



You will need:

- A sheet of white paper or card
- A pencil
- A ruler
- Glue or Pritt Stick
- A pair of suitable scissors
- Coloured paper (alternatively, you can use paint sample cards, scraps of fabric, or magazine clippings)
- A circular or cylindrical object to trace around, e.g., a tin, jar, glass, bottle or vase

Who was Alma Thomas?

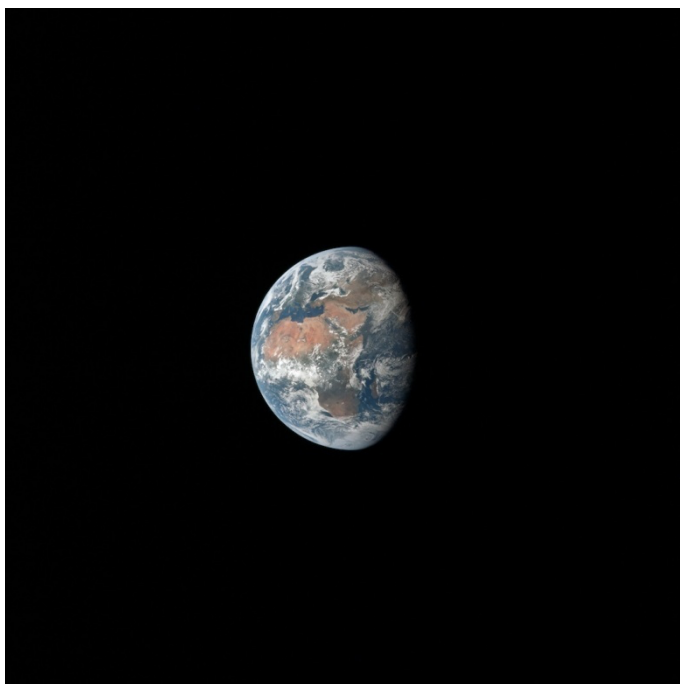
Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891 – 1978) was an African American abstract painter. Her works are renowned for their distinctive brush strokes and exuberant use of colour. Alma Thomas applied vivid shades of paint to her canvases in short, precise patches, creating irregular, striking patterns. She would often arrange these marks in vertical stripes or concentric circles. In Thomas's circular works, rings of colours appear to radiate out from a central point, like rays of light emanating from the sun.



Alma Woodsey Thomas was born in Georgia in 1891, but moved to Washington, D.C. as a teenager and remained in the city for most of her life. Thomas was a junior high school teacher and only became a full-time artist when she retired in 1960.

Photograph of Alma Thomas in her studio, circa 1968, Ida Jervis, photographer.

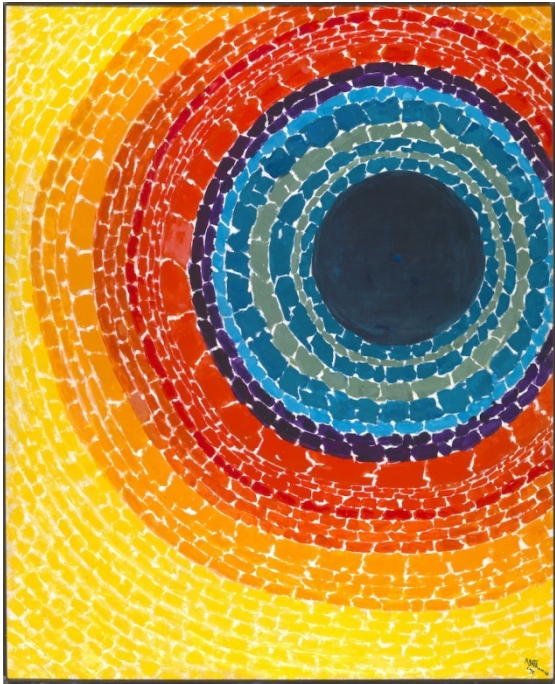
Image Credit: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution



Thomas was inspired by the space exploration that was taking place during the time she was painting, particularly the 1969 moon landing. She began to think about the earth as viewed from outer space and its place in the solar system.

Earth as seen by the Apollo 11 astronauts, 1969

Image Credit: NASA



These interests led Thomas to create her *Space Paintings* series. In these works, she depicted subjects including space launches, eclipses, space shuttles hurtling through starry skies, and flaming sunsets. In all these astronomical scenes, Thomas applied patches of jewel-like colours to the canvas to create shimmering patterns.

Alma Thomas, *The Eclipse*, 1970
Image Credit: Smithsonian American Art Museum



Thomas's technique has led her work to be compared to Byzantine mosaics, with their gleaming fragments of colour.

Agnus Dei, early 20th century (original dated 6th century)
Image Credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

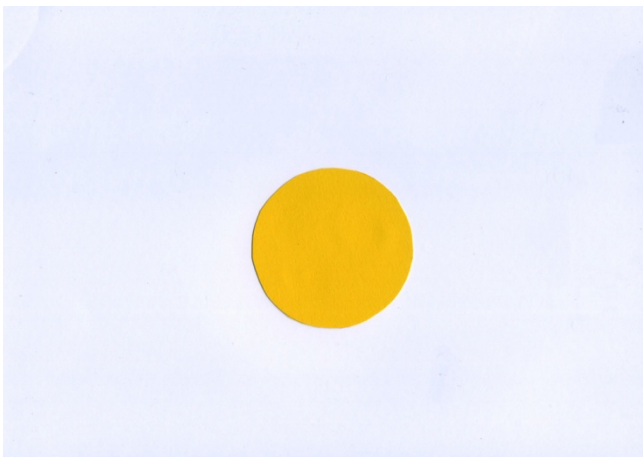
Create your very own abstract sun inspired by Alma Thomas

Step 1



Decide which colour you want to use for the centre of your abstract sun. I've opted for a deep yellow shade. Place your circular or cylindrical object on your chosen piece of paper and trace around it with a pencil.

Step 2



Use your scissors to cut out the circular shape you've traced. Place your circle on a piece of white card or paper. Think about where you'd like to place it:

- Do you want the centre of your sun to be in the middle of the page?
- Or would you prefer for it to be up and to the side, to imitate how the sun appears in the sky?

When you're happy with the arrangement of your circle, glue it into place.

Step 3



Using a ruler and pencil, divide each of your coloured papers into strips approximately 1.5 cm wide.

Step 4



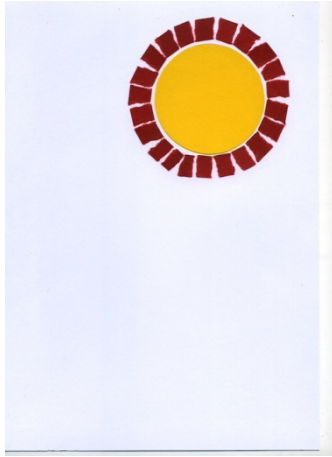
Cut each sheet of your coloured paper into strips. Tear the top and bottom off each of your strips; discard these torn off pieces. Then tear the remaining strips into scraps of colour. We're now ready to start adding the coloured rings of colour that will circle our central 'sun'.

Step 5



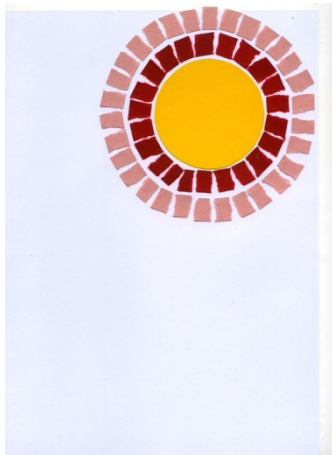
Decide which colour you'd like to use for your first ring. Place a scrap of your chosen colour beneath your central 'sun'. You'll notice that each of your coloured pieces has two straight edges and two torn, ragged edges. Make sure that the edge facing your 'sun' is straight. Once you're happy with the arrangement of this coloured piece, glue it into place.

Step 6



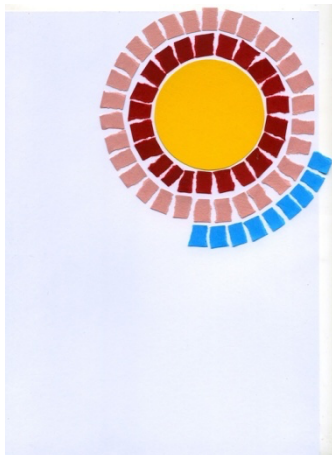
Continue adding and gluing scraps of your chosen colour to create the first ring circling your 'sun'. Keep the pieces quite close to each other, but don't let them overlap. Check that each piece has a straight edge facing the 'sun'.

Step 7



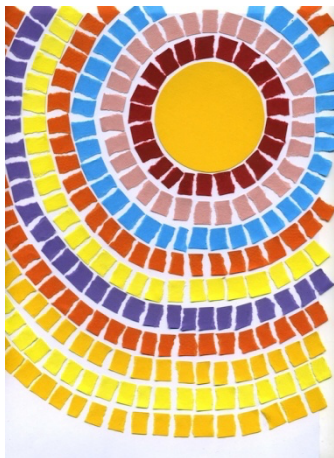
Add further rings of colour to create the impression of light radiating out from your central 'sun'.

Step 8



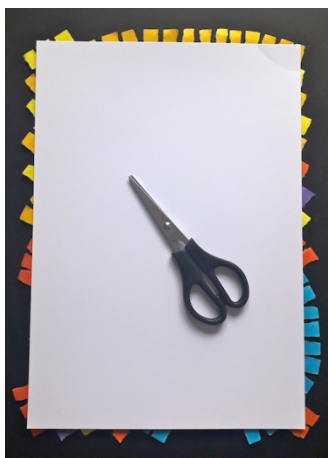
As you continue to build up your rings of colour, the scraps will start to go over the edge of the paper. Don't worry about this; we'll neaten it up later.

Step 9

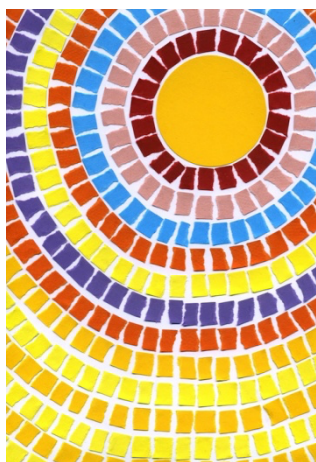


When you reach the bottom third of your page, start to only use shades of orange and yellow to emphasise the heat radiating from your central 'sun'.

Step 10



Nearly done! Turn your piece over and trim off any coloured paper that extends beyond the edge of the white page.



Congratulations, you did it! You've created an abstract sun worthy of Alma Thomas.