Ida Kohlmeyer
(Kisses and Hugs)

Note to parents: All lessons include suggested art materials; a book to read to student artists to further their understanding of the artist and their work; information about the artist; discussion questions; and step-by-step instructions for completing the artwork. Whenever possible, ideas for changing the lessons to make them age appropriate for student artists are suggested. These lessons should be educational, fun, and offer a chance to spend some time using their brains in a different way. We suggest turning on some classical music while they (and you!) create.

Lesson: Artists will create a grid, which they will then fill with abstract symbols in the style of contemporary artist, Ida Kohlmeyer.

Parent teachers: All adults should create a sample FIRST with the art materials on hand. Be creative with available materials. Crayons and markers will work with this lesson if oil pastels are not available. Use timelines, maps, internet images and cross curricular connections to Ida Kohlmeyer.

Art Supplies

- Create or buy spray watercolor*
- Sticky notes (approximately 6 per artist)
- Cardboard (corrugated) from recycling bigger than the paper used to create this work
- Approximately 6 pins/thumbtacks/pushpins- any one of these will work
- White paper approximately 11” x 13” - heavy enough for spray watercolor, such as cardstock
- Oil pastels - crayons will also work, but won’t be as vibrant or able to layer colors

*Helpful Hint: If you don’t have spray watercolors: Fill an empty spray bottle with 2 inches of water. Put old, dried out Crayola color marker inside with the tip down. Let sit overnight or a few nights. Depending on how dark the water becomes, add another marker if necessary. Dilute as desired with more water if color is intense. Remember: only put in color markers that hold hands on color wheel!!! Complementary colors will turn the water brown. Spray watercolors may be purchased online from Amazon or Discount School Supply. Discount School Supply: www.discountschoolsupply.com Spray watercolor brand: Colorations

1 OIL PASTELS are like an oily crayon. Because they are soft, artists can layer colors. They will get on hands and table and will smear. They air dry over time. There is no fixative. I recommend Crayola oil pastels 28 colors ($6 on Amazon)
Ida Kohlmeyer
Life, Love, Color
By Kathleen Kane-Murrell

Ida wasn’t interested in art.

When anyone asked, “What are you going to be when you grow up?”
Ida never said she wanted to be an artist.

What she liked to do was play basketball and read. In high school she was a cheerleader. In college she studied literature. She married, had children and traveled.

Ida said, “I didn’t become interested in art until I was 37 or 38 years old.”

Her interest in art began after traveling to Mexico. The feeling was like flipping a light switch. Suddenly she needed to know more about art and artists. This was a powerful feeling, so she went back to college. It did not bother Ida that she was much older than the other art students. Art taught her to be herself. And she was doing what she was meant to do.

Learning to draw is learning to see, and drawing became important to Ida. She learned how to draw everything. Some of her first paintings were faces of lonely children. The children looked real.
BUT.... another powerful moment happened when she was taking an art class. Her art teacher, Mr. Hoffman, taught abstract art. It took Ida about a week to think about Mr. Hoffman’s way of teaching.

Ida said, “...I didn’t have to stick to two eyes, a nose and a mouth. I had been in prison, so it was a great awakening for me.”

Overnight, Ida became an abstract artist.

Realism vs. Abstract

What is abstract art?

Abstract art does not look like the actual form of what is real. The artist still uses color, line, shape and form. It is a little like the difference between fiction and non-fiction. In writing, non-fiction tells the real story. Fiction changes the real world and tells stories that are made-up from the writer’s imagination.

---

2 Ida Kohlmeyer, oral history interview by Avis Berman, May 17-20, 1989, Smithsonian Institution (quoted in Newcomb Art Gallery Catalog)
Ida began using big blocks of color, just color. She showed the brush marks of her process. The lines were not precise but filled with the action of her hands. There was scribbling, drips and quickly drawn shapes and lines in her art. The paintings were bright and colorful and messy!

She began to add mysterious shapes. They looked like symbols and forms of things that look familiar but odd. Is this a secret language? Are these ancient hieroglyphics from Egypt or pictoglyphs of Mayan culture? Is this some sort of Asian writing? This was Ida’s own language. Sometimes an artist will give a hint what the painting is about in the title. Ida rarely does this.

Grids are an important tool for Ida. The grids look as if it is a way to organize her thoughts or ideas.

She doesn’t use rulers and the lines are not precisely drawn. Sometimes she places her shapes floating on the canvas or paper.

They look as if they are drifting and moving in space.

Deep inside herself, Ida knew there was magic and wonder in making art.

Words used to describe her art are joyful, energetic, familiar, child-like, crowded, bright and complex. Can you think of any other words to describe what you see in Ida’s art?

What does Ida want us to see in her art?

“One of the things I hope reaches the viewer of my work is Life and Love and Color.”  

---

3 “Ida Kohlmeyer, Recent Works, Morris Museum of Art, 1996” as reference. All direct quotes are Ida’s own words.
Famous Art and Artist Discussion


“Ida Kohlmeyer energetically pursued her career as a painter and sculptor from the late 1950s until her death, at age eighty-five, in 1997. Despite her stylistically identifiable work and her critical and commercial success, she has remained low on the art-historical horizon for the past twenty years. During her most productive decades, however, Kohlmeyer attracted a national audience and critical acclaim.”

Her work is in numerous collections including the Smithsonian, The National Museum of Women in Arts, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. I list just a few because you may have never heard of this artist. She was born in New Orleans in 1912 but did not decide to become an artist until she was 37. Several artists influenced her work- Hans Hoffman, Joan Miro and Mark Rothko. Hoffman encouraged her to move from representation to abstract. She taught art at the college level but quit teaching at the age of 63 and devoted herself to the creation of her own work.

Her artistic vocabulary is rich with symbols and designs that grew into a spontaneous and intuitive process. Her unique pictorial language may sometimes be recognizable, but it is often mysterious. Bright colors, grids, playful designs are all hallmarks of her work.

Discussion Questions

Look at artwork- Ask and answer questions- Cite your reasons- Explain and elaborate

• When you look at Kohlmeyer’s artwork, how would you describe the mood?
• How would you describe her color choices?
• Would you say her work is realistic or abstract?
• Does she color in all the space? What is positive and negative space?
• Do you see recognizable shapes? What do they look like to you?
• What is a symbol? Can you think of any symbols you use?
• What can an X and O symbolize?
• What is a grid? How does Kohlmeyer use a grid system?
• Is her grid “perfect”? 

---

Process

- Place large sheet of white paper on top of cardboard.
- Arrange sticky notes on the white paper to form a grid. Artists have many choices, but I recommend no more than 6 sticky notes. **For young artists, 4 sticky notes are enough.**
- Use one pin to anchor each sticky note to the cardboard.
- Move cardboard outside to spray with watercolor.

- Spray watercolor on top of white paper; do not saturate the paper, but enough to show the shape of the grid.

Allow paper to completely dry.
Remove pins and sticky notes.
Cardboard is no longer needed.
Complete the project with oil pastels (or crayons and color markers if oil pastels are not available)

Complete the grid composition by using: X and O (symbols for kisses and hugs)

Color choices up to artist.

Color around each X and O shape.

May color outside the grid box and enlarge any of the grid shapes.

May vary size of symbol.

May layer colors with oil pastels, but keep in mind complementary colors mixed will be muddy.

May fill in negative space around the grid on top of the spray water colors.

"Kisses and Hugs for Fine Artists"
Oil pastels, spray watercolors,
11” x 13”, on paper
By Kathleen Kane-Murrell
“How I Do Love Thee” by Kathleen Kane-Murrell
Spray watercolor, oil pastel, 11” x 13” on paper

Note: The more grids, the longer the time required for the project. Artists can complete the work over several sessions.

Oil pastels allow for layering of color. I did not like the spray watercolor on this one, so I colored around my grids (negative space) with oil pastels on top of the spray watercolor.

Experiment with the oil pastels. I like using white or a lighter version of the color to blur the lines.

This project WELCOMES smears, imperfect shapes, going outside the lines and bright colorful combinations.