

ME, MYSELF AND I

Explore different examples of self-portraits and reflect on the reasons why artists paint themselves.

VIEW ONLINE

QAGOMA
LEARNING



MP "Self Portraits #8" G. Bennett 15-4-03

GORDON BENNETT SELF PORTRAIT #8 2003

After taking up painting in his early thirties, art gave Gordon Bennett the means to deconstruct his personal experiences. Self-portraits was a recurring interest for him, forming part of a larger investigation of the representation of identity in his work. *Self portrait #8* is one in a series of many self-portraits that artist produced between 2003 and 2004. The work makes direct references to European — often white Australian — artists and histories. Fracturing and obscuring his likeness through different visual effects, Bennett emphasises the ambiguous and transitory nature of identity.

LOOK

Compare *Self Portrait #8* to Bennett's *Self Portrait #2* below. What are the similarities and differences between the two?



MP "Self Portrait #2" G. Bennett 15-4-03

THINK

1. Look carefully at how the artist has used layering in this self-portrait. How many faces can you see?
2. What feelings or thoughts do you think this self-portrait conveys?
3. What colour catches your eye the most and why?

CREATE

Using some old magazines, cut out images of eyes, a mouth, a nose, hair, etc. and see if you can create a portrait by layering these different parts together on a blank sheet of paper. Draw the outline of a face and create a background or paste on other elements to complete your portrait collage.



MICHAEL ZAVROS *BAD DAD* 2013

Bad dad captures a thoughtful moment in which artist Michael Zavros has cast himself as a contemporary version of the protagonist from Caravaggio's painting *Narcissus* c.1597–99. In ancient mythology, Narcissus is a beautiful young man who did not appreciate those who loved him. As punishment, the gods made him fall in love with his own reflection — something which could not return his love. Here Zavros describes himself as someone who looks deeply into the range of emotional experiences associated with material things. This image produces a sense of longing — for travel, for luxury and for the past, and also simply for beauty.

THINK

1. Why do you think Michael Zavros titled his painting *Bad dad*?
2. Take a look at the setting in this painting. Where do you think the artist is?
3. Look carefully at the figure and objects in this work. How do you think this person is feeling?

EXPLORE

View online Caravaggio's 400 year-old painting titled *Narcissus*. What are the differences and similarities between this work and *Bad dad*?



CREATE

Examine how your reflection changes in different reflective surfaces, e.g. a mirror, a window, a container of water or the back of a spoon. Describe in one sentence how your reflection looks on each surface. Once you have finished, try this drawing exercise which was created by the Children's Art Centre called 'All about me. ME! It's me!'



MILOŠ TOMIĆ

MUSICAL DIARY #1 2012

Miloš Tomić is interested in how we create sounds in our everyday interactions that are just daily experiences, such as flicking a light switch on and off. *Musical diary #1 2012* features the artist and his young son (plus other children) playing instruments and creating sounds with everyday household items that have been edited together into an unpleasant mixture of sounds. Together the artist and his son delve into the world of sound and help us as the viewer to discover and realise the way music exists in our everyday lives.

WATCH ▶

Watch and listen to a sample of the artwork. There are a lot of different sounds and actions which have been put together to create a musical piece.



THINK

1. Can you list some of the sounds that you can hear *Musical diary #1*?
2. Did you recognise any of the objects in the video?
3. What is the artist trying to help us understand about music and sound?

CREATE

Keep a sound diary for one day. Write down all the sounds that you hear throughout the course of your day. For example, pouring cereal into a bowl, the school bell, bouncing a ball at lunch, doors opening and closing, etc. Do you think any of the sounds are unique to you?



NORA HEYSEN *SELF PORTRAIT* 1938

Nora Heysen spent some months in late 1937 at her parents' home in Hahndorf, South Australia after returning from Europe. The late 1930s were an important time in finding her identity as an artist. Her father was a renowned landscape painter, so Heysen used self-portraits as a distinct way to establish her identity as an artist and to make a name for herself.

LOOK

Look closely at this portrait and the colours the artist has used. Can you see where Heysen has used darker colours and where she has used lighter colours? What about the dab of green just beneath her nose?

THINK

1. What expression has the artist captured?
2. How old do you think she is?
3. What do you think the portrait tells us about Nora's life and character?

CREATE

Try this portrait activity from the Children's Art Centre called '[Learn to Draw with Olivia](#)'. Olivia Quilty, daughter of artist Ben Quilty, takes you through some easy steps to help you create a portrait. Have a go drawing your own self-portrait!



TAKAHIKO IIMURA
PERFORMANCE: AIUEONN
SIX FEATURES 1994

Takahiko Iimura has focused much of his work on creating personal cinema, using the 'self' as his starting point. In *Performance AIUEONN Six Features* 1994, he explores the relationship between vowel sounds and characters of the Japanese and English (Roman) alphabets. His face is distorted using digital manipulation into exaggerated shapes as he pronounces each vowel sound; making us consider the relationship between words, sounds and images. Digital technologies have provided another platform for artists to explore self-representation not only visually, but also through sound.

WATCH ▶

Watch a sample of this video artwork. The artist has captured a video of himself, but he has edited it so his face stretches and moves. Look at yourself in a mirror and say each vowel: A-E-I-O-U. Notice how the shape of your face and mouth changes with each letter?



THINK 

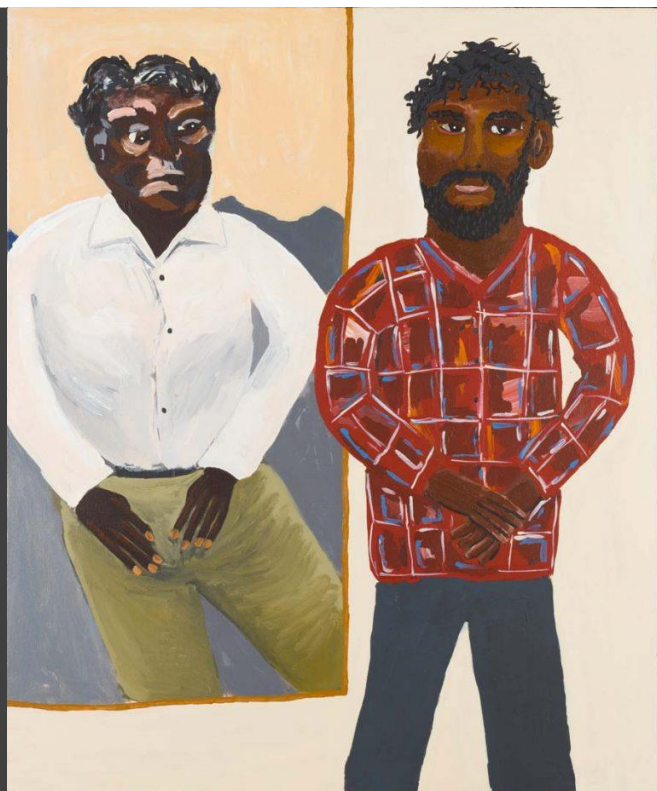
1. Why do you think the artist stretched and changed his face with each vowel?
2. What was your reaction to the video? Did it make you laugh?
3. How many different languages can you name? Can you speak a language other than English?

CREATE 

Think of words that have vowels in them. Write three different sentences on a piece of white paper — these could be from your favourite book. Use a different coloured pencil for each vowel and a black pencil for all the other letters (consonants) in each word. At the end you will see how often these vowels are used!

VINCENT NAMATJIRA *ALBERT AND VINCENT* 2014

In 2014, Vincent Namatjira flew on a plane for the very first time to visit the Queensland Art Gallery, where he saw a portrait of his great-grandfather, renowned Indigenous Australian artist Albert Namatjira, by William Dargie. Albert passed away before Vincent was born, so they never met. While he was in the Gallery, Vincent decided to draw some sketches of himself with the portrait of his great-grandfather. He took those sketches back with him to remote Central Australia and created this painting at his home.



EXPLORE 🔍

View Dargie's [*Portrait of Albert Namatjira*](#) that Vincent Namatjira saw when he visited the Gallery in 2014. [Read](#) together the story about Vincent creating his artwork *Albert and Vincent*.



THINK 💭

1. Why do you think Vincent decided to paint a self-portrait of himself with his great-grandfather?
2. Describe some of the feelings that the artist may have experienced when he saw the painting of his famous great-grandfather Albert Namatjira.
3. Compare the depiction of Albert Namatjira in Vincent's painting with that of William Dargie's 1956 portrait. Can you see any similarities or differences?

CREATE ✎

Download and print the '[Little Book of Me](#)' from the Children's Art Centre. Learn more about self-representation and what a self-portrait is.

CAPTIONS

Gordon Bennett / Australia 1955–2014 / *Self portrait #8* 2003 / UV inkjet print on photographic paper / 72.5 x 61cm, 54 x 54cm (comp.) / Purchased 2005. The Queensland Government's special Centenary Fund / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Estate of Gordon Bennett | **Gordon Bennett** / Australia 1955–2014 / *Self portrait #2* 2003 / UV inkjet print on photographic paper / 72.5 x 61cm, 54 x 54cm (comp.) / Purchased 2005. The Queensland Government's special Centenary Fund / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Estate of Gordon Bennett | **Michael Zavros** / Australia b.1974 / *Bad dad* 2013 / Oil on canvas / 110 x 150cm / Purchased 2016 with funds raised through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation Appeal / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Michael Zavros | **Caravaggio** (Michelangelo Merisi) / Italy 1571–1610 / *Narcissus* 1597-99 / Oil on canvas / 113.3 x 94 cm / Collection: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini | **Miloš Tomić** / Serbia b.1976 / *Musical diary #1* 2012 / Digital video: 3:37 minutes, colour, sound / Purchased 2014 with funds from Gina Fairfax through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Miloš Tomić | **Nora Heysen** / Australia 1911–2003 / *Self portrait* 1938 / Oil on canvas laid on board / 58.8 x 48.2 x 4.3cm / Purchased 2011 with funds from Philip Bacon, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Lou Klepac | **Takahiko Iimura** / Japan/United States b.1937 / *Performance: AIUEONN Six Features* 1994 / Videotape: 8 minutes, colour, stereo / The James C. Sourris AM Collection. Purchased 1999 with funds from James C. Sourris through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Takahiko Iimura | **Vincent Namatjira** / Western Aranda/Pitjantatjara people / Australia b.1983 / *Albert and Vincent* 2014 / Synthetic polymer paint on linen / 120 x 100cm / Gift of Dirk and Karen Zadra through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation 2014. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery / © Vincent Namatjira / Licensed by Viscopy | **William Dargie** / Australia 1912–2003 / *Portrait of Albert Namatjira* 1956 / Oil on canvas / 102.1 x 76.4cm / Purchased 1957 / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © QAGOMA

© Queensland Art Gallery Board of Trustees, 2020

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced without prior written permission of the copyright owners. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the publisher. Copyright for texts in this publication is held by the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art.

This resource has been developed by QAGOMA Learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land upon which the Gallery stands in Brisbane. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past and present and, in the spirit of reconciliation, acknowledge the immense creative contribution Indigenous people make to the art and culture of this country.