AUSTRALIAN PORTRAITS
1880–1960
Secondary school education resource

Following a visit to the exhibition *Australian portraits 1880–1960*, the education resource will assist secondary students to examine the question, what is a portrait?

In 1960, the education resource will assist secondary students to learn about the richness and variety of Australian portraiture over 80 years, from the late 19th to the mid 20th century. The ability to recognize and respond to faces and facial expression is crucial to the dynamics of portraiture. Our ability to recognize and respond to faces and facial expression is crucial to understanding facial expressions in paintings, so fascinating and appealing. The word 'portrait' comes from the Latin *protrahere*: to draw forth, disclose, reveal, to capture the inner essence or to visualize the invisible. A portrait may be a likeness to the visual appearance of a face or body or an evocation of the physical presence of a face or body, or a depiction of character or personality, the mood of a person, their spirit or soul — or the sum of all of these.

The ability to recognize and respond to faces and facial expressions is crucial to the dynamics of portraiture. Our ability to recognize and respond to faces and facial expressions makes viewing faces in paintings so fascinating and appealing. The artists use the genre of portraiture to explore the formal and technical aspects of painting in a variety of ways. The artists use the genre of portraiture to explore the formal and technical aspects of painting in a variety of ways. The portraits selected for this education resource show how approaches to portraiture and portraiture as an aesthetic object have developed and evolved during a period of change. The portraits reflect significant moments in Australian history and provide representations of our culture, our character and our interests. Some are images of wealthy or important individuals, others are intimate portraits of artists, families and friends or revealing self-portraits. In these works, portraiture comes from the Latin *protrahere*: to draw forth, to capture the inner essence or to visualize the invisible. A portrait may be a likeness to the visual appearance of a face or body or an evocation of the physical presence of a face or body, or a depiction of character or personality, the mood of a person, their spirit or soul — or the sum of all of these.

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Robert Dowling was Australia’s first locally trained colonial artist and the most successful portrait painter in Australia in the 1880s. Dowling was acquired with the assistance of the Masterpieces for the Nation Fund, 2010. 103 × 127.6 cm oil on canvas Miss Robertson of Colac (Dolly) 1885–86

Activities

Look at another Australian portrait painted by a different artist in the 1880s and compare it with this painting. How have these two artists shown you something about the personalities of their subjects?

Robert Dowling, Miss Robertson of Colac (Dolly), 1885–86

Miss Robertson of Colac (Dolly) was one of Dowling’s last paintings. She was one of the first Australian to achieve success at the Royal Academy in London. Dowling showed Dolly seated in a garden setting surrounded by objects that reflect her lifestyle and status. Originally, Dolly was depicted wearing a white dress. She later requested the colour of the dress be changed to brown so she would look more grown up. Dowling agreed to do this and reworked the painting. The cushion Dolly is leaning against, a fashionable Japanese tea service on the tea table with a plate of vanilla slices, a book and her faithful dog reflect her lifestyle and status. Dowling was attracted to the lushness of the garden, Dolly’s pose with one foot peeping out from beneath her dress and the possessions placed nearby all contribute to create an impression of Dolly’s character at a significant time in her youth.

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Activities

Look at the face and posture of this woman. Copy her pose and expression. How do you feel?

Australian identity was topical for artists and writers in 1901. Investigate why this was the case and reference other works by Roberts and McCubbin. Find the portrait painted by McCubbin in the exhibition and compare it to the portrait painted by Roberts. Look carefully at the painterly approach and colours used by McCubbin and Roberts. Look carefully at the portraits by Roberts and McCubbin. Find the portrait painted by McCubbin. Find the portrait painted by Roberts. Compare the portraits painted by these two artists. What similarities and differences can you see? What is the intent of the portrait by Roberts? Look carefully at the portrait by McCubbin. Find the portrait painted by McCubbin. Find the portrait painted by Roberts. Compare the portraits painted by these two artists. What similarities can you see? What differences can you see?

Tom Roberts's portrait of a fashionably dressed young woman evokes the colours and textures of the Australian bush. This is likely to be a portrait of Ada Crossley, the then unestablished contralto singer. She was a close friend of the artist and had been a model for him. The title of the painting does not identify the sitter, but the artist did not identify his sitters in the titles of his portraits. The painting is a portrait of a woman dressed in the style of the Australian bush. The title is An Australian maiden 1888. The portrait was painted in 1888 and is oil on canvas. It is 76.2 x 127.2 cm. Purchased through the Joseph Brown Fund, 1979.
How is this self-portrait daring?

Discuss why artists paint self-portraits?

Was this possible?

Mirror and trying to render it as accurately and the other by studying your face in the mirror, expressing what it is like to do your:

Create two self-portraits: one by doing a series of quick sketches without looking in your own face and:

What is your face look like?

Think you can show in a drawing or painting what the image we see in the mirror. Do you think we have of our own face and:

Activities

Range of colours and strong contrasts between light and dark tones.

This dramatic effect is enhanced by the way Lambert has used a limited palette for his self-portrait, appearing both daring and vulnerable.

So the viewer has to look upwards at his strikingly naked chest, literally baring his chest for his audience. This dramatic effect is enhanced by the way Lambert has used a limited palette for his self-portrait, appearing both daring and vulnerable.

In this bold self-portrait, Lambert is posing as if for a doctor’s examination. He has placed himself in the centre of the composition looking down, and the viewer has to look upwards at his strikingly naked chest. He is literally baring his chest for his audience, appearing both daring and vulnerable.

George W Lambert was one of Australia's most brilliant, witty and fascinating artists. He lived and worked in London for about 20 years and returned to Sydney in 1924 as the most successful expatriate Australian landscape artists. He died and worked in London for about 20 years and

Chesham Street 1910

George W Lambert (1873–1930)
Activities

What does the title 'The green parasol' suggest to you? Does it suggest something about the weather? How is the colour green important?

E Phillips Fox was born in Melbourne and studied art there as a young man before travelling to Europe to continue his studies. He exhibited his work in Edwardian London and Paris, as well as in Australia.

The green parasol shows Fox's friend Edith Anderson sitting in the garden of his home in Paris. Fox has used short, textured brush strokes and bright patches of colour to evoke the heat and light of a warm summer afternoon. Edith is sitting comfortably in the cool green shade under her parasol.

All important artists have questioned whether a painting should idealise the subject or be a realistic likeness: should the subject represent humanity more generally or be a picture of a specific person? Some portrait titles do not indicate who the sitter was so that the viewer looks at the painting as a whole rather than focusing on the identity of the person. These works are still portraits, and we often know who the subjects are, but the artists who painted their works in this way wanted their paintings to be regarded first and foremost as works of art.

Many artists have questioned whether a painting should idealise the subject or be a realistic likeness: should the subject represent humanity more generally or be a picture of a specific person? Some portrait titles do not indicate who the sitter was so that the viewer looks at the painting as a whole rather than focusing on the identity of the person. These works are still portraits, and we often know who the subjects are, but the artists who painted their works in this way wanted their paintings to be regarded first and foremost as works of art.
Activities

Look at the relationship between the background and the figure. What are the differences in the brushstrokes and patterns that the artist has used in these areas? Can you find Bunny’s signature in this painting?

Photograph a friend from a distance and then from up close. Compare the effect of these viewpoints.

Design your own monogram or signature inspired by Japanese printmaking. Many artists of his era created monograms inspired by Japanese printmaking.

Can you find Bunny’s signature in this painting? Many artists of his era created monograms inspired by Japanese printmaking.

A woman in a brown hat is looking at you. Framed beneath the wide brim, her gaze is steady. The faint blush in her cheeks and chin hints at the warmth of the day. She is Jeanne Morel, wife and muse of the artist Rupert Bunny.

This postwar portrait shows a middle-aged woman whose hair is contained under a practical sunhat. The non-specific title suggests that Bunny may have been interested in painting Jeanne as an exercise exploring colour, form and texture. Bunny repeats the blue-green of Jeanne’s eyes in her looped beads and floral kimono-style jacket. The fabrics are thinly painted and the texture of the fabric contrasts with Jeanne’s smooth, opaque, creamy skin.

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Activities

Using the internet to find other works by Margaret Preston. What other subjects interested her?

Find the portrait by Agnes Goodsir in this exhibition. Describe how the two artists’ works convey the characters of their respective subjects.

In this portrait, Myra looks directly out of the frame. The title of the painting suggests that she is a flapper, a young bohemian woman of the 1920s. Her cloche hat, pulled down to reveal a glimpse of her trendy bobbed haircut, was a common item of a flapper’s apparel. But Myra is not quite flash enough in her homely woollen dress and knitted tights to be a fashionable flapper of the 1920s. She is, however, a self-possessed young woman. Margaret Preston used strong contours and flat shapes with dark purple and green elements in her portrait of Myra. The title of the frame: The title of the frame. These are aspects of what they had learned from their studies and travels overseas.

During the 20th century, at a time when many male artists continued to use traditional approaches in their work, women such as Margaret Preston, Grace Cossington Smith and Elise Brunner distilled aspects of what they had learned from their studies and travels overseas to create a bold modern portrait.

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Preston was one of the leading modernists in Australia in the early 20th century.
Grace Crowley (1890–1979)

Portrait study

1928

oil on composition board

79.2 x 59.8 cm

bequest of Grace Crowley, 1979

Activities

Where have shapes been repeated and where do they intersect in this painting?

Use the internet to find an image of Madame Devaucay de Nittis by Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres. Discuss the similarities and differences between the image and Madame Devaucay de Nittis by Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres. Another portrait study also makes reference to Madame Devaucay de Nittis 1807 by Ingres.

In the pose of the sitter and in Crowley’s use of the round-backed chair, was an important lesson for Crowley when she was studying in Paris.

Crowley returned to Australia after studying in Paris and continued to challenge herself throughout her life, always trying new ideas and approaches to painting.

The sitter for this portrait is relaxing in a high-backed chair and gazing calmly towards the viewer. Looking at her hands and face, we can see how Crowley used light, shade, and shape in this portrait to create a sense of volume.

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One of the important lessons for Crowley when she was studying in Paris was an important lesson for Crowley when she was studying in Paris.

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Research the golden mean and create your own cubist work of art using the golden mean.

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Discuss the similarities and differences between the image and Grace Crowley’s Portrait study.

Research the golden mean and create your own cubist work of art using the golden mean.
Activities

Compare this portrait to the one Tucker painted four years later. Describe some of the differences and similarities.

Think about the different roles you play with different friends. Look at Tucker’s self-portraits and describe the different aspects of himself that he evoked in each portrait.

What do you see as the differences between the two works? What do you see as the similarities?

What do you see as the differences between Tucker’s presence dominant, with the head and body filling the canvas, curiously self-assured. Tucker’s presence dominates, with the head and body tilted forward so that he has to look up gives the impression that he is not yet this is contradicted by his unshaven chin. The way Tucker’s head is combed hair gives the impression of an upright young man of his time—combed hair and a wide-eyed stare. His neat appearance and his carefully combed hair because he used strong colours to depict himself and presented himself with a wide-eyed stare. His neat appearance and his carefully combed hair.

Self-portrait 1937 shows the artist at the age of 23. At first sight, he seems born in Melbourne in 1914, Albert Tucker’s formative years were shaped by the poverty that affected many Australians during the Great Depression. (1929–32).

Self-portrait 1937

Oil on paperboard mounted on composition board
56.4 x 42.8 cm

Albert Tucker (1914–1999)

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Albert Tucker (1914–1999)
Activities

Paint your own abstract self-portrait.

Imagine some things that are important to you, someone you know, and paint a portrait of them. How do you might simplify and distort your own features?

Spend some time looking in the mirror and think about how you might simplify and compress some of your features.

Albert Tucker’s Self-portrait 1941 is almost unrecognizable as a portrait. The whole world, and all the people I knew, seemed to be seething with the social issues of this time also had an impact on him. Looking back, he explained some of the social influences on his work.

The structure of the artist’s face is made from a series of close-ups. Tucker uses bold colours—blood reds and acid clashing planes that crowd the composition, creating a cramped and claustrophobic atmosphere. Tucker was inspired by international approaches to art such as Cubism, Surrealism and German Expressionism. He experimented with these techniques and bold colours—and stark contrasts to create the features.

At this time Tucker was seething with ideas and energies and experiences; and my own mind was a seething mess... the highly emotional, overwrought expressionist paintings suited the highly emotional, overwrought expressionist paintings suited...
Sidney Nolan (1917–1992)
Ned Kelly
1946
enamel on composition board
74.5 x 61.5 cm
purchased 1970
© trustees of the Sidney Nolan estate

Activities

Do you think Kelly is a hero or a criminal?

What do you think Nolan was interested in expressing about Ned Kelly’s character when he painted this portrait?

Use the internet or your library to find images of Ned Kelly paintings. Compare this portrait of Ned Kelly with the images you find.

Do you think Kelly is a hero or a criminal?

Sidney Nolan was fascinated with the Ned Kelly story and worked on it for more than 30 years. His series of paintings evoking the life of Ned Kelly is well known. They are often bright and bold and show dramatic events, including police chases, the Kelly Gang escaping in disguise and the famous siege at Glenrowan where Kelly was finally captured and the rest of the Gang were killed.

Unlike many of the artists in this exhibition, Nolan did not work directly from life; rather, he referred to a photograph to paint an image that is preserved in Beechworth gaol records, of Kelly at the age of 18.

This portrait is a stark contrast to most of Nolan’s Ned Kelly paintings.

Many of Nolan’s paintings feature Ned Kelly in his homemade armor.

The somber man wearing a dark suit resembles a police photograph.

The portrait is a stark contrast to most of Nolan’s Ned Kelly paintings.

Inspired by history.

Secondary school education resource

Paintings from the NationalGallery of Australia collection

1880–1960

AUSTRALIAN PORTRAITS

1946 Ned Kelly (1917–1992)

Enamel on composition board

© trustees of the Sidney Nolan estate

© National Gallery of Australia 1979
Activities

Why physical attributes would you feature and take a similar approach to Marek, what like to paint a portrait? If you were going. Think about someone of whom you would, it surreal. What about this painting do you think makes. Where surrealists artists. Use the internet to find images by two or. character of Helena Marek? you think these features indicative about the hair or the woman in this portrait. What do. Look at the features (mouth, cheeks, eye, yellow and green colour scheme is enlivened by the brilliant red of Helena’s multiplied lips. Dušan Marek appears to have portrayed his wife, Her head has been simplified into a series of flat shapes and the spiritual states in his work. My wife is a portrait of the fair-haired Helena. Marek was a Surrealist artist who explored psychological, emotional and spiritual states. From Prague, and they become inseparable companions. On board, he met the beautiful young Helena Jakubova, a fellow refugee. Dušan Marek immigrated to Australia in 1948 on the SS Charlton Sovereign.

Dušan Marek (1926–1993)
Activities

Choose one other self-portrait in this exhibition and compare it to Fairweather’s. Look at the surface of this painting. Look at the different kinds of brush strokes and the different textures of the paint. Discuss the different approaches the artists have taken.

In Portrait of the artist, Fairweather built up the surface—layer upon layer, dark over light and light over dark—to create a dense and powerful, expressionist painting. The brushstrokes are reminiscent of Chinese calligraphy and abstract Chinese calligraphic painting techniques, literature and language as well as comparative religions. Portrait of the artist was painted when Ian Fairweather was living in isolation near the artist’s studio on Bribie Island, north of Brisbane. He settled there after years of travel and encounters with different cultures, particularly in Asia. These travels had inspired Fairweather to explore comparative religions and other cultures through painting.

Fairweather worked with quick-drying materials such as ink, gouache and synthetic polymer paint on readily available materials such as paper and cardboard. Paint your own portrait in a similar manner. Look at the surface of this painting. Look at the different kinds of brush strokes and the different textures of the paint. Discuss the different approaches the artists have taken.

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Create a portrait

Use this side of the card to make some notes about who your portrait will portray.

Use this side of the card to make some notes about who your portrait will portray.

Think about what aspects of the person's character or history you want to explore and choose a portrait that reflects this. What will they be wearing? Will they have a hat? Will you depict them in a setting that reflects their personality? What will appropriate approach to take for your portrait. And decide what would be the most approach used by artists in this exhibition important to you. Think about the reasons for using this card to create a portrait of someone.
This exhibition is supported by the National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program, an Australian Government program aiming to improve access to the national collections for all Australians; and by Visions of Australia, an Australian Government program supporting touring exhibitions by providing funding assistance for the development and touring of Australian cultural material across Australia.