



Make a Collage Portrait

Overview

During this project, artists will use materials from around the house to create a portrait inspired by 19th-century portraitist Ruth Hensaw Bascom. Bascom was an itinerant artist, which means that she traveled around the region and created portraits for sitters throughout New England.

In the early 1800s, portraits were no longer cost-prohibitive. This meant that it was easier for middle class people to get portraits made of their families. Portraits helped families express pride in their wealth and accomplishments. Many itinerant painters of this time period started their careers as sign or furniture painters and were trained ornamental artists.

Ruth Henshaw Bascom

Ruth Henshaw Bascom was born in Leicester, Massachusetts, in 1772. Throughout her life, she lived in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Bascom first mentioned a portrait in her diary in 1801. There are many more mentions of portraiture in the 1820s and 30s. Throughout her career, her records indicate that she created over 1400 portraits of 19th-century New Englanders. About 200 of these are known today. Bascom made these portraits in exchange for money, services in kind, or as gifts to friends and loved ones.

Most of Bascom's portraits were created using pastels, typically in blue and green. They are in profile (from the side) and life-sized or slightly smaller. She also created many silhouettes, which is a portrait cut from black paper and pasted against a light background. Using a candle or lamp, Bascom traced the shadow of her sitter onto a piece of paper. Some historians note that Bascom added bits of foil to her portraits as jewelry and accessories. Others note that she very occasionally used ribbon or bits of cut paper to add to the portraits.

Supplies Needed

- Large paper (watercolor, mixed media, or plain paper are fine)
- Pencil
- Pastels or colored pencils



- Examples of portraits by Ruth Henshaw Bascom (added to the end of this lesson plan)

Other Supplies (if you want them!)

- Scissors
- Foil, ribbon, fabric scraps, etc.
- A mirror



Directions

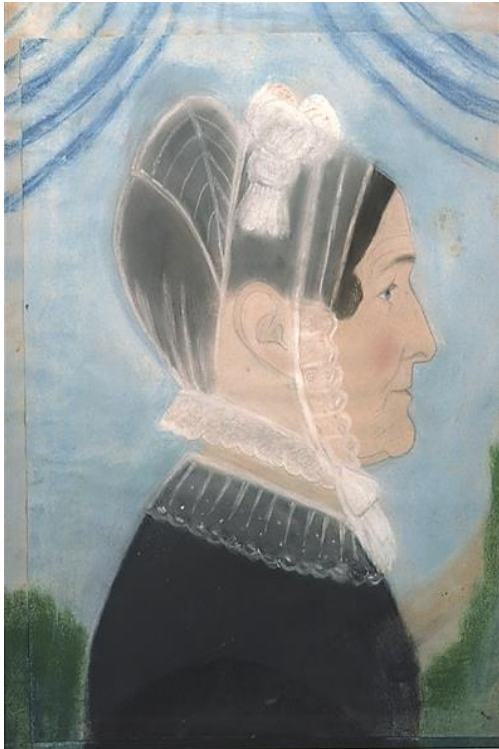
1. If you are drawing a friend or family member: have your sitter sit sideways in front of you. Looking carefully, draw his or her likeness on your piece of large paper. If you are drawing yourself, you can either have someone sketch out your profile or consult a mirror while drawing.
2. Take a moment to look at the historic examples of portraits. What kinds of features and details do you notice? Note how the eyes, ears, and eyebrows are drawn from the side.
3. Use your pastels and colored pencils, add details like hair, clothing, and a background to your portrait.
4. If desired, use foil, bits of paper and fabric, and ribbon to add three-dimensional details to your work.

Questions

1. What outfit would you wear if you were sitting for a portrait artist?
2. People who sat for portraits were often painted with items that helped to show a little bit about them or their business. What would you want included in your portrait?
3. Many people at the time may have only had a few likenesses made of themselves. How many images of yourself do you have?



Examples of Portraits by Ruth Henshaw Bascom



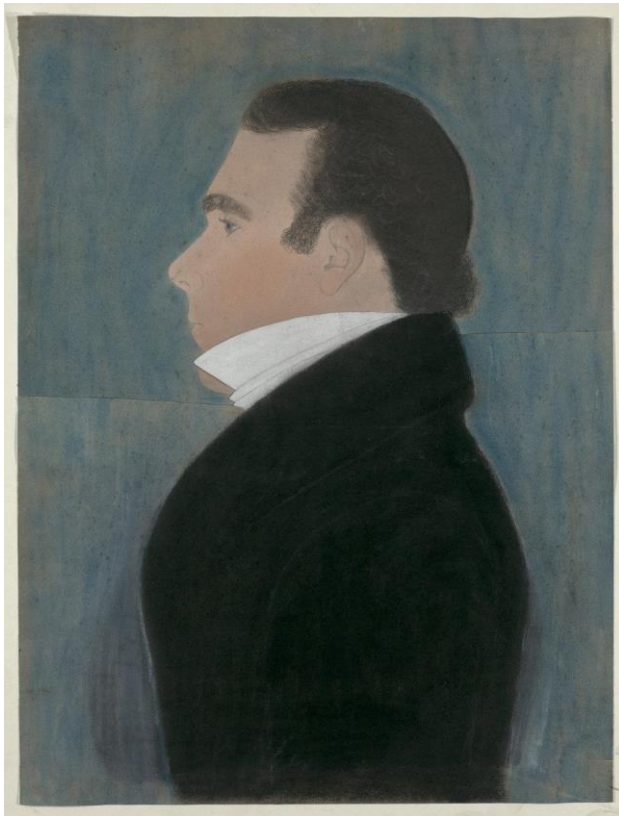
Bascom, Ruth Henshaw. *Self-Portrait*. 1829. Five Colleges and Historic Deerfield Museum Consortium.



Bascom, Ruth Henshaw. *Reverend Ezekiel Bascom*. 1829. Five Colleges and Historic Deerfield Museum Consortium.



Bascom, Ruth Henshaw. *Cynthia Allen*. 1840. Private Collection.



Bascom, Ruth Henshaw. *Mr. William Waters*. C. 1825/1830. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.