Art & Activities / Commission Portrait: Acetate Activity

Overview:

Students use photographic images and an easy collage process to alter their own self-portraits. Using Andy Warhol's photographic-silkscreen portraits, students explore the function of portraiture and why artists are paid to create portraits.

Grades: K-12

Subjects: Art, Graphic Arts, History, Social Studies, Cultural Studies

Pennsylvania State Standards:

Arts and Humanities:

> 9.1.8. E Communicate a unifying theme or point of view through the production of works in the arts.
> 9.2.A Recognize, know, use and demonstrate a variety of appropriate arts elements and principles to produce, review and revise original works in the arts.

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening:

> 1.6.9.C Speak using skills appropriate to formal speech situations.

Objectives:

• Students will identify formal aspects of portraiture

• Students will discuss the historical importance of portraits

• Students will assess the importance of portraiture in culture

• Students will compose portraits based on personality traits

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Andy Warhol, Tina Chow, 1985
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Founding
Collection, Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for
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About the Art:

Warhol started painting portraits on commission in the early 1960s. These works developed into a significant aspect of his career and were a main source of income in the 1970s. Many of his subjects were well known in international social circles, the art world, and the entertainment industry at this time. Andy Warhol began his commissioned portraits with a photo shoot using a Polaroid camera. The Polaroid afforded a very high contrast image that Warhol enlarged and trans-ferred onto a silkscreen. Each portrait was "under painted" first. Warhol traced simple outlines of the photographic image onto the canvas and painted in shapes of color. Some portraits were painted in very slick, hard-edge styles whereas others had solid fields of color or more gestural brushwork. Once this initial painted layer was dry, he printed the photo-graphic silkscreen image on top. See the Online Silkscreen Activity for more information about this process.

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Points of View:

I think eventually people competed to be portrayed by Warhol because that appeared to give them instant immortality of the sort usually enjoyed only by the greatest of stars or the most celebrated products, as if they were also part of the common consciousness of the time."

<div align="right">Arthur C. Danto, "Art," The Nation, April 3, 1989, p.461.</div>

Bob had asked Andy Warhol to do a portrait, which sort of frightened me, naturally, because one never knew what Andy would do. So he said, "Don't worry, everything will be splendid." So I had great visions of going to Richard Avedon.
He came up for me that day, and he said, "All right, we're off."
And I said, "Well, where are we going?"
"Just down to Forty-second Street and Broadway."
I said, "What are we going to do there?"
He said, "I'm going to take pictures of you."
I said, "For what?"
He said, "For the portrait."
I said, "In those things? My God, I'll look terrible!"
He said, "Don't worry," and he took out coins. He had about a hundred dollars' worth of silver coins, and he said, "We'll take the high key and the low key, and I'll push you inside, and you watch the little red light."
The thing you do the passport with, three for a quarter, or something like that.
He said, "Just watch the red light," and I froze. I watched the red light and never did anything. So Andy would come in and poke me and make me do all kinds of things, and I relaxed finally. I think the whole place, wherever we were, thought they had two nuts there. We were running from one booth to another, and he took all these pictures, and they were drying all over the place.
At the end of the thing, he said, "Now, you want to see them?" And they were so sensational that he didn't need Richard Avedon. I was so pleased; I think I'll go there for all my pictures from now on.
When he delivered the portrait, it came in pieces, and Bob said to him, "How would you like...don't you want to sit down at this, too?" because there were all these beautiful colors.
He said, "Oh no. The man who's up here to put it together, let him do it any way he wants."
"But, Andy, this is your portrait."
"It doesn't matter."
So he sat in the library, and we did it. Then, of course, he did come in and did give it a critical eye. "Well, I do think this should be here and that should be there." When it was all finished, he said, "It really doesn't matter. It's just so marvel-ous. But you could change it any way you want."
What I liked about it mostly was that it was a portrait of being alive and not like those candy box things, which I detest, and never ever wanted as a portrait of myself.

<div align="right">Ethel Scull, Warhol friend and collector on her portrait,
Emile De Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art
Scene, 1940-1970 Abbeville Press (New York: 1984), p.123-24.</div>

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Points of View continued:

If there were a portrait commission, we'd have a lunch. It was fun and helped to relax people who were nervous about having their portrait done . . . You never knew who was going to be at lunch. You could have a pop star, if it was some-body very famous, we wouldn't say that they were coming, we would tone down the lunch. I heard later that people were a little intimidated about coming to lunch . . . We had impromptu things happen, like when Georgia O'Keeffe came to get her portrait, I was videotaping Paloma Picasso and John Richardson, so by chance I also taped Georgia O'Keeffe and Paloma talking about Paloma's father. Once I was taping a lunch, and Rupert brought John Lennon in while Andy was photographing Liza Minelli. Not every day at 860 was exciting, but you had many times where great people came in that you wouldn't normally have a chance to really talk to. Andy was the whole reason for it being such a center of energy.

Vincent Fremont on The Factory lunches,
quote for web project One Stop Warhol Shop, 2000.

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare and contrast the formal aspects of Warhol's portraits (e.g., his use of color and shape, each artwork's overall balance and unity, and the sitter's pose).

2. Are portraits important to us? Why or Why not?

3. Why have artists painted portraits throughout the ages?

4. 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
Camera
Colored background paper
Clear tape
Scissors
Colored markers
Glue
Colored construction paper
Metallic markers
Foil paper
Stickers

Procedures:

1. Plan your portrait, deciding which personality trait you would like to convey. Try different poses then take the photographs.
2. Using a photocopy machine, manipulate the photographs 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 portrait so you can experiment with color and shape.
5. Choose colored background papers of the same size and hinge the acetate to the background paper 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 background 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 photographic 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. Create variation among the portraits 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 answer the following questions: What personality trait were you trying to convey in your portrait? Why did you choose certain colors and compositional elements?

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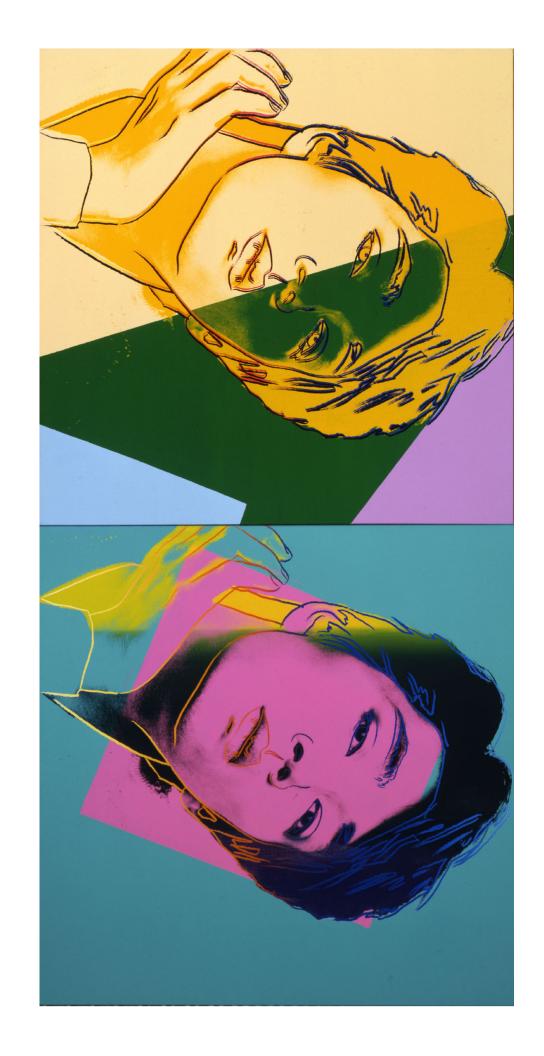© The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.
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Andy Warhol
Ethel Scull, 1963
silkscreen ink ad spray paint on linen
20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm.)
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh Founding Collection,
Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts,
Inc.

Andy Warhol
Dennis Hopper, 1970
Acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas
40 x 40 in. (101.6 x 101.6 cm.) each
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh Founding Collection,
Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

Andy Warhol
Ryuichi Sakamoto, 1983
Acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas
40 x 40 in. (101.6 x 101.6 cm.) each
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