

Akron Art Museum: Art & Selfie Experience

Art & Selfie is an identity & art tour program for students in grades 6-12 that explores sexuality, gender identity, body image and race in art, highlighting artists in the museum's collection such as James Gobel, Cindy Sherman & Robert Colescott.

The tours are discussion based & ask students to look at artworks, mining them for cultural stereotypes & other identity based markers. Tours also include hands on activities that ask students to rethink their assumptions about gender through games and activities.

At the conclusion of the tour, participants will explore and manipulate their own identities, creating self-portrait alter egos inspired by artist Cindy Sherman. Students will use costumes, props, and backdrops to create an identity and then record the image using phones/iPads & Polaroid cameras. Students can share their "selfies" via social media and the project will use the hashtag #art&selfie.



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Introduction Activity: Identity Web

Give each student an "I AM" sticker and have him/her complete the sentence with a word or phrase that says something about his/her identity. An example might be "I AM an athlete" or "I AM hard working". Be sure to emphasize that these phrases will be shared, so students should only write something they're willing to show to the group.

Place all of the stickers in a bowl and mix them up.

Have each student draw a sticker, not revealing what they've drawn.

Once all of the students have stickers, they should peel them and stick them to their shirts, allowing the words to face outward like a name tag.

Give one student the spool of string.

Have everyone walk around, trying to find the person who wrote the sentence on their shirt. Talking should be encouraged.

Gather the group in a circle and choose a student to start creating the identity web. The student should read the "I AM" statement on his/her shirt and then try to find a connection between that statement and a statement that another student is wearing (For example "I AM an athlete" could be connected to "I AM hard working" because training to be an athlete is hard work)

As they make this connection, have the first student hold the loose end of the string and then pass the spool on to his/her "connection". This person will hold the string, and then pass the spool to the next connection, letting the string unravel between them.

By the end of the session, there should be a tangled web attaching everyone.

*The sticker/nametag is optional. This could just be done by each person saying their "I AM or I LIKE" statement out loud.

ARTWORKS



William Merritt Chase

(Williamsburg (now Nineveh), Indiana, 1849 - 1916, New York, New York)

Girl in White , c. 1901

Oil on fabric

84 3/8 in. x 40 in. (214.31 cm x 101.6 cm)

Bequest of Edwin C. Shaw

1955.16

About the work: This portrait depicts Florence Irene Dimock, the daughter of a Connecticut silk merchant, but it also expresses Chase's conception of refinement. He placed Dimock in a formal setting, gave her flamboyant studio props and depicted her with an air of seriousness that by all accounts did not match her fun-loving personality. His inspiration for the courtly style and dynamic painting technique of this work was the art of seventeenth-century Spanish painter Diego Velasquez, whose works Chase admired while studying in Europe.

Discussion Prompts: The style of this portrait (the clothes, props, pose) don't really match the girl's personality. Not knowing that, what would you assume about her based on what you see here? How can our clothes impact the way we're perceived by others? If you were to have your portrait painted, would you prefer a more casual or formal setting? Why?



[Mickalene Thomas](#)

(Camden, New Jersey, 1971 -)

Girlfriends and Lovers, 2008

Acrylic, enamel and rhinestones on panel

108 in. x 144 in. (274.32 cm x 365.76 cm)

About the work: Thomas takes on exoticized stereotypes of black femininity while also exploring how her women fit into art history. Influenced by her stylish mother (a former fashion model), imagery in *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines, 1970s funk and soul music and trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas draws on personal experience, popular culture and art history. Diverse cultural and art historical references abound in *Girlfriends and Lovers*. The repertoire of patterns and textures ranges from Egyptian-style textiles evoking 1970s Africanist sensibilities to black-and-white tile reminiscent of fifteenth-century Dutch Old Master painting. The painting's scale and composition meanwhile reference group portraits by Rembrandt van Rijn and Pablo Picasso.

Discussion Prompts: Many artists draw on personal experiences and cultural influences when they make art. How does where we came from shape who we are? Does our past decide our future? What parts of your family, friends and teachers do you see in yourself? What ideas/values will you pass on through your art and to your future children?

Think of yourself as a collage. What pieces and parts do you have to fit together to make yourself whole?



[James Gobel](#)

(Portland, Oregon, 1972 -)

I'll Be Your Friend, I'll Be Your Love, I'll Be Everything You Need, 2009

Felt, yarn, acrylic and rhinestones on canvas

72 in. x 56 in. (182.88 cm x 142.24 cm)

About the work: Gobel's men make visible the relatively unseen "bear" subculture of the gay community through pattern and material. His portraits of hairy, bearded, large-bellied men dressed in working-class clothing challenge the notion that homosexuality conflicts with masculinity. They counter the stereotypical image of the fit, smooth-shaven, and highly styled gay man. In 'I'll Be Your Friend', Gobel effects a push and pull between ideals of gay and straight masculinity. Is the heavy-set performer a heavy metal rocker or a Liberace-esque lounge singer? Gobel illustrates the pitfalls of attempting to categorize people by literally layering contrasting stereotyped identities. The title of this work plays on the lyrics to the 1986 song "Disenchanted" by British pop duo The Communards.

Discussion Prompts: What would you assume about this person based on the image? Are you surprised about your assumptions once you learn more about the piece?

Can you think of famous people who have used stereotypes to their advantage? Who has been hurt by them? Did they do something to stop or encourage the stereotyping, or was it going to happen no matter what?



Andy Warhol

(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1928 - 1987, New York, New York)

Single Elvis , 1963

Silkscreen ink and spray paint on linen

82 in. x 40 in. (208.28 cm x 101.6 cm)

Purchased with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the L. L. Bottsford Estate Fund
1972.1

About the work: Warhol typically borrowed his images of celebrities from newspapers and publicity photos; this work is based on a publicity still from Elvis Presley's 1960 western film, *Flaming Star*. Like most of Warhol's paintings as well as his Brillo Box sculptures, *Single Elvis* was created through screenprinting (also called silkscreen), a stenciling process in which a design is transferred to a fine fabric, blank areas are coated with an impermeable substance, and ink is then pushed through the open areas of the fabric to transfer the design onto the printing surface. The technique permits images to be reproduced repeatedly with slight variations in each printing.

Discussion prompts: Warhol was obsessed with celebrity- making artwork and taking photos of his famous friends and eventually becoming a celebrity himself. He famous said "In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes". Do you recognize the celebrity in this image? Why do you think Warhol was so interested in famous people? Warhol became quite a character himself. Can you think of any current celebrities who basically invented their fame? Kim Kardashian, maybe? How did these people make themselves into characters that the world would be interested in knowing?

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Studio Experience

Supplies:

Costumes
Wigs
Props
Backdrops
Cameras
Tripod (optional)
Garment racks
Stools if necessary

Procedure:

Now that the students have explored and discussed the concept of identity in the galleries, they will create an identity and capture the character in a “selfie”/portrait. Students can choose from the selection of props, costumes, and wigs to create a character/identity. This could be closely related to who they actually are, or a complete departure. Next, students should select a backdrop that compliments their characters. They can always just use a blank wall in the lobby or studio if they prefer. Finally, students should capture their photo (with assistance from fellow students) with the Polaroid cameras provided. The images will be saved digitally on the cameras and will also print a copy for each student. The students are also welcome to capture images with their personal phones/cameras if they’d like. If students would like to share the images on social media, please ask them to tag the museum @akronartmuseum and use the hashtag #art&selfie

Follow-up:

Teachers can extend this experience by discussing the images with the students once back at school. The students could create a display using all of their Polaroids, or the teacher could display them digitally for the class. Students could take turns discussing the identity or personality traits associated with each portrait. To take it even further, the students could be assigned to write about their characters, perhaps by creating an online dating profile or an interview with the ‘character’.

Resources:

Art21 episode about identity <http://www.pbs.org/art21/films/identity>
Akron Art Museum online collection www.akronartmuseum.org/collection