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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to answer the question 'how do portrait painters capture a person's personality through painting the expressive qualities of the face?' The first half of the paper describes the anthropological research, taken from the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, and other social sciences studying perception, physiognomy, and caricature. The second half of the paper analyzes four portraits painted by well-known portraitists to relate the painting with the sitter's character. The findings lie in the application of the information gathered from the anthropological research to the specific portraits being studied. The resulting analysis is new knowledge; these portraits have never been described in this way. This makes the paper more than a research paper but a paper introducing new perspectives and ideas.

Portraiture: Exploring the Language of the Face

The face is arguably the most communicative part of the body. Cicero once said, "everything is in the face" (McNeill 1). The face and whether or not it indicates any character or mood is the first thing that is noticed when one person meets another, and we are good at reading those visual clues (Sturgis 5). Because we are reading a language we cannot articulate and might not knowingly notice, the face is both the ultimate truth and a mirage (McNeill 8). Some are better at reading faces than others, and those who are skilled at reading faces can utilize their ability in a career, or they may use it in everyday occurrences. Painters Jan Van Eyck, Raphael, Hans Holbein the Younger, and Titian are a few of these talented people who used this ability and translated it for others through painting.

Painters have an exceptional task in reading a face when they paint a portrait[1]. They know that it is automatic and uncontrollable to read faces, and they explore that (Sturgis 78). "Portraits" have many different definitions in history. In the 18th century Sir J. Reynolds said, "in portraits, the grace, and, we may add, the likeness, consists more in the general air than in the exact similitude of every feature" (Reynolds). In the 20th century people were describing portraiture in similar terms. The Grove Dictionary of Art quotes John Gere's 1974 definition of the portrait as "an image in which the artist is engaged with the personality of his sitter and is preoccupied with his or her characterization as an individual (Grove, Portrait)."

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[1] The whole idea of portraiture is linked to the Renaissance ideal of art as a "mechanical exercise" to be perfected (West 12). It is more common in cultures that emphasize individuality instead of collectiveness (which are mostly Western cultures, thereby making portraiture an originally Western art form), and individual identity was a major development of the Renaissance (West 12). Portraiture and this ideal have both spread because of globalization (West 220).

More general descriptions are "a wandering piece of reputation" (McNeill 117), "the most durable and significant image in art" (McNeill 117), and the capturing of "one moment and encounter in time" (West 41). One must note that all definitions of portrait take into some account the person as a whole, meaning their character or personality, as well as their visible physical features. Somehow these two things are linked, and the link between them is not clear or defined. How do faces show the subject's character, and how do portrait artists perceive and represent that character? Is likeness of those physical features important to depict the person? What difference do skills and techniques make? This paper aims to answer these questions. I would like to study portrait painting by applying studies in the social sciences to art history. First I will set out the anthropological context, then turn to specific artwork.

Physiognomy,[2] a pseudoscience popular during the Victorian era, focused on facial features. Physiognomists made parallels between face/head shape and character (Sturgis 23). The difference between physiognomy and the study of facial expression is that physiognomy focuses on the permanent features of the face, while expressions deal with temporary emotions (West 34). Johann Caspar Lavater was important in the field. He believed that the face revealed the soul, and that every feature said something about the person's personality (West 32). Physiognomy was concerned with two main elements: universal connections between facial anatomy and emotion, and resemblances between man and animals (Cowling 14). Physiognomy in the first sense was a resource

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[2] The earliest evidence of physiognomy comes from the Greeks, in a treatise by Aristotle (Cowling 13).

for Victorian genre painters,[3] helping them to "ensure that the faces be individual; they should each tell a story, contain lines of history, and marks of joy and sorrow" (Cowling 87). Art was the only way to visibly embody the ideas of this science in the height of its popularity, since the camera was not invented yet (Cowling xvii). Physiognomy in another sense was used to "scientifically" support racial stereotypes, and it gradually faded out of popularity.

While physiognomy was used as a way to stereotype different races, caricature can be considered a form of stereotyping a personality by exaggerating distinct features. When artists exaggerate features to create humor, it is called caricature. Caricature is used in satirical portraits (West 36). Daniel McNeill defines caricature as "a portrait in epigram. It exaggerates a few distinctive features, often for witty effect" (142). Sometimes artists exploit expression and also use gesture to show a personality. One critic said that Honore Daumier's caricatures were said to show "every little meanness of spirit, every absurdity, every quirk of intellect, every vice of the heart" (McNeill 143).[4]

Psychologists Robert Mauro and Michael Kubovy have shown through studies that people store faces in their minds as caricatures. Some psychologists call caricatures "superportraits" (McNeill 144). A good portrait painter uses the same techniques as a caricaturist but with "infinite subtlety" (Grove, Portrait). Exaggerating and emphasizing uncommon, subtle "special" features is the way to catch a personality, a likeness (Sturgis 36).

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[3] Most physiognomy was too detailed to help artists, but some portraits reflect common beliefs it supported (Sturgis 23).

[4] Annibale Carracci, an artist of the late 16th century, once said, "The caricaturist strives to grasp the perfect deformity, and thus reveal the very essence of a personality. A good caricature, like every work of art, is more true to life than reality itself." (Grove Dictionary of Art)

Some portraitists use caricature techniques and attention to facial features to increase individualization of the portrait. Many enlarge the head because it is particularly communicative, and some also enlarged the face in proportion to the rest of the head for that same reason (Grove, Portrait). The eyes were the most important feature used to capture the sitter's "character and humanity, not showing a disguised expression and personality" (Woods-Marsden 165). Sometimes the nose is set in more profile than it actually appears, because the contour was a telltale sign of identification, and asymmetries between the eyes or corners of the mouth were often exaggerated or emphasized (Grove, Portrait). Many of these techniques are the same as those used by a caricaturist, but at a subtler level.

One of the strangest anthropological studies of the human face was conducted by Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne. He first documented the facial muscle movements with a camera in the 1800's (Gladwell 45). He touched live electrodes, first to dead heads he collected from the guillotine, and then to the face of an old man who could not feel his face(McNeill 177). Duchenne also was the first to document the difference between a real smile and a fake smile.[5]

Facial expression has also been studied extensively in the field of psychology. Paul Ekman[6] pioneered the current study of facial expression, and with fellow psychologist Wallace Friesen, he wrote a guide to decoding all possible facial expressions called the Facial Action Coding System (Roth 1). He published this work in

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[5] Artist Arthur Elsenaar also studied facial expression by electrically stimulating the facial muscles (McNeill 180).

[6] Ekman and Duchenne both noted that both smiles require a flexing of the zygomatic major (which brings up the corners of our mouth), but a real smile shows a tightening of the orbicularis oculi (the muscle that encircles the eye) (Gladwell 45).

1978 and again in 2002, and it has been used as a resource for people in fields ranging from neurology to computer animation (Roth 1). His method of discovering the universality of facial expressions grew from an idea he first had in the 1960's after encountering a psychology professor that had figured out the manner and nature of two completely different Papua New Guinea tribes just by seeing the tribesman's faces (Gladwell 41). He showed photos of different facial expressions to people all over the world, from developed parts to remote villages in Papua New Guinea (Gladwell 41). People across cultures consistently assimilated the facial expressions to the same emotions/meanings (Gladwell 40). Ekman and Friesen scoured medical books to identify every muscle in the face, and tested as many combinations of the forty-three different movements as they could (Gladwell 42). They found 10,000 possible expressions, but only 3,000 of them signified a significant emotion (Gladwell 42). This was the basis of the Facial Action Coding System, which was originally a 500 page document that only about 500 hundred people in the world know well enough to be certified to use in research (Gladwell 43).[7][8]

All faces communicate – even a face with no expression at all says something (Sturgis 78). Raphael combined "depth of color and piercing gaze" to show emotion in his subjects (Oberhuber 80). Peter Paul Rubens painted *Lady-in-Waiting* with a facial

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[7] Most artists try to paint quieter and "less defining" expressions to represent their subjects with (Grove Dictionary of Art). Most expressions they use are neutral, which comes across as natural (West 35). Besides the difficulty of holding the same expression for several hours, "too fixed a facial expression will, after prolonged contemplation of a portrait, seem irritating and fatuous" (Grove Dictionary of Art).

[8] Ekman developed "lie-spotting" tests, and most people do not do better than detecting the lie half of the time (Gladwell 38). About .10% of people who take the tests score "off the charts;" (Gladwell 38).

expression that shows different moods if the viewer focuses on one eye or the other, or one side of the mouth or the other (Grove, Portrait). This causes the viewers eye to move across the face, creating what seems like two different expressions, showing "vivacity and vitality" through a "labyrinth of shifting muscles and features" (Grove, Portrait). The inventor of the comic strip, Rodolphe Topffer, wrote that an artist studying expression just needs to draw a face on a paper, which will automatically have some expression, and then play with the facial features a bit (McNeill 172). Da Vinci tried experiments like this. Other artists specialized in certain facial expressions. For instance, David "specialized in catching the flash of life, the secret or delicious glance, the flare of excitement," and Manet and Degas "excelled in awkward or off-guard instants" (McNeill 172).

For a long time, attempts at painting a psychological state were limited to symbols that suggested the character of the subject, rather than expressing character through facial expression (West 31-32). Portraiture really took off in the 15th century. Before that artists were more interested in showing status than character (West 14, 31). The 1400's marked the first century that produced specialized portrait painters (West 14). Jan Van Eyck, Raphael, Hans Holbein the Younger, and Titian, the painters whose works I will analyze below, are some of the most acclaimed portrait painters of this era.

"A recognizable image of a model is not necessarily a portrait, and likeness cannot be the only determining factor in defining a portrait" (Grove, Portrait). West explains that portraits are "not just likenesses, but works of art that engage with ideas of identity as they are perceived, represented, and understood in different times and places" (11). Leonardo Da Vinci once said,

"The good painter has two principal things to paint, that is man and the

intention of his mind. The first is easy, the second difficult, because it has

to be represented by gestures and movements of the body." (Sturgis 67)

How does the artist convey what Da Vinci calls "the intention of the mind"? A skilled

portraitist pays attention to the subtlest of facial expressions and gestures, and plays upon

slight exaggeration of unique facial features. We will be examining these techniques

through Jan Van Eyck's "The Virgin of Chancellor Rolin" (Fig. 1), Raphael's "La Donna

Velata (Portrait of a Woman" (Fig. 2), Hans Holbein the Younger's portrait of Henry VIII

(Fig. 3), and Titian's portrait of "Eleonara Gonzaga della Rovere" (Fig. 4).

Jan Van Eyck[9] painted the Chancellor Rolin with the Virgin and Child, now in

The Louvre, Paris. For this paper I will only focus on Rolin, and not the other figures

shown. It appears that Van Eyck treated this figure of Rolin as a portrait because of the

highly individualized nature of his face. In the painting, Rolin steadily gazes at the

Madonna with a look of concentration. His expression does not give any hints of

arrogance, yet he does not look humble either; he looks determinedly focused. Rolin

wears a solemn expression with his mouth closed fiercely and eyes fixed forward. He

appears to be experienced and seasoned because one can detect all of the fine wrinkles

and folds in the skin that indicate a man of middle age[10]. Van Eyck painted these

wrinkles to show the Chancellor's age, but the way that he painted them does not make

the Chancellor's age the first thing we notice. Van Eyck showed his age by painting the

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[9] Van Eyck was from the Netherlands and born around 1390, the oldest of the artists explored here (Faggin 5).

[10] Jan Van Eyck's eye acted as both a telescope and a microscope; he brought every object under an intense, obsessed, scrutiny (Faggin 6). He paid extreme attention to facial surface and textures (Sturgis 41).

delicate crow's feet by the eyes and a receding hairline, without making him look old or weak (West 139). It is apparent that the Chancellor is a man of respect, power, and importance.

Nicolas Rolin was, in fact, a man with a very forceful personality. He was Philip the Good's most trusted counselor, and one of the principal architects of his success. It is apparent that Van Eyck succeeded at showing the Chancellor's dignity and serious demeanor (West 22-23). In 1953, L. Van Puyvelde said

"Jan Van Eyck is a portrait painter who affirms, expands and develops faithfully the individual character of each model. He penetrates the mask which hides the virtues and vices of the individual and by rendering every visible detail with shrewd objectivity reveals the person's very soul. In his work the art of portrait painting took a great leap forward."

In Raphael's "La Donna Velata (Portrait of a Woman)" now in the Galleria Palatina, Florence, the artist has portrayed a woman whose identity is unknown, yet we see her here at a very intimate level[11]. The visual evidence for her character is twofold: the structure of the features and the colors of her complexion. Everything about this woman's pose and facial expression seems more relaxed than most formal, posed portraits. All of the muscles of the face that are usually contracted even in a serious pose are relaxed here. For instance, the eyebrows slope down instead of arching up, and the forehead is smooth and wrinkle-free (no furrowed brow here!). Her shoulders also slope down to give her a posture that doesn't look lazy but rather comfortable. A strand of hair

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[11] Raphael paints portraits so we are able to get closer to the actual person (in a way much better than even Da Vinci, according to Konrad Oberhurer, author of Raphael: The Paintings) (77).

delicately grazes her cheekbone, further softening the look of her face. Rapahel painted her jawline with extreme care, blending the curve from her face to her neck with subtle and soft shadows. All of the shadows on her face are painted subtly, and this gives shape to her face. Instead of appearing as darker value, the shadows blend seamlessly into the surface of her face. Her lips are closed but not pressed together, which produces a sweet expression that isn't quite a smile. This sweet expression clues us in to a possible special relationship, or comfort level, between the sitter and the artist. Her eyes are a major communicator of intimacy, because they are very large and look very knowingly. This is not a blank gaze; it appears as though she is very comfortable and very open with the artist producing this work.

The slight flush in her cheek and the rosy color of her lips are a longtime standard of beauty[12]—women wear blush and lipstick today to achieve this look. These colors also suggest that the woman is blushing slightly with happiness. We see that this is a beautiful woman who appears to be naturally so. Her skin is glowing with light, which tells us she had a certain special presence. Through his use of luminous color, the way he has painted the flush of her skin and the subtle shadows, and through his careful attention in recording the features of her face in a gentle manner, Raphael has shown us this woman on an intimate level. Raphael shows this by her open pose, open eyes, and relaxed body, all painted in "delicate, transparent glazes that are full of the light of love"

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[12] Raphael and Titian created a standard of beauty when they painted that is still used to describe women today, using such phrases as "Titianesque" or "pre-Raphaelite." This shows that the two artists created ideals as well as reflected them (Sturgis 27). The figures in his work obviously show the Renaissance ideal of beauty as well as the human warmth and serenity that he was known for (Getty Art).

(Oberhurer 208). She comes to life for the viewer because she was full of life to the artist.

Hans Holbein the Younger's portrait of Henry VIII, now in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid, shows the subject as stern, determined, and spoiled. His expression is fairly neutral, yet it shows us the true nature of his personality. Henry's lips are pressed together tightly in a smug little pout. There is no space between the top and bottom lip and the artist has painted the mouth as very small and thin-lipped. Above the mouth is a rather large nose with the profile exaggerated. Henry's eyes are also painted small, and his gaze makes them seem beady and disapproving, which is exaggerated by the thin eyebrows with a high arch, forming a permanent frown. The ears on the side of the king's head also look small, and all of these small features in comparison to the large head show us that this was a very large man. Making the sense organs (eyes and ears) small in comparison to the large fatty face suggests a person more animal than intelligent. The neck is barely visible, covered up by a beard and a high collar. There is no space between the collar and the neck—it looks to be a very tight fit. Henry VIII therefore comes off as very well-fed and stolid. By subtly exaggerating the features as he did, Hans Holbein the Younger painted Henry the VIII as a spoiled and rather unpleasant man.

According to legend, as a child he was so spoiled he even had a whipping boy to take his punishment. Henry VIII was a king who went through six wives and many mistresses in an effort to have sons and establish a dynasty (Kings and Queens of England to 1603). He ordered two of those six wives to be executed and also appointed

himself head of the church of England to avoid one of the Pope's decision that he couldn't divorces his wife (Kings and Queens of England to 1603).

Titian[13] painted a portrait of Eleonora Gonzaga della Rovere in 1536, now in the Uffitzi Gallery, Florence. Looking at the face alone, she comes off as wealthy and a bit high-strung. Her lips are very thin and pressed together to form a tight-lipped expression that does not look friendly. Her eyes gaze past our left shoulder in an wistful sort of strained emotion, with an impression of an effort to control her composure. Her nose is painted in detail and shows a prominent bridge. This long, narrow nose and her upturned nostrils suggest the sharp, delicate features of an aristocrat[14]. This much individuality in the nose shows that Titian was very careful about producing a likeness of this woman[15]. Her skin is extremely pale, which is a clue to her wealth--she never had to go outside! A slight double chin rests between her neck and her face, which also shows us she always had plenty to eat. Her acute features and pale skin are supplemented by other status indicators throughout the painting--fancy dress and jewelry, chair and setting[16]--that this woman is wealthy and perhaps a little rigid in personality, yet not overbearingly so.

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[13] Titian was born in 1488 and started studying art at the young age of nine in Venice (Getty Art). His busiest years were the 1540's, when he was the most sought-for (Wethey 5) and the court painter for the Venetian republic and Emperor Charles V (Getty Art). He became one of the most famous artists in Europe in his later years (Woods-Marsden 163).

[14] Titian didn't use miniscule detail, but instead concentrated on shaping the facial features very carefully (Sturgis 41). "Titian brings out [contrasts] in the subtlest manner through minute variations of surface, emphasis upon the eyes, clarity of the nose, and slight twists of the lips" (12).

[15] Titian's art shows a profound understanding of human character (Wethey 51, 10).

[16] This style of portraiture that used "sensitive characterizations" and luxurious accessories eventually inspired other great portrait artists such as Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck, and some modern portrait photographers (Getty Art).

Through these examples and the anthropological studies of portraits discussed, we have addressed how portraits concern both physical features as well as the "inner life" of a person (21). William Hazlitt described the face as having

"infinite varieties . . . the mere setting down what you see in this medley of successive, teasing, contradictory impressions, would never do . . . you must feel what this means and dive into the hidden soul . . . portrait-painting is, then painting from recollection and from a conception of character, with the object before us to assist the memory and understanding." (Grove, Portrait)

Erwin Panofsky said that "a portrait seeks to bring out whatever it is in the sitter that differs from the rest of humanity and would even differ from himself were he portrayed at a different moment or in a different situation" (West 11). Good portraits, most of all, "take us into a face, present a mind made flesh, and they can fascinate us almost like living people" (McNeill 170).

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