

Modulo CLIL STORIA DELL'ARTE

ITC DEGANUTTI Udine

a.s. 2008 - 2009

Docenti : Prof. Visintini, Prof. Tubaro, Prof De Cillia

Titolo del modulo	REVEALING SELF-PORTRAITS
classi	5C erica , 5A erica
livello linguistico	Intermediate/ upper-intermediate(B1+/ B2)
punto del programma (eventuali prerequisiti)	Conoscere i principali elementi che concorrono alla rappresentazione della profondità e dello spazio Conoscere i significati simbolici e i valori espressivi dei colori Saper riconoscere i valori espressivi della luce Conoscere le principali tendenze dell'arte pittorica nell'Ottocento e nei primi decenni del Novecento. Saper riconoscere e descrivere nelle loro caratteristiche essenziali i principali dipinti realizzati in Europa nel corso dell'Ottocento e del Novecento.
contenuti disciplinari	Percorrere la storia artistica dell'Ottocento e del Novecento attraverso una scelta di "autoritratti" dei più importanti pittori, da Antonio Canova a Marc Chagall. Conoscere il volto e la personalità di Antonio Canova, di Francisco Goya, di Eugène Delacroix, di Gustave Courbet, di Vincent van Gogh, di Paul Gauguin, di Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, di Umberto Boccioni, di Giorgio de Chirico e di Marc Chagall. Individuare le numerose modalità e i vari tipi dell'autoritratto: da quello "professionale" a quello più personale. Scorrere tra stili e interpretazioni diverse le differenti tecniche di raffigurazioni dell'autoritratto. Scoprire, attraverso l'autoritratto, l'io dell'artista, ossia l'introspezione personale, la sua vita interiore, i caratteri peculiari della sua esistenza e il percorso ella sua attività.
numero di ore	10 -12 ore
materiale	Dispensa del docente, Libro di testo, Immagini autoritratti
Supporti	Siti Web (vedi allegato Useful Websites)
compresenza	Si

INDICE

[Lesson Plan](#)

[Lesson 1 – Self portraits](#)

[Boccioni](#)

[Canova](#)

[Chagall](#)

[De Chirico](#)

[Gauguin](#)

[Goya](#)

[Van Gogh](#)

[Useful web sites](#)

[Torna all'indice](#)

LESSON PLAN

1. BRAINSTORMING

The Art teacher briefly revises characteristics and style of self-portraits.

2. PRESENTATION

She then hands out **SELF PORTRAITS** , reads and explains.

3. GROUP WORK

Students divide into pairs and choose one of the self-portraits presented in class .They are told that they will become the Artist's "double" and will have to answer questions in an interview. They need to find information about his life, techniques and place in art history to understand and imagine why their artist chose to paint himself the way he did.

4. PROJECT Web Quest

Students are told to find as much relevant information about the artist they will double. Students start researching on web sites (See **USEFUL WEB SITES**) with the help of their English teacher . Pairs continue work at home, sharing the data collected, and write a biography in first person and answers to possible questions (with the help of the English teacher). They should focus on what their self-portrait tells the viewer.

5.CLASS PRESENTATION/INTERVIEW

The two students take on the role of the artist and sit below his self-portrait.

(Teachers/Students – student interaction) Students and teachers (both Art and English teachers) ask questions about the artist's personality and biography. The students presenting themselves as the artist explain what they wanted to communicate with their self- portrait, or answer any question regarding their life or gossip about themselves.

Some answers can be foreseen in part (see Useful web sites – examples of questions), others will be unexpected.

6. EVALUATION

The art teacher will give a mark for content and choice of detail, while the English teacher will evaluate fluency, choice of vocabulary, and the ability to answer unexpected questions.



SELF-PORTRAITS

What is a self-portrait ?

A self-portrait is a representation of an artist, drawn, painted, photographed, or sculptured by the artist. Although self-portraits have been made by artists since earliest times, it is not until the Early Renaissance in the mid 1400s that artists can be frequently identified depicting themselves as either the main subject, or as important characters in their work. With better and cheaper mirrors, and the advent of the panel portrait, many painters, sculptors and printmakers tried some form of self portraiture.

What is the different between a portrait and a self-portrait?

A portrait is a painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artistic representation of a person, in which the face and its expression is predominant. The intent is to display the likeness, personality, and even the mood of the person. A portrait often shows a person looking directly at the painter or photographer, in order to most successfully engage the subject with the viewer.

A self-portrait is a [portrait](#) an [artist](#) makes using himself or herself as its [subject](#). The self-portrait supposes in theory the use of a [mirror](#); glass mirrors became available in Europe in the 15th century. The first mirrors used were convex, introducing deformations that the artist sometimes preserved. A painting by [Parmigianino](#) in 1524 *Self-portrait in a mirror*, demonstrates the phenomenon.



Parmigianino, *Self-portrait in a mirror* is itself painted on a convex surface, like that of the mirrors of the period.

Why do artists make self-portraits?

When artists make self-portraits, they may be asking themselves a very basic but difficult question: Who am I? Does this artistic method help people to understand themselves better? Why is that important?

Since the Renaissance, artists have used self-portraits to answer the basic question: Who am I? A mirror or a photograph can tell a person what he or she looks like, but that outer image rarely reflects the whole self. Self-portraiture asks artists to think carefully about personality, character, mood, and physical appearance in order to make decisions about how to represent themselves. For each self-portrait, the artist must ask: what expression, posture, clothing, setting, colours, texture, style, and material best conveys the *real* me?

Here are some practical reasons why artists make self-portraits:

- They get a model who is always available and works for free.
- Self-portraits are a good way for artists to practice representing different expressions and moods.
- Self-portraits advertise an artist's skill. A potential customer can compare the image in the self-portrait to the actual person and decide on the spot to hire the artist—or not.
- Self-portraits live on. They preserve memories and let the artist leave his or her image behind—a way of fulfilling the human quest for immortality.

What types of self-portraits are there?

An art critic separates two basic forms of the self-portrait: "professional" portraits, in which the artist is depicted at work, and "personal" portraits, which reveal moral and psychological features.

Here is a more detailed taxonomy:

1. the "inserted" self-portrait, where the artist inserts his or her own portrait into, for example, a group of characters related to some subject;
2. the "prestigious, or symbolic" self-portrait, where an artist depicts him or herself in the guise of a historical person or religious hero;
3. the "group portrait" where the artist is depicted with members of family or other real people;
4. the "separate or natural" self-portrait, where the artist is depicted alone.

However these classes are not so rigid, in fact many artists manage to combine several of them.

A self-portrait may be a portrait of the artist, or a portrait included in a larger work, including a group portrait. Many painters are said to have included depictions of

specific individuals, including themselves, in painting figures in religious or other types of composition not intended to depict the actual persons as themselves. Often these are just faces in a crowd, often at the corner of the work, but a particular hybrid genre developed where historical scenes were depicted using a number of actual persons as models, often including the artist, giving the work a double function as portrait and history painting.

Inserted self-portraits

The great Italian painters of the Renaissance made comparatively few formal painted self-portraits, but often included themselves in larger works.

- a) Masaccio(1401-1428) depicted himself as one of the apostles in the painting of the [Brancacci Chapel](#),
- b) Sandro Botticelli's painting of the *Adoration of the Magi* (1475, tempera on canvas, Florence, Uffizi Gallery) has an "inserted self-portrait". The position in the (right) corner, and the gaze out to the viewer, are very typical of such self-portraits; as a spectator of the [Adoration of the Magi](#), who turns from the scene to look at us.
- c) Piero della Francesca as a sleeping soldier in his *Resurrection* (1463, fresco, San Sepolcro).



Masaccio inserted self-portrait from the Brancacci Chapel frescoes.



fresco, Sansepolcro.

Piero della Francesca as sleeping soldier in his *Resurrection*, 1463



Sandro Botticelli's painting of the Adoration of the Magi has an "inserted self-portrait".

Painters at work

Self-portraits of the artist at work were the commonest form of medieval self-portrait, and these have continued to be popular, with a specially large number from the eighteenth century on. A famous large view of the artist in his studio is *The Painter's atelier* by Gustave Courbet (1855, Paris, Musée d'Orsay), an immense "Allegory" of objects and characters amid which the painter sits.

Other meanings

A self-portrait can be as varied and limitless as our imagination. A self-portrait can be an exact likeness or an abstract whirl of thoughts and feelings. It has the potential to create a myth, tell a story, suggest sadness or jubilation. A self-portrait is a person's version of himself/herself.

A classification includes these typologies

1. *Analysis*: A self-portrait is an exploration of your face, body and personality.
2. *Authorship*: A self-portrait is an historical record of the person that made it, left behind for posterity.
3. *Autobiography*: A self-portrait can be a visual journal documenting something that is happening or has happened in your life. The self-portraits of many contemporary artists and modernists often are characterized by a strong sense of narrative which recalls fantasy, role-playing and fiction.
4. *Advertising*: A self-portrait is a demonstration of style and skill to show to prospective clients. The self-portrait can be a very effective form of advertising for an artist, especially for a portrait painter. With the advent of regular Academy shows, many artists tried to produce memorable self-portraits to make an impression on the artistic stage.

5. *Availability*: A self-portrait can be a way to experiment with pose and technique using a readily available model.

What does a self-portrait tell the viewer?

The artist had to think and decide on the following:

- How large or small to make a self-portrait?. People will feel very different standing and peering at a tiny image, than standing back and gazing up at a huge one.
- Where to place the figure?. Usually the face is the focal point of a portrait and is positioned somewhere near the middle, but it doesn't have to be necessarily located there. A self-portrait can be a detail of the artist's face or can represent his three dimensional body .
- Is there a background behind the figure?. Some artists use a plain colour in the background to heighten the atmosphere of their portrait.
- Clothes?. Some artists dress up for their portraits and don't just wear their normal painting clothes. What do the clothes say about a person? Are they an indication of one's true self or are they a disguise?
- Props in the portrait give a sense of interests or personality. An artist may be holding something or include objects in a more abstract or symbolic way.
- Pose?. What does artist's body language communicate?
- Facial expression?. Do they indicate how the artist is feeling?
- Artist at work?. Sometimes you can tell a self-portrait because the artist has depicted themselves working at an easel or on paper.
- Is the artist the only figure in a self-portrait?. We usually think of a self-portrait as being an image just of the artist but if someone else is included, a partner or family member for example, the self-portrait can also be about the relationship between the artist and that person.

Interview with Umberto Boccioni



Why did you cover your first self portrait?

I covered my first self portrait because it didn't represent me anymore, physically and emotionally. In fact I painted this portrait just because I was very happy, I had just discovered my passion for painting and I wanted to keep it for myself, when I was sad or disconsolate, to remind me I am a painter. Of course during the years my painting changed, I discovered new ways, new techniques to practice in my paintings. So, for example, I replaced the typical pointillist background of the first portrait with a futurist one: the free colored brushes turned into a more controlled background, which often represent the scenery of a city. I started with the pointillism but I have always been interested in a futuristic view of reality, so I thought that a more futuristic portrait would have been more representative of my personality.

Why did you change your style during the years?

I changed my style during the years because, as I said, I needed to move on, to find out new ways to represent reality, feelings and the society that was changing. I couldn't do it without representing the dynamic and frenetic life of that period. I needed to focus my attention on these aspects of the painting and also on sculpture, anyway, I wrote the Manifesto of Futurist Painters which explains my theories about dynamism and the simultaneity. After that, I practiced dynamism not

[Torna all'indice](#)

only in my sculptures, also in painting, which turned into a more surrealistic one. In fact I amalgamated the exterior and the interior part of the object or the person I represented, I painted them as I saw them but also as I remembered them. The result is that the painting is a moving figure in the space.

You are also a famous sculptor, what do you prefer, painting or sculpture? I really like both, because I can do different experiments, for example with the sculpture I can use different types of materials in the same work, as I explain in my Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting and with the painting I can experiment the various effects of the color and the reality of the frenetic life. Personally I'm interested in creating something different from the common art: in many paintings I represent banal events which, under a specific light and with specific colors turn into unique painting, this is not possible with sculptures. Of course, sculptures have a stronger visual impact on people, but my sculptures are not so easy to understand so the public appreciate my paintings less than my sculptures.

What do you think about the World War and why did you enlist in the army? When the World War broke out in Europe in 1914 I was a man, I was charmed by my friends and futurist artist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's ideas. He thought that the war was the only hygiene for the world. I was in favor of the war and I was a member of the group of interventionists who considers the war the only way to unite Italy and to make the national unity stronger. Some other artists, friends of mine, had political purposes but I didn't care about politics. In fact I enlisted, as a volunteer in the army, only because I wanted to win the war and help to unite our nation and to expel the Austrians.

What is your favorite work of art and why?

My favorite work of art is "Elasticity" because finally I was able to recreate the universal movement not the relative one and I was able to reach an abstraction never touched before, which didn't make it difficult to understand or to recognize the subject.

I like the way I rebuilt, with tension, the dynamism of an industrial environment and the whirl of lines, besides I like the colors I used (red, blue, yellow, orange, green) that mixed together perfectly. I am very proud of my work and for what I was able to reach.

Why did you never get married?

My whole life has always been a nomadic life. I have often changed cities since my childhood because my father was a civil servant so he was forced to move around Italy a lot. Growing up this "movement mania" didn't leave me.

After graduating in Catania I went to Rome, then to Paris, after some months I went to Russia, then I came back to Italy, to Padova, but I wanted to discover the new techniques of "Sturm und Drang" in Monaco, in the end I came back to Italy to Milan before leaving for the war.

I am a person that loves travelling, seeing, learning and discovering new things, so I have never stayed long in one place. The consequence is that I haven't enough time to meet and fall in love with a woman. But I'm happy because my only true interest, the only true love of my life is Art.



AN INTERVIEW WITH CANOVA

the hidden secrets of his life

Why did you decide to paint a self-portrait?

I decided to paint myself when I was 30 years old.

I wanted to leave a personal picture because when I die new artists can remember the man who dedicated all his life to the Arts.

In the picture I didn't want to show only my physical appearance because I wanted to create a kind of complicity with the spectators only with my glance.

When people admire my portrait I hope that my painting will catch their attention because I drew it with passion.

Why did you paint yourself with a brush?

I represented myself with a brush because I didn't want to forget the painting that I loved when I was in Venice.

In this city I studied drawing and I went to the naked portrait school where I was inspired by mould.

To paint this canvass I used a mirror of my workshop.

I worked hard to represent myself and I spent a whole month working on it.

At the beginning it was difficult because I had to paint and look at my person in the mirror at the same time.

The most difficult parts to paint are the hand, which keeps the brush, and the eyes. These were especially complicated to create my real expression.

Although painting is very different from sculpture I was fascinated with it since I was young.

But why didn't you continue your painting career?

Oh...that's a good question!!

Since my youth I was enchanted by the emotions that a painting can transmit, but I was conscious that my destiny was sculpture.

When I was 6 years old during an important dinner with a Venetian noble I was bored so I started to engrave with a knife a lion on a piece of butter.

The owner of the house saw my talent and he decided to show me his collection of ancient Arts.

When I saw these ancient masterpieces I was shocked for so much beauty.

Moreover the noble man helped me to start my artistic studies and to improve my talent.

Can I ask you a personal question?

Why didn't you get married?

First of all I never fall in love with a woman because I have always loved only Art. Every single thought was only for sculpture and I didn't have time to waste in useless love stories.

I have never needed to create a family because my real family was in Possagno and my heir was my brother.

All my works are my children; they give me emotions as no-one else!

Sorry, can I ask you one more question?

Yes, sure.

Why is Possagno so important for you?

Oh..Possagno is the place where I was born. There I left my family and all my childhood memories.

In Possagno I started my career, I produced there my first works that were bought by the citizens of this small village so I think that mostly it is for these reasons that I love this place so much.

To show my love I decided to plan a temple, I spent my fortune to make it but all the community took part on the realization offering materials and voluntary work.

Unfortunately, I died when the works started but I'm very proud of the final result.

What is your favourite statue?

There is no statue that I love more than others but the best one is "Paolina Borghese come Venere Vincitrice." which I realized from 1804 to 1808.

When her husband, Camillo Borghese, asked me to engrave the statue of his wife I was glad because I had the opportunity to work with a beautiful woman.

I decided to represent her as a divinity because she always had good manners and she was very patient when I worked for her statue.

I don't want to show off but I think that Paolina Borghese is a masterpiece.

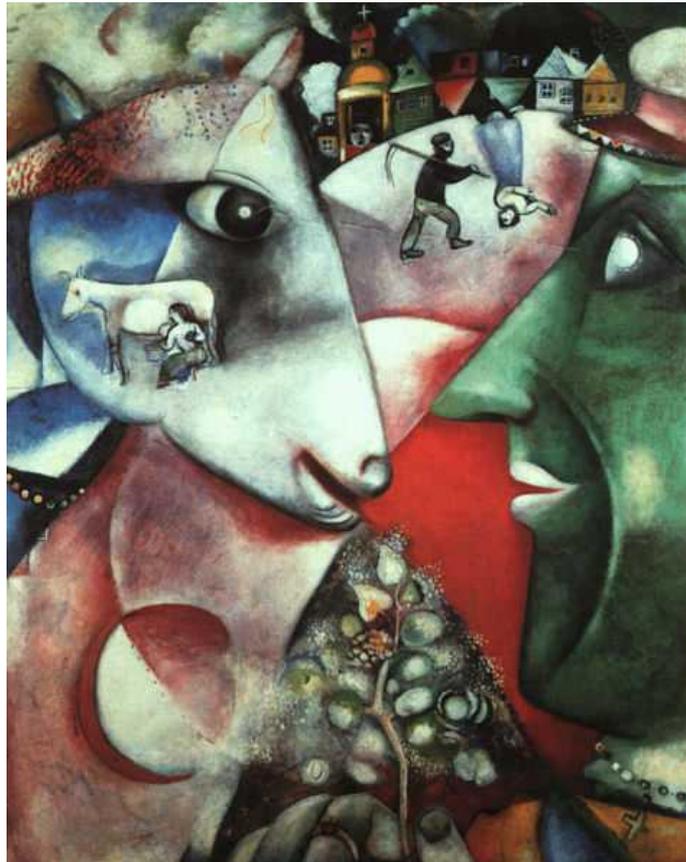
For this work I used not only marble but also wood that came from Africa.

When I finished the statue the result was magnificent; the "marble woman" looked like a real woman lying down on a sofa.

For this complex work of art I was paid very much but I spent all of it going to Rome and buying my new instruments for my work.

Stefania Moretto - Anastasia Serra 5^C erica a. s. 2008 2009

INTERVIEW WITH MARC CHAGALL



- Why do you often represent a goat and a violin in your paintings? Does it have a meaning?

I often represent goats and violins in my paintings because in my religion, Judaism, the goat is often used as a sacrifice for God in the Old Testament, but I was also struck by different paintings for example Goya's "Caprichos" where there are a lot of hybrid images like the man that seems a donkey. When I was a child I had violin lessons with a nextdoor neighbour and I wanted to become a violinist because the violin, used by east – European klezmer Jewish is an instrument that shows love and happiness to other people.

- Why did you move to France?

In 1910 I moved to Paris thanks to a rich merchant that funded my travel to let me approach European art. In Paris I made friends with Guillaume Apollinaire, Robert Delaunay, and Fernand Léger who influenced my artistic style.

- Has the Jewish persecution influenced your paintings?

In 1941 I was forced to leave Paris and escape to Spain first and then to the United States. Nazism and the Jewish persecution gave me strength to realize big paintings dedicated to terror and martyrdom and through those works I obviously endorsed Jewish people. One of my paintings called “The White Crucifixion” represents a denunciation of the Stalin regime, the Nazi Holocaust, and all oppression of which Jews are victims.

- Do you feel a strong connection with your birthplace?

When I work on a new painting I am always inspired by the popular Belorussian life, so I can say that my birthplace influenced my paintings. I also feel a strong connection with my religion, in fact I portrayed several biblical episodes that reflect my Jewish culture.

- You had relationships with three women in your life: who was the most important for you?

I have loved three women in my life: Bella Rosenfeld who I met in my birthplace in 1909 and with her I had a daughter, whose name is Ida, my second lover was the English woman Virginia Haggard, and with her I had a son, and the third woman was Valentina Brodsky, who I married in 1952.

But the most important woman for me was Bella, because she was my first wife, with her I had my first daughter and she makes me remember my birthplace. To point out the importance of them in my life I represent Bella and Ida in many of my early and most famous paintings. When she died I fell into depression for several years till I met Virginia, my second wife.

- Talk us about your famous painting “I and the Village”

It’s an oil painting of 1911, the artwork features many soft, dreamlike images overlapping each other: in the foreground, a cap-wearing green-faced man stares at a goat with the image of a smaller goat being milked on its cheek. In the foreground there is a glowing tree held in the man's dark hand. The background features a collection of houses next to an Orthodox church, and an upside-down female violinist in front of a black-clothed man holding a scythe. *I and the Village* shows the relationship between me and my place of birth. The significance of the painting lies in its

seamless integration of various elements of Eastern European folktales and culture, both Russian and Yiddish; it has many symbolic elements (e.g. The Tree of Life); and its style is new and groundbreaking. Its frenetic, fanciful style is due to my childhood memories becoming shaped and reshaped by my imagination but not diminishing with the passing of time.

- Has the artistic style of your time influenced your paintings?

My artworks are difficult to categorize. Working in the pre-World War I Paris art world, I was involved with avant-garde currents, however, my work was consistently on the fringes of popular art movements and emerging trends, including Cubism and Fauvism, among others. But while for the Cubists a painting was a surface covered with forms in a certain order for me a painting is a surface covered with representations of things . . . in which logic and illustration have no importance. I was closely associated with the Paris School and its exponents, including Amedeo Modigliani. I was also associated with the Surrealist Movement. Especially because my imaginative works reflect the resonance of fantasy and dreams.

- Did you try different techniques?

Yes, I experimented with numerous techniques: gouache, watercolors, pastels, ink, collage, engraving, and lithography. I also became involved with large-scale projects involving public spaces and important civic and religious buildings such as in 1960 I created stained glass windows for the synagogue of the Hadassah University Clinic in Jerusalem and in 1966, wall art for the new parliament being constructed in that city.

INTERVIEW with GIORGIO DE CHIRICO



When did you decide to become an artist?

Since I was very young, art has been my passion and my father supported me. He let me take my first drawing lessons with the Greek painter Mavrudis. To tell the truth, in these times I couldn't imagine that in the future I would become an artist.

So, when did your artistic career start?

Well, my real artistic career started in 1911 when I was 23 years old. In that year I travelled to Paris with my mother and my brother. There I got in touch with the French artistic-cultural avant-garde circles and in the same year I exhibited three of my works at the Salon d'Automne.

Which important events changed your life?

Yes, I think that everybody has, during his or her lifetime, many experiences that lead to changes.

My life was influenced by my father's death: I was so shocked by this event, that I failed my final exams at the Higher School of Fine Arts in Athens. Another significant historical event for me was the First World War. During this period I stayed at the military hospital in Ferrara because of my nervous condition and There I met Carlo Carrà. He stimulated me in my art, particularly in the creation of mannequin paintings. Out of this exchange grew "Pittura Metafisica".

Who is the most significant person in your life?

The most significant person in my life is Mavrudis, my first drawing teacher. I was enchanted by his cleverness. He taught me perfectly how to draw and he was so good that I thought he could draw everything.

Which are the features of your art?

My art is difficult to define because I didn't follow a single art movement: I always experienced new subjects and new techniques but I also studied classic art. In my paintings I mix a lot of classical elements with my new inventions. I like painting city elements in a surrealist contest and my paintings' atmosphere is full of mystery and tension. Maybe, my mysterious art come from the type of headache I suffer from: sometimes I have strange visions and I think I am a sort of clairvoyant.

My artistic and philosophic researches were influenced by the readings of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.

In your metaphysical paintings there are a lot of architectural elements in a very good perspective. Where do this inspiration come from?

When I moved to Florence in 1910 I was influenced by Giotto and primitive Tuscan painting, characterized by a style rich in perspective layouts and constructions with arches.

The architectural elements in my paintings are taken from real places. For example I often take inspiration from Volos, the Greek town where I grew up. But not only Volos inspires me, the richest sources of imagery is Turin: The Mole Antonelliana often appears in my paintings.

Could you explain why you choose to depict yourself as you did in your self-portrait of 1920?

Sure. There is a very personal reason if I chose to depict myself as I did there; It is connected to my headache. When I didn't feel well, I have my usual visions and sometimes I saw me mirrored in another myself. It is like there were two persons coexisting in myself, so I decided to paint me twice. But while the first being is really me, the other is a statue and represents my vision, the illusion.

Sabrina Cecchini 5A Erica ITC Deganutti

a.s. 2008 2009

Interview with Paul Gauguin



1-Why did you decide to paint your self-portrait? And why did you present yourself in this way?

It was 1893, I had just come back from Polynesia. I wanted to show French artists my new rough and wild painting-style, but nobody appreciated it. That was one of the worst periods of my life but I needed to react. So one day I started painting this self-portrait, my final objective was to show to the rest of the world the deep change in my life.

I represented myself in my new studio, which I had personally painted in green and yellow, to remember the lively colours of Tahiti and I furnished it with exotic objects like the blue and yellow cloth that you see in the background and the table and the chair, all coming from Polynesia.

I painted myself in quite a shabby way, with a hat, which I often used to paint in the open-air when I was in Polynesia and a jacket, bought in Tahiti. I wanted to give the image of a savage artist, with something primitive. Even my facial expression reflects my rebellious nature.

The picture in the background, hung on the wall, is one of my favourites. I consider it the best I painted during my stay in Polynesia, the title is Manau Tupapaù, which means Spirit of the Dead Watching (1892). This painting is so important for me that I represented it.

The roughness of the picture is emphasized by the simple brush-stroke and by the rough material of the canvas.

2-How and why did you start your artistic career?

After my journeys sailing around in the Merchant Marine and then in the French Navy I returned to France in 1870 where I took a well paid job, becoming a successful broker's assistant. Later I started my artistic career thanks only to my guardian, Gustave Arosa, a successful businessman and art collector. He introduced me to the art leagues of Paris and his daughter taught me the rudiments of painting. I became more and more interested in exhibitions and in 1874 I decide to attend the Colarossi Academy. In the same period Arosa introduced me to Émile Schuffenecker and Camille Pissarro. I kept working for the stock business but I spent a lot of time painting with Pissarro and Cezanne and I made visible progress. In 1876 I showed my first work at the salon and I accepted Pissarro's invitation to join the 4° Impressionist exhibition. After that, I took part in all the other Impressionist exhibitions and I devoted my life to art.

[Torna all'indice](#)

3-When did you meet Van Gogh? Did you establish a friendship with him?

I met Vincent Van Gogh for the first time in November 1886 thanks to his brother Theo. The latter in fact was running a small art gallery in Paris where I was staying at that time. Then in 1888 Vincent invited me to go to live in Arles, but I refused and left for Pont Aven. I met the Van Gogh brothers again in the summer of the same year when I signed a contract with Theo declaring that I would have painted for him one work each month in exchange for a 150 franc-wage. Then he invited me to join his brother in Arles, Provence, paying my stay for me there. I couldn't reject so much money, so I accepted. While Vincent expressed admiration towards me, I never could stand his sloppy habits, moody personality and opinions about art, which have always been too different from mine. Anyway we painted together nearby the town, till I broke up with him as everybody knows. One night he raised his elbow a little bit too much and we started arguing in a café so I left and he followed me holding a razor. I spent that night in a hotel. He's always been emotionally unstable and when he got home he may have had an hysterical fit and cut off his hear. For a while I got in trouble for that, but then the police recognized my innocence and let me leave for Paris. I never met Vincent again.

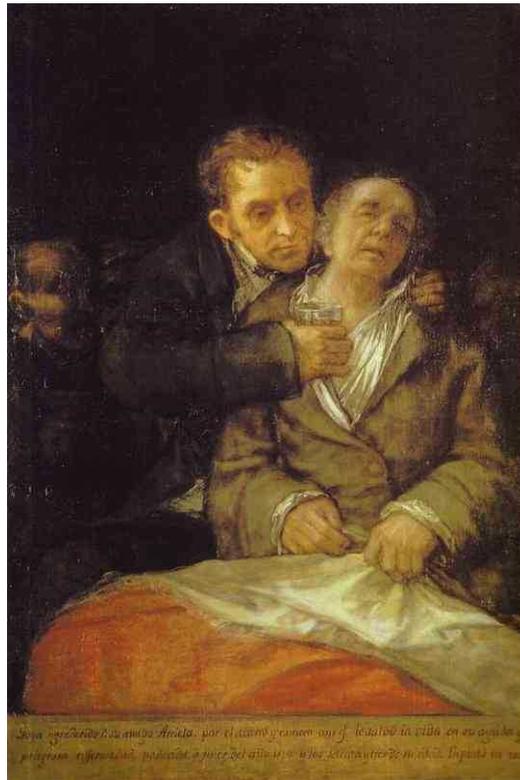
4-Why were you so interested in exotic landscapes and indigenous life style? Did they influence your art?

My passion for exotic landscapes and indigenous life style are a consequence of my interest in the concepts of "primitive" and "wild". I first found them in nature and in the quiet life style of Bretagne. To achieve my goal of creating a primitive painting that could reflect the deepest aspects of the inner life I started to simplify my art evolving it towards Cloisonnism while I was in Provence. (I reduced the images to areas of pure colour separated by heavy black outlines, I paid little attention to classical perspective and I eliminated subtle gradations of colour.) Anyway my art wasn't appreciated in Europe and I wanted to escape from its civilized society, which I have always hated, to follow my desire of freedom and quiet, far from civilization. Tahiti offered me the occasion both to satisfy those needs and to keep in contact with wild nature and humanity so I could find the real essence of the human being. The mysterious landscapes of Polynesia, the sacredness of its population and its colours struck me and influenced my art, which in that period was characterised by bright colours and mysticism.

5-What was the reaction of the public to your new painting influenced by the Polynesian civilizations?

After my first journey in Polynesia I wanted to impress and finally obtain critical success from the public with my primitive art. However the museum of Luxembourg had just refused my work as a gift and my last exhibit of Tahitian masterpieces wasn't appreciated. Just a few painters and critics, as Degas, Jarry and Natanson, believed in my painting while the majority of my colleagues, especially impressionists, still disliked my art. I think that the public didn't understand my simple art, first of all because they preferred the original impressionist style, and secondly because I refused to paint the European image of exotic countries. Instead I wanted to show the real Polynesian nature and civilization. As a consequence I believe the public at that time was not ready to appreciate such a deep art as mine.

Interview with Francisco de Goya



1. Your self-portrait with Dr. Arrieta shows a difficult moment in your life. People tried to explain it the best they could, but they know little of your life from that period. Could you tell me what were the real circumstances you were going through at that time?

That period was maybe the climax of my life. It was at my residence in France shortly after my son's visit. His coming pleased me so much but at the same time reminded me of the good times that were gone. Francisco, my son, stayed with me for a while but then he had to leave. No sooner had he left that I had a psychological breakdown. I was overwhelmed again with hallucinations. I felt like all the terrible things I had seen during the war in Spain were coming after me. It seemed that I was always followed by ghosts. I was very confused and I did not know how to react anymore and how to fight against those haunting images. I locked myself in the house. I wasn't able to hear any real sounds but only my imaginary world that I couldn't bear any longer.

2. Who was Dr. Arrieta?

Dr. Arrieta was an old friend of mine. Those days he came to visit me various times but he noticed that the door was constantly closed and no one answered. So finally one day he forced the door and got in finding me almost dead on my bed. He came like an angel in my anxious life and gave me the relief of the Good Samaritan.

3. I see... The picture it's a mixture of colours, shapes and figures put together in order to reflect various feelings. Could you explain now the connections between the complex representation and your feelings?

The picture is part of my last works known as Black Pictures. It represents a moment of

compassion and relief of a restless and desperate state of mind. The background is covered by a heavy layer of black which represents death. This is connected to my psychological state of mind of that period . I was depressed and I saw nothing but death before me. I remembered the death of many people who had died in the war. I was desperate to recall many friends of mine that had died in odd situations during the Inquisition. My wife was dead too. I had no one to comfort me and stay beside me.

Then the pale and strange figures placed on both sides of my back express the hallucinations that wandered in my mind. They seemed to be the ghosts of the people that I saw dying before my eyes. There were people, most of them not guilty, tortured and executed by the Catholic Church.

4. Why did you use red at the bottom of the painting? What did you want to express through it?

There are three reasons I used for it. First of all Dr. Arrieta loved his neighbours; and one of them was me. This idea I expressed by the red colour of the blanket that covers me. The same red means also the war I saw with the innocent blood of my people that poured for such an unchristian reason. And finally that pale red from the left means my life, my weak living close to its end.

5. Why did you paint yourself the way you did?

I represented myself abandoned in the arms of my friend and doctor to show my longing for a protected refuge where to escape to. I was relieved in Dr. Arrieta's arms but not completely. There were moments in my life when I felt that there wasn't any strong reason to live for. The terrible events I saw made me feel this way. I expressed this by the white and grey colours of my shirt and bed sheet.

6. Why did you choose to depict yourself in Dr. Arrieta's arms?

Dr. Arrieta was a strong consolation for me. He comforted me and showed me charity. He really took care of me for quite a long time. I chose to depict myself in his arms to express what he did for me and to show my gratitude to him. This picture it's a gift to him for his care.

7. When and why did you break with the tradition?

According to the tradition I should not depict historical events of my times but those of ancient times. So I can say that I broke with it when I started to paint the tragic events and consequences of the war and Inquisition. I just couldn't accept this request of the tradition. I couldn't stay away from reality. I couldn't deny the reality I was living in and only enjoy the position of court painter. I wanted to let others know the truth about what happened in Spain in those times and not let them get just an understatement of it.

8. Which is your favourite work?

Each period of my life is represented somehow by one painting which is like a title of that period. I tell you now about one of this works from my early career as painter. I was about 34 at the time I painted "Christ on the cross". I considered for long this painting very close to me because of its relevant meanings. It is a complex work despite the reduced colours I used to it.

The painting represents the sufferance of Christ on the cross but as well it is a symbol of what

[Torna all'indice](#)

was happening in my country at the time I painted it. It was about Inquisition. There were people deeply suffering for supposed faults invented by the Catholic Church of those times. This is what the picture represents: sufferance for doing nothing wrong. In the foreground I represented Christ suffering for sins He had never committed and the background is covered with heavy layers of black which refers to death. It was the death of Christ; it was the death of many accused people of the Inquisition.

There is a contrast between foreground and background, between black and the nude colour of the body which seems to be brightened up from above. The face of Christ is lifted up looking upwards, seeking the face of God and the relief of His Father. This raising of His face expresses His steadfast belief in God despite the circumstances.

I wanted to encourage through this painting the people in pain to keep looking to their Creator and to not lose their faith but trust God who really cares for them and who will give them relief one day.

Silvana Todos 5 C erica ITC Deganutti a.s. 2008 -2009

Vincent Van Gogh: the story beyond a self-portrait.

We are here today with Sir Vincent who kindly accepted this interview after almost 110 years of silence, it's my pleasure to start this unique conversation, trying to understand your character with a simple but significant question:

- Mr. Van Gogh we know you as a sensitive, introverted but some times even very "loony" persona, so please tell me which important event changed your life?

Oh dear thank you for having me today, this is such an important opportunity to clear some facts that everyone keep talking about even nowadays.

To answer your question you need to know that during my troubled life I've passed through some dark periods, I was able to find peace just in my frenetic work as artist. I tried different techniques and combination of colors. But I suffered of a form of epilepsy that caused in me a weird behavior. So one afternoon my dear friend Gauguin was visiting me in my nice little yellow house. I've always enjoyed his presence, well this time Paul was worried, because I was acting very nervous, we started arguing about his technique (I strongly believed that he needed a change!), I was such a stupid you know, I've always criticized his work in the past, but this time was different. I was out of myself, he didn't want to listen what I was saying (actually nobody ever did it!), but I was used to it! He was scared when he left me alone, I felt so empty without him. That makes me realize that Paul was the only one who truly tried to understand me...And that he was gone..Forever!

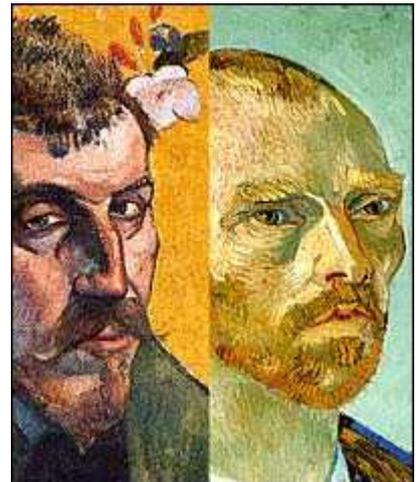
I was so sensitive at that time that I grabbed the knife (the one that I used that morning to cut some onions..You know I'm a great cook!) and two seconds later a piece of my ear fell down on the ground. It was just a little piece (no the whole ear as everyone think!), but the blood was everywhere around. Everything that I felt later was just a confusing fog inside my brain.

-How fascinating Mr. Van Gogh!

Oh you can call me Vince, I'm not very into formal stuff.

-Ok Vince, the next question that I would like to ask you is: Who the most significant person in your life?

I suppose that an answer such as my parents or relatives would be too easy and boring. Even if my dear brother Theo was my best supporter, I bet you know that the most important person in my life was my dear and fair friend Paul Gauguin.



We were very close and we shared some very interesting pices of life together. After a peaceful period spent together in Southern-France painting (that was a delightful place!) he left me as I said before and he moved in South-Pacific. I know that was my fault, I know he loved me, but life with the old Vince is very hard...Let's say I'm not the perfect room mate!

-Well, don't say that Vince, you are not a bad person! Do you know that your pictures nowadays are the most expansive pices of work of all times? What do you think about it?

Oh please don't even say it!!! Through all my life I've spent my days chasing money, as you know my dad was just a Shepard of a small community in Netherlands, only my brother Theo was able to halp me with some money every now and than, so when I chosed to move in France I was truly hoping in a better life. But, my dear, life is hard and not always able to pay back your efforts. Well actually it did it with me, unfortunately when people started to appriciate my hard work and pay it with big money I was...Uhm...already dead!!!



-But Mr. you chosed to stop your life remeber?

Yes, you made a good point. I've always been the only one to make decisions about my life, I was (well I still am in a certain way) a free spirit and at that time I thoght that it was better for me to stop my miserable life even if I was a deep believer of God Word. Which man is the one who can't be what he want to be? Which man is the one who can't live without his brother money? Which man is the one who scared to dead his best friend with a pice of his own ear in the mail? At that point I wasn't even able to finish my work... My life was useless! I was just 37 but every single year weight on me in a terrifying way. My mind was full of voices and I was obsessed by the mess that was going on in my brain!

-Oh I see Vince, I'm sorry, I suppose that this still hurts you badely. But that's why people marked you as the "Mad Genius" because of your original personality isn't it right?

I guess so, but I would like much better to be remebered as a brilliant artist instead of a "Crazy Horse" with a trubled life. But I suppose that this is my fault too... I couldn't halp it! I was possessed by this crazy voices inside my head, I've to say that now that I'm dead it gets better! People see just what they want to see and they think to me as a weirdo, they don't understand my art, they see just a nice picture with nice colors,

but there's more! My art is impulsive, simple but complicated at the same time...it reflects my personality!

[Torna all'indice](#)

As I always say the best picture, the most complete one seen from nearby, is just patches of colors side by side, but it will make sense only if you look at it from a certain distance. The same is for me, if you look at my life closely you will see just a big mess, but if you take the distances and you analyse just the good things, you will see that I'm not such a weird person, you will see that I've always tried my best in everything I did.

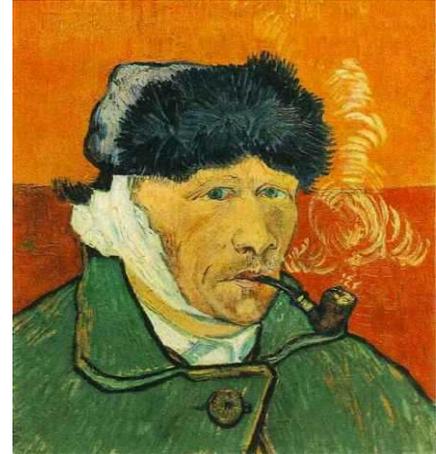
-Well said Sir! Interesting point of view! Now if you don't mind I would like to ask you about your self-portrait with pipe...

Oh my beloved pipe!!! Thanks for the question I love to talk about this picture, is one of my favourite, because of the colors, they are so brilliant and I've marked the borders in such a meticulous way. I'm proud of this piece of work! You know in 1889 I was in Paris and I was very into the self-portrait thing. I started looking for an inspiring model, but they were so expensive for my empty pockets!

So I chose to depict myself (even if I wasn't very happy with that!) with different expressions, from different point of view, with different colors, with my hat on or without it.

But the one that expresses better my status at that time it's most certainly this one. Just look at it and you will understand how much I was suffering, you can tell it by the eyes, my pale face, the lost expression and the bandage on my ear. If you look close at my eyes you can see how proud I was even if the situation wasn't the best one! This is a sign of my strong personality: my stare. I look so old, but I was just 36, can you believe it?

You know, one of my bad habits that my dad passed me was smoking. That pipe is one of the few presents that he ever gave me. As I always say: the best picture is the one made while smoking my dear pipe!



Useful Web Sites for Self- portrait Artists

All Artists

<http://userpages.umbc.edu/~ivy/selfportrait/study.html>

<http://www.artinthepicture.com/artists/> see quotes

Canova <http://www.scultura-italiana.com/Galleria/Canova%20Antonio/imagepages/image18.html>

<http://www.museocanova.it/menu.php?name=canvituno&lang=uk>

Delacroix http://www.artinthepicture.com/artists/Eugene_Delacroix/Biography/

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/D/delacroix.html>

http://www.bookrags.com/wiki/Liberty_Leading_the_People

<http://www.answers.com/topic/eug-ne-delacroix>

Courbet http://www.artinthepicture.com/artists/Gustave_Courbet/Biography/

http://www.metmuseum.org/special/gustave_courbet/view_1.asp?item=0

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/C/courbet.html>

<http://userpages.umbc.edu/~ivy/selfportrait/fantasy.html>

GOYA http://www.artinthepicture.com/artists/Francisco_Goya/Biography/

<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=535989>

<http://tribes.tribe.net/affirmingmercy/photos/5f4a4e16-ebd6-4898-af00-dc76700d81bb>

Chagall http://www.artinthepicture.com/artists/Marc_Chagall/Biography/

http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A1055&page_number=3&template_id=1&sort_order=1

BOCCIONI http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/boccioni_umberto.html

http://www.moma.org/collection/details.php?artist_id=2206§ion_id=T033021

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/B/boccioni.html>

Van Gogh http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/self_portraits/bio_van_gogh.shtm

Paul Gauguin http://www.artinthepicture.com/artists/Paul_Gauguin/Biography/

http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/self_portraits/bio_gauguin.shtm

De Chirico <http://www.italica.rai.it/eng/principal/topics/bio/dechirico.htm>

http://www.fondazionedechirico.it/eng/eng_index.html

[Torna all'indice](#)

http://www.moma.org/collection/details.php?artist_id=1106§ion_id=T021740

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,922868-1,00.html>

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

<http://www.art-ww1.com/gb/texte/010text.html>

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/K/kirchner.html>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/collective/A1098498>

<http://www.art-ww1.com/gb/texte/010text.html>

<http://www.kilidavid.com/Art/Pages/Artists/kirchner.htm>

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS

Could you explain why you chose to depict yourself like you did in this self-portrait?

When did you decide to become an artist?

What historical/important event changed your life?

Who was the most significant person in your life?

Why did you break with tradition? Why was your technique new/traditional?

Which is your favourite work?

What do you think of the way your work is interpreted today?

Would you have ever expected someone to pay so much money for your paintings?