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Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec Working with Color

 SCHOLASTIC



COVER: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901). *Jane Avril*, 1899. Lithograph. 22" x 13 1/4". Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, Albi. Photo Art Resource.

SCHOLASTIC ART

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Toulouse-Lautrec's Night World

"If my legs had been a bit longer, I never would have become a painter."

—TOULOUSE-LAUTREC



Since he was 13 years old, the French artist Toulouse-Lautrec (Too-LOOSE La-TREK) knew he was different. As a child, his health had never been good. During his teens, he broke first one leg, then the other. His legs never grew again. As a result, he had the head and body of a grown man set on tiny, weak legs. Lautrec's appearance made his life difficult. On the other hand, his disability forced him to spend all his energy developing his artistic talent, and he created some of the most powerful images in Western art.

Count Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was born on his father's estate in the south of France in 1864. A member of one of the oldest and wealthiest families in France, young Henri was often unable to go to school. This gave him plenty of time for one of his favorite activities—drawing. In spite of his handicaps, Lautrec passed his high school exams. In 1881, he moved to Paris to study painting. There he saw the works of the Impressionists, a group of French painters who were challenging traditional ideas of art. He became friendly with artists like Degas (day-GA), and Van Gogh (van GO), painting by day and meeting with his new friends in the evening.

Life at the end of the 19th century was very different than it is today. Most of the things we take for granted—television, movies, telephones, automobiles—had not yet been invented. Even

electric lighting was just being developed. About the only sources of entertainment after dark in large cities like Paris were music halls, cafés, and cabarets.

Toulouse-Lautrec loved these places. He felt at home in dim settings where people couldn't see him. And among the dancers, circus performers, and other



Toulouse-Lautrec made fun of his own appearance, often posing for trick photos like the one on the left.



night people that went to the *Moulin Rouge* (moo-lon ROOJ, “or red mill”), Toulouse-Lautrec didn’t look so strange. In one of his best-known works *At the Moulin Rouge* (above), the artist has included himself. He is the small stunted figure in back who walks past the group in the foreground, observing everything around him.

Toulouse-Lautrec is best known for the expressive portraits he made of people in the music halls and bars of Paris. He also created posters, which became as famous as his paintings and drawings. But in 1898, because of his handicaps and the life he led—staying out all night and drinking heavily—the artist had to be hospitalized. In 1901, at the age of 37, he died at his parents’ estate. After his death, his work was not thought fit to be seen and French officials tried to keep his paintings out of sight. Today, Toulouse-Lautrec is considered one of the greatest artists of the 19th century, and his colorful works can be seen in museums all over the world.

The face on the right is the former Jane Avril, who is also featured on the cover.

At the Moulin Rouge, 1892-93. Oil on canvas. 48 1/2' x 55 1/4'. The Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Birch Barlett Memorial Collection.



What kind of dance might this woman have been famous for?

Jardin de Paris: Jane Avril, 1893. 48 3/4" x 36". Lithograph. Photo Art Resource.



How did the artist use color to draw attention to this performer's hair?

May Milton, 1895. Lithograph. 31 1/4" x 24". Free Library of Philadelphia. Photo Art Resource.

Star Power

"I became famous the moment his poster of me appeared."

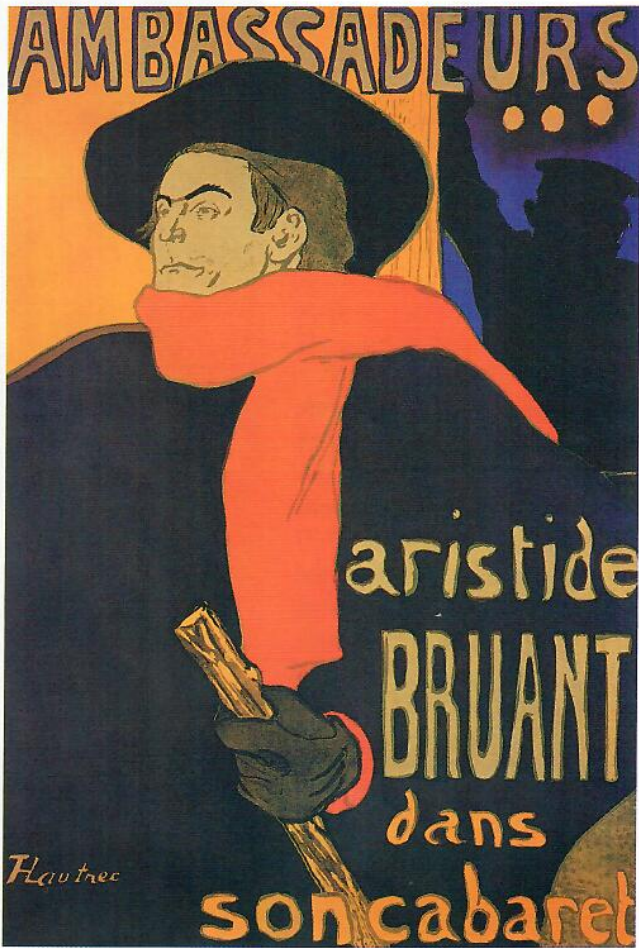
—JANE AVRIL

Today, there are many ways for rising stars to showcase their talents. But how were performers able to reach audiences in the days before there were TV talk shows, comedy clubs, MTV, or even magazine cover stories?

During the 1890s, there were basically two methods of announcing a show or performance—to run an ad in the newspaper or put up posters. And, of course, everyone wanted their poster to get the most attention. Since Toulouse-Lautrec spent so much time

in the Moulin Rouge and the nightclub needed publicity, the manager asked him to design a poster. The image Toulouse-Lautrec created (see pages 8-9) was so successful, he went on to do posters for performing artists all over Paris. The artist would begin his designs by choosing an image that **symbolized the essence** of the performer. He then **simplified** that image so it could be seen and recognized instantly from a distance. His unique use of **color** was a vital part of the process. (At this point, a quick look at the color wheel on page 14 may be helpful).

Toulouse-Lautrec's favorite performer was probably the dancer Jane Avril (av-REEL). She is featured in many of the artist's most important works, including the image on the cover and two of the posters shown above. Avril was pale and almost sickly looking—until she began to perform. Then, according to a friend of the artist, "There was an



What do the dark, intense colors say about this entertainer's songs?

How can you tell that music was an important element in this act?

Aristide Bruant, 1892. Lithograph. 55 1/2" x 38 1/2". Private Collection.

Jane Avril, 1899. Lithograph. 22" x 13 1/4". Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, Albi. Photo Art Resource.

uproar and a crowd gathered. Jane Avril had started to dance. People stopped breathing as she wove back and forth, weightless, just like a climbing plant.”*

In the poster (page 4, left), Toulouse-Lautrec uses **flat, simplified shapes** and the basic **primary colors—red, yellow, and blue**—to capture the intensity of Jane Avril's movements and energy. A long, thin shape winds around her gown to emphasize the dancer's curving, snakelike movements. In the other poster featuring Jane Avril (above, right), Toulouse-Lautrec uses **pale, closely related colors—yellows, oranges, and red**—to describe Avril's delicate appearance. He then contrasts her fragile looks with the stage set's **sweeping diagonal lines** and the **frantic, angular movements** of her dance. Her performance is **framed** within the swooping sounds of the orchestra, symbolized by a curved musical instrument.

In the poster he did for May Milton (page 4, right), the artist draws immediate attention to the dancer's trademark blond hair. The bright yellow shape of her hair is the only color appearing within the white, **negative space** that suggests her figure. Milton's hair is further highlighted by setting it off against yellow's opposite or **complementary color**—the purple area that forms the poster's background.

Toulouse-Lautrec could also combine bright colors to give a sinister feeling, as he did in the poster above, left. Aristide Bruant (brew-AHNT) was a popular Parisian singer who told crude jokes and liked to insult his audiences. He was known for his cape, large black hat, and bright scarf. The **related color scheme of purples, oranges, and red, all dark in value**, and his blood-red scarf draw the viewer's attention to the somewhat cruel expression on Bruant's pale face.

*Paul Leclerc

Creating a Masterpiece

“My poster was pasted up on the walls of Paris last night. I shall soon be doing another one.”

—TOULOUSE-LAUTREC



The director of the Moulin Rouge shows Toulouse-Lautrec the “old” poster he wants the artist to redesign.

The quote on the left is from a letter Toulouse-Lautrec wrote to his mother in October of 1891. The artist left a great deal out of this letter. He didn’t tell her about the sensation his poster (pages 8-9) had created that morning, when the city of Paris woke up to find 500 of them hanging on nearly every wall. He forgot to mention the words of praise the work received: “When

you see one of these wonderful works, tear it off the wall. You’ll have an image with more life than the blobs hanging in the museums.”* He especially didn’t tell his mother the terrible things some other critics wrote such as, “The man is a deformed human being who sees only ugliness.”*

Two years before Toulouse-Lautrec designed this poster, the Moulin Rouge had had its grand opening. It was not just a night club but a vast entertainment complex, made up of a large dance hall, a garden, and a huge papier-mâché elephant that held an entire orchestra. In front, the red arms of a big wooden windmill revolved above the crowded Parisian streets. One of the music hall’s best customers was the small painter who came night after night, sitting at the same table, always looking, always drawing. Finally, the manager commissioned him to do a poster.

The artist wanted to focus on what he felt made the Moulin Rouge a magical place—its performers. Since the nightclub had opened, a dancer known as La Goulue (goo-LOO, which means “greedy” in French), had been one of its greatest stars. Her favorite partner named Valentin—a tall, thin man who worked in a law office all day—became “Valentin the Boneless” by night. Toulouse-Lautrec had done many paintings and drawings of these two (above and right), and he decided to feature them in his poster.

Toulouse-Lautrec had become interested in a printing process called *lithography*. To make a lithograph, the image is drawn on a stone with a special crayon. Prints are then made from the image on the stone. In order to attract attention, the design of the Moulin Rouge poster had to be simple, flat, dramatic, and colorful. Once the artist had all the elements in place—the two dancing figures against the black, silhouetted audience and the lettering above—he had to plan his colors. To capture the raw energy of the scene, he decided to use the



*Félix Fénéon; Goncourt



In sketches like the one at left, Toulouse-Lautrec carefully planned every element in his composition before doing the poster shown on pages 8-9.

La Goulue, and Valentin the Contortionist, 1891. Charcoal and oil. 60 1/2" x 46 1/2". Albi, Musée Toulouse-Lautrec.

three **primary colors** (yellow, red, blue) in addition to black. The background, the lights, and the dancer's hair would make up the **yellow** plate. The large figure of Valentin in front, the lettering, and the woman's costume would be on the **red** plate. There is a great amount of blue in the poster, but can you find it? The background, the floor, and Valentin are on the **blue** plate. When blue **overprints** a yellow area, it appears green. When blue overprints a red shape, such as the figure of Valentin, it seems to be purple. The lines and the audience were done last, on the **black** plate.

Viewers, used to seeing the bland and colorless advertisements posted around the city, were not prepared for Toulouse-Lautrec's bold, distorted designs or his powerful, unusual, and intense colors. Today, the work shown on the next two pages is known as "the first modern poster."

How did the artist change the figures of the two dancers shown below when he used them in the poster shown on the next pages?

Ball at the Moulin Rouge, 1889/90. Oil on canvas. 45 1/2" x 59". Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Henry P. McIlhenny Collection.



M OULIN ROUGE OULIN ROUGE OULIN ROUGE CONCERT BAL TOUS Les SOIRS LA GOULUE



SCHOLASTIC ART 8-9

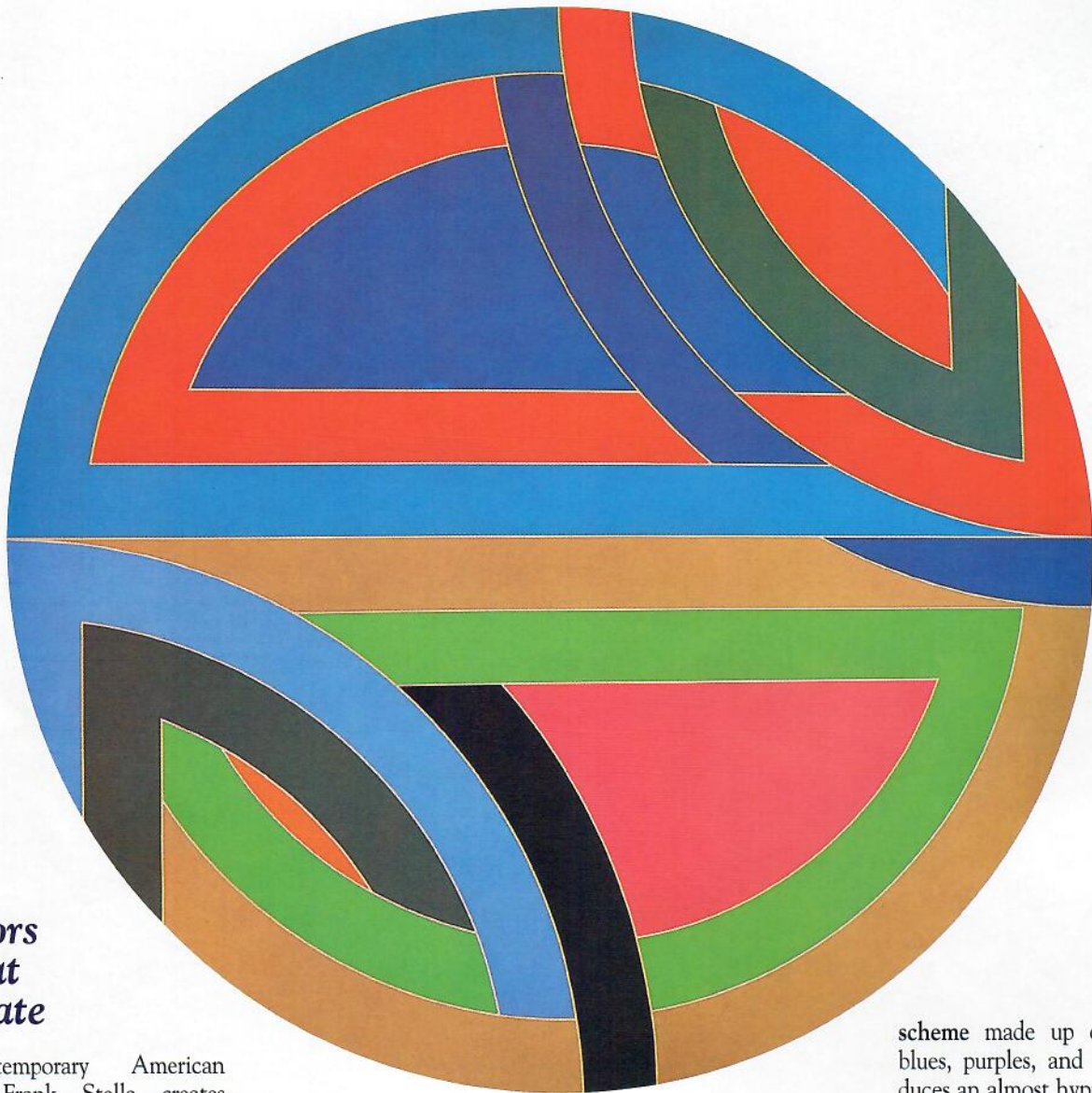
H. Lautrec

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
(1864-1901) Moulin Rouge:
La Goulue 1891. Lithograph.
Toulouse-Lautrec Museum,
Abi. Photo Art Resource.

Moulin Rouge by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Colorful Images

These three modern artists have used color in very different ways.



Colors That Relate

Contemporary American artist Frank Stella creates works that are completely abstract. The two other paintings shown on these pages are representations of other objects. The painting above is an object in itself. The artist has explained his concept of abstraction by saying, "In my paintings, what you see is what you see." In works like this one, Stella wants the viewer to respond directly to the **formal el-**

ements of composition—shape, line, balance, color. The artist offers no clues to the ideas and emotions that led him to create this work. Any "real life" associations must be brought to the painting by the viewer.

Stella's works are usually enormous. More than six feet across, this shaped canvas is meant to be experienced as a

single overwhelming presence. Its circular frame determines the curves within and makes the surface seem even flatter and more abstract. The **even, precise, geometric shapes** add to the painting's objective and unemotional effect. The artificial colors heighten the work's mechanical quality.

The throbbing **related color**

scheme made up of greens, blues, purples, and reds, produces an almost hypnotic feeling. The white lines that separate the colors produce "breathing spaces," further emphasizing the painting's optical effect.

**"I want my paintings to live in a world of their own."
—Frank Stella**

Frank Stella, b. 1936. *Sinjerli Variation II*, 1968. Acrylic on canvas. 120" in diameter. Galerie Stetlow, Düsseldorf.



< *Life in One Color*

Sometimes artists need only a single color to express themselves. Spaniard Pablo Picasso is widely regarded as the most important visual artist of the 20th century. The thousands of masterpieces he created changed the way people thought about art. But even Picasso had to begin somewhere.

When Picasso painted the self-portrait on the left, the 20-year-old artist had just moved to Paris. At the time he did this work, he was living in a cold, rundown building. He painted constantly but sold nothing, sometimes surviving for days on a crust of bread. The works he did at this time reflect his state of mind. His subjects—thin, hungry people and homeless outcasts—were painted in a fairly realistic way.

But they all had one immediately recognizable feature; they were all **monochromes** (one color) and everything in them was painted in blue.

Just as reds and yellows stand for warmth and sunlight, blue usually symbolizes gloom, sadness, or suffering. Picasso was barely out of his teens when he did this self-portrait, but his hollow cheeks, beard, and intense expression make him appear much older.

Except for a slightly pink mouth, which brings the viewer's attention to the artist's face, everything in the picture has been painted in various shades of blue. This is why certain specific years (1901-1904) in the artist's early career are sometimes known as Picasso's "Blue Period."

"Blue is the color of all colors."—Pablo Picasso.

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). Self-Portrait, 1901. Oil on canvas. 31 1/2" x 23 5/8". Musée Picasso, Paris.

Contrasting Colors >

During the 1940s, African American artist William H. Johnson used color to develop his distinctive style. Pablo Picasso, in his self-portrait, used color to express his emotional life. Frank Stella used color to emphasize his painting's abstract quality. Johnson, in his images, wanted to describe the experiences of Southern blacks.

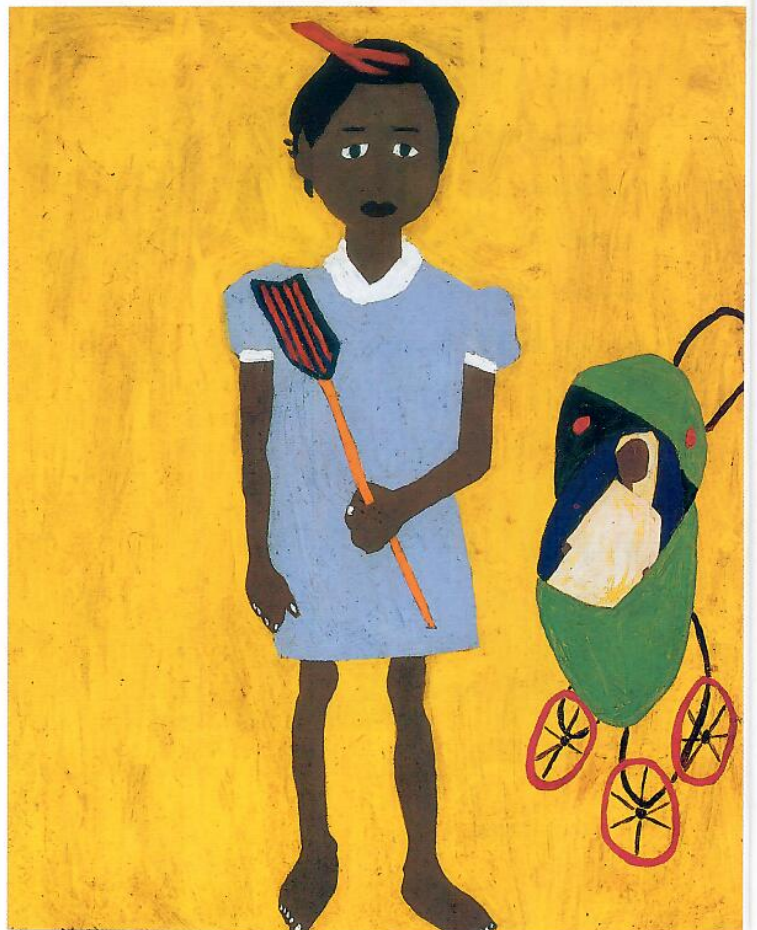
Johnson spent much of his life living and working in Europe, but he always returned to his family in South Carolina. Most of his best known paintings are of family members. *Li'l Sis* (right) is his niece Ernestine. This painting is based on two **complementary** (opposite) colors—yellow and blue-violet. Both are of equal **intensity** (brightness), which makes the figure seem to blend in to the

background. But the blue against the yellow produces an "after image," causing the figure to appear to shimmer or vibrate. Another complementary pair—red and green—is used to depict the girl's doll carriage.

The **intense, "sunny" colors** Johnson has used in this work suggest a bright, carefree childhood. But the **angular, stylized shapes** reveal poverty and hardship. The **contrasting dark browns** of the girl and her doll make skin color one of the first features the viewer notices.

**"Color is a vital part of the traditions I grew up with."
—William H. Johnson**

William H. Johnson (1901-1970). *Li'l Sis*, 1944. Oil on paperboard. 26" x 21 1/4". National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian. Washington, DC. photo Art Resource.



Erin Haldrup

PRINTING IN COLOR



Eighteen-year-old Erin Haldrup did this colorful Scholastic Art Award-winning print (right) in her senior year at Greenfield (Indiana) Central High School. She calls it the “Jane Print” because the image is of her Aunt Jane lying on a beach towel.

When she’s not with her friends, Erin often works on her art. At this point, she’s still trying to decide which school she’ll soon be going to—Indiana Uni-

versity, the Art Institute of Chicago, or Santa Fe College in New Mexico—since “I’m not sure what area of art I want to be in yet.” But there is one thing she’s very definite about: “I love art. I know I’m going to do it for the rest of my life.”

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.

■ **How did you first get involved with art?**

My grandmother is an artist, so whenever I visited her we would work together in her studio. I took art through high school and I’ve been working very seriously at it during this last year.

■ **How did you come to do this award-winning print?**

I did it in a printmaking class that I was taking outside school. It’s a color-reduction monotype. With this method of printing, you can make only a single print.

■ **Where did you get the idea for this image?**

I based it on a family photograph of my aunt lying on a beach towel. I loved the com-

position of the photo. It was simple, but really interesting. I thought it would be a good image to use as the basis for a color print.

■ **How did you choose the colors you used?**

I wanted the colors to make the print feel like a day at the beach. I thought I could do that by using the three primary colors. The towel would be red and blue, and the sand yellowish orange. The bathing suit and the outline of her body would be black, and she’d have brown hair.

■ **How did you actually go about making this print?**

I first did a drawing on scrap paper using heavy lines, to use

as a guide. Some people don’t work from a drawing when they do a monotype. They do free-form stuff, working right on the plate.

I then put a plexiglass plate over the drawing. For this print, I used oil-based printing ink—it’s really thick and goopy to work with. I started with the lightest color, yellow, and rolled the ink evenly over the plexiglass, making sure I could still see the drawing. Then I wiped off all the parts I didn’t want to be yellow, or any variation of yellow.

To make a print, I placed a piece of paper over the inked plexiglass and rolled it through a press. I peeled off the paper, hung it up to dry, and cleaned all the yellow off the plate.

■ **How did you print all the other colors?**

I did the same thing again using red ink. I taped the piece of paper that had yellow ink on it so it would land in the same place on the plexiglass. I figured out what areas I wanted to stay yellow, and I wiped the red off them. Where the red and yellow overlapped became orange. I had to think about what I wanted to be green and purple, because I would be doing the blue plate next. I had to remember to wipe off the paint where I wanted it to be just yellow or just red. The blue plate made the red bathing suit purple and added a few green areas.

When the colors went on top of each other, they mixed, so I had to be careful to keep the primary colors pure and the secondary colors layered. I did this print using just primary colors, but you can mix any color inks you want. I printed all three colors to make the brown hair. The last plate I printed was the black one.

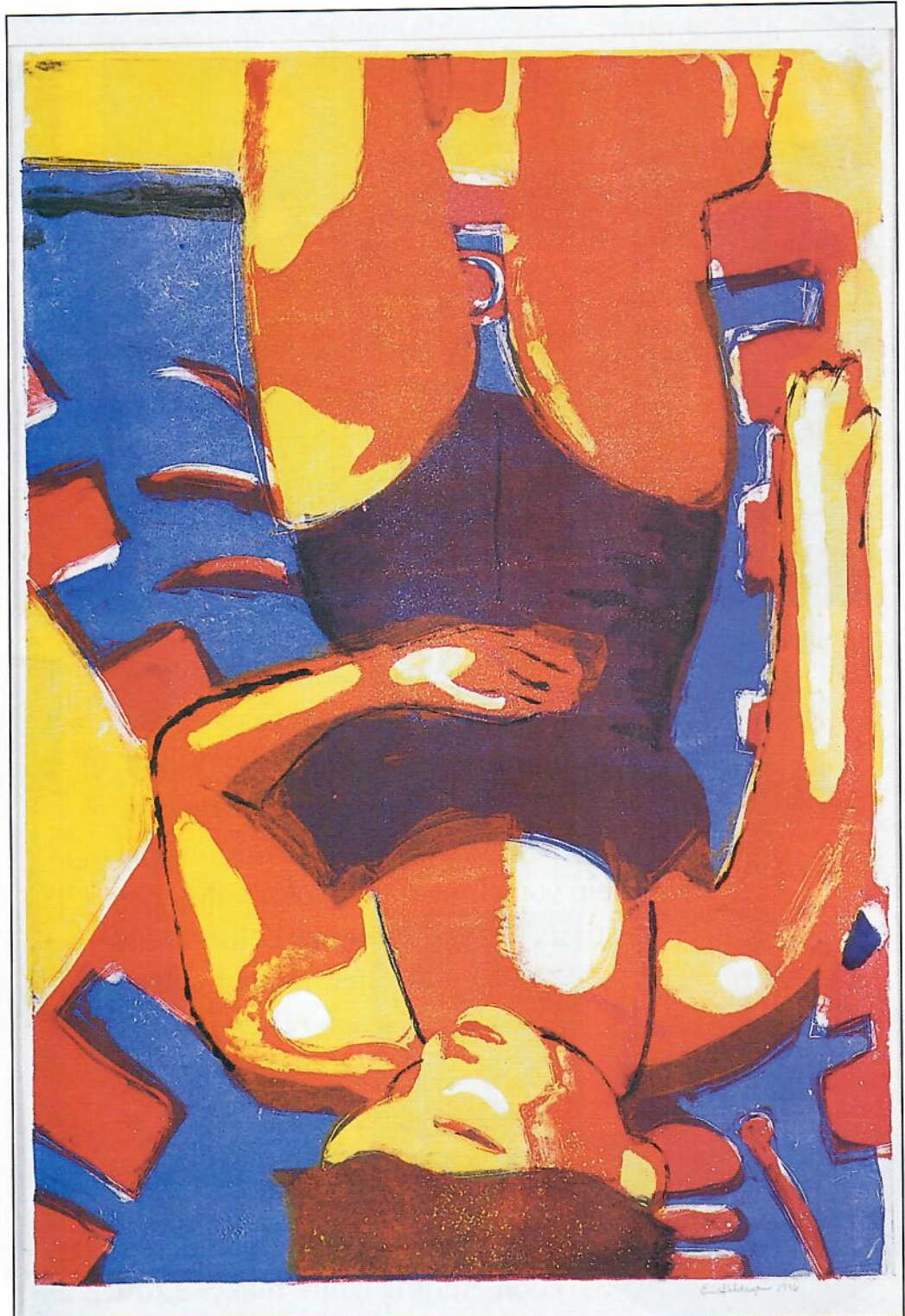
■ **Have you made any other prints?**

Not that many. We made linoleum block prints in high school, and a few woodblocks and etchings in print class. This was the first color reduction monotype I've made. I thought the print turned out pretty well, but I had no idea it would win a national award.

■ **Do you have any advice for other students interested in art?**

If you love art, keep doing it just because you love it. Don't get discouraged by people who don't like what you're doing. But also make sure you're open to criticism, because sometimes it can help. Just don't lose your vision while you're learning.

“I wanted the colors to make the print feel like a day at the beach. I thought I could do that by using the three primary colors.”



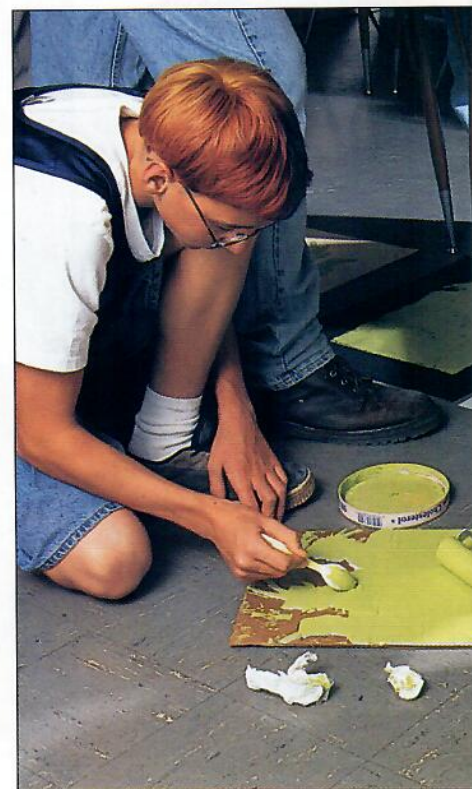
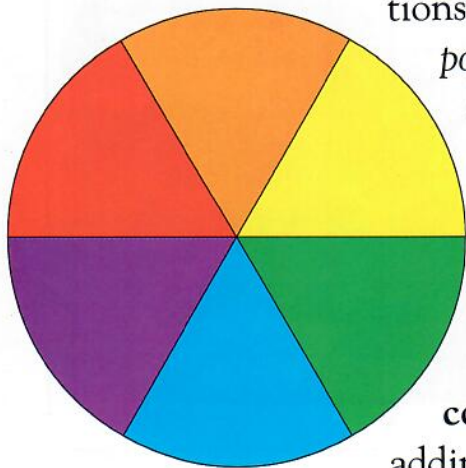
Creating a Color Print

Use Toulouse-Lautrec's printing techniques to make your own color print.



You've seen how Toulouse-Lautrec used new images and color combinations to re-create the unusual world he lived in. In this workshop, you'll make a color print that expresses the way you feel about your own world. The color wheel below will help you choose your color combinations.

Complementary colors are *opposite* each other; **related** colors are *next* to each other. Red, yellow, and blue are **primary** colors; orange, green, and violet are **secondary**. Red, yellow, and orange are **warm** colors; green, blue, and purple are **cool**. Adding white makes a **tint**; adding black makes a **shade**.



Materials

- Costumes (plain clothing; simple patterns) and hats
- Ebony pencils
- Vinyl eraser
- 12" x 18" 30 lb newsprint (to use for drawing)
- *Dick Blick Water Soluble Block Printing Ink* (black, white, red, yellow, blue, green, orange, violet, brown)
- Medium soft 4" roller (breyer) or wooden spoon for burnishing
- 18" x 24" 80 lb white or manila drawing paper
- 10" x 10" Plexiglass inking plate (or any hard, non-absorbent surface for rolling out ink)
- Styrofoam meat container sheets (with smooth surface), or sturdy cardboard
- *Elmer's Glue-All*
- *X-acto knife*
- Newspapers
- System for drying prints (drying rack, clothes pins, paper clips on string, or tape prints to the wall)
- Toilet tissue

Starting Out

Arrange model (standing or sitting) on platform slightly above eye level. Emphasize silhouette and expressive body language. Models can wear costumes and/or hats. Arrange objects (telephone, trumpet, fan, bike wheel, hub cap, etc.) with distinct shapes near model and incorporate into your composition. Do several drawings, then simplify and choose the most interesting composition.

Step 2

Choose the two colors you'll use in your print (consider the "third" color you can obtain by overlapping your two colors.) Do color drawings to decide which shapes will be what color. Carefully measure and cut two 12" x 18" cardboard pieces; one plate will be used for each color. Trace the shapes for each color on foam and carefully cut out with a sharp X-Acto knife. REMEMBER, IMAGES WILL PRINT IN REVERSE. Make sure the side of the foam with indentations (product name, etc.) is on the bottom. After images are cut out, arrange all those to be in the first color on one of the plates. Then arrange the images that will be in the second color on the second plate. When you are completely satisfied, glue all shapes down. Put books on top to attach shapes firmly to plates.

Credits for page 16: Art Resource; National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian. Washington, DC.; Art Resource; The Art Institute of Chicago; Art Resource; Musée Picasso, Paris.

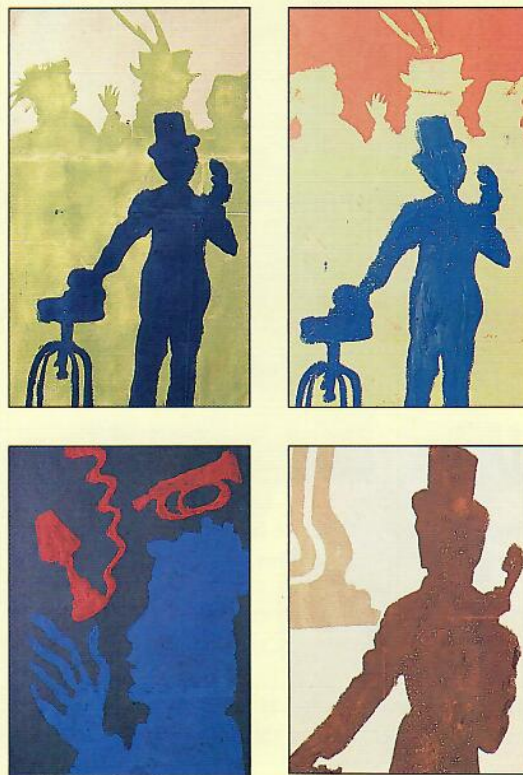
Step 3

Mix the two colors you will use. Decide which one will be on your first plate (light colors usually print first). Use a roller to put an even coat of ink on only the raised shapes. Carefully register the 18" x 24" paper in the center of the 12" x 18" plate. There should be a 3" border on all sides. Carefully burnish (rub or press) the

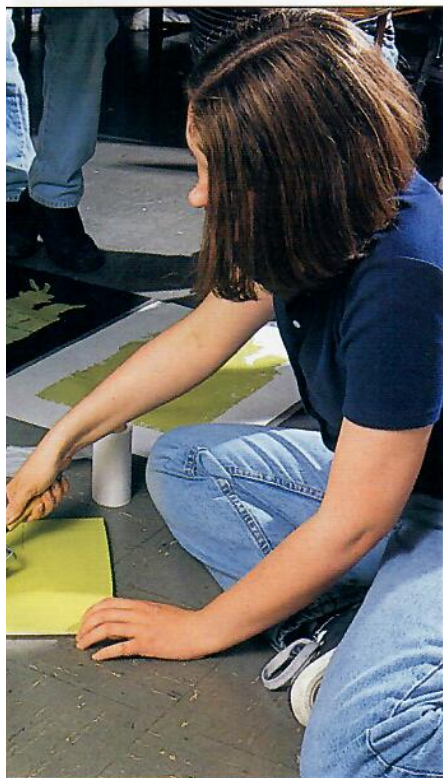
paper with a wooden spoon or fingers. Determine edition number (how many prints you will make). Consider printing on different kinds of paper—colored paper, foil, velour, wallpaper, etc.). Dry print, register, then print second color. After print is completely dry, sign it. Include title, print number, edition (such as 1/12—one out of 12) and date.

Some Solutions

Will your composition work better **vertically** or **horizontally**? Consider overlapping your two colors to create a third one. Will your colors **relate** to each other or will they be **complements**? You can use different **tints** (light), **shades** (dark), **intensities** (bright/dull), or **temperatures** (warm/cool) of one color to produce a **monochromatic** print. Will the white **negative space** of the paper become a shape in your composition? Try printing your plates in different color combinations; use different background papers for more variations.



Prepared by Ned J. Nesti, Jr., Art Instructor, Morrison (IL) High School.
Photos by Larry Gregory
Prints by Andrea Beveroth; Chris Paul Reed; Matt Kooi.



Portraits in Color

All the people below were featured somewhere in this issue. Can you find each of them?



1. Can you find the work each of the details shown above is from and write down the page number?

A _____ C _____ E _____
 B _____ D _____ F _____

2. The following words suggest at least one of the figures above. Can you match the words to the image (or images) that apply?

_____ yellow hair _____ lithograph
 _____ crude and insulting _____ after-image
 _____ Blue Period _____ dramatic lighting
 _____ warm colors _____ a cool color

3. Can you find examples of the following colors? (You may combine two details as long as the colors are *juxtaposed*, or next to each other.)

_____ a complementary pair _____ primary colors
 _____ colors that contrast in value _____ light colors
 _____ monochromatic color _____ related colors

4. Can you remember the name of each of these figures?

A _____ D _____
 B _____ E _____
 C _____ F _____