

Painted Self Portrait instructions

The prerequisite for this unit is: both the color units, painting a still life (with acrylics), and preliminary drawing units that address the proportions of the head.

With this experience, students are now equipped to paint self-portraits directly from their own image. I used mirrors in the art room.

1. Student makes a drawing of his own image. Students can use a mirror or a photograph.
2. A transparent glaze of a dark neutral color is laid over the drawing and allowed to dry completely.
3. The largest value areas are painted first. It is important not to use thick paint, but to lay down semi-transparent layers.
4. All colors at this stage are darker and blander than the colors that will go on last.
5. The protocols for this are demonstrated in the painted still life unit.

Notes to Teachers

Painting styles are personal, but the most important thing to encourage student to do, is to learn to evaluate the value of the colors they use. They also need to make the original drawing accurate so that it is easier to place shapes within the interior of the drawing.

The head and face have an outline, but it is the shapes within these contours that define the face. Explain to students that painting is somewhat like putting a jigsaw puzzle together, locking in each shape with its own color and value. Judging the value correctly is even more important than using the right color.

Acrylic is a forgiving medium, because what does not work can be easily covered up. The danger is using paint that is too thick. Students must learn to add medium to the paint so that glazing layers of color together is possible. If heavy impasto is used, it will only be on the last layer.

Doing the portrait in tempera and in only different values of the same color is also a good way for students to learn how to model the surface of the face. Without the problem of guessing color, the difficulty of painting accurate appearances is reduced. There are examples of this on the page. The portraits I posted there were done by freshmen.