artists who used shapes to express their thoughts and feelings.



Abstract Shapes

Long before Miriam Schapiro and other feminist artists had rediscovered quilts, early 20th-century Russian artist Sonia Delaunay (Deh-law-NAY) saw the possibilities for abstract art in this traditionally female craft. Delaunay's own painting style,

which featured repeat patterns and abstract geometric shapes, was inspired by a quilt she had created for her son in 1911. Sixty years later, Delaunay's work would influence Schapiro.

Electric Prisms (above), one of Delaunay's best-known paintings,

is composed of repeating circles whose rhythmic patterns and shifting colors seem to draw the eye inward. In this work, the artist wanted to represent electric lights that had recently replaced gaslights—to capture “circles of pulsating light.”

Can you see the glow of electric lights in this abstract design composed of circular shapes and bright colors?

Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979). *Electric Prisms*, 1914. Oil on Canvas. 99" x 99". Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Stylized Shapes

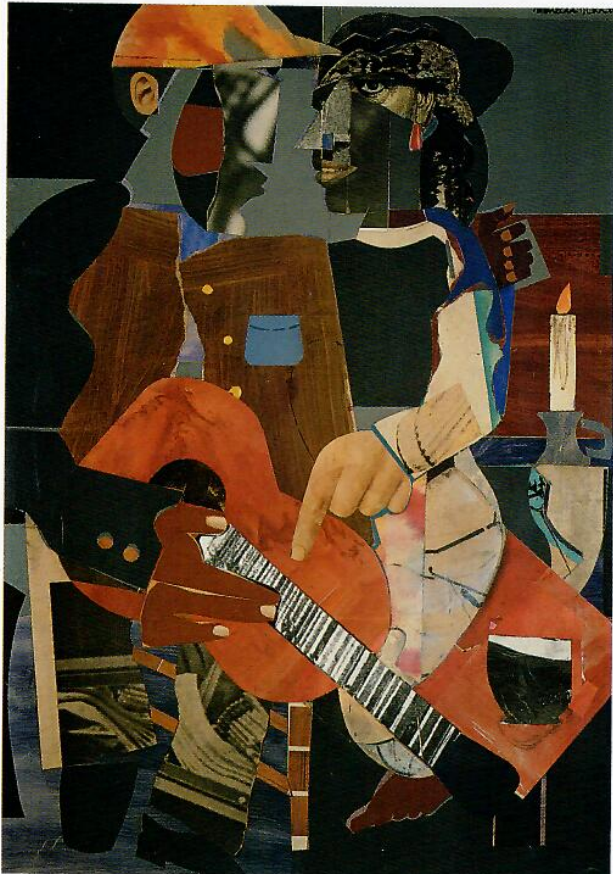
Early 20th-century French artist Henri Matisse (on-REE Ma-TEESE) wanted to reduce every object to its most basic shape. The artist began as a painter, but his later work was almost entirely made of cut paper. By working with simplified cutout shapes, Matisse found he could focus the viewer's eye entirely on essentials—*shapes*—rather than allowing realistic details to interfere.

Matisse focuses on shapes in his cutouts, varying them with color, pattern, and distortion. In *The Fall of Icarus* (right), we can still recognize the falling body of Icarus, the boy in the Greek legend who flew too near the sun and fell into the sea. By confining Icarus's body within a black diagonal—stretching it and making the arms different lengths—Matisse helps us feel what Icarus felt on his long, terrible fall. Matisse lets simplified, stylized shapes tell the story, rather than the expression on Icarus's face.



Compare the shape of the cut-out figure on the right to Miriam Schapiro's dancer on page 9.

Henri Matisse (1869-1954). *The Fall of Icarus*, 1952. Gouache on paper, cut and pasted. 30" x 24" National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.



Fragmented Shapes

Miriam Schapiro is not the only contemporary artist to have been fascinated by shapes. Romare Bearden is best known for his unique collages created from found, drawn, and painted images. His portrayals of African-American urban life combine elements from modern art and African tribal art.

Many critics have compared

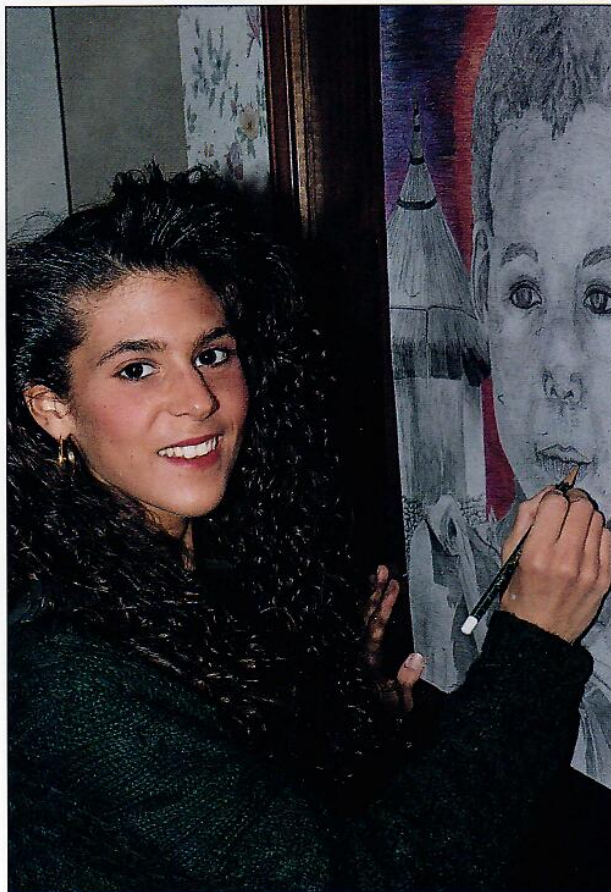
Bearden's work to jazz, pointing out its "vital, jumpy quality." *Serenade* (left), for example, includes images of guitar and piano, as well as faces, hands, and bodies. Each image has its own distinct shape, and exists in its own separate space, much as jazz is created by several different instruments, each improvising on its own. In *Serenade*, like jazz, we look at the images themselves as well as the playful way in which the shapes fit together. In both jazz and Bearden's work, all the separate elements combine harmoniously to create a whole.

Can you recognize the fragmented shapes in this work, including a candle in a vase, suggesting a jazz club?

Romare Bearden (1912-1988). *Serenade*, 1968-1969. Collage, paint on board, 43 3/4 x 32 1/2". Madison Art Center, Madison, Wisconsin. © Estate of Romare Bearden.

Amy Wenzler: CREATING A COLLAGE WITH FOUND OBJECTS

This imaginative Scholastic Art Award-winning collage (right) incorporates fabric, buttons, string, and other unusual materials. It was created by Amy Wenzler when she was a junior at Avon (Ohio) High School. Now 18 and a senior, Amy enjoys art as a hobby but wants her career to be in health care, perhaps in nursing. She says, “Art is something I enjoy doing because it’s fun and helps me to relax. I’d like to keep it that way.” Most of Amy’s free time is spent working at a retirement home, where she serves dinners and helps older people.



Senior Amy Wenzler wants to continue to enjoy creating in her spare time rather than to make art a full-time job.

Photo by Jacqueline Janosik

■ **When did you start doing art?**

I started taking art when I was a sophomore. My mom encouraged me, but I was also interested on my own.

■ **How did you happen to do this collage?**

Our teacher gave us an assignment. We were supposed to create a thematic collage with five main characters. We also had to incorporate at least five different media, like cloth, string, buttons, etc. And each character’s face had to be altered somehow. The goal was to be creative. The assignment was tough; it inspired our creativity.

■ **How did you come up with your idea for this collage?**

As I was looking through magazines, I saw a lot of images of kids. I like helping people of all ages, so I made my main characters little children. I also thought it would give me a good variety of images since so many kids’ photos were available.

■ **Does this work have a story?**

I guess the title, “Child’s Play,” best expresses the theme. My characters are little children playing, and my background is a park with grass and play equipment. The picture is about relaxation, taking time for yourself and having fun. Play time is especially important in today’s stressful world. As I was creating this



“This picture, ‘Child’s Play,’ is about relaxation, taking time for yourself, and having fun.”

collage, I realized how relaxing I find art. That’s what I wanted the picture to express.

■ **How did you start to work on this collage?**

Since the theme was relaxation, I looked for pictures of open grasslands and trees, blue skies, things that looked warm and peaceful. I cut them out and covered the entire background. Then I thought about how my characters would look on that background. I wanted a realistic scale, so I tried to find bigger characters for the foreground, smaller ones in back to give the picture depth.

■ **Then how did you proceed?**

I wanted each child to express a completely different feeling so I looked for kids who seemed to have five different

self-images. Since we had to change the characters’ faces, I used foods to represent facial features. I used hot dogs or carrots for mouths, blueberries for eyes.

■ **What did you do next?**

I also had to incorporate five different media into the collage. I used cloth for the kid resting on a blanket. The little girl sitting on a stool has beads for eyes. Another child has a tissue in his hand.

I wanted to give the collage an old, comfortable-looking feeling so, after everything was glued down, I antiqued it. I used Elmer’s glue to fill the areas I wanted to remain bright. After the glue had dried for about 24 hours, I rubbed brownish oil paint onto sections of the picture, then quickly rubbed it off. The im-

ages protected by the glue were bright, but the brown paint on the rest gave it a feeling of depth.

■ **This issue is about Miriam Schapiro and other women artists. How do you feel about women’s issues?**

I’m glad to see that women are achieving a lot more today than in the past. Especially where work is concerned. Everyone should be treated equally, not just women, but every race and person.

■ **Do you have any other comments about art?**

I’ve found that if a person really enjoys working with art and expressing themselves, they should never stop. Whether they make it a career or not, they should always pursue art.

We select our Artist of the Month from among Scholastic Art Award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, 730 Broadway, New York, NY 10003 for entry deadlines and rules books. ***Scholastic Art*** magazine does not have a separate competition.



A WORLD OF SHAPES



Transform images of your classmates into works of art

You've seen how artist Miriam Schapiro creates visual dramas. She places her figures in dynamic poses, presenting them theatrically to emphasize her message about women's creativity. The textures and patterns in fabric and other collage materials are an important part of the artist's work. In this workshop, you'll use costumes, models, and stage settings to create your own dramatic figures.



Materials

- 12" x 18" 60-lb. white sulfite paper
- 18" x 24" soft absorbent paper
- Spray bottle with water/pencil
- Vinyl erasers/pins/toothpicks
- Scissors and/or X-acto knife
- Drawing boards and cutting boards
- Medium paintbrushes/old toothbrushes
- Elmer's Glue-All/watercolors
- Variety of fabric pieces/old clothes
- Variety of colors of construction paper

Starting Out

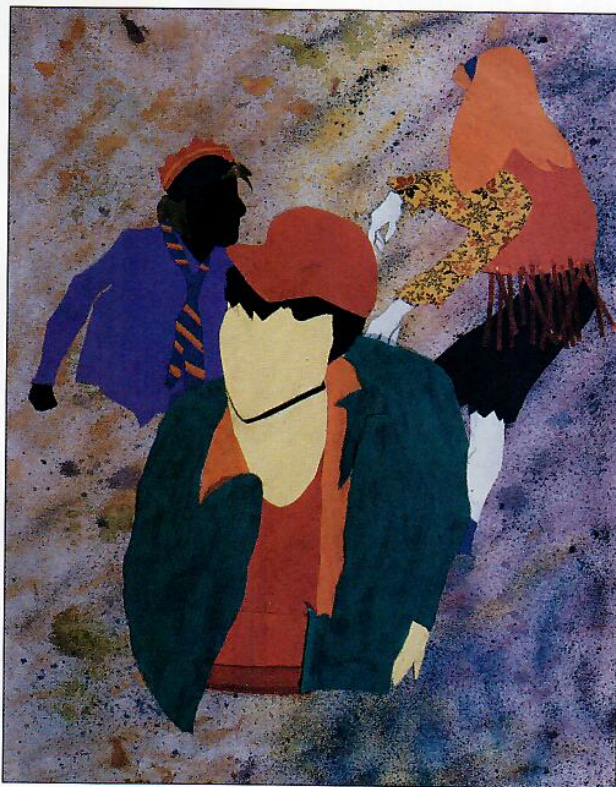
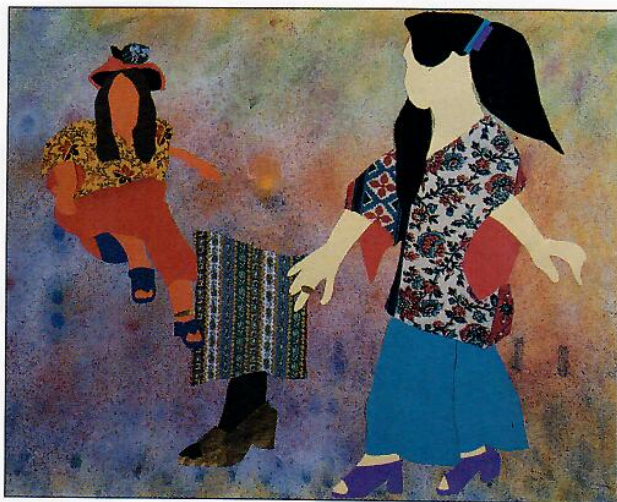
Pose several students in colorful, detailed, patterned costumes (60s/70s clothing works well). Select expressive poses (sports, dance, rock group, theatrical). What do you want to say about these figures (how they work together; competition, self-expression)? Draw simplified, silhouette drawings of each model in several positions.

Step 2.

Which background goes best with your figures—bright/solid; soft/atmospheric? Determine color scheme, then spray 18" by 24" paper with water. To create textures, brush toothbrush or paintbrush over pan watercolors and "flick" a little paint over the surface. For bright color, let paper dry; brush more paint.

Step 3.

Select and cut out best figures. Arrange in an interesting, balanced composition. Figures can overlap or touch, but they must relate to each other and background. Select fabric/colored paper and decide where to place them. Using cutout figures as patterns, trace and cut out areas you have chosen. Do not glue until you are sure composition is unified.



The kinds of shapes and patterns you use in your collage will determine the way in which your figures appear to relate to one another.

Prepared by Ned J. Nesti, Jr.,
Morrison (IL) High School.
Photos by Larry Gregory.

Some Solutions

Select one dominant color/ texture for use throughout the collage to unify your composition. Will you use diagonals, busy, complex patterns/textures, and bright, warm, color opposites to emphasize movement and energy? Or will you stress smaller figures, soft, fading backgrounds, cool, quiet, solid pastels, verticals and framed compositions to show quieter interactions? You can overlap patterns and textures for even more dynamic results in addition to using enlarged shapes, and tightly cropped figures which appear to be bursting out of the frame.

Two comments on American life.

Fragments of Being

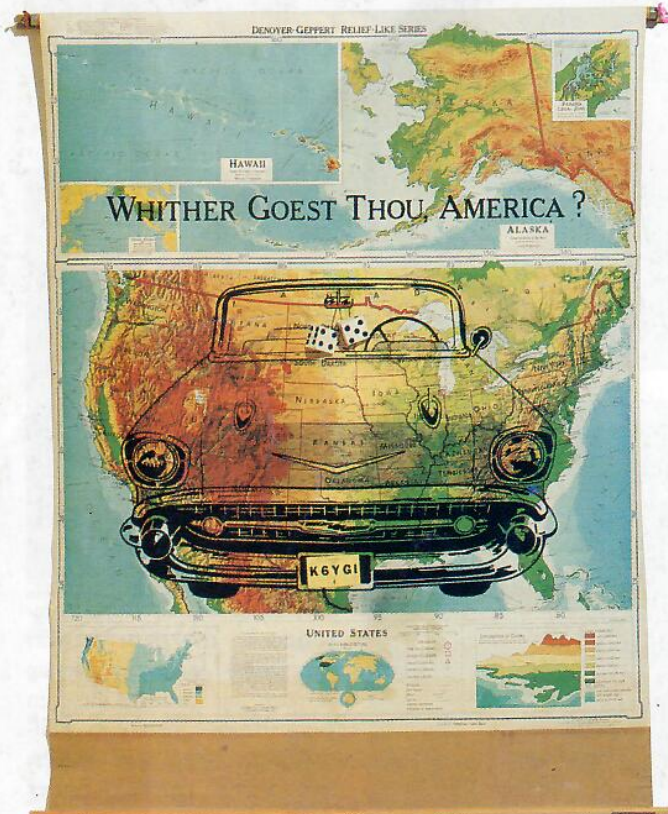
Contemporary American artist Howardena Pindell uses her own life as the subject of many of her large, detailed collages such as the one on the right. In this work, the artist expresses the concept that she is a combination of her ancestors, historical events, and experience. At the center of the work, is a life-size outline of the artist's body.

The focal point of the work is Pindell's self-portrait, which is sewn into the center of the canvas. She has changed the color of her face, to white in reference to Michael Jackson's "Thriller" album, and also as a satiric comment on her struggle

as a female African-American artist. The many photos of black faces, as well as the blank white shape of a slave ship, suggest the oppression of Pindell's African ancestors. Included are many double-images which could be an allusion to the artist's biculturalism.

As you can see by the autobiographical work on the right, some collagists tell very personal stories.

Howardena Pindell, b. 1943.
Autobiography: Water/Ancestors, Middle Passage/Family Ghosts, 1988.
 Collage on sewn canvas. 118" x 71".
 Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT.



Machine Dreams

For the past 20 years California artist Alexis Smith, who did *Pair O' Dice* (left), has been making detailed narrative collages about American life. Her pieces are examinations of popular culture, usually based on a belief about contemporary society. She uses familiar images, changes their context, and juxtaposes them unexpectedly, giv-

ing them a new meaning.

In this work, Smith combines a high-contrast photo of an older-model car complete with fuzzy dice, and an old-fashioned classroom map of the United States. Each of Smith's collages revolves around the quote she chooses, which is usually a combination of great literature and trash. The words at the top of this work are from the Bible, to which the artist has added the word "America."

In *Pair O' Dice*, the artist has set up the sensation of speeding across the country with the top down—50s hits blaring from the radio—then seemingly cancels everything out by asking us where we think we're going.

Could the title of this work, *Pair O' Dice*, have another meaning?

Alexis Smith, b. 1949. *Pair O' Dice*, 1990. Mixed media collage. 86" x 67". Private Collection.



▲ **FIGURE 6.37**

Miriam Schapiro. *Father and Daughter*. 1997. Acrylic and fabric on canvas. 182.9 × 175.3 cm (72 × 69").
Collection of Aaron and Marion Borenstein, Fort Wayne, Indiana.