



MAY 2011

## Drawing the Circus

Fernand Léger | *Cirque*



**VISIT THE BMA**  
and find abstract  
paintings by Léger in  
the Cone Wing.

Fernand Léger (French, 1881-1955). Detail, *Cirque*. From the publication *Cirque*, p. 44-45. 1950. Color lithograph. 16 5/8 x 25 9/16 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from Nelson and Juanita Greif Gutman Collection, BMA 2006.92.25. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

### *"ALLEZ AU CIRQUE!"* \*

These are the words of Fernand Léger, a French artist who thought that everyone should "Go to the circus!" From the time he was a small boy, Léger loved sitting under a circus tent taking in the brilliant spectacle before his eyes. For him it was a magic place where amazing things could happen. As an older man, Léger was still entranced by the circus. He produced a book called *Cirque* with 34 original color prints and many more in black and white. This picture is a page from his book.

Imagine yourself as an aerialist performing way up high near the top of the circus tent. Perched on a ring suspended by ropes, you stare straight ahead, then ever-so-carefully raise one leg. If you wobble, you can use your arms to keep your balance. All around you, trapeze artists in skin-tight leotards fly through the air, some right-side up and some upside down.

Does this picture remind you of a page from a coloring book? Strong black outlines define the acrobats' bodies while areas of pink, orange, green, yellow, and blue fill in spaces between the lines. Some outlined arms look extra long or strangely short. Other lines bulge out a bit to show that the acrobats' legs are muscular and strong. Heads appear small and less important than fingers and toes, which are essential for grasping and gripping trapeze bars or ropes in mid-air. As the acrobats swing close to each other, their arms and legs crisscross so that they seem to be woven together in space. But after a split second, they'll be off again, flying in and out of the picture.

\* Say "Ah-lay oh seek"

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Imagine reaching into this circus picture and lifting out all the colors. What would be left? Try sketching the outline around the upside-down trapeze artist. Notice how the line tells you which of his legs is in front. Find other places where outlines overlap each other. Then design the outlines for your own original coloring book page using a bold black marker. Photocopy your page and distribute it to your classmates (or younger children) to color in.

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

**BALTIMORE  
MUSEUM OF  
ART BMA**

To comment or register  
for Art-To-Go, email  
[Landre@artbma.org](mailto:Landre@artbma.org)

For visitor information:  
[artbma.org](http://artbma.org)





Fernand Léger. *Cirque*.

From the publication *Cirque*, p. 44-45, 1950. Color lithograph, 16 5/8 x 25 9/16 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from Nelson and Juanita Greif Gutman Collection, BMA 2006.92.25. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris