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# Playing with Layers: A Bruno Munari-Inspired Gelli Printing Workshop

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## Materials Needed:

- **Printing Surface:** Gelli Arts® Gel Printing Plate (a 5x7 or 8x10 inch plate is perfect)
  - **Ink Roller:** Soft rubber brayer
  - **Paints:** Acrylic paints in a limited, complementary palette. For example:
    - Primary colors (Cadmium Yellow, Magenta, Cyan)
    - Black and White (for tinting and shading)
  - **Paper:**
    - Plain copy/printer paper for practice prints
    - A few sheets of higher-quality, smooth paper for final prints (e.g., cardstock, mixed media paper, or Bristol board)
  - **Stencil & Masking Tools:**
    - Cardstock or thin cardboard (like from a cereal box)
    - Scissors and/or a craft knife (with adult supervision if needed)
    - Hole punch
    - Found objects with interesting textures or shapes (e.g., leaves, bubble wrap, string, lace, mesh from a fruit bag)
  - **Inspiration:** A few printed images of Bruno Munari's work, particularly his abstract compositions and designs that show layering.
  - **Other Supplies:**
    - Palette paper or a plastic sheet for rolling out paint
    - Paper towels or a damp sponge for cleanup
    - Apron or old t-shirt
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## Lesson Plan (Total Time: 120 Minutes)

### Part 1: Introduction & Munari Inspiration (15 minutes)

**Learning Objective:** The student will be introduced to the artistic philosophy of Bruno Munari and identify his core design principles (simple shapes, layering, playfulness) to inspire their own printmaking.

#### 1. Meet the Artist (5 mins):

- Introduce Bruno Munari as an artist, designer, and inventor who believed that art should be accessible and playful. Explain his idea of "playing with art" as a form of discovery.
- Show examples of his work. Point out how he uses basic geometric shapes (circles, squares) and simple organic forms to create complex and beautiful compositions.

#### 2. Analyze and Discuss (10 mins):

- Ask guiding questions to encourage observation:
    - "What do you notice about the colors? Do they look solid or transparent?"
    - "How does he use overlapping shapes to create new shapes and colors?"
    - "Even though these are simple shapes, does the artwork feel simple or complex? Why?"
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- Establish the goal for the session: We are not going to copy Munari, but we will borrow his playful spirit and his method of building images from simple, layered shapes.

## Part 2: Tools, Techniques, and Stencil Making (30 minutes)

**Learning Objective:** The student will learn the basic process of inking a Gelli plate and pulling a print. They will create a personal set of stencils and masks inspired by Munari's aesthetic.

### 1. Gelli Plate Basics (10 mins):

- Demonstrate how to properly use the tools. Squeeze a pea-sized amount of a single color (let's start with yellow) onto the plate.
- Show how to roll the brayer through the paint in multiple directions to get a thin, even, smooth layer. The sound should be a light hiss, not a sticky squelch.
- Place a sheet of practice paper onto the inked plate. Rub your hand all over the back of the paper, ensuring contact everywhere.
- Peel the paper back dramatically to reveal the first print! This is a "monoprint" because each one is unique.

### 2. Stencil & Mask Creation (20 mins):

- Explain the difference: A **stencil** is the shape you lay on the plate to block the paint (creating a white shape on your print). A **mask** is the paper with the shape cut out of it (creating a colored shape on your print).
- Task the student with creating their own Munari-inspired tools. Using cardstock, scissors, and a hole punch, they should create:
  - 3-4 geometric shapes (circles, triangles, rectangles)
  - 2-3 organic, wavy, or blob-like shapes
  - At least one mask (e.g., the leftover cardstock after cutting out a circle)
- Encourage them to also gather a few found objects (like a leaf or a piece of string) to use as stencils.

## Part 3: The Experimentation Lab - Layering & Discovery (45 minutes)

**Learning Objective:** The student will experiment with layering at least two colors and multiple stencils to create prints with visual depth and complexity.

### 1. First Layer - Using a Stencil (15 mins):

- Roll out a light color (like yellow) onto the Gelli plate.
- Place one or more of the created stencils directly onto the wet paint.
- Lay a sheet of practice paper over everything and pull a print. Observe how the shape of the stencil appears as negative (white) space on the paper. Let this print dry to the side.
- **The Ghost Print!** Remove the stencils from the plate. Notice the paint left behind? Place a fresh sheet of paper on the plate and pull this "ghost print." It will be a lighter, reversed image.

### 2. Second Layer - Adding Color and Depth (20 mins):

- Roll out a new, transparent color (like magenta) on the clean plate.
- Take the first (dry) print and carefully lay it face-down onto the freshly inked plate. Pull the print. Now the white space is filled with the second color! Notice how the two colors create a third color where they overlap.
- **Try it with a Mask:** Roll out another color. This time, place a MASK on the plate. Put a new piece of paper down and pull the print. This time, you get a solid block of color in the shape of the cutout.

### 3. Free Play (10 mins):

- This is the time for pure experimentation. Encourage the student to ask "What if...?"
  - "What if I use a dark color first and a light color second?"
  - "What if I layer three colors?"
  - "What if I use the string and a paper stencil on the same print?"

- The goal here is process over product. Create a pile of interesting, experimental papers.

## **Part 4: Creating a Final Composition (20 minutes)**

**Learning Objective:** The student will apply their experimental knowledge to create one or two intentional, well-composed final prints on high-quality paper.

### **1. Plan the Piece (5 mins):**

- Look over all the practice prints. Identify which color combinations and stencil arrangements were most successful.
- Encourage the student to quickly sketch or think through a 2-3 layer plan. Which color will go first? Which stencils will they use? How will they place them to create a balanced or dynamic composition?

### **2. Execute the Print (15 mins):**

- Using the higher-quality paper, the student will now carefully create their final artwork.
- Remind them to take their time, roll the paint evenly, and embrace any "happy accidents" that are part of the printmaking process. They can create one or two final pieces.

## **Part 5: Cleanup & Reflection (10 minutes)**

**Learning Objective:** The student will care for their tools and verbally reflect on their artistic process, identifying successes and areas for future exploration.

- 1. Studio Practice (5 mins):** Clean the Gelli plate with water and a soft cloth/paper towel, wash the brayer thoroughly, and put away the paints. This is a crucial part of being an artist.

### **2. Gallery Walk & Talk (5 mins):**

- Lay out all the prints made during the session, from the first pull to the final pieces.
- Discuss the journey. Ask reflective questions:
  - "Which print is your absolute favorite? What makes it successful to you?"
  - "What was the most surprising or unexpected result you got?"
  - "Looking back at the Munari images, how did his ideas influence your work?"
  - "If you were to do this again, what is one new thing you would try?"

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