

# Craft Contemporary

## Lesson Plan Relief Portraits

**Essential Question** How can we use air dry clay to build a portrait of someone who inspires us from our culture, community, or family including 2D and 3D elements?

**Grade** 3rd - 5th (lesson plan will be scaled depending on grade level and lesson time)

**Time** 1 hour - 1 hour 30 minutes

**Art Concepts** Clay, ceramics, sculpture, portraiture, relief

**Materials (Art Kit)** Cardboard base, air dry clay, clay tools, sponge **(In the classroom)** water pots, paper towels, hand wipes and/or a place to wash hands, a place to let the clay artworks dry for 1-2 days

**Artworks in Focus** Jaishri Abichandani, *Jasmine Blooms At Night* series (2018-22)

## TALKING ABOUT CRAFT

### What is Craft?

Craft has been described as the skilled creation of objects, installations and other artworks using metal, fiber, glass, clay and wood. Craft is often collaborative and involves techniques, colors, patterns and ideas passed on between people in different cultures and communities. Art and craft often overlap.

### Vocabulary

Clay - Clay is a natural material that can be found in the earth! It is made up of tiny particles of rock. When clay is mixed with water, it feels like soft, gluey mud. Clay can be pinched, rolled, cut, or built up in layers to form shapes of all kinds. Wet clay hardens as it dries!

Relief - A relief is an artwork and type of sculpture, in which three-dimensional elements are raised from a flat base.

Portrait - A portrait is a picture of a person. Artists often include details in portraits such as a setting or background, objects, facial expression, pose, clothing and objects to tell a story about the person in their picture.

South Asia - Is an area in the southern part of Asia. It includes the countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Hinduism - A major religious and cultural tradition of South Asia. Hinduism incorporates beliefs and customs. Do you have traditions and beliefs that you share with your family?

We are going to look at some artworks by the artist Jaishri Abichandani. She is an artist from Brooklyn, New York who is often inspired by her South Asian heritage (family history) and culture. Raise your hand if anyone here has family or heritage that comes from a different country? Abichandani created a series of portraits called *Jasmine Blooms at Night* in which she represents South Asian women who inspire her and are all working hard for social change and making the world a better place.

The portraits are created with the input of the people who inspired them, including choice of image and colors, symbols and framing. The embellishments and decorative elements, the compositions and colors are specific to South Asian culture and aesthetic traditions.

### ***Saadia Toor, 2021***

Look closely at this artwork by Abichandani. What do you notice? What materials has the artist used? Is the artwork 2D, 3D or both? This artwork is a relief. It has both 2D and 3D elements. This portrait is of Saadia Toor. She is a professor, a teacher. How would you describe her facial expression? How would you describe the colors and shapes that the artist used in the background, what kind of emotion and mood might they represent? Abichandani made this joyous portrait of Saadia Toor because she respects her as a teacher and someone who writes books about equal rights and making the world a better place.

### ***Naomi Munaweera, 2021***

Now let's look at this portrait of Nayomi Munaweera who is a famous author and storyteller. In this portrait Abichandani has used clay to make 3D parts of the artwork. What do you notice that is different between the picture of her on the right and the artwork created by Abichandani? How is this portrait similar or different to the last artwork we looked at?

In Hinduism we often see deities, or gods with multiple body parts, such as many arms, legs, heads, or eyes. This can often represent special powers or abilities like strength or wisdom. Abichandani has included many eyes in this picture of Munaweera. The eyes are made of clay set into precious metals such as silver and copper. These special materials are often used in sculptures of Hindu deities and gods and are believed to give the entity power.

***(If time allows) Los Angeles Councilwoman Nithya Raman, 2022 and Sonia Mehta, 2021***

## **CRAFTING PROJECT**

Inspired by the way that Jaishri Abichandani creates portraits of people who inspire her, we are going to create air-dry clay relief portraits of someone from our culture who inspires us. Let's brainstorm some different people who might inspire us together.

***Sensory Warning:*** Clay can dry on students hands while they are working. The sensation can bother some people but it is easily washed off.

1. Start by getting your clay ready. We are going to warm it up with our hands by squeezing and massaging it.

2. Break the clay into two equal chunks and put one piece to the side. Place the other piece onto your cardboard base.
3. Roll out the clay using your rolling pin until it is about the same thickness as your pinky finger. This will be the background to your portrait. We don't want it too thin because air-dry clay can crack when it dries. Shape your clay background using the clay tools.
4. Once you are happy with the shape of your background, start building your portrait by adding a head, neck, shoulders, face and other details, using some of these techniques:
  - a. COILS + SHAPES: A coil is a long snake-like shape which can be made by rolling the clay on a flat surface. You can also make other shapes such as triangles or spheres by pinching and shaping the clay in different ways.
  - b. SCORING + BLENDING + WATER: Once you have made a coil/shape you can attach it to your base by making little textured marks on the two pieces of clay that you want to join together. This is called scoring. Once you have scored the surfaces of the clay, add a little water to the area. The water acts like a glue. Place the coil or shape onto your scored base and use the clay tools to blend the two pieces of clay together creating a strong join.
  - c. DETAILS, SHAPES + SYMBOLS: Add details such as hair, glasses, facial details and expressions (eyes, eyebrows, nose, mouth) to represent the person in your portrait. You can use clay tools to scratch and draw shapes and symbols into the clay.
  - d. TEXTURE + PATTERN: Add texture to your portrait by gently pushing the lace into the clay or add patterns using the clay tools.
5. Make sure that all of the pieces of clay you have added are joined firmly to your base by using the clay tools or your fingers to smooth and blend the clay.
6. Write your name on the cardboard base and leave your clay to dry for a day or two. Once it is dry you can leave it as it is or you can add color and detail with paint.

### **Reflection**

Who did you choose to represent in your portrait and why? Which details, symbols and shapes did you add to tell us who they are?

### **Suggested Pre-visit / Post-visit Activity**

#### *Pre-visit*

Ask students to write a story about someone who inspires them from their culture.

#### *Post-visit*

Add color and detail to the clay portraits using water-based paints such as acrylic or tempera. Once the paint is dry, you can also seal the clay by coating it in a layer of PVA white school glue although this is not necessary.

### **Curriculum Connections**

California Arts Standards for Public Schools—Visual Arts

3.VA:Cr1.2: Apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the art-making process. 3.VA:Cr2.1: Create personally satisfying artwork

using a variety of artistic processes and materials. 3.VA:Re7.2: Determine messages communicated by an image.





4.VA:Cr2.1 Explore and invent art-making techniques and approaches. 4.VA: Re7.2: Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages. 4.VA:Re8: Interpret art by referring to contextual information and analyzing relevant subject matter, characteristics of form, and use of media.

5.VA:Cr2.1: Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice. 5.VA:Re7.2: Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.


NOTE: If you choose to do the suggested pre-visit activity of writing a story about someone who inspires students from their culture, English Language Arts standards can also be incorporated.

*Prepared by Billie Rae Vinson, Education Programs Manager, Craft Contemporaria*

## ARTWORK INFORMATION

Jaishri Abichandani, <i>Jasmine Blooms At Night</i> series (2018-22)			
	Saadia Toor 2021		Naomi Munaweera 2021
<p>Dr Toor's scholarship revolves around issues of culture, nationalism, gender/sexuality, state formation, and international political economy. Her book, <i>The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan</i> was published by Pluto Press in 2011. A special issue of <i>Women's Studies Quarterly</i> on the theme of <i>Solidarity</i> co-edited by Dr Toor was published in November 2014.</p>		<p>Nayomi Munaweera was born in Sri Lanka. She grew up in Nigeria and immigrated to Los Angeles with her family in the early 80's. She is the award-winning author of the novels, <i>ISLAND OF A THOUSAND MIRRORS</i> and <i>WHAT LIES BETWEEN US</i>. Abichandani said that "many of her novels are quite dark" which is represented in the colors seen in this portrait.</p>	
	Los Angeles Councilwoman Nithya Raman 2022		Sonia Mehta, 2021

*Example of student work:*

	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Grand View Elementary, Teacher - Bertha Sanchez, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade</i></p> <p><i>This student has understood the principle of portraiture by considering facial expression to communicate mood or emotion and adding objects and other details around the figure to further tell a story about the person that inspires them. They have demonstrated and understood techniques in clay by rolling coils or snake-like shapes to build three dimensional forms and have made marks in the clay, called scoring, so to better join each shape that they have added to their work.</i></p>
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## EXHIBITION INFORMATION

### ***Jaishri Abichandani: Flower-Headed Children***

The work of Brooklyn-based multimedia artist Jaishri Abichandani responds to her experiences navigating her South Asian heritage and her identity as a woman of color, from immigrating to the United States from India as a teenager, to forging deep connections with anti-racist and feminist activist groups. Abichandani's painted portraits and imaginative sculptures celebrate feminist and queer bodies, taking their forms from Indian classical art, but their subjects come from contemporary South Asian diaspora culture and activism. While South Asians are increasingly visible in U.S. politics, this diverse population is divided by national, regional, religious, and caste differences, and externally marginalized by a national discourse on race that casts the community as perpetually foreign. For more than 25 years, Jaishri Abichandani has been building spaces where South Asian women, femmes, and queer people can meet in creative community. This has been her focus as a founder of South Asian Women's Creative Coalition in New York and London, as the inaugural Director of Public Events and Projects at the Queens Museum of Art, and as a Consulting Curator for the Ford Foundation Gallery, and it remains an important aspect of her visual art practice today.

The exhibition includes Abichandani's ongoing portrait series, *Jasmine Blooms at Night*, now numbered at over 40 paintings and sculptures, which celebrates the contributions of South Asian women and femmes to 21st century culture and politics in the U.S. Also included are Abichandani's ornate sculptural works which emulate the lithe, elegant postures of Indian devotional art, appearing as gods, serene even in arduous postures. Forms from Hindu, Buddhist, and African art are often Abichandani's source material, while her subject matter comes from the inclusive and dynamic queer community that she builds around her art and activism, which extends from her home in Brooklyn to London, Toronto, Mumbai, and around the globe.

South Asian aesthetics inform Abichandani's approach to art practice which is grounded in *Rasa* theory, a philosophy originating in medieval Sanskrit texts and re-popularized by Satyajit Ray and other Indian modernists that posits all art as an act of psychic and emotional transference between maker and audience. Using South Asian materials such as gold brocade or zari, silk, floral garlands, and costume jewelry, Abichandani's artworks vivify their environments to activate the global, feminist ramifications of *Rasa* theory and broaden American art audiences' appreciation of aesthetics that represent an unfamiliar cultural experience.

*Jasmine Blooms At Night* is an on going series of 40 sculptural and painted portraits that makes visible the work of South Asian American feminists who are generating incredible social change on a local and international level. They include a range of feminists across age, sexual orientation, religions, national origins and caste. It includes lawyers, educators, activists and writers across generations who are contributing to transforming our socio political landscapes. Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal and her gender non conforming child Janak are the best known figures in this series . The portraits are created with the input of the subjects including choice of image and colors, symbols and framing to reflect their choices. The embellishments

and decorative elements, the compositions and colors are specific to South Asian culture and aesthetic traditions. This series of paintings and sculptures doesn't just document my South Asian American feminist organizers community, it creates new ones through building relationships between feminists and organizations who would create greater social change in solidarity with one another. As the series grows, the feminists learn about one another's work.

*ARTIST QUOTES - JAISHRI ABICHANDANI*

- "Most of the sculptures I make, mash up autobiography with mythology, social justice and politics."
- "My primary agenda is always to bring visibility to black/PoC/indigenous LGBTQ+ feminist and disabled voices as a fundamental correction of institutional injustice."