

Art & Activities / Icon Portraits



Overview:

This lesson is a good introduction to Warhol's pop art and silk screening methods. Students learn how and why Andy Warhol selected imagery from culture to reflect popular values. Students make their own art project using a popular icon from their generation. Teachers can adapt this lesson by substituting images of famous people or historical images.

Grades: K-12

Subjects: Art, Social Studies, History, Cultural Studies

Pennsylvania State Standards:

Arts and Humanities:

9.1.A Know and use the elements and principles of each art form to create works in the arts and humanities 9.3.8 E . Interpret and use various types of critical analysis in the arts and humanities.

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening:

1.6.8 C Speak using skills appropriate to formal speech situations.

Objectives:

- Students will identify and interpret visual data from iconic images
- Students will discuss cultural trends
- Students will choose and apply design elements
- Students will determine cause and effect
- Students will defend rationale for applied choices

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Andy Warhol, Silver Liz [Studio Type], 1963
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About the Art:

Warhol was drawn to the glamorous worlds of Hollywood, fashion, and celebrity. His interest in pop culture manifested itself early on in his childhood collection of autographed celebrity photographs. Warhol bought and read teen magazines and tabloids to stay current on what was pop, even into adulthood. He carried this interest into his artwork, creating iconic paintings of mega-stars such as Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, and Elizabeth Taylor. Warhol appropriated images for his portraits from magazines, newspapers, or directly from publicity photographs.

Warhol used photographic silkscreen to create his celebrity portraits. This method of printing creates a very precise and defined image and allows the artist to mass-produce a large number of prints with relative ease. Warhol adopted the methods of mass production to make images of movie stars that were themselves mass-produced. Elvis Presley existed not only as a flesh-and-blood person but also as millions of pictures on album covers and movie screens, in newspapers and magazines. He was infinitely reproducible. Similarly, through use of the silkscreen printing process, Warhol could produce as many Elvis paintings as he pleased.

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Points of View:

“The contradictory fusion of the commonplace facts of photography and the artful fictions of a painter’s retouchings was one that, in Warhol’s work, became a particularly suitable formula for the recording of those wealthy and glamorous people whose faces seem perpetually illuminated by the aftermath of a flash-bulb.”

Robert Rosenblum, *Andy Warhol Portraits*
Thames and Hudson (New York:, 1993), p. 143.

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare and contrast the formal aspects of the portraits (e.g., Warhol’s use of color and shape, each artworks overall balance and unity, and the sitters’ poses)
2. Andy Warhol not only made portraits from photographs he shot himself, but also from images he appropriated from mass media. What portraits do you see all the time on the television and in magazines and newspapers?
3. What effect does this repetition have on culture?
4. Are there different types of fame? Which type is most valuable?
5. If you could make a portrait of anyone in the world, who would it be? Why?

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Activity: Portrait Acetate Project

Materials:

Photocopy machine acetates
Photographs/images of contemporary celebrities
Colored background paper
Clear tape
Scissors
Colored markers
Glue
Colored construction paper
Metallic markers
Foil paper
Stickers



Andy Warhol, Mick Jagger,
1975, ©AWF

Procedures:

Steps 1-4 should be completed prior to class or activity.

1. Choose 3-4 visual images of pop icons (magazine clippings and internet sites are good sources for high contrast images) Example: Madonna, Britney Spears, The President of the United States, Tiger Woods, etc.
2. Using a photocopy machine, manipulate the images to the desired size. If you reduce the image to 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" you can place two images per one piece of 8 1/2" x 11" acetate. Try to make the image high contrast by using the copy machine's "lighter" and "darker" functions.
3. Copy this image onto photocopy acetate. (Acetate can be ordered through most office supply stores.)
4. Make 2-4 acetates of each pop icon.
5. Choose your pop icon and colored background papers of the same size. Hinge the two together by using clear tape. To make the hinge, place the tape on one edge of the acetate, and then fold it over to stick on the backside of the back ground paper. Once this is done your two papers should open like a book.
6. Now you are ready to "under-paint" your portrait. Warhol would paint on the canvas first, and then print the photo graphic silkscreen image on top. For this project the acetate will act as the final printed layer. The image on the acetate has certain see-through areas; whatever is underneath those areas will be visible. Using cut or torn paper, create a collage-type pattern on the background paper so these colors show through the acetate.
7. Colored foil paper, stamps, and colored markers can also be used for the under-painting. Metallic or permanent markers can be used to draw on top of the acetate surface.
8. Have students create variation among their 2-4 acetates by changing elements, such as color and paper edges (ripped/torn edges vs. cut/smooth edges), adding linear elements using markers, and working with the background areas, as well as the subject areas.

Assessment and Wrap-up:

In a class critique, students present their artwork and discuss the following questions:

- Why did you choose certain colors and compositional elements?
- What is the cultural significance of the pop icons selected?



Andy Warhol
Lenin, ca.1986
Acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas
22 x 16 in. (55.9 x 40.6 cm.)
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Andy Warhol
Mao, 1972-1974
acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas
50 x 42 in. (127 x 106.7 cm.)
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Andy Warhol

Mick Jagger, ca. 1975

Two prints from a portfolio of 10 screen prints on paper
43 1/2 x 29 in. each

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