**ART SPOT:**

**Raft**

All Ages

60 mins

Learn about the work of Mernet Larsen and create a hanging sculpture inspired by her painting *Raft*.

**Supplies**

Cardboard, construction paper, scissors, hole punch, markers, glue stick, string.

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*Raft by Mernet Larsen*

Mernet Larsen is an artist who has been active since the 1970s, and Professor Emeritus at the University of South Florida. She currently lives in Tampa and in Jackson Heights, NY. Larsen is known for her geometric figures and landscapes that are responding to paintings from art history. Her inspirations include art from the Italian Renaissance, abstract geometric art from Russia, Japanese handscrolls, and Cezanne.

Larsen based her painting *Raft* on collections of geometric shapes she found in paintings by early 20th century Russian artists El Lissitzky and Kazimir Malevich. She then used those shapes to depict a swimmer and a fisherman that you might find on bridges and piers in the Tampa Bay area. Unexpected and interesting things happen when you depict organic things with only geometric shapes. The shapes that make up the objects and people in the painting are clear and precise, but how those shapes interact and where they are located in this geometric space becomes less clear and more surprising the more you look at it.

For example: are the dark diamond shapes holes in a gray surface, or are they the bottoms of clouds that are floating in a gray sky? Are the figures surfing down a huge wave, or are we looking at a very calm sea from an extreme angle? We know the horizon is far away, but when we notice how the tip of the fisherman’s head is resting on the horizon, what once felt very far away now feels unusually close to us! Notice how the raft is floating on the water. Is it floating perfectly flat on the water, or is it at an angle with some of the raft sticking up in the air like a skateboard? How is that fisherman balancing on the raft? And why do the parts of the raft that are farther away appear bigger than the parts of the raft that are closer to us? All of this uncertainty contributes to the mood of this painting.

This is just scratching the surface of what you can see in this painting, and so many more questions can arise while looking at *Raft*. Something else we want to ponder for today’s project is this: **What do you think is underneath the surface of the water in this picture?** For this project we will imagine what is beneath the surface and try to depict those things only using geometric shapes. We’ll then use our undersea geometric objects to create a hanging sculpture. We’ll reverse where we expect to see our undersea objects by hanging them from the ceiling! That way our sculptures will be a part of the same topsy-turvy geometric world of Mernet Larsen’s *Raft!*
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Getting Started

1. Cut a piece of cardboard into a 9 x 9 inch square and glue a piece of construction paper to the top of it. This will eventually represent the water, so pick a color that reminds you of the ocean. You can color with markers if you are using only white paper.
2. Draw a spiral made out of straight lines like the example, and cut along that line.
3. Imagine the things that might be under the surface of the water, and draw your ideas on colored construction paper. Try to only use simple geometric shapes in your creations (squares, circles, triangles, and rectangles). Make sure to leave enough space to punch a hole through the top of each drawing.
4. Cut out your drawings and add details to the other side of your shape.
5. Use a hole punch at the top of each one. If you don’t have a hole punch use a pencil or chopstick.
6. Use a hole punch to make one hole in your cardboard spiral for each drawing you’ve made, and use string to tie each one to your cardboard spiral.
7. Punch a hole in the center of your cardboard spiral and tie a piece of string to it. Ask a grownup to help you hang your creation from the ceiling, or tie it to a long stick to represent a fishing pole, and your geometric fishing scene is complete!

Further Explorations
To further challenge yourself, and to start constructing imagery in a way similar to Larsen, cut out lots of different geometric shapes, and start to move them around and put them together until you begin to recognize images in those abstract structures. Glue them together and use them as the hanging elements in your sculpture. You can vary the size of your hanging elements too. Try to make one hanging element really big and one really small.