

## Transfer Drawing Monoprints

**GRADE LEVEL:** Middle School, High School

**SUBJECT:** Visual Arts

**MEDIA:** Painting

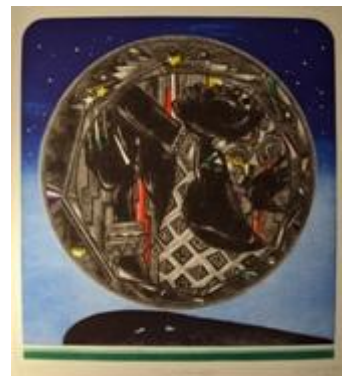
### FEATURED ARTWORK:



Eldzier Cortor (American, 1916), *Dance Composition No. 35*, n.d. edition 6 of 100, Gift of the Eldzier Cortor Trust, In memory of Sophia Cortor, 2012.24.39



Eldzier Cortor (American, 1916), *Dance II - Diptych*, nd. Edition 2 of 35, Gift of the Eldzier Cortor Trust, In memory of Sophia Cortor, 2012.24.4



Eldzier Cortor (American, 1916), *Jewels Theme VII*, n.d., edition 10 of 125, Gift of the Eldzier Cortor Trust, In memory of Sophia Cortor, 2012.24.23

### OBJECTIVE:

Inspired by the prints of African-American printmaker Eldzier Cortor, students will explore the technique of transfer drawing monoprints.

### DISCUSSION:

One of the oldest living African-American Works Progress Administration (WPA) artists in the United States, Eldzier Cortor was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1916. A self taught artist, he grew up during the Great Depression but remembers having the opportunity to visit the opera and museums of Chicago. He attended the Art Institute of Chicago and studied under the former Bauhaus painter and photographer László Moholy-Nagy. Cortor was drawn to printmaking as a medium of artistic expression because the process allowed him to make multiple images of his drawings. He served as an apprentice to several printmakers, including Japanese printmaker Junichiro Sekino. As the recipient of a Rosenwald Fellowship, he traveled to the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia, and his exposure to black culture and folk art was further enhanced when he lived and taught in Haiti during a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Cortor's body of work spans several stages - from an artist employed by the WPA during the Great Depression, to his prints about the slaughterhouse in Haiti, to drawings of dancing women from the Sea

Islands off the coast of South Carolina. During the McCarthy era, when many artists were targeted as Communists, Cortor sold his work underground to avoid being blacklisted, forgoing traditional gallery representation. His *Facet* series incorporates haiku with printmaking, and many of his other series reference specific movements in art history, including Cubism, Abstract Expressionism and Art Deco. Cortor currently resides in New York City, and although he is no longer able to work as a printmaker, he continues to paint everyday.

## **MATERIALS:**

- 9 x 12" white construction paper
- Pencils
- Watersoluble block printing ink
- Plexiglass or acrylic plates
- Brushes
- Rulers
- Masking tape
- Optional: Colored construction paper, cardboard stencils

## **PROCESS:**

1. Review the art of Eldzier Cortor with the class:
  - What commonalities do these three prints by Cortor share?
  - How does the artist incorporate the traditional patterns and motifs of Art Deco into these three prints?
  - How does the artist use symmetry and repetition of line to create movement and rhythm in these prints?
  - How does the artist use color to create emphasis?
  - What does the artist communicate about the female African-American figure in these prints?
  - What adjectives and/or art vocabulary would you use to describe these figures?
2. Discuss the traditional technique of etching with the class. The etching process involves covering a zinc or steel plate with a waxy ground. The artist then scratches into the ground with a sharp, fine tool to draw an image. The plate is placed into an acid bath to “etch” (deepen) the scratches in the plate (known as biting). After rinsing the acid off of the plate, it is wiped with ink. The ink is rubbed into the etched lines, and often artists leave a soft layer of ink on the rest of the plate to create areas of light and shadow.
3. Explain the transfer drawing monoprint technique and how it uses a different process to achieve a similar style of print. Reinforce to students that by its nature, a monoprint is unique from other prints because it produces only one image at a time, whereas other printing processes such as lithography, intaglio and woodcuts result in a series or set of prints called an edition.
4. Demonstrate the process of monoprint etching (see directions below) for the class. If students plan on incorporating words, remind them that all imagery will be reversed in the final print.
5. Provide students time to develop and sketch their ideas for their imagery.
6. Set up the printmaking station:
  - Place two plexiglass plates on a table.
  - One plate is for inking the brayer and one plate will be the printing plate, used for making the monoprint etching. Optional: Additional inking and printing plates can be added to the station to allow several students to print simultaneously.
7. Using a brayer, spread an even layer of printing ink on the inking plate. With the brayer, roll a thin, even layer of ink on the printing plate.
8. Float a sheet of paper onto the printing plate – do not press it down. The top edge of the paper can be taped to the plate to allow for lifting the paper during the process.

9. Using a pencil, draw the desired image onto the back of the paper.
  - Do not allow your hand to touch the paper – it is best to hold the pencil vertically.
  - Everywhere the pencil touches the paper, it will pick up an ink line. Stencils and rulers may be placed on top of the paper to draw straight lines and trace geometric shapes. These areas will pick up more ink from the extra pressure applied.
10. Once the drawing is complete, pick up the paper from the corners. Certain sections of the paper may have a light gray finish, which is typical of etchings. Allow the finished prints to dry completely before stacking them.

**Extension:**

- Explain to students what characterizes the design style referred to as Art Deco. After showing examples of Art Deco art and architecture, have students create transfer drawing monoprints in the Art Deco style.

**TEKS:**

**§117.32. Art**

(1) Perception. The student develops and organizes ideas from the environment. (A) illustrate themes from direct observation, personal experience and traditional events; and (B) analyze and form generalizations about the interdependence of the art elements such as color, texture, form, line, space, value and principles such as emphasis, pattern, rhythm, balance, proportion and unity, using art vocabulary appropriately.

Lessons are written by area educators and the San Antonio Museum of Art Education department. If you are interested in sharing your lesson ideas featuring works of art from the museum's collections with the San Antonio Museum of Art Education department, please email [education@samuseum.org](mailto:education@samuseum.org).