

FAMILY ART ACTIVITY – Personal Portraits

Robert Pruitt (b. 1975) was born and raised in Houston, Texas. His large scale portraits include objects and symbols that allude to many ideas and cultures across history. In *Flux*, a pregnant woman sits on a boombox, her body adorned with timekeepers and talismans, as if ready and waiting to embark on a journey. The devices around her neck—including a circular clock and an African drum—relate to time, alluding to Pruitt's fascination with time travel and a people's ability to journey to a better place. On her right arm is an Akan Sankofa bird from Ghana, which symbolizes the need to look to the past to borrow what can help you make progress in the present and future.



Robert Pruitt, *Flux*, 2011

Conté, charcoal, and gold leaf on hand-dyed paper, 50 x 38 inches (127 x 96.5 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum Purchase. 2011.7.1 © Robert Pruitt

Activity:

Robert Pruitt uses various drawing materials – most often charcoal, pencil and conte crayon - on large sheets of hand-dyed paper.

Choose a person in your family to do a portrait of OR create a self-portrait. Ask the person to choose three different objects that are important to them or that communicate something about themselves they want others to know. Have them pose with these objects and use a camera or smart phone to take a series of photographs with their objects.

Choose your favorite photograph and use it as reference to create a portrait in the style of Robert Pruitt.

Share a photo of your finished artwork online and tag #nashermuseum!

Biography:

Robert Pruitt was born in 1975 in Houston Texas. He received his BFA from Texas Southern University (2000) and a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Texas at Austin (2003). He is a founding member of the Houston artist collective Otabenga Jones & Associates. He has had solo exhibitions at The Pennsylvania College of Art & Design; The Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, Texas; McKinney Art Center, Dallas, Texas; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Bakersfield Museum of Art, Bakersfield, California; and most recently, a solo exhibition at the California African-American Museum in Los Angeles, CA.

Pruitt was a participating artist in the 2006 Whitney Biennial and the 2010 SITE Santa Fe Biennial, which traveled to MoMA PS1 in New York. He is a recipient of the Artadia Artist Award, Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation award and Joan Mitchell Foundation award (2013). Pruitt recently was awarded residencies at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art(2015) and The Joan Mitchell Center in New Orleans, Louisiana(2016).

Pruitt's work is in the collections of The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; The Studio Museum of Harlem; the Dallas Museum of Art; the University Museum of Texas Southern University in Houston; the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston; and most recently the Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, Arkansas (2016); The Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, Massachusetts (2016) and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2016).

Pruitt works in a variety of materials, but his practice is chiefly centered on rendering portraits of the human body, specifically the black body. He projects onto these bodies a juxtaposing series of experiences and material references, denoting a diverse and radical black past, present, and future.



Photo of Robert Pruitt courtesy of ArtX

Label Text:

Robert Pruitt creates work that examines black identity, and, more specifically, notions of African American liberation from social, economic, and psychological constraints. He explores self-determination and the notion of an idealized black reality—an Afrofuturistic, utopian existence. In *Flux*, a pregnant woman sits on a boombox, her body adorned with timekeepers and talismans, as if ready and waiting to embark on a journey. The devices around her neck—including a circular clock and an African drum—relate to time, alluding to Pruitt's fascination with time travel and a people's ability to journey to a better place. On her right arm is an Akan Sankofa bird from Ghana, which symbolizes the need to look to the past to borrow what can help you make progress in the present and future.

Pruitt's influences are vast, drawing from science fiction, comic books, black power ideology, and a romanticized notion of pre-colonial Africa. He also pays homage to pioneering visual artists like Charles White and Barkley L. Hendricks and the cosmic philosophy of musicians such as Sun Ra and Parliament-Funkadelic.