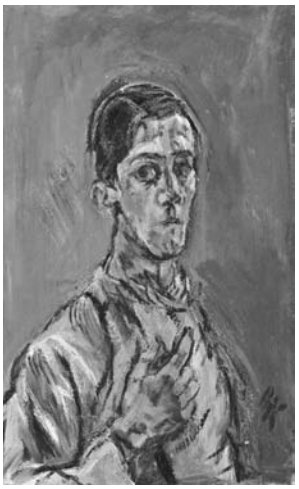

IMAGE FOUR
Oskar Kokoschka. Austrian, 1886–1980. *Self-Portrait.* 1913. Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 19 1/2" (81.6 x 49.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Pro Litteris, Zurich

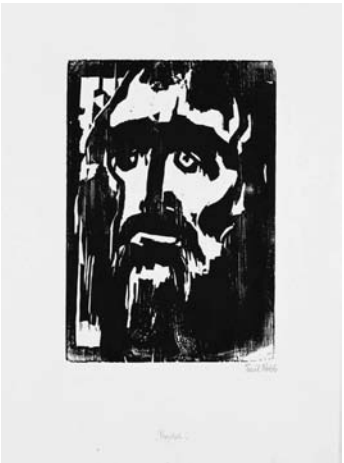

IMAGE SIX
Emil Nolde. German, 1867–1956. *Prophet.* 1912. Woodcut. Composition: 12 5/8 x 8 3/4" (32.1 x 22.2 cm); sheet: 19 11/16 x 14 3/8" (50 x 36.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously

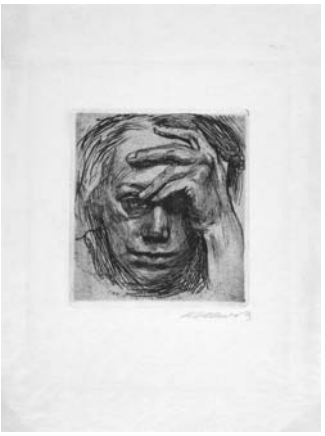

IMAGE FIVE
Käthe Kollwitz. German, 1867–1945. *Self-Portrait with Hand on Forehead, State II a.* 1910. Etching. Plate: 6 1/16 x 5 1/2" (15.4 x 14 cm); sheet: 13 3/16 x 9 13/16" (33 x 24.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Milton Weill © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

IMAGE SEVEN
Oskar Kokoschka. Austrian, 1886–1980. *Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat.* 1909. Oil on canvas, 30 1/8 x 53 5/8" (76.5 x 136.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Pro Litteris, Zurich

IMAGE EIGHT
August Sander. German, 1876–1964. *Farming Generations (Bauerngeneration).* 1912. Gelatin silver print, 8 5/8 x 11 7/16" (21.9 x 29 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the photographer © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

INTRODUCTION

The following lesson is divided into two parts. The first part features portraits of individuals and the second addresses works depicting more than one person. These images are presented together because in all cases the artists chose not to specify their subjects' setting nor to include details about their subjects' occupation or interests. Rather, the artists were deliberately ambiguous about such material concerns, seeking instead to communicate the inner dispositions of their subjects through compositional and medium choices. The self-portraits by Oskar Kokoschka and Käthe Kollwitz, as well as the portrait by Emil Nolde and the double portrait by Kokoschka, are not precise representations of specific people; instead, the artists manipulated their subjects' appearance to express what cannot be easily observed.

Image Seven, Kokoschka's double portrait of the art historians Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat, reveals a psychological study of the sitters. Kokoschka created portraits for many prominent figures of Viennese society, such as artists, lawyers, scientists, writers, and doctors. Here Kokoschka placed the two figures in an ambiguous setting, inviting the viewer to speculate about their relationship primarily through their facial expressions and hand gestures. As a point of comparison, August Sander's photograph *Farming Generations* (Image Eight) is a carefully constructed representation of an agrarian family, formally posed for a group portrait. In contrast to Kokoschka's double portrait, Sander's methodological photographic process attempts to capture as many physical details as possible about his subject.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- **Students will compare portraits, two of which are self-portraits, focusing on artists' choices, such as *medium*, or the materials an artist uses to create a work of art, and *composition*, meaning the arrangement of different elements upon the surface of a painting, drawing, etc.**

- **Students will explore the characteristics that these portraits convey about the sitter.**

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

Ask your students how they would define a portrait. Ask how they would define a self-portrait. Ask them to describe some similarities and differences between the two kinds of portraiture. Your students should consider examples of portraiture that they have seen in books, magazines, online, or in museums.

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- **Describe what you see in Kokoschka's *Self-Portrait* (Image Four). By looking at the painting, what can you tell about the artist? How has he chosen to depict himself?**

- **Suppose you were able to see more of the person in this painting. What would you see? What more might you learn about this person?**

This painting is a self-portrait by the Austrian artist Oskar Kokoschka which he made when he was twenty-seven years old. Early on in his career, Kokoschka received numerous **commissions** for portraits from patrons in Vienna, mostly writers. Although he devoted most of his career to being an artist, Kokoschka was also a writer and teacher. Kokoschka made the following remark in a letter that he wrote to The Museum of Modern Art forty years after finishing this self-portrait:

> It is a representative example of my work of that period, the student may learn from it to see with his own eyes how the self becomes a constant in a self-portrait that does not

vary even after years when age, life, ambitions have changed the persona of the creator. All my self-portraits were painted in the sense of stock-taking, in the view of estimating individuality.[4]

- **Ask your students what they think Kokoschka is trying to express. Ask if they support or disagree with his statement. Ask if Kokoschka's comment changes their ideas about this painting. Ask why or why not.**

- **Compare Käthe Kollwitz's *Self-Portrait with Hand on Forehead* (Image Five), an etching, to Kokoschka's *Self-Portrait*. What sorts of similarities and differences do you see?**

- **What do you think Kollwitz has chosen to express about herself? How would you compare Kollwitz's self-portrait with others you have seen?**

From an early age, Käthe Kollwitz expressed an interest in becoming an artist. During the late nineteenth century, the state-run art academies in Germany only admitted men, so Kollwitz attended a private art school for women. In 1890, Kollwitz gave up her studies in painting after seeing an exhibition of prints by Max Klinger (1857–1920), a German artist who advocated the use of printmaking and drawing, which can exist in multiple copies, as a means of communicating social concerns to a larger audience. Klinger's message resonated with Kollwitz, and she began to pursue printmaking.

By choosing printmaking as her primary means of making art, Kollwitz could make more copies of her work available to more people. She did not practice the tradition of printing a limited edition of an image, as most artists did. Instead, in order to keep prices of her prints affordable, she produced numerous copies of a single image. Kollwitz also published her work in periodicals, and she created posters to support various social causes. People occasionally sent their copies of prints to her so that she could sign them.[5]

Kollwitz chose not to be active in the avant-garde scene that surrounded her. Instead of mingling with other artists in smaller circles, she preferred to maintain a strong connection with a larger public; she considered the developing artistic movements to be elitist and out of touch with current social issues, as her following statement suggests:

> [Art must be] an understanding between the artist and the people such as there always used to be in the best periods in history. [In] our century, the figurative arts have degenerated to the wretchedness of exhibition galleries.[6]

- **Ask your students to compare Kollwitz's comment with *Self-Portrait with Hand on Forehead*. Ask if they feel that the way Kollwitz represented herself communicates the idea that there is a connection between art and its audience. Ask why or why not.**

- **Ask your students to consider Kollwitz's choice to make her works of art more accessible to a larger number of people. Ask them if they agree or disagree with her approach. Ask if they think that an artist must necessarily create more works of art in order to reach a larger audience.**

- **Ask your students what they think Kollwitz meant when she referred to "the wretchedness of exhibition galleries."**

- **Artists traditionally display their work for the public to see in museums and galleries. Ask your students to consider some of the places where they have seen works of art other**

4. Letter from Oskar Kokoschka to Dorothy Miller, October 4, 1953. Tobias G. Natter, *Oskar Kokoschka: the Early Portraits from Vienna and Berlin, 1909–1914* (New York: Neue Galerie, 2002), 164.
5. Hildegard Bachert, in Elizabeth Prelinger et al., *Käthe Kollwitz* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), 120.
6. Fiona Griffith, *Käthe Kollwitz: Artist of the People* (London: The South Bank Centre, 1995),12.

than in a museum, such as large sculptures in a public park, murals at school or in the library, and reproductions in books. Ask if they think the meaning of a work of art changes depending on where it is displayed. Ask why or why not.

- **Give the class a few minutes to look at Emil Nolde's *Prophet* (Image Six). Ask your students what they see in the image. Ask them to think of three descriptive words that come to mind when they look at this image. Ask why they chose those words.**

- **Then ask your students what words they would choose to describe the person's expression. Ask them what they see that makes them say that.**

This image is a **woodcut** by the artist Emil Nolde. Titled *Prophet*, Nolde made this print after recovering from a serious illness. His illness inspired him to address issues of spirituality in his work, and he began making references to Biblical passages. Prior to creating this print, Nolde began a cycle of religious paintings centering on the life of Jesus Christ.

- **Ask your students how they would define the word "prophet." Have them compare their definition to Nolde's painting. Ask what they think of the way Nolde chose to depict a prophet.**

Emil Nolde was originally named Emil Hansen. He later changed his family name to Nolde in honor of his birthplace, a seaside town in the state of Schleswig-Holstein, a region of northern Germany bordering on Denmark. Although he came from a farming family, Nolde worked in a furniture factory before becoming an artist. He once explained that making woodcut prints remained one of his preferred methods of creating art because of some of the same skills and delights it shared with furniture making. For example, he chose to include in his prints the inconsistencies and knots from his woodblocks. He once described the process of making woodcuts as "controlled (and happy) accidents."[7]

- **Ask your students to take another look at *Prophet*. Ask them if knowing about how Nolde made the work of art changes their ideas about it.**

- **Ask your students what kinds of comparisons they would make between Nolde's *Prophet* and Kollwitz's *Self-Portrait*, considering that the artists used two different printmaking processes.**

Nolde was briefly involved with the Brücke group, where he exchanged printmaking skills with the other members; he taught them about **intaglio** and etching, and learned how to make woodcuts. Nolde, along with the other Brücke artists, shared an interest in non-Western art. However, he eventually departed from the group because he felt at odds with his colleagues. Nolde was strongly attached to his agricultural roots, which clashed with the group's urban cultural sensibility. He described his art as ". . . a rural art [that] believes in all human qualities and in the primal beings that scientific research already rejected long ago, and that are, indeed, no longer to be found within the city walls."[8]

- **Ask your students what they think Nolde meant by this statement. Ask them if his comment supports their ideas about his work. Ask why or why not.**

7. Timothy O. Benson, in Benson et al. *Nolde: The Painter's Prints* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1995), 37.
8. Benson et al., *Nolde: The Painter's Prints*, 15.

Throughout his artistic career, Nolde collaborated most closely with his wife, Ada. She often printed his work and helped him maintain fastidious records of his prints. In 1926, the couple settled permanently in Seebüll, a quiet village near Nolde's birthplace. There, Nolde and his wife purchased a house where they established a foundation and museum where Nolde's works are exhibited today.

- **Show your students Kokoschka's *Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat* (Image Seven) and ask them to spend a few moments looking closely at the image. Ask them to describe what they see in the painting. Ask them what they can tell about the two people in the painting. Ask them to describe their gestures.**

- **Ask your students if, based on what they see, they suppose there is a relationship between the two figures. Ask them what they see that makes them say that.**

- **Ask your students to take a look at the space around the two figures. Ask how they would describe the space.**

This painting, a double portrait called *Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat*, was painted by Kokoschka in 1909, four years before he completed his *Self-Portrait* (Image Four).

- **Ask your students what kinds of similarities they can find between *Kokoschka's Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat* and his *Self-Portrait*? How do the two paintings differ?**

Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat were a married couple. They commissioned Kokoschka to paint their double portrait, which they kept in their home. The Tietzes were art historians and supported Kokoschka's work. However, they refused to show this painting in public, regardless of Kokoschka's attempts to borrow it for inclusion in an exhibition of his work. During the Nazi occupation, the Tietzes fled Germany and came to the United States. In order to help finance the cost of their relocation, the Tietzes sold this painting, which they had rolled up and carried with them. The Museum of Modern Art purchased the painting in 1940, and it has remained in the Museum's collection ever since.

- **Ask your students to take a moment to look at the photograph titled *Farming Generations* (Image Eight). Ask them what they notice about the photograph. Ask them to pair up with a classmate to make a list of similarities and differences between this picture and Kokoschka's painting *Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat*.**

- **Ask your students what they can determine about the people in the photograph. Ask them who they suppose they are. Direct them to look closely at all the elements of this image. Ask them what details they think the photograph reveals to us about these people.**

This photograph, called *Farming Generations*, was taken by August Sander. Shown in the photograph is a farming family from Westerwald, an area in southwestern Germany. During Sander's youth, Westerwald contained many farming communities and small, family-run mines. Sander took this photograph in 1912 after he had opened his own photography studio in a suburb of Cologne. One Sunday Sander packed his photographic equipment onto his bicycle and set off to a few of the towns in Westerwald, aware that many of the families would be dressed in their best church attire and would therefore most likely be receptive to having their portraits taken.

Sander's frequent trips through Westerwald inspired him to begin an ambitious endeavor around 1911 that would span over forty years. A selection of these portraits was first published in 1929, as a volume of sixty photographs titled *Face of Our Time*. Sander was unable to complete the project during his lifetime, but in 1980 his son, Gunther, published a group of the photographs in a book called *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*.[9]

Along with his portraits of the Westerwald farmers, Sander also photographed writers, artists, bankers, miners, lawyers, circus performers, musicians, beggars, and gypsies. His goal was to capture as thoroughly as possible German types from different professions and social strata. The organization of these images was based on Sander's own sense of Germany's economic and sociological structure at the time, and was not associated with any scientific research. Rather than following a typical hierarchical social order, Sander's own philosophy espoused the strong connection between man and nature, and therefore privileged farmers because of their close ties to the earth.

Sander often made his photographs in the sitter's home or local environment. He was also very particular about the composition of the photograph; the subject's entire body had to be visible in the photograph or else cropped from the knee up. Sander believed that these compositional choices maintained a level of scientific objectivity in his work.[10]

- **Ask your students to respond to this information. Ask them to compare *Farming Generations* with other family portraits they have seen, either in books, museums, or their own photo album at home. Ask if they notice any similarities or differences. Ask them to explain their response.**

- **Ask your students to define "scientific objectivity" in their own words. They should include other examples of photographs that they have seen. Ask your students to consider whether or not they feel that the image represents scientific objectivity, based on what they know about Sander's photograph. Ask them why or why not.**

ACTIVITIES/PROJECTS

1. Looking at Yourself in the Future (Image Four)

Imagine yourself twenty-five years from now. What do you think you will be doing? How do you think you will have changed? Do you suppose certain characteristics of yourself will remain the same? Create a self-portrait as you envision yourself in twenty-five years. Compare this self-portrait with the one you did earlier. Do you notice any similarities or differences?

2. The Meaning of Body Language (Image Seven)

What are gestures and what do they tell us? Gestures often communicate specific feelings or messages. For instance, we wave a hand to say hello. Some gestures can be ambiguous, leading people to interpret them differently.

For this activity, divide your students into small groups. Ask each group to create a gesture that communicates the following: happiness, sadness, fear, anger.

3. Banned Art (Image Seven)

During the 1930s, the Nazi party rose to power in Germany. Many artists and intellectuals were affected by the suppression of political, individual, and artistic rights. Some artists, such as Kokoschka, sought asylum outside of Germany, while others, such as Kollwitz,

9. Robert Kramer, *August Sander: Photographs of an Epoch, 1904–1959* (New York: Aperture, Inc., 1980), 17.
10. Ulrich Keller, *August Sander: Citizens of the Twentieth Century, Portrait Photographs, 1892–1952*, ed. Gunther Sander, trans. Linda Keller (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 28.

remained in the country for fear of repercussions against family members. Research the impact of political events in Germany during this period on the artists in this guide. As an extension, consider examples of other political events and their impact on other artists.

4. Group Portraits (Image Eight)
Ask your students to bring a photograph of themselves taken with family or friends. Students can volunteer to show their picture to the rest of the class for discussion.

- **Describe what happened when this picture was taken.**

- **Consider the following details: Who took the photo? How many people were in the picture and who were they? Did everyone pose, or did people move around? Where was the picture taken? What other details were included in the photograph? Why do you think they were included?**

5. Faces of Our Time (Image Eight)
Obtain a copy of Sander's *Faces of Our Time* or *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*. Alternatively, you can view Sander's photographs on the following Web sites:

www.moma.org/collection/depts/photography/blowups/photo_009.html
www.getty.edu/art/collections/bio/a1786-1.html
www.metmuseum.org/special/August_Sander/Germany_images.htm

Choose two or three photographs to compare. List their similarities and differences.

What does each image tell you about the person or people in the photograph? How would you describe the decisions Sander made when he took the photograph? For example, what can you tell about the setting of the picture? Take some time to discuss what you *don't* see in the photograph as well. Suppose Sander had taken the photograph ten steps further away from the scene than he actually did. How do you think this new vantage point would change the photograph? What do you think you would see?

Now that you have spent time looking at a few photographs from one of Sander's books or from a Web site, what are your thoughts about his work? For instance, do you think that he achieved his goal of creating a record of the people around him during his lifetime?

- **Consider your own experiences taking pictures, or other photographs you have seen. Return to the picture you chose of your family or friends for the class discussion earlier. How would you compare your photograph with Sander's *Farming Generations*?**

- **Choose another portrait from this lesson or another lesson in this guide. Consider the type of medium the artist used. Compare Sander's *Farming Generations* with your selected portrait. How do you think the medium of each work affects your interpretation of it? Explain your ideas. You can explore this idea further by taking into consideration specific techniques the artist used and choices he or she made. For instance, in Kokoschka's painting *Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat* (Image Seven), the artist used his fingernails to create small scratch marks on the surface of the canvas. Matisse deliberately left spaces between the marks of paint, revealing the bare canvas in his painting *Landscape***

at Collioure **(Image Eleven). Sander's photographs were made according to consistent guidelines that he had established; he made sure that the subject appeared either from the waist up or from head to toe.**

Find out more about some of the other photographs included in *Faces of Our Time*.

- **How would you describe the system Sander used to organize these photographs?**

- **Learn more about critics' responses to Sander's work. For example, the writer Thomas Mann once commented:**

  This collection of precise and unpretentious photographs is a treasure-trove for lovers of physiognomy and an outstanding opportunity for the study of human types as stamped by profession and social class.[11]

- **What do you suppose Mann meant? Compare Mann's ideas and those of other writers with your own ideas. Do you find that you agree or disagree with these statements?**

- **Take another look at *Farming Generations*. What is the effect of looking at this image by itself versus looking at it as part of a group of photographs?**

6. Portrait versus Self-Portrait

The purpose of this activity is to enable students to compare the experiences of creating a portrait of a close acquaintance and a self-portrait.

A Portrait of Someone You Know

Create a portrait of someone you know, such as a friend or family member. As you make your portrait, keep track of the decisions you make along the way.

- **What sorts of things do you want other people to know about this person? How did you choose to represent these details? Why?**

- **Are there certain characteristics of this person that you excluded? Explain.**

- **Did you create your portrait from direct observation, from memory, or from a photograph? Why?**

Many artists have received commissions to create portraits of people they do not know well. Suppose you were an artist and were asked to make a portrait of someone you do not know. What kinds of things would you like to know about this person in order to create a portrait? How do you suppose knowing this information would influence your work? How would you represent certain characteristics of this person in the portrait?

Looking at Yourself

Create a self-portrait. While working, consider the types of materials you choose. Keep track of compositional choices, such as the arrangement of figures or objects in space.

- **What types of other choices did you make?**

11. Letter from Thomas Mann to Kurt Wolff, January 6, 1930, in Kramer, *August Sander: Photographs of an Epoch*, 11.

- **What did you include in your self-portrait—your face, your body—and why? How would you describe your pose?**

- **What kinds of meanings do these choices have for you? If you were to give your work a title, what would you call it?**

- **Think about the works of art that you discussed in this lesson. Did these portraits play a role in the portraits you created for this activity? In your view, would it make sense to make these portraits before or after looking closely at the portraits in this lesson? Why?**