

## Dream of Being an Artist Teacher's Notes **A2** **B1**

***The Dream of Being an Artist*** is an exhibition being held in Lille's *Palais des Beaux Arts* until January 6 2020. Over a hundred works from different areas and spanning several centuries, the exhibition questions the way artists have been considered in society and perceive themselves. It includes several works by contemporary English speaking artists. The subject fits the new syllabus for the *classe de seconde* – “*Axe 6: la création et le rapport aux arts*”.

In this **A2-B1** sequence, students talk about artists they like and what they think makes an artist before reading a text about the vision of artists and arts in society throughout history. Then, they are given reproductions of several works that will be on display in Lille – an occasion for them to discover contemporary artists and start a reflection about arts and artists in society.

### Culture, language and structures

- a few contemporary artists
- how artists have been considered throughout history
- describing and commenting
- opposing and contrasting
- the passive form

### Introducing the topic – Speaking

■ Ask students to name a few artists they like. You are likely to have mainly singers, actors and actresses. Accept it. See if they can name painters, photographers or sculptors, though, but let them answer according to their tastes and personal knowledge. Encourage them to mention a few works (paintings, songs, movies...) these artists made or were involved in and try and have them explain what they like about these artists and works. Help them gradually develop their interventions asking for details or feigning ignorance or incomprehension – a good way to encourage them towards more precision. After a few examples, see if they can find

common points and explain what being an artist means for them. See **Activity 1** for some guidance.

### The way artists have been considered throughout history – Reading

Students read a text and discover that artists haven't always been considered the same way throughout history. **Activity 2**

### Several works by contemporary artists – Speaking and Reading

Show students several works that will be displayed in Lille's Palais des Beaux Arts:

*Bobble Head* by Richard Jackson

<http://www.galerie-vallois.com/en/artiste/richard-jackson/>

<https://wsimag.com/galerie-vallois/fr/artworks/55876>

*Masters of the Universe* by Tim Noble and Sue Webster

[http://www.timnobleandsuewebster.com/masters\\_otu\\_2000.html](http://www.timnobleandsuewebster.com/masters_otu_2000.html)

*Art Magazine Ads* by Jeff Koons

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/koons-art-magazine-ads-flash-art-ar01130>

*Self portrait, submerged*, by Bill Viola (the

last page of this pdf, and our site.

It's also possible to see it as a video on the Smithsonian site, but you may have to watch an ad first. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/category/arts-culture/self-portrait-submerged/>

Have students react freely and say what they like or dislike about them. Encourage them to say if these works match their conception of arts.

**Activity 3** offers a matching exercise in which they have to read short presentations and match them with the corresponding works.

## Follow-up Work

Ask students to select a work of art they like and write a short text presentation for it.

## Activity 4

## Solutions

### Activity 2.A.

#### What makes art valuable—then and now

For artists **in the period before the modern era (before about 1800 or so)**, the process of selling art was different than it is now. **In the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, works of art were commissioned, that is, they were ordered by a patron (the person paying for the work of art). A patron usually entered into a contract with an artist that specified how much he would be paid, what kinds of materials would be used, how long it would take to complete, and what the subject of the work would be.**

Not what we would consider artistic freedom—but it did have its advantages. You didn't paint something and then just hope it would sell, the way artists often do **now**.

#### What was the status of the artist before the modern era?

One way to understand this is to think about

what you “order” to have made for you today. A pizza comes to mind—ordered from the cook at the local pizza parlor—“I'll have a large pie with pepperoni,” or a birthday cake from a baker “I'd like a chocolate cake with mocha icing and blue letters that say ‘Happy Birthday Jerry.’”

**In the Middle Ages and even for much of the Renaissance, the artist was seen as someone who worked with his hands—they were considered skilled laborers, craftsmen, or artisans.** This was something that **Renaissance** artists fought fiercely against. They wanted, understandably, to be considered as thinkers and innovators. And **during the Renaissance** the status of the artist does change dramatically, but it **would take centuries** for successful artists to **gain the extremely high status we grant to “art stars” today** (for example, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons, or Damien Hirst).

#### What we value has changed

**Medieval** paintings were often sumptuous objects **made with gold and other precious materials**. What made these paintings valuable were these materials (blue, for example, was often made from the rare and expensive semi-precious stone, Lapis Lazuli). **These materials were lavished on objects to express religious devotion or to reflect the wealth and status of its patron. Today** the value of a painting is often the result of something entirely different. **Picasso could have painted on a napkin and it would have been incredibly valuable just because it was by Picasso**—art is **now** an expression of the artist and materials often have little to do with the worth of the art.

#### B. For example:

*In the past, works of arts were commissioned or ordered by patrons, whereas now, artists often make work and then try to sell it.*

Unlike/Contrary to modern artists like Picasso or Koons who are considered stars, intellectuals and creators, artists in the Middle Ages were considered to be skilled craftsmen or artisans, producing art on themes and in styles chosen by other people.

Nowadays, to make a work of art, you can use materials like/such as felt pens, spray paint or objects you find in the rubbish but in the past, artists had to use materials that were expensive and valuable to show religious devotion or the importance of the patron who ordered the work.

**3.A.1. Masters of the Universe 2. Art Magazine Ads 3. Bobble Head 4. Self portrait, submerged**

**B. For example:**

*I think Bill Viola's self-portrait must be displayed in "Me, Myself and I".*

*Jeff Koons' parodies of adverts could also be in "Me, Myself and I" because he portrays himself in them, but I think they might also Splendour and misery? because he has a workshop and is a rich artist.*

*In my opinion, Masters of the Universe and Bobble Head are most likely to be displayed in Self-mockery! Both works show the artist can laugh at him or herself but they also have an ironic view of our society.*



**Bill Viola,  
Self portrait,  
Submerged,  
2013. Still  
image from  
a video.**