

Behind the Mask

A Student Activity Guide

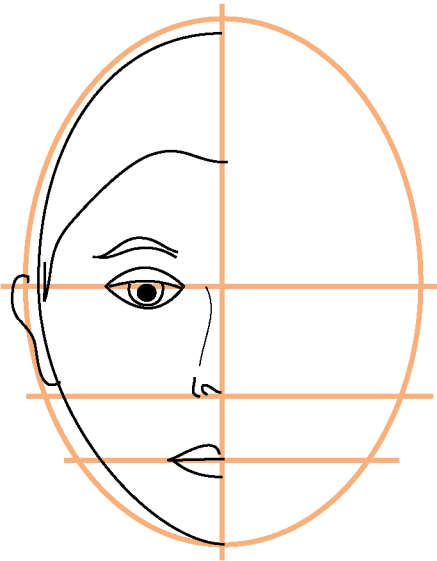
based on the exhibition

SPIRIT AND POWER IN AFRICAN ART

**from the Godwin-Ternbach
Museum @ Queens College**

**October 1 to
December 15, 2007**

**Guest Curator
William Siegmann**



Right: (Fig. 1) Large Mask, Wood, 17" h. Possibly Bekom, Grasslands Kingdoms, Cameroon, ca. 1930 Gift of Leonard and Judith Kahan Queensborough Community College Art Gallery.

This guide is made possible by generous contributions from the Godwin-Ternbach Museum and Penny Hamrich, Dean of Education, Secondary Education and Youth Services Department, Queens College. Dr. Amy Winter, Director & Curator, Godwin-Ternbach Museum, Dr. Rikki Asher, Director of Art Education, Secondary Education and Youth Services Department, Brita Hegelsen, Research Assistant. Kristina Seekamp, Writer & Designer, Candidate: M.S. in Art Education



Pre-Museum Activity: Putting a Face on Function



Look and Discuss

Look at figure 1. What do you notice about this work of art? What do you see in the piece that makes you say that? This **representational artwork** shows a face, but it is very **stylized** and becomes almost **abstract**. What basic **forms** and **shapes** did the artist use to represent the eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and hair? What details have been left out?

This artwork is a **relief**. What **medium** do you think it is made of? What tools might the artist have used? What do you see that makes you say that? This artwork was probably made by the Bedom tribe in the grasslands of Cameroon. Find Cameroon on a map or globe. What continent is it on? What countries and ocean does it border?

This work of art has a **function**, or purpose. What do you think it was used for? This **mask** was worn during religious and spiritual ceremonies. Have you ever worn a mask before? When people wear masks, they appear as if they are someone or something else. Many African masks represent gods and spirits. What else could a mask turn someone into? Use your imagination!

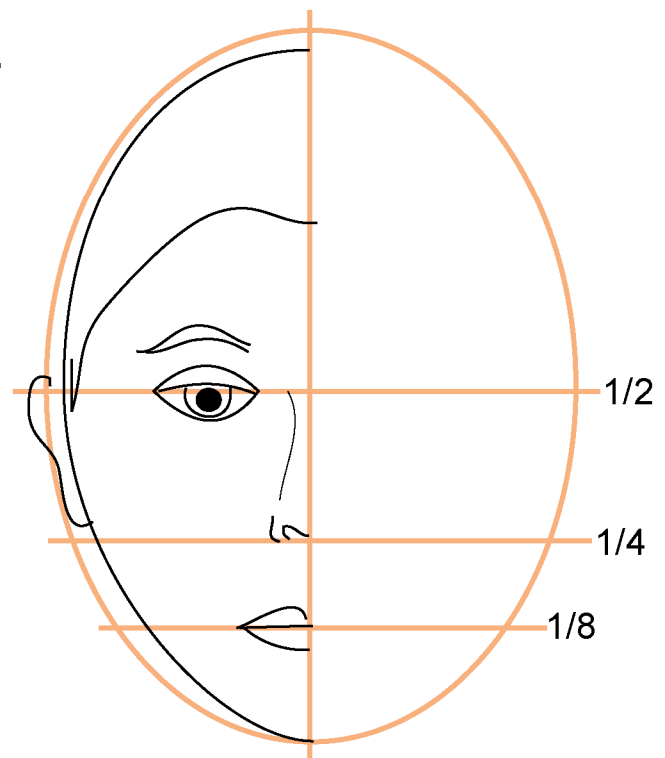
Realistic Portraiture

When a work of art shows a particular person or animal, it is called a **portrait**.

Look in mirrors and discuss the basic **shapes** and **proportions** that form the human face. For example: The human head is an oval. What shapes are our eyes, nose, mouth and ears? Where are they on the head in comparison to one another? Practice in the diagram on the right.

Pair up and draw realistic portraits of each other. Using pencil, begin with an oval, drawing pale vertical and horizontal guidelines (as shown orange in diagram). Then begin placing facial features.

Emphasize the importance of looking carefully. Add color with a medium of your choice.





Museum Activity:

Mixing it Up: Stylizing the Human Face

Look and Discuss

Look carefully at the masks in the exhibition. How many masks are there? Locate the mask on the cover page. What do you notice is different about seeing the real mask in the Museum?

Find a **mixed media** mask. What media did the artist use? Why do you think the artist selected these materials?

To **stylize** a human face, artists do not follow the realistic **proportions**. Instead, they often **simplify** facial features into basic shapes and forms, making some larger or smaller, put them in different places, and leave out the details.

Design your own stylized mask

In the space on the right, create a **composite** stylized mask. A composite is created by choosing parts from various places and putting them together in a new way.

For each feature, draw from a different mask in the exhibition. Then draw a shape around the outside of the face. Remember, it does not have to be an oval!

hair

eyes

nose

mouth

WORDS TO KNOW

Subject: What is shown or represented in a work of art.

Representational art: Art in which you can recognize an image or images from the real world.

Abstract art: Art in which the **subject** is color, line, & shape, not recognizable forms you can identify.

Relief: Three-dimensional effects applied to a two-dimensional (flat) surface.

Form: Three-dimensional **shape**.

Stylized art: When particular features are exxagerated (ie. enlarged) from their natural form.

Medium (Media): The material(s) used to create a work of art (ie. paint, clay, raffia, wood).

Mixed Media: When a work of art is made of more than one material, or **medium**.

Functional artwork: Art that has a specific purpose, or **function**.

Proportions: Relative size of various parts (ie. facial features proportions)

3

Post-Museum Activity: Stylized Self-Portraits: Mixed Media Masks



Look and Discuss

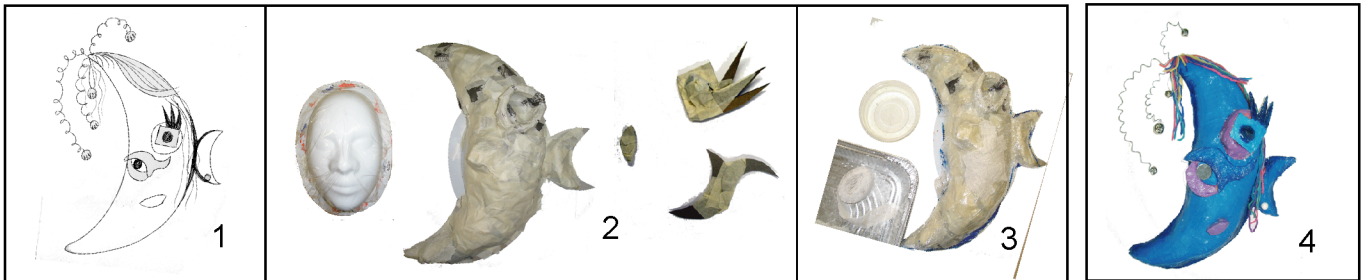
Often, certain facial features are made larger or smaller to add **meaning** to a stylized mask. In general, African carvers enlarge people's heads in their artwork. Why do you think this is? What might it mean?

Brainstorm Ideas

Think about your own personality and interests. What makes you unique? A stylized self-portrait is not about what you look like on the outside, but what you are like on the inside.

Choose one facial feature to enlarge that you feel expresses you best. Other features can either be smaller or eliminated all together. Features do not have to be in the real proportions or places. The overall form of the head does not have to be an oval. Look at the sample above. What shape is the head? What might this tell us about this person?

"Form" your stylized mask



Step 1: On a separate piece of paper, create a drawing to plan out your mask. Keep it simple, not realistic, and remember to highlight one feature.

Step 2: Create three-dimensional forms out of crumpled **newspaper** and attach them to a **plastic face mold** base. Also, cut cardboard shapes if desired. Secure newspaper and cardboard to the plastic with masking tape. For parts that will pop out significantly, cut the cardboard/crumple the newspaper separately and do not attach. Once finished building the form of the mask, cover the surface with **glue**. Place **plastic wrap** on top of the **glue**, making sure the entire surface is covered.

Step 3: Use **scissors** to cut **Pariscraft™** into small strips. Dip the strips in a bowl of water and apply on top of the plastic wrap. Gently smooth out the holes to distribute plaster evenly through each strip. Overlapping strips, continue until the entire front surface of the mask is covered. If desired, leave select areas uncovered to create a negative space. Repeat to form two to three layers. Apply two layers to any separate parts as well. Allow 24 hours to dry. Once dry, very carefully remove the Pariscraft™ from the mold. (Mold is reusable, if a series of masks is desired.)

Step 4: Add color to the mask (i.e. acrylic paint, tissue paper and watered down glue). Finally, use a **hot glue gun** to attach any separate parts and additional media (i.e. raffia, wire).