

## Helen Lucas - Flowers and Colour/and Cooperative Art

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The art of Helen Lucas is bright and bold. ([www.helenlucas.com](http://www.helenlucas.com)) She paints large-scale floral pieces. She paints what flowers mean to her and does so with amazing use of colour. She paints her pieces on raw canvas, not gessoed or prepared in any way. She uses a staining process. Using acrylic paint she waters down the paint and stains the canvas. This transparency in the paint makes her work unique. There is little or no texture in her work. Helen Lucas was born in Saskatoon in 1931 and now lives in Bibury, near Toronto. Her parents immigrated to Saskatoon from Greece. Her childhood and her upbringing had an enormous impact on her art.

*"The flower paintings say something about life, your own life,  
and your feeling about life in general.  
The proclamation of joy in the midst of our frightening world will  
not be missed by anyone with eyes to see and a heart to understand".  
(Margaret Laurence, Canadian Author, 1926 - 1987)*

In this unit the use of colour is emphasized by creating work with the Chine Colle technique as a guide. Helen Lucas DOES NOT create prints but this unit focuses on her colour an composition by using a printmaking technique called Chine-colle. **Chine-collé** is a special technique in printmaking in which the image is transferred to a surface that is bonded to a heavier support in the printing process. The purpose is to allow the printmaker to print on a much more delicate surface, such as rice paper or linen, which pulls finer details off the plate. During printing, a glue is applied to the back of the paper (a paste made of rice flour and water being traditional), and then the heavier support (typically, the heavyweight paper normally found in printmaking) is placed on top. In the pressure of the press, the lighter surface is glued to the support simultaneously with the image printing on it.

### Materials

- Coloured Tissue Paper
- Styrofoam Meat Trays- Unisource Product #072154 (931-8004) Saskatoon
- Printmaking rollers
- Images of prairie wildflowers
- Printmaking ink - black, white, silver/gold (optional)
- White tag paper
- Blank newsprint

### Procedures

1. Have the students view some of the work of Helen Lucas on line at [www.helenlucas.com](http://www.helenlucas.com). Emphasize the balance of colour and the various shapes of the flowers in her work.

2. (Day 1) Bring real flowers to school. Have the children sketch the various shapes. Plan the unit for the 1<sup>st</sup> week back to school and you will have a wide variety of flowers when you ask the children to bring them. I also had images of prairie wildflowers available for the students.
  3. (Day 2) Adhere tissue paper to the white tag paper using a watered down glue solution and brushes. Be sure that the tissue paper lays flat and smooth. Cover most of the paper with coloured tissue. Emphasize that the tissue must be very flat. process- glue on paper, then tissue, glue overtop. I has the younger children repeat this back to me many times "Glue, tissue, glue, repeat"
  4. (Day 3) Give each child a piece of Styrofoam on which to draw their favorite flower from their sketches. The sketches can be transferred by placing the newsprint over the Styrofoam plate, taping it and tracing over the lines. Drag a pencil on the liens and a small dent will appear on the foam when the paper is removed.
  5. The flower needs to be an outline not a solid flower. To achieve this children draw double lines around the edges of the petals. The insides of the petals are pushed down. (Anything pushed down will show the colour of the paper that is behind it). The negative space round the flower also needs to be pushed down or cut off using an xacto knife. See diagram below. When drawing lines on the Styrofoam always drag the pencil DO NOT push it. Pushing will snag the Styrofoam.
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6. The children all create a test print on a piece of newsprint. (Printing Day 3) The newsprint and the Styrofoam are displayed when complete.

***Some tips on creating good prints using a roller***

- *Be sure to use the correct amount of ink, too much fills the cracks, too little tears the Styrofoam. The correct amount of ink sounds like wet tires on pavement.*
  - *Place new ink on the tray well above where the roller is moving.*
  - *Be sure that the roller rotates fully on the tray to have even distribution of ink. (The same as when rolling the paint on a wall you want even distribution.*
  - *Take a little ink when needed on the roller and then move roller to center of tray (floor tiles work really well as ink rolling trays)*
  - *Ink the Styrofoam block (flower) in two directions so that the ink covers well.*
  - *Place the block on the paper ink side down.*
  - *Press down; the ink will stick to the paper.*
  - *Flip the paper over and rub evenly on the back.*
  - *Turn paper over and carefully remove the Styrofoam.*
7. THE ACTUAL PRINTING PROCESS IS A GREAT CAREPARTNER ACTIVITY.
  8. The children now have to decide upon their composition selecting from the displayed examples. I had them start with their own flower and then add other people's flowers to the composition as needed. It is best if the composition has an odd

- number of flowers rather than an even number (great math link- I displayed odd numbers on the chalk board) I only let them use one colour of ink for all flowers, as the composition is more cohesive this way.
9. The begin selecting flowers of their classmates to create a collaborative bouquet. The selecting of classmates flowers and the creation of the collaborative bouquet was great fun for the students.
  10. Title each piece.
  - 11.

#### **Adaptation for Middle Years**

I had the older children create more than one Styrofoam piece. Emphasis was placed on repetition of shape.

#### **Images**



## **Second lesson on the art of Helen Lucas – Painting large Flowers without a Brush**

#### **Materials**

- Tempera Paint
- Small chunks of mat board
- Large white drawing paper (tiff paper is best)
- Images of flowers
- Real flowers
- Lots of low-sided containers to hold tempera paint

#### **Procedure**

1. Children draw the simple outline of the flower(s) on the paper. I talked about cropping and composition. I encouraged them to not place the flowers directly in the middle of the page and to create interesting negative space between the petals and the edge of the page.
2. Using the mat board chunks as paintbrushes. They fill in the areas with paint. They can easily drag the mat board. I had the paint in small yogurt containers in the center of the table with a different colour in each container. This kept the colours relatively clean.
3. The student used the corners of the cardboard to create dots and the edges of the cardboard touched down to make thin lines. They dragged the boards in various ways to create interesting textures.
4. I had them fill in the negative space last.

This is an extremely simple project that allows all children to be successful. It is great for the small children as allows them to work on their fine motor skills with a new type of tool.

