
Art Masterpiece: *Pisa II*, by Al Held

Keywords: Abstract Expressionism, Kinetic Art/Op-Art, Geometric

Grade(s):

Activity: Optical-Art 3-D hand drawing



About the Artist:

- Al Held, born in Brooklyn, New York, on October 12, 1928.
- He was a high-school drop-out who joined the Navy and discovered an interest in art. He later became a Professor at Yale University.
- Held touched on several styles of art from Abstract Expressionism to Op-Art, Illusionism, Minimalism, and Hard Edge.
- Abstract Expressionism is a style of artwork that is focused on expressing a feeling through the use of color and shape.
- Held developed his geometric form of abstraction by blending the randomly dripped painting style of Jackson Pollack with the meticulously ordered canvases of Piet Mondrian.
- Held used straight edges, masking tape and multiple coats of evenly applied paint to create works with intersecting lines, overlapping circles, triangles and other geometric figures. With subtle splashes of color and illusions of

three-dimensional depth, the paintings could, in the words of one critic, be "disorienting to the point of vertigo."

- Busy until the end, Held could command more than \$1million for his monumental works. He felt proprietary about his paintings along after completed. He would oversee a team of artists whenever his murals needed touching up.

About the Artwork:

Pisa II is a work that exemplifies the intersection of math and art. The painting was created during a time when abstract art was gaining prominence all over the world, particularly in America. While many artists took a more relaxed and spontaneous approach to abstract art, Held used mathematical precision and elements of geometry to create his work.

Nowadays artists use computer programs to generate artwork that is geometrically precise. However, Held used rulers, compasses and other math tools to create *Pisa II*. Notice the interlocking geometric shapes? These shapes weave a form that resemble a solid structure but is mathematically impossible to build. The colors are designed to show viewers how math can be used to create pieces full of movement and excitement. *Pisa II* seems three-dimensional. *Pisa II* is called kinetic art – art involving movement. The circles appear to move through optical illusion. Later this style is called Op-art, short for "Optical-Art"

Held's pieces were often large in scale and their popularity is partially based in mathematic tricks and tools used to create a fun, if complicated series of abstract figures.

Activity: In small groups the students stand in front of the artwork that you have hanging in the classroom. Have students find the red beam in the piece of art that is pointing straight out at them. (It is near the top middle of image). Have them stare at this beam and then slowly walk to another location (left or right) in the room. Does the beam appear to move with them? YES. This is a great optical illusion!

Possible Questions: •

1. What kinds of lines and shapes do you see?

2. How do you think the artist made them so precise? (rulers, compasses and other mathematical tools) •
3. Find the strong vertical line in the painting. Now look for other vertical lines.
4. Look for the horizontal and diagonal lines.
5. Study the circles. Do they seem to be moving? How does this make you feel? (dizzy)
6. Do they connect to anything? (no) Which appear closer?
7. How did the artist use color? Where did he place the darker colors? (background) The shadows show the cool colors. The contrast of the bright clear colors with the cool help give the piece dimension.
8. How would you describe the painting to someone else?
9. What emotion do you feel when you look at this piece of art?

Activity: Optical-Art 3-D hand drawing

Materials Needed:

- White construction paper 9" X 12," one per student
- Medium-tip black Sharpie markers, one per student
- Felt-tip markers, approximately 12 sets (to share)
- Pencils, one per student (students will have their own)

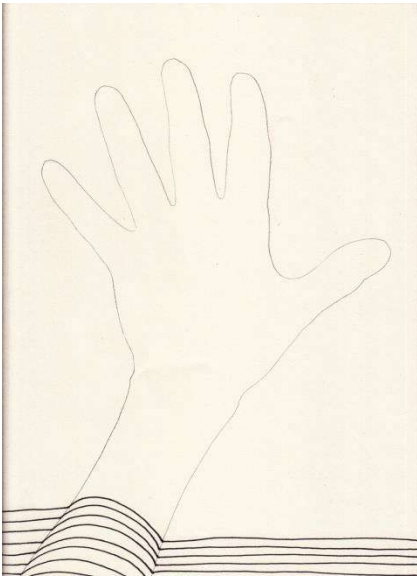
Troubleshooting: Students may understand the process of drawing their 3-D Op-Art hands if they can see the pictures. You can use the classroom Document Camera to project the images on the screen. Ask the teacher for assistance in this.

Process:

1. Pass out papers. Remind students to write their names on the back.
2. Using a pencil, have students *lightly* outline their own hand *and arm* on the paper. (Their arms will run off the edge of the paper.)

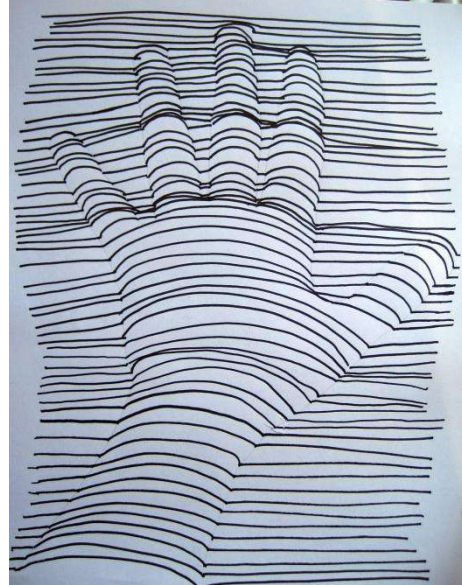


3. Starting at the bottom of the page (where their arm starts) and draw a curved line on the arm and then straight lines for the background. Tell students to place their lines close together. If there is too much space between the lines it will not look like the hand is popping off the page.

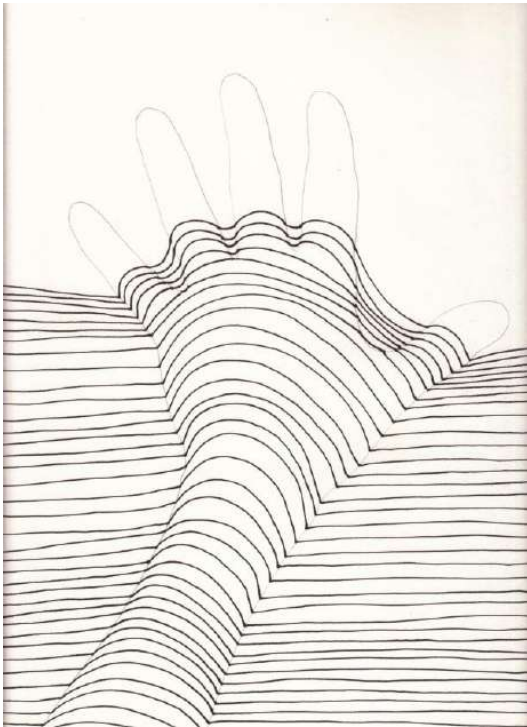


Make sure their curved lines line up with the straight line in the background.

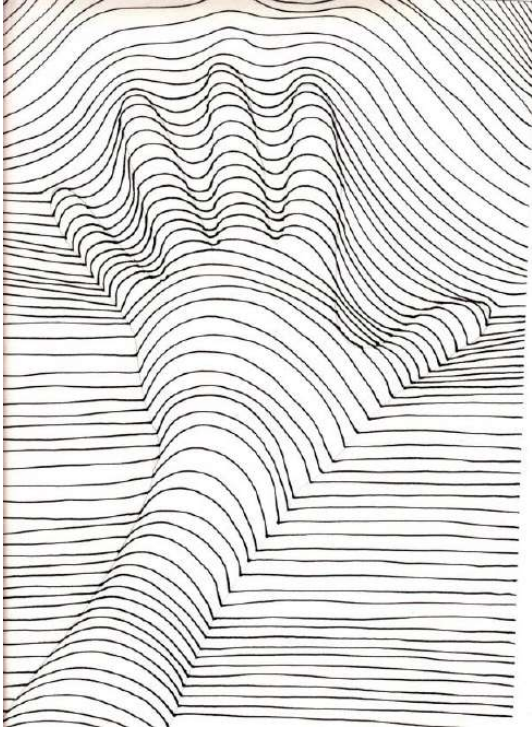
4. Once students get the hang on the “straight line-curved line-straight line” pattern, you can pass out the Sharpie markers and, if they wish, they can use the Sharpies for the rest on their lines. Students should **not** trace the outline with the Sharpie marker.
5. Have students continue adding lines and moving up the paper towards the top of the page.



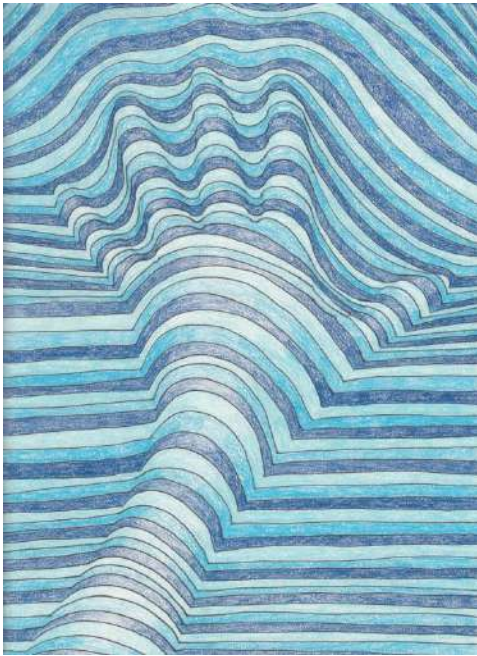
6. Alternately, students can curve their lines in the opposite direction instead of trying to add straight lines there.



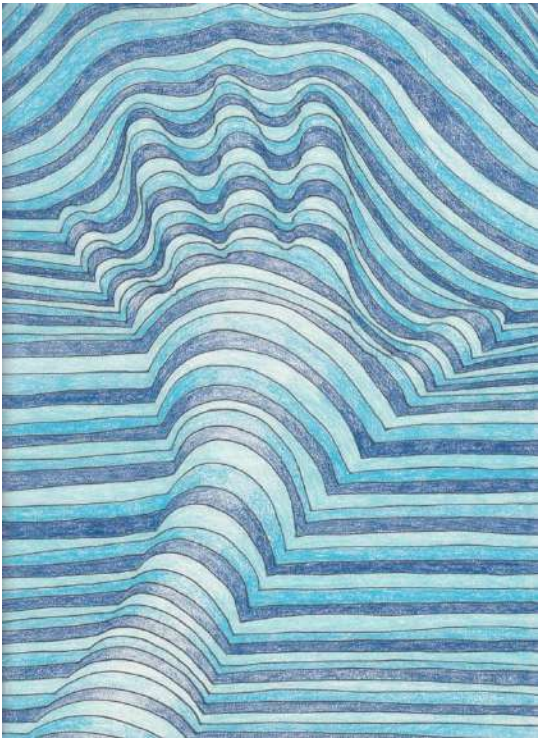
7. IF they chose this method, the most difficult part of this project is ending the fingers – finding a way to try to get back to straight lines at the top once students get past the finger tips. Tell students to try to flatten out their line as much as possible so it no longer matches the curve of the fingers.



8. Pass out the colored marker sets. Once all their lines are drawn, students can choose three colors and color between the black lines.



Examples:



Parent Note:

Al Held (1928 – 2005) was an American Abstract expressionist painter. He was particularly well known for his large scale “Op-art” paintings, full of movement. *Pisa II* seems almost three-dimensional.

Today in Art Masterpiece, students created their own Op-art style, 3-D artwork, using their own arm and hand as a guide.



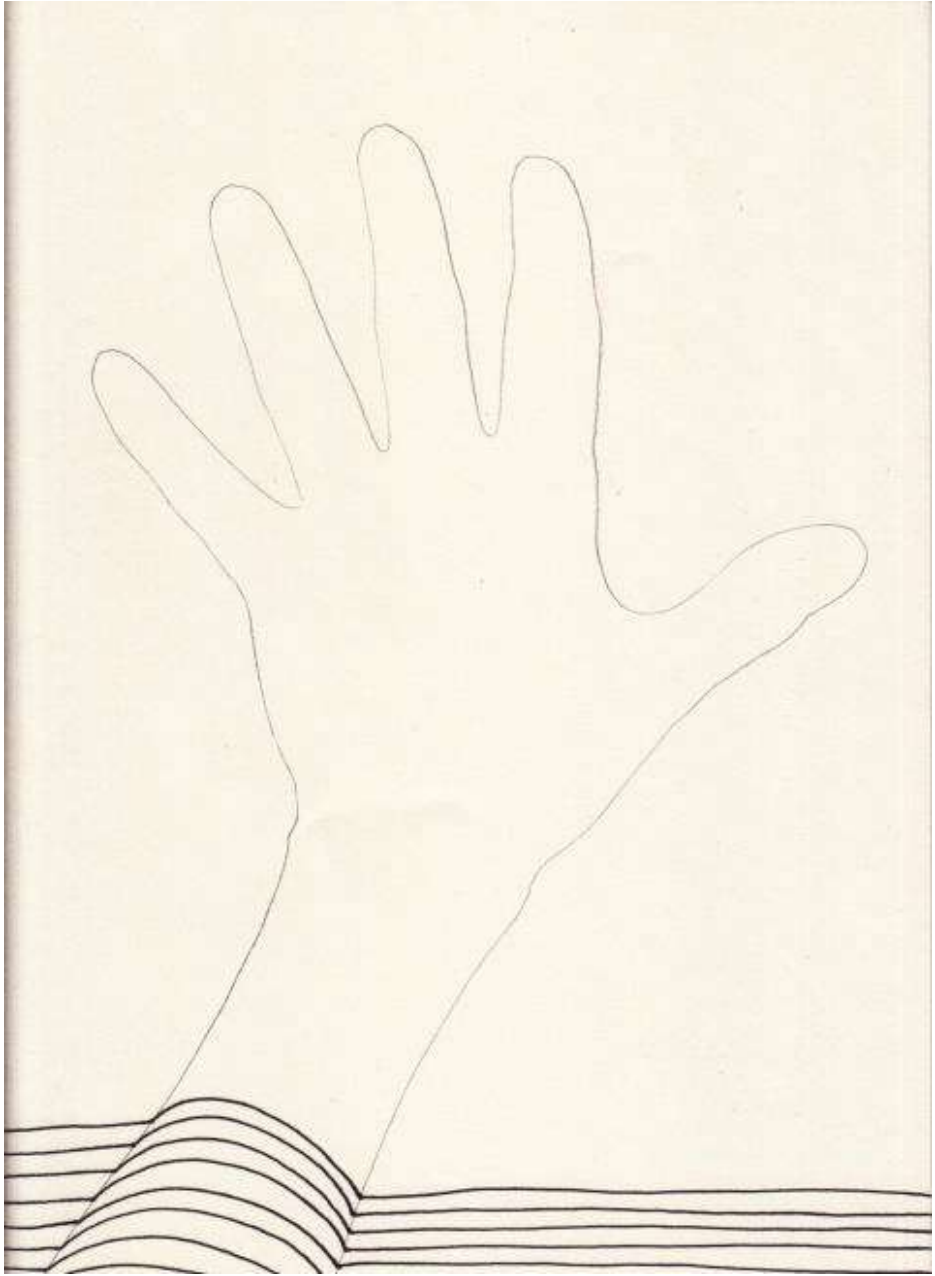
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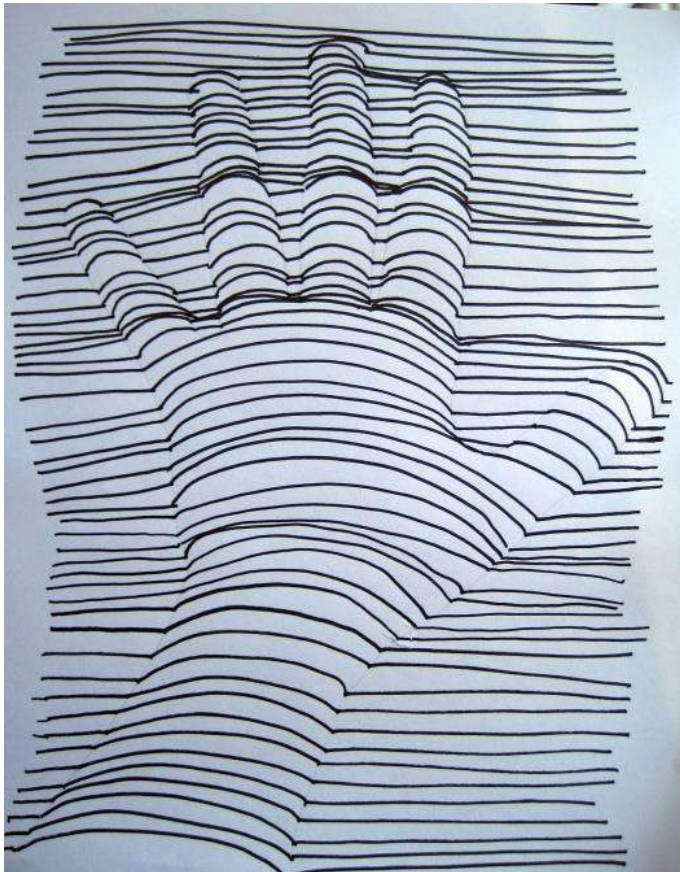
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Step-by-step photos to project (using the doc-cam)







Chandler Unified School District **Art Masterpiece Program**, Chandler, Arizona, USA

