

Intersubjectivity in the Process of Portraiture

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A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Art Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Art Education at Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2008

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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-45498-5
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-45498-5

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ABSTRACT

Intersubjectivity in the Process of Portraiture

Hyo Min Park

This studio-based thesis investigates how the artist and the sitter interact with one another during the process of portraiture, and how the interpersonal relationship between artist and sitter affects the narrative quality of portrait art. I observe how the familiarity and intimacy of a relationship frame the process of portrait painting and my response to it as an artist, collaborating with my husband, a person with whom I have a strong established relationship, and who is a willing participant in a visual and psychological exploration of the portrait process.

Intersubjective theory is investigated and applied as a theoretical frame to explore the portrait painting-making process as a lived experience from both the artist's and the sitter's perspectives. A portrait painting was produced, and an animated video was also completed as an experimental portrayal of the natural dynamics of the sitter and the artist in the portrait making process. While considering other portrait artists' interaction with their subjects and how this relationship affects their work, I also discuss intersubjectivity as it affects the practice of portraiture, and its significance in art education.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Paul Langdon, who helped me finish this thesis even though he was on vacation, Lorrie Blaire who agreed to sit on my committee on such short notice, and Linda Szabad-Smyth, who introduced me to the idea of 'self-narrative', which formed the foundation of my study. Their patience and kind, honest opinions have been extremely valuable to me.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the Department of Art Education, Concordia University, for fostering an excellent environment in which I could explore what it means to be an artist and an art teacher.

Finally, none of this would have been possible without my husband, J.P., who is just everything to me. I also deeply thank A-Myoung Su-Nim, my mentor, my parents, and all of my family both Korean and Canadian.

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Note: A DVD of the animation, “Sitter”, was submitted together with this thesis.

Introduction

Perhaps more than any other art form, portraiture comes in a variety of media. Portraits can be paintings, sculptures, drawings, engravings, photographs, coins, and medals. They can appear as images in newspapers or magazines or on mosaic, pottery, tapestry or bank notes...Portraits can also be found in a range of contexts and locations: they share with other genres a place in galleries and private homes, but they can also be held in the hand (for example coins), worn as locket (miniatures), displayed as garden decorations or public monuments.... The all-pervasiveness of portraiture means that it is perhaps the most familiar of all art forms. (West, 2004, pp.13-14)

My studio-based inquiry into intersubjectivity through the process of portraiture¹ is my attempt at finding meaning in portrait art on a theoretical level, as well as being a self-learning process to gain a lived experience in and to articulate the significance of my practice in portraiture. The intersubjective² nature of life is essential to my understanding of people, and I explore this through a phenomenological inquiry into my artistic practice.

The study is concerned with how the artist and the sitter interact with one

¹ In this paper, I use 'portraiture' mostly for representational portrait paintings and drawings executed in traditional ways.

² The term 'intersubjective' refers to "the status of being somehow accessible to at least two minds or 'subjectivities'. It implies that there is some sort of communication between those minds" (The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, 1995, p.414).

another during the process of portraiture, and how this interpersonal relationship³ affects the narrative quality of portrait art. I observe how the familiarity and intimacy of a relationship frame the process of portrait painting and my response to it as an artist, collaborating with my husband, a person with whom I have a strong established relationship, and who is a willing participant in a visual and psychological exploration of the portrait process.

The kinds of interpersonal relationships in which the artist participates become the core element upon which they develop the qualities of their artistic production. Some portrait artists use people they already know as sitters in their studios, while others work with those who they have never encountered before. Some artists attempt to offer “true” statements about their subjects through intense observation, and some use the images of people as a method to recreate and project their subjective narratives. Woodall (1997) in the introduction to

³ From my recent portraiture practice pilot project, which was conducted with an acquaintance, I came to understand that development of an interpersonal relationship is a significant consideration in terms of interpreting another’s narratives. My preconceptions and my Korean cultural background both contributed to the degree of formality I use in my approach to my subject. This in turn influenced how comfortable I was communicating with and understanding the insight of my sitter.

'Portraiture: Facing the Subject', states that in contemporary art, naturalistic portrait painting has been seriously undermined. The meaning of portraiture now evolves from the interplay between the artist, the subject and the viewer. The process of portraiture engages the psychological tension shared by the artist and the subject, and invites the viewer into the relationship, where the viewer's curiosity searches for the drama of the character.

In this study, I apply intersubjective theory in order to outline my perspective, and provide the description of the relationship that I have with my sitter and the portraiture process as a lived experience from both the artist's and the sitter's perspectives, along with producing a portrait painting related to the topic. An animated portrait was also created as an experimental portrayal by imposing the natural dynamics of a person, corresponding to the scene of the painting making process. While considering other portrait artists' interaction with their subjects and how this relationship affects their work, I also discuss the intersubjective nature of practice in portraiture, and its significance in art education as art practice.

Personal Significance:

Questioning the Meaning of Portraiture in Contemporary Fine Art

People have always intrigued me: I like watching and listening to them, thinking about them and drawing them. I enjoyed drawing and painting people from photographs when I was a teenager, which I believe led me to consider pursuing an education in art. However, ever since I had started my studio practice in college level⁴ in the 1990's, my interest in images of people had been discouraged by the hostile atmosphere towards realist portraiture in academic fine arts, which tended to cast portraiture as meaningless, uncreative draftsmanship. I never understood the reason for its marginalized stance in contemporary art and people's contempt towards it, and was unable to articulate my own justification for making paintings and drawings of people. Influenced by the trend in Korean academic fine arts around that time, I ignored my interest in portraiture, keeping it as merely a self-indulgent hobby. My question about the meaning of portraiture was aroused again when I met a practicing artist in

⁴ I did my undergraduate in printmaking in Studio Arts at Hong-Ik University, Seoul, South Korea between 1993 and 1998.

Montreal. I asked her whether or not she did portraiture. She answered, “No, but I am (technically) capable of it”. I found her response curious, and it has kept me wondering about the justification of portrait art for a contemporary artist. Although my attempts to understand the meaning of that genre of art have been meager, now that I reflect on my own art practice, “people” is always the theme that I explore. Thus, my studio-based inquiry into the process of portraiture is my attempt to find meanings in its practice for me as an artist, strengthened by the theoretical study of people and our life.

Artwork reflects the artist’s concern. Being able to depict the complex, multi-narratives of human faces and features, and present the dialogue of their expressions is my concern as an art practitioner. My practice of portrait art from an intersubjective perspective will help me develop a critical foundation for my art practice.

Literature Review

Portraitists and Their Engagement with Their Subjects

Whether or not a portrait was actually based on a sitting, the transaction between artist and sitter is evoked in the imagination of the viewer. (West, 2004, p. 41)

Woodall (1997) in the introduction to 'Portraiture: Facing the Subject', states that in contemporary art naturalistic portrait painting has been seriously undermined. It used to be believed that identity was a fixed, unchangeable condition, depicted through the sitters' appearances, and artists' attempt to get their sitters' likeness was the main focus of the discipline. In the 20th century, however, a single appearance in a fixed image no longer represents people's identities since photography has proven that the stories of people can be told diversely depending on the photographic conditions. Cindy Sherman's portrayal of various characters in her photography is a good example of this challenge to the notion that physiognomic resemblance represents an unchangeable self. Woodall continues to argue, "In the field of portraiture, the interplay between

viewer, artist and sitter, or within the psyche of the artist-sitter can all now participate in an identity inseparable from representation” (P.13).

In the process of portraiture, there is tension between the ‘looker’ and the ‘looked at’ (Werner, 2005) negotiating the context and developing the image together. It is also a form of qualitative research wherein the researchers (portraitists) observe the relationship between themselves, others and the world and carefully bring out the findings of it. Some artists depend on the direct presence of the sitters, while some adapt images from photography. The goal is to capture the uniqueness of each individual, and its inquiry results in an intense study of human subjects (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

The highly acclaimed 19th century German portraitist, Franz von Lenbach became frustrated with the usual pose of the sitters in the studio setting. The likeness of his clients was not his concern. He wished to be able to catch the “people’s fleeting expressions” (Muysers, 2002, Introduction Section, ¶. 1) in order to depict their personalities. In addition to the prevailing theory that the facial expressions and the shape of the head determine the description of a person’s character, the argument about the importance of human behavioral movements to understand the diversity of human personalities was newly

introduced. Lenbach tried to synthesize the two aspects. He started to integrate sketches of his models in real life and the use of photography, which was a fairly new technology at that time, in order to document their natural movements. The artist deliberately hid the camera and the photographer depending on his models' sensitivity. He studied his subjects in both real life and photographs, and developed a painting process combining his understanding, the likeness and the captured "fleeting expressions" of the models apparent in the photographs.

Although Lucian Freud spends a lot of time attending to his sitters in his studio, he also argues that great portraits do not need to deliver the exact likeness of the models: rather, it is character traits that make individuals distinctive from each other.⁵ Through the careful examination and contemplation of his subjects, the artist co-creates the image with the presence of the sitters. Gayford (2004), who for over six months was the sitter for Freud's 'Man in a Blue Scarf', testified that the completed painting was not exactly an image of him posing in the studio but also of him having conversations with the artist at different occasions.

⁵ He appreciates the essential quality of individuals: "I like the idea of working with people who are able to be themselves-not posing, just being" (cited in Nairne & Howgate, 2006, p. 11).

Engaging subjective knowledge is a vehicle to reconstruct the narrative of portraits. Lenbach enriched his understandings of clients by observing the interactive responses through natural conversation with them. Lucian Freud also applies his interpretation to the description of character. As an example, he is not particularly fond of self-loving people. When he gets the impression of that trait from his sitters, he distorts their features 'sardonically' (Gayford, 2004).

Janet Werner is another portrait artist whose work develops from her subjective perspective towards others. Her way of co-creating portraiture is a little different in that she works with those who she never encounters in real life. In her statement, she says "they are half-remembered and half-imagined faces" (Werner, as cited in Laurence, 1999). The artist, who used to focus on abstract art, said that her portrait painting started accidentally. While she was concentrating on drawing, she found herself making human figures by adding some geometric shapes. She was fascinated by the images emerging naturally from her, and stated, "It was a mirror that was reflecting the viewer, or me" (2002). She created faces from her mind, and they look a lot like the artist, herself. She now makes use of media images of celebrities, re-envisioning their identities in her portraits of them. There is a struggle between the artist's intention and the

context of magazine photography. The media promoting the images direct the viewers to a predetermined narrative. The artist attempts to break the narrative frame by giving an anonymous feel to those recognizable people and suggests that the viewers explore their own perceptions about the characters.

While Werner utilizes mass-media photography to challenge its ready-made story, Chuck Close tries to surmount the technology of photography by using the images of acquaintances only. Close's intention of working with familiar people is not to describe a narrative involving his personal insight, or the relationship with his subjects. The real subject for him is the subject in the photograph, not in real life. However, familiarity is a significant element that has him engage with the performance of the painting (Finch, 1989). Lucian Freud as well, attempts to overcome photography. Over a long period of time posing for the artist, the sitters change. Their appearances, moods and characters are changing minute by minute. The artist endeavors to capture the core element existing in those people and their lives, and bring it to the captured moment of paintings while the moment in photography is only a single instance (Feaver, 2002; Gayford, 2004).

Portraiture stands where painting, psychology and the philosophy of representation meet (Hudson, 1993). For portraitists, the process of retelling the

stories about people is an approach with which to construct their understandings and meanings both aesthetically and intellectually. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' (1997) studies about using the process of portraiture as a psychological device to develop one's perspective, 'portraiture' can be used as a methodology for social study, and also as a vehicle for students to enrich their concept of self, allowing them to "introspect" others at a deeper level.

Theories of Intersubjectivity and the Practice of Portraiture

Like any other social event, doing portraiture is an intersubjective experience. The artist and the subject co-construct the narrative, negotiating the context, sharing dialogue through the sense of each other's existence (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The term 'intersubjective' refers to "the status of being somehow accessible to at least two minds or 'subjectivities'. It implies that there is some sort of communication between those minds" (The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, 1995:414). For phenomenologists, the intersubjective nature of the human life is the fundamental question met in their methodology with reduction to 'pure

consciousness'. One's own consciousness always constitutes otherness through spatio-temporally situated encounters. In his essay "I and Thou" (1958), the existentialist philosopher Martin Buber articulates that "I" alone does not accomplish its primary meaning. He states, "There is no I taken in itself, but only the I of the primary word **I-Thou** and I of the primary word **I-It**" (p. 4). The word "it" is the objectified world including things and other people, which the self acquires through experience. The **I-Thou**, on the other hand represents the mutual encounter between selves, a direct relation not mediated by the self's presuppositions, intuitions or self-conceptualization.

The American Social Behaviorist (Symbolic Interactionist), G.H. Mead, also advocates the existential sense of self with the distinction between "I" and "Me". "I" is the fundamental agent of self, the direct doer, where "Me" is the conceptualized, objectified, analyzed self being with "generalized others", the community of others within a social context. For Mead, thinking is an action, and the "psychical" is not a substance but a continuous process, which is social in character. Mind or consciousness is not a static state, but rather conceived as an "ongoing process", socially constructed, and restricted to human behaviors since it serves as an "instrument" for the organism's better adjustment to its

environment (Pfulze, 1954). In his perspective, “Doing” always comes before “Knowing”, which means the bodily response to the environment comes before consciousness. Individuals interact with others and experience the environment, and the shared meanings from this experience become the constitution of consciousness (Coelho & Figueiredo, 2003). However, mind or consciousness and body, and the accommodated social behaviours are all interrelated.

Human social behaviours involve language, the “significant symbols”, beginning in gestures, where individuals perceive its meanings learned from the interaction with others. This socially constructed knowledge always has the context of other, and it is also actively applied when individuals themselves think, and develop their own consciousness reflecting on their own perspective.

Between the social role of portraitists (the observer and the interpreter) and that of models (the observed and the interpreted) in the setting of making portraits, the dialogue between the two through shared gestures is dynamic when they are present to each other, as in a studio setting (Brooks, 2000). There is direct interaction between the two under the tension of the artists’ intense attention to the presence of the sitters. In the case of portraitists’ using photographs for portraiture, this intersubjective dynamic is also posited although

there is no direct, reciprocal interaction between the two social selves. However, borrowing Buber's notion of relation, i.e. of I and others, and Mead's point of view, the otherness always resides in our consciousness and in the very core of our existence. It is suggested that there is an interactive dialogue between the artists' selves and their selves perceiving the visual contents of the photographs as another person, and interpreting the narrative based on the character of the person suggested in a particular dimension. Perceiving another person's character is enriched by the artists' social encounters with others and the intuitively, intellectually learned lived experiences. Since our social environment has manifold dimensions, diverse aspects of a person's character are manifested and conceived by other people.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, in her 'the Art and Science of Portraiture' (co-authored with Davis, 1997) states that portraiture develops from relationships. Empathy is the tool for understanding the other and our relationships in a shared context. It is a process of self-understanding and self-reflection, embodied with other people and their meanings to us founded on the relationships with people in our lives.

Methodology

Inquiry into Artistic Practice as Qualitative Research

In drawing up personal descriptions of lived experience, the phenomenologists know that one's own experiences are also the possible experiences of others. (Van Manen, 1990, p 54)

This qualitative study uses grounded theory to gather and analyze data collected from descriptions of lived experience.

The inquiry of artistic practice engages the subjective narrative account of the artists themselves, and their own artistic pursuit, which is the complex of their personal thoughts and lived experience (Hawke, 1996). It is a form of qualitative research, requiring *close* scrutiny of the interpretative process, by which pre-existing theories and truths are discovered (Ezzy, 2002).

The pre-existing theories and concepts are the criteria on which we rationalize our behavior, and whether or not academically or intuitively learned, they are the rationales that influence our forthcoming experience. In the

qualitative paradigm, a researcher's preconceptions towards the subject set up the frame of study, the understanding of the research process and the findings from it. Dilthy (as cited in Ezzy, 2002) explains the intersubjective nature of human behavior as the interaction between the 'expresser' and the 'interpreter', and the interpretative process as an 'on going process' between one's own perspective and the perspective of the other. The researcher's subjectivity is the viewfinder of the context of the research experience. While there is no absolute shared-ness between people (Prus, 1997), 'engagement of empathy' is the way to understand the other (Goldberg, in Fielding, 1996), and by doing so, one also raises his or her self-recognition and can reflect on him/herself as an object. (Mead in Prus, 1997).

At times, in studio practice inquiry, the artist's him/herself is the subject of study, and by paying close attention to the practice they raise self-consciousness of their artistic intention (Hawke, 1996). As Mead indicated, self-understanding occurs when the artist reflects him/herself as an object to observe and consider the contextual surrounding where the self of the artist is situated.

Through my pilot project, I found that the portrait making process is affected by the specific sitter's presence and the social interactions elicited by the

interpersonal relationship between my model and me. Since I intend to carefully examine the interaction between an artist and a sitter, and its influence on the process, I collaborate with my husband, who allows me to reflect on our relationship closely on different levels, and to examine how this can help develop the portrait making process. I make use of 'intersubjectivity' as a grounded theory in order to frame my subjective point of view towards the study, and interpret the interactive truths that I observe during the lived experience of portrait making. My emotional and intuitive responses are also considered in the sense that they reflect my empathy towards my sitter as a person, as is my sitter's account, his honest response to his own experience in posing for an artwork and his wife.

Data Procedure⁶

I produced an oil painting, 40 inches by 60 inches large, with the subject as a live sitter, and a two-minute long animation made from approximately 1000 frames based on pencil sketches. During this process, I kept field notes and

⁶ Data were collected from March 2007 to April 2007. There were 11 or 12 painting sessions over the course of a year because the animation took an impressively large amount of time: The animation project (non-subtitled version) was completed in April 2008.

journals whenever relevant thoughts occurred and after each session. I also asked my sitter to write journal entries after the sessions and when he had any thoughts or opinions regarding his experience reflecting his account as a collaborator. Several portrait drawing sessions were convened before the painting was started in order to find the most agreeable approach for both of us: the most comfortable, physically bearable posture for him and the most interesting, convincing composition for me.

I had my digital camera set to document the sessions as well. Numerous short films (because of the technical restrictions of my camera) and time lapse movies were taken, focusing on the sitter's face and the full view of the studio. These audiovisual materials were used as additional information for analyzing the data, and also substantial material for the animation project.

Only the process of making the portrait painting was recorded, since it is the situation that the artist and the sitter were physically present to each other. However, how the animation project was induced as an alternative medium to the still image (painting) will be also discussed.

Reflection on the process

Considerations and Preparations

All portraits involve a series of negotiations often between the artist and the sitter, but sometimes there is also a patron, who is not included in the portrait itself. The impact of these negotiations on the practice of portraiture must also be addressed. (West, 2004, p. 21)

(H.M.'s Journal entry/Jan, 27 2008) For us it's like preparing for a ceremony: cleaning up the living room, which is used as a studio; cleaning ourselves. We eat. We wake up with coffee and cigarettes, and prepare for the long studio session, which can be 'mentally demanding' as my sitter described.

It has a ritual quality. Preparing myself for intense concentration and quietness so I can listen to those silent but busy dialogues in my mind. I'm not sure how my sitter might feel. In this studio session, I am the leading agent, the active one. I'm excited about creating my painting and about the process; on the other hand, he's anxious about the mental and physical boredom he'll have to deal with. According to him, he's the passive participant, merely a helper with no intention of getting involved. Although each of our emotional responses to this studio research might be different, it's a big commitment for both of us and we feel obliged to act respectfully towards it. We silently take our positions, speak to each other softly, and start our work.

In her essay, "The Lived Experience of Making a Life Drawing: Drawing Amy" (2000), Brooks describes her observational life drawing as "a kinesthetic

experience” (¶. 7) in which the medium itself responds to the communication between her sight and hands. She describes the intensity of her drawing moment, stating that her “sense must become super alert” (¶. 8). Drawing is like a ritual for her, involving peculiar preparations to centre her mind before performing the physical practice. There is a certain pattern and order in which her materials must be set; she has to behave in a certain way, do certain things. She empties her mind before she gets into her kinesthetic experience. Like hers, our studio sessions were commitments. Though seemingly trivial, a session required that I follow certain procedures to open my sense before I sat in front of the canvas. After all, painting from observation requires a neutral temper coupled with an improvisational flexibility; one needs to be able to capture fleeting, spontaneous expressions through acute but calm examination.

Before the actual sessions began, it seemed easy to paint from straight observation since the subject was simply there in front of me. I thought painting skill and concentration would be the all that was required for this kind of artistic performance, but soon realized that there were numerous considerations. Here I am painting a person, a real person, animate by nature. My sitter has never modeled in the studio before, and has no idea how to carry himself. He’s not

good at staying still and keeping a pose, demonstrated by the fact that he usually appears blurry and ghostly in photographs.

Using intersubjectivity as a key theme, I also had to situate myself in reference to discourse regarding the “likeness” or the “essence” of the sitter, terms commonly used in the literature of portraiture, and whose definitions are often left open ended.⁷ Making a portrait involves knowing my subject and examining my own understanding of him, and our shared context greatly influences my artistic perspective, and how his character presents in the painting.

A facial expression for the painting, which would suggest emotions and personal traits, also had to be decided upon. This was followed by further questions about the degree to which the depiction would represent the reality of my sitter, and whether or not this concern would actually matter for the quality of the portraiture.

In order to find the most characteristic aspect of my sitter for this painting project, we started with test drawing sessions, where a pose, a composition, and

⁷ West (2004) states that likeness is an “unstable concept” (p.22). It involves various considerations: the sitter’s social status, the sitter’s relationship with the artist, the time and place of the production of the portrait, and for what purposes it is being created. This is demonstrated when different artists execute different approaches to the same subject in the same context, e.g) Jan Van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden’ different portrayals of Chancellor Rolin.

the subject of the sitter were chosen for the painting. The test drawings also served as the basis for an animation project used to further articulate how the artist portrays a person.

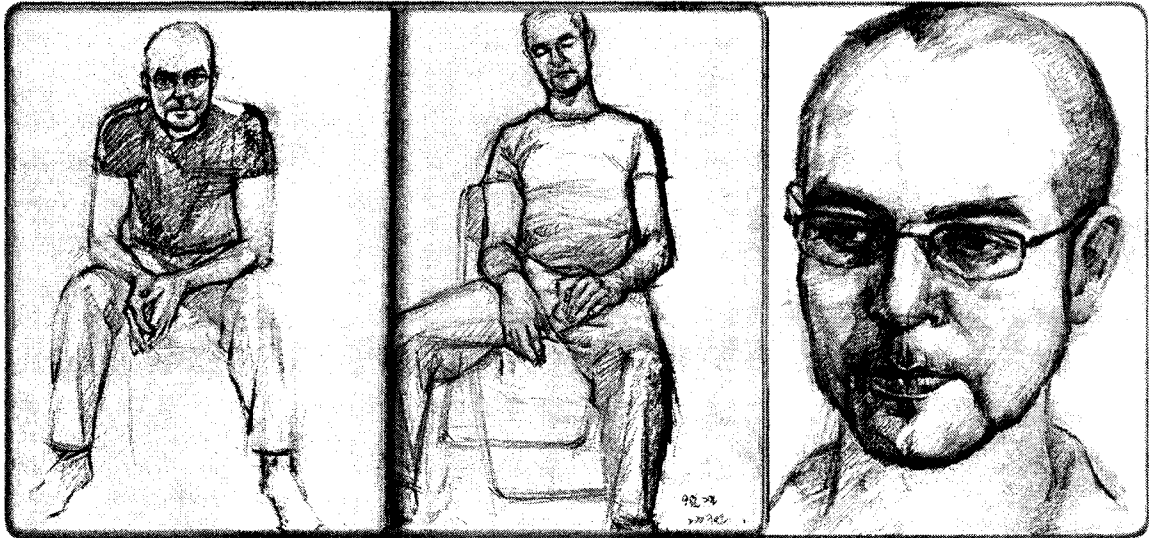


Figure 1. Test drawings of the subject.

Deciding on a Pose

Whatever pose was chosen, it would serve as the foundation of my painting. Depending on the angle of his chin, the position of his hands, or the shape of his legs, the narrative would vary. Although a pose that indicates a person's habitual posture can be used to represent a person's identity (Schwaninger, Wallraven, Cunningham & Chiller-Glaus, 2006), it was unrealistic to ask my sitter to assume

a dynamic pose for me simply because of the limits of his physical endurance. The limits of physical capability are an inspiration to realist figurative artists like Pearlstein, who waits for his naked models to tire and transfers the tangible physical tension to his paintings (Alvarez, 2001). I find the way Pearlstein studies his subjects fascinating, and following this method could have offered me a chance to study the human body changing under duress. However, as my husband had never tested his physical limitations in the context of a long portrait sitting, and had no desire to pose nude whatsoever, I decided to let him sit on a chair and to focus on his face.

(H.M.'s Journal entry/ September 10 2007) It's too difficult to describe the whole view of the sitter sitting on a chair. There are too many distractions: I realize that it is the face that I want to observe and study, to see how the expression expands on a large canvas. Since this project explores the expressiveness and conceptual references of realistic conventional portrait art, I will be attentive to every element that is given to my painting as I have learned from the practices of Pearlstein and Freud. I am also very curious about the body and its changes during the sessions, and ask J.P. if he'd be willing to take off some of his clothes. J.P. simply refuses. No degree of nudity allowed. Not even his socks should be off. That being the case, he'll have to wear the same clothes throughout the project. Freud emphasizes the uniqueness of individual objects when he paints, including items of clothing; he doesn't allow his sitters to change their clothes no matter how long the picture will take. No replacement by purchasing an identical item, and no washing the clothes is allowed either (Gayford, 2004). I ask J.P whether he would mind wearing the same clothes for months without washing them, and he says, "Yes, I mind, and I think you would mind that too."

To be very honest, I usually find depicting the detail of fabrics tedious, where the face interests me the most.

An additional request was that he looks towards me during the session so that it would be easy for both of us to experience each other's presence. I wanted to have the face look to the front of my painting, which meant that we would be making eye contact during the sessions. The big 60" x 40" canvas would be filled with his face, and might suggest something I didn't intend: it may look overly dramatic since the face is so large, like a movie character shot close up for an emotional monologue. It might also look like a challenge, or an attempt to seduce the viewer as was often presumed of portraits in the past⁸. It might even look like a reference to the typical driver's license photograph, or to picture IDs, which Chuck Close often uses for his portraits (Contemporary Artists 5th Edition, 2002). However, having the chance to observe every feature and muscle in a face and their changes during the sessions is what I was looking forward to the most in this study. Contrary to my anticipation, my sitter was anxious about physical and mental boredom since he had little self-motivation to participate, and agreed to sit

⁸ The gaze to the front in historical portraits with direct eye contact is easily interpreted as a challenge, provocation and seduction of the viewer (Alvarez, 2001). "The gradual evolution of Leonardo's female portraits, from *Genevra de' Benci*, to the *Cecilia Gallerani*, to the lady in the Louvre, shows how important the direction of the gaze is in creating the illusion of a "personality" interacting with the viewer" (Tinagli, 2001, p.232).

for this project largely because he wished to be a supportive husband. When he realized that more would be required of him than just reading or watching TV in front of his painting wife, his motivation to be the subject of a portrait was found suddenly lacking.

(J.P.'s Journal entry, May 21 2007) I'm not allowed to look at a book or at TV today as I am supposed to be looking up to provide a better view of my face. This is hard, frankly, just sitting there with absolutely nothing to do. I am bored, and I seem to notice every itch that I normally wouldn't because I had nothing else to concentrate on... I am certainly worried about the time it will take after realizing that I don't have much patience to sit still but I also want to make sure I am doing it right, doing what I am told because I know it's an important project for HM. Again, I don't want to get cranky or be a pain to work with.

(H.M.'s Journal entry of May 21, 2007) I ask my sitter to find the most comfortable position for him since he has to keep the same pose for a while. He sits on the sofa, and asks me if he is allowed to watch TV or read a book. He is preoccupied with the American baseball league, which is on TV these days. I consider my answer, and then say no, because I want him to be attentive to the setting like I also have to be. He looks to the front, but his eyes are not focused anywhere. I sit down right in front of him with my sketchbook and a pencil. My sitter looks reluctant to be involved and sad as if he was making a big sacrifice. He probably intends to make me feel guilty because I refused his request. I notice stubborn muscles appearing around his mouth. I am discouraged by his lifeless expression, and I am getting anxious about filling the empty space.



Figure 2. The sitter is taking a rest between sessions.

Tension: Power Jockeying

(H.M.'s Journal entry/ Feb 4 2008) I feel very uneasy because of the accusation that I see in his eyes. He starts to doze a few minutes after we started, but he seems aware that I need to see his eyes more closely. He tries to keep his eyes open, but I can also see the complaint in them. That makes me uncomfortable, so that I can't think. I apply a color to the part that I'm staring at, but the color looks weird. I get more frustrated. I almost shout at him again. I know it'll make the situation worse but I really, really want to do it. If I do though, he'll definitely be pissed off, and will try to demonstrate how difficult he can be as much as possible; especially, when he believes that he's doing me a favor, and I'm not appreciating him. I instead swear at the painting, pretending that I'm a fastidious, selfish artist, who gets frustrated by a little mistake that nobody would understand. I think it works. He flinches a little bit, and he looks a little concerned about how I'm feeling. He's

tense, and looks sympathetic to me but, as usual, it only lasts for a few minutes. He again struggles with his own drowsiness. He closes his eyes from time to time, and his head leans toward the right. The angle is wrong, but I hesitate to ask him to keep his head up straight towards me since he became upset last time I pointed my brush at him. I ask him carefully to turn his head to the right angle. He looks in towards me too, as I observe the structure of his eyes. There's something wrong about my painting his eye today. The hostility towards this studio practice that my sitter showed at the beginning of this session still affects me, I think.

Most of the time my sitter dozed outrageously. He found it extremely boring, and very *not* engaging. His boredom wasn't just the force of nature, but was also him deliberately expressing his negative opinion of the portrait making process. He looked helpless but stubborn, which he himself described as "passive aggressive". The subject of the painting was then decided; it was about my sitter's being bored, and his own "passive aggressiveness" as shown during the studio sessions.

There was a conflict between my sitter's reluctance to participate and disapproval of the studio setting, and my aggravation towards his negative attitude. My sitter even remarked that the studio setting and I were both "abusive". It tends to be understood in the traditional setting of portrait making that the artist is who controls and supervises the situation and the model is under surveillance being objectified (Alvarez, 2001; Brooks, 2000). I honestly overlooked this aspect

thinking this would only occur in sessions involving chauvinist male artists getting stupidly excited about naked female models. However, it was apparent in our setting as well. Despite the fact that we compromised on the sitter's pose, and the diplomatic way of talking we employed attempting to foster a calm, respectful atmosphere, there was a degree of oppression that I had to apply. For instance, I had to stop my sitter talking to me, to ignore his questions or to tell him to keep his eyes open, etc. in order to proceed with my painting. I also thought it would be a simple task for my sitter to look at the front sitting in a chair since the physical demands were minimized. But to my husband, besides sitting flat on a small plastic chair for hours without any entertainment, being told what to do by his wife was the last thing that he wanted on his days off. He was also envious of my situation, in which I was animate and busy, where his was "painfully boring". There was silent but persistent and vibrant resistance displayed all over his face and gestures: he looked sad and lifeless on purpose.

(H.M.'s Journal entry/ Jan 13, 2008) We start the second session today. Unlike the first hour that we engaged in conversation, we go straightly to our jobs without talking. I like it better in a way because I can concentrate on my painting. (Chatting with him while I'm painting was actually distracting.) He looks really sad, disapproving as if something bothered him. I ask him what's wrong, and he complains, "We've been doing this for a long time today" I look at the clock and it's been only 10 minutes after we started the second session. Okay, so with the first session included, which took 50 minutes, it's been

1-hour so far, only ONE hour! Besides, we talked a lot in that "50 minutes".

I burst out, "So what's wrong with you, huh?" "Because you do something, but I don't. I can't move, and it's boring!" Although I'm trying to calm down, I can feel that my temper is flying high. I'm cross. I tell him to get off and rearrange the lights and the canvas. I'm looking at the photograph that I took in the beginning of this project, which was taken from the same angle as my painting.

It was power jockeying between us: his agitation, wishing to run away, trying to look pathetic, and my suspicion that he was being manipulative and trying to play with my sympathies. Regardless, it was vibrant and inspiring as well.

Although his uncooperative attitude was discouraging, his protest was vigorous and interestingly self-revealing. I was busy catching the vibrancy in his restless state, which I found stimulating and real. If I compare this experience in making an artwork, dealing with my husband's mental agitation, to the general drawing sessions with professional models that I have taken before, I could say that this time was more than just contouring the objectified visual components of a human figure: it was painting a person.



Figure 3. A studio scene: the sitter is posing.

Eye contact

(J.P.'s Journal entry, Feb 10 2008) Basically, it is this: sitting for this picture has been a colossal pain to me in large part due to the fact that I have to make eye contact with the artist throughout the sessions. Seems simple doesn't it? Sure, the chair itself isn't comfortable and we can be at it for quite a while, but the bottom line is that it's the constant eye contact that I find so draining. It demands a lot of what you might call emotional attention and effort to maintain.

Before the invention of photography, the physical awareness through shared eye contact between artist and sitter, or the artist's long gaze at the sitter during studio encounters often generated their romantic affairs, or inappropriate sexual scandals (West, 2004). The tension between the seducer and the seduced in the portraiture process was also addressed by one of J.P.'s female coworkers, who sometimes sits nude for studio sessions. She feels that her femininity is admired and secured by the pedestal, and feels powerful over male artists, luring them with her naked body. Curious about this, I had looked forward to finding erotic content or power games while doing the portrait of my husband. Though I considered and examined this possibility due to the direct eye contact present between us, sexual tension never became a prominent theme in our case.

(H.M.'s Journal entry/ Jan 20 2008) Where is the flirtation? The teasing smiles, or shy glances, the deep gaze, whatever the gaze! Or the challenge and confrontation⁹; none of these is apparent in my case. Now, how did those sitters manage to make themselves fully available to the painters during the painfully long hours? Did they really stay as fresh as they appear in the paintings¹⁰? Are there any pieces focusing on the agitation

⁹ Confrontational portraits were not developed greatly due to the psychological difficulty of eye contact (self portraits using mirrors being an exception). The invention of photography made exploring the front view of subjects an easier possibility for artists (Gage, 1997).

¹⁰ Rather than having their sitters keep their eyes wide open during entire sessions, the old

and pain that the sitter goes through during the long boring period of a studio session?

(J.P.'s Journal entry/ Apr 10 2008) Also I had a conversation with this girl from work the other night about sitting for paintings/drawings. She claimed to have done nude modeling for some guy, though it might have been bullshit, hard to say. I found the conversation a bit weird (aside from the obvious reasons) in that her whole thing seemed to revolve around some kind of sexual dimension where she was trying to look hot, or desirable while she was doing it and then kind of tease it back or some such non-sense. It was kind of a flirty power game for her, which sounded, well, you know, very lame 20-something, and just simply lame on top of that. My experience was so different that I thought she must have been either lying about having done the modeling at all, or at the very least about how she really felt about it. For me it's 0% sexy, equal parts angry, sleepy, and just emotionally draining as each second has to be scrutinized, paid solid attention to, shit, I'm not even sure how to say it properly. It seems so long because there's not a second that goes by that I'm not absolutely aware of and feel some demand to give or perform or to approve of what's happening.

My sitter was skeptical of the sexuality in his friend's account. Rather than a romantic encounter, our sessions for him were an "emotionally draining" psychological battle, where the theme of surveillance rather than romance

portrait painters used existing portraits, life masks and sketches of their sitters and pattern books as well as their imagination and memory, to help them to finish the portraits (West, 2004). Gage (1997) also indicates that "... the mobile, socially interactive glance was hardly less so (comparing the rarity of distant profile portraits in historical portraiture): the features are usually composed, ... (p. 122)."

prevailed. He expresses his resentment toward my scrutiny, his own self-consciousness, and the unfair conditions in which he was unable to act but where I seemed privileged to know and control the setting. That he had to keep his eyes fixed and available to me was frustrating for him in that he wanted to be watching what was happening; he wanted to participate as actively as the painter does, despite his initial reluctance and continued resistance to take part in this studio practice.

Unlike him, my physical activity when painting is dynamic, especially when working with a canvas bigger than I am. I stand up, walk back and forth to check if what I have painted is correct, with my right arm moving in wide arcs and busily mixing colors. My sitter's eyes sometimes followed the lines of my movement. He looked timid, but curious and awake. When I noticed his glance shifting from me to the work on the canvas, I became self-conscious and distracted. As painting is a very personal activity to me, usually working alone for an extended period of time, I was disturbed by the unfamiliar communication between the "painting me" and my observing husband. When his curious, anticipating gaze found me, I felt totally exposed.

(H.M.'s Journal entry /Nov 18 2007) It feels like I was putting on a show to entertain

him since he's watching me doing something, painting. He keeps asking me why I do things the way I do. I don't know how to answer; I never even bothered to think about why and how. His curiosity makes me feel a bit proud of myself for doing something I'm good at but he's not. At the same time, the expectations implicit in his curiosity make me feel like walking away from here. Feeling bit ill at ease, I'm rushing myself. I'm exposed by his stare, shy and distracted. I am almost tempted to go back to work with the photos of J.P. instead of having him sitting right here. I guess it's because painting and drawing are very intuitive, personal and private to me. I'm being peculiar, but there's something that I don't like about somebody staring at me while I'm painting. Something secure and reserved for just me has been intruded upon, and I'm cranky.

I think that I know everything about him and we're very close with each other, but there are some moments that I feel as if I was a stranger to him. It's not that he seems like a person that I don't know, but it's more like I was being somebody that he doesn't know.

He's now dozing again. Despite the self-consciousness aroused by his stare, I try to engage in eye contact with him. I'm silently telling him to wake up, and wanting to get his attention back.

It is interesting that I didn't feel comfortable when he looked aware of and attentive to me painting. Ironically, although I accused him of being only reluctantly involved, I felt relieved to observe closely when his eyes were getting stale, providing me with the full view of the structure of the eyes, but with his consciousness drifting away. I found his curious stare intimidating. I was afraid that he might have criticized and evaluated me as an artist. Obviously, this was not his intention, but rather to get involved more dynamically and to be helpful:

(J.P.'s Journal entry/ Nov 18 2007) Watching the process is good also in that it makes you feel a bit more a part of

what's going on. I remember that when she got around to doing my eyes, I could tell that it was important or maybe more difficult; she changed brushes, was mixing a number of colours she hadn't before, and was watching me more carefully than she had been up to that point. I felt that I wanted to respond in kind, and took my own positioning and attention more seriously hoping that I was "doing a good job" and helping out as best I could.

...

It's a difficult thing to sit still like that. I figure most people when they're sitting still, like on a bus or something are hardly sitting still at all. They shift their sitting position, look around at things, read, whatever, and there's certainly no sense of any consequence for doing so. When you're sitting for a painting though, you know that everything you do is being scrutinized to the extent that even shifting your glance or your weight in the chair a little could well be a mistake, and you'll be told not to do it. This kind of outside micro-management of your body is (at least for me) irritating at best, stressful and positively annoying at worst, even for a short period of time.

At one point my sitter described his facial expression in the painting as vacant. He added, "It's like you're on the metro or bus. It's beyond you looking around; looking at posters or people around you. (Because) you feel so bored being on a trip, you don't even notice that you're bored and how bored and how stupid you might look to the other people on the train." His comparison between his sitting experience and being on public transportation prompted me to think

about the possibility of constant eye contact without any active communication exchanged. It also reminds me of Alvarez (2001)'s description about her modeling experience for Pearlstein. She finds Pearlstein's "objectifying"¹¹ his sitters "liberating", so that there is not much obligation to interact with the artist or to offer and maintain an emotional display for him. She feels free to contemplate and imagine, or even explore her "erotic fantasies"(¶. 4), which makes her physically painful modeling session bearable and meditative. I hadn't considered that when immobile for a long period of time, the sitter has to be objectified, and allowed to move through his own mental space since maybe, it's mental activity that keeps us awake. If there is nothing to think about and no one to communicate with the static sitter naturally loses concentration; his eyes lack any substantive content and lose vibrancy and focus, truly become vacant. In my sitter's analysis as well, on the Metro for example, there is bustling stimulation, colorful ads and people talking, getting on and getting off. The passengers are not always directly interacting with their visual and animate environment, but this

¹¹ No human emotional dispositions are sought in Pearlstein's studio practice; his human sitters are treated as his still life objects: juxtaposed, and appreciated together. "His approach is almost a denial of the model as icon, or at least a demystification; a refusal to exploit the body's power to inspire worship or sexually beguile" (Alvarez, 2001, ¶. 5).

vigor generates psychological dynamics, leading them to their own mental spaces. Being on a trip alone, they read or think about something, without feeling exhausted by their self-consciousness of the stares of others.

While he felt obligated to hold his eye contact with me, he was also struggling to escape into his own meditative state while at the same time I was specifically looking to see that very personal, emotional struggle. I often saw this silent but persistent request to let him go, and leave him alone.



Figure 4. Studio scenes.

Artistic Procedure

(H.M.'s Journal entry/ Dec 06 2007) In my memory, he has an oval face, thin hair, a wide, high forehead and big round eyes, the edges tending downward. He's got big olive green irises with black pupils, each of which is different in size. He has a big and slightly crooked nose and a not too -big nor too – small mouth. I can picture him as I describe it; I could easily make cartoon caricature of him.

When I scrutinize my sitter's face for this painting, all the information is there, but it's not as simple as knowing what he looks like. It becomes complex and distracting.

His green eyes are wide open, facing me, but the pupils are not pointing in the same direction; he's not looking at me. I wonder what makes him look like that. Is it simply the direction of the pupils? Or, is it more complicated than I think? I look closely into his eyes to find any visual characteristics to account for this particular expression. His eyes suddenly meet mine as if he guessed what I was thinking, and he tries to stay focused on where my eyes have been as I busily look at him and my canvas in turn. I can see the change now. He can barely keep his eyes fixed longer than a minute; he needs to have something real and animate to look at that can keep his attention.

The square reflections on the surface of his eyeballs have moved downward a little bit, they appear smaller, and are softer at their edges than before. His irises, which were wide open and clearly black are getting smaller and losing their clearness. The gradation between black and green in his irises are changing slightly as the shadow under his eyelashes is getting wider. The eyelashes are getting heavier and heavier as the muscles around his eyelids relax. He's not asleep quite yet.

There is no remarkable transformation, but all the little things around his eyes are flickering so fast. I want to look at them for longer until I figure out more thoroughly what they look like and how they change, so I gesture to my sitter a not to move, reminding him of his role as a sitter: I stare at him silently with a stern mouth and my brow knit. He seems aware of what I want, and soon tries to collect himself but after a few seconds (literally), his eyelids are half closed.

It is the most rewarding moment for me when the sitter starts to become

languid, and to fight against his own sleepiness. He struggled in a passive-aggressive way to press an accusation against me for rendering him so helpless. Finally the harshness in his eyes dissolves, and a hint of complicity appears as he fixes his stare right to the front, tightening his lips. Unfortunately, this cooperation lasted no longer than 5 minutes as he started to doze off. The visible changes in his eyes and face are fascinating: his irises get smaller, the facial muscles sag, and the edges of his mouth relax into helplessness. He looked half asleep and stupid as if his soul had temporarily left his wilted, insensate body. He tries to recover, to stay awake, but it lasts only a minute. My sitter is too tired to be fancy, there's no pretentiousness left in him. This is the moment I want to capture and bring to the painting.

Everything that I search for within the face becomes magnified. The size of the canvas affects my visual perception. If a canvas is bigger than the subject's life size, I am often preoccupied with the structure of the volume. It feels like I'm using a magnifying glass to look at the characteristics of a particular spot. In one instance I obsessively took measure of the way that eyes are structured physically as I fixed my stare on him. The complicated multi-layers of skin and the shadows that they create are intriguing, a perceptual challenge.

(H.M.'s Journal Entry/ Jan 27 2008) It feels like doing the puzzle: My eyes are fixed on the complex structure of the eyes and my head is busy calculating the depth of the angles that the eyebrows; I'm busily mixing colors to find the hues closest to what I'm examining. It's about getting it, remembering it, and attempting to match things to each other. All of my senses are working in one direction. I have to look carefully to decide where the shadow comes from and how it covers the different layers in his eyelid.



Figure 5. Detail of the left eye

The bone under the eyebrow casts a shadow over the flesh between the eyebrow and the upper eyelid. The stiffness of the bone under the eyebrows aligns with the angle of the upper nose bridge, which determines the width and the depth of the shadow. This shadow immerses into the double eyelid, the deep wrinkle and the side of the upper nose bridge, and

they together form a dark strip over the eyeball, and dissolve into the colors of the irises.



Figure 6. A detail from the painting, “Sitter”.

Those dominant visual elements guide my senses to analyze shape, color and structure as well as the sitter’s emotions. There is something in the little visible descriptions that recount his emotional and personal state, and an understanding of the emotional narrative isn’t coherent until I successfully account for these details on the painting. I know how he feels to an extent, but don’t exactly know what makes him look the way he does right now. By gingerly adding certain strokes, the expressions become tangible.

According to Alphen¹² (1997), the sitter’s essential quality, the inner state, is rendered by the depiction of the *expressions* of the person portrayed, mediated

¹² Citing hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s contemplative statement on portraiture (pp. 240-1).

by the portrayer.¹³ Similarly, in my practice contouring my sitter's face from observation is an attempt to present his character based on what I know of him. It's not only about accurately representing the sitter's actual facial features, but also the expressions and facial gestures that remind me of him. It's like somebody who knows the subject might say, "Yeah, that's him! I know when he makes that face".

In addition to the nervously open eyes, the clearly shaded pits between his nose and upper jaw make inverted triangular shadows descending to his mouth, whose edges lead downward. These represent his passive aggressive stance towards the implicit demand to sit still and the boredom, a resistance predictable enough given the seemingly oppressive situation the sitter finds himself in. The degree of intimacy that can be addressed indicates the quality of inter-relationship between the sitter and the artist. The likeness is not all about demonstrating or refining technical ability; it's also about expressing the feeling that the artist has about the subject.

¹³ If the expressions are tokens of the sitter's inner state, it is the portrayer, who collects the subject's characteristics and re-displays them as a response to the interaction with the sitter. It reveals the kind of appreciation that the painter has towards the sitter. Both the portrayer's and portrayee's psychologies are intertwined (Alphen, 1997).

The artist's ability to produce expressive accounts of the sitter is acquired through the shared encounters between the two of them, the portrayer and the portrayed. The likeness is the exterior visual condition of the person portrayed, while the "life" of the person is located *in the portrayal* of that likeness. The sense of reality is achieved not only by representing an apparent resemblance, but also by providing an account of the interpersonal insight acquired through the experiences shared and interpreted by the portrayer (Gage, 1997; Woodal, 1997).

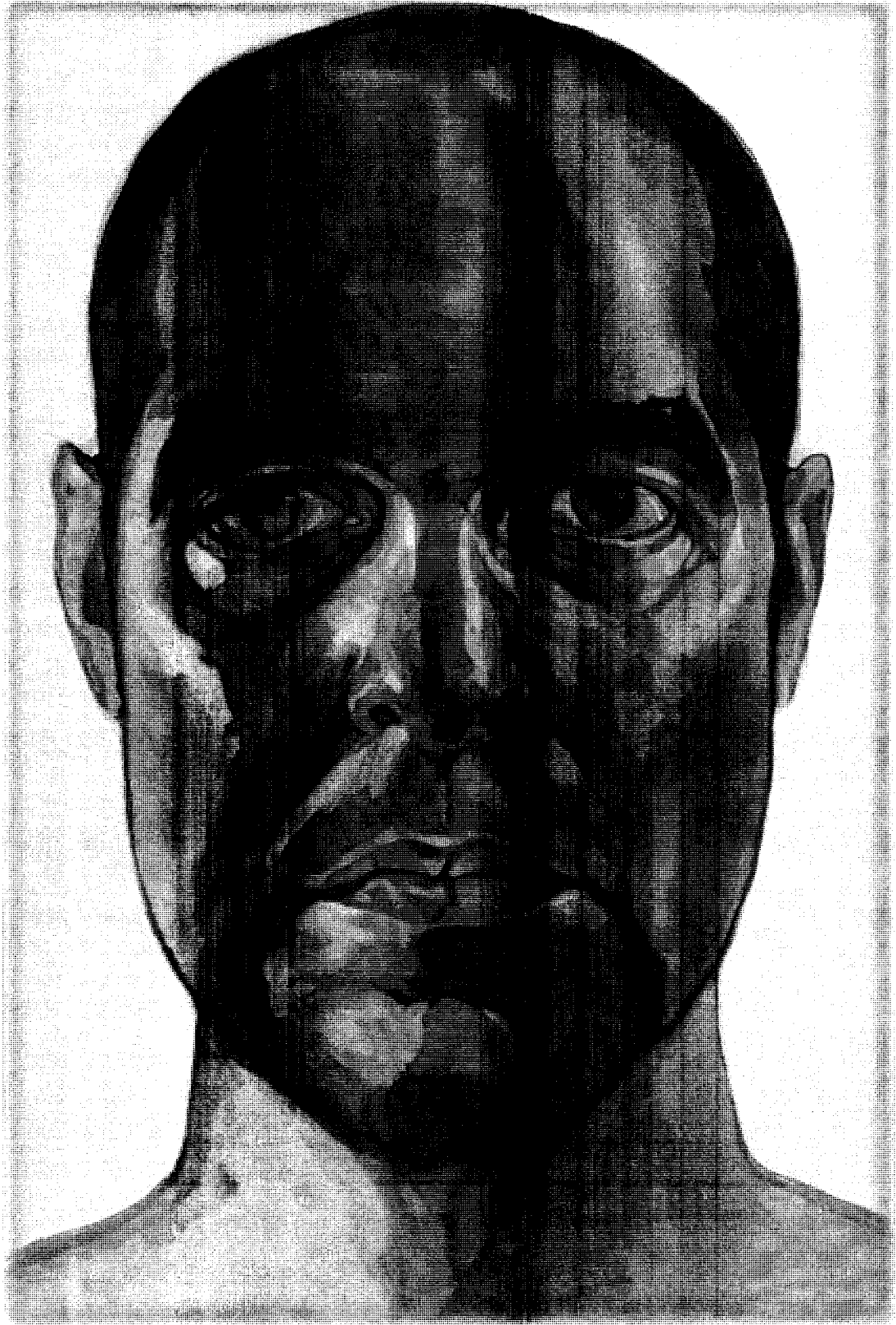


Figure 7. Painting, "Sitter", Oil on Canvas, 40" x 60", 2008

The Humor of Mimics

(H.M.'s Journal entry/ Jan 20 2008) Maybe it's been mesmerizing; the sitter's eyes are locked in my stare and they follow wherever my eyes go. My sitter, keeping a deadpan expression and his eyes wide open, is innocently animated by my changing focus of attention: when I look at the palette, he looks down, too; when I look into his eyes, he looks at me. It's quite comical as if he was under hypnosis. I'm sure he doesn't intend to make me laugh; actually, he probably doesn't have any intention at all right now, none whatsoever. He'll be offended if I make fun of him, but I can't help laughing a little. The silence has been broken and he looks a bit confused. I say, "No, nothing" giggling.

I look into his eyes again stifling the laughter so that the session will go on without any further interruption.

He looks very sleepy. I could caricature him sleeping: a "log face" drooling with eyes half open, rolled back and showing only the whites. The picture in my imagination overlaps with his actual dozing face in front of me, which strikes me as funny. He just looks dumb now. Laughter's coming out, but I stifle it. I keep moving my brush, and see: there are his heavy, sagging cheeks transferred right onto my painting. I have the urge to giggle again as I see the perfect facsimile of his stupid expression. I try to be serious. Maybe he's looking silly on purpose to get some sympathy from me.

There is something funny about portraying someone. It's not because the character in the painting is necessarily comical looking, but it's because there is something funny and ironical about people captured in a single image, as well the act of that capturing itself.

The humor comes right at the moment I realize that I have successfully captured the subtle, ambiguous expressions from the real figure. The whole

experience here is acutely cathartic. I praise myself for smartly catching the instant of people's vacant consciousness, i.e. the blank, stupid looks on their faces. This is the time when people abandon social expectations and find themselves in a place of their own; they're vulnerable, exposed, free of pretence and self-consciousness. Because they are exposed, they seem vulnerable, and because of their vulnerability, we feel sympathetic to them. Sympathy opens the possibility of approaching people, and as they become approachable, we can appreciate them in elaborate detail. Looking closely allows me to find the characteristic elements of my subjects' appearance, and because I am an interpreter representing them, there's a sense in which the whole project could be considered a form of mimicry. Mimicking somebody in their vulnerability is a form of mockery, which is one of the most basic and direct ways to produce humor (Berger, 1993).

Painting a portrait is similar to impersonation as a technique of humor. Impersonation and mimicry involve "stealing and borrowing identity" (p.42) from a person. Humor is generated when the impersonator mimics the personal characteristics of the person impersonated, such as "mannerism and personality" (p. 42) in an exaggerated or distorted fashion. Since humiliation, ridicule and

revealing stupidity are techniques used to generate humor, there is tension between the one who is mocking and who is being mocked. The quality the mocker's skill is important as well, as is how the object of the joke reacts when he realizes that he has been fooled. The relationship between the impersonator and the impersonated matters here. Portraying someone by drawing or painting also involves mimicking techniques: the habitual, unique or peculiar qualities of the person portrayed are examined, recognized, re-performed and re-presented by the painter. Painting itself is a form of mocking performance where the evidence or trace of the mimicry remains in the visual image, not in a direct bodily performance. Tension develops in the relationship between the painter's empathy and the subject's self-consciousness in the act of realist portrayal. The portrayer is afraid that the portrait might expose too much and could be insulting to the sitter by picking up and describing expressions, facial features or personal traits that the sitter might be embarrassed about. The parameters for engaging in realist expression, the extent of what is possible artistically for a given piece, is delineated by the kind of inter-relationships that the painter and the subject share.

In a conversation with Janet Werner¹⁴, she mentioned that she sometimes

¹⁴ It was a brief, informal meeting that I had with her in Winter 2006, where I introduced me and

has doubts about using anonymous images of people from the media, an ethical dilemma over using and modifying the identities of people she doesn't know. She doesn't intend to make fun of them in her work, but there a tension is present as she questions the degree to which she is qualified to use these unknown identities without their permission. In my own portraying of more unfamiliar acquaintances¹⁵, I felt awkward staring at their faces even in photographs; I was very careful not to offend by ogling and exhibiting, exaggerating or distorting their appearances when painting.¹⁶ I just felt that I didn't have a right to reveal the contents of their personal space since I don't know them very well.

Working with my husband, there was no apology required; I imposed fewer self-restrictions about looking directly at my sitter and expressing him my own terms, as boldly as I needed to. I am allowed to appreciate the unpretentious gestures; the personal tics when he feels uncomfortable and impatient about sitting on a little chair, and complains about it. I see humor in his struggles, and I

my thesis project to her.

¹⁵My experience of "portraying acquaintances" includes my pilot project conducted in 2006, where I examined my lived experience in portraying my friend's fiance as a live sitter, and my "Listeners" series, portraits of my classmates painted from photographs I took in our studio class.

¹⁶ In an oversized portrait of one of my classmates, I was afraid the subject depicted might look older than she actually is.

feel like teasing him about his immature attitude, mocking his agitation. His emotional vulnerability is exposed, and I entertain myself by catching it right away and presenting it as evidence so that he can't deny his behaving badly. I am mocking him. It's mean, but subtle too, and there is humor to be appreciated in this affection that only a few people are privileged to share. There is a quality in the painting that extends beyond the particular time in the studio; although the particular scene of this portrait was collected and painted during a limited studio encounter, my understanding of him is derived from a broader context and simultaneously broadcasts on a more general level. When I see the fragments in the painting that indicate to me who he is, I appreciate them with a sense of humor.



Figure 8. Another studio scene: the painter and the sitter are entertaining themselves.

Animation, "Sitter"

(Synopsis of Animation "Sitter", H.M. Park) The animation "Sitter" is a portrait about the process of portraiture. Contrary to the usual expectations of a traditional portrait, in this piece we encounter a subject whose postures and facial expressions change constantly. He seems to struggle against boredom in order to make himself available to the painter, but eventually falls asleep.

While traditional portrait painting attempts to capture the core aspects of the subject in two dimensions and one frozen moment, this piece makes use of the time-based medium to articulate the social space and the relationship between sitter and artist.

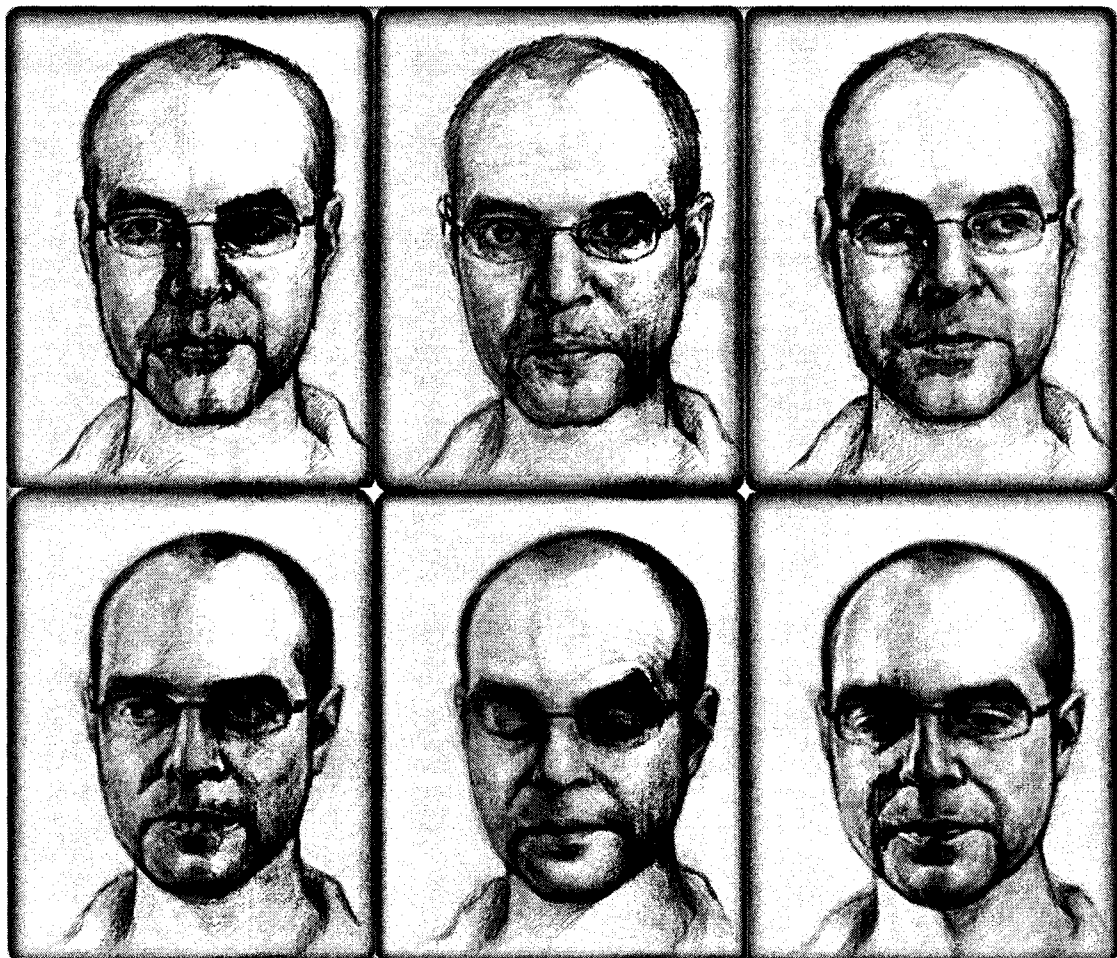


Figure 9. Still images from the animation, "Sitter".

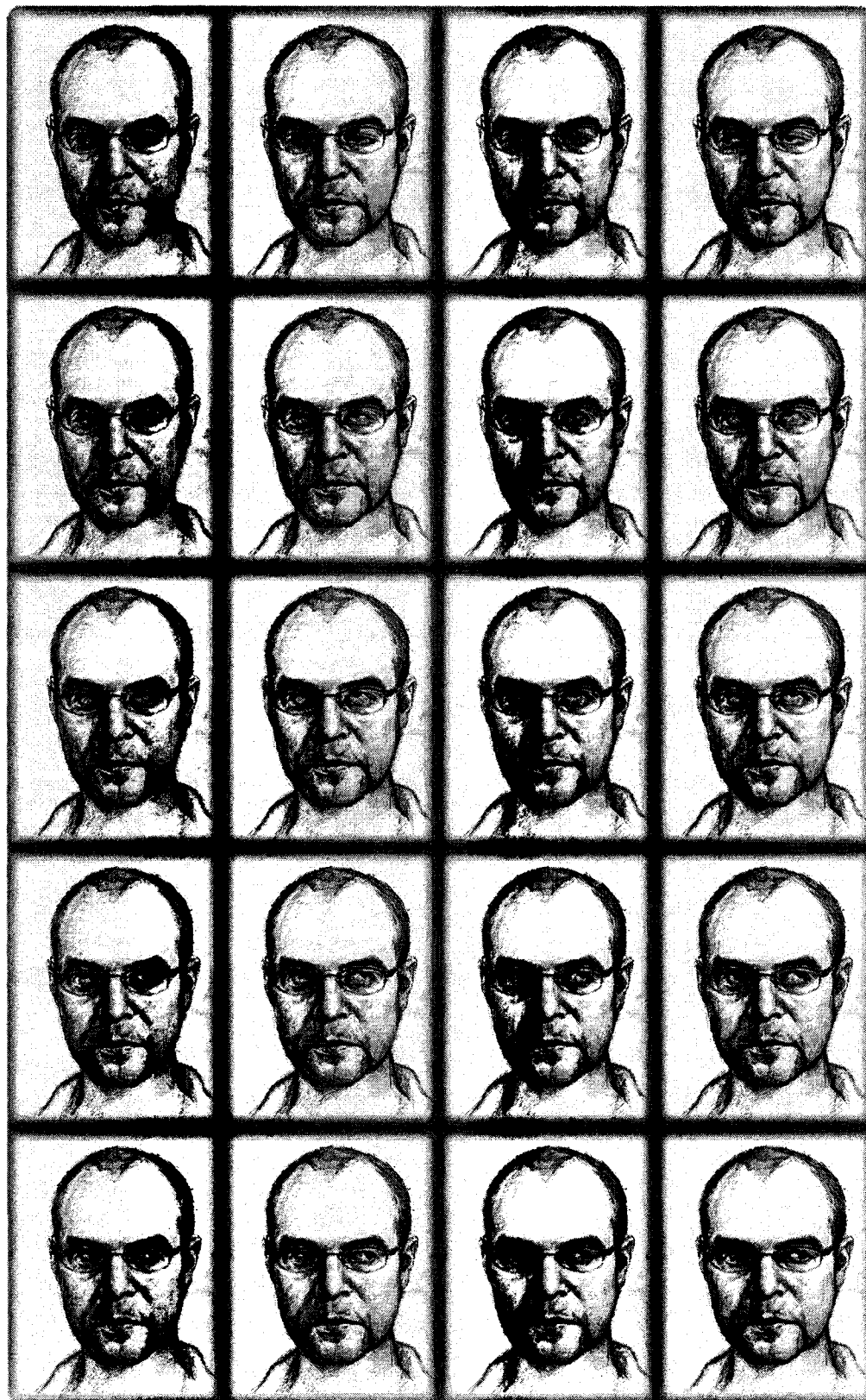


Figure 10. A sequence of the animation, “Sitter”, frames 401 to 420.

“Human faces are not static entities” (Schwaninger, Wallraven, Cunningham, & Chiller-Glaus, 2006, p327).

The salient point I learned from my lived experience in painting sessions with a live model was that the sitter is never static. The sitter moved around not only because he is impatient by nature, but also because he is a living person, naturally animate. Much of the literature about portraiture addresses this vital aspect of the portraiture process when making use of live models; the portraitists' challenge is always to capture *fleeting* expressions. In my own experience I found it ironic that in still portraiture, one attempts to capture the core aspects of the subject in a single instance of space and time, when in fact the subject is in constant motion, his expression changing throughout the encounter. My sitter consistently demonstrated a predictable range of expressions, being sleepy and bored throughout the sessions, but within that range there was a dynamic quality. To me, the image created in the portrait is the synthesis of what I observed and construed from the encounter, rather than a replica of a single image that I might have observed. Since according to some researchers human facial expressions and identity are better communicated in dynamic conditions than in static

images¹⁷ (Schwainger, et al., 2006), I wondered about the advantage of portraying actual movement to convey the essential quality of the sitter in addition to the context that he and I encountered. I also wanted to see if the time-based narrative could demonstrate more precisely the characteristics of my sitter's response to his sitting experience, which was largely about being bored and sleepy; the face in the painting looks intimidating and confrontational although he wasn't trying to impress anybody¹⁸. With this in mind, I made an animated portrait. This animation is two minutes long, and has about a thousand frames, in each of which I attempted to maintain the finished quality of a traditional pencil drawing. Although they are digital¹⁹, any randomly chosen frame can still satisfy the expectation of conventional realist portraiture. I filmed him

¹⁷ Psychophysical researchers found that emotions and identity were better understood through animated images in temporal order than either still images in order or images in disarray.

¹⁸ This kind of viewer response came from one of our friends who visited our home, where J.P.'s portrait is set. He said, "I can't look at it. It makes me (psychologically) uncomfortable." I found his response interesting since I see it as a funny piece; my subject had no power to resist, and I basically mocked him for being so tired. It's possible that it looks intimidating to some because of the size of the canvas, the composition of the face, and the agitated expression.

¹⁹ The original frames of the animation, "Sitter" are JPGs saved from Photoshop. First, the portraits were drawn in pencil on paper, then scanned and imported to Photoshop. Using a Wacom tablet I drew on Photoshop layers in order to maintain the quality of the drawings while being able to manipulate them.

sitting, and exported it into filmstrips at 10 frames per second.²⁰ These are the source of the drawings for the animated portrait.²¹

The process of making an animation expanded my understanding about human physiological movement and expression. The natural quality of dynamism in the human face comes from the combination of the 'rigid face motion' (the rotating or translating movement of the entire head such as nodding) and 'non-rigid face motion' (the movement of partial facial features such as eyebrow-lifting motion or lip motion)²² (Schwainger, et al., 2006). It is also apparent that the human body moves around a central axis, and the parameters of this movement, its speed and rhythm are critical factors in portrayal.

I learned this largely through a mistake I made during one of my first sessions working on this animation. I overlooked the integration of rigid and non-rigid motions, and failed to notice the arc of action created by inbetweeners²³.

²⁰ I used Quicktime Pro, which has 'Movie to Image Sequence' as an export option.

²¹ The narrative sequence in the animation "Sitter" is the combination of various sequences filmed from different sessions in order to create a realistic account of how the sitter interacted with the situation.

²² As an example, we tend to blink just before or when we turn our heads in natural movement.

²³ "Inbetweeners" (p.48) refer to the middle positions between 'extremes', the main drawings of an action. The term was introduced by Dick Huemer, one of the most celebrated American animators from the 1920s when he requested an assistant to help produce finer quality pieces by adding more drawings in between the main drawings (Williams, 2001).

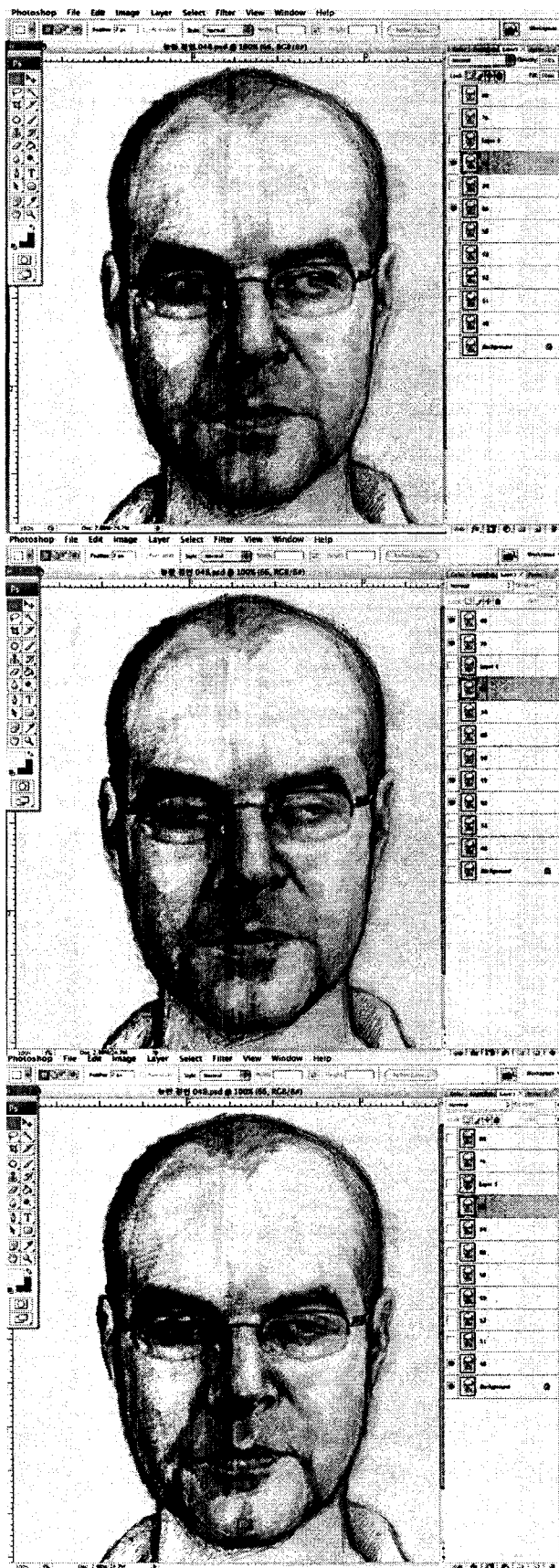


Figure 11. A technical description of the animation process: it was possible to create sequences of natural movement with detailed pencil drawing quality by drawing on a digitizing tablet and using Photoshop layers.

For example, in turning the head, I did not indicate the consistent length of the neck, which supports the head but does not fully appear. I also neglected to make a decision regarding the number of frames and the duration between the inbetweeners, which give the bouncing rhythm and the speed of the action. Without these considerations, the motion looked flat and inhuman.

Psychophysical studies on face recognition also emphasize the significant role of the tempo of movement when indicating the personal characteristics of individuals (Schwainger, et al., 2006). The study notes that the “specific tempo and rhythm of motion is important for face recognition” (p.328), and “different expressions seem to have a characteristic speed or range of change” (p.327). One’s emotional gestures are mediated by speed, and this mobility becomes the main factor in relating the narrative of the person. The description of personal physical dynamics is important in distinguishing one’s identity.

The animation “Sitter” is my experiment in using a substitute medium for static images like paintings when addressing the essential quality of persons. I was able to examine the realistic quality and the vitality of my sitter by imposing a temporal condition, while maintaining the position that any single frame in this dynamic system could provide an adequate account of the sitter’s identity.

Conclusion

Portraits could either be theorized as exact, literal re-creations of someone's external appearance, or as truthful accounts of the artist's special insight into the sitter's inner or ideal self. Both could be assimilated to the concept of realism. (Woodal, 1997, p.5) "

Through this study, I have attempted to describe a range of possibilities in the interaction between the painter and the sitter. The sitter's social role as the painter's husband facilitated his agreeing to sit as the subject of a portrait, and the expectations of this relationship framed the quality of his performance. The eye contact, the sitter's physical endurance, mental agitation and engagement greatly affected the narrative of the portrait and prompted further study of movement in portraiture, and how it enriches the articulation of a person.

The lived experience in my studio practice with a sitter provided me with an opportunity to develop a position regarding the value of portraiture and its continuing place in the arts and art education. It has been beneficial to me not only as an artist, but also as a studio art teacher, who's concerned about the

meaning of practice in studio art, and wished to be able to articulate the significance of portrait practice. A practice in portraiture is meaningful in the sense that it is a study of people and the dynamics of relationship. As Woodal's quotation indicates, the reality of portraiture is an interpretation of the conditions given, and portraiture is a genre of "literature" that displays the profound reality of people with immediacy. It is an accessible point of departure for us to understand who we are as people, a question which all of the humanities hopes to address, ultimately. As an art form, portraiture is unique in that there is a tension between the independent reality of the person portrayed and the person as they are represented in the artist's imagination. This tension acts as a check, so that I approach the subject with a moderate, controlled attitude, subduing the excitement of the work itself, and drawing me back to the ethical concerns of interpersonal encounter, not prejudging or misrepresenting through misinformation or exaggeration, and observing the limits of the sitters privacy. A person's "essence" is a narrative constructed and interpreted by others, where the nature and texture of the interrelationship matters. The artist responds to the relationship with the subject, and the two together create the reality of realism, an *intersubjective reality* negotiated between them.

Significance to Art Education

Philip Pearlstein in his essay, "Censorship on Stylistic Grounds" (1991), addresses the style preferences²⁴ of the mainstream fine art establishment, and its exclusion of realist art throughout the past half century. In an interview with Yezzi (2004), Pearlstein points out the condescending atmosphere of contemporary art towards realist art, and its assumption that, "the realist artist is a dumb, inarticulate person, who can't do anything else... It's "easier" to paint something that's right in front of you" (p.21). Realist painters are characterized as intellectually unsophisticated, not worldly enough to understand the complexities of modern life. This dismissive attitude of the art community towards traditional portrait art is something that I have experienced personally. The issue though is not to decide which genre of art is greater than the other, but rather to explore and recover the meaning of portraiture practice in contemporary art education.

²⁴ When Pearlstein was invited in early 1990's to be on the second jury for the Giverny Awards, by the Lila Acheson Wallace Foundation of the Reader's Digest, he discovered that all the representational works submitted had been eliminated from the first round of the competition. The jurors for the first round "proudly" informed him that the eliminations were made simply on the basis of whether or not they looked "conventional" (Pearlstein, 1991). It's ironic that despite the meaning of its name, the conceptual art community is able to prejudge a work so superficially, even before the meaning of the work is appreciated.

Institutionalized disapproval of conventional-looking art has intimidated practitioners of representational portrait painting and drawing, and consequently training in figurative art has been neglected at the college level (Nairne, 2006). Regardless, images of people are ubiquitous in studio practice before the college level and enjoy a wide appreciation amongst the general public, making portraiture accessible and “perhaps the most familiar of all art forms”²⁵ (West, 2004, p. 14). The meaning of portraiture should not be limited by style or medium, but it is rather a genre of art that can help cultivate the meaning of ‘otherness’ by the close observation and contemplation of the way we live our lives in current society. Portrait painting requires a significant amount of time for artists to connect themselves to subjects, and this interpersonal empathy is the foundation on which the ensuing narrative rests.

In my experience, the practice of portraiture involves an intense study of

²⁵ “Perhaps more than any other art form, portraiture comes in a variety of media. Portraits can be paintings, sculptures, drawings, engravings, photographs, coins, and medals. They can appear as images in newspapers or magazines or on mosaic, pottery, tapestry or bank notes... Portraits can also be found in a range of contexts and locations: they share with other genres a place in galleries and private homes, but they can also be held in the hand (for example coins), worn as locket (miniatures), displayed as garden decorations or public monuments.... The all-pervasiveness of portraiture means that it is perhaps the most familiar of all art forms” (West, 2004, p.13-14).

people and requires critical thinking to interpret the stories of others. Portraiture is not necessarily about developing sufficient 'draftsmanship' to acquire the exact likeness of others, but rather it is a methodology allowing us to look closely at others and develop meaning in our relationships (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1996). Through the study of portraiture in art education and practice, students learn to reflect on the social context in which they and their subjects are both situated, the subtle meanings in our faces and gestures, and to develop a sense of human wholeness, a fundamental goal of education in its most basic sense.

The intersubjective self is also engaged in the development of self-expression. Self-expression through art was once thought to imply a release of one's subconscious desires, and focused on objects that would elicit emotional responses. Since then, the aesthetic outcomes of the relationship between the artist, objects, and media have been considered in terms of understanding the practice of art. Since the idea of a pluralistic, flexible subjectivity prevails these days, the introspective self, reflecting on one's context with others has been added to the term 'self-expression'. Emery (2002), discussing this change in the notion of self in art education, argues that the application of the concept of subjectivity as social is significant in terms of students' critical thinking about

society and its expression through art.

My research into the process of portraiture is one collaborative social event. Developing my understanding of empathy and exploring the multiple facets of self, emerging through meeting the other, I have stressed the interactive social behaviors between my sitter and me, which are described as a vicarious lived experience. Knowledge is the account of human life, and the unique account of each individual life through the study of lived experience can be shared as knowledge (Van Manen, 1990). It tends to be understood that knowledge is gained only through academic sources. Our life in itself has potential as knowledge, and its meaning becomes significant when encountered in consciousness derived from lived experience. This is the great project of knowledge construction, of articulating the human experience.

Since this research is a learning process for myself as an artist, I hope it will serve as an informative example of the process of portraiture, and its meaning at the theoretical level to art educators and student artists. I also hope that employing the discourse of intersubjectivity in practicing art will be helpful to art educators and educators who are concerned about enriching their students' self-concepts and their lives through art practice.

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