

Of Dogs and Other People: The Art of Roy De Forest

Curriculum Activities

Grades: TK/Kindergarten–2nd Grade

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Lesson #1: Introduction to Roy De Forest

Understanding Goals

Students will learn how the biography of an artist relates to their work—why would De Forest paint the subjects he painted? He grew up on a farm, surrounded by open spaces and animals. These things interested him or made him feel happy, so he wanted to make art inspired by these subjects.

Materials

11x17 paper

pencils

oil pastels

images of Roy De Forest's artwork (see accompanying PowerPoint file)

Vocabulary

fantasy, exaggerate, color, bold, biography

Anticipatory Set

1. WOW! Look at these paintings. What do you notice? Show a representative set of De Forest paintings (e.g., three images) with animal scenes and bold colors that will be appealing to TK–2 students and discuss them.
2. What do you notice about the colors in the paintings? How are the animals in the paintings different from the ones you have seen? How are they the same?
3. What interesting or fantastic things do you see in these paintings? Have you ever seen a green pony in real life? Someone with a heart-shaped head? What kind of fantasy things will you draw or create in your own art?

Lesson

1. Show the class three examples of Roy De Forest's paintings. Share a brief biography about his life around farms, animals, and open space. (See Background on Roy De Forest on page 6.) Refer to paintings for echoes of his biography. What do you feel when looking at these paintings? Do you feel happy, sad, excited, or do you think they're funny? Any other feelings?
2. "The Green Pony" will serve as inspiration for the students to draw a surrealist dog or pony in a non-traditional color with exaggerated dimensions. The drawing should be done in pencil before coloring with oil pastels.
3. Display student artwork and have a class discussion. Prompts: "What did you draw? Why did you choose to use those colors and/or exaggerate a particular feature?"

Extension

- Students will now think about their surroundings (where they live) and their pet or favorite animal and draw a picture of it using Roy De Forest's style of non-traditional color with exaggerated dimensions. The drawing should be done in pencil before coloring with oil pastels. Compare their artwork to Roy De Forest's—how is it similar/different?
- The language and elements of art and qualitative assessment can be applied to all art that students may encounter. Students will also build on the language of art in future lessons.

Ongoing Assessment

Use of new vocabulary in describing their future work— fantasy, exaggerate, color, contrast, etc. They incorporate aspects of Roy De Forest's art into their own work.

Lesson #2: Roy De Forest and Loose Parts

Understanding Goals

Students will learn vocabulary related to four elements of art: line, shape, texture, and color. They will learn to identify some of these elements in examples of De Forest's work as well as in their own interpretation of his work using "Loose Parts." (For more information, refer to the book, *Loose Parts*, by Daly and Beloglovsky.) The act of selecting and placing the loose parts into the De Forest outlines will also refine students' fine-motor skills.

Materials

light table, overhead, or document camera

"loose parts"

transparencies of outlines from Roy De Forest's artworks (see accompanying PowerPoint file)

Note for loose parts: transparent and translucent items in various colors, shapes, and textures with minimal use of opaque items. Examples of items include glass beads in various colors and sizes, translucent buttons, small rocks, jewels, small tiles, etc.

Vocabulary

line, shape, color, texture, dark, light, translucent, opaque

Anticipatory Set

Talk about various lines and shapes and have students make them with their hands and body. This kinesthetic activity will engage the students and get them moving. Can you make your body straight like a line? How about wavy? Can you lay down on the rug diagonally? Show me a heart with your hands, now show me using your entire body. Next, have students look for color in their clothes and around the room. For texture, have children touch their clothes, the rug, their hair, etc.

Lesson

1. Show the class three images of Roy De Forest's paintings. How can we use loose parts to produce images similar to Roy De Forest's works of art? Loose parts are 3-D and full of **texture** and **color** and can be used by students to create art inspired by the works of Roy De Forest. This activity also reflects

De Forest's technique of **assemblage**—building out or sculpting three dimensions onto a 2-D surface.

2. Students will choose loose parts materials depending on what kinds of feelings they want to elicit from viewers. The students will use either a light table, document camera, or overhead projector to recreate one of three works with their chosen materials. The loose parts made available to students should depend on the light source used. Note: although not necessary, the light table adds another dimension to the success of this lesson.
3. In groups of three or four, allow students to make their art on the light table using loose parts. Have Roy De Forest's images posted for reference. Take a picture of finished artwork and xerox it in color or print a photo. It may take a few days to rotate the class through the light table.
4. Gallery Walk—display all the xeroxed images or photos on a bulletin board. When viewing the art in the class gallery, quietly guide students through identifying elements and ideas they have now been exposed to. Ask students to share what they appreciate about other students' loose parts arrangement.



Roy De Forest, *Tyrus*, 1999



Tyrus with Loose Parts



Extension

Look at artwork in your home, your neighborhood, and in everyday items such as cereal boxes and notice how the elements of art are incorporated into many places. Ask students to share three examples of color, line, shape or texture that they discover outside the classroom.

Ongoing Assessment

Use of new art vocabulary when describing their future work—line, color, shape, texture, dark, light. They deliberately incorporate these basic elements of art into their own work.

Additional Resources

If you do not have a light table, overhead, or document camera, you can check out these DIY, low-cost light table instructions:

<http://tinkerlab.com/homemade-easy-low-cost-light-table/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaTjkMQv13E>

Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children, by Lisa Daly and Miriam Beloglovsky

Background on Roy De Forest

Excerpts from the exhibition *Of Dogs and Other People: The Art of Roy De Forest*

Roy De Forest's fantasies invite us on journeys into rich alternative worlds. Playful and humorous elements—including bright colors and animals—define his art. At the same time, De Forest grappled with important cultural and philosophical themes. His imaginative journeys began during the time when Cold War conformism was the dominant cultural force in California.

De Forest (1930–2007) spent most of his childhood on a small farm in Yakima, Washington. His family couldn't afford to buy him toys, so he learned to entertain himself by reading adventure books. These books, along with the boats and planes he built by hand, remained important sources of inspiration for his work.

Dogs reign supreme in De Forest's imaginary kingdom. As a child, he had a succession of dogs, all of which he named Hector. He also loved horses and their sleek bodies. He was particularly drawn to the spotted coats of the Indian Paint horses that grazed on the nearby Yakima tribal lands and sprawling ranches.

In 1950, De Forest moved to San Francisco to attend art school. He became associated with the Funk Art movement in the 1960s, which rejected the trends of Pop Art and Minimalism that dominated the art scene nationally. De Forest preferred freedom of imagination, spontaneity, and a maximalist approach.

De Forest made art spontaneously rather than carefully thinking it through in advance. An art critic, reviewing an early De Forest exhibition, described the artist's imaginative approach to making sculpture:

“He takes boards, sticks, and irregular scraps of wood, other miscellaneous materials, just about every hue of paint known to man, and in a frenzied delight of creativity whips out some of the wiggliest, most utterly delightful works of art that have graced gallery walls in my recent memory.”

—Dean Wallace, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Drawing was crucial to De Forest's creative process, helping him to develop his ideas along with his paintings and wall sculptures. Never preparatory sketches, his works on paper are stand-alone artworks.

Roy De Forest loved to read and had a lifelong fascination with travel books and adventure stories. But he was mostly an avid armchair traveler, journeying more often through his reading than he did in person. Journeys—by foot, boat, or horse—are often featured in his artwork. The voyage De Forest painted most frequently was the inward one, into the realm of his imagination.