

Study Guide:

“Old Self: Portrait of the Artist as He Will (Not) Be, Variation 1” (2011) by Evan Penny

About the artwork: *Old Self: Portrait of the Artist as He Will (Not) Be, Variation 1* is a twice-life-size, sculptural bust depicting the head and shoulders of a man in his mid-70s. This man wears a plain t-shirt, round glasses, and a contemplative facial expression. Up close, it is highly detailed with stubble, wrinkled skin marked by

blemishes and stippled with tiny pores. The work is both a self-portrait of the artist and an imaginary portrayal of the artist as he may look one day, years in the future. Penny says the portrait evokes experience and world-weariness. *Old Self* belongs to a two-part series of sculptures, with its companion piece *Young Self: Portrait of the Artist as He Was (Not)*. The pair is often exhibited together, each accompanied by a black-and-white photographic portrait of the sculpture hung nearby. *Old Self* and *Young Self* both started with a 3D photographic scan of the artist’s own body. With the use of a computer numerical control (CNC) machine and traditional clay and silicone modeling, Penny spent over 200 hours in the creative process. Although *Old Self* is a complete fiction, Penny has said the work has changed his self-image. He feels older now, having imagined it so intensely. The black-and-white photograph that accompanies the sculpture closes the loop, so to speak. The picture shows a living, breathing person. It appears like proof that this man, who’s purely an invention of the artist’s imagination, exists in our world. Penny’s work suggests, by the same token, that photographs may not be the reliable documents of reality we mistake them for.



About the artist: Evan Penny is a Canadian artist world-renowned for his spectacularly realistic creations that manipulate the human body in surprising ways. Penny was born in South Africa in 1953. His father was a missionary doctor and the Penny family moved frequently, eventually immigrating to the Northwest Territories, Canada, in 1964. Penny attended the Alberta College of Art (now the Alberta University of the Arts), studying sculpture. He began making and exhibiting realistic sculptures of the human form in the late 70s and early 80s. He has also worked extensively in special effects for the film and

television industry. He created notable prostheses, body doubles and props for films like *Jacob's Ladder*, *Legends of the Fall*, *Nixon*, *JFK*, *X-Men* and David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* and was even nominated for an Emmy (*Truman* 1995). Through his experience with special effects, Penny became skilled in using materials like human hair and fleshy silicone, and he began incorporating these techniques in his sculptures. Penny is associated with an art movement known as hyperrealism, an advancement of photorealism; it draws on our familiarity with high-resolution pictures, digital manipulation, and computer-generated imagery, creating lifelike works that expand beyond the world we observe. Photorealism asks, "What happens when you take a distortion of the human body that is normal in the context of an image and bring it into our physical space?"

Please preview the short film and then share it with your students. Select one or two guiding questions that reflect your curriculum and can guide student research and inquiry connected to the artwork, artists, and the socio-cultural context in which it was created.

Guiding Questions:

- In a world of AI and social media, how do we know what we see is real?
- Examine the way the artist uses the principle of "duration" in this artwork.
- Examine the way the artist uses the principle of "point of view" in this artwork.
- In what ways does this artwork ask us to question what is real?
- What effects might the widespread use of computers and associated technologies have on society and how we perceive ourselves?
- Examine how ideas of aging are present in the artist's work.
- How does Penny's work in film support his success as a sculpture?
- Explore possible career paths in art and film, what training and skills might be required?
- Examine how the process and the variety of material contributes to the success of the artwork.
- Create an artwork, dance, dramatic scene, or creative writing piece that compares and contrasts your current self with your future self.
- Create an artwork, dance, dramatic scene, or creative writing piece that compares and contrasts your current self with your future self.
- What factors might contribute to healthful aging?
- Examine environmental issues related to health care, personal well-being, and experiences of aging.
- Create an artwork, dance, dramatic scene, or creative writing piece that explores the impact of conventions and/or unconventional healthcare.

Supporting Links:

- [Evan Penny - Old Self: Portrait of the Artist as He Will \(Not\) Be](#)
- [Re Figured / Interview with Evan Penny – ARTORONTO](#)
- [Evan Penny: Re figured](#)
- [CURRENTS: Evan Penny p1](#)
- [Evan Penny - Absolutely Unreal](#)
- [Can We No Longer Believe Anything We See?](#)

Ontario Secondary Curriculum Connections

The Arts- Visual Arts

B1. The Critical Analysis Process: demonstrate an understanding of the critical analysis process by examining, interpreting, evaluating, and reflecting on various art works;

B2. Art, Society, and Values: demonstrate an understanding of how art works reflect the society in which they were created, and of how they can affect personal values;

C1. Terminology: demonstrate an understanding of, and use correct terminology when referring to, elements, principles, and other components related to visual arts;

C2. Conventions and Techniques: demonstrate an understanding of conventions and techniques used in the creation of visual art works;

A1. The Creative Process: apply the creative process to create a variety of art works, individually and/or collaboratively;

A2. The Elements and Principles of Design: apply elements and principles of design to create art works for the purpose of self-expression and to communicate ideas, information, and/or messages;

The Arts - Media Arts

B1. The Critical Analysis Process: demonstrate an understanding of the critical analysis process by using it to monitor the creative process, and by examining, interpreting, assessing, and reflecting on media art works;

B2. Identity and Values: demonstrate an understanding of how media art works reflect personal and cultural identity, and affect personal, cultural, and community values and their awareness of those values;

C2. Contexts and Influences: demonstrate an understanding of the sociocultural and historical contexts of media arts;

A1. The Creative Process: apply the creative process to create media art works, individually and/or collaboratively;

A2. The Principles of Media Arts: design and produce media art works, applying the principles of media arts and using various elements from

contributing arts (dance, drama, music, visual arts);

A3. Using Technologies, Tools, and Techniques: apply traditional and emerging technologies, tools, and techniques to produce and present media art works for a variety of audiences and purposes.

The Arts - Dance

A1. The Creative Process: use the creative process, the elements of dance, and a variety of sources to develop movement vocabulary;

A2. Choreography and Composition: combine the elements of dance in a variety of ways in composing individual and ensemble dance creations;

The Arts - Drama

A1. The Creative Process: use the creative process and a variety of sources and forms, both individually and collaboratively, to design and develop drama works;

A2. Elements and Conventions: use the elements and conventions of drama effectively in creating individual and ensemble drama works, including works based on a variety of sources;

A3. Presentation Techniques and Technologies: use a variety of presentation techniques and technological tools to enhance the impact of drama works and communicate for specific audiences and purposes.

The Arts - Music

A1. The Creative Process: apply the stages of the creative process when performing notated and/or improvised music and composing and/or arranging music;

A2. The Elements of Music: apply elements of music when performing notated and improvised music and composing and/or arranging music;

English:

Writing: use a variety of organizational structures and patterns to produce coherent and effective written work;

Computer Technology, Grade 10

C2. identify effects of the widespread use of computers and associated technologies on society

Healthcare, Grade 10

- A2. describe factors that affect personal health and well-being;
- A3. compare and contrast conventional and complementary therapies and their role in maintaining personal health;
- C1. demonstrate an understanding of environmental issues related to health care and personal well-being;
- C2. describe social trends and health care issues relating to children and adolescents.

Hairstyling and Aesthetics, Grade 10

- A1. demonstrate an understanding of the structure and characteristics of hair, skin, and nails;
- B2. use knowledge of design elements and principles in the contexts of hairstyling and aesthetics services and marketing;
- D2. describe career opportunities in hairstyling and aesthetics, including relevant secondary and postsecondary educational pathways, and identify key knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits that are important for success in the industry

Technological Design, Grade 10

- A1. identify and describe the purpose, scope, and steps of a design process;

- A2. identify and describe tools, strategies, and skills needed for project research, planning, and organization;
- A3. demonstrate an understanding of how design ideas are represented graphically;
- A4. explain the purpose of building models and prototypes, and identify tools, materials, and methods for building and testing them;
- A5. demonstrate an understanding of communications methods used in the design process
- B1. research, plan, and organize projects, using a design process and appropriate methods and tools;
- B2. apply appropriate methods for generating and graphically representing design ideas and solutions;
- B3. create and test models using a variety of techniques, tools, and materials;

Writer's Craft:

- produce writing for a range of purposes and audiences with an emphasis on well-developed content and the effective use of appropriate forms, techniques, diction, voice, and style;