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# THE PORTRAIT



# **What is a portrait?**



**When we look at a portrait, what can we find out about that person?**

- \* Make a list of what we see when looking at a portrait**

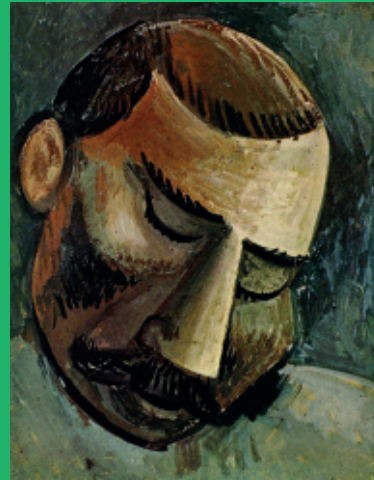
In these portraits, can you find anything that you put in the list?



Pablo Picasso, *The Artist's Mother*, 1896



Pablo Picasso, *Bust of Smiling Woman*, 1901



Pablo Picasso, *Head of a Man*, 1908



Pablo Picasso, *Weeping Woman*, 1937

# What is a portrait?

- The image of a person and/or description of the figure or character.
- It can be carried out through any artistic language (painting, sculpture, photography or literature).
- It can be an exact reproduction of the features.
- It can be an interpretation by the artist according to his or her sensibility or taste and the art of the time.

# What was the first portrait in the history of art?

The first portraits we know of are from the 5th century BC, minted on Persian coins.

During ancient Egypt, they portrayed the lower classes in a realistic way, while royalty was represented with figures and animals.



Anonymous, *Book of the Dead of Ani*, c. 1275 BC

In Greece and Rome, portraits were based on models but styled to respond to an ideal of beauty.



Anonymous,  
*Portrait of the  
Baker Terentius Neo  
and His Wife*, 20-30  
AD

# How has the portrait evolved throughout the history of art?

In the Middle Ages, it was more important to portray one's position in society and religion than to portray the person faithfully.



Giovanni di Paolo, *Crucifixion with Donor Jacopo di Bartolomeo*, c. 1455

The great masters practised it during the Renaissance, Baroque or classicism, in which portraits served to display the wealth of the nobility and the new bourgeoisie.



Jacint Rigau, *Portrait of Louis XIV*, 1702

# What role has it played in the history of art over the last 100 years?

The avant-garde of the early 20th century focused on expressiveness, breaking with the previous desire to faithfully represent the person portrayed.



Henri Matisse, *The Green Stripe (Madame Matisse)*, 1905

In the mid-20th century, with the rise of abstract art, there was a time when the portrait was not a genre used to explore new art forms. Currently, contemporary artists have modernised the genre, opening it up to a lot of possibilities.



Andy Warhol, *Shot Marilyns*, 1964

# And what about us ...

**When do we decide to do a portrait?**

**What use do we make of the portrait?**

**Where, or why, do we use it?**

**How do we share portraits?**

# Picasso and the portrait

- The portrait always occupied an important place in his art.
- He did not work by commission but portrayed the people in his inner circle and this gave him extraordinary freedom as a portrait artist.
- He did portraits with all the technical means and the whole range of styles he cultivated.
- He was always more concerned with portraying character than the exact physical features of his models.

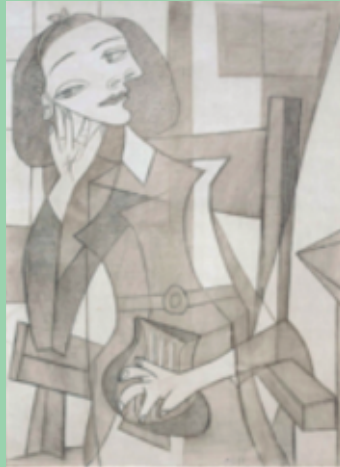
# Unpredictability and innovation are the distinguishing features of his portraits:

1. Affectionate and voluptuous, with modelled and curved shapes that evoke their sensuality.



Pablo Picasso, *Reading*  
(Marie-Thérèse Walter), 1932

2. Sensations of translucency and weakness of the model's body, outlined with pointed and angular shapes.



Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Nusch Eluard*, 9 February 1938

3. Tension exuded by their firm posture, with over-sized dimensions and intense black tones.



Pablo Picasso, *Aunt Pepa*,  
Málaga, 1896

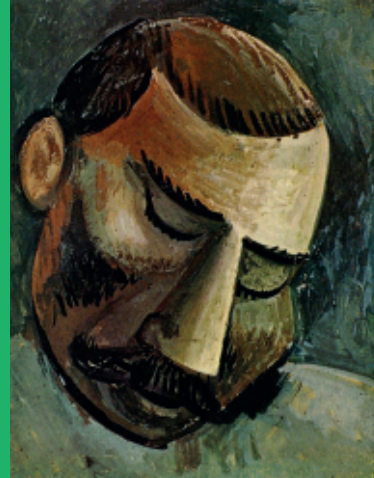
Now, in your own words, define one of these four portraits we have seen before



Pablo Picasso, *The Artist's Mother*, 1896



Pablo Picasso, *Bust of Smiling Woman*, 1901



Pablo Picasso, *Head of a Man*, 1908



Pablo Picasso, *Weeping Woman*, 1937

# Let's find out about other artists who do portraits



Bisa Butler,  
*The Princess*, 2016



Francis Bacon, *Portrait of  
Lucian Freud*, 1965



Lita Cabellut, *Mujer  
quebrada*, 2016



Angélica Dass, *Humanae*  
photographic project, begun  
in 2012



Cecil Beaton, *Charles  
James*, 1926



Tanit Plana, *ADNALOI*, 2020

# We propose a challenge:

Based on a black and white photograph of a face, and using any technique available (colour, collage, photographic programs, etc.), transform the portrait to convey at the same time how the person is physically and in terms of character.

The proposal is to ensure that the portrait is not only a copy of the physiognomy, but also represents the person's character, beliefs, interests, etc.



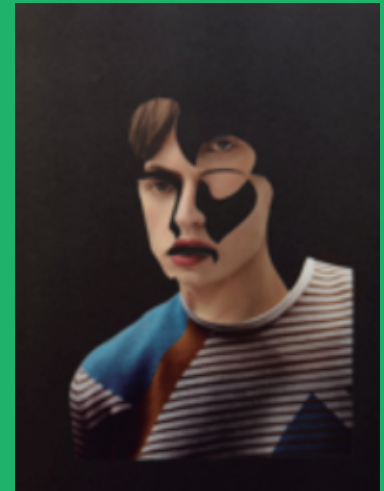
Ouka Leele, *Hairdresser*, 2016



Javi Larrauri, *Carmen Arrojo*, 2012



Arinze Stanley, *The Machine Man*, 2019



Marco Laborda, *Altered*, 2019

# Competence proposals:

1. Discuss gender issues in class based on portraits in the history of art.
2. Work based on digital competence: <https://www.photoscapeonline.com/>
3. Video tutorial for years 5 and 6, with points that enable us to relate the drawing or a face with mathematics and the environment:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqA31tSsWtA>

If you feel like sharing your ideas, send us an email to:  
[museupicasso\\_educacio@bcn.cat](mailto:museupicasso_educacio@bcn.cat)

# Bibliography and references

- Website of the Museu Picasso: <http://www.museupicasso.bcn.cat/>
- Website of the exhibition *Picasso: Portraits*:  
<http://www.bcn.cat/museupicasso/ca/exposicions/picasso-retrats/>
- Museu Picasso blog: <http://www.blogmuseupicassobcn.org/2017/04/exposicio-picasso-retrats/>
- Cowling, Elizabeth, *Picasso: Portraits*. Museu Picasso of Barcelona, 2016. Catalogue of the exhibition.
- Rubin, William (ed.), *Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation*. New York, Museum of the Modern Art, 1996. [Picasso et le portrait. Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Flammarion, 1996]
- Lemay, Violet, *100 Pablo Picassos*. Barcelona, Editorial Juventud, 2016
- *Discovering Picasso*: <https://pablo-picasso.space/>



**Visit our website if you want to know more  
about Picasso and the museum:  
[www.museupicasso.bcn.cat](http://www.museupicasso.bcn.cat)**

**Museu Picasso of Barcelona**



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