

D Train

BY RICHARD ESTES

PMA CLASSROOM
BEST FOR
Elementary
Middle School
High School

SOUND LAYERING



Richard Estes (United States, born 1932), *D Train*, 1988, screenprint, 35 7/8 x 72 1/4 inches. Private Collection. Image courtesy of Luc Demers

CONTENT AREAS AND STANDARDS MET

Disciplinary Literacy - Visual Arts: Students show literacy in the art discipline by understanding and demonstrating concepts, skills, terminology, and processes.

Aesthetics and Criticism: Students describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate art (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts).

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES:

Self-Awareness: Students will be asked to listen and use their senses to create a scene. They need to be self-aware of how they interact with the group of sounds.

Social-Awareness: Students will need to listen to each other and preform as a group in order to create the soundscape.

THEMES

- The Screen-Printing Process
- Sound & Art
- Observation

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can we change or alter the feeling or mood of an artwork?

MATERIALS NEEDED

Voices and bodies

INSTRUCTIONS

Look

Take some time to look at the work of art. Notice that every color of the piece was made with a different print.

Respond

Think about and respond to these questions:

- How many layers do you think there are in this artwork?
- You may notice that there are no people. Do you think this is normal for a NYC subway? Why or why not?
- How can you tell if a sound is closer or farther away?
- What do you see in the work of art?
- What would you add to this scene?
- How do the many layers in the artwork add to the overall feeling?
- How does the space Estes creates differ from real life?
- Why do you think the artist made the scene feel so quiet?
- What do you think might happen if we add sounds back in?

OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the printmaking process.
- Students will demonstrate collaboration to create a performance.
- Students will discover the importance of listening to one's surroundings and understanding how sounds interact.

LEARN

Richard Estes, born in 1932, is best known for his artwork creating photo-realistic paintings of New York life. In his early work, Estes used mainly oil paints, creating pieces that looked photographic not only because of their imagery and attention to detail, but also because of the lack of texture. Unlike some paintings in which there are visible brush strokes, Estes would have very solid, flat areas of color that looked like real scenes. *D Train* and many of his more recent works, however, use screen-printing techniques, which have a similar flat texture. Estes says that screen printing is similar to painting, except that simplification is key: ". . . you have to simplify. You can't get all the gradations of color, the subtleties you get with a brush . . . it takes . . . a lot of colors to get a three-dimensional effect." Estes uses layers and layers of colors over his screen prints to create the illusion of three dimensions. Some of his prints have over 100 layers of color!

When preparing to make a work of art, Estes takes many photographs of the area he wants to represent, focusing on many different angles. He then uses these photographs in combination to organize and arrange his paintings and prints. This combination of views can actually capture something that the human eye cannot, creating an illusion of what is there while also showing something that is impossible to see. One of the greatest themes in his work is reflection. Using glass windows and shiny surfaces, Estes shows an almost panoramic view of the world, capturing what is in front of and behind the viewer. Unlike most of his other works, the reflection is not the

most prominent feature of the print *D Train*. While we still see it in the reflections in the windows of the train, one of the most profound parts of this work is the use of light. The way the sun hits the beams creates extreme shadow. The way the light bounces off the seats creates a shine that makes the seats seem brand new. This adds dimension and character to the work. Another theme common in his paintings is complete focus. Cameras often fade out what is in the background, as do our eyes. What is farther away tends to be more blurred to show distance and depth. Estes throws away this idea and focuses equally on every piece of his prints, making sure that the details are visible even in the farthest corners of the street. In *D Train*, this does something more than simply give us more to look at: it actually captures an impossible moment. While our eyes or a camera would have been blurred by the speed of the train, Estes takes away the motion of the piece, suspending the viewer in a moment in time, stopped above the Manhattan bridge, pausing to enjoy the scene.

Once you have seen a work by Estes, it can be easy to pick his pieces out of a lineup. His unique use of reflection and blocks of color can be found in almost all his works. His attention to detail and architecture transport the viewer into his work. A little-known fact about Estes is that he used to sign his paintings differently each time. Sometimes his name appears on a sign in the background or as a license plate number. Unfortunately, in his screen prints, this is less common, but as we have seen there are other kinds of hidden treasures in these works.

ACT

This activity should be done with multiple people and is best done in an in-person setting. If you are not in an in-person setting, this can be adapted to be done virtually, or you can ask students to write about the types of sounds they would imagine this scene might make.

We are going to create a collaborative soundscape based on this scene to explore how sound changes an artwork. If in-person, line up around the artwork in a semicircle so that everyone can see the artwork. Give participants about a minute to look quietly at the image again. Ask participants to identify a sound that they think would be coming from this scene. Give them a few minutes to brainstorm sounds, either collaboratively or individually. Each person should pick a sound that they would like to add back into the piece.

One at a time, giving about five seconds between each person, ask that each person add a noise into the mix until the bustling sounds of the NYC subway fill the room. The teacher or leader of the group can gently tap participants on the shoulder to let them know it's their turn to start their sound, or they can simply point to the person whose turn is next. Let this soundscape go for a minute or two before slowly removing sounds from the soundscape. Repeat the process of gently tapping participants on the shoulder or pointing to people to ask them to stop making their sound until there is only person making sound, and eventually no sound exists.

This layering effect is similar to what Estes did in his work. Think about and reflect on how adding sound changes the piece.

If there is time, ask students to do another soundscape somewhere different. Maybe an ocean or a forest. They can then compare and contrast the two soundscapes and notice what was different and similar about them.

REFLECT AND SHARE

Let's reflect on what we just did and the experience we just had engaging with this artwork.

- How did the soundscape make you feel?
- What was the experience of creating sounds like for you?
- How did the different layers change the overall environment?
- How did your thoughts about the print change after hearing all the sounds we made?

The last step in interacting with art is to share your experience with others. Share your artwork or your experience with the PMA!
Learning@portlandmuseum.org

Or share with others in your home or class.

RESOURCES

"Actually, Iconic: Richard Estes Official Trailer."
YouTube, Friday Harbor Film Festival,
11 October 2020,

[YouTube.com/watch?v=EmZEzbkhU3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmZEzbkhU3s)

"An Evening with Richard Estes-Smithsonian
American Art Museum." YouTube, Smithsonian
American Museum of Art, 26 November 2014,

[YouTube.com/watch?v=zULrV4B0Bxo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zULrV4B0Bxo)

"'Holland Hotel', Richard Estes, 1984."
Richard Estes Holland Hotel 1984,
Tate, 1 January 1984,

[Tate.org.uk/art/artworks/estes-holland-hotel-p77083](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/estes-holland-hotel-p77083)

Art Now and Here. "Richard Estes' Realism at
Portland Museum of Art on Art Now and Here."
YouTube, Art Now and Here, 31 March 2015,

[YouTube.com/watch?v=bOeds5hlbtQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOeds5hlbtQ)

"Richard Estes: Urban Landscapes."
Portland Museum of Art, May 2021,

[PortlandMuseum.org/urbanlandscapes](https://www.portlandmuseum.org/urbanlandscapes)

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COLLABORATOR NOTE

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