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INDIVIDUALISM IN PORTRAITURE:
ACCOUNTING FOR THE PEOPLE IN OUR LIVES IN IDENTITY REPRESENTATION

by

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Abstract

      This joint research and creative honors project challenges the traditional painted portrait of Western culture. I do this through a study of the history of portraiture compared to construction of identity in the contemporary world. I argue that the traditional portrait of a single and serious individual doesn't truly express what it means to be human today. Instead, I propose that a "sociological portrait" may be more accurate because it accounts for both the large, societal constructs that shape our identity as well as our more personal and emotional states. I argue that the most accurate way to unite those tensions within each person is through relationships—that the way our family interacts with us shapes what our gender is, that the religious beliefs of my best friend shape my own, that the racial experiences of my non-white friends shape the way I view my whiteness. In this paper, I explain in greater depth what I mean by this kind of portrait. I also reference my body of artwork based on this theory, called *Being Me Because of You*.

I. INTRODUCTION

What do you see when you hear the word "portrait"? Chances are, you imagine a canvas of a seated individual looking solemnly in a specific direction and titled with said individual's name. It's probably something like the portraits of George Washington or Paul Revere that we see in history textbooks in elementary school. We are taught that the portrait is the truest version of these men, who are standing stoically by themselves, intentionally chosen and posed by the artist. The nature of portraiture indeed leads us to believe that "a named person seems to exist somewhere within or behind the portrait" (Brilliant 46). The question since the invention of portraiture has been, then, how to capture that person's essence most effectively.

The persistence of the genre indeed proves that in our Western culture we believe that the individual is something worth being explored. We are intrigued by ourselves psychologically and emotionally and proud of ourselves for our accomplishments. Portraiture serves as a genre for both exploring and commemorating these individualized aspects of ourselves. In a time when portraiture is coming out of an age for its disregard—during both the modern and contemporary movements—it remains essential exactly because it is a reflection on the state and interests of this world. Sandy Nairne, former director of the National Portrait Gallery in London, believes that "the portrait remains central to artistic practice as an essential way of exploring the world through representations of the people in it." The sustained essentiality of the portrait proves one thing to me: we in the West inherently value individualism. Even though we do not often have our portraits painted these days, we live in a way that suggests that we want people to know who we are, and what we look like, independent from the rest. For example, we create virtual profiles of ourselves, a twist on a "portrait," on Facebook; we create résumés that should convey how we

"stand out" from all the other applicants; and we all have a secret dream of being a celebrity or at the very least of being remembered for generations. Western, capitalistic culture inundates us with questions like "why should I hire *you*?" that pressure us to be completely original and completely independent. Democracy tells us that we are each unique and each have a voice, a vote, a freedom to be ourselves. And so, even as portraiture changes and may not today look anything like a Colonial portrait, one aspect has never changed: the individual is central.

It's easy to understand why. Our bodies are the only consistent thing that never leaves or is separated from us. Because we are tied to our bodies, then, we in the West find it is easiest to literally embody our accomplishments, our emotions, our history, into the most obvious image we can project for others—our face. Therefore it makes sense that we have, for centuries, made portraits of our faces or busts to commemorate our status, our occupation, or some aspect of our social identity.

But instead of finding these clear-cut, bust-composition portraits today, it is more likely that we find portraits that challenge a specific facet of identity. Artists ask, for example, how does my gender stereotype affect my identity? How does my society's beauty ideal affect my identity? These portraits walk somewhere in between wearing a mask and grappling with identity in the context of society. Sonia Boyce, for example, explores her African and British identities, and how white western stereotypes affect her African identity by distorting images of African people in the media with people like Tarzan and Rambo (Fig. 17). These portraits acknowledge that society's frameworks are a significant chunk of how a person in today's world forms their individuality—for better or worse.

What this means in today's world for the average person is radically similar to what Boyce is questioning, and perhaps we are all becoming more aware of it. With the rise of

globalization and migration, conversations about cultural appropriation and originality, and the pressure to create endless profiles of ourselves—Facebook for the social self, LinkedIn for the work self, Instagram for the artsy self, etc.—we have become hyper-conscious of who we are and how we look. As a result of being more aware of identity, we are becoming more aware of ourselves as constructions, as fragmented experiences that are impossible for another person to fully know. And this is a shift. As Richard Brilliant explains, in the 19th century there was a conception of the individual as a "bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe." Meanwhile the 20th century has departed from that view in favor of doubt about the reality of an individual, because of the rise of a "variety of factors, commonly accepted as causing fragmentation of self," including things like the rise of Marxism, sociology's insistence on a social rather than personal identity, and increasing doubts of philosophers about the reality of self (Brilliant 171). What this means is that we are able to segment different facets of our identity—that we separate our gender, race, religion, wealth, personality, etc. instead of examining our selves as wholes. Or in another sense, we may have a work self, a social self, a home self, a college self, a traveling self, etc. Instead of a cohesive life experience, many people use the word "compartmentalized" to describe our varied experiences in life.

So, how can we reorient a long-standing and rich art-making tradition to align better with our 21st century understanding of the individual as fragmented? I argue that there is one question not asked enough during identity-examination in contemporary portraiture—"Who are we in context of each other?" By defining ourselves in context of each other, all of the fragments of our identities are valid but don't necessarily have to be cohesive. By defining ourselves in context of each other, we can express pain and joy, just as those relationships truly create for us in our daily lives. By defining ourselves in context of each other we can talk about how race and

socioeconomic status impact our lives in a personal sense instead of an archetypal, big picture sense. Certainly race and gender are important aspects of our identity which are created in relationships, but here I want to point out that portrait's like Boyce's operate at a stranger-level instead of a personal-level—which fails to be a portrait in its limiting of Boyce's personal narrative. I am suggesting, instead of traditional solemn busts or contemporary explorations of a single facet of identity, that we can visually define ourselves by how we are cared for and the relationships we choose *because of* how they impact our gender, race, religion, etc. I am challenging the detached nature of individualism of the past and instead asking how we can reorient what it means to be an individual in context of our personal *and* cultural relationships.

While some artists are already exploring this idea, it is primarily done through contemporary means of performance and socially engaged art, like the work of Angelika Böck or Anthony Gormley which I will discuss later, that are based on community-interaction documented by photography. I am interested, however, in how our developing notions of identity can remain in touch with traditional forms of portrait making—that is, painting—while continuing to challenge how we go about defining who we are. I am pursuing this traditional, 2-D form of portrait making not because painting is necessarily the best medium for portraiture, but because I am directly challenging society's tradition of portrait making, which happens to be oil painting. I want to make portraits that are in the same "language," if you will, as the ones that have defined beauty and success standards in the West. That decision will prove that painting isn't less conducive to my proposal than, say, performance-based art and therefore is not an inherent fault of oils that the sociological lens hasn't been previously explored in this medium. To challenge the way we make portraits, I am, in essence, removing one of the factors that will impact the results to better highlight the real shift I am emphasizing.

II. HISTORY OF PORTRAITURE: Tracing Individualism

Since portraiture is a direct reflection and portrayal of identity, it is easy to trace portraiture through movements that parallel historical shifts. I am going to walk through the evolution of portraiture through time and how societal shifts have impacted the portraits, reflecting on how ways of forming identity have adjusted through time.

Portraiture as we think of it today in our Western context emerged around the time of the Renaissance, not uncoincidentally at the same time as what has been called "The rise of self-consciousness." Due to the Black Plague and corruption in the Church, the people during that era felt obligated to rely on themselves for knowledge as they watched their government and the religious structures crumble around them (Kresser). This was one of the first major periods of identity crisis that resulted in works of art that preserved the secular individual's face. The people of the Renaissance started to value their individual self-worth so much that they created these portraits, knowing they would be seen for years to come. We are direct witnesses to their desire to be seen as individuals seriously contemplating their lives and decisions, as in Jan van Eyck's self portrait, *Man in a Red Turban* from 1433 (Fig. 1)*,* wherein Van Eyck confronts us with a squinting stare. As the inventor of oil paints and arguably the first portraitist since ancient times, van Eyck emphasizes his intellect in this work by painting only his head against a dark and restricted background. This portrait is fascinating because it is devoid of contextual references. We can see barely any of Van Eyck's outfit, since the portrait is cut off around the shoulders, and Van Eyck's pale face and bright red turban glow against the dark background. We don't know where he is, and there are no symbolic references around him to give hints at his personality. What we see is an individual in all his self-sufficiency and independence, speaking for himself. In this way, this portrait is predictive of the portraits to

come—Van Eyck is presenting his mind and psyche just by the way he is looking out at the viewer with a quizzical and arrogant stare. It is his face and his intelligence, and nothing else that defines who he is.

Other portraits from a little after this time and from a little farther south in Italy revolved more around social standing than individual personality. If we compare the sculptural portrait of Bartolomeo Colleoni by Verocchio (Fig. 2) and the portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni by Ghirlandaio (Fig. 3), both created in 1488, we see that both present the archetype of their respective genders rather than specific information about the subjects as individuals. Colleoni is a massive bronze statue on horse, vibrating with power as a commanding military leader—in fact it is unlikely that Verocchio had ever seen Colleoni, and so this artwork is a creation of a man like him rather than Collenoi himself. Tornabuoni, meanwhile, is presented in profile with a flat expression, looking more like an ideal construction of beauty and intelligence in a Renaissance Italian woman than like Giovanna Tornabuoni herself (West 149). Already we are seeing how hard it is to navigate between individual expression of personality and the archetypal factors of our identity that shape us.

During the Reformation Era in the mid-1500s, the presiding form of portraiture was of royalty—evidencing another function of portraiture, which is to capture status and power. Whether Francis I in France (Fig. 4), Anne of Cleves in England, or Philip II in Spain, everyone of power with enough wealth had their portrait painted. Usually a three quarters view and with a solemn expression, cut off just above the stomach, the 1500s portraits are strikingly similar to each other and mostly absent of any personality. As with the portrait of King Henry VIII, the goal of these portraits was to command attention and preserve the sitter's power and memory beyond the grave. The intention of these portraits was not to capture the complexity and

individuality of their leaders, but instead portray a leader that was easy to rally around and to heighten national pride.

Rembrandt, the Dutch genius, is considered the first master of portraiture and sheds considerable light on what the psychological capacity for portraiture could be. He was intent on capturing the unique gaze and gesture of his sitters, going through multiple versions of the same picture, creating around seventy portraits of himself (Fig. 25) and creating multiple portraits of select other people including his wife and mother. He certainly created many society portraits, like *The Portrait of Marten Soolmans* (Fig. 5), who stands poised and in his best clothes in front of a curtain. When he transitioned into his later form of portraiture, which included a more pasty application of paint and even more gestural and atmospheric rendering, he was rejected by society. At this time, the clean, regal portrait was preferred to the messy and psychological one. Yet, Rembrandt was foreshadowing the looser and more psychological form of portraiture that would become most respected later on in history. He pushed portraiture to a new level of self-consciousness, transitioning between the more formal "status" portrait and the more middle class "individualized" portrait.

When the monarchies were thoroughly dissolved in the nineteenth century, portraiture underwent a shift to appeal to the bourgeois class. Instead of functioning as displays of rank and power, as monarchical portraits did, portraits of the rising middle class challenged that perfected façade and were more apt to depict physical deformities or their sitters' informal/intimate settings (West 86). This is seen in the juxtaposition of the *Portrait of Marie Antoinette* from 1778 (Fig. 6) with the portrait of *Dr. Samuel Johnson* from just a few years earlier in 1772 (Fig. 7). Marie-Antoinette is placed at a distance in a massive palace room, looking off to into her palace as if asking for the viewer to consume her confidently bored poise. We as the viewers are

not close enough to interact with her; rather we are seated fifteen to twenty feet away, which forces us into the role of just looking at her. Meanwhile Dr. Johnson sits close to the viewer and peers at her as if attempting to understand the interaction taking place—he seems to be thinking "Who are you? What are we talking about?" The emphasis is placed on his intelligence in this portrait because of his quizzical expression and large head. This intelligence is a personal attribute that he has worked for in his career and chosen to be identified by, whereas Marie-Antoinette seems bored by the identity she has been born into. It is in this pondering expression and quality of paint that we see hints of Rembrandt. These bourgeois portraits are leaning away from a polished mask of authority and toward self-defined elements of individual work, psychology, and quirks, embracing identity found in and of ourselves separate from the domineering structures of society.

With portraits like Dr. Samuel Johnson's, all of a sudden we see Western portraiture diverge into a newfound territory of self-consciousness, because for the first time the individual has increased ability to choose their identity by work rather than birth. West attributes this type of portraiture to the rise of specialization of labor in the nineteenth century when emerged professionals in medicine, law, the military, education and science; they received so much recognition for their work that their identities became formulated by their work (86). Brilliant affirms this, saying the "identity of a person in the nineteenth century was more and more established on the basis of what he or she did, or had done, than by birth." It is not a coincidence that there was a simultaneous rise in capitalistic and democratic ideologies in the whole Western world. The emphasis on production and individual power, in conjunction with specialization of labor, placed even more emphasis on a human's value being found in their occupation, beginning to hint at where our culture today originates.

However, with the rise of modernism at the turn of the century, the norms for how to depict a person radically changed, because the styles and techniques of painting radically changed. During this time, with the rise of Cubism, Expressionism and Post-Impressionism, portraiture could be seen more as stylistic experimentation than as pure representation (West 194). The invention of photography around this time released the painter from the type of portrait whose primary aim was to preserve likeness, freeing the artist to expand the potential of portraiture. Figurative work did not disappear from this time period—it just changed into something that arguably wasn't even portraiture. It became a vehicle for avant-garde interests over individual representations; using the human face in some cases for commentary on the human condition and in some cases as a motif, color study, or subject for Cubism (or any other period style). More than ever before, artists didn't have to be concerned with status, likeness, presentation, and propaganda in their portraits. Whistler, for example, titled his portraits in a way that suggested that colors were the primary subject over the human. In *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* (Fig. 10)*,* from 1871, he paints a very personal and sentimental figure in his life, but downplays that to elevate the formal qualities of the painting, in this case the tones of the palette. Similarly, Matisse painted a portrait of his wife titled *Portrait of Madame Matisse with a Green Stripe* in 1905 (Fig. 11). In this case, he did declare the painting a "portrait," yet he clearly viewed "the green stripe" as a prominent aspect of the painting, and in this way he put significance not on his wife's likeness *or* her individuality, but on what the paint can do.

Van Gogh's self-portraits, meanwhile, explore the human condition rather than the formal qualities that Matisse and Whistler were more interested in. His collection of works that depict his face are assuredly portraits of himself, but they are concerned with psychology rather

than likeness. In order to convey the depth and confusion of his mind, Van Gogh chose to exaggerate certain facial features, and his mental unrest was reflected in the way he applied the paint in short, bold strokes (Fig. 12). Indeed, in Van Gogh's *Self Portrait* of 1889, the background swirls that Van Gogh is famous for absolutely convey the undulating turmoil of his mind. The background in this case sets the mood of the painting that we as the viewers can then project onto the subject, Van Gogh himself. This painting is not about either the formal qualities of the painting or about Van Gogh's personal narrative based on social constructions, but it instead heavily expresses his inner life and psychology.

By the mid- to late-1900s, America ran into a representational road block, pushing what the modernists had started even further. If the early modernists used the human form as an object for their artistic experiments, the Abstract Expressionists completely ignored the human form in favor of their artistic experiments. Mimetic objects no longer received the praise they once did; the symbolic qualities of still life objects—or any object from real life—were of less interest than the more universal vocabulary afforded to color, form, and line of abstraction. What this allowed for, then, was for portraiture to depart from mimesis and focus on gesture and energy, which could arguably be more representative of an individual than the face (Fortune 34). Consequently portraits could be made that looked more like fields of color than a specific individual, as with Willem De Kooning's portrait *Marilyn Monroe* (Fig. 13)*,* which hints at the form of a blonde woman with carnal red breasts and lips amidst aggressive and seemingly randomly placed swaths of color.

As soon as portraits started to become more and more abstracted, the next step became object-based portraiture—a slippery slope, if you will. The gradual drift in types of "accurate" representation made it possible for art history to reach a point where the human could be "best"

represented through objects. For example, Felix Gonzalez-Torres in 1991 (Fig. 14) chose to represent his deceased partner in what appears to be a pile of candy. Taking apart the metaphor, it is revealed that the portrait is interactive, asking its viewers to take a candy from the 175 pound pile, which is Ross' ideal body weight. As viewers take candies, Ross' weight symbolically diminishes as his real weight did while suffering from AIDS. The pile is continuously replenished, giving Ross an eternal life through art. Taken literally, this artwork doesn't seem to be a portrait, if an artwork at all. But through the release of mimesis as most accurate portrayal, we arrive at the point where our face almost becomes seen as a mask of our true selves and symbolic objects become more revealing of character and struggle.

Portraiture's consistent appearance in our Western culture absolutely points to our desire to uphold and dignify individual people. Through history, we see the individual being defined by 1) a specific behavioral characteristic conveyed through facial mannerisms (van Eyck), 2) archetypal gender expectations (Colleoni and Tornabuoni), 3) power and social standing (all monarchs), 4) work accomplishments (Dr. Samuel Johnson), and 5) psychology (Van Gogh). With all of these approaches to portraiture, there is a tension between the larger society and the individual. No matter what aspect of our identity society has chosen to emphasize—whether our gender, our economic status, our intelligence, or our work—we have striven to maintain individuality despite social pressures. All of the portraits I highlighted from the Renaissance until the late-18th century Enlightenment featured single people, by themselves in a space, attempting to stand out from the rest of society. Even though portraiture since modernism has struggled to retain value and prestige, I believe we see modern artists laying the groundwork for the decades to come, thereby allowing contemporary portraiture to become what it is today.

III. CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITURE

Overall, it seems the movement today in contemporary artwork is to use portraiture to work through identity issues rather than to tell a unique narrative or to declare status, as was more prevalent in the earlier periods I just discussed. This indicates that our self-consciousness has risen to a new level—that the common individual doesn't just think about who they are as an individual, but realizes how society has constructed and shaped specific facets of their identity. This discussion is also becoming a part of mainstream culture. "Identity" is becoming a buzzword—racial identity, gender identity, sexual identity, religious identity, geographic identity. These are all cultural inventions of categorization that each individual can place themselves into. West says of our world today that, "there has been a greater self-consciousness on the part of artists about the implications of the age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and other signs of their sitters' identity" (205). This is directly tied to the quote from Richard Brilliant that I included at the beginning of this paper, where Brilliant explains that we as individuals today have a tendency to fragment our different aspects of identity instead of seeing ourselves as whole, bounded individuals.

We are breaking ourselves down into these different aspects to attempt to better understand how we become who we are. We are interested in how a part can inform, and even define, a whole. We pursue this to such an extent, though, that the part begins to override other aspects, I believe. Artists have all different approaches for discussing identity with new media, but the strength of the trend is undeniable.

Yasumasa Morimura, for example, takes photographic self-portraits of himself as a myriad of Western icons. These reveal little about his individuality, but more strongly make commentary on how the umbrella Western culture is engulfing and confusing other cultures—

which for him and many minorities today is a large part of their identity struggle. Morimura takes portraits of himself as Marilyn Monroe (Fig. 19), the Girl with a Pearl Earring, Frida Kahlo, Olympia from the famed Titian and Manet paintings, Cindy Sherman herself, Audrey Hepburn, multiple dictators, the list goes on. The photographs are commentary primarily on masculinity and Japanese identity and its relation to Western empire. These are completely masterful and jarring portraits because of how they subvert our cultural norms, but they function specifically for and within a milieu obsessed with fragmented identity.

Similarly, Jenny Saville paints portraits that are entirely about the body (Fig. 16). Her paintings exaggerate and emphasize the manipulation and categorization of women by the appearance of their bodies. By painting her subjects in the nude, with incredibly fleshy paint application, at a huge scale, Saville is forcing us to confront how we label the body—especially stigmas around fatness and femininity. She, in fact, "openly rejects the idea that her work is about portraiture" and instead treats the figure as "a site for vulnerability, revulsion, intimacy and anxiety" (Higgins 184). Her use of the figure doesn't capture a personal essence but instead is a commentary on the body and how much we are each judged by our own bodies, in a way that alienates and contorts us. The body is the ultimate container of ourselves, and carries all of our identities in it and on it.

While figurative works like Morimura's or Saville's are arguably not portraits, because they aren't concerned with individual expression as much as archetype, these works are relevant to the discussion on how figurative pieces are used to express identity. Sometimes they intend to express identity in a very personal and narrative way, which comes closer to portraiture, and sometimes in a more archetypal or political way, which moves away from portraiture towards commentary on the human condition. Both are relevant because there are at least two levels to

who we are: personal and stranger levels. With the presence of artists like Morimura, Saville, Sonia Boyce, and others like Cindy Sherman, I believe we see artists today more engaged with the "stranger-level" portrait that tells a superficial story than a deeply personal story.

That type of identity portrait that has emerged in the contemporary art world is evidence that individuals today are using portraiture to engage in vulnerable and honest explorations of how we are constructed by society—these artists ironically put on certain masks to shed light onto the stereotypes. Where portraiture up until this point was often used to construct masks representing an idealized identity (the sitter's power, their status, their career) this new type of figurative work critiques social stereotypes rather than uncritically, or even unconsciously, embracing them.

Angelika Böck expands on the efforts of these artists, making a more concerted effort to talk about identity formation through less traditional means like participatory art. She explores the concept of cultural definitions of individuality by visiting different cultures and having them create a portrait of her in whatever their tradition is. With her group of work *Smell Me* (2011), she visits Mongolian herdsmen, whose welcoming ritual is mutual sniffing. She asks them to sniff her and proceeds to record their description of her on a snuff bottle, a significant object of cultural exchange and respect. In 2005, she went to the Sami people in northern Scandinavia, where they are known to develop "yoiks," which are essentially sung alternatives to their spoken names. She spent a week with five different Samis so they could experience her fully and honestly before writing a yoik for her. This intentional barrier-breaking practice happened with three other people groups, ending in bodies of work called, *Smell Me, Seek Me, Name Me, Track Me,* and *Tell Me* completed over a span of six years (Fig 29 and 30). Not only was Böck's goal to work collaboratively and socially with these people, but she was also interested in issues of

portrayal, more specifically the possibility of making a faceless portrait. Her work is departing from the traditional portrait in so many ways—by its social relevance, the reversal of roles between artist and sitter/collaborator, and the abandonment of the face. This work comes out of her belief that "ways of seeing are often perceived as individual acts, but are, in fact, at the same time greatly influenced by social and cultural factors, and often collectively shared" (Böck 13). Because of how she is dignifying and sharing their non-Western cultures with the West, Böck's work is a perfect confluence of factors that point to how contemporary art and portraiture are leaning not only towards issues of identity but also toward social-awareness.

Another artist who thinks socially is Anthony Gormley. In 2009, he created a 100 day performance-based portrait called "One and Other" in Trafalgar Square (Fig. 31). Every hour for 100 days, a new individual stood on one of the main plinths in the square for the whole public to see. Gormley was creating a national portrait of Britain, and these 2,400 individuals were randomly selected and allowed to do anything or dress as they liked while standing on the plinth. The work's location in Trafalgar Square was significant not only because Trafalgar Square is heavily trafficked and central location, but because it is associated with military, heroic male statues and accomplishments. Gormley's work places the every-day individual literally on the same pedestal as military heroes. Gormley is embracing a shift in diversity and individuality by allowing for such a range of citizens to take part in his national portrait. But by placing these "ordinary" individuals on a plinth for all to see, he is also commenting on the narcissism and voyeurism prevalent in contemporary society—he is embracing how we tend to present ourselves as if everyone is watching us (Higgins 133-135).

Böck and Gormley are both moving portraiture in the direction I think it should be moved. Böck is allowing the "other," essentially any person who is not herself, to define her.

Rather than struggling to maintain a self-cultivated image of her identity, she is asking other people how they perceive her and forming relationships through that process, being very aware of culture and how that background shapes our self-knowledge. Through this work, she is showing that our Western notion of portrayal through mimesis is highly specific to us, and not necessarily the best indicator of self. I am interested in how Böck's type of portrait can be created by people without means to travel across the world and within the constraints of a traditional, painted 2-D portrait.

Gormley, meanwhile, emphasizes the individual as a part of a whole, and our individuality as essential within the whole. While he is giving dignity and influence to the common man of Britain, what Gormley's portrait lacks, in my opinion, is interaction between individuals. He presents the portrait of Britain as a kind of photograph of each person, still solitary and demanding individualized attention. However, a society is created through the interaction of people, ideas, and ideals. A society isn't built up by an individual's actions but instead by what an individual may do for someone, or may lead others to, or may accomplish through teamwork. Gormley created a beautiful portrait, but in my opinion he did not take it far enough. The socially-engaged portraits produced by Böck and Gormley are unique to and born within our contemporary society, and certainly their popularity will continue to increase as performance art gains more popularity and authority.

However, the presiding form of portraiture today is still the 2-D painted bust. I want to emphasize that despite the inventive, multi-media portraiture being created, the primary form of portraiture is still 2D painting. I can't talk about contemporary portraiture without talking about this other type of portrait that Western standards have normalized and ingrained into us. In fact, as I said earlier, when people hear the word "portrait," instead of thinking of a portrait like

Gormley's, their first inclination is probably to think "face and shoulders with a serious expression." This is what I call "the self-reflective portrait" that rests strongly in Western tradition, born from Van Eyck's self-portrait. By "self-reflective" I mean a portrait that usually has a psychological element of introspection—often apparent anxiety, contemplation, or soft contentment. Usually these portraits are of one individual, often making direct eye contact with the viewer. They are meant not just to capture likeness, but the psychological life of the person. We are in a period where we reject pure mimesis as productive of the most appropriate portrait, but if combined with some expression or coloring of the individual's inner life, the 2D portrait could be regarded as extremely successful because of the 2D format's ability to both tell narrative and reference the past.

I am going to use the winners of the BP Award at the National Portrait Gallery, one of the most prestigious awards for contemporary portrait artists, as a kind of sample group for what the best artists are producing and what the best critics are attracted to and label as "the best" (Fig.s 20-22). Again, I am not arguing that the 2D portrait is the end-all-be-all of portraiture (indeed I have a lot of respect for non-traditional work like that of Böck and Gormley), I am merely interested in how to reinvent a traditional and dying form of 2D portraiture that institutions like the National Portrait Gallery are striving to preserve. In looking at the twenty-six works that have won this award, painted every year since 1990, I am interested in what aesthetic and behavioral decisions have been made that lead to these portraits being hailed as the most true and accurate. Here are my findings:

Portraits with a single figure: 18 out of 26

With two figures: 5 out of 26

More than two figures: 3 out of 26

At least one figure making eye contact with the viewer (external unity): 15 out of 26

At least one figure looking at another figure in the painting (internal unity): 1 out of 7

Of the single figures, ones making eye contact with viewer: 11 out of 18

With serious expressions: 25 out of 26

Serious expression *and* eye contact with the viewer: 14 out of 26

I think it is very significant that 69% of the winning portraits are individual figures, and that 61% of those are making eye contact with the viewer. This type of portrait is a strong declaration of self, even if it's an acceptance of uncertainty and anxiety as to the sitter's state of being. We, the viewers, look at them and they can stare at us with an arresting and unceasing look that, despite their anxiety, presents them as very confident in their individuality. In fact, 96% of the portraits wear serious expressions, where by "serious" I mean that they wear some apparent anxiety or entirely flat expression. Only one portrait, of an elderly nude woman, is wearing a slight smile. What does this say about our idealized Western method of portrayal? That we are serious and solitary individuals.

And there certainly must be something true about that because of how apparent it has been in the history of portraiture. Rembrandt, the first great portraitist, after all, expressed the constant flux of tension between all states of "individuality." He produced dozens of self-portraits, and a plethora of other portraits, proving the elusive nature of the human self. He searched honestly and genuinely, as is so apparent in his own self portrait of 1660 (Fig. 25). He looks earnest, yet patient, and honest, but demanding. We are fascinated by ourselves, but never truly understand who we are and what we do. By looking at ourselves (in the sense of artist looking at the sitter, viewer looking at the sitter, and sitter looking back at both of them) we are expressing our curiosity, which intrinsically rests in a state of seriousness. The search for "self"

within that visual vocabulary has persisted ever since. I am not exempt from this conundrum of self, yet I still contend that looking outside of ourselves may shed some light on why we are the way we are on the inside.

So, in addressing the world of contemporary portraiture, I am suggesting that there seems to be a disconnect between the traditional artists that are pursuing these serious, self-reflective, 2D portraits and the artists creating inventive, performative, socially-engaged portraits. Both are relevant and prevalent because they express two important aspects of human life—the personal and emotional aspect, and the socially constructed aspect, respectively—but the gap between them is of concern to me. In a human life, these two forces are non-separable and formative of both who we are and who we become. How can portraiture reflect that tension?

IV. CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY FORMATION

But before I can answer that question, I need to talk more about the solutions and methods the average, non-artist American uses to express their identity. Indeed, we primarily rely on social media for that. The self-consciousness phenomenon has never left Western culture, it has only evolved in alliance with culture. Social media allows for each individual to construct their own identity through a "fill-in-the-blank" kind of format. The profiles are created explicitly for public consumption, just as painted self-portraits were. The distinction is that the "social media portrait" is an identity constructed by the self where the traditional "painted portrait" is an identity constructed by the artist. This gives the individual today even more control over who they are—what they want to show of themselves—whereas in traditional portraits the artist had to decide what was most essential about the sitter.

Yet, even as we complain about Facebook profiles being shallow and dishonest, the painted portraits of wealthy landowners and nobility also created poised and manipulated identities. Power and wealth was today's "coolness." As Brilliant witnesses in his study of portraiture, images are almost always subject to stereotyping—"mental representation of another in these circumstances is effected by prior exposure…and by the general tendency to categorize all persons encountered, especially those we do not know well, in order to place them in context, often in clear disregard of observed idiosyncrasies or in spite of them." (Brilliant 105) We see so many issues with correct representation in art—we see Jan van Eyck's self portrait and are correct to ask, "Is he honestly self-contemplative, or is he completely egotistical?" Yet there is a level at which we all allow ourselves to fall into the specified pockets and be categorized, for as Brilliant follows up, "to be fully engaged in one's cultural milieu involves playing a role" because that is what is accepted and understood by society (108). And so, he asks the question, "Can there ever be, particularly in portraiture, some finite and unique quality that cannot be reduced to a social norm?" (109). Brilliant suggests that there isn't; portraiture therefore directly reflects the Zeitgeist of the time (111). We are inextricably bound to the place and the time we come from and find our identities within the options presented to us, or by intentional rebellion against those options.

And the way that we see ourselves has changed through time. Andrew Graham Dixon, well-known art critic and historian, wrote in the foreword of *21ˢᵗ Century Portraits,* published by the National Portrait Gallery, that, "To the Victorians, the portrait stood for fixity, absolute moral truth, an unwavering sense of personal and social identity." We see this confidence with the neoclassical portrait of George Washington or with lesser known, typical portraits of upper-middle class folk like Michael Faraday (Fig. 8) or Louise Jane Jopling (Fig. 9) painted in the 19ᵗʰ

century. And in some sense, Dixon believes, the 21st century artist is everything that the Victorian artist was not—"the contemporary artist deals not in affirmations but in questions; not in certainties but in ambiguities; not in statements of truth but in explorations of relative value" (Graham-Dixon 7).

Our lack of self-certainty results in these deeply psychological portraits of wondering, doubt, and searching. This manifests itself in curiosity about our interior life (again the "self-reflective portrait") as well as our exterior life (again, how race or gender affects our identity). This latter form results in famous artists like Cindy Sherman, mentioned above, or more recently Kehinde Wiley, who is specifically interested in exploring race in Western artwork. Wiley grapples with Western, white tradition and what it means for a black man to be living in a country where whiteness is standard. He produces both portraits of celebrities like Michael Jackson, Ice T, or Biggie as well as portraits of women he finds on the street of New York and men in his own life (Fig.s 23-24). In these portraits he is concerned not necessarily with his sitters' personal narratives, but with portrayals of their race and the power they have but were never afforded in history. These portraits, more than almost any others, are created for their time and to prompt questions about race and power in America. The strength of his work's voice will not be what it is now in 100 years because the viewers will not feel the racial tension in the same way we do now.

In this way, the contemporary portrait is inextricably bound to social interaction—made for consumption by others, made by an artist that makes judgments on the sitter. Like John Klein says, "the process of making a portrait must also be understood in social terms, as a negotiation of how the sitter's identity should be visualized in the portrait" (3). And yet, "any discussion of likeness and character isolates the individual from society" and therefore analyzing a portrait

without societal context is inaccurate (3). As with Jan van Eyck's self-portrait, van Eyck has placed himself against a completely dark background that suffocates anything in the image other than his head, declaring that his likeness is unique enough to be preserved without reference for contextualization. While this portrait is technically accurate, I think it shows that even from the beginning Western individuals attempted to see themselves as unique and independent from life around them.

In a more in depth analysis of Matisse's many portraits, John Klein argues that Matisse's paintings of his models cannot be regarded as portraits because the sociological context is missing for them—their last names and who they are are compositionally insignificant to the painting's success because he used their life forms as a guide for the essentially fictional character he wanted to paint (237). Klein here is touching on a very significant aspect of portraiture that I value deeply—he is placing value on constructing an individual with strong regard for name and place. Any painted figure does not immediately qualify as a portrait. If that was the case, then any model study could be considered a portrait of them. This is not the case. A portrait must necessarily include specific "sociological" information. Today we persist in defining the individual through distinction from society—needing to find the "bests" and make everything we do the "firsts"—but Klein and I agree that we must analyze the individual in context of society if we are to do it correctly.

I believe for the first time we today are encountering an effort that aims to place our identity in context of the whole. Where in history we have located our identities in a power hierarchy or in our profession, today we are striving to locate our entire self (our makeup of gender, race, religion, sexuality) in the larger structure of society by hearing all of the stories that are told. We are still strongly capitalistic in the Western US, and so there are many people who

still do choose to identify by their profession and the list of words on their resume, but with the rise in popularity of people like Bernie Sanders, we must acknowledge that there is an undercurrent of communal living influencing how we identify. We are enabling ourselves to see ourselves as units of a functioning whole. The Black Lives Matter movement, for example, has no clear individual leader, rather it is "leaderfull," meaning it has lots of leaders everywhere on its staff (NPR Politics Podcast). People are starting to see themselves as significant to group movement, in addition to preserving the mentality that we are each unique.

And so, as Graham-Dixon calls for, there is development necessary for the next generation of portraiture. The NPG's book on 21st century portraiture believes that the question of ambiguity and wandering in portraiture is being reinvented and successfully explored through several different themes, including: the body, how we sit in "our necessary container;" celebrity and commissioned portraits, how we have made the celebrity into common property; observational, who we are when we are "un-self-conscious;" social portraits, how class or race or and societal aspects shape us.

I am arguing to add a new approach to how we may consider making portraits of ourselves and others: the sociological portrait. It is different from the "social" portrait in that I want it to be more wholesome and all-encompassing. Rather than exploring how one specific facet of social structure shapes our identity, I want to explore as many of the facets as possible. The more facets I can address, the closer I come to forming a complete picture of who a person is. This is my answer to the question that ended the previous section: How can portraiture reflect that tension, between personally constructed and socially constructed identities, that we hold within ourselves? Instead of exploring just my gender, just my race, just my relationship to my parents, just my demeanor, I want to see what happens when I explore all of those things in

context with each other. After all, they are not separated but united in me. To do this, I also think it is necessary to place myself in context with the other people in my life, because who I am is not grasp-able without knowing who my mother, my best friend, my boyfriend, my roommate, or my host sister are. They have all taken a role in shaping who I am. Who I am would feel incomplete without them. So, in my self-portrait, I wouldn't feel the weight of the world's questions on only my shoulders; I argue that with a sociological portrait approach, I have a place to rest my lost gaze and any heaven burden: on those around me.

V. DUTCH GROUP PORTRAITURE

This type of portrait may sound like a group portrait, and I want to clarify that it is not. The portraits I am calling for are portraits of individual people that have their influencers positioned around them. Again, this is an approach to identity formation focused less on individualism and more on socialism or communalism.

There has been an instance in the history of portraiture where the primary form of portraiture was not individualized but instead group-based portraiture. This was the era of Dutch portraiture from the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries, wherein Rembrandt and the masters around him were fascinated by familial and institutional portraits. These portraits included anywhere from a couple of individuals to upwards of forty. These portraits show the strong desire of the Baroque Dutch to be seen and defined in the context of their group, because, as we have already established, portraiture and most art is meant for public consumption. The result of these types of portraits is that the sitter's identity first and foremost is understood as belonging to the group—before status, taste or psychological state, there is group membership.

There are, of course, contextual intricacies to correctly understand what Dutch group portraiture meant beyond just saying that group identity is primary. Alois Riegl analyzes group portraiture under two main categories— those having "external unity" and those having "internal unity." The shift from external unity, or the attention paid to the viewer usually through eye contact, to internal unity, characterizes the increase in interaction of members in the portrait.

Riegl discusses Rembrandt as the most advanced of all the Dutch painters, coming during the era of painting from 1624-1662 where the image achieved momentary presence and required the viewer to complete the image because it was no longer directed just towards the viewer but relied heavily on internal narrative. Achieving internal interactions and life was what made Rembrandt's work unique, according to Riegl. However, to achieve this "internal unity," Rembrandt relied on subordination of individuals to the main protagonist.

The best example of this is the *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp,* where Dr. Tulp is performing a dissection of corpse's arm in the presence of seven other medical professionals (Fig. 26). The attention of the central three surgeons is actively engaged and concerned with Dr. Tulp's lesson, leaning in to see and hear better. The two to the left seem to thoughtfully ponder, but not as anxiously; the sixth with the membership list is more collected but still has a furrowed brow. The seventh, at the top of the triangular arrangement of figures looks directly at us, the viewer, and points his hand down toward the dissection, as if marveling to us about the wonder of Dr. Tulp's lesson. As Riegl says, what happens with these varying reactions is that they all become subordinated to Dr. Tulp because their attention converges on him. Similarly, we the viewers are subordinated to the seventh surgeon, who is subordinated to Dr. Tulp, and so we are subordinated to Dr. Tulp by transitive properties of relation (Riegl 256).

Rembrandt relies on sophisticated subordination in order to achieve this psychological life of the group, but, as Riegl points out, it isn't a kind of subordination that completely invalidates the individuality of the members. Riegl argues that because each member retains their own quality of reaction and interaction, their individuality is preserved. He calls their mannerisms "willful and active delight" at the situation. The faces of early Dutch portraits, like those in *The Civic Guard Group Portrait of 1613* (Fig. 27)*,* do interact with each other and with the viewer, but they are all rather dazed and their gestures are all rather stiff with hand motions detached from facial attention. Spatially, they are impossibly stacked on top of each other, which makes their internal coherence less believable and less momentary. Meanwhile, the figures alongside Dr. Tulp each have unique reactions and exist with each other in a reasonable space that make their story convincing.

So, their individuality, despite hierarchy, isn't entirely erased. However, two things still stand in the way of these group portraits being portraits of the protagonist, or the person who is directing attention: 1) the portraits seem to be about *the power* of the individual pictured rather than *the powerful individual* and 2) they are presented as portraits of surgeons, of regents, of the civic guard which emphasize group membership before all else. For example, if *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* was instead titled *Dr. Tulp*, the painting would take on different meaning. It would show that Dr. Tulp primarily finds his identity in teaching and his leadership role over fellow surgeons. Rather, in actuality, it is a narrative of an anatomy lesson and how the surgeons are reacting to the information, which happens to come from Dr. Tulp.

Richard Brilliant agrees with Riegl that Dutch portraiture's strong emphasis on detail and eye contact preserve individuality, but he also agrees with me that the identity of any given individual is inherently tied to the group's actions, habits or beliefs (Brilliant 93, 95). He speaks

about Frans Hals' *Officers and Sergeants of the St George Civic Guard* painted in 1639 (Fig. 28), who Riegl also considers one of the most developed of Dutch group portraitists painting in the third era of group portraits. Brilliant agrees that the placement of these individuals isn't random but intentionally reflects states of the relationships, and that the clarity of detail in the individual faces allow us as viewers to have momentary interactions with each person as we pass over their faces. However, he phrases this in the same sentence with the statement that "the integrated ensemble may prevail over the independent individual" (93). He argues that by being pictured in these portraits, they have "revealed the outward expression of each actor's personhood by virtue of his participation in the group" and make "ideological statements about the values, attitudes, and practices shared by their members" which bind them together in a "transcendental association" (96). Overall, Dutch group portraits do not fail to acknowledge each individual, especially as time goes on, but they place individuals' identity primarily as membership to the group.

VI. THE SOCIOLOGICAL PORTRAIT IN TODAY'S CULTURE

In light of contemporary society and contemporary portraiture, I am proposing a new type of portrait that I am calling the "sociological portrait." I have chosen the word "sociological" because sociology aims to understand the bigger picture of human life and the different ways of how we go about organizing ourselves. The "sociological portrait" does the same thing. It intends to look at the bigger picture of a human's life and how those bigger forces end up impacting the minutia of their personality. Therefore this type of portrait I am proposing is a portrait of an individual person, but surrounded by all of the people that most shape who they are. It is not a group portrait like that of the Dutch or even like that of Britain by the artist

Anthony Gormley where the group identifies as "British" or as the "civic guard of St. George." It is a portrait of an individual's identity and how it is drawn in bits and pieces from other people— other people who may not necessarily know each other.

This is relevant in a world today where we are moving away from our homes more and more, prioritizing career over family quite often. What this means is that when we meet new people, they don't know anything about who we are other than our career. We don't know what their childhood bedroom looked like or what ditties their grandmother sang over them their whole life. We see them in context of career, and while that is certainly appropriate at times, it is imperative that as soon as we get to know those people more intimately we can see them beyond the professional lens. For example, when my best friend, who I consider a sister, went to college, all of a sudden my picture of her was incomplete—what if she chose friends who were out of line with who I thought she would choose, what was she learning in her classes that could change her worldview or perception of our friendship? To understand her I had to understand everyone else in her life.

This is what is being asked of us today with the Black Lives Matter movement as well as the more general conversation around race—to see where we come from, to see color, to see stories, to see culture, to see each person as completely as we can. Everyone is more than their identity as a co-worker, a student, a man sitting in Starbucks with a Macbook, a homeless woman holding a sign for money.

So what are we doing, making portraits of ourselves set against dark backgrounds, saying our face best represents our self? There is certainly something to the psychology of an individual portrait, as I discussed with Rembrandt's laundry list of self-portraits, because we do get a powerful sense of an individual like Karel in *Man with a Blanket* (Fig. 22). Yet, we are more

than contemplative, more than a subtle smile on our face, more than the clothes we choose to wear. We are a summary of the people we surround ourselves with, plus a little more. In a sense, I am the sum of all the people in my life. I wonder if this is what was missing in Rembrandt's self-portrait, why he was so confounded by his own gaze, because he couldn't figure out who he was without knowing the other people in his life.

In a time where competition and needing to be the "best" and needing to be the center of attention and celebrity worship are so rampant, we must be willing to see our value and place in a group, in society. I conjecture that our sense of individualism in Western culture is linked to our intolerance of others. For example, this is why many react so negatively against policies like Affirmative Action. The idea that our government can give someone else a leg up feels like encroachment on freedom, equality, and our own ability to get a job. What Affirmative Action is doing, though, is trying to recognize that there are societal factors that shape our individual choices and opportunities. We are not just free-floating specimens that are objectively hired by our work experience—there are so many other biases built in that we can't recognize because of how enmeshed we are in our own society. I believe that if we realize how our gaze and actions impact another person, we may be less fearful of the "other." It starts on a small scale of being able to recognize how our family and friends shape us. Embracing that idea will seep out into all our interactions with people; we may eventually treat them with more reverence when we understand how interconnected all our stories are. As soon as we can think about ourselves in context of everyone else, we are necessarily more able to consider their needs.

This type of portrait is ambitious, it could be messy because of how complex a single human is, and at times large depending on how many people are necessary to include. This type of portrait may even change over time because we are not the same throughout our lives. We are

in a constant state of growth and flux, internally and externally, as new people come and old people go, altering their level of impact on us. This portrait is certainly still not capable of encapsulating anyone's whole identity exactly because of that, but it begins to show how much more we are than our face and our gaze. It is our answer to the generations of portraits that stood lost and alone, looking for something.

VII. MY RESPONSE: *BEING ME BECAUSE OF YOU*

In my work, I explore the potential of the sociological primarily through representation of people in my life, both how they define me and how I see them defining each other. I have created portraits of specific individuals and placed them alongside the people I see forming their journey. In some of the portraits the subject is not centered or may not be looking at the viewer, sometimes making it hard to tell who the main subject is; these conditions both subvert the traditional portrait, where the subject is often clearly declared by those two things. Instead, I am suggesting that personal-ness may come from the small moments of interaction and rhythm of searching for truth and life together. In life it may not be easy to recognize our beliefs to their fullest extent without others there to clarify and ask questions, so my portraits aim to reflect that give-and-take, relational nature of life.

Often my portraits take place in the context of my current house, a building that is becoming a symbol of how fifteen-odd separate stories have become one, starting to be embodied in common objects we use in our house, whether the dining room table, a couch, our plastic cups, or a coffee maker. Painting portraits also gives me the opportunity to bring together seemingly disparate elements of our lives.

I can speak best into my desires for sociological portraiture in my own self-portrait. In the introduction, I said "By defining ourselves in context of each other, all of the fragments of our identities are valid but don't necessarily have to be cohesive." This is true in my own life and portrait. I have my Spain self, my Chicago self, my Seattle self, my art self, my social self—and they don't all fit together into a beautiful, cohesive self. But still, all the fragments in me inform each other. By uniting my dining room tables from my three different homes, I am acknowledging how disjointed they are in my physical reality but how necessary it is for them to be together in one space as they are in my mental reality. I have brought together my Chicago people, Spain people, and Seattle people into the one world that is me and put objects in the tables relevant to that space. For example, I have placed a set of billiard balls in front of my best friend Veronica, who is interacting comfortably and casually with my family as she does in real life, and placed the 8-ball upwards as a symbol of our group of eight friends who gave me the confidence and risk-taking capacity I have today. On the central table, my table from Bilbao, I have the street tile of Bilbao (la baldosa de Bilbao) and the street sign of my own home, as well as the coffee maker that I use in all three of my homes. On the table in Seattle, I have nine other mugs representing the nine other people that live in my house.

While the symbolism of these objects wouldn't be understandable to every viewer, these objects are secondary to the primary emphasis on relationships and people at the table. The relationships and organization of space are what I am concerned with conveying to the audience more than the specific meanings of these objects, though they are relevant to my own personal life. For example, anyone can read the body language of the young girl sitting next to me and get a sense of our relationship, regardless of who she specifically is; similarly, since it may not be

clear what cities the three tables come from, it should at least be clear that they are three different spaces, indicated by the different shapes and different perspectives utilized.

As I move into the future with these artworks, with portraits of other people, I will still be sure to emphasize the relationships accurately. I want to be aware of how people are looking at each other, how close they are to each other, what the body language is, etc. since I am arguing that it is relationship and small moments of interaction within the bigger world that shape our identity. As I am engaging in creating portraits of other people, I see my practice moving in a direction where I am in partnership with the individual being painted. Since so much of these portraits are about inner life, I need to be sure to be conscious of and attentive to that for others as much as I was for myself.

I want this to be clear: I refuse to define myself by my face, clothing, or presentation of objects around me, but choose to define myself by the people in my life, how I interact with them, and how they interact with each other. Within that context, my gender, my race, my religion, my education, and my family life all mean something more nuanced and specific than the overarching story of "gender" in America or "race" in America. We each take societal narratives and constructs into our lives in different ways, living with them in entirely unique manners because of the singular combination of individuals in our lives. In this way, we can unite the disconnected facets of ourselves, bringing together our personal and emotional self with our public and constructed self, into one whole that is the narrative of each of our body's lives.

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Appendix:

The Pertinence of the Sociological Portrait as Regards Christian Faith

A driving force behind this project is my faith: I am a non-denominational Christian, not deeply committed to any certain practices, sacraments, or churches in my faith, but deeply committed to the model that Christ set for loving the poor and using our gifts to the best of our abilities to serve God's kingdom. I grew up in a place modeled after John Perkin's theories on wholistic, Christ-centered community development. It was the glue for my faith during an otherwise quite doubtful high school experience. My community kept me loaded with success stories that were undoubtedly touched by the hand of God that I couldn't deny without disrespecting my entire community. The significance I ascribe to that model for integration of living and faith was only affirmed by the John Perkins Center on campus and my involvement with them over the last few years.

My community is founded around a church in the inner city of Chicago, and started with asking the question "What do you, the community, need, and can we fix it?" The first problem they addressed was a church—these high school wrestlers didn't want to go to the traditional suit-and-tie, Gospel-music singing black churches, so they started their own. The second was a Laundromat. The third was a gym. This eventually grew into the more ambitious dream of a health center, which now has hundreds of employees and serves hundreds of thousands of patients per year. There is also a legal corporation to defend young men who can't pay for good legal defense, a development corporation to build affordable housing, a fitness center for a quite overweight population, a dental clinic, a long-term shelter/short-term housing for drug and alcohol addicts, the list goes on. The motto of the church is simple—"Loving God, loving people." It is the practice of loving your neighbor. You are a part of the neighborhood, feel the

struggles of the neighborhood, and work together to fix them. We have church in a gym, don't pass an offering plate, have communion once a month, we wear whatever we feel like, and the praises are graduating from college and "being clean" for x-number of years. We are the farthest thing from an intellectual church, we don't have deep exegeses about homosexual marriage or the age of the Earth. The strength of my community and being witness to how other people stories can hold your own up I think has impacted my desire for a more holistic type of portrait. Their stories and their lives have maintained my faith during its dry spells, thereby being crucial in shaping me today.

Coming to SPU changed my relationship with my faith and other Christians. I often doubted my relationship with the Bible and SPU asked me to grow into a much more articulated respect for what the book is. One of my biggest takeaways from my Bible-reading experience at SPU is that an appropriate reading of the Bible means that we have to take it in its historical context and so that it wasn't meant to address every issue we encounter today. This was affirmed in my Women's Studies class with Dr. McKinney and her strong arguments for how the Christian faith has gone through changes based on societal events and inter-Christianity reactions. I have gained so much more appreciation for the Catholic and Orthodox churches and their vision for tradition and one unified church through sacraments, much less willing to eagerly split on any issue like Protestant churches.

I still have moments where I doubt the church and wonder if God really exists at all— because after all this life could just be one grand occurrence without purpose and without life after death. But even if that is the case, I don't mind calling myself a Christian in this life. Christianity teaches me and has taught millions of others how to live a life that is honoring to others and pursues service to others in humility. Even if there is nothing to God, Christianity

encourages the most humble, joy-filled, and hope-filled lifestyle I have ever come into contact with because of how it engages *community*. Even if it's an illusion, it's the most helpful illusion I've ever encountered. Perhaps that is radical and wrong of me to say—it would be a warning sign to many that I have a default button on my faith that "justifies" it, that it's not enough to just believe fully. But it's a part of my doubting nature, what can I say? As much as Christianity is about faith in God, so much of it is about how it asks us to live, and having that quiet doubt always simmering on the backburner keeps me from losing my focus.

I believe that as much as Christianity is about faith in God, it is more about how it asks us to live. As such, I want there to be usefulness for my scholarship, knowledge, and career—which is a precise definition for what I mean by "usefulness" because certainly art isn't useful in the utilitarian sense of saving lives, or helping people save money, or providing them with a life-altering tool. Medicine is much more useful than art in that sense. But I want to pursue "usefulness" in that I need my work to fulfill a bigger picture, which for me is serving under-privileged communities. Like Paul Farmer says, I feel a need to "put up a fight" in the most John Perkins way possible. Art can be a high-culture and expensive hobby, but also has an incredibly ability to serve reconciliation when done right. As a fellow theater major and I decided in one of our many art-crisis conversations, medicine is useful in that it gives people the opportunity for living another day, but art is useful in that it gives people something to be passionate about in that day. If we follow only utility in a world that favors science and cuts art programming in elementary schools, we cultivate the mindset of "the cheerless gloom of necessity" (McGilchrist124). So, art isn't useful in that we need it to live, but is useful in that it creates community and gives us joy in living. Because art in my experience has had an incredible capacity for community building, and because I am a Christian that has seen the product of

wholistic community development, I have an obligation to use my gifts and my faith in community. It would be easy for the artist to seclude themselves off in their studio, in the world that is their imagination, much like Rothko expressed in *Red*, but that is profoundly selfish.

George Marsden had an interesting approach to what it meant to be a Christian artist versus a secular artist. He quoted Roger Lundin who explains that secular artists in the 20th century, with the rise of modernism, saw "human creators assume mammoth proportions" (Marsden 89). He further explains that "one's own creative vision [was] used to justify almost any artistic expression" in a rather God-like elevation of self. Meanwhile Christian "poets, artists, and musicians" he claims, "may be most open to giving expression to [God's] dimensions of reality, but they are there for all to perceive" (92). The difference between these two types of artists is that instead of creating profound beauty from our own intelligence, a God-driven artist will view their responsibility to convey God's ultimate creation in a unique way that could better communicate to the general human population. Essentially, instead of being God, Christian artists are serving God's vision. In my experience, art takes an incredible amount of observation and thought, regardless of faith, and requires a unique synthesis of those ideas. As such, artists are always creating new things. I think those new things can be honoring to God, like creating any new product or new service in the world. Marsden perhaps takes his theory on secular artists slightly too far, but the essence of his claim—that artists need to remember humility in their creation—stands.

My belief about what being a Christian artist means doesn't center around the idea of glorified creation but instead creation in community. I am of the opinion that everyone in the world should work for justice and closing the economic, racial, religious, etc. gaps. This would mean that even artists without a faith in God should pursue art in community, but if you are

Christian, that "should" is even more obligatory. My work with the non-profit organization in Chicago, Marwen, has shown me how individuals who are vehemently anti-religion can live, what I see, as incredibly Christ-led lives in their work. This organization serves and loves on under-privileged 6th-12th graders in Chicago by providing them with a, figurative, home where they can make art after school and on the weekends for free, and where they are aided in applying for colleges and jobs. Marwen doesn't stop at providing art classes, but embraces the idea of wholistic care for these teens. It is the most God-filled place I have ever experience and yet 110% secular.

In my own artistic practice and most body of work, I see creating the sociological portraits as a means engaging not just our inner thoughts and life but recognizing our place in the larger community. I believe this recognition and interaction is something God calls us to do— again the mantra of my church "Loving God and loving people." We have an obligation to recognize ourselves as a part of something bigger and as a neighbor to those around us. In our Advanced Topics in Reconciliation class we have been discussing that to be good reconcilers we must first know our own story and our own identity, to be working towards healing our own pain before we can ask others to do so as well. Through the process of creating these portraits, especially my own self portrait, I had to ask who was most relevant in my life, what spaces were most relevant in my life, and how I wanted all of those things and people to be interacting. It was an intentional examination of my life and my story.

What Marwen, SPU, and my community in Lawndale have raised me to believe, then, is that my scholarly work and my love of art all have to fit together to serve the kingdom of God. The Jacobsen's definition of scholarship is helpful to understand this:

The primary task of scholarship is to 'pay attention' to the world—with a sense of focus, care, and intensity that non-scholars lack…Attention to the world can mean many things. For some, understanding in and of itself is sufficient. For others— artists, poets, musicians—creative response has to be part of the package. For still others paying attention means intervening, encouraging certain outcomes and discouraging others.

This definition acknowledges that understanding is a part of scholarship, but goes so much farther with the implications of that knowledge, giving it application and concrete actions. It is important to me that we each individually be as good of citizens in this world as we can, which usually means actively contributing something. It also explains my appreciation for the work that Marwen does despite not being explicitly Christ-led. Scholarship can't be passive. Like the way that Farmer lived, I need solidity and practicality to my scholarship. Perhaps I subscribe to Liberation Theology, which I understand as the belief that God gives, but he leaves the distribution of it up to us. In our capitalist world, that's no surprise we have screwed it up. To fix it, we are responsible for being accountable for our own actions. For me, this means creating portraits that recognize our place in the world, that indicate that we are more than independent individuals but essentially bound up with the communal and global narrative. While at this point this art and this process has been just for me, I see it necessary to take this artistic practice out into schools and communities where I will work making and teaching art. I feel it an obligation to help other people find their own stories and create their own artwork about it, through running classes and helping run the organizations who are running those classes. At the very least, my resonation with Farmer's articulate analysis of Matthew 25 explains why I feel the drive to use my art for reconciling: "'When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me

something to drink. When I was a stranger, you took me in… *Then* it says, Inasmuch as you did it *not*, you're screwed'" (Kidder 185).

Catalogue of Referenced Artworks

Fig. 1: *Man in a Red Turban* Self Portrait by Jan van Eyck 1433

Fig.2: *Bartolomeo Colleoni* by Verocchio, Venice 1488

Fig. 3: *Giovanna Tornabuoni* by Domenico Ghirlandaio, Florence 1488

Fig. 4: *Francois I* by Jean Clouet 1530

Fig. 5: *The Portrait of Marten Soolmans* by Rembrandt 1634

Fig. 6: *Portrait of Marie Antoinette* by Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun 1778

Fig. 7: *Dr. Samuel Johnson* by Joshua Reynolds 1772

Fig. 8: *Michael Faraday* by Thomas Phillips 1841-1842

Fig. 9: *Louise Jane Jopling (nee Goode, later Rowe)* by Sir John Everett Millais 1879

Fig. 10: *Arrangement in Black and Grey: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* by James McNeill Whistler 1871

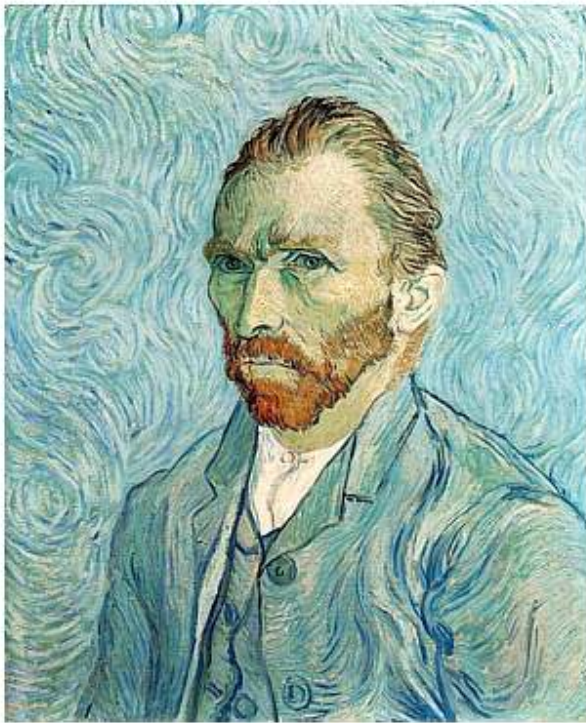Fig. 11: *Portrait of Madame Matisse with a Green Stripe* by Henri Matisse 1905

Fig. 12: *Self Portrait* by Vincent Van Gogh 1889

Fig. 13: *Marilyn Monroe* by Willem De Kooning 1954

Fig. 14: *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A)* by Felix Gonzalez-Torres 1991

Fig. 15: *Woman in a Sun Dress* by Cindy Sherman 2003

Fig. 16: *Branded* by Jenny Saville 1992

Fig. 17: *From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born 'Native' Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and Her Roots in Reconstruction* by Sonya Boyce 1987

Fig. 18: *Le Visage du 21 Siecle* by Orlan 1991

Fig. 19: *Self Portrait—after Marilyn Monroe* by Yasumasa Morimura 1996

Fig. 20: *Auntie* by Aleah Chapin 2012

Fig. 21: *Pieter* by Susanne du Toit 2013

Fig. 22: *Man with a Blanket* by Thomas Ganter 2014

Fig. 23: *Anthony of Padua* by Kehinde Wiley 2013

Fig. 24: *Equestrian Portrait of King Phillip II (Michael Jackson)* by Kehinde Wiley 2010

Fig. 25: *Self Portrait* by Rembrandt 1659-1660

Fig. 26: *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* by Rembrandt van Rijn

Fig. 27: *The Civic Guard Portrait of 1613* by Anonymous (Jan Tengnagel?)

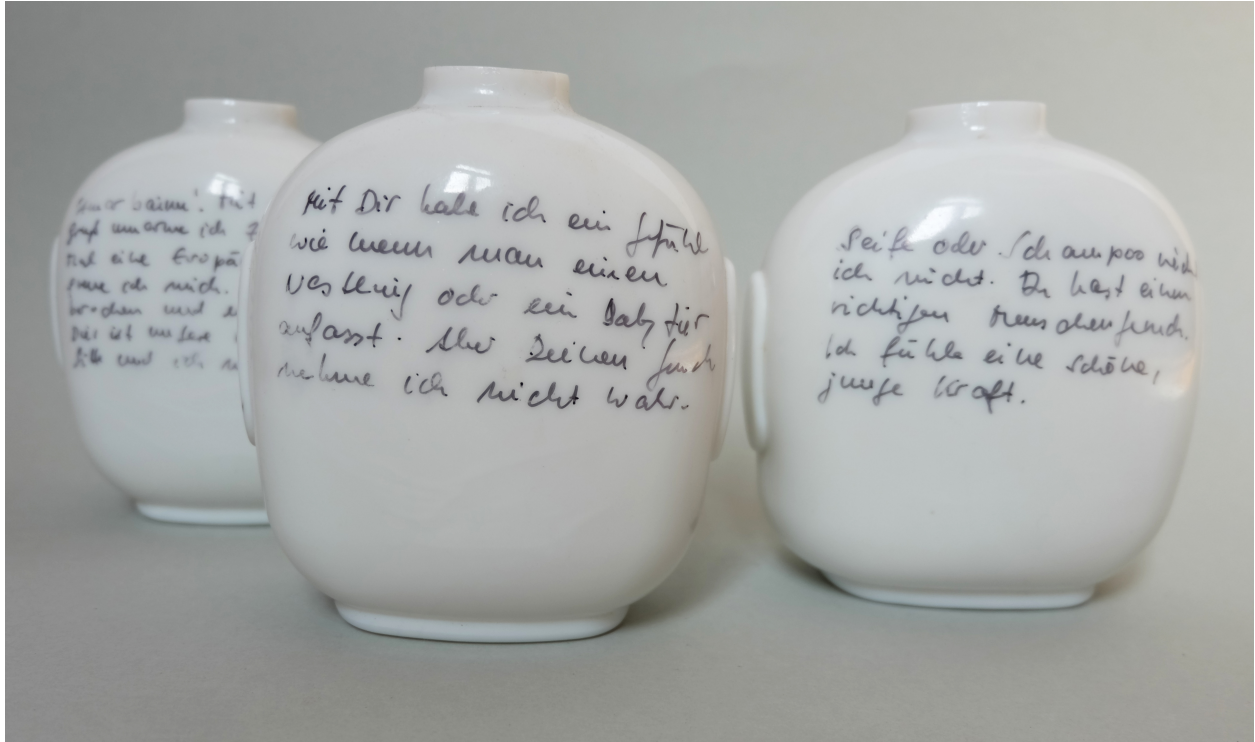Fig. 28: *The Officers and Sergeants of the St. George Civic Guard* by Frans Hals in 1639

Fig. 29: *Smell Me* Angelika Böck

what can you tell about a person
if you read it's tracks?

Fig. 30: *Track Me* Angelika Böck

Fig. 31: Still from *One & Other* by Anthony Gormley

Work from *Being Me Because of You,*
the body of artwork I created based on my proposed theory of the "sociological portrait"
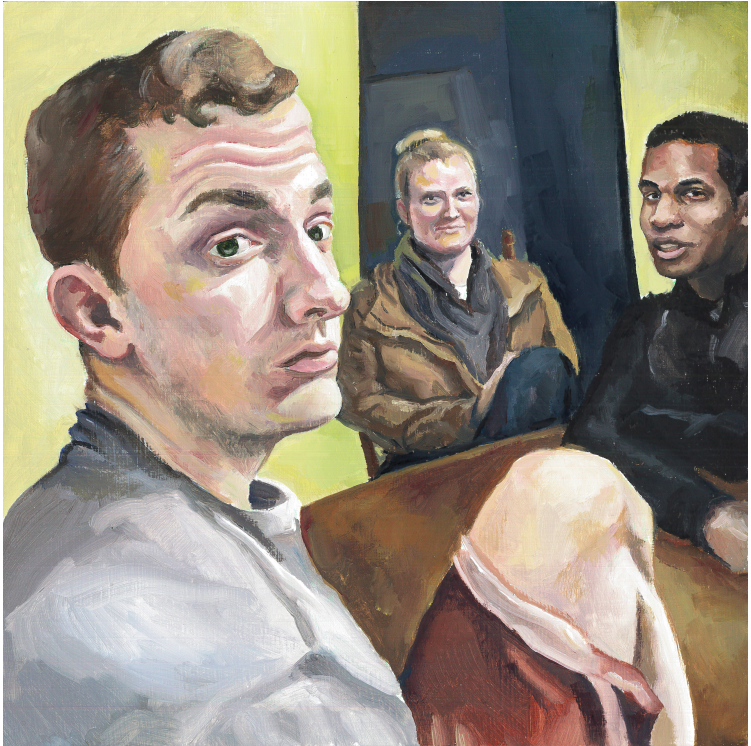

Self Portrait by Erin Miller 2016

Veronica by Erin Miller 2016

Jordan by Erin Miller 2016

Katherine by Erin Miller 2016

TFord by Erin Miller 2016