

Art Study

The Art of Alma Woodsey Thomas

Tips for leading an art study with your group:

- Make sure everyone has a good view of the art, either print individual copies of the art or have it displayed on a screen or tablet.
- Introduce the art, artist, title and date it was painted.
- Take time to quietly look at the art, let the art speak.
- Use questions to stimulate discussion.
- Use open ended questions that will solicit opinion.

Here are some questions that will help get the discussion going:

- What caption would you give this painting?
- Can you tell the time of day or the season in this painting, what clues do you have?
- What is the mood of the painting? Do the colors and lighting help to define the mood? How?
- Pretend you are inside this painting, describe how you feel.
- If money were no object, would you buy this painting?
- Does this painting make you think of any place you have visited.
- What would you ask the artist about this painting if they were here?

The Art of Alma Woodsey Thomas

Thomas was born in 1891 in Columbus, Georgia, the oldest of four girls. In 1907, her family moved to Washington, D.C., seeking relief from the racial violence in the South. Thomas attended Howard University, and became the colleges first fine arts graduate in 1924. Thomas then began a 35-year career teaching art at a D.C. junior high school. Devoted to her students, she organized art clubs and student exhibitions for them. Teaching allowed her to support herself while pursuing her own painting.

When she retired from teaching, Thomas worked to develop her signature style. She debuted her work in an exhibition at Howard University in 1966, at the age of 75.

Thomas became an important role model for women, African Americans, and older artists. Thomas was, in 1972, the first African-American woman to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

The work of Alma Thomas graced the Old Family Dining Room at the White House during the Obama administration. The painting is the first artwork by an African American woman to hang in the public spaces of the White House and enter the permanent collection.



Credit: PETE SOUZA/WHITE HOUSE

For Discussion:

Alma Thomas, who overcame barriers of race, gender, and age, became a successful artist in her seventies. She had this to say about her art:

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

What do you think Thomas is saying about art in this quote?

Between 1969 and 1972, by then in her eighties, Thomas developed a series of paintings devoted to space exploration.

Consider the fact that Thomas was born in 1891, the horse and buggy days. When she painted this series, she listened to the reports of the moon landing and stories of space exploration.

What might have interested this artist about space exploration?

Appreciating abstract art can take practice. Here are some questions to aid discussion:

What words would you use to describe these paintings?

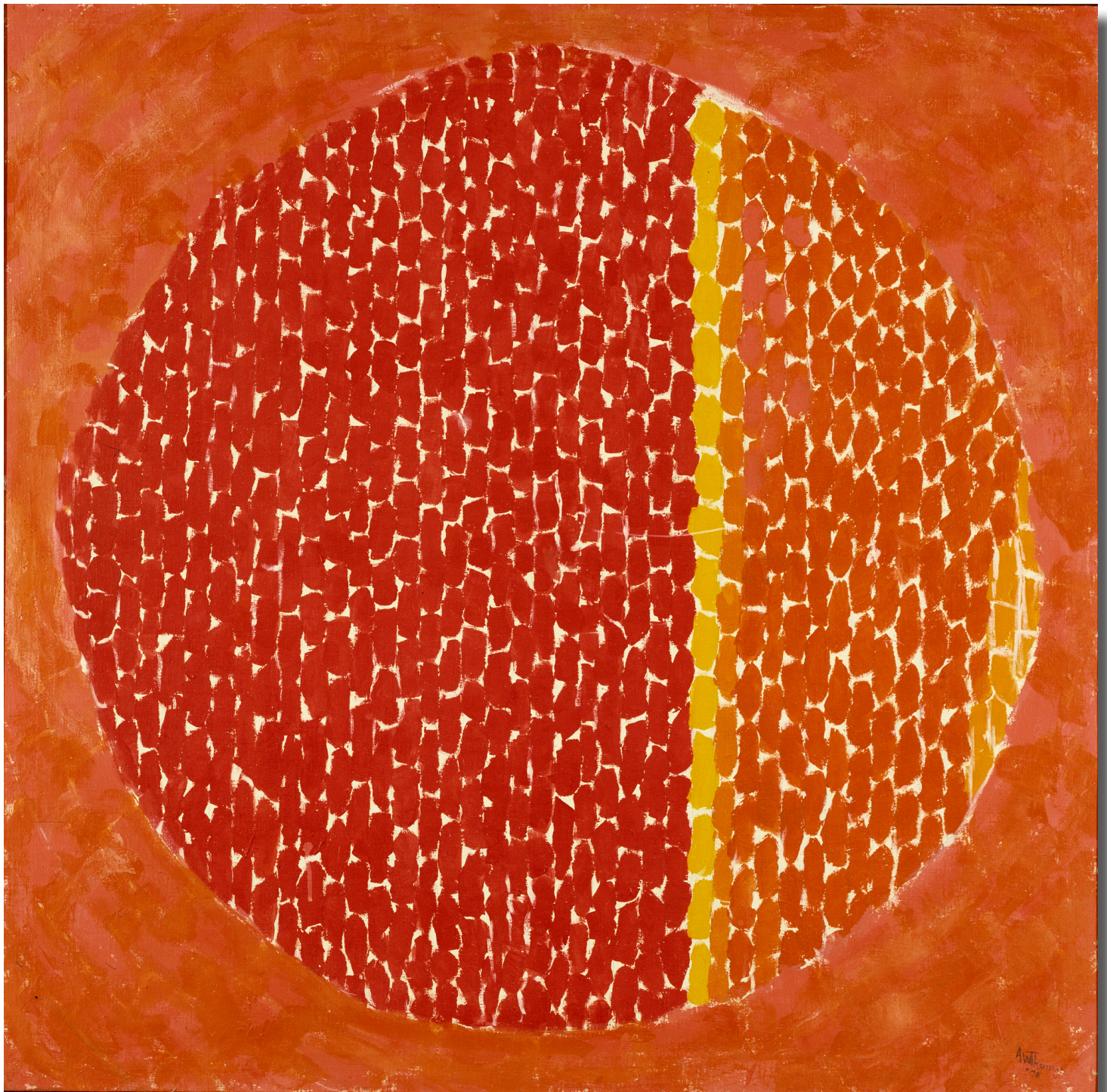
How would you describe the lines in these pictures? The shapes? The colors?

What does this painting show?

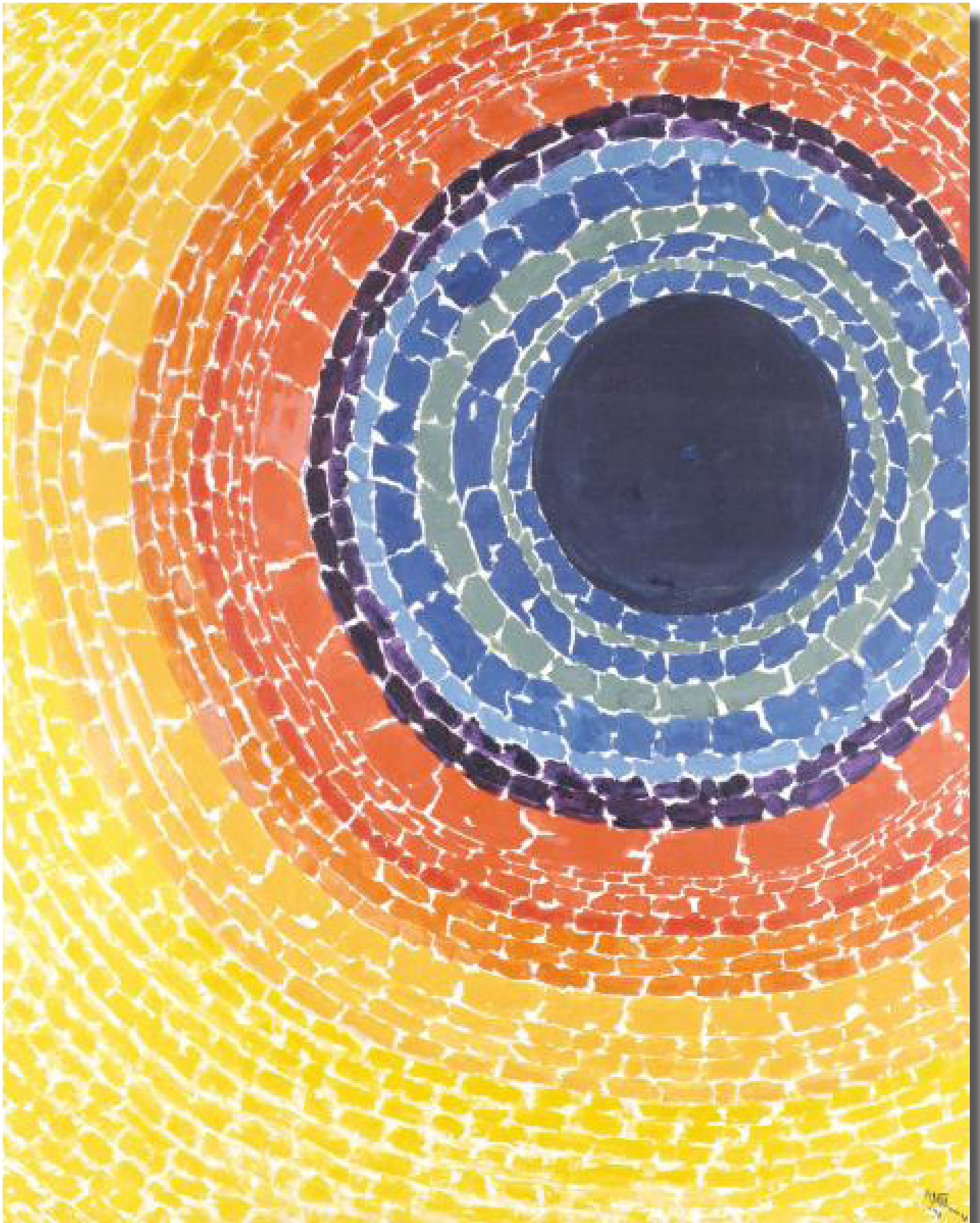
What do these 4 paintings have in common?



Alma Woodsey Thomas



Snoopy Sees Earth Wrapped in Sunset
by **Alma Woodsey Thomas** 1970



The Eclipse by Alma Woodsey Thomas 1970



Atmospheric Effect II by Alma Woodsey Thomas 1970



Starry Night and the Astronauts by **Alma Woodsey Thomas** 1970