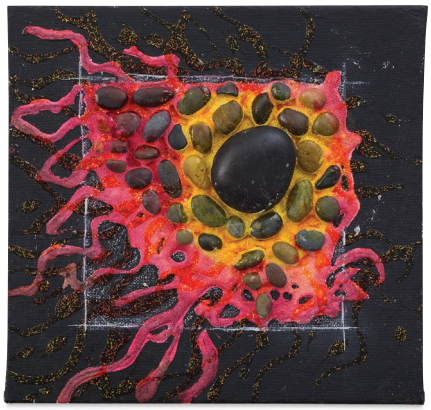
Geomorphic Watercolor Mosaics

Nature is constantly changing, and artists such as Andrew Goldsworthy enjoy being part of the change

(art + science)



Sculptor/photographer/environmental artist Andrew Goldsworthy finds art materials everywhere he looks. "If it is snowing, I work with snow. At leaf-fall, it will be with leaves," he has said "It's not about art. It's just about life ... a lot of things in life do not last."

Working in nature, Goldsworthy creates temporary art with leaves, twigs, weeds, ice, feathers ... whatever he finds to work with. Immediately after completing a piece, he photographs it and allows nature to take over and continue working on the piece. Nature will provide growth, decay, movement, or change of some sort. Colorful leaves turn brown, ice melts, twigs decay — change is inevitable.

Not all of Goldsworthy's sculptures are so fleeting. Some of his pieces are made with trees and stones that will endure long after the artist and his contemporaries no longer exist. Time and place, order and chaos, the connections and the disconnections between what is manmade and what is natural — these are the themes that Andrew Goldsworthy explores.

In science, a geomorphologist studies the way the earth is constantly being changed by the actions of water, wind, ice, and fire, along with chemical reactions in the soil and atmosphere.

To gain understanding of Goldsworthy's ideas and as an experiment in geomorphology, students can combine what humans use to create art — that which is manufactured — with what nature has created in the form of a pebble mosaic. Color, glue, and surface involve human design, creation, ideas, and arrangement. Rocks and sand have been eroded, broken down, worn smooth, and otherwise altered over long periods of time. If nature is allowed to complete the work (by placing the mosaic outdoors), the human elements will eventually weather away. The rocks and sand will be placed and perhaps scattered, but still remain.

GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed

Preparation

1. View photographs and videos of works by Andrew Goldsworthy.

Materials (required)

Blick Liquid Watercolor, assorted colors, 237 ml (00369-); share at least three colors across class

Art Sand, White, 2 lb bag (61006-1002); share one across class

Choose a base option; need one per student:

- All Purpose Chipboard, 30 ply, 28" x 44" (13115-2236); cut to 6" x 6"
- Blick Studio Canvas Panels, 6" x 6", package of 5 (07008-5066)
- Hardboard Panels, 6" x 6" (14945-1066)

River Rocks, assorted colors, 2.2 lbs (14996-); share two bags across classroom

River Rock Assortments, Montana Neutrals, 1 lb (61138-1001); share 2–3 bags across class

Blick White Glue, 4 oz (23882-1004); need one per student

Dynasty Faux Camel Watercolor Brushes, round size 4 (06292-1004); need one per student

Optional Materials

Paint Pipettes, package of 25 (06972-1025)

Stone by Stone Mosaics, assorted colors, 2.2 lb (61117-1119)

Sargent Art Watercolor Magic, Glitter, set of 6, 237 ml bottles (01759-2659)

Hygloss Styrofoam Trays, package of 25, 9" x 11" (61726-1010)

Blick Matte Acrylics, assorted colors, 2 oz (00727-)

Elmer's Glitter Glue, assorted colors, 6 oz (65304-)

Arnold Grummer's Brilliants for Paper Making (12882-9020)

Preparation, continued

2. Gather pebbles to incorporate into mosaics. If other materials are used, discuss whether they are made by nature, manmade, or both. For example, a piece of glass may have been formed from a natural material (sand), but altered by a natural force (heat), and manufactured under the direction of humans.
3. Determine a base for the mosaic based on how long it will last. If the goal is to allow nature to work quickly, corrugated cardboard matboard, or chipboard will be affected more rapidly by moisture from rain, humidity, and soil. If longer-lasting pebble mosaics are desired, a canvas panel or hardboard panel might be used.

   As an experiment, a class could use multiple materials for bases and record nature's work to see which surfaces last longer.

   Pebble Mosaics may be any size, but the weight of the rocks and sand may cause buckling of chipboard in sizes larger than 8" x 8".

   NOTE: If using a cardboard surface, applying a coat of white acrylic paint prior to building the mosaic is recommended. This will prevent the glue from being absorbed as quickly into the cardboard and will make colors appear brighter.
4. Pour sand into paper cups for easier distribution across class. Work on a tray to contain the sand.

Process

1. Working a section at a time so the glue doesn't dry too quickly, squeeze a generous covering of glue onto the panel and arrange stones as desired.

   NOTE: Glue does not need to be a solid covering. Drips, drizzles, and squiggles of glue add interesting line and texture effects to the mosaic.
2. While glue is still wet, pour white sand over the piece so that it fills all the space between the stones. Allow to dry overnight.
3. Turn the panel over and allow the excess sand to fall onto a tray or into a container so that it can be reused.
4. Using a brush or an eyedropper, apply colorful liquid watercolor over the sand, watching it flow and blend throughout the grains. Spritz the sand with a small amount of water to help the color flow even more, but not too much, or the glue will weaken.

   There will be a noticable color shift when the paint has dried. It will be much less saturated and will have a matte finish.
5. Allow the mosaic to dry completely. Mosaics may be enjoyed indoors indefinitely or photographed and placed outdoors for nature to begin working and changing them.

Step 1: *Gather pebbles and determine a base to build the mosaic upon.*

Step 2: *Glue pebbles in place and pour sand over the wet glue in-between the pebbles.*

Step 3: *Drop colorful watercolors over the sand. Spritz with a little water to help the color flow among the grains.*

Options

— Record nature's changes through photography and display images together as a single piece.

— If desired, paint negative areas of the mosaic with a contrasting color of acrylic paint.

— For sparkling effects, shake a few iridescent mica flakes onto the wet glue, then cover the rest of the glue with sand. Or use glitter glue or metallic liquid watercolor.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Responding

Anchor Standard 8: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.