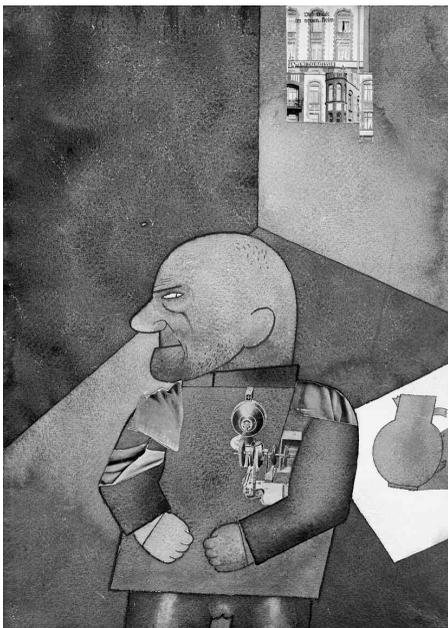


**LESSON THREE: Portraiture**



**IMAGE SEVEN:** George Grosz. *“The Convict”*: *Monteur John Heartfield after Franz Jung’s Attempt to Get Him Up on His Feet*. 1920. Watercolor, pencil, cut-and-pasted postcards, and halftone relief on paper, 16 ½ x 12” (41.9 x 30.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of A. Conger Goodyear. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



**IMAGE EIGHT:** Hannah Höch. *Indian Dancer (From an Ethnographic Museum)*. 1930. Photomontage with collage, 10 ½ x 8 ¾” (25.7 x 22.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Frances Keech Fund. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



**IMAGE NINE:** Man Ray (born Emmanuel Radnitzky). *Indestructible Object (or Object to Be Destroyed)*. 1964 (replica of 1923 original). Metronome with cutout photograph of eye on pendulum, 8 ¾ x 4 ¾ x 4 ¾” (22.5 x 11 x 11.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. James Thrall Soby Fund. © 2006 Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

## INTRODUCTION

Portraits can represent individuals in many different ways. A portrait can be a literal representation of a person or it can represent a person symbolically. Rather than seeking to capture a particular person's physical appearance, Dada and Surrealist artists often sought to represent character, disposition, and the inner psyche. In order to represent such subjective and symbolic aspects of their sitters, artists often developed new compositional devices, and used non-naturalistic color and scale, as well as non-traditional materials, to reveal something about their subject.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will be introduced to some of the conventions of portraiture.
- Students will consider how symbols can be used in a portrait to add meaning.
- Students will be introduced to the technique of **photomontage**.

## INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Begin the conversation by asking your students to define portraiture. Ask them if they have ever sat for a portrait. Perhaps they have had their picture taken at school. Ask them if they do anything special in preparation for having their picture taken. Ask them why or why not.
- Ask your students to imagine that they are sitting for their portrait. Ask them what someone looking at their portrait could learn about them from what they are wearing (**costume or outfit**) or from the **expression** on their face.

## IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

Ask your students to take a moment to look at “*The Convict*”: *Monteur John Heartfield after Franz Jung’s Attempt to Get Him Up on His Feet*.

- Ask your students what they think is going on in this work. To help your students explain what they are seeing, it may be useful to introduce them to the terms **foreground**, **middle ground** and **background**. In this image the figure is in the foreground, the vase is in the middle ground, and the corner and window are in the background.
- Ask your students to describe the figure’s **pose**, **expression**, and **costume**. Ask them what they can tell about this person just by looking at the figure.

Inform your students that this work is by the German artist George Grosz. In 1917, after being drafted for his second military service, Grosz was promptly deemed unfit to serve, and was discharged and placed in a sanitarium. The title figure is the artist’s friend and fellow Berlin Dada artist John Heartfield, who was confined to a military hospital for most of his service after a mental breakdown on the eve of his mobilization. Deeply disillusioned by their experiences in the military, both Grosz and Heartfield were known for their politically satirical images, journals, and performances.

- Ask your students if they are familiar with the term “**caricature**.” Ask them to give examples of caricatures that they have seen.
- Ask your students if they think that the figure in “*The Convict*” could be considered a caricature. Ask why or why not.

Although not a realistic rendering of Heartfield, the figure's pose and expression capture his real-life political defiance. Interestingly, the likeness is actually closer to that of Grosz himself, who may have created a self-portrait in empathy with his friend.

- **Ask your students to consider what materials were used to make this image.**

Inform your students that this is a watercolor with some collaged elements, including a postcard of a delicatessen and wine shop. The postcard fragment acts as a window from the convict's cell looking outside, but is ironically inscribed, "Lots of luck in your new home." Other collaged elements in this work are a small machine situated where the figure's heart should be, and patches of material.

- **Ask your students to consider what the machine in place of a heart might symbolize.**

Inform your students that the machine relates to the title adopted by both Grosz and Heartfield, "*monteur*," which means engineer or constructor. They called themselves *monteurs* because they considered their artistic production to be similar to the work of technicians.

Show your students *Indian Dancer (From an Ethnographic Museum)*, by Hannah Höch.

- **Divide your students into pairs. Ask them to compare and contrast this image with "The Convict": *Monteur John Heartfield after Franz Jung's Attempt to Get Him Up*, keeping in mind **composition** and the materials used in both works. Once they have come up with a number of similarities, go around the room and have each pair name one. Tell your students that they cannot repeat an idea that has already been stated, so they must listen closely to one another.**

Inform your students that this is a **photomontage** made by the German artist Höch, who took much of her source material from the mainstream press and advertisements. The right side of the face is a publicity photograph of the actress Maria Falconetti, who starred in Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. The left side of the face is a photograph of a wood dance mask from Cameroon, in Central Africa. Joan of Arc's traditional straw crown has been replaced with cut-out silhouettes of silverware.

- **Ask your students to consider how the different images combined in *Indian Dancer* construct the subject's identity. Ask your students how the composition, or arrangement of these elements, contributes to how they perceive the subject.**

Inform your students that Höch was interested in examining and critiquing the representation of women as well as other social and political issues in Weimar Germany.

- **Ask your students to look at the image of *Indestructible Object (or Object to Be Destroyed)*. Ask them if it could be considered a portrait.**

Devastated after his girlfriend and fellow photographer Lee Miller broke up with him in 1933, Man Ray cut out and attached a photograph of her eye to the pendulum of a metronome. Although he attached only a fragmented image of Miller, the instructions accompanying the work, which he at first called *Object to Be Destroyed*, indicate that for Man Ray the object was an emotionally evocative portrait. Man Ray created a number of versions of *Indestructible Object*, many of which have survived. In the instructions, he invites us to create our own "Indestructible Object":

Cut out the eye from the photograph of one who has been loved but is seen no more. Attach the eye to the pendulum of a metronome and regulate the weight to suit the tempo desired. Keep going to the limit of endurance. With a hammer well-aimed, try to destroy the whole at a single blow.

- **Ask your students if any of them have ever used a metronome. If so, ask them to explain the function of metronomes (to keep tempo when playing a musical instrument) and to describe their experience using one.**

Quite radically, Man Ray's instructions encourage us to destroy the very work of art he instructs us to create. Have your students consider what it means to destroy art. It may be helpful to introduce your students to the term "iconoclasm."

Inform your students that in 1957 a group of students protesting a Dada exhibition in Paris stole one of these objects. When Man Ray filed a claim with his insurance company, the agent suggested that he buy an unlimited supply of metronomes with his reimbursement money. Man Ray replied that not only would he do just that, he would also change the name of the work. What he had at first called "*Object to be Destroyed*" was renamed "*Indestructible Object*."

- **Ask your students if *Indestructible Object* matches their definition of a portrait. Does it have anything in common with the other two images in this lesson? Ask them how they would perceive this work differently if the image attached to the metronome were a nose, an ear, or the eye of a person whom they know.**

### ACTIVITY

Now that your students have explored different ways artists have created portraits, ask them to make a photomontage portrait or a caricature. If they want to create a photomontage, direct them to bring in source images from magazines, postcards, photocopies, and/or photographs. If they want to create a caricature, they will just need paper and a pen or pencil.

Your students should consider whether they want to make a self-portrait, a portrait of someone they know personally, or a portrait of a famous political figure or entertainer. After completing the project, students should present their portraits and explain how and why they chose to render their subject as they did.