

# George Sugarman (American, 1912 - 1999)

*Trio*, 1972-1973  
Painted aluminum



George Sugarman was born in 1912 in the Bronx, New York. His father was a dealer in Oriental rugs and Sugarman spent much of his childhood traveling with his father on sales trips through the eastern and southern United States. Observing the colors and patterns of Persian and Turkish rugs made a lasting impression on him.

Often described as forward-thinking, Sugarman's body of work defies a definitive style. His innovative approach to art-making gave his work a fresh, experimental feel and it enabled him to continually expand his creative focus. According to Sugarman, "Caution is the artist's greatest danger." He was among the pioneers of the concept of pedestal-free sculpture and is best known for large-scale, brightly painted metal sculptures like *Trio* at the Lynden Sculpture Garden.

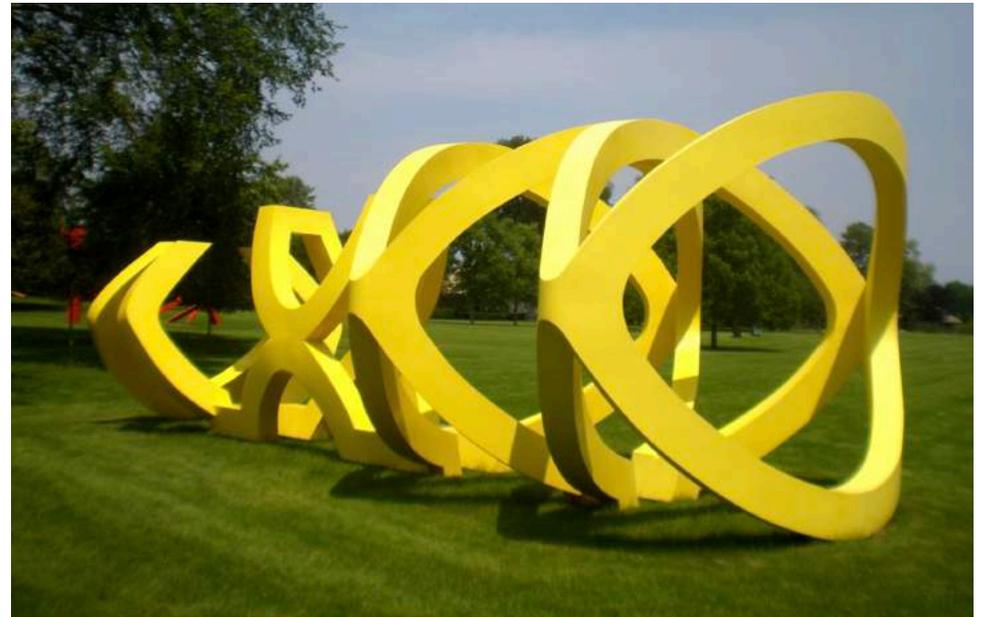
In the early 1960s, Sugarman's work was a part of the sculpture explosion in Europe and the United States. Along with Anthony Caro, Donald Judd, and Mark di Suvero, he was among the first to make large-scale sculpture that rejected the traditional pedestal to sit directly on the floor. After 1970 as Sugarman increasingly turned to large outdoor sculpture commissions, these, too, were sited directly on the ground. Taking these large-scale architectural compositions off the pedestal removed the barrier blocking the viewer's space and invited the viewer to walk around and even through the work—fostering new ways to explore sculptural space.

The brightly colored forms of Sugarman's sculptures, which were initially made of painted wood and then of painted aluminum, could seem chaotic at first. But as the viewer walks around his works, they unfold in an abstract story of color and shape.



In designing his sculptures, Sugarman first explores color, pattern, and form in space by making cardboard models. These were only scaled up in size by a metal craftsman once a work had been commissioned. *Trio* demonstrates Sugarman's concern with making volumes out of what he terms "essentially linear elements" or forms that reach out horizontally rather than vertically. "I'm interested," he explained, "in the transformation of forms." His sculptures seem "open-ended" – as if they are made of many sculptures and put together like a complex puzzle. Sugarman described his chain of forms as the result of a process in which 'the first form fathers the second, the second the third, etc.'" Asked how best to interpret his sculptures, he said, "My choice has been to keep all possible sources of meaning open. Open is one word I like, complexity is another."

Visit our [collections](#) page to learn more about this sculpture at Lynden.

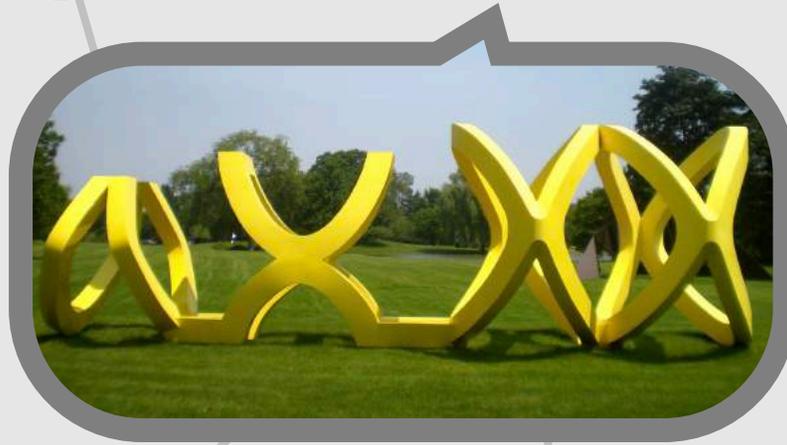


What examples can you find?

Why do you think Sugarman called this sculpture *Trio*?

What does the word *trio* mean?

**George Sugarman, *Trio*, 1972-1973**



Why do you think the artist chose to paint *Trio* bright yellow?

Why are some things found in nature brightly colored?

What caused them to be this brightly colored?

Imagine walking around and through this sculpture. How does it change?

What relationship does your body have to sculpture?

What relationship do objects and living things have to each other?

*Space fascinated me. Why did most sculptures use a vertical, figure-like space even with abstract forms? I looked around. Objects and living things crawled and spread out on the ground. You had to bend down to see them properly. Your body had a different relationship to them. Some things climbed up, hugging other things for support. Others hung above your head. Objects were broken up, yet remained continuous. Some forms very different from each other were adjacent yet made a coherent image. Space was used in every conceivable way. It was active, it was as if it adapted itself to the needs of the world, that its role was not merely passive.*

—George Sugarman

## Explore and Create

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All living things create patterns. Some patterns are easy to see while others are invisible to the naked eye. Patterns are found in plants and animals, but also in the way things grow and the movements each makes. On a larger scale, the world is full of patterns created by the relationships between things. Think about how weather creates erosion patterns using wind and water. Scientists, mathematicians, biologists, designers, and artists look for such patterns to learn from and imitate nature's framework. How can we draw inspiration from the things we observe in nature?

# Connect to Nature:

## Color and Pollination

Sugarman chose bright colors for his artworks. What color is *Trio*? Explore *Trio* inside and explore the space that surrounds it. Find one object from nature that stands out and has a similar color to the sculpture. Why do flowers, like dandelions, have this bright yellow color?

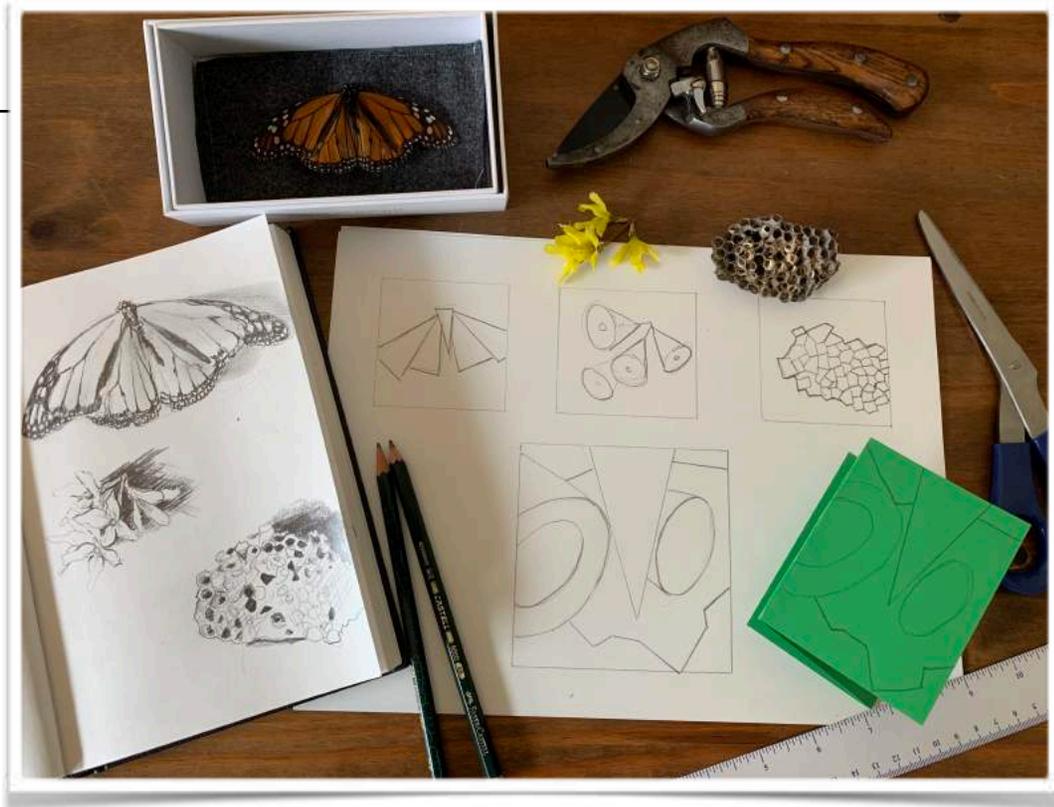
Brightly colored flowers attract more pollinators—like bees—that help the plant reproduce. Without pollination a plant cannot produce fruit or seed, therefore they make themselves very colorful and attractive to pollinators. Now, why do you think Sugarman chose this color for *Trio*?

## Shadow and Registering Time (for sunny days)

Walk through and around *Trio*. Besides our bodies walking in and out of the sculpture, how is *Trio* interacting with the sun? The shape of the sculpture determines the shape of its shadow. The position of the sun affects the size and shape of the shadow, we can test this observing our own shadows at different times during the day. How does a shadow look when the sun is low in the horizon? How does a shadow



look when the sun is high in the sky? Let's observe the sun's position in relation to *Trio*'s shadow. Using yarn, we will trace *Trio*'s shadow on the ground, and we will come back in 30 minutes to retrace it and see whether it moved or not. What is moving to produce these shadows? Is it the sun or the earth?



## Art Elements and Principles Vocabulary:

**Color** the visual sensation dependent on the reflection or absorption of light from a given surface. The three characteristics of color are hue, intensity, and value.

**Shape** A two-dimensional area or plane that may be open or closed, free form or geometric. A shape can be found in nature or created by humans.

**Form** Forms have volume and take up space. They are three-dimensional (length, width, height) and can be viewed from many angles.

**Space** (in sculpture) the positive and negative space, between, around and within objects.

**Pattern** A repeating unit of shape or form, or the "skeleton" that organizes the parts of a composition.

# Explore and Create

Project suggested for ages 7 & up  
or with help from an adult.

**Materials:** Your journal or drawing paper, three collected natural objects, pen or pencil, colored card stock paper (3 pieces cut to 3.5"x 8.5"), scissors, glue or tape.

Sugarman describes our bodies' relationship to the objects and living things that surround us as inspiration for his sculpture. Slow down, move around and look closely at the things you find interesting. Bend down for a closer look or spread out on the ground—if that's possible—to change your point of view. Look for patterns, relationships and structures.

Is the object or form you are observing leaning, hanging, hugging or sitting on something else? Did it grow/was it built in relation to something else? Are there other things around it that have similar patterns or shapes? How might their patterns be related to one another? How might they connect to you?

On a piece of paper or in your journal, begin by making three quick drawings of the things you notice as you look around. These are called observational sketches.

1. Starting with the three observational sketches you made, focus on patterns that you see in the drawings. Begin by simplifying each drawing down to basic geometric shapes (circles, squares, triangles).
2. Using these three simplified shapes as inspiration, and looking for similarities, connections, and relationships, combine them into a single pattern. Draw your new **pattern**.
3. Select a piece of **colored** card stock or construction paper and fold it several times in accordion style folds, as seen at right.
4. Transfer your pattern onto your folded paper and choose areas of your design to cut away. Be careful not to cut away all of the folded edges.
5. Unfold your paper to bring your 2D pattern into a 3D **form**. How has your pattern changed? Can you still identify what your original source of inspiration?



6. Continue to experiment with your pattern on a new piece of colored, folded paper, emphasizing the parts you like or eliminating the parts you dislike. You might try folding the new piece of paper a different way, or reverse the areas of your design to cut out. A different combination of patterns, folds, and color will create a whole new form!
7. Make three variations of your cut paper pattern, each building off the last. Then, like Sugarman, connect them together into a chain of transforming forms.

