



[art21.org/alizanisenbaum](https://art21.org/alizanisenbaum)



## Aliza Nisenbaum

ABOUT

### Born

1977 (Mexico City, Mexico)

### Education

School of the Art Institute of Chicago, BFA, MFA

### Lives and Works

Queens, New York

### About the Artist

Painting portraits of individuals and groups, Aliza Nisenbaum forms intimate relationships with her sitters that become evident in highly detailed paintings that humanize, honor, and make visible the underrepresented and underserved. Her portraits often depict her subjects in moments of reprieve or contemplation, revealing an interiority of the figure while situating them in environments that reflect their cultures, personalities, and relationships. Throughout her practice, Nisenbaum demonstrates the value of caring, compassionate, and ethical relationships and makes politically potent work through who and how she chooses to represent.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

### Media and Materials

painting

### Key Words and Ideas

care  
citizen  
community  
empowerment  
friendship  
home

immigration  
inspiration  
observation  
portraiture  
profit-sharing

### Related Artists

Tania Bruguera  
Jordan Casteel  
Katy Grannan  
Graciela Iturbide

Zanele Muholi  
Amy Sherald  
Kerry James Marshall

**“I was always torn between being a social worker and being a painter. I feel like it took all my life, pretty much, or up to this point, where I have kind of integrated both of those things.”** —Aliza Nisenbaum

**How to Use This Guide**

Art21 encourages active engagement when teaching with our films. The questions and activities below are recommendations for incorporating Art21 films featuring Aliza Nisenbaum into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

**NOTE:** Please view all films before sharing them with your students.

**Before Viewing**

Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):

- ① What kinds of things do you observe closely? Why? When do you find yourself observing other *people* closely?
- ② What kinds of things characterize a “friendship” versus other kinds of relationships?
- ③ How does participating in the arts, and engaging with art, empower people in different ways?

**While Viewing**

Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:

- ① Why does Nisenbaum paint from observation? What advantages does this approach allow for?
- ② How does Nisenbaum foster a friendship with Veronica Ramírez and Marissa Campiz? What kinds of characteristics are present in this friendship?
- ③ How does Nisenbaum’s paintings affect the people and the community she works with?

**After Viewing**

Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):

- ① How are Nisenbaum’s portraits from observation different from other portraits you’ve experienced?
- ② In what ways does this film extend, or redefine, the concept of friendship and community?
- ③ Who is empowered through Nisenbaum’s work? How?

**Related Activities**

Engaging in creative activities after watching Art21 films can reinforce learning and stimulate ideas. Art21 encourages educators to adapt these activities to their classrooms.

- ✓ Choose a person in your school community, or even in your neighborhood, that you want to learn more about. Have a conversation with them, and for at least part of the conversation create a portrait of this person. The portrait can be painted, drawn, or photographed, and can be realistic or abstract. Share your work with classmates, or in an exhibition. What did you learn about this person? How is this evident in the work you created?
- ✓ Write an essay or poem about a personal friendship. Where and how did it begin? What has been the trajectory of this friendship? Where is it going?