Value-Added Fiber Landscape

Layers of simple cheesecloth create dramatic values and textures.

In art, "value" refers to the light and dark ranges of color. The element of value is key to communicating how an object is seen by our eyes and processed by our minds.

If viewed without color, as in a black and white photo, many of the world's most masterful paintings remain structurally true. Color is important to the emotional impact of a painting, but not to the overall composition.

For instance, this famous self portrait by Rembrandt van Rijn, viewed side by side, shows the painting with color and without.

The illusion of light and the composition of the subject is created by the values, not the color.

Balancing value, form, color, and texure can be a bit of a challenge, especially for beginners. In this lesson, layering open-weave fabric creates a variety of values, while draping and fraying naturally and effortlessly create texture and form.

Named for its primary usage within the food industry, cheesecloth is an intriguing fiber that sometimes crosses over into the art realm in painting, printmaking, and sculpture. It is extremely lightweight with a wide weave that gives it an almost ethereal, barely-there appearance.

In this lesson, students can cut, layer, fold, roll, and bunch cheesecloth to create layers of opacity-driven values on black paper. As an option, add color to complete the piece. An unusual benefit of a cheesecloth composition is a semi-flat, yet textured surface that makes a great alternative pastel ground. As fabric, it can also be stitched. For inspiration, view the incredible work of fiber artist Mary Pal.

GRADES 5-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Unwind, (but don't unfold) cheesecloth from the bolt. The delicate fabric is easier handled and distributed when it is folded upon itself. Cut into 12″ sections.
2. Cut black Railroad Board or heavy black paper to 8-1/2″ x 11″.

Process

1. With white charcoal, pastel, or pencil, create a very simple line drawing on black paper.
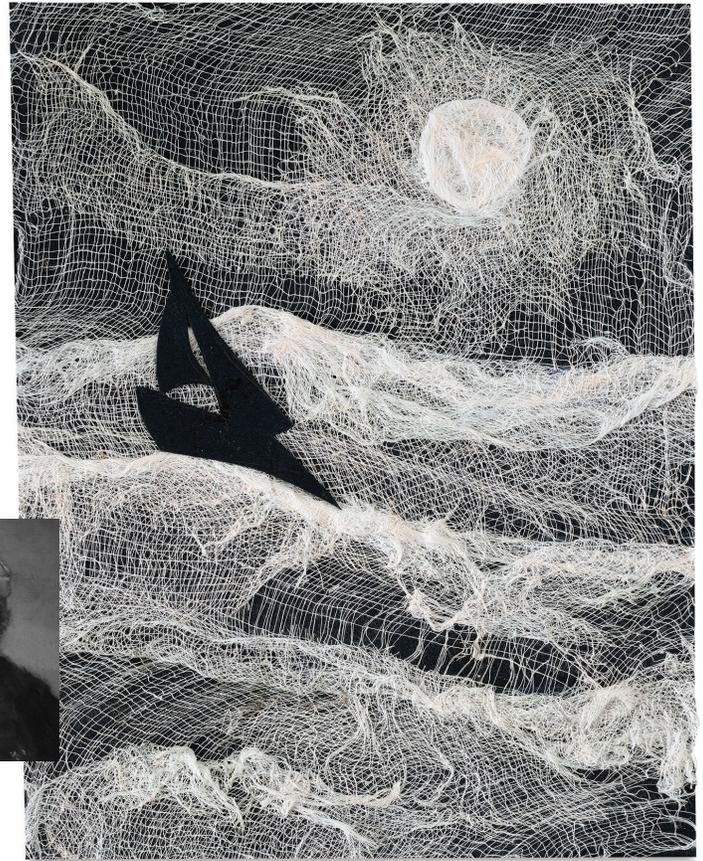
Materials (required)

Dritz Cheesecloth, 36″ x 3 yd (01293-1001); share among six students

Gorilla Kids Glue Sticks, 0.21 oz, pkg of 6 (23976-1003); one per student

Pacon Railroad Board, Black, 6-ply 22″ x 28″ (13105-2102); share one among four students

General's White Charcoal Pencil (20418-1001); one per student

Elmer's Washable Clear School Glue, 9 oz (23810-1601); share one across classsroom

Westcott Student Scissors with Microban Protection (57607-1006); one per student

Blick Essentials Value Brush Set Foam Brushes, 1″ set of 25 (06280-1319); one brush per student

Optional Materials

Genuine Boxwood Tools, set of 3 (60502-1009)

Blick Pastels, Landscape, set of 24 (20016-0249)

Angora Watercolor Pans, set of 14 (00395-0149)
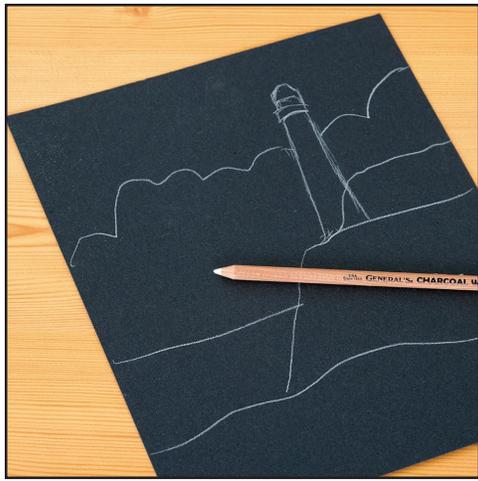
Step 1: *Create a simple white line drawing on black paper.*

Step 2: *Begin with a layer of cheesecloth. This will be the second darkest value and also serve as the base for building up lighter values.*

Step 3: *Apply subsequent layers to increase opacity. Allow fabric to drape, fold, and fray to create textures.*

Process, continued

Recommendations for compositions:

- Because of the way cheesecloth drapes and the goal of achieving multiple values, start with a flowing landscape or seascape rather than a detailed subject.
- Cut silhouetted items from extra black paper and glue them to the finished cheesecloth arrangement (rather than attempt to position the fabric around it).
- Plan where to place values by creating a simple pencil sketch prior to starting the fiber painting.

2. Cut a 3″ wide strip from the folded cheesecloth. Unfold the strip into a single layer and cut into smaller strips as desired.

3. Remember that values will be created by subsequent layers of fabric. The first layer will be the second darkest value (black paper is the deepest shadow) in areas where it will remain uncovered. The first layer will also be the base that lighter values will be built upon, so it will most like cover much of the image.

4. Fill area loosely with glue stick — just enough to tack a portion of the cloth in place. Position cloth and tap gently in place with fingers. Add more glue on top if needed.

5. Repeat with a second layer of cheesecloth; then add more layers to increase opacity in areas of lighter value. Use white lines as a reference unt they're no longer visable. Suggestions to keep in mind:

- A wooden or plastic tool may be helpful in arranging cheescloth pieces, especially if glue is on fingers.
- Rather than try to cut exact shapes (which is difficult to do with delicate cheesecloth), cut a swatch and form it to the desired shape.
- Create ″hard″ edges by folding cloth, ″soft″ edges with fraying.

6. Trim away excess cloth and seal finished piece with glue that has been diluted with water enough to make it easy to apply with a brush.

Options

- Apply color with pastel or watercolor.
- Glue a silhouetted image on top the landscape for a dramatic effect.

Step 4: *Seal with diluted glue when complete. Add optional color.*

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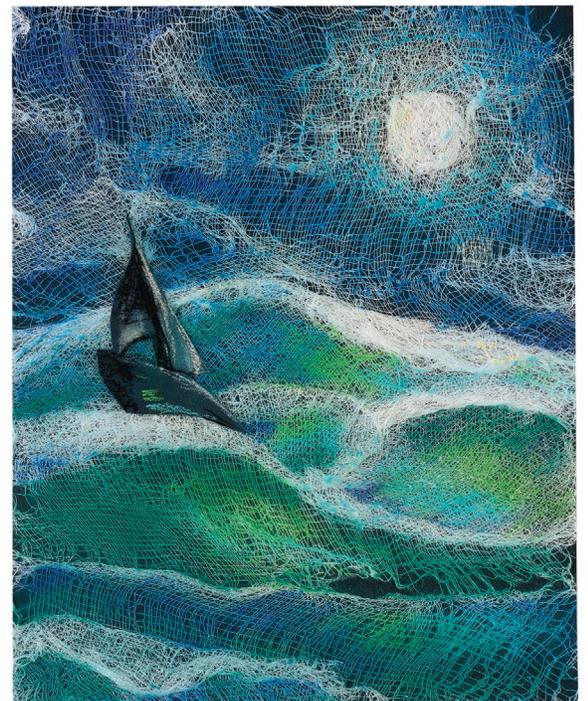
National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

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.