



# **START YOUR ART**

**48 Warm Up Exercises to  
Jumpstart Your Art**



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# Why is bad art so good?

## **BAD ART: WHY MAKE IT?**

Bad art is what you create to get yourself out of a rut, into the groove, and ready to go. It is free from the pressure of perfection, small, quick, and focused on the process rather than the product. It's about exploring, playing, and learning. Your work, your rules!

## **BAD ART: HOW TO DO IT?**

Alone or with a group. You have permission to throw it away. Use junk or use the good stuff and any medium you prefer. Make a mess! Nobody has to see it. Your practice, your rules.

## **BAD ART: WHEN TO DO IT?**

Set a timer for 15 minutes at the beginning of your practice or whenever you need to fire up your creative neurons.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR PLAYING ON YOUR OWN**

Get yourself to your creative workspace. Pull out your stuff, then pick any card. Set a timer for 15 minutes (or more if you wish) and start playing. If you want to go easy on yourself, use the medium you are most comfortable with. If you want to push yourself into the wild unknown, use a medium new to you. Stay within a size that is small enough to finish in 15 minutes, such as a 5" x 7".

## SUGGESTIONS FOR PLAYING WITH A GROUP

- Choose a consistent size for everyone to work with. Hang them all as a group.
- Cut a large line drawing into puzzle shaped pieces. Everyone works on their piece of the puzzle then reassembles them.
- Lay a large canvas on a table. Every 15 minutes, move to the next seat.
- Leave your art for random strangers to find with a note saying “Take me, I’m yours!”



# Texture

the tactile quality or visual pattern of a surface

## Play With the Dark Side:

Peel and break a black crayon or piece of charcoal. Use only the side of it to draw an object and make bad art. No lines, just shading. Dramatic side lighting works best. Look for and record patterns of light and shadow.





## Change Is Good:

Make bad art by changing the actual texture of a plain piece of paper or fabric or clay in as many ways as you can. Fold it, scrunch it, tear it, weave it. Add things or take them away. Now close your eyes and “see” it with your fingers.



## Click and Cut:

Take photos of any interesting patterns and textures you can find. Blow them up as big as you can or shrink them down small. Take your photos in black and white or print them out that way. Use an app to punch up contrast or flatten it out. Use your printed papers to create collages. Play with scale and value contrast.



## See the Unseen:

Choose an object and look at it for a full minute. Now blindfold yourself, work on your lap under the table, close your eyes, or be ridiculous and put a paper bag over your head. Using cloth, clay, paper, or wire, create your object without using your eyes.



## Details:

Make bad art by drawing every detail in one brick, or every grain in three inches of floorboard, every fiber in a woven basket, or a three inch square of the ground outside. Record the patterns of dark and light with shading, crosshatching, patterns, or use only lines.



## Mix Mediums:

How many different ways can you make bad art depicting the texture of hair or the leaves on a tree? Try out many different mediums such as ink, watercolor, crayon, thread, patterned or woven cloth, dirt in glue, or whatever crazy thing you can imagine.



# Shape

a closed two- or three-  
dimensional form encased  
by a line or edge

## Distort Reality:

Trace a fairly flat and recognizable object such as scissors on a piece of paper. Remove the object then add another piece of tracing paper on top of the first. Trace your shape again but change your lines in ways big or small. Repeat. How many tracings can you create before the recognizable shape of scissors is completely abstract?

## Get a Move On:

Create a bad art collage using only the element of shape to create the most visual movement that you can. Now do the opposite – using shapes alone to create a visual feeling of stability or stillness.



## Break It Down:

Find a picture of a dog, cat, horse or any animal you like. Sketch it using only geometric shapes. Remember the “learn to draw” books from when you were a child? Start with the big shapes and work your way down to smaller shapes as you add more detail.

## Negative Space:

Cut out a small rectangle from the center of a piece of paper. Look at an interesting chair through your paper window. Sketch all the shapes that aren't there by drawing the space around the object rather than the object itself.

## Make a Mix:

How many different compositions can you create using two circles and a rectangle? Repeat the exercise choosing your own collection of three or four shapes. Change the size as well as the position of your shapes.

## Blender:

Find a picture of a house, a car, a person, or a machine. Trace all the shapes you can find in the picture. Now cut them out and rearrange them into a work of bad art.



# Line

a mark, long in proportion  
to its breadth

## **A New World View:**

Cut a small rectangular hole in the center of a piece of paper. Now draw at least nine rectangular boxes on a piece of paper. Close one eye and look through your paper window at the environment around you. Draw the lines you see in one box. No details. Try limiting yourself to five lines. Fill as many boxes as you can in 15 minutes.



## Doodle Time:

Draw a meandering line on paper, or draw with a sewing machine and thread, or with glue and yarn. You get the idea. Stare at your scribble until you start to see images in the shapes, then fill in the details so that other people can see them too.



## **This and That:**

Pull up the last photo on your camera or open a giant gorgeous art book from the library.

Scribble, sketch, or lay it out in one long line. Don't lift the pen or the brush. How many different materials can you use to make a continuous line? A finger in the sand? A piece of bark on the sidewalk? Rope on the floor?





## **Listen To the Music:**

Flip through random songs on the radio or pick your favorite tunes and crank up the volume. Using one tool or many, make as many line variations on paper as imaginable that express what you are hearing. Try it with your eyes closed. Try it again without lifting your markmaking tool. Try it with a wet mop on the floor.



## No Peeking:

Find something complicated like a toy car, a flower in a vase, or even your own hand. Place your sketchbook on your dominant side and your subject opposite. Without looking at your paper, slowly (like a sleepy snail slow!) follow the contours of your object with your eyes and let your marking tool move at the same pace. Draw in every detail, every wrinkle, every edge.



## Let's Dance:

Go to a park and watch your kids, have your roommate dance, or turn on the TV. Scribble out five-second sketches of people as they are moving. Glance up and try to hold a moment or two in your mind as your line captures the gestures and the idea of movement.



# Color

The hue of an object—the name of its reflected light: yellow, green, etc.

## The Artist as Thief:

Look at your favorite piece of art and record the main colors used with circles of paint, marker or crayons. The more the color is used, the bigger the circle will be. Now create your own, completely different composition using those colors. Loosely stick to the same amounts of colors used by your inspirational art piece.



## Hero vs. Villain:

A complementary color scheme uses opposite colors on the wheel. The contrast is so great that one often makes the other really stand out. See if you can use a complementary color scheme to make one color the hero/star and the other the villain/sidekick. Now, using those same colors, can you reverse the hero and villain?



## A Pal Named Gus:

Analogous colors, colors that are next to each other on the color wheel, usually get along very well together. Tell your story by imagining the main actor heading out on the town with his/her two best friends, Al and Gus. Create a composition using two or three analogous colors while imagining what these friends are doing.



## Melodrama:

A triadic color scheme is any three evenly spaced colors on the wheel. If three colors are the hero, villain, and person in distress, what is the story and which three colors will you choose? Try a different medium than your usual. Capture the feeling of the story in abstract shapes.





## Monologuing:

Imagine one color as a lone actor onstage, going on and on and on, giving a monologue. Is it a fiery speech, a whispered secret, or perhaps something in between? Your color can move from very dark to very light but it's still just one color.



## Cool It:

Create a composition using very warm colors. Now add one cool color to the mix. How much of that color do you need? What happens when you place it next to different warm colors? Now do the opposite, beginning with cool colors, and then adding the warm. Could you create a third composition with equal visual balance between warm and cool colors?



# Value

how much dark or light  
is in a color

## Three Times:

Create the same composition three times. Once, using all low (dark) values. Once, using all high (light) values. Once, with a highly contrasting combination of low and high values.

## The Third Dimension:

Value can create the illusion of depth and space on a two dimensional surface. Add form to a collection of flat colored shapes with the addition of shadow and highlight. Go back to art school by dramatically lighting a ball, a cone, or a box as you study and sketch shadows and reflections.

## Shades of Gray:

Look at a wonderful work of art or any colorful photo from a magazine. Copy it with charcoal, markers, painted paper, or fabric, using only shades of gray. Try it again using only black, white, and one shade of gray.



## Pen and Ink:

Using black ink on white paper, draw a horizontal row of five boxes. Using patterns, lines, crosshatching, dots, or anything you can imagine, create a gradation from very light to very dark as you move from box to box. How many different ways can you create a value gradation with pen and ink?

## Paint Chips:

Cruise your local paint store and pick up a number of paint chips. The kind with a bunch of value gradations from dark to light are fabulous. Cut out shapes from each part of the chip and glue them down. Which values appear to be closer to you? Which appear to be further away?



## Emphasis:

Draw a 3x3 grid of rectangular boxes. In each row, create a simple composition in the left box, then copy it across the row. Now, color in the shapes in the left boxes with different values. In the next box, switch up where you place the dark, medium and light. Repeat until the boxes are full. How does changing values create emphasis in different parts of each thumbnail?



# The Visual Language

“True art selects and paraphrases, but seldom gives a verbatim translation.”

– Thomas Bailey Aldrich

## Rephrase:

Express an idea in alternate ways.

Choose one of the five elements:

**Texture, Shape, Line, Color, Value.**

Emphasizing that element, create

two compositions interpreting

one of the following pairs:

**Add/Subtract, Bend/Straighten,**

**Bridge/Partition, Clarify/Confuse,**

**Divide/Multiply, Sharpen/Soften,**

**Exaggerate/Minimize, Fracture/**

**Weave, Flatten/Texturize, Hide/**

**Find, Nestle/Isolate.**



## Noun:

Being the element about which the rest of the clause is predicated. Pick one of the five elements. Use that element to interpret one of the subjects below:

Tree, Vegetable, Swamp, Garden,  
Prairie, Woman, Child, Man, Alien,  
Family, Zebra, Cat, Elephant, Fish,  
Frog, Rain, Ice, Hurricane, Summer,  
Winter, Home, Retreat, Cocoon,  
Cafe, Prison, Web, Mountain, Dirt.



## Searching For a Muse:

In which an artist finds the inspiration for a creative endeavor. Pick one of the five elements, then go on a treasure hunt. Find an example of the element and bring it back with you, take a picture, or sketch it. Work like one possessed by the muse and create as many compositions as you can relating to your treasure.



## Poetic License:

Special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm. Find a book of poetry or a novel and open to a random page. Choose an entire poem or even one line or sentence, and use this as a springboard for your composition. What medium best expresses the poetry? What colors do the words evoke?



## Like a Greek Chorus:

Collaborate to create a composition. By yourself, pick three elements to concentrate on. Work for five minutes on each element. With a group, assign each artist a different element. Work on one element for five minutes, then pass your composition to the artist next to you. Take what was passed to you and add to it, concentrating on using your element. Repeat.



# What Was That?

Write a short sentence in really big letters that fill up a page.

Now turn the paper upside down and pull out a few of the letters – put them together – move them around and change them so that they create an image.





# Get Weird

“The artist must create a spark before he can make a fire, and before art is born, the artist must be ready to be consumed by the fire of his own creation.”

– Auguste Rodin

## The No Hands Rule:

Draw something without hands. That's it. Draw with your feet, or your mouth, or hold a pencil in the crook of your elbow.



## Ex Machina:

Make a work of BAD ART using a machine. Any machine. What medium will you use? How big will it be? Will it be messy? Got a power drill anyone?



## **Broom, Blender, Fork:**

Use any implement found in your kitchen to paint a composition. Would you like to replace your paint with something found in your refrigerator or pantry?



## Polka Dot Polka:

Scatter random dots on a page. Turn them into something by connecting them. Do you have moles or freckles all over your arm? Use a washable marker (or not) and give yourself a temporary dot-to-dot tattoo.



## Alien Eyes:

Look closely at a knot in a tree trunk or a cut piece of wood.

Look until you see creatures in it. Bring those creatures to life.

Picture what those creatures are doing. Give them a vehicle. Draw what they might eat.



## Picture This:

Find an old-fashioned paper dictionary. You remember those, right? Open to a random page and choose the first noun you see. Now choose a random verb. Picture that noun doing that thing and depict it in whatever medium you choose.



# Big, Bad, and Ugly

“I have not failed. I’ve just found  
10,000 ways that won’t work.”

– Thomas Edison



# Big, Bigger, Biggest:

Go outside. Look carefully at something small. Sketch it big. Sketch just a tiny part of it even bigger, bigger, bigger!



## Chopped:

Photocopy a work of art. Fold up the printed work until you have found an interesting crop. Create a composition using just that bit.



## **Crinkle, Crunch:**

Find a big sheet of paper or a large piece of fabric. Any kind. Using nothing but your hands, or perhaps only your bare feet, shape it into a work of art. Now sketch it from many different angles.



## Good Enough to Eat:

Create visual instructions for how to make a sandwich – or your favorite recipe. No words. Just pictures. You can use torn paper collage, crayons, embroidery, watercolors, or whatever weird thing you can imagine.



## Deconstructed:

Draw a picture of something recognizable. Now tear it up into at least six pieces. Choose one of the pieces, glue it to another paper, then expand that detail to create something else.



## The Odd Couple:

Look around at all the mark making tools you have. Mix them up and randomly choose two that don't normally go together. Figure out a way to make them work and create a picture of a tree. Or a shoe. Or a candy bar. You get the idea.



## YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

A pocket guide to

# Critique

How to see your work  
with an artist's eye



By Lyric Montgomery Kinard

[www.LyricKinard.com](http://www.LyricKinard.com)

# **STUCK? BLOCKED? BORED? UNINSPIRED?**

Then it's time for you to play.  
Jumpstart your art with 15 minutes  
of bad art so you can spend the rest  
of your day getting to the good stuff.

*“Inspiration exists, but it has  
to find you working.”*

*– Pablo Picasso*

**Play alone or with a group!**  
**Great for classrooms!**

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