

To See Is to Think

Housing a Personality

Overview: After completing this activity, students will have a better understanding of how artists express thoughts and feelings using color, line, and shape.

Age Group/Grade Level: 8-10 years, grades 3-5

Subject Area: Language Arts, Visual Arts

Duration: approximately 45 min.

Background

Patssi Valdez grew up in East Los Angeles in a vibrant community of Mexican Americans during the 1970s. The neighborhood was surrounded on all sides by highways. Valdez and her friends felt that, in addition to being physically hemmed in, their community was overlooked in Hollywood and beyond. In order to push boundaries, Valdez began as a performance artist as part of a group called ASCO (Spanish for “nausea”). This group challenged discrimination and explored modes of creative expression.

Valdez later worked as a painter, making art that was a personal expression of her thoughts and feelings. She often creates topsy-turvy rooms occupied by swirling objects and patterns. She considers her paintings of domestic interiors to be self-portraits.

Discussion

Explain that the class will be “reading” a painting called *The Magic Room*. Before showing the painting, begin discussion by asking these pre-reading questions:

- What story or stories would you expect this artwork to tell based only on the title?
- How might the artist show those ideas in a painting?
- What does the title make you curious about?

Share Patssi Valdez’s *Magic Room* with students. Have small groups share their initial impressions within their groups:

- How does this artwork compare with what you were expecting to see?
- What parts are confusing?

Have the small groups share with the whole group, summarizing their discussions.

For a full-size image of Patssi Valdez’s *The Magic Room*, visit:
https://ids.si.edu/ids/deliveryService?id=SAAM-1997.70_1



Patssi Valdez, *The Magic Room*, 1994, acrylic on canvas, 96 x 119 5/8 in., Museum purchase through the Smithsonian Institution Collections Acquisition Program, 1997.70.

Expand the conversation with the following questions:

- What is moving in this artwork? How can you tell?
- What colors, shapes, or lines stand out to you?
- How do the colors, lines, or shapes contribute to the mood of this painting?
- What do you think is happening in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Do parts of this artwork link to the real world or other stories you know? If so, how?

Explain that the artist considers her paintings of rooms to be self-portraits, or pictures the artist makes of herself.

- There are no people in this picture. How has the artist shown us something about herself with only a room?

Activity

Begin by having students individually brainstorm a list of words that they feel best describes their personality; then have students pair their words with shapes, lines, and colors.

Next, have students draw a room using these elements of art. Challenge them to think carefully about what kind of room and objects would best communicate something about them.

Finally, encourage students to imagine walking into their own artwork. Ask them to write a “jump inside” poem to describe the thoughts and feelings that being in their room elicits.