

Exploring Lines and Space

*Inspired by the work of
Julie Mehretu*

Grades 6-12





In this lesson, you will experiment with scale, movement, mark making and layering to understand how an artist's process can create meaning. You will draw, and then connect your drawing process to the artwork of Julie Mehretu.

You will need:

A soft graphite pencil

An eraser

Paper—as large as you can find. An open paper bag or multiple pieces

Optional drawing materials: charcoal, white chalk.



Your paper can be on a wall, a table or the floor. Using a wide gesture, make marks that span your whole paper.

Use your arm from the shoulder, and move it across the page. Think about your body, not only your fingers and wrist. Capture your body's motion with your pencil.



Explore drawing with the side of the pencil, not just the point. Try making soft light marks to fill large areas.

You can create shapes and pick up textures from underneath your paper when working this way.



Smudge your drawing in different places, using your fingers, or if you prefer, a tissue or paper towel. Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty.

How does smudging change the marks you have made?



You can use your eraser as another drawing tool. Experiment with your eraser in the smudged areas of your drawing to create lines and shapes.

Take some time to erase and open up some areas of your drawing.



Step back from your drawing.

Is there an area you would like to make darker or more concentrated? Is there an area you would like to open up and make lighter? Is there a shape that you would like to make more solid?

As a final act, work with your pencil and eraser to create emphasis by making some darker and lighter areas. Be mindful of the areas you chose not to touch, they are important too.



Stand back and look at your drawing.

What do you notice?

How do your marks move across the page? Do some marks and shapes recede in space? Do some appear to move forward in space?

How have you created a sense of depth?



Find a mark that comes forward and a mark that recedes. What actions did you take to make these marks?



Julie Mehretu, *Ghosthymn (after the Raft)*, 2019-2021, Diptych; Ink and acrylic on canvas, 144 × 180 in. (365.8 × 457.2 cm). Tom Powel Imaging. © Julie Mehretu

Take some time to look closely at this painting by Julie Mehretu.

Think about the space that you see. Like in our drawings, the lines move across the painting, but also forwards and backwards creating a layered space.

What types of marks recede into the background? What marks come forward?

Select an area where this layered dynamic is particularly strong. Describe what you see. What do you think the artist did to create these layers?

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