

CURRICULUM THEMES

Identity; Photography

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

GRADE 6 | CP6.11- Students will both explore how an artist uses portraiture to convey identity and try their hand at depicting a person's identity through drawing.

ROSALIE FAVELL: FACING THE CAMERA: DAPHNE ODJIG

This image of artist Daphne Odjig is part of a large series of portraits that Favell created called Facing the Camera from 2008 to 2016. Favell wished to document the Indigenous arts community, re-evaluating the relationship between Indigenous peoples and photographic documentation, which was often in its own way a form of domination. Curator Michelle LaVallee wrote the following about this body of artwork:

In Facing the Camera, Favell recognizes the agency of the individual. There are numerous social, cultural and personal factors—positive and negative, Aboriginal and Western—that are brought together in a conscious and unconscious way, through which the sense of self is expressed. The individuals are not posed by the photographer but are given space to find their own way of dealing with the camera. “For most, standing in front of a camera is unnerving. For many Aboriginal peoples, however, placing oneself within the photographic frame is a political act.” Facing the Camera is a contemporary visual archive which offers a snapshot of many of the significant intellectual and creative players who have individually and collectively made contributions to contemporary Indigenous art production and practices. These proud, strong, diverse and dynamic professionals include artists and curators of a previous generation such as Daphne Odjig, Alex Janvier, Tom Hill, Rita Letendre, and Shirley Bear, as well as her contemporaries, including Gerald McMaster, Shelley Niro, Ruth Cuthand, Kent Monkman, Adrian Stimson, Lori Blondeau, and Candice Hopkins, to name a few.

Speaking about this series, Favell says that, “In these images, as in all my work, I see the photograph as a performance space, where identity is constantly worked and reworked, represented, and perhaps hidden. I use the portrait convention to acknowledge the agency of the individual in bringing together in a conscious and unconscious way, the numerous cultural and personal factors through which the sense of self is expressed. This idea applies to me taking pictures of myself, and others, who stand before my camera, seeing their selves revealed in the photograph.” (rosaliefavell.com/portfolio/facing-the-camera/)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

What makes up your sense of self? What parts of your identity come from inside of you, and what parts come from outside of you, from the communities you are part of?

This portrait from the Facing the Camera series is of another well-known artist, Daphne Odjig. What does this portrait reveal to you about Odjig's identity? What parts of her identity do you think don't show through the camera?

How do you feel when someone takes your photograph? Does how you feel depend on the scenario—who is taking the photo, and why?



Rosalie Favell, *Facing the Camera: Daphne Odjig*, Ottawa, ON 2009, photograph on paper, edition 1/10. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, gift of the artist.

CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE IMAGE

ACTIVITY

How can an artwork convey ideas about identity? Create a portrait of an imaginary person that is meant to convey specific traits.

- Randomly select three or four adjectives (describing words) that can apply to a person. You can select these yourself or try pointing to a list of adjectives with your eyes closed, such as the one found here: <https://englishgrammarhere.com/adjectives/positive-personality-adjectives-list-in-english/> .
- Think about how these adjectives can apply to people as traits, and how those traits can be reflected in a portrait. Would you see these traits in their expressions, their clothing, their posture, or their overall presentation? Would some of these traits be invisible?
- To further fill out your idea of this imaginary person, discuss with a family member (classmate for teacher resource) their backstory. What's their name? Where are they from? What do they like to do for fun? What did they eat for lunch yesterday? What type of music do they listen to??
- Draw a portrait of your imagined person. Start your drawing in pencil, but consider going over the linework in black pen, and adding colour with markers or pencil crayons.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Large stamp pads or large water-based marker
- Paper, possibly varying colours
- Piece of flat styrofoam, such as a rectangle cut from a clean, flat food tray
- Pencil

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Photographer Rosalie Favell is a Winnipeg-born artist of Métis and English ancestry. Favell works through ideas related to her own identity and Métis culture in her photography. Barry Ace notes that, “Favell is clearly not speaking for Métis people, nor is she presenting herself as a spokeswoman or expert on Métis culture. What she is presenting is her personal journey through the 21st century as a contemporary Métis woman. Like the work of those she admires like Diane Arbus, Julia Margaret Cameron, Louis Gonzales Palma, and Shelley Niro, Favell too is contributing to a deeper understanding of our collective contemporary reality.” (Ace, 2007)

Favell is highly involved in the Indigenous Arts community as a lecturer and workshop leader. Writer Keith Berens describes Favell's approach: “through her photographs Rosalie is involved in an exploration of her identity within community. Her notion of community is a multi-layered one encompassing her Métis origins, family, gender, and sexuality. The internal resolution of external questions, and the individual versus society's norm and paradigms, are issues central to Rosalie's photographs and life.” (Berens, 1996)

Favell's mother, the family photographer, and her sister from whom she received her first camera, have been influential in Favell's choice of studying photography and art. Rosalie received her Master of Fine Arts from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, and her Bachelor of Applied Arts in Photographic Arts from the Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, Toronto. She also received her PhD in Cultural Mediations from Carlton University, and has been teaching there, as well as at the University of Ottawa and Discovery University. Her artwork has been shown internationally, and she has spearheaded international collaborations between Australian and Canadian Indigenous artists.