



LESSON #2 Exploration of the Self

VOCABULARY WORDS

PORTRAIT: A WORK OF ART (A DRAWING, PAINTING, PHOTOGRAPH, SCULPTURE, OR ANY OTHER REPRESENTATION) OF A PERSON, A GROUP OF PEOPLE, OR EVEN AN ANIMAL

SELF-PORTRAIT: WHEN AN ARTIST HAS CREATED A REPRESENTATION OF THEMSELF

Every job is a self-portrait of the person who did it. Autograph your work with excellence.

~Unknown

THE BEGINNINGS OF SELF-PORTRAITS

In Lesson #1, we learned about portraits and the different elements artists include to create a good portrait. Now let's closely examine *an artist's representation of him or her self*, also known as a **self-portrait**. Self-portraits have been traced back to Ancient Egypt, around 1360 B.C., more than 3,000 years ago. During that time in history, artists used their self-portraits as their signatures by placing their images into their larger works of art. This practice continued into 16th century A.D., when architects of the great cathedrals would sometimes carve their images into parts of the building. Eventually artists began to create works of art that focused only on themselves as the subject. The invention of the mirror in the 15th century helped to the artists' turn their attention away from others and onto themselves.

WHY ME?

There are different reasons why artists began to use their image as the subject for their work. Some art historians think that artists began to model for their own works of art because it was cheap and easily available. Artists didn't have to pay models or work with a model's schedule when they created a self-portrait. Another reason could be that artists wanted to explore and express what was in their minds and emotions. Artists, like Rembrandt and Frida Kahlo, are famous for their self-portraits because they studied themselves and were able to create portraits that showed their true inner emotions. Some artists used the self-portrait as a way to show others how wealthy, talented, religious, or powerful they thought they were. Other artists, like Gustave Courbet, created their self-portraits with their own likeness but included a background scene that is made up of fantasy and fiction.

Throughout history, artists have created their self-portraits to show the audience who they are physically and emotionally. For some artists it is a way to let go of the emotions building inside of them, while other artists use the self-portraits style of art to learn new things about themselves and their work. For all artists, the self-portrait is an exploration, a chance to search into their soul.

WHAT'S IN THE INSIDE?

Now that we have learned about the different reasons why artists have created self-portraits, let's think about what's in the inside. What are some of the emotions that you are feeling right now? Do you show your emotions to your family and friends often? What emotion or feeling do you feel most often? Think about the different emotions and feelings that you feel inside each day -happy, sad, angry, upset, bored, worried, calm, peaceful, frustrated- and then think about what your face would look like to others when you are feeling those different emotions.

LOOKING AT SELF-PORTRAITS



Self-portrait, Jan Svetlik, oil on canvas

This is a painting by Jan Svetlik and it is part of the Carnegie Art Museum's permanent collection. Take a few minutes to examine the portrait and discuss the following questions with a partner. Write your responses on a separate piece of paper.

1. What do you see in this painting? Who do you think is the artist?
2. Describe, in detail, the expression on the subject's faces. In your opinion, what are the subjects thinking?
3. What does their clothing say about them?
4. What do you think the sitters do for a living? What part of the portrait makes you think that?
5. What makes this portrait unique? Are you interested in this portrait?
6. In what era do you think the subjects lived? Are there any clues to support your answer?
7. Examine the self-portrait. Do you think this is a good self-portrait? Why or why not? Use the reference information on page 1 to help you.