

Dream of Being an Artist Activities **A2** **B1**



Activity 1

A. Note down a few elements to help you develop a short presentation about an artist you like.

1. Name of the artist: _____

2. Activity (*artist painter – sculptor – musician – singer – actor/actress – dancer – photographer...*) : _____

3. Personal information (origins? family? tastes?...) : _____

4. Career as an artist? (prizes? important works? major exhibitions, concerts or films?):

B. Get ready to describe or present one of his/her works.

1. Select one work you like (painting, sculpture, song, movie...) and describe it or sum it up.

2. Say what you like about it.

C. For you, works of art and artists should be...

- beautiful difficult to understand inspiring defending a cause fun
 moving food for thought accessible to everybody famous expensive

Select the two elements you find most important and try and say why using concrete examples.



Activity 2

A. Read the following text.

Underline time references in blue.

Underline elements referring to the way artists were perceived in red.

Underline elements about the way artists created in green.

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.

Adapted from www.khanacademy.org

B. Use your notes to oppose and contrast artists then and now.

In the past, works of arts were... whereas now, ...

Unlike/Contrary to modern artists like Picasso or Koons who are considered... artist in the Middle Ages were...

Nowadays, to make a work of art, you can use materials like/such as... but in the past, artists had to



Activity 3

A. Match the works you have seen to their presentations.

In the presentation, underline the elements that helped you make your decision.

Get ready to justify your choice using those elements.

Bobble Head ● *Masters of the Universe* ● *Art Magazine Ads* ● *Self portrait, submerged*

1. Tim Noble & Sue Webster are among the most celebrated of the emerging generation of British artists. A couple in life as well as in art, they are perhaps one of the most interesting examples of how the two are inextricably intertwined.

Noble & Webster have become known from their silhouetted self-portraits made out of heaps of rubbish. Exploiting the mundane and the kitsch, they transform the most humble materials into complex and visually arresting installations and sculptures. By using the genre of self-portraiture, they also comment and undermine the cult of the celebrity artist and the art world hype surrounding British art in the '90s.

3. Richard Jackson has been one of the main figures in American Contemporary Art since the 1970s. He obtained international recognition in 1988. For the artist, paint is not a tool to create a representational image but is used as an omnipresent liquid that spurts, spouts and splashes on the surface of his sculptures and installations. With this work, Richard Jackson is openly criticising, with humour and wit, the myth of the artistic genius and the figure of the artist as a contemporary symbol of culture. In this self-portrait, he parodies himself as a figurine whose head (wearing his signature cap) bobs as these kitsch gadgets adorning some cars' rear decks.

2. Since his emergence in the 1980s, Jeff Koons has blended the concerns and methods of Pop, Conceptual, and appropriation art with craft-making and popular culture to create his own unique iconography, often controversial and always engaging. His work explores contemporary obsessions with sex and desire, race and gender, and celebrity, media, commerce, and fame. A self-proclaimed "idea man," Koons hires artisans and technicians to make the actual works. For him, the hand of the artist is not the important issue. This suite of colour lithographs presents Koons' iconic visage in playfully bizarre scenes—evoking his flashy, Pop-inspired, larger-than-life style.

4. "Bill Viola approaches portraiture in the spirit of the artists of the early Renaissance, where personal likeness combines with universal themes of spirituality and faith," said Kim Sajet, director of the National Portrait Gallery. "His great gift is to take age-old questions about human experience and re-present them for contemporary life, to connect people over time through the art of video."

Viola's intimate studies of the human face and body depict a range of emotions, gradually revealed by his signature use of slow motion. Viola also turned the camera on himself, making several self-portraits. Water themes course through Viola's art.



B. The works you saw are displayed in an exhibition in Lille. Here is an extract of the exhibition's press release. In what section(s) of the exhibition do you think the works by Richard Jackson, Tim Noble & Sue Webster, Jeff Koons, and Bill Viola will be displayed? Get ready to explain your choices using elements from the text.

Divided into six sections and more than 100 works, the exhibition examines the following themes:

I sign therefore I am?

Making your name in your lifetime and for posterity?

Signing literally means making your name. In the Middle Ages, in illuminated manuscripts, a signature was equivalent to a self-portrait. In the Renaissance, it raised an artisan product to the status of a work of art. Today, it has become a certificate of authenticity, commercial value, a brand or a logo. Sometimes it becomes the work itself.

A place in the sun?

Power, patrons and dealers – making a living from art...

Finding a place in the sun is not easy for an artist who wants creative freedom: courting favour without compromising principles, making a living from art without completely depending on the powerful patrons immortalized in your work.

Achieving greatness?!

The myth of the artist as God?

If you want something done well, do it yourself. Artists created their own legend to prove that they were not like ordinary men or women. From the Renaissance and Giorgio Vasari, who was also an artist, biographies were written in which the artist was represented as a genius, possessing an innate, godlike gift.

Me, Myself & I

What image of oneself for eternity?

What could be better than a self-portrait for creating the myth of the artist? From every angle, full-length, bust, from the front, three-quarters, firstly in ceremonial attire to show off their success, then in scruffy clothing or fancy dress to display their freedom, finally naked and uncompromising to signify their difference, artists know how to represent their condition and the changing states of their soul. In doing so, by becoming both the subject and object of their works, artists demonstrate their own vanity and ours.

Splendour and misery?

The golden myth of the artist, from Bohemian to celebrity

From the “First Painter to the King” to the Bohemian artist, from the Royal Academy to art school, from a miserable garret to a luxury studio, the living and working conditions of artists have gone from one extreme to another. The path to art, like the path to gold, oscillates between poverty to wealth.

Self-mockery!

Shattering your image

Laughing at yourself is an art in itself! Although artists have spent centuries trying to create an extraordinary status, they are also capable of making fun of themselves and representing themselves with uncompromising humour.



Activity 4

Select a work of art you like (painting, photograph, monument or building, sculpture...) and write a short presentation about it.

In you presentation, you should include:

a. A short presentation of the artist.

*It was painted/composed/designed... by... He/She is a... artist from... He/She is famous for...
He/she usually... He/She wants to...*

b. A brief description of the work you selected.

It shows... It is made of... It was displayed in...

c. The reasons you like it.

I'm fond of/crazy about this work because... I think it... It moves/surprises/questions me because...
