Bright and Colorful Portraits

This activity will guide you through two different projects as you create a colorful and vibrant self-portrait inspired by Kehinde Wiley’s large-scale portrait of former President Barack Obama.

Investigate the Work of Art!

1. By placing figures in the postures and settings of powerful historic figures, such as Napoleon or John D. Rockefeller, the American artist Kehinde Wiley applies the conventions of glorification, history, wealth, and prestige to urban and contemporary Black and Brown male subjects. How does this portrait of Barack Obama relate to these past portraiture traditions, and why might the artist reference these traditions?

2. Look at the vibrant patterned background. How does this background relate to past landscape paintings and/or portraits you may have seen before?

3. Describe President Obama’s clothing. How does his clothing define his roles both during and beyond his presidency?

Let’s Make Some Art!

Gather These Art Materials

For Project 1:
- Glue stick
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Acrylic paint
- Paintbrush
- Oil-based Sharpie markers

For Project 2:
- Glue stick
- Craft decorative paper
- Mixed-media paper, 9 x 12–inch
- Paintbrush
- Acrylic paints (skin tone colors)
- Scissors
- Cup for water
- Paper plate for palette
Step-by-Step Artist Instructions

Project 1: Creating a Background
1. Think about a design pattern with repeating shapes, lines, and colors that best represents you. This could be flowers, like in the portrait of Barack Obama, or it could just be shapes and colors you like.
2. Fill up a 9 x 12-inch mixed-media paper with your design lightly in pencil.
3. Use acrylic paint to cover the largest areas of your design.
4. Use the Sharpies to add in the more detailed parts of your print.

Project 2: Drawing a Self Portrait
1. Draw a portrait of yourself on the mixed-media paper. The portrait should take up a large part of the paper. Use a mirror or a photo of yourself as your reference. Think about how you want to be portrayed. Is this a casual picture? Is more formal? In what pose do you want people to see you?
2. Mix the correct skin tone for yourself and paint your portrait.
   *Please see skin tone mixing lesson below.
3. If your portrait is full body, paint your outfit, thinking about what you want to be wearing, whether casual or formal. If you only want to include your face, that is fine too.
4. Once your portrait is dry, cut it out and paste it onto the paper design you created in Project 1.

How to mix skin tone:
• Start by using an equal amount of the three primary colors (yellow, blue, and red) to make brown.
• Next, you can lighten your brown by adding white.
• You can create darker shades of your brown by adding burnt sienna, burnt umber, or dioxazine purple.
• When you are painting a portrait, you will need multiple shades of skin color to create all the shadows.