The first time I visited a Montessori classroom, I could only describe it in one way:

*The most structured environment I had ever seen AND the most freedom in a classroom I had ever seen.*

How can structure and freedom co-exist in such harmony? How can this environment be so carefully planned, yet all students are working on something different?

**General Montessori Background**

First, I would like to share some quotes from Maria Montessori herself, that really speak to the idea of choice in education and how Montessori fits this bill.

*“The world of education is like an island where people, cut off from the world, are prepared for life by exclusion from it”*

*“It should be realized that genuine interest cannot be forced. Therefore all methods of education based on centers of interest which have been chosen by adults are wrong.”*

*“The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, “The children are working as if I did not exist.”*  

*“Children themselves have furnished us with practical, positive and tested norms for constructing an educational system in which their own choices are a guiding principle and their natural vivacity prevents mistakes”*

Looking for endless inspiration after reading this article? Browse this collection on Pinterest of Montessori Art Ideas.
Note the general structure and principles of Montessori, which is explained so well through this infographic from Racheous Loveable Learning.

WHAT MAKES A ACTIVITY 'MONTESSORI'?;

Montessori Activities:

AR CHILD DIRECTED
Montessori activities are self-motivated. The child has freedom (within limits) to choose their own works.

HAVE CONTROL OF ERROR
Montessori materials and activities typically have a control of error for self-correction and learning.

INVOLVE THE SENSES
Maria Montessori found that young children learn through their senses. Activities inspired by Montessori often involve sensorial input/output.

ARE HANDS ON
Children learn by doing. Even the most abstract concepts are best introduced in a hands on way.

ISOLATE CONCEPTS
Often, Montessori activities focus on one concept or break complicated learning into steps. Sometimes the tasks appear simplistic but the emphasis on one task helps children to perfect necessary steps.

AID IN INDEPENDENCE
Children gain confidence and pride due to the way that activities are set up. They are created in an orderly, inviting way and contain all that is required to complete the task.

EMPHASIZE CONCENTRATION
Most Montessori works are able to be repeated. This, plus the freedom of time, allows children to develop deep concentration and attention to detail.
The basics of the Montessori structure is the idea that each activity is segmented into simple skills which build up on one another. Each skill, activity or theme is put on a tray or in a basket, and is to be worked on in isolation of the other activities. Students continue to choose one activity at a time, but they are free to choose any activity, and for the most part, in any order, except for some more difficult skills which build up on one another and are taught in mini-lessons before the student can choose that tray.

Many Montessori schools also have an ‘art area’ which students can work on various, isolated, art skills.

Of course, the art area is a welcome addition to any general Montessori classroom, the ideas here can also transfer fluently to the art classroom, where only art skills are offered in this structured way.

Direct Implications for the Art Room:
Here are some examples of how “Art Skills” can be consolidated and organized into trays, in the literal style of a Montessori classroom. Students have full control over which tray to choose, but they must work on one activity at a time before moving to the next one.

Montessori Style Observational Drawing

Read the following Montessori article, Introductory Observational Drawing. Note how skills are organized and simplified. {image source}
Fine Motor Montessori Ideas

One of my favorite ways to consider the use of a literal Montessori style setup in the art room, is the idea of isolating skills you want students to learn (fine motor, art elements) into trays, and then allowing students to choose and move through the trays as they please. For something like this, you might consider {Flex Time Choice} or perhaps move students who need extra help with fine motor through these activities as bonus work.

Fine Motor: Scissors Practice {source}{source}
Fine Motor: Gluing and Lines {source}

Color Theory and Mixing

This article has an excellent roundup of Montessori color mixing ideas. {source}
Here is one of my favorite examples of very simple art trays for children, which really drives home the idea of media, and focusing on the use of one media at a time. (source)
Finally, some inspiration for setting up creative areas in the Montessori style from schools I have visited and become inspired by….

Art Shelves
Even Clean-Up can become “Montessori” with careful structure assisting student independence and choice.