

Abstracting the Everyday

By Caponi Art Park

Project Overview:

Recommended for ages 4 and up

From weasel hair to natural materials, brushes can be made out of anything if you use your imagination. Using materials found around the park, participants will create their own tools to paint with. Thinking about how they can represent their ideas in as few shapes and lines as possible, participants will create an abstract painting unique to the tools they made themselves.

Supply List:

- Sticks (Should be thick enough that they won't break when small amounts of pressure are applied, approximately 1 ft. long.)
- Different types of flowers, grass and leaves (Collected from outside. This project does not work if it has just rained on the pieces of nature you are using. They must be dry.)
- Rubber bands (You can also use hair ties, or twist ties from food bags.)
- Heavy paper for painting on (You can substitute this for recycled cardboard. You just need a surface heavy enough to hold paint well.)
- Assortment of acrylic paints (You may also use tempera paint. Watercolor will not work.)
- Trays for putting out paints
- Pencils for writing their names (You can use any writing utensil)

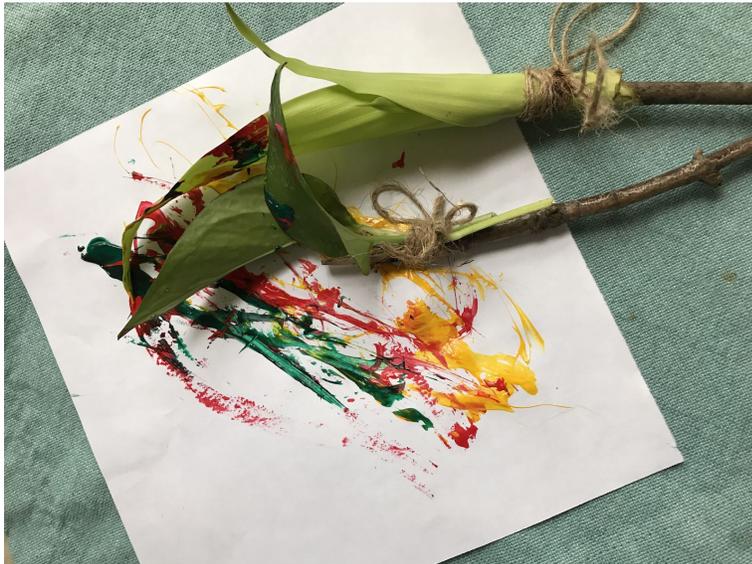
Instructions:

- Spend some time outside with the participants and encourage them to imagine what different flowers, leaves and long grasses would create different strokes and textures in paint. Have them pick 4-5 different pieces of nature and 4-5 sticks.
- Make sure they are picking nature they are allowed to pick, and not from the neighbors garden, unless they will allow you to do so!
- Give each participant a piece of paper (or cardboard) and have them write their names in the corner or on the back.
- Attach leaves, flowers and grasses to the ends of the sticks with a rubber band, creating something that looks like a paint brush. (You can also attach the nature

to the sticks using hair ties or twist ties) Make sure they are all secure enough to withstand small amounts of pressure.

- Using a variety of paint colors and different natural paint brushes, students will create an image of their choosing, **expressing their ideas with as few lines and shapes as possible**. This will be an abstract painting.
 - Have them run their paintbrush across the paper. Ask them how that specific movement of their brush looks on paper.
 - Have them make a different movement. Ask them how that movement felt and appeared differently from the first attempt.
 - Keep doing this, asking questions, guiding them through an abstract painting.
 - Reinforce the idea that they are not painting a tree, for example, they are painting the essence of a tree. They are pulling it apart piece by piece and dissecting and deconstructing every element of the painting.
- Note: Participants should share the natural paint brushes they create so everyone can try the different textures and lines each individual brush creates. However, you should encourage participants to experiment with each paintbrush in different ways before they move onto another one.
- Once finished, allow painting to dry and discuss how the different brushes made different marks and how this affected their paintings.

Example of finished project:



Discussion Questions:

- The different natural paint brushes each had their own unique marks, lines and textures. How did this unpredictability affect how your painting turned out?
- Was it more difficult to work with a paintbrush you made than it would be with a factory-made paint brush? What made it more difficult or easier?
- Knowing now how to use a natural paintbrush, how would you approach creating your paintings differently?

Short Lesson for Abstracting the Everyday:

- The Abstract Art movement began in the United States in the 1940's.
- The main characteristic of abstract art is that it has no recognizable subject.
- Some abstract artists had theories on the emotions that were caused by certain colors and shapes. Although these artist's work appears completely random, they planned out their paintings to the last detail.
- Abstract art uses a visual language of shape, form, color and line to create a composition which may exist with some independence from visual references in the world. For example, instead of painting a picture of a tree, an abstract artist would paint the essence of a tree using basic lines and shapes.
- When you think of abstract art, a lot of people immediately think of abstract artist Jackson Pollock.



Alchemy by Jackson Pollock, 1947

- Pollock was widely noticed for his technique of pouring or splashing liquid household paint onto a horizontal surface, enabling him to view and paint his canvases from all angles.
- It was also called 'action painting', since he used the force of his whole body to paint, often in a frenetic dancing style.
- Jackson Pollock was married to fellow abstract artist Lee Krasner.

