



Shape and Substance: Rethinking the Leaf

Nancy Mollhagen

In the artroom, shape is a form separated from its surroundings by its outline. The power of a single shape in a composition is often overlooked in secondary art projects. Single shapes and objects



are generally used for shading or contour line studies. Last fall, my high school two-dimensional studio class was populated with students who had little experience with either drawing or composition. I decided to use a single enlarged leaf for their first major assignment using oil pastels.

Preparation
Each student chose a dozen leaves

with various textures from outside the school building from which we selected one that had an interesting outline and three-dimensional qualities. This leaf was stapled to a square of white printer paper and cropped using a paper cutter to

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allow the leaf to run off or touch three sides of the square. This square was bisected twice to create a four-square grid.

Starting to Draw

Students each enlarged the leaves using pencil, one grid square at a time, onto a 19 x 19" (48 x 48 cm) black charcoal paper sheet divided into four similar squares. The

drawing was started with the main center vein of the leaf followed by the main side veins and then the exterior outline.

Inspiration from van Gogh

We referred to the directional lines

of several van Gogh prints to fill in the background areas of the piece with parallel pencil guidelines around the contours of the leaf to the edges. Likewise, the interior of the leaf was filled in with pencil guidelines originating from the center vein to reveal the three-dimensional qualities (the highs and lows).

Adding Intense Color

A color range was picked with the addition of white for the highlights and a complementary color for the darker areas. Color shifted from one side of the leaf to the other using analogous hues. The background color range changed from darker to lighter. The build up of strokes fol-

lowed pencil guidelines to achieve extreme texture, movement, and volume.

I cropped each leaf to 18 x 18" (46 x 46 cm) and backed them with a 19 x 19" (48 x 48 cm) black backboard, then displayed sixteen finished pieces side by side for maximum impact. The power of each shape alone is great . . . en masse they are amazing. ☺

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NATIONAL STANDARD

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