Overview: What is a Self-Portrait?

A self-portrait is an artistic representation of yourself, created by you. It's a way to explore your identity, express how you see yourself, and share your unique perspective with the world.

The term "self-portrait" comes from the combination of "self" (meaning you) and "portrait" (a representation of a person). Self-portraits have been used throughout history as a way for artists to explore their own identity, document their existence, and express how they see themselves.

Why Should We Create Self-Portraits?

Self-portraits give us the freedom to express who we are without needing words. They allow us to celebrate what makes us unique, including the ways our minds work differently. Creating a self-portrait is an act of self-discovery and self-acceptance.

For neurodivergent artists, self-portraits can be especially powerful. They provide a space to show the world how you experience life, to celebrate the creativity that comes with thinking differently, and to challenge the idea that there's only one "right" way to be.

Self-Portraits and Identity

A self-portrait doesn't have to look exactly like you. In fact, the most interesting self-portraits often show how someone feels rather than just how they look. You can use colors, shapes, symbols, and abstract elements to represent your personality, emotions, experiences, and the things that make you uniquely you.

|Your self-portrait can include symbols that represent your interests, your neurodivergence, your culture, your dreams, or anything else that's important to your identity. The only rule is that it should feel authentic to you.

Famous Self-Portrait Examples

Frida Kahlo - Celebrating Identity Through Pain and Beauty

Mexican artist Frida Kahlo created dozens of self-portraits throughout her life. She used bold colors, symbolic elements (like animals, plants, and cultural references), and emotional honesty to show not just her physical appearance, but her inner world. Kahlo experienced chronic pain and disability throughout her life, and her self-portraits became a way to process her experiences and assert her identity on her own terms.

"I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best." — Frida Kahlo
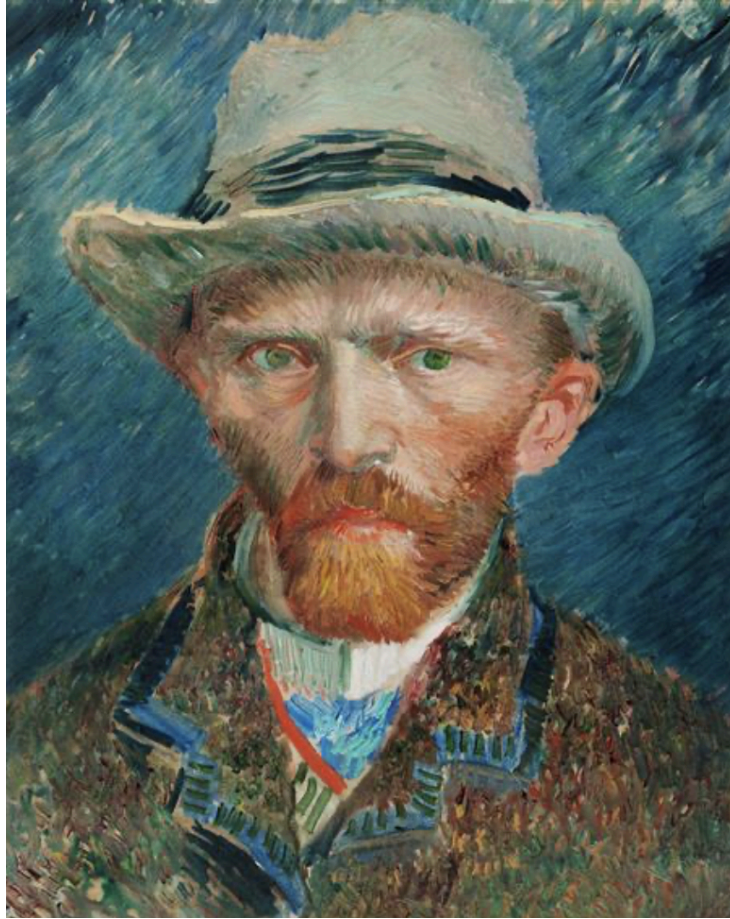
Vincent van Gogh - Emotion Through Color and Brushwork

Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh created over 30 self-portraits in just a few years. His self-portraits are known for their expressive brushwork and bold use of color. Van Gogh used his self-portraits to practice his technique, but also to explore his emotional state. Each portrait captures a different mood, showing how self-portraits can be a way to document how we change over time.

Jean-Michel Basquiat - Raw Expression and Cultural Identity

American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat created self-portraits that were bold, raw, and unapologetic. He often included text, symbols, and cultural references in his work. Basquiat's self-portraits challenged traditional ideas about art and identity, celebrating his Black identity and his unique way of seeing the world. His work shows that self-portraits can be abstract, symbolic, and deeply personal all at once.

What Your Self-Portrait Can Include

Your self-portrait is completely unique to you. Here are some elements you might consider including, but remember—there are no rules!

Element	What It Can Represent
Colors	Your emotions, personality, favorite things, or how you experience the world
Symbols	Your interests, hobbies, culture, neurodivergence, dreams, or values
Patterns	The way your mind works, repetition, comfort, or visual stimming
Abstract shapes	Feelings that are hard to put into words, energy, or inner experiences
Text/Words	Important phrases, your name, words that describe you, or labels you choose
Animals	Creatures you relate to, your spirit animal, or qualities you admire
Nature elements	Growth, change, connection to the environment, or favorite places

Different Approaches to Self-Portraits

There's no single "right" way to create a self-portrait. Here are some approaches you might try:

Realistic: Draw or paint what you see in the mirror, focusing on accurate proportions and details.

Abstract: Use colors, shapes, and patterns to represent how you feel or how your mind works.

Symbolic: Fill your self-portrait with objects, animals, and symbols that represent who you are.

Emotional: Use exaggerated features, bold colors, and expressive brushwork to show your mood.

Collage: Combine images from magazines, photos, drawings, and text to create a mixed-media portrait.

Silhouette: Fill your outline with patterns, textures, or images that represent your identity.

Series: Create multiple self-portraits showing different sides of yourself or how you change.

Remember: Your neurodivergent perspective is not a limitation—it's your superpower. The way you see colors, patterns, details, or big-picture connections is unique and valuable. Your self-portrait doesn't need to make sense to anyone else. It just needs to feel true to you.

Activity: Create Your Own Self-Portrait

Now it's your turn! Use the materials available to create a self-portrait that represents who you are.

Things to Consider:

What colors represent your personality or mood today?

What symbols or objects are important to your identity?

How do you want to show your neurodivergence (if at all)?

What makes you feel most like yourself?

Do you want to include your face, or make it completely abstract?

What story do you want to tell about who you are?

Materials Suggestions:

Pencils, colored pencils, or markers for drawing

Paint (watercolor, acrylic, or tempera) for bold color expression

Magazines and scissors for collage work

Paper in different colors and textures

Glue, tape, or other adhesives for mixed media

Any other materials that speak to you!

Most importantly: Have fun and be yourself! There are no mistakes in self-expression. Every mark you make is part of your unique artistic voice. Your perspective matters, and the world needs to see the way you see it.