

Portraits with Non-Traditional Materials

Subject: Visual Arts

Grade Level: Grades 6-12

Guided Instruction (To be self-directed, or with teacher, parent, caregiver, older sibling, etc.)

Durham-based visual artist Stacy Lynn Waddell often uses non-traditional materials and techniques to create her stunning works of art. One of her works in the Nasher's collection, *Self Portrait (Silver and Burned)* (2017) is just that – a self-portrait of the artist that was created by using a branding iron, or piece of hot metal, to methodically burn the paper to create an image of the artist. Waddell also uses aluminum leaf to create a reflective background.

View *Self Portrait (Silver and Burned)*, 2017 on page 2 or online here: <https://bit.ly/3f53ux2>.

Discuss:

- What is going on in this portrait?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- How does the use of non-traditional materials effect the artwork?

If you have access to reliable internet and technology, view a short 8-minute documentary about Stacy Lynn Waddell and her work: <https://vimeo.com/143698873>

After viewing the documentary, how has your understanding of the work changed? What reasons did the artist mention for utilizing different types of materials in her art making process?

Practice

Use “non-traditional” art making materials in your home to create a self-portrait or portrait of someone else (or really anything you like). Try “painting” with things such as coffee or tea. Alternatively, pour some spices in a bowl (paprika, curry, turmeric, etc.) and mix with a little water to create some beautiful colors, or try other items like tomato sauce you might find in your pantry. Use cotton swabs, a tightly rolled paper towel, even your fingers to apply the colors to paper.

1. Think about ways you could use a specific media to create a connection with the person portrayed – for example, my grandfather always drank coffee with a lot of sugar, so I might make a cup of coffee similar to the style he would drink and use that liquid to create his portrait.
2. Try building up layers of material in order to create light and dark marks.
3. What are some of the challenges to using these types of materials? Can those challenges ultimately help make the work of art more successful? Why or why not?



Stacy Lynn Waddell, *Self Portrait (Silver and Burned)*, 2017. Burned paper with composition aluminum leaf, Sheet: 30 × 22 inches (76.2 × 55.9 cm); Frame: 35 × 27 × 2 inches (88.9 × 68.6 × 5.1 cm). Museum purchase with funds provided by Susan Rosenthal and Michael Hershfield. 2018.8.1 © Stacy Lynn Waddell

Label Text:

Stacy Lynn Waddell creates works spanning a range of mediums and techniques, including drawing, collage, painting, photography, sculpture, and installation. Her art often involves the use of branding irons, both for the unique visual quality they provide, and for their loaded historical significance. This image incorporates aluminum leaf and burned paper to create a richly textured surface capturing Waddell's own portrait, drawn with detailed contour and shadows. The reflective quality of the aluminum leaf suggests depth and contrasts with the burned paper surface. Waddell looks directly out at the viewer, confidently establishing her own place within the history of self-portraiture, and her role as an artist using both traditional and nontraditional methods.