

Pixelated Portrait Collage



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Squares of colored and patterned paper bring this color study likeness into—or out of—focus.

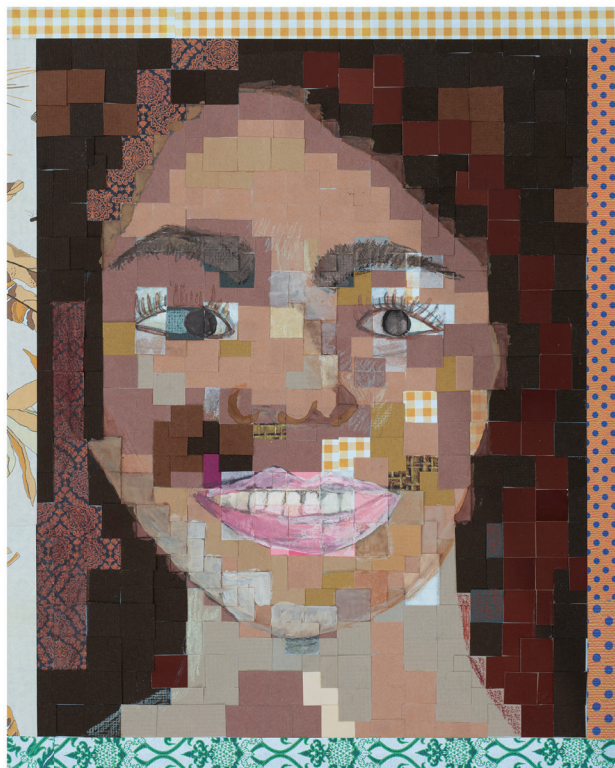
In digital imaging, a picture element—or pixel—is the smallest component of an image. Each pixel represents a sample of the original image, meaning that the more pixels an image contains, the closer it resembles the original. Traditional art forms like embroidery, loom weaving, beadwork, mosaics, and Pointillism can be seen as visual predecessors to the modern digital pixel.

When an image is divided into small squares of color, a visual distortion occurs. Up close, the image appears blurry, but from a distance, it becomes clear. Portraits are particularly effective for this technique because humans naturally recognize faces, even in abstract or random patterns—a phenomenon called pareidolia, driven by the brain's tendency to find meaning in ambiguous stimuli.

In this lesson, an image will be broken down into 1/2-inch squares of colored paper. Using a light pad and graph paper, students will create striking pixelated collages by layering pieces of the original drawing—such as key features like eyes, noses, and mouths—directly onto the grid or over colored squares.

The final artwork will be a dynamic, pixelated image that shifts in clarity depending on the viewer's distance, capturing a balance between abstraction and definition.

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.



Materials (required)

Artograph LightPad, LX LED, 9" x 12" (55337-1023); one per student

Blick Drafting Tape, 3/4" (24153-1075); share one roll across class

Bienfang Gridded Paper Pads, 4 x 4 grid, 8-1/2" x 11", 50 sheets (10613-1095); one sheet per student

Blick Studio Tracing Paper, 9" x 12", 50 sheets, 25 lb (10609-3003); one sheet per student

Blick Studio Drawing Pencil, 3B (22220-2031); one per student

Blick Kneaded Eraser, large (21026-1030); share one between four students

Blick Glue Stick, Purple, 0.28 oz (23895-5632); one per student

Suggested materials for collage

Roylco Skin Tone Craft Paper, 8-1/2" x 11", package of 48 sheets (11342-1001)

Roylco Design Paper, Patterned, 8-1/2" x 11", classroom pack of 248 sheets (11262-1170)

Roylco Decorative Papers, Stained Glass, 5-1/2" x 8-1/2", 24 sheets (11262-1030)

Roylco All Kinds of Fabric Paper, 5-1/2" x 8-1/2", 200 sheets (12651-1058)

Roylco Mosaic Paper Shapes, assorted colors, 3/8", package of 10,000 (60974-1001)



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Preparation

1. Each student will need an 8-1/2" x 11" color printout of a posterized portrait.

Process

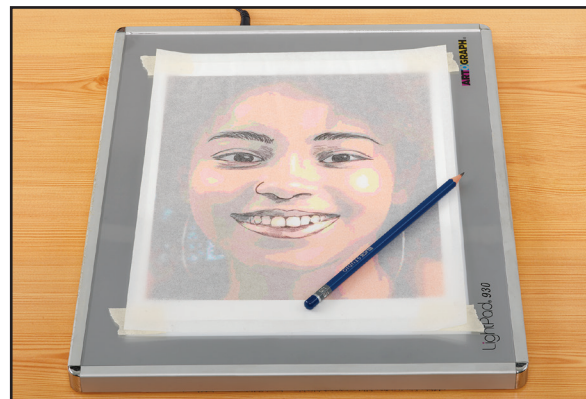
1. Place the reference image on top of a light pad. Use tape to secure corners to the light pad. Place tracing paper over the reference image. Using a pencil, trace the reference image, paying attention to detail and shading in the eyes, nose, and mouth. This will be used later for adding detail to the assembled collage.
2. When complete, remove the drawing from the light pad, leaving the reference image attached.

Note: More advanced students can use the grid method of drawing instead of tracing to replicate the reference image.

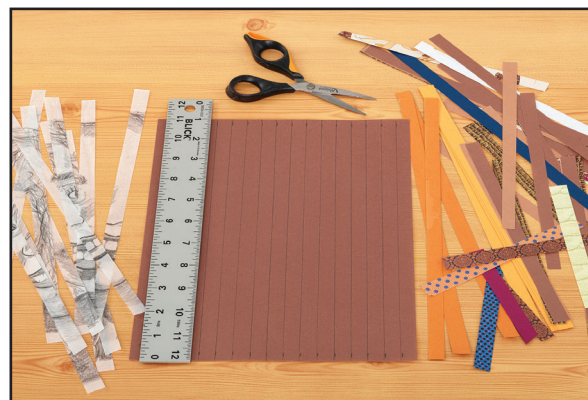
3. With a ruler, make 1/2-inch registration marks at the top and bottom of the tracing. Connect the registration marks.
4. Cut along the registration lines, dividing the drawing into seventeen 1/2-inch strips.
5. Choose a variety of colored and patterned papers that match the color palette of the original reference image. Follow steps 3 and 4 to cut collage papers into 1/2-inch strips. Each student will need approximately 20 strips of paper or the equivalent of one 8.5" x 11" sheet. Students can cut whole sheets and share, or cut only a few strips from each sheet, as needed.

Note: More mature students can use a paper trimmer or cutter to cut their paper, removing the need for step 3 and 4.

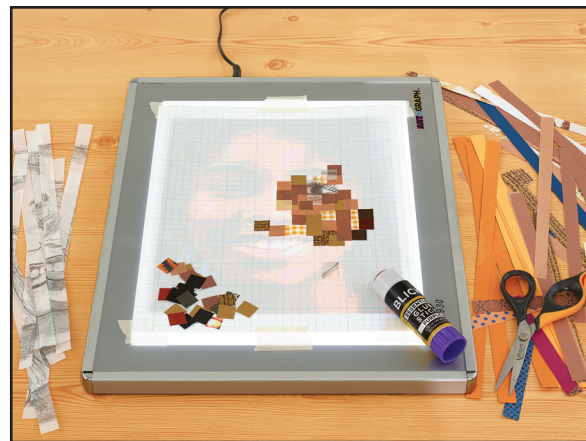
6. Place a sheet of graph paper over the reference image, still taped to the light pad. While graph paper is somewhat translucent, use of a light pad will make the reference image much easier to see.
7. Begin the collage using the colored and patterned papers. Cut 1/2-inch squares from the strips of colored paper, as needed. The collage can be started at any place on the page. Work in sections, applying square tiles in the closest color match possible. Use the lines of the graph paper as a guide when attaching squares. Overlap squares in grid segments as needed. Continue adding squares until the entire image is covered.
8. Use the strips from the traced drawing to add detail to the features, such as the eyes, nose, and mouth. The translucent pieces can be placed on top of the colored or patterned paper squares and some of the color will show through.
9. Remove from the light pad and trim the excess graph paper or create a paper-strip frame to display.



Step 1: Use tracing paper to copy the reference image in pencil.



Step 2: Cut the drawing and collage materials in 1/2" strips.



Step 3: Using a light pad, assemble the collage on graph paper.

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Options

- Use Blick Studio Artists' Colored Pencils or Royal & Langnickel Essentials Gouache Paint to further define features.
- Create your own colored collage paper using Royal & Langnickel Essentials Gouache Paint, Winsor & Newton Promarker Brush Markers, or Blick Studio Artists' Colored Pencils.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

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