

MEET THE ARTIST

Kong Ho is a successful artist who also happens to have a disability. At the age of one, Mr. Ho acquired polio and now uses heavy leg braces for walking. But to Mr. Ho, this difficulty in walking is no big deal. Mr. Ho graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and then received his Master of Fine Arts in painting and drawing from Texas Tech University. After traveling and working in many countries, Mr. Ho immigrated to the United States in 2000. He is currently an assistant professor of art at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, Pennsylvania. We asked Kong Ho a few questions. Take a look at what he had to say.

When did you first start creating art?

Mr. Ho: I started to seriously make art when I was studying for a B.A. degree in fine arts at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. At that time I was fascinated with geometrical forms, bold colors, and simplified compositions. My early work was very abstract.

How would you classify or describe your art?

Mr. Ho: I usually introduce myself as a two-dimensional artist. My paintings are generally abstract designs. With murals, I try to create large compositions that incorporate the history and social heritage of each community's geographic region.

What inspires your art?

Mr. Ho: My inspiration comes from my interests in science, mathematics, and Eastern philosophy. I look to mathematics and science together because each of these disciplines presents different views about the order of the natural world, which fascinates me. Eastern philosophy helps to connect me with the natural world from which I draw much of my inspiration. The Taoist concept of yin and yang, or opposing forces, provides a good analogy to the opposing colors, shapes, and values in my abstract acrylic and watercolor paintings.

What themes and images do you like to include in your art, and why?

Mr. Ho: I am particularly drawn to spirals, which have become a kind of trademark in my abstract paintings. I also incorporate mathematical concepts like the Fibonacci sequence and the Golden Ratio in my work. Obviously, I cannot make a pleasing composition from a mathematical diagram or from a bunch of spirals, so what I do instead is to look for natural objects like seashells and leaves with forms or structures that are based on these concepts and designs. A nautilus shell has a defined spiral and it is a beautiful and elegant object. One other important symbol that occurs in many of my paintings is wings. For me, wings represent my desire to break away from the Earth and my own physical disabilities by soaring high into a sky of imagination.

How do you go about creating a painting or mural (what is the process)?

Mr. Ho: The initial process for creating murals and paintings is the same. First, I make sketches in pencil of the individual elements that I think might appear in the picture and then I experiment with the placement of these objects in a composition. Next, I select and draw objects from things that I have in my studio, such as favorite seashells. After I have developed a satisfying composition I then

enlarge my design and redraw it onto a piece of unprimed canvas or watercolor paper. After this, I will splash colors onto the canvas to create random patterns that represent the concept of chaos or disorder. The splashes and random spills left by the paint partially cover up my carefully rendered composition, so that it becomes reorganized and revitalized. I then sit and study the interesting patterns that the splashed and dribbled paint has left on the canvas. After observing these random designs I can begin to see how these shapes might be developed and integrated into more defined objects, like an abstract nautilus shell or a bird's wing.

Growing up, did you feel that people treated you differently because of your disability?

Mr. Ho: When I was growing up I attended a Catholic school where everyone was treated the same. In addition to support from my family, I also was given the opportunity to participate in outdoor activities with other kids under the supervision of a kindly priest named Father Woo. Father Woo really helped me to feel more confident about myself. That feeling of confidence in my ability to do anything that I want to do is still with me today.

What advice do you have for young people who aspire to be artists?

Mr. Ho: There are many categories within the field of art, so my first advice to any aspiring artist would be to do some research into different art related careers and then find a college that offers a well-developed art curriculum. My experience as an art teacher has taught me that while one budding artist might become interested in commercial design, another artist might be happier making independent art for a gallery. However, no matter what branch of art a person chooses, they must be prepared for a lot of hard work and a lot of stiff competition.

What advice do you have for young people who have physical disabilities?

Mr. Ho: I think that young people can often turn a disability into an advantage if they give themselves a chance. When I was a child I was unable to run around the school yard with my more able-bodied friends, so I learned to have more patience and to appreciate the extra quiet time that I had for developing my art. Also, there are amazing art organizations for people with disabilities like VSA arts, which I have been actively involved with since 1996. Whether it is for personal pleasure or practiced as a career, I believe that everyone, regardless of any disability that they may have, can create art.

IS THERE MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE?

In his artwork, Kong Ho uses a variety of colors, textures, and shapes. He uses images found in nature, as well as abstract images found in math. Mr. Ho mixes these symbolic images with random marks to create paintings that are somewhat . . . *mysterious*.

Take a few minutes to check out *Copper Wings & Yellow Spiral*, Kong Ho's painting featured on the poster. Then, answer the questions below. Use the back if necessary.

1. What images do you see in the painting? _____

2. Is your eye drawn to any one image, or do you look at the painting as a whole? _____

3. Do you notice a theme that ties these images together? _____

4. What images from nature do you recognize? _____

5. What math-related concepts do you notice? _____

6. How would you describe the colors used in the painting? _____

7. How does Kong Ho create a sense of texture? _____

8. How does Kong Ho use shapes in his painting? _____

9. What do you think Kong Ho wants you to take away from this painting? _____

Did your view of this painting differ from your classmates'? Just as artists have different styles, people interpret images differently. The same is true for who we are and the way we learn—we all have different styles and different strengths. There may be some things you are good at, and some things you are not so good at. The key is to find what works for you.

When asked what he wants people to take away from his art when they look at it, Mr. Ho responded:

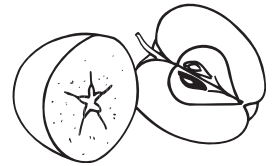
"When people look at my murals I hope that they can better understand something about the heritage of the community in which they are placed. But when someone views my paintings, I hope that he or she feels drawn into the work. I want the person looking at my work to feel as though they are experiencing a colorful symphony. I also want my art to stimulate an interest to seek out the beauty of the natural world."

SHAPES AND NUMBERS BEYOND YOUR MATH BOOK

When you look around you, do you see math? Numbers, shapes, and patterns are everywhere—not just in your math book! In fact, in the 1200s, a famous mathematician named Fibonacci wrote down a list of numbers that are often found in nature, art, architecture, and science. These numbers make up the Fibonacci sequence. Take a look at the first several numbers in this infinite sequence and check out the rule for how the pattern is generated.

Fibonacci sequence: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233, etc.

Rule: To get from one number to the next in the sequence, you add the previous two numbers together (for example: $1+1=2$; $1+2=3$; $2+3=5$; $3+5=8$; $5+8=13$; $8+13=21$; $13+21=34$)

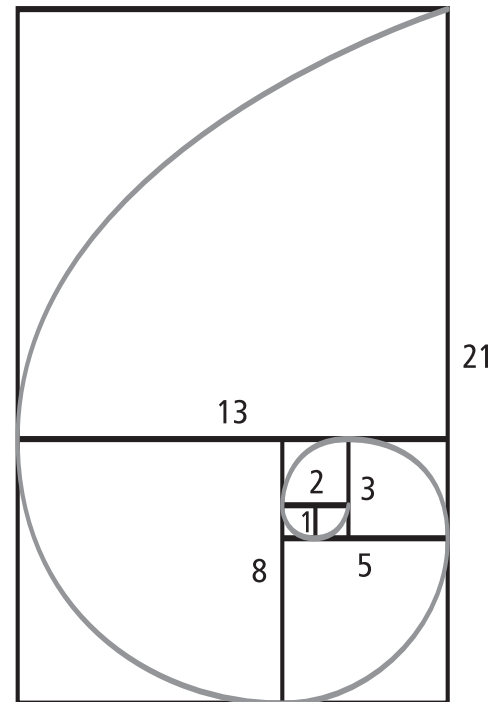


So, where do you see these numbers? The number of petals on flowers, points on tree leaves, and seeds or chambers in fruit and vegetables are usually Fibonacci numbers.



The Fibonacci numbers can also be used to create spirals like the nautilus shell, and the rows seen in pinecones, artichokes, and pineapples. You can create your own spiral by following these steps:

1. On a piece of graph paper, mark a rectangle that is 13 units across by 21 units high.
2. Draw a horizontal line dividing the rectangle into a square on the top (13x13) and a rectangle on the bottom.
3. In the new rectangle, draw a vertical line to create a square on the left (8x8) and a rectangle on the right.
4. Now in the new rectangle, draw a horizontal line to create a square on the bottom (5x5) and a rectangle on the top.
5. Next, draw a vertical line through the new rectangle to create a square on the right (3x3) and a rectangle on the left.
6. Now, draw a horizontal line in the new rectangle to create a square on the top (2x2) and a rectangle on the bottom.
7. Finally, draw a vertical line through the new rectangle to create two squares (1x1).
8. Now, connect the spiral by creating arcs. Using a compass, place the pencil in the top right corner of the one-inch square on the right side. Draw downward to the bottom left corner of the square to create a quarter circle arc. Then draw a quarter circle arc from the bottom right corner of the left-sided one-inch square to the top left corner. Continue drawing quarter arcs through each square you created from the point where the last arc ended until you get to the top right-hand corner of the largest square.



NOW IT'S YOUR TURN!

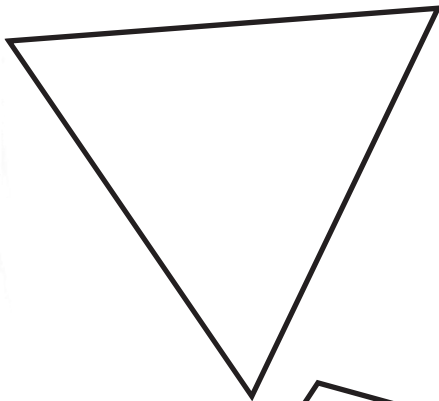
With your group, brainstorm places where you see patterns, shapes, and the Fibonacci numbers, and list them on the back of this sheet. When you are done, choose some of these items to illustrate or paint.

Name: _____ Date: _____

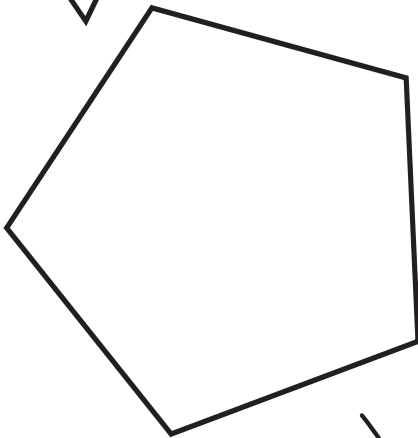
IT'S SHAPING UP!



Now it's your turn to be the artist. Think about the shapes that you discovered when you brainstormed your list in Activity Three. Did you find any of the shapes outlined to the left? Using these shapes, create a drawing or painting. You can create an abstract interpretation of something you put on your list, or create an image that represents something found in nature. Another alternative is to design something that you feel represents you. To get started, cut out or trace the shapes onto a larger sheet of paper. You can use each shape more than once. Your teacher will provide you with additional instructions that you can note below.



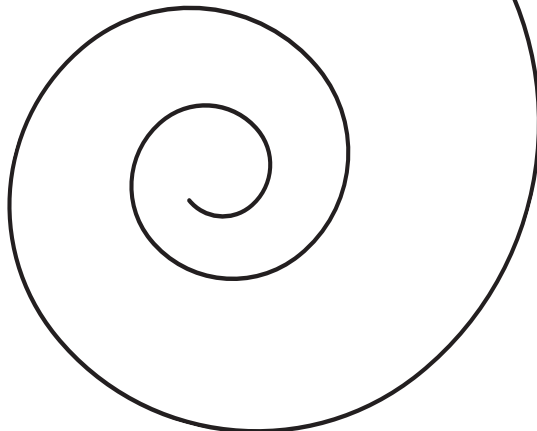
Medium to be used (painting, drawing, sculpture, etc.): _____



Type of image to create (abstract, landscape, etc.): _____

Shapes to be used: _____

Number of shapes to be used: _____



Project due date: _____
