

CreativeConnections

Art Themes + Works

GESTURES + FRANCIS

VIEW



Let us begin with careful looking. Using our eyes, let's spend one whole minute silently seeing what we notice. Scan the image. What stands out? What are you drawn to? Look for colors, shapes, and lines. What is in the background, the foreground? What can you identify? What appears mysterious? Is there anything you notice after looking for one minute that you did not see at first glance?

Sam Francis (American, 1923 - 1994)
Summer No. 2, 1957

oil on canvas

72 1/8 x 96 in.

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of the Richard and Jeanne Levitt Family in
Memory of Ellis and Nelle Levitt, 1984.25

© 2021 Sam Francis Foundation, California /
Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Photo Credit: Rich Sanders, Des Moines

CreativeConnections

Art Themes + Works

DIG

Let's go back to the artwork on page one and try another slow looking practice. You will spend one whole minute looking. After your slow looking, you will write three lists of the all things that you notice. Sort these words into groups of nouns, adjectives, and verbs that you see, feel, or sense from the artwork. Try to identify as many words as you can to fill up your lists!

Nouns | people places or things

- | | | |
|----|----|----|
| 1. | 4. | 7. |
| 2. | 5. | 8. |
| 3. | 6. | 9. |

Adjectives | describing words, size, color, feelings, shapes etc.

- | | | |
|----|----|----|
| 1. | 4. | 7. |
| 2. | 5. | 8. |
| 3. | 6. | 9. |

Verbs | action and doing words

- | | | |
|----|----|----|
| 1. | 4. | 7. |
| 2. | 5. | 8. |
| 3. | 6. | 9. |

What kind of words were easiest to find in the artwork? Why do you think that is?

It is possible you have some words on your lists that seem contrary (or opposing) in some way — even though both are present in the artwork? What are these words?

Now that you have these lists of words inspired by artwork, what could you use them for?

CreativeConnections

Art Themes + Works

DISCUSS

What do you notice first about this painting? What questions come to mind with your initial observation?

When you look closely at different areas of the painting, can you see individual marks, shapes, or colors that make up the whole image? How would you describe them? Find similarities and differences. When you look at the colors and shapes as a whole again, do you see anything new?

Imagine Sam Francis making this painting. The way we move is called gesture; can you see Sam Francis' gestures? Think about how he might have stood when he was working or where the canvas might have been positioned in his studio. What kind of brush do you think would have been used, and how might he have moved to make the marks with the brush? Do you think the marks he made were random or planned? What makes you think that?

Sam Francis left lots of white space in this painting on purpose. Why do you think he did that? Do you notice anything different when you focus on the white space instead of the colored areas? How would the painting be different if there was no white space?

CreativeConnections

Art Themes + Works

CREATE

MATERIALS

Your Body

ASSIGNMENT #1

Gesture Exercises | Physical Education

Your body has many ways of moving and expressing your thoughts and feelings; let's explore the gestures in you!

INSTRUCTIONS

The way your body moves says a lot about you. There are movements that we do on purpose, like waving at a friend or dancing. There are also movements that we don't even need to think about doing, like holding our heads up or swinging our arms as we walk.

Let us examine and explore our own gestures. First, walk around a little. Don't think too much about it, just walk. Now, as you are walking, think about how big your steps are. How do your feet move when you walk? What are your arms doing as you walk? What is the posture of your back? What are your fingers doing? When you walk, do you feel like you are swaying back and forth or does it feel more like marching?

Now try some gestures with your arms and hands. Make sure you have plenty of space. Move your arms in big circles. How does that feel? Make your arms look like floppy rubber bands. How does that feel? Can you move your fingers like spider legs? What about when you touch the finger tips of both of your hands against each other. Try to push your arms and hands away from your body as far as they will go. This should feel like a really big stretch. Can you feel it in your back? Try and stretch your neck side to side at the same time. How does that feel? Try to curl up your body as small as you can. Now slowly spread out as big as you can.

What ways can you move your body and your arms and your legs that feels the best to you? Do you think all movements feel the same for all people? Why might different movements feel differently for different bodies?

Next time you are moving, think about your body— what you are expressing with it and how it feels. Try and notice how other people move and express with their bodies.

ASSIGNMENT #2

Gesture Paintings | Visual Art and Movement

You are going to be making a piece of art by thinking about gestures and exploring how we move to make different kinds of marks.

MATERIALS

Paper
Paint
Paintbrush
Water
Paper towels

INSTRUCTIONS

When you think about gestures, do you think about the motions in your arms and hands? Often when we paint, we use our arms and hands to make the artwork. Think about motion as you make this artwork and as you select the colors you would like to use.

Start by painting a straight line across your paper. How does your arm move to make this line? Paint a line with waves. How does your arm need to move differently to paint this line? How does it feel to paint a wavy line?

You will next paint a shape very slowly. Choose a color that feels like a slow color to you. Paint a shape quickly. What color feels fast to you? What shapes feel fast to you?

Hold your paintbrush very tightly. How does this make your hand feel? How do your lines look when you hold the brush tightly? Loosen your grip and hold the brush very lightly, so that it almost flops on the paper. How do your lines or shapes look when you paint with a loose grip? How does that make your hand feel? Does it make you move your arm differently as well?

Paint a great big arching line, like a rainbow, and try using your entire arm. Can you feel that movement in your shoulder?

Paint something really small, a tiny detail. Do you have to hold the brush differently to do it? How does your hand feel painting something small compared to the big rainbow arch? How does your arm feel different?

Explore different lines and ways of moving your arm and hand to paint. Try painting with your other hand. How does that feel different? How does the painting look different?

When you feel like you have covered enough space on your paper and feel done exploring different gestures, look at your painting. Have you ever painted something that looks like this before? How is this painting different? Do you usually think about how you move your body when you are making art? Do you think that changed the way you painted?

CreativeConnections

Art Themes + Works

RELATE

In this [video](#), are the gestures Sam Francis makes what you imagined when you first looked at the painting? What were the different ways he controlled the marks that were made on the canvas? Is there anything in this video that shows what Sam Francis was *thinking*? Could there be a connection between what Sam Francis was thinking or feeling, what his body was doing, and what ended up on the canvas?

On this [site](#), check out some large, public artworks by Sam Francis. Most of these were done much later than *Summer No. 2*, which was created in 1957. Which works do you think are similar to, and which seem different from, *Summer No. 2*? How are they different? Why do you think they might be different? What do you think are the challenges of making artwork for such large spaces?

Sam Francis had a wide variety of interests including music, literature, and science. Can you find any of these influences in his art? How is artwork like music? How is his artwork like literature? How is his artwork like science? Do you think thoughts or emotions might be reflected in his art? Why?

CreativeConnections

Art Themes + Works

WONDER

Now that you have spent time viewing and thinking about Sam Francis' painting *Summer No. 2*, what do you still wonder about this work? If you could ask the artist or the painting anything, what would you want to know most? Use the question starters below to write three questions.

Why is...	I am curious about...	What part....	Are we...
Who is...	How did you...	What if...	Is she...
Where...	Did you know...	Suppose that...	Do you...

My questions about Sam Francis' *Summer No. 2*:

1.

2.

3.