

# HEATHER BUCHANAN

## *EATING*

### EXHIBITION GUIDE



ART GALLERY OF GRANDE PRAIRIE  
TRAVELLING EXHIBITION PROGRAM



# HEATHER BUCHANAN

## *EATING*

### PRESS RELEASE

Heather Buchanan is an artist from Calgary who has painted realistic renditions of famous people in this exhibition. The use of pop culture imagery in 'Eating' stems from a desire to use painting as a vehicle for human connection. We connect with objects and characters through the fiction of the screen. Dramatic scenes elicit real human emotion because they capture and isolate the truth of the matter, we can empathize with the scenarios in which the characters are placed. For better or worse, we identify with characters in pop culture, unconsciously shaping our understanding of the media-saturated world.

Consumption, or "eating" has a double meaning when it comes to pop culture. We consume images in film and television, and they become part of our identity. Consuming food can be a means for sustenance or comfort, whereas our everyday consumption of media culture has other implications.

When we look at each painting we see the cultural landscape of the time in which it was produced from the 1990s to the 2000s to today. Food can mean friendship, comfort, hedonism, rebellion, weakness or the release of tension in an awkward moment.

How does our consumption of media culture, through film and television, shape our own identity and understanding of the world around us?

Curated By Todd Schaber, Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, TREX Region 1



ART GALLERY OF GRANDE PRAIRIE  
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# HEATHER BUCHANAN

## *EATING*

### MEET THE ARTIST

**HEATHER BUCHANAN** is a painter and illustrator from Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She snagged a BFA from the University of Calgary in 2012 after writing an honours thesis in rhyming verse about her large-scale nude self portraits. Her artistic practice includes everything from paintings drenched in pretty realism to tiny drawings of fart jokes. Throughout it all is an exploration of what it means to have an identity trapped inside a human body.

With clients like Big Rock Brewing and Simon and Shuster, she enjoys the occasional collaborative challenge of freelance illustration. She's shown her work in art galleries across North America, though hermitish tendencies have her dishing out most of her work online.



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## ARTIST STATEMENT

The use of pop culture imagery in the series *Eating* stems from a desire to use painting as a vehicle for human connection. Popular culture in film and television presents us with something familiar, immediately shedding all pretensions. It has the same function as mythology, characters and storylines mirror or reflect our lives and desires—or is it the other way around?

We connect with objects and characters through the fiction of the screen. Dramatic scenes elicit real human emotion because they capture and isolate the truth of the matter, charged with a deep understanding of the human condition. Even though we may not be a sci-fi character or a crime boss or a down on their luck character, we can empathize with the scenarios in which the characters are placed. For better or worse, we identify with characters in pop culture, unconsciously shaping our understanding of the media-saturated world.

Consumption, or “eating” has a double meaning when it comes to pop culture. We consume images in film and television, and they become part of our identity. Think of how many times you have repeated a line from your favourite fictional character in a TV show or movie. Consuming food can be a means for sustenance or comfort, whereas our everyday consumption of media culture has other implications. For example, when actor Samuel L. Jackson’s character Jules Winnfield eats a Big Kahuna burger in

the 1994 movie *Pulp Fiction*, he creates a menacing uneasiness while asserting his authority by eating his target’s Big Kahuna burger. Eleven in *Stranger Things* devours Eggos not only as comfort, but also as an assertion of her freedom from captivity and as a symbol of newfound friendships. Scully when offered a cricket by a man trying to rattle her in *The X-Files*, pops it into her mouth with casual ease, defying the constraints of 90’s femininity. In the *Eating* series head judge of the Top Chef franchise Padma Lakshmi, Abbi Jacobson & Ilana Glasser (the “broad” of *Broad City*, but also the Executive producers, creators and writers of the show), Daenerys Targaryen of *Game of Thrones* and Michael Burnham of *Star Trek: Discovery* depict women in the media and popular culture in a way that forces us to see gender as a social construct. When we look at each painting we see the cultural landscape of the time in which it was produced from the 1990s to the 2000s to today.

Food can mean friendship, comfort, hedonism, rebellion, weakness or the release of tension in an awkward moment. It’s something to chew on; how exactly do we consume popular culture? Pop culture imagery can be delicious or unpalatable. How does our consumption of media culture, through film and television, shape our own identity and understanding of the world around us?



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14. *Daenerys Eats a Horse's Heart*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Game of Thrones (2011 - )



15. *Jughead Eats a Burger*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Riverdale (2017 - )



13. *George Eats a Shrimp*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Seinfeld (1989 - 98)



4. *Jules Winnfield Eats A Big Kahuna burger*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: Pulp Fiction (1999)





8. *Eleven Eats an Eggo*, 2017-18.  
Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Stranger  
Things (2016 - )



7. *Padma Eats a Skirt Steak*, 2017-  
18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Top Chef  
(2006 - )



12. *Will Eats a Tomato*, 2017-18.  
Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Fresh Prince  
of Bel Air (1990 - 1996)



10. *David Lynch Eats a Donut*, 2017-  
18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Twin  
Peaks: the Return (2017) Adapted  
from the original series Twin Peaks  
(1990-1991)





6. *Broads Eat a Pizza*, 2017-18.  
Acrylic on Canvas, TV: *Broad City*  
(2014 - )



2. *Forrest Eats Ice Cream*, 2017-18.  
Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: *Forrest Gump* (1994)



5. *Marie Antoinette Eats Cake*, 2017-18.  
Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: *Marie Antoinette* (2006)



1. *Frida Eats a Banana*, 2017-18.  
Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: *Frida* (2002)





9. *Scully Eats a Cricket*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: The X Files (1993 - 2002, 2016, 2018)



3. *Michael Burnham Eats Kelpian*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Star Trek: Discovery, (2017 - )



4. *Detective Logan Eats a Hotdog*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Law & Order (1990 - 2010)



## CRATE #1 INVENTORY

01 *Frida Eats a Banana*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: Frida (2002)

02 *Forrest Eats Ice Cream*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: Forrest Gump (1994)

03 *Michael Burnham Eats Kelpian*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Star Trek: Discovery, (2017 - )

04 *Detective Logan Eats a Hotdog*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Law & Order (1990 - 2010)

05 *Marie Antoinette Eats Cake*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: Marie Antoinette (2006)

06 *Broads Eat a Pizza*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Broad City (2014 - )

07 *Padma Eats a Skirt Steak*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Top Chef (2006 - )

*Jules Winnfield Eats a Big Kahuna Burger*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: Pulp Fiction (1999)

08 *Eleven Eats an Eggo*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Stranger Things (2016 - )



## CRATE #2 INVENTORY

09 *Scully Eats a Cricket*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: The X Files (1993 - 2002, 2016, 2018)

10 *David Lynch Eats a Donut*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Twin Peaks: the Return (2017) Adapted from the original series Twin Peaks (1990-1991)

11 *Jules Winnfield Eats a Big Kahuna Burger*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: Pulp Fiction (1999)

12 *Will Eats a Tomato*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Fresh Prince of Bel Air (1990 - 1996)

*Jules Winnfield Eats a Big Kahuna Burger*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, Movie: Pulp Fiction (1999)

13 *George Eats a Shrimp*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Seinfeld (1989 - 98)

14 *Daenerys Eats a Horse's Heart*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Game of Thrones (2011 - )

15 *Jughead Eats a Burger*, 2017-18. Acrylic on Canvas, TV: Riverdale (2017 - )

- FRAGILE WORKS: Carefully review how the works are packed.
- Please refer to the numbering system for each work in the Image Inventory to return each work to the crates.
- Where possible place framed works back-to-back or front-to-front. Avoid placing the wire hanging systems facing the front of artworks to avoid scratches.
- Only remove foam packing that is marked remove/replace.
- Keep all packing with the crate.
- Repacking: Line up the numbers.

Concerns Contact:

Art Gallery of Grande Prairie

Danielle Ribar- Associate Curator,  
780.357.7483

Region 1, AFA Travelling Exhibitions



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## How to Look at Artwork

### Based on the Four Stages of Criticism

Note to Educators: These four stages of criticism help us analyze and appreciate art. Without this guide, judgements may be made too quickly about a work of art before it can be thoroughly looked at and interpreted. This is meant to be a guideline that builds both observational and critical thinking skills.

**AGE LEVELS:** (Kindergarten – Grade 3) Do stage 1, and possibly stage 2; (Grades 4 – 6) Do stages 1, 2, and possibly stage 3; (Grades 7 – 12) Do all 4 stages.

#### STAGE 1: DESCRIPTION

*What do we see when we look at a work of art?*

- List or describe all that you see. Hint: Start with what you know.
- Describe the subject: What is this a picture of? Landscape, nature, people, animals, flowers, still life, etc.
- Describe media (materials): what is this work made of? Oil painting, clay, sculpture, photography, etc.
- Describe elements of design: (line, shapes, colours, textures, values) what colours are used? Describe the types of lines. What kinds of shapes are used, natural or geometric? Is there texture? Rough, smooth, dry, or wet? Does the work have dark and light areas/values?
- Describe the style of the work: (for advanced students) Is the work representational or abstract? Does the work have a subject or theme that is non-objective? Can you describe a style that it resembles? (For example Impressionism, Expressionism, Surrealist)

#### STAGE 2: ANALYSIS – OBSERVING RELATIONSHIPS

*How is this artwork (composition) arranged?*

List or describe the principles of design (movement, contrast, unity, balance, emphasis, rhythm, scale and space).

- Are there contrasts of dark and light colours?
- Are colours or shapes repeated to create unity or rhythm?
- Is there one object that stands out and is more emphasized than other objects?
  - What makes the object stand out more?
- What type of balance is it, symmetrical or asymmetrical?
- Is there a sense of motion or something moving?



- Do the objects seem to be close and in a shallow space or move far back to create deep space and distance?

### **STAGE 3: INTERPRETATION**

*What meaning or reason did the artist have in making this work?*

This stage is a statement to help make sense of all the observations. It is the most difficult, yet most creative stage and it requires courage. It is an educated guess that makes connections between the work of art and the viewer's personal experiences.

- What do you think this work is about?
- What mood or feeling do you get from this work?
- Why did the artist create this work?
- What do you think the artist thinks or feels about their world?

Give an explanation of the work or describe the problem the artist is trying to solve. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers in interpretation; each viewer will bring their own ideas and life experiences into their 'guesses' and explanations.

### **STAGE 4: JUDGEMENT – CONCLUSION ABOUT WORK**

*What do I think or feel about this work?*

Decide what you like about the work or what you dislike about the work. This is purely subjective, however, the decision should be backed with valid explanations and possibly ideas as to how the artist could have changed the work to make it better.

- Do you like the work? Why or why not?
- What are the strengths about this work?
- What are the weaknesses and how could they be changed?
- Has your impression of the work changed after observing and analyzing the piece?



## Educator's Guided Tour

### Eating by Heather Buchanan

Heather Buchanan is a painter based out of Calgary, Alberta and can be found selling her art at local markets, exhibiting at shows nationally, and working as a freelance illustrator. Buchanan strikes a fine balance of work that combines her quick wit and quirky humour with her love of painting and popular culture to create laughable puns and personable portraits. Her art largely revolves around portraits as Buchanan has said her style is suited to painting the complexities of skin. Buchanan graduated from the University of Calgary in 2012 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours in Studio Concentration. Here she was able to experiment and refine her style of realism while exploring a variety of complex themes such as identity, sexuality, and the idealized versus the grotesque. In her more “serious” work, many of these themes are examined through popular culture references.

*Eating* is an exhibition of fifteen acrylic paintings that depict certain characters from popular culture while they are consuming food. Popular culture is roughly defined as cultural activities, products, ideas, and images that appeal to the general public. By using popular culture, Buchanan can reflect on the values, ethics, and beliefs that we hold as a society. These stories present familiar narratives that are easily accessible and relatable. How we relate to or interpret the stories depends upon our own cultural background and experiences. Everyone will view media in their own unique way and it can act to connect or divide us from our peers. Whether we like it or not, we are judged based on the media that we consume. Certain inferences about our character can be made on what we choose to surround ourselves with. Keeping that in mind, it is interesting to think about why Buchanan chose these particular scenes to paint and how they might reveal insights into the artist themselves.

With this exhibition, Buchanan wanted to explore the relationship between the perceived reality of media and the actual reality behind the camera. Eating food is integral to our survival and culturally it has evolved to be a mindful experience that many of us enjoy. In these scenes from TV shows or movies, we see these actors consuming food and portraying what appears to be genuine emotions, but when the director calls cut the actors spit the food out into a bucket. They repeat this artificial process until the scene is perfect before moving on to the next. As the audience, especially for young children, it is difficult to distinguish between reality and fiction when something is presented so realistically. The inclusion of food is one way to make the fictional world appear more tangible and familiar to us. Buchanan examines these contrived moments and calls into question the cultivated reality the media has presented. Painted portraits, especially in early art





history, were carefully staged with each element meticulously selected in order to tell a meaningful story. By reinterpreting these popular culture images into a traditional painting, it establishes that link of artificiality and calculated staging.

It is often said that when artists take images from popular culture and bring them into the realm of fine art they obscure the boundaries between low and high culture. Artists will generally idealize these images, but Buchanan rejects and even pokes fun at this notion based on the expressions she has selected. Buchanan's portraits have an intimate and candid quality to them where the subject avidly consumes food in an almost awkward manner. Often their mouths are left gaping open with tongues sticking out in an unflattering view or they are stuffing their face. Rather than trying to select the most favourable scene of the subject, Buchanan decides to immortalize that rare and carnal moment that makes the subject vulnerable to the viewer's judgements.

The small size of the portraits also draws the viewer in and contributes to the personal and intimate feel. Upon closer inspection the viewer will see how Buchanan builds thin, transparent overlapping layers that gives the skin a soft and glowing quality. The artist relies on intuition to guide her paintings and often sketches directly onto the canvas. Buchanan first blocks out large areas of colour and slowly adds more and more layers to achieve a level of detail she is satisfied with. If she makes a mistake she simply covers it up. Sometimes these mistakes are hinted at under the transparent layers and it helps add a richness and vibrancy to the image.

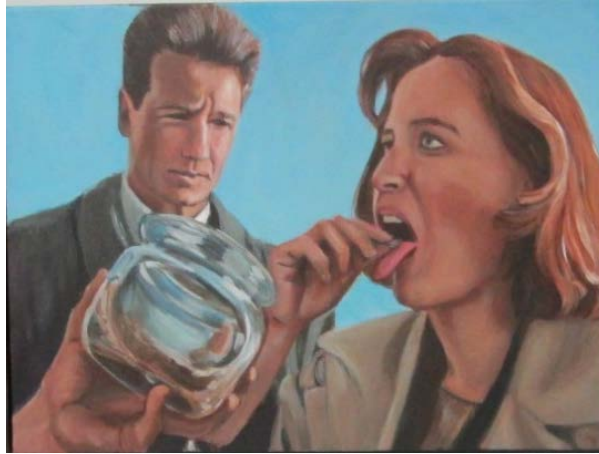
Another aspect Buchanan examines is how food is not simply a latent prop, but rather integral to the narrative and has its own implications. The conscientious selection of a single frame provides visual clues to the emotions that can be interpreted.



Let's consider a few of Buchanan's paintings. "Marie Antoinette Eats Cake" and "Daenerys Eats a Horse's Heart," two vastly different images both compositionally and in tone. The first image presents a zoomed-out view allowing the observer to take in the splendor of the surroundings and the full figure of Marie Antoinette surrounded by pastry while

passively laying down with a servant attending to her shoes. The way she uses a finger to taste the extravagant cake beside her while her dress is pulled up to her knees displays apathy and a rejection of the rigid social etiquette required for a queen. The painting clearly demonstrates the opulence and over indulgence so famously known for this historical figure. The second image is an intense close up of Daenerys' face and bloody hands as she eats a raw horse heart. The background is soft and muted so the viewer can concentrate on Daenerys and her powerful expression of determination. Because Buchanan chose to have the character with a direct gaze she becomes an active rather than passive subject that is confrontational to the viewer. It is as if you are in that world and she is making eye contact with you. This scene is pivotal for this character as Daenerys takes control of her life and proves her strength not only to herself but also to everyone around her by consuming the horse's heart.





In “Skully Eats a Cricket” we see Skully defy being intimidated by nonchalantly eating a cricket. Mulder’s expression is one of disgust and probably mirrors our own expression at the thought of eating any sort of bug. This simple act challenged what it meant to be feminine in a powerful way. “Michael Burnham Eats Kelpian” however, portrays the opposite for the character. Here Burnham is submissive and compromises her beliefs and ethics by eating Kelpian. Her power is taken away by being forcefully fed while Skully takes control of the situation by eating the cricket of her own volition.



Buchanan’s portraits offer a variety of images and themes to ponder. Even if the viewer is unaware of the context of the popular culture reference, the images are rich in visual cues to allow for multiple layers of interpretation. If nothing else, these sumptuous portraits are a delight to look at.





## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following are some general questions that can be considered when looking at portraits.

### Elementary Level Questions

- What do you see?
- Do you recognize the person?
- What is the person doing in the portrait?
- Are there other people in the portrait? Is one person the main focus of the portrait? Why or why not do you think so?
- How are the people interacting?
- How would you describe the person in the portrait? Do you think they are someone you would like to know?
- How do you think the person is feeling? What things give you clues to the person's mood or emotions?
- Are there objects in the portrait? How are they interacting with the subject?
- Does the portrait represent the past or present? Look at the subjects clothing and surroundings for clues of that time period.
- How is colour used in the piece? Does it create a certain atmosphere or give the work a distinct feeling?
- How has the artist cropped the image? Why do you think they did that?
- What adjectives would you use to describe the works? What verbs?
- Close your eyes and describe the artwork from memory. What parts did you remember and why? What parts did you forget?
- How does the artwork make you feel?
- Do you like the artwork? Why or why not?
- Does your opinion change the longer you look at the artwork?

### Secondary Level Questions

Portraits have been around for thousands of years and were originally the only way to record someone. Traditionally these portraits were a luxury for the rich and showed the subject in the most flattering way. They demonstrated traits such as wealth, power, beauty, and status. Portraits evolved beyond documentation, especially when photography became widespread. Now they provide an interesting look of the world through the artist's eyes. Good portraits not only allow you to discern traits about the subject, but also what is important to the artist.



- What do you think the goal of the artist was when they chose who they wanted to paint?
- What are they trying to convey to the public?
- How has the artist portrayed the subject? In an idealized manner or accurate?
- Does the portrait make you want to know more about the subject or content of the painting?
- How does the size and scale of the artwork affect your perception of the work?
- Can you see individual brushstrokes or marks in the work? Do they give you a sense of how the work was painted i.e. quickly and fervently, or methodical and precise?
- What insights do you gain about the artist?
- How are painted portraits different from photographs?
- Are there elements that are more successful in a painted portrait rather than a photograph and vice versa? For example, does a painted portrait showcase emotions better than a photographic portrait?

### **Interpreting the Exhibition**

When it comes to interpreting art, it is important to remember that there are no wrong answers. Everyone will have different experiences and memories that will influence how they view art. An individual's interpretation may be very different from the original intention of the artist, but that is okay as that is how art remains relevant for generations to come.

- What do you think was the goal of the artist when making these portraits?
- Does she effectively communicate her ideas? Why or why not?
- Why do you think she wanted to portray people from popular culture?
- Do you recognize any of the people in the portraits?
- How does knowing the character's story change your interpretation of the work?
- What role does food play in the portrait? Are the characters simply eating or does it represent something else? Because they are eating, does it make them more relatable?
- How does her selection of characters from tv shows or movies affect your perceptions of the artist? Can you make any conclusions about the artist's personality from these works?
- What elements (if any), i.e. colour, composition, painting style, etc. emphasize the emotions seen in the characters?



- Because these portraits are of well known characters, do you think painting in a different style that is less realistic would be less or more effective for communicating the artist's ideas?
- These portraits are a copy from the original media translated into paint. Do you think they make them less valid compared to other portraits painted from life or memory?
- Do the titles help inform your interpretation of the work? Why or why not? If not, what sort of titles would you suggest?
- What kind of questions did you have while looking at the art?
- Did the work remind you of something that you had seen before?
- Did you like looking at the exhibition?
- Did it inspire you to think differently about the movies and tv shows presented?

References on page 30

## A Brief History of Portraits

*“Painting someone’s portrait is, of course, an impossible task. What an absurd idea to try and distil a human being, the most complex organism on the planet, into flicks, washes, and blobs of paint on a two-dimensional surface.”*

— David Cobley

For as long as humans have been around we have been trying to record the world around us. There is an innate fascination to document what we see and experience, whether it’s for the benefit of ourselves or future generations. Portraits are no exception and they offer us an exciting glimpse into that time period’s beliefs, values, and ethics while providing insights about the artist.

The first known representation of the figure, known as the “Venus of Hohle Fels” was found in a cave in southern Germany. It is a small sculpture carved out of mammoth ivory 40,000 years ago. It depicts an exaggeration of the naked female form. Such artefacts renew the ongoing debate about whether these ancient sculptures were made to record what these people experienced and saw or express abstract concepts and emotions. While we cannot know for certain if this was meant to be art or an account of history, some have hypothesized the carving symbolized the desire for a prosperous community.



Fragment from the Tomb of Amenemhet and His Wife Hemet, 1976 - 1794 B.C.

It is believed, however, that the art of portraits really began in ancient Egypt with the depictions of Pharaohs and their many gods in tombs, palaces, and temples. These pieces were either painted or carved and demonstrated their religious beliefs. Pharaohs were highly revered and the art indicates they were worshipped and treated like gods. Their style of art, known as Frontalism, is easily one of the most

recognizable today. The head was always in profile while the eye was drawn as if you are viewing it from the front. The chest was illustrated to show the full broadness of the shoulders with the legs switching to a profile view with one foot in front of the other. This style was strictly regulated and it did not change for thousands of years.





Continuing that tradition established long ago in ancient Egypt, art was dedicated to portraying religious beliefs and royalty during the Middle Ages in Europe. Over the years, stylistic advances were pioneered, especially during the Italian Renaissance such as linear perspective, chiaroscuro, and sfumato. The illusion of volume and depth in paintings were much more tangible than they ever had been before. The subjects of paintings also started to shift with the introduction of the ideas of Humanism where religion was no longer the ultimate authoritative source commanding one's life. Portraits departed from the idyllic and gallant scenes of royalty and the nobleman and instead depicted the mundane of everyday life of ordinary people.

**"Elisabeth of Valois holding a portrait of Philip II", 1561 – 1565 by Sofonisba Anguissola**



**"The Floor Scrapers", 1875 by Gustave Caillebotte**

As the middle class grew, so did the popularity of portraits and the genre flourished in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. More people could afford to commission artists to paint flattering portraits of their family and loved ones. Materials for painting also became more easily accessible due to mass production so painting was not limited to a select few. The Social Realism movement extended the choice

of subjects even further to include the working class and poor, making for bold political statements at the time. The style of art also experienced a transformation initially with Impressionism followed by Post-Impressionism. Impressionism moved away from trying to recreate a perfect rendering of life and instead tried to capture the transient effects of light and colour.



“At the Moulin Rouge”, 1892 – 1895 by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Post-Impressionism was a reaction to Impressionism that rejected the Impressionists concern for trying to depict light. Rather, Post-Impressionists introduced a new concept of using colour symbolically to express emotions and other meanings. This novel idea would be pivotal for inspiring future artists to push the bounds of portraiture even further.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was rich with experimentation and artists tried different techniques in how to convey line, form, and colour. Artists took portraits one step further by trying to represent not only the likeliness of the subject, but also the subject's inner self or disposition. The art movements during this time were Fauvism, Cubism, and Expressionism and they would help shape modern art yet to come.

The central art movements later shifted from representational imagery, including portraiture, to exclusively explore conceptual ideas and abstraction. It was not until the 1960s when portraits would make a comeback in the Pop art movement.

Pop art pulled imagery from popular culture and everyday life effectively obscuring the boundaries between high art and low culture.



“On the Balcony”, 1955 - 1957 by Peter Black

Portraits are considerably predominant in our culture today. They thrive in the form of paintings, photographs, and selfies. With such a diverse and rich history of painting to inspire artists, portraits offer endless opportunities to develop new and intriguing ways of creating art while offering incredible insights and explorations into what it means to be human.

*“Portrait painting is difficult. There are no short cuts... Every human being encompasses a whole world within himself. The artist must understand this.” — Martha Orozco*





## **Art Activity for Kindergarten to Grade 12**

### **Portrait of a Friend**

#### **Purpose:**

To introduce students to the basic ideas of staging and drawing portraits

#### **Objectives:**

- Learn how to stage a scene
- Experiment with different mediums and techniques

#### **Materials:**

- Variety of drawing tools such as coloured pencils, crayons, markers
- Acrylic paint
- Various weights of paper depending on the medium being used
- Containers
- Paint brushes
- Paper towel
- Camera

#### **Motivation**

Buchanan's portraits capture very candid moments and they give the viewer a glimpse into what everyday is like for those characters. The viewer can see how something as simple as eating is full of a range emotions and atmospheres. In this project, the students will have the opportunity to create their own staged portrait of a friend and attempt to capture various emotions in a portrait. It can be a very simply making an observation and capturing a moment of concentration of frustration, or creating a moment that provokes a reaction, like capturing the excitement and anticipation of getting out of class to go outside.

Students should think about what kind of scene and emotion they want to capture in their portrait. They should refer to Buchanan's portraits as inspiration in how she framed the works to achieve different moods and atmospheres. Should the portrait be a close up of the subject's expression or should they consider framing the work so that the background can provide visual clues? It's up to the students to decide and experiment.

\*\*\* Allow students to use cameras to take a photograph to use as a reference, just like Buchanan does in her paintings of screen grabs from film and television.



**Project:**

This project can be as simple or as complex as time allows and is a great way for students to reflect on the *exhibition* Eating by Heather Buchanan.

1. Group children into pairs and discuss some ideas for scenarios they may want to try. For really young children it may be easier to assign them to a specific activity. For example, if you choose to stay in the classroom you can have groups reading, eating a snack, playing with a toy, putting on their shoes, washing their hands, fixing their hair in the mirror, etc.
2. One student will pose first for the other student to draw with their pencil and paper. You can have the student pose for roughly ten minutes. Depending on the skill level of your students you should adjust the time to suit their attention span. After the time is completed the student who was posing will now draw the other student. They can simply switch spots or do an entirely new pose depending on the skill level of your students.
3. After they are finished drawing they can take their paper back to their desks and colour them in or they can leave them as pencil drawings.
4. For more advanced students you can extend the lesson over several classes so students have the opportunity to draw in depth portraits from life or you can have students take a picture of their staged scene to work from as a reference. They may wish to try painting their portrait with acrylic paint rather than using coloured pencils.

**Images for Inspiration**



Left: David Friedman

Top Right: Marco Foderà

Bottom Right: Hope Gangloff





## **Art Activity for Kindergarten to Grade 3**

### **Exploring Expressions**

#### **Purpose:**

To introduce students to the importance of expressions in art

#### **Objectives:**

- Learn how expressions showcase a variety of emotions
- Understand how smaller parts of an image come together to form a whole
- Experimenting with mixed media

#### **Materials:**

- Magazines
- Glue
- Scissors
- Markers
- Paper
- Mirrors

#### **Motivation**

Buchanan's portraits showcase a variety of emotions and facial expressions. She does not try to paint the subjects at their most ideal or beautiful, but rather showcases some awkward expressions that happen while eating. In this project students will explore and experiment with exaggerating expressions to match emotions that one can experience while eating by creating a collage from various other images. They will have to determine what kind of emotion they want to portray while eating a certain food, perhaps happy or disgust, and think about how that can be expressed in facial features.

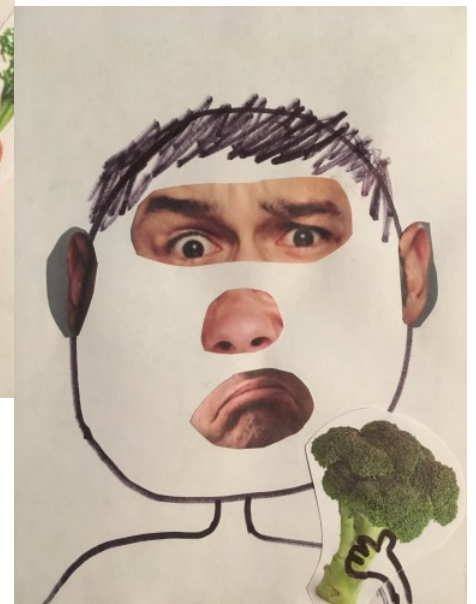
#### **Project:**

This project requires preparation beforehand. A variety of facial features such as eyes, ears, nose, and mouths should be cut out from magazines along with various food items.

1. Have students look through the various food items to select one. Based on that food item they should think about how they feel when eating it. Do

they like it or hate it? Have them pick an emotion they associate with it and the corresponding expression.

2. They can practice the expression in the mirror to see what their facial features do. Do they stick their tongue out, close their eyes, open their mouth really wide? They should look for cut out features that match their expression.
3. Once they have selected their pieces have the students draw a large circle on the paper in marker. If they want, they can add a neck and shoulders.
4. Students can then start to glue the facial features down. The students can also mix drawing with the collage. For example, if they didn't find a nose that they liked, they can draw one in. Once all the features of the face are glued down they can draw in hair and add the piece of food into the image.





## **Art Activity for Grades 3 to 7**

### **Line Portrait**

#### **Purpose:**

To create a realistic line portrait using a photograph for reference

#### **Objectives:**

- Learn to use line to depict the contours and features of the face
- Learn about the proportions of the face

#### **Materials:**

- Watercolour paper
- Watercolour paints
- Acetate sheets
- Brushes
- Palettes for mixing paint
- Colour Wheel
- Containers for water
- Paper towel
- Fine tip permanent marker
- Camera
- Tempera or acrylic paints (optional)
- Large jar lids (optional)
- Fine grit sandpaper (optional)

#### **Motivation**

All of Buchanan's paintings are done in a realistic style which is very difficult when painting portraits. It is very easy to see when something is out of proportion when it comes to the figure and the painting will look wrong. For that reason, many young artists often become discouraged drawing a portrait when it doesn't come out looking exactly like what they see in real life. Tracing over a photograph can help young artists discover how to draw the contours of the face and the correct proportions.



**Project:**

This project requires preparation beforehand. Each student will need their photograph taken, preferably a close up (similar to how Buchanan frames her subjects in her paintings) on a plain white background. Encourage students to try a different expression rather than just smiling. Print these black and white photos out to fill an 8.5 x 11 inch sheet of paper.

1. Students will tape the piece of acetate and place it over their photograph to create a self portrait or you can randomly distribute the photographs for the students to create a portrait of their classmate.
2. Have the students trace the contours of the face with the permanent marker. These drawings aren't about capturing every single detail, but rather the main shapes and lines.
3. Students can now work on creating their backgrounds on the watercolour paper with their watercolour paints. To create a soft background they can use the wet on wet technique. Use clean water to dampen the paper with a clean brush. While the paper is wet apply one colour with very loose and gestural brush strokes ensuring to leave white spaces around the page. Use the additional colours to fill in the white areas and then tip the paper to help the colours blend together. To ensure the background does not become muddy, students should refer to basic colour theory principles and select a colour scheme using about three colours.
4. Once the backgrounds are dry, attach the acetate to the background for the completed portrait.



Optional: This project can be made more complex. Students can paint their acetate line drawings to add even more life and dimension to the portrait. They can also select a photographic reference to create a background. In many of Buchanan's portraits she has painted the background so the details are soft and hazy with large blocks of colour. Students can look for images that are blurry so they can focus on colours rather than details. They can also experiment with tempera or acrylic paint on the background.

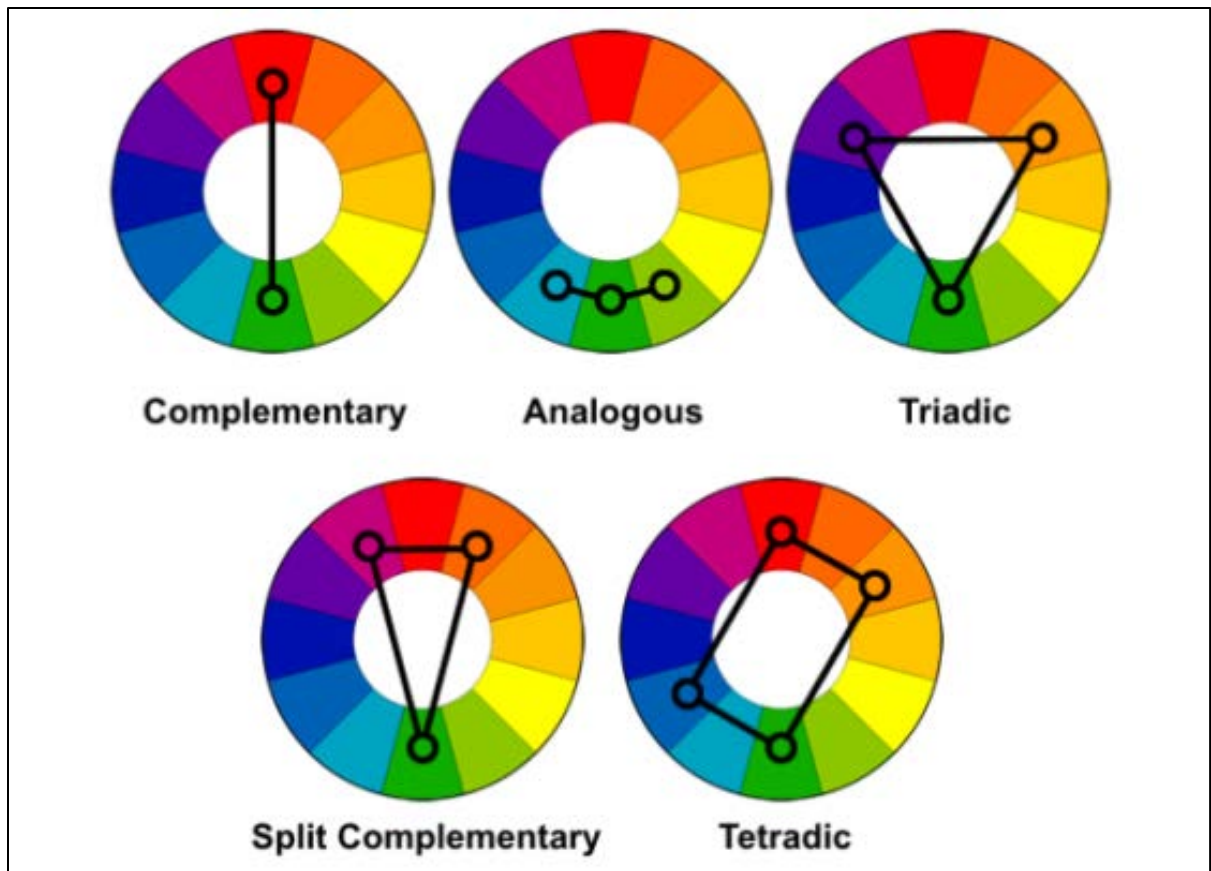
- In order for the paint to adhere to the acetate the back of it must be sanded. You can create temporary sanders by gluing a piece of fine grit sandpaper that is slightly larger in size to the top side of a lid. Students should ensure they thoroughly sand only the area that is under their line portrait.
- Once the back of the acetate has been sanded, the students can paint the back of the portrait with opaque tempera or acrylic paints.
- When the paint has dried students will turn the acetate over and attach the portrait to their background either by stapling the sheets together.



Lesson plan adapted from:

<https://cdn.dick-blick.com/lessonplans/selfies-exactly-where-i-want-to-be/selfies-exactly-where-i-want-to-be-selfies.pdf>

<http://dalimoustache.blogspot.com/2012/04/layered-self-portraits.html?m=1>



Example of basic colour schemes

For more information about colour theory visit Learn the Basics of Color Theory to Know What Looks Good

[https://lifehacker.com/learn-the-basics-of-color-theory-to-know-what-looks-goo-1608972072?utm\\_campaign=socialflow\\_lifehacker\\_facebook&utm\\_source=lifehacker\\_facebook&utm\\_medium=socialflow](https://lifehacker.com/learn-the-basics-of-color-theory-to-know-what-looks-goo-1608972072?utm_campaign=socialflow_lifehacker_facebook&utm_source=lifehacker_facebook&utm_medium=socialflow)



## **Art Activity for Grades 4 to 9**

### **Half and Half Portrait**

#### **Purpose:**

To draw half of a symmetrical portrait based on a black and white photograph

#### **Objectives:**

- Learn about proportions and symmetry of the face
- Learn how value can be used to create volume and form
- Use observation to recreate a realistic image

#### **Materials:**

- Pencils
- Erasers
- Paper
- Rulers
- Camera

#### **Motivation**

Buchanan's portraits are rich in light and shadow that help create the illusion of depth and space in her work. Without shadows or highlights the work would appear flat and dull. In this project students will work in black and white to examine how value helps create the impression of volume and shape. By using half of a photograph for reference, students can constantly review their drawing as it progresses and adjust as needed. They can carefully observe facial features and translate an exact mirror copy. Attention to detail is encouraged.

#### **Project:**

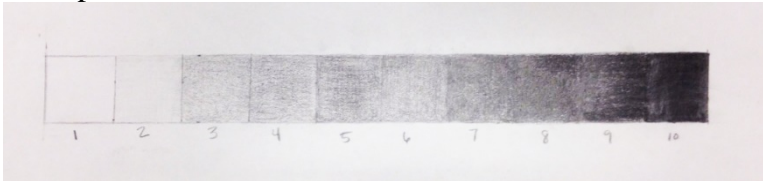
This project requires preparation beforehand. Each student will need their photograph taken, preferably a close up (similar to how Buchanan frames her subjects in her paintings) on a plain white background. Print the black and white photos to fill an 8.5 x 11 inch sheet of paper. You can either crop the photos in the centre of the face before printing or cut them in half after you have printed them.

1. Have the student attach the photo lined up to the edge of a larger sheet of paper or the students can cut out the shape of their head and place off centre on a sheet of paper.



2. Instruct the students to draw very light horizontal lines for their eyebrows, eye, nose, and mouth. This will help keep things symmetrical. You can demonstrate to students how they can measure from the centre of the photograph to the edge of the feature to determine where they should place the features and edge of the head.
3. Encourage the students to carefully observe their features and draw what they see. They should draw very lightly so it is easy to erase.
4. Once they are satisfied with their drawing they can start adding in tonal values. It is easiest to work lightly and add layers to create darker tones. It also might be helpful if students created a value scale of 5 to 7 greys prior to the assignment so they know how hard to press in order to match the values in the photograph. To see the differentiation in values encourage students to squint while looking at the photograph.

Example of a value scale



For more information about value visit Art and the Web: Value  
<http://blog.teamtreehouse.com/art-and-the-web-value-2>



<http://josettebrouwer.edublogs.org/2012/05/17/split-face-portraits/>  
Lesson plan adapted from:  
<https://www.theartofed.com/lesson-plans/meet-me-in-the-middle-free-lesson-plan-download/>



## **Art Activity for Grades 6 to 12**

### **From Blurry to Realistic**

#### **Purpose:**

To carefully observe shapes and value while continually reworking an image to create a realistic drawing

#### **Objectives:**

- Use observation to see how proportional relationships are formed between shapes
- Create a variety of tones and highlights
- Explore the process of continually refining an image

#### **Materials:**

- Charcoal paper
- Charcoal
- Slide projector or digital projector
- Photographic portrait

#### **Motivation**

This project will help students learn to draw what they see rather than what they think they see. One of the biggest hurdles to drawing realistically is how our brain tricks us into thinking it knows how certain shapes look so we try to draw what we know instead of what we are seeing. This causes drawings to look awkward and wrong. To help students get past this, one technique is to have them draw a blurry image that only shows value. You continually re-adjust the image so it slowly comes into focus while students rework their drawings until the final image is revealed. This method also helps alleviate any stress a student might have when it comes to drawing something realistic as they do not know what they are drawing. This process is similar to how Buchanan works. She starts by overlaying large general blocks of colour and then refines those blocks further and further, adding more colour or taking it away, until the details are revealed. She doesn't worry about mistakes as she knows she can simply cover them up with paint.

**Project:**

This project requires preparation beforehand. If your school has access to a slide projector then you can use the projector to blur the image. It should be a black and white portrait that has very distinct areas of light and dark. If you only have a digital projector you can digitally blur the images in Photoshop using the Gaussian blur filter and project each successive image. To also help the students focus only on the shapes and value, turn the image upside down.

1. Project the blurriest of the images (the image should be very soft with no distinct lines or shapes) and get students to record what they see using charcoal. They should try to copy exactly what is shown and be mindful of proportions and scale of the shapes. For each stage you can give them roughly fifteen to twenty minutes depending on the skill level of your students.
2. Adjust the image so it is slightly more focused and have students rework their image. They may have to erase parts that were previously a shade of grey and add darker tones to specific sections. This process will be repeated approximately four times until the final clear image is shown. You can adjust the iterations based on their skill level and available time.
3. When the final clear image is revealed encourage students to continue working to refine the last of the details.

Example of blurry image stages



<https://ccnyarted.wordpress.com/2012/02/24/drawing-technique-teaching-students-to-draw-what-they-see/>



## **Art Activity for Grades 9 to 12**

### **Reinterpretation of Popular Culture**

#### **Purpose:**

To research their own topic and choose a piece of popular culture to help represent their ideas

#### **Objectives:**

- Use research to develop an idea
- Critically examine popular culture and how it can be reinterpreted
- Experiment with acrylic paint to create something in a realistic style
- Explore how composition affects the mood and atmosphere of a work

#### **Materials:**

- Acrylic paint
- Brushes
- Containers for water
- Heavy paper or canvas
- Access to computer for media screen shots

#### **Motivation**

In this project students will follow Buchanan's process to develop work about topics they are passionate or interested about and show how pop culture can be used to create a commentary on those themes. It could be anything from current social or environmental issues, human connection, or perception of self for example. This project also introduces how important research is to art and the artist's process. In order to create meaningful work, the artist should have a thorough understanding of the topic and how it has been presented before.

#### **Project:**

1. Students will select a topic or theme they want to explore. It might be helpful if they choose three and do a bit of research on each topic to see if one has greater potential over the others. Once they have selected their topic they should find legitimate sources to review information about it. The school or public library would be a great resource.





2. Once they have researched their topic and formulated their ideas the students can select a piece of media they think they can use to represent their idea. This can be from a movie, TV show, or even a photograph.
3. If they are using a scene from a movie or TV show, the student should examine various shots from within that scene to determine which composition will best communicate their ideas. Buchanan did not restrict herself to only doing portraits that were closely cropped, but explored having scenes with other people in them or showing the surrounding environment to communicate different ideas. The student should carefully consider what kind of mood and atmosphere they are trying to achieve and how the composition can help provide visual cues to the audience. While Buchanan typically translated the still of the media very faithfully, students can try cropping the image to suit their needs.
4. After selecting their desired image students can begin reinterpreting it in paint. If they are concerned about achieving hyper realistic results they can try creating a proportional grid to help them sketch out the scene on their canvas or paper.
5. As previously mentioned, Buchanan kept the paintings very similar to their source material. Students can do the same if they wish. They can also consider changing aspects, such as colour or adding their own elements to it as well. Colour can be used to infer specific types of emotions and create an overall mood that could help with portraying their idea.
6. Once the class has completed the project you can have a class or small group discussions where students can talk about their work and what kind of techniques they used to convey their idea.

Note: This project would ideally extend over several classes, however, if time is short then an option would be to ask students to reflect on the themes present in Buchanan's exhibition and create their own portrait of someone eating in popular culture that is relevant to them.

Images for Inspiration (By Alice X. Zhang)





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