



Nightwatch – Self-Portrait Project Rembrandt

Volunteer:

Date:

Grade Level:

Artist: Rembrandt

Print/Sculpture: Night Watch
Self-Portrait

Art Vocabulary:

BAROQUE: A baroque pearl is a large, irregularly shaped pearl. In art or literature, the Baroque style is associated with the elaborate, ornate, fantastic, even sensational. It is opposed to the Classical style. Classical worker of art have smooth, simple lines. Baroque paintings or sculptures, on the other hand, show tension or conflict. They reflect a changing, less orderly world. Instead of vertical and horizontal lines, they are filled with curves or diagonal lines. They are full of action, excitement, movement. Baroque buildings have ornamented facades and richly decorated interiors. Baroque paintings often have a dramatic, spectacular characters they use sharply contrasting colors, or chiaroscuro to suggest violent emotions or drama.

CHIAROSCURO: This is a technique of contrast between light and dark that Rembrandt borrowed from the Italian Caravaggio, although it had been used other painters before, and most notably by Leonardo da Vinci.

I The Artist

Rembrandt was interested in everything in his world. He sketched or painted animals as well as landscapes, but was especially concerned with human beings of all ages and social backgrounds. Even when he could have used the extra money brought in by specific commissions, he chose to paint people that appealed to him, instead of commissioned portraits.

He was torn between the flesh and the spirit. He loved the good things of this life, as was evidenced by his taste for elegant, flashy clothes, his collections of expensive and unusual art objects, and his admiration for fleshy, sensual women. But he was also a deeply religious man concerned with life after death. He chose biblical subjects for some of his greatest paintings.

He matured considerably from the sensational Baroque style of his younger years (which culminates in the painting of Night Watch) to the intimate, realistic style of his older age (which is well exemplified by the Girl with a Broom, a genre picture and psychological portrait of a servant girl).

II The Painting: Night Watch and Self Portrait

III Composition of Artwork

Group portraits can be very dull. In Night Watch, Rembrandt made a striking departure from the tradition. Instead of a static portrait of sedately aligned Civic Guardsmen, he gave us an action scene.

The Guardsmen are assembling for a parade or a hunt, a purely social and fun occasion, which Rembrandt has turned into an epic event. That's Baroque flamboyance!

Let the children describe the epic or heroic elements in the painting:

The elegant, elaborate costumes, the shining swords and muskets, which seemed most war-like to a 17th century audience, but which are reminiscent of the Three Musketeers for today's children. Notice details, like the magnificent boots of the Captain and the hats of the Guardsmen.

The prominence given to the leaders, the two men in the foreground, with the stark contrast between the Lieutenant soberly clad in black and the flashy Captain dressed all in white. Do we need to see here a statement on the essential ambivalence of man who is made up of white and black, good and evil?

The atmosphere of military activity: Somebody, is loading a musket, others are wielding swords or spears; there is a drummer on the right of the picture. The scene is filled with turmoil, NOISE too. We are on the brink of imminent action of the most grandiose sort.

The determination, excitement, and eagerness for action painted on the faces of the participants.

The scene looks like a call to arms.

Emphasize the fact that this is no night scene at all. Try to decide with the children what the setting really is. Does the scene take place outside or inside.

IV Artist's Materials or Techniques

The chiaroscuro technique reinforces the dramatic and epic character of the scene. The dark spaces are vacant spaces contrasting with the solid, tangible, brightly lit figures. Rembrandt uses chiaroscuro to emphasize certain details and leave out others which he considers either irrelevant or distracting.

He uses it to select significant elements out of the real world, but also to heighten the emotional and dramatic impact of these elements. Thus, he simplifies reality and at the same time amplifies it.

V Students' Self-Expression: Guided Activity

1. A STUDY IN LIGHT SOURCES AND SHADOWS

Set up 3 simple and identical still lifes, such as a bottle, a crystal glass with interesting geometrical designs on the base of it, a small pyramid of cubes, etc. Use a different source of light for each still life. Floodlights or flashlights set up at different angles should work: One directly above the subject, one behind, one on the left or right, for example. Experiment until you find sufficiently different shadow effects. Also, make sure the background for the still lifes is uniformly light in color so that the shadows can be seen well.

Give each child a sheet of paper divided into three sections. Ask the children to put arrows to indicate where the light comes from in each section, and let them sketch what they see, emphasizing the outlines and designs cast by the shadows. Give them more time to draw the first subject as they will need to figure out how to draw the subject before they even start on the shadows. Use charcoal for the exercise.

2. COLORING

Following this document are two simplified tracings of Rembrandt's masterpieces. The painting of the Drapers' Guild is another wonderful group portrait which can very effectively be compared to Night Watch. Let the children figure out how they would use chiaroscuro in the picture before showing them what Rembrandt achieved" Use charcoal again.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON A GIRL WITH A BROOM

Note how differently the chiaroscuro technique works here.

The girl is in the center of the picture, her face and hands are prominently exposed. The background is so dark as to be absent. The clothes are not sufficient to date the painting. The broom alone connects her to a particular social. background. The girl does not belong to a particular century, she is for all times.

Instead of revealing the excitement of action, the chiaroscuro technique brings out the inner being of the servant girl. It helps to internalize her portrait. In this reflective picture, the only action lies in the inquiring eyes of the girl and her pose. She is leaning forward as if she were going to emerge out of the! portrait and become alive. There is a great deal of intensity in the large, somewhat sorrowful eyes of the girl. She is plump, healthy-looking, pretty in a childish way. There is nothing to suggest suffering or abuse in her face or clothing. She is not badly treated; she is not questioning the social. order and her particular place in society as a servant girl. Why the look of sorrow? She is looking straight at us, and seems to be asking us to justify the way we live. With all the innocence and insistence of a child, she is, watching the world adults have created for her, and she is forcing us to ask: ourselves questions about the kind of example we are setting for all children.

This is a timeless little painting, not a major work of Rembrandt, but a profoundly beautiful piece.





