

Jazz Collages

Inspired by the work of Sam Gilliam



Sam Gilliam , *Butterfly Days*, 1986. printed acetate and painted wood on printed, handmade couched paper with string embedded, 43" x 53 1/2" approx. (trapezoid-like shape). Gift of Sue Steinmann and Bill Weege.

Sam Gilliam was an African American color field painter and lyrical abstractionist artist. He was inspired by jazz musicians such as Miles Davis and John Coltrane in their use of improvisation. He used this concept to create his collages such as, *Butterfly Days*, pictured above. In creating this piece, he experimented with different types of mark-making to create layers of texture. He then cut up the pieces of paper that he painted and arranged them in a quilt-like pattern, inspired by traditional African American quilts that were abundant in his childhood.

VOCABULARY

Jazz: a type of music of African American origin that emerged in the 1920s; characterized by improvisation, syncopation, and usually a regular or forced rhythm

Improvisation: something that is created or performed spontaneously and without preparation

Mark-making: marks that are made while creating art including dots, lines, textures, and patterns varying from loose and gestural to controlled and neat

Collage: a piece of art that uses pieces of paper, photographs, fabric, and/or other ephemera that are rearranged and stuck down on a surface

MATERIALS

- Several sheets of colored construction paper **Variation**: you can use white paper but this will require more coloring of the space.
- Drawing materials such as colored pencils, markers, or crayons. **Variation**: you can use paint and wait for it to dry before cutting the paper.
- Scissors
- Glue

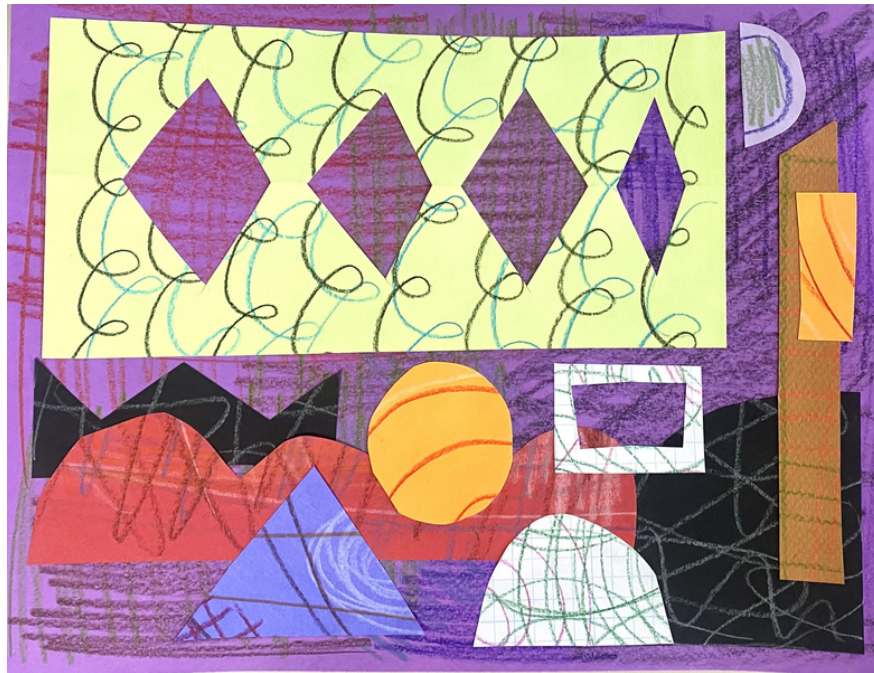
Variation: to add a three-dimensional aspect, use the same methods but with cardboard paper. Look at Sam Gilliam's three-dimensional plywood collage pieces such as *Daily Red* for inspiration.

BACKGROUND

Take a look at Sam Gilliam's mixed media collage pieces [here on our website](#) including *Purple Antelope Space Squeeze* and *Manet*. Notice the patterns and textures. Gilliam enjoyed experimenting with different mark-making techniques. Listen to some jazz music and notice the use of rhythm and repetition, which can also be seen in the patterns of Gilliam's work. He often improvised, similarly to how jazz musicians improvise while playing music, while he worked on the mark-making and collaging of the piece. Use this as inspiration as you create your own artwork inspired by Sam Gilliam and jazz music.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.) Gather all of your materials.
- 2.) Draw patterns and add color to the construction paper. Try experiment with different methods of mark-making such as scribbling, dotting, making broad strokes or swirls.
- 3.) Once finished adding patterns and color to the sheets of construction paper, set one of the sheets aside. This will be the background for your collage.
- 4.) Using the other sheets of colored paper, cut out shapes from the paper. They don't have to be conventional shapes like circles or squares, you can make up your own shapes!
- 5.) Place the shapes onto the piece of paper that you set aside. Think about the arrangement of the shapes, how do you want them to be spaces out, or how do you want the composition to look?
- 6.) Once you are satisfied with how it looks, glue down the shapes onto the background paper.



Activity example.