

Who Am I?



Image by John Lake

EDUCATION KIT

An exhibition developed and toured by



Who Am I? ~



ABOVE: Paul Rayner, *Ken & Ken*, 2004. Collection of The Dowse Art Museum. Image by Jeff McEwan

There are many different kinds of portraits made for different reasons and The Dowse is showcasing our portrait collection in an exhibit especially curated for youth. To demonstrate the diversity of the genre there will be paintings, photographs, drawings and sculptures on display. There will be opportunity to examine pose, expression, presentation and backgrounds in individual portraits, group portraits and self portraits.

Learning Outcome: Students will understand that portraits tell us about who people are. Students will consider how they automatically make assumptions based on what they see and consider how images can manipulate people's assumptions.

New Zealand Curriculum Achievement Objectives:

Visual Arts: Investigate the purpose of objects and images from past and present cultures and identify contexts in which they were made, viewed and valued.

Social Studies Curriculum Link: Diversity, Identity and Belonging

Students will gain knowledge, skills and experiences to

- Understand how cultural practices reflect and express peoples, customs, traditions and values.

- Understand how belonging to groups is important to people

Key Core competencies

Managing Self - As students move between and respond to different cultural practices they will be challenged to consider their own identities and assumptions.

Relating to others - Students will interact effectively with a diverse range of people in a new context. They will use and develop their active listening skills as well as practice recognising different points of view while sharing their own ideas.



TOP: Vita Cochran, *Huttette at 21*, 2008. Collection of The Dowse Art Museum.
 ABOVE: Young visitors discuss the portraits in *Who Am I?* Both images by Jeff McEwan.

In the Gallery

Introduction

The Museum Educator sits in the big red chair with class seated around on the floor. (Dressing up is a fun way of delivering this programme). To set the context use flash cards and then have a discussion.

Possible text for on the backs of the cards is:

A portrait can be as varied and limitless as our imaginations.
It can be an exact likeness or abstract whirl of thoughts and feelings.
It has the potential to create a myth,
Tell a story,
Suggest sadness,
Or joy.
A portrait is one person's version of another person.

Some key questions are:

What is a portrait?
What would you expect to see in a portrait?
Has anyone ever sat for a portrait before?
Did you do anything special to get ready for it?

Talk about a King or Queen getting ready for a portrait 300 years ago.
Brainstorm the process of choosing costumes, selecting props, choosing where to be positioned, expression on face and discuss the purpose of the portrait.

Consider the power an artist has to influence an audience through images. Use the 'expression' interactives to demonstrate how you can be feeling one thing but look like you are feeling something else.

RIGHT: Assorted facial expressions. Image by Jeff McEwan.



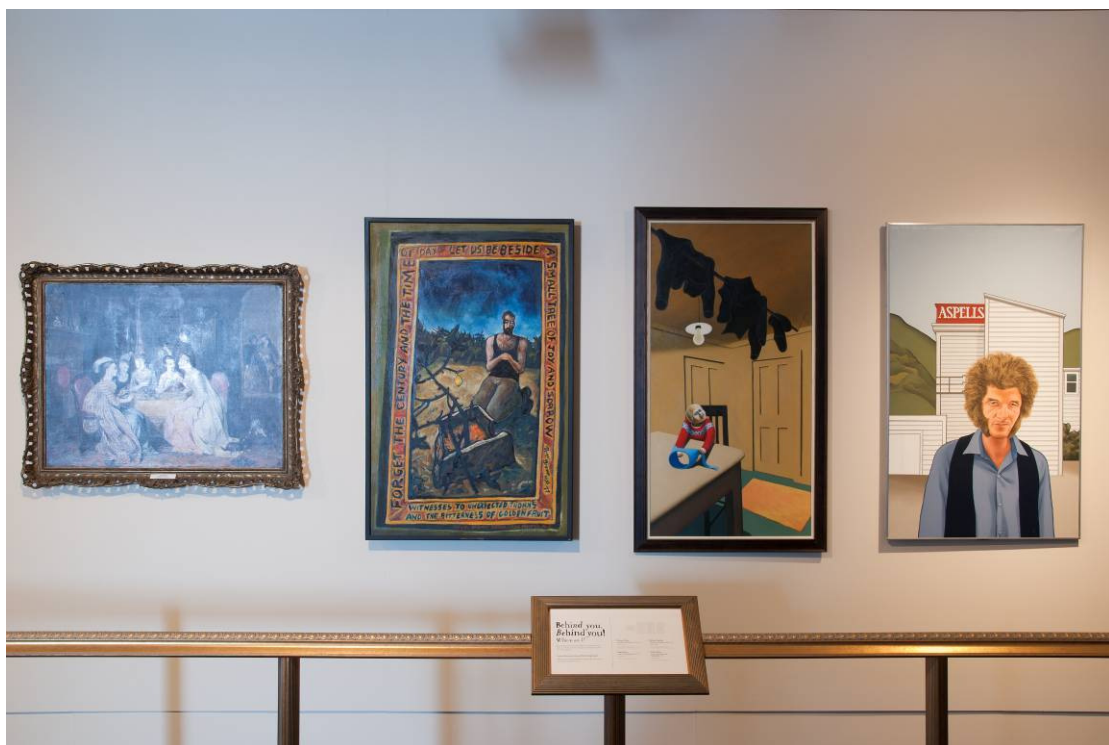


Have a student sit in the chair and put them in some different poses. Formal and informal work a treat because of the contrast.

ABOVE: Visitors enjoy the interactives in Who Am I? Images by John Lake

Give an overview of the layout of the exhibit pointing out the pose, gaze, expression, props, gesture and background sections.

Explore the works in groups searching for a work which gives the student a feeling about the person. Come back together in front of the background paintings. Take time to hear the students thoughts about the people in the works. Either share as one big group or facilitate a Think, Pair, Share session. works.

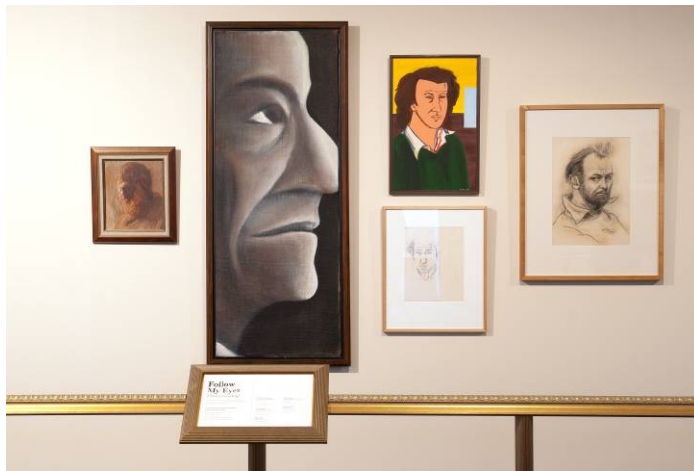


ABOVE: Portraits in the Background section. Image by John Lake

Select one of the Background paintings and explore how as a viewer we get information. To focus this discussion these three questions could be used:

- What do you see?**
- What do you think?**
- What do you wonder?**

Explore how, as a viewer, we get information.



Consider the Gaze works together as a class using these possible questions: Which paintings/drawings look directly at the viewer?

How does the work make you feel?

Does it make a difference that only a detail of the face is shown?

ABOVE: *Who Am I?* artworks in the Gaze section. Image by John Lake.

Activity 10 mins

Sit the class in a circle with pencils and paper. Explain that they will be creating a series of blind contour drawings that will take 30 seconds each to draw. Use a pointing finger to feel their mouth, talk about texture and angles. Close eyes and time a mouth drawing. Repeat process feeling and blindly drawing ears and then the whole face. Allow for time in between each to have a good look at what they have drawn—and their neighbour.



LEFT: Thomas Clater, *Scandal! Only Think*, date unknown. Collection of The Dowse Art Museum. Gift of J and R Calquhoun to the City of Lower Hutt. Image by Jeff McEwan



The Gallery Experience Upon Reflection

From a Teacher's perspective *Who Am I?* is potentially a very rich resource. The students will be exposed to some of New Zealand's top artists and a range of techniques/materials. The exhibit is well structured for learning the key elements and principles of portraiture, making the experience easy to refer back to. It strongly supports identity work back in the classroom as well as any literacy work.

From a Museum Educators perspective it is a joy to work with. It is a slow gentle exhibit. The students have time to get to know and

become friends with the works. Particular works can be taken apart layer by layer and the students' insights are a delight to hear.

It is a fun exhibit in an 'old school' way. I pretended the whole space was a salon, I dressed up in an old velvet cloak and wig and used a little bell to move groups along or beckon them back.

The Thomas Clater painting *Scandal!* was a favourite and Paul Rayner's *Ken and Ken* ceramics are brilliant for making the point about image manipulation and assumptions we make about people's appearances.

The interactives need to be managed. You'll find your own way to do this as I'm sure you'll find your own way to work with the entire exhibit and breathe life into the works. In hindsight I would recommend making a way to cover or remove some of the interactives while teaching a class (particularly the silhouette interactive). They are thoroughly enjoyed by the public and the students but they can be a distraction and the learning that occurs can be far less than would be otherwise. See how you go though. This was just my experience.

I wish you lots of fun and great learning. Jen Boland, The Dowse Art Museum

“Reveal or Disguise”

The Who Am I? Creative Workshop explores the idea of assumptions and image manipulation.

Learning Outcome: Students will realise that a person can choose how people perceive them.

Focus: What image will they choose to present?
Will they reveal their true self or disguise it?

Key competency: Students will use symbols to represent ideas.

Visual art achievement objective: Explore new art materials and processes.

Skill focus: Students will

- Gain confidence translating ideas onto a 2D surface
- Experiment with a new medium- ink and nib
- Use symbols in an authentic context to tell a story

In the workshop students will:

Look at and discuss portraits that show the real person and the disguised person.

Brainstorm what they would choose and feed in ideas about which symbols could be representative of that.

Watch an ink demonstration.

Explore with ink and nibs on paper making lines and dots. The students will get a feel for what the medium allows.

Focus Questions

Will your self portrait be a detail or represent your whole body?

Will you develop a background?

Will you include props in your portrait that give a sense of your personality and interests?

What will you wear—some artists have their subjects dress up for a portrait.

What will your clothes say about you?

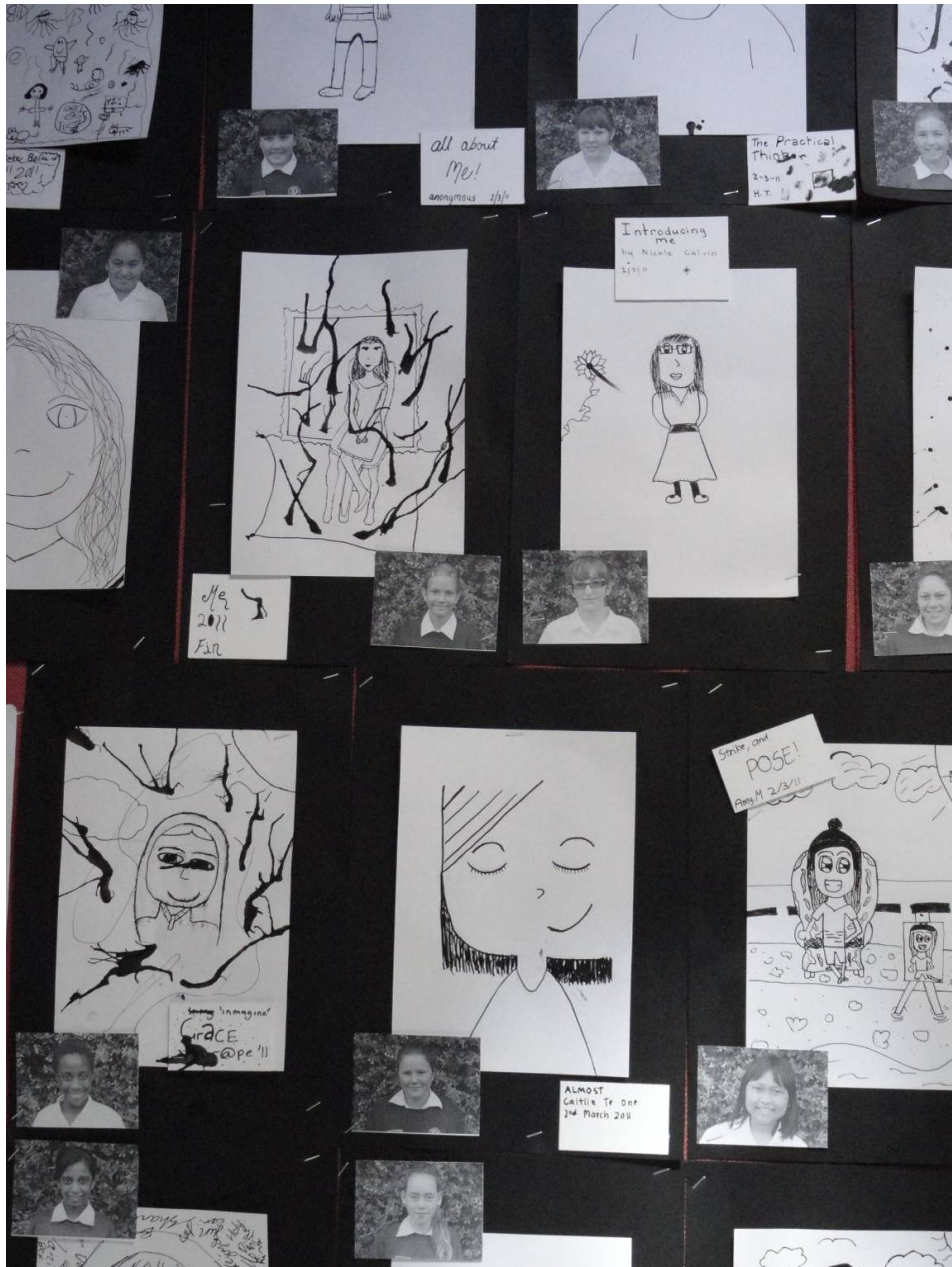
Remember you have the power to project a certain image. Will you show your true self or be in disguise?

What will the title of your work be?

Will you be the only figure in the work?

Will you be looking at the audience—where will your gaze be directed?

Students will draw themselves on watercolour paper using ink and nib. They will choose whether to draw the 'real' or 'disguised' version. Whichever they choose they will develop the identity by incorporating symbols. The drawing will be cut out and mounted on black card. Students will also create a label to accompany their work. Ink on white, then white on black will create a strong aesthetic- a class set will make for a powerful display back at school.



Pre-visit activities

1. In groups make a visual/keyword map about what they can expect to see in a portrait show.
2. Discuss what does identity mean to them
3. Consider how identity is recorded in 2011. Compare and contrast these methods with ones practised in the past e.g. photos, albums, voice recording, journals, stories, teeth records, finger prints, id cards, prenatal photos....
4. Discuss as a class or in groups: "How many faces do you have?" What image do you put forward in different situations and in different relationships.

Post visit activities

1. In pairs use digital cameras and explore 'emotion'.
2. Draw faces that are proportionally accurate.
3. Curate an exhibit of 6 portraits. Each portrait is to be represented with an image and a label. The label should contain information about the artist and the painting. For example: Who painted it, who the sitter is and what the piece was used for. The students should also prepare a curators floor talk. This should include an introduction to portraiture as a genre and move onto their thoughts about the works considering mediums and context. Parameters for choosing works could be loose or restricted- particularly regarding time, geography and medium.
4. Make a class collage. In groups ask students to create an image of someone else in their group. The group then puts all their pictures together and develops a setting including props. "How easy is it to decide where the pictures go?" What stories can they create?



ABOVE: Louise Lewis, *The Visitor*, 1969. Collection of The Dowse Art Museum. Image by Jeff McEwan