

## ART APPRECIATION ACTIVITY

**Lesson length:** double lesson (100 minutes)

### **Materials:**

Interactive Whiteboard

Cascading Flowers Image Document retrieved from <http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/mobile/calder.htm>

Portable Whiteboard for note taking

Whiteboard markers

### LESSON OBJECTIVE

Art appreciation at its simplest means being able to look at works of art and form your own opinions. (Arthistory.net, 2009). This lesson falls under the 'Exploring and Responding' dimension of the Arts domain of VELS. Students will explore, interpret and respond to the ideas, techniques and contexts of the artist. Students will critically analyse Calder's piece and adopt his process of identifying line, shape and form in nature through a class excursion to the park.

This lesson focus is informed by the Conceptual Framework and focuses on the relationship between the Artist and the Artwork in relation to Alexander Calder and his work with mobiles, in particular *Cascading Flowers*, 1949.

It is important to note that many artworks lend themselves to multiple interpretations, in an inclusive and safe art classroom, we all must value the opinions and responses of each individual with equal merit.

### INTRODUCTION

To introduce the lesson, students and teacher will be sitting on a floor in a circle large enough that every student can make eye contact with one another. The teacher will introduce the sculptor Alexander Calder as the focus artist for the day by showing the YouTube clip Get To Know Alexander Calder retrieved from:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCQvGie068g> (Play until the 1.52 mark)

After closing the YouTube clip, open and maximise the cascading flowers image on the screen. Be sure all children can view the image.

### TALKING PROFILE

Create a talking profile of the artist by exploring the following focus questions and writing down key words drawn from student responses on the board. For encouraging students to appreciate art, that is form their own opinions, it is important to construct and pose questions which help them to identify and articulate their interpretation of a given artwork through discussion. Drawing on the information shared in the video clip and the artwork they see in the image, students are to answer some or all of the following questions in a casual, welcoming class discussion. Once the teacher feels that a talking profile has been developed and each student has contributed, they can move on.

## FOCUS QUESTIONS

### THE ARTIST

Who is the artist?

What **form** of art does he produce?

What does a sculptor do?

What **materials and processes** does he use in his work?

What textures/tones/shapes can you see?

How do you think it feels?

What do you think the artist's message is? What is he trying to say/what idea or themes was he exploring when he made this artwork? (Think back to clip)

What do you think the artist's intentions were? Hint: was he more concerned with the formal qualities of line/shape/tone/texture/colour or was there something else of greater concern (movement, kinetics)?

What do you notice about the shade? (made by the mobile in the exhibition)

What signs and symbols can you see in the artwork or do you think the artist wanted you to see?

### THE ARTWORK

What is the **title** and **date** of the artwork?

How big do you think the mobile is? (Refer to Reference A)

Where is the artwork located? (Refer to Reference A)

Why is the location important? Is there something that this painting needs to 'come alive'? (air flow)

What do you think influenced this artwork?

What do you notice about the colours used?

Primary colours are a common theme in Alexander Calder's mobiles. Why do you think he used these colours and not others?

What **processes** do you think he may have used in this mobile?

How does Calder use **line** in this work?

What do you notice about the way the mobile is joined together? Does it resemble something?

What aspects of nature has he explored? How does this artwork represent these?

What mood is captured in this artwork? What adjectives could you use to describe this artwork? Happy? Sad? Angry? Energetic? Fun?

What is the function of the artwork? If you bought this artwork, what would be your reason? Why and how would you like to exhibit it? (Eg decoration, religious reasons, political motives)

### GUIDING QUOTE

Present to students:

*The simplest forms in the universe are the sphere and the circle. I represent them by disks and then I vary them... spheres of different sizes, densities, colours and volumes, floating in space, traversing clouds, sprays of water, currents of air, viscosities and odours – of the greatest variety and disparity. (Robert Genn, 2011)*

## **GET INSPIRED**

Teacher is now to take students to the playground in a nearby garden/recreation area. On the way to and at the park students are to take notice of all the line/shape they can see in the garden. Can they find a circle, cone, rectangle, square etc?

Encourage children to collect a few items to bring back to the classroom. Remind students to only collect articles that are no longer attached to a living organism. Each student is also to collect two thin sticks, each around the size of a ruler, and bring them back. Upon returning to the classroom, students are to document the shapes, textures, lines and colours that they noticed. This is to be done on a clean page(s) in their visual diary. This can be done through small sketches, colour samples, words or other means. Inform students that, in the following lesson, they will be making their own 3D representations of these shapes next lesson.

## **ASSESSMENT**

By the end of the lesson, students will have contributed constructively to the class discussion on at least one point. They will have collected at least two sticks of appropriate size and also articles of inspiration. They will also have documented their findings from the garden in their diary in an appropriate manner.

## **EXTENSION**

If you wish to further this lesson you could look at the methods and techniques that Calder used in his piece. This would enrich the exploration of the 'Artist' component of the Conceptual Framework by helping students to understand the processes and techniques that artists used to translate their idea into a visual representation. This could be done through YouTube tutorials, demonstration etc.



### Resource for Art Appreciation Lesson

Alexander Calder, *Cascading Flowers*, 1949, painted metal, painted wire, and wire, 221 x 243.8 cm (87 x 96 in.)

Retrieved from: <http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/mobile/calder.htm>

## ART PRACTICE ACTIVITY

**Lesson Length:** Half - Day (180 minutes)

### **Materials:**

Interactive Whiteboard

Audio Visual Resource (see website)

The sticks that students collected in the previous lesson

Copper wire, 1mm gauge, cut into 30cms strips

Moulding plaster

Fishing Line or cotton cut into 30cms lengths

Twine, 2-3mm gauge, cut into 30 cms lengths

Chopsticks

Glue gun - teacher use only

Prepared drying area: newspapers laid out in a sunny spot

Laminator and sheets

### **PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**

Students have critically examined Alexander Calder's mobile *Cascading Flowers*, 1949. They have explored the relationship between the artist and the artwork guided and informed by the Conceptual Framework. They have partaken in a class discussion which analysed the form, materials, processes, mood, and function of Calder's work. They have visited a garden area to explore the lines and shapes of nature. They have documented their findings in their visual diary.

### **GUIDING QUOTE**

Present to students:

'Calder's initial and continuous inspiration was nature, but he applied advanced scientific techniques and inventions to man-made materials to produce his mobiles that seemed to have a life of their own.' (Art Heritage Program, Date unknown)

### **INTRODUCTION**

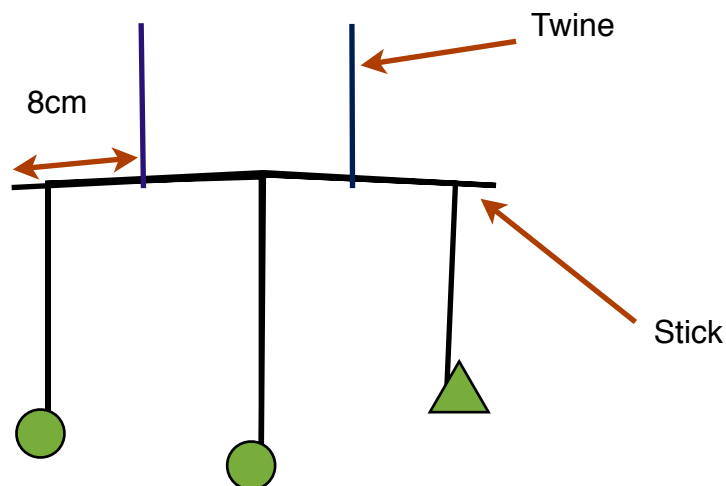
Teacher is to remind students of the previous art lesson. Conduct a short 5 minute discussion to jog students' memory of what they learnt that lesson. Prompt questions using the following terms: form, materials, processes and inspiration of Alexander Calder.

Display the image of *Cascading Flowers*, 1949 on the interactive whiteboard and inform students that in this lesson they will be creating their own 1 or 2 level mobile inspired by Alexander Calder. Each student will choose one 'focus' for their mobile, that is, they will choose one part of the garden that intrigued them the most (flower, cloud, plant, tree, feather, trunk, mulch etc). The symbols that make up their mobile will reflect **their perception** of that focus and they will use their sketches that they made in their diary last week to help them. The symbols will hang from the sticks by string to create a mobile. The mini sculptures on the mobile will be made from copper wire and moulding plaster. The mobiles will then be exhibited in the school.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Show students the Audio Visual Resource YouTube clip. Teacher is then to first model then instruct and supervise students' completion of these steps. Each table is to be covered in newspaper and set up with small knobs of plaster (two per child), lengths of wire (2 per child), chopsticks (1 per child), strong scissors (2 pairs per table), pieces of string (10 per child), pieces of twine (3 per child).

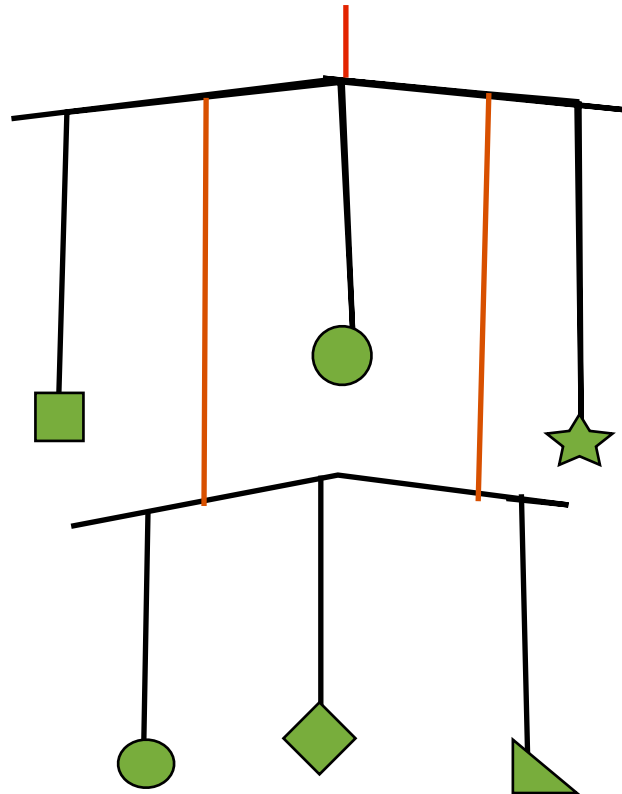
1. Using their drawings from their visual diary students are to use the plaster to make two or more small sculptures (about the size of a 50c piece) to hang on their mobile. Students should use a skewer to pierce their sculpture with chopstick to allow hanging by string. Place in drying area before moving onto the next step.
2. Using their drawings from their visual diary students are to use the wire to create two or more small (about the size of a 50c piece) sculptures.
3. On their empty desk or the floor or any flat, clear space they must 'toy' with the arrangement to make sure it will balance. It is best to start with the bottom level to make it easier to keep it balanced as they add levels.
4. For the bottom level, students are to select 2 or 3 of the sculptures and attach a piece of string to each (they can trim the string later if they wish) and tie the free end loosely to the stick. Tying it loosely allow them to move the string across the stick later/make string shorter to achieve balance.
5. Students are now to attach a piece of string to the stick (around the centre) and hold the mobile up by the string, moving and shortening the strings to achieve balance. Once achieved, students are to shift the string so that it is placed about 8 cm from the edge and attach another piece of the same length 8cm from the edge of the other end.



6. Complete Step 4 with the top level. Remind students to keep balance in mind when selecting and positioning their sculptures on each side. Note that the plaster sculptures will be heavier than the wire ones. NB. Around 15-20 minutes should be set aside for

this step, it takes quite a lot of experimenting, manipulation and patience to balance a mobile. Teacher should assist students if necessary.

7. Attach both levels and once the students are happy with the positioning of their sculptures in the mobile and it balances when hanged, the teacher to fix the strings in positioned with the use of a glue gun. Remember to tie a piece of twine top-centre so the mobile can hang.



8. Exhibit the mobiles in a public area of the school. The monkey bars on the playground are a good idea. Inform other classroom teachers of the exhibition.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Students are able to create two plaster and two wire sculptures and exhibit them as a functioning mobile. Students are able to create sculptures which reflect their concept of shapes in nature.

### **EARLY FINISHERS**

Those who finish early could write a short statement about the activity including inspiration, processes, and materials and laminate it to display in the exhibition space.

## **CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

The construction of the mobile required problem solving to make the mobile balanced. This activity would be appropriate to compliment a unit on Machines as students could use and explore their prior knowledge of loads, levers and pulleys.