

# Color, Line & Pattern

## Color:

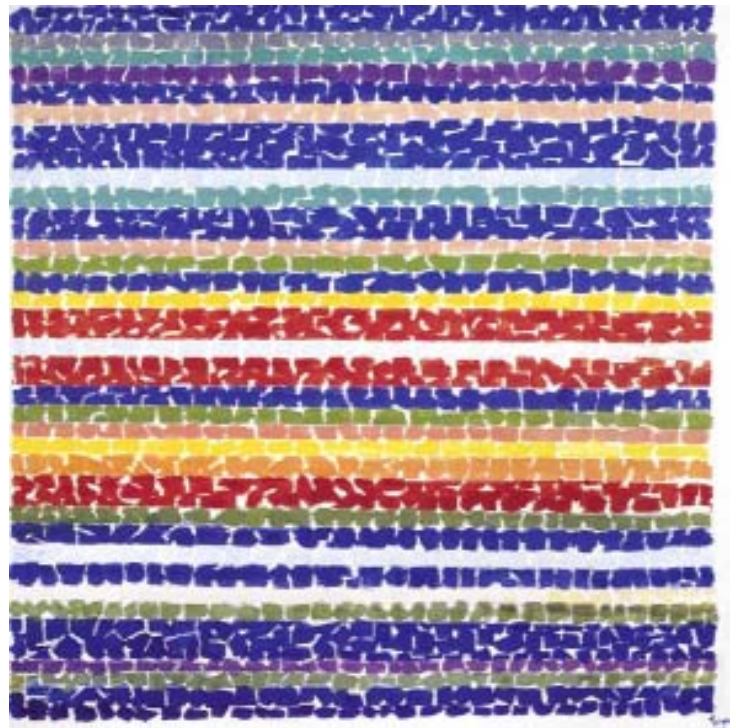
The colors we see are lightwaves absorbed or reflected by everything around us. In nature, a rainbow is white light that is broken apart by the moisture in the air.

## Line:

A line is a mark made by a pointed tool (brush, stick, pencil, pen, etc.) and it is often defined as a moving dot. It has length and width, but its width is very small compared to its length.

## Pattern:

Artists create pattern by repeating a line, shape or color over and over again.



# Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891-1978)

*Air View of Spring Nursery, 1966*  
Acrylic on canvas

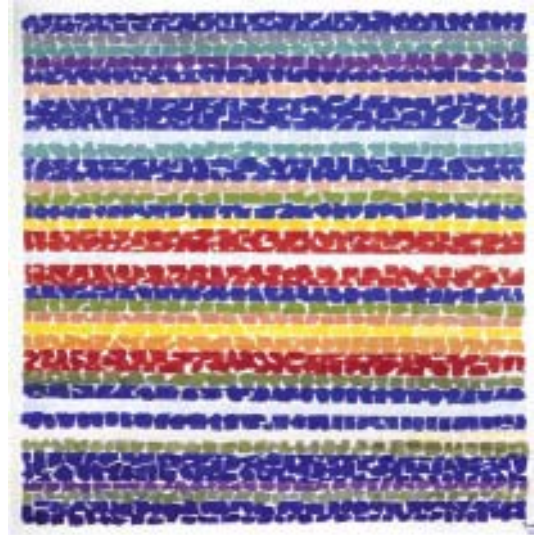
## About the Artist:

Known for her wonderful smile and cheerful nature, abstractionist painter Alma Woodsey Thomas was born in Columbus, Georgia in 1891. She spent the summers during her early childhood on her grandfather's farm in nearby Alabama, where she enjoyed playing amongst the animals and flowers. Her parents had always stressed the importance of education and when Alma was 16 her family moved to Washington, D.C in search of a better education and jobs. Her family surrounded their new house in Washington with trees and flowers (like the ones they'd lived in before). After high school she studied at both Howard University and Columbia University Teachers College. Her love for both teaching and learning led her to become an art teacher in Washington, D.C., where she taught until 1960.

After retiring from 35 years of teaching, Thomas devoted all of her time to her painting. Inspired by a holly tree in her yard she developed a new style of painting that brought together bright, powerful colors in small, rectangular shapes inside circular shapes. In 1972, at the age of 80, Alma Woodsey Thomas became the first African American woman to be granted a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. She was also invited to the White House during Jimmy Carter's presidency.

## About the Art:

*Air View of Spring Nursery, 1966* is a dramatic departure from Thomas' earlier work. Previously, she painted with oils and somber hues of color. Here the viewer sees the artist's adoption of a brighter range of colors and beginnings of working with acrylic paints. This painting is representative of the artist's ideas of what the colorful rows of plants in a nursery might look like from an airplane and is included in her series of "Earth Paintings." These works were influenced by displays of azaleas at the Arboretum in Washington, D.C., the cherry blossoms, circular flower beds, nurseries and foliage in the fall. Her technique for painting irregular patterns with bright colored paint has been compared with mosaics. Mosaics refer to a technique first used by Roman artists to tell stories. It is a technique typically used to decorate walls, ceilings or floors. They are made from tiny pieces of colored stone, glass, tile or paper that are attached to a surface in plaster or concrete.



## Discussion Questions:

- What **colors** do you see in this painting? What flowers could each color represent?
- Can you find any **patterns** in this work? What elements did Thomas use to create a pattern? What makes the way she used those elements a pattern?
- Is this work **symmetrical**? What makes you say that?
- What season does this painting remind you of? Why?

# Ida Kohlmeyer (1912-1997)

*Composition, 1996*  
Oil on canvas



## Discussion Questions:

- What **colors** do you see? Are the colors **warm** or **cool**?
- Name the **geometric shapes** in this work. Describe the **organic shapes** you can find in this artwork.
- What kind of **lines** can you find? Can you see that the artist has used different lines for different types of objects?
- Do you recognize any of the symbols in the painting? What are they and what do they stand for?
- Think of another name for this painting. Then, explain why you chose this name.

## About the Artist

Ida Kohlmeyer, who spent most of her life in New Orleans, took up painting when she was in her 30s, and managed to achieve wide recognition for her work which was exhibited in galleries and **museums** around the country. A daughter of Polish immigrants, Ida Rutenberg earned a bachelor's degree in English literature at Sophie Newcomb College of Tulane University in New Orleans. Her interest in art began during her honeymoon in Mexico, when she was drawn to the ceramic folk art of Central and South America.

In 1950 she returned to Newcomb, this time to its art school, and earned a master's degree in painting. In 1956 she studied at the summer painting school of the New York painter Hans Hofman, known for his use of color, who persuaded her to give up representational art for abstraction. For more than a decade she worked primarily in a gestural style influenced by Hofman and other Abstract Expressionists, including Arshile Gorky and Mark Rothko, whom she met in New York.

By the mid-1970s, inspired by the work of Miro as well as her interest in South American art, she developed a distinctive vocabulary of hieroglyphs, shapes and signs, all organized in a loose grid, that hovered among abstraction, writing and emblem. That style, which she explored for the rest of her life and eventually translated into sculpture, gave expression to her draftsmanship and encouraged her sense of color. Ida worked everyday in her studio adjacent to her home until her sudden death in January 1997.

## About the Art

Kohlmeyer liked to make up her own shapes, which she called her "shape alphabet." She also mixed and used many different colors. In this work, the artist has used black lines to draw her made-up shapes.

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## COMPARISON QUESTIONS

1. These two artists created abstract works that utilize color, pattern and shape in different ways. How are these works similar? How are they different?
2. What colors jump out at you in these two paintings? How do the colors make you feel?
3. Count the number of primary colors in each painting. Are they equal?
4. How would you describe these paintings to someone that had never seen them?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

### VISUAL ARTS

#### Make a Mosaic

Alma Thomas' paintings have been often compared to mosaics.

#### Materials:

Small squares of bright colored paper, white paper and glue.

#### Goals/Objectives:

Students will create an original work of art inspired by Alma Thomas. They will utilize their knowledge of balance and symmetry to design a mosaic.

#### Procedure:

1. Have students create their own mosaic inspired by Thomas' painting. Discuss concepts of symmetry, whether or not the students believe Thomas' painting to be balanced and encourage students to follow Thomas' example and design a mosaic in the same fashion.
2. Using small squares of bright colored paper students can make a design on a sheet of white paper. After determining the pattern and color scheme, have students glue the pieces into place.

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## VISUAL ARTS AND MATH

### One Liners

#### Materials:

White paper, black paper, scissors, writing utensil (colored marker or crayon), glue, crayons or markers and *Composition* transparency.

#### Goals/Objectives:

Students will create an original work of art using organic and geometric shapes they developed. Students will be able to identify the difference between **organic** and **geometric shapes**.

#### Procedure:

1. Define **organic** and **geometric shapes** as a class. Reference the transparency if necessary to develop a class discussion.
2. Many of the shapes in Ida Kohlmeyer's painting *Composition*, 1966, are outlined in a darker color or black. Have students create their own **organic** and **geometric shapes** using paper and scissors. After the shapes have been formed, students will select half of the shapes to be outlined either partially or completely. Shapes may be colored or the color of the paper. Students will then affix the shapes to a black piece of paper. Place all the pieces of paper together after students have completed the assembly. Each paper represents a part of the entire work.

