

Bob Boyer - Pattern and Design

1948-2004

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photo of Bob Boyer with his artwork - used with permission from Rodney Konopaki

Métis artist, Bob Boyer was born near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. In 1971 he graduated from the University of Regina with a Bachelor of Education degree in Art Education. Boyer has worked in a variety of media and is probably best known for his "Blanket Statements" in which he uses blankets as a painting surface. In his work, Boyer combines traditional design patterns of the Plains Cree people with elements inspired by more contemporary painting. Currently residing in Regina, Boyer has been a Professor and Department Head of Indian Art at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College at the University of Regina since 1981.

Remember Nathan Crazy Bull's Post 54 is in part, a commemoration to those First Nations men and women who have died in the major world wars. For many years, First Nations people fought in many wars for the United States with little or no recognition. Boyer pays tribute to Nathan Crazy Bull, a member of Post 54 in Montana who was among the first from that Post to be killed in the Vietnam War.

The balance of the geometric design takes the form of a rectangular playing field. Boyer has splashed red paint onto the blanket as a metaphor of the blood spilled in the game of war. The use of the "pluses and minuses" reference the losses and gains of both sides in war. The use of a blanket as a painting surface alludes to a multitude of meanings: life, comfort, warmth, security, death.

The internet will give many sites on which his images appear.

- <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/BobBoyer/en/artwork.html>
- http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/boyer_bob_1948-2004.html

Aboriginal symbols

- <http://www.geocities.com/ctesibos/symbols/native-american.html>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cree_language

Materials

- Many images posters, fabric, wallpaper etc with pattern in them
- Aboriginal art images and symbols
- Newsprint
- Toothpicks
- Old wooden salad bowls or other wooden products
- Plastercine of various colours
- Pizza lids
- Rulers

Definitions and concepts to be discussed with students

Symmetry – rotational and reflection

Design

Pattern

Repetition

Detail

The Aboriginal teaching that everything is interconnected can be taught and explored in this lesson.

Law of Control – you have a free will; use it wisely; balance your wheel (the student images will need to have balance in order to look good, also the control it takes to roll an even worm is great practice for real life where control over our free will is important)

Law of Harmony – everything exists in harmony; all creation is interrelated (all parts of their creation will need to work together because all parts of an artwork are interrelated, the pieces of plastercine become part of a whole when they press one into another. Once the decision is made to attach a piece it can not be moved without leaving a mark. This is true in life each decision we make affects everything and everyone around us.)

Procedure

1. This project is unique in that many children have worked with Plastercine and even adhered it to a surface. In this project the surface is three-dimensional and this creates many new challenges.
2. Each student is given a wooden object and blank newsprint. Using the design patterns explored earlier in class the children designed a pattern on paper. Some of the designs can tell stories if they wish. Some students created a series of shapes to represent various things and then told a story on their bowl through the shapes. See attached sheet with aboriginal designs. The children can also draw upon the colours, designs and patterns from Bob Boyer's work. (I had exposed the children to the art of Bob Boyer, which has any different geometric properties. One slide of his work is in the *Saskatchewan Art Works - A Visual Art Resource for Kindergarten to Grade 8, 1991*.)
3. A base coat must be applied to the bowl. If you are working with very small children this is an excellent care partner activity. The Plastercine is used as a base squashed onto the

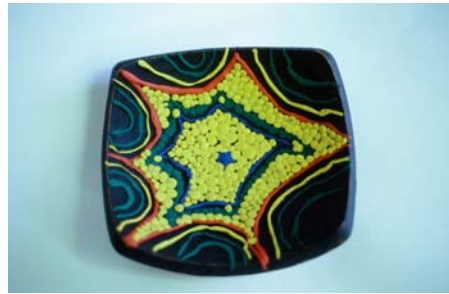
wood. Dragging and rubbing techniques can be used. The layer should be thin so that the shape of the wooden object is not changed. This layer of Plastercine allows the subsequent layers to stick. The base of the wooden object need not be covered and then plastercine will leave a grease stain on surfaces.

4. Using various techniques the children create their designs from Plastercine and place them on the under layer.



Various techniques and Tips for design creation

- *To create thin EVEN worm (lines) use a ruler to roll the Plastercine rather than fingers. Flexible rulers are best. Place a small ball of Plastercine under a ruler and roll back and forth.*
 - *Use toothpicks and skewer sticks for cutting the Plastercine*
 - *Wash hands between colours, the students must use soap or the colour will not come off. Window cleaner works very well too. Be careful not to spary in eyes.*
 - *Do all rolling on pizza lids or sheets of thick cardboard, this helps with clean up (Plastercine leaves grease marks tables behind) and the Plastercine if flattened on the cardboard lifts quite easily. Change the cardboard often so as not to have residue from another project enter the new plastercine.*
 - *A marbling effect can be created by partly mixing two colours.*
5. Title the projects
 6. Varnish the projects with a clear spray varnish (optional)



Language Arts Link

1. The Cree language in the written form originated as syllabics. The letters of the alphabet consist of many geometric shapes. Go to this web site to see an example of Cree syllabics. Also, go to the Home page and see more great information on the Cree culture as well as two myths. <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/waskaganish/language.html>

After reviewing the Cree syllabics with the students, ask them to make up syllabics of their own, using geometric shapes and lines for the letters. Students can provide the code to a classmate and they can write messages back and forth.

2. Have fun with symbols. Ask the students to imagine that they live in a land where there is no written alphabet. Everyone communicates with symbols or pictograms. You want to invite friends and family to gather for a celebration.

Make up a list of symbols and then make an invitation.

Additional Artist Study

Jim Logan is a Canadian aboriginal artist living in Nova Scotia. He began his career in Yukon Territory. His Web site has a piece called "remembering America" that is a good example of geometric design. <http://www.jimlogan.net/Remembering.htm>

The Dancer and the Dance, the Painter and the Paintbrush

Written in Memoriam by Jasmin Thomas – St. Matthew School, Saskatoon

Bob Boyer had a great impact on Canada. He was an aboriginal artist from Saskatchewan. He died in August of 2004, his impact in this year is great because he can no longer create and express the ideas of aboriginal people in his art. His impact was felt through his political paintings and the understanding of aboriginal people. Boyer led the way in the creation of aboriginal art. His work has been shown all over the world. He's made a great impact on many people. Boyer developed the fine arts program at the First Nations University of Canada, and through powwows he celebrated his culture and identity.

Boyer did not forget about his culture and he celebrated it through his paintings. He has made many paintings that have affected Canadians and people all over the world. One was "*Blanket Statements*". He painted a variety of symbols on blankets to show how the white people had given the Aborigines blankets with the small pox virus, which killed many Aborigines. Boyer used paintings to speak to people instead of words; words can be forgotten the ideas in his art will not be forgotten.

Boyer was not only an artist but also a teacher. He had taught at the First Nations University of Canada from 1979 to 1997. He was founder and developed the fine arts program at this university. Boyer's actions have become one "the dancer and the dance", the painter and the paintbrush. His paintings have involved teachings since the beginning.

Boyer developed the fine arts program at the First Nations University of Canada. He headed the art department for the university. He was a graduate of the Fine Arts program at the University of Saskatchewan. He was an art teacher in Prince Albert and then he joined the staff at the Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina. When in Regina he started work for the provincial government and was asked to join the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, which became the First Nations University of Canada. This is a

major contribution to the people of Canada. Boyer says, "Education goes beyond teaching. You can teach information, you can teach skills. But education involves the whole human being". He taught the whole person.

Bob Boyer never forgot his culture it was in his art and his heart. Boyer had a very close relationship to his art and his community. The powwow is something that all Aboriginals do to confirm their identity and to celebrate. Boyer would go to powwows for this reason, at his last powwow he died dancing. His great impact on Canada will last forever because his artwork will last forever.