

From Darkness to Light

Arts integration lesson by [Malaika Latty](#)

Grades 6–12

Teaching about Jewish life and creating connections to Jewish stories, people, history, art, and culture are vital to addressing bias and hate of all kinds, especially amid rising antisemitism in our schools and communities.

Objective

Inspired by the life of Jewish immigrant and artist Peter Krasnow, students will practice visual storytelling using color and composition. They will strengthen their critical thinking and empathy-building skills to make connections to their own lives and identities.

Materials

- Blank paper (a few sheets around 8.5" x 11" in size)
- Bright or light colored paper (optional)
- Pencil and eraser
- Markers and/or colored pencils
- Highlighters (gather several colors of highlighters if you have them)
- Scissors
- Glue stick or glue or tape
- Printed copy of *The Wanderers* line drawing (page 6)

Optional:

Lesson Appendix: Color Harmony—resource on color harmony and color mixing (page 7–8)
Selected Works by Peter Krasnow (pages 10–14)
Large examples for class activity (pages 15–17)

Warm Up Activity

Drawing Warm Up: Using a pencil and paper, **sketch** a simple picture or map of the city or neighborhood you call home. This sketch does not need to be realistic—include the things you think of that you see in your neighborhood such as streets, hills, freeways, trees, parks, your school, etc. Anything that reminds you of home can be in the sketch. When finished, set your sketch aside to use as inspiration later on.

Sketch means to draw loosely and quickly, not overly detailed.

Close Looking and Reflection Warm Up: Get to know artist Peter Krasnow by reading the Artist Bio on page 9 and see samples of his work on pages 10–14. Use the following prompts to lead a class discussion, or use the space under each prompt for individual or small group written reflection.

Look closely at *The Wanderers* and *Casa Verdugo* by Peter Krasnow (see page 5). What do you notice about them right away? How are they similar? How are they different? How do they make you feel and why?

Artists use color to express emotions such as hope, sadness, anger, and joy. What colors did Peter Krasnow use to paint *The Wanderers*? How does color help an artist show their emotions and connection to a place?

Now, look at *Casa Verdugo*. What colors did he use when painting his Southern California home? How do those combinations of colors (**color harmonies**) feel?

Color harmony means a relationship between colors that feels harmonious to the eye, such as red, yellow, and blue (primary colors) or pink and green (complementary colors).

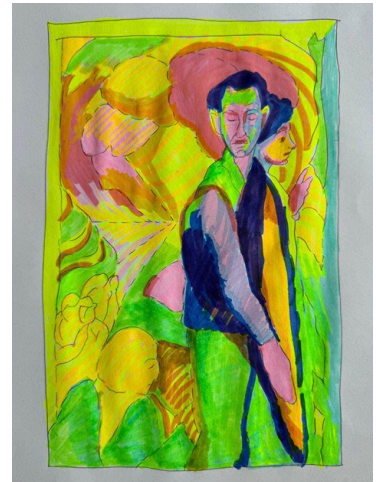
See page 7–8 for more information on color harmony.

Class Activity

1. Color the print out of *The Wanderers* line drawing (page 6) with bright colors, similar to the colors Krasnow used in *Casa Verdugo*. Notice the color harmony in this piece—Krasnow used a lot of bright colors such as yellows, light greens, and pinks in his Southern California paintings. (See example A or page 15)
2. Use scissors to cut out all the shapes and figures so they are all separate, like puzzle pieces.
3. Create a new composition by moving your colorful shapes around. Reimagine and reconfigure the shapes to create a different composition—a new “place,” a new home. Krasnow and his wife immigrated to the United States and ended up in a new place for them in Southern California. This new design can be abstract—you can draw more lines to create a new landscape or map of their home. (See example B or page 16)

Inspiration ideas: Look at the original *The Wanderers*. Notice how Peter Krasnow and his wife, Rose Bloom, are facing the right edge of the painting as if they are leaving. Notice how the other figures are lining up behind them all migrating out of the painting. Notice the shapes of the clouds above them.

A



B



Look at your warm up sketch. Notice what scenery elements you chose to incorporate. Notice where on the page you sketched them. Notice the shapes, textures, and the way your composition makes you feel.

4. Use a new piece of white or bright-colored paper to glue down your new composition. It is okay to overlap your pieces. To finish, you can color in any **negative shapes** to make the composition whole. (See example C or page 17)

Optional follow up: You can use your favorite color harmony to color your original sketch of your neighborhood/community.



Reflection

Share the bolded section with students and lead a discussion using your own prompts or suggested prompts below:

Negative shapes are the spaces between forms.

“Between alerts, blackouts, rationing, brighter grew my palette,” Krasnow remarked about the hardships he faced living through World War II and the Holocaust. “When tragedy was at the deepest point, my paintings breathed joy and light-color structures instead of battle scenes, symmetry to repair broken worlds. A means of protest to ease the pain.”

Krasnow talks about his art as a tool to “repair broken worlds.” *Tikkun olam* is a Hebrew phrase that means “repairing the world” or “mend the world.” It’s a central teaching in Jewish tradition and a central principle of Judaism, along with *tzedek*, another Hebrew word, which means righteousness or justice, and is commonly used to describe actions taken to make the world more just and fair.

How can art bring awareness to social issues and foster a sense of unity and/or acceptance?

Can you think of any examples you have seen or experienced of artists using their art to repair the world?

How can artists bring in their own heritages to the artistic process, and use their work as a tool to build cultural literacy, empathy, and compassion?

What are some ways you can use art to create positive change in your communities?

Curriculum Connections

Standard Identifier

4.VA:Cr1.2, Prof.VA:Re7.2, Adv.VA:Cr1.1, Acc.VA:Cr1.2, Acc.VA:Cr2.3

Resources

[Peter Krasnow: Breathing Joy and Light, past exhibition](#) at the Skirball Cultural Center, May 4–September 3, 2023.

[Resources for Teaching About Jewish Culture](#) from the Contemporary Jewish Museum

[Educator Resources](#) from the Holocaust Museum LA

[Painting Joy at the Deepest Point of Tragedy](#) by Renée Reizman, May 30, 2023, Hyperallergic

[Breathing Joy and Light—The Skirball Cultural Center Presents Peter Krasnow Post-War Paintings](#) by Hesper Cane, June 15, 2023, WIDEWALLS

[Peter Krasnow, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2024](#)

Learn more about teaching artist Malaika Latty

Website: malaikalatty.com | Instagram: [@malaikazweiglatty](https://www.instagram.com/malaikazweiglatty)

Connect with Us

Our educators are here to help! If you have questions about this curriculum or would like to share your students' writing or artwork with us, please email education@skirball.org.

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Left: Peter Krasnow, *The Wanderers*, 1927, oil on canvas. Los Angeles, CA. (see page 11)

Above: Peter Krasnow, *Casa Verdugo*, 1923, repainted 1963. Oil on board. Collection of the Skirball Cultural Center, gift of Peter and Rose Krasnow (see page 12)





Color Harmony

Lesson by Teaching Artist Malaika Latty

Objective

Students will learn how to recognize color relationships like a primary triad. They will learn how to mix colors and create harmonies. They will learn to identify complementary colors and place them together to look brighter or to mix them together to create neutrals.

Colors harmonize visually just as notes make harmonies in music.
Color harmony makes a big difference in how an artwork feels.

Primary Colors

Red, Yellow, and Blue are the primary colors in painting. You cannot mix these colors by combining any other colors together. For example, you can't make yellow if you ran out of yellow paint. Red, Yellow, and Blue harmonize. This is called a primary triad.

When you mix two primary colors together, you get a Secondary color.

Red + Yellow = Orange

Yellow + Blue = Green

Blue + Red = Purple

Secondary Colors

Orange, Green, and Purple are called Secondary colors.

These three colors create the secondary triad, another color harmony.

Complementary Colors

Each primary color is opposite a secondary color.

Red <complements> Green

Blue <complements> Orange

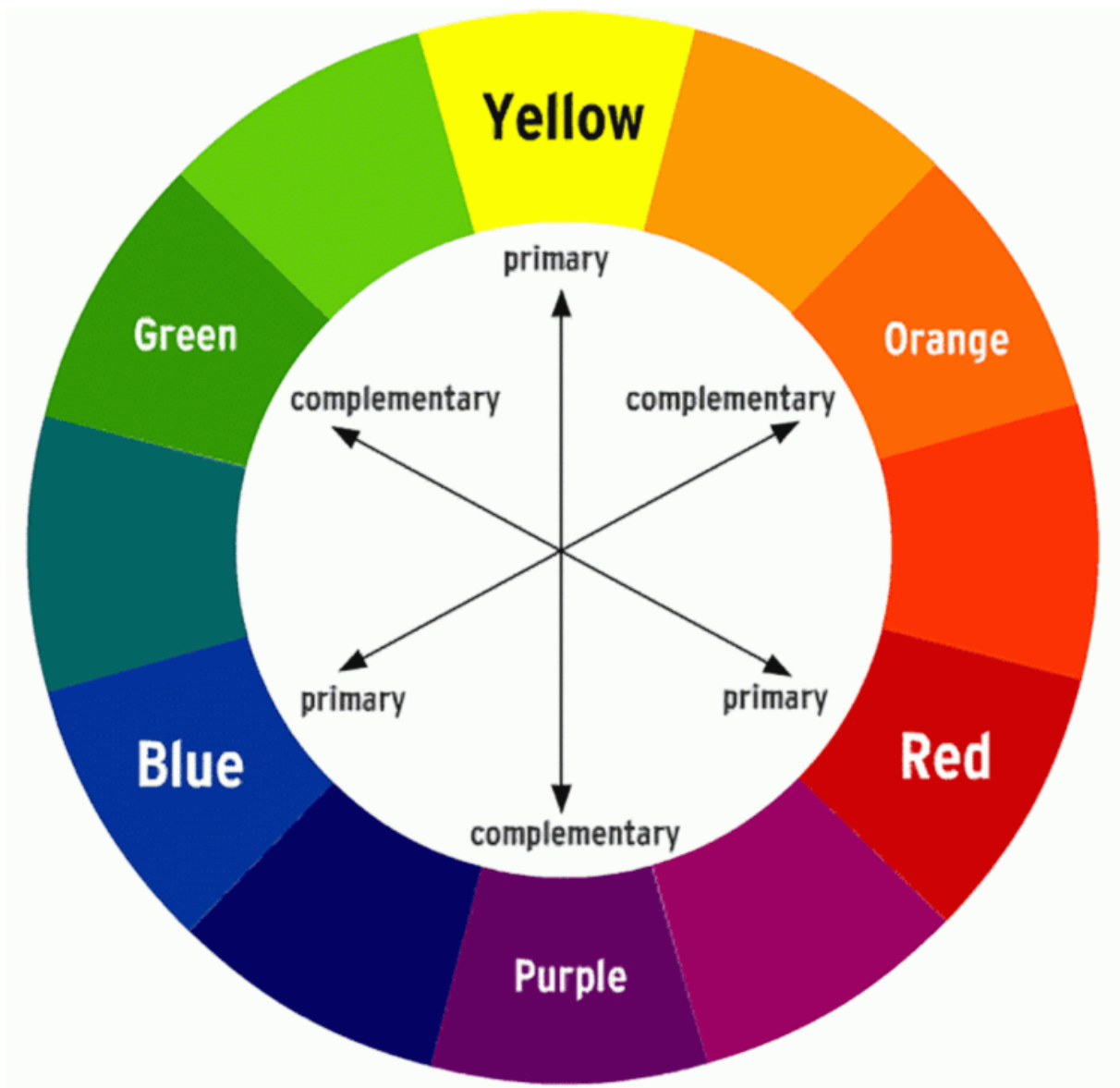
Yellow <complements> Purple

Complementary colors look especially bright when they are next to each other. However, when you mix them together, they create neutral colors or gray. They darken each other when mixed together. They are the farthest away from each other on a color wheel, so they act like opposites. Opposites harmonize and create contrast when they are adjacent to each other, but they cancel each other out and create neutral browns or grays when mixed together, similar to black and white. For example, if you mix blue and orange with white, you make a beautiful gray. Using colors to make neutrals is how you can mix flesh tones and colors in nature.

Experiment with color mixing with whatever drawing tools you have.

Color pencils or markers and highlighters will allow you to mix new colors. Try placing complementary colors next to each other. Try mixing complements together to make darker colors or gray.

What is your favorite color harmony? Do you like pink and green? Do you like yellow and purple? Do you prefer a primary triad or secondary triad? Lighter colors are called a tint. For example, try a light green with a light pink. Try a dark blue/green with a light orange/pink. Color harmonies are infinite.



Artist Biography

Peter Krasnow (b. 1886, Novograd-Volynsky, Ukraine—d. 1979, Atwater Village, Los Angeles) was a significant figure in the Southern California modern art world. Krasnow came from a humble beginning; he grew up in a Jewish home in the small town of Zawill in the Russian Empire, today known as Ukraine. He worked with his father, a house painter, learning to grind and mix pigments even before he knew the alphabet. As a teen, Krasnow dreamed of attending art school in faraway Odessa but faced steep obstacles, including sharp limits on Jewish enrollment in higher education and his traditional community's disapproval of pursuing art as a profession. Krasnow began his artistic career painting signs in his father's shop. He came to the United States in 1907, fleeing the **pogroms** that had been taking place throughout eastern Europe, as well as seeking training as an artist.



Pogrom is a Russian term, originally meaning “riot,” that came to be applied to a series of violent attacks on Jews in eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

He studied art in settlement houses, and ultimately graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1915. Chicago is also where he met his future wife Rose Bloom (1885–1984). Rose wrote poetry, short stories, and plays. After five years in New York City, they moved to Atwater Village in Los Angeles in 1922 where they lived and worked for the rest of his life. His artworks dating from the 1950s through the 1970s were often based on Hebrew calligraphy and other subjects related to his Jewish heritage.

Krasnow's colorful artistic style was influenced by the bright sun and colors of Los Angeles, and sadly by the **Holocaust**, which deeply affected him until his passing in 1979. He avoided directly depicting death and suffering in his artwork. Rather, he included Jewish symbols and mystical elements in vibrant and lively paintings, honoring his heritage in fresh and hopeful ways. Rose taught Hebrew school and Krasnow's calligraphic works were informed by her Jewish knowledge.

The **Holocaust** was the murder of six million European Jews by the German Nazi government during World War II (1939-1945).

Immigration, as many of us have experienced, is not always a happy picture—Krasnow was forced to leave his home to escape **antisemitism** and violence. His life experience, and the places he lived, influenced and shaped his artistic choices. Through color, he expressed his sadness, his hopes, and his joy.

Antisemitism is the hatred and discrimination towards Jewish people.

Photo: Peter and Rose Krasnow in front of a wood relief panel, c. 1930s.
Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of Monroe Price and Aimée Brown Price.



Peter Krasnow, *The Wanderers*, 1927, oil on canvas. Los Angeles, CA.

Selected Works by Peter Krasnow



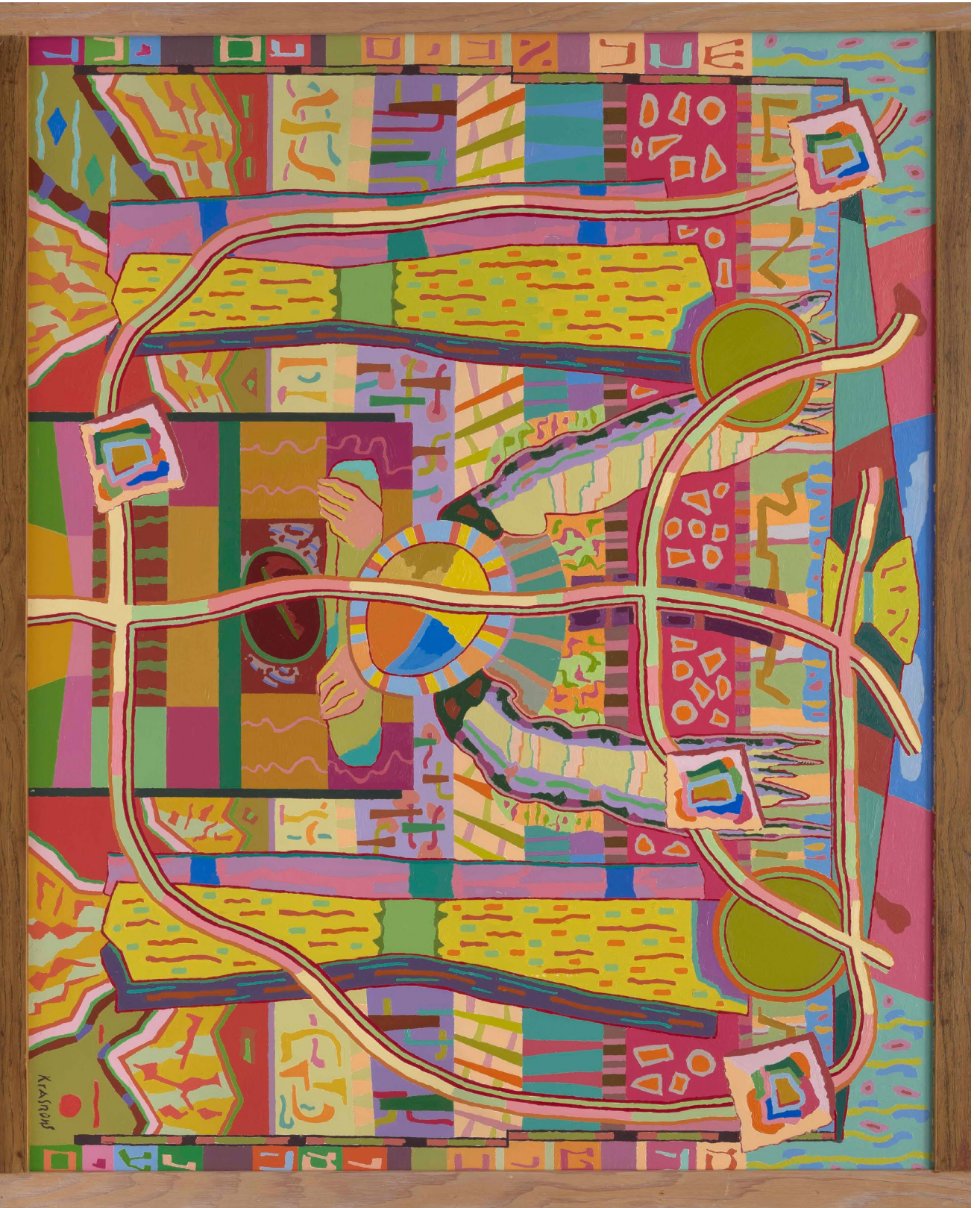
Peter Krasnow, *Casa Verdugo*, 1923, repainted 1963. Oil on board. Collection of the Skirball Cultural Center, gift of Peter and Rose Krasnow



Peter Krasnow
K-7-1949, 1949
Oil on Masonite
Collection of the Skirball Cultural Center. Gift of Elisabeth K. Itenberg
41.1009

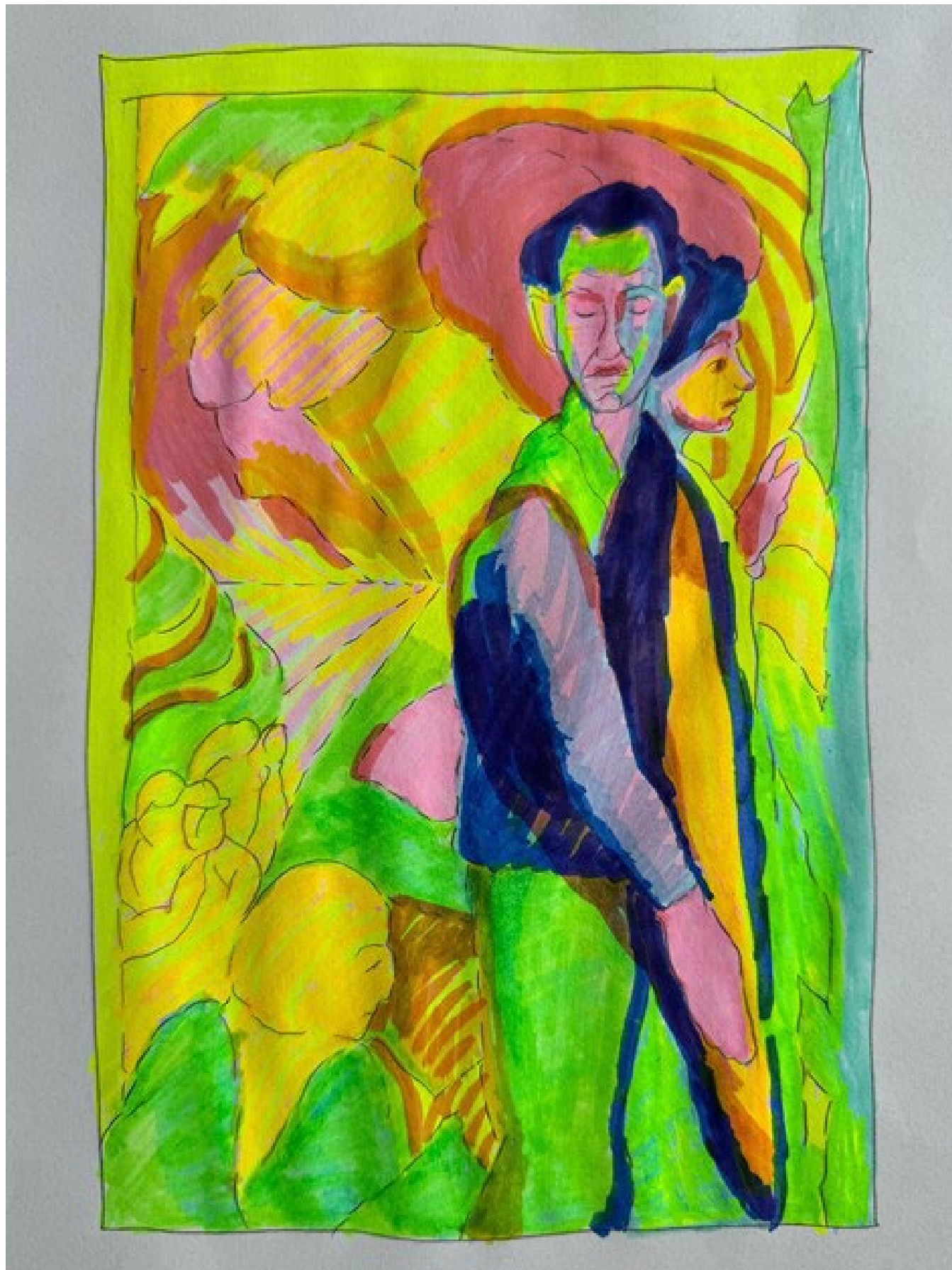


Peter Krasnow
K-4-1976, 1976
Oil on board
Collection of the Skirball Cultural Center. Gift of Hannah and David Lippert
41.435



Peter Krasnow
K-14-1964 (*Two Brothers*), 1964
Oil on board
Collection of the Skirball Cultural Center. Gift of Peter and Rose Krasnow
41.292

Example A



Example B



