

# Open Studio

## A Collection of Art-Making Ideas by Artists

### Cheryl Donegan

## “Scratching the Surface”

# Aspen Art Museum

## September 2018

#### About Open Studio

Open Studio makes contemporary art education accessible to educators and students around the world by offering a collection of classroom activities created by noted international artists. The activities cover a wide range of materials, media, and subject matter, and can be tailored to students of all ages. This project was originally conceived by Los Angeles-based artist Mark Bradford for the J. Paul Getty Museum and has since expanded to the Aspen Art Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



Photo: David Goldsmith

#### About the Artist

Cheryl Donegan is the AAM's 2017–18 Gabriela and Ramiro Garza Distinguished Artist in Residence. She earned her BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and her MFA from Hunter College. She gained critical acclaim for her political, feminist performance and video work in the 1990s, and continues to work in painting, fashion, and other media to investigate gesture, beauty, and perception. Solo exhibitions of her work have taken place at: Kunsthalle Zürich (2017); New Museum (2016); White Flag Projects (2013); Rockland County Museum of Art (2009); and White Columns (2001).

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## Introduction

This project aims to exhibit how layers come through to the surface via the process of uncovering in unexpected ways. This project might best be done with young children who like to experiment with materials. Children of all ages can transform materials, and older children, especially, can be engaged by discovering through collage and “adding” to the picture by subtracting from the surface.

Demonstrate to kids that sometimes the art process involves subtraction, undoing, or taking away, rather than always adding, to create something new. This can illustrate that a surface often involves multiple layers that can be formed and revealed through time and physical processes. It can also be used to demonstrate concepts like “on top of” and “underneath,” encouraging an understanding of “layers.”



Cheryl Donegan, *Empire Today*, 2010. Metallic tape, acrylic, collage, fabric, adhesive vinyl, glitter, acrylic, water-based oil paint and spray paint on archival cardboard mounted on MDF, 18 x 24 in (45.72 x 60.96 cm). Courtesy the artist

## STEP 1

Gather materials for the collage:

### Base

- Paper for the base of the collage: poster paper, heavy construction paper, oak tag, corrugated cardboard, cardboard found in shirt packaging, or any other type of stiff paper

### Collaging

- Magazine pages with text or image
- Pieces of wrapping paper or other colorful papers from cards and notes
- Acetate or any hard, transparent plastics that are available
- Strips of fabric
- Colored or patterned tape
- Glue sticks
- Tape (optional for edges)

### Surface

- Tinfoil
- A scratching tool: chopsticks, popsicle sticks, tongue depressors, or dead ball-point pens

## STEP 2

Have students begin by making a collage on the stiff cardboard or paper base.

Encourage an abstract collage of their choice, filling the entire base in layers of text, colors, transparent materials, and/or cloth strips.

Layer up and glue down all of the materials onto the surface, making sure none of the background's base shows through.

Once the collage is dry, have students cover the collage with a sheet of aluminum foil so that it completely hides the collage, wrapping the tinfoil around the back of the collage and folding the edges over.

The edges can be secured with glue or tape if desired.

## STEP 3

Have the students delicately begin to scratch (like a scratch card or a lotto ticket) into the surface of the tinfoil with the scratching tool.

Ask them to scratch delicately, as if they are an archaeologist searching for the layers below, or an animal delicately scratching the bark of a tree or earth to hunt for food. Encourage them to notice the marks they make while using their tool to scratch the surface...is it a squiggly mark? A "scritch-scratchy" mark? A hatch mark?

Encourage students to reveal the underlying colors, patterns, and texts so they're actually "drawing" into the surface, not violently ripping it. While using the scratching tool, the tinfoil will inevitably tear, partially revealing the imagery in the underlying collage. This "re-appearing" imagery can look new and unfamiliar. Encourage kids to reveal it like little "windows" or "clues" rather than rip off the tinfoil.

The picture can be rotated any way during the process. Encourage students to examine the process while engaged to see it as revealing what is "underneath" in a surprising way.



Cheryl Donegan, *Crack 4*, 2010. Metallic tape, sheet metal, and spray paint on MDF, 24 x 18 in (61 x 45.7 cm).  
Courtesy the artist and David Shelton Gallery

By scratching away at the surface, they can experiment with revealing shapes and partial images to create a unique picture. The resulting collage will combine surface texture and multiple layers beneath, maybe some of the original backing layer.

#### STEP 4

The final collage can ideally portray a surface that is thoroughly “worked” in terms of an abstract image that balances a shiny, scratchy surface “drawing” with bits of text, partial images, and colors peeking through. Have a discussion that considers an ancient wall that reveals the many layers of human presence.

Ultimately, this art project can be additive and subtractive, as students can continue, if they choose, to add items on top of the multi-surfaced collage.