

RESOURCE FOR EDUCATORS

The Art of Collage

This resource is aimed at integrating the study of photographs from the collection of the MoCP into secondary and post-secondary fine arts, language arts, and social science curriculum. This guide contains questions for looking and discussion, historical information, and classroom activities and is aligned with Illinois Learning Standards.

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MoCP Museum of
Contemporary
Photography

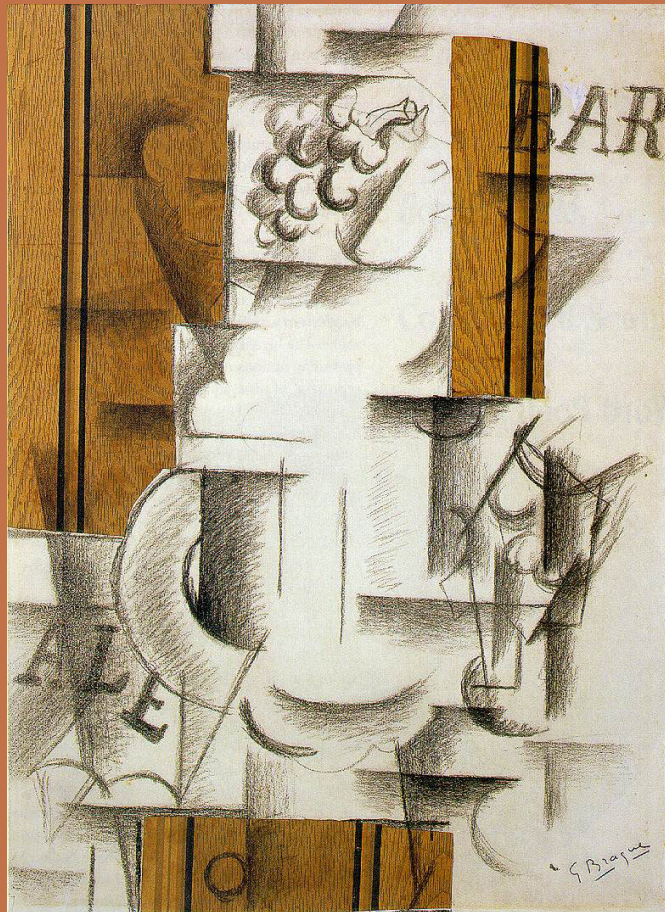
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What is Collage?

Collage is a visual art form comprised of elements assembled from any number of sources, which are cut and affixed to a surface to create a new artistic expression. The history of layering materials in this way traces its roots all the way back to the invention of paper in China around 200 BC. In Japan artists applied paper to silk in the 1100's. The first known European assemblages of this type were created in the 1400's. The 1500's saw the creation of flap-books, which were made to show human anatomy by layering paper in a way that could be lifted to reveal the organs below.

In 1912, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso started affixing scraps of wallpaper, labels and cloth to their paintings, and they eventually coined the term collage, which comes from the French verb collager, meaning "to glue or stick."



Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912. Not in the MoCP collection

Collage and Socially Concerned Artists

Since collage is a process of destruction and reconstruction, the medium allows for artists to explore creating new meanings through changing contexts. This makes collage a particularly effective tool for politically and socially concerned artists who can splice images together to create stimulating and challenging new meanings. Anyone can make a collage without previous arts training, and collage styles can be as varied as the people that make them.

In the next section, we will look at examples of collages in the MoCP collection that demonstrate some of the many ways artists have used collage to communicate a personal, social, or political message.



Krista Franklin, *Hip-Hop by Default*, 2009

MoCP Collage Collection Highlights

Ralph Arnold

(United States, b. 1928)



Ralph Arnold, *Above this Earth, Games, Games*, 1968

Questions for Looking

- As you look at this piece, notice where your eyes are pulled to. How do each of the colors make you feel? How are the colors working to organize your attention?
- How are the images and pieces of text working together? How do you think the artist wants his viewers to feel or what kind of thoughts might he want us to consider while encountering this piece?

In this piece, Ralph Arnold pairs images of a wounded soldier being carried off the battlefield with the text “**above this slumbering earth / games, games, games.**” This implies that football is both a metaphor for war and a public distraction from the deaths of soldiers and civilians in the Vietnam War (also known as the American War in Vietnam). As a veteran, Arnold empathized with the troops thrust into the confusing social and political climate of the conflict, where the line was often blurred between savior and captor, ally and enemy, or noncombatant and guerrilla.

MoCP Collage Collection Highlights

Martha Rosler

(United States, b. 1943)

Martha Rosler also made collages that comment on the war in Vietnam. Between 1967 and 1972, she created *Bringing the War Home*, a series of collages that integrate photojournalistic images of the war into photographs of idealized domestic interiors clipped from popular magazines. In mainstream publications these two kinds of images were often printed on adjacent pages, yet they ostensibly represented distant and unrelated worlds. As Rosler knits together stark depictions of a supposedly foreign conflict and materialistic visions of a perfect American life, she creates the impression of a continuous space and suggests their interconnection. Rosler saw *Bringing the War Home* as an act of agitation and social commentary, which she originally intended it for publication by underground presses and hand distribution, rather than for an art audience.

Nearly forty years later, in 2004, Rosler was struck by similarities between the war in Vietnam and the developing war in Iraq. Returning to the method of handcrafted collage—followed now by a scanning and printing process—she reprised the *Bringing the War Home* series, combining images from Iraq with contemporary interiors.

Given the passing of four decades, the images register certain superficial changes, but Rosler's two collages also call attention to a continuity in U.S. policies and violence.



Top to bottom:

Martha Rosler

Roadside Ambush, from the *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* series, 1967, and *Gladiators*, from the *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, New Series*, 2004

Questions for Looking

- How is Rosler creating an illusion of complex space in her collages? If you look at them slowly, how would you describe what you are seeing in the most literal way possible?
- Try speaking what you see aloud to a friend and feel your way into it. As you describe what you see, how does it feel in your body? What connections can you make with your visceral experience of the piece and what you now know about Rosler's work?

MoCP Collage Collection Highlights

Marshall Brown

(United States, b. 1973)

As a practicing architect, professor of architecture, artist, and theoretician, Marshall Brown believes that architecture is a “cultural medium,” with the capacity to connect concrete pasts with imagined futures. In his series *Chimera* (2014), Brown cuts and pastes images of twentieth century postmodernist, dadaist and constructivist architecture to create new urban landscapes. The word chimera has two meanings: one is a fire-breathing beast from Greek mythology comprised of lion, goat, and serpent body parts; the other is synonymous with illusion or fantasy. Brown’s works takes on both interpretations of the word, combining historical and iconic buildings into new fantastical realms of impossible structural standing.



Marshall Brown
Chimera 14-7-27, 2014

Questions for Looking

- As you look at this collage, how are all the fragments of these images of architecture working together?
- How do the colors feel to you? If they had a mood, what would that be?
- Imagine that you had the task of describing this complex image to a friend who could not see. What would you say to them?
- How might you describe the way the straight lines seem to be working in this piece? If you think there is a sense of place in this collage, how might you describe it?

MoCP Collage Collection Highlights

Joanne Leonard

(United States, b. 1940)

Joanne Leonard uses collage, text, and mixed media to create candid representations of intimacy and womanhood. Working over the past four decades with themes including pregnancy, miscarriage, sexuality, motherhood, romance, and self-acceptance, Leonard provides a window into her physical and internal life while casting light on the larger absence of feminist narratives in art history.

Questions for Looking

- Take some time to look at this image very slowly and carefully. It might seem to you at first that there's not too much to see. Remember though that this collage, like any artwork, is the result of many intentional choices made by the artist. How does all that empty space feel to you?
- How is the smooth texture of the support ground working with the textures of the gauze?
- What do you see in the partly obscured photograph? Why do you think the artist layered her collage this way?
- What is the overall emotional response you feel looking at this work?



Joanne Leonard

Another Window, from the *Winter Windows* series, 1975

Make Your Own Collage

MATERIALS NEEDED

Support (can be paper, cardboard, or any kind of object. If you can glue to it, you can use it.) Your support needs to be at least the size of your finished product.

Broad selection of items you are willing to cut up.

Examples of great collage items are:

- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Paper or cardboard scraps from the recycling bin
- Photographs
- Drawings or sketches
- Maps
- Fabric
- Personal or found items
- Items found in nature

Scissors or X-acto knives (for older students—make sure they take safety precautions)

Adhesive Adhesive (such as glue, PVA, rubber cement, spray adhesive, hot glue sticks, etc.)

PROCESS

First

Determine the theme for your collage-making. Are students making a self-portrait? Are they making it about their home? Their city? Family? Once the theme is determined, dedicate a significant amount of time for students to look through available materials and collect images or scraps they may use. For this gathering process, let the workspace get messy and allow for students to stack many different pieces they may or may not use. Ask them to only respond to the materials, collecting what catches their attention.

Then

Begin arranging materials onto the support, not yet affixing, but considering how each piece affects the whole composition. It can be helpful to use low-stick artist's or reusable tape to affix items briefly as students experiment. Some questions to consider:

- How does each piece function separately?
How does it change once it is next to another material?
- Should text be included? Why or why not?
What words are effective to your story?
How does the font or size of the words impact the way your whole collage appears?
- What role does color play in the overall collage?
Are you using many colors or just a few? What feelings do different colors suggest to you?
- What role does texture play? What kind of surfaces does the collage have? How do different kinds of textures play off of each other?
- Is the collage flat or more three-dimensional?
When using paper, fabrics or flexible items, students may want to explore the topography of their collages through crumpling, folding or other ways of manipulating their materials.
- What mood or emotions are you trying to portray? How are those conveyed?

Finally

Put the materials in place with adhesive. Invite students to share their creations and to talk about one another's work. What stories do they see in each collage? How is that narrative shaped by choices in material and composition?



Collages in progress by students from Waters Elementary, 2018

