



**Action/Abstraction:  
Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976  
A Gallery Guide for Families**

*This guide is for kids and grown-ups to use together as you explore the exhibition.*

The artists in this exhibition are interested in the power of line, shape, and color to express ideas and emotions. A work of art with simplified shapes and exaggerated forms is called *abstract*.

As you enter, turn left and find a very large, brightly-colored painting made up of lots of drips of paint.

**Convergence, Jackson Pollock, 1952**

This painting is by an artist named Jackson Pollock. He was one of the first artists to drip and pour paint to create an image.

Stand back and take a close look at this painting.

How would you describe the lines? The colors? What does this image remind you of?

How do you think Pollock made this? Where did he stand when he applied the paint? Did he use a paintbrush? If you were going to make a painting like this one, how would you do it? Can you find the film of Pollock painting in this room?



Here is Pollock making a painting just like the one you see in the gallery. Using hardened brushes, sticks and even cans with holes he applied the paint to the canvas. And look, the canvas is on the floor of his studio!

“On the floor, I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting.” --*Jackson Pollock*

What would it feel like to be in this painting?

Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, 1950. Photograph by Hans Namuth. © 1991 Hans Namuth Estate. Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona. Painting © 2008 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Spend some time looking around at the other paintings in this gallery. Some show recognizable things using bold colors and brushstrokes. Are there paintings in this room that include things that you recognize, such as parts of the human figure?

Now move on into the next room. Look to your right and find two paintings by Hans Hoffman.

***Sanctum Sanctorum*, Hans Hofmann, 1962 and  
*Fantasia*, Hans Hofmann, 1943**

Look closely at these two paintings. How are they similar? How are they different? The painting on the left, *Fantasia* has a lot of squiggly lines and organic, curvy shapes. What about the painting on the right? What sort of shapes do you see? The painting on the right, *Sanctum Sanctorum*, includes geometric shapes, such as squares. Look around the room at the other paintings. Can you find any more curvy, or geometric shapes?

Stand back from the paintings and use your finger to trace these shapes in the air.

Continue to the next room.

As you walk into this gallery, there is a painting on the wall to your right.

***New England October*, Grace Hartigan, 1957**

It is called *New England October* and was made by the artist Grace Hartigan. Take a moment to look at this painting. What might it feel like to be inside this painting? Is it cold and windy, or sunny and warm? Does it feel soft or scratchy? What sounds might you hear inside this painting?

***Describe your ideas to your grownup.***

Grace Hartigan was often inspired by the words of poets and writers. Sometimes she would even include the words of poets in her paintings. Think about your description of Hartigan's painting. Can you turn your description into a poem?

***Share your poem out loud.***

Spend some time looking at the other paintings in this room.

Pick one of the paintings and tell your grownup a story about it.

Move on into the next gallery...

This gallery is different from the last ones—it has sculptures, or three dimensional works of art, instead of paintings. What makes a sculpture different from a painting?

Look to your left and follow the row of sculptures until to you find  
**Hero, David Smith, 1952**

Does this sculpture remind you of a person? Which part might be the head? What about the legs and arms? Is this sculpture big or small?

**Make yourself big like the sculpture. Reach your arms way above your head!**

What sort of sound might this sculpture make if it were to come alive? Could it speak words, or might it just make a noise?

**Make a sound like this sculpture.**

Take some time to look around at the other sculptures in this room before you move on.  
How many different shapes can you find in this room?

Continue on to the next gallery.

Look around at the paintings and sculptures in this gallery.  
Find your favorite work of art and describe to your grownup why you chose it.

To finish exploring the exhibition,  
head upstairs to the 2nd floor and find....

**Mountains and Sea, Helen Frankenthaler, 1952**

Which parts of the painting remind you of the mountains and what areas might be the sea?

Here is an image of the artist applying paint to a canvas.

What is she doing? Can you think of some unusual tools, or interesting ways of applying paint to a canvas?



Photo of Helen Frankenthaler  
by Ernst Haas (1969)

Which of these would you like to use to apply paint to a canvas?

Toothbrush    Spoon    Your Hand    Soda Can    Spray Bottle

Paperclip    Paintbrush    Stick    Rubber Ball    String

To finish up your tour, explore the rest of the galleries and complete this scavenger hunt.

Can you find....

the number 2

the blue drips

a green circle

shapes made of steel

a footprint

a heart

Don't forget to explore the last room full of words, and add your own words to this work of art!

Many of the artists whose works are in this exhibition did not plan their paintings in advance.

They relied on how they felt while they were creating their art.

**At home**, take a piece of string, shoelace, yarn, or ribbon and drop it on the ground.

Look closely at the way that it has landed, and draw a line or shape inspired by it. Pick up the string and try again. You can repeat this over and over again until your page is full of interesting squiggles and lines, curvy and geometric shapes.

**Congratulations, you have finished your tour of  
Action/Abstraction: Pollock, deKooning and American Art, 1940-1976!**



This Family Gallery Guide for the Action/Abstraction Multi-Generational Family Day is made possible by The Office of Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer funded under contract with the New York City Department for the Aging.



Promotional support is provided by PATHMARK.