

# Kimmy Cantrell-Inspired Clay Portraits

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**Grade:** 3rd

**Medium:** Clay

**Learning Objective:** Students will: create a visually balanced work using elements of art; observe art by Kimmy Cantrell; work with clay and clay tools; use art vocabulary.

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## **Elements of Art**

**Color:** the visible range of reflected light. It has three properties: hue, value (lightness or darkness of the hue), and intensity (brightness or dullness of the hue).

**Form:** an object found in three dimensions, having height, width and depth.

**Shape:** an enclosed line, having height and width, lacking depth. It is either **geometric**, with angles/corners or **organic**, as found in nature, without angles/corners.

**Space:** can be **positive:** the space an object occupies or **negative:** the space around the object. It also refers to an illusion of depth on a 2-dimensional (height and width) surface, so that the scene appears to go back into space.

## **Principles of Design**

**Balance:** the arrangement of elements that make the individual parts of a composition appear equally important visually, not top-heavy or anchored by 'weight' to one side. When each side is the same it is **symmetrical**. If it isn't a mirror-image but still equally important visually, it is **asymmetrical**.

**Pattern:** repetition of line, color or shape to unify a composition. Variations of pattern create interest.

## **Additional Vocabulary**

**Clay:** a naturally occurring sticky fine-grained earth which is often found in lake beds and dug out of the ground. This material is malleable when wet.

**Firing:** the act of heating dried clay to a specific temperature to permanently harden it.

**Glazes:** a mixture of clay, water, colorants and silica. When fired it becomes colorful, hard and glassy.

**Scoring (Scratch & Attach):** how we attach two wet clay pieces, by scratching each touching clay surface to 'interlock them' before pressing together firmly.

**Sculpture:** 3-dimensional forms/works of art. A sculptor sculpts sculpture.

## Materials & Supplies

- Low fire clay
- Wood skewers for drawing, scoring & cutting clay
- Plastic knives for cutting
- Glazes in primary & secondary colors
- Glaze examples
- Slip or water in small cups
- Newsprint or paper towels for wadding to create a mold
- Glaze brushes: large and absorbent

## Context (History and/or Artist)



**Kimmy Cantrell** discovered his artistic vision in high school when he fell in love with clay in an art class. After his first hand-built vase was chosen for display at the local board of education, his teacher suggested he study art in college. Instead he decided to study business at Georgia State University and spent fifteen years in distribution management. After almost twenty years, he decided to reconnect with clay. First there were vases, then bowls with faces, leading to clay-pieced collages. The self-taught evolution of his art continues today.

Kimmy uses many forms to tell his stories, from free standing sculptures to still life collages. He uses asymmetry to challenge traditional definitions of beauty. “I want to show the beauty within flaws,” he explains. “Imperfections tell stories that

are far more compelling than perfection.”



These images are taken from Kimmy Cantrell's website, <https://kimart.com/gallery/>.

## Advanced Preparation

- This lesson requires two sessions.
  - Students build the work, it dries, then is fired.
  - Students glaze the work, then it is fired again.
  - Volunteers will wrap wire around the knobs on the back to create a hanger.
- Gather more volunteers to help with this project.
- Roll out 1.5 lb. rectangle slabs, to about 1/3" (thickness of a slice of bread) for each student (these can be stored in an airtight container separated by plastic for weeks).

## **Tips & Tricks**

- Use scrap clay for students to practice “scoring”.
- Any air pockets trapped between clay pieces could result in cracks during firing. Pressure avoids this.
- Pieces **must** use slip or water in the scratches to guarantee they stay together.

## **Discussion Points**

Post all vocabulary on the board & quickly go through them.

What do you notice about Jimmy Cantrell’s work? Have them respond using the art vocabulary. If they can’t, ask them where they see form vs shape, positive vs negative space, or symmetry vs asymmetry pattern vs solid.

What sort of colors does he use? What’s the visual effect on the viewer? All responses are good.

How does he use shape in his work? What kind of shapes are they? (Geometric)

What sort of marks does he make?

How is he using positive and negative space? He leaves out sectional shapes that we still think of as part of the overall sculpture, so positive and negative space work together.

His pieces feel balanced if they have the same amount of ‘visual weight’ on both sides. How does he do this? Does he use color? Lines? Shapes? Negative space? Are they actual mirror images on each side, and if not, how do they still seem balanced?

## **Reflection Points (Assessment of Learning Objectives)**

Students will:

- create a visually balanced work using elements of art
- observe art by Kimmy Cantrell
- sculpt with clay and clay tools
- use art vocabulary

## **Instructions for Lesson**

Set up the work space with taped butcher paper or canvas mats on the tables to work on. Put out the slip or water in small plastic tubs or bowls, not much (you can always refill) and skewers or plastic forks for attaching parts.

**Building work:** Every students space should have a slab, scrap clay and a skewer.

1. **Demonstrate lightly drawing on the clay** with the skewer to get the face shape. You can erase with your fingers. You will use a geometric sort of shape with angles and corners. Show how to cut with the skewer standing vertically and pressed completely through the slab until the point touches the mat. Drag gently along the outline and remove the excess.



2. The clay that is cut away will become the additions on the face. Don't discard it or ball it up.
3. Have students draw and cut out the contour of a face.
4. Smooth the rough edges of the face with the fingers.



5. **Demonstrate sketching on the surface** to divide the face into parts. Describe aloud the choices you are making as you plan out your work.
  - a. Have them plan three attachments: eye, nose, eye brows, hair, lips, whatever they like
  - b. Where to attach shapes? Why? They should maintain the balance even if they don't match on each side. How big or small can they be? This depends on the visual 'weight' they give.
  - c. Plan decorative marks. They can practice mark making on their scrap clay.
  - d. Add negative space, making sure it's still part of the design.
6. Allot about 5 minutes for the students to sketch and plan.
7. Make patterns by drawing or stamping with tools. These can be personally meaningful or simply decorative.



8. Stop them and **demonstrate scoring**. With the fork or skewer make scratches on both surfaces of clay that will attach. Brush on slip or water, then firmly press together.
9. Have the students cut out the attachments, score, brush slip onto both scored areas and press pieces gently together from the center out.



10. When finished, they can use some of the scrap clay to make two balls about the size of their thumbs. Score a side of each ball.

11. Have a volunteer gently turn their work over (one hand spread on the front, one on the back) and attach two small balls to the top sides, about ¼” in from the side. These will become the bits to wrap wire around to hang the work.



12. Have the student or volunteer sign the work on the back with a skewer.
13. Gently turn the work over again, set it on the table and press the balls down into the table to make sure they are securely attached.
14. Have the students create a mold for their pieces by wadding up newsprint, cover with a clean sheet so it doesn’t scratch the back and set on the drying space. Place the paper mold on top of a sheet of newsprint.



15. Drape their piece over the top so the face curves slightly, making sure the two knobs on the back are directly across from each other. The work can dry on this until it is time to fire.
16. Remove the paper before putting the pieces into the kiln.



**Glazing Work:** using primary and secondary opaque colors glaze their work as desired.

Each table should have small cups of glaze with a brush dedicated to each color. No mixing, as we don’t know what we will get when we mix them.

1. Demonstrate dipping the brush in to the glaze and dabbing the surface until a space is covered with glaze. Dragging a brush, like with paint, is not effective as the glaze dries so fast that the brush can stick. Glaze dries quickly and typically need two to three coats.
2. Have students glaze sections of their work, getting the full number of coats needed before changing colors.



## References and Attributions

Lesson written by Juliette Ripley-Dunkelberger; see also Kimmy Cantrell's website

<https://kimart.com/gallery/>.

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## Notes for Educators

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thinking Skills

Thinking flexibly, creating, taking responsible risks, reflecting, observing, making connections, visualizing, sequencing, comparing/contrasting, determining main idea, finding evidence, problem solving, cause and effect, decision making, evaluating.

### WA State Learning Standards

(VA:Cr1.1.3) a. Elaborate on an imaginative idea.

(VA:Cr1.2.3) a. Apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the artmaking process.

(VA:Cr2.1.3) a. Create personally satisfying artwork, using a variety of artistic processes and materials.

(VA:Cr2.2.3) a. Demonstrate an understanding of the safe and proficient use of materials, tools, and equipment for a variety of artistic processes.

(VA:Cr3.1.3) a. Elaborate visual information by adding details in an artwork to enhance emerging meaning.

(VA:Re7.1.3) a. Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art.

(VA:Re7.2.3) a. Determine messages communicated by an image.

(VA:Re9.1.3) a. Evaluate an artwork based on given criteria.

### Arts Integration Opportunities

Procedural writing: Students can explain steps taken to go from soft clay to a finished clay sculpture.

Narrative writing: Students can write about what the 'face' sees from the wall, or who the student was thinking of when creating this sculpture.

Science: How water and heat affect clay and what we can do with that knowledge.