

# *A Cultivating Journey: The Herman Levy Legacy*

and

# *Living, Building, Thinking: Art and Expressionism*



Claude Monet  
*Waterloo Bridge, Effet de Soleil, 1903*  
oil on canvas  
McMaster Museum of Art



Otto Dix  
*Portrait of Anna Grünebaum, 1926*  
oil, tempera and gesso on wood panel  
McMaster Museum of Art

## **TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE SPRING 2018**

**Vancouver**  
Artgallery

# Contents

---

Program Information and Goals .....	3
Background to the Exhibitions.....	4
Preparing Your Students: Nudes in Art .....	5
Artists' Background .....	6
Pre- and Post-Visit Activities	
1. About the Artists.....	9
Artist Information Sheet .....	10
Student Worksheet .....	12
2. Working <i>en plein air</i> .....	13
3. Collecting Collections.....	14
4. Still Life Shapes.....	16
5. Expressionist Expressions.....	19
Vocabulary .....	22
Resources .....	24

# Vancouver Art Gallery

## Teacher's Guide for School Programs

---

The exhibition *A Cultivating Journey* showcases five centuries of magnificent art from the McMaster Museum of Art's Levy Collection and Bequest from Herman Herzog Levy. Among the numerous paintings on view, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works by artists such as Claude Monet and Vincent Van Gogh are included. The exhibition reflects the remarkable expertise of Herman Levy as a collector.

The exhibition *Living, Building, Thinking: art and expressionism* features more than 90 works from the German Expressionist collection from the McMaster Museum of Art. It explores the development of Expressionism in art from the early 19th century Europe to the present day.

### DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of *A Cultivating Journey* and *Living, Building, Thinking*. It also provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Vocabulary section.

The tour of *A Cultivating Journey* and *Living, Building, Thinking* has three main goals:

- to introduce students to the work of various Modern artists
- to consider diverse artistic traditions and disciplines,
- to explore individual artworks within historical, social and cultural contexts.

# THE EXHIBITIONS

---

## **A Cultivating Journey: The Herman Levy Legacy**

Representing one of the most important donations ever made to a university gallery in Canada, *A Cultivating Journey* presents five centuries of magnificent art from the McMaster Museum of Art's Levy Collection and Bequest from Herman Herzog Levy.

This exhibition reflects the remarkable expertise of Herman Levy as a collector and explores new scholarship and perspectives on the objects and the collector himself, demonstrating the continuing impact of one man's passion for art. Works by well-known artists such as Camille Pissarro, Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh reflect Levy's personal taste and interests, which favoured Impressionist and Post- Impressionist landscapes, portraits and still lifes. He followed his donation of artworks with a substantial financial bequest specifically for art purchases, through which 219 acquisitions were made. The Levy Bequest made it possible to expand different aspects of the museum's collection and add historical, modern and contemporary works, including those by a range of French, British, Japanese, German and Dutch artists.

Organized and circulated by the McMaster Museum of Art and curated by Dr. Ihor Holubizky, Senior Curator

## **Living, Building, Thinking: art and expressionism**

*Living, Building, Thinking: art and expressionism* uses the German Expressionist collection from the McMaster Museum of Art to explore the development of Expressionism in art from the early 19th century to the present day.

The term Expressionism is invariably associated with the period of art and social activism in Germany between 1905 and 1937, encompassing visual art, literature, philosophy, theatre, film, photography and architecture. In the context of an expanded view on the subject, *Living, Building, Thinking* offers a rich and thought-provoking perspective on the relationships between artists and societies, and the ever-changing responses and visual expressions of shared hopes and aspirations for social awareness and change.

*Living, Building, Thinking* is comprised of more than 90 works in all mediums, including examples of European art from the 16th to early 20th centuries. Also highlighted are striking works from the German Expressionist and Weimar period, as well as mid-to-late 20th century European paintings by artists such as Anselm Kiefer. Canadian contemporary works also on view demonstrate the lasting legacies of Expressionism.

Organized and circulated by the McMaster Museum of Art and curated by Dr. Ihor Holubizky, Senior Curator

## PREPARING YOUR STUDENTS: Nudes in Art

---

The tour does not focus on images containing nudity, but students may see some images of the nude body as they walk through this exhibition. It can be helpful to talk with students beforehand about images of the nude in art, and to encourage them to examine their own responses to the work and to think about why an artist might choose to include a nude body in a work of art.

A good place to begin is simply to inform students that some of the works of art they will see when they visit the Gallery will contain images of nude bodies. People who visit the Gallery have all kinds of different responses to these images. Some people laugh, others feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. All of these responses are normal. But why? Why is the body so humorous and/or embarrassing? Ask the students whether they fall into hysterical laughter when they are in the shower or bath. Probably not. Part of the surprise of seeing a nude figure in a museum is just that: we are accustomed to our unclothed bodies only in private. To see one in public is a shock. Artists know this too. In showing the nude body, they remind us that the human body can mean many things.

Nudity can be a symbol of:

- Privacy: The artist observes a very private moment when the person in the artwork is alone or with someone he or she loves.
- Innocence: Many Christian religious images produced over the last five hundred years include images of angels figured as nude babies, and the Christ child is often depicted nude. Like all babies, these figures are innocent, indifferent to their nudity.
- Bravery: When Michelangelo sculpted the famous statue of David, he spoke of David's nudity as a symbol of bravery. David faced a giant without any protection on his body, relying on his faith and his skill to keep him safe.
- Vulnerability: Nudity can represent a lack of defence—a person who has nothing and has nowhere to hide.

What are you wearing?

Another way to approach this topic is to think about clothing instead of nudity. What do clothes tell us about a person? Clothing can send messages about:

- the time in history
- age and culture
- wealth and style
- the wearer's profession
- stereotypes and expectations

Some artists and art historians suggest that the nude figure is set free from all of the "distracting" information transmitted by what we wear, and becomes just a human being, from any time, place or culture.

## ARTISTS' BACKGROUND

---

The following information briefly introduces some of the artists whose work may be explored in the school tour.

### **Joseph Beuys (1921-1986)**

Joseph Beuys was a German-born artist active in Europe and the United States from the 1950s through the early 1980s, who came to be associated with that era's international Conceptual art and Fluxus movements, which turned away from the art world's prevailing commercialism in favor of "found" and "everyday" items for creating temporary, time-based "happenings" and impermanent installation art. Beuys's diverse body of work ranges from traditional media of drawing, painting, and sculpture, to process and time-oriented "action" or performance art. Beuys is especially famous for works incorporating animal fat and felt, two common materials - one organic, the other fabricated, or industrial - that had profound personal meaning to the artist. His career was characterized by open public debates on a very wide range of subjects including political, environmental, social and cultural trends. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential artists of the second half of the 20th century.

### **Otto Dix (1891-1969)**

Otto Dix was a German painter and printmaker, noted for his brutal realistic depictions of German Weimar society and the brutality of war. Dix mixed compassion and Expressionist despair to create works harshly critical of society. He lived through and fought in both world wars, and vividly relayed the horrors of both front-line battle and post-war society through his work.

Born in 1891 in the town of Untermhaus in Germany, Dix's first experience of making art was in the studio of his cousin Fritz Amann who was a landscape artist. Dix became his apprentice, and eventually went on to attend the Kunstgewerbeschule art school in Dresden. With the advent of WW1, Dix, aged 23, volunteered for service and fought all over Europe. In 1918, he was injured and finally discharged. He kept notebooks and sketchbooks throughout the war, recording the experience. After his wartime experience, Dix's landscapes went from pastoral to depicting scenes of death and destruction. His personal memories of the front line became the main subject matter of his work, along with satirical depictions of a post-war Germany heading towards WWII. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, his art was deemed as "degenerate" and Dix was dismissed from his professorship teaching art at the Dresden Academy, where he had worked since 1927. In the years following, some 260 of his works were confiscated by the Nazi Propaganda Ministry. Dix continued to work until his death in 1969. Today his works are held in museum collections all over the world.

### **Hannah Höch (1889–1978)**

Born in 1889 in Gotha, Germany, Hannah Höch was a German artist and the only woman associated with the Berlin Dada group, and is also associated with the Expressionists at times. She is known primarily for her provocative photomontage compositions that explored gender and ethnic differences in the Weimar period. The daughter of a painter and insurance company manager, Höch attended the College of Arts and Crafts in Berlin and studied glass design and graphic arts. She also studied calligraphy, embroidery, fabric and wallpaper design. Höch experimented with non-objective art through painting, collage, photography and graphics. She pieced these together and worked with a style that would later become known as photomontage. More often than not her work centred on women as they are depicted in media in comparison with reality. She formed women from mannequins, brides, children and dolls—everything deemed small or unimportant in society. To combat stereotyped, objectified

images of women she created many pieces combining males and females. Photomontage became an accepted and celebrated medium during the late 1920s, and Höch became recognized as a great pioneer of the art form.

### **Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945)**

Anselm Kiefer is a German painter and sculptor who studied with Joseph Beuys during the 1970s. In his works, Kiefer incorporates heavy impasto and uncommon materials such as lead, clay, ash, glass shards, dried flowers, and strands of hay, many of which reference various aspects of history and myth, German and otherwise. He considers themes of German history, the horror of the Holocaust, and spiritual concepts of Kabbalah. Kiefer is considered part of the Neo-Expressionist movement.

In his entire body of work, Kiefer addresses taboo and controversial issues from recent history in works that are often done on a large, confrontational scale well suited to the subjects. It is also characteristic of his work to find signatures and names of people of historical importance, legendary figures or historical places.

Kiefer has lived and worked in France since 1992. Since 2008, he has lived and worked primarily in Paris and in Alcácer do Sal, Portugal. His works are held in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, and the Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art in Amsterdam, among others.

### **Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945)**

Born in Königsberg, Prussia, Käthe Kollwitz, was a German artist, who worked with painting, printmaking (including etching, lithography and woodcuts) and sculpture. Her most famous works depict the effects of poverty, hunger, and war on the working class as well as the theme of the protective or grieving mother. Despite the realism of her early works, her art is now more closely associated with Expressionism. As a female artist, Kollwitz was in many respects a pioneer, overcoming traditional barriers to become the first woman admitted to the Prussian Academy of Arts (1919) and the first to receive the highest honor of the Weimar Republic, the "Pour le Mérite" award (1929).

In 1933 the Nazi regime forced her to leave her faculty position. Her work was subsequently removed from German museums, and she was banned from exhibiting. In 1936 she and her husband were threatened with deportation to a concentration camp, but her international renown was such that no further action was taken. She died in Moritzburg, a town near Dresden, Germany in 1945. Kollwitz created 275 prints and at least 50 self-portraits that reveal her probing and self-reflective nature.

### **Claude Monet (1840-1926)**

Born in 1840 in Paris, France, Claude Monet was the leader of the French Impressionist movement and is accredited with giving the movement its name. As an inspirational talent and personality, he was crucial in bringing its adherents together. Interested in painting in the open air and capturing natural light, Monet would later bring the technique to one of its most famous pinnacles with his series paintings, in which his observations of the same subject, viewed at various times of the day, were captured in numerous sequences of paintings. At his home in Giverny, Monet created the water-lily pond that served as inspiration for his last series of paintings. Masterful as a colorist and as a painter of light and atmosphere, his later work often achieved a remarkable degree of abstraction.

Monet's popularity soared in the second half of the 20th century, when his works traveled the world in museum exhibitions that attracted record-breaking crowds. This established his unparalleled public appeal, sustaining his reputation as one of the most significant and popular figures in the modern Western painting tradition.

**Max Pechstein (1881-1955)**

Max Pechstein was a German Expressionist painter and printmaker known for his boldly colored painted figures, still lifes and landscapes. Born Hermann Max Pechstein in 1881 in Zwickau, Germany, he studied art in Dresden from 1900 to 1906. In 1906 he was invited to join Die Brücke, a group of art students that had been founded in 1905. Primarily working in the Impressionist tradition, his association with the members of Die Brücke and his exposure to their works led Pechstein to begin painting in a more vibrant palette with vigorous brushstrokes. Subsequently, he became interested in primitive art from other cultures and In 1914, the artist traveled to the Palau Islands in the South Pacific so he could experience the culture first-hand. Pechstein's art was deemed "degenerate" by the Nazi regime in 1933 and he was forced to resign his teaching position at the Berlin Academy, though it was reinstated after the war. He died in 1955 at the age of 73. Today, the artist's works are held in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Albertina in Vienna, and the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal, Germany, among others.

**Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890)**

Vincent Van Gogh was a major Post-Impressionist painter of Dutch descent. He started drawing as a child but did not begin painting until his late twenties, and completed many of his most famous works in the last two years of his life. As a young man, he pursued his hope of leading a life of religious devotion, but in 1880 he moved to Brussels to become an artist. In 1886, Van Gogh moved to Paris, where he first saw Impressionist art and was inspired by its colour and light. His work included landscapes, still lifes, portraits and self-portraits, as well as paintings of cypresses, wheat fields and sunflowers. During the last ten years of his life he produced more than 2,100 artworks. His work, known for its rough beauty, emotion and bold colours, greatly influenced twentieth-century art, but throughout his life Van Gogh remained poor and virtually unknown. In 1890, after years of painful anxiety and frequent bouts of mental illness, he died in France at age thirty-seven, from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.



## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: About the Artists (intermediate and secondary students)

---

### **Objective:**

Students read, research and share information about some of the artists represented in the exhibitions.

### **Materials:**

- ❑ writing materials
- ❑ Internet. Some useful websites:
  - [www.artcyclopedia.com](http://www.artcyclopedia.com)
  - [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)
  - [www.artandculture.com](http://www.artandculture.com)
  - [www.biography.com](http://www.biography.com)
- ❑ Artist Information Sheet (pp. 10–11,) Student Worksheet (p. 12)

### **Process:**

1. Divide the students into seven groups. Cut up the Artist Information Sheet (pp. 10–11) and assign one artist to each group.
2. Give each student a copy of the Student Worksheet (p. 13) and ask them to transfer the information about their artist to the appropriate box.
3. Have students figure out what they need to know to complete the section on their artist, and search the Internet, either at home or at school. Older students can find more information; younger students, just the basics.
4. Ask each group to find/copy/sketch a piece of work by each artist on a separate piece of paper. Do not label with the artist's name or any other information.
5. Have each group present the information on their artist while the rest of the class adds the information to their worksheets.
6. After the presentations, lay out the images, and have the class guess which image is by which artist.

### **Conclusion:**

#### Discuss:

- What were some of the most interesting things that students learned or discovered?
- Which artists and/or kinds of artwork made students curious about seeing the actual work in the exhibition?
- Are there any artists, ways of working or ideas that the students would like to find out more about?

# Artist Information Sheet

---

## Joseph Beuys

- Born and died in Germany (1921-1986)
- Lived and worked in Europe and the United States
- Is associated with Conceptual art and Fluxus movements
- His work ranges from painting, drawing, sculpture to action and performance art
- Often incorporates animal fat and felt in his work
- He was interested in political, environmental, social and cultural subjects
- One of the most influential artists of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

## Otto Dix

- Born and died in Germany (1891- 1969)
- Painter and printmaker known for brutal depictions of war in Germany
- He lived through and fought in both world wars
- Originally painted landscapes, but war became the main subject of his work
- The Nazi regime deemed his art as degenerate and confiscated hundreds of his works
- His works are in museums all over the world

## Hannah Höch

- Born and died in Germany (1889–1978)
- The only woman associated with the Dada group
- Known primarily for her photomontage works, which she pioneered
- She sometimes painted in an Expressionist style
- Her work focused on women as they were depicted in the media in comparison with reality

## Anselm Kiefer

- Born in Germany in 1945, lives and works in France and Portugal
- Painter and sculptor who incorporates uncommon materials such as clay, lead, ash, glass in his large-scale works
- Considers themes of German history and the holocaust
- Is considered part of the Neo-Expressionist movement
- His works are in museum collections in Europe and North America

## Käthe Kollwitz

- Born in Prussia in 1867, died in Germany in 1945
- Worked with painting and printmaking
- Considered subject of poverty, hunger and war in her art
- Her work is associated with Expressionism
- Was the first woman admitted to the Prussian Academy of Arts in 1919
- The Nazi regime removed her work from German museums during her lifetime

### **Claude Monet**

- Born and died in France (1840-1926)
- Was the leader of the French Impressionist movement
- Painted outside in the open air
- Was interested in capturing natural light at different times of the day
- One of the most significant and popular figures in modern Western painting

### **Max Pechstein**

- Born and died in Germany (1881-1955)
- Was an Expressionist painter and printmaker
- Known for his boldly coloured figures, still lifes and landscapes
- Was interested in primitive art and traveled to the South Pacific
- His art was deemed degenerate by the Nazi regime during his lifetime
- Today, his works are held in museum collections in Europe and North America

### **Vincent Van Gogh**

- Born and died in Holland (1853 -1890)
- Drew from a young age, started painting in his late twenties
- Initially wanted to become a pastor, decided to be an artist instead
- Major Post-Impressionist painter
- Completed most of his works in the last two years of his life
- His works are known for their rough beauty, thick brushstrokes and bold colour
- Typically painted portraits, landscapes and still lifes

## Student Worksheet

	Personal Information	Type of Art and Movement	Known for	An Artwork
Joseph Beuys				
Otto Dix				
Hannah Hoch				
Anselm Kiefer				
Käthe Kollwitz				
Claude Monet				
Max Pechstien				
Vincent Van Gogh				

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Working *en plein air* (all levels)

---

### Objective:

Students are introduced to the process of working outdoors directly from nature.

### Discussion:

Both Impressionism and Post-Impressionism refer to influential artistic movements arising in late nineteenth-century France. Artists in this exhibition, such as Monet and Van Gogh participated in these movements and painted contemporary landscapes and scenes of modern life, instead of drawing on past art or historical and mythological narrative for their inspiration. Interested in capturing transitory moments, they paid attention to the fleeting effect of light, atmosphere and movement. In contrast to traditional artists of their time, they confronted nature and modern city life directly by moving out of the studio to the streets and countryside. They painted *en plein air* (in the open air) using a palette of pure colours.

### Materials:

- drawing pads, or clipboards and sheets of paper
- pencils
- pencil crayons OR crayons/pastels OR paint

### Process:

1. Discuss how Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters often painted outside as opposed to inside a studio. They did this in order to capture the effects of natural light, atmosphere and movement. Gardens, landscapes and flowers were among their most frequently painted subjects.
2. Choose an outdoor area with some greenery, one or more trees or flowers. Have the students decide on a perspective; for example, from far away or close up.
3. Have them look closely at the greens and yellows of the leaves, the browns and greys of the trunk and branches, the colours of the flowers, the blues and greys of the sky. Remind them that landscape painters like Cézanne didn't use just one colour, but mixed and blended colours and shades to create rich, dense surfaces.
4. Have the students sketch lightly with pencil to create a composition and plan out their work.
5. Once they have completed their light pencil markings, have them start applying colour. Encourage them to fill the page with quick detail—short strokes of colours, lines and shapes that include all the elements in their line of vision.
6. Encourage them to fill the page, layering on and blending colours as they work.

### Conclusion:

- Display the students' work.
- Have them look at all the work and talk about similarities and differences in styles, perspectives, colours and composition.
- Discuss the process. How easy or hard was it to create the work? What are the differences between working outdoors and indoors? How did working outside affect their work?

## PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Collecting Collections (all grades)

---

### **Objective:**

Students explore some issues collectors need to consider, using their own interests and collections as the basis for discussion.

### **Discussion:**

Herman Levy loved art and collected it from Europe for most of his lifetime. His mother introduced him to art and encouraged him to begin collecting it. He started his collection when he travelled to Europe at the age of 21 and researched art and artists by reading thoroughly and learning from experts. Regular visits to museums and galleries allowed him time to look at art and develop his eye and established a lifelong practice – the careful examination, contemplation and experience of objects of quality. When Mr. Levy died in 1990 at the age of 88, he left his entire collection to McMaster University in his hometown of Hamilton Ontario. Herman Levy's generosity also ensured the growth of the University's art collection. The receipt of the Levy bequest in 1990 made it possible for different aspects of the collection to be expanded. The purchases that have been made, reflect in part Herman Levy's own interests, but also give the collection greater scope in terms of historical, modern and contemporary art.

### **Materials:**

- ❑ writing materials
- ❑ large sheets of plain white paper

### **Process:**

1. Invite students to bring a personal collection from home to share with the class. Those who do not have a collection can gather some things that they like, such as rocks, scarves, trading cards, books, candies, etc.
2. Have students work in pairs to prepare a list of interview questions in order to learn about each other's collections. See sample questions on p. 16.
3. Have students set up and display their collections on a clean sheet of white paper on their desks.
4. Have students look at all the collections and interview three classmates about their collections, using the questions they have prepared.

### **Conclusion:**

Discuss:

- In what ways were the collections similar and different?
- What makes a successful collection?
- How important is it to have background information to the collection?
- Do stories about the objects make them more interesting? Give examples.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Why did you begin to collect? What made you decide on this focus?
- What was the first thing in your collection?
- If this is a brand new collection, what made you choose it? Would you like to expand your collection?
- How do you learn about what you collect?
- Where do you find the things you collect?
- How do things enter your collection? (purchase, gift, trade...)
- What is the “star” of your collection? Was it the most important thing when you acquired it, or did it become important over time?
- Do you have a favourite thing in your collection?
- How do you decide to add something to your collection? What do you look for?
- Has your interest in what you collect changed? How?
- Do you display your collection? Where? How?
- Do you ever put your collection away? How do you store it?
- Has anyone ever borrowed your collection? Why?
- How long do you think you will continue to collect?
- What do you hope will happen to your collection when you are an adult?
- What is your favourite story about an object in your collection?

## PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Still Life Shapes (primary and intermediate levels)

---

### **Objective:**

Students create a still life shape collage

### **Discussion:**

Herman Levy's collection features a number of painted still lifes. Still lifes are often produced in the studio, with simple props: a cloth, some food or fruit, a vase or bowl. The repeated use of these types of objects enabled artists to focus their attention on the layout of the objects and the treatment of space, and to study the effects of light on shapes. In their simplicity, still lifes often depict richly orchestrated compositions of overlapping shapes, patterns, colours and textures.

### **Materials:**

- a selection of fruits, a bowl or basket etc.
- pencils
- black and white pastels or pencil crayons
- construction paper in a variety of colours
- scissors
- glue

### **Process:**

1. Discuss and define the term still life for the students. Provide some examples of still lifes for the students to study. See examples on p.16
2. Arrange a still life display using fruits, a bowl or basket and other articles of your choice. Students could also contribute objects such as candles, vases etc.
3. Ask students to look at the shapes of the different fruits and objects.
4. Have students choose a selection of construction paper and draw the forms they observe in the still life on their chosen paper.
5. Have students cut out their fruit and bowl or basket shapes.
6. Have students look carefully at the texture, pattern, light and shadow on the fruits and objects.
7. Have students use black and white pastels or crayons to shade and add detail to their construction paper cutouts.
8. Have each student choose a background sheet and create a composition by layering and overlapping their shapes on it. Have them try at least four different compositions to select the best one.
9. They do not need to use all of the objects. Have students glue down the objects when they choose the best composition.
10. Display the collages. See examples on following page.

### **Conclusion:**

Discuss:

- Have students look at all the work and talk about the similarities and differences in colour, shapes, shading, texture and composition.
- Discuss the process. How easy or hard was it to create the work? What are the differences between creating a shape collage and creating a painting or drawing?
- Do students perceive a simple bowl of fruit differently now? In what ways?
- Have students analyze the different techniques that went into making the still life and frame.



## Examples of Still Lifes



Émile Bernard, *Still Life with Cup and Bowl of Fruit*, 1887



Vincent Van Gogh, *Untitled, Still Life: Ginger Pot and Onions*, 1885

# Examples of Student Work



## PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Expressionist Expressions (all levels)

---

### **Objective:**

Students will learn about Expressionism and Neo-Expressionism by creating a portrait of a friend who inspires a mood or feeling.

### **Discussion:**

Expressionism was all about the depiction of emotions and the types of responses those same emotions evoked. The traditional goal of representing nature as accurately as possible was rejected and instead vibrant colors, wild abstract shapes and emotional subject matter took over. Similarly, Neo-Expressionist artists portrayed violent emotions using somewhat crude and raw approaches in their work. Traditional painting skills were not required, neither were conventional ideas of composition and design. An expression of spontaneous emotion was the main focus of the Neo-Expressionist work.

### **Materials:**

- black construction paper, ideally 11x17"
- white chalk
- white school glue
- oil pastels or chalk pastels

### **Process:**

1. Discuss portraiture with the students. What is a portrait? Why do portraits exist? What kinds of portraits have they seen before? Do all portraits look realistic?
2. Show the students a few examples of Expressionist portraits (p. 19) to demonstrate the use of distortion and color to evoke emotions.
3. What do they notice? How are the portraits realistic? How are they abstract? How are they similar? How are they different?
4. Have students work with partners, sitting across from each other at a table or at their desks.
5. As one partner makes a face, which portrays a certain emotion, the other partner should quickly draw him/her with white chalk on black paper. Emphasize that this should not be a realistic drawing.
6. Have students use simple lines and large shapes to capture the expression. Make sure the picture fills the page and extends to the bottom.
7. Have students use white glue to trace over the chalk lines. Students can practice controlling the flow of the glue on scrap paper prior to beginning. Let the glue dry undisturbed overnight.
8. Have students use bright pastels to color in all areas and use a fingertip to push the color into the edges of the glue.
9. Talk to students about using colors in unusual ways to create a mood.
10. Encourage students to fill the page and to choose a colour for the background.
11. Once backgrounds are complete, spray with fixative or hairspray to set the pastel.
12. Display the portraits. See examples on following page.

### **Conclusion:**

Discuss:

- How do the realistic and abstract portraits differ?
- Do portraits need to be realistic? Why or why not?
- How are the students' portraits similar? How are they different? Discuss the expressions.

## Examples of Expressionist Portraits



Otto Dix, Leonie, 1923



Hannah Höch, Mother and Child (Self-Portrait Dream), c. 1931

# Examples of Student Work



# VOCABULARY

---

**abstract/abstraction:** a style of art that can be thought of in two ways:

- a) the artist begins with a recognizable subject and alters, distorts, manipulates or simplifies elements of it;
- b) the artist creates purely abstract forms that are unrecognizable and have no direct reference to external reality (also called non-representational art)

**conceptual art:** conceptual art: art whose idea or concept is more important than the finished artwork, and whose form does not necessarily conform to traditional art objects such as paintings or sculptures.

**Dada, or Dadaism:** An art movement of the European avant-garde in the early 20th century. It was a form of artistic rebellion born out of an aversion to the social, political and cultural values of the time. It embraced elements of art, music, poetry, theatre, dance and politics. Dada was not so much a style of art like Cubism, it was more a protest movement that attacked traditional artistic values. Dada artists are known for their use of found materials and readymade objects - everyday objects that could be bought and presented as art with little manipulation by the artist. Although the Dadaists were united in their ideals, they had no unifying style.

**degenerate art:** a term adopted by the Nazi regime in Germany to describe virtually all Modern art. Such art was banned on the grounds that it was un-German, Jewish or Communist in nature. Those identified as degenerate artists were subjected to sanctions, including being dismissed from teaching positions, being forbidden to exhibit or to sell their art and, in some cases, being forbidden to produce art.

**Expressionism:** Expressionism was a Modernist movement, initially in poetry and painting, originating in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its typical trait is to present the world solely from a subjective perspective, distorting it radically for emotional effect in order to evoke moods or ideas. Expressionist artists sought to express meaning or emotional experience rather than physical reality.

**Fluxus:** an international and interdisciplinary group of artists, composers, designers and poets that took shape in the 1960s and 1970s. Fluxus artists did not agree with the authority of museums to determine the value of art, nor did they believe that one must be educated to view and understand a piece of art. Unlike previous artistic movements, Fluxus sought to change the history of the world, not just the history of art. The persistent goal of most Fluxus artists was to destroy any boundary between art and life.

**Impressionism:** a late nineteenth-century art movement that focused on everyday subject matter, and sought to capture ephemeral qualities of light and specific moments of time. Paintings included visible brushstrokes and often showed unusual visual angles.

**landscape:** artwork in which the subject is a view of the exterior physical world. Traditionally, landscapes have been paintings or drawings depicting natural scenes and are often concerned with light, space and setting.

**Modern/Modernist:** a historical period of art practice—from 1850 to 1970—during which approaches to art embraced new ideas in science, political thought and many other areas. The

Modernists rejected the restrictions of past art traditions and stressed innovation over all other values.

**Neo-Expressionism:** Neo-expressionism is a style of late modernist or early-postmodern painting and sculpture that emerged in the late 1970s. It is characterized by a return to figuration in expressive, gestural, and sometimes brashly aggressive works. The Neo-Expressionists returned expressiveness and raw emotion to art, and in particular painting, using instinctual mark-making, subjective color, and distorted forms.

**Photomontage:** a collage that includes cut, torn and/or layered photographs or photographic reproductions.

**Post-Impressionism:** a genre of painting that grew directly out of Impressionism, but rejected its limitations. Artists continued to use vivid colours, thick paint and real-life subject matter, but were more inclined to emphasize geometric forms, to distort form for expressive effect and to use unnatural or arbitrary colour.

**Still life** (plural **Still lifes**): a work of art depicting mostly inanimate subject matter, typically commonplace objects either natural (food, flowers, dead animals, plants, rocks or shells) or fabricated (drinking glasses, books, vases, jewellery, coins, pipes and so on).

**Weimar era:** the period 1919 to 1933 in Germany, between World War I and the ascension of Adolf Hitler. The nation state during this time was known as the Weimar Republic, so called because the assembly that adopted its constitution met at Weimar from February 6 to August 11, 1919.

# RESOURCES

---

**Print:**

Tabitha Barber et al., *A Cultivating Journey The Herman H. Levy Legacy*, Montreal, QC: ABC Artbooks Canada, 2018.

Robert Belton et al., *Living Building Thinking: Art and Expressionism*, Montreal, QC: ABC Artbooks, Canada, 2017.

**Online:**

[www.artcyclopedia.com](http://www.artcyclopedia.com)

[www.artnet.com](http://www.artnet.com)

<http://brookwoodelementary.com>

<https://kinderart.com>

<http://mrssmileysartroom.blogspot.ca>

<http://sandburgartenrichment.blogspot.ca>

<http://www.theartstory.org>

[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)



## Vancouver Art Gallery School Programs Supporters:

Corporate Partners:



Visionary Partner for Community Access:

*diamond*  
FOUNDATION

Generously supported by:

**Ace and Hemsä Fipke**

Visionary Partner for Art Education:

**Ji Ping Bai**

Additional support from:

**NORDSTROM**

**Sheldon Gilmour Foundation**