

Contemporary Portraits Oil Painting



Teachers' Notes

Information and activities for teachers

These teachers' notes are suitable for use with Key Stage 3 and 4 Art and Design students. They can be used to assist teaching in the gallery as well as in the classroom. Each image has suggested activities, questions and talking points that can be adapted to meet student's needs.

Portraits in the gallery can go off display at very short notice. Please check on the website (www.npg.org.uk) to see if these portraits are on display before you make a visit and look for alternative portraits to use as part of your lesson planning.

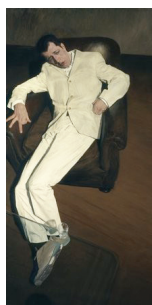
Teachers' guide lines



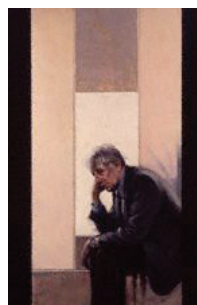
Marjorie 'Mo' Mowlam



Judi Dench



Thomas Ades



Jonathan Miller



Iris Murdoch

Introduction

The portraits in this pack are part of the contemporary portraits in the collection. Each one has been chosen for its different pose and its different use of oil paint. Teachers may wish to use this pack as an introduction to visiting the BP Portrait Award or to discuss different approaches to portraiture in contemporary art.

Classroom activities

- Collage
- Drawing with felt tip pens
- Experimenting with lighting
- Experimenting with scale
- Figure drawing
- ICT
- Painting with experimental tools
- Photography

Gallery activities

- Collage with gummed paper
- Drawing with oil pastels
- Sketching

Groups at the Gallery

Dry drawing materials can be used in the gallery, including pencils, charcoal, chalk and oil pastels.

Booking

Please phone 020 7312 2483 to book a visit. Advance booking is essential and we require a minimum of two weeks notice.

Please check our website www.npg.org.uk for further information.

QCA Schemes of work

Key Stage 3

- Unit 7A: Self Image
- Unit 8A: Objects and Viewpoints
- Unit 8B: Animating Art
- Unit 9A: Life Events
- Unit 10 Generic: Visiting a museum, gallery or site

Thomas Joseph Edmund Adès (b.1971)

Artist: Philip Oliver Hale (b.1963) Date: 2002 Medium: oil on canvas



This portrait is the result of a close collaboration between artist and sitter over a seven month period. The setting is an anonymous corner of Adès' London home. After a meteoric rise to fame, Adès is now widely regarded as one of the best known composers of his generation. Adès's Asyla was chosen by Sir Simon Rattle to open his inaugural concert as Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Berlin Philharmonic in 2002.

Practical Activities in the Gallery

- Students could make a pencil copy over two pages in a sketchbook
- Students could be given a rectangular piece of paper and asked to sketch the basic shape of the figure in an angular fashion. They could concentrate on the space in the picture that is taken up by the shape of the body
- Students could work on dark paper and draw the figure in white and/or yellow pastels or pencils, to bring out the strong contrast between the figure and the background

Practical Activities in the Classroom

- Students could draw each other from unusual angles; This could be a series of works in different materials and sizes
- Students could analyse how they use (the) space in their pictures and deliberately manipulate composition

- Students could be given paper, board or canvas of a particular **shape and size** to encourage them to use space and composition creatively

Questions

- What do you notice about the sitter?
- What do you think about the angle from which he is viewed?
- Is there anything unusual about the size/ shape of the canvas?
- How has (the) space been used?

Talking Points

- The unusual angle of the viewpoint
- The way the canvas is divided up.
- The way the glass table changes the perspective of the sitter's legs and feet

Key words

Composition, angle, space, canvas

Sir Jonathan Wolfe Miller (b.1934)

Artist: Stephen Conroy (b.1964) Medium: oil on canvas Date: 1999



Jonathan Miller is a director and producer for television, stage, film and opera. He is also an actor and writer and a Research Fellow in Neuropsychology, University of Sussex.

Since exhibiting in the National Portrait Gallery's Portrait Award in the 1980s, Stephen Conroy has become one of the leading Scottish artists of his generation with three one-man shows at Marlborough Fine Art.

Practical Activities in the Gallery

- Students could make a line drawing with soft pencils, using smudging to recreate dark and light and the loose transition between figure and background

Practical Activities in the Classroom

- Drawing from life, students could emulate the pose of the portrait as well as looking at the portrayal of mood
- Using colour pastel on black paper or off white sugar paper, painting or collage, students could concentrate on tonal contrast and/or the linear elements of the portrait. As a way of extending this activity, students could also draw over a collaged background, mixing their media

Questions

- Describe the mood of this picture
- Which are the abstract elements and which are the more realistic?
- Describe the lighting in the picture
- Discuss the amount of space the figure takes up in the picture?

Talking Points

- The scale of the background compared to the subject
- The significance of the abstract background, the realistic figure, and the blurred edges of the figure

Key words

- Collage, background, mood, contrast, transformation, colour, subdued

Marjorie ('Mo') Mowlam (1949-2005),

Artist: John Keane (b.1954) Date: 2001 Medium: oil on canvas



Mo Mowlam was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from 1997 to 1999, where she played an important role in orchestrating the Good Friday Agreement and reviving the flagging peace process. Mowlam was one of Tony Blair's most popular ministers with a direct and human approach to politics.

John Keane is a painter, who has often been concerned with conflict - military, political and social and he was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum to document the Gulf War in 1990.

Practical Activities in the Gallery

- Students could use chalk or oil pastels to create textured backgrounds on A4 or A3 sketchbook pages. One of these backgrounds should be based on the background behind 'Mo' Mowlam. Students could then sketch a portrait on top of one of their backgrounds
- Students could make a colourful portrait incorporating and blending unusual colours together using oil or chalk pastel
- Using thick coloured pencils, students could use different marks to create an experimental portrait, using complimentary colours as their main palette

Practical Activities in the Classroom

- Using tools such as rollers, spatulas, glue spreaders, edges of cardboard (not brushes), student's could create a portrait using complimentary colours such as purple for the background and yellows for the face
- Using strips of coloured paper students could create a collage portrait that is then worked over the top with oil pastels, to bring out the detail of the face
- Using photoshop filters, students could create an experimental portrait on the computer

Questions

- How has the artist applied the paint?
- How has the artist shown light and dark?
- Does the background have anything in it and does it?
- Do the colours suit the mood of the painting?

Talking Points

- What are the colours used in the portrait?
- Are these colours correct?
- Why do you think these colours were used?

Key words

- Canvas, oil paint, experimental, sketching

Dame Judith Olivia ('Judi') Dench (b.1934)

Artist: Alessandro Raho (b.1971) Date: 2004 Medium: oil on canvas



One of the leading stage actresses of her generation, Judi Dench trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama. She was awarded BAFTA's for best actress in a leading role for her parts in *Mrs Brown & Iris*.

Practical Activities in the Gallery

- Using a piece of white paper or sketchbook page, students could draw a standing figure using only beiges, browns, pinks and greys, using either coloured pencils, chalk or oil pastels. This activity could be extended by drawing different poses in the Collection, using a similar colour palette, but with different drawing materials

Practical Activities in the Classroom

- Set a model (or student) in front of a white background, take photographs and then draw and paint this subject using only a limited palette of tonal colours

Questions

- Is this a formal or informal portrait?
- Why is the figure be standing? Would the painting have the same effect work if the sitter were sitting?
- Is the use of white in a painting unusual? Has this colours worked for the painting?

Talking Points

- What words sum up the feeling of this painting?
- What impact does this painting have on you?

Key words

Tonal, composition, scale

Dame (Jean) Iris Murdoch

Artist: Tom Phillips Media: oil on canvas Date: 1984-1986



Practical Activities in the Gallery

- Copy of picture in colour, pastel, colour pencil
- Pastel on black paper

Practical Activities in the Classroom

- Painting
- Colour work
- Look at technique.
- Look at contrast of elements, things in the background compared to pose and face

Questions

- What is in the background of the picture?
- Is it real?
- Why is it there?

Talking Points

- Painting technique / style.
- The painting in the background.

Key words

Light, Colour, technique, skin, tone, contrast, background

Further Information

Search the National Portrait Gallery website for links to sitter and artist on www.npg.org.uk/search/
Products on www.npg.org.uk/shopw

Footnote: Written in partnership with teachers from Lillian Bayliss Technology School as part of the engage 'Watch This Space 2: Teacher Placement Programme' 2005

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