

Abstract Vistas, Inspired by Jerry Schurr

Project by Marlene Sanaye Yamada



Jerry Schurr first became known for his rugged American landscapes of the Western United States, made using the “reduction” method of painting and silkscreen printing. Students will use watercolor, paper, and scissors to create their own landscape masterpieces inspired by the early work of artist, Jerry Schurr.

Biography: Jerry Schurr (1940 - present)

From www.askart.com:

Following is a biography based on writing of Sandra Wolf:

Jerry Schurr is known for rugged landscape paintings and prints of the Western United States.

Trained as a painter at the University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia-born Schurr began to make serigraphs in 1971. Since then Schurr has developed a complex "reduction" method of painting and silk-screen printing that is as precise, and difficult to master, as the extraordinary multi-leveled imagery of his complicated vistas. Using as many as 75 colors in a single image, Schurr works on single large canvas or screen to which he applies stencils of the individual image areas. After an area has been completed, that portion is blocked out, thereby gradually reducing the open areas of the image as the composition slowly builds, layer upon layer, on the substrata.

Jerry Schurr's love of nature has led him from his overview of a vast pre-historic landscape to a study of the exquisite creatures that inhabit the nooks and crannies of that space. His latest images are three dimensional constructs of butterflies, moths and orchids. Each of these later color renderings is consistent with Schurrs layered approach. The butterflies, moths and orchids are constructed using color overlays and linear complexities derived directly from the actual specimens or their scientific photographic images. Every one is a celebration. In the tradition of Plato's concept that there is an ideal, a prior, form for all things existing in the material world, Schurrs creations are as close to perfectly symmetrical in both color and construct as he has been able to achieve. These are "Ideal" butterflies, moths and orchids.

Recipient of the prestigious Thouron Prize for Painting in 1966, Schurr also won the Eugene Feldman Memorial Prize in 1977 from the Philadelphia Print Club. His paintings and serigraphs are exhibited in innumerable galleries throughout the United States and appear in the collections of the Minneapolis Museum of Fine Arts; Standard Oil of New Jersey; Scott Paper Company and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Currently, Schurr spends his time actively working in his studio in suburban Philadelphia.

Project: Inspired by Jerry Schurr's abstract landscapes which include magnificent vistas of distant canyons, rugged shorelines, vast valleys, and other natural American scenes, students will construct their own landscapes from their mind's eye, using watercolors in graduated levels of intensity.

Medium: Collaged watercolor on paper.

Project Objectives / Concepts:

- Learn about the artist, Jerry Schurr
- Use teamwork to create the color palette for the project
- Notice how lighter color values can give the impression of greater distance, and darker color values can give the impression of closer proximity to the viewer
- Construct a complex landscape with simple materials, inspired by the work of Jerry Schurr

Vocabulary:

Background – the part of an image represented as being at maximum distance from the viewer.

Foreground – the ground or parts situated, or represented as situated, in the front; the portion of a scene nearest to the viewer.

Middle ground – an intermediate position, area, or recourse between two opposites or extremes; a halfway or neutral standpoint.

Collage - an art form in which compositions are made out of pieces of paper, cloth, photographs, and other miscellaneous objects, juxtaposed and pasted on a dry ground

Supplies per student:

- 2' sheet of plain white paper from a roll (Costco carries large rolls of white paper used to cover tables.)
- 1 2" wide foam brush suitable for use with watercolor paint
- 1 2" wide flat brush for gluing paper with Mod Podge or Acrylic Matte Medium
- Watercolor paint from tubes (One dime-sized portion of Payne's Grey, Burnt Sienna, Burnt Umber, or Yellow Ochre. Recommend Van Gogh brand. Although each student will get only one color, they will share the painted paper so that each student will have a variety of colors. Recommend four separate islands of tables with each student at the same island getting the same color so they won't contaminate each other's paper with a different color.)
- 5.5 x 8.5 inch cyan (or similar) blue card stock
- Small plastic, foam, or slick (non-absorbent) paper plate
- Scissors
- Matte Mod Podge or Acrylic Matte Medium
- Paper towel

Shared Supplies:

- Containers of water to rinse the brushes

Discussion:

- Present art enrichment lecture to students about the artist, Jerry Schurr. Show PowerPoint presentation and specifically show examples of photos of landscapes where the foreground is of darkest intensity, and the intensity of middle ground and background features are increasingly lighter the further they are from the viewer.
- Show images of Jerry Schurr art.
- Give a step-by-step demonstration to show students how to construct their own landscapes.
- Repeat the step-by-step demonstration, as needed, while the students construct their own landscapes.

The Process:

Set-Up:

- Distribute designated supplies, with each student receiving only one of the four colors of watercolor paint on the small plastic/slick paper plate. Between sets of four students, they will collectively have all four colors.

The Project:

- The docent will first demonstrate how to paint the white paper with the watercolor, graduating from dark to light.
 1. Lightly wet the foam brush (dab with paper towel if too wet) and load it with as much paint as given. Circular movements with the brush will help to distribute the concentrated water color evenly across the foam brush. Try not to leave any clumps of paint on the plate.
 2. With paper from roll laid horizontally across desk, paint horizontal strokes of color contiguously, starting from the top of the paper and proceeding toward the bottom. Intensity of color will start out dark, and gradually get lighter as the foam brush runs out of paint. Use additional water on the brush to stretch the color to the far end of the paper. The final strokes will be almost colorless. (If paint does not spread easily, you may need a bit more water on the foam brush. If foam brush is too wet, you may dab the foam brush on the paper towel. If the paper is too wet, you may lightly dab the puddles with the paper towel. Uneven textures are fine.)
- The students will then paint each of their own white roll paper with watercolor.
 1. Lightly wet the foam brush (dab with paper towel if too wet) and load it with as much paint as given. Circular movements with the brush will help to distribute the concentrated water color evenly across the foam brush. Try not to leave any clumps of paint on the plate.
 2. With paper from roll laid horizontally across desk, paint horizontal strokes of color contiguously, starting from the top of the paper and proceeding toward the bottom. Intensity of color will start out dark, and gradually get lighter as the foam brush runs out of paint. Use additional water on the brush to stretch the color to the far end of the paper. The final strokes will be almost colorless. (If paint does not spread easily, you may need a bit more water on the foam brush. If foam brush is too wet, you may dab the foam brush on the paper towel. If the

paper is too wet, you may lightly dab the puddles with the paper towel. Uneven textures are fine.)

- Collect the painting supplies and let the paint dry while listening to, and participating in, the discussion. (To clean the foam brushes, rinse with water.)
- ***Discussion: Discuss the history of the artist, view images of landscapes and Jerry Schurr's artwork, and have the docent demonstrate how to construct the landscape. Be sure to point out that colors with the lightest value/intensity should be used to create the most distant land forms. Colors with the darkest value should be used to create the foreground. A variety of pre-cut shapes of varying intensity will speed the demonstration along.***
- With scissors, cut painted paper vertically into four strips, each of which will have the full gradation of color.
- Trade strips of paper so that each student will have a strip of each color.
- Pass out the blue card stock and the plates of Mod Podge or Acrylic Matte Medium.
- Students write their names on the back of their card stock.
- The student may choose to use one or more colors in his/her composition.
- Starting from the lightest end of a color strip, cut off a few inches of the paper. Cut that piece of paper into an irregular shape to form the most distant hill or cliff. This first layer should be arranged near the top of the blue cardstock and cover most of the width of the cardstock.
- Cut off a few more inches of the same color of paper. This section will be slightly darker than the previous section. Again, cut an irregular shape to form the next hill or cliff closer to the viewer. Arrange that piece of paper over the previous shape, leaving the top edge and one or two sides of the previous shape partially visible.
- Continue layering the landscape with increasingly darker shades of color.
- The student may choose to switch colors as desired, as long as the color value of successive layers is darker than previous layers.
- For visual interest, the student may choose the foreground color to be a different color scheme from the background and middle ground. The closest, darkest portion of the landscape should hide any bottom edges of previous layers.
- The student may choose to cut out a silhouette of a tree of a contrasting color to add to the foreground.
- When the student is happy with the arrangement of the landscape elements, he/she will use the paint brush and Mod Podge to glue the pieces of landscape elements to the blue cardstock, starting with the most distant (lightest in color) paper, and building up the landscape with successively darker layers. Paint Mod Podge over each layer.
- Trim edges of paper that extend outside of the background paper.

Clean Up:

- Thoroughly wash Mod Podge or Acrylic Matte Medium off of brushes with detergent and water. If Mod Podge or Acrylic Matte Medium gets on scissor blades, wipe clean with baby wipe or damp paper towel.

Process Photos:



Set-Up



Load paint on foam brush

Paint paper



Add water to stretch paint

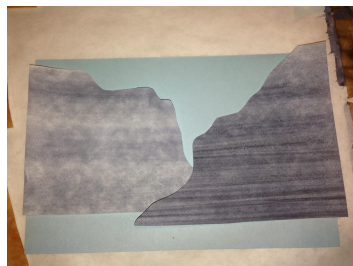


Cut into 4 vertical strips

Collect all 4 colors



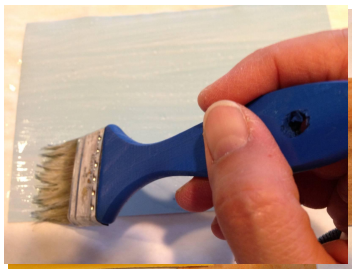
Arrange light to dark



Cut lightest colors first



Stack successively darker



Add optional tree

Mod Podge blue cardstock



Mod Podge each layer

Trim edges