

I'm Still Working

Lesson Plan
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Jennifer Packer
Ivan, 2013
Oil on canvas, 36 × 24 in.
The Studio Museum in Harlem;
Museum purchase with funds
provided by the Acquisition
Committee 2013.13.3
Photo: Zalika Azim

Jennifer Packer paints portraits that explore the subject of emotional vulnerability, and the relationship of the artist to the person in the painting. Using an almost monochromatic palette and leaving many details about the environment undefined, Packer directs the viewer's attention to the individual human being, the central focus of her work.

Packer's artistic process allows time for reflection and revision of works in progress, and flexibility in deciding when a painting is finished.

Her work *Ivan* (2013), shows a young man seated in a relaxed position. The color of his clothing almost blends in to the space around him, drawing the viewer's attention to a few defining characteristics of his person; his face, hands, and feet.

According to Packer, "It's not figures, not bodies, but humans I am painting. I want to know how to present a personal relationship without damaging the individual or putting them in harm's way."

Objective

Students will use a monochromatic palette to create a figure painting, and reflect on the relationship between work in progress and finished work.

Essential Question

How can the absence of some details or information make a work of art more compelling?

Vocabulary

Brushstroke

the paint left on a surface by a single application of a brush or palette knife.

Monochromatic

Having various tones of only one color or hue.

Color Palette

The particular range of colors in one painting.

Portrait

A visual representation of a person, usually showing the face.

Texture

The visual representation of the tactile characteristics of a surface, a visual depiction of how it might feel to the touch.

Vulnerable

The state of being physically or emotionally open, and revealing intimate or private parts of yourself to others.

Materials

9 × 12 in. multi-media paper
Tempera paints
Palettes
Popsicle sticks for mixing paint
Brushes
Containers for water
Paper towels
Pencils
Erasers

Preparation

1. Introduce Jennifer Packer's artwork and discuss *Ivan* using visual inquiry.
2. Ask students to consider why someone may choose to leave certain details out of an artwork, story, or film?
3. Organize the art materials and demonstrate how to add white to a color to create a range of hues.
4. Ask the students to create a list of five strong emotion words and assign a different color to each of the words.
5. Have the students work in pairs and do gesture drawings of their partner, taking turns posing and drawing for 1–2 minutes at a time.

Methods

1. Ask students to choose one of their gesture drawings to develop into a finished painting.
2. Have students then use the emotion colors they mixed to create a monochromatic palette.
3. Using a variety of brushes have students paint the figure and the surrounding environment using a range of brushstrokes and color hues to create a contrast between the figure and the environment.
4. Ask students to be thoughtful about how much detail they choose to include and how much detail to leave out of their finished work.
5. Ask students to stop working periodically and walk around the class to see each other's work in progress.

Reflection

1. Have students share their work. They can share how their painting shows emotion, how they worked with the materials, what they intentionally left out of the image, and why or how they decided the painting was finished. (Leaving the painting intentionally unfinished is also an option.)

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