
PECULIAR PERSONAL PORTRAITS

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What can a drawing capture about you that a photograph cannot? In this project, we will explore a variety of techniques for producing a surrealist, expressive self-portrait. After looking at works by **Enrico Baj**, **Suellen Rocca**, and **Karl Wirsum** for inspiration, students will use whatever drawing tools they have on hand to practice new ways of mark-making before producing one large final drawing.

MUSEUM OF
CONTEMPORARY ART
CHICAGO



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ACTIVITIES FOR CLOSE LOOKING

Examine three artworks from the MCA Collection and try some activities to help you look closer at their details.

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DISCUSSION TOPICS

Have conversation with friends, classmates, or family members on some themes in the three artworks.

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PROJECT: PECULIAR PERSONAL PORTRAITS

Create some portraits of your own. Use some simple exercises to build skills for a final work of art.

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EXERCISE THREE: Make a feelings-portrait-collage.

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RELEVANT LEARNING STANDARDS

Illinois Early Learning and Development Standard 31

Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.

Grades 3-5

2A.2a. Identify verbal, physical, and situational cues that indicate how others may feel.

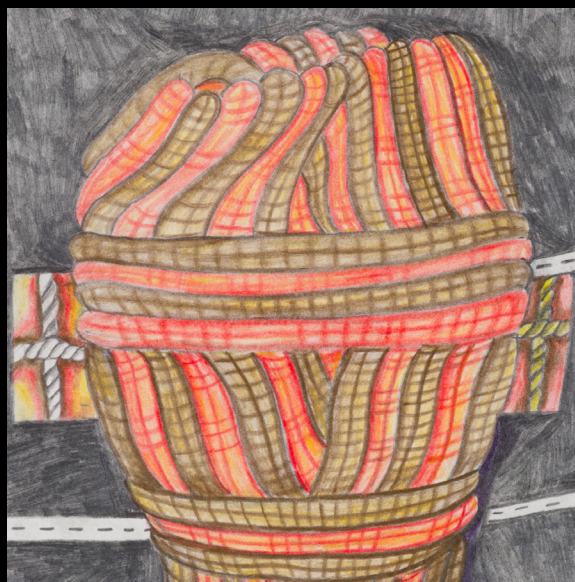
2A.2b. Describe the expressed feelings and perspectives of others.

Fine Arts Anchor Standard 10:

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

ACTIVITIES FOR CLOSE LOOKING

Take a closer look at each of the following portraits. When we see artworks in person, we might see details it's easy to miss online. When looking at an artwork digitally, it can be fun to connect to the artworks with some creative experiments.





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Baj

Take a look at the variety of texture in Enrico Baj's portrait, "Baj Chez Picasso." He collected these patterns and shapes from a variety of sources. Grab a big piece of paper and some crayons, and go on a texture scavenger hunt around your home (inside or outside.) When you find a relatively flat object that looks interesting, simply place your paper on top and then scribble with your crayon to capture what's underneath.

Enrico Baj, Italian, 1924–2003

Baj chez Picasso, 1979

Screenprint on paper

28 3/4 x 20 3/4 in. (73 x 52.7 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of Mrs. Robert B. Mayer

Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



Suellen Rocca's portrait seems to be a portrait that is hiding. Collect items around your home that might look interesting draped over your face. Take some selfies of these experiments.

Suellen Rocca, American, 1943–2020
1979 SCHOOL PICTURES DON'T LIE, 1982
Colored pencil, and marker ink and collage on paper
Sheet: 14 x 11 (35.6 x 27.9 cm.)
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of Mrs. E. A. Bergman
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



Imagine how Karl Wirsum's portrait might look more distorted up close vs. far away. Can you find some interesting objects to look through that change how you see the people in your home? You might try looking through a paper towel roll or bubble wrap. What else can you look through?

Karl Wirsum, American, b. 1939

What's the Confusion, 1974

Print on paper

38 x 30 in.; 96.52 x 76.2 cm

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Bequest of Ruth S. Nath

Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

DISCUSSION TOPICS

FREE ASSOCIATION

- What do each of these portraits remind you of? Any other pieces of media? Anything else you've seen in real life? Other than people, what do you think these artworks look like?

FEELINGS

- Look over the list of feelings. Go over any words that are unfamiliar. Assign feelings from this list to each portrait.
- Assign each portrait a familiar situation that may evoke a certain feeling. For example, "This artwork represents how I feel when I (realize I forgot to do my homework, ate too many chips at once, don't feel like getting out of bed, etc.)"

OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH PORTRAITURE

- How do you feel when you get your picture taken? What would your portrait look like if it captured that feeling, instead of just your face? What else can't a photograph capture?
- Does it feel different when you are taking a selfie vs someone else takes your picture? Explain the difference.
- Are there any pictures of you from when you are younger that you look back and laugh at (or that your family does?) What is it about these pictures that gets your attention?
- Talk about photo filters. What are some qualities of a "fun" filter? Are there certain kinds of photo filters you would share on social media vs ones you would never share?

LIST OF FEELINGS:

ANNOYED	MISERABLE	JOYFUL
AGITATED	HEARTBROKEN	LIVELY
FRUSTRATED	DEPRESSED	ESTATIC
RESENTFUL	WORN OUT	CALM
DISGUSTED	OVERWHELMED	CONTENT
SEETHING	DISCOURAGED	DELIGHTED
BITTER	CURIOUS	PROUD
UNEASY	INQUISITIVE	THANKFUL
NERVOUS	ENERGETIC	JEALOUS
INSECURE	ENGAGED	SHY
WORRIED	OBSESSED	GRUMPY
PANICKY	CONSIDERATE	EMBARRASSED
FLUMOXED	FRIENDLY	ALONE
UNCOMFORTABLE	KIND	HESTITANT
DISORIENTED	UNDERSTANDING	PESSIMISTIC
STUNNED	CONNECTED	PLEASED
SHOCKED	RELAXED	ASTONISHED
LOST	LIGHT-HEARTED	ENCHANTED
HELPLESS	CHEERFUL	PUZZLED
FROZEN	SILLY	REASSURED
GLOOMY	OPTIMISTIC	HOPEFUL
UNHAPPY	GIGGLY	UPLIFTED
TIRED		

PROJECT: PECULIAR PERSONAL PORTRAITS

PORTRAITURE

DISTORTION

EXAGGERATION

SURREALISM

MONOCHROMATIC

MAXIMALISM

DRAWING

PATTERN

COLLAGE

Introduce students to the idea of a series--a project where an artist creates multiple artworks while thinking of the same idea.

Start with three warmup projects, working towards one final project.

The end goal is for students to make one surreal, maximalist self portrait that captures their feelings rather than their face's realistic proportions.

Feel free to do all these projects, or pick and choose which exercises may work best for your students.

EXERCISE ONE:

How do you draw a feeling?

Materials: pencil, pen, paper, and markers

Return to the list of feelings words, if you discussed it previously. Ask students to choose one word that describes how they feel today.

PROMPT

- Imagine that this feeling is a character making its debut on a stage or a fashion runway. Like in a game of charades, this feeling can't speak, so viewers will have to guess the name of the feeling based on its clothing choices, accessories and other details. (Drawings may not be labeled with any words--all information should be communicated in visual details.)

After students complete their drawings, give their classmates an opportunity to guess what feelings they chose.

DISCUSS:

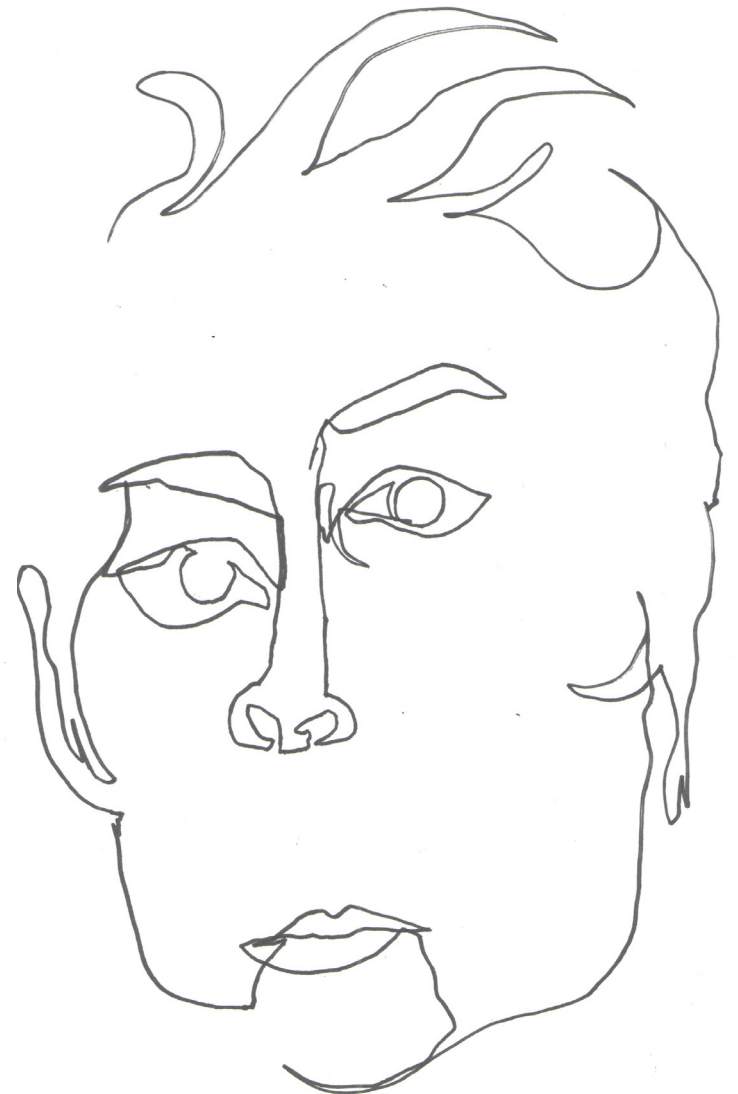
- What was challenging about this project? What was easy?



EXERCISE TWO: Practicing distortion.

Materials: Pen and paper

Introduce the idea of a “blind contour” drawing. Have students practice timed blind contour drawings, drawing either themselves or their classmates. Their drawings may look weird. Ask students to identify one thing about one of their drawings that they enjoy.



EXERCISE THREE:

Make a feelings-portrait-collage.

Materials: paper, blind contour self portrait, magazines, junk mail, construction paper, scissors, and glue

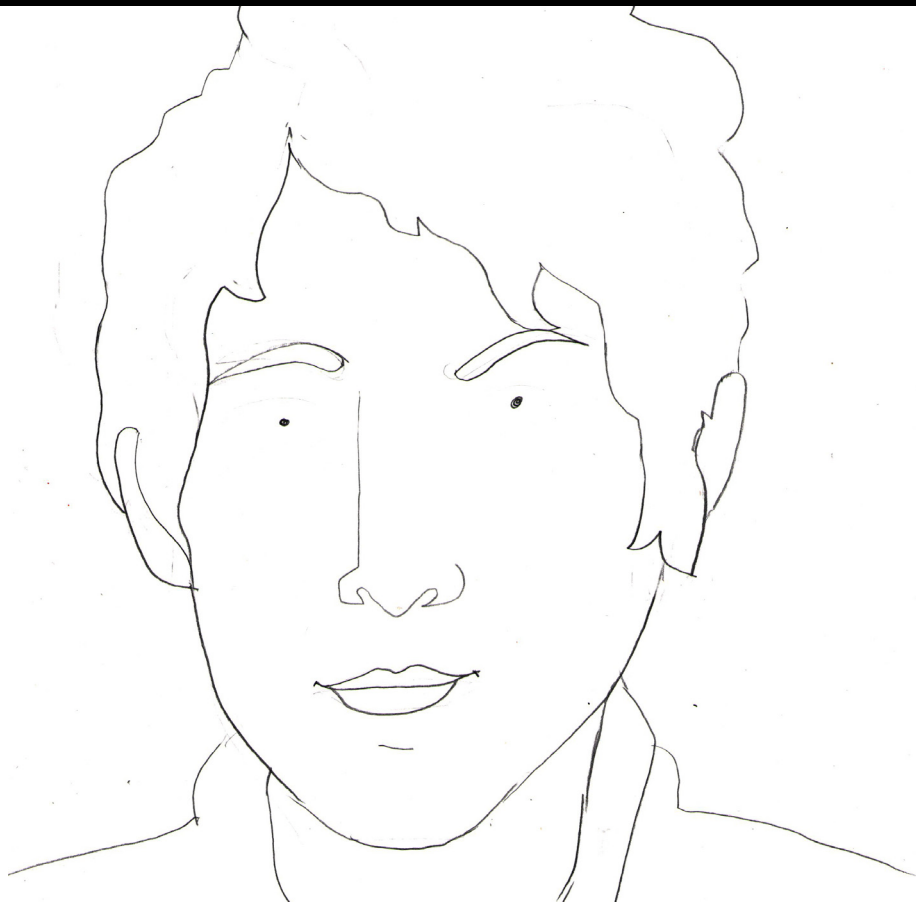
PROMPT

- Start with one of your blind contour portraits. Look closer. What emotion do you think this portrait best expresses? Pick a color to go with that emotion.
- Going through all your paper materials, collect as many instances of that color as you can. You can include text, patterns, textures and illustrations.
- Next, you'll build a monochromatic collage right on top of your blind contour drawing. Think of it as a coloring book that you are filling in cut and torn paper. Cover as much or as little of your drawing as you want.



FINAL EXERCISE: Pull it all together.

Start by drawing a simple self portrait, using a pencil. It can be any level of detail you want. It can be realistic, or a simple smiley face.



Using a pencil, divide the face up into segments. You can use any shapes you want. This example uses a series of curves.



Choose two feelings you'd like this portrait to express. Choose two colors that correspond with those feelings. Fill in each segment of your portrait with shapes, doodles, and patterns, using only these two colors. This portrait is meant to represent the feelings "calm" and "tired." The colors chosen were blue and black.



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