

## THE VISIONARY ACADEMY OF OCULAR MENTALITY



LUCA DEL BALDO

**THE  
VISIONARY  
ACADEMY  
OF OCULAR  
MENTALITY**

ATLAS OF  
THE ICONIC TURN

DE GRUYTER



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I dedicate this book to Arthur C. Danto, Rick Brettell, and my father, Tarcisio Del Baldo.

Como, May 2020

#### Editorial note

The authors' texts are published without major modifications. In order to keep as much of the original character as possible, only minor standardizations were made.



# W. J. T. Mitchell

## Introduction

### The Visionary Academy of Ocular Mentality

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The human face is the most powerful and paradoxical object in the field of visual perception. It is the site of parental imprinting in infants, an automatism we share with many animals, and the sight that provokes what Jacques Lacan called “the Mirror Stage” of self-objectification. It is, as Emanuel Levinas taught us long ago, both the factual and figurative location of our ethical relation to Others. It enjoys the status of transparent immediacy (the face to face encounter) and is therefore the organ of the deepest deception and dissimulation in the form of masks, makeup, the poker face, and the “bald-faced lie.” It is the sacred icon of honor and reputation, and therefore something we can lose, the object of defacement, caricature, and disfiguration. It is something we are born with, and yet, as George Bernard Shaw insisted, the thing we are responsible for by the time we are forty.

Given its centrality, we might expect the portrait of the human face to be the most important genre in the visual arts. But from Roman busts to oil portraits to the selfie, portraiture has remained a minor genre compared with mythical and historical compositions. Its association with vanity and temporary celebrity has done little to elevate its status, and the current explosion of surveillance technology has reduced the human face to a data file in societies of control. Facial recognition software renders the face little more than an identity card linked to a “data double” that renders privacy a quaint, obsolete memory. George Orwell

concluded his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with a nightmare vision of totalitarian power: “If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – for ever.”

In the midst of this dark picture of the human visage, Luca Del Baldo has proposed a counter-strategy of celebrating a group of scholars whose work provides a contrary vision of vision itself. The Visionary Academy of Ocular Mentality is centered around a band of contemporary scholars who have devoted their lives to the iconic or pictorial turn, expanding the domain of art history into the larger domain of visual culture, and elevating the study of visual images into parity with the study of language and literature. Beyond this central group Del Baldo has drawn in representatives of a larger cohort of scholars who have provided new visions of human possibility in politics, sexuality, and history. Members of the Visionary Academy investigate vision in both its literal and figurative sense, as a study of optical technologies and perception on the one hand, and the boundless field of human understanding and imagination on the other. Scholars such as Michael Ann Holly, Griselda Pollock, and Norman Bryson who have inspired the study of visual culture are here, along with pioneers of art history like T. J. Clark and Svetlana Alpers. Philosophers like Judith Butler and Arthur Danto rub shoulders with Gayatri Spivak and Jacques Ranciere. Historians of the “anti-ocularcentric prejudice” (Martin Jay) appear alongside ethnographic critics of the “ocular mentality” such as Johannes Fabian. And the German triumvirate of *Bildwissenschaft*, Horst Bredekamp, Hans Belting, and Gottfried Boehm are included to insure that the field of “image science” comes face to face with itself.

Anyone who studies this gallery of well-known scholars might come away with the impression that this an academic version of Andy Warhol’s array of silk-screened celebrity portraits. But the fact is that very few of the people depicted here will be recognizable to the general public; their “celebrity” is pretty much confined to the academy, where they are known principally by their writings, not their faces. And if Warhol’s silk-screened portraits emphasized the mass circulation and repeatability of the faces of Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe, Luca Del Baldo renders his portraits in the medium of uniqueness and singularity, oil painting on canvas.

Del Baldo's method of assembling his Visionary Academy flies directly in the face of the contemporary reduction of the portrait to a data blip in societies of spectacle and surveillance. Returning to the medium of thickly applied oil paint, at a scale roughly life-size, Del Baldo paints his gallery of scholars in a thick impasto that catches every blemish, wrinkle, and scar with unerring accuracy. His method combines fidelity to the mostly aged faces of his subjects, with a precise attention to the surface of his 11"X15" canvases. The result is an intimate close-up well beyond the capacities of photography, in which the hand of the artist has touched every freckle and pore, and hinted at the soul captured in a fleeting expression, a turn at the edges of the mouth, a peculiar glint in the eyes. The paradox is that none of these portraits were made "from the life," but were based on photographs – in my case, a digital selfie – sent to the artist by email. The artist works from these photos which, significantly, are nowhere to be found in this album, but consigned (as Roland Barthes noted) as "refuse . . . to the drawer or wastebasket." (93) If the original photos, as Barthes also insisted, bear the *punctum* of Time ("*that* is dead and *that* is going to die" 96), the paintings conjure the faces back to life. The visible touches of paint, the heavy impasto Del Baldo employs, are like the traces of a counter-cosmetician, healing the blemishes by marking and enhancing them, defeating Time by re-tracing it in the gestures of the artist's own hand. This is partly because, as a keepsake, the painted portraits are much more valuable in their singularity than the photos on which they are based, much more likely to survive as family heirlooms than the innumerable digital photos that clutter data clouds and forgotten hard drives. If photography drained what Walter Benjamin called the "aura" from the faces of the academicians, Del Baldo brings it back in the precious, lovingly applied brushwork of these painted portraits.

Of course we have to admit that in the form they are reproduced in this book, that whole process of re-animation has been re-interred in photographic reproductions. The paintings are now mainly consigned to private places – the wall of a study, an upstairs hallway, at best at discreet location in an academic office. The only signs of life will be the words of the subjects, commissioned by the artist in exchange for the gift of his painting. The whole circuit of exchange between artist and scholars in this book is a kind of hyperbolic potlatch, the competitive

giving of gifts. Del Baldo asks no payment for the intense and protracted labor he invests in each portrait, only the recompense of a few words. The minimalist response is provided by Noam Chomsky, whose seven line response is really a refusal to respond. The maximalist is offered by Mieke Bal's learned meditation, "Allo-portraits: Collaboration Between Mirror and Mask" complete with eleven footnotes, taking us far and wide into the phenomenology of the face and the history of portraiture. Between these extremes, the Visionary Academy ranges over personal revelation and theoretical speculation, confession and confident appreciation. Del Baldo saw something in the writing of every one of these scholars that impelled him to ask them for a photograph of their face. He turned down the first one that I sent him, a professional photographer's close up of my face in a café in Palermo taken after several glasses of wine. I was mugging for the camera, trying to impersonate a famous photo of Michel Foucault glaring at the photographer. Wrong proportions, said Luca, and so I sent him a selfie that leaves me cold. I love Luca's rendering, but dislike the original on which it is based, uncertain whether this is a failure or triumph of narcissism.

So what does *The Visionary Academy of Ocular Mentality* amount to, finally? Certainly it is a completely original venture in the long history of transactions between art and learning, painting and writing. No artist that I am aware of has tried something so ambitious and selfless with such devotion and skill. When one thinks of the hours that each of these portraits has required, the patient labor and attention required, one has to be astonished by the stubborn persistence of the whole project. The members of the Visionary Academy certainly have a lot to be thankful for, including the generosity of Luca's request that their only payment for these exquisite renderings of their faces be a few well-chosen words. The result is a unique and profound conversation between image and text focused on the enigma of the human face in all its mediations.

# Horst Bredekamp

## Introduction

### The Warburgian Tradition and *Bildwissenschaft*

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#### The Necessity to Reflect on the Picture

The worldwide Corona crisis in 2020 is a challenge for all sciences. As if in time-lapse footage, the material for a huge field study has emerged not only for virology and epidemiology, but also for psychology, sociology, and, not least, image science. In the way the pictures are currently used and reflected and their functions renegotiated lies the key to a pictorial understanding of the crisis.

The efforts to limit the infections around the world to the point that the capacities of health systems were not overwhelmed were based on complicated extrapolations and models. They were given visual form in a pictorial graphic whose conveyance with the accompanying motto “flatten the curve” guided action worldwide. At the same time, photos of overflowing intensive care wards in Bergamo and of mass burials worldwide circulated and were shared by the millions on social media; without them, the measures that in some cases interfered drastically with basic civil rights could hardly have been enforced.

In the months of Spring 2020, the digital possibilities of communication received a spur like nothing since the introduction of the Internet in 1992. Digital conferences – in which, via the pixels on the computer screen, groups of individuals were connected into communities, like the body of the Leviathan, the image with which in 1651 Thomas Hobbes envisioned the archetype of the state – expanded the paths of commu-

nication, and in this way, instruction at schools and universities became a great theater of living portraits. The lasting form of a representation that lacks the haptic quality of touch underscores, on the other side, the unsurpassable significance of the argumentation of the body, the direct gaze, and sensitive matter.

The painter Luca Del Baldo could not have known any of this when he began creating his series of likenesses, the “Academy of Ocular Mentality”, almost 20 years ago. And yet, the disposition of his undertaking aimed at the question of representing the human being in a picture, as has become clear in the most recent crisis with its possibilities and deficits. He took the rise of the picture to the center of communication in the 1960s with the development of the mass media in print, television, and the pictorial digital media as the occasion to transfer to painting the representation of people as achieved by photographs. He thereby employed the material and bodily experienceable, individual and original level that arises when the model and the painter enter a relationship. The calculated irony of his series, however, lies in the fact that his likenesses do not arise directly and are not similarly experienceable, but are imbued with a doubled alienation effect via photography and its transference into painting. The material, physical picture thus presents itself as a medium of transformations that occur through the character of these transfers. With that, the “Academy” series aims at a return of portrait painting that does not regress to pre-modern culture, but that places the genre of likeness in the center of the reflexivity of the picture in itself.

### *The Iconic Turn*

Del Baldo has devoted his philosophical painting to the concept of the *iconic turn*, which has given a name to and inspired the profound methodological changes in the humanities and natural sciences that have been developing for about half a century. This slogan goes back to the art historian and philosopher Gottfried Boehm. In 1994, as the introduction to his highly influential book “Was ist ein Bild” (“What is a picture”), he published an article about the “return of the pictures”, in which he introduced the term *iconic turn* to describe the picture’s entrance to the central area of hermeneutics and philosophizing as an autonomous instance of its own.<sup>1</sup> With an eye to the visualization of

large areas of communication, this formulation was a call to methodologically sharpen the pictorial means of analysis in every field and in every medium in which pictures are present, whether statically or in motion.

In the context of the cultural shift from text to picture and under the motto of the *pictorial turn*, in 1992 W.J.T. Mitchell had already tried to update Erwin Panofsky's iconology.<sup>2</sup> Mitchell, Boehm, and with them a large number of researchers wanted to encounter the increased importance of pictures art-historically and philosophically in critical correlation with the linguistic turn that Richard Rorty had proclaimed in 1967.<sup>3</sup> Mitchell performed the concept of the picture as a pseudo-living entity,<sup>4</sup> and like no other, he is predestined to introduce this book from the viewpoint of the English-speaking world.

#### The Return of *Bildwissenschaft*

It is no coincidence that the term *iconic turn* emerged from the starting situation in the German-speaking world. Since about 1965, in the course of increasing reflection on the crimes of the Nazi regime, a younger generation of art historians was confronted with the fact that, along with musicology, art history was the discipline with the highest percentage of forced emigration from Germany. My generation had to learn that with these personalities outstanding achievements in methodology were more or less lost sight of. The recovery of this continent of knowledge and methodological diversity was a specific reason why the generational, and with it epistemological, struggle was carried out comparatively bitterly and lastingly. The basis for this was the study of the biographies of more than three hundred art historians who emigrated, mostly to the United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

The essential conclusion drawn from the methods that were developed in the Weimar Republic and have been recovered since the 1970s lay in Aby Warburg's conviction that no realm of design is unworthy of art-historical research. In particular via Hamburg's Warburg Library of Cultural Sciences, which was able to emigrate to London in the fall of 1933, the path was open to de-hierarchalize the materials and fields of art-historical concern to the point of including the analysis of popular art and the visual products of political propaganda. One of the essential sources of inspiration, along with the Hamburg School, was the Vienna

School, especially in the person of Alois Riegl, became a kind of bible of a material-historical and societal-historical art history.<sup>6</sup> It was through him that there was a direct perception of Walter Benjamin as an art historian. Benjamin had repeatedly called Alois Riegl one of his intellectual predecessors in calling art history one of the leading disciplines during the Weimar Republic.<sup>7</sup> Benjamin's statement was strong motivation to recover what led him to this judgment.

The art historians conference in Cologne in 1970 marked the watershed beyond which art history became a discipline that newly fulfilled Warburg's ambition to be "pictorial historians" in the broadest sense under the criteria of the present. At the center stood the section of Martin Warnke, *Das Kunstwerk zwischen Wissenschaft und Weltanschauung* (The work of art between science and worldview), in whose course, among other things, the demand arose to expand the discipline's methods to cover all visual media, including even advertising and methods of mass media communication.<sup>8</sup> The decisive long-term effect can be seen in the fact that, since then, art history regards itself once again as an *image science* into which social science, neuroscience, anthropology, media history, political iconography, and the iconology of material have all found entry.

This is especially true also of the natural sciences, which for quite a while have applied a great degree of aesthetic innovation to grasp and convey their often invisible objects. The aesthetic brilliance of, for example, medical imaging, molecular biology, and nanotechnology shows particularly well that it would be an understatement to speak here solely of "illustrations". As a rule, pictures not only reproduce the results they depict; they also shape and produce results out of themselves.<sup>9</sup> Because it took all these fields into account, this tradition of art history as *Bildwissenschaft* defends the unity of image-science in its most unhierarchical sense.<sup>10</sup>

Considering the phenomena they attend to, the validity of the *pictorial* and *iconic turns* has never had the character of a fad; rather, they continue to be effective as a broad reflection of the concept of the image in extremely diverse disciplines and the most diverse cultures, for which the researchers brought together in this volume provide the best evidence. The concept of the picture that Gottfried Boehm applied to human artifacts and that the philosopher John Michael Krois extended



to non-human entities<sup>11</sup> was expanded at the international CIHA Conference in Nuremberg to include the “object”<sup>12</sup> and at the German Art Historians Conference in Göttingen in 2019 to the “thing”.<sup>13</sup> This cleared the way for a definition that overcomes the boundary between what is biological and what appears to be dead matter. The concept of *active matter* possesses a deeply image-relevant character standing at the end of a development already implicit a hundred years ago with Aby Warburg.<sup>14</sup>

### The Painted Space of Reflection

These topics can be heard in the commentaries of the researchers gathered in this “Academy”. Luca Del Baldo has produced a painted space of reflection, as illuminated in the interview with Andreas Beyer, published as a conclusion at the end of this book. It is no coincidence that this painted building stands *prima facie* in an Italian tradition. It takes up the *Illustrium Imagines*, which, in the style of the ancient portrait collections, found canonical form through Andrea Fulvio in 1517<sup>15</sup> and, in various editions including a collection of likenesses of scholars from 1577, through Paolo Giovio.<sup>16</sup> These collections served to honor important individuals, but also the prestige of the matter itself, and in this, they were more than an homage to reputation. But there was and is the danger that the medium of the portrait can become an organ of self-stylization, and, possibly for this reason, Georges Didi-Huberman, who developed Aby Warburgs impetus further in the French-speaking realm like no other, did not take part. But it can be observed throughout that, for their part, the commentators reflected on this danger. Some contributions contain things that, not being actual any more, are all the more reflexive. For example, Hans Belting writes that his book on “faces” is still being worked on. It deals precisely with the object that Del Baldo had in view. Meanwhile published, it reads today like a meta-commentary to the “Academy”-book.<sup>17</sup>

Del Baldo did not choose the rigor of profile depictions as found in the *Illustrium Imagines*. By relating his paintings to photographs, most of which were taken frontally, his paintings lack the strictness of the profile line of most of the *Uomini illustri*-series, but he is all the more able to reformulate the hope, inherent also in these historical likeness series, that the portraits are able to speak for themselves.<sup>18</sup>

- 1 Gottfried Boehm, *Die Wiederkehr der Bilder*, in: *Was ist ein Bild?* (ed.: idem), Munich 1994, p. 11–38.
- 2 W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Pictorial Turn*, in: *Artforum*, 1992, March, p. 89–94.
- 3 Richard M. Rorty, *Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy*, in: *The Linguistic Turn* (ed.: Richard M. Rorty), Chicago and London 1992 [1967], p. 1–39.
- 4 The foundation was laid in his publication: *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago 2005.
- 5 Karen Michels, *Transplantierte Kunstwissenschaft. Deutschsprachige Kunstgeschichte im amerikanischen Exil* (= *Studien aus dem Warburg-Haus*, Bd. 2), Berlin 1999; Ulrike Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch deutschsprachiger Kunsthistoriker im Exil. Leben und Werk der unter dem Nationalsozialismus verfolgten und vertriebenen Wissenschaftler*, 2 vols., Munich 1999.
- 6 Alois Riegl, *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, Vienna 1901 [reprint Berlin 2000, with an afterword by Wolfgang Kemp].
- 7 Walter Benjamin, *Strenge Kunstwissenschaft*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. III, *Kritiken und Rezensionen*, Frankfurt am Main 1972, p. 363–369 (first version), p. 369–374 (second version); Wolfgang Kemp, *Walter Benjamin und die Kunstwissenschaft*, Teil 1: *Benjamins Beziehungen zur Wiener Schule*, in: *Kritische Berichte*, Bd. 1, 1973, No. 3, p. 30–50; Teil 2: *Benjamin und Aby Warburg*, in: *Kritische Berichte*, Bd. 3, 1975, No. 1, p. 5–25.
- 8 Martin Warnke (ed.), *Das Kunstwerk zwischen Wissenschaft und Weltanschauung*, Gütersloh 1970.
- 9 *The Technical Image. A History of Styles in Scientific Imagery* (eds.: Horst Bredekamp, Vera Dünkel, Birgit Schneider), University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London 2015.
- 10 Horst Bredekamp, *A Neglected Tradition? Art History as Bildwissenschaft*, in: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 29, 2003, No. 3, p. 418–428.
- 11 John Michael Krois, *Für Bilder braucht man keine Augen. Zur Verkörperungstheorie des Ikonischen*, in: *Kulturelle Existenz und symbolische Form. Philosophische Essays zu Kultur und Medien* (eds.: idem and Norbert Meuter), Berlin 2006, p. 167–190; idem, *Image Science and Embodiment or: Peirce as Image Scientist*, in: *Kompetenzen der Bilder* (eds.: Ulrich Ratsch, Ion-Olimpiu Stamatescu, and Philipp Stoellger), Tübingen 2009, p. 201–215.
- 12 *The Challenge of the Object. Die Herausforderung des Objekts*. 33. Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art. 33. Internationaler Kunsthistoriker-Kongress Nürnberg, 15.–20. Juli 2012. *Congress Proceedings* (eds.: G. Ulrich Großmann and Petra Krutisch), Nürnberg 2013.
- 13 On this, see: Kilian Heck and Iris Wenderholm, *Zu den Dingen! XXXV. Deutscher Kunsthistorikertag, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, 27–31 March 2019*, in: *Kunstchronik* 72 (2019), p. 88–99, and *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 83, no. 3.
- 14 *+ultra knowledge & gestaltung* (eds.: Nikola Doll, Horst Bredekamp, and Wolfgang Schäffner), exh. cat., Leipzig 2017.
- 15 Andrea Fulvio, *Illustrium Imagines, Rome 1517*. Cf. Milan Pelc, *Illustrium Imagines. Das Portraitbuch der Renaissance*, Leiden/Boston/Cologne 2002, p. 8, 69–72.
- 16 Paolo Giovio, *Elogia virorum literis illustrium*, Basel 1577.
- 17 Hans Belting, *Faces. Eine Geschichte des Gesichts*, Munich 2013. More recently, the tradition of the series of likenesses has been taken up again in the form of the fourteen portraits of researchers joined in 2000 as Fellows at the Collegium Budapest and painted in profile by the artist Anke Doberauer (*David Craven, Anke Doberauer Series for Collegium Budapest: An Historical Profile of the Neo-Humanist Portrait*, in: *Collegium Budapest. Institute for Advanced Study, Newsletter*, Spring 1998/1999, p. 22–24).
- 18 Pelc 2002, p. 56f.





# Svetlana Alpers

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Dear Luca, your project is impressive ... My problem with it is that I do not like the tone in which most of the individuals you have worked with write about themselves – it seems to me to be too self-important, too much fuss about the individual – what I admire those people for is not a photograph of them, but the work itself. The final chapter of my book *Roof Life* ( in French *Tuilages*) is titled *Self-Seen*. I begin the chapter by considering two photographs of myself taken by my companion Michael Baxandall (dead 10 years now) – what interested me was not how I look but how I was seen by Michael. I believe in the words I wrote about those pictures .ever Svetlana

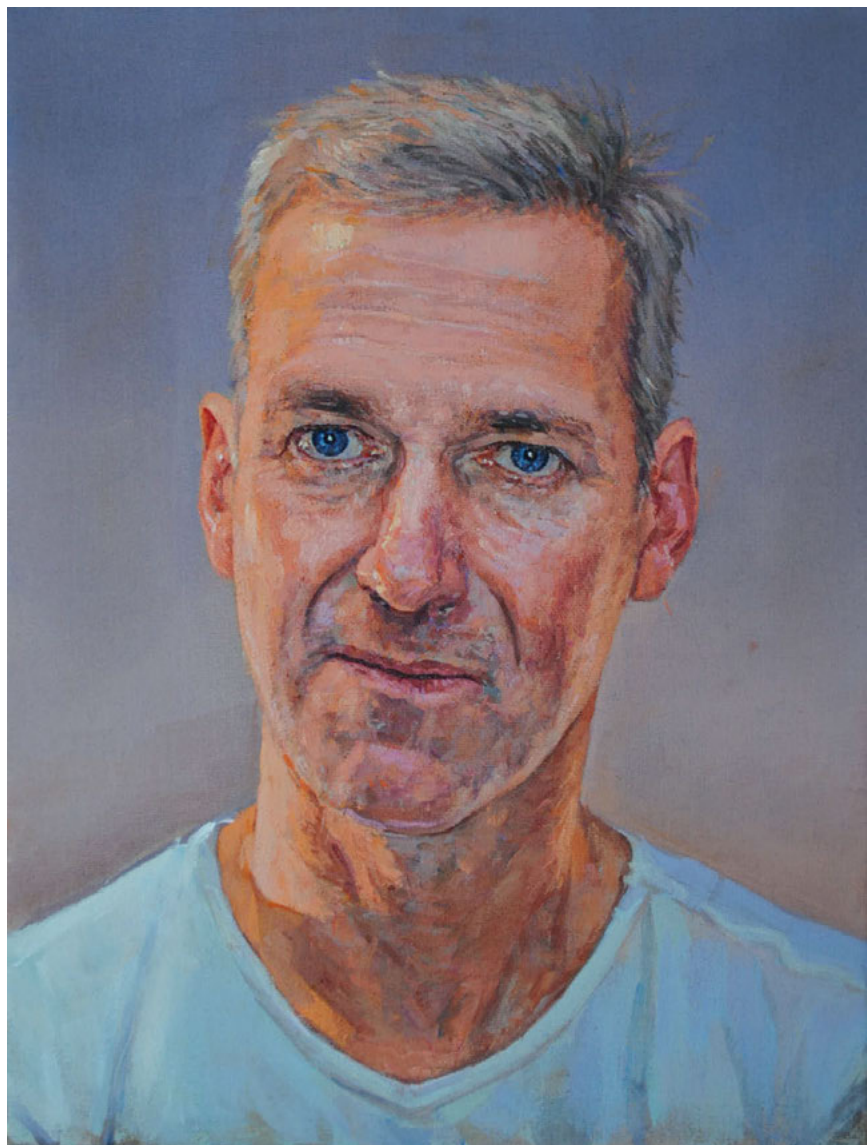
On my desk, to the right of where I sit, there are two small photographs. They are propped up against a strip of wall in the narrow space behind the pencil box of pale wood brought back from a trip to New Zealand by one of my sons. That shadowed strip of wall, along the arm of the I-shaped desk beneath the high wall of book shelves, is layered with bits of paper. Phone numbers, addresses, postcards, some resonant words printed out from friends' e-mails and more are all tacked up. The photographs are not of family or friends. They are photographs made of me by M.

It happens that they both were taken from the same distance and angle – the face seen close-up in % view from the left and slightly below,

body seen to the waist in a black top, eyes looking to my right. I have gotten used to myself in that expanded profile, hair pushed back, the further eye and cheek glimpsed beyond the large nose, a shadowed crease leading down from it to the corner of the mouth, the line of the jaw interrupted by a bit of loose flesh. In the photograph at the right, the arms are raised, hands behind head, elbows jutting out from sleeves pushed up, back resting against the curve of a white plastic chair with a blur of garden leaves beyond. In the left one, the face and neck in bright light stand out above the v-neck of a black sweater before an interior wall faintly seen. People often don't like how they look in photographs. But what does that mean? How do you know how you look, or what you look like – an odd phrase that is. When I look to the right and see the photographs, that is me. There I am as seen, known and the point is, made known to myself through M's eyes. The face in the photos doesn't smile. It is at rest, set, but in a relaxed way, conscious perhaps of being observed. Disposed to being looked at, let's say. M. is there indirectly too, in the record of how he saw me after lunch sitting in a chair in the garden of the gîte at Dracy and again a year or so later standing in twilight in the splendid 18<sup>th</sup> century salon of the apartment in Dijon lent us by friends.

2019







# Ernst van Alphen

## The Portrait as Battleground

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Usually when I see a photograph of myself I feel alienated from the person I see in the image. The image I have of myself does not match the photographed face I am facing. For a second, I cannot believe that that person is me. It is not that I do not recognize myself; but there is slight, uncanny mismatch between the image of myself which I have internalized, and the image outside of myself, which I am looking at. It is familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

This is the case for photographic portraits of myself. A painted portrait has never been made of me, until Luca Del Baldo painted my portrait. It is first the time that I see a portrait of myself that does not have the effect of uncanniness on me. How can that be? It suggests a difference between photographic portraiture and a painted portrait. In order to understand this difference, I will first say a few words about the reflections on portraiture by the French cultural critic Roland Barthes and by the British painter Francis Bacon.

In his *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes has written about the nature of the relation between portrait and the portrayed.<sup>1</sup> In his view the image has a strong hold over the subject through the ability to represent the body of the subject as whole, an ability that the subject lacks. For the subject has only transient bodily experiences and partial views of its own body. To transform these fragmented experiences and views into a whole, the subject needs an image of itself.

Barthes, however, does not see the dependence on the unity and form-bestowing relation with the image as desirable, but as mortifying. "I feel that the photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice." The subject loses itself when it is objectified in representation. This loss of self is brought about because the objectification of the subject that bestows the experience of wholeness on her or him is a discursive transformation that translates the subject into the terms of the *doxa*. The subject falls prey to a representation that constructs it in terms of the stereotype. So, according to Barthes, in the portrait the subject is not confronted with itself in its essential quality, but, on the contrary, by becoming an image it is alienated from itself, because assimilated into the *doxa*. Hence, Barthes' view on the portrait is highly ambivalent. One depends on portraiture for the illusion of wholeness, but at the same time one has to pay for that by a loss of self. One's image is always cast in terms of the already-represented. Barthes needs the portrait and resists it, which makes the portrait into a battleground. Barthes' account of the relationship between representation and subjectivity as a discursive conflict enables us to see the disturbing quality of Francis Bacon's portraits as efforts to unsettle the kinds of representations of the self that mortify any experience of the self. In interviews Bacon's incessant emphasis on the need for distortion in order to represent the "real" appearance of somebody can be understood as a fight against stereotypical representations of the subject. In interviews Bacon talks about his portrayals as conflicts between the artificiality of representation and the resistance of the model to that artificiality.

"FB: What I want to do is to distort the thing far beyond the appearance, but in the distortion to bring it back to a recording of the appearance.

DS: Are you saying that painting is almost a way of bringing somebody back, that the process of painting is almost like the process of recalling?

FB: I am saying it. And I think that the methods by which this done are so artificial that the model before you, in my case, inhibits the artificiality by which this thing can be brought about."<sup>2</sup>

Bacon talks about his portrayals as conflicts between the artificiality of representation and the resistance of the model to that artificiality. That which Bacon depicts is exactly the fight between subject and representation. He folds the subject back onto itself, endorsing the resulting

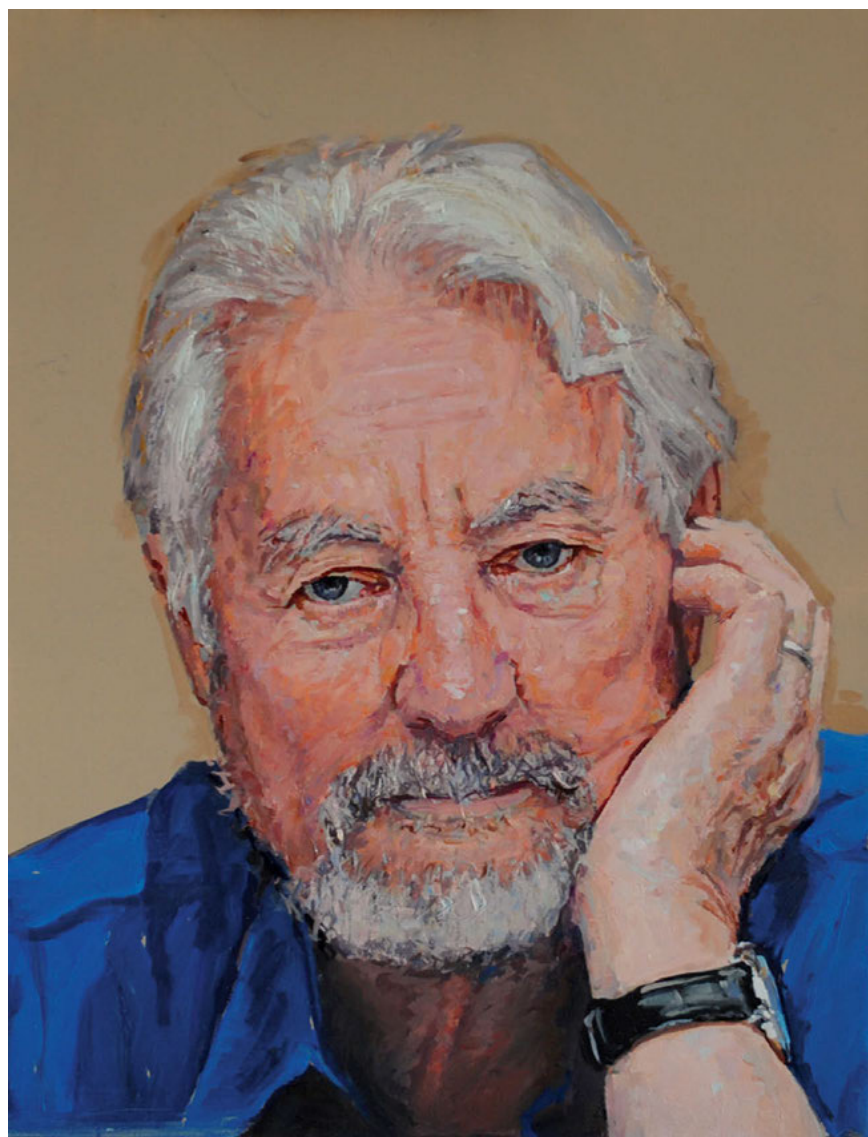
fragmentation as the inevitable consequence of this denial of the unity-bestowing power of representation.

Although at first sight, Bacon's paintings have little in common with the painting Luca Del Baldo has made of me, also Del Baldo's mode of painting demonstrates the artificiality of representation, of painting in this case, Bacon is talking about. My image is not "caught" or "mirrored", but is artificially built up by means of paint and brushstrokes. The building stones that artificially construct my face are emphatically visible. As I result, there is not one single moment of (mis)recognizing myself. Instead I admire an artificial construction that is me.

2018

<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard. (London 1982: Fontana).

<sup>2</sup> David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*. (London 1987: Thames and Hudson), p. 40.



# Marc Augé

## Regard

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Étrange sensation: il m'est arrivé, comme à tout le monde, de me reconnaître sur une photo, mais jamais je ne m'étais surpris à me sentir l'objet de mon propre regard.

Ici aucun moyen de lui échapper. Non qu'il soit particulièrement vif ou inquisiteur: il ne me cherche pas, mais, face à lui, je sais qu'il m'a trouvé. Il faut dire que dans le portrait de Luca Del Baldo il n'y en a que pour lui. Le peintre a pris pour modèle une photographie publiée dans un blog de recherches anthropologiques, et il y a ajouté de la matière: la peau du visage est moins lisse, plus colorée, plus chargée de plis et de taches. On pourrait être tenté de dire qu'il m'a vieilli. Mais je crois surtout qu'il a voulu mettre en évidence le regard de celui dont il étudiait la photographie, moi en l'occurrence. Comment peint-on un regard?

Je ne sais, mais le résultat, pour moi, est troublant. À mi-hauteur de la toile, les yeux accaparent l'attention. Ils se situent entre l'espace clair du fond de tableau, sur lequel s'inscrit, avec le blanc de la chevelure, la pâleur du front dégagé, et sa partie basse, aux couleurs plus marquées: menton mal rasé, bleu de la chemise, noir du bracelet – montre en cuir. Ils ne reflètent a priori qu'une pensée vague, vaguement contemplative, mais ils expriment un état d'âme ou d'esprit qui devait être le mien quand la photographie a été prise; je me trouve soudain au centre du tableau et d'une énigme dont je suis le seul à pouvoir éclairer les termes. Le regard, on serait tenté de dire qu'il est intérieur, intime, réflexif, mais c'est moi qui le regarde!

J'ai les yeux verts, mais, si j'y regarde de plus près, cette impression se décompose; il y a un peu de bleu, dans ce vert-là, et quelques reflets d'un marron doré. En outre une source lumineuse inconnue allume quelques flammèches à l'ombre des paupières. Au total, j'ai l'air très sérieux, un peu fatigué peut-être; la main qui soutient le menton accrédirait cette hypothèse, même si l'on ne voit pas la pointe du coude qui étaye l'ensemble. Dira-t-on qu'influencé par l'air du temps, je suis sinon inquiet de notre situation globale, au moins préoccupé par certains de ses aspects?

Honnêtement, je n'ai pas le souvenir du moment où la photo fut prise et j'en suis pas certain, en outre, que mon regard ait eu la même expression sur la photo originelle que sur le tableau de Luca Del Baldo. Et pourtant il s'agit bien de mon regard. Le peintre a su capter quelque chose que la photo ne révélait pas. Je me fixe dans les yeux et, au bout d'un moment, je comprends: la vie passe vite, mais le temps ralentit parfois; nous nous arrêtons pour la regarder passer avec un peu de nostalgie apparente mais aussi le sentiment que tout est dans l'ordre des choses, et s'ébauche alors, du haut des yeux jusqu'aux confins des lèvres, l'esquisse d'un sourire.

2018







# Oskar Bätschmann

## My Short Career as an Artist

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When I was a boy, I received a box of oil paints from Amsterdam's Talens for Christmas. From then on I practiced oil painting by copying all kinds of colored illustrations including the "Wetterhorn" by Joseph Anton Koch after a reproduction in a magazine. At eighteen I enrolled in the local arts school for courses that took place in the evening or on school-free afternoons. I learned to draw from living models and we practiced on a very thin old man and a rather stout woman. After two years of military service, I fled to Italy and enrolled at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence. I was accepted into the class of Professor Primo Conti, who was a very famous painter at the time. The lessons were remarkable because we painted every morning until 1 p.m. from Monday to Saturday and the professor came on Saturday at 11:30 a.m. to greet us. He said very kindly: *Ciaò Oskar, vieni domani al tè*. He owned a beautiful house in Fiesole and was married to an English woman who made wonderful tea. Teaching in anatomy, life drawing, printing, and art history took also place as was the case for a traditional art academy. My best friends at the academy were Elia Li Gioi from Avola in Sicily and Anna from Livorno, who was unfortunately already engaged. Elia was the most talented of all of us and gave me the instruction to paint still-lives like Giorgio Morandi's. Nevertheless, I spent more and more time in the Uffizi Gallery. I then returned to my hometown of Lucerne and I participated at a few exhibitions. I was unsuccessful and had to admit

that I was no more talented than the others. This judgment prompted me to end my short career as an artist and I began studying Art history, German literature and Philosophy at the University of Zurich. It turned out to be a good decision.

I admire David Freedberg's essay *Against Portraiture*. Indeed, the alienation in front of one's own portrait is already predetermined with the discovery of the image by Narcissus. He kept his portrait as a representation of a stranger and this is in the history of the portrait more important than any other aspect of the legend. In fact, each portrait of yourself, whether painted or photographed, is the work of a stranger, even a self-portrait with the help of a mirror. What can we recognize as our own in a portrait? I think it's the expression. From a great distance, Luca succeeded perfectly in expressing my friendly irony.

2019





# Mieke Bal

## Allo-portraits: Collaboration Between Mirror and Mask

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*I see all people behind their masks. Smiling, peaceful faces, pale and silently hurrying along a weaving road where its end is the grave.*

Edvard Munch<sup>1</sup>

Does a portrait present us with the person depicted – a ‘likeness’? That remains to be seen. The portrait is a classical genre. The genre of portraiture is usually discussed without reflection on the affiliated genre of the self-portrait. I will argue that in the fissure between these two, we can see the most characteristic feature of both: the presence of otherness. The term “allo-portrait” can thus be deployed to think about both. They are equally strongly anchored in the representation of a face. What allo-portraits have in common is the questioning confusion of self and other – a confusion conducive to thought. This is the basis of their philosophical relevance. That variety alone undermines the humanistic certainties regarding the face, its depth, and its individual uniqueness. Many portraits are self-portraits, and some of the greatest artists – Rembrandt, Munch – are near-obsessive self-portraitists. Yet, there is one key difference between the two genres: the primary tool of the self-portrait is the mirror, which is entirely irrelevant in portraiture. Portraiture, on the other hand, is based on what the artist sees. This may be the friendly face of someone he or she knows, but it may also be, and has often been, the way the sitter wishes to be immortalized. That is, at least, the premise of most studies of the portrait. Perhaps the last classical account of this classical genre is Richard Brilliant’s 1991 book on the subject, which entirely rests on those premises that the twentieth century portrait has vehemently rejected.<sup>2</sup>

Edvard Munch, in the scribble that is my epigraph here, sees the portrait more as a mask – which is hiding, rather than revealing, whatever “essence” – personality or character – a person might possess. In accordance with my view that later art “remakes” older art, in the sense that the latter cannot be seen without the screen of the former modifying what we see, contemporary or more broadly, modern art changes the portrait, even the much older instances of it. In an essay that is crucial for the understanding of modern portraiture, Ernst van Alphen distinguishes portraiture from common presuppositions. One of those is the affiliation, in classical depictions, with royal, noble, and bourgeois self-importance; another is the mimetic or realistic presupposition, the idea of likeness; a third is the idea that portraits capture a person’s essence. Van Alphen alleges many important portraitists from the twentieth century who all, in different ways, undermine these classical notions. Instead, as the final sentence of the essay has it: “Portraiture as a genre has become the form of new conceptions of subjectivity and new notions of representation – a genre that does not take its assigned place in history but embattles what history has naturalized” (2005: 21-47).<sup>3</sup>

But what is it that history had naturalized, but shouldn’t have? A discussion of the authenticity – or not – of self-portraits by Rembrandt in the double-voiced catalogue with the exhibition *Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt*, held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1995 in New York, sheds light on the relationship between portraiture and self-portraiture on the basis of the concepts van Alphen and the artists he discusses, emphatically reject. Some of the paintings included in the Rembrandt exhibition were self-portraits. The discussion of these demonstrated that the definition of that genre, as all genre definitions, affects judgments of value and decisions of attribution, of authenticity. Briefly put, the “self” of the face and the “self” of the hand are merged, as if they were of a single interest. There lies the presupposition I would like to use as a wedge. For example, in volume II, curator Walter Liedtke wrote about a beautiful self-portrait from 1660: “Rembrandt here reveals an extraordinary ability to describe physical qualities (which presumably were studied in a mirror) and simultaneously to suggest character” (1995: 76). This statement nicely sums up what the standard view of self-portraiture stipulates as features of the genre: *description*

as mode, *mirror* as tool, and *self* as subject, the latter being conceived as character, inner self, or personality, readable in facial features. What passes unnoticed is the theory of the face this implies.<sup>4</sup>

Van Alphen's view that the modern portrait corresponds, rather, to new conceptions of subjectivity can be taken to allude to, or at least, to include Lacan's famous brief but crucial explanation of the function of the mirror-stage in the formation of subjectivity. Rather than bringing the viewer or painter closer to the self, the mirror alienates from the self. Distance, reversal, and, most of all, seeing your own face as other, produce the estrangement that makes full subjectivity possible. In other words, the authenticity debates are based on the pre-mirror stage, the pre-symbolic imaginary. Genres consist of the self-evident definitions people "think in" or "live by" rather than of well-theorized categorizations. (Self-)portraiture is no exception. Because we think we know what a portrait is, we don't question the notion of whether there is enough theoretical substantiation for such a category.<sup>5</sup>

It is a further note by Liedtke that is the occasion for my approach to portraiture in this brief essay. The curator quotes a remark by Joshua Bruyn that demonstrates the need to revise the classical conception. Bruyn is quoted to have said that in this picture "only the face is by Rembrandt." It is a profoundly intriguing remark that puts on the table the intersection of the two issues of authorship and genre, which are at the heart of any discussion of (self-)portraiture. I shall retain the place of the *face* in this remark. Incredibly, and apparently on the basis of this opinion of the then-leader of the Rembrandt Research Project, Christian Tümpel de-attributed the painting and catalogued it as "Circle of Rembrandt." Given that in the nineties, the possible de-attribution of *The Polish Rider* also centered on the autograph face versus allo-graphic rest, this decision on Tümpel's part is an astonishing but potentially important contribution to the discussion of the centrality of the face in figurative art in general, and (self-)portraiture in particular. Liedtke's remark about the artist's accomplishment would predict his disagreement with his colleague. At stake is not only the contestable issue of coherence, but more precisely, the centrality of the autograph face as a distinctive feature of the genre of self-portraiture. This centrality, plausible as it may seem, is not "natural" enough to be accepted without some reflection.<sup>6</sup>

The face is not simply a part of the human body. It is the one that facilitates connections between people and thus constitutes the interface of sociality. The face is, in this sense, both over-estimated and under-estimated. In order to get out of the kind of discussions in which Bruyn was able to make such a farcical even if at the same time, potentially profoundly productive, because so contestable, judgment of authenticity, and based on which, in turn, Tümpel was able to deprive the public by dis-attributing the painting, I propose to focus on the *performativity* of the face – the way it acts. This allows us both to consider self-portrait and portrait together, and to avoid essentialist views of what the face “expresses”. For this I shift for a moment to the significant verb “to face”. To face is three acts at once. Literally, facing is the act of looking someone else in the face. It is also, coming to terms with something that is difficult to live down by looking it in the face rather than denying or repressing it. Thirdly, it is making contact, placing the emphasis on the second person, and acknowledging the need of that contact simply in order to be able to sustain life.<sup>7</sup>

This view leads completely away from the mirror (tool for self-portraiture) and, or versus, the mask, as a tool for sitting for portraiture, withholding self-revelation, replacing it with self-presentation. It makes the distinction redundant. If we just assume that the self-portraitist also poses – wears a mask – since he or she presents the self self-consciously for a public, the mask is just as relevant as the mirror. And the disputes in Rembrandt scholarship make more sense when we consider, in terms of facing, the possibility of that intermediate genre, the self-portrait made by someone else, commissioned or not. In both cases – of the doubted self-portrait and the overly-posed portrait, hence, a portrait of another, whether or not the features on the painting resemble either the sitter or the artist – we can call the result an “*allo-portrait*”. This would be the reverse of Leonardo’s famous claim that all painting is, unconsciously, self-portraiture.<sup>8</sup>

I would like to complement this view with the thesis that all portraiture is *allo-*, in relation to the self as well as to other sitters, even in the case of self-portraiture, and hence, that a self-portrait commissioned from another artist, or done by students, deserves the genre label as much or as little as an autographic one. Between the hand and the face, and the performativity of both, they would have, inevitably, aspects of auto-



and aspects of allo-. An instructive example of the commissioned self-portrait is the photographic self-positioning of the run-away, then emancipated American slave Fredrick Douglass, which he systematically (had) made, and which he used to put forward his political argument for emancipation. Prefiguring the later view of subjectivity mentioned above, he poses for the camera, stages himself the way he wants to be seen – the Munchian mask – and thus shows himself and hides himself at the same time, in the same image. The many photographs, as numerous and emphatically “self”-oriented as the self-portraits of Rembrandt and Munch – two instances I happen to have studied – cannot be generically distinguished from the autographic self-portraits that constitute the basis of the genre.<sup>9</sup>

In a study of Goya, Tzvetan Todorov gives two further indication that, I think, support my attempt to integrate the two genres. One is the caricature. Todorov writes that the fact that the caricature distances the subject from his habitual self allows the image to become truer, since “the mask tells the truth that the deceptive façade of the naked face hides”. The caricature “simplifies and amplifies the features of the face in order to makes visible what one tends usually to keep secret”. (64) Eliminating redundant features and deploying hyperbole, the artist is better equipped to reach the truth of the person, rather than judging them subjectively, as caricatures tend to do. In a slightly different vein, later in the book the author praises, precisely, the recognition of the subjectivity of the look. But then, he is discussing the self-portraiture, which in Goya’s case is a remarkable contribution to muddling the genre waters. Not only are his self-portraits amazingly devoid of narcissism, but also, one of his most beautiful self-portraits show the artist/sitter being attended to, with tenderness, by someone else. (275) Thus, with portraiture, self-portraiture, caricature and what is more easily seen as a genre painting, we must face that allo-portrait, paradoxical as the notion is, seems the best proposal for a wider, more encompassing conception of portraiture.<sup>10</sup>

Where does this leave the kind of portraits Luca Del Baldo makes? His fine painting makes them entirely “auto-” in terms of his “hand” – they are most surely autographic. With “fine” I am emphatically not alluding to the so-called “fine painting” of utter realism in the seventeenth century, but to a combination of artistic and technical “finesse” – a thin

(fine) brush stroke that nevertheless significantly doesn't hide itself. The sitters are other people, but selected by the artist; that is already one step in the merging of self and other. Moreover, the portraits are based on photographs made by other hands, different from each sitter. But the sitters, or subjects, select the photographs. Hence, they choose a likeness to themselves; one they like. Given that choice they make, the photograph with its resemblance to the sitter, comes close to the mask Munch wrote about. Auto- and allo- move around, and it becomes impossible to distinguish them.

This allows other aspects to come to the fore. The faces we see in Del Baldo's collection are first of all just that: a collection. And the elements in collections, as distinct from arbitrary storage, have something in common. In this case, it is the profession they share: the study of art, and hence, the knowledge and insight in, among many other genres, portraiture. The remarkable, and confusing feature is that each portrayed face belongs to a person who will recognize the other faces, since they are all colleagues, meet in conferences and other professional events. With the verb "recognition" I bring in another half-baked characteristic, this time of the act of looking. Looking (at art) is a mixture of recognition and innovation. Both are necessary. Without recognition, an image cannot mean anything. Without innovation, art becomes wall-paper. As a consequence, we are compelled to look at the way Del Baldo has performed his task. Armed with a paint brush, his hand has made something else, something allo-, of the photograph, and thus the resulting portrait challenges the reliance on recognition. It depends on the viewer; but it is possible to contemplate these portraits stroke by stroke, looking at color nuance and juxtaposition, and feel the confusion, almost annoying, that recognition places in the way of such contemplation of the surface and texture of the paintings. The tension between the two, recognition and novelty, or better, between figuration and paint work, I have term "surface tension" in a study on Munch's emphatic brushwork that counters the realistic, biographical clichés that viewers tend to bring to the art of this over-exposed artist.<sup>11</sup>

Let's face it. Perhaps we should give up on, or at least relativize the distinction between portrait and self-portrait, between portraiture and other forms of painting, between autographic and allographic paint work, and abandon the genre label altogether. Like the identity of sit-

ters when the portrayed person is famous, a genre label makes us jump to conclusions, and turns the recognition itself into a mask, hiding the art work. Between the face and the hand, the artist's eye is more strongly influential for the resulting artwork as the face, and eye, of the sitter is for the recognition. A collaboration between sensations – the reassurance of recognition and the excitement of surprise – makes such distinctions futile, even untenable. Collaboration: as among colleagues, such as this merry bunch of art historians. Collaboration: not similitude, but a respect of differences.

2018

<sup>1</sup> Ms in Munch Museum MM T 2547, quoted in Woll (1993: 33). For an extensive analysis of Munch's practice of, especially, self-portraiture, see Jon-Ove Steihaug, "Edvard Munch's Performative Self-Portraits", 12–24 in Guleng, Mai Britt, Brigitte Sauge and Jon-Ove Steihaug, eds. *Edvard Munch: 1863–1944* Oslo: Munch Museet, Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design / Milano: Skira Editore S.p.A. 2013, and my own study on Munch, *Emma & Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*. Oslo: Munch Museum / Brussels: Mercatorfonds; Yale University Press, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> A classical study on the portrait is Brilliant, Richard 1991 *Portraiture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Attempts to move beyond that view can be found in Woodall, Joanna (ed.), *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*. Manchester, 1996: Manchester University Press. The term *allo-portrait* was first used by Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe 1979 *Portrait de l'artiste, en general* Paris: Christian Bourgois (91) and developed more by Hirsch, Marianne 1997 *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (ch.3).

- 3 Alphen, Ernst van 2005 "The Portrait's Dispersal", included in a volume of his essays, *Art in Mind, How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (21-47).
- 4 Liedtke, Walter, Carolyn Logan, Nadine M. Orenstein, and Stephanie S. Dickey, 1995 *Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Aspects of Connoisseurship*. Vol. II: *Paintings, Drawings, and Prints: Art-Historical Perspectives*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art / Harry N. Abrams.
- 5 In this sense, genre concepts are like those "metaphors we live by" theorized by Lakoff and Johnson in their book *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1980; 1999). On the mirror stage, see Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience." In *Ecrits: A Selection*. Ed. and trans. Alan Sheridan, 1-7. New York: W.W. Norton (1977).
- 6 Cat. Nr A 73. Tümpel is among the most eager de-attributionists of Rembrandt paintings, surpassing the Rembrandt Research Project on this respect.
- 7 I have developed this view of facing on an article on a video installation based on it. See "In Your Face: Migratory Aesthetics." In *The Culture of Migration: Politics, Aesthetics and Histories*, edited by Sten Pulz Moslund, Anne Ring Petersen and Moritz Schramm. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015, 147-170.
- 8 See Zwijnenberg, Robert (1999). *The Writings and Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci - Order and Chaos in Early Modern Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 9 For an in-depth discussion of the case of Douglass see chapter 2 in Ernst van Alphen, *Failed Images: Photography and Its Counter-Practices*, Amsterdam: Valiz 2018.
- 10 Tzvetan Todorov, *Goya à l'ombre des lumières*. Paris: Flammarion, 2008. The self-portrait by Goya that lacks all narcissism, and I would add, comes closer to caricature than to self-portraiture, is the 1820 painting *Self-Portrait with Arrieta*, at the fine Arts Museum in Minneapolis.
- 11 I have developed this concept in order to foreground Munch's radically innovative mode of painting, that tends to remain unseen or undervalued, due to an overdose of biographical information. See chapter 10 of my 2017 book *Emma & Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*. Oslo, the Munch Museum / Antwerp, Mercator Fonds / New Haven, Yale University Press.



