

What is a Portrait?

Schools Resource Pack

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nationalgallery.ie/schools



NATIONAL
GALLERY of
IRELAND

GAILEARÁI
NÁISIÚNTA na
HÉIREANN

Introduction

People and portraits are at the heart of the Gallery's collection. This schools resource has been designed as both an introduction to portraiture and an in-depth exploration of key works in the National Portrait Collection. Primary and Post-Primary teachers can use it as a starting point for tailored lesson plans and all activities are adaptable for different ages and abilities. Looking and responding questions underpin the resource and enable students to develop visual literacy and critical thinking skills. Each portrait is accompanied by suggested activities that allow for creative practical exploration of the work and encourage students to further develop their understanding of the diversity of portraiture.

In 2019 we launched the Zurich Young Portrait Prize, an inclusive art competition for children and young people, up to the age of 18, of all abilities, from across the island of Ireland. We hope this resource will provide inspiration and ideas for your students to enter the Prize.

About the National Portrait Collection

The origins of the National Portrait Collection date back to 1875. Over the years the collection has been developed with additions of paintings, drawings, watercolours and sculpture depicting prominent Irish individuals who have contributed to the civic, social, and cultural life of the nation. Since 1998, generously supported by Irish Life & Permanent, the Collection has been enhanced by a series of commissioned portraits of prominent figures from contemporary Irish life. The annual Portrait Prize, launched in 2014, has further contributed to the growth of this significant collection.

Curriculum Links

Primary

Visual Arts \ Drawing \ Paint & Colour \ Looking & Responding
Potential to work across all six strands of the Visual Arts Curriculum
Cross-curricular links with history, language & literacy

Junior Cycle Visual Art

Critical and visual language \ 1.1, 1.2, 1.3
Visual culture and appreciation \ 1.7, 1.8, 1.9
Art elements and design principles \ 1.10
Media \ 1.13

Leaving Certificate Art

History and Appreciation of Art \ Irish Art

What is a portrait?

A portrait is an artwork that tells a person's story. The artwork can be made of any material from painting on canvas to a piece of performance art!

What is a sitter?

A sitter is someone who sits (or stands, or lies!) for a portrait. Sometimes the sitter commissions the artist to make a portrait of them. A commission is when an artist is invited to make a portrait of someone in exchange for a fee and inclusion in a collection. Other times, the artist invites someone to sit for them and makes their portrait as a part of their practice.

What is the subject of a portrait?

The subject of the portrait is the person in the portrait. Sometimes they are called the subject instead of a sitter. This is most often used when they are not sitting for the portrait but they are doing something else, like playing a sport.

What can a portrait tell us?

Portraiture can tell us about how we see people. Portraits often show us what a person looks like but they also do lots more. They can capture an idea of a person or what they stand for. Portraits can also tell us how a person wants to be seen and capture the particular mood that the sitter is experiencing. This can be described through choice of colour, objects surrounding the sitter, clothing and a general atmosphere in an image.

What is a self-portrait?

A self-portrait, just like a portrait of another person can be in any medium and include as much or as little information as the artist wishes. Sometimes artists make self-portraits to express their personality and inner world. Posture, body language and facial expression provide clues about the artist's mood and personality.

What can we learn from portraiture?

We can learn lots! Portraits tell us about people, social history, art history and much more. How and why portraits have been made has evolved over time, and continues to evolve. In art history, portraits were often used to represent power and status. In more recent history, portraiture comes in infinite forms and it is no longer a marker of status but a way of exploring another person's life.

What can a portrait do?

A portrait can do many things. It can give a sense of importance to a person and their life; it can make a person more widely known; it can also give immortality to a person's character. Portraits live on forever!

How are portraits made?

First of all, portraits are made by looking and understanding the sitter. Artists can make them using a variety of different materials, including drawing, painting, sculpture and photography. Artists can work from life, from a photograph, or even from their imagination.

Choice of material for your portrait and choice of content including location, body language, facial expression, objects and colours can all help you to tell a person's story. Would a painting be the best media for your portrait? If so, should it be small, large, or medium size? Should the person be sitting or standing? Or maybe they are doing one of their favourite things, like playing a sport, spending time with a pet or taking a nap! It can be ANYTHING!



Portrait of Prince Alessandro Farnese (1545-1592), later Duke of Parma and Piacenza

Sofonisba Anguissola / Portrait of Prince Alessandro Farnese (1545-1592), later Duke of Parma and Piacenza / Purchased, 1864
/ Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Sofonisba Anguissola

Where is the artist from? Italy

When did the artist live? about 1532-1625

What is this painting called?

Portrait of Prince Alessandro Farnese (1545-1592), later Duke of Parma and Piacenza

When was this made? around 1560

What is it made of? Oil on canvas

What size is it? 107 x 79 cm

What type of portrait is this?

Commissioned portrait

Who is the sitter?

Prince Alessandro Farnese was an aristocrat who was the son of the Duke of Parma and grandson of King Charles V of Spain. He was educated at the Spanish court and he became a noted general and fought in campaigns against the Turks, French and English.

How was it made?

This was made using oil paints on a canvas. To prime a canvas, oftentimes, artists used rabbit-skin glue, which dries clear. The artist also uses a medium to thin the paint, such as turpentine or linseed oil. Stand oil elongates the drying time. A longer drying time may have been important to make this painting, to allow the artist to include all this wonderful detail!

Why did the artist make this portrait?

Sofonisba Anguissola painted the prince a short time after her arrival at the Spanish court, having had an unusually broad education for a woman at the time. The Gallery purchased this work in 1864, thinking it was by Alonso Sánchez Coello as he had a similar style to Anguissola. Interestingly, it turned out that this was the first work by a woman artist to enter the Gallery's collection, but this was only correctly identified in modern times when Anguissola's work as an artist was better known.

Look & Respond

- \\ What can you see in this painting?
- \\ What colours can you see in this painting?
- \\ How would you describe the person in the painting?
- \\ What do you think this person does? Why?
- \\ What do you think this person is wearing?
- \\ What fabrics do you think the clothes could be made out of?
- \\ What age do you think this person is?
- \\ This person is holding an object. What do you think this object is?
- \\ This person seems to be looking right at the viewer. Why do you think this is?
- \\ Do you like this painting? Why/ why not?
- \\ If you were to give a title to this painting, what would it be?
- \\ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a sculpture? A print?

Create

- \\ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \\ Take a look the detail that you chose, now think about how you can make a new portrait by repeating this image. You could trace or photocopy the detail to create a collage or a patterned background, or even make a lino print.
- \\ Make a portrait of someone you know. Ask them to dress them in clothes that make them feel important. How do clothes change how you see a person?



Portrait of The Artist's Parents

William Orpen / Portrait of the Artist's Parents / Bequeathed, Mrs F. Orpen, 1956
/ Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Sir William Orpen
Where is the artist from? Ireland
When did the artist live? 1878-1931
What is this painting called?
 Portrait of the Artist's Parents

When was this made? Around 1911
What is it made of? Oil on canvas
What size is it? 169 x 138 cm
What type of portrait is this?
 Family portrait

Who are the sitters?

William Orpen's parents Anne Caulfield (1834–1912) and Arthur Herbert Orpen (1830–1926), a solicitor. Both his parents were amateur painters.

How was it made?

This painting was made with oil paints. These paints take a long time to dry, so they are often mixed with other substances, such as white spirits, to help them thin out a little so the artist can work more quickly. This portrait is painted on canvas which is a great surface for oil paints. It is often primed (a method of preparing the canvas by adding a layer of substance to the surface) with a white material such as glue gesso, which was traditionally an animal glue binder, usually rabbit-skin glue, chalk, and white pigment. This provides a lovely paper-like quality on the surface. Artists sometimes make their own canvases in which they make a simple wooden frame and then stretch a piece of canvas over the frame using nails.

Why did the artist make this portrait?

William Orpen made portraits of people in his life. This is a portrait of his parents who would have been significant and important to him. He was encouraged to paint it by his mistress, Mrs St George, who thought that he should do so in the interests of posterity. Orpen's father was less convinced, asking the artist persistently during its production why his son was painting the portrait at all!

Look & Respond

- \\ What can you see in this painting?
- \\ What colours can you see in this painting?
- \\ Who do you think these people are?
- \\ What objects can you see in the background?
- \\ There is a mirror in the background of this painting. Can you see anything in it?
- \\ Is there anything you can tell about their personalities?
- \\ How do you think they know each other?
- \\ Do you see any patterns in this painting?
- \\ Why do you think the artist chose to paint them in this particular room?
- \\ Do you like this painting? Why/ why not?
- \\ If you were to give a title to this painting, what would it be?
- \\ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a sculpture? A drawing? A painting?

Create

- \\ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \\ Make a portrait of two people you know. Are they friends, a couple, or siblings? Are they strangers? How will you pose them to show their relationship?



Self-Portrait in a Black Hat

Hilda Geralda van Stockum / Self-Portrait in a Black Hat / Purchased, 1991
 / © Estate of Hilda van Stockum, used by special permission.
 Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Hilda Geralda van Stockum

Where is the artist from? The Netherlands

When did the artist live? 1908-2006

What is this painting called?

Self-Portrait in a Black Hat

When was this made? 1988

What is it made of? Oil on board

What size is it? 73.7 x 52.7 cm

What type of portrait is this?

Self-portrait

Who is the sitter?

This is a self-portrait so the sitter is the same person as the artist! Van Stockum was a children's writer and artist. She made this self-portrait when she was 80 years old. When she was younger she studied at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art. She lived in many different countries, including Switzerland, USA and the UK.

How was it made?

This painting was made with oil paints. The technique Hilda Geralda van Stockum uses is known as Pointillism. This is a technique in which small, distinct dots of colour are applied in patterns to form an image. It is likely that the artist propped up a mirror beside her easel so that she could see her own reflection and her surroundings.

Why did the artist make this portrait?

Self-portraits are made for many reasons. In this portrait Hilda Gerada van Stockum has shown that she is an artist. She is at a later stage in her life and she is still working and creating art. Perhaps she wanted to capture and celebrate this specific time and place in her life.

Look & Respond

- \ What can you see in this painting?
- \ What colours can you see in this painting?
- \ Why do you think the artist made this self-portrait?
- \ What object is she holding? Why?
- \ What time of day do you think this painting is set in?
- \ What part of the world do you think this painting is set in?
- \ Is there anything you can tell about her personality?
- \ Do you see any patterns in this painting?
- \ The artist is looking to the side, why do you think this is?
- \ Do you like this painting? Why/ why not?
- \ If you were to give a title to this painting, what would it be?
- \ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a sculpture? A drawing? A collage?

Create

- \ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \ Van Stockum uses small dots of colour to make her portrait. Experiment with using this technique on your sketch. How do larger or smaller dots change the image?
- \ Try making self-portrait of you doing your favourite activity. It can be a sculpture, a drawing, a collage, anything!



Portrait of Maeve Binchy (1940-2012), Writer

Maeve McCarthy / Portrait of Maeve Binchy (1940-2012), Writer / Commissioned, National Gallery of Ireland, as part of the Irish Life and Permanent Portrait Series, 2005 / © Maeve McCarthy. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Maeve McCarthy

Where is the artist from? Ireland

When was the artist born? 1964

What is this painting called?

Portrait of Maeve Binchy (1940-2012), Writer

When was this made? 2005

What is it made of? Oil on board

What size is it? 125.2 x 88.4 cm

What type of portrait is this?

Commissioned portrait

Who is the sitter?

Maeve Binchy was one of Ireland's most successful writers. Born and educated in Dublin, she wrote for many years for *The Irish Times* newspaper and published in various genres. Binchy's husband Gordon Snell appears in the background of the portrait.

How was it made?

This painting was made with oil paints. There are many colours and details in this painting, the artist would have mixed lots of colours to get all this information into the picture!

Why did the artist make this portrait?

This portrait was commissioned by the Gallery as part of the Irish Life and Permanent Portrait Series, 2005.

Look & Respond

- \ What can you see in this painting?
- \ What colours can you see in this painting?
- \ How many people are in this portrait? Who do you think the other person is?
- \ What objects can you see in the background?
- \ What time of day do you think this painting is set in?
- \ What room do you think she is in?
- \ Is there anything you can tell about the subjects' personalities?
- \ Is there anything unusual about this portrait?
- \ Do you like this painting? Why/ why not?
- \ If you were to give a title to this painting, what would it be?
- \ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a photograph? A drawing? A collage?

Create

- \ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \ Take a look at the background of this painting, who do you think is in the background? Try making a new portrait of the person in the background, what would this portrait look like? Would you have Maeve Binchy in the background of your new portrait?



Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), Poet, Playwright, Translator, Nobel Laureate

Jackie Nickerson / Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), Poet, Playwright, Translator, Nobel Laureate / Presented, Phoebe Matson and Tom Gurry, 2012 / © Jackie Nickerson

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Jackie Nickerson

Where is the artist from? USA

When was the artist born? 1960

What is this painting called?

Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), Poet, Playwright, Translator, Nobel Laureate

When was this made? 2007

What is it made of? Digital C-print

What size is it? 52 x 63cm

What type of portrait is this?

Commissioned portrait

Who is the sitter?

Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) was an Irish poet, playwright and translator. He was born in Castledawson, County Derry and he died in Blackrock, Dublin. He was renowned for his depictions of Irish life and personal memories. He won the 1995 Nobel Prize for Literature.

How was it made?

This was made with a digital camera. The artist was struck by this particular setting and a specific atmosphere that was created during her encounter with Seamus Heaney. She spontaneously captured this, using her camera there and then, which wonderfully harnesses this moment.

Why did the artist make this portrait?

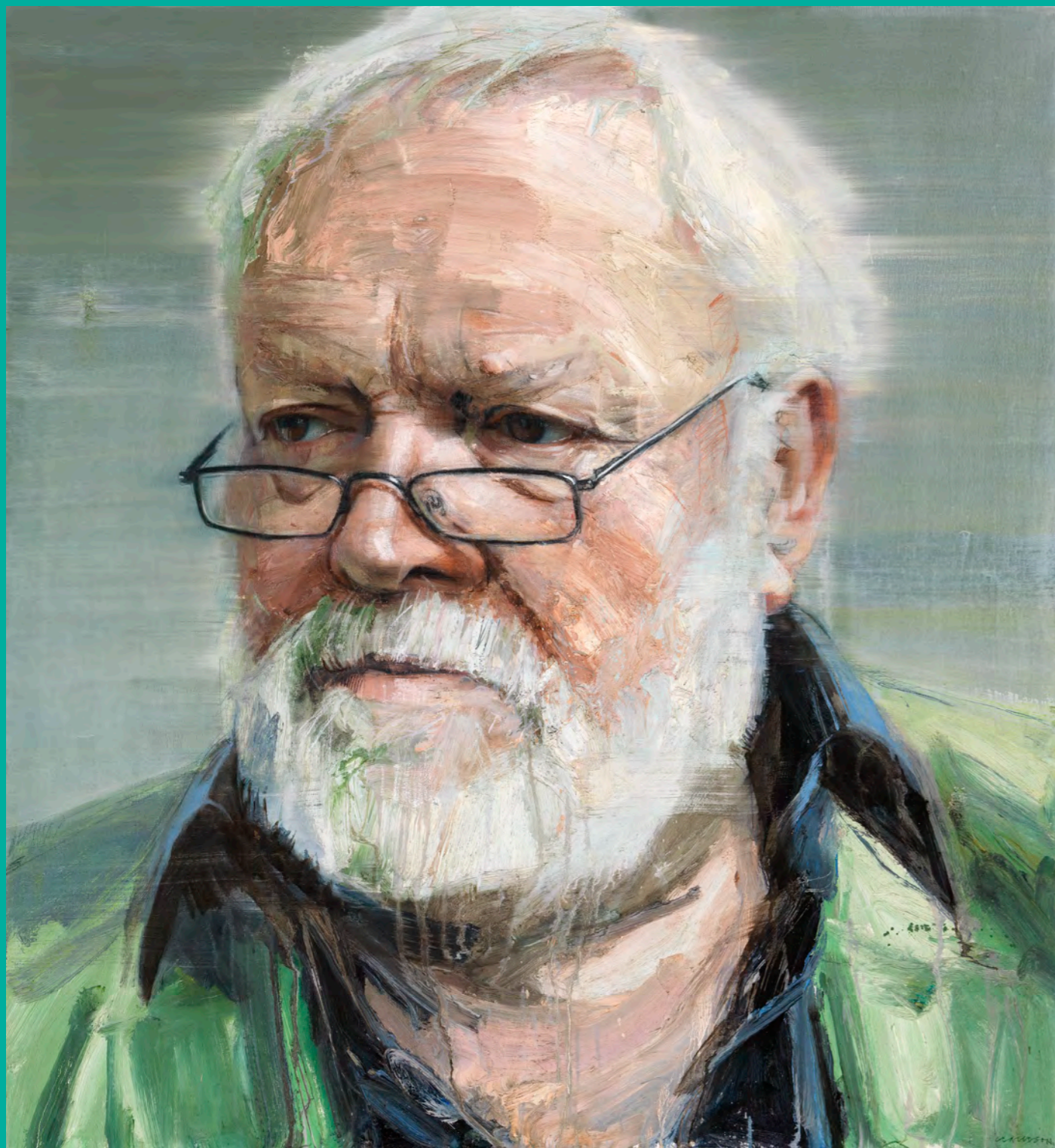
In 2007 Nickerson was commissioned by a British newspaper to take a photographic portrait of the poet for a feature article. After the formal sitting in his Dublin home, Heaney invited her into the kitchen for a cup of tea. Nickerson realised that she had an opportunity to take a striking, informal picture and asked permission to take another photograph, which resulted in this image.

Look & Respond

- \\ What can you see in this photograph?
- \\ What colours can you see in this photograph?
- \\ What time of year do you think this photograph is set in? Why?
- \\ What objects can you see in the background?
- \\ What room do you think he is in?
- \\ Why do you think he is in this particular room?
- \\ Is there anything you can tell about the sitter's personality?
- \\ In what direction is the sitter looking? Why do you think this might be?
- \\ Is there anything unusual about this portrait?
- \\ Do you like this photograph? Why/ why not?
- \\ If you were to give a title to this photograph, what would it be?
- \\ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a painting? A sculpture? A collage?

Create

- \\ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \\ Take a look at all the objects you can see in this room. Now try writing a poem or a story that is about you or someone you know, using some or all of these objects.
- \\ What light sources can you see in this photograph? Make a photographic portrait of someone you know, experimenting with natural and artificial light. How does different light change the atmosphere of your portrait?



Portrait of Michael Longley (b.1939), Poet, Editor and Anthologist

Colin Davidson / Portrait of Michael Longley (b.1939), Poet, Editor and Anthologist
/ Presented, 2012 / © Colin Davidson. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Colin Davidson

Where is the artist from? Northern Ireland

When was the artist born? 1968

What is this painting called?

Portrait of Michael Longley (b.1939), Poet, Editor
and Anthologist

When was this made? 2011-2012

What is it made of? Oil on linen

What size is it? 127 x 117 cm

What type of portrait is this?

Artist-led portrait

Who is the sitter?

Born in Belfast, Michael Longley is one of Ireland's most celebrated poets, editors and anthologists. Having read classics at Trinity College Dublin, he taught in Dublin, London and Belfast before joining the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, where he worked for over 20 years. He has published more than a dozen collections of poetry and won various prestigious awards, among them the Whitbread Poetry Prize, the T.S. Eliot Prize and The Irish Times Literature Prize for Poetry.

How was it made?

This painting was made with oil paints. Here, the artist decided to paint on linen. Linen is a slightly softer material than canvas therefore the paint can go on more smoothly and it can be really fun to work on!

Why did the artist make this portrait?

This portrait is one of a series of oversized portrait busts (head and shoulders) by Colin Davidson of private individuals and public figures. The artist paints people he is interested in and who he feels are worth celebrating with portraiture!

Look & Respond

- \ What can you see in this painting?
- \ What colours can you see in this painting?
- \ Can you see anything in the background?
- \ Do you think this painting is in a particular location? Why?
- \ How would you describe the style of this painting?
- \ What is the sitter wearing?
- \ Is there anything you can tell about the sitter's personality?
- \ Do you think the artist knows the sitter?
- \ In what direction is the sitter looking? Why do you think this might be?
- \ Do you like this painting? Why/ why not?
- \ If you were to give a title to this painting, what would it be?
- \ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a photograph? A video? A collage?

Create

- \ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \ Take a close look at the colours in this painting, how many can you see? Using paint, create swatches of all the colours and tones you see. Now make a new portrait using these colours.
- \ Create a different colour palette and paint a new version of your portrait. How do different colours change the atmosphere of your portrait?



Gesture 2

Saoirse Wall / Gesture 2 / Purchased, 2015 / © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Saoirse Wall

Where is the artist from? Ireland

When was the artist born? 1992

What is this painting called? Gesture 2

When was this made? 2014

What type of portrait is this?

Self-portrait

What is it made of? This piece is a digital HD video. The image you see here is a still from the piece. A still is one frame of many frames that make a moving image!

What size is it? This piece is shown on a standard sized flat screen monitor.

Who is the sitter?

This is a self-portrait so the sitter is the same person as the artist! Saoirse Wall is an Irish artist living and working in Mayo and Dublin.

How was it made?

This was made by placing a camera on a tripod and recording this one shot for a period of time. Many things would be considered by the artist when making a video like this, instead of mixing paints to get the right colours the artist would position the camera in a certain way and at a specific time of the day to achieve a particular lighting and atmosphere!

Why did the artist make this portrait?

Self-portraits are made for many reasons. In this portrait the artist uses video to show that one person can be many things. During the video they move in different ways and take on lots of poses, they look at the camera to communicate with us the viewers and let us see their portrait unfold in real time!

Look & Respond

- \ What can you see in this image?
- \ What colours can you see?
- \ Can you see anything in the background?
- \ What room do you think this portrait is set in?
- \ Why do you think the artist used this particular location?
- \ How would you describe the style of this self-portrait?
- \ What is the artist wearing?
- \ Who do you think this person is?
- \ Is there anything you can tell about the artist's personality?
- \ In what direction is the artist looking? Why do you think this is?
- \ This portrait is a still from a film. What do you think the portrait might look like before or after this frame?
- \ Do you like this portrait? Why/ why not?
- \ If you were to give a title to this portrait, what would it be?
- \ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a drawing? A painting?

Create

- \ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \ Try using a video camera from a camera phone or a digital camera, now take a video of a person you know or yourself. The video can be you or your subject talking, looking, moving, anything that you think would represent them the most! How does a moving portrait differ from a static portrait?



Portrait of John Rocha (b.1953), Designer

Geraldine O'Neill / Portrait of John Rocha (b.1953), Designer / Commissioned, 2015 / Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Geraldine O'Neill

Where is the artist from? Ireland

When was the artist born? 1971

What is this painting called?

Portrait of John Rocha (b.1953), Designer

When was this made? 2015

What is it made of? Oil on linen

What size is it? 220 x 200 cm

What type of portrait is this?

Commissioned portrait

Who is the sitter?

John Rocha is a Hong Kong-born fashion designer living in Ireland. Inspired to come to Ireland in the 1980s, having used Irish linen in his graduate collection, he has lived and worked in Dublin since then.

How was it made?

This painting was made with oil paints on linen. These paints take a long time to dry so they are often mixed with other substances such as white spirits to help them thin out a little so the artist can work more quickly! Linen is a slightly softer material than canvas, therefore the paint can go on more smoothly. It can be really fun to work on!

Why did the artist make this portrait?

The National Gallery of Ireland commissioned Geraldine O'Neill to make this portrait to celebrate John Rocha's wonderful designs and contribution to Irish fashion.

Look & Respond

- \ What can you see in this painting?
- \ How would you describe the person in the painting?
- \ What do you think this person does? Why?
- \ Where do you think the person is standing? Why?
- \ What objects can you see in the background?
- \ Why do you think the artist has put them there?
- \ What other objects could be included in the portrait?
- \ What textures are in the painting?
- \ What materials has the artist used? Why do you think she chose them?
- \ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a sculpture? A video work? A photograph?
- \ What title/name would you give this painting?
- \ Do you like the portrait? Why/why not?

Create

- \ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \ Draw out a grid of squares on a sheet of paper, there can be as few as four squares or as many as four hundred squares. Now look at all the colours in this painting. Make a list of the colours and begin to add each colour into a square. Once you have filled in the colours, now you have a pattern. This can be used for a design of a blanket, it could be backdrop for a new portrait or simply a beautiful grid of colours inspired by this portrait!
- \ Make a portrait of someone you know. Choose items that relate to that person and arrange them in a still life around them.



Portrait of Henry Shefflin (b.1979), Hurler

Gerry Davis / Portrait of Henry Shefflin (b.1979), Hurler / Commissioned,
the National Gallery of Ireland as part of the Hennessy Portrait Prize, 2016
/ Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Gerry Davis

Where is the artist from? Ireland

When was the artist born? 1985

What is this painting called?

Portrait of Henry Shefflin (b.1979), Hurler

When was this made? 2017

What is it made of? Oil on canvas

What size is it? 117 x 122 cm

What type of portrait is this?

Commissioned portrait

Who is the sitter?

This portrait is of Henry Shefflin. Henry Shefflin was born in 1979, and he is an Irish hurler. Over a sixteen-year career he played centre forward for Kilkenny, and won a record ten All-Ireland medals, thirteen Leinster championship medals and six National Hurling League titles.

How was it made?

This painting was made with oil paints. This is a realist painting as it almost looks like a photograph, so the artist really took his time in getting the detail and colours accurate. There are rich colours in the sky and the grass. To achieve this the artist painted many layers on top of one another until they become deep and realistic colours.

Why did the artist make this portrait?

Gerry Davis was commissioned to make this by the National Gallery of Ireland as part of the Hennessy Portrait Prize 2016. Henry Shefflin retired from inter-county hurling in March 2015. This portrait is a wonderful celebration of his career and achievements.

Look & Respond

- \ What can you see in this painting?
- \ What colours can you see?
- \ Can you see anything in the background?
- \ What time of year do you think this portrait is set in?
- \ Why do you think the artist used this particular location?
- \ What is the subject of the portrait wearing?
- \ What are they holding?
- \ Who do you think this person is?
- \ Is there anything you can tell about the subject's personality?
- \ In what direction is the subject looking? Why do you think this is?
- \ Do you like this portrait? Why/ why not?
- \ If you were to give a title to this portrait, what would it be?
- \ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a drawing? A video? A collage?

Create

- \ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \ Do you have a favourite sportsperson? Or a favourite singer, writer, artist? Make a portrait of someone you admire. How would you show them? Where would they be and what would they be doing? This can be a collage, a drawing, a sculpture, anything!



Garry Hynes (b.1953), Theatre Director, Co-founder of Druid Theatre

Vera Klute / Garry Hynes (b.1953), Theatre Director, Co-founder of Druid Theatre
/ Commissioned, the National Gallery of Ireland as part of the Hennessy
Portrait Prize, 2015 / Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Vera Klute

Where is the artist from? Germany

When was the artist born? 1981

What is this painting called?

Garry Hynes (b.1953), Theatre Director,
Co-founder of Druid Theatre

When was this made? 2017

What is it made of? Porcelain and
concrete on bespoke timber plinth

What size is it? 164 x 54 x 46 cm

What type of portrait is this?

Commissioned bust

Who is the sitter?

Garry Hynes is the co-founder of Druid in Galway with Marie Mullen and Mick Lally in 1975. Druid is an exciting theatre in Galway which shows live plays made by some of Ireland's best writers and actors. In 1998 she was the first woman to win the Tony Award for Direction.

How was it made?

This portrait is three-dimensional, meaning it is an artwork that you can walk around and see from all directions. The artist decided to make this work out of porcelain. Firstly, she would have sculpted the piece out of clay. This would have been made three times larger than the size it is now because porcelain shrinks during what is known as the firing process. Firing is when the piece is put inside a giant oven called a kiln and it is heated until it becomes hard. Before the firing process the artist makes a plastic mould and a plaster mould of the piece. Porcelain is a liquid substance that is then poured into the mould. It is treated and worked on until the artist is happy with it, then it goes into the kiln for firing. It is left to cool down after firing until it is ready to be displayed as an artwork!

Why did the artist make this portrait?

This portrait was commissioned by the National Gallery of Ireland as part of the Hennessy Portrait Prize 2015 to celebrate the success and influence Garry Hynes has had on Irish theatre.

Look & Respond

- What can you see in this sculpture?
- What colours can you see?
- How would you describe the colours of the shadows in this sculpture?
- What materials do you think this is made from?
- Why do you think the artist used these particular materials?
- What is the subject of the portrait wearing?
- Who do you think this person is?
- Is there anything you can tell about the subject's personality?
- In what direction is the subject looking? Why do you think this is?
- Do you like this portrait? Why/ why not?
- If you were to give a title to this portrait, what would it be?
- What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a drawing? A video?

Create

- Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the sculpture and make a detailed sketch.
- Try making a three dimensional portrait using some modelling clay, or scrunched up newspaper, or anything you can find! Think about how you might build the portrait, do you need glue? Masking tape? Or wire? Try out different materials and see what happens!



Portrait of Lenny Abrahamson (b.1966), Filmmaker

Donald Teskey / Portrait of Lenny Abrahamson (b.1966), Filmmaker
/ Commissioned, 2018 / Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

About the Portrait

Who is the artist? Donald Teskey

Where is the artist from? Ireland

When was the artist born? 1956

What is this painting called?

Portrait of Lenny Abrahamson (b.1966),
Filmmaker

When was this made? 2018

What is it made of? Oil on canvas

What size is it? 80 x 80 cm

What type of portrait is this?

Commissioned portrait

Who is the sitter?

Lenny Abrahamson is an Irish film director and screenwriter. He has won six Irish Film and Television Awards, and in 2015 his film *Room* was nominated for four Oscars.

How was it made?

This painting was made with oil paints on canvas. Unlike Gerry Davis, who painted Henry Shefflin's portrait, Teskey applies thick loose brushstrokes to build up an image. It is likely that Teskey used wide brushes to achieve the large, thick layers. For this painting he has used whites, blacks and greys instead of bright colours. He also uses layers of white to give an impression of light bouncing off the back wall. It is possible that there are other layers of colours hiding behind the whites and greys to give depth to the painting.

Why did the artist make this portrait?

Donald Teskey was awarded a commission to make a portrait of Lenny Abrahamson in 2018. Funded by a private benefactor, this work was a part of a series of commissions to showcase contemporary art practice and, in keeping with the nineteenth-century origins of the National Portrait Collection, to acknowledge individuals who have made major contributions to Irish life.

Look & Respond

- \ What can you see in this painting?
- \ What colours can you see?
- \ Can you see anything in the background of this painting?
- \ Why do you think the portrait is in this setting?
- \ What is the subject of the portrait wearing?
- \ Who do you think this person is?
- \ Is there anything you can tell about the subject's personality?
- \ In what direction is the subject looking? Why do you think this is?
- \ Do you like this portrait? Why/ why not?
- \ If you were to give a title to this portrait, what would it be?
- \ What other ways could the artist have made the portrait? Could it be a drawing? A video? A painting?

Create

- \ Use a viewfinder to zoom in on an interesting area of the painting and make a detailed sketch.
- \ Take some tracing paper and mark a simple outline of the person in the portrait. Now cut out the outline so you have a silhouette. Now, choose a range of backgrounds from old magazines and newspapers. Place the silhouette on different backgrounds until you find one that you like. Stick it down using PVA glue and start to make a new portrait by drawing facial features on the silhouette and drawing onto your chosen background.

Compare & Contrast

Media

The portraits in this pack are made using different media (methods and materials). Some are paintings, some are photographs, one is a video work and one is a sculpture. How important are the methods and materials used to create a portrait? Would you like to see any of the portraits in a different media? What methods or materials would you use to create your own self-portrait? Why?

Colour

Take a look at the colours in each of the portraits, now select one colour from each image that you think best represents the sitter. Why have you chosen this colour? If you made a self-portrait using shades of just one colour, which colour would you use? Why?

Composition

Composition is the placement of different visual elements in the portrait and how they relate to each other. Look at each portrait and how it has been put together. Is the sitter full length, three-quarter length, or can you just see their face? Are they in the foreground or the background of the work? If you just saw the sitter's face, or hand, or shoulder, what kind of portrait would that be?

Settings

Take a look the settings in all these portraits. Are the sitters indoors or outdoors? If you were to make a portrait of someone you know, would your sitter be indoors or outdoors? If they were to be indoors, what room or space would you place them in? If they were to be outdoors, would they be in the natural landscape or in a city? Could they be in an imaginary place?

Clothes

The clothes that the sitters are wearing can tell us about their personalities or how they wanted us to see them. Choose three different portraits and compare the sitters' clothes. What can clothes tell us about different times and places? What would you wear in a self-portrait?

Objects

Many of the portraits contain objects that tell us something about the sitter. Choose three different portraits from the pack. Do they include objects? Are they being held by the sitter, or in the background? What if there are no objects? What other clues can you use to find out about the sitter?

Gaze

Gaze describes where a person is looking, what they are looking at and how they are looking. Take a look at all the gazes in all the portraits. Where are the sitters looking? Which sitter is looking directly at us? Which sitter is looking to their left, and which sitter is looking to their right? Are any of them looking downwards? Do they look friendly, or shy, or maybe they are they challenging us? How do you feel when you look directly into the eyes of the sitter?