

# Alex Janvier – Curvilinear Lines

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Alex Janvier, *Where the Big Fish Live*, 1973 (courtesy Canada Council of the Arts)

## Biography of the Artist

Alex Janvier has been painting for over 40 years and has created a unique style, his own “visual language,” informed by the rich cultural and spiritual traditions and heritage of the Dene in northern Alberta. Alex Janvier was born on Le Goff Reserve, Cold Lake First Nations, in northern Alberta in 1935. At the age of eight, he was sent to the Blue Quills Residential Indian School near St. Paul, Alberta, where the principal recognized his innate artistic talent and encouraged him in his art. Mr. Janvier received formal art training from the Alberta Institute of Technology and Art in Calgary (now the Alberta College of Art and Design) and graduated with honours in 1960. In 1966, the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs commissioned him to produce 80 paintings. He helped bring together a group of artists for the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo '67, among them Norval Morrisseau and Bill Reid. In recent years, his work has been characterized by flowing, curvilinear lines and more abstraction. His unique language has made its mark, cementing his legacy as one of the country's foremost painters. Alex Janvier lives in Cold Lake, Alberta.

## The Art Style of Alex Janvier

Although his work is influenced by other artists, most notably Swiss artist Paul Klee and Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky, it is definitively his own. In fact, once you've viewed a few of Janvier's paintings, you'll be able to recognize his work immediately without looking at the signature.

Using a blend of abstract and representational styles, Janvier produces unique images that haunt the viewer. Both geometric shapes and flowing shapes are found in his work. He often uses bright colours and it's said he chooses his colours based on Dene symbolism.

The size of Alex Janvier's canvases varies, but he is very well known for his large pieces. In fact, Janvier has done several commissioned murals in the last few decades. His work hangs in the Muttart Conservatory in Edmonton, Alberta and the County of Strathcona Building in Sherwood Park, Alberta, as well as at The National Museum of Man. He also painted a mural for the 1983 World University Games in Edmonton.

Alex Janvier, the 'first Canadian native modernist,' has created a unique style of modernist abstraction, his own "visual language," informed by the rich cultural and spiritual traditions and heritage of the Dene in northern Alberta. His abstract style is particularly suited to large-scale works.

## Art Lesson / Alex Janvier / Curvilinear Lines

### Student Objectives

- Students will be inspired by the life and art of Alex Janvier
- Students will understand asymmetry and how to create it in design.
- Students will understand flowing, curvilinear lines and more abstraction.
- Students will create a low relief art object using found materials
- Students will be able to define low relief sculpture

### Materials

Mat board pieces 5 x 7 to 9 x 9" in size

White glue

Pins

Cardboard cut on the side and on diagonals (see images below)

Pencils

Scissors

Xacto knives

White acrylic paint or latex paint

Coloured acrylic paint

### Definitions

Relief sculpture: high, low, and sunken. In high relief, the forms stand far out from the background. In low relief (best known as bas relief), they are shallow. In sunken relief, also called hollow or intaglio; the backgrounds are not cut back and

the points in highest relief are level with the original surface of the material being carved.

Curvilinear lines- Curvilinear lines are often referred to as organic lines and they are curvy and free-flowing. Curvilinear can create a soft natural feel within a work of art. Curvilinear lines are commonly seen in artwork depicting the female form. A dominant use of curvilinear lines is also often evident in art nouveau works that project a sense of warmth and a connection to the natural world.

### Web Links

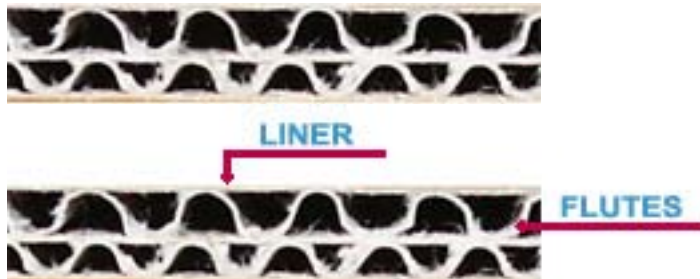
<http://www.bearclawgallery.com/Paintings.aspx?ArtistID=14>

<http://www.canadacouncil.ca/prizes/ggavma/2008/lo128502351435379480.htm>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsPgxRoXz1E&feature=related>

### Procedure – Project #1

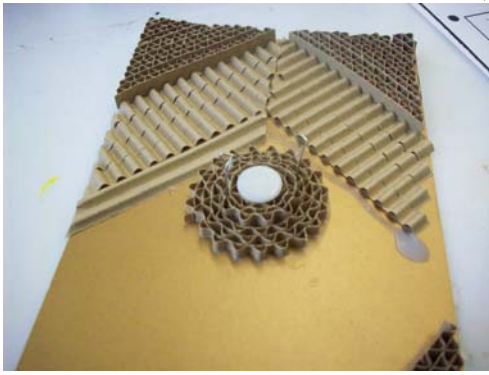
1. Look at images of Alex Janvier's work. Point out the flowing, curvilinear lines and abstraction within his pieces. Have the students flow several of the lines with their eyes so that they can see the path that the lines take.
2. Point out the colour and asymmetry within his pieces
3. Draw an image on the mat board that uses flowing, curvilinear lines like his. Make sure that they still have a focal point and not just a whole bunch of lines going all over the place.
4. Use pieces of cardboard cut on its edge to create the lines.



5. The cardboard can be curled using their fingers.
6. When the cardboard is curled they can lay it on the paper and glue it insitu. See image below.



7. Thin cardboard that has a liner on only one side can make fantastic circles and wonderful curvilinear lines, see below.



8. After it is dry the students paint the cardboard pieces white with acrylic or latex paint.

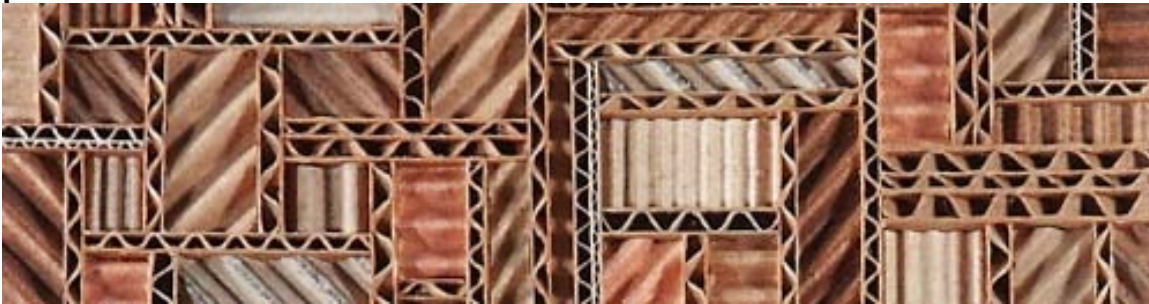


9. The children can practice making curvilinear lines with coloured acrylic paint on scrap paper before going to the good copy. The trick to making lines that end in a point is to simultaneously lift the brush and apply less pressure. With acrylic paints it is important to use enough water that the paint can flow while making a line.





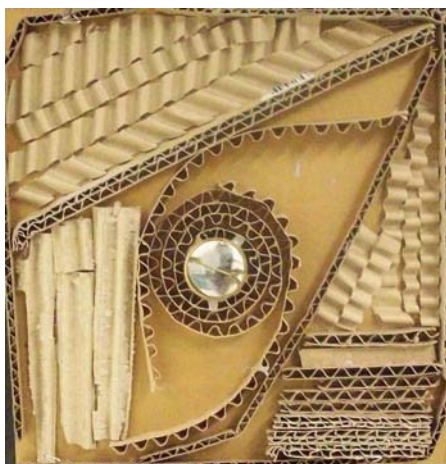
## Project #2 – From Curvilinear Lines to Geometrical patterns



This unit of study focused on repetition and pattern within the simple cardboard boxes we see each day. When the side of a cardboard box is viewed the flutes that give the box structure also give an excellent medium for creating works of art that utilizes repetition and geometry in an interesting way and the students also work with a recycled medium.

1. Look at images of work by Luci Lytle. The following link is amazing <http://www.corrugatedart.com/>
2. Draw an image on the mat board (no more than 6 x 6" in size) that uses geometrical shapes.
3. Fill in the space with cardboard cut on the side.
4. Thin cardboard that has a liner on only one side can make fantastic circles and wonderful. These can be rolled to create circles or lay the cardboard flat to create interesting wave patterns.
5. Below are images of student work that detail the many possibilities for this

medium.



### Mathematics Link

- Use tangrams to explore the ways in which geometric shapes can connect together.

