



BkM Art Hangouts
Process

Goals

In Art Hangouts, learners will:

- Look closely at a work from the collection
- Explore new artistic processes through close looking, conversation, and art-making
- Reflect on their own art-making processes

In this lesson, learners will:

- Observe Stuart Davis's *The Mellow Pad*
- Create a drawing inspired by music
- Consider how mark-making can relate to sound

Materials

- Paper
- Drawing or painting materials (e.g., colored pencil, crayons, markers, watercolors)
- Speaker and music

BkM Art Hangouts are adapted from a series of virtual classes that took place in spring 2021. These thirty-minute lesson plans are designed for teachers and caregivers to engage learners with works from our collection and to explore hands-on, artistic processes. Lessons are created for ages 9–14, but can be adapted for any age group. In each lesson, participants will look closely at a work of art, consider how an artist finds inspiration, and create their own artworks inspired by these approaches. Art Hangouts are open ended, and students are invited to continue working on their projects even after the lesson ends.

Stuart Davis

American, born 1892

The starting point for this lively patterned abstraction called *The Mellow Pad* was an earlier canvas by Stuart Davis titled *House and Street* (1931). Treating each subsequent version as a riff—a short repeated phrase in music—on a jazz theme, Davis moved increasingly far from his original painting to establish independent, rhythmic color patterns that retained only a few direct visual cues to the original. Davis theorized that abstract compositions could communicate to the viewer something of the subject from which they were derived. This work embodies the “mellow pad”—jazz lingo for the “cool” place to be. Jazz is an American musical style originating in New Orleans, with roots in ragtime and blues, and was a potent inspiration for Davis. Its presence added a distinctly American component to his abstractions.



Stuart Davis (American, 1892–1964). *The Mellow Pad*, 1945–51. Oil on canvas, 26 1/4 × 42 1/8 in. (66.7 × 107 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Bequest of Edith and Milton Lowenthal, 1992.11.6. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

● Part 1: Look!

Invite students to look at [Stuart Davis's *The Mellow Pad*](#). As a warm-up, ask students to share a color they see in the artwork. Take turns looking for the color in the painting.

Example: Stacey sees the color black. Look for all of the places you see black in the painting.

- What do you notice about the shapes? How do the shapes interact with each other?
- What is the mood or feeling of this painting?
- Share your mood word for this painting. What do you see that makes you choose that word?

Share with students the title of the artwork, *The Mellow Pad*. Explain that “mellow” means laid-back or relaxed, and that “pad” is a word for “sketchbook” as well as for “home.”

- Does the title of the piece change how you see it? Why or why not?
- What about this artwork is like a mellow pad?

Teachers can share that Davis was inspired by jazz music. Davis lived in New York City during the Harlem Renaissance, a period during the 1920s and '30s when Black artists were reviving and celebrating their culture through the arts. Jazz was born out of this era. Students may discuss what they know about jazz and their associations with it. Note that, like jazz musicians, Davis would often riff on earlier compositions, retaining some elements and altering others. Teachers can play song #1 on the playlist.

- Can you make a connection between jazz and this artwork?
- Does the music you've just listened to line up with your perception of the artwork? Is there another type of music that this artwork reminds you of?

● Part 2: Explore!

Stuart Davis made colorful, abstract paintings in which shapes mingle and overlap. Inspired by jazz, the artist often riffed on or repeated themes in his artwork, and frequently made several versions of a painting.

→ How will you make artwork inspired by music?

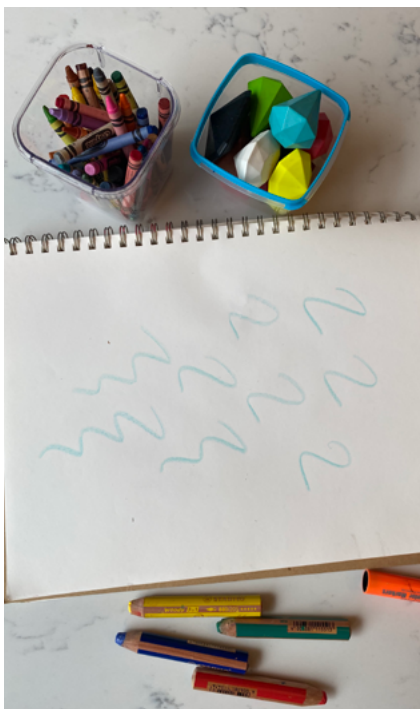
Step 1: Warm up! Fill a page with marks inspired by the music you hear. Try to use as many different kinds of marks as you can. You might include straight lines, wavy lines, short lines, long lines, dots, and dashes. Experiment with speed or pressure as you make your marks. Later, this page will serve as a mark dictionary for your musical compositions.

Step 2: Draw to music. Listen to the music and make marks inspired by what you hear.

Tip 1: Try to be responsive to the sounds. Perhaps riffs in the music correspond to the same type of mark. How will the marks you make for a fast song be different from those you make for a slow song?

Tip 2: Use our suggested playlist or create your own. Repeat this activity three times with three different songs.

Project in Progress ↓



● Part 3: Reflect!

How do your drawings correspond to the music you heard? Share the kinds of sounds that inspired some of your marks.

Do your drawings have a mood? Is this mood similar or different to the mood of the music? How did you use color and/or marks to show the mood? How did changing the music influence your work?

A Finished Project! ↓



This resource was written by Sarah Dinkelacker, Curriculum Consultant and Teaching Artist, with assistance from Stacey Kahn, School Partnerships Coordinator and coordinator of the Art Hangouts initiative. Additional assistance provided by Michael Reback, School Programs Manager.