

Printed Pattern Portrait

Combine printmaking, painting, and drawing to create a fresh take on portraiture in the style of Kehinde Wiley.

Long before photography, portraiture was the only means of recording the likeness of an individual. A great portrait does not merely record someone's features, but says something about who the individual is and captures their whole personality.

Contemporary portrait artist Kehinde Wiley creates multi-layered, modern portraits by using dense, elaborate, wallpaper-like patterning mixed with art historical compositions to heighten the personality and presence of his subject. In a number of his paintings, Wiley inserts black protagonists in modern clothing into Old Master paintings, such as Napoleon Crossing the Alps painted by Jacques-Louis David in 1800. Wiley combines West African textiles, modern hip hop references, and a range of period styles, from ancient Classicism to the Renaissance and Neoclassicism. His portraits are created using oil paint, and his signature "wallpaper effect" is painstakingly hand-painted. Most notably Wiley was commissioned in 2017 to paint President Barack Obama's official presidential portrait, which is on display at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

In this lesson, students can recreate the feeling and energy of a Wiley portrait, without having to hand-paint every element. Printmaking is combined with drawing and watercolor painting, making this project both accessible and engaging for students.

First, lightly sketch where subject will be in the composition. Next, print the surrounding area repeatedly with a design until it is densely covered — even overlapping onto the area where the figure will be placed. The subject and background are then painted with watercolor. Finally, add details using colored pencil to really make the subject pop.

GRADES 5-12

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

Preparation

1. Students will need an image of themselves, preferably sitting somewhere meaningful to them. Students can select a photograph of themselves, or one can be taken with a phone, camera, or tablet. Make a black and white photocopy that fills an 8-1/2" x 14" legal size piece of paper. Depending on the pose, some size changes may be required.



Materials (required)

Blick Essentials Watercolor Pads, 15 sheets, 11" x 15" (10180-1015); two pads

Blick Readycut, 12" x 18" (40422-1218); share at least four across class

Blick Lino Cutter Set, (40216-1001); one per student

Speedball Fabric and Paper Block Printing Ink, assorted colors and sizes (40326-); share two to four colors share across class

Niji Aquarelle Watercolor, Pan Set of 36 (00334-1369); share one among four students

Blick Studio Artists' Colored Pencils, Set of 24 (22063-0249); share one set among four students

Optional Materials

Faber-Castell Red Line Metallic Pencils, Set of 12 (20552-1012)

Crayola Colors of the World Colored Pencils, Set of 24 (20519-1024)



Ready to order materials?

Go to www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/printed-pattern-portrait to access a product bundle for your convenience.



Step 1: Transfer image onto watercolor paper.



Step 2: Cut 1-3 designs using Blick Readycut.



Step 3: Print patterns, alternating stamps until all negative space is filled.



Step 4: Use watercolor and colored pencils to illustrate the main figure.

Process

1. Place a sheet of transfer paper, graphite side down, onto a sheet of 11" x 15" sheet of Blick Essentials Watercolor Paper.
2. Using the reference photo, trace the figure with a ball point pen or stylus. Not every line and detail needs to be transferred, only big shapes, creating a general outline of the figure to use as a guide. Use the photo as a reference later when color and small details are added.
3. Trace or transfer a pattern or image onto the Blick Readycut and carve. The image should be small, no larger than 2" x 3" and simple, as it will be repeatedly printed on the portrait. Students can create up to three different patterns, or they can swap and share pieces for a more diverse background.
4. Choose one color of Speedball Fabric and Paper Block Printing ink and print. This is the perfect ink for this process, as it will not reactivate after dry. It is helpful to trim the edges of the stamp, contoured closely to the carved areas, so that when printing, each stamp can be placed close to the previous print without closely overlapping images. If a few stamps end up overlapping, however, that is okay! It will add to the overall wallpaper effect of the piece.
5. Allow to dry fully. This will depend on humidity levels, but will generally take 72 hours to fully dry and cure.
6. The Niji watercolor set comes with 36 colors, minimizing the need for mixing, thus taking away some of the anxiety a student new to watercolor may have, but really any watercolor can be used to color the figure.
7. Finally, use colored pencils to add details and shading.



Options

- Use Faber-Castell Red Line Metallic Pencils to add a metallic pop to the finished piece.
- Don't stop adding color with just the figure. Use watercolor to fill the background as well. The printed areas will act as a resist, so watercolor can be applied directly over the prints.
- Outline the printed design using colored pencil to really enhance the allover pattern.
- Younger students can use rubbing plates or ready-made stamps instead of carving printing plates.

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.

Responding

Anchor Standard 8: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.



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