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Roxy Paine, *Bad Lawn*



Roxy Paine, *Bad Lawn*, 1998, epoxy, PVC, polymer, steel, wood, PETG, lacquer, oil paint, and earth, 48 x 120 x 84 in. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, 2011.2. Photo courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York/Shanghai.

Imagine if you could shrink down and explore this artwork. What kind of amazing things would you see? Roxy Paine made this work out of metal, plastic, and wood, but it looks like a real outdoor space...a real lawn! This artwork is also an example or model of an ecosystem. An ecosystem is a community of living organisms and their physical environment, or the place where they live. This includes plants, animals, weather, and even landscapes. Have you ever thought of your front yard as an ecosystem? What types of organisms would you find there?

Roxy Paine chose to title this sculpture *Bad Lawn*. We all know what the word bad means, but what exactly is a lawn? Is it the same as a vegetable garden or a forest? Why or why not?

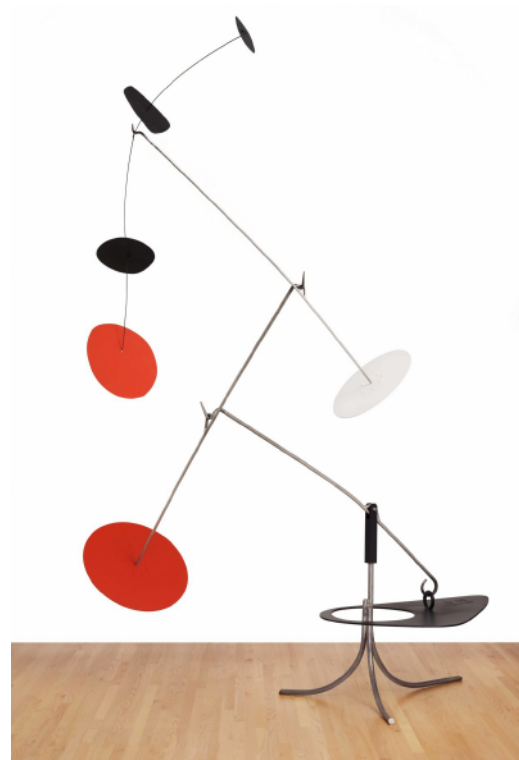
A lawn is an area of grass in a yard, garden, or park that is kept short by mowing. When someone mows the grass, they also cut down any mushrooms, flowers, or baby trees that could grow there. What roles do flowering plants, trees, and fungi play in ecosystems? Did you know that plants, trees, and fungi keep us alive? They provide food, clean our water, create oxygen, increase pollination, provide us with building materials, and even clothe us. Life would cease to exist without plants, flowers, trees, and fungi.

Let's look at the title of the work again: *Bad Lawn*. Is the artist referring to the fact that the lawn has not been mowed and is therefore bad? Or is he referring to the idea that having a lawn decreases our chances of having flowering plants, trees, and fungi to help our own ecosystem? What do you think?

Perhaps Roxy Paine created this artwork to spread a message about lawns and their purpose in our lives. Maybe he believes lawns belong in a museum as something to be observed and studied instead of in our natural environment. Maybe he just wanted to create a window into a special world or ecosystem that we often ignore. No matter what the artist intended to share with us, we can use our knowledge of ecosystems and our relationship with the natural world to think about how we affect it with our decisions—for good or for bad.

2

Alexander Calder, *Trois noirs sur un rouge* (*Three Blacks Over Red*)



Alexander Calder, *Trois noirs sur un rouge*, 1968, painted sheet metal, 130 x 118 x 86 5/8 in. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, 2009.23. Photography by Edward C. Robison III.

Take a moment to think about this artwork in terms of color, shape, and balance. What do you notice? Does it look like anything you recognize or is it just a combination of pieces? Does this sculpture move? Or is it frozen in place?

This artwork by Alexander Calder is an example of a standing mobile. A mobile is a type of sculpture that moves and balances. While some of Calder's earlier works included motors to create movement, *Trois noirs sur un rouge* depends on outside sources to actually move. We could then think about this sculpture as having potential energy, meaning it has energy stored until the situation changes and it is released.

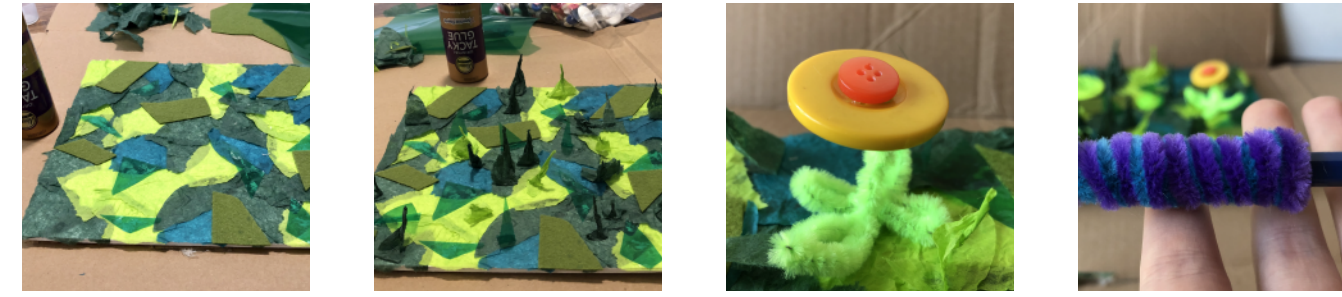
If this artwork were outside and was hit by a gust of wind, what do you think would happen? What would happen to the potential energy of this standing mobile? According to the laws of physics, once the situation changed around the artwork (the gust of wind), the energy would be released. It would change from potential energy to kinetic energy and there would be movement. Which parts do you think would move? Which parts would stay in place?

Calder was fascinated by the universe and the laws of physics. He "felt there was no better model for [him] to choose than the Universe... Spheres of different sizes, densities, colors, and volumes, floating in space". When we think about the planets revolving around the sun, we know that there is a trackable movement that creates our days, our nights, our seasons, and our concept of time. There is an equilibrium, or balance to this movement with the help of gravity, the same force that attracts our bodies to the center of the Earth and keeps us from floating into space.

Follow in Roxy Paine's footsteps and create a mini lawn of your own!



Grab these materials from My Museum Classroom Kit: Pencil, foam board, craft buttons, felt sheets, cellophane sheets, tissue paper circles, pipe cleaners, and tacky glue. Also, with permission from an adult grab these materials from your home or classroom: Scissors.



Step 1 Cover the foam board by gluing down felt, tissue paper, and cellophane sheets to create a base for your lawn.

- Use small dots of glue on a section of the foam board and smear it around.
- Then, take small pieces of cut felt, tissue paper, and cellophane sheets and place them on the section of smeared glue.
- Keep adding small sections of glue and materials until your foam board is covered.
- You can then trim along the edges of your board with scissors to get any pieces that are hanging off.

Step 2 Create grass by twisting strips of tissue paper. Fold the bottom of the grass and glue to the base. This makes your lawn three-dimensional—a sculpture!

- Take a piece of tissue paper and twist it into a cylinder.
- Fold a small section on one end of the twisted cylinder to make a base.
- Add a dot of glue to the base of the twisted cylinder and press it onto the board.
- You can bend your twisted cylinders in different directions to look like real grass.

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Much like the balanced movement of the cosmos, Alexander Calder used gravity and weight to balance his sculpture. Do you think that this sculpture would move in the same way every time? Or would there be variation in its movement? How would it change if it were hanging from the ceiling? There are so many factors to consider!

At first glance, *Three Blacks Over Red* or *Trois noirs sur un rouge* may seem like a simple sculpture of wire, shape, and color. However, after learning about what inspired Alexander Calder and the laws of physics that create balance within his sculpture, it seems that there is more than meets the eye. An artwork is made by an artist and the experiences of that artist will always come through in some way or another. What would your artwork show about your experiences?

Be inspired by Alexander Calder and create a mobile that represents your universe!



Grab these materials from your My Museum Classroom Kit: Pencil, paper, metal wire, foam sheets, wooden dowel rod, washi tape, and tacky glue. Also, with permission from an adult grab these materials from your home or classroom: Scissors



Step 3 What other plants could be in your lawn? To make a flower, find two buttons of different sizes. The smaller button will be the center of the flower and the larger button will be the petals.

- Choose a pipe cleaner to be the stem of your flower.
- Push or thread one end of the pipe cleaner through a hole of the larger button.
- Bend the pipe cleaner on the top of the large button so it stays in.
- Glue the smaller button on top of the larger button.
- Bend the end of the stem without the buttons to create leaves that you can glue to the base.

Step 4 You might also find insects crawling through the grass! To make a caterpillar, grab two pipe cleaners. Use different color pipe cleaners to create stripes!

- Twist the ends of two pipe cleaners together.
- Use a pencil to wrap the pipe cleaners around.
- Keep twisting the pipe cleaners and bunch them together on the pencil.
- Slide the coiled pipe cleaners off of the pencil.
- Make your caterpillar look as if it's inching its way across the ground by raising up his middle section and gluing the ends down. What else could you make for your lawn using the materials in the kit?



Step 1 Make a list of people, things, ideas, or experiences that are important in your personal universe.

- Practice drawing simple shapes or objects to represent the things from your list.
- Redraw your shapes on the foam sheets.
- Cut out your foam shapes with scissors.

Step 2 Add details to your shapes by using smaller foam pieces of a different color.

- Notice on the picture to the right, the artist added orange stripes to the butterfly and a white circle to the camera.
- Cut the detail pieces and use the tacky glue to add it to the larger shape.

Step 3 Take each large shape and trace it onto the back of another foam sheet.

- Then cut out your copied shape.
- Using tacky glue, stick the two matching foam pieces together.

Step 4 Take a piece of metal wire and a pencil to create the frame of your mobile.

- Bend both ends of the wire around a pencil using your fingertips. The ends should look like two "U" shapes.
- Then bend the middle of the wire around a pencil.
- Cross the two ends of the wire around the pencil to create a loop. The "U" ends of the wire should be facing upward.

Step 5 Slide the wire loop off the pencil. You now have a hook for your mobile!

Step 6 Create multiple hooks by following step four above. You will use these hooks to hang your foam shapes.

Step 7 Poke holes through each foam shape using a pencil and carefully hook them on your wires. You should have a few hooks that you do not use.

Step 8 Slide a wooden dowel rod through the loop of an empty mobile hook. Using washi tape, hang the dowel underneath a table or countertop. Place the wires with foam shapes onto empty mobile hooks. How can you create balance in your mobile?

Step 9 When you are finished arranging your mobile, use any leftover metal wire to create a large loop for the top of your dowel. Then you can hang your finished mobile around your home!



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