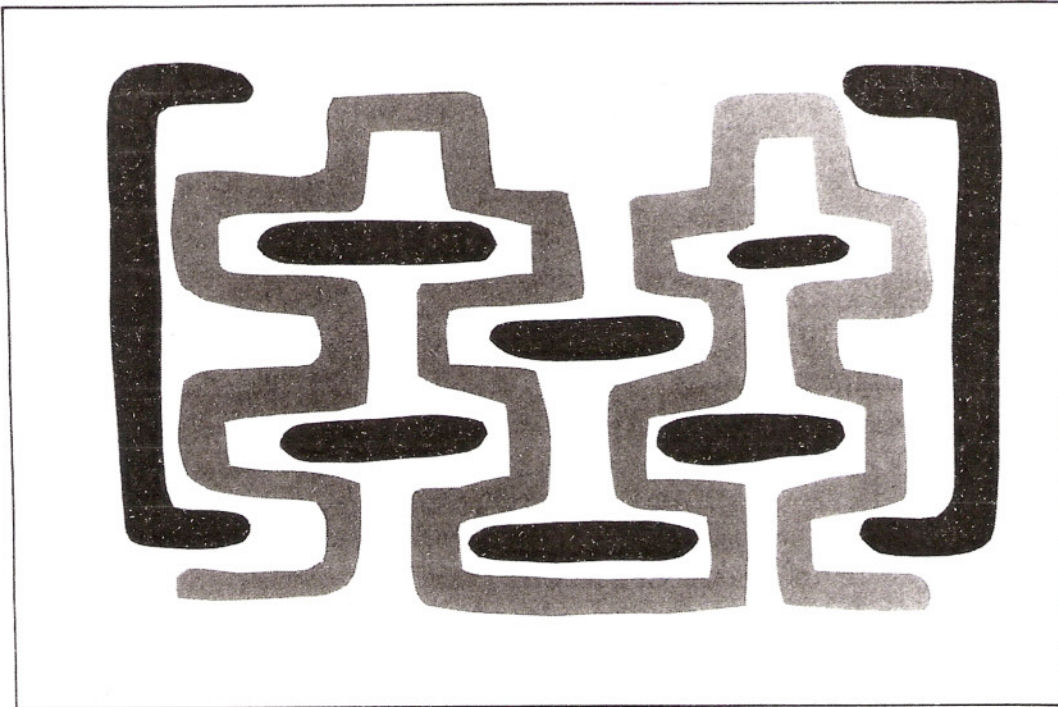


P . A . N . A . M . A

Molas



Molas are brightly colored, intricately designed appliquéd fabric panels that are made by Cuna Indian women from the San Blas islands of Panama. Molas are a relatively new art form, having appeared in the last century. The word *mola* originally referred to an entire piece of clothing, a dress or blouse. Now *mola* signifies just the brightly colored panels that appear on the front and back of Cuna blouses.

Molas are an important part of the everyday costume of the Cuna women, who also wear wraparound sarongs, beaded bracelets, gold nose rings, and vertical stripes down the middle of their noses. Cuna men wear traditional Western attire.

Women make molas in their spare time, using machine-made cloth sewn by hand. Fabric is layered with two to seven layers of fabric, sewn together, cut, and then resewn to create an intricate, multicolored design. Children learning how to sew molas make two-layer molas, using their mother's scraps.

Older molas depict scenes from everyday life such as gathering coconuts or paddling canoes. Compositions also included indigenous plants and animals as well as completely abstract geometric designs. Contemporary molas often have numbers, letters, and trademarks incorporated into their designs. You may want to look at the abstract elements of labels and trademarks with your students. Then they can choose to use them in their mola design if they like.

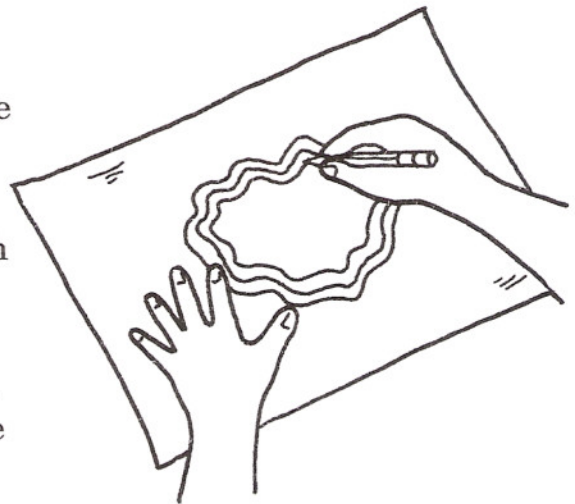
HOW TO MAKE A **Mola**

Materials

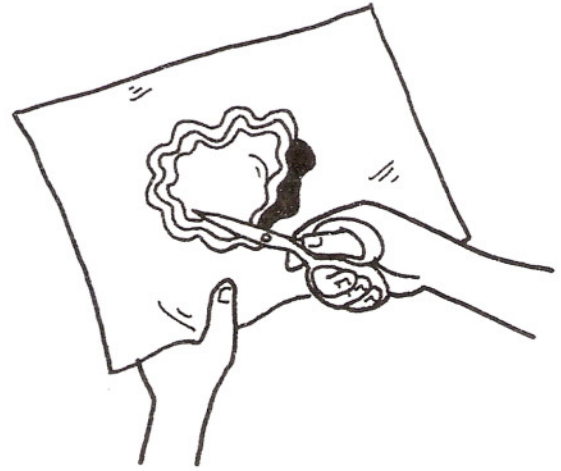
- scissors
- pencils
- glue
- paper scraps
- construction paper, at least two 9 × 6-inch pieces of contrasting colors for each student

Directions

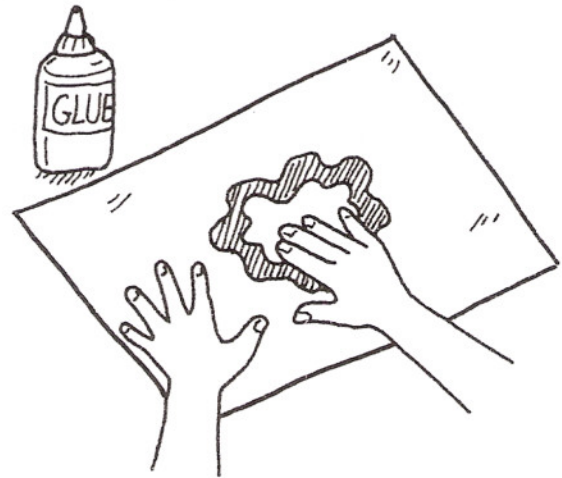
1. Draw a simple design using one continuous line on the first piece of construction paper. The line does not have to connect to itself. Use a plant, animal, person, logo, or abstract shape for your design.
2. Draw a second continuous line about 1/4 inch away from the original line.
3. Draw a third continuous line about 1/4 inch away from the original line on the other side. There should be 3 lines, with the original line in the center.



4. Cut along the outer line in order to remove the entire design from the piece of construction paper.



5. Glue the design to the contrasting piece of construction paper.



6. Cut leftover paper or additional scraps into shapes to glue to your design. Let dry.

Follow-up

- Put the molas together to make a large wall hanging to display in your classroom.
- Have students draw mazes, using molas for inspiration. Let pairs of students attempt to solve each other's mazes.