

Shapeshifters: Mixed Media Collages Inspired by Marianna Schmidt

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TOPICS: Using found imagery; Exploring the elements of space, shape, line and colour; Creating abstract imagery; Inventing a shapeshifter or hybrid character; Exploring the concept of transformation

SUBJECT(S): Visual Arts, English Language Arts

GRADE(S): 4-7

UNIT DURATION: 3 lessons



Marianna Schmidt, *Jealousy*, 1994, acrylic and collage on canvas, 35 x 27.25 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

OVERVIEW & CULMINATING

TASK: In this unit students will explore the mixed media paintings of Canadian artist Marianna Schmidt. Schmidt (1918-2005) lived and worked in Vancouver from the mid-1950s until her death in 2005. The fragmented bodies in Schmidt's works appear to ambiguously situate themselves on their backgrounds, providing a sense of belonging to a place and simultaneously a sense of displacement. Much of Schmidt's work evokes a sense of intricate knowledge of the environment and yet a feeling of bodily detachment. This has been attributed to her own lived experience in Hungary from the 1920s through the 1940s.

Students will create mixed media collages representing an abstract shapeshifter character of their own invention. They will incorporate

human and non-human body parts through collage and will use pencil and pastel to complete their characters. Students will create environments for their collaged characters, considering techniques for depicting mood and motion.

BIG IDEAS (What students will understand):

- Artists experiment in a variety of ways to discover new possibilities and perspectives. (Arts Education 5)
- Exploring works of art exposes us to diverse values, knowledge, and perspectives. (Arts Education 4)
- Through art making, one's sense of identity and community continually evolves (Arts Education 7)

CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES (What students will do):

- Intentionally select artistic elements, processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, techniques, and environments to express meaning in their work
- Interpret and communicate ideas using symbols and elements to express meaning through the arts
- Describe, interpret and respond to works of art and explore artists' intent

CONCEPTS & CONTENT (What students will know):

- Image development strategies
- Elements of visual art; principles of design
- Symbolism and metaphor to explore ideas and perspective

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) (What students will keep considering):

- How can you represent transformation in a collage?
- How can you combine found and original imagery in the creation of an abstract character?
- How do artists use symbolism to explore and represent ideas?



Marianna Schmidt, *Untitled (Barcode Head)*, 1993, mixed media on canvas, 35 x 27.25 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

FIRST PEOPLES' PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING:

Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES:

- digital Images of artwork by Marianna Schmidt
- digital projector/computer
- 11.5"x15.5" pre-cut thick white paper (i.e. cardstock or opaque vellum) (1 per student)
- oil pastels
- paint brushes
- 4 neon or warm colours of paint (tempera or acrylic) mixed with water or acrylic medium
- colourful paper (2 scraps per person)
- glue sticks
- scissors
- magazines
- 4 pre-mixed acrylic paint colours (2 light blue/grey, 2 dark blue/grey)
- pencils
- printed faces

VOCABULARY:

collage, abstraction, realism, transformation, shapeshifter, portrait, colour palette, symbolism, found imagery, horizon line

RESOURCES & REFERENCES:

- <http://art-history.concordia.ca/eea/artists/schmidt.html>
- <https://feltmagnet.com/painting/Acrylic-Brush-Stroke-Techniques>
- <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/>

ADAPTATIONS & MODIFICATIONS:

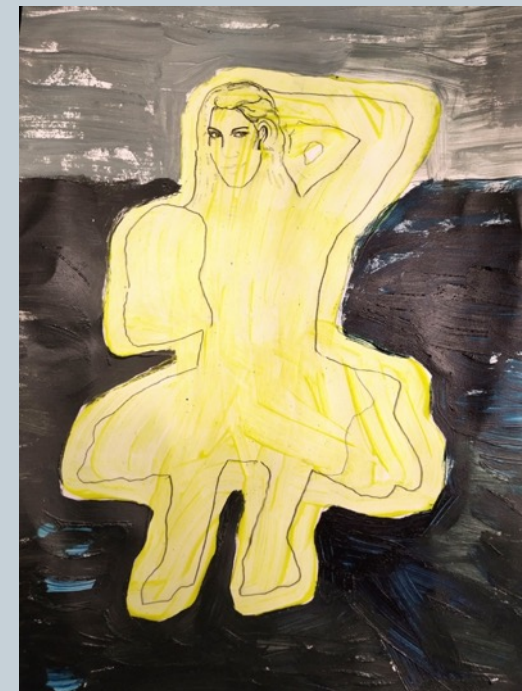
Students with difficulties using scissors may carry out portions of the assignment using a computer and design software such as Adobe Photoshop or MS Paint.

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES (Teacher Action/Student Action):

LESSON #1 (intro to Marianna Schmidt and shapeshifter creation):

- Write the word transformation on the board and create a mind map, including both definitions and examples of transformations (i.e. in nature, in the human body, etc.). Ask the students to brainstorm examples of fictional characters who transform or who are part human and part something else (i.e. the Hulk, Dog Man, Harry Potter characters, etc.). Explain to students that they will be inventing their own transforming or shapeshifter character who will be part human and part something else. They will create these characters in the form of a mixed media collage.

- Introduce students to the artwork of Marianna Schmidt. View examples of Schmidt's mixed media collages and pose questions for discussion: Describe the shapes and colours that Schmidt has used to create her character's bodies. How has Schmidt incorporated collage details into her figures and backgrounds?
- Have each student randomly select a head shape (see head shape template at end of document). Have students cut their face in half, choosing to discard either the top or bottom. Have students cut around the shape of the head.



Teacher Sample in progress, AFK Gallery Program

- Have students select 3 body parts for their character from magazines. Students should select 2 human parts and 1 non-human part. Ask students to choose parts that roughly match the scale of the face that they've chosen. The finished characters should take up a good portion of the collage (students should therefore avoid tiny body parts).
- Once students have selected their 3 body parts, they will space them out on their 11.5"x15.5" sheet of thick white paper, along with their half face. Students will use a pencil to outline their collaged parts, to finish the rest of their character's face, and to connect their chosen body parts, creating an entire body shape. Students will not include details within the body shape at this point. Students will then draw a second outline around the entire body shape about 1.5 – 2 cm in width (see teacher sample above).
- Have students glue down ONLY their half face and save their collaged body parts so that they do not get lost.
- Have students choose 1 of the 4 neon or warm paint colours and glaze over their character shape (see teacher sample above).

LESSON #2 (the shapeshifter's environment):

- Revisit the 2 artworks by Marianna Schmidt with students. Ask the students to observe and describe the differences between the two environments that Schmidt's figures are located in.
- Describe the rule of thirds to students and have them draw a horizon line using pencil in either the top or bottom third of their paper.
- Demonstrate techniques for applying paint (see resource links) and ask students to carefully consider the type of environment that their shapeshifter character would be located in (i.e. a room, outer space, outdoors, under water, etc.).
- Have students apply one pre-mixed light paint colour to one part of their environment and one pre-mixed dark paint colour the other part of their environment. Students may blend together the 2 parts of their environment.



Collage by Gleneagles Elementary grade 5 student, AFK Gallery Program

- Optionally, provide students with the opportunity to choose 1-2 oil pastels to add final details and definition to their shapeshifters.
- Have student complete their collages by adding 3-4 details to the shapeshifter's environment using collage elements and/or oil pastel. Prompt students to thoughtfully consider the spaces around their characters: Where is your character? Is your character in motion? What colours would be in your character's environment?

LESSON #3 (completing shapeshifters, adding details to the environments, and reflection):

- Have students select 2 small pieces of colourful paper. Students will cut these scraps to create body parts, clothing, hair, patterning, etc. in order to complete their shapeshifter character. Encourage students to delay gluing down their body parts and paper shapes in order to experiment with layering and composition.



Work in progress by Cleveland Elementary grade 5 student, AFK Gallery Program

- Have students place their finished collages on table tops and walk around the classroom to view each other's work. Pose the following questions to prompt discussion: Tell us about a peer's shapeshifter that includes a surprising or unexpected combination of body parts. Tell us about an artwork in which the artist made effective use of brushstrokes to create an interesting environment for their shapeshifter. Tell us about an artwork that incorporates interesting cut paper details.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

After choosing their body parts and creating their body outline in Lesson #1, have the students write in their sketchbooks about their imagined shapeshifter. Use the following questions for prompts: Describe the human and non-human parts of your shapeshifter character. What kinds of transformations does your character undergo? Does your shapeshifter have any special powers? What important features do you plan to include as you complete your character (i.e. colours, shapes, hairdo, mode of transportation, etc.)?

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

After students complete their collages, have them reflect in writing on their finished works: What is the name of your character? Describe your character's environment. Describe how you used brushstrokes,

collage elements, and/or oil pastels to create your character's environment.

**EXTENSIONS & POSSIBLE CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS
(Language Arts):**

Have students write short stories featuring their shapeshifters as main characters. Have students describe aspects of their painted and collaged environments in their stories.



Collage by Cleveland Elementary grade 5 student, AFK Gallery Program

AFK RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

Looking for more art lesson ideas? Looking for ways to connect art to other areas of the curriculum? Visit the AFK Resources page to find lesson plans for all grade levels!

<http://tiny.cc/AFKResources>



Collage by Brooksbank Elementary grade 5 student, AFK Gallery Program





Marianna Schmidt, *Jealousy*, 1994, acrylic and collage on canvas, 35 x 27.25 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.



Marianna Schmidt, *Untitled (Barcode Head)*, 1993, mixed media on canvas, 35 x 27.25 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.