

Van Gogh | Exploring Self

Insights into Art History – online workshop for ages 16-18

Tuesday 15 February 2022, 10:30-12:30

Delivered by, Alexandra Blum, Francesca Herrick, Karen Serres, and Helen Higgins

This resource contains further information and links to:

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 - Further information about 'Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear'
 - Van Gogh's Letters – primary source
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 - Online articles – secondary sources
 - General bibliography

Explore The Courtauld

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/> The Courtauld's website, for further info about the gallery and university.

[The Morgan Stanley Exhibition Van Gogh. Self-Portraits](#) on display at The Courtauld until 8 May 2022.

Explore highlights of The Courtauld Gallery collection:

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/the-collection/>

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/the-collection/prints-and-drawings/>

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/highlights/self-portrait-with-bandaged-ear/>

Take a Virtual Tour of the Courtauld before gallery refurbishment:

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/the-courtauld-gallery-virtual-tour/>

What is a Self-Portrait?

Responses from our workshop participants:

'The most direct form of expression of the self'

'a representation, something that defines us'

'having a representation of yourself as the sitter'

'a form of art resembling self identity'

'a representation of the artist...it's something that artists make to express feelings and mood'

'a portrait that a person/artist produces of someone or themselves.'

'a portrait of yourself using any materials to express your own feelings that might be hard to express normally. It can also just for fun to practice portraiture. Can also express your culture and history.'

'a self portrait is portrait of yourself, you draw it by 'looking at your photo or yourself in the mirror.'

'Art of yourself, or something that you think you are'

'how you see yourself'

'A drawing of the person who is drawing it to send their personal views'

What is a self-portrait?

Tate Terms <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/portrait>

Young People's Guide to Self-Portraiture

Created by the National Portrait Gallery

<https://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/self/home/>

James Hall, **The Self-Portrait: a cultural history**, Thames and Hudson, London, 2015

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/27/self-portrait-culture-history-james-hall-review-profoundly-human>

<https://artuk.org/discover/stories/james-hall-on-self-portraiture>

Joanna Woodall, **Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary**, National Portrait Gallery, 2005

Facing the world: Self-portraits from Rembrandt to Ai Weiwei, Exhibition Catalogue, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, 2016 ([Exhibition website](#))

[The Self-Portrait, from Schiele to Beckmann](#) – 2019 Exhibition, Neue Gallerie, New York ([see video](#))

Self-portrait drawings

<https://www.thedrawingsource.com/self-portrait-drawings.html>

Artists and works of art featured in the workshop (plus a few extra!)

Albrecht Durer	https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/durr/hd_durr.htm
Jacopo da Pontormo	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1936-1010-10
Ali Kazim	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_2012-3048-1
Rembrandt	https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/rembrandt-self-portrait-at-the-age-of-63 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_Gg-2-253
Parmigianino	https://www.khanacademy.org/parmigianino-self-portrait-in-a-convex-mirror
Artemesia Gentileschi	https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/artemesia - Review 1 & Review 2
Jonathan Richardson	https://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/what-on/exhibitions/jonathan-richardson
Kathe Kollwitz	https://www.kollwitz.de/en/self-portraits-overview/ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1930-0111-41
Lovis Corinth	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1981-0221-2-1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1938-1028-10 https://www.tavolozzafoundation.com/blog/
Max Beckmann	https://www.artic.edu/artworks/84241/self-portrait
Partou Zia	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2009-7093-4
Michael Landy	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2019-7021-1-b
Gwen Hardie	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2004-1030-1
Avigdor Arikha	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2004-0601-1
Claude Cahun	https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/claude-cahun-10611
Amrita Sher Gil	https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/amrita-sher-gil
George Cruickshank	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1974-U-298-338
Georg Baselitz	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2015-7091-3-a-b https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2015-7091-2-a-b
Winifred Knights	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1992-1003-125
Euan Uglow	https://artuk.org/discover/stories/euan-uglows-self-portrait
Louise Bourgeois	https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/louise-bourgeois-2351
Lucian Freud	https://www.wikiart.org/en/lucian-freud/reflection-self-portrait-1985 https://www.mfa.org/exhibition/lucian-freud-the-self-portraits
Celia Paul	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2008-7091-1
Stuart Brisley	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2008-7022-1
Chris Ofili	https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw132439/Chris-Ofili
Tracey Emin	https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/emin-my-bed-l03662 see Tate video https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everyone_I_Have_Ever_Slept_With
Linda Karshan	https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2003-0429-1
Yinka Shonibare	https://artsandculture.google.com/self-portrait-after-warhol-6 https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/warhol-self-portrait-t07146
Marc Quinn	https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw138260/Marc-Quinn-Self https://www.smh.com.au/hyperreal-how-the-head-of-blood-is-made
Zaneli Muholi	https://www.lensculture.com/articles/zanele-muholi-on-self-portraiture

Philip Guston	https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/great-works/guston-philip-the-studio-1969-798087.html
Sonia Boyce	https://www.nocolourbar.org/sonia-boyce https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/sonia-boyce-794/explore-tarzan-rambo
Helene Schjerbeck	https://ateneum.fi/nayttelyt/helene-schjerbeck-royal-academy/?lang=en
Lois Mailou Jones	https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/self-portrait-76331
Sarah Lucas	https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lucas-self-portraits-1990-1998-66686
Donald Rodney	https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rodney-in-the-house-of-my-father-p78529
Cindy Sherman	https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/cindy-sherman-1938
Lucian Freud	https://www.wikiart.org/en/lucian-freud/reflection-self-portrait-1985
Gerhard Richter	https://www.gerhard-richter.com/en/art/paintings/photo-paintings/portraits-people-20/self-portrait-8185/?p=1
Peter Blake	https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-10-summer-2007/study-denim
Kehinde Wiley	https://kehindewiley.com/
Helene Amouzou	https://www.juxtapoz.com/news/photography/helene-amouzou-s-ghostly-self-portraits/
Francesca Woodman	https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/francesca-woodman-10512/finding-francesca
Laura Knight	https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/self-portrait-aka-the-model-157053
Gwen john	www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-self-portrait-n05366
Senayt Samuel	https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/imagine-art-after/imagine-art-after-senayt-samuel
Cherry Pickles	https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/my-sullen-art-self-portrait-as-dylan-thomas-231036
Yayoi Kusama	https://www.artsy.net/artwork/yayoi-kusama-self-portrait-tway
Damien Hirst	http://www.damienhirst.com/contemplating-a-self-portrait http://www.damienhirst.com/self-portrait-as-surgeon
Jenny Saville	https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/the-groundbreaking-self-portrait-that-launched-jenny-savilles-career
Sam Taylor-Wood	https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw58423/Sam-Taylor-Johnson-Sam-Taylor-Wood-Self-portrait-in-Single-breasted-Suit-with-Hare
Mary Cassatt	https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.76.33
Berthe Morisot	http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/gallery/31d2d146.html
Zhang Huan	https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/99.164/ and https://www.phillips.com/detail/zhang-huan/NY010414/252
Tatsumi Orimoto	http://www.dna-galerie.de/en/artists/tatsumi-orimoto/tatsumi-orimoto--works.php
Marie-Louise von Motesiczky	https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/marie-louise-von-motesiczky
Paula Modersohn-Becker	https://www.independent.co.uk/modersohn-becker-paula

Van Gogh | Exploring Self Drawing Activity

Devised by artist and Courtauld Educator Alexandra Blum

Don't stop now, draw a self-portrait!

Make the most of the skills you began to build during our workshop by drawing a self-portrait using the guide below.

Materials: Mirror or phone, pencil (4b is ideal but an ordinary HB pencil is fine too), A4 white cartridge paper, eraser, pencil sharpener

Timings: 50-60 minutes.

Mind set: Do not worry about whether the drawing looks like you, instead focus on observing the light on the surface of your face. Keep your mind neutral, rather than trying to express how you are feeling.

Setting up: You do not have to sit directly facing the mirror. If you prefer, try sitting at an angle instead. What happens if you are very close to the mirror, or further away?

Learning from Van Gogh: Think back to the variety of marks Van Gogh used. You can use a mixture of line, broader marks following the contours of the face, and patches of tone* to describe shapes which make up parts of individual features.

Light: As you draw, focus on the contrast between the light and dark areas on the surface of your face. It's useful to start your drawing with an area of mid-tone*, so that you can draw darker and lighter areas in relation to the first tone you drew. Consider layering marks to create the darkest areas and do not forget you can use the white of your paper as the lightest tone. As you draw, keep comparing the tone of the area you are drawing with surrounding areas. Ask yourself which is lighter or darker and adjust the drawing accordingly. Try creating the edge of a form without using an outline. Instead, create the boundary between one form and another purely through contrasting patches of tone.

Shape and form: Think in terms of straight lines, curves and diagonals instead of eye, nose, ear etc. Compare one form with another, to understand their relative positions. Remember how it felt to draw the contours of your face with the hand you do not usually draw with. Try to recreate that same level of focus on the surface of your face as you make this drawing. Allow the marks you make to follow the contours of your face, so that tone and form emerge simultaneously.

Tips: Start with a small area, you might want to begin with a single eye and move out from there. There is no need to be overwhelmed, just draw slowly, bit by bit and see how far you get. Notice how your drawing changes, pay attention to the aspects which surprise you. Stop when you discover something unexpected.

Next steps: Want to make more drawings? Try shorter, faster drawings of 20 minutes and longer drawings of 90 minutes. Which qualities emerge in each? Which do you find most interesting? Can you work out why? What happens if you draw at different times of day? For example, first thing in the morning or at the end of the day. Try turning your phone off and drawing the reflection you see of yourself in the black screen. How does that change the tone in your drawing? Experiment with using colour to find equivalents of the tones you see. Pay attention to the colours which jump into your head as you focus on the tone. Do not question your colour choices, just follow those intuitive suggestions.

*vocabulary: **tone** = light and dark areas, including the gradations between the darkest and lightest areas;
mid-tone = the tone which is half way between the darkest and lightest area.

Please email education@courtauld.ac.uk if you took part in this workshop and would us to email links to Alex's videos so you can watch them again.

Van Gogh | Exploring Self

Uncover the true story behind Van Gogh's Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear (1889)

Research activity



Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)

[Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear](#), 1889

Oil on canvas, 60.5 x 50 cm

The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust) © The Courtauld

Uncover the true story behind Van Gogh's Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear

Research activity

Vincent van Gogh's [Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear](#) captures one of the most famous moments in art history. But what really happened during that dark winter night in 1888?

We have compiled a variety of primary and secondary sources relating to this event. **Your task** is to carefully select the most reliable sources and carry out art-historical detective work in order to unearth the truth behind Van Gogh's famous *Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear* (1889) which is now in The Courtauld Gallery Collection.

You might like to use these points as a guide when analysing your sources:

- Date of source:
- Title of source:
- Where was the source first published?
- Is this a primary or a secondary source? (see [here](#) for a definition of each)
- Who wrote, researched or produced it?
- Is the article factual, or based on personal opinion?
- What evidence is used to back up their argument? Is this evidence reliable?
- Consider the **date** of your source – has more recent research been carried out?

Consider - how reliable is each source?

Reputation	– reliable/unreliable source?
Ability to see	– does the source know what they are talking about?
Vested interest	– does the source have something to gain?
Expertise	– does the source demonstrate true expertise?
Neutrality	– is the source biased or unbiased?

Once you have decided which sources contain the most recent and/or reliable research you can then **draw your own conclusion**.

Points to consider:

- Has your research changed the way you now view the painting? If so, how?
- Has your research changed the way you now view the artist? If so, how?
- What new information have you uncovered?
- What has your research taught you about the reliability of sources?
- How can you apply this approach to the subjects you study at school/college?

Trigger warning: The following links include discussions about mental health, including suicide and self-harm. You may choose not to carry out this activity. If you or anyone else you know is affected by these issues, please visit Mind's [resources page](#) for more information and support.

Vincent van Gogh (1853 - 1890)

The following links provide an introduction the artist and his work, and how we view it today:
(information on Van Gogh's Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear can be found on the following page)

Challenging the Myth of the 'Tortured Genius' – understand Van Gogh's mental health through a new perspective: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/ey-exhibition-van-gogh-and-britain/van-gogh-challenging-myth>

The Art of Creativity – <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/vincent-van-gogh-1182/art-creativity>

Is there a link between mental health and creativity? Do artists have to 'suffer for their art'? This is something Van Gogh thought about a lot. This Tate podcast explores the role creativity can play in promoting well-being.

Van Gogh experienced lockdown – how did isolation impact on his art?

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/blog/van-gogh-in-lockdown>

Van Gogh's Biography

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/vincent-van-gogh> - National Gallery, London

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/artist-info.1349.html#biography> - National Gallery of Art, USA

https://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/HD/gogh/hd_gogh.htm - Met. Museum of Art, New York

Read Van Gogh's Letters

<http://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/> - a searchable inventory of Van Gogh's letters

Explore the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam (where the majority of his works are held)

<https://www.vangoghmuseum.com/en/vincent-van-goghs-life-and-work>

<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en>

Works by Vincent van Gogh in UK Collections

Use the ArtUK website to find works by Vincent van Gogh in a museum or gallery near you:

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/search/actor:van-gogh-vincent-18531890>

Online exhibition catalogues - available as free downloadable PDFs – click on link

Ronald Pickvance, [Van Gogh in Arles](#), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1984

Colta Ives, [Vincent van Gogh: The drawings](#), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005

Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear (1889)

Follow the links below to uncover a variety of primary and secondary sources highlighting different perspectives on the events surrounding Van Gogh's *Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear*.

Download a [high resolution image](#) of the painting.

Information on the painting from The Courtauld, which is where the painting is held
<https://courtauld.ac.uk/highlights/self-portrait-with-bandaged-ear/>

Geishas in a Landscape: Van Gogh's Lost Print – The Courtauld
http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/insight/van_gogh_geishas/van_gogh_geishas01.html

Van Gogh: Self-Staging and Myth-Making - [Courtauld Learning Resource, chapter 5](#)

Van Gogh Collects | Japanese prints – <https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/japanese-prints?v=1>

Van Gogh's Letters – relating to Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear

Letter 724: Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh Arles, around 11 December 1888
<http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let724/letter.html>

Letter 728: Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Wednesday, 2 January 1889
<http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let728/letter.html>

Letter 772: Vincent to Theo van Gogh, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Thursday, 9 May 1889
<http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let772/letter.html>

Documentaries / short videos - exploring the painting's subject matter

The Mystery of Van Gogh's Ear (2016) - BBC Documentary (1 hour)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqMBRQLhgFE&t=198s>

Bernadette Murphy: Van Gogh and Gauguin | National Gallery (1 hour) 25 Nov 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4GEKqI3tY8> From Gauguin's perspective

The Art Mysteries: Van Gogh's Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear – Waldemar Januszczak (2020)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XA_CqvjQWu8 (25 minutes, originally broadcast on BBC 4)

Van Gogh's Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/avant-garde-france/post-impressionism/a/van-gogh-self-portrait-with-bandaged-ear>

Van Gogh's doctor's note found in the library of the University of California in 2016

<https://news.berkeley.edu/2016/07/12/sharp-eyes-at-bancroft-and-a-new-focus-on-van-goghs-ear/>

<https://news.lib.berkeley.edu/tale-van-gogh-note> several short videos

Why Did Vincent van Gogh cut off his ear? The Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 2020 (4 minutes)

<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/art-and-stories/vincent-van-gogh-faq/why-did-vincent-van-gogh-cut-off-his-ear>

Online articles relating to *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*

Was truth the biggest casualty in the case of Vincent and his severed ear?

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/was-truth-the-biggest-casualty-in-the-case-of-vincent-and-his-severed-ear-1678988.html> John Lichfield, the Independent, May 2009

On the Verge of Insanity – Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (exhibition in 2016)

<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/stories/on-the-verge-of-insanity>

The whole truth about Van Gogh's ear, and why his 'mad genius' is a myth

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2016/jul/12/vincent-van-gogh-truth-about-ear-exhibition-on-verge-of-insanity-amsterdam> Jonathan Jones, The Guardian, 12 July 2016

Van Gogh 'cut off his ear after learning brother was to marry'

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/oct/31/van-gogh-cut-off-his-ear-learning-brother-theo-to-marry-new-study> Maev Kennedy, The Guardian, 31 Oct 2016

The Real Van Gogh – BBC article (2020)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4WfKFFNY2Nx2ch3GMJTRLdc/the-real-van-gogh-a-genius-not-driven-by-madness-but-crippled-by-it>

Van Gogh Gave His Ear to a Farmer's Daughter

<http://observer.com/2016/07/van-gogh-gave-his-ear-to-a-farmers-daughter-not-a-random-prostitute-report/> Yissca Schiff, The Observer, 21 July 2016

Solving the mystery of Van Gogh's severed ear - Andrea Morabito, New York Post, Dec 12, 2016

<https://nypost.com/2016/12/12/solving-the-mystery-of-van-goghs-severed-ear/>

Woman Gifted With Van Gogh's Ear Identified 128 Years Later - Henri Neuendorf, July 20, 2016

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/van-gogh-ear-gabrielle-berlatier-566720>

Gauguin's Stirring First-Hand Account of What Actually Happened that Night

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2017/08/23/gauguin-van-gogh-ear/> Maria Popova, 2017

Did Van Gogh cut off his whole ear? Or only a part? Martin Bailey, The Art Newspaper, April 2020

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/blog/did-van-gogh-cut-off-his-ear-or-was-it-only-part-of-the-ear>

General Bibliography

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- Druick and Zegers, **Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South**, Van Gogh Museum, 2001–2
- Louis van Tilborgh, **Van Gogh and Japan**, Exhibition catalogue, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 2006
- Jill Lloyd, **Van Gogh and Expressionism**, Exhibition catalogue, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 2006
- Martin Bailey, **Van Gogh and Britain: Pioneer Collectors**, National Galleries of Scotland, 2006
- Martin Gayford, **The Yellow House: Van Gogh, Gauguin and nine turbulent weeks in Arles**, 2007
- Ann Dumas (editor), **The Real Van Gogh: The Artist and His Letters**, Royal Academy of Arts, 2010
- John House, **Van Gogh and Impressionism**, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 2012
- Marije Vellekoop, **Van Gogh's Studio Practice**, Exhibition catalogue, New Haven and Amsterdam, 2013
- Nienke Bakker, **On the Verge of Insanity: Van Gogh and His Illness**, Van Gogh Museum, 2016
- Bernadette Murphy, **Van Gogh's Ear: The True Story**, Penguin, 2016
- Karen Serres (editor), **Van Gogh. Self-Portraits**, The Courtauld, Paul Holberton Publishing, 2022