

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/open-arts-objects>

Student Handout

Presenter: Leah R. Clark

Alesso Baldovinetti, *Portrait of a Lady*, c. 1465, National Gallery, London

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-alesso-baldovinetti-portrait-lady-c-1465-national-gallery-london>

How many pictures of family and friends do you have access to on your phone or computer? In this short film, Dr Leah Clark discusses how artists in the Renaissance recorded likenesses. The film explores the function of female profile portraits, a genre that became popular in fifteenth-century Italy. Many of the sitters of these portraits are unknown, but by looking closely at the clothing and the jewellery in the portraits, it is likely that these paintings were commissioned at the time of marriage. Portraits are extremely relevant today because we are bombarded with pictures of people in the media and on social media, while we also have the capacity to make our own images—taking selfies. Learning how identity was constructed through clothing, jewellery and even posture in the Renaissance can also help us to critically assess how portraits are constructed today.

Before watching the film

Before watching the film, locate the work online and download an image of the work here:

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/alesso-baldovinetti-portrait-of-a-lady>

1. What do you know about portraits and their functions?
2. How has the artist rendered this portrait? Describe what you see on the screen. Is the sitter easy to identify with? How does the viewer interact with her? What clothing is she wearing? Do you think she is poor or wealthy?
3. Where do you think this work would have been viewed originally?

4. What function do you think this work might have served?

After watching the film

1. What effects do you think the artist was trying to achieve in this work?

2. Has the film helped you define some of the formal elements of the work? Consider scale, subject matter, medium, and other formal elements.

3. Does it have a recognisable purpose or function? Does this relate to the time period in which it was made?

4. How has this film helped your understanding of portraits?

5. What is its relevance for today?

Online Activity

1. Searching the image/collection of database of a museum to look for other portraits to see how the format and rendering of the composition and sitter has changed over time.
2. Read about Roman portrait sculpture:
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ropo2/hd_ropo2.htm
3. Explore portraits of the Renaissance on Google Arts & Culture:
<https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/usergallery/dAIC5c6N2UYrJg>

Resources online

For an overview on portraiture see https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/port/hd_port.htm

Renaissance Resources online

<http://italianrenaissanceresources.com/> : This is a comprehensive site on a number of different issues related to the Renaissance provided by the National Gallery in Washington, DC

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/r/renaissance/> : This is a comprehensive site on a number of different issues related to the Renaissance provided by the Victoria and Albert Museum

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Simons, Patricia. 'Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture.' In *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism in Art History*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, 39-57. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992.

Compare this painting with a Renaissance portrait of a man by Francesco del Cossa:

<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/cossa-francesco/portrait-man-ring> (see table below)

You might also consider comparing it with a modern portrayal found in a recent newspaper.

You could also consider other portraits from the Open Arts Objects films:

1. Velazquez, Prince Baltasar Carlos in Silver, 1633, The Wallace Collection:

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-velazquez-prince-baltasar-carlos-silver-1633-wallace-collection>

2. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, La Parisienne, 1874, National Museum Wales:

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-pierre-auguste-renoir-la-parisienne-1874-national-museum-wales>

3. Beaton's portrait of Queen Elizabeth II on her coronation day:

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-beaton%E2%80%99s-portrait-queen-elizabeth-ii-her-coronation-day>

Comparative table:

Complete the table below

Works of art	Alesso Baldovinetti, Portrait of a Lady, c. 1465, National Gallery, London	Francesco del Cossa, <i>Portrait of a Man with a Ring</i>, c. 1472 – 1477, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid
date		
What is it?		
Material		
Size/scale		
Subject matter		
Original location in the Renaissance		
How is the figure depicted?		

Composition		
Condition		
Function		