

Self Portrait by Henri Rousseau

Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1890
- Size: 56 x 43 inches
- Location: National Gallery, Prague
- Style: Post Impressionistic
- Genre: Self portrait
- In this painting, the artist is wearing his painting uniform.
- This painting was designed to show the artist as a master painter. He painted himself larger than life, dwarfing his surroundings, to make this point.
- The balloon is thought to represent his great future in the history of art.
- When it was first exhibited people laughed at it.
- The Eiffel tower was built in 1889, the year before this portrait was created. (It is in the background, on the left side, behind the ship.)

Artist Facts

- Pronounced (on-ree roo-SO)
- Born May, 1844
- Died September, 1910 (age 66)
- He was born in France, and never left France his entire life.
- His father was a tinsmith.
- People described him as having a delightful personality, and he was well liked by his peers.
- He married his landlord's daughter. They had six children (only one survived).
- He didn't start painting until his early 40's, and at 49 took an early retirement so he could paint full time.
- Before Rousseau began to paint, he held a post in the Paris Customs Service.
- He died of gangrene from a minor leg injury
- Rousseau is famous for painting jungle and forest scenes.
- He was one of the most important forerunners of the Surrealist movement because of the dreamlike quality of his paintings.
- Rousseau taught himself to paint later in his life.
- He said he had "no teacher other than nature."
- "Beauty is the promise of happiness"-Rousseau
- When he painted portraits he carefully measured his subjects with a tape measure.
- Rousseau earned supplemental money by playing the violin in the streets.
- He also composed songs.
- Picasso bought several of Rousseau's paintings.
- Rousseau was not taken seriously by the people of his time.
- Despite heavy criticism, Rousseau never doubted his own abilities.

Key Idea to Teach

- **Portrait:** A portrait is a likeness of someone but can also tell you something about the subject. Portrait painting is a genre in painting, where the intent is to depict the visual appearance of the subject. Beside human beings, animals, pets and even inanimate objects can be chosen as the subject for a portrait. Portraitists create their work by commission, for public and private persons, or are inspired by admiration or affection for the subject. Portraits are often important state and family records, as well as remembrances. Historically, portrait paintings have primarily memorialized the rich and powerful. Over time, however, it became more common for middle-class patrons to commission portraits of their families and colleagues. Today, the portrait painting is still commissioned by governments, corporations, groups, clubs, and individuals. A portrait is a likeness of someone, but it can also tell something about the subject.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach About Portrait

- Cover the subject. What would you guess this is a painting of? Uncover. We call this type of painting a portrait. Can you guess who this is? (Point out the paintbrush and palette as clues.) This is called a self-portrait.
- What can you learn about the artist from his self-portrait?
- What might his personality be like?
- Would you say this is a realistic or abstract?
- What does the background tell us about the subject of the portrait?
- What do you think he's thinking?

Keywords

- Perspective, line, abstract, portrait, contrast, balance, color, value, texture, form, imagination

Other Possible Questions

- What is the artist holding in his hands? What does that tell us about the artist?
- What other clues are there in the painting about the artist?
- What shapes do you see in the clouds? Is this really what clouds look like?
- What do you see in the background?
- Do you see contrast in this painting? How does the contrast (the black clothes, hat and beard against the light colored background) draw your eye to the subject?
- Do you see other people in this painting? What are they doing?
- Are the things in the background smaller or bigger than the subject in the foreground? Why do you think the artist did this?
- What colors do you see in this painting? Which colors do you see the most?
- Do you see any warm colors? Where?
- Would you say this painting is balanced or is it heavier on one side?
- Do you see light in this painting? Where? Do you see shadows? Where?
- Do you see the Eiffel tower in this painting?