

Literary Still Life

Week 3: Content Focus: Parody
Technique Focus: Pattern-making with Stamps and Stencils

Parody: The imitation of the form or content of a prior artwork either for comic effect or to ridicule it or its author.

In my painting [below right] called “Guess Who’s Coming for Dinner?”, I parodied Matisse’s original work [below left], by using his basic composition and general subject matter, but making changes that make my version more personal and more contemporary. Besides the humor, there is also some deliberate ambiguity in this piece. Firstly the title [are the penguin guests we see through the window coming to *have* dinner, or are they themselves the dinner?], and secondly, the knife on the table, partly hidden by the turned up corner of the tablecloth: Is it for cutting fruit or something else more sinister? Is the penguin under the table peeking at the young woman’s legs or hiding?

Painting Exercise:

Create a parody of an advertisement you’ve seen in a magazine or newspaper. Alternatively, you can do a little research and do a parody of another work of art. Use a stamped or stencilled pattern somewhere in this painting. See the next page for some information about working with stamped images and creating patterns.

Have fun with this!



*Harmony in Red, Henri Matisse, 1908-09
Oil on Canvas*



*Guess Who's Coming for Dinner?
Ellen Fountain
Watercolor on Paper, 30'' x 40'' image*

Making a Stamp

Because I use lots of patterning in my paintings, I've explored lots of ways to create patterns without having to paint each pattern element over and over again. One of the techniques I use is stamps, either hand-made ones, professionally made ones (from my design) or ready-made ones.

Making a Stamp from an Eraser



Cut your eraser in half - you need a flat surface



Draw your design on the flat surface with a pencil



Use an X-acto knife to cut away around your design -- make the vertical cuts first, right along the lines of your drawing. Take material away to a depth of about 1/8 inch.

An easy material to use for making a stamp is a rubbery eraser (pink pearl or green pearl). Get the largest one you can find. The first step is to cut the eraser in half (or quarters if your design is small). The cut surface needs to be very flat, as it is your stamping surface. If it is uneven, it will not stamp well.

Follow the directions in the illustration to create your stamp. Be very careful when carving! You want to cut the eraser, not your fingers!

The stamps that I use the most are ones that can be used to make a variety of patterns, rather than a single motif. At right is a photo of some of my hand-cut stamps. Take the circled stamp, for example. I can use that stamp in a number



of different ways to create larger motifs.

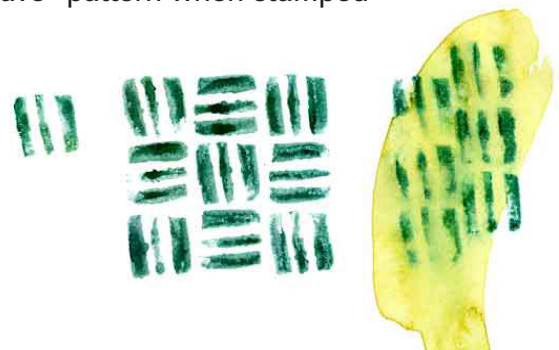
[left] I've also used it as stylized "grass" in several of my southwest series paintings.



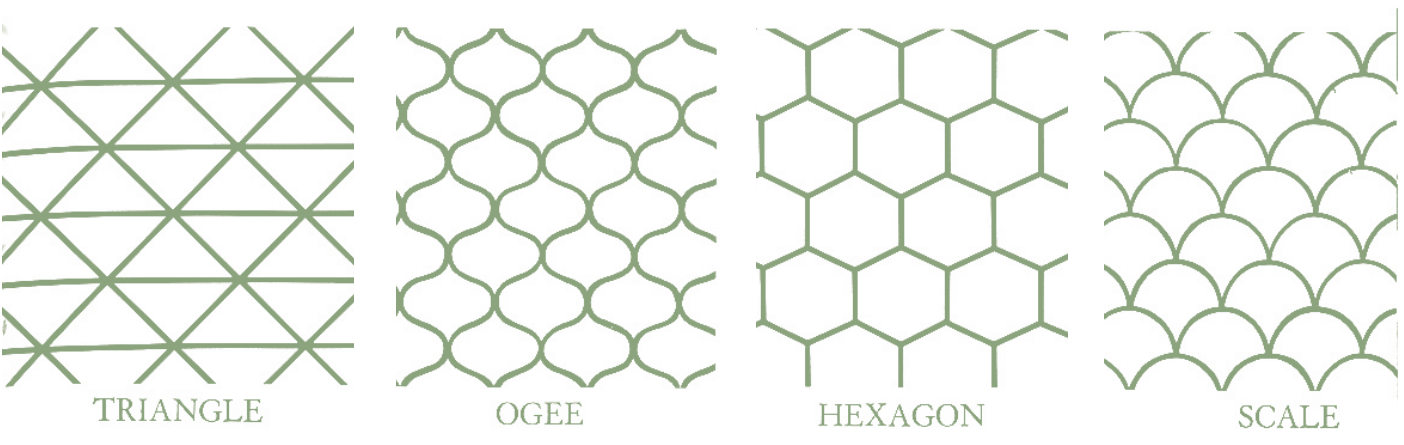
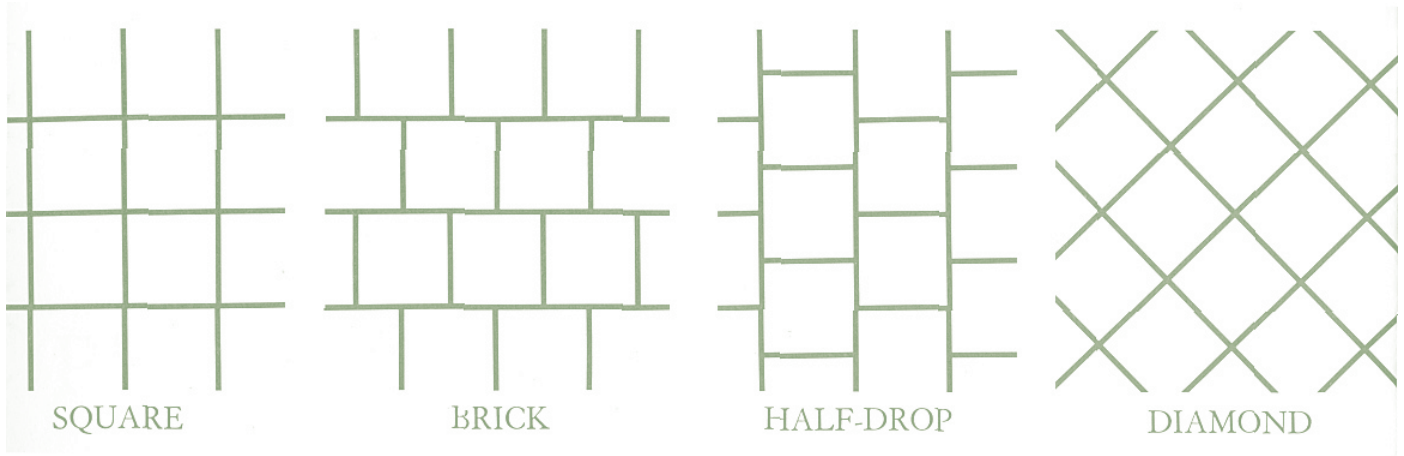
You can also combine the stamps with hand-painted strokes or marks, or paint over the stamped area to soften it, or change its color slightly. Note how in the sample below right, the stamp made up of three parallel lines makes a great "basket weave" pattern when stamped at alternating right angles.



You can buy ready-made stamps, or have any line drawing made into a stamp at an office supply/stationery store that makes rubber stamps.



Use a "dry" wash (mostly paint, not much water) to use with your stamps. You can apply the paint to the stamp with a



Above are the basic “networks” for patterns. Regular all-over patterns generally follow one of these basic networks, which can either form an invisible grid for the placement of individual motifs or design units, or become an integral and visible part of the pattern (plaids and checks, for example). The versatility of these networks lies in the fact that they interlock or connect endlessly in any direction. M.C. Escher understood this perfectly, and many of his wondrous graphic works take advantage of the interlocking nature of patterns.

Keeping a basic network in mind as you stamp or create stencils will help you create a more believable illusion of fabric in your paintings.



In my painting, 'In Pursuit of Something Good' [detail shown above] I used the ogee network in the pattern at the top, a square network for the white checked fabric, and stripes (variation of the square network) for the other two fabrics.

Further Reading on Pattern:
 Cristie, Archibald H., *Traditional Methods of Pattern Designing*
 Edwards, Edward B., *Pattern and Design with Dynamic Symmetry*
 Justerna, William, *The Pleasures of Pattern*
 Kepes, Gyorgy, *Module, Proportion, Symmetry, Rhythm*
 Escher, M.C., *The Graphic Work of M.C. Escher*, 2nd Rev.