

ANIMALS IN ART

ARTIST: Roger D. "Sam" Wilson (1943-) Salt Lake City, Utah
TITLE: A Tension to Detail 1982
MEDIA: watercolor
SIZE: 22-1/2" x 29-3/4"

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Sam Wilson was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1943; then his family moved west, living first in Golden, Colorado, and eventually staying in the Los Angeles, California area, mostly in Long Beach. He graduated from high school in 1961, an experience he says is ". . . best forgotten. I was too young to be a Beatnik and too old to be a Hippie. I owe my career to Lyndon Baines Johnson. I went to school without much direction. I guess it was partly to avoid getting drafted. I was drafted. After service, mostly in Barstow, California, and Viet Nam (Barstow was the scary place), I resumed my education with the crucial G.I. Bill. My education was completed with a Master's from California State University, Long Beach."

Currently, Sam Wilson is an Associate Professor, soon to be a full professor, in the University of Utah Department of Art. His varied career includes a number of teaching positions in California and Colorado, being an illustrator for Carl Sagen's *Cosmos* on PBS, a "Magician" with Paramount Pictures, and working in stage design, construction, and silkscreening for *Silent Running* for Universal Studios.

Wilson's work has been exhibited throughout the Intermountain Region and in California, earning him numerous awards. He spent 16 months painting the interior of the Cathedral of the Madeline in Salt Lake City, Utah. He enjoyed working there because, "They let me do 'Wilson' stuff."

Talking about his work, Wilson said: "Since I never could figure out the right way to start

a painting, I would look at a piece of 'stuff,' thinking that it may be a way of generating a picture. It's like those horse-cart, chicken-egg questions. Do I collect stuff to paint or do I paint to collect stuff?

"By way of paint or pencil, I display objects both exotic and mundane on desk tops or in caves. This stuff I use may be replicas of other cultures or junk and tools from my work place. Masks may be people, people are animals or a rock is a place--it doesn't matter. I entertain myself and satisfy my curiosities by accumulating and arranging the items on the surface of the picture in a manner as unpredictable as possible. I believe that these oblique references and nonsense relationships open to me (and you) greater possibilities, more surprises and a justification for such a quiet and solitary entertainment.

"I use the techniques of realism and illusionism as a medium to present these harmless dramas. The pictures are just hanging around on the wall--I mean they are static. I assume the role of magician to add a helpful tension. The game of what's 'real' or not is a ploy, a device to catch your eye.

"The final result of this labor would be, for you, a trip with no passport, a contest with no clock and a visual snack without the predictable flavor of a franchised fun house."

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

(History, Aesthetics, Criticism)

What is the first thing your eyes are drawn to? What does the title do to your thinking about this painting? Did you notice the 'ghost' fish at first? Why do you think it's there? Why do you think the artist put the dots and lines above the central fish? What do you notice about the tail on the right? This artist likes puns: How is the title a pun? The painting?

How does this painting make you feel? What do you think it means? What do you think the numbers stand for along the bottom?

Does this painting make you think? Do you feel it is a successful piece of art? Why or why not? Do you like this painting? Why or why not?

ACTIVITIES

Science

Objective: The students will learn about native and introduced species of trout in the state of Utah and explain how they fit in their biomes.

Have an officer from the Division of Wildlife Resources come to your class and show posters and mounted fish of the different species of fish we have in Utah and explain how to tell them apart. Have the officer explain the fish's role in the food chain of its biome and its importance in the overall ecology and economy of our state. Discuss how the cutthroat replaced the rainbow as our state fish. Have the students learn the parts of the trout and then label them on drawings.

Arrange for a field trip to the fish hatchery in Springville or the one in Midway.

You can also tie this activity into specific science lessons by including pertinent information for that lesson.

Art--Making

Objective: The students will improve in their skills of drawing and paying attention to detail.

Bring in guide books to fishes, posters, and models (mounted fish) and have the students practice sketching from them. They can label the different parts of the fish (type of fins, etc) on their completed drawing. Allow the students to experiment with paints, pastels, and colored pencils. There are examples of beautiful paintings of fish in the book Joe and Me.

Art--Making

Objective: The students will demonstrate their knowledge of trout by making a correctly formed paper mache' fish.

The artist Bri Matheson (Park City) does residencies in schools and leads the students through the whole process of making paper mache'. Each student produces a final product at the end of the two weeks. He starts with a styrofoam body which the students sand into shape. The fins are made from coat hangers and stuck into the styrofoam (with a little glue to hold them in). The students then begin the paper mache' a layer per day. After 3 to 4 layers, the students sand out the rough spots and then paint their fish white. Then the

fish are ready to have color applied.

Language Arts

Objective: The students will successfully write a story patterned after the old folktale, "The Magic Fish."

Share different versions of "The Magic Fish" (can be found in many collections-- most schools have the Scholastic version by Freya Littledale). Brainstorm the things different people would ask for today. Ask the students if they think their list would be different than their parents' lists. Their grandparents'? What would a very rich person ask for? Lead them through the writing process to a finished product. You could possibly bind these as a collection for your classroom library. Your discussions can, of course, include how their wishes would impact the environment and their own lives. Be sure to allow your students to illustrate their stories.

Art--Perceiving, Contextualizing, and Expressing

Objective: The students will discuss the use of masks in various cultures and then create animal masks.

Show the class the slides from this packet and discuss the different ways animals have been portrayed in the variety of art works. Then ask students to help you make a list of the ways different peoples have and do use depictions of animals. (religious, cultural, mythological, magical, theater, entertainment, etc.) Then choose whichever area fits other class curriculum such as Social Studies, Language Arts, etc. Or choose an area of interest to you and gear the rest of the activity to it. The following are several ideas.

1. Explore a culture's use and styles of animal-like masks. Have images for the students to look at. Talk about how the masks were used and what qualities different animals were believed to confer on the wearer. Students will probably need help to understand that for many indigenous peoples, day-to-day survival depended on their ability to personally confront and defeat their environment, which was usually hostile, or at best, indifferent. Many cultures have folktales or myths that can be used to set the stage for the art activity.

Then have students brainstorm about what qualities different animals might convey on mask wearers such as a cheetah mask could make the wearer run fast, a wolverine mask might make the wearer fearless, and a mouse mask might make the wearer be able to hide from his enemies. Then have students choose an animal to make a mask of. Use a media and method from the following pages. Ask students to write or tell what properties their mask can impart to the wearer.

Variation for older students: Have students combine two animals that have contrasting qualities.

Extensions

Language Arts: After the students have made their masks, have them write a short story about someone who wears the mask.

Theater: Choose a myth, fable, or folktale to preform as a class. Or do several, so each student has a part. Have the students create masks to wear in the production.

Art: Focus on a particular style of folk or native art such as Oaxacan, and make animal masks in that style.

Art: Focus on a specific art media and use animal masks as a way to learn additional techniques in a creative setting.

Social Science: Explore a particular culture and make masks suitable for that culture. (The culture doesn't need to be one that necessarily makes masks. Use ideas from other art and artifacts to suggest suitable designs.)

Social Science/Art: After presenting some information and images about one or more culture's use of masks, ask the students to create an animal mask they feel could play a role in their culture. Students should accompany the mask with a written statement about how the mask is representative of or fills a role in their culture. Younger children can either say their ideas aloud or the teacher or a helper can write them down.

Healthy Lifestyles: After discussing how some cultures believed that a mask could transfer specific qualities to the wearer, ask students to create animal masks that have qualities they would like to have. Ask for volunteers to share what qualities they want to gain from their mask. (Some children may not want to tell the class, which is okay.)

Extension: Have students act out impromptu scenes with their masks, demonstrating the qualities the masks have given them. You may want to include a discussion of how the students felt when acting differently. Ask them what it would take for them to permanently acquire the traits they assigned to the masks.

Art/ Social Science--Masks

Objective: Students will study a culture's use of masks and make a mask in a similar style.

Show the class the slides from this packet and discuss the different ways animals have been portrayed in the variety of artworks.

Next, ask the students to name all the ways they can think of that masks are used. (Religious or cultural rituals, celebrations such as Halloween and Mardi Gras, theater, movies, as disguises, etc.) Then narrow this down to animal masks.

Then concentrate your presentation on the particular area you wish to focus on with masks. Some possibilities follow:

Native Americans--North West Coast, Inuit (Eskimo), Iroquois, Navajo, Hopi, Zuni,

Apache
African
Polynesian
Shamans or sorcerers

After your presentation, if desired, assign students to research further information. Then introduce the maskmaking portion of the activity. Have items suitable to your chosen emphasis available. You may want to assign students to find and bring appropriate items from home. Several kinds of masks are explained below, but many other kinds are possible.

Ceramic Clay Masks

supplies: ceramic clay, approximately 2 lbs. per student.

tools for cutting, shaping, etc.

heavy material, pieces of cardboard or hardboard for each student

acrylic paint and spray-on sealer or ceramic glazes

beads, feathers, leather scraps, material, paper, found objects, etc.

After completing the historical portion of one of the suggested approaches, have students make their own masks. Structure this part of the activity so it enhances the learning of the earlier section. (For example, the students can make masks that represent the spirit of a specific animal, or masks a shaman might wear, or masks for a theater production, see Extension, below.)

To make the masks: If you have purchased clay in bags, cut a 1" thick slice for each student. Before beginning, students should sketch at least three possible designs. Have the students evaluate the designs for the criteria you have established. Once students have decided on a design, they can roll or pat their slab of clay into a 1/4"-1/3" slab. Using a cutting tool, students should cut the shape of the outline. Then use a small moistened sponge or a damp fingertip to smooth the cut edge. Features can be cut out or added on. Discourage students both from using small, delicate pieces, which rarely stay on and also from cutting out so much that the mask can break apart. No part of the main mask should be smaller than 1/4".

Attach additions by scoring (scratching into the surface of the clay) and slipping (adding enough water to the scored area for it to form clay "paste") both the piece to be added and the spot it will be added to. Do not attempt to add things like hair or ears by butting the edges together--they won't stay. Instead, score and slip and overlap the additions onto the base part of the mask, and smooth the excess clay into the back, stamp the join; or simply score and slip well and press the piece on with fingers or a flat object larger than the addition.

Features can be built up with one or more layers of the slab, or can be molded and then attached. If any areas are very thick, students should allow the mask to harden somewhat--so the clay is the pliability of heavy leather--and then carefully scoop out excess clay from the back of the mask using a loop tool. (Thick clay can be successfully dried and

fired, but the drying and the early stages of the firing must be very slow to prevent cracking.) If any features are created by cutting sections out, they should have the edges smoothed. The mask can be given some curve by placing it over crumpled layers of newsprint. When designing and creating the mask, students can plan ways to attach objects to the mask after it has been fired. For example, holes around the edge allow raffia, string, yarn, rope, or fabric strips to be attached for hair or fur. Holes above cut outs for eyes can have beads strung in them to be eyes.

Students also should create some way for the mask to be displayed or used. Two holes, one on each side, with wire, sturdy twine, or a leather thong strung between works well. So does one centered hole, or a small piece of clay attached to the inside near the top, with an indentation that will hook on a nail or dowel. Other, more decorative ways are also possible, as is a small support for table display.

Encourage students to incorporate texture in the surface of the masks. (See Sept. 1998, The Elements of Art packet, Gary Price Activities, for suggestions for teaching and creating texture.)

When the students have completed their masks, allow them to dry slowly and then fire them. Students can paint the masks. Again, have students make preliminary design decisions by sketching their masks and trying colors with crayons. When the paint is dry, spray the masks with nonglossy sealer. (Make sure you do this in a well-ventilated area--outside, if it's not too cold.) The sealer dries quickly. Beads, feathers, and other ornaments can then be added. Display the masks with appropriate historical information and visuals, or use the masks in an appropriate activity. Students should write a critique of their mask using the critical model you use in class. Even first graders can do this.

Stiff Paper Masks Use stiff paper for the mask base. Cut out exaggerated features from colored paper or poster board and glue on. Add beads, feathers, small found objects, lightweight material, or fake fur.

Fabric Masks Buy stiff cloth Halloween or theater masks and have the students decorate them to look like animal faces. They can glue and sew beads, sequins, feathers, gauzy material, net, paper, felt, etc., onto the masks.

Other simple methods for making masks are papier-mâché, paper bags, paper plates, buckram, wire, wire frames covered with paper strips, material, or found objects. Other kinds of masks are also possible.

Resources:

Sivin, Carole. Maskmaking Davis Publications, Inc. Worcester, Massachusetts: 1986 (This book contains good directions for many different kinds of masks)

Casey, Kevin K. Masks. Rourke Publications, Inc. Vero Beach, Florida: 1996 (A children's book from the "Customs, Costumes and Cultures" series. Has excellent

historical information on a child's level about 14 kinds of masks with at least one picture for each type.)

Internet--I used AOL and got the best search results using masks and art. A few good sites follow:

<http://www.huichol.com/> (Great images of beaded masks from Mexico (traditional Huichol) with some explanation and history. Also has sculpture.)

<http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfwc/wiu/form.html> (Cast paper masks. Good images, describes process.)

<http://www.alaskagifts.com/nwc.html> (Alaskan native (Inuit) carvings, masks, sculptures.)

www.coastalimports.com (African Art. Good images, variety, lots of masks from different tribes. They sent me a color catalog with nice pictures, about three days after I asked for it--all you have to do is click on a button and type in your address.)

Variation--Totem poles: Show the class the slides of the artworks and briefly discuss the different ways the artists have portrayed animals. Then move into other ways animals have been used in art. One of the most interesting ways is in totem poles. Show the class some examples.

To make totem poles:

Have pictures of real animals available. Divide students into groups of three to five. Ask students to choose animals that can symbolize something important to them or that have qualities they want to have or can provide them some sort of protection. They should each choose one animal and make a sketch of their animal. When each student has a sketch the student is happy with, the group should decide how best to order them. Then the students will make the totem pole using the following method:

1. Materials:

heavy cardboard tubes (These can be found in garbage cans at fabric stores and sewing factories. Or, if you don't want to scrounge from garbage cans, just go in and ask.)

wood scraps for base

cardboard and stiff paper

paint

scissors, exacto knives, shears, hacksaw

twine, feathers, buttons, beads, etc.

Glue, hot glue, wire

The cardboard tubes can be cut to lengths with a band saw. If you don't have access to one at school, ask a parent for help. Since this activity will take more than one class time, have the students plan their totems one day so you can get approximate measurements for the tubes; or, cut a variety of sizes of tubes and let students choose. Stiff paper,

cardboard, material, etc. can be attached to make animals. When the totem is finished, use hot glue to attach it to the base.

Updated November 26, 2003 | Page Designer: [Webmaster](#)