

## PORTRAITS IN BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

### TEACHERS' NOTES

Portrait worksheets can be used individually, or several can be used to form a trail, enabling pupils to compare different paintings. They are suitable for KS2 - KS4, but it is helpful to split KS2 classes into three or four groups with an adult to assist them. The groups can then share their findings with the rest of the class. Alternatively, teachers can use the information provided to produce their own worksheets. At KS1, adults with a small group of children could use the pupil worksheets as starting points for discussion.

It is worth pointing out to children that most of the pictures were not produced for public gallery display, (most of them are much older than the Art Gallery), but for homes, churches, workplaces, etc. Portraits grouped together by chronology can give children a false impression of relationships between the sitters and paintings, which did not exist in real life.

Children need to be encouraged to think of each picture as a unique representation of an individual or group of people, painted by a living artist. Both sitters and artist were trying to convey something about themselves and their view of the world when they arrived at the chosen form of portrait. In many portraits, individuals are represented in a way that indicates their profession or social status. Often these are revealed through important objects, signifying their profession (mainly male). Other pictures concentrate on the individual's appearance and costume (mainly female).

*\* We have selected those pictures that are usually on display, but please check before your visit that they are on show.*

### BOOKING A GALLERY VISIT:

To book an unassisted visit, or to arrange a teaching session with the Schools Liaison teacher (Birmingham LEA schools only), telephone 0121 303 3890

### LINKS TO THE ART NATIONAL CURRICULUM

#### 1. Exploring and developing ideas

At KS1: pupils record from first hand observations, and explore ideas.

At KS2: pupils collect visual information to help them develop ideas.

At KS3: to develop visual literacy, pupils learn about the different ways in which ideas, feelings and meanings are communicated in visual form; they explore ideas for different purposes and audiences.

#### 3a. Evaluating and developing work

At KS1: Pupils should review what others have done and say what they think and feel about it.

At KS2: Compare ideas, methods and approaches in others' work and say what they think and feel about them.

At KS3: Analyse and evaluate others' work, express opinions and make reasoned judgements.

#### 4c. Knowledge and Understanding

Pupils should be taught about differences and similarities in the work of artists, craftspeople and designers in different times and cultures (e.g. painters at KS1, Western Europe and the wider world at KS2; differences in purposes and audiences at KS3).

#### 5c. Breadth of study

At KS1: Pupils should investigate different kinds of art, craft and design during visits to local museums, galleries and sites.

At KS2: Pupils should investigate art, craft and design in a variety of genres, styles and traditions during visits to local museums, galleries and sites.

At KS3: Pupils should investigate art, craft and design in a variety of genres, styles and traditions, and from a range of historical, social and cultural contexts, during visits to local museums, galleries and sites.

#### LINKS TO QCA SCHEMES OF WORK

Unit 1A: Self Portrait

Unit 2A: Picture this!

Unit 3A: Portraying relationships

Unit 4A: Viewpoints

Unit 7A: Self-image

Generic unit: Visiting a museum, gallery or site.

## **Gallery 27**

### FLEMISH SCHOOL

*Nicholas Gaze and his son with St. Nicholas (c. 1518)*

This painting is the left half of a diptych (a painting with two panels), the other part of which probably showed the Virgin and Child, to whom St. Nicholas was presenting the donor. The arms identify him as Nicholas Gaze de Joursauveux, a knight in the service of Philip, Duke of Burgundy. The disproportionately small figure of the son and the cross he holds signify that this was a posthumous portrait. St. Nicholas is often identified by three golden balls, symbolic of the dowry which he gave to the three daughters of a poor man to stop them being sold into prostitution. Here however, he carries three round loaves on a baker's peel, in a visual pun on Nicholas Gaze's position as Supply Officer to the Burgundian army.

## **Gallery 26**

### GIOVANNI BELLINI (1426/30-1516)

*Madonna and child with Saints Peter and Paul and the Donor (1505)*

Giovanni Bellini is the most important Venetian painter of the last years of the fifteenth century. He created and developed the sensuous and colouristic style associated with Venice which was handed down to the great painters of the 16th century, such as Titian and Giorgione.

Bellini brings life to this symmetrical arrangement, based on the pyramid. In the old Byzantine tradition, the icon of the Virgin was rigidly flanked by saints, represented in a fixed convention which was intended to show the unalterable nature of belief. Bellini uses the same arrangement, but gives the figures life, whilst retaining their sacred character and dignity. They appear solid, with the light source from the left giving them a three dimensional appearance. The kneeling donor appears to be painted by a different artist.

### BOCCACCINO (c.1467-1525)

*Virgin and Child with Saints and a Donor*

The symmetry of the figures surrounding the Virgin and Child is altered by the kneeling donor who wears contemporary clothing. St. John the Baptist, who prophesied the coming of Christ, stands on the far left. St. Nicholas is represented as a bishop on the right, with cope, staff and three gold balls, which symbolize charity.

### JAN VAN SCOREL (1474-1562)

*Noli me tangere with donors (1557-1561)*

The main panel shows the meeting of Christ and Mary Magdalen after the Crucifixion and Resurrection. It is a supreme moment of recognition as the Magdalen was the first to see the risen Christ, though she had at first thought

he was a gardener. The title, 'Noli me tangere', (do not touch me), is a quotation from the Latin Vulgate account of Christ's first words to her. (John 20.17)

The donor family is shown on the wings. They have been identified from inscriptions on the back of the wings and from the arms on the signet ring worn by one of the male donors. Hendrik Joeszoen van der Stypen of Duveland (d. 1531 ) was churchwarden of the Nieuwe Kerk, Delft, where this altarpiece originally stood, in 1504; later he was burgomaster (1509 and 1514). He is shown with his wife Marritgen and their sons and daughters. All except one son, Joest Hendrick (left wing, second from the right) were dead by the time the altarpiece was made, so the theme of Resurrection would have been most appropriate.

Jan van Scorel, though little known now, was one of the leading Dutch painters of his day. He had travelled in Germany, Italy and even to the Holy Land (1518-24). He was one of those artists who brought a knowledge of Mannerism to the north, and evolved a highly individual Dutch Mannerist style. His figures have a delicate refinement of form and gesture which stems from Mannerism, while the brilliant, thinly painted landscape is in the northern tradition. The death of the fifth daughter, depicted in miniature and dressed in white, is not recorded. She possibly died in infancy.

#### PALMA IL GIOVANI (1544-1628)

##### *Portrait of a Collector*

Collecting works of art, both ancient and modern, grew to new importance during the Renaissance. In this Venetian portrait, which dates from around 1600, the collector is surrounded by his treasures. In the background to the right are fragments of antique sculpture, including a cast of the famous Roman head of the Emperor Vitellius. (A seventeenth century bust of Vitellius after the same Roman prototype may be on display in gallery 23). To the left is a well known contemporary piece, a sketch model for the figure of St. Sebastian made in marble by Alessandro Vittoria, for a Venetian church.

We do not know what the page held out by the collector is meant to tell us. The identities of both artist and sitter are controversial. Palma, called 'il Giovanne', the younger, to distinguish him from his artist father, formed his style in close contact with Titian and Tintoretto. The sitter may also have been a sculptor.

#### **Gallery 25**

##### JEAN-BAPTISTE SANTERRE (1651-1717)

##### *Philippe Duc d'Orleans, Regent of France (1674-1723)*

This grandiose image follows in the tradition of French royal portraiture established by Rigaud's portrait of Louis XIV. Rigaud created an image of royal majesty and originated the tradition of the court portrait in painting, where the

aim is less to depict individual character than the rank and condition of the sitter. This is achieved by nobility of attitude and expressiveness of gesture, in an age when deportment and attitude were symbols of rank to a far greater extent than they now are.

Philippe, Duc d'Orleans was Louis XI V's nephew and was appointed Regent from 1715 to 1723, during the minority of Louis XV. He is depicted wearing armour and holding the baton of a Marshal to symbolise the military might of France.

Reaction from the forced austerity and political upheaval which clouded the closing years of the 17th century in France, found its expression in a growing relaxation of morals. An elegant frivolity became the vogue; the era of 'boudoir' art had begun. This found full scope during the regency of the libertine Duke of Orleans (Louis was five years old when he succeeded to the throne).

The portrait portrays a powerful and impressive man who embodies the nobility, military might and importance of the country which, as Regent, he represents. The mode of dress is significant; the armour appears to be symbolic rather than practical. Visiting ambassadors would receive an impression of culture and refinement, enhanced by the opulent swathes of drapery, which lend an air of classical grandeur to the figure. However, the drapery and elaborate wig would be highly inappropriate on the battlefield! The Duke carries the Baton of the Marshal of France, emblazoned with the fleur-de-lys, to indicate his role as commander of her armies.

## Gallery 24

SIR PETER LELY (1618-1680)

*Elizabeth, Lady Monson (1613-1695) c.1661*

Lely's portrait practice survived from the reign of Charles I, through the Commonwealth to the Restoration in 1660, when he was appointed Principal Painter to Charles II.

The lady in this portrait has a composed facial expression, somewhat lacking in psychological insight; she is self-assured, looking directly at the viewer. Her clothing is opulent and in the fashionable French style of the Restoration, of sumptuous velvets and silks. Pearl jewellery enhances the opalescent skin and shining hair, adding to the extravagant feeling of the painting.

Lady Monson's third husband was tried as a Regicide in 1661 and he died in the Fleet prison. She disagreed with his political views and is said to have whipped her naked husband after tying him to a bedpost with the help of her maids, in order to force him to change his views. This colourful story is recounted on the 18th century rococo frame which is decorated with cat o'nine tails and surmounted by a figure of Justice.

In a family memoir, Lady Monson is described as a 'handsome, proper woman of great wit and conduct..... a very notable woman, only she was a little too masculine'.

## **Gallery 22**

ANTON VON MARON (1733-1808)

*Peter du Cane*

From the Restoration and throughout the 18th century, the Grand Tour (a journey of one or two years to the continent, chiefly to France, the Netherlands and Italy) became a conventional feature in the education of the English gentleman. Often it was the eldest son of a wealthy family, accompanied by a tutor, who was sent to complete his education. He would study, view Italy's classical ruins, and would often purchase sculptures and paintings. These purchases formed the basis for many collections amongst the landed gentry. It became fashionable for such gentlemen to have their portraits painted in Italy. This picture was painted in Rome by an Austrian artist in 1736.

The portrait conveys the image of a wealthy, cultivated and well-travelled English gentleman.

The artist has included certain objects in the picture to ensure that we are left in no doubt about the status of his subject. Du Cane is fashionably dressed and carries a sword, a symbol which both indicates his gentility and shows that he is a man of action.

Beyond the window draperies, the Colosseum can be seen, although it probably was not visible from the artist's studio. Another allusion to Peter du Cane's classical learning is the antique bust in the background. The marble floor, opulent rococo furniture and Oriental carpet all enhance the grandeur of the confident, poised figure.

THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

*Miss Isabella Franks (1770's)*

Isabella's parents, cousins who married in 1765, belonged to one of the leading families of British Jewry. The Franks lived at Teddington in Middlesex, then part of London's rural fringe. Isabella, who inherited great wealth, married a future Royal chaplain and baronet in 1787. She died at a great age in 1855.

Gainsborough's theme of informal portrait of a child with a lamb introduces a hint of the Old Master tradition of grand allegorical portraiture. It is a happy coincidence that a Murillo such as Gainsborough may have had in the back of his mind (The Child Christ as the Good Shepherd) is on view in the adjoining Gallery 23

## **Gallery 21**

EDGAR DEGAS (1834-1917)

*A Roman Beggar Woman (1857)*

This early painting dates from Degas' visit to Italy in 1857 when he was twenty-three. The unconventional close-up profile view and restrained colour harmony lend the peasant woman an extraordinary dignity, despite her shabby clothes and careworn face and hands. Degas may have had in mind the 17th century peasant studies by such artists as the Spaniard Velasquez, or the Italian Ceruti. She may have been one of the professional models who worked for the multitude of painters in Rome at the time.

Though a friend of the Impressionists, Degas was better known for his interior scenes, studies of the ballet and portraits.

MARY CASSATT (1845-1926)

*Portrait of a Woman (c. 1882)*

The American artist, Mary Cassatt, settled in Paris in 1874, after travelling and studying widely in Europe. Her style developed through her contact with artists Manet and especially Degas, her lifelong friend.

This unfinished, loosely painted portrait dates from a period when she was developing a more tautly contoured style as a result of her interest in Japanese prints and her activity as a printmaker. Her subjects were mainly women and children, but her emphasis was less on character study or picturesque interiors than on the '*reflections and shadows on skin and costumes for which she had the greatest understanding*' (Degas). This preoccupation with the fugitive effects of light is in keeping with the interests of the Impressionists.