

# DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University  
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## Analyzing a self-portrait

*Agnes Learns*

2023

### SPEAKER

Sonia Riabtchik

### KEYWORDS

Agnes Learns, Grade 4–6, School Resource, Self-portrait, Children's Education, Canadian Art, Contemporary Art

### FEATURED WORKS

Barbara Astman, *I as artifact*, 2014, digital print on Epson Ultrasmooth Fine Art Paper. Gift of the Artist, 2020

### TRANSCRIPT

#### Sonia Riabtchik:

Let's talk about self-portraits and identity using Barbara Astman's *I as artifact* as an example.

A portrait is an image of a person. A self-portrait is unique because the artist is the person in the piece! If you've ever drawn a picture of yourself or taken a selfie, that's a self-portrait!

Since an artist makes a self-portrait themselves, they can choose to use specific materials, pose in a certain way, or have a particular expression on their face to show how they feel and share unique elements of their identity.

Artists can make self-portraits to better understand themselves and to show people who they are. An artist's self-portrait can also encourage us to look within ourselves and consider who we are.

Let's take a moment to look at this self-portrait:

To make *I as artifact*, Astman first used anti-aging masks on her face. After taking them off and letting them dry in different positions, she wanted to take pictures of them.

Is this like other self-portraits you've seen? What are things you're used to seeing in a portrait or a self-portrait that are different here?

For me, something different is that the masks are missing details like the eyes and mouth, which would show me what Astman looks like. However, there are still details on the masks that are very specific to Astman. Each image captures the textures of her skin: pores and even some hairs. Kinda

cool, right? I think Astman wanted us to focus less on what a person looks like and more about what a self-portrait can say about *who* they are.

I think she chose to use a material that left out many facial features so that anyone can look at the masks and see themselves in them.

What mask do you connect with the most?

Even though these prints are different from what you might be used to seeing in a self-portrait, they're still considered self-portraits because they're a unique representation of the artist! *I as artifact* is a great example of how self-portraits can represent how you see yourself, and how you want to be seen by the world.