

Pixel Portraits

Ages: 5+ (Kindergarten–12)

Duration: Open-ended

Materials Needed: Graph paper, plain paper, and multi-colored construction paper; ruler; glue or tape; regular pencil, plus crayons, markers, or colored pencils; a source photograph or reference from the HRM's permanent collection.

Inspiration: Claudia Blanco (San Jose, CA). *8-bit Frida*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas. Featured in *The World of Frida*, February 4–May 22, 2022, Hudson River Museum.



Introduction

A portrait is a painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artistic representation of a person, in which the focus is the face and its expression. A self-portrait is a portrait of an artist produced or created by that artist. Visionary Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) is known for her many portraits, self-portraits, and works inspired by nature and the vibrant colors found in Mexican culture and fashion. Contemporary artist Claudia Blanco (San Jose, CA) explores and celebrates her Mexican roots through creativity. Let's take a closer look at Claudia's portrait of Frida.

Look

- What's going on in this painting?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Think

- What shape can you find within this portrait? How has the artist used this shape to build the image?
- Can you find any facial features or other clues hidden within the image?
- What colors can you find in this portrait? Where do you think Frida might be?
- What happens if you look at this image from far away? What happens if you look at this image up close?

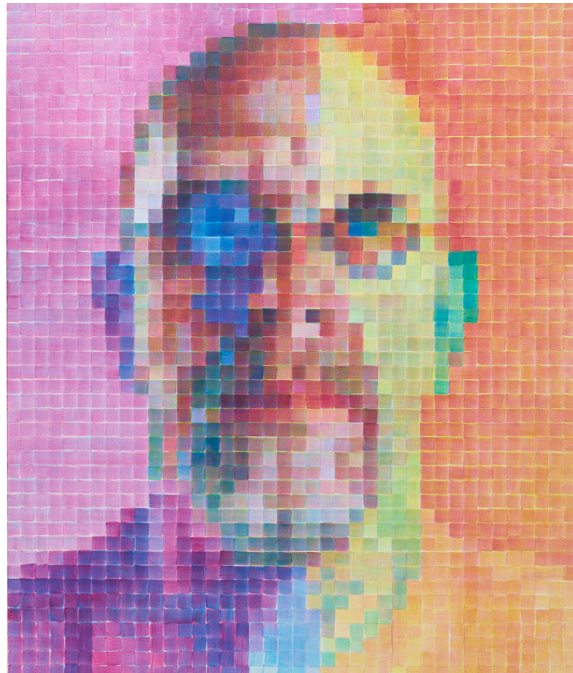
Connect

Claudia Blanco wanted to celebrate Frida in a modern way. On the left is a photograph portrait of Frida Kahlo by Nickolas Muray, which is currently on view in *Frida Kahlo in Context*. Claudia Blanco utilized this work to create her pixel portrait. Claudia used a grid layout inspired by another artist, Chuck Close (American, 1940–2021), for the composition itself. This grid layout is a form of abstraction, or art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of a visual reality but instead uses shapes, colors, forms and gestural marks to achieve its effect. A grid is a network of lines that cross each other to form a series of squares or rectangles.

Compare the photograph with Blanco's painting. Do you notice grid lines? Can you find details from the photograph in the painting? What other similarities can you find? What differences do you see?



Left: Nickolas Muray. *Frida Kahlo on White Bench (2nd Edition)*, New York, 1939. Gelatin silver print, 19 x 14.5 inches. © Nickolas Muray Photo Archives.



Right: Chuck Close. *Self-Portrait I*, 2015. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches. © Chuck Close.

Do

1. First, think of a subject you want to celebrate through a pixel portrait. This can be a person you know, a family member or a friend, or it could be an artist, a fictional character, or even yourself!
2. If you have an existing photograph of that person, take several minutes to look closely at it. You can Google search for an image of your subject too. What colors can you find? What shapes do you see? What details about this person are your favorite? In a pixel portrait, will you want to recreate the entire image, or just a section?
3. If you have graph paper, use a ruler to make a series of marks 1 inch apart on the bottom edge of your paper. Do the same at the top. Then use your ruler to connect the marks bottom to top with a pencil. If you have plain paper only, follow this same procedure. Now, make a series of marks 1 inch apart along the left side of your graph paper, do the same on the right side, and connect the marks with your ruler and pencil left to right. Do the same if you are using plain paper. Note: you can experiment with the size of your grid if 1 inch resulting squares seem too small or large for you.
4. Using scissors and construction paper, cut a pile of 1-inch squares in the main colors you see in your source image.
5. Using plain paper and crayons, markers, and colored pencils, observe and re-draw a few key details from your source image that you would like to hide like clues in your pixel portrait.
6. Arrange your construction paper squares and your drawn details into a re-creation of your source image on your grid. Don't use glue or tape until you are happy with your arrangement!

Reflect

How does your pixel portrait compare with your source image? How is it similar or different? What clues did you include that help viewers know the subject of your portrait? Why did you decide to include these details? What do they tell a viewer about your subject? Why do you think Claudia Blanco left details like Frida's eye, mouth, and flower crown so clear in her celebration of the artist?

Share

Post a photo of your work on Instagram and tag @HudsonRiverMuseum.

Collection Conversations: Raul Caracoza & George Segal

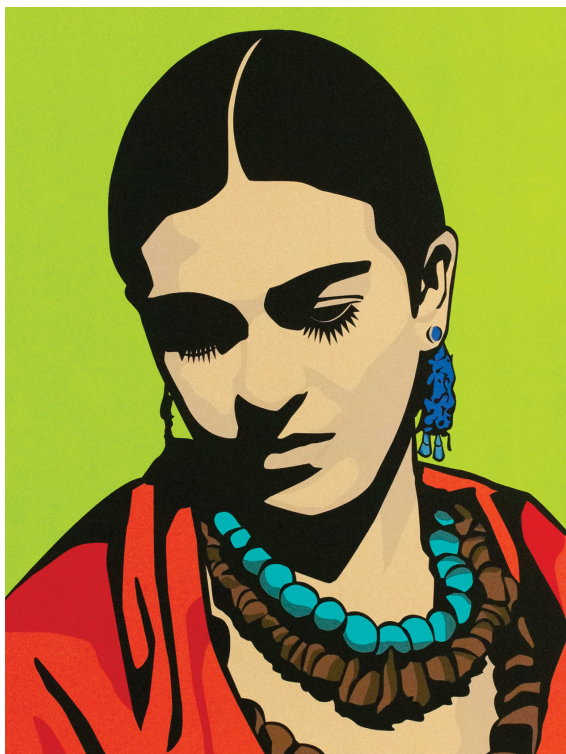
Ages: 8+ (Grades 3–12)

Duration: Open-ended

Materials Needed: Paper, plus pencil, colored pencils, markers, crayons, and/or paint.

Inspiration: Raul Caracoza (American, b. 1980). *Young Frida (Green)*, 2006. Serigraph, edition 14/40. Collection of the Hudson River Museum. Gift of Henry S. Hacker, by exchange, 2019 (2019.11). © Raul Caracoza (@artbyboog). Featured in *Frida Kahlo in Context*, February 4–May 22, 2022, at the Hudson River Museum.

George Segal (American, 1924–2000). *Untitled (Cast of a Face with Bust)*, 1974. Plaster and gauze. Gift of Jan and Warren Adelson, 2010 (2010.11). Art © The George and Helen Segal Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York, NY.



Introduction

Portraiture is a genre, or type, of artwork. Portraiture includes paintings, photographs, sculptures, or other artistic representations of a person, in which the face and its expression is predominant.

Look

- What's going on in this painting?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Connect

George Segal (American, 1924–2000) is best known for his monochromatic (single-color) plaster figures placed in ordinary settings, suggesting everyday isolation and alienation in the modern world. The sculptor's pioneering technique required reproducing live models by encasing separate sections of their bodies in plaster-coated cloth designed to make casts. He assembled these shells into complete figures, preserving the rough texture of the bandages. You can see an example of one of Segal's full-body sculptures in HRM's collection, *Man Leaning Against a Wall of Doors*. Segal's rough surfaces are a visual clue indicating his focus on process. As early as 1970, taking these ideas one step further, Segal also produced a series of individual fragments exhibited on their own, like *Untitled (Face with Bust)*, illustrated above.

Contemporary visual artist and graphic designer Raul Caracoza (American, born 1980) creates work inspired by Latino culture in his hometown of Los Angeles, California. He has also created several series of works inspired by Latino icons and musical figures. Caracoza's serigraph, or screenprint, portrait of Frida Kahlo depicts the artist in bright colors and graphic lines, highlighting Kahlo's colorful clothing inspired by traditional Mexican dress and hinting toward her complex and unique character.

Both works of portraiture rely on the subject's expression and body language to make a connection with a viewer, despite the vast difference in medium, or material, used to create the work.

Think

- What similarities can you find between these two works?
- What differences can you observe between these two works?
- How does each piece make you react emotionally? What makes you say that?
- What comes to mind when you view each portrait?

- What clues in each work give you a fuller understanding of the person portrayed?
- What do you think the subjects represented in the works might be thinking about? Why?
- If you were able to ask the subject of each work one question, what would it be? Why?

Do

1. Choose a person you would like to portray with a portrait. What personality traits does this person have? What physical features are unique to them? What details of how they dress, move, or present themselves do you want to highlight through your work?
2. Consider the mood or emotion you want your work to convey to a viewer. How can you position the subject of your portrait to share that mood? What body language or facial expression might you include in a visual depiction of this mood or emotion?
3. Consider the colors you might use to communicate something about your subject to a viewer. How might your color choices impact or affect the mood of your work?
4. Using scrap paper and pencil, experiment with sketching your portrait first. You may work from an existing photograph or image, or from your memory. Experiment with the layout: a full portrait shows the entire person; a bust includes just the head and shoulders.
5. Using fine art materials of your choosing (markers, colored pencils, paint, multicolored paper, or even digital apps), make a final version of your portrait.

Reflect

How can a portrait tell a story about a person or group of people? How does the medium, or material, used to create an artwork affect your understanding of the subject, if at all? What examples of portraiture can you point to today that illustrate the full range of an individual's characteristics and personality? Where do you see those examples—in museums, in magazines, in newspapers, on social media, in ads, etc.?

Share

Post a photo of your work on Instagram and tag @HudsonRiverMuseum.