

Collaborative Paper Sculptures

Level: Elementary School

Lesson Overview:

Students will create three-dimensional public art sculpture models inspired by artist Martin Puryear. Students will gain knowledge of how artists produce their work, the function and purpose of their work and how they work collaboratively to realize a large-scale project. Students will create three-dimensional forms using paper and apply concepts of balance and positive/negative space to create volumetric models for a public sculpture.

Preparation:

Students will need a variety of strips of construction paper: long, short, wide, narrow, different colors. Many of these are in the supply kit that Tom brought. If you need to create more, this should be done before class starts.

Essential Questions:

How, as artists, do/can we work together to make large works?
What elements do I need to consider before creating a sculpture?
How can I create a sculpture that stands on its own?
How can I arrange materials to create a sense of both visual and physical balance?
How can I create a public sculpture for a specific community setting or place?
How does looking at and talking about sculptures help my understanding of their construction and purpose in public spaces?
How can I create a sculpture using limited materials?

Students will...

- understand the three-dimensional nature of sculpture
- find creative solutions while working with design and material restrictions
- understand the difference between positive and negative space in a sculpture
- explore the concept of balance within a three-dimensional sculpture
- understand that artists consider many factors when planning a public artwork/installation

Materials:

Construction paper strips, cardboard, glue

Reference Images:

- Martin Puryear, *Swallowed Sun* (Monstrance and Volute), 2019 (Southern yellow pine, steel, polyester, canvas, rope sculpture)
- Martin Puryear, *Big Bling*, 2016, Madison Square Park, New York (Pressure-treated laminated timbers, plywood, fiberglass, gold leaf- sculpture)



Session

Step 1: Close-looking and Engagement

The teacher will begin the session by having students view Martin Puryear's *Swallowed Sun (Monstrance and Volute)*. The teacher will ask, "What shapes do you see? What shapes or principles of design are you noticing (geometric shapes, symmetry/asymmetry, scale, repetition)? Which part is the positive space? Which part is the negative space? What are the two parts of the structure? Do they individually remind you of anything? How are the two elements working together? How does the meaning change when they are viewed together?" The teacher can have the students also view Puryear's other large scale sculpture installations, like *Big Bling*, for comparison. Have students consider how an artist works in a team to create their work. Engage students in a discussion what kind of professionals and skills are need to complete and install large scale sculpture.

Show the short video about the installation and fabrication of Martin's *Big Bling*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZY7XV3E5PaA>

After viewing the video ask students to recall what they learned from the video and more specifically how Puryear worked with engineers who offered their knowledge and skills. Puryear also makes the point that the process of making art is as important as the finished work itself. An engineer discusses how the piece needed to change in order to work. (You can end the video around 3:10 when the finished piece is shown.)

While looking at *Swallowed Sun*, ask students to comment on the scale of the building and work. Show images that provide clues as



to how big the installation is. Show the students how *Swallowed Sun* started as a small model, and ask, “How do models help artists solve problems?”

Step 2: Art-making

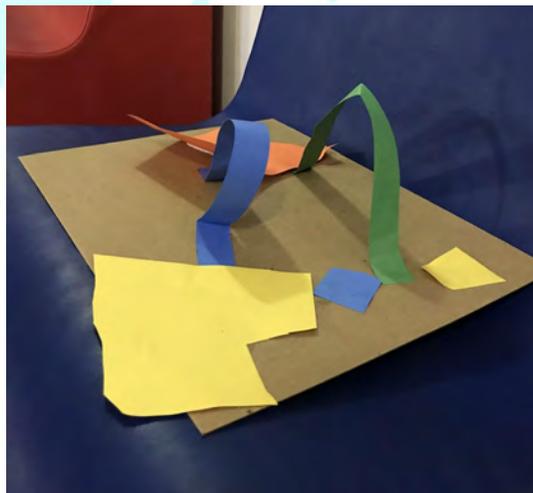
The teacher will explain that like professional artist, they will be working in groups (paired). The teacher will model how to make the construction paper strips “stand”. The teacher will ask that students consider “Where would you want your sculpture to be? Would you like it to be inside or outside? Is your art to be enjoyed in a park? Would you place your work in a grove of trees, or at the sea, or in front of your school or in a garden? How do you want people to see or approach the sculpture? Do you want a path up to it or around it? How do we want people to feel when they see your sculpture? What might they think of?”



With these considerations in mind, students will build their sculptures on top of a cardboard base. Encourage experimenting with different ways to shape paper, reinforce it, and make it stand up: bending, folding, rolling, pleating, etc. Create arches and spirals like in *Monstrance and Volute*. Point out that repeating an element creates style and unity. Ask students to choose which of these techniques they would like to use the most in their sculpture to create a unified visual result.

Step 3: Reflection

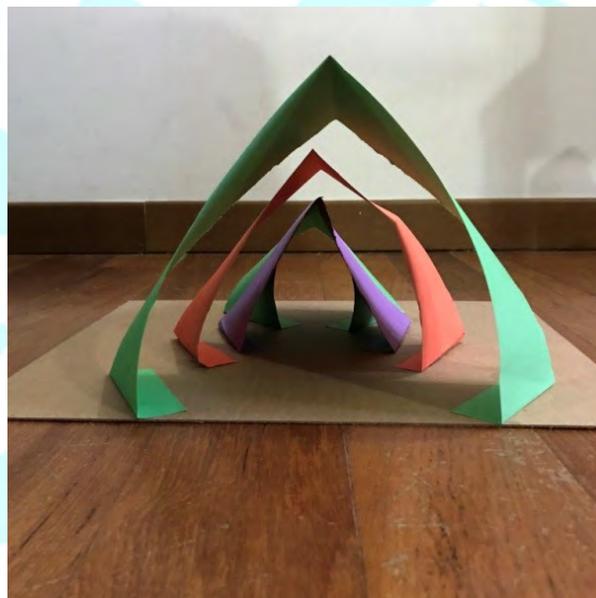
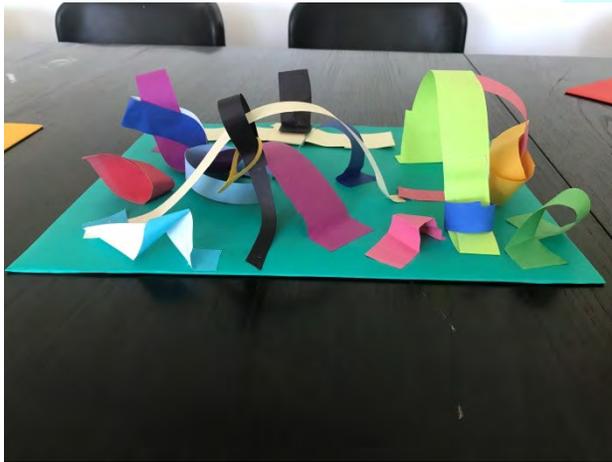
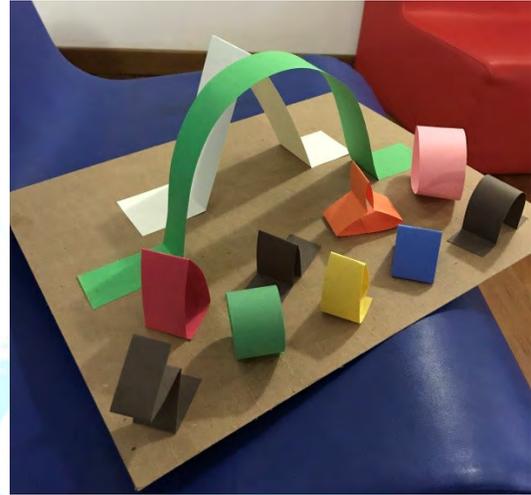
The teacher will lead a gallery walk and discussion about the final works and say, “Let’s look at the variety ways we changed paper. What choices did you make to keep your piece from falling over? Did anybody come up with a new way to use the paper? How did your sculpture incorporate teammates’ ideas? Did collaborating influence the final work?”



Vocabulary:

Sculpture, environment, design, arrange, positive space, negative space, geometric shapes, symmetry/asymmetry, scale, repetition, dome, placement, installation, location, collaboration, construct, construction





This lesson was developed through a partnership between Madison Square Park Conservancy and Studio Institute to tie formally and thematically with the 2019 United States Pavilion's exhibition, "Martin Puryear: Liberty/Libertà", at the 2019 Biennale Arte. Learn more about this at martinpuryearvenice2019.org and studioinstitute.org/arts-intern-venice-2019-biennale-arte