



THE BIG SHOT: ANDY WARHOL AND THE POLAROID PORTRAIT

Recommended for Grades 9-12

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OVERVIEW

The Big Shot: Andy Warhol and the Polaroid Portrait

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Andy Warhol (American, 1928-87) was a prolific documentarian of his own life, often shooting the various scenes of New York City celebrity nightlife or photographing simple moments and people of interest. In this lesson, students will look closely at a sample of Warhol's collection of Polaroid portraits, question the roles and processes of portraiture, and create portraits of their own using instant film or their personal cameras.

Objectives:

- Students will look closely at a collection of Polaroid portraits taken by Andy Warhol, then discuss their observations and identify visual elements that support their analyses.
- Students will collaborate with peers to make visual choices, direct models, and manipulate environments to take a series of photograph portraits.
- Students will select and critique a favorite portrait from their series.

Essential Questions:

- What is the role of portraiture and photography—in everyday life, social movements, art movements—and what is the effect of colliding these genres of visual media?
- How do identity and portraiture interact? How does one inform the other?
- What dynamics are at play between subject/model and artist/photographer? How does this relationship impact the final form of a portrait?

LEARNING STANDARDS

Texas State Standards:

Art, High School 1, Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 117, Subchapter B, Rule §117.302, (2)D; E
Art, High School 2, Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 117, Subchapter B, Rule §117.302, (2)D; E
Art, High School 3, Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 117, Subchapter B, Rule §117.302, (2)D; E
Art, High School 4, Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 117, Subchapter B, Rule §117.302, (2)D; E

Creative expression. The student communicates ideas through original artwork using a variety of media with appropriate skills. The student expresses thoughts and ideas creatively while challenging the imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem-solving skills. The student is expected to:
(D) create original artwork to communicate thoughts, feelings, ideas, or impressions
(E) collaborate to create original works of art



Andy Warhol, images (from top left, clockwise): Frau Buch with a dog; Chris Evert (professional tennis player); Caroline, Princess of Monaco; and an unknown sitter dressed as Uncle Sam, ca. 1975-85. Polacolor; 4 ¼ x 3 ¼ inches. Gift of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., Photographic Legacy Project, 2008. © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.



Andy Warhol, *Wyeth, James*, December 1975. Polacolor Type 108; eight prints, each 4¼ x 3¼ in. Coll. Public Art UHS, gift of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., Photographic Legacy Project, 2008. © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. Photographs depict artist Jamie Wyeth (b. 1946).

ABOUT ANDY WARHOL

Andy Warhol (1928-87) was a New York-based artist most famous for his leading role in the Pop Art movement of the 1950s and 1960s. His large-scale silkscreen paintings are well-known and easily recognizable. However, his photographs were not considered artworks in their own right until recent years.

Public Art of the University of Houston (Public Art UHS) maintains a collection of 99 Polaroids and 50 black-and-white silver gelatin prints, created by Warhol from 1975 to 1985. These objects were donated in 2008 as part of the Andy Warhol Foundation's Photographic Legacy Project. This series includes portraits of some known subjects—like Princess Caroline of Monaco, artist Jamie Wyeth, and athlete Chris Evert—while the identity of others remains unknown.



Warhol would begin his iconic silkscreen portraits with a photo session with the sitter in his studio. He referred to this initial photography as his “pen and pencil,” similar to traditional sketches that would begin his artistic process. Typically, Warhol would shoot multiple portraits, a series of staged, similar yet slightly different images. Ultimately, these studio shots would result in finished silkscreens or painted portraits of the sitters.

The Polaroid camera encapsulated exactly what Warhol was seeking to achieve: factory-like efficiency, hands-off mass-production, and with an unusually bright and unreliable flash, a bleached tone, rendering the sitter a blank canvas. Warhol used two Polaroid cameras: the large, cumbersome Big Shot and the popular, origami-esque SX-70. The Big Shot was designed especially for portrait-taking at close range, while the highly portable SX-70 comfortably hid in his jacket pocket and accompanied him to every social engagement.

Although he was a public figure, Warhol could be elusive about his own identity and personal life. Even when he was behind the camera, his unique artistic vision is evident. Portrait subjects responded to Warhol's presence, personality, and direction.

CLOSE LOOKING: DISCUSSION

Objective: Students will look closely at a collection of Polaroid portraits taken by Andy Warhol, discuss their observations and identify visual elements that support their analyses.

Estimated length: 15 minutes

Materials:

- Andy Warhol portraits, printed or projected
1. Display a small number of Andy Warhol Polaroid portraits from Public Art UHS's collection for a group discussion. You may curate the display from those available on the Public Art UHS website (publicartuhs.org) or use the selection of images reproduced on pages 4 & 5 of this lesson plan.
 2. Invite students to discuss the role of photography in pairs or groups, then share with the class. Write observations and ideas on the board so all students can see:
 - Why and how do we make portraits (in the present and historically)?
 - How is portrait photography different than other forms of portraiture?
 - How does the process of creating a photographic portrait differ from taking any other type of photo? How is the process similar?
 - What do you consider when you take a photo of someone? What is the role of the photographer?
 - What do you consider when someone is taking a photo of you? What is the role of the subject/model for a photographic portrait?
 - What is the power dynamic between the photographer and subject/model? Is the dynamic always the same? If not, what might cause the dynamic to change?
 - What elements make a photographic portrait successful? What makes it appeal to the viewer? What gives it artistic merit?
 3. Invite students to look closely and ask them to state their observations as a class. Students may pay attention to medium/format, poses, distance, composition, expressions, clothing, props, lighting, colors, their qualities, and the emotions and memories which might follow their observations. Additional questions to consider:
 - What are common characteristics of the portraits and what differs?
 - What inferences can be made about these subjects (identities, personalities, moods, age, relationship to Warhol)? How well do you feel you know or understand the subject from viewing the portrait?
 - What sort of subject was Warhol interested in photographing, based on this small selection of works? What sort of subject is missing or excluded?
 - Do these subjects remind you of celebrities or anyone you know?
 - What questions do you have about these photographs or these subjects?

4. Show an image of Warhol taking a photograph, such as the image below. Point out the Big Shot camera that Warhol is using and the interaction between the photographer and his subject. Transition to the activity by telling students that they will be creating their own portrait photographs of classmates.



*Christopher Makos, "Andy Warhol photographing Princess Caroline of Monaco," 1983. MAKOSTUDIO, New York.
Image courtesy of Public Art University of Houston System*

ACTIVITY: PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

Objectives: Students will collaborate with peers to make visual choices, direct models, and manipulate environments to take a series of photograph portraits. Then, students will select and critique a favorite portrait from their series.

Estimated length: 45 minutes

Materials:

- Instant film cameras – can be substituted with phone camera, iPads, or other computers/tablets with cameras
- Projector or printer
- Optional: change of clothes, props, makeup, lamps, stools, chairs

Method:

1. Set up the classroom so that students may each have a station to create their portraits. If available, provide a seat, lights, and a small selection of props for each “studio.”
2. Instruct students to take a series of portraits of a classmate that they know well, or of someone they’d like to know better. Pairings/groupings may also be assigned.
3. Ask students to consider pose, lighting, composition, makeup, clothes, expression, and the effects of each of these elements (use Resource Sheet for possible prompts) as they create their series of photographs. Use the Worksheet to keep track of photos and prompts used. Remind students: *What do you know about or how do you relate to this person, and how do you ultimately want to convey them in this series of photographs?*
4. After one student has completed their series of photographs, switch to a different photographer. Ensure that all students in a pair/group have a chance to serve as both the photographer and as the subject/model.

Reflection/Share:

Invite students to choose two of their photographs to display in a class mini-exhibition. You may choose to hang or pin up the photographs, or, if digital, ask students to send their files to be projected on the projector screen/SmartBoard.

As a group, discuss the displayed works. Comment on how the pieces are similar to and different from each other and how they interact as a collection. Pick a few to close-read:

- Based on this close-reading and not on prior knowledge, what kind of person do you see? What might you notice that you haven’t noticed before?

- Ask the artists to comment on their work and responses. What did they want to capture, and how did they work to achieve that? Discuss the extents to which they were successful, and the extents to which they were limited.
- Ask the subjects/models to comment on their work and process. What was within their control and outside of their control? To what extent did they feel vulnerable or guarded? How does the way they see themselves differ from their portrayal? Do they agree or disagree with the work?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Exhibition Page: publicartuhs.org/event/instantaneous-beauty-2

Teaching Materials: publicartuhs.org/K-12/educator-resources/the-big-shot

Artwork Page: publicartuhs.org/artwork/andy-warhol-polaroids

Bibliography and Sources:

1. Tipton, Cammie, Assistant Curator, Public Art UHS. "The Man and the Machine: Andy Warhol, Photography, and Everyday Life." Stories + Spotlights, Public Art UHS website. publicartuhs.org/the-man-and-the-machine-andy-warhol-photography-and-everyday-life/

WORKSHEET: POLAROID PORTRAITS (page 1 of 2)

Name: _____

Class Period: _____

Date: _____

Model Name(s): _____

Talk to your model a little bit. How do they see themselves? What are some aspects of their personality that they would like to share in this photograph? Write your notes here:

You will be taking a series of photographs of your model(s). Each photograph will have a different direction or prompt that captures a different mood, trait, aspect, or angle of your model. Use the template below to list the directions you provided for your model for each photo:

Photo 1: _____

Photo 2: _____

Photo 3: _____

Photo 4: _____

Photo 5: _____

Photo 6: _____

Photo 7: _____

WORKSHEET: POLAROID PORTRAITS (page 2 of 2)

Now, look at your series of photographs and discuss with your model(s). Imagine that you must choose one image to submit to an art competition or magazine. Which do you choose and why?

Photo Number: _____

Photo Title: _____

Why did you and your model(s) choose this photograph?

RESOURCE: PORTRAIT PROMPTS

Mood Words: sad happy excited angry bored confused afraid thoughtful restless uncomfortable shy confident cheerful lonely surprised stressed indifferent relaxed satisfied relieved hopeful guilty irritated jealous mischievous exhausted anxious annoyed grateful cranky depressed determined blissful mellow cautious nervous eager skeptical sleepy weird loved shocked sick hungry vengeful dreamy peaceful playful amused overwhelmed somber pained

Trait Words: ambitious creative caring intelligent strong sweet skittish compassionate mean cruel sarcastic nerdy passionate daydreaming friendly fun honest lazy unique loyal brave spiritual emotional adventurous casual hilarious respectful aggressive reserved skillful committed silly practical powerful crafty picky scary mysterious dazzling generous serious polite cute proud greedy disorganized fearful graceful patriotic romantic outgoing mature childish easygoing smooth chatty quiet kind stylish cool bold elegant professional insecure

Facial Expressions: smile, frown, wince, scowl, grin, grit your teeth, close your eyes, wrinkle your nose, wink, stick out your tongue, blow a kiss, bat your eyelashes, open your mouth as if you're screaming, raise one eyebrow, raise both eyebrows, cross your eyes

Light Source: left, right, above, behind, front, soft, harsh, single-source, double-source, dramatic, dim, bright, colorful, natural light, artificial light, flash, glow, sparkle, spooky, diffused

Pose: sit down stand up lean against the wall turn around look over your shoulder look at me look at the ceiling look at the floor crouch down sit up straight tilt your head turn your head in profile

Hands: at your sides touching your face touching your shoulder crossed in your lap clasped together clapping twirling your hair cover your mouth cover your eyes pointing making a sign

Additional Prompts:

- What is one word that relates to you (the model)? Convey this word in your portrait.
- How would you describe your personality? Convey this description in your portrait.
- What hobbies, interests, or skills do you have? Convey these in your portrait.
- What is a memory that has defined you, or has greatly informed who you are today?
- In what contexts do you feel vulnerable? In what contexts do you feel strong?
- What historical figure, celebrity, or fictional character would you most want to embody?
- How would you describe the highest version of yourself?
- How would you describe the lowest version of yourself?
- If you were place or a climate, what would you be?
- Who are you today? Right here and right now?