

*Janice Mason Art Museum*  
LESSON PLANS FOR WIER EXHIBIT  
Background Information

**ARTIST NAME: Robert Arneson**

**ART PIECE ON DISPLAY: “Jackson Pollock, # 7”**

**About The Artist**

Robert Arneson was born in Benicia, California September 4, 1930. His father, a fine [draftsman](#), encouraged Arneson to draw at an early age. Arneson also became a proficient draftsman as a young man, and he drew cartoons for the local newspaper as a teenager. His desire to become a cartoonist led him to college. The artist received his bachelor’s degree from the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland in 1954 and a master’s degree in art from Mills College in Oakland in 1958. While teaching art in an Oakland high school, he became interested in [ceramics](#). Ironically, Arneson had received his lowest college grade in a ceramics class. He became head of the ceramics department at the University of California at Davis in 1962 and became a full professor of art in 1973.

He rejected the idea that ceramic artists should produce only pieces that were decorative or had a useful function. In the early 1960’s Arneson created good-humored sculptures with political and social messages. Throughout his career, Arneson loved to outrage and amuse people with his art in order to “reveal the human condition”. Rene di Rosa, who owns thirty-nine of Mr. Arneson’s works, said, “Bob would be ever so pleased if a person burst out laughing when they saw a piece of his”.

In 1981, was involved in the biggest controversy of his career when he created a ceramic [bust](#) to commemorate assassinated Mayor George Moscone of San Francisco. The commissioned art piece was to have been the centerpiece of the then-new Moscone Convention Center. The city’s Art Commission rejected the bust, feeling it presented an irreverent representation of the former mayor.

Arneson was plagued with recurring bouts of cancer since 1974, though he worked actively until his death on November 2, 1992.

**About The Art**

Recognized as one of the founding fathers of American ceramic sculpture, Arneson brought ceramics into the world of art, adding drawings, paintings and sculptures that related to current events. Arneson’s first important artwork, “No Deposit, No Return,” represented his rebellion against traditional forms and was influenced by a Jasper Johns bronze piece. Early in his career, Arneson became part of the dynamic group of irreverent California [Pop artists](#) whose works have become known as “California Funk Art,” a profound art movement in America. Funk artists used [irony](#) and shock value of “carefully chosen and aggressively handled objects”. This movement was clearly a rejection of [Abstract Expressionism](#).

Arneson also created a proliferation of [self-portraits](#) using photographs, mirrors and drawings. His self images appeared to have a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde duality, with grotesque misshapen

[caricatures](#), which he used as vehicles to present universal concepts and feelings. By using his own image, he was able to express a frustration with the human condition in behalf of all of us. Arneson demonstrated his mastery of caricature in his depiction of himself and many military and political figures.

The piece of art in this exhibit “Jackson Pollock,#7,” is typical of Arneson’s style to spoof himself and the art world. In this piece, Arneson creates a portrait of the famous American artist Jackson Pollock, using the recognizable Pollock style. Arneson admired Jackson Pollock, and during 1983, he spent the year producing work centered around Pollock. He produced at least one drawing each month.

“Jackson Pollock, #7” is a two-dimensional drawing, measuring h 44” X w 32,” and it combines the media of [acrylic](#) and [oil pastel](#) on paper. This piece was completed in 1983.

### **Related Terms**

Abstract Expressionism  
acrylic  
bust  
caricature  
ceramics  
contemporary  
decorative ceramics  
draftsman  
functional ceramics  
humor  
irony  
media  
oil pastel  
Pop artist  
portrait  
sculptor  
self-portrait  
two-dimensional

Age Specific Lesson Plans  
*Grades K-5*

**Kentucky Core Content**

AH-E4.1.34 Describe a variety of media and processes used to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

AH-E-4.1.35 Media-crayon, pencil, paint, fabric, yarn, clay, paper, papier-mâché (Used to produce artworks).

AH-E-4.2.35 Recognize that artists choose to express themselves in different styles and subject matters.

AH-E-4.2.37 Subject Matters: landscape, portrait, and still life.

AH-E-4.1.42 Use a variety of media and art processes to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

**Objectives**

- To learn that many different materials (**media**) can be used to produce art.
- To realize that a drawing can be done with **acrylic** and oil on paper.
- To learn that Robert Arneson copied the style and techniques of Jackson Pollock in the **portrait** he did of Pollock. He admired Pollock greatly.
- To understand that the Arneson piece in our museum is a portrait.
- To learn that this paintings is **two dimensional**.
- To learn that paint may be applied by different techniques, as well as by brush.

**Suggested Questions**

1. What materials (media) were used to complete these drawings?
2. Do you see any part of the works that look as if they were not painted on with a brush? Point to that part of the picture.
3. Who was the subject of these pictures? What is the special word to describe this type of subject matter?
4. What makes these pictures two dimensional?
5. Is there any three dimensional artwork in the museum? Why is it called three dimensional?
6. Robert Arneson was a **contemporary** American artist and **sculptor**. What does this mean?

**Related Activities**

1. Have the students draw/paint a portrait.
2. Have the students do a painting where they drip the paint onto the surface as Jackson Pollock and Robert Arneson sometimes did instead of using a brush.
3. Have students draw/paint something to express how they feel. This was Jackson Pollock's style as well as Arneson's.

### **Kentucky Core Content**

AH-M-4.1.31 Principles of Design: repetition, pattern, balance (symmetry/asymmetry), emphasis (focal point), contrast (light and dark), rhythm, proportion, and movement.

AH-M-4.1.34 Identify and describe a variety of art media, art processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, experiences, and stories.

AH-M-4.1.35 Media: two dimensional-crayon, pencil, fabric, yarn, paint (tempera, watercolor), ink, and pastels.

AH-M-4.1.37 Art Processes: two-dimensional-painting, fabric design, printmaking, and mosaics.

AH-M-4.1.39 Subject Matter: landscape, portrait, still life, abstract, and non-objective.

AH-M-4.1.42 Effectively use a variety of art media, processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, and experiences.

### **Objectives**

- To create a descriptive conversation about a work of art.
- To learn that Arneson was talented and began by drawing, and later changed to working in [ceramics](#).
- To understand that Arneson was one of the first contemporary artists to move away from [functional](#) and [decorative ceramics](#).
- To realize Arneson was one of the California [Pop artists](#) whose work became known as “Funk Art”.
- To learn that Arneson’s work was characterized by [humor](#) and [irony](#) in the early years.

### **Suggested Questions**

1. Based on the background information, would you consider Arneson a follower or somewhat of a [non-traditional](#) artist?
2. As you look at the Jackson Pollock piece, how is it different from a real photograph?
3. Describe the colors in these works. What are some of the colors you see on Jackson Pollock’s face? Are these colors ones you would see on a real person’s photograph? Explain.
4. How did this picture make you feel? Happy or sad? Why?
5. Arneson used techniques other than a brush to apply some of the paint on these pictures. How do you think he got the effect he did in Pollock’s portrait?
6. What do we mean by [functional and/or decorative arts](#)?

### **Related Activities**

1. Have the students draw/paint a portrait of another person in the class.
2. Paint a picture using the drip method that Jackson Pollock and subsequently Arneson used.
3. Arneson worked in ceramics a great deal. He was also considered a Pop artist. Out of clay dough design a sculpture that would not be functional or decorative but might show humor.

## Grades 9-12

### **Kentucky Core Content**

AH-H-4.1.31 Describe works of art using appropriate terminology.

AH-H-4.1.32 Art Elements: color and color theory: primary and secondary hues, values (tints and shades), intensity (brightness and dullness); color relationship: triadic, complementary, and analogous.

AH-H-4.1.33 Principles of Design: Balance (symmetry/asymmetry), emphasis (focal pattern), pattern, repetition, contrast, variety, movement, rhythm, proportion, transition/gradation, and unity.

AH-h-4.1.34 Defend personal interpretations of works of art and architecture by using arguments.

AH-H-4.2.36 Subject Matter: portrait, landscape, still-life, abstract, non-objective.

### **Objectives**

- To know that Arneson's work in our gallery is a **portrait**.
- To be able to describe Arneson's work in the gallery using correct terminology.
- To understand and be able to discuss Arneson's two pieces of art using the art elements and principles of design.
- To examine the art works by describing, analyzing, interpreting, and judging.
- To use role-playing as a way to discuss art from a variety of perspectives.

### **Suggested Questions**

1. Do you believe that Arneson would be considered a **traditional** artist?
2. Were Arneson's **self-portraits** serious?
3. Why do you think Arneson's did so many portraits of Jackson Pollock in 1983?
4. How was color used in Jackson Pollock's portrait in our gallery?
5. What technique of Pollock's did Arneson use in "Pollock #7"?
6. Arneson was a master at **ceramic sculpture**. What kind of art had he mastered?

### **Related Activities:**

1. Have students do a drip painting such as Arneson's and then have them critique their own work.
2. Have the students draw a portrait of someone in the class and then have someone else critique their work.
3. Have students do a clay or play dough **sculpture** and critique it.