

Portraits



Portraits

Welcome to this learning resource

This has been designed for Key Stages 3 and 4.

This is part of a series of resources designed to be used in your classroom or as a virtual resource for home learning.

Each resource provides a set of learning materials to invite your students to critically examine (*Close Encounter*), think and discuss ideas (*Discuss*), develop their own artwork through artist-led virtual workshops or ideas (*Create*), and conclude with an opportunity to reflect and evaluate their work (*Reflect*). There are hyperlinks for students to research in greater depth.

This session is designed to meet these learning objectives:

- How to interpret the ideas and narratives of artists.
- Taking creative risks.
- Investigating, exploring and testing expressively.
- How to interpret the ideas of artists from different art historical genres and cultures in a political, spiritual and moral context.
- Expressive knowledge of properties of materials and processes for students to select techniques and control their outcomes.

Portraits

Key artworks

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *'The Twins Kate and Grace Hoare'* (1876)

Lucas Horenbout (d. 1544), *'Henry VIII'* (c.1525)

Gwen John (1876-1939), *'The Convalescent'* (1923-1924)

Simeon Solomon (1840-1905), *'Fanny Eaton'* (1859)

Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), *'Self Portrait'* (1939)

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *'Cubist Head (Portrait of Fernande)'* (c.1909-1910) (right)

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *'The Last of England'* (1860)

You might like to use this resource alongside the Portraits video on the Fitzwilliam Museum schools website.



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Portraits

Close encounter

What compels us to create images of ourselves and each other?

Throughout art history we can see detailed images of human figures, depicted going about their daily lives, or sometimes formally posed in a controlled space, for example: a studio or a natural or urban environment. We usually think of a portrait as an image of a specific individual, capturing something about their personality, identity or status. More intimate portraits detail a time in someone's life. This could be a seemingly incidental event – see Gwen John's painting, *'The Convalescent'* (1923-24); or a painting that marks an occasion such as a birthday – see the detail below of the painting by the artist Millais, *'The Twins Kate and Grace Hoare'* (1876).

As well as paintings, portraits can also be statues, sculptures, coins, medals, ceramic ware (pottery), tapestries, prints and drawings. These portraits may also record a particular political or historical event.

We have briefly thought about identity; now let's touch on the notion of power and control: who decides what you look like in a painting? Who will see the painting? Who is **not** included in the painting? Who paid for the painting? And where is the artist in all of this?



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Details

Proportionally the human face is a relatively small part of our physical self – what is it we seek to capture or discover in faces? Which part of the face do you look at to find someone's true emotions, thoughts and responses? Is it in their eyes, mouth, forehead, eyebrows, the tilt of the head, or a facial gesture?

How can we capture these in a painting, drawing, sculpture or photo? How does Millais show this in the detail above from the painting, *'The Twins Kate and Grace Hoare'*?

Portraits

Discuss

How you could take on a different personality or identity, or an exemplary and exaggerated version of yourself? Discuss where you might ask to be painted and the details and objects included. What will you wear? Are you involved in a 'scene' or posing on your own?

Discuss how many people might be 'behind' the portraits seen in the Fitzwilliam portraits. Think about the running of the grand houses and gardens, making the costumes and armour, preparing the food and drink...why do you think these people are unseen? Where are these people's portraits?

Who owns your identity? This is a topic that social media has taken to a whole new level. It's not a new idea as many portraits throughout history were commissioned to create a particular identity.

Lucas Horenbout (d. 1544)

'Henry VIII' (c.1525)

Watercolour on vellum on card,
53 x 48 mm

This image of a young beardless Henry VIII, aged 35, is different to the image we most often think of. Why is this?

Are you interested in learning more about miniature paintings like this one? See here: https://fitz-cms-images.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/fs_miniautres.pdf.



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Portraits

Create

Are you keen to learn more about realism and using pencil and graphite to create a portrait? Follow artist John Wiltshire's video as he takes you through some step-by-step techniques: <https://youtu.be/-sHoUINclgc>.

Materials you might need:

- Paper of your choosing but light cartridge works well
- Pencils: HB, B2, B4; graphite stick, conté or charcoal
- Clean rag, eraser (putty rubber if you have one)

We are fascinated by faces. Why do you think that is? What are we looking for when we look at other people and how is that different from when we look at ourselves? Of course, to see ourselves we often need to see a reflection, which is in reverse, but there are other ways that we can see ourselves – what could these be?

Explore different ways to see yourself... it might not be a reflection!

Reflect

Explain how many layers of story might exist at the same time in one portrait painting or sculpture.

Describe how these stories tell us about ourselves. Think about the common experiences we all share or might experience in our future selves. How might this inform us about the decisions we take? Think about how you might present the same person in different art historical genres (styles) and put this into a reasoned context. Why did the artist use this style and why are you choosing to use this art genre in your own work?

Extension activities

Sometimes figures depicted in artworks are models, whose identity we may or may not know. These models are often paid to play a part in particular poses and in costumes with props, perhaps showing a religious or antique scene. Occasionally these models are the artist's friends or family, such as in the artist Ford Madox Brown's painting, 'The Last of England', described here later. While these artworks capture the models' *likeness* it is often not 'about' them. So we are going to explore the ideas around image and identity – what makes *you* you.

Recommended for Years 7-9:

<https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/idea-starter-5-face-face-portraits>.

Recommended for Years 10-13:

<https://www.museums.cam.ac.uk/lookingatcollections/projects/the-twins-1>.

Portraits

Gwen John (1876-1939)
'The Convalescent' (1923-24)
Oil on canvas, 41.2 x 33 cm

Can you find areas that Gwen John has painted more loosely and areas where she adopts a different technique in this intimate portrait? Why has she done this?

Think about where the woman in this portrait is sitting. What is she doing and how are you involved with this narrative? The title gives us a clue as to the circumstances that this young woman currently finds herself in. How do you think reading a letter from a beloved friend might make her feel? How does this portrait make you reflect on your own experiences?

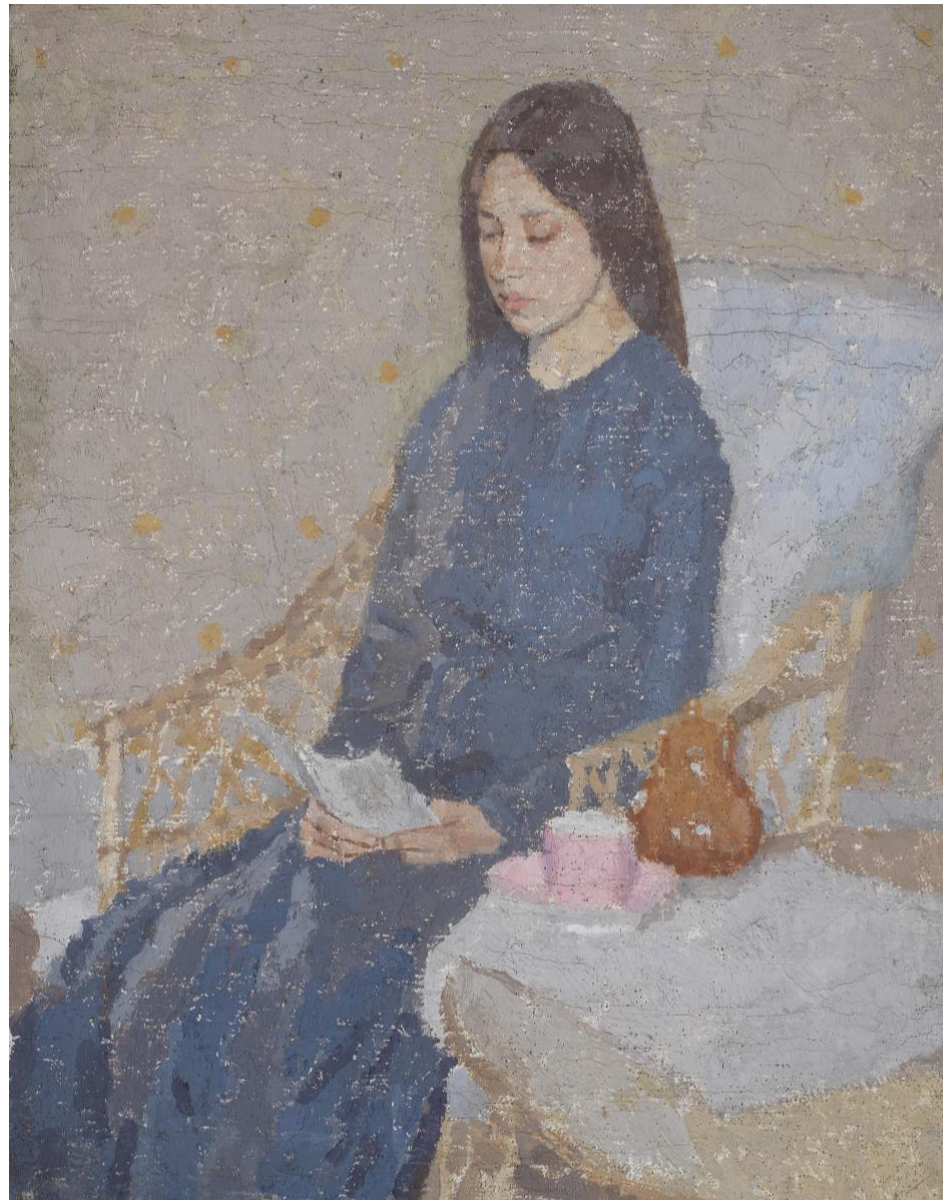


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Portraits

Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)

'Fanny Eaton' (1859)

Graphite and watercolour, 14.7 x 13.4 cm

Artists know how to capture the subtle ranges of our expressions and there are so many examples in our collection of portraits here at the Fitzwilliam Museum. Here are a few. Try looking at these portraits when you are in different moods – how does this affect how you engage with them? You bring your own emotions, stories and experiences when you look at artworks. This is often referred to as your '**personal narrative**'.

This delicate graphite and watercolour study is of Fanny Eaton, a Jamaican woman who was frequently called on as a model for the artists in the **Pre-Raphaelite** group.



Image © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Portraits

Stanley Spencer (1891-1959)
'Self-Portrait' (1939)
Oil on canvas, 39.7 x 55.2 cm

On the canvas or paper you meet the artist's narrative. One of the fascinations of portraits is the third narrative, that of the sitter. There is a complex blending of stories: you (the viewer), the artist, and the sitter (the subject of the painting). Compare this self-portrait by Spencer with the drawing of Fanny Eaton (above). In a self-portrait, the sitter has control of their image.



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Portraits

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)
'Cubist Head (Portrait of Fernande)'
(c.1909-1910)
Oil on canvas, 66 x 53 cm

Picasso enjoyed experimenting with lots of different painterly techniques. Here, he is exploring **cubism**. At the time this was painted, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a fascination with mechanisation, and the construction of this painting may bring to mind an engineer's plan or an architect's sketch of a modern cityscape.

Can you find the portrait? Do we learn anything about Fernande?



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Portraits

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)

'The Last of England' (1860)

Oil on canvas, painted surface

46.4 x 42.3 cm

Here are the artist and his wife with their tiny child beneath her red shawl. They are posing as an imaginary couple on their voyage to seek a better life overseas. This was inspired by Brown's friend and fellow artist, Thomas Woolner, who emigrated to Australia in 1852. Why would an artist use their friends and family as their models for their paintings? If you set up a similar painting who would you choose to be your models?

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