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*Fashioning the Self*

The piece discusses the realism of portraits and other reflections of real persons in an interpretive form. The reading also addresses the relationship between the artist and the subject and the viewer. The artist is seen as an interpreter and intermediary. When a subject allows himself to be interpreted as a portrait he is opening himself up to be viewed by the world as well as opening his entire self to the artist for interpretation and analysis. This analysis is of the life of the person, which the reading states is the only true subject of a portrait. The reading reminds me that in portraiture it is very important for elements of the person that makes the person unique be present. An aspect of portraiture that is addressed that I had never considered before is its scale. The reading makes note of Lenin's huge portrait in Leningrad. Such a grandiose piece of work is used to show the personality and perhaps the ego of this figure who considered himself to be larger than life. Scale has nothing to do with how memorable portraits are however. An artist's portraits are rarely judged on the artistic value of the work itself, but on the person portrayed and how well the portrait portrays the personality and overall known figure of the person. Mechanical means are briefly discussed, but for portraiture I find mechanical means to be tacky, impersonal and lacking in artistic value. Painting as an art form began as a way of keeping records, and then was replaced in technological procession by much



more accurate means. A camera can not lie, and for historical purposes that is wonderful, however, the camera misses a lot. A camera can not extract hidden emotions or project a coldness that enters a room with a person. An artist can interpret these things and place them into a portrait. If a coldness enters the room with a person, darker colors and colors more towards deep blues can be used to show these things. Cameras have historically had problems handling proper reproduction of the human eye. It is said that the eyes are the window to the soul of a person. In portraits done well it is possible to go up to the portrait and look into the eyes of the subject and see the emotions of the person at the moment the portrait was painted. The hue of an eye color can make an enormous difference in the overall mood of a painting. Deep blue eyes may project fear and a sense of situational control, but go a few shades lighter and the eyes are of compassion, sensitivity and submission.

A portrait whether mechanical or done by hand is merely a window into a person, and many ways exist to view that window. Busts are usually popular for official images of dictators and dignitaries, whereas standing full body shots are more appropriate for English gentlemen. In the United States one of the most popular portrait “views” is of a southern belle sitting in her best dress holding a parasol, this shows the women in her element during this time in her life.

Physiognomy of portraits is mostly irrelevant when planning for a portrait, as everyone seems to know what is expected for their particular portrait based on historical notions and what has been classically defined as being appropriate for that type of portrait.



The reading introduces a very unusual feeling for the reader from an artistic perspective, the perception of multiple personalities attached to a single physical presence. In modern psychology this is called dissociative personality disorder and is considered to be abnormal and in need of correction. From the perspective of an artist there can be no better way to view a self. The splitting of personalities and personality traits allows individual aspects of a person to be captured in portraits and allows for an artistic balance to be created. Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde comes to mind for many when dissociative personality disorder is described from an artistic point of view, but it doesn't have to be good and evil sides portrayed. Seeing a differentiation between professional and casual sides of a person is typically the perfect complement, or in the case of some other artists from earlier this semester, self-portraits with a time delay, a complement of young and old.

Portraits are the most intimate form of art for all concerned, the artist, the viewer and especially the subject. The artist the interpreter, the viewer the guest and the subject the critic.

