

Monochromatic Self-Portraits

Expressing Emotions Through Art

by Maria D. Rapicavoli, CMA Artist in Residence 2023-24

This lesson will introduce the concept of monochromatic art, focusing on expressing sadness through color and facial expression. Using Picasso's Blue Period as inspiration, students will create self-portraits reflecting on personal experiences and utilizing shades of a single color.



Materials

- Blue Paint
- White Paint
- Black Paint
- Water
- Paintbrushes
- Media Paper
- Pencil
- Eraser

What is Monochromatic Art?

Monochromatic art uses only one color, but we can play with its lightness and darkness to create different effects.

Picasso's Blue Period, spanning from 1901 to 1904, is characterized by a predominant use of blue tones in his artworks. During this period, Picasso explored themes of poverty, loneliness, and despair, often depicting marginalized individuals. The somber color palette and melancholic subject matter reflected his personal struggles and empathetic response to societal injustices.

Let's look at the following examples of Picasso:

[Le Bock \(Portrait de Jaime Sabartes\), Pablo Picasso, 1901, Painting](#)

[Woman with Bangs, Pablo Picasso, 1902, Painting](#)

[The Tragedy, Pablo Picasso, 1903, Painting](#)

[Woman with a Helmet of Hair, Pablo Picasso, 1904, Painting](#)

Here are other artists who incorporate monochromatic colors schemes:

[Blue Black Boy, Carrie Mae Weems, 1997, Photograph](#)

[Untitled \(Policeman\), Kerry James Marshall, 2015, Painting](#)

When looking at these artworks, consider the following questions:

- What do you notice about the colors used? How do they make you feel?
- Look closely at each individual in each artwork. What do you think they are feeling?
- How does the artist use color and light to create a mood in this painting?
- What elements do you see that suggest sadness or sorrow?

It's Time to Make Your Own Portrait!

Step 1: Mixing Tints, Shades, and Hues

Start with your base color, blue.

Mixing Tints

To create a tint, gradually add your base color [blue] to white paint. Start with a small amount of the base color and mix it thoroughly. Continue adding more white until you achieve the desired level of lightness.

Mixing Shades

To make a shade, add black paint gradually to your base color. Like with tints, start with a small amount of black and mix it well. Keep adding black until you reach the desired depth or darkness of color.

Mixing Hues

To mix different hues of blue, start with a base blue color and gradually add small amounts of gray to lighten or darken the shade. How does mixing blue with light gray differ from mixing blue with white? How is mixing with black different from mixing with dark gray? Experiment with the amount of gray added to achieve the desired saturation [or intensity] of the blue color

Step 2: Getting Inspired

Have you ever felt sad before? What does it feel like inside? How can we show that feeling in a picture?

Step 3: Draw Your Sketch

Use a pencil to sketch your self-portrait on paper, focusing on capturing the sad expression you observed. Try looking in the mirror. Pay attention to how your eyes, brows, and mouth look when you make a sad expression.

Step 4: Painting Your Self-Portrait

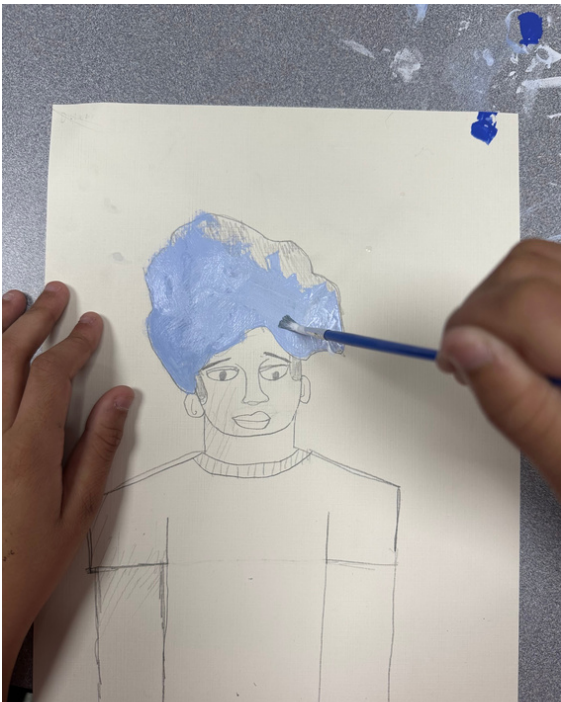
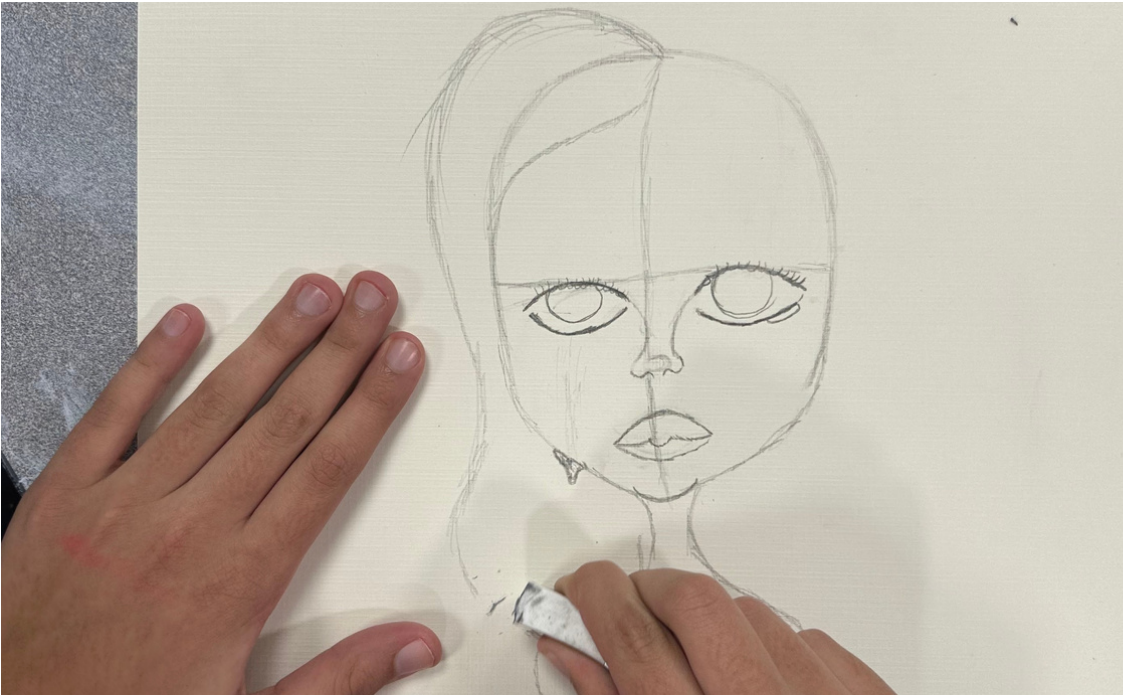
Using your variety of shades, tints, and hues, fill in your self-portrait. How can adding color amplify the emotion in your painting? Use lightness, darkness, and brightness to guide the view around your painting,

Maria's Notes

This activity showed how art can powerfully express and process emotions. The depth of their emotions led to impactful artwork. By the end, a transformation was seen; students moved from exploring sadness to creating self-portraits that expressed both intriguing artistry and a sense of joy and accomplishment.

Examples From the Field:
Fourth and Fifth Graders at Hudson Guild, NYC

Process Shots



Examples From the Field:

Fourth and Fifth Graders at Hudson Guild, NYC

Finished Works



Examples From the Field:

Fourth and Fifth Graders at Hudson Guild, NYC

Finished Works



Examples From the Field:

Fourth and Fifth Graders at Hudson Guild, NYC

Finished Works



Examples From the Field:

Fourth and Fifth Graders at Hudson Guild, NYC

Finished Works

