

Turning Heads!

Lesson Plan
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Derrick Adams
Head #4, 2011
Mixed media collage on paper,
36 × 35 ¾ in.
The Studio Museum in Harlem;
Museum purchase with funds
provided by the Acquisition
Committee 2012.21.1
Photo: Zalika Azim

Derrick Adams is a multidisciplinary artist. His practice—which includes performance, video, sound, sculpture, and 2D forms such as collage and photography—focuses on the fragmentation and manipulation of structure and surface. His work explores self-image and various ways of projecting that image outward.

Adams credits TV and media as a source of inspiration for his work. His work directly references pop culture, but also introduces new ideas about representation, identity, and blackness into the conversation.

Head #4 shows a head in profile. The face is created with earth colored, decorative papers cut into interlocking shapes. The hair and beard are made with silver paper that contrasts with the brown skin. Adams states that collage “reflects black culture in America, because we have so many different extensions of identity.”

Objective

In this lesson, students will learn about the work of Derrick Adams, explore their identity, and use collage to project an image of themselves into the world.

Essential Question

How do I see myself, and how do I want to present my identity through my artwork?

Vocabulary

Collage

An artistic composition made of various materials (such as paper, cloth, or wood) glued onto a surface.

Contour Drawing

A drawing that focuses on outlining the edges of a object with one continuous line as your pencil follows the movement of your eye.

Fragment

A part of something larger that is broken off, detached, or incomplete.

Identity

The distinguishing character or personality of an individual.

Self-Portrait

A portrait of oneself done by oneself.

Silhouette

A likeness in profile cut from dark material and mounted on a light ground, or sketched in outline and solidly colored in.

Materials

Multiple 4 × 4 in. pieces of paper for sketching
12 × 12 in. paper for collage background

Assorted decorative papers

Scissors

Glue sticks

Pencils

Erasers

Black magic markers

Preparation

1. Introduce the work of Derrick Adams and discuss using the vocabulary words.
2. Ask the students to create a list of five to ten words that describe their identity. Ask the students to brainstorm different shapes and colors to express these ideas.
3. Have the students work in pairs and do quick contour drawings of each other in profile view, change the pairs three times. (4 × 4 in. paper)
4. Each student will review the drawings that their peers made of them and then draw a large profile of themselves based on what they see in the drawings made by their classmates. (12 × 12 in. paper)

Methods

1. Students will go over their pencil lines with a black marker to create a stronger outline in their profile drawing.
2. Students will review their identity words and begin to select papers with the colors/patterns/textures that express their identity.
3. Students will cut the papers into shapes that also express their identity and begin to fill in their silhouette with these shapes and colors.
4. After covering the surface of their silhouette with a variety of colors and shapes, students will add details that further define their identity; such as defining physical characteristics or elements of their personal style.

Reflection

1. Ask each student to give their work a title that includes at least one of their identity words.
2. Students will present their self-portrait to the group and talk about how they see themselves and how they were able to show their identity in their artwork.

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