



Families @ BAMPFA

ARCHITECTURE OF LIFE





Welcome to BAMPFA. Explore our exhibition **Architecture of Life** with your family using this interactive guide.



What do you think about when you hear the word “architecture”? A skyscraper? A castle? An Egyptian pyramid? A house in your neighborhood? Or even the building you’re in right now, the new BAMPFA?

Now what does the word “structure” make you think of? Maybe another building? Or the Bay Bridge? Or maybe something smaller, that you’ve made yourself, like a house or city made with legos or a papier-mâché mask? Or maybe when you hear the word “structure” it makes you think of a way to organize, like a diagram or a plan for your day.

Today you’ll see how artists and scientists and other thinkers from different times and places have found structure in everything from buildings to the human body to nature. They even find structure in things that are invisible!

A



Are you surprised to see this quilt hanging on the wall in a museum? Why or why not?

Look closely at this quilt:

What shape do you see most often? Notice how this shape appears again and again, in different sizes, colors, and patterns. How do these shapes fit together to make other shapes?

Which part of the quilt do you like looking at the most? Why?

If this were picture of a building, what would the blue rectangle be? A courtyard? A window looking out into the night? Any other ideas?

The geometric shapes—triangles and rectangles—give a sense of structure to the quilt. Does this geometric structure make the quilt look calm? Or does it look like it is in motion? Why?

If we could listen to, as well as look at, the quilt, what would it sound like?

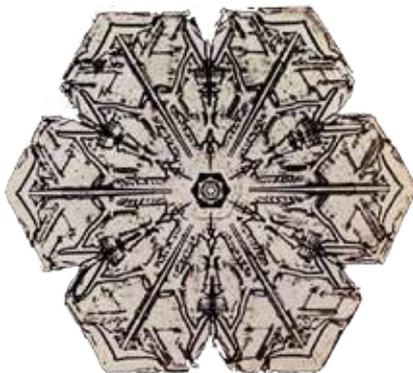
Draw a design for a quilt using geometric shapes!



INSIDE INFORMATION

Rosie Lee Tompkins is the artist who made this complex, captivating quilt. Tompkins was born into a large family of poor farmers in Arkansas. She learned to make quilts as a young girl. Quiltmaking is one of several traditional African American art forms, particularly in the in the American South. Tompkins made this quilt and many others after she grew up and moved to Richmond, California, where she lived and worked as a nurse and artist for many years.

B



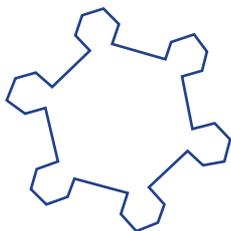
Have you ever made a snowflake by folding paper and cutting patterns? Then you know that even though snowflakes are tiny and soft, they are actually made from geometric shapes.

As different as snowflakes are from one another, they do have something in common. Have you noticed that all the snowflakes in these photographs have six sides?

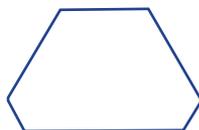
Scientists divide snowflakes into different types based on their structure. Three structures are represented in Bentley's photographs: the dendrite star (diagram 1, below), the star crystal (diagram 2), and the plate (diagram 3).



#1 Dendrite Star



#2 Star Crystal



#3 Plate

Using the diagrams, see if you can tell which one underlies each of Bentley's snowflake photographs on the wall. Which type is seen in the most snowflakes?

Draw your own six-sided snowflake here!



INSIDE INFORMATION

Over 130 years ago, a farmer named Wilson Bentley worked outside during freezing Vermont storms to take the first photographs of snowflakes. He used a feather to transfer single flakes to a microscope and then took pictures with a big, bulky camera. After taking thousands of photographs, he studied them and made an important scientific discovery: no two snowflakes are ever alike!

C



Each glass cube in this gallery contains a unique sculpture made of silvery threads that seems to be floating in air. These are artworks by artist Tomás Saraceno, but he did not make them alone!

Saraceno often collaborates* with experts in other fields to make his art. He has worked with biologists, astrophysicists, engineers, sound experts, and others. This time, he collaborated with some non-human experts. Can you guess who?

*To collaborate means to work together toward a common goal.
It's like teamwork.

If you guessed that he worked with spiders, you're right!

For Saraceno, these spiderweb artworks are a kind of model for his ideas about floating architecture, or "cloud cities."

If you could collaborate with an animal to make a house, which animal would you choose? What would the house look like?

Draw it here:



HOW DID HE DO IT?

Saraceno chose spiders of different species to spin their webs, one at a time, in each cube. As you might expect, spiders of different species spin different kinds of webs. Sometimes, he rotated the cube between spiders. By doing these two things, he worked with the spiders to create completely unique web designs, unlike those found in nature.

D



Pomo baskets are known for their finely woven structure and striking patterns. Basket weavers used plants of different colors to create these lively patterns: sedge roots and willow (light tan), bulrush and fern roots (black), redbud (red).

These baskets were made to serve many different purposes, such as cooking, food storage, and carrying things. The structure of each basket often corresponds to what it was used for. If you needed a basket to catch fish, would you want it to be small and tightly woven, or long with a looser weave? If you were storing rice or grain, would you use a shallow disc-shaped basket or a deeper, more rounded one? What structure would be good for a basket designed to: Store your Legos? Collect firewood? Be a bed for your pet?

Some baskets were made specifically to give to someone as a special gift. These gift baskets can be especially artful: shells, beads, and feathers make them even more beautiful.

What would you use to ornament your basket?

These baskets, of many different sizes, shapes, and patterns, were all made by California's Pomo tribe. Which is your favorite? Why? Draw a picture of your favorite basket here:



E



Do these hanging wire sculptures remind you of anything else you have seen today at the museum?

Do they look transparent (see-through) or solid?

Because Asawa's sculptures are transparent, light passes through them, which makes the shadows especially complex and interesting.

Where else have you seen interesting shadows?
Have you sometimes made shadows yourself? When?



INSIDE INFORMATION

As a young woman, artist Ruth Asawa traveled to Mexico, where she saw people using a crochet technique to make metal egg baskets. She was inspired to learn this technique. One reason she liked this crochet technique was because it transforms a two-dimensional line (wire) into a three-dimensional object (basket).

F



Imagine you are an architect designing a building. One way to describe your creation is by using a floor plan. This is a kind of diagram that shows a structure as if you were looking down on it from way up high, without its roof. In a floor plan, outlines represent walls or pathways and openings indicate doors or gates.

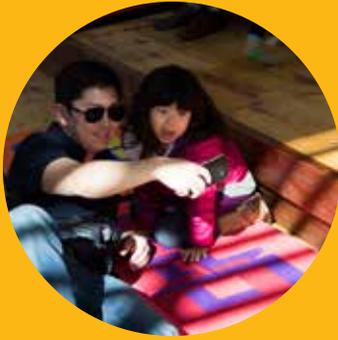
A mandala is a kind of floor plan for a perfect palace, where a Buddha or other deity lives, and reachable only through your mind. If you look closely at one of the Tibetan mandalas in this gallery, you can see that the floor plan shows the palace surrounded by circular barriers.

Inside the barriers are gates to the north, south, east, and west. The mandala invites you to enter the palace through a gate and imagine that you follow pathways through beautiful gardens and rooms until you reach the center. This is where the Buddha resides, in the most important and beautiful space in this palace.

These mandalas are very much alike, but each is a little different. How are they different? Which is your favorite?

Draw a floor plan of your house. Where is the most important room? What path do you take to get there from outside?





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