



NOVEMBER 2011

## Playing with Shapes and Colors

Sonia Delaunay

Plates from the portfolio *Compositions, Colors, Ideas*



**VISIT THE BMA**  
and see 40 of Sonia  
Delaunay's designs  
in the exhibition *Print  
by Print: Series from  
Dürer to Lichtenstein*,  
on view through  
March 25.

Sonia Delaunay. Detail, *Plate 3* from the  
portfolio *Compositions, Colors, Ideas*. 1930.  
Color stencil. The Baltimore Museum of Art:  
Friends of Art Fund, BMA 1997.152.3.  
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What is this? A tangle of rubber bands? A pile of colorful rings and bracelets? Or is it simply a collection of circles, beautifully arranged to delight the eye?

Sonia Delaunay was an artist who created bright and bold designs using simple shapes and colors. She sold many of her designs to fabric manufacturers who were interested in women's fashions. Before long, women who considered themselves "modern" were buying dresses made of cloth that Sonia Delaunay designed, printed with circles, rectangles, triangles, squares, curves, stripes, diamonds, spirals, dots, crosses, or zigzags.

Creating imaginative designs with simple shapes and colors is harder than it looks. But Sonia Delaunay discovered that there's no end to the possibilities! Over her long career, she produced several thousand designs. As she worked on each one, she probably asked herself questions such as these:

- Should the shapes overlap? Should the lines cross over each other?
- Should all the shapes fit tightly together? Barely touch each other? Or should they be spread far apart?
- Should they be arranged neatly in rows? Or scattered about?
- Should they be absolutely identical or a bit irregular in shape?
- Should they vary in size?
- Should the lines be absolutely straight or a little bit crooked?

Sonia Delaunay never intended that any of her designs look like real objects. But that shouldn't stop you from using your imagination. Which of these four designs looks like confetti blowing in the wind? Which could be a collection of beads or beetles? Which one makes you think about being in a crowded place where you can barely move?

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Invent your own design based on one or two simple shapes or types of lines. Experiment with various possibilities, using the six bulleted questions above as a guide. Choose one of your designs to develop for a classroom exhibition and ask your classmates to suggest imaginative titles. Consider using your design to decorate an actual object.

**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**

