

HEROIC PORTRAITS

London.



Sue Liedke

Inspired by the large-scale portraits of Mickalene Thomas and Kehinde Wiley, our pre-kindergartners created their own heroic portraits, blending digital and hands-on art-making techniques. We began our lesson by viewing Wiley's paintings, that feature street-cast black New Yorkers in familiar Renaissance poses. As it turns out, the juxtaposition of contemporary subjects in grandiose postures is intriguing, even to our littlest friends who don't have years of art history classes on their resumé's.

Later in the week, we looked at some school-safe portraits by Mickalene Thomas: detailed and rhinestone encrusted paintings celebrating race and femininity. Showing these works on the projector gave students an idea of the exciting scale of Wiley's and Thomas's work.

Creating the Background

Both Wiley's and Thomas's paintings feature complicated patterned backgrounds, so our first step was to create patterns on paper. I broke out our "smelly markers" for this, which elevates any project to a special event. Students were encouraged to carefully consider their color schemes and add lots of details to their paper. Their drawings were photographed and archived into class folders.

Portrait Photography

Our next step was portrait photography. Our "photo studio" is a green screen tacked up in a well-lit corner of the art studio, a basket of digital and point-and-shoot cameras for practice, and an iPad on a tripod. We practiced framing our subjects with only green in the background, and students got a chance to try some of the heroic poses they've seen in the paintings we've studied.

Students helped arrange each other with basic props into poses and stepped into the roles of photographer and model. They shot photos in front of the green screen and chose their favorites, which I organized into their class folders on the iPad. About



Skylar.

five or six students completed their photo shoot each class period in our choice-based studio.

Working with an App

After that, we combined our photos with our hand-drawn backgrounds using a green screen app (there are

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several apps available for Android, iOS, and PC)—it's so simple that even my pre-kindergartners can use it! Together we would locate their drawings and

photos and import them to the app. Students could then resize their images, spin the orientation, and adjust the green screen sensitivity. Finished pictures were saved into their folders.

Putting It All Together

When students' files were complete, I sent them off to be made into 4 x 6" (10 x 15 cm) prints. While we waited for the prints to arrive, students worked on their "frames," which were inspired by the heavily bejeweled images of Mickalene Thomas. For our frames, we used takeout sushi containers, which I bought in bulk. The clear lids worked well as a protective "glass" covering for our frame, and the depth of the containers allowed room for adding 3D objects.

Students painted the insides of the sushi containers with acrylic paint

and then glued their green screen photos into it. They had the option to add pom-poms, sparkles, doilies, beads, and other embellishments to their portraits. They also used fluorescent window markers to decorate the sushi container lids before gluing them on and completing their masterpieces. 

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Creating: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

WEB LINK

Mickalene Thomas Artist Website: mickalenetomas.com