

Extreme Variety

We've done extreme variety of line, and variety (though not that extreme) of shape quality. We have also explored color a little bit in the context of extreme *unity*. So now it's time to put these lessons together into compositions that are as extremely various as you can make them.

By striving for extreme variety - making pieces that lack unity as much as possible within the given parameters - you may gain some insight into what creates unity. How much variety can a composition stand? How much does it need? Can you really get away from a sense of unity, given that the "picture plane" holds all the elements?

Explorations

Variety in a Grid: "Collections"

This is an exercise in putting together unlike elements, no matter how uncomfortable it feels. These are not random collections - you have to give some thought and deliberation to the process because you want to avoid repetition. Watch the first part of the video.

Cut out some collage papers and images, striving for as much variety as possible. The more sources you have, the better: magazines, junk mail, book pages, decorative paper, your own hand-painted papers, etc. Go for pattern, color, image, type, etc. Get out your paints, tools, and drawing materials.

Mentally divide a 9"x12" sheet of cheap drawing paper into a grid (that is, you don't need to draw lines, just imagine the lines dividing it into squares of approximately equal size).

DO NOT paint a background.

In each square, collage, draw, or paint *something*. Do not repeat elements; make each square different.



In the above piece I include magazine collage, several different paint applications, watercolor pencil, a rubbing in graphite, oil pastel, and other elements.



Go back into each square and add something to the mark or image, whether it be some drawing, shading, outlining, doodling, etc. Some squares you may leave as is, but try to do something to most of them.

Do not connect the squares; try to maintain as much variety and as little unity as possible. Make three or four of these Collections.



The above is the same pieces as on page 1, but with my added marks.

Several more Collections



Take a look at your collections all together and ask yourself the following:

- How difficult was it *not* to repeat elements?
- Do any of your collections look like interesting compositions in themselves? Or do they all look disjointed?
- Are they fun to look at?
- Did you discover any new ways of making marks?
- Did you use processes or materials that felt uncomfortable to you?
- How difficult was it not to paint a background or connect the elements with some unifying principle?

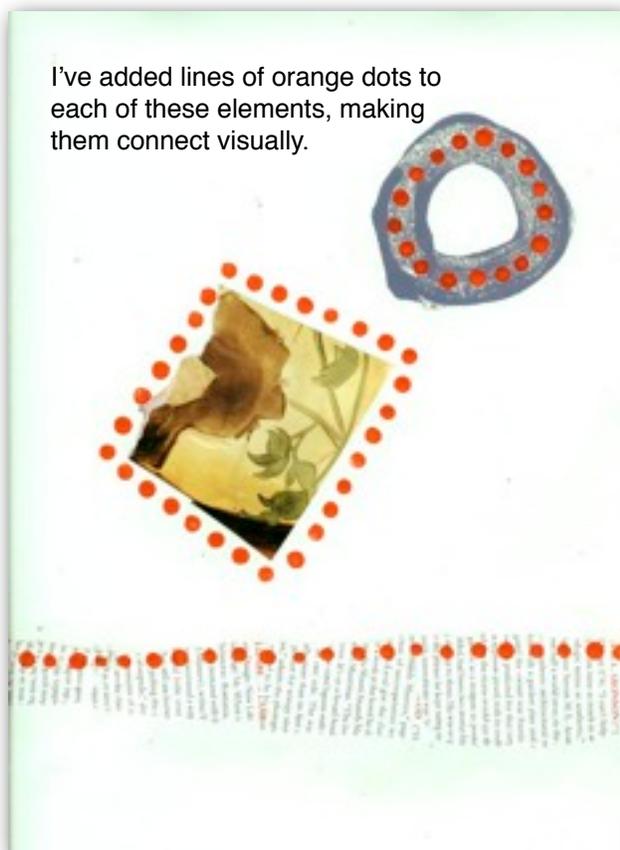
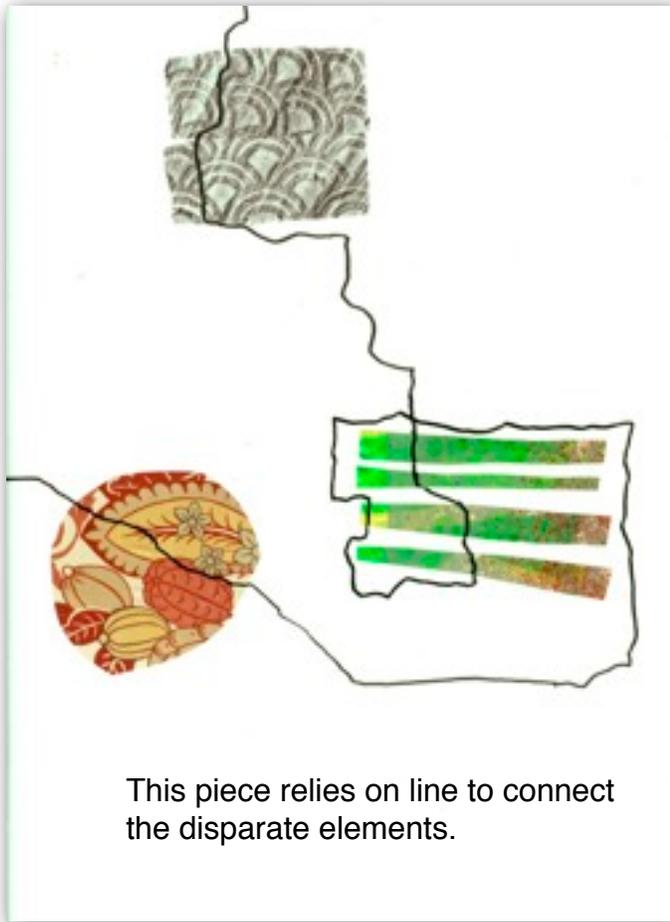
It doesn't matter what your answers to these questions are, but it is important to ask them. This is an exercise in observing your responses.

Three Elements: Variety and Connection

The next exercise is about connecting elements that are quite different from one another. Here you get to connect the dots, as it were, but first create the “dots” for maximum variety. Use 9”x12” cheap drawing paper or printmaking paper, your choice.

1. Put three elements on your paper. These can be collage, drawing, or paint. Make them quite different from each other in size, shape, material, color, etc. Make several of these beginnings.
2. Add an element that connects the three original elements. These, like the last exercise, are not meant to be compositions, just practice in connecting disparate elements.



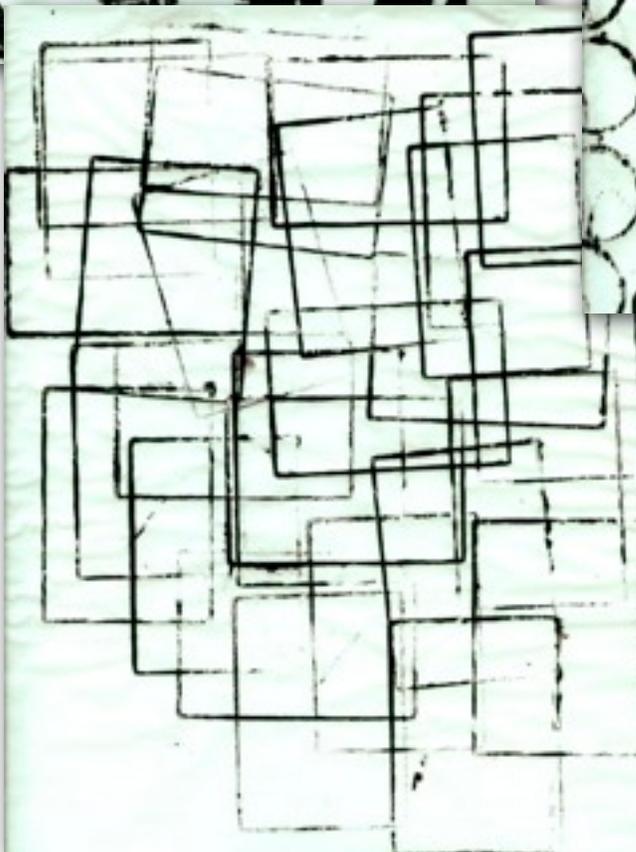
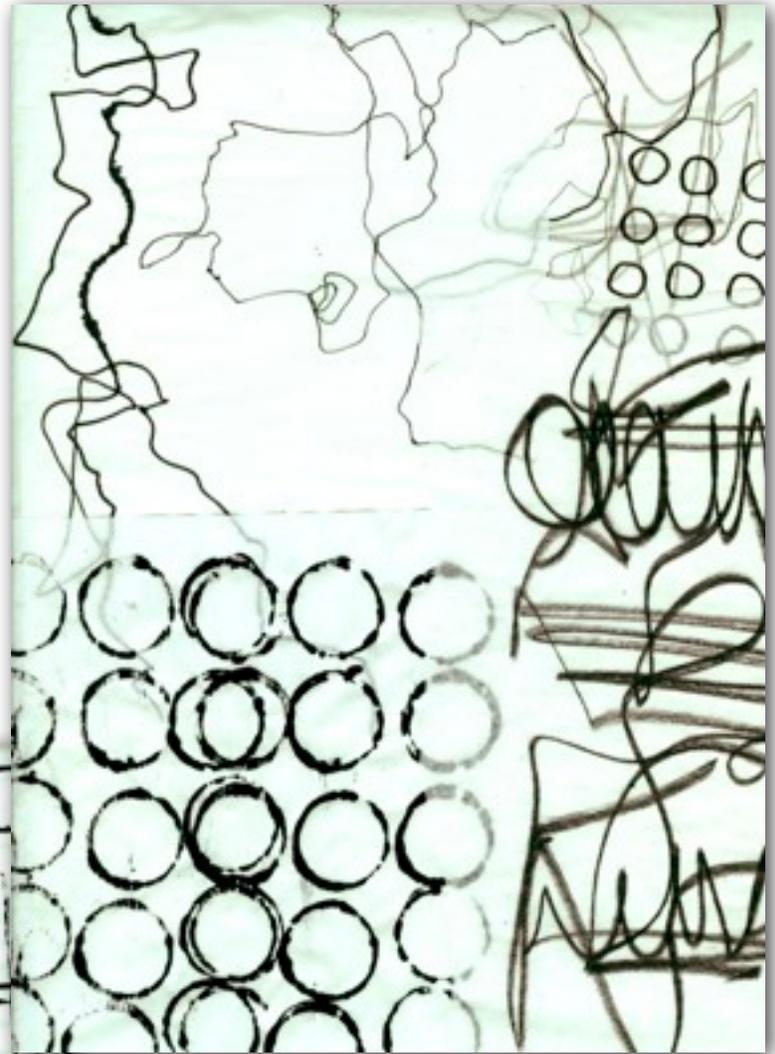


Consider the following ways of relating elements to one another:

- Apply one kind of treatment to all three elements.
- Create a pattern that overlaps all three elements.
- Create a line that intersects all three elements.
- Create a fourth element (transparent paint, drawing, texture, etc.) that overlaps and connects the first three elements.

Transparent Papers

Watch Part 2 of the video and create a collection of marks - lines, shapes, patterns, etc. - on transparent papers such as tissue paper or deli paper.



▲ A group of overlapping transparent papers.

Grid Collage with Transparent Papers

This project is an extension of the previous one, but with the addition of another unifying element: the grid format.

Make a collage beginning in grid format, leaving plenty of open space. See Grid Collage with Transparent Papers in the video (part 3). *Do not use the same collage paper twice*, though elements such as shapes, lines, colors, or textures, may be repeated from one paper to the next (make all your own collage papers or use a combination of hand-painted and found papers). We are still working with maximum variety, though unifying with format.

Complete your collage (or continue it) using the transparent papers, as I do in the video.



To the left is the collage I created in the video. I decided the bottom portion was too strong a color, and use the texture layering techniques from Lesson 3 to lighten it.

I'll review the **parameters** of this collage:

- Work in a grid format (see the original Composition handout, downloadable from the right margin of the blog).
- Do not use the same collage paper twice.
- Let the transparent papers do the work of relating the collage elements.

OR, in step-by-step format:

1. Use the grid, and establish variety.
2. Connect-relate-unify with transparent papers.
3. Have fun!

Though I use only abstract lines and shapes in my transparent materials, feel free to draw imagery. This goes for any non-transparent collage papers as well.

Here are some suggestions of techniques from previous lessons that you might apply to this collage:

- Use **line dances** and **shape variations** on your transparent papers.
- Paint a background, if you like, using the technique demonstrated in Lesson 1.
- Use the **texture techniques** from Lesson 3 to make interesting areas of color.
- Use the texture techniques to make collage papers.

As usual, I encourage you to make a number of collages using this format. I also encourage you to have a bit of fun with this one.