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Methods of Teaching Art to Children

Title of the Lesson Painting a figurative series in the style of Susan Rothenberg

Unit of Study: Susan Rothenberg and Contemporary Art

Lesson # 1 – Meant for 8th graders

The Big Idea:

Rothenberg first became known for her horse paintings in the 1970's and 80's, and became known as a return to figurative painting. Her famous life-size images of horses seem almost hieroglyphic – the horses have fragmented body parts, like symbols. Rothenberg seems to be paring down the very essence of painting into the bare essentials of what she sees in the horses. Students will examine a figure they see in every day life and break it down into a series, as Rothenberg did with her horse series.

Specific Content Standards addressed in this lesson:

- Figurative and abstract painting
- Minimalism
- Color, light and imagery
- Objects in motion
- Multiple aspects of one object explored through a series
- Acrylic paint on canvas paper
- Taking inspiration from the methods of a particular artist
- Making comparisons

Specific Essential Questions addressed in this lesson (What leading questions can you ask of students to get them to understand the Big Ideas?):

- - How was Susan Rothenberg groundbreaking for her time?
- How can a series of paintings expand on one object or subject matter?
- What is minimalism? What is figurative painting?
- How can you explore symbolism through art, namely a series?
- How might Susan Rothenberg be influenced by other artists and contemporaries?
- How can the student break an every day object/image down to its raw, essential elements?

Learning Outcomes/Expectations/objectives:

As a result of this lesson, students will understand that:

- Susan Rothenberg's style and methods for creating her art
- An every day object can be seen in multiple ways
- A series can expand on a simple object based on the eye of the beholder

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As a result of this lesson, students will know that:

- They have a good understanding of Susan Rothenberg's biography and inspiration for her series, and a better understanding of why her horse paintings were so acclaimed
- They can work easily and effectively with acrylic paints
- One object can be interpreted in many ways

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Find a recognizable image they can deconstruct and interpret through a series
- Break down an object in motion
- Interpret every day objects in new ways
- Have more experience with acrylic painting and canvas

Learning Activities: Step-by-step description of the lesson components as follows:

- 1.) Brief Overview Susan Rothenberg – biography, method, inspiration, acclaim, etc.
- 2.) Show slides of her horse series, explain the method and thought behind them
- 3.) Discuss the idea of a “series” in art
- 4.) Have students pick an object in motion that means something to them – look through magazines for inspiration or ideas
- 5.) Have students practice working with acrylics on small pieces of canvas paper, playing with color and light
- 6.) Discussion: deconstructing an image – what you see just geometrically in the object you chose, the color, the light, etc. – write a few bullet notes about what the eye alone observes
- 7.) Students will work on three paintings – each on an 8 x 10 piece of canvas paper with acrylic paints. These three paintings will complete a series that show the object starting, in the process of, and finishing a simple motion (i.e. a horse in the midst of a gallop)
- 8.) Clean up
- 9.) Discussion of student's objects – what they chose, how they chose it, the motion they represented in the paintings, and how they broke down the image into its core elements, how they drew inspiration from Rothenberg
- 10.) Conclusion: Discuss with students how they related to Susan Rothenberg's approach as they were painting. Do they think Rothenberg effectively painted her objects in her series?

Pacing – how much time will each component take?

- 1.) Brief Overview Susan Rothenberg – 15 minutes
- 2.) Discuss the idea of a “series” in art – 5 minutes
- 3.) Have students pick an object in motion that means something to them – look through magazines for inspiration or ideas – 5 minutes

- 4.) Have students practice working with acrylics on small pieces of canvas paper, playing with color and light – 10 minutes
- 5.) Discussion: deconstructing an image – what you see just geometrically in the object you chose, the color, the light, etc. – write a few bullet notes about what the eye alone observes – 10 minutes
- 6.) Students will work on three paintings – each on an 8 x 10 piece of canvas paper with acrylic paints. These three paintings will complete a series that show the object starting, in the process of, and finishing a simple motion (i.e. a horse in the midst of a gallop) – 20 minutes per painting = 1 hour
- 7.) Clean up – 15 minutes
- 8.) Discussion of student’s objects – what they chose, how they chose it, the motion they represented in the paintings, and how they broke down the image into its core elements, how they drew inspiration from Rothenberg – 15 minutes
- 9.) Conclusion: Discuss with students how they related to Susan Rothenberg’s approach as they were painting. Do they think Rothenberg effectively painted her objects in her series? – 15 minutes

This would definitely be a good 2-session workshop, considering the painting alone will take at least an hour.

Introduction/Opening:

(How will you begin to lead the students towards the outcomes you expect of them?)

Going over Susan Rothenberg’s biography, methods, and inspiration in detail. Supplementing this with many slides and images, providing her own personal quotes as well as quotes from critics at her exhibits, discussing the idea of a “series”

Demonstration:

(Does something need to be demonstrated to make these expected outcomes clearer?)

Many visual representations. Slides of her artwork. In-class demonstration of how to use acrylics paints. Providing an example of breaking down an every day object into its most figurative, essential elements.

Body

Activity #1

- Intro/Overview. Slides, Discussion

Transition

Time for students to ask questions, have students look through magazines and find an every day image or object that they can draw inspiration from for their own series.

Activity #2

Experiment with acrylic paintings, jot down thoughts about the object, what they essentially see in it, and then begin to work on a series of three paintings of their object in a simple motion.

Transition

Clean up. Discussion of their own series, what they saw in it, etc.

Closure

Discussion, check-in, more sharing what they learned about Susan Rothenberg, minimalism, figurative painting, working with acrylics, and whether or not they think Rothenberg was an effective artist, what they liked and didn't like about the activity.

Materials needed for the lesson: (List these materials per student):

Attach handouts (if any).

- Pencil and paper to jot down notes
- Stacks of magazines to flip through
- Scissors
- Variety of acrylic paints
- Paint brushes
- Water and tubs to dip brushes in
- Paper towels and napkins
- 8 x 10 canvas paper

Teacher Materials needed for demonstration:

- Projector
- Computer
- Slides of paintings
- Power point presentation
- Acrylics and canvas paper, brushes

Modifications/Extensions (for students on IEP's or language differences.)

- Extra assistance and explanation
- Supplementary handouts on Susan Rothenberg
- Student peer mentor
- Have them sit in front of class if they have any additional questions
- Write key words on white board
- Help with scissors if needed
- Demonstration of acrylic paintings

Assessment of Student Understanding

(How will you assess student understanding of the content of the lesson?)

- Authentic, performance based tasks that have students apply what they have learned and demonstrate their understanding.
 - includes pre-assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment evidence
 - Can be individual or group based
 - Can include informal methods (such as thumbs up, thumbs down, and formal assessments, such as quiz, answers to questions on a worksheet, written reflection, essay
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- The two discussions we have in between activities and the questions that the students ask
 - When they jot down bullet notes of what they see in their object
 - The final closing discussion of how they related to Susan Rothenberg's work
 - How effectively they were able to portray their object in motion and break down the object into figurative elements.