FROST ART MUSEUM

Untitled, 1959, Lee Bontecou

THE TEACHER RESOURCE PACKET

FIU | Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum
Florida International University

ABOUT THE ARTIST

THE ARTIST

Lee Bontecou

Lee Bontecou was born in Providence, Rhode Island and grew up just outside of New York City in Westchester County. Her father, an engineer, built gliders for the military during the Second World War. Her mother, equally industrious, assembled submarine transmitters at a munitions factory. Exposure to their work fostered in her an early fascination with engineering and the mechanics of industry.

Bontecou's summers were spent in Nova Scotia, where her maternal grandmother lived on a small island. There she observed with great relish the diversity of lifeforms specific to the area. She spent her free time reading science fiction novels and studying marine life. As a youth during World War II as well as the postwar period, she saw the mingling of these two interests and the impact that industrial and technological development had on nature. This dichotomy of nature versus machine would be an enduring theme throughout her long artistic career.

Bontecou studied art at Bradford Junior College in Massachusetts for two years. In 1952, she enrolled at the Art Students League in New York where she remained until 1955.

@frostartmuseum

Lee Bontecou Bio (continued)

She was initially trained in academic painting but later turned her attention to sculpture. She studied under William Zorach, whose abstract figurative sculptures were an early compositional influence. She spent the summer of 1954 at the Skowhegan School in Maine, where she learned welding and afterwards began to incorporate it into her figurative sculptures.

Lee Bontecou's intricately constructed black holes, or voids, in Lee Bontecou's most famous pieces don't seem to belong to any type of art previously produced - painting or sculpture. These voids seem to connect to ulterior dimensions. Her work immediately calls to mind the alien worlds of science fiction and fantasy films and novels. Indeed, her methods, materials, and often vaguely unsettling images, set her apart from her contemporaries in the New York art world. Cited as a major influence by a variety of well-known artists, she nevertheless occupies an ambiguous place in the art history canon. She was difficult to categorize, both when she first emerged as a woman artist in the still largely male dominated New York art scene, and retrospectively. She was neither a Minimalist nor an Abstract Expressionist, although her work shares similarities with art from both movements. Despite being regarded as a Feminist artist, her art was not expressly feminist and, more importantly, she did not consider it as such. One of the most striking qualities of her work is that it struck a tense balance between celebrating technology and lamenting its impact on the natural world.

Source: Lee Bontecou, The Art Story - https://www.theartstory.org/artist/bontecou-lee/

ABOUT THE ARTIST

UNTITLED, 1959

Lee Bontecou proclaimed that she liked “space that never stopped.” Starting in the late 1950’s, the notion of the endless depth became a central motif within Bontecou’s visual language. The artist selected velvet as a fabric that complicates one’s perception of depth.Untitled (1959) is one of Bontecou’s early velvet-holed relief sculptures. She has assembled disparate materials in a way that exerts heaviness while simultaneously inviting viewers to consider the weightlessness inviting views to consider the weightlessness of a void-like, wall-mounted portal. These wall constructions lie in limbo between painting and sculpture an innovative idea that became Bontecou’s signature style.She thoughtfully remarked, “I just got tired of sculpture as a big thing in the middle of a room. I wanted to to into space.”

As you examine the intricate layers and details of this work, think about the artist’s innovative techniques and allow your imagination to soar beyond the confines of what you see.

"Cosmic Creations: Sculpting through a Space-Inspired Vision"

Essential Questions:

1. How does Lee Bontecou's use of materials and form convey a sense of space and depth in her sculptures?
2. In what ways do Bontecou's works reflect themes of isolation, exploration, or the unknown?
3. How can the concept of negative space be utilized to enhance the impact of a sculpture?
4. What role does texture play in the interpretation and emotional response to Bontecou's art?
5. How can Bontecou's innovative techniques and materials inspire your own approach to creating three-dimensional art?
6. What connections can be drawn between Bontecou's work and broader artistic or cultural themes of her time?

Discuss: Discuss how artist Lee Bontecou's work. Reflect on connections between sculpture, engineering and her view on space.

Connect: Visit, tour, and discuss Untitled artwork by Lee Bontecou at the Frost Art Museum .Use the Close Looking questions and expand on this dynamic artwork.

Studio Experience: Cosmic Creation Boxes
Grades 2-12

Materials:

- Acrylic paints, including metallics brass, gold and copper
- All-Purpose chipboard
- Black tape
- Brushes, various sizes
- Corrugated cardboard various sizes
- Gel scissors
- Matte gloss medium
- Plastic posterboard
- Quick dry tacky glue
- Railroad board, Black
- Stainless steel ruler, 18"
- Water buckets

Cosmic Creation Boxes

Step 1: Review and display the images of Lee Bontecou's artwork. Discuss Bontecou's life and work. Introduce sculpture and explain to the students they will be creating works using Bontecou's engineering strategies.

Step 2: Have students design/prototype 3 to 4 sketches for the Cosmic Creation Box.

Step 3: Distribute corrugated cardboard pieces in various sizes. Cardboard pieces can range from 8" x 8" to 20" x 20"

Step 4: Demonstrate to students the various engineering attachment formats: Flange, Gussett, Lash/Wrap, L-Brace, Sewing and Tab Insert

Step 5: Have students select attachment styles that will support their prototype. sketch.Using gel scissors, black tape and tacky glue students will build the Cosmic Creation Box.

Step 6: Discuss and demonstrate dry brush painting technique using metallic colors.

Step 7: Students will paint their Cosmic Creation Boxes using black and metallic acrylic paints. Metallic colors should be mixed and applied in the dry brush technique as a final coat finish.

Step 8: Students can finish their pieces with a coat of matte floss medium.

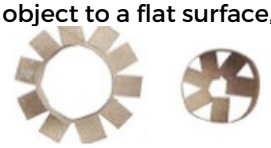
Assessment: Display the sculptures in the school gallery, library, or art lab. Have students participate in a group critique using TAG: T – Tell the Artists Something You Like; A – Ask the Artist a Question; G – Give the Artist a Suggestion. Have the students write a story about the "Hero" in their portraits.

Art Vocabulary: Abstract Expressionism, Dada, Dimension, Engineering, Flange, Gussett, Lash/Wrap, L-Brace, Minimalism, Neo-Dada, Notch Insert, Sculpture, Sew, Tab and Tab Insert

Elements of Art and Principles of Design: Balance, Form, Movement, Space, Shape, Symmetry and Texture.

ENGINEERING STRATEGIES

Flange: A flange is a projecting flat rim, collar, or rib on an object that serves to strengthen or attach. To attach a cylindrical object to a flat surface, one must first create a flange.



L Brace: Just as the name implies, the L brace is shaped like a capital "L". L brace attachments are great for creating walls, though the walls may lean over time without additional support. Tab: Tab construction builds on the concept of the L brace, with one basic change: the base is split in different directions to create more stability.

Gusset: A gusset is a triangle brace attachment that strengthens the angle of a structure. Notch Insert: Two pieces of notched material can be joined at right angles by sliding the notches together, creating an "X" shaped structure that will stand upright.

Lash/Wrap: Two pieces of material with similar diameters or widths can be attached using a rubber band, string, or yarn.

Notch Insert: Two pieces of notched material can be joined at right angles by sliding the notches together, creating an "X" shaped structure.

Sew: Use string or yarn and a needle to attach two pieces of material together with sewing.

Tab: Tab construction builds on the concept of the L brace, with one basic change: the base is split in different directions to create more stability.

Tab Insert: A tab is a piece of material that protrudes from the base material. To attach a tab to another material, cut a slit and insert the tab.

Visual Arts Benchmarks, Grades 4-12:

Grade 4: VA.4.S.1.1, VA.4.C.1.2, VA.4.F.3.1

Grade 5: VA.5.S.1.1, VA.5.S.2.1, VA.5.O.1.1

Grade 6-8: VA.6.S.2.2, VA.6.C.3.1, VA.6.F.1.3, VA.7.S.3.1, VA.7.O.3.1, VA.7.H.1.3, VA.8.S.1.4, VA.8.C.1.1, VA.8.O.2.1

Grade 9-12: VA.912.S.1.2, VA.912.C.1.1, VA.912.O.3.1, VA.912.S.2.3, VA.912.C.3.4, VA.912.F.3.12

STEAM Connections in Lee Bontecou's Artwork

Science (Materials Science and Physics): Lee Bontecou's artwork often reflected themes of outer space. Consider space as subject matter as you explore the properties of materials used in Bontecou's sculptures, which include metal, canvas, and found objects. Investigate how different materials interact with light, texture, and structure, and discuss the physical properties that contribute to the durability and aesthetic of her work.

Technology (Fabrication Techniques): Examine the techniques Bontecou used to create her sculptures, such as welding and sewing. Discuss how advancements in technology and tools have evolved since her time and how modern technologies, like 3D printing, could influence or replicate similar sculptural forms.

Engineering (Structural Design): Analyze the structural design and engineering principles behind Bontecou's sculptures. Consider how she achieved balance and stability in her three-dimensional forms. Discuss the attachment methods and their real-world applications: Tabs, Flange, Gussett, L-Brace, Lash/Wrap, Sewing, Notch Insert, Tab Inserts.

Art (Visual and Conceptual Exploration): Delve into the artistic elements of Bontecou's work, including her use of space, form, and texture. Discuss the emotional and conceptual themes she explores through her art. Students can create their own artworks inspired by her approach, focusing on how to convey similar themes in their own sculptures.

Math (Geometry and Proportions): Explore the geometric shapes and proportions in Bontecou's sculptures. Students can investigate how different geometric forms are used to create dynamic compositions and how mathematical principles of proportion and symmetry contribute to the overall aesthetic of the artworks.

RESOURCES

Art Journal, Lee Bontecou's Trajectory
https://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=3532

Attached to Bontecou Lesson Plan, Blick Art Materials
https://www.dickblick.com/lesson-plans/attached-to-bontecou

Lee Bontecou's Brave New World
https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/lee-bontecous-brave-new-world-180940689/

Lee Bontecou's Untitled, 1959 artwork on exhibit at the Frost Art Museum was made possible by the Art Bridges Foundation. - https://artbridgesfoundation.org/

The Art Story, Lee Bontecou
https://www.theartstory.org/artist/bontecou-lee/

William Zorach
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Zorach

Art Bridges

This is a teacher resource packet intended for elementary through high school students. For more educational resources, please visit: https://frost.fiu.edu/learn/schools-teachers/index.html