ME, MYSELF AND I

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

**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.

**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?

**LOOK**

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

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!’

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?
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 house 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.

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?

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?
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 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!
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*.

**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.

**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?
CAPTIONS


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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.