Lesson Plans | Patron, Master Artist, and Apprentice: A Symbiotic Relationship | Visual Arts | Grades 6–12
While other artists used pen and ink for their preparatory drawings, Rubens more often used oil paint and panel. These preparatory paintings are called oil sketches or modelli. A master of a large studio, Rubens would often paint an oil sketch for a patron, gain approval, and then pass this sketch on to an assistant for the creation of the final painting. Rubens would then come in at the final stages and add his own finishing touches.

In this lesson, collaborative student teams will take on the roles of patron, master artist (Rubens), and apprentice. Each team will gain insight into the process that Rubens and members of his studio went through to create a painting for a given patron. Each team will create a portrait that reflects their knowledge and understanding of the process.

Students will closely examine Rubens’s oil sketches and examples of finished oil paintings.

Students will learn about Rubens’s studio and his interaction with patrons.

Students will work in collaborative teams of three people, each member taking the role of patron, master artist, or apprentice.

Collaborative teams will work together to create a portrait of the patron team member.

Collaborative teams will present their portraits and discuss their reflections on the process.

Materials for this activity may vary depending upon available facilities and budget. There are two options below, one using wet media, the other using dry media. Keep in mind that neither option utilizes the same materials used by Rubens. Instead of focusing on learning how to use the exact kind of materials that Rubens used, students will be concentrating on the process behind creating a work of art, as well as examining the color palettes used and degrees of finish attained in Rubens’s sketches vs. his paintings.

Students may also compare how the surface qualities of the oil-based media used in work by Rubens differ from those of the media they use for their artwork.

Option 1, Wet Media:
- Watercolor sets (one set per team)
- Brushes
- Cups of water
- Paper towels or rags
- Watercolor paper or illustration board (at least two sheets per team)

Option 2, Dry Media:
- Colored pencils or crayons
- Unlined white or brown butcher paper (at least two sheets per team)

1. Download and print class set of several of Rubens’s oil sketches.
2. Download and print class set of several of Rubens’s finished works.
3. Review background information on Rubens available on this website.
4. Review information on oil sketches available on this website.
5. Review the procedure for creating a portrait.
6. Prepare materials.
**CLASS PROCEDURE**

1. Discuss with students the concept of the oil sketch and how Rubens used them in his studio.

2. Tell students that as a master of a large studio, Rubens would often paint an oil sketch for a patron, gain approval and then pass this sketch on to an assistant for the creation of the final painting. Rubens would then come in at the final stages and add his own finishing touches.

3. Show students several examples of Rubens's oil sketches.

4. Compare the oil sketches with the final works; ask students to locate differences between the oil sketch and the final painting.

5. Discuss with students why they think some aspects of the works changed. Was it due to the artist's creative whim or due to the patron's wishes?

6. Now tell students that they are going to break up into collaborative teams of three people, each member taking the role of either patron, master artist, or apprentice.

7. Inform collaborative teams that they will work together to create a portrait of the patron team member. Each team member will have a particular role to play:

   a. The patron will inform the master artist what he/she wants in a portrait and will sit for the portrait. The patron should consider how he/she wants to be portrayed and what message he/she wants to convey—is it one of beauty, of wealth, of great intelligence? Patron will then approve the sketch and give suggestions for desired alterations.

   b. The master artist will interview the patron to get ideas for how to design the portrait and will create a sketch from life of the patron. Keep in mind that this sketch should be created relatively quickly (5–20 minutes) and its goal is to give a rough indication of how the patron looks, capture the desired message of the patron (if one of wealth, master artist might give the patron lots of jewelry and include an image of a grand house and land in the background, etc.) and to use a combination of colors similar to that Rubens used for his oil sketches. Stress to students that this project is about examining the work of Rubens and trying out a new process; it is not about mastering the skill of drawing or achieving a realistic likeness of a person. The sketch should indicate the outlines of the design and areas of color. It should give enough information for the apprentice to paint the finished work. The master artist will devise the color palette for the final painting.

   c. When finished with the sketch, the master artist will present the patron with the sketch and ask for desired alterations. The patron will then approve the sketch and come up with suggestions (at least 3–5) for the finished portrait.

   d. The master artist will then give the apprentice the sketch and list of suggestions from the patron. The apprentice will create a final portrait on a new piece of paper, looking at the sketch by the master artist, and considering the patron’s desired alterations. The team should reexamine the images of finished Rubens's paintings and help the apprentice come up with a color palette that is similar to one of them.

   e. After the apprentice has worked up the final portrait, he or she will give the portrait to the master artist. The master artist should add at least 3–5 finishing touches to the portrait.

   f. Last, the master artist will present the patron with the portrait.

8. Once students have completed their portrait, have them write a short statement that reflects their thoughts on the process. Ask students to consider the following questions in their papers: What was your experience of creating an artwork using this process? Who do you consider the primary creator of the artwork and why (or do you think there was a primary creator?) How does this process of creating artwork support creativity? How does it limit it? What is different about the look of oil paint compared to the material used in your artwork?

9. Students should be prepared to present their portraits and written reflections to the class.

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**VOCABULARY**

- **Modello** highly finished sketch in oil paint
- **Bozzetto** quick sketch in oil paint
- **Grisaille** monochromatic painting in shades of gray
- **Oil Sketch** preparatory drawing drawn in paint
- **Panel** wooden painting surface
- **Oil Paint** paint in which the vehicle is oil
- **Gesso** a white chalky substance brushed onto a canvas or panel to seal it and prepare it for painting
- **Medium** a substance used to change the substance of paint; in the case of Rubens’ paintings, linseed oil may have been mixed with the paint to improve its flow and change its level of transparency
- **Glaze** thin, transparent layer of paint. Many layers of glaze make up a finished painting by Rubens.
NATIONAL STANDARDS: VISUAL ARTS

Standard 1—Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts

Grades 6–8
Understands what makes different art media, techniques, and processes effective (or ineffective) in communicating various ideas
Knows how the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes can be used to enhance communication of experiences and ideas

Grades 9–12
Applies media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that one’s intentions are carried out in artworks
Understands how the communication of ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes one uses

Standard 2—Knows how to use structures (e.g., sensory qualities, organizational principles, expressive features) and functions of art

Grades 6–8
Knows some of the effects of various visual structures (e.g., design elements such as line, color, shape; principles such as repetition, rhythm, balance) and functions of art
Knows how the qualities of structures and functions of art are used to improve communication of one’s ideas

Grades 9–12
Understands how the characteristics and structures of art are used to accomplish commercial, personal, communal, or other artistic intentions
Understands the effectiveness of various artworks in terms of organizational structures and functions
Knows how organizational principles and functions can be used to solve specific visual arts problems

Standard 3—Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts

Grades 6–8
Knows how visual, spatial, and temporal concepts integrate with content to communicate intended meaning in one’s artworks
Knows different subjects, themes, and symbols (through context, value, and aesthetics) which convey intended meaning in artworks

Grades 9–12
Understands how visual, spatial, temporal, and functional values of artworks are tempered by culture and history
Applies various subjects, symbols, and ideas in one’s artworks

Standard 4—Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Grades 6–8
Understands similarities and differences among the characteristics of artworks from various eras and cultures (e.g., materials; visual, spatial, and temporal structures)
Understands the historical and cultural contexts of a variety of art objects
Understands how factors of time and place (e.g., climate, resources, ideas, technology) influence visual, spatial, or temporal characteristics that give meaning or function to a work of art

Grades 9–12
Knows a variety of historical and cultural contexts regarding characteristics and purposes of works of art
Knows the function and meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times, and places
Understands relationships among works of art in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture
Standard 5—Understands the characteristics and merits of one’s own artwork and the artwork of others

Grades 6–8
- Distinguishes among multiple purposes for creating works of art
- Understands possible contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks
- Understands how one’s own artworks, as well as artworks from various eras and cultures, may elicit a variety of responses

Grades 9–12
- Identifies intentions of those creating artworks
- Understands some of the implications of intention and purpose in particular works of art
- Knows how specific works are created and relate to historical and cultural contexts
- Understands how various interpretations can be used to understand and evaluate works of visual art