DAYTON ART INSTITUTE

draw from the COLLECTION ... at home!

Theme:

Portraiture

What is your first impression of this portrait?

Look for various shapes and patterns.

What is the sitter's expression? Look in a mirror and try to recreate it yourself.

Study closely the artist's use of lines; how would you describe it?

Do you think the sitter's personality comes across? If so, how would you describe him?

How might the portrait appear different against a light background?
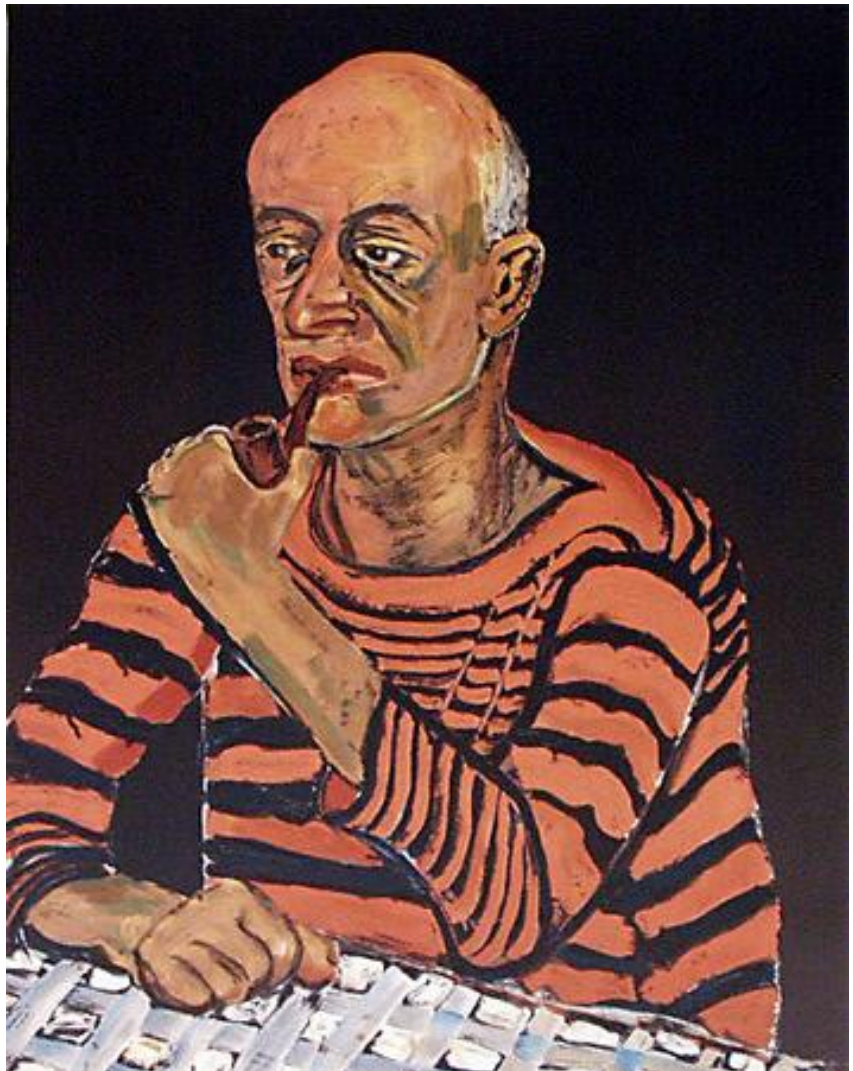
Portrait is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as, "a painting, drawing, photograph, or engraving of a person, especially one depicting only the face or head and shoulders." From group portraits to self-portraits, this artform can be evaluated through many lenses: significance, realism, representation, and convention are just a few. Modern and contemporary portraiture make no exception to capturing expression, personality, and presence.

Artwork: Alice Neel (American, 1900—1984) *John*, from the *American Portfolio*, 1979, lithograph, edition 12/150. Gift of Mr. John Onodi. 1981.66.4

Beginning with Basic Forms

1. Lightly draw a vertical line down the middle for alignment.

2. Along line's top half, softly sketch an oval shape for his head. Add a point to the bottom left-of-center for the chin.
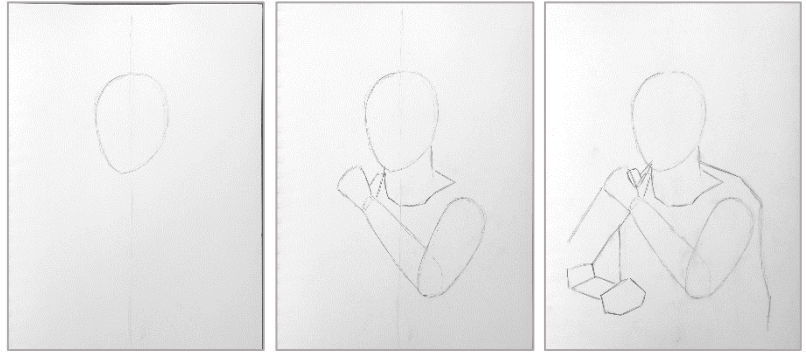

3. Begin finding basic shapes which compose the figure. Find approximate placements for these and lightly sketch them in (forearms, hands, torso, etc.) Only outline the shapes lightly as fine-tuned details will be added later.

Rendering Proportion

1. Observe the face. Softly draw "cross-hair" guidelines, (for proportion and erased later,) left-of-center from the head, with the horizontal line at about a 10° angle.

   Note: eyes are almost always proportionately halfway down the head, but *John's* face is tilted forward, adding extra dimension and challenge to this portrait.
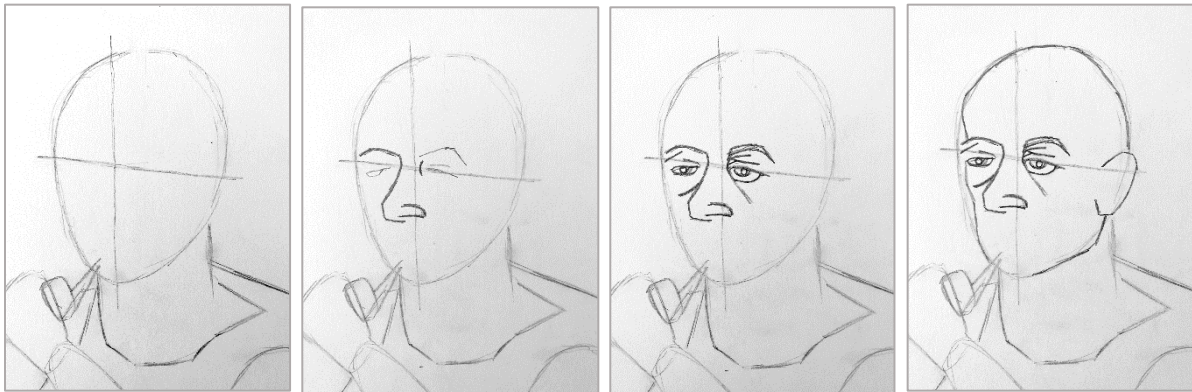

2. Begin with the nose left of your guideline and add eyes from there. Notice the many lines surrounding his eyes. Many look like simple dashes and some intersect while others do not.

   Note: the tilted angle of his face is often referred to as "3/4" and because of this, his left eye appears smaller and more angled than his right.

3. Next, finetune the outline of his head. Notice the curvier lines which outline the left side of his face. Apply a hard angle along the jawbone. Begin the ear just above your horizontal guideline. Erase away your original oval-ish shape.

Conveying Expression

1. Add his mouth about halfway between the nose and chin. Also aligned left-of-center, draw a curved line where lips meet. Then, outline top and bottom lips.

2. After this, sketch his pipe by again finding basic shapes.

3. Next, add details. Strengthen lines, develop dimension to his ear, and draw a shape above it where his hair is. Sketch slowly and lightly until satisfied with your sketch.
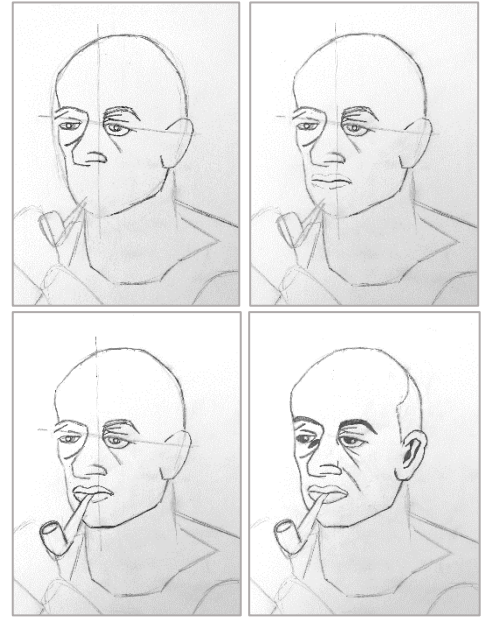
Embellishing with Patterns

1. Look closely at how his shirt rumples. Draw and shade in shirt stripes, starting with one sleeve, then reinforce outlines and erase away any unused lines.
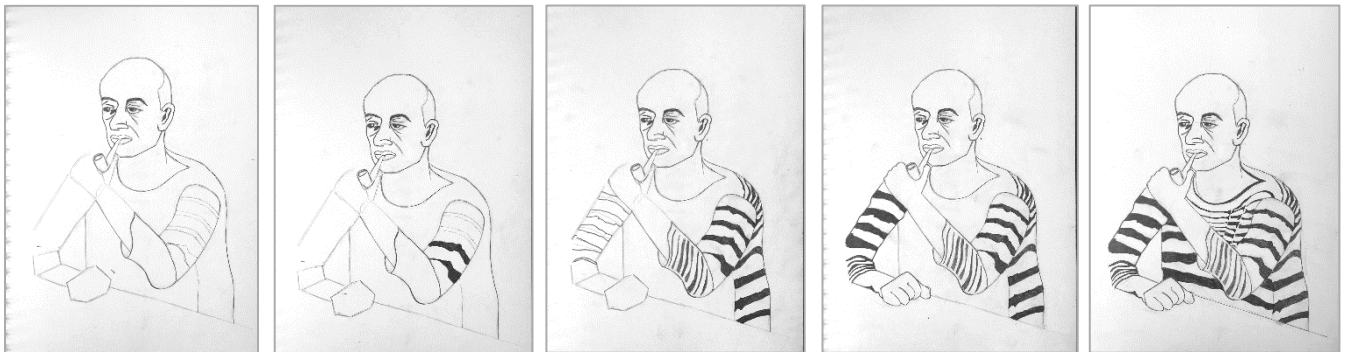
2. Use fluid, curved lines to develop his hands. Notice that the artist has applied minimal details here and how soft bumps create knuckles. Erase away old lines.

3. Shift front: draw a swooshing line below his collar. Then, lightly add two lines below the swoosh. Use these two lines to form the striped pattern and erase them away when complete.

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Finalizing with Detail and Value

1. Turn your pencil sideways so its tip is completely flat along your paper. Lightly rub the graphite to render rough, yet loose, shadowy textures on his neck, forearms, hands, chin, and temple.

2. Draw a series of angled lines away from the tables edge to create the tablecloth pattern. Notice the over- and underlapping shapes. Keep marks loose and improvise.

3. Add detail by going part by part. Start with a sleeve, then the shirt side, then opposite sleeve, finally, the front of his torso. If desired, reinforce lines and shapes with a black sharpie or fine-point pen.
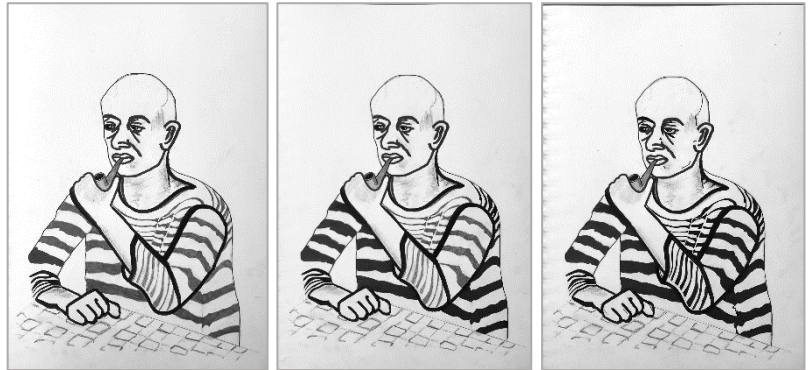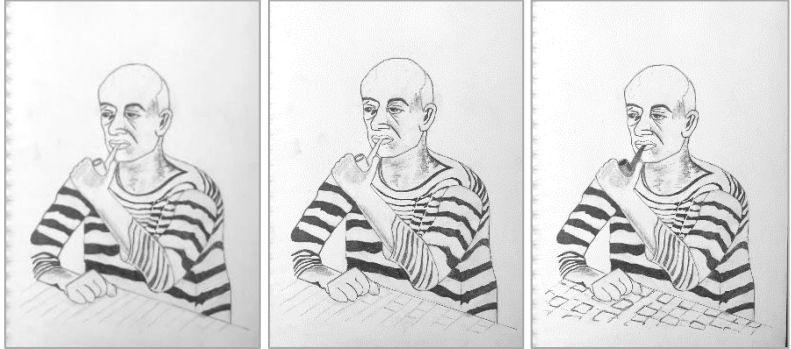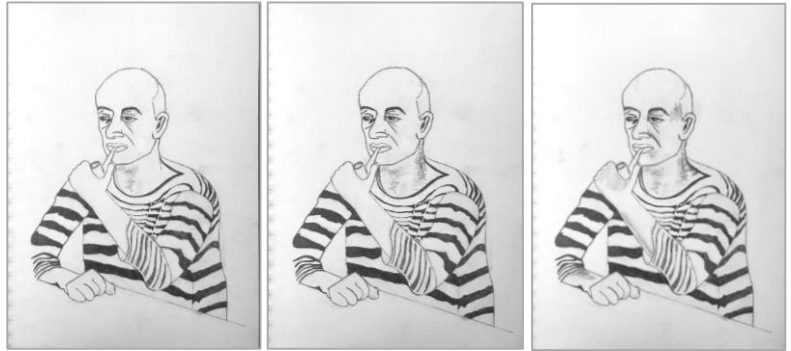
Complement with Color

1. Make your piece more dynamic by using colored pencils to add colors. You can opt to recreate the hues seen in *John* or select your own.

2. Notice how the artist uses greens, greys, and browns to build dimension and create shadows.

3. Finally, if you choose to keep the background blank, make sure to erase any extraneous marks. Or, select a background color and fill it in entirely.