

HAYWARD OUBRE

STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE
TO THE EXHIBITION

JANUARY 30 — MAY 3, 2026

New Orleans Museum of Art

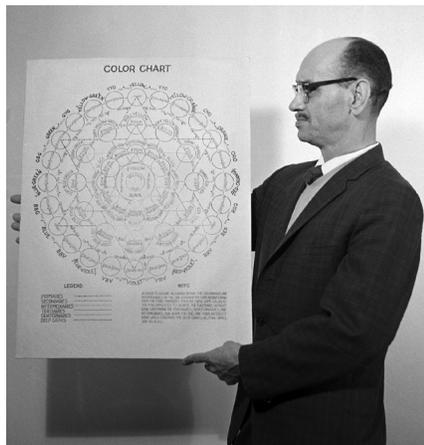


This educator’s guide complements the exhibition *Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity* and supports classroom investigations by K-12 educators and students. Included in the guide are an introduction to the artist, a brief description of the exhibition and related topics, classroom activities that encourage student reflection, guiding questions and additional resources to support learning.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

A New Orleans native, Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (1916-2006) was the first student to graduate with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Dillard University, the oldest historically Black University in Louisiana.

After serving in the United States Army during World War II, as a structural draftsman, Oubre returned to education, first to earn a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Iowa, followed by academic appointments as the first Chair of the Art Department at Alabama State University and later establishing the Art Department at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina.



Professor Hayward L. Oubre with color wheel, about 1968, photonegative, Winston-Salem State University, © C.G. O’Kelly Library

Recognized for his work with wire coat hangers, Oubre is known for his use of this everyday material to construct modernist works that were influenced by his own lived experience as well as art historical influences. While he completed nearly forty of these sculptures before the early 1980s, Oubre is also known for his prints and paintings.

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Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity is organized by the Birmingham Museum of Art and is presented with generous support from the Terra Foundation for American Art, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and the Henry Luce Foundation. Lead support for the exhibition catalogue is provided by the Wyeth Foundation for American Art.

The presentation in New Orleans is sponsored by Stephanie and Ryan Burks.

Exhibition program support is provided by Boh Bros. Centennial fund.

ON THE COVER
Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Equilibrium*, 1969, acrylic and acrylic resin on canvas, Collection of Carla and Cleophus Thomas, Jr.

ON THE BACK COVER
Hayward L. Oubre, Jr., (1916 – 2006), *Space Rhythms*, about 1960, wire, The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, South Carolina

GUIDING QUESTIONS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. How are fortitude and precision evident in the artworks showcased in *Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity*?
 2. How do the variety of materials, such as wire and acrylic paint, guide the trajectory of his work?
 3. How does the term “structural integrity” connect the art to the culture referenced in Hayward Oubre’s work?
- Students will synthesize social, cultural, and historical knowledge with information about Hayward Oubre’s personal life, advocacy and mentorship of African American students, and how his body of work contributed to the advancement of Black art in the South.
 - Students will analyze how the exhibition’s title resonates with both the physical structure of his works and the metaphorical endurance of his career despite historical under-recognition.
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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. pushed the boundaries of his materials to create unexpected works of art. Without sketches or preliminary studies, he improvised and experimented like the jazz musicians who often were the soundtrack in his studio. This exhibition brings together his prints, paintings, and sculptures to show the remarkable scope and achievement of his work for the first time.

While creating his exceptional body of work, Oubre molded generations of young Black artists from Alabama. As the first chair of the art department at Alabama State University (ASU) in Montgomery from 1949 to 1965, he grew a program that attracted students from throughout the region. In turn, he stood within a robust community of Black artists who have shaped American art. When he retired from teaching in 1981, he had taught and made art for more than thirty years, working at the center of the Civil Rights Movement and into the recent past. Producing art influenced by scientific progress, political struggle, modernism, and his daily life, he bridged a century with his unshakable resolve to create.

Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Stevedore*, 1945, black painted plaster with wood base, Studio Museum in Harlem; Gift of Michael Rosenfeld and halley k. harrisburg, 2003.2.6



BEFORE YOU VISIT

ASK

1. What do you think the term “structural integrity” means when describing artwork? How can that phrase relate to other facets of someone’s life?
2. In what ways do you think Hayward Oubre’s professions as an engineer and an art educator inform the construction and aesthetic of his artwork?

EXAMINE

1. Oubre’s teaching and mentorship modeled an honest approach to creativity, and believed a knowledge of art history fueled not only his own creation, but the art practices of his students. Examine the ways in which Hayward Oubre encouraged his students to learn about the past in order to propel their future.
2. Hayward Oubre developed many innovative artistic methods and tools to help progress not only the education of his students, but his own artistic expression. Investigate the ways in which science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) have contributed to artistic development.

EXPLORE

Study Oubre’s intentional use of color in the sculptures, prints, and paintings exhibited in *Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity*. What do these colors provide or contribute to the overall work? Explore the color wheel developed by Oubre and how the knowledge of color is showcased in his artwork. How has that been implemented in his paintings and sculptures?

CONSIDER

Consider the extensiveness of the works included in *Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity*. How has Oubre’s life influenced his own artistic development and expression? How has your own life and experiences influenced your own development and work?

Much of Oubre’s work and influence can be discussed and observed by his own students. Consider the educators that you have had the opportunity to work with. How have they influenced your own growth and advancement?

CONCLUSION

The collective work of Hayward Oubre shines light on an artist who was often under celebrated. How can our careers, home lives, and personal calls to action affect what we make, who we become, and what we feel called to create?

ART EDUCATION IN HBCUS

The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, defines Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as: “...any historically black college or university that was established before 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans,” New Orleans is one of a few U.S. cities tied for having the most Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), with three institutions: Dillard University, Xavier University, and Southern University at New Orleans, making it a significant hub for Black higher education.



Dillard University, founded in 1935, is Louisiana’s oldest HBCU and was born of two institutions that served as equity-building engines in the South—New Orleans University (1869 – 1935) and Straight University (1868 – 1834). Established as an educational center of excellence in the South, the campus, which remains in its original location, was unique in being the first HBCU with a sound architectural plan. The new liberal arts university subscribed to the DuBoisian notion of disciplining the mind and stimulating both “the creation of ideas and the development of the higher qualities of the individual.”

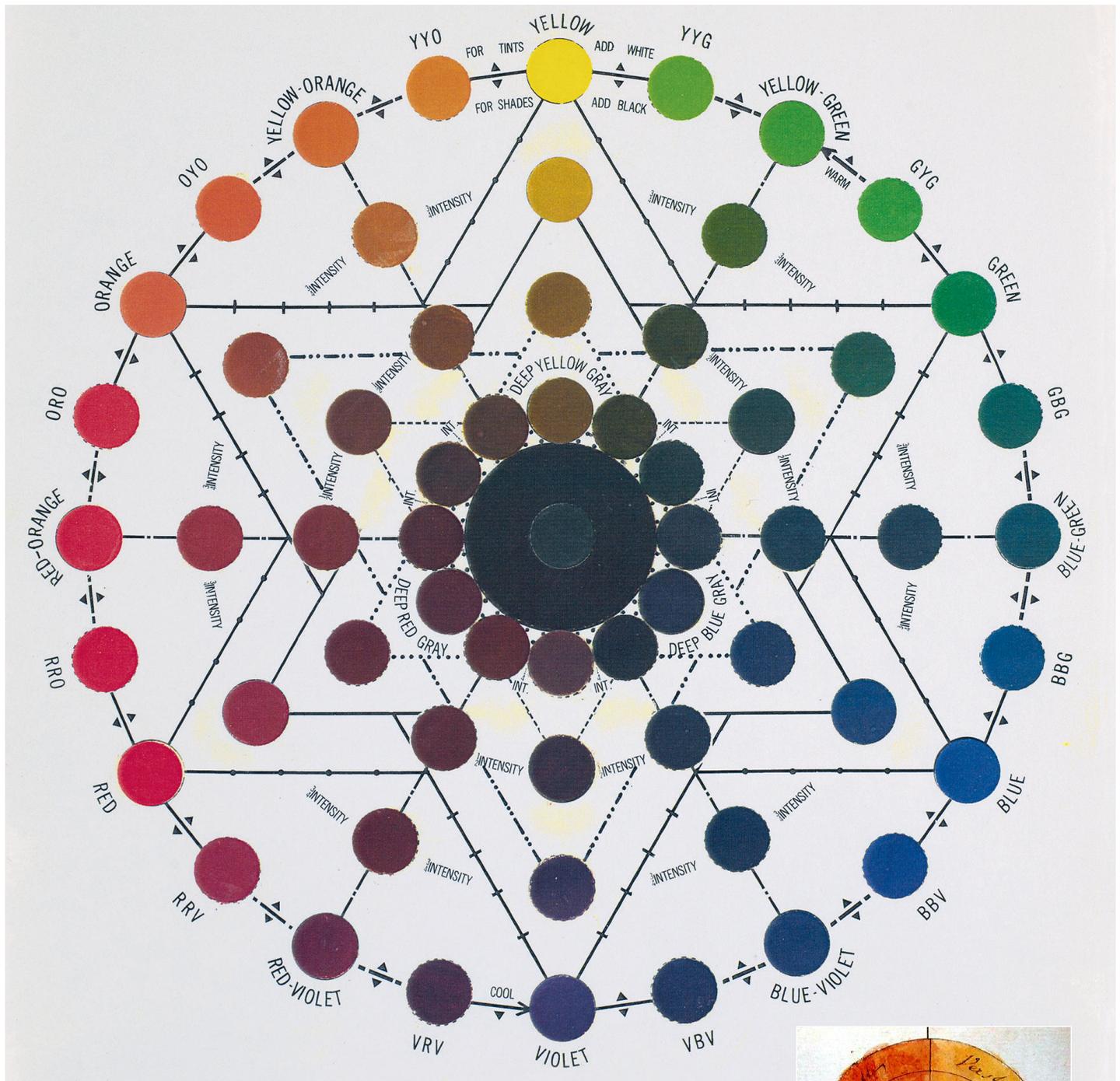


Xavier University of Louisiana, founded in 1925, is a private historically Black Catholic university in New Orleans, Louisiana. It is the only Catholic HBCU. Upon the canonization of Katharine Drexel in 2000, it became the first Catholic university founded by a saint. Xavier is a nationally recognized leader in STEM and health sciences, graduating more African American medical school students each year than any other university in the United States. Its College of Pharmacy is also among the top producers of African American pharmacists.



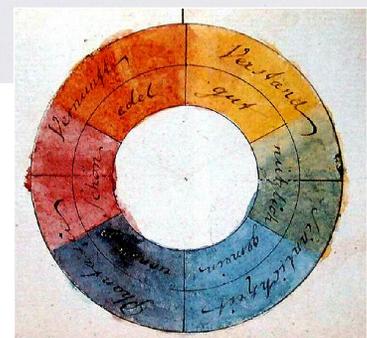
Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO), founded in 1956, is a public historically Black university that provides higher education opportunities for students in the Gulf Coast region. In recognition of its contributions to higher education and the community, SUNO has received numerous accolades, including being ranked among the top 10 HBCUs in the nation by U.S. News & World Report in 2016. SUNO is a member of the Southern University and A&M College System, the only historically Black university system in America. The over 140 year System has diverse enrollment of more than 12,000 students, with campuses in New Orleans, Shreveport, and the main campus law school and agricultural and research center in Baton Rouge.

HAYWARD OUBRE'S COLOR WHEEL



In an effort to provide his painting students with an understanding of color theory, Hayward Oubre developed an advanced color wheel. The color wheel was originally depicted as a disc of organized colors in Isaac Newton's book, *Opticks*. Oubre's work is an expansion on that and the triangular color wheel developed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1810.

Hayward Oubre developed an advanced color wheel in 1960 to help his painting students better understand color theory. His color wheel illuminated the relationships between colors, color mixing, and color chemistry.



Wolfgang von Goethe's Color Wheel, presented in his *Theory of Colours*, was a psychological and symbolic model contrasting Newton's physical one, proposing that color arises from light and darkness interacting, with yellow representing light/warmth and blue representing darkness/cold, creating green when mixed. His wheel arranged complementary colors opposite each other (like yellow and purple) and explored colors' emotional impact, linking colors to human feelings and artistic expression.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY #1: WIRE SCULPTURES

This lesson plan encourages students to create pipe cleaner sculptures of animals inspired by the artwork of Hayward Oubre. Students will first analyze examples of wire sculptures and sketches of animals to understand how to translate 2D lines into 3D **forms**. Students can discuss and identify some of the basic **shapes** required to design and construct an animal, using images

from *Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity* as visual aid. They will then create their own pipe cleaner animal sculptures by applying techniques for constructing 3D shapes with lines. Finally, students will reflect on how their sculptures and those of their classmates express the attributes of different animals through use of **color schemes** and **gestural forms**.

MATERIALS REQUIRED

Pencils
Paper
Pipe cleaners
Scissors
Cardboard

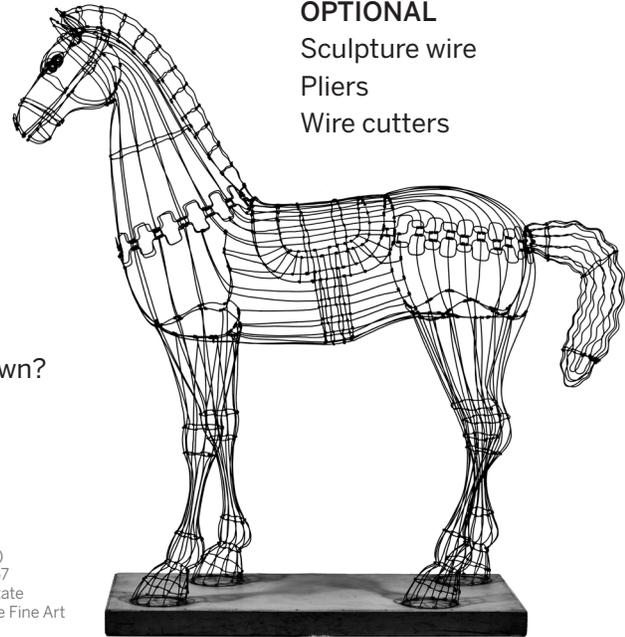
This lesson can be elevated or simplified for a variety of students. To elevate the lesson, students can use sculpture wire or floral wire to construct their animals, using pliers and wire cutters to secure construction.

OPTIONAL

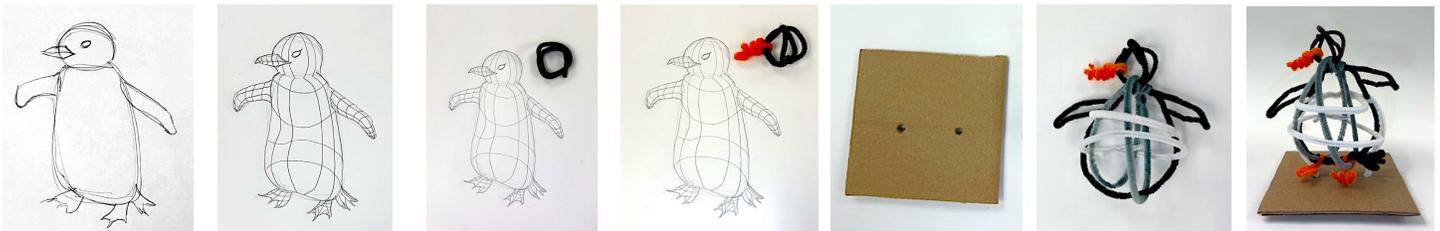
Sculpture wire
Pliers
Wire cutters

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the difference between two-dimensional art and three-dimensional art? How does that relate to shapes and forms?
2. What can be done to help make three-dimensional art stand on its own?
3. How can a drawing help to plan the construction of a sculpture?



Hayward L. Oubre, Jr.
(American, 1916–2006)
Young Horse, about 1957
The Hayward Oubre Estate
Courtesy of Debra Force Fine Art



Step 1:

Students will observe an animal and compose a sketch, simplifying the form to geometric shapes in order to better understand the structure. Once that sketch is completed, students will build upon the sketch to include **cross contour lines**, as exhibited in Oubre's *Young Horse* sculpture.

Step 2:

Teachers will distribute cardboard material, cut into 4x6" rectangles, which will work as the sculpture's base.

Step 3:

Using their geometric and cross contour sketches as a guide, students will begin to construct their sculptures. The cross contour lines and shapes are to be mimicked by the wires.

Step 4:

Shapes and components of the sculpture can be attached by wrapping the wires around its neighboring piece, as observed in the sculptures of Hayward Oubre.

Step 5:

Students are encouraged to secure their sculpture to the base of the cardboard by poking holes in the cardboard with the wires, threading them through, then bending the wires to become flush with the cardboard.

Students may use scissors or wire cutters to adjust the length of the wire for better use.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS

The following curriculum standards can be addressed by activities and discussions related to *Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity*.

LOUISIANA STATE STANDARDS

Science:

- 2-PS1-1: Plan and conduct an investigation to describe and classify different kinds of materials by their observable properties.
- 2-PS1-3: Make observations to construct an evidence-based account of how an object made of a small set of pieces can be disassembled and made into a new object.

Math:

- 1.G.A-1: Distinguish between defining attributes (e.g., triangles are closed and three-sided) versus non-defining attributes (e.g., color, orientation, overall size); build and draw shapes that possess defining attributes.
- 1.G.A-2: Compose two-dimensional shapes (rectangles, squares, trapezoids, triangles, half-circles, and quarter-circles) and three-dimensional shapes (cubes, right rectangular prisms, right circular cones, and right circular cylinders) to create a composite shape, and compose new shapes from the composite shape.
- 3.G.A-1: Understand that shapes in different categories (e.g., rhombuses, rectangles, and others) may share attributes (e.g., having four sides), and that the shared attributes can define a larger category (e.g., quadrilaterals). Recognize rhombuses, rectangles, and squares as examples of quadrilaterals, and draw examples of quadrilaterals that do not belong to any of these subcategories.
- 6.G.A-4: Represent three-dimensional figures using nets made up of rectangles and triangles, and use the nets to find the surface area of these figures. Apply these techniques in the context of solving real-world and mathematical problems.
- 7.G.A-2: Draw (freehand, with ruler and protractor, or with technology) geometric shapes with given conditions. (Focus is on triangles from three measures of angles or sides, noticing when the conditions determine one and only one triangle, more than one triangle, or no triangle.)
- GM: G-CO.D-12: . Make formal geometric constructions with a variety of tools and methods, e.g., compass and straightedge, string, reflective devices, paper folding, or dynamic geometric software.
- GM: G-MG.A-1: Use geometric shapes, their measures, and their properties to describe objects (e.g., modeling a tree trunk or a human torso as a cylinder).

NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS

Creating:

- Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

Producing:

- Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Responding:

- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Connecting:

- Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY #2: GEOMETRICAL PAINTING

While Hayward Oubre's exploration of painting began with figural representations, by the 1960s, his production advanced in the direction of **abstract painting**. These works, which were more geometric than representational, became a study of dynamic color theory. His use of bold geometric shapes were influenced by his interests in science, astronomy, and technology.

In this lesson, students will be encouraged to create works similar to those of Oubre, while incorporating a series of geometric shapes. Students will pull from the provided list of geometric shapes and angles in order to compose their own paintings, while demonstrating an understanding of geometric measurements.



Hayward L. Oubre, Jr., *A Missile Breaking the Sound Barrier Causing Sonic Booms*, 1961, acrylic and acrylic resin on canvas board. Collection of Norm and Carnetta Davis

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS:

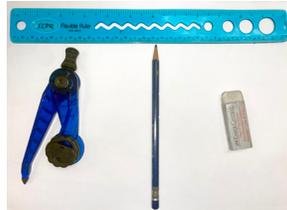
1. How can the placement of geometric shapes influence the tone of an artwork?
2. What ways can a 2-dimensional work of art support the concept of structural integrity?
3. Can color, along with composition, support the tone or mood created by an artist? Name an example.

EACH PAINTING MUST INCLUDE:

- A series of **concentric circles**
- Two **acute angles**
- 2 **equilateral triangles** (Separate from the angles mentioned above)

Step 1:

Teachers will discuss the paintings of Hayward Oubre, presenting visuals of his works and prompting students to observe a series of geometric aspects of his works. Students are encouraged to describe the mood of each piece and explain their reasoning. Teachers can use the introductory questions to guide class discussions.



Step 2:

Teachers will distribute materials, communicating expectations and geometric requirements of the project.

Step 3:

Students are encouraged to sketch their designs, making sure their designs meet the requirements while establishing a thoughtful composition.

Step 4:

Once students have finalized their designs, they can begin drawing on their final surface. Regardless of materials used, students are encouraged to complete their first drawing in pencil. Students are encouraged to use rulers, protractors, and compasses to ensure correct measurements are made.



Step 5:

Apply color by way of color pencil, marker, or acrylic paint to complete the work. Students are encouraged to consider a color scheme, consisting of a few colors, after studying Oubre's color wheel.



MATERIALS REQUIRED

Paper
Pencil
Ruler
Protractor
Compass
Markers

This lesson could be elevated by including additional or more complex geometric requirements. Additionally, students could use paint, masking tape, and bristol paper as opposed to markers and traditional drawing paper to create substantial paintings.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS

The following curriculum standards can be addressed by activities and discussions related to *Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity*.

LOUISIANA STATE STANDARDS

Math:

<p>4.OA.C-5: Generate a number or shape pattern that follows a given rule. Identify apparent features of the pattern that were not explicit in the rule itself.</p>	<p>4.G.A-1: Draw points, lines, line segments, rays, angles (right, acute, obtuse), and perpendicular and parallel lines. Identify these in two-dimensional figures.</p>	<p>7.G.A: Draw, construct, and describe geometrical figures and describe the relationships between them.</p>
<p>4.MD.A-1: Solve problems involving measurement and conversion of measurements from a larger unit to a smaller unit.</p>	<p>5.OA.B: Analyze patterns and relationships.</p>	<p>7.G.A-2: Draw (freehand, with ruler and protractor, or with technology) geometric shapes with given conditions. (Focus is on triangles from three measures of angles or sides, noticing when the conditions determine one and only one triangle, more than one triangle, or no triangle.)</p>
<p>4.MD.C: Geometric measurement: understand concepts of angle and measure angles.</p>	<p>5.NF.B-5a: Interpret multiplication as scaling (resizing), by comparing the size of a product to the size of one factor on the basis of the size of the other factor, without performing the indicated multiplication.</p>	<p>GM:G-CO.D12: Make formal geometric constructions with a variety of tools and methods, e.g., compass and straightedge, string, reflective devices, paper folding, or dynamic geometric software.</p>
<p>4.MD.C-5: Recognize angles as geometric shapes that are formed wherever two rays share a common endpoint, and understand concepts of angle measurement.</p>	<p>5.MD.C: Geometric measurement: understand concepts of volume and relate volume to multiplication and to addition.</p>	
<p>4.MD.C-6: Measure angles in whole-number degrees using a protractor. Sketch angles of specified measure.</p>	<p>5.G.B: Classify two-dimensional figures into categories based on their properties.</p>	
<p>4.G.A: Draw and identify lines and angles, and classify shapes by properties of their lines and angles.</p>	<p>5.G.B-3: Understand that attributes belonging to a category of two-dimensional figures also belong to all subcategories of that category.</p>	

NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS

Creating:

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Integrity: firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values.

Monographic: exhibiting the artwork of a single artist

Color Theory: The study of how colors interact with each other and how they can be combined to create visually pleasing art and design

Color Wheel: A diagram used in the visual arts to represent the colors of the visible spectrum as well as their relationships to one another. It serves as an essential tool for artists and designers, aiding in the understanding of color relationships.

Color Scheme: A selection of colors used in an artwork that consider color relationships that are implemented to convey a mood or create a harmonious composition.

Tone: Refers to the lightness and darkness of colors, which can aid in the perception of depth, mood, and structure in an artwork.

Tint: When white is added to an original base color in order to achieve a lighter hue or value of the original base color.

Shade: When black is added to an original base color in order to achieve a darker hue or value of the original base color.

Form: Three-dimensional aspects of an artwork, encompassing the structure's height, width, and depth, as well as its composition within space.

Shape: A shape is created when a line is enclosed on a 2-dimensional surface. A geometric shape can be defined in mathematical terms and is often qualified by a name.

Gestural Art: Artwork that is characterized by sweeping marks or movements. The implication of this is to express movement and emotions through artistic representation.

Cross Contour Lines: A type of line drawing that describes a three-dimensional form of an object by following its surface and indicating its changes in three-dimensional space.

Abstract Art: Artwork in which the portrayal of things from the visible or concrete world plays little or no part. This type of artwork is rarely representational.

Concentric Circles: Two or more circles that share the same center point but have increasing or decreasing radii.

Acute Angles: An angle that measures greater than 0° and less than 90° . Any angle smaller than a right angle is considered an acute angle.

Equilateral Triangle: A triangle in which all three sides have the same length and all three angles are equal. Each angle should measure 60° .

AFTER YOUR VISIT

ASK

1. How do Hayward Oubre's sculptures transform a common household material into dynamic artwork? What physical challenges do you think this medium presents? Can you think of other household materials that could be reimaged into art?
2. How does the exhibition encourage you to reflect on the intersection of art, education, and social change?

EXAMINE

3. Many of Oubre's paintings evoke an emotional response, based on his use of composition and color theory. After exploring the exhibition, we encourage you to visit additional works of art in NOMA's collection. How have other artists explored abstract art to convey emotion? What colors or shapes are explored? What makes Oubre's work unique?
4. Oubre's wire sculptures showcase open constructions that challenge the concepts of 3-dimensional compositions. Investigate, compare, and contrast the sculptures of Hayward Oubre with other sculptures in the museum. Examine the ways in which Oubre's sculptures explore and exhibit ingenuity and innovation.

CONSIDER

5. Hayward Oubre's artwork and impact can be seen and felt beyond this experience at NOMA. This exhibition acknowledges that artists, like Oubre, have played a pivotal role in the shaping of Modern American Art. His work as an artist and educator have laid the foundation for artistic growth of many Black Americans. Traditionally marginalized, artwork like Oubre's showcases a spirit of integrity and innovation.
6. During Oubre's career, he was guided by mentors such as Hale Woodruff and Nancy Elizabeth Prophet. Later in his career, Oubre became a mentor himself, as he served as an art educator for many students enrolled in Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the South. Consider what educators have influenced and impacted your life. Were they also overlooked, as Oubre's work and tenure were? How have those educators impacted your life and what imparted lessons still help guide you today?

CONCLUSION

7. Hayward Oubre was a creative and motivated trailblazer: The first Arts major to graduate from Dillard University, one of the first Black Master of Fine Arts (MFA) graduates from Iowa State University, and the founder of art departments at two Historically Black Universities. And while his artwork is certainly in its own class, there are no affectations or pretentiousness. His work balances expressiveness, logic, and resourcefulness, which are qualities also observed in his teaching practice. Though undercelebrated during his lifetime, his creativity and influence can be seen throughout contemporary art. Oubre's deliberate structures and thoughtful use of vibrant color schemes are apparent in works being created today.

RESOURCES

ONLINE



Birmingham Museum of Art



Burnaway Digital Magazine



Stanley Museum of Art



Little Village Magazine

FILM



Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities



Artwork: The Art of HBCU Art

AUDIO



Noah Jemisin discusses he and Oubre's student/teacher relationship.



Noah Jemisin describes Oubre as a teacher.



Cleve Webber notes the influence and outreach of Oubre by speaking about several of his prominent students.

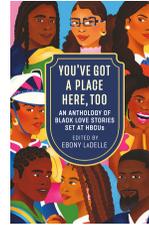
RECOMMENDED READING

CATALOG



Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity
edited by Katelyn D. Crawford

FICTION



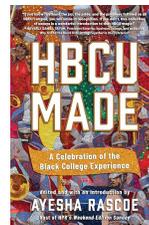
You've Got a Place Here, Too: An Anthology of Black Love Stories Set at HBCUs
Edited by Ebony LaDelle

NONFICTION



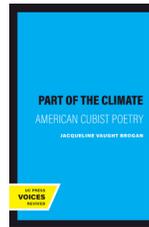
The Secret Lives of Color
by Kassia St. Clair

NONFICTION



HBCU Made: A Celebration of the Black College Experience
edited by Ayesha Rascoe

POETRY



Part of the Climate: American Cubist Poetry
by Jacqueline Vaught Brogan

YOUNG ADULT



Shadowshaper
by Daniel José Older

CHILDREN'S BOOKS



I Am An Artist
by Doro Globus and Rose Blake

CHILDREN'S BOOKS



Letters Of Legacy: An Educational Adventure in HBCUs!
by Alexis Loving

CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE TO USE THIS LIST AS A BOOKMARK.



