Micrography Self-Portraits

Submitted by: Jeff Bertoncin, Art Teacher

Age: Middle School/Early High School

Time Required: Seven or more 45-minute periods

I. Goal
To create a self portrait combining the power of image and text.

II. Objectives
A. The learner will create a portrait using high contrast (FA1, FA2, 2.5).
B. The learner will use words to express themselves as a form of value (FA1, FA4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.1, 2.5).
C. The learner will learn new vocabulary and history behind an art form (FA3, FA5, 1.9).

III. Concepts
A. Positive and negative space B. Shading C. Value D. Self-Expression

IV. Visuals
A. Teacher and student examples.
B. Scarface Series, artist unknown (See the series online); Shakespeare's Rose, artist unknown (Link below)

Also see Micrography: Text Art and Typography
V. Supplies and Equipment
Extra large, Posterboard or if you have a tight budget, Kraft Paper Roll trimmed to size (30 x 40 inches or larger); Ultra-Fine Point Markers; Digital Camera; photo manipulation software (FastStone Image Viewer is free to download. Photoshop is the most popular); LCD Projector connected to a computer.

VI. Teaching Procedure
1. In advance of this project, take photos of the students from the shoulders up. Encourage poses that show more personality than the traditional “driver’s license” type of portrait. Photos with the head turned, eyes looking down, chin in hand, or making a face make a much better portrait.

2. Lead a discussion on portraits. Discussion questions could include:

   • What types of portraits are there?

   • Why do artists create portraits?

   • What information does a portrait give the viewer?

   • How can a portrait show personality?
3. Introduce artists to the term micrography. Give some history and show examples. (Click on the images on this page for full size)

4. Explain that students will create a self portrait using micrography to give a more detailed portrayal of themselves. Show teacher and student examples.

5. Artists work independently on their own digital images to “blow out” the contrast in their photos. Care should be given to leave important elements without sacrificing contrast. Omit backgrounds if possible. Final version should contain only black and white (no grays) and contain enough information to still look like the artist.

6. Project the images onto the paper and trace lightly around the dark shapes with a pencil. Provide each artist with a printed black-and-white copy for reference.

7. Artists should choose words to describe themselves and begin filling in the dark values with these words using permanent ink. Ideas could include phrases, quotes, song lyrics, family members, poetry, or random thoughts. Words can be repeated if necessary. Discourage artists from tracing around the dark shapes with their pens.

8. When artwork is complete, display a selection of portraits and lead a critique. Ask students how these portraits are more like our true selves than the traditional portrait (students should come to the conclusion that from a distance, we recognize the person, but to get to know more about them, we must get closer).
VII. Evaluation
A. Did the students combine words and image to accurately portray themselves?
B. Were the students able to fill in the dark values evenly?
C. Did the students use a consistent letter size?
D. Were the students able to recognize which areas to darken in?

See Rubric

VIII. Important Terms
Value, Highlight, Shadow, Portray, Micrography (Also called Microscopy, Microcalligraphy, or Calligram)

Other IAD Lessons on Micrography
Heroes Portrait with Micrography
Art with Text
Name Design Projects

Four Grid Value Lessons

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