Pearl Fincher Museum of Fine Arts

Pearl at Home

This art project is designed for family fun, for suggested ages of 12 and up to be completed at home with easily-accessible art materials.

BLOCKED OUT PAINTING

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6815 Cypresswood Dr, Spring, TX 77379 | 281.376.6322 | pearlmfa.org
MATERIALS

- Canvas board, watercolor paper, or mixed media paper
- Acrylic paint
- Paintbrushes
- White gesso • Small cup (to hold gesso)
- Ultra fine black Sharpie, calligraphy pen, technical pen, or fine line brush
- Reference photo of your choice
- Optional:
  - Paint palette • Acrylic ink or acrylic pens

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This project engages the creative side of your brain, as you work on emphasizing part of an image while loosening control of the art-making process to create an abstract background.

White gesso, which is often used to prime canvases for painting, will instead be used to “block out” your background. Only the subject of your painting will be in full color. Let's get started!

DIRECTIONS

1 Select a reference:

Find a photo of a relatively simple subject. In our example, we're using a picture of a sunflower. Remember that your painting will have an abstract background, so the focus to be placed on the subject you choose.

2 Choose your paint colors:

Look at the photo and decide which colors are the most dominant (in your subject, not the background). Where are the lightest hues? Where are the darkest?
3 Paint your background:

Put the colors you need on a palette, OR dab small amounts of paint (about as big as a fingernail) directly onto the canvas where you need it.

Wet a paintbrush (preferably a 1/2” to 1” size brush) and wipe out the excess water. Use the damp brush to spread the paint around the canvas. Don’t try to form an image in your background – let go of your controls and paint in a loose, abstract manner.

**TIPS:**

- Wipe the brush in between colors, but try not to rinse it. Only use a little bit of water if you need to re-dampen your brush.

- Keep your paint thin so there’s no texture (except for that of the canvas).

- You can wipe areas with a paper towel if the paint is too thick.

4 Lightly draw your subject:

Let the canvas dry **completely** before beginning this step.

Once the acrylic is dry, use a pencil to lightly draw lines – just enough to be able to “see” the subject.

Do not do any shading or detailing at this point.
5 Add white to the background:

In order to emphasize the subject, we’ll block out the background using white gesso. You will still see some of the background colors showing through, but they will be muted. The bright colors will only be left in your subject area.

Place a small amount of gesso (2-3 tablespoons) in a small cup and use a brush to paint around the outline of the subject, then fill in the background.

If you want less of the color in the background, let the first coat dry and go over it again.

6 Add more color:

Use either acrylic paint or acrylic inks to add more color to emphasize your subject. Add shadows and highlights where they are needed. Focus only on the color in your subject – details will be done in the next step! Let it dry completely.
7 Create details:

Use the Sharpie marker, pen, or India ink to create outlines and details in your subject. The paint needs to be completely dry for this step, in order to protect the tip of your marker or pen.

In areas of thick paint, using a fine line brush with ink or paint will work best.