

Young Portrait Explorers: José Limón

Learning Objective: Learn about José Limón's love for dancing and how he created his own dance **technique** (a certain way of doing something).



Portrait Discussion:

Take a look at the portrait of José Limón. Look closely at the entire photograph – from the top of José Limón's head to the bottom of his feet.

Pose: Notice how José Limón is standing. What is he doing with his legs? What is he doing with his arms? How would you describe his pose? Try posing like José Limón. How do you feel in this stance?

*José Limón was a dancer and **choreographer** (a person who creates steps and moves for a dance performance).*

Facial Expression: Look closely at José Limón's face. What emotions do you see? Is he being serious or silly?

Rhythm (*a regular pattern of movement*): *José Limón made up his own form of dance called the 'Limón Technique,' which focused on expressing emotion through natural rhythms, like breathing, can help express our feelings.* Can you create a rhythm by clapping your hands or stomping your feet? Is it fast or slow? Which rhythm do you prefer? Is there a rhythm that makes you feel peaceful or energized? *In this photograph, José Limón is dancing the **chaconne** (a series of short musical rhythms that repeat).*

Historical Context: *José Limón was born in Mexico and grew up in the United States. He trained as a dancer, and years later he started his own dance company, the José Limón Dance Company. His dances were inspired by things that were important to him, like his childhood in Mexico, watching bullfights, Greek myths (stories from a long time ago), and the tales of William Shakespeare.*

Related Children's Books:

José! Born to Dance by Susanna Reich, illustrated by Raúl Colón

Related Video:

There is a Time (excerpt), performed by the Limón Dance Company

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDgol6lgQ08>

Art Activity: Dancing Self-Portrait

Materials:

Paper

Markers/crayons/colored pencils

Instruction:

José Limón loved to dance. Turn on music and dance in front of a mirror. Watch how your arms and legs move as the music plays.

Think about how dancing makes you feel. Do you feel happy, excited? Draw yourself dancing and share how you feel when you dance. How will you pose in your dancing portrait? Will you pose like José Limón?



José Limón by Barbara Morgan, gelatin silver print, 1945 (printed 1972). National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. © The Regents of the University of California on behalf of UCLA Library Special Collections

Find the portrait on our website, here: https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2016.105