

Studio Saturdays: Inkblot Creatures



Africa 1
Robert Motherwell

1970

Screenprint on paper

131 7/8 in. x 23 1/8 in. print

Gift of Mr. Mark Cosgrove © Robert
Motherwell/Artists Rights Society (ARS)
New York, NY, 1996.20

MATERIALS

- 1 Sheet of White Paper
- Black & White Colored Pencils
- Paint
- Paintbrush
- Scissors

Robert Motherwell was an American artist, born in Washington state in 1914. He was mainly a painter, but also created many prints like this one, made in 1970, titled Africa I. Robert Motherwell's art is in a style called Abstract Expressionism. Abstract Expressionism is art that does not show something recognizable. Instead of painting a bowl of fruit, an Abstract Expressionist artist would paint shapes and colors that were not meant to represent or recreate a real object. This kind of image is called abstract. Through different shapes, lines, and colors, Abstract Expressionist artists wanted their artworks to convey a feeling or emotion. That's why the style is called Abstract Expressionism. The artist expresses their feelings and/or their ideas through their art.

Early in his career as an artist, Robert Motherwell was introduced to the idea of automatic drawing. Automatic drawing is an exercise where you let your hand move freely without thinking about what you're drawing, or trying to draw something specific at all. This is one way of making an abstract image. Then, the artist could make their automatic drawing into something else, finding objects and shapes in the lines they made, or just leave the lines themselves as the artwork. Africa I is an example of Motherwell using the automatic drawing process, creating abstract shapes.

Today, part of our craft will be inspired by another type of abstraction: the Rorschach test. The Rorschach test is a psychological test. In it, the person taking the test is asked to look at abstract inkblot images, and say what they think the images look like. Even though the inkblots are random and abstract, not meant to resemble anything, the objects a person “recognizes” in the inkblot show their state of mind. This relates to art, and the artwork we looked at today, because just like in art, every person who looks at it might see something different or take a different meaning from the same image. For this craft, we will be creating our own abstract inkblots and then using our imaginations to make them into whatever creature, object, or thing we recognize in them. Try having your family members or friends make inkblots too, or tell you what they see in your inkblots before you draw over them. You may be surprised how different your interpretations can be!

THINK LIKE AN ARTIST

- 1) In Abstract Expressionism, artists use shape and color to express different emotions. What shapes and colors would you use to express an emotion like happiness? Nervousness? What else?
- 2) Slogans are quick and catchy. How will you turn your idea into a slogan while keeping your full message complete?

INSTRUCTIONS

1. First, take your white sheet of paper and fold it in half, making sure the crease is flat. Then, fold it in half again the other way, again making a strong crease. Open your paper back up; you should have four clear sections. Take your scissors and cut along the creases so you have two equal sections. Now, you can make two different ink blots!
2. Now, take your black paint and your paintbrush. Using a thick amount of paint, create random markings on just one half of your paper. Work quickly, and don't think too hard! You want the paint to still be wet so it will transfer to the other half of the square.
3. Once you have your markings made, fold the square back in half and press down. Press or rub over where the paint is to make sure it transfers.
4. Now, open your paper back up. You should have a mirror image! If there are any spots the paint didn't transfer, you can fill them in with a little more paint, making sure to look at the original markings so the two sides are the same. Or, you can leave the two sides different if you want.
5. Now take a look at your inkblot. What do you see? Show it to some family members or friends; what do they see in it? Turn the square upside down, to the left, and to the right. How does that change what you see?
6. Once your paint is dry, use your black and white pencils to draw over your ink blot and make the shapes into the things you see. Don't feel contained by the paint, either; you can use your black pencil or more paint to extend the shapes.
7. Now you can make three more ink blots with your other paper squares. Have a family member or friend help out and make their own ink blot for you to transform!