

SBMA Art Making Project: Surreal Headdresses (Grades 2-12)

Inspiration: Hendrik Kerstens, *Paper Roll*, 2008 and Hung Liu, *A Third World*, 1993 (SBMA)



Goals:

Students will compare/contrast, analyze, and evaluate works of art as they participate in open-ended, facilitated discussions. Students will explore metaphor as they view artwork, create self-portrait collages, and write poems or prose pieces.

Supplies:

- printed black and white photographs of students (enlarged copies)
- watercolor paper (90 or 140 lb. cold press) 11" x 14"
- watercolor paints and brushes
- containers for water
- scissors
- magazines or newspapers
- glue sticks
- masking tape and Masonite boards



SBMA Inspiration: The photograph *Paper Roll*, 2008, by Hendrik Kerstens (far right), and the self-portrait *A Third World*, 1993, by Hung Liu (middle).

Lesson Features:

Distinguishing features of this project include the pose and posture of the subject, the contrast of a black and white image against a watercolor wash, the juxtaposition of "surreal" or imaginative head pieces and realistic photographs, and metaphoric/symbolic representations of objects, text, or images that reflect student ideas, attitudes, dreams, hopes, experiences, ideas, etc.

Discussion Points:

Invite students to look carefully at the two images referenced above. What surprises them? What are their ideas regarding each artist's possible statement? What objects appear in the portraits? What are the students' ideas about these objects? What might they represent? Could they be symbolic? Metaphoric? (see [Discussion Suggestions](#), slides 2-6)

Introductory VTS* Discussion: 30 Minutes

Project the image of Hung Liu's *A Third World* (use the next slide) and invite students to look carefully at the subject and the smaller details in the work.

After a full minute of careful viewing, ask the group: *What is going on in this picture?* Remind students that there is no one "right" answer – you are interested in their ideas, hypotheses, and responses to the work.

As each student contributes an idea, ask him/her to support the statement with evidence from the work. Ask: *What do you see that makes you say that?*

After the student provides evidence, paraphrase the comment(s), pointing to the specific referenced detail(s). Continue asking for more ideas from other students by asking: *"What more can we find?"*

If students have not explored the symbols and metaphors in the work during the general discussion, introduce the Thinking Routine *Signs & Symbols* – name the routine, and ask students:

Does the artwork include any signs or symbols that reveal meaning, or culturally significant stories or myths? Are there any "secret messages" portrayed by the symbols? Name a detail you observe, and share your idea(s) about the significance or metaphor (provide evidence).

As students note details and their ideas about possible meanings, paraphrase the comments as noted above, and then ask the rest of the group: *What more can we find?*

*Visual Thinking Strategies, see <http://www.vtshome.org>

Option: After the VTS discussion and/or using the *Signs & Symbols* Thinking Routine, discuss the background information (slide 4).



Hung Liu, *A Third World*, 1993, SBMA



Hung Liu
Chinese, b. 1948

***A Third World*, 1993**

Oil on canvas; gold leaf on wood

Museum purchase with funds provided by 20th Century Fund,
and by Jill and John Bishop, and Lillian and Jon Lovelace

Exploring Symbolism: One Artist's Story

A Third World, 1993, Hung Liu (SBMA)

A Third World is a self-portrait by the Chinese artist Hung Liu, in which she uses the brilliant red of the encircling scarf to enhance the drama of its monumental size. Tremendous portraits of Chairman Mao dominated public squares and buildings in China. Hung Liu seems to be asserting her importance as an individual as she constructs her portrait in an equally grandiose manner..

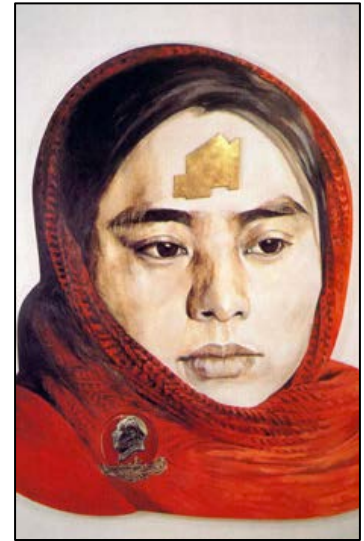
In *A Third World*, Chairman Mao is no longer on Hung Liu's mind. What is on her mind, shown literally on her forehead, is a map of San Francisco from 1839. This is the first known map of San Francisco, and Hung Liu may have chosen it as representative of an idealized time and place. This gold medallion is a symbol of her new world. The map itself is a wooden attachment covered in gold leaf. It may also reference the fact that when the Chinese first came to California, they referred to San Francisco as Gold Mountain.

Hung Liu's head is covered—a symbol of submission in many cultures, but also a reflection of the headwear of new immigrants to this country. Pinned to the shawl there is a large button showing Chairman Mao in gold profile. The red of her shawl and the Mao button tell of her origins and experiences. The portrait itself resonates as a monumental passport photograph.

The canvas is shaped to conform to the outline of her self-portrait. The shaped canvas increases the drama of her work; she uses this technique in other monumental portraits, asserting the worth and value to society of these ordinary subjects.

One becomes alive in a totalitarian society through anger. Hung Liu has chosen to show us yet another way - through art. Having learned about the worth of the individual through her own struggles to become an artist, and having come to respect the rights of peasant farmers and their work, she has arrived in this country prepared to show us that the struggle for human rights and freedoms still exists here for those who belong to *A Third World*.

Source: SBMA Docent Council





Extension:

View other portraits with students, and discuss/ analyze the pose, posture, emotion, and/or attitude of the subject. After students offer an interpretation, ask: What do you see that makes you say that?

See the Portrait Image Collection in SBMA Teacher Resources.

Session One: Discussion, Experimentation with Poses, & Photography (60 min.)

Talk to students about possible poses for a self-portrait photograph, and discuss/demonstrate options. As a practice activity, ask students to assume various poses and postures that portray different suggested emotions (i.e. confident, calm, dreamy, fearful, joyful, thoughtful, worried, etc.) . Or, ask for student volunteers to strike a pose and expression that they feel demonstrates a given emotion, quality, or attitude. Other students try to identify the emotion or trait. Things to consider:

Body Direction And Posture

Will the student face forward, look upward or downward, stand to the side, look over a shoulder, or fold his/her arms? The placement of arms and hands is important in this self-portrait.

Facial Expression And Emotion

Will the student smile for the camera, look pensive, thoughtful, direct, curious, bold, confident, dreamlike, etc.? How will each student choose to express an emotion?

Look at the photograph *Paper Roll* (next slide) and discuss the subject's pose, facial expression, etc. Consider sharing images of traditional painted portraits with students, and compare/contrast the painted portraits with *Paper Roll*. See the Portrait Image Collection in SBMA Teacher Resources. What is similar, what is different?

Taking the Photographs

When students have decided on a pose and expression, take their individual photographs from the waist up (see examples). If possible, have students stand in front of a neutral background. After taking the photographs, print them in black and white on a printer or copy machine, enlarging each photograph to about 8" x 10".





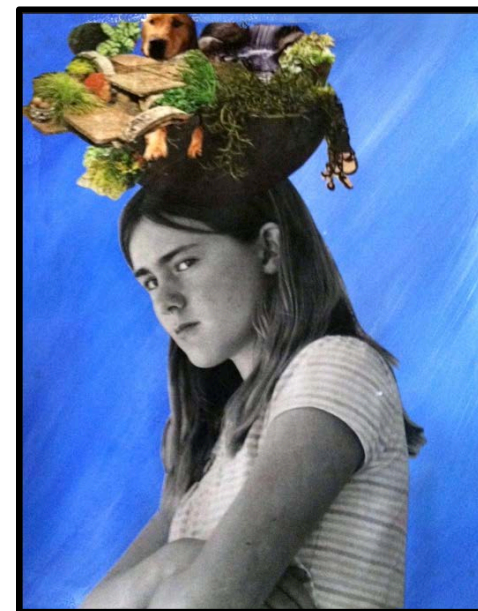
Hendrik Kerstens, *Paper Roll*, 2008, SBMA

Session Two: 45 minutes

Tape watercolor paper to the Masonite boards using masking tape. Distribute water containers, watercolor paints, and brushes to the students. Next, have students paint the background for their self-portraits in the color of their choice. They can create a graded wash (darker pigment on top, gradually becoming lighter toward the bottom of the page as the pigment becomes more diluted by repeated application of water across the width of the paper), or a solid color background. Allow the background to dry thoroughly.

While the watercolor background is drying, ask students to cut away the background of the black and white photograph.

When the watercolor paper is dry, students can adhere the cut-out portrait onto the background paper, using a glue stick. Important: Students need to leave a good amount of space above their heads, as this is where the bulk of the “headdress” will be created.



Session Three: 45 minutes

Students consider the statements their “surreal headdresses” will make. The headdresses should reflect what is on their minds and/or in their heads; they are metaphoric and imaginative rather than realistic. When the students have a few general ideas about what they want to portray, they can begin to look through magazines and/or newspapers for images and text (collage elements for the headdresses). New ideas will occur to the students as they look through the magazines. They should gather several images before gluing any pieces onto the paper, and then experiment with creative arrangement.

Next, students can begin to glue their cut-out shapes and words onto the paper, creating the collaged headdresses. When the self-portraits are finished, remove the masking tape from the watercolor paper. Students may wish to add a few final elements to the piece that extend into the white border of the paper (revealed when the masking tape edge is removed).

See the following slides for student examples of completed Surreal Headdresses.





A closer looks at two student Surreal Headdresses

Integrated Art & Writing Activity

When students have completed their metaphoric self-portraits, they can explore in writing the meaning/symbolism of the collage elements they selected for their headdresses.

As a pre-writing activity, ask students to fold a sheet of notebook paper in half. In the first column, they list all the objects and elements in the collage they created. In the second column, they write down what each object stands for – the symbolism or metaphor.

Next, they draft and later refine a poem or prose piece that describes what is “On My Mind” or “In My Head” – using any of the words from their pre-writing lists.

For example, the student in the self-portrait to the right might write: “I am a sailboat, cutting across the sea / a silver race car...” etc.

Or, “If you walked into my mind, you would see...”

Or, “I’m as sweet as a ..., as curious as a ...”



Connections to the Standards

[Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts](#)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.RL.5.7 Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy. CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4.3.D Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5.A Interpret figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context.

This lesson was developed by SBMA Senior Teaching Artist Monika Molnar-Metzenthin and Joni Chancer, SBMA Curriculum Consultant

Credits and Permissions:

This presentation was created by SBMA for instructional use only and is not to be altered in any way, or reproduced without attribution.

Artwork was created by students in the SBMA Education and Outreach Programs.

For further information about these or other Education and Outreach Programs, contact Rachel Kriebs at rkriebs@sbma.net

