

CONTEMPORARY + ANCIENT POTTERY DESIGN



INSPIRED BY MIMBRES and MATA ORTIZ

An abstract painting with a textured, layered appearance. The upper portion features several vertical, brush-like strokes in shades of blue and green, set against a darker, more complex background of similar colors. The lower portion of the image is dominated by two bright red apples, which appear to be superimposed on the painting. The apples are positioned side-by-side, with their stems pointing upwards. The overall composition suggests a connection between art and nature, or perhaps a metaphorical statement about the creative process.

Two Art Teachers

we did it now you

a series of extraordinary Art
Projects for Middle School

ANCIENT TECHNIQUE + MODERN SYMBOLS

MIMBRES-POTTERY-inspired PERSONAL SYMBOL PATTERNS

for Pottery, Household Objects and Décor

...or just for Art

You want to make a mark on the world? Leave something cool behind so people in the future know you were here? Doesn't everybody? Sure, sure, make a difference now. But isn't it great we know about King Tut and Aztec Warriors and Chinese culture from 3000BC? Mostly we know about them from the stuff they made, particularly objects made out of materials that last. Turns out that's pottery. Fired to a high temperature, it almost turns to rock. That's why we've dug up so many ceramic pieces in modern times. They're like the bones of civilizations. And they tell stories.

Sometimes the stories are told through the shape of the object. Was it for use or for decoration? What does it depict? Animals? Humans? What are they doing? How could the object be used? Sometimes the stories are painted onto the object. Shapes, colors, animals, figures. What do these paintings mean? Just pretty pictures? Or messages?

Scholars have deciphered many of the symbols found on pots. On the pottery made by the **Mimbres** peoples of ancient New Mexico, an entire alphabet has been sorted coded in the symbols. Look at the pottery below. Notice the patterns and the images.





What do you think they mean?

What do you think the symbols on the pots shown below mean?



Mata Ortiz plate by Miriham Gallegos



Tito Tena

These pots are actually contemporary, made by ceramists using ancient Mimbres techniques and symbols with a modern hand and eye.

What is the same about the ancient Mimbres pot and the modern pot? They were both handbuilt in a coil style. Both were fired one at a time in a super-hot fire made from burning cow dung. Decorations were painted with stiff brushes made from their own hair.

What is different?



Olla by Master Mata Ortiz potter Juan Quezada



Tom Fresh, contemporary "Mayan" pot, 1986

The painting tended to be one or two colors only, on a contrasting background. Often, the ceramists only used black and white. Patterns formed a border and, in the center or bottom, there was often a single image, a rabbit or a turtle. On the Quezada pot, as in most of the pottery from the **Mata Ortiz Pottery movement** he inspired in the 1980s, the circular **pattern** has been flattened out, like one of those maps you see in a school book of the entire globe spread out flat [PS Mercator projection]. A repeated series of borders surrounding a central image gives the design **unity**.



Diana Loga

The design focuses our attention on the central image. Why is that rabbit there? Was it a tribal symbol? A spirit animal? An animal that hung around the family? What would you put on a Mimbres pot that might be dug up a thousand years from now?



Mimbres pottery, 5th Grade

In this lesson you will develop a personal symbol and a pattern that can be to that pot you've been wanting to make, or to that smooth rock you picked up on the beach or that drawing that just needs a little something... more. For practice, you will be designing on a **paper plate**.

HOW TO DO THIS PROJECT:

MATERIALS

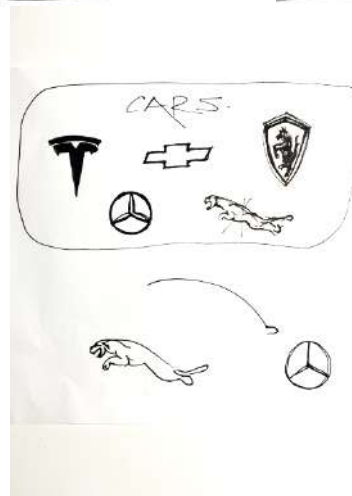
- 8" or 10" white paper plate – not plastic (see picture below)
- scratch paper – both plain and lined notebook paper
- black Sharpies, extra fine and fine
- pencil
- pushpin + string to make circles w/ or a smaller round lid or plate to draw around



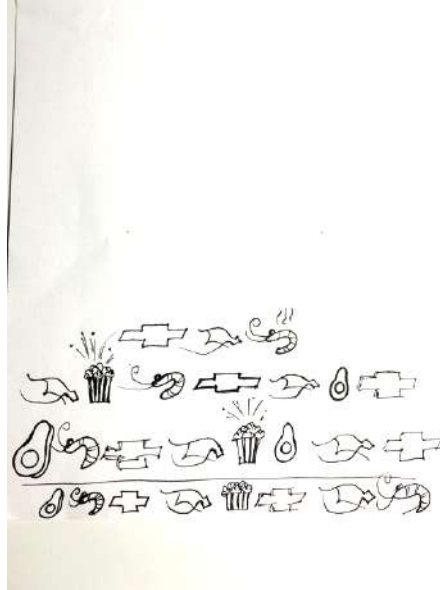
--

STEPS:

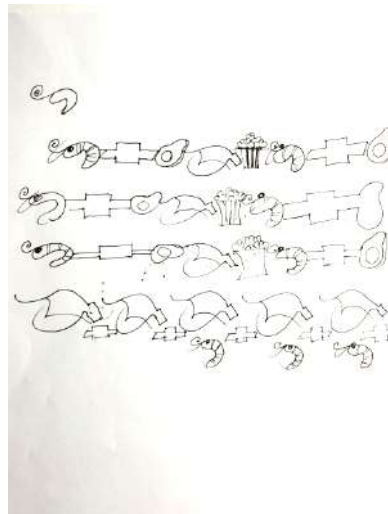
1. Brainstorm ideas for your symbol. On scratch paper, make a list of your 5 favorite animals. Then make a list of your 5 favorite foods. Then list 5 favorite activities. Then 5 favorite something else: basketball teams, bands, plants, shoe brands, cars. Now draw a very simple picture to remember each of these by.



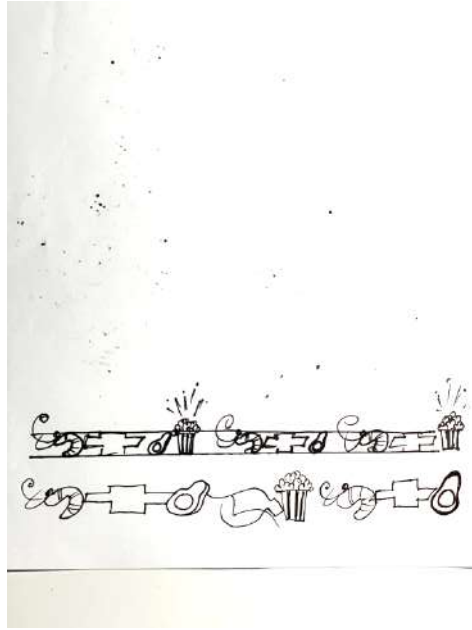
2. Look at the “symbols” you have created for each of your favs. Were some easier to design than others? Maybe because they already had a symbol (like a band logo, or a brand symbol) that you – and everyone else – recognizes immediately. Maybe some already have emojis. (aka “symbols”). Maybe others completely baffled you. Pick out your 5-6 favorites and draw them again, refining their shapes. Until you’re happy with them. You can make the symbol your own here. Try turning it around or upside-down, distorting it like the letters in graffiti, or adding borders or embellishments. Make sure that your symbols are SIMPLE, even if they become less easy to read.



3. Now, experiment again on the scratch paper, with running the symbols all together into one. Repeat the run-on pattern. Do you like it? Try different ways of running the symbols together, like letters into your alphabet turned into cursive writing.



4. As you experiment with your new shape-age, start flattening it out until the shapes become narrow and long... try to fit them all into the lines of a piece of notebook paper. Think of these bands as borders that you will use in your finished plate design.



5. Now you need to pick a center symbol. Go back to your original lists and rows of symbols. Is there one that particularly stands out, one that was hard to string together with the others? Or one you particularly love, or is your favorite-favorite thing? Or the thing you want everyone to associate with you? Or what you want aliens or future generations to know about you? Or... Just pick one! You don't have to take this that seriously if you don't want to. That's why we're practicing on paper plates.



6. After you've decided on your central symbol, draw it 3-4 times to refine its shape. You can use geometric curves or shapes. You can add lines that might suggest texture, fur, or scales. You want to really like it before it gets to be in the center of your design.

7. Now it's time to transfer the design onto your plate. First draw a border around which you'll put your center symbol. Use pencil and either a pushpin in the center tied to a string w/ a pencil to draw a perfect circle. Or trace around another plate or circle template. Try to leave a lot of space in the center, to give your symbol room to breathe. The circles should be **radially symmetrical**, that is they move out evenly from the center, like a target.
8. Draw 2-3 more border circles lightly in pencil around the first circle. You will be tracing over these lines/borders in Sharpie, so make all your mistakes with the pencil.
9. Now draw your design with pencil. Draw from the inside out. Center your big symbol first. Adjust the first border circle so that you like the way it looks around your center symbol.



10. Continue refining the circular bands. For the outer ones, you may want to use the elongated symbol “borders” you created in Steps 3 and 4 above. Or try other ideas.



11. Now trace over the design in Sharpie. Again, move from the inside it, as it causes the least amount of smudging. Even Sharpie needs several seconds to dry.

Start with the thinnest Sharpie you have, the extra-fine. If you don't like the look, you can always go to a fatter Sharpie; but you can never go thinner. Trace your center image. Then trace the circle around it w/ a thin black line of Sharpie. Continue to trace over your bands and a final thick black border.



12. Draw carefully. Take your time. Use good light and don't let anyone bump you. You get one chance with this. But don't worry, the mistakes show you're human... those aliens will want to know that.

NEVER use white-out on this project. It's better to have a botched line and just leave it be to add a little zest to your design, than to have the whole thing look patched with white-out.

13. When you're finished, hang the plate up for display, use to collect things on as you would any decorative plate. or keep as a template for all the other fantastic items you are going to create with your fantastic new personal symbol repertoire.

REFLECTION:

What do the symbols on your plate design communicate about you, the artist? How are your lines, shapes and patterns the same/different as those in the ancient Mimbres pots? In the Juan pots?

How does using a technique or method from the past (bla bla) help you appreciate the work of indigenous artists?

Does your design have unity?

GLOSSARY

Radial symmetry: symmetry around a central axis, as in a starfish or a tulip flower. Starfish have a fivefold radial symmetry.

Pattern: a series of objects that repeat in a predictable manner.

Repetition: a way of combining art elements so that the same elements are used over and over to achieve balance and harmony.

Unity: wholeness or oneness that is achieved through effective use of the elements of art and principles of design

SOME MIMBRES-STYLE ANIMAL DESIGNS



ABOUT MIMBRES POTTERY

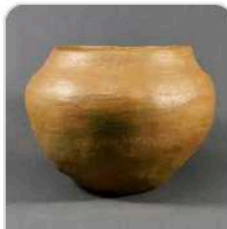
'Mimbres' means "willows" in Spanish and refers to the willow-lined Rio Grande river valley which winds through eastern Arizona and western New Mexico. The Mimbres people, as they came to be called, were part of the vast Anasazi civilization that disappeared without a trace in 1300. However we still have their pots! Archaeologists have found artifacts proving that they were among the first to make pottery in the entire region. Classic Mimbres pottery, characterized by black and white painted bowls decorated with geometric designs, animals and figures, dates to A.D. 1000-1130, just before the people disappeared forever.

Another interesting fact: Ancient Mimbres bowls are usually found in human burials and appear to be used to cover the face or head of the deceased. They often have a distinctive 'kill hole', an intentional puncture at the base of the bowl which appears to be associated with this ceremonial function.



More 5th grade Mimbres ceramics

More Southwest pottery traditional styles:



Taos Pueblo
pottery



Santa Clara
pottery



Santa Ana
Pueblo
pottery

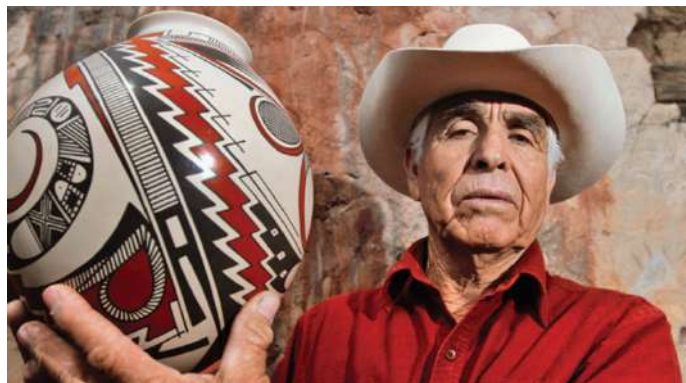


San
Ildefonso
pottery



San Juan
Pueblo
Pottery

ABOUT THE MATA ORTIZ POTTERY MOVEMENT:



Juan Quezada

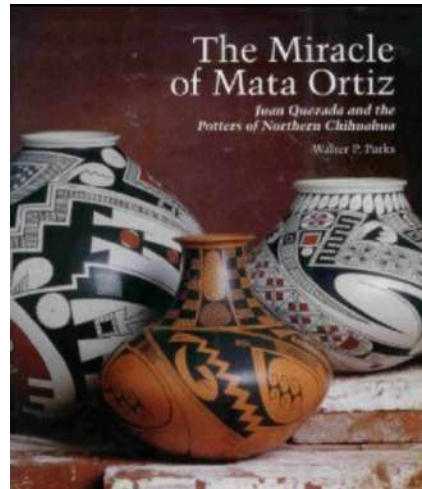
The revitalization of Mata Ortiz into a world-renowned pottery center makes for a great story. As a young, curious man without education or money, Juan Quezada rode his horse all over the Casas Grandes looking for cow piles to sell as firewood - and found his destiny. He found shards of pottery made from a white clay he'd never seen before. His search for the special clay sparked him to study, experiment, and eventually resurrect the style and ancient techniques of his ancestors' pottery. In the process, he rescued his village, which was on the cusp of obscurity, and is now a thriving pottery district known for the production of original, contemporary folk pottery. There was enough evidence from the ancient pottery shards to intuit the spirit of the long-lost art and rekindle the Native aesthetics.

The shards Juan found were obviously Mimbres-influenced, but probably came from the Paquime (or Zuma) trading center which occupied much of the Casas Grandes area from mid-1200s-1340. Due to having very limited info about the old cultures, the local potters were not overly concerned with historical accuracy or a definitive style and thus successfully developed a

post- modern adaptation of traditional pottery which has become a style all its own. There are now thousands of potters in the area, creating high-quality pottery which is sold all over the world. Juan's pots are in the Smithsonian Musuem.

For more, read the definitive book:

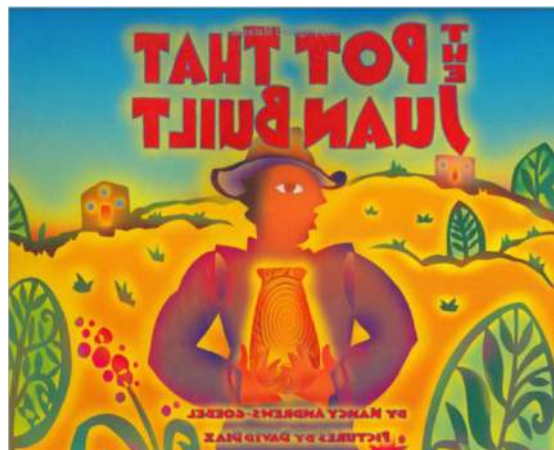
The Miracle of Mata Ortiz by Walter P. Parks



Juan Quezada pottery <http://juanquezadapottery.com/home.html>

Watch this video to see how a Mata Ortiz pot is made: <https://youtu.be/f8CjG1Qxl08>

A wonderful kid's book about Juan: The Pot that Juan Built <http://www.amazon.com/Built-Belpre-Honor-Illustrator-Awards/dp/1584300388/>



Visual Arts Standards:

VA:Cr1.1.6a

Combine concepts collaboratively to generate innovative ideas for creating art.

VA:Cr2.1.6a

Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design.

VA:Cr2.3.7a

Apply visual organizational strategies to design and produce a work of art, design, or media that clearly communicates information or ideas.

VA:Cr2.3.8a

Select, organize, and design images and words to make visually clear and compelling presentations.

VA:Cr3.1.8a

Apply relevant criteria to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for a work of art or design in progress.