

teachers activity guide

what is a portrait?

2014
2015

MATHAF
STUDENT ART
COMPETITION AND EXHIBITION

This activity guide features selected artworks from Mathaf's permanent collection and temporary exhibitions to provoke thought, discussion and give inspiration to students for this year's theme of portraits.

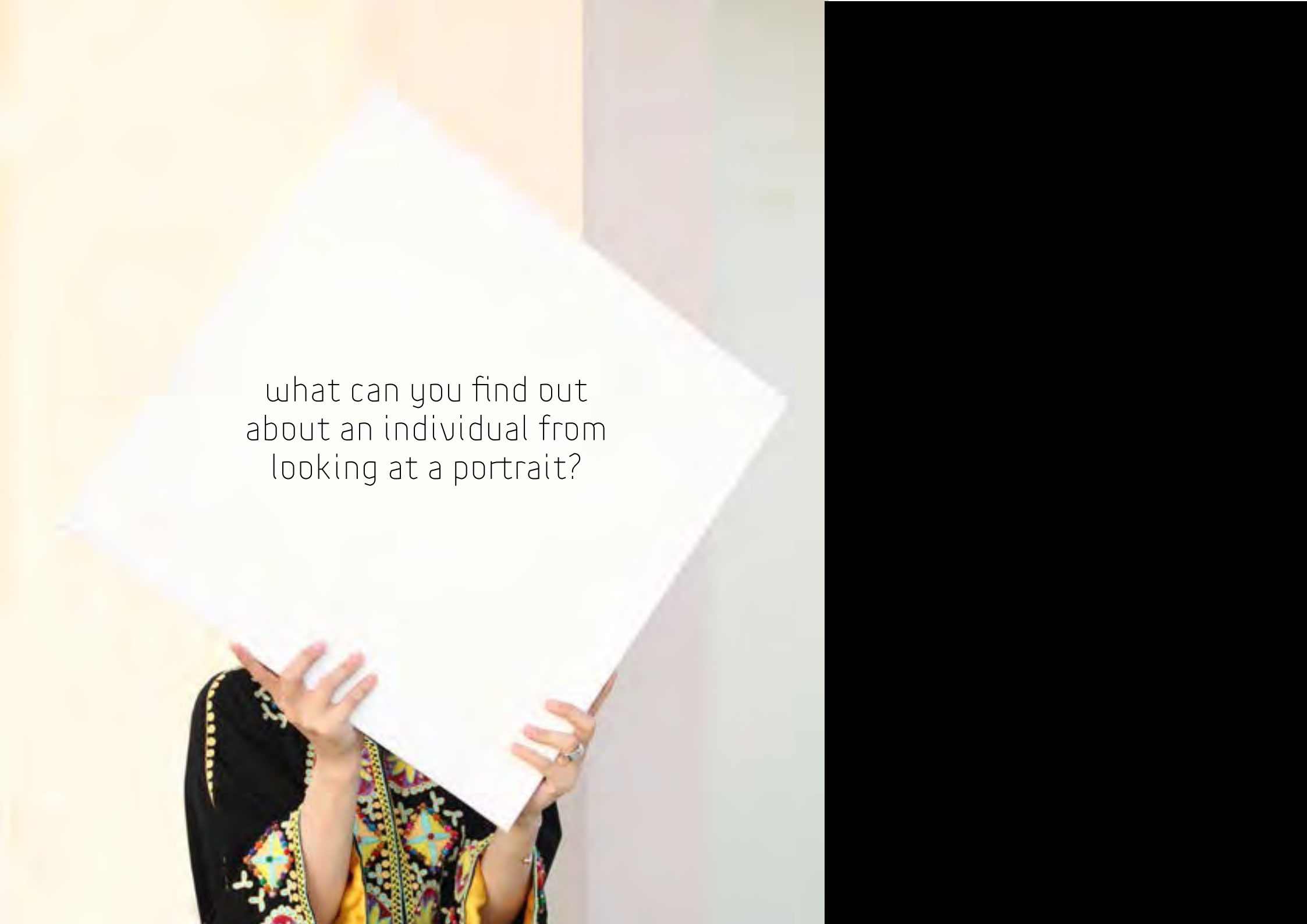
Questions have been provided which aim to get students to look at art in different ways. We hope this will inspire them to create original works art and think beyond the narrow definition of a portrait as only a painting of an individual in a naturalistic style.

We recommend that you project the images of the artworks in your classroom and/or print copies to look at with your students. When discussing the artworks allow students to give as many answers as possible – there is no right or wrong answer.

All artworks in the Mathaf collection can be enjoyed and used for study by all age groups, however we have grouped our guide into those artworks we feel are appropriate for both primary and secondary school students and those which may be more suitable just to secondary school students.

Please select the artworks and questions to suit your students' needs.

We encourage you to visit Mathaf to view these artwork and the rest of the collection to gain further inspiration. Some of the questions work better if students are considering them while viewing the artworks in person but can be adapted if this is not possible.



what can you find out
about an individual from
looking at a portrait?



Mahmoud Said (1897 - 1964), Title unknown, 1946, oil on panel, 73.5 x 58 cm

title unknown

by mahmoud said

Mahmoud Said was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1897, studied law in Paris, and then returned to Egypt where he worked as a judge. In 1947 Said quit his law career and devoted all his time to painting, focusing on portraits and scenes of modern Egyptian life. He died in 1964, and in 1973 the Egyptian government turned his home in Alexandria into a museum in his honor.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

Look at the woman's clothes.

What can you tell from them? Do you think she is rich or poor? What do you think her job is?

What other details can you see that tell you about her life?

How old do you think she is?

Look at her facial expression and her body language.

What do you think she is feeling?

Is she happy or sad, energetic or tired?

Why do you think she is feeling this way?

(Write down what you think this woman is feeling and discuss it with your classmates.)

Why do you think the artist chose to paint this woman's portrait?

Have you seen other portraits in Mathaf that look similar?

Do you think it is important for artists to make portraits of ordinary people?

Why do you think that? Do you think the artist was making a political statement through this portrait?



Will. L. ...
Mrs. Bainbridge Colby
Khalil Gibran
1922

Khalil Jibran (1883 – 1931), Mrs. Bainbridge Colby, 1922, graphite on paper, 56 x 45 cm

mrs. bainbridge colby

by khalil jibran

Khalil Jibran (1931-1883) was a Lebanese poet, artist, and writer. He spent many years in the United States and wrote in both English and Arabic, becoming well-known for his 1923 book *The Prophet*. He was also a prolific artist and painted many portraits of writers and visual artists who were his friends.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

Look closely at this drawing. Who do you think the woman in the portrait is?

The title is "Mrs. Bainbridge Colby," which is her husband's name.

What do you think this woman's real name might be?

What name would you give her?

What do this woman's eyes say, in your opinion?

Can you understand people's emotions through their eyes? What other parts of the face or body can be used to express emotions?

Can you see/read the signature?

Have you ever heard of Khalil Jibran before? If you created an art work, how would you choose to sign it?

Going back to the woman in the drawing what would you draw behind her in the background if you got the chance to do so, and why?

Often in portraits objects in the background tell us about aspects of the person being portrayed.

Do you think there is a reason/meaning for why Khalil Jibran has not put any details in the background?

activity idea

Create a portrait of one of your classmates or family members from life, using pencil. While creating this artwork think about lines, shading and blending.



Aisha Al-Misnad (b. 1972)
Untitled
2009
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm

untitled

by aisha al-misnad

Aisha Al-Misnad was born and raised in Qatar. She is one of four artists currently working for the Emiri Diwan, providing the Emir with paintings of important Qatari places, people, and events. She graduated from Qatar University with a degree in Physics and worked as a mathematics teacher before becoming an artist.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

primary school students

Even though you cannot see the woman's face how do you think she feels?

Is she happy, sad, excited or angry?

There is a mirror on the ground. Why do you think it is there?

What do you think her face would look like if you could see it?

activity idea

Use a mirror to draw yourself (a self-portrait).

Look very carefully at your reflection and try to draw what you actually see in the mirror, not what you imagine is there or how you feel about yourself.

People often perceive things about themselves such as 'my nose is too big' or 'my eyes are too close together' which other people do not see.

secondary school students

Why do you think the artist included a mirror?

And why do you think the mirror is placed far away? What does this mean?

Try to think of different interpretations for why the mirror is at a distance.

Discuss your answers with your classmates.

Imagine the woman's reflection in the mirror.

What do you think she might look like? How do you think she feels? Why do you think that?

The woman in the painting appears to be wearing an abaya.

Do you think the artist is making a statement about women in the Gulf today? What might her message be?

Look closely at the edge of this portrait. What do you see?

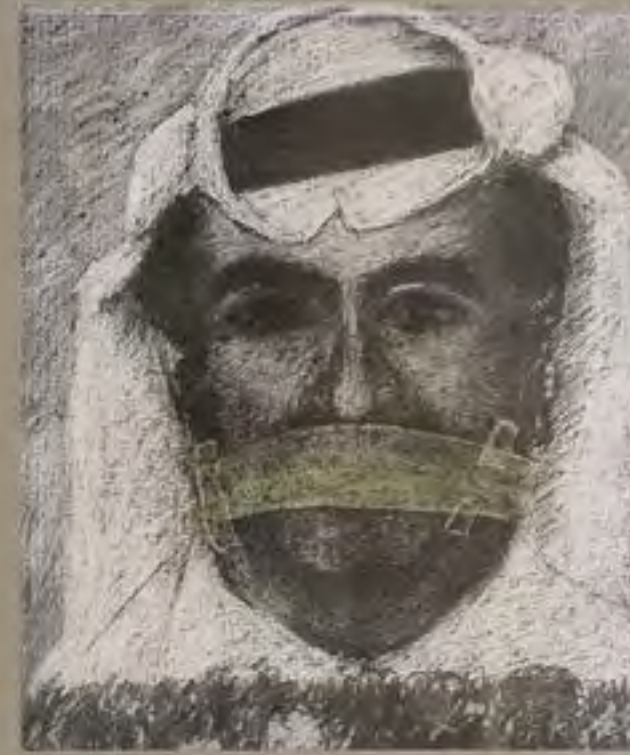
It has been painted to look like it is using the back of the canvas.

Why do you think the artist chose to do that? Is she hiding something? If so, what is it? Why do you think that?

activity idea

Try drawing a self-portrait without showing your face.

How could you reveal your identity in a portrait through clothing and body language, and through objects or symbols that represent you, rather than by showing your face?



Hassan Al-Mulla (b. 1951),
Title unknown, c.
2000 – 2007
charcoal, pastel on black
and white.
photo-copies 73 x 92.5 cm

untitled

by hassan al-mulla

Born in 1951, Hassan Al Mulla is a well-known artist from Qatar. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad. During his studies he was influenced by the dynamic and experimental styles of some of his professors, and upon returning to Qatar he formed a group called “The Three Friends” along with the artists Yousef Ahmad and Mohammad Ali Abdulla. Unconventionally, they took their art to the streets in order to better reach the local population.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

What do you think this portrait shows?

What do you think the six different sections represent? Are they all the same person? Do you think is a self-portrait?

This artwork shows that you can use multiple different images to create one artwork.


If you created a self-portrait and wanted to show different aspects of yourself or your feelings what methods could you use to do this?

What aspects or feelings would you want to show?

What do you think of the colors used in this artwork?

Look at how the artist has created a variety of different shades using only black and white.

Why do you think the artist choose to depict a man wearing a thobe and gutra? What is the relationship between national dress and individual identity?

A person wearing a white lab coat is holding a large, blank white rectangular sign. The person's left hand is raised in a thumbs-up gesture, while their right hand is raised in a thumbs-down gesture. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

how do portraits tell history or
describe national identity?



Mahmoud Mouktar (1891-1934),
The Nile, 1930, Bronze sculpture,
220.5 x 50 x 46 cm

the Nile

by Mahmoud Moukhtar

Mahmoud Moukhtar (1891-1934) was born in Egypt and lived and worked in Paris and Cairo. An Egyptian nationalist, he created several prominent monumental sculptures in Alexandria and Cairo, including Egypt's Awakening, made from Aswan granite and completed in 1928. Today there is a museum dedicated to his work in Cairo.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

What do you see in the sculpture and what do you think those things represent?

What possible meanings could they have? *E.g. the woman, the water jug.*

What do you think this sculpture would feel like if you could touch it?

Would it be hard or soft? Warm or cold? Why do you think the artist chose to use this media?

This sculpture was made in a classical style inspired by Egypt's ancient past.

Why do you think the artist chose that style?

Moukhtar chose the figure of a woman and named it the Nile.

Why would he choose a female figure to represent the river? What is the importance of the River Nile for Egypt?

How does Moukhtar's portrayal of woman represent his ideas?



Salman al-Malik (b. 1958), *Al Khofouss*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 60.5 cm

al khofouss

by salman al-malik

Salman Al Malik, an artist from Qatar, discovered his interest in art when he was a student in the early 1970's. His first artistic works were the illustrations and drawings that he contributed to Al-Orouba, a magazine published in Qatar. Al-Malik went to Egypt to pursue his university education. When he graduated and went back to Qatar, he continued publishing caricatures in various newspapers. He is known primarily as a painter of images of women, and the vibrant colors in some of his paintings are inspired by traditional Bedouin dress.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

Where do you think this man is from? What makes you say that?

Paintings come in many styles from realistic images that look like photographs to abstract images that use just lines and shapes to suggest the subject.

How would you describe the style the artist used to paint this painting? What adjectives can you think of?

Do you think there are any hidden messages in this artwork? If so what do you think these messages are?

How do you think the artist felt when he was creating this portrait?

What makes you say that? What nationality do you think the artist has?

What do you think of the colors used in this piece? What do they symbolize? How do they make you feel?

share the history behind this portrait.

In 1991 during a conflict in the area of Al-Khofouss on the border between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, a Qatari man was killed. Inspired by this incident the artist, who is Qatari, created this painting to portray and comment on this historic moment.



Ismail Fattah al-Turk (1934-2004), *The Guardian of the Fertile Crescent* 2001-2010, granite sculpture, 500 x 800 x 460 cm

the guardian of the fertile crescent

by issam fattah al-turk

Ismail Fattah (1934-2004) was born in Iraq and studied under Jewad Selim at the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad. He is an important modern Iraq sculptor who was interested in modern artistic techniques as well as the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia. He studied in Roma and also worked in Doha during the last years of his life.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

primary school students

What do you think this sculpture shows?

What do you think the images of a man and a woman mean?

How big do you think it is?

secondary school students

What do you think this artwork portrays?

The title of the piece is “The Guardian of the Fertile Crescent”.

What do you think this title means? Who are the Guardians? What is the “Fertile Crescent”?

What media do you think it is made from?

How big do you think it is? Why do you think the artist chose this media and size? Do you think the choice of media and size represents anything?

Sadly the artist passed away before he was able to complete this work.


He had created the small version of the work from which Sheikh Hassan commissioned another artist, Ali Nouri, to complete the large piece.

Can you see where the artwork is displayed?

It is displayed outdoors in front of Mathaf. When artworks are displayed in public spaces outdoors rather than inside a gallery, how does this change the way we see them?

Why do you think people display artwork in public spaces?

If you saw the small version of this sculpture displayed in a glass case inside a gallery do you think you would feel differently looking at it and why?

A person with dark skin, wearing a dark grey t-shirt, is holding a large white rectangular sign in front of their face. Their hands are raised, with fingers spread, holding the corners of the sign. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

how do group portraits show
relationships between people?



Baya Mahieddine (1931 - 1998), Les deux musiciennes (The Two Musicians), 1966, gouache on paper, 99 x 148.5 cm

les deux musiciennes

by baya mahieddine

Baya Mahieddine (1931-1998) was a self-taught artist who lived and worked mainly in Algeria. She lost her parents at a young age and was adopted by a French artist who encouraged her to go to Paris and show her work there in 1940s, where she met artists including Pablo Picasso and Andre Bréton.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

primary school students

There is a lot to see in this picture.

Describe the colors, shapes, and animals that you see.

How many people can you see? What are they doing? What are they wearing?

How do you think the women in the painting are feeling? Are they happy or sad?

activity idea

Sketch your favorite part of the painting.

secondary school students

Do you think this artist was influenced by modern or traditional artistic styles?

Baya Mahieddine was a self-taught artist which means she never went to art school, but she was familiar with the traditional art in her native country of Algeria and she also met modern artists including Picasso on a visit to Paris.

What do you think of the colors used in this painting?

How do the bright colors make you feel? Do you think the colors match the subject matter of the painting?

There are musical instruments in the painting.

What do you think the music that is being played sounds like?

Other than by including representations of instruments how else could you portray music or sound in artworks?

If you visit Mathaf you will see three works by Baya Mahieddine in the collection, including one which is displayed next to this painting.

Take a look at them and see what similarities and differences you can see in the artworks. What images, patterns and symbols are repeated?



Faisal Laibi (b. 1947), Relationship, 1989, oil on canvas, 101 x 91 cm

relationship by faisal laibi

Faisal Laibi (b. 1947) an Iraqi artist who is strongly inspired by folklore and folk heritage of Iraq. He highlights social topics related to the Arab world and focuses on realistic details of everyday life. In this painting, he presented the way some Arab women are treated by men. In the painting, the woman's bent-over posture seems to be a sign of weakness and humiliation. The man looks as if he is strong and has the power and authority in their relationship.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

primary school students

What are the man and woman in the painting doing?

Who do you think they are?

How do you think they are feeling?

secondary school students

What was the first thought that came to your mind when you saw this painting? Why did you think this?

Look again and try to describe what's happening in the painting.

What kind of movement is there in the painting?

Who do you think the woman in the painting is?

What is she doing? What do you think she is she thinking? What do you see that makes you say that?

What is the man doing in this painting?

Why do you think he is looking towards us?

Do you think the artist was male or female?

activity idea

Write a dialogue between the two people in this portrait imagining their conversation at this moment and what happens afterwards.



Hamed Owais (1919 – 2011), Peasant Family, 1959, oil on canvas, 99.5 x 80 cm

peasant family by hamad owais

Born in 1919 in Beni Soueif, Egypt, Hamed Owais was a leading painter of Egyptian social realism and one of the founders of the Egyptian “Group of Modern Art”. He graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1944 and pursued his studies at the Institute of Art Education. After receiving a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid, he served as the head of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Alexandria between 1977 and 1979. His work was influenced by the Mexican muralists and portrays the daily life and labor of the Egyptian working class. Owais died in 2011 in Cairo, Egypt.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

primary school students

Who are these three people?

What clues does the artist give you about their identities?

What are they carrying?

Where do you think they work? Are they rich or poor?

What do you see that makes you think that?

What does the presence of the dog add to the painting?

How do you think they feel – happy or sad, energetic or tired?

Do all of the people feel the same way?

secondary school students

Look at the expressions on these peoples' faces.

How do you think they feel? Why do you think that?

The painting shows a poor, rural family (a peasant family).

Do you think it is important for artists to make portraits that express the lives of ordinary people? Why do you think that?

Do you think the artist was making a political statement by painting a peasant family?



Jassim Al-Zaini (1943 - 2012), The Bicycle Passenger, C. 1960, oil on canvas glued to panel, 76.5 x 103.8 cm

the bicycle passenger

by jassim al-zaini

Jassim Al-Zaini (1942-2012) lived and worked in Qatar. He is one of Qatar's most important modern artists and was very active in local artist groups and art societies, as well as showing his work internationally. Zaini studied in Baghdad and then returned to Qatar in 1968, devoting his career to painting images of people, urban life, and traditional culture in Doha. He documented the economic and social transformation of the country in the 1950s and 60s following oil discovery. In addition, he was Qatar Fine Arts Society's first elected president.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

primary school students

Can you see any people in this picture?

What they are doing? Where do you think they are going?

What are they wearing?

Where do you think they are from?

What colors has the artist used?

How do these colors make you feel?

How many people do you see cycling today?

How do people in Qatar usually travel around today? How do you think people will travel 50 years in the future?

secondary school students

What do you think this is a portrait of?

Is it simply two men on a bicycle or do you think it represents something else? What do you think it represents?

Look at the colors the artist has chosen.

Why do you think he chose those colors and what do they represent? How do they make you feel?

Do you think this picture represents the past or the present? What makes you say that?

This artwork was created in 1960. Qatar has changed a lot since then. What other things have changed that would represent developments in Qatar during the last 50 years? (e.g. styles of dress, architecture, jobs, industries, food etc.)

If your families were in Qatar in 1960 ask them about life at that time and how things have changed, and share these stories with your classmates.

A person is holding a large, blank white sheet of paper. The paper is held up by two hands, one at the top right and one at the bottom left. The person's arms and hands are visible, and they are wearing a light-colored shirt. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

how do artists push the
boundaries of what a
portrait can be?



Miloud Labied (1939 - 2008), Composition, 1971, oil on canvas, 223 x 163 cm

composition

by miloud labied

Miloud Labied (1939-2008) is a Moroccan artist who first worked as a business man before teaching himself to paint. He created works that combine elements of the human body with abstract forms to create vibrant, swirling compositions.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

primary school students

Is this a bright or a dark painting? What makes you say this?

Look closely at the painting.

What shapes do you see? Can you see any circles?

Do you see a face, or part of a face? What else do you see around it?

secondary school students

If you were given the chance to draw the other half of this person's face, what do you think it would look like?

Why do you think the artist included many circular shapes?

Can you think of anything that these circles could represent? (*E.g. thoughts, emotions, the cycle of life, a storm, etc..*)



Manal Al-Dowayan (b. 1973), *Suspended Together*, 2011, fiberglass, dimensions variable

suspended together

by manal al dowayan

Manal Al Dowayan is a conceptual artist, born and raised in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Mainly producing photography, Al Dowayan often works in collaboration with invited women participants to address feminist politics and history within the Gulf region and beyond. Al Dowayan worked as the Creative Director of the Saudi Arabian oil company for ten years before becoming a full-time artist. She has participated in several residencies including: Delfina Foundation, London, The Town House Gallery, Cairo, and Cuadro Gallery, Dubai.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

What are these white sculptures? What are they doing?

Take a close look at the bodies of the doves.

What do you think is printed on them?

Why can't these doves fly?

Who is holding them back?

Why do you think this artwork is called "Suspended Together"?

What does suspended mean?

Do you think the title of an artwork is part of the artwork itself? Do you think it is a good choice of title?

If you had the chance to change, add or remove something from this artwork what would it be? And why?

What do wings represent?

Have you ever wished you had wings? Why? If you had wings where would you fly?

Have you ever wanted to do something but someone else stopped you?

How did that make you feel? How would you express those feelings through art?

useful links

http://www.manaldowayan.com/-___Manal_AIDowayan___-/Art/Pages/Suspended_Together.html



Shirin Neshat, Turbulent 1998, Video/sound installation 10 min, Production still

turbulent

by shirin neshat

Shirin Neshat was born in Qazvin, Iran, in 1957. She was a university student in the United States during the 1979 Iranian Revolution and has lived in the U.S. ever since, settling in New York City. After a return trip to Iran in 1993, she produced the photographic series, *Women of Allah* (1993-97), in which she established the central ideas that guide her work to this day. Her often provocative practice addresses universal issues of gender, power and freedom, using an active aesthetic of change.

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

In the first video a male singer is showing his back to the audience, what do you think that means?

Why do you think all of the audience are males?

Do you think the singer cares about the audience?

Now listen to the other video.

What do you think of the female singer's performance? What makes you say this? Why do you think she is singing to an empty theatre?

What emotions do you think she is feeling?

Is she happy or sad? Why do you think she is feeling like this?

You may notice that these videos seem to represent opposites (male and female, full and empty, black and white, classical and contemporary singing).

In your opinion, do you think these opposites were stressed intentionally by the artist? What makes you say so? Why do you think the artist has done this?

Do you enjoy singing or listening to singing?

What do you feel while singing or listening to singing?

Have you ever sung in front of audience? How did that make you feel?

Can you think of any other types of artworks that combine performing arts such as singing and music with visual arts?

What do you think music adds to visual arts?

useful links

This artwork is on display at Mathaf until 15 February 2015 as part of the exhibition Shirin Neshat: Afterwards.

It can also be viewed on You Tube here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCAssCuOGIs>



Shirin Neshat, "Ahmed, Our House is on Fire series," 2013, Ink on Digital C-print, 157.8 x 102.2 cm



Shirin Neshat, "Ghada, Our House is on Fire series," 2013, Ink on Digital C-print, 157.8 x 102.2 cm

ahmed and ghada from “our
house is on fire” series
by shirin neshat

questions

What do you see?

(Give students time to observe, notice and share as many observations as possible.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

(Ask students to explain what they see and give evidence of their observation.)

Who are the people in these portraits?

What do you see that makes you think that?

What emotion do these portraits convey?

Unlike many of her other portraits, Shirin Neshat uses color instead of black and white in these photographs.

How does her use of color add to the mood of these portraits?

Why do you think the artist title this artwork, Our House is on Fire?

fyi

In 2010, the artist visited Cairo and invited ordinary Egyptians to sit for these portraits and to share their stories. What kinds of stories are captured in these portraits?
How do you know?

mehri and zahra from “our
house is on fire” series
by shirin neshat

questions

How do artists express personal portraits by using other body part, rather than the face?

What do you think the artist is trying to convey?

How do these images make you feel?



Shirin Neshat, Mehri, from Our House is on Fire series, 2013, Ink on Digital C-print, 144.1 x 215.9 cm



Shirin Neshat, Zahra, from Our House is on Fire series, 2013, Ink on Digital C-print , 144.1 x 215.9 cm