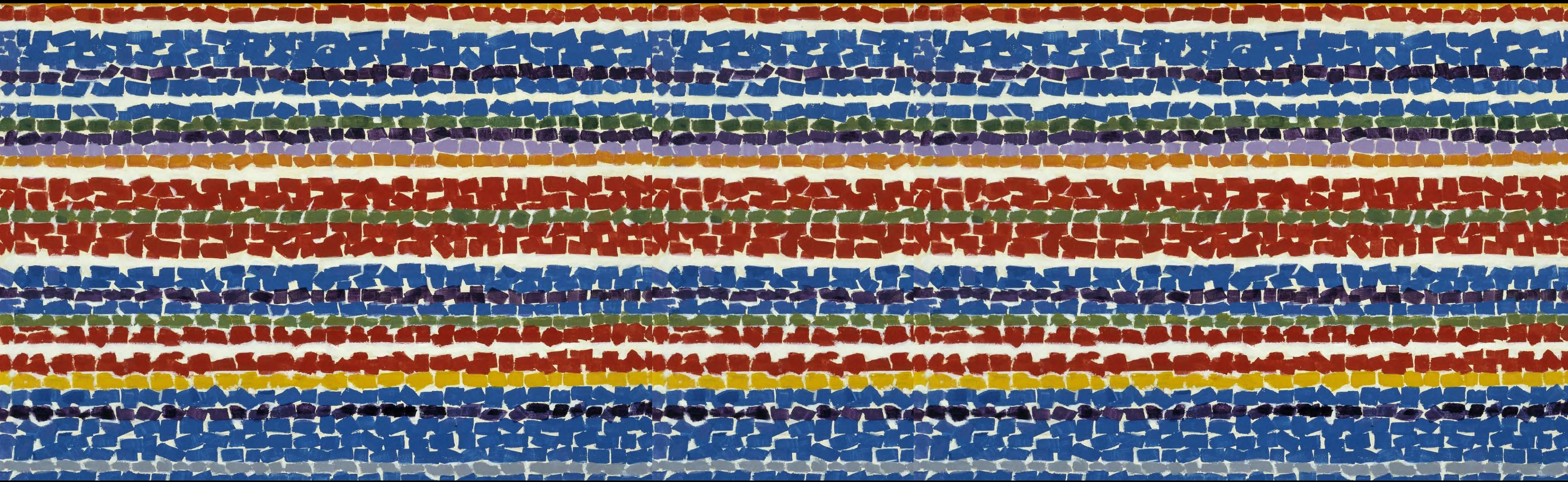


A Walk Through Color Fields with Alma Woodsey Thomas



By Sandi Arthur
October, 2025





- **Born 1891, Columbus, Georgia**
- **Moved to Washington, D.C.**
- **First graduate from Howard University's art program**
- **Teaching career and late start as a professional artist**
- **Art was part of the white house collection, and in the Smithsonian**

“I’ve never bothered painting the ugly things in life. People struggling, having difficulty. You meet that when you go out, and then you have to come back and see the same thing hanging on the wall?

No. I wanted something beautiful that you could sit down and look at.

And then, the paintings change you.”

— *Alma Thomas, ca. 1977–78*

**Let's look at her work and
notice some things....**



Vivid colors, some with big contrast.

Solid in center, outer corners

Lines have different weights (widths)

Similar colors adjacent to one another

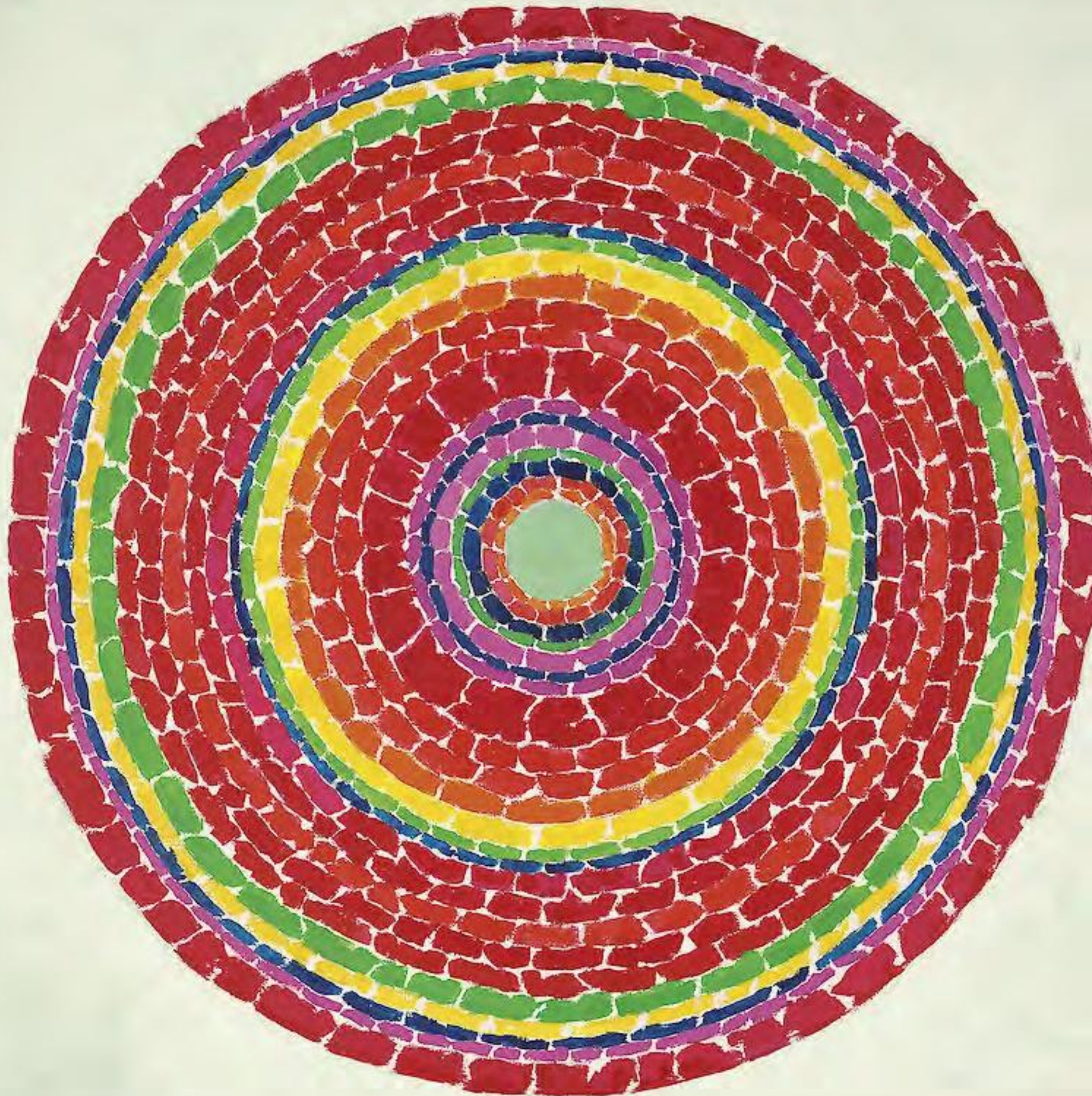
Multiple reds, greens and blues

Some pale neutral

Pansies in Washington

“Man's highest aspirations come from nature. A world without color would seem dead.”

— *Alma Thomas, ca.*



Notice: Very tiny spaces/gaps between strokes.

Notice the gaps are staggered so you don't get spokes

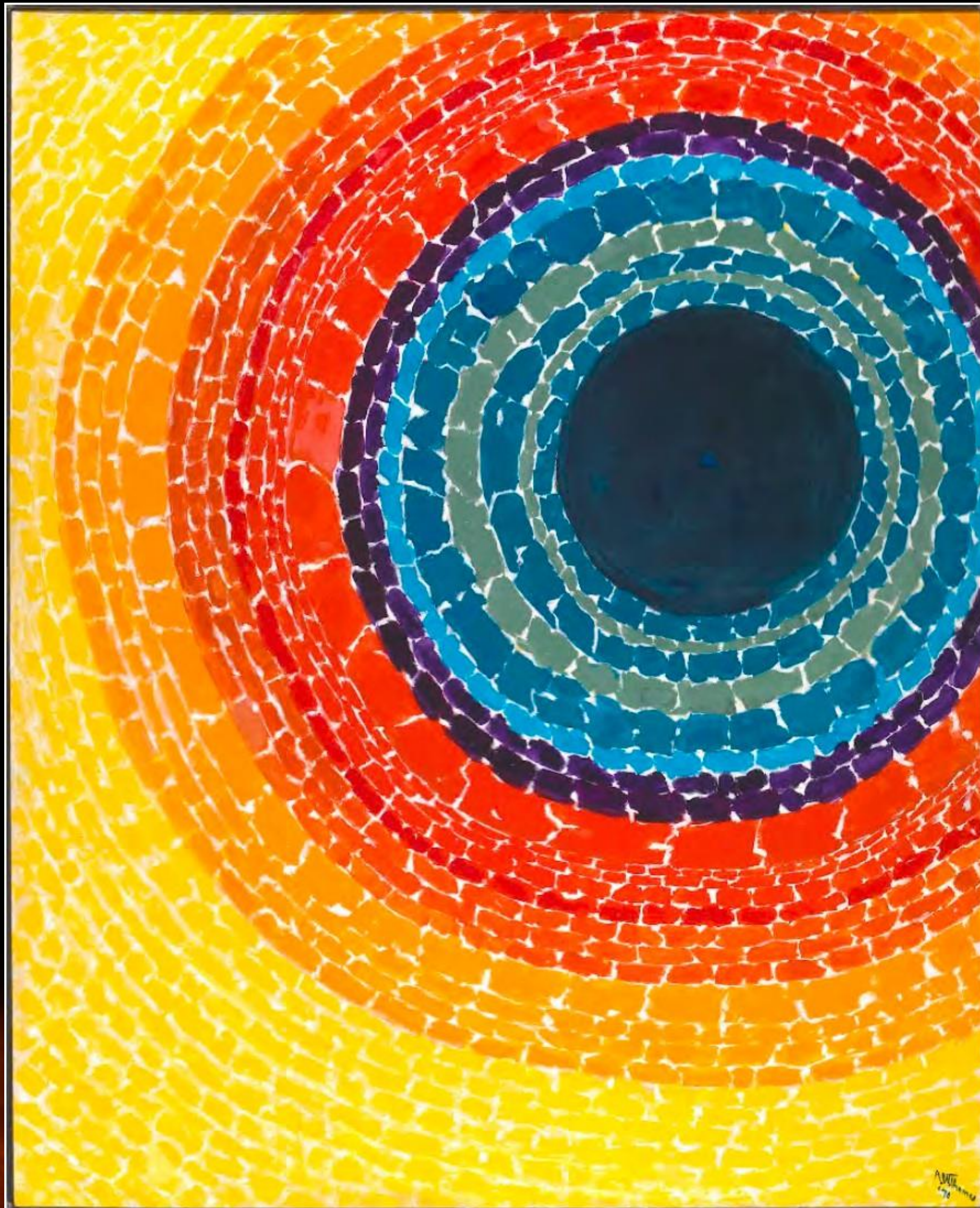
This one has many shades of red and red/orange

Green is a complimentary color that makes the red pop

Springtime in Washington

“Through color, I have sought to concentrate on beauty and happiness, rather than on man's inhumanity to man”

— *Alma Thomas, ca. 1977–78*



Note solid center
Large monochromatic areas
Off-center
Cool color center
Warm color outer

*The
Eclipse*





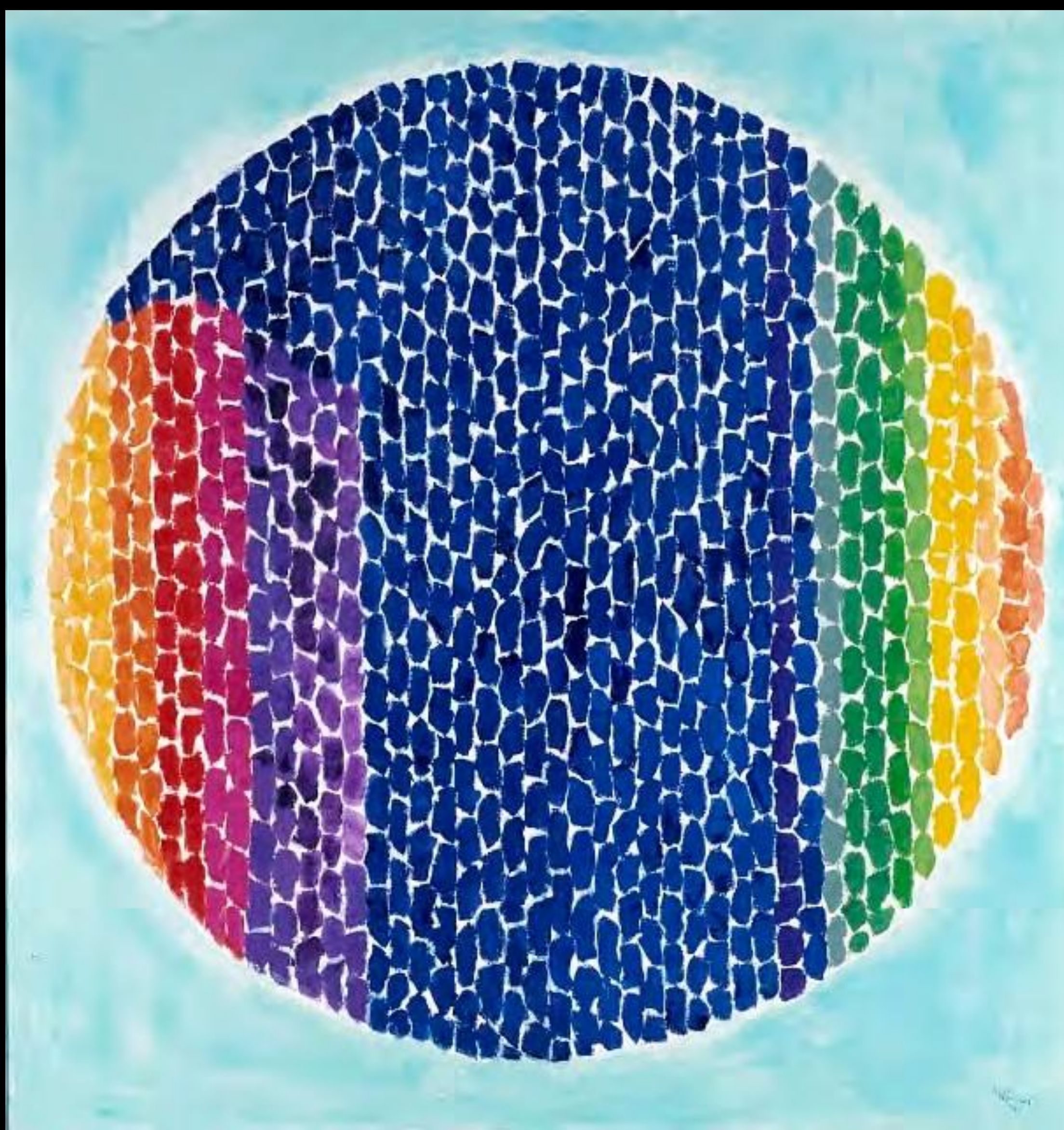
Vibrant, mosaic-like composition. Historical significance as the first work by an African-American woman acquired by the White House Collection in 2015, where it hung in the dining room during the Obama administration.

Resurrection

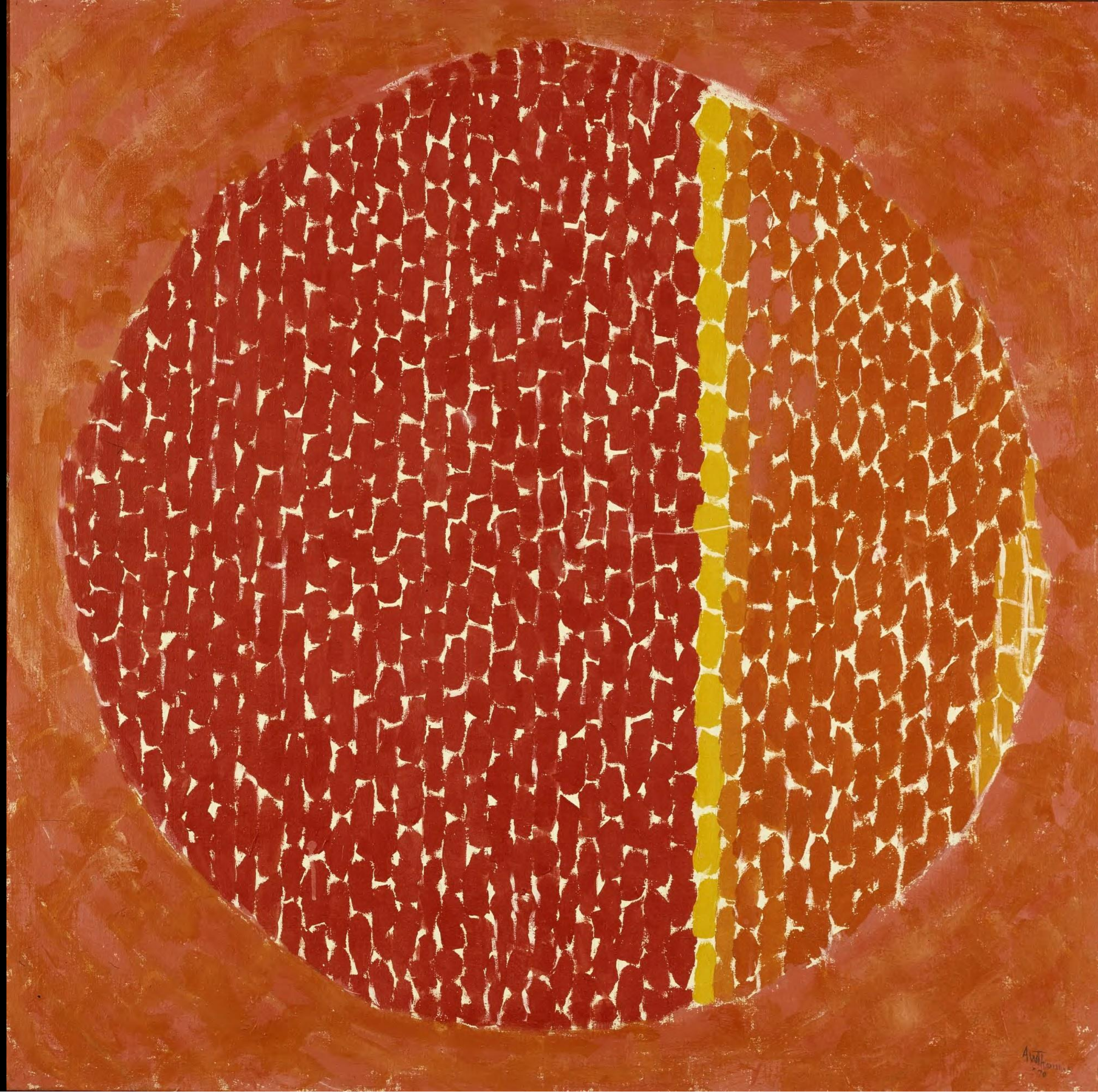


**Influenced by nature,
space exploration, and
impressionism**

Starry Night and the Astronauts



*Snoopy - Early Sun
Display on Earth*



Monochromatic

Not entirely dashed lines

Also, background is not
entirely solid

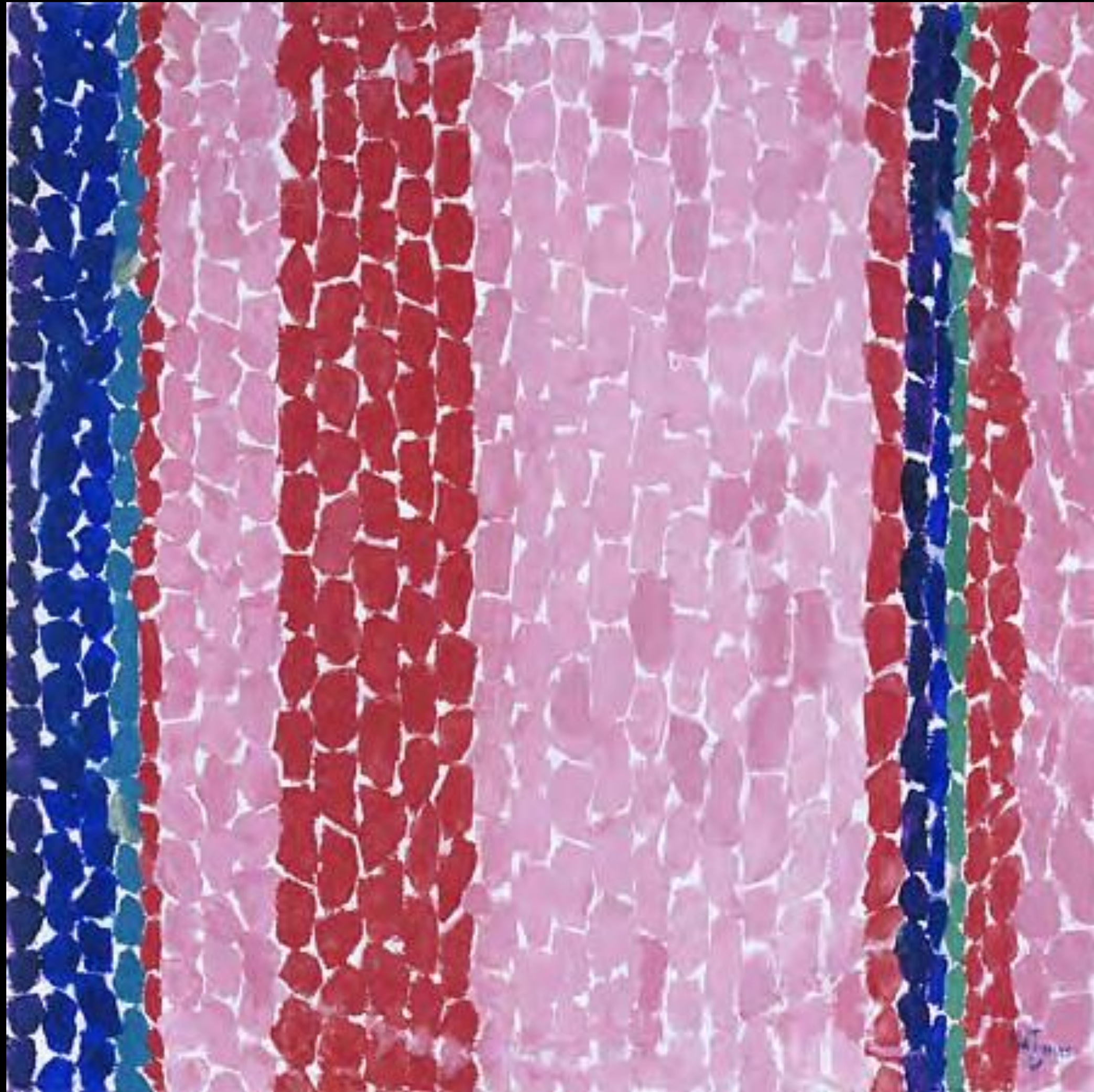
*Snoopy Sees
Earth Wrapped in
Sunset*



*New
Galaxy*

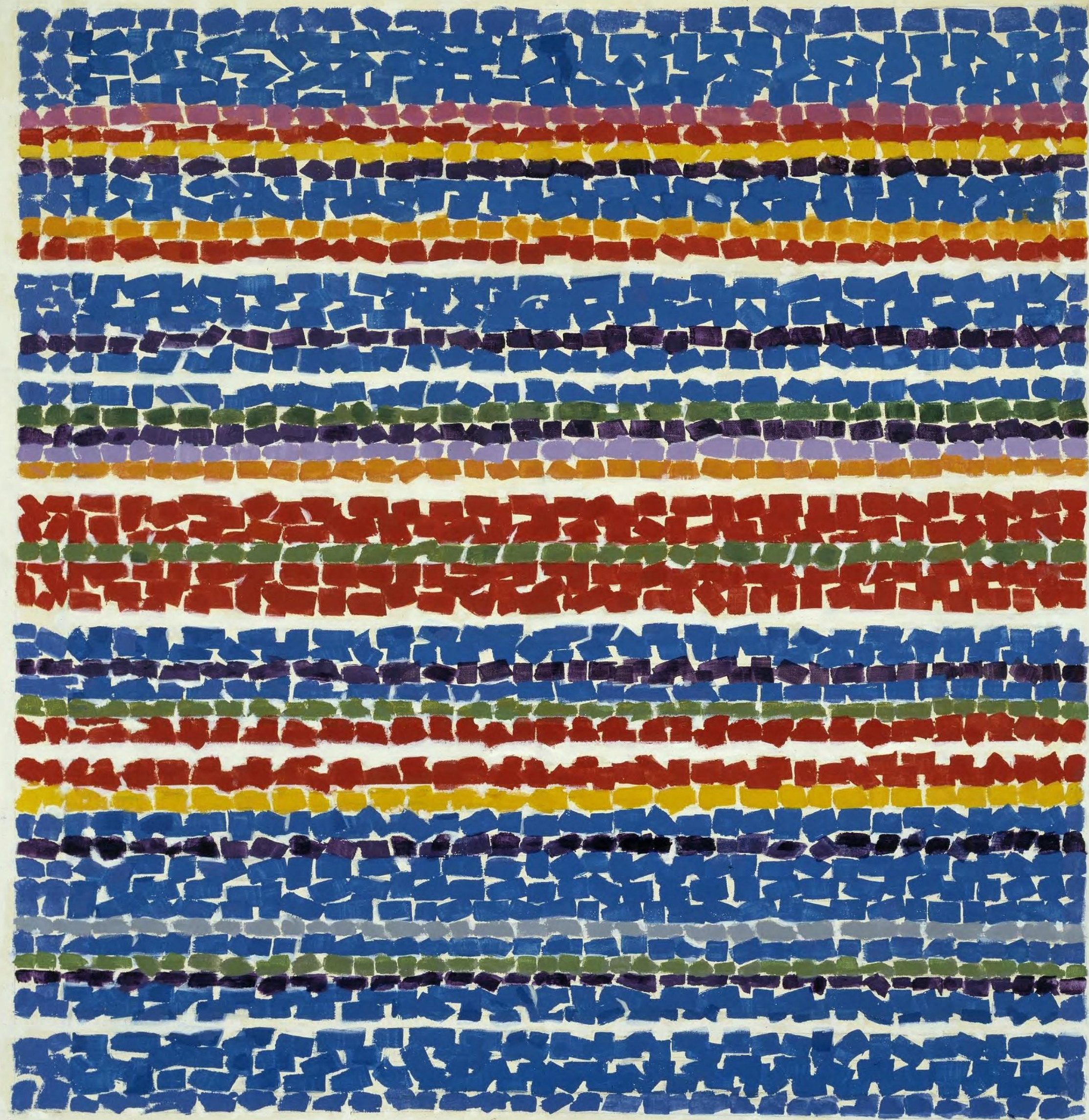
Key Art Vocabulary

- **Abstract Art:** Art that doesn't represent reality directly but uses shapes, colors, and forms to create compositions.
- **Color Field Painting:** Large areas of a single color to convey emotion.
- **Rhythm:** The repetition of elements to create movement and flow.
- **Palette:** The range of colors used in an artwork.
(Alma's color palettes tend to be bright and cheerful)
- **Tint:** A hue made by mixing white with a color
- **Shade:** A hue made by mixing black with a color



She created a lot of circular images, but not always...

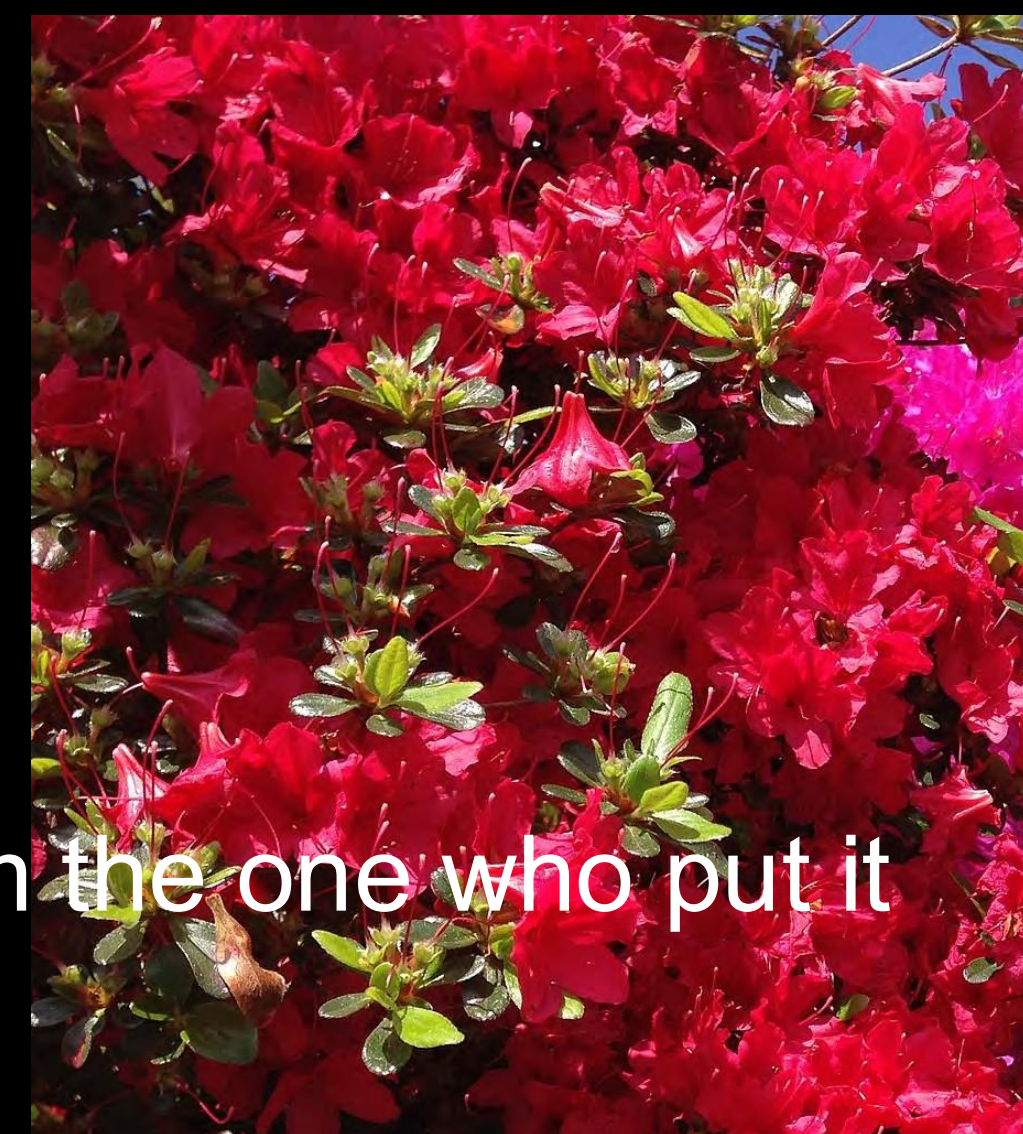
A Glimpse of Mars



Light Blue Nursery



*Red Azaleas
Singing and
Dancing*



Do you see that painting? Look at it move. That's energy and I'm the one who put it there. . . . I transform energy with these old limbs of mine.

--Alma Thomas



Notice that this piece is different in that it has an under color that is more dynamic than the layer over it.

The two colors are complimentary, or opposite each other on the color wheel.

*Fall
Begins*



Notice that this piece does not have straight lines or geometric shapes. It has a pastel under layer which juxtaposes with the top layer.



*Wind and Crepe
Myrtle Concierto*



*Autumn Leaves
singing and Dancing
in the Breeze*



- This one has a very limited color palette
- Notice how her marks are clustered to give a hint of flower petals, but is still very abstract.

*White Roses
Sing and Sing*

Getting Started

Supplies:

- 9 x 12 oil and acrylic paper
- Pencil
- 1 flat brush - about 1/4" wide
- 1 flat brush - about 1" wide
- White, black and bright versions of yellow, orange, fuscia, red, blue, green, and purple paint (fewer colors is ok) Small bottles to squirt small amounts.
- Paper palette or small coated white paper plate (one per child)
- Round lid or container (use recycled!)
- Paper towel
- A color wheel or visual showing primary and secondary colors. (For front of class)



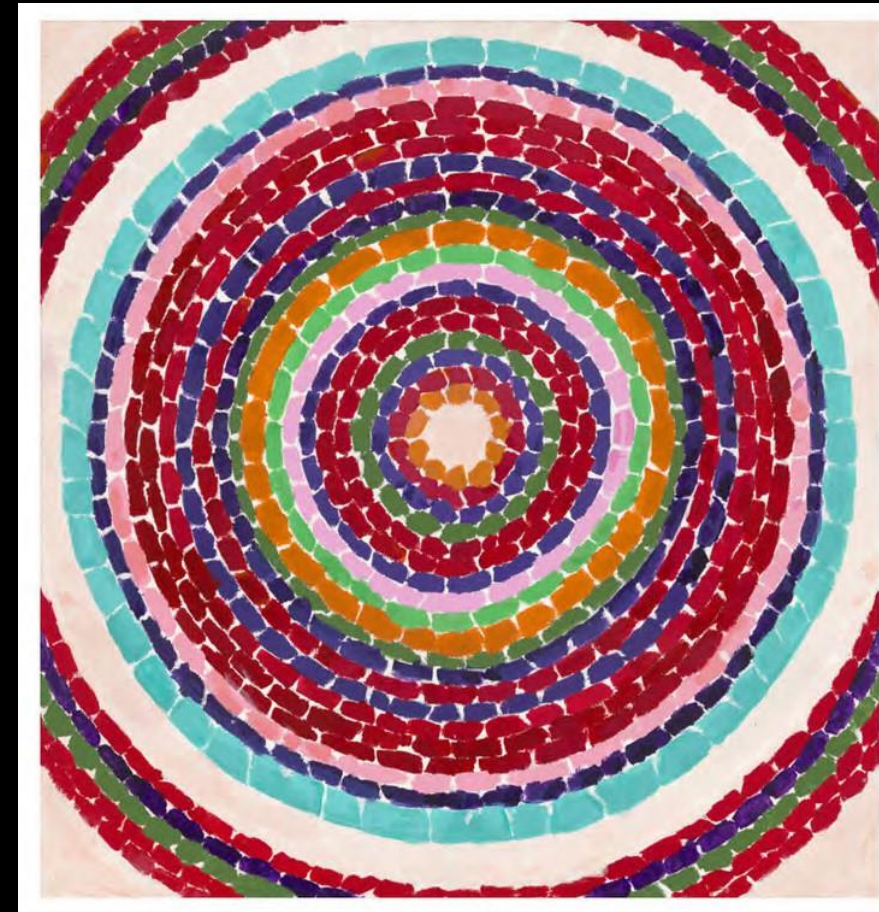
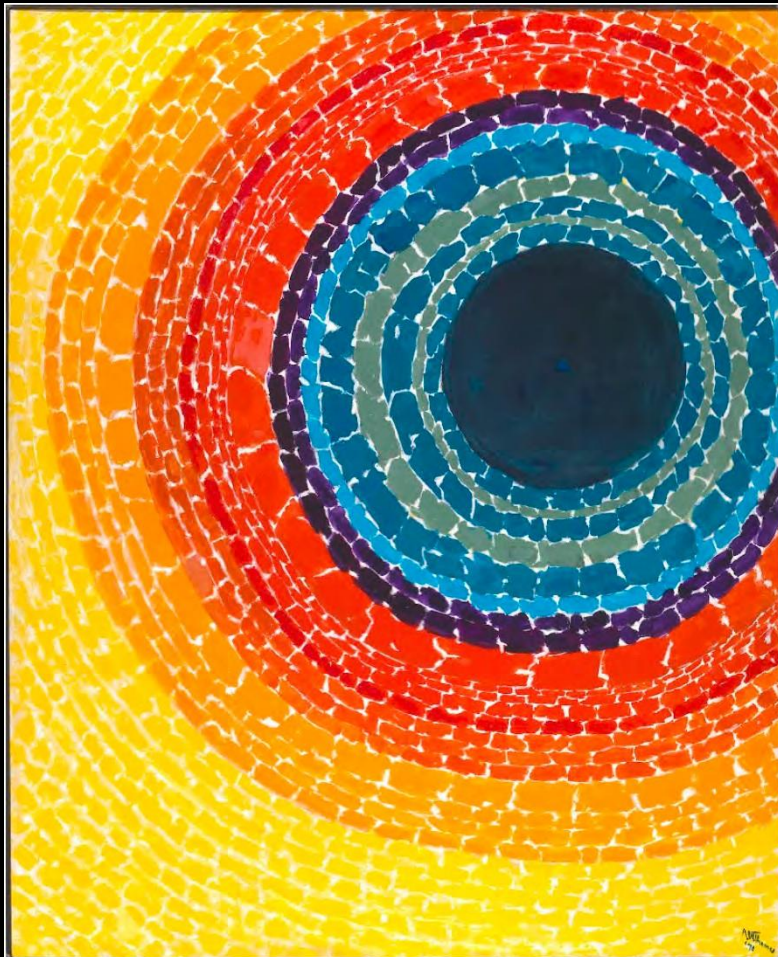
- Use small dabs of color... a little more of white
- Leave room for mixing

Find Inspiration

Do you have an idea for a color scheme or theme? Or, you can just decide as you go.

The colors you use are called your “color palette”

Alma Woodsey Thomas was inspired by nature and space primarily



**Some
Examples...**





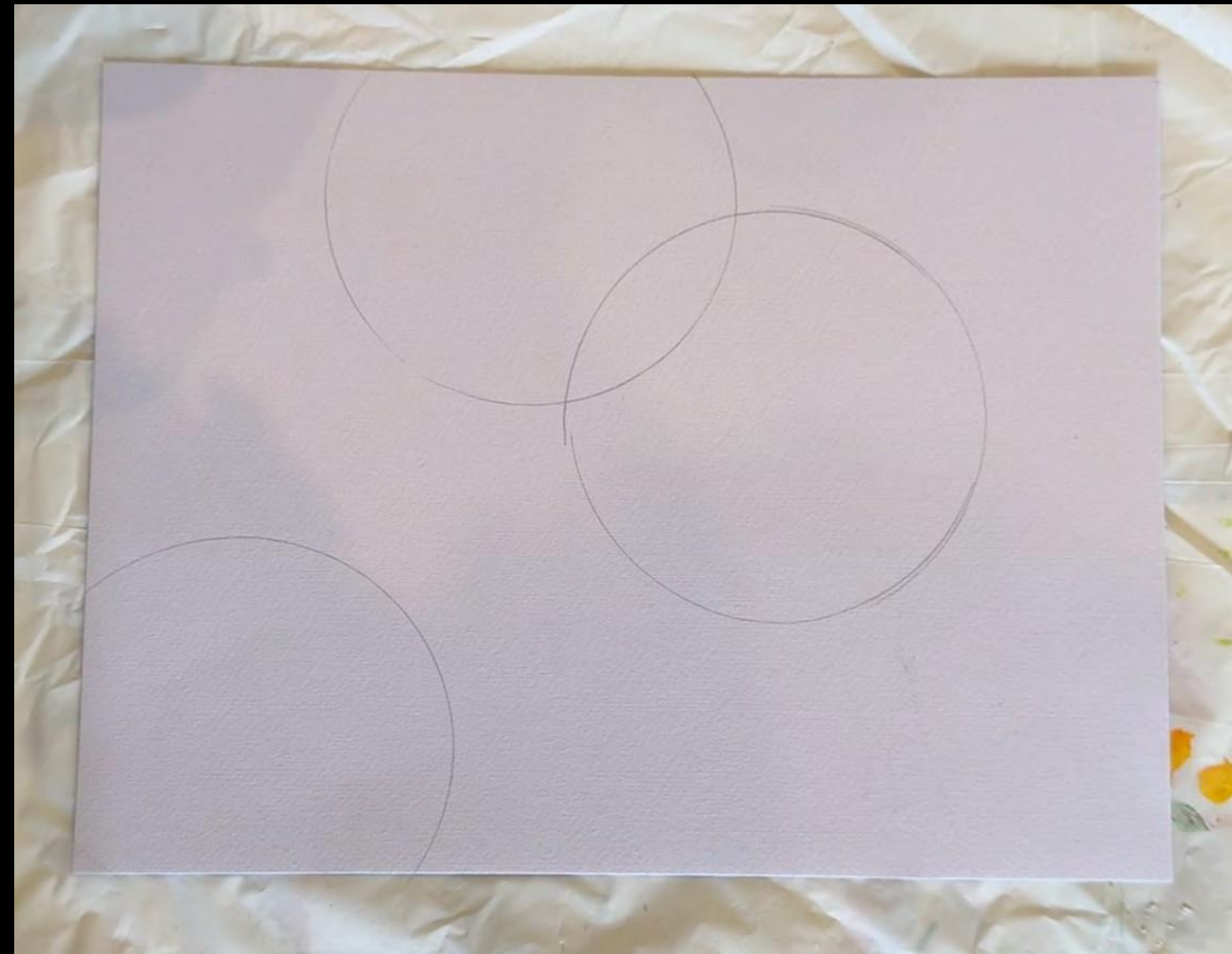




Use a pencil to create a guide

Consider lightly tracing a lid if you want a rounded shape.

With a guide line you can build both outward and inward strokes.



Keep it VERY simple. Even one circle is fine!

Tips for painting your design

Use a small (1/4" or so) flat brush.

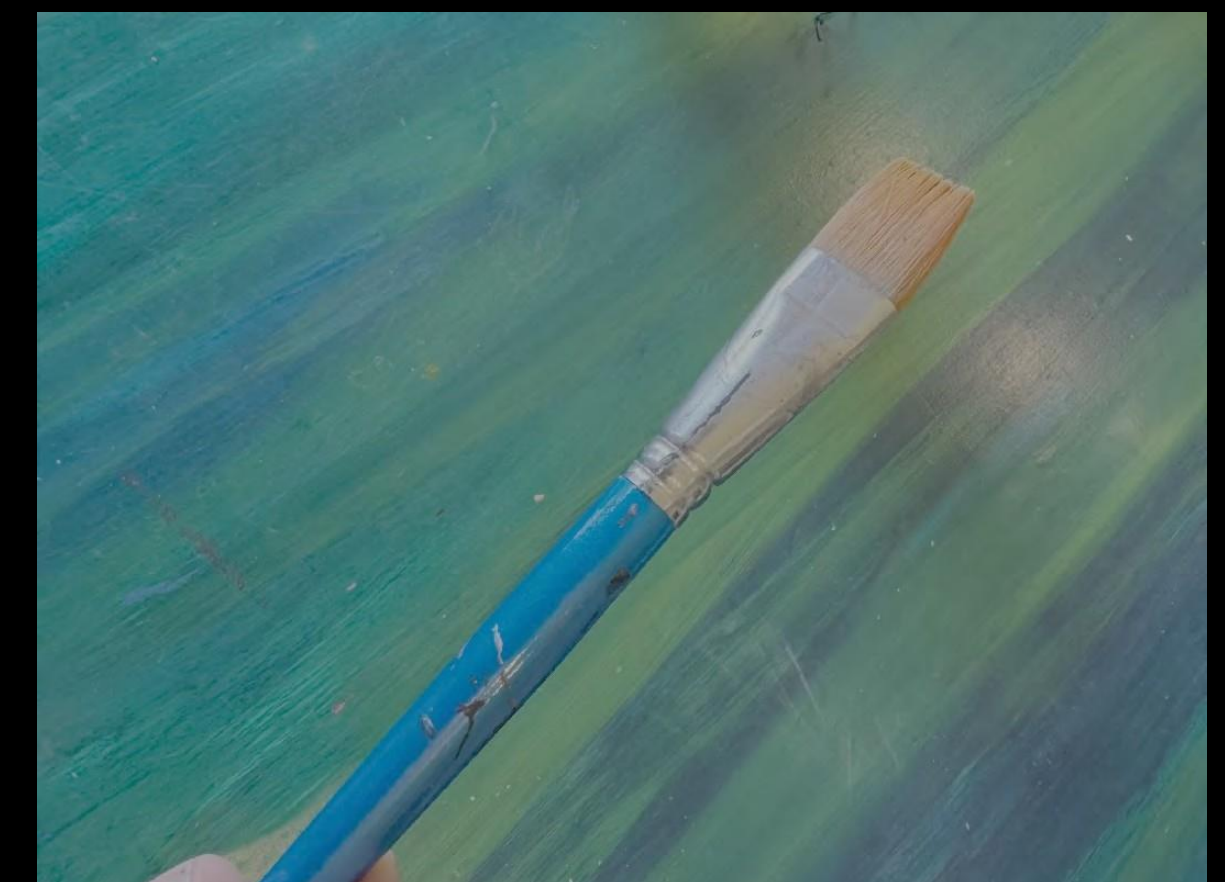
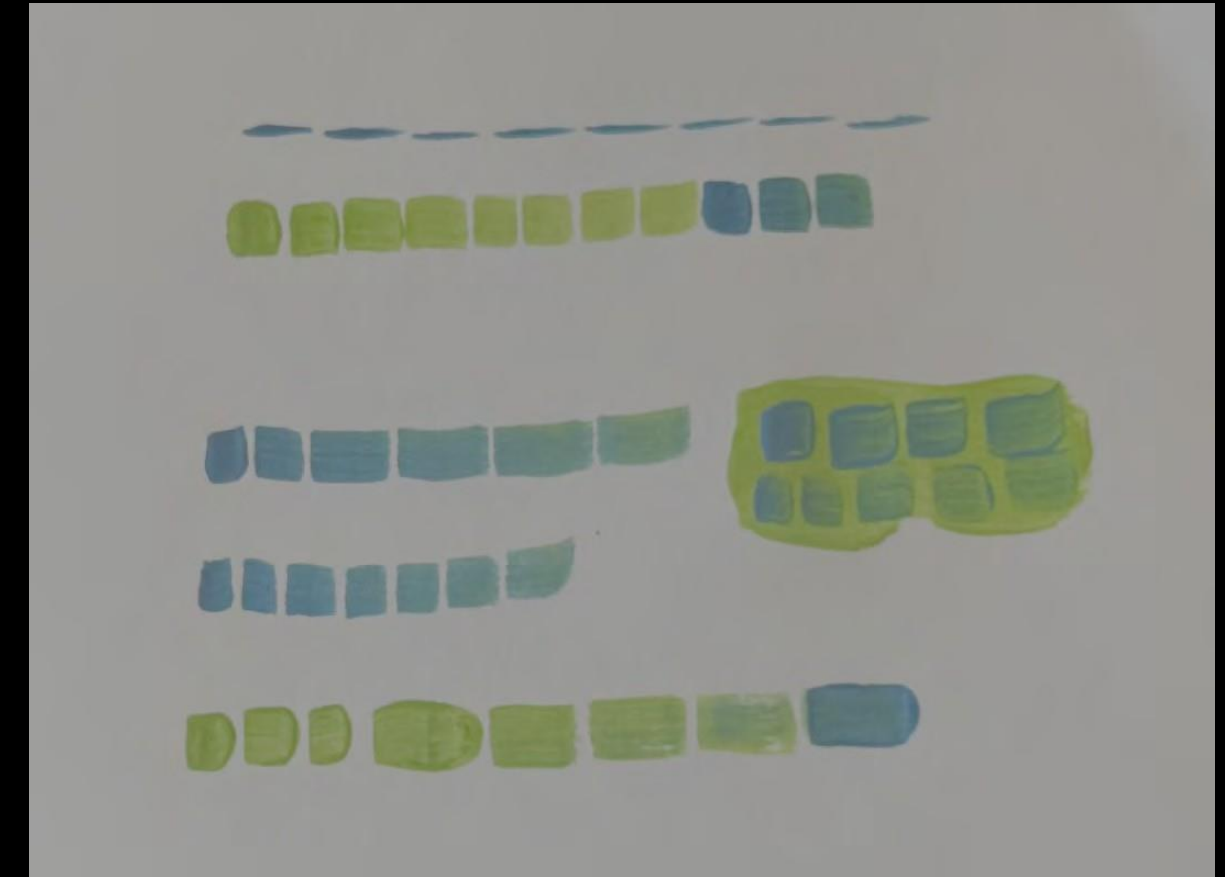
The width of the stroke on paper varies depending on how you hold your brush AND how much pressure you use. Turn the brush sideways to make thin strokes.

If you push down, the brush spreads out more and makes a wider stroke.

Test a few strokes on a scrap paper. Try to make your marks the about same length and width in each row. Making wider, longer strokes will make the project move more quickly.

You do not need to dip each time you make a mark. Make marks until you start to run out of paint, then flip the brush over and get the paint from the other side.

Mix variations in color on your plate!



Let's choose any one of your colors and begin painting along your guide

Make your marks as much the same as you can.

Leave only a tiny gap between strokes...nearly or barely touching

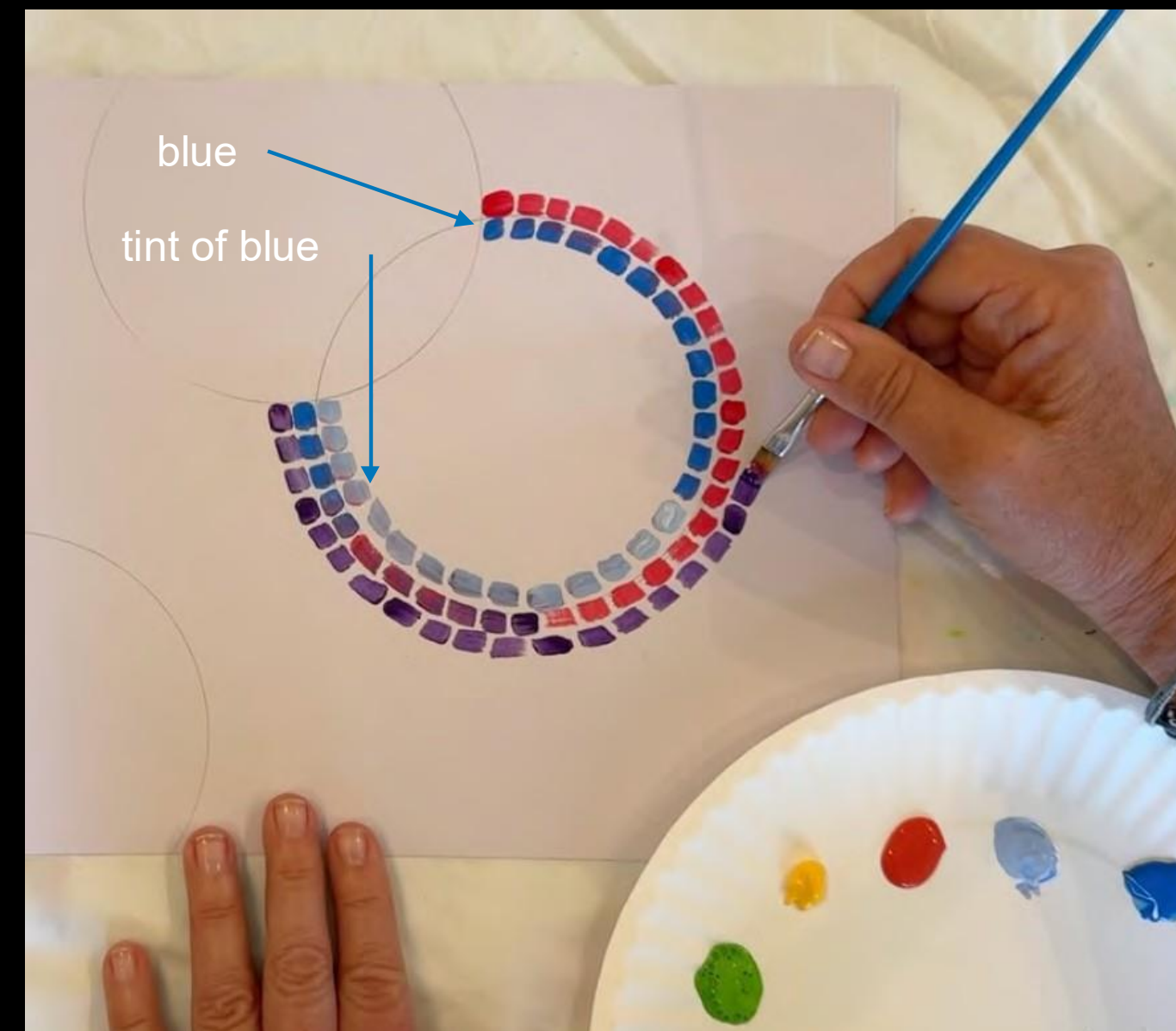
When you've completed the circle (or stripe) let's try making a tint by adding white to a color



mix in a
new spot
on your
plate!

Now mix a tint of that color on your plate, and make a second row using that tint.

- Note: take a little white and a little of the color you choose. Don't mix all of either color!
- More white = a lighter tint



As you pass out colors, talk to the kids about how they might look:

“If orange is made from red and yellow, what happens if you add more yellow?”

“What happens if you add more yellow to turquoise?”

- Note: both of these colors already contained yellow, it will just change the shade.

“What happens if you mix yellow with purple?”

- Note: purple is made from blue and red. When you add yellow, you are really mixing 3 colors together. You will likely get some form of brown...

HAVE KIDS WORK WHILE YOU PASS OUT COLORS



Example of variations
between green and green
mixed with various
amounts of yellow



Try adding rows of new colors.
You can also have solid areas.

You can vary the length of the
“dashes” and width of the bands
of color.

Pass out black last... when you do, you can talk about “shade”



Shade is the opposite of tint. And...

REMEMBER:

**BLACK IS THE “HOT
SAUCE” OF
COLOR!!**

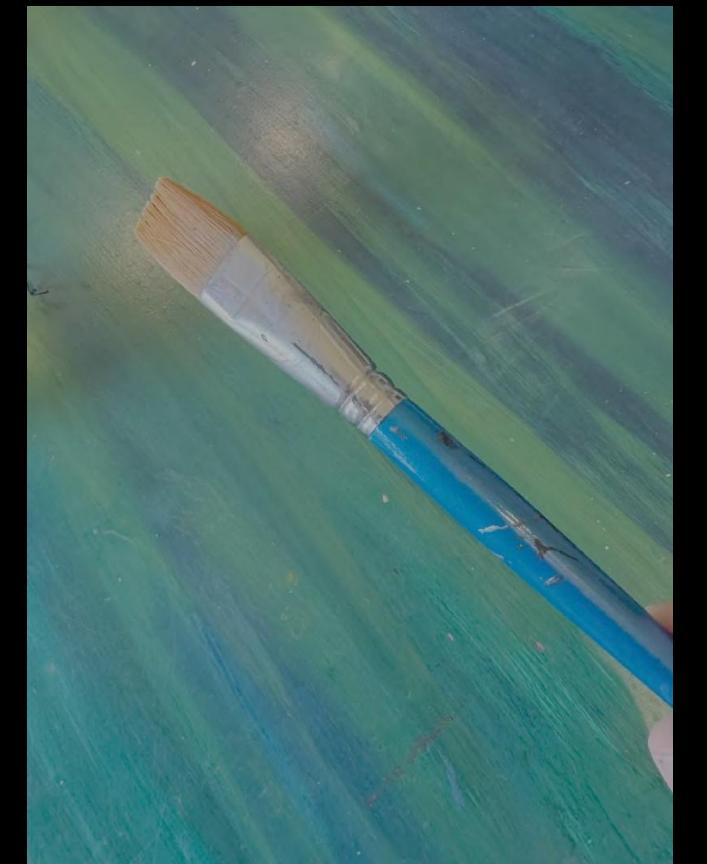
Meaning: A little goes a very, very long way! A little can wipe out the “flavor” of the color you are mixing with, so go slow.

With all of our experimenting, let’s use small dabs



Keep adding rows of colors.

If you are running short on time, encourage switching to a larger 1" brush and make some areas solid.





Keep building your rows.

Mix new colors

Vary your stroke width

Add Contrast (dark next to light colors)

Consider adding some solid areas

Keep going until your page is full - you can layer over solid if you like

Do you want to name your work?

Here's a list of notable artworks by Alma Woodsey Thomas:

1. "Resurrection" (1966)
2. "Starry Night and the Astronauts" (1972)
3. "The Eclipse" (1970)
4. "Autumn Leaves Fluttering in the Breeze" (1973)
5. "Wind and Crepe Myrtle Concerto" (1973)
6. "A Glimpse of Mars" (1972)
7. "Air View of a Spring Nursery" (1966)
8. "Blast Off" (1970)
9. "Snoopy Sees Earth Wrapped in Sunset" (1970)



Sunrise on the meadow