Beckoning Blue

National Core Visual Art Standards:
VA2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
VA8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
Objective: Students will analyze how to use color and cropping to create a captivating composition.

About This Work
Alisa paints an immersive summer scene. She uses blue to render a pool that fills most of the composition. She adds white to blue paint to make lighter tints. She adds black paint to blue paint to make darker shades. She paints a pair of legs visible above the water's surface in the middle ground, creating a focal point and adding a sense of mystery to the scene. She crops the picture plane so that only a glimpse of a ledge is visible above the water. Alisa prompts viewers to wonder: Who is in the pool and how did he or she get there? The artist adds swirling patterns on either side of the legs to mimic the shapes of moving water.

Discussion
How does Alisa use color to immerse the viewer in the scene? (Alisa mixes white and black paint with blue paint to render a pool of water in varying tints and shades, filling most of the picture plane.)

How does Alisa evoke a sense of mystery in her work? (Alisa shows only legs in the pool, making the viewer wonder who is in the water. She crops the scene so that only a small part of a ledge is visible beyond the pool, inviting the question of how the figure got in the water.)

Sketchbook Starter
Use color pencils to sketch a pool or body of water. Include patterns that evoke the movement of water.

Write About Art
Write a flash fiction piece that illuminates this artwork's narrative mysteries.
Stylized Subjects

National Core Visual Art Standards:
VA6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
VA8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
Objective: Students will make connections about how to render a stylized portrait using traditional and contemporary techniques.

About This Work
Chloe experiments with portraiture to paint a stylized portrait. She renders a serious-looking woman in the center of the canvas. A dog—often depicted alongside human subjects in traditional portraits—partially overlaps the figure from the right side of the composition. Chloe paints the dog’s visible eye so that he appears to stare straight at the viewer. She stylizes the woman’s features, exaggerating certain details. She renders high, defined cheekbones using white paint to create highlights, and dark gray paint for heavy shadows. She also adds wispy shadows under the subject’s eyes, giving her a weary appearance. Chloe elongates the woman’s neck and simplifies her narrow shoulders.

Discussion
Which characteristics of traditional portraiture does Chloe include in her painting? (Chloe paints a woman’s bust. She renders the woman wearing a serious facial expression. She includes a dog in the composition.)

In what ways does Chloe stylize her portrait? (Chloe exaggerates the woman’s features. She elongates the subject’s neck and adds protruding cheekbones and heavy shadows, giving her an extreme, tired appearance.)

Sketchbook Starter
Ask a friend to sit for a portrait. Exaggerate his or her features in a sketch.

Write About Art
Pretend you are an art critic from a different century. Write a paragraph from the point of view of the art critic detailing how he or she would critique this portrait.
Patterned Protest

National Core Visual Art Standards:
VA1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
VA4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
Objective: Students will consider how to employ color and pattern to make a statement in a digital artwork.

About This Work
Elizabeth creates a digital collage that makes a powerful statement. The artist employs color and pattern to help her communicate her message. She digitally adds a vibrant floral print pattern onto a black and white photograph of a women's equality march, juxtaposing the grayscale photo with the colorful patterns. She includes a repeating image of a bright pink shotgun shell across the top half of the picture plane. By contrasting flowers—which are often used to convey femininity—with shotgun shells—which are typically considered a masculine symbol—she makes a striking statement about gender and power.

Discussion
What role does color play in Elizabeth's work? (Elizabeth contrasts the black and white photo of a protest march with colorful patterns to emphasize her statement about gender and power.)

How does Elizabeth use pattern to make a statement? (Elizabeth includes floral patterns and a repeating image of a shotgun shell to communicate a message about expectations of femininity.)

Sketchbook Starter
Choose an event in history that inspires you. Cut and paste images from magazines to make a collage in response to your chosen event.

Write About Art
Consider the issues Elizabeth addresses in her collage. Write a paragraph explaining your thoughts on a related issue.
Fierce Faces

National Core Visual Art Standards:
VA3: Refine and complete artistic work.
VA7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Objective: Students will assess various ways of working with expression and needlepoint.

About This Work
Summer defies traditional needlepoint techniques to create a mixed-media series. Instead of opting for neatly stitched lines to create quiet images, the artist uses unpredictable stitches to create two expressive characters. She uses varied lines to build the characters’ facial features and hands. She loosely attaches black string around both figures, creating the texture of curly hair and adding three-dimensional detail. In the left work, she uses pink thread to render the inside of the person’s open mouth. She leaves parts of the cloth white and unstitched, in the shape of teeth, to complete the surprised facial expression. In the right work, the character sports pursed lips and glances sideways. Summer photographs the works in the series side-by-side, juxtaposing the left work’s chaotic mood with the right character’s more controlled expression.

Discussion
How does Summer break the rules of traditional needlepoint? (Summer embraces varied, unpredictable lines to build the forms in her work. She renders hair using loose string, adding a three-dimensional aspect.)

Discuss the way Summer works with expression. (Summer renders her characters showing strong emotions. She juxtaposes the left work’s chaotic expression with the right work’s more controlled mood.)

Sketchbook Starter
Take a photo of a friend making a striking facial expression. Use the photo as a guide for sketching a portrait that emphasizes his or her mood.

Write About Art
Write a poem that expresses one of the bold emotions conveyed in this artwork. Write another poem that evokes a juxtaposing mood.