



Judy Millar *Dusking* 2020

## Resource Card Judy Millar: Action Movie

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## Resource Card

# Education Programme Judy Millar: Action Movie

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### About the Exhibition

Judy Millar is a New Zealand artist who famously 'paints backwards', wiping paint off her canvases to create exaggerated, hyperactive brushstrokes that seem to float in illusionistic space. Full of drama, her works breathe life into the discredited idea of action painting.

This exhibition showcases two new series of paintings: three mural-size paintings in hot reds and pinks and seven portrait-format paintings in colder hues. The 'hot' ones started with the idea of making a sequence of painterly gestures as a framed 'comic strip'. The 'cool' ones are hung in a line suggesting frames in a length of movie film.

*Action Movie* presents Millar's paintings in conversation with two 'direct' films inspired by abstract expressionism, made by painting directly onto film stock. Len Lye's *All Souls Carnival* (1957) was made using felt-tip pens and lacquer. Stan Brakhage's *The Dante Quartet* (1987) took six years to produce by painting images directly onto film. In both films, the idea of painterly expressivity is complicated by being scrambled with the mechanics of cinema.

### Vocabulary

**Sequence**—one thing after another in succession.

**Frame**—a single image in a comic strip or sequence of movie film.

**Direct film**—an animation technique where images are made directly onto film, rather than photographed with a camera. Methods include drawing, scratching, painting, and collage.

**Abstract**—art that doesn't attempt to represent reality, but instead uses lines, shapes, and colours to achieve its effect.

**Abstract expressionism**—a form of abstract art developed in the 1940s and 1950s. It is often characterised by gestural brushstrokes or marks, and by the impression of spontaneity.

**Action painting**—a vein of abstract expressionist painting that emphasises the act of painting.

### Pre-Visit Discussion

Judy Millar's brushstrokes have been described as 'hyperactive'. What does that bring to mind? Can a still picture show movement? Brainstorm some ways to create an artwork that's full of movement.

### Pre-Visit Activity

Watch a timelapse video showing the installation of one of Judy Millar's artworks in an exhibition called *Cinema and Painting*. What do you notice? What does the artwork remind you of?

[judymillar.com/space-work-7/](http://judymillar.com/space-work-7/)

### Post-Visit Activities

#### Reflect on your visit.

What did you see and do at the Gallery? What did you learn or discover? What do you want to find out more about?

#### Invent an unusual paintbrush.

Judy Millar uses unusual instruments—including sandbags or multi-headed brushes—to make her marks. Invent your own painting tool and make a layered abstract painting.

Find materials you think would make interesting marks e.g. rags, sticks, sponges, leaves, and bubble wrap. Cut or fold them, then attach them securely to a stick. Notice the different marks and effects you can achieve with your brush.

Combine some different effects in a layered painting.

#### Perform a collaborative action painting.

Make a whole-class abstract painting along the length of a large piece of paper or card. Each class member will repeat a signature gesture or brushstroke at set intervals along the painting's surface.

To begin, have everyone devise and practice a signature brushstroke that can be easily repeated. It could be a large sweep, a long loop, or a group of small dabs. Plan the painting so that everyone's mark is visible in the finished piece. Record the painting as a timelapse film to see the work develop.

Reflect on the process. What links to dance or drama did you notice? What could this artwork express about your class, as individuals and a collective?

#### Find out more about Judy Millar

[judymillar.com/](http://judymillar.com/)  
[vimeo.com/127326990](https://vimeo.com/127326990)

#### Find out more about Len Lye

[govettbrewster.com/len-lye/](http://govettbrewster.com/len-lye/)  
[govettbrewster.com/news/2017/4/spotlight-on-len-lyes-filmmaking-tools-the-stencil](http://govettbrewster.com/news/2017/4/spotlight-on-len-lyes-filmmaking-tools-the-stencil)

#### Find out more about zoetrope animation

[letstalkscience.ca/educational-resources/interactives/zoetrope](http://letstalkscience.ca/educational-resources/interactives/zoetrope)