

# Seeking the Family Face

## An experiment in and investigation of portraiture

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## Abstract

I look at portraiture in the context of its use in history, contemporary use and social practice: how and why to paint at a time when photography is ubiquitous. Some artists are happy to use photographs as studies and source material, while others prefer to work only from a live sitter or model. I prefer to work from life rather than photographs, but had to reassess my own working preferences and find ways to interpret and use photographic and other sources when I chose my family as a subject. (None of them lived close by, and I included some from previous generations who are now dead). In doing so I have developed practice in drawing on memory and emotion as part of the relationship between artist and sitter or absent motif, which I now find to be a core part of the endeavour. I learned to develop my judgment to distinguish between attempting simply to capture the features of the sitter (as a snapshot or passport photograph might do), and an insightful portrait. I have gained more awareness of social and political implications of who, how and why I and others try to depict or just record peoples' features, whether as works of art or the many other ways they are used, or mis-used, in modern society as in the past.

Portraiture has evolved as a genre in form and representation, from the earliest periods of human history through to the present, and now appears ubiquitous. In all its forms it is always a search for and acknowledgment of the person the artist perceives and wants to portray. Its basis in our interest in genealogy, familial and social groupings and the projection of rank and position remain a fascination across our cultures as well as time.

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## Preface

I have wanted to account for the interest I and others have in portraiture, how far back it can be traced in human history and some of the variety of modern forms it takes. When I was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s there seemed to be polarised positions on what art should be: whether modern and probably abstract, or in suspicious contrast a fuddy-duddy preference for comfortable realism. (Yes, I caricature). (These exaggerated positions seemed to be bound up implicated in the British or English class system, where the first view was attributed to an elitist, rather foreign, intellectualism, and its alternative a pragmatic common-sense – or lack of imagination.) An interest in figurative and representational art, including portraiture, seemed old hat: historical remains superseded by photography.

The start of the National Portrait Gallery Portrait Award in 1980 has led a huge swing in interest and exposure. Entrants are international, as they are also for the Photographic Portrait Prize set up in 2003. Emerging as entertainment from local Art Groups' demonstrations or pavement displays, portrait competitions have been promoted and televised since 2013 by Sky and other television channels. Why are we so interested?

As I set out to make a work based on portraits of members of my family who could not be present, I have needed to explore the difference between portraiture (which I take to be a depiction of a specific person, intended as a likeness) and other forms of understanding resemblance (such as archaeological or forensic reconstruction). While finding how to paint my absent sitters from photographs and other sources, I have looked at the practice of some leading 20<sup>th</sup> century artists: their relationship with their sitters; how emotional engagement transfers to the work; the use and development of the artist's memory as a working tool, and as a reason for why they may choose to use or to eschew photographs as a source or support in portraiture.

## Introduction: My personal interest

The work I've been doing is representational, and often based on portraiture. Looking at faces and postures has been instinctive for me all my life. At meetings I draw other attendees on the agenda or in notes; if I see striking features when on a train, they go in my sketchbook. As someone who is not good at names, it helps me remember faces.

My earliest memory of drawing as a child was showing 'the grown-ups' a drawing, a face or figure. Once I'd put the drawing on the table, or counter, I couldn't see it: the edge of the paper was at eye level, or just above it. It must have been a typical small child's drawing with disc face, dot eyes, smile. The grown-ups said 'but, it has no nose'. I thought, but doubt I said, the nose wasn't needed (was it? It must have made me question myself, to remember it). I think now this was a conflation of my stage of development as a child, and of my family's return when I was three and a half from Singapore, where the Asian nose of the Malays and Chinese around me then is so much less prominent than the European. At the time I was pleased the drawing was given attention and serious comment - which may be a reason why I carried on drawing when other children lose confidence, and stop.

While growing up I saw around me family pictures, the family photo album and pictures on the wall. Looking through the family album we build our childhood sense of self, our position in the family and the position of our family among others. As a child it's difficult to understand the mutation of our baby selves, already forgotten, into a child, and more so of a child of a previous generation into the adult one knows. My memory of this puzzlement is still strong. Seeing correspondences in features over stages of life, how child features could develop into adult and how adult features have come to be as they are, is a skill we learn as we ourselves develop over time.

In the past, portraiture was regarded as a minor genre of western art, subsidiary to the "High Art" of History painting (Sutherland, 1976, p. 23; Aglionby, et al., 1683) ; a major thread of British art history is how portraiture became respected and regarded in criticism in a country which discarded religious

and Roman Catholic traditions at the Reformation. Contemporary culture is said nowadays to be visual in contrast to the verbal and literary culture of the last few centuries. However, this is certainly not universal and is not reflected everywhere in our society: I am not alone in seeing an antagonism to visual culture (among other arts) regularly criticised by politicians who see no need for professional artists in public places. To widespread concern, the arts have been largely omitted from the EBac (English Baccalaureate) and National Curriculum, so that they are currently taught less and later in state schools, stratifying learning along income and class lines.

In this study I have found the recognition of individuals in various forms that is central to portraiture to be even more central to human culture than I had fully realised. Psychologically, recognition of features is a survival skill for infants and necessary throughout our lives, to know our family members, friends and enemies. Nationally (in recent history, as these things go) we have set up Portrait Galleries so that we can recognise *our* Great and Good; the ways we sort people – face, figure, dress, colour and racial type – continues to have immense political repercussions. Who do we recognise as *our* people, and why not others? The ways that we use identification photographs in passports, and are developing from the camera - a mechanised stand-in for the human eye - in rapidly evolving technologies, turn out to have fascinating precedents in ancient cultures and very foreign traditions.

## Why portraiture? How far does it go back?

Most of my life I have assumed that we humans recognise each other most directly by looking at faces and features. Just as I have drawn people as long as I can remember, so there is a long history of depicting people in art and culture, whether real portraiture of actual people, or imagined as characters or allegorical figures. When studying art history, I saw the understanding and handling of portraiture at different periods by various schools or traditions: an intersection of the ambitions of patrons, artists and national prestige. In museum work I handled and interpreted those of specific people in a local area. The ways that portraiture shows our understandings of ourselves at particular times has always interested me, as do assumptions and misunderstandings arising from changes of dress, custom and expectations over time.

Portraiture is one of the major genres of Western and other traditions of art, but it has been subject to remarkable cycles of critical esteem and success. The twentieth century saw a loss of confidence in making art that was directly realistic or directly representational, as the forms of doing so were widened by Cubism and a new understanding of work from non-European traditions, children, or those without formal training. The very need for representation made by eye and hand onto paper, canvas or in clay or stone, appeared to have been largely superseded since the nineteenth century by the mechanical eye of the camera, as it made picture-making possible for everyone. Newer concerns in art, and the prominence of various forms of abstraction after the Second World War, led to the study of the human body in life-drawing classes, a central discipline in Western art schooling since the Renaissance, being sidelined on the programmes of schools of art from the 1960s onwards (Walker, 2003).

In spite of this, the practice of portraiture continued, still a part of the practise of major artists, still commissioned by individuals or institutions, still the subject of texts for amateurs or students. Why, then is portraiture not dead but continuing to hold interest, as evidenced in a continuation of practitioners' societies and thematic exhibitions at museums and galleries, stands of touting artists



at tourist spots and offers online or in corner shops to do a portrait from a photo? What draws me to this genre? How is it reflected more widely in modern life?

Consider the origins of portraiture in the history of art and human culture. We have rôle portraiture: the sitter portrayed as ruler, donor, on marriage, in professional capacity, or in mythological roles.

The artist's self-portrait seems to come later, a self-promotion or self-exploration secondary to or less prominent than the sitter. Who are these people portrayed in portraits, and portrait groups?

Possibly the oldest human form of marking *I was here, we were here*, is the hand outlined in blown pigment on cave walls and rocks. To the person that did it, it was his (or her) own hand, but it must quickly have become just a hand, male, female or child's, as soon as it dried: unless he or she had a peculiarity like a bent finger, one hand outline is much like another.

This type of representation is repeated today: infants' painty hand- or foot-prints on sugar paper adorn many fridge doors across the land, some are moulded and cast in clay or plaster or even glass or silver, and footprints of the famous are impressed into wet sidewalk cement. Once done, they are generic, unless labelled with a name. Likewise, medical scans or dental moulds are absolutely specific to a particular patient, but most of us without specialist knowledge could not pick out our own jaw or skeleton from a choice of them. (I would still like to have a print-out of my own whole-body scan, were my anatomy still recorded on some hospital computer...) Marc Quinn's *Self*, his head cast and re-cast anew quintennially in his own frozen blood, is a logical development in this line of interest (National Portrait Gallery, 2017).

Reaching back into prehistory takes us through schematic geometrical figures to depictions of body types of each emergent civilisation or culture. Each case seems to be part of the early history of religion. So many cultures through the world have had some form of preserving and individualising actual human heads: how do the 9,000 – year old plastered skulls of Neolithic Jericho (Newitz, 2016) compare in treatment of the head with the shrunken heads of New Guinea or other stone-age cultures contacted in the last hundred years? Only by comparison with the more recent cultures can

we infer whether the oldest ones were ancestor worshippers or head-hunters, or both. By the time flesh has fallen or been stripped away from bones, or scalp and skin lifted, who can recreate for the hero, ancestor or honoured enemy his or her particular features – if that is what they or we wanted to do?

The earliest depictions of people seem to be temple sculptures, presumed gods or goddesses such as the Warka or Uruk head of c3100BC (Frankfort, 1970, pp. 31-32) or kneeling donors; the heads may show the ideal of beauty, or power, for the place and period, but we cannot tell if there is any greater realism than that. Identifiable royalty or nobility have been shown individually or in dynastic groups from antiquity on, apparently from before 3,000 BC in Ancient pre-dynastic Egypt and Mesopotamia. In Egypt on a stone palette from around 3,000 BC, the pharaoh Narmer is identified by his distinctive crown or hat, but may otherwise be an ideal type of royal heroic warrior rather than identifiable by features (Smith & Simpson, 1998, pp. 12-13). Kings, priests and donors were identifiably represented in temples, palaces and tombs but this did not give their features recognition much beyond those locations. Representations followed rigid conventions to show such people by conceptual frameworks of their times, and did not include the emotional characterisation that we seek today. (I will show this lack of emotion is a trait of hieratic and controlling structures, reflected to this day at the passport control-desk). Akhenaten and his family briefly subverted these conventions, mid 1300s BC, which seems to have given the opportunity for the first known self-portrait, that of Akhenaten's Chief Sculptor, Bak (Hall, 2014, p. 13).

In Ancient Greece gods were portrayed in the guise of leaders, but the artists of the classical period of the fifth to third centuries BC developed increasingly lifelike proportions and movement to show both gods and men. The play of emotions this suggested remained a core of Western traditions (Gombrich, 1978, pp. 49-64). Living shortly after the achievements of republican Athens, King Philip of Macedon had his coins struck with a lively head of Apollo resembling his heir, Alexander (The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, 2014-01-06). (Philip may even have had himself portrayed on a coin

(Prag & Neave, 1997, p. 78). It seems to have taken Alexander's successors to have legitimised their new kingdoms by showing Alexander himself on coins, and themselves resembling him: he was thus the first man to have been known by his likeness over an empire and its trading networks, and for a still-current posterity (Meadows, n.d.).

The achievements of classical Greece spread round the expanded known world of the Mediterranean Magna Graecia and the eastern territories of Alexander's empire and his successors' kingdoms, leaving traces as far as the Indian subcontinent. Classical Rome absorbed Greek achievements as it conquered Greek territories, adding its own history of veneration of ancestor busts. From some centuries BC a Roman tradition of portraiture developed which did not require idealisation but acknowledged the signs of experience by showing wrinkles, scars or balding, as the so-called "Capitoline Brutus" shows (Holliday, 1996, p. 235–36). In Imperial times each emperor's likeness was disseminated by coinage in quantities indicated by successive finds of archaeological hoards. Hundreds of years after the disintegration of the Roman Empire the Renaissance consciously revived and reworked classical art and learning.

On the other side of the globe a more static tradition developed little known to the West. The Chinese tradition of worshipping ancestors through so-called 'Spirit Tablets' and painted or sculpted portraits can be traced back into antiquity, to early Confucian texts of 300-200 BC, and still continues (Hays, n.d.). As in Ancient Egypt the ancestors, like pharaohs, are depicted as at an ideal stage of life, without fugitive effects such as smiles or shadows on the face, or much indication of ageing. In Ancient Egypt the subject was shown in profile when painted or in relief, but the Chinese convention for these formal portraits, brought out for worship at the New Year, is usually full-face like the format now used for identification photographs – of which more below. Only the face was observed (and usually only of men), while the dress was conventional. In the Eighteenth Century the Jesuit artist Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), known in China as Lang Shining, found he had to adopt such Chinese conventions at the court of the Emperors Ch'ien-lung, Kangxi, and Yongzheng (McDowall,

n.d.) (Musillo, n.d.), along with local materials (painting on silk rather than canvas or wood). He and other European artists working at the Chinese court portrayed the emperors, and their most senior courtiers, in armour or on prancing horses and the like, in the manner of the Baroque swagger portrait; but no lasting trace was left in the ritual portrait tradition (Stuart & Rawski, 2001). From the Renaissance on in the West the study of the nude body as an anatomical construct underpinned the practice of life drawing, supporting the illusion of single-point perspective; neither were adopted in China. Rather, models drawn from Tibetan Buddhism became more entrenched, with painted figures centred on the scroll and shown seated as if enthroned, at bust or full length.

Based on traditions of reverence to the Emperor, senior courtiers and administrators, the ancestors were shown in their grandest court or administrative robes. If the *paterfamilias* were promoted, his forebears' scrolls could be reworked or replaced to show them also sharing the higher rank. One of the fascinating aspects of Chinese culture thrown up by the Smithsonian's *Worshiping the Ancestors* exhibition catalogue is that the largely artisan portraitists were sometimes commissioned to produce portraits of sitters already dead, or of ladies of status in a *purdah*-like seclusion inaccessible to a male tradesman (or any other non-family member). Resemblances however idealised or generalised were sufficiently important to be recreated with the use of 'face books' of different types of features, as police today assemble a photofit likeness from witnesses' descriptions. As sumptuary laws governed dress, ancestors were limited by law; citizens of the lower ranks were only permitted to have their portraits, or spirit tablets, three generations back. How many of us know of our forebears further back or care about their appearances? To go further back is to step beyond living memory and claim a place in history. (For huge numbers of Chinese this evidence of their family in history was destroyed in the iconoclasm of the Cultural Revolution, through ideology or fear.)

In the early Twentieth Century the Dowager Empress Cixi demanded the same conventions to be followed not only by Chinese photographers (whose mere admittance to the palace women's quarters was revolutionary, in emulation of Western rulers like Queen Victoria) but also by two visiting western artists. One was the American Katharine Augusta Carl, whose memoir of her

experience was published in 1905 (Hogge, 2011), and also the Belgian-American Hubert Vos, who painted the Dowager Empress in the same year – twice, once according to the Chinese conventions the Empress required, and then again with more Western handling of chiaroscuro and of her actual age, for Salon exhibition (Anderson, 2012). Later and lower down the social scale, in Marguerite Duras' 1984 novel *L'Amant* (The Lover), set in interwar Indochina, the narrator's elderly villager mother goes to be photographed: "All the faces were prepared in the same way to confront eternity, all toned down, all uniformly rejuvenated" (Stuart & Rawski, 2001, p. 90) citing (Duras, 1984, 1992, p. 97).

Is a face more recognisable when shown with the gravity of stillness or animated with expression, with chiaroscuro or even lighting? The pharaohs were not shown with animated expressions (though their bodies might be shown in motion) nor were the Chinese ancestors. Queen Elizabeth I also required of Hilliard an unshaded likeness for portraits that were iconic or hieratic even in miniature (Hilliard & Norgate, 1981, p. 65). Her controlling of her image thus seems both ancient and modern. Like the ancient conventions for ancestor worship or reverence to rulers, modern passports use full-face, unsmiling, evenly lit photographs that can be analysed by facial recognition softwares. The softwares need the face to be presented in full – no hat or scarf - from a limited viewpoint; they are still inflexible (International Airport Review, n.d.).

How much of what information is needed to make a representation, and is the result always a portrait? In *Making Faces*, John Prag and Richard Neave (of Manchester University) expound their practice of facial reconstruction from skulls, often incomplete, damaged and deformed, for both forensic and archaeological investigation. They build up the features from the evidence of the skull (using a cast), the soft tissues built up to typical thicknesses known from studies of cadavers or, more recently, from ultrasound scans (Prag & Neave, 1997, p. 19). The muscles and soft tissues are built up in strips of clay as a "logical and foolproof way of ensuring that the face grows from the

surface of the skull outwards of its own accord and according to the rules of anatomy, and reduces to a minimum the possibility of subjective interference by the artist.

“The speed with which the skull changes from an uncompromising skeletal shape into something recognisable as a human face never ceases to surprise, perhaps because all other stages through which a face normally passes after death operate in the reverse direction, be it through anatomical dissection or natural decay. Facial reconstruction should not be confused with figurative sculpture... although both share certain routine techniques, facial reconstruction is up to this point a purely technical exercise based upon well-documented anatomical rules...

“In taking a reconstruction on to the next stage... art and science blend before separating again at the end of the process. It is the stage where all the precisely calculated anatomical modelling is covered up by a layer of clay, laid over its surface to simulate the outer layers of subcutaneous tissues and skin... allowing them to mirror the form underneath but always using the measurements to guide their thickness. This ensures that the hand of the artist does not and cannot influence the final shape of the head and face. The measurements still rule supreme.” (Prag & Neave, 1997, pp. 30- 31).

In the end, though, for this process with so much about the subject unknown – not just the details of the style and colour of hair (if any) and the eye colour, but the size of the nose, ears, contour and colouration of lips and wrinkles of age, “there are too many variables for a reconstruction based only on the skull to be completely accurate, and it can never be regarded as a portrait. As a general rule what seems to happen is that one creates a face which is very similar to the kind of face which the individual had when alive... it can only be as accurate as the information which it contains, and if incorrect or false is included then the report – in this case the reconstruction – will be flawed...” (Prag & Neave, 1997, p. 33) – and examples are given. Their work confirmed the cremated bones in an ancient royal tomb excavated in 1977 as nearly certainly those of Philip II of Macedon (Prag &

Neave, 1997, pp. 53-84): “The reconstruction turned out to be neither simple nor straightforward, either as a technical exercise or as the unravelling of a vital clue in an extremely complicated historical puzzle... With the skull from Tomb II at Vergina and the face of Philip of Macedon facial reconstruction as an academic technique came of age”.

Writing in 1997, Prag and Neave comment on the development of computer technologies for this sort of reconstruction: storing and matching laser scans of skull, tissue and head measurement and calculating probable developments over time, though “it can no more answer the problems of the unknown than any other technique” ... “The computer is probably quicker than the medical artist and changes can be made more rapidly... most computer-based approaches are aimed at modifying an existing image rather than creating a face from scratch. For the moment use of the computer in our studio is confined to experiments in adding colour to the skin, hair and eyes of scanned photographs of conventional reconstructions in order to add realism...” (Prag & Neave, 1997, p. 40). (This technology is evolving).

It is fascinating to see how this discipline, mainly science but also an art, influences how communities and nations perceive themselves. To find the tomb and recreate the features of so important an historical figure as Philip of Macedon has resonances for not just Greek but world history and culture. More locally, the identification and reconstruction from the remains of King Richard III caught the imagination of much of the nation; two cities, Leicester and York, jockeyed to retain – or gain – the bones and ensuing tourism revenue from visitors to the tomb, like medieval cities competing for saints’ relics. A TV documentary in 2018 went further in using DNA remains to identify the colouring of the Mesolithic “Cheddar Man” which, to researchers’ surprise, turned out to have a 75% probability of sub-Saharan colouring – with blue or green eyes. Seeing on the widely-reported model that an early inhabitant had the colouring associated with another continent and racial type leads to a quite different understanding of ancestry and regional characteristics (Natural History Museum, n.d.), which has implications for national debates about identity, nationality, and

immigration. The Kennis brothers, the Dutch makers of the latest “Cheddar Man” model, seem to give themselves much wider license in animating their recreations with expressions than Prag and Neave – possibly because they appear to specialise in pre-history rather than archaeological and more recent forensic reconstruction.

These issues, then, for me, go to the fundamentals of why and how I among many others try to make portraits, and why people look at them. We want to commemorate our features or those of our lineage or leaders, pretty much universally through settled human life. When we can do this to trace our missing and dead with some accuracy, it has great psychological meaning for us as seekers or mourners but also in forensics in civil life. Examples (in bewildering numbers) include the aftermaths of disputes, wars or massacres such as the Balkan war of the 1990s or the Rwandan massacres, or after natural disasters such as earthquakes or tidal waves, where bodies have to be buried quickly to avoid disease, and may or may not be identified to be reclaimed by relatives. Our understanding of who we are as a people is based on our understanding of who our kindred and forebears were and what they looked like – and this can be manipulated in politics or general knowledge, or widened, deepened and made more inclusive by it. We are all descended from a genetic Eve, after all.

Some understanding of anatomy, however basic, will underpin making a recognisable likeness, whether or not we know all the bones and muscles of the head. Schema or templates for basic shapes and features are now programmed into cameras, social media and other software as into our brains’ species recognition, so that the camera on my mobile ‘phone will pick out heads automatically, and programmes ask if I want to name my friends?... The degree to which we need to depict or infer fugitive or habitual emotions varies culturally but depends on the uses we want to make of the likeness. Facial expression is useful to us socially, so it matters to us if a portrayal has the features but not a habitual expression of the person depicted. This is considered in some degree



when I look at my or another's work to assess whether it is successful, or if not, why not. However, we shall see that our technologies mostly cannot yet use or interpret it.

### Relating Expressions:

In the Western tradition the fleeting expressions that suggest emotions are important to us. From infancy onwards, we react to features in representations, responding to expressions and stance, inferring the personality and character whether we know anything about the person shown or not.

In her memoir *The Pattern in the Carpet, A Personal History with Jigsaws*, Margaret Drabble links female artists to classical encaustic paintings and her reaction to the Fayum funerary portraits from Hellenistic Egypt:

“Some years ago the British Museum, which holds some of the best of the Fayum mummy portraits, mounted an exhibition titled ‘Ancient Faces’. This made a deep impression on me and on many of those who saw it. I was at that time writing *The Peppered Moth*, which dealt with mitochondrial DNA and the recovery of genetic information, and the faces in the British Museum seemed to have personal messages for me. They looked at me from their dark and lustrous eyes; there was language in their lips, their necks, their noses. Confidently they insisted on resurrection, with the full polychrome glow of the fully human. They waited for the morning. They had never died. I wove them into my novel, basing the appearance of Faro, the high-spirited representative of the younger generation in my saga, on these women: she has their large brown almond eyes, their delicate pink and smiling lips, their apricot flesh tones, their golden hoop earrings, their charming hairstyles of bandeaux of small corkscrew ringlets, their fondness for brooches and necklaces, their untiring grace and vivacity...

“One of the Fayum-related women (a painted woman, not an encaustic portrait) has something of the look of Cherie Blair. She has large eyes made larger with spiked mascara, a

wide mouth... She gazes at us so confidently, smiling slightly, with such a pleasantly inviting intimation of immortality. She looks just a touch crazy, as, sometimes, does Cherie Blair.

“What she does not look is dead.” (Drabble, 2009, pp. 299-300) .

This shows not only how we engage with portraiture, looking for resemblances, inferring character or traits to beware of (“looks just a touch crazy”), but how it leads to reworking in another art form: a particularly deep engagement.

The emphasis on “the full polychrome glow of the fully human” explains much of why so much consideration of portraiture dwells on the pictorial, rather than the sculptural. However good a likeness is in three dimensions, people seem to react more directly to colour or light and shade in a picture. They are more familiar and accessible to us; most people now have family photographs around their houses or in wallets: sculpture is more monumental, formal, and is mostly uncoloured. Statues are usually too large, or too expensive, for most households, while in grand settings they tend to be seen as architectural decorations. We are conditioned by the now-ubiquitous availability of photographs to give more attention to picture formats than sculpture, snapping and sharing for information as well as sentiment.

Similar levels of realism and authority to the antique were revived in the Renaissance in all major art forms and genres, both patrons and artists eager to reclaim the prestige of classical models. Works such as Holbein’s English portraits of Henry VIII, his family and courtiers are sharply observed and show a range of the uses of portraiture of the time. With them we see a method of working from drawings, allowing compilation of composite groups of people who may not have all been available or in one place, or even all alive at the same time. For example, Queen Jane Seymour appears in the portrait of *Henry VIII with his Children* at Hampton Court Palace, even though she had died of puerperal fever after the birth of her son Edward, who is shown at around six or seven years old (Royal Collection, n.d.). This interest in including the beloved dead as dynastic markers or *memento mori* continued into the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and beyond.

Work on large group portraits usually requires this method of assembling references, sketches, and arranging like a collage, as in Zoffany's *Academicians of the Royal Academy* (1772); or David's *The Tennis Court Oath* showing the members of the *Estates General* (1791).

Working from photographs has enabled an updating of this method. For *The Lord Mayor's Reception in Norwich Castle Keep on the Eve of the installation of the first Chancellor of the University of East Anglia* (1966-7,) Michael Andrews commissioned a photographer to take pictures which Andrews then 'collaged' to position them in the complex composition (St-John Wilson, 1994, p. 47), the grey tones of black-and-white print, of a black-tie event, showing under and highlighted by dabs of brighter paint (Smith, 2012). It is now a matter of course that an artist portraying so many people will work from photographs.

## The basis of portraiture in human psychology, child development and family structure

We know from psychologists that babies recognise discs with a few schematic lines as faces in early infancy (Schaffer, 2003, 2004, p. 68). As humans we're primed to react to the human face, to recognise specific faces and the meanings of expressions (we've now carried this into adulthood with smiley faces and emojis. These are more knowing, based on an understanding of psychology and child development. Julian Opie, too, plays with this, with heads simplified to a disc and personalised by the barest of signifiers, maybe just a hairline, head-disc positioned above but un-linked to shoulders or plinth (Opie, no date); ~~or before him the Mr Men, or Edward Lear's Nonsense.)~~

When I look at what I understand of infant psychology it is to understand not *how* or what to draw but *why* we want to do it. We have the instinct to see very simple lines and dots as representing people, and the ability to make marks that repeat that experience. This understanding of how basic and universally human it is to respond to such marks is important to me. It's not that I have wanted (so far) to paint like a child or to abstract my mark-making to these primal levels. The primacy of drawing, of artistic activity, is important in an age when for many people it is something done by children, but then, seemingly, grown out of and left behind. Conversely, the perceived prestige of the art market can seem far away from many people who may feel excluded by its elitism; but that too seems a limitation of why we draw and have such works around us.

When young children draw, they themselves and their families are frequent subjects – maybe often suggested or identified by adults, but also the child showing their own world, surroundings and actions. When children draw a basic face they describe as “mummy” or “me” we assume that what is drawn is based on a particular individual because they use their own familial experience, having little experience of the world beyond it. The particular person is the one to whom infants cling when insecure, hungry or tired. It is possible that the “mummy” is also a generalisation of motherhood, the role in the form of the particular person. When the child begins to add distinguishing features –

hair or eye colour, particular attributes, is that the stage at which they demonstrate an awareness of the particular person, or that “my mummy” needs distinguishing from the general role? Like an infant, I reach inside myself when I want to investigate family as a concept; I refer to my own. Referring to them when they are not present, I draw on memory for my own view of their characteristic pose and features, whether or not this is as others see them, or as free as a child’s drawing seems to others.

Most children’s sense of place in the world is reinforced, as mine was, by looking at photos and family albums. Through them, nowadays, we learn our recent genealogy; parents celebrate children’s presence and achievements. Pictures of the latest arrival are now ‘posted’ around the family via social media, on the day of birth. Teenagers and their elders taking ‘selfies’ with their friends are also affirming their own presence as they send it round social media: portraits have never been so widely available.

We now assume from snapshot photography that a picture captures a moment in time. In times past, it was transience that was implicit: time to sit for a portrait was understood to take place, even with photography, until with the more recent gradual shortening of camera exposures the snap of a brief exposure became the norm. Portraits, and other forms of representational art, are more like setting a moment of time in amber, a gradual lamination which takes time to build up. They may show people not actually present, but dead or distant: a process photography has continued with retouching and now photoshopping, both ways of ‘improving’ reality (sometimes indeed by removing people, like pentimenti, as Stalinist communists removed even the image of people who were no longer to exist actually, in records or in memory (Censorship, Index on, 2017). We may also remove pictures of people that have become painful to remember, whether of a former friend or lover or of the beloved dead.

## Facial recognition and reconstruction: modern science:

All around us today is Facial Recognition, the electronic use of the recognition implicit in taking a likeness, for identifying people. For most humans with functioning eyes, sight of another's face is the easiest and most immediate way to identify another, and we have programmed machines that will do this job for us faster, more accurately and at greater distances than we can normally do it ourselves – or is this really true yet, and should we allow this? Our voices identify us but speech is momentary: we have been able to record and reproduce it for a fraction of the centuries we have been able to make pictorial or sculptural recognisable individual likenesses. When we mimic someone's movement, it depends on prior knowledge of the person mimicked to be recognisable.

Since antiquity written texts and messages have been authenticated as being from a particular person or authority by means of seals, signatures or finger-prints. I confirm to you that I am who I say I am, or my message is from me; you or I check that such a person or message is who or what it purports to be. The need to protect ourselves and others from misidentification, misrepresentation, fraud and forgery is as great as it has ever been; and there are so many more of us to consider, check, and discount. Other systems we have developed, such as finger-printing or scanning the eye's iris, only work close up.

Identification from photographs is something that has been made possible by cheap and available photography. Passport photographs have been required for UK passports since 1915 (Parkinson, 2015). Before photography, passports were text documents, not even necessarily requiring a description of physical characteristics (Wordsworth's 1837 passport, a sheet of print and writing, intrigued me when visiting his house at Dove Cottage, Grasmere, as a teenager). First, we became accustomed to having our height, eye and hair colour noted – our Nineteenth Century British forebears considered even this much being so formally noted was an invasion of privacy. The requirements for our photographs have also become more restrictive, stipulating nowadays the size, even lighting (as Queen Elizabeth I instructed Hilliard) and plain background, hatless and not smiling,

a format we acknowledge makes us look like a criminal's identifying photograph (a form of photography with roots in historic classification of people by phrenology, predating the use in passports). The stance from customary posture that a close associate or portraitist might identify or a caricaturist exaggerate is no longer considered suitable, but cropped out.

Unlike criminal records, passports do not currently record fingerprints, though we can now use these to unlock mobile telephones or other computerised recognition, such as entry locks. However, various countries, such as the US, do scan and read not only fingerprints but also eye irises as part of their port-of-entry immigration checks. In high-security environments people are becoming accustomed to be identified by a facial scan as much as by a bar-code on an identification badge, though these scans still depend on being seen from particular angles or restricted viewpoints (International Airport Review, n.d.). In China and elsewhere in Asia facial recognition via a Smartphone can be used for banking (Chen, 2017). China, it appears, is leading the use of facial recognition on a vast scale for control of civic or public security: from identifying jaywalkers in Shanghai or dissidents in Tibet, but also for quicker ordering of fast food. Systems are in use for fast-track boarding at Beijing Airport (Jing, 2017), and also by Delta at Minneapolis-St Paul, and British Airlines at Heathrow.

At present these technologies are not reliable for large numbers of people and suffer from unreliable identification derived from sheer numbers, or insufficient data for different racial types. In Britain, Australia and America, as in Russia and China, police and government agencies deploy covert cameras in public spaces - even though human 'recognisers' are better able to identify people from fragmentary glimpses (Evison, 15 February 2018) - and avail themselves of resources like passport or driving licence picture databases (Big Brother Watch, n.d.), often exceeding their legal authority. The authority is, indeed, being expanded, by governments around the world; the algorithms for DNA analysis are being adapted to this new area to cope with the volume and complexity of data (Nebel, n.d.).

In civil society the potential for abuse by lazy, repressive, inefficient or corrupt regimes or administrations is immense, and overambitious and poorly structured or resourced governmental databases are vulnerable to hacking, whether in London or Australia (Arnold, n.d.). Yet the technologies are also being used for medical diagnosis of rare conditions (The Economist, 2017). Facial recognition is developing rapidly and is here to stay; it affects every citizen, and the working of justice.



### Failures of recognition and representation:

*What about Lesley?* This dear friend didn't recognise people by faces but by voices or habitual attire, so would be confused when someone had a change of hair style or moved desk in an office: a reason for preferring a smaller to a larger workplace, and a probable curb on ambition.

Someone like Lesley who doesn't recognise faces is at a disadvantage: in the title first chapter of *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, Oliver Sacks recounts the case of "Dr P", a musician, who recognised details "he spotted like blips on a radar screen" and aspects rather than all of his surroundings; recognised people by their voices, or attributes; could not read the emotions of a Bette Davis film. He had enjoyed painting but his work had changed from representational to geometric, abstract and confused – a deterioration, in Sacks' opinion (Sacks, 1985, 2011).

There is extensive bibliography on visual agnosia, Sachs says in a postscript to this chapter. The condition seems to affect particularly recognition of animate things – people, even oneself in a mirror, or cows – while schemata – geometry and topography – are often unaffected or enhanced. "Dr P" could recognise students from their habitual movement after he had lost the power to recognise faces. It seems to have been the movements of animals that brought Lesley to printmaking (Pangburn, n.d.) – in which she quickly became accomplished – from taking holiday photographs (she was a good photographer; she loved music, and watching dance).

How does this compare with difficulty remembering peoples' names (one of my failings) or identifying them out of context? Surely this is one of the functions of portraits: we remind ourselves (using our family photos!) or the recognition is imposed through official portraits on coinage or public monuments.

The ambition of a portrait nowadays is to catch not just the features but the character of the sitter, a probable reason why people can react very strongly to portraits they don't like. Clementine, Lady Churchill, or Churchill himself, famously disliked the portrait of Sir Winston by Graham Sutherland so viscerally that she burnt it; a lost painting, though recorded in black-and-white photographs. Many

people would consider Sutherland's portraits strong if harsh, even biting, but still just: what was it about the portrayal of the ageing leader that caught so much under the quick? Was it that in it they did not see the hero they wished him to be remembered as, but a man in mental as well as physical decline (Crawshaw & Lexden, 2016)? This famous portrait of a famous subject has, interestingly, been the subject of continuing speculation as to the reasons for the destruction, and more than one recreation (Factum Arte, n.d.).

What about those one could call inadvertent models, who are depicted in circumstances they do not control? One circumstance would be forms of scientific study or recording. Ethnic variations are recorded and feature as *other*, exotic, from a dominant people. Captives and tributaries of rulers are depicted to show the range of power. From at least the Sixteenth Century the costumes of the New World and the newly reached Orient were drawn and circulated in engravings. Various human types have been analysed, often prejudicially, by phrenologists and racial theorists, but also by anthropologists, ethnologists and medical researchers. A story of the mid twentieth century onwards is of learning to recognise the consent and cultural sensitivities of those previously unenfranchised – veilings, taboos, and the return of remains.

So often people dislike being photographed or sketched – we lack confidence in the aesthetic appeal of our features, their distortion in expression or ageing. We require images of ourselves to be edited, appropriately lit and dressed: “show my good side” (“fit to be painted” is an old expression). We are in the throes of requiring Social Media to take down pictures of persons who haven't consented to having their image recorded and disseminated, even if policing and security structures are resistant to this pressure. Those who like me jot down quick sketches of friends, colleagues or passers-by must consider when these may, or may not, move from the privacy of the pad to more public sharing. Do Data Collection laws apply?

Medical drawings or photographs usually give little away that is personal. Even when the patient's face is the subject, the conventions of depiction are depersonalised by lack of expression. A great

exception to this would be the surgeon-artist Henry Tonks' medical drawings or paintings (mainly pastels, they can be categorised as either) from the first World War, of the subjects of Harold Gillies' pioneering facial surgery, at the beginning of facial reconstruction. The young soldier subjects of these drawings were considered grossly disfigured (Biernoff, 2010); many considered themselves so terrifying in appearance they did not want to see or return to their families, finding or anticipating a revolted rejection. Unlike others recording patients' appearance before and after surgery, Tonks' work has the characterfulness of portraiture: "In his letters he referred to these drawings as 'fragments', conflating the damaged faces of his sitters with those of classical antiquity" (Chambers, 2002, p. 13). Tonks himself resisted showing this body of work in public, referring to it as "rather dreadful subjects for the public view" (Chambers, 2002, p. 16). - Surely those of us who undergo surgery do so with the fear that our bodies will be disfigured nearly as prominent as the fear that it will not succeed, even nowadays when cosmetic plastic surgery, fillings and Botox treatments are so easily available. - It took until 2002 to exhibit Tonks' work at the Strang Print Room of University College London and the Slade School of Art, where he was such a formative teacher.

It is a short step, but a marked shift of attitude from these to the paintings of Francis Bacon, whose striving for visceral effect drew on medical texts (among other sources) and was rooted in surrealism. His usual inhibition against working from live models or sitters acknowledged the violence of his depictions— he worked mainly from photographs of people he knew well. It was not enough to respect the unhappiness of some subjects such as his "rough trade" lover George Dyer (BBC Two, 2017), whose dependent relationship was like that of a paid model. (This was at least in part a class issue, as those like Bacon's drinking-club friend Henrietta Moraes who were more from his *milieu* - and shared his *nostalgie de la boue* - took it more in their stride).

In this country political caricatures are said to be collected frequently by the politicians depicted, but in other countries and times the powerful subjects of caricatures and *pasquinades* have retaliated on the artists concerned. Philipon's and Daumier's caricature pages showing *Louis-Philippe as a Pear*

(an insulting comparison in 19<sup>th</sup> Century France) expounded and reinforced his identification by breaking down the process of caricature into basic steps, each one of which seems logical and unobjectionable (Soo-Hoo, n.d.) The caricaturists were jailed. The response to the cartoons depicting Mohammed in the Danish *Jyllens-Posten* newspaper (Staff, 2015) in 2006 and after, and the two attacks on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris in 2011 and 2015 show the level of anger felt by those believers who see this form of political commentary as an insult to the Prophet who should, like the Almighty, not be represented in images.

(You may be annoyed if I draw you without asking, but it is not usually a killing matter in this country. Normally it just stays in my sketchbook).

Oscar Wilde's 1890-91 novella *The Story of Dorian Gray* has a portrait which shows the corruption and mutation of the titular protagonist, who himself remains miraculously unchanged in appearance by age or moral disintegration. The portrait itself acts like a caricaturist by changing and displaying decay.

## Comparisons of painters' methods:

What do artists look for, talk about, think they are doing when making portraits, how do they work?

How many sittings might they need or want, do they work from photography or memory? This is something I need to learn, and establish my own parameters and practise, as I move from working for my own pleasure towards emerging professionally. Whether and how to use photos, or how far off I place myself supported by chair or easel, in what lighting, are essential practical matters.

Books written for artists tend to be rather brief on these issues. In the early Florentine renaissance Cennino Cennini's advice is based on learning through copying and tracing; observation from nature comes well down the line. There is no specific mention of portraiture and his advice on painting figures is among recipes for preparing supports, brushes and paint for garments and flesh, following usual methods. He gives exact (i.e. customary) proportions for a man, but "Those of a woman I will disregard, for she does not have any set proportion" (Cennini & Thompson, 1933, 1954, 1960, p. 48) – not a common assumption in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Some two centuries later the miniaturist Nicholas Hilliard was, by contrast, deeply concerned with portraiture as imitation of nature "so near and so well after the life that as not only the party in all likeness for favour and complexion is, or may be, very well resembled, but even his best graces and countenance notably expressed; for there is no person but hath variety of looks and countenance, as well ill-becoming as pleasing or delighting". (We are back to the reaction to the sitter as person explored by Margaret Drabble, and to the exploration of expression that may or may not be needed in particular works or technologies). Referring to Albrecht Dürer on human proportion, Hilliard allowed for greater variety of sitters' physiques and remarked on how human bodies change during life: "All men see a marvellous change in the face of mankind from a child to an old man, but few can tell how in parts it is wrought so to change by the effect of time... Albert's proportion holdeth not in children; neither... in old folk, for the forehead waxeth higher, the nose longer, and so consequently the mouth and chin, sometimes for want of teeth, shorter...Then Albert meant that such proportion

holdeth but at ripe years, as from fourteen to forty or fifty, or thereabouts". His advice on posing his sitter comes at the end of *The Arte of Limning*: "In drawing after the life, sit not nearer than two yards from the party, and sit as even of height as possibly you may; but if he be a very high person, let him sit a little above, because generally men be under him, and will so judge of the picture, because they under-view him...If you draw from head to foot, let the party stand at least six yards from you when you take the description of his whole stature... After you have proportioned the face, let the party arise and stand, for in sitting few can sit very upright as they stand, whereby the drawer is greatly deceived, and commonly the party drawn disgraced. Tell not a body when you draw the hands, but when you spy a good grace in their hand take it quickly... for commonly when they are told, they give the hand the worse and more unnatural or affected grace" (Hilliard & Norgate, 1981, pp. 55, 63, 95). - There will be more to say on this positioning of sitter and artist, which assumes that the sitter's face receives detailed study but the body will be jotted down quickly and probably completed later, without the sitter. Two yards (6 feet, 1.83 metres) seems a good distance to be from a sitter, whether the artist sits or stands, but six yards (18 feet, 5.48 metres) is a distance that assumes use of a large room or studio space.

There have been some more recent studies of artists working by the subjects of the portraits. Colin St-John Wilson sat for two artists and recorded his experience in *The Artist at Work: On the Working Methods of William Coldstream and Michael Andrews* (St-John Wilson, 1994). During ninety-six sittings with Coldstream he made "furtive" notes and diagrams: as the painting remained in St-John Wilson's office between sittings he "had an ideal opportunity to monitor its development as well as to observe the methods of its creator. So I took 149 progress photographs. It was, however, well known that Coldstream disliked any discussion of a work-in-progress. I sensed, therefore, that as long as nothing was said about it and that there were no question of discussing progress, or the approval or disapproval of changes, he would not object to my voyeurism..." (St-John Wilson, 1994, p. 12). This was because, quoting an earlier essay by Coldstream himself: "If the sitter likes what I have done I am inhibited from putting a brush through it and I must reserve the right to do that..."

(Coldstream, 1938, p. 8). The inhibitions caused by the sitter's comments is remarked on by several artists; it is interesting to note that approval of part of an incomplete work can be as limiting as dislike of it.

St-John Wilson mentions in his foreword that Coldstream was "amazed" how little was known of artists' working methods (St-John Wilson, 1994, p. 7); Coldstream's own were observed in great detail and others' were discussed during the many sittings:

"There were no preparatory studies. Indeed there was no drawing at all in the conventional sense. There was, however, a light horizontal pencil line drawn right across the canvas exactly six inches from the top. This turned out to be tangential to the top of my head and served for a long time as a plimsoll-line from which horizontal lines were generated. The whole composition was built up touch by touch direct onto white canvas as a balanced whole at all times, no part being developed too far ahead of any other. This 'architectural' mode of procedure closely resembled what, from the unfinished watercolours, appears to have been the method of Cézanne. For instance, throughout the early 'structural' plotting of the canvas each stroke was followed by a counter stroke so that, at any one moment, the balance of the structure was preserved. (In this sense every Cézanne watercolour is complete whether 'finished' or not).

"Coldstream did not stand and walk back and forth to the easel: he sat. This was crucial to his method. The positions of chair, easel and model were all fixed with scotch tape to ensure constancy. When 'measuring' he always leant back to take up the fixed viewpoint" (St-John Wilson, 1994, p. 19).

This classic method of working learnt and taught by Coldstream at the Slade School of Art (Plotkin & Groff, 2010) was similar to that of Coldstream's student and, later, colleague, Euan Uglow, who left markings in paintings like *Female Nude Standing by a Heater* (1952, UCL Art Museum) (Art UK, n.d.). When used by the Spaniard Antonio López García in paintings such as *Emilio y Angeline* (Ciudad de la

Pintura - La mayor pinacoteca virtual, n.d.) we see it in a wider European academy and atelier tradition. Erice's 1992 film *El Sol del Membrillo* shows López working over several months on a picture of a quince tree, markings shifting as branches droop with swelling fruit.

"Coldstream was above all obsessed with an interest for things in their own right, and for him painting had its unique way of rendering that interest. Convinced that the realism of the camera (be it still or movie) had in no way superseded the way of painting, he felt he had to start from scratch. Unlike his beloved Degas, he did not use photographs, and drawings from the figure were rare...

..."Correspondence between the motif and the painted form were precise and yet somehow held back from conventional 'likeness'. Certainly anything that might undergo change between sittings was eliminated... (St-John Wilson, 1994, pp. 22-23)

St-John Wilson refers to Coldstream's love of Degas as an example he might have followed, but didn't, when considering non-use of photographs as reference. Edgar Degas used photographic cropping of figures and perspective, and a photographic tonality in many of his monoprints. In terms of portraiture his younger friend Walter Sickert often used photographs as a source of subject material – including painting from press cuttings - in his later years, as seen in his *Portrait of Hugh Walpole* (1929) (Cayzer, 1998, pp. 40-43), *George V*, himself, or again *Winston Churchill*, who painted occasionally with Sickert. (In avoiding "anything that might undergo change between sittings" we note the requirements, again, of ancient Egypt or the Chinese memorial tradition).

In contrast to Coldstream and-going further than Sickert, St-John Wilson's other portraitist Michael Andrews "had [in 1993] used photographic material since the early 1960s, both as a collage-like exploration of compositional alternatives and also as a form of 'sketch-study' for individual components; and the surface finish of his paintings showed evidence of a wide range of techniques...



“There was no preliminary drawing or photography. Standing before me with the easel to his right, Andrews painted two horseshoe marks on the floor around the toes of his sneakers as if to fix once and for all the position of his view point – that at least was in the Coldstream manner. But that position was not retained... Certainly there was no measuring or comparing of dimensions.

“In the first place he did not sit but was always on the move, withdrawing from the hoof-marks almost at once and only returning to that station on rare occasions” (St-John Wilson, 1994, pp. 47-48).

There were, St-John Wilson states, “two central preoccupations in Andrews’ work: the ‘mysterious conventionality’ of phenomena (‘as it appears so it is’) on the one hand, and on the other the wilful assertions of his painterly medium” (St-John Wilson, 1994, p. 38) experimenting technically on the canvas (rather than in studies) because “methods devised for other occasions, like obsolete equipment, would only get in the way”. (In Andrews’ case the painted foot positions on the floor iterates for me that portraits were only a part of his wider practise and interests – otherwise surely there would be too many such marks on his studio floor. Coldstream was painting in Wilson’s office.)

In “Man with a Blue Scarf: On Sitting for a Portrait by Lucian Freud” Martin Gayford also recorded his experience from the start:

“When, one afternoon over tea, I – very tentatively – mentioned to him that if he wanted to paint me I would be able to find the time to sit, my motive was partly the standard one of portrait sitters: an assertion of my own existence...

“The other reason was a curiosity to see how it was done. After years of writing, talking and thinking about art, I was attracted by the prospect of watching a painting grow; being on the inside of the process.” (Gayford, 2004, 2010, pp. 7-8)

Gayford's understanding is that the "subject is the individuality of a particular person: the sitter. So, in a sense, a portrait is all about the model. But, of course, it is also an expression of the mind, sensibility and skills of its creator: the artist...

"Then again, perhaps the true subject of a portrait is the interchange between painter and subject – what the sitter consciously or unconsciously reveals, and the artist picks up... I am, in the studio, behaving slightly differently than I do anywhere else.

"For the artist it is important to elicit the facial movements, glances and expressions through which in large part we recognize and communicate with each other. But to do so the artist must interact with the sitter..." (Gayford, 2004, 2010, pp. 20-21)

Gayford's experience is thus a very traditional one of numerous sittings, like St-John Wilson – both comment on the quality of conversation, interaction, with the artists. Unlike Andrews, or Coldstream with his experience of film, Freud did not draw on photography (in this, Freud is contrasted with his friend Francis Bacon, who did not paint from a model).

Gayford also describes Freud's working methods, both in action: "he is not so much standing as constantly dancing around – stepping back to consider an effect, leaning forward to inspect me more closely, prowling round the studio to locate a tube of Naples Yellow..." and his method: "Many artists, when embarking on a picture such as this portrait would first make a loose, all-over sketch, which they would then elaborate, refine and sharpen until the whole is finished.

"LF, on the other hand, as he has with this painting, is inclined to put a blob in the middle then slowly work out from it, creating a mosaic of pigment that spreads across the canvas. Though he may later adjust these first thoughts, the sections he paints look fairly 'finished' from early on, surrounded by blank white canvas" (Gayford, 2004, 2010, pp. 49-51) (a characteristic his work in progress shared with Coldstream and Cezanne, according to St-John Wilson).

The emphasis these writers on artists put on the artist's posture and movement during painting is not a mere idiosyncrasy of each painter. Artists know that their position in relation to the model or subject and to their easel or support dictates their viewpoint of what they see, and also how they put it down. The viewpoint determines the view and how the artist works. Proportions and perspectives get checked from different distances, as a piece worked from too close or at a poor height in relation to the artist's eye can reveal itself to have sections at different scales, like the game where drawings of different figures are cut up in sections and recombined in different sequences, to comic effect. (It has taken me a long time to work out the easel height I need to get a figure all drawn at the same scale; it's very frustrating when it's wrong).

Gayford reports Freud's remarks on his own brushwork, and its implications: "In a way I work the way I do because I can't see what I'm doing. I decided long ago not to wear reading glasses when I painted, although I do when I make etchings because that is very close work. It's only by stepping back that I can see what I've been painting ...

"It is an important fact about LF's paintings that they are done entirely by natural vision, his own idiosyncratic way of seeing. They are not seen through a lens; nor are they dependent in any way on the camera-eye view of the world – as many figurative paintings have been since the time of Daguerre, and more and more so today...– he feels the medium has little in it to help him as a painter. Photography, he says, provides a great deal of information about the fall of light, but not about anything else" (Gayford, 2004, 2010, pp. 96-97).

Gayford considered the sitter's expectations: "Facing up to the facts of life, such as ageing and mortality, are precisely the point of LF's type of painting – of course, we applaud it in Rembrandt, but I'm not sure how I feel about the policy when it is applied to myself" (Gayford, 2004, 2010, pp. 82-83)... and amplifying the difference between the artist's and sitter's points of view: "The artist wants the painting to be as powerful and interesting as possible; the sitter perhaps wants that too, but can hardly help also wanting to look good personally in it... We arrange our features pleasingly in

the looking glass, pull in our stomachs, present our best angle, and presume the result is the truth.

Photographs that do not correspond to that appearance, we dismiss as accidental misrepresentations.

“LF is ruthless about such sensitivities on the part of the sitter. Andrew Parker Bowles, he told me, has protested about the way his stomach protruded from his open jacket in the full-length portrait next door. ‘He complained a bit about it, so I thought I’d better emphasise it a bit more’” (Gayford, 2004, 2010, pp. 106-107). (This is not an attitude that, historically, has been available to most portraitists who are financially dependent on the approval of the sitter). -“I know my idea of portraiture came from dissatisfaction with portraits that resembled people. I would wish my portraits to be *of* the people, not *like* them. Not having a look of the sitter, *being* them. I didn’t want to get just a likeness like a mimic, but to *portray* them, like an actor...As far as I am concerned the paint *is* the person. I want it to work for me just as flesh does” (Gayford, 2004, 2010, pp. 111-112) quoting (Gowing, 1982, pp. 190-191).

(I cannot, myself, take this identification of paint with sitter quite this far. A portrait, even the polychrome three-dimensionality of the waxwork, is always a representation; it does not think, speak or move. There can be a point when working on a likeness when it seems itself to claim a certain detail or degree of finish, but I am learning to beware of this as a point when the image becomes tight and finicky: a sort of lifeless mimicry).

However, a portrait like Freud’s of John Minton can, Gayford observes, show more of the sitter’s state of mind – when Minton was depressed (pre-suicidal) than photographs of the same period (Gayford, 2004, 2010, p. 116):

... “Even in the short-term, painting is always a matter of memory... There is an interval, however short, between the observation and the act of painting, then another pause for consideration.

“During that time, the original sight has been passed through LF’s eyes, nervous system and mind, then he has contemplated in relation to all the other notations he has made. This process is repeated hundreds, indeed thousands, of times. Thus a painted image, certainly one by LF, is different in nature from an instantaneous image such as a photograph. David Hockney puts it like this: the painting of him by LF has over a hundred hours ‘layered into it’, and with them innumerable visual sensations and thoughts” (Gayford, 2004, 2010, p. 145).

What about artists who work more swiftly, like the Welshman Kyffin Williams, who worked swiftly with a palette knife and strong outlines, which gave his work simplicity and monumentality (somewhat like that of his elder contemporary Georges Rouault in France) - how did Williams get a result he was happy with? Introducing a book of his portraits he wrote:

“All my pictures have been painted in a single day and I have been able to do this as I have always been blessed with limitless energy. This particular way of painting suits me, because the heavy weight of my paint prevents me from overpainting. It is not a better way, but merely a different one.

“Every portrait I have painted has been a considerable strain, for nothing comes easily to me, but I believe that some of my best work has been of the many interesting faces I have painted” (Williams, 1996, p. 9).

Several times Williams says that he was dissatisfied with a painting as worked with the sitter but painted or drew another more satisfactory (to him) version from memory on his return to his studio. Likenesses weren’t always immediately obvious but found to be true by disconcerted sitters or their relatives on looking for an hour or so (like Freud’s distinction between the representation of an actor or of a mimic). Commenting on his portrait of *Colonel Wynne-Finch* he tells how this retirement-presentation portrait was disliked by the sitter’s wife and sold; it was purchased at a subsequent sale

by the sitter's son who liked the portrait but avoided risking family argument by not asking for it while his parents were alive (Williams, 1996, pp. 16-17).

Williams was epileptic, of a generation that therefore chose not to marry. He would have felt isolated by the disease which frightens so many people, even more than now. Did that isolation enable him to step aside, like Freud, from the need to please which can weaken so many artists' work? Did it also give him a feeling for essential character, or make him think he could see further through surfaces than most, as he shows he thought? In Williams' account of his working method he walks a line between producing a work which may not please the sitter or his relatives – and he defends the need to keep his interpretation – and an emotional engagement with them which led him to re-work and re-interpret from memory, which I find sympathetic. I can hope to develop this exacting use of memory.

Edward Bawden was among those artists who hated to be watched while working or to have their work looked at by the sitter, so that he advised when sketching landscape to “get a wall behind you” to avoid disturbance from “passers-by coming and looking over his shoulder”. In his work as an illustrator and designer his figures are usually doll-like “staffage”, with the stiff-jointed movement of artists' lay figures. Only in his work as a War Artist (1940-1944) did he do portraits of soldiers and others native to his foreign postings: “In Africa and among the Arabs he found his sitters not only cooperative but also, blessedly, unconcerned. ‘Not once’ he explained, ‘did they evince any interest in my drawing, which was absolutely lovely because I always feel sensitive when I’m drawing or when I’ve completed a drawing; I want to cover it up’”. “His sitters, he reminisced, were excellent, because they showed no interest in his work and sat motionless, uncomplaining. ‘Their manners were perfect’ he recalled. ‘They would sit for any length of time’” (Russell, 2018, pp. 82, 17, 92).

Bawden looked at these men with the same interest whether they were British, African or Arab, with the same curiosity as to their settings, attire or character; they were all part of the same war effort - and humanity. This is deeply sympathetic. Some of this war work was published in J.M. Richard's

brief monograph (Richards, 1946) and in Ruari McLean's selection of his wartime letters (Bawden, 1989), but it has not been known widely. Might it have helped post-war race relations in this country if these unfamiliar faces had been better known? Could such War works have challenged the racist assumptions of post-war British society which did not see coloured faces as having a place here, among us, in our history – attitudes we had assumed, comfortably, had largely faded from a more multicultural society, but now find (to my horror) still endemic in the workings of civic representation, the Home Office, police, popular journalism and social networking.

The people of colour and the working class of the rank-and-file soldiers that Bawden depicted are still effectively disenfranchised in political considerations, assumed to be *not us* – so we can hardly be surprised when we find these people are those dispossessed of nationality, deported, or living in criminally unsafe housing such as the Grenfell Tower. What we think we look like and how we identify ourselves is personal, but also very deeply political.

Thus, I see that there are a range of ways of working and relating to the model that I can try using. Looking at these artists' working methods gives a range of possible approaches; I shall work through to find which are most useful to me. Physical closeness to a sitter and whether I sit, stand still or move around will affect compositions in terms of sightlines and angles; the materials and tools I use and adroitness in handling govern the effects I can achieve; as I work, I develop the visual working memory so important to Freud and Williams. Who I depict and how I relate to them is a day-to-day working and social issue, but is also political on a societal level I need to be aware of and consider as I try to show and place work more widely.

## The *Family Face* triptych:

### *Heredity:*

*I am the family face;  
Flesh perishes, I live on,  
Projecting trait and trace  
Through time to times anon,  
And leaping from place to place  
Over oblivion.*

*The years-heired feature that can  
In curve and voice and eye  
Despise the human span  
Of durance -- that is I;  
The eternal thing in man,  
That heeds no call to die. (Tomalin, 2012, p. 324)*

**Thomas Hardy** (1916).

This short poem, when I recalled it, clearly crystallised the considerations I find at the heart of portraiture, its origins and enduring interest.

The poem *Heredity* itself shows family features over time to be a preoccupation of Hardy's, a writer with a visual sensibility trained as an architect, who saw in his lifetime (he was born in 1840) the advent of photography making likenesses of themselves available to ordinary people (Thomas Hardy Society, n.d.). Genealogy interested him; Hardy himself shared his first name with his father and grandfather. It is a direct theme of *Tess of the Durbervilles* (1891) where the earlier form of the surname of the decayed poor family has been appropriated by unconnected *nouveaux riches*; in other novels where conflict between generations is a theme, or other poems in which he referred to his family life. Genealogy was also a widespread interest of his time: Charles Darwin's *On The Origin of Species* (1859) was the most famous and still the most influential of a number of texts considering biological change and mutation over generations and epochs. The Czech-Austrian Gregor Mendel's work in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century on heredity and cross-breeding in peas and other plants became known posthumously (he died in 1884) from c1900 (Lorenzano, 2011). The implications of his work may not have worried Mendel, a Friar, but Darwin's atheism became the model for a number of intellectuals



such as Hardy himself. Heredity is a force in itself, "*The eternal thing in man/ That heeds no call to die*", not beholden to Creation, Adam and Eve, or Salvation, reappearing across generations whether we care to follow it through family trees or social constraints of legitimacy, or not.

Family genes, patterns, also recur in voice and movement, as Hardy notes – less easy to catch in any single image (but nowadays caught on film and video). When, answering the telephone while house-sitting for one of my mother's friends, another thought she had rung the wrong number, I was told how much my voice sounded like my mother's at the same age. If we move in similar ways, is it through build, through imitation, through occupation and interests, or in our genes?

What is it about us that is individual, but is always part of humanity, of genealogical succession?

Part of it is our features, Hardy's "trait and trace", "years-heired". When as small children we are puzzled that grown-ups can trace resemblances between our small, round, plastic faces and limbs, and those of fully-grown adults or the gaunt aged. It was difficult to believe my aunt whom I knew with dark hair was blond as a child, or that grandparents once had rounded cheeks. How could our child's frame have the 'same' eyes, nose, lips, jaws, as that old one? Gradually I began to see that, for example, my grandfather and aunt both had a prominent lip shape but my father and sister, and now my nephew, have it more softly.

When young children talk to their elders it is difficult to take in the weight of generations beyond the immediate, the contemporary: if Granny, or Granddad, remembers the Second or the First World War, might they also remember the Tudors, or the Romans? When children hear from parents and grandparents about their childhood and relatives a generation or two further back, an idea of historical time begins to form. Nowadays the family photograph album is a familiar part of childhood; looking through it, children are prompted to understand how they themselves have changed since babyhood and are changing, to remember happy occasions and people they see infrequently. Usually only the rich and geographically stable can take photographs or portraits back more than a few generations, as inks and paints fade, paper and canvas decay, albums get refined

down, discarded, lost. It is a contemporary truism that the photo album is the item that would be missed most, if the house burned down.

Nowadays we take portraits and images of all sorts to fossilise a moment in time, but this is the legacy of the snapshot. We exist in time and a record has to be as at a particular time, but passage of time can be suggested in more ways than the allegorical figure with a scythe. The *memento mori*, transience of life with the presence of death, was a preoccupation of previous generations. When approaching his death (in 1631), John Donne had himself drawn in his shroud for the sculpture by the master-mason Nicholas Stone, it was for one of the few sculptures from Old St Paul's, London, that was to survive the 1661 Great Fire (The British Library, n.d.); it was a survival of the medieval cadaver tomb tradition associated with the years after the Black Death. In contemporary Seventeenth Century painting deceased relatives were included in mournful family portraits such as *Sir John Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife* by John Souch (Art UK, n.d.); a form of this practice as a mourning souvenir continued in painting and photography late into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bell, 2016); (Nelson, 2016). Now there are photographers specialising in photographs of new-born babies, and of still-born ones done in the same manner (Pauletto, 2016).

However, as soon as we put different generations together, mother, father, child, children, grandparent, any of them so long as there is a generation gap, the passing of time is implied. For royalty this is suggested to imply good rule through stable succession; for the rest of us it is simpler genealogy, not wider politics. We like to show children as such; showing little ones playing with their toys acknowledges the strong attachment to the toys, without which the child might not cooperate. It records also the brevity of childhood, the meaning of Chardin's *Boy Building a House of Cards* of c1736-7 or the butterfly chased in Gainsborough's unfinished portrait of his two daughters of c1756 – both portraits referencing longstanding symbols. Hogarth shows an affecting mastery of this in *The Graham Children*, (1742), where one child dances to her brother's music while the eldest sister holds out cherries for the baby, while Time himself features on the clock behind them. (It is

another family portrait where the youngest child died before the painting was completed) (Uglow, 1997, 1998, p. 354). An earlier painting, that of *A Performance of the Indian Emperor, or the Conquest of Mexico* (1732) records a home theatre with children both acting and watching the play, along with tutors and parents both present and represented by portraits within the painting. It is possibly Hogarth's most elaborate conversation piece – a genre new in the Eighteenth Century, opening up familial and domestic life (Uglow, 1997, 1998, pp. 168-170).

Family history and genealogy is generally agreed to be of most interest to the middle-aged and elderly, those with families who have time and settled lives to allow recall of and research into past generations, rather than young adults with lives to establish. But to children family anecdotes can be interesting as other stories, or were for me. My grandmothers found me receptive to family anecdotes as to other storytellings, and, growing up with an unusual name, I was aware when young of some forebears known in wider circles.

Remembering the poem, I began to work out a composition drawing on family faces dear to me. It was important to me to show family members across generations, with the younger generation of my nephews and nieces standing for the future but reaching back into the past too. Could I express with the faces of my own family the *years-heired feature that can/ In curve and voice and eye/ Despise the human span/ Of durance* - Like the poem, a record of heredity in our recent generations?

First ideas explored arranging figures as in a family tree, in a grid or window casement, but this did not seem likely to offer the interest of interactions between subjects, nor the suggestion of expression in emotions. As none of my relatives live nearby the likenesses would also “leap from place to place” at least conceptually. I see my mother most often; my brother's family are two hours away across or around London; my sister and her family in Australia visit every other year.

Making the triptych: choice of sources, composition studies, choice of medium, sketches and studies

My *Family Face* triptych was made up referring to collages of images from photos of different dates. I prefer to work from life but, as few of my family were available to sit, the composition needed to make substantial use of photographs - as many different angles as possible, where I could not study people face-to-face. At a Christmas get-together on Boxing Day I made quick sketches of my brother's children, with Charlie (then a few months short of nine years old) playing his 'cello. (His

elder sister, more bashful, did not like to play her violin to us).



Figure 1: Charlie playing the 'Cello (pencil, 26 Dec 2016)



Figure 2: Charlie playing the 'Cello (2)



*Figure 3: May (pencil, 26 December 2016)*

First studies now began to lead to groups of heads or figures, more like family photos. I begged round the family for recent photographs including from social media and old photos from albums, fleshing out my previous dependence on sketches, drawing and studies alone, took mobile 'phone snapshots of items in my mother's house – very poor quality, but they served as rough reminders and I did not want to be tied down too closely. I was beginning to think of the composition falling in three sections: older and previous generations to the left; younger family groups to the right.

My previous avoidance of photographs as sources came from lack of technique in 'translating' from one medium to another without the transition being clumsily literal: so often such drawings are seen with lights dead like overexposed photos. Working on coloured grounds, as I was accustomed with pastel or gouache, gave an escape from that literalness: this way, the light and tonal relations cannot be repeated without change. Two sketches of groups of heads in near-monochrome gouache on thin acrylic grounds were reassuring as to catching likeness and expression, but lacked interaction. They also showed up the limits of the medium in terms of lack of sparkle and depth, and chalkiness of the white highlights. I had been working in gouache at the Portrait group I attend, as I find this medium convenient for group working: as a form of watercolour it is water-soluble, compact to transport and odourless (mediums vapours are an issue for some of us). It is also better suited to relatively small-scale work. It was time to change medium for the greater flexibility of oil paint.



Figure 4: Nicho and family (gouache)



Figure 5: Catharine with her children (gouache)

Another sketch of the older generations in oil *grisaille* was more satisfactory as a composition, with generations implied by positioning and relationships by directions of gazes; I was confident that it

was a medium that would give gains rather than lose depth and resonance in this more complex process.



*Figure 6: Oil sketch for the first canvas*

Comments on these three sketches at the January pre-exhibition colloquium helpfully confirmed the direction I was thinking of developing them. I collated and cut-and-pasted printouts from a variety of photos to have a number of sources from different angles, and made rough composition layouts to decide whether to paint this as a single long panel or as a triptych. When I had decided on the latter, I made a full-scale drawing of the three canvases to get the sizes and placings of figures right.

In the first section I show older and previous generations, referencing at top left a portrait of my great-grandfather Charles Benjamin as a young man (in c1870) by his father Charles Henry Augustus Lutyens (1829-1915) a minor sporting artist usually mentioned in passing as the father of his youngest son Edwin, but the subject of an exhibition in 1971 (Watkinson, 1971). The hunting horn Charles Benjamin blows is only part-glimpsed behind the next head but gave me a link of implied sound to connect with the more prominent musical instruments of the second and third sections. The next head is of my grandfather, Enderby – Ben – from a polaroid of a family group, c1970, with

my grandmother, Kathleen, from a photo of the later 1970s. Bottom left is my mother, separated by the previous generation from my father in the top right corner. For this I referenced a sketchbook drawing of my father asleep in a chair that I had given my mother shortly after his death in 1992. I tried to keep the manner of drawing in paint like the pen and ink original: I would have liked to have a suggestion of the way that Antonio Lopez García stuck a drawing of the child's head to the unfinished canvas of *Emilio y Angeline* (1964-65) (Ciudad de la Pintura - La mayor pinacoteca virtual, n.d.). In this section of the composition I would have liked to indicate the passing of life and time by suggesting the different media of what are now historical records. I don't feel this was successful, either in this sketch or the final canvas.

The last figure in the first section is my brother, to make a link with the younger generations. As he reappears on the centre canvas with his family he acts like a hinge, and I have repeated my own likeness to do the same at top right of the centre canvas and top left of the third with my sister's family.

Before starting on the canvases, I made sketches to try different ways of using and enlivening the oils: several with palette knife, to see if it would give a fresher base to the heads. To experiment, I tried a different shade of ground for each canvas to see how this would affect the mood of each; this is not something I shall repeat for linked works, as the moods do differ between canvases. A study of my brother and his wife combining oil paint and oil pastel worked as a study but not on the canvas: it had to be overpainted.

In the second canvas the figures are arranged around young Charlie playing his 'cello, and the sizes of the figures more varied. The size relationships are not realistic but the positioning and interchange of glances and stances tries to show their family dynamics as they appear to me. My (Chinese) sister-in-law had to be portrayed from photographic sources without having sketched her. (She had not wanted to join a family group snapshot at Christmas, so I had to consider whether she



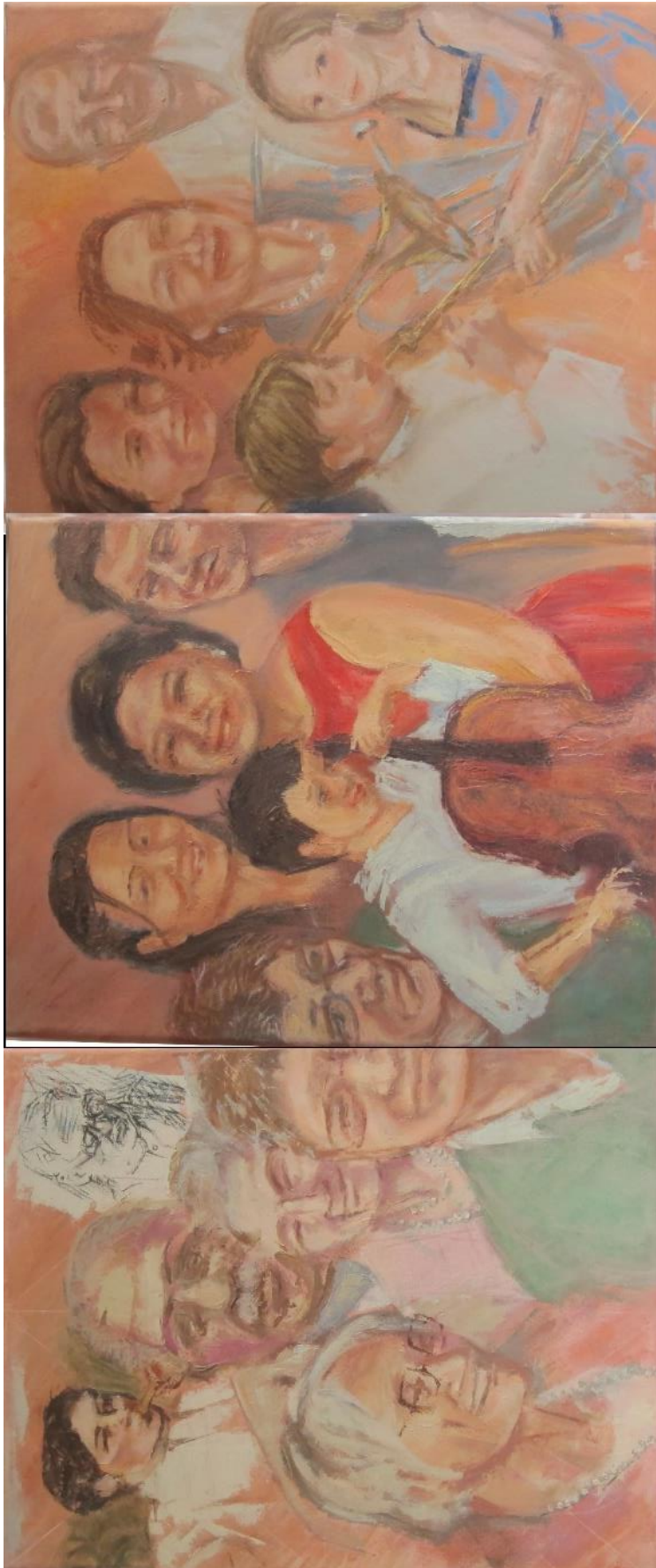


Figure 7: *The Family Face* triptych (oil on

canvas)

might rather be omitted from the picture: potentially a question of consent rather like whether children's photos should be included on social media. The other side of this coin is, might she have taken non-inclusion poorly, as a symbolic exclusion?) I felt I needed her in the picture narrative; without her the children's more oriental colouring could have seemed unexplained. In she went.

The subjects are still from recollection, guiding the choice of source photo for ones that seemed characteristic to me of features and poise. Moreover, in one detail the representation turned out to have a greater resemblance to appearance when last seen face to face, two years before, than the more recent photo (Isobel, holding her euphonium, on the third canvas). This interested me, when I realised I had done it. My memory is a factor in my idea of the family, and precious; updating her image might not have worked, and I found it unwished-for.

The children's instruments required further research, particularly to realise the angle and fingering of Charlie's 'cello, as the Boxing Day sketch was too slight. The 'cello changed angle and tone and the hands and body angles shifted - like a beginner trying to play the instrument. The photographs my sister sent of her children playing their wind instruments were better, though with parts of the instruments and figures elided behind other members of the children's school bands. This gave me the idea that the instruments on the third canvas should be shown as shifting through each other, trombone and euphonium, and through the figures of the children themselves and their parents behind them. The instruments (particularly the trombone) are also intended to refer across to the hunting horn my great-grandfather is blowing in the first canvas, and the overlapping figures to the way there the central two figures overlap each other. It was fun to do.

Representing the playing of music has for centuries symbolised harmony, which we hope to find in family relations – like most families this may not always be the case. Music takes place in time and varies a bit each time it is interpreted and reinterpreted on successive occasions and places. This resembles the shifting patterns of our genes through and across generations, as Hardy's poem expresses. Viewing is comparable with hearing in taking in an artwork, but painting is more like its

composition, as the time a painting takes to execute is longer than most pieces of music to play. Like a piece of music, I have tried to show the features and expression of each family member as I understand a composer uses the characteristics of each voice of an ensemble, to associate them by structure across the parts so that links of immediate and wider descent and likeness are made, and to use colour individually and for the mood of the whole piece.

## Further directions, painting and sculpture?

After completing the *Family Face* triptych for the exhibition, I needed a change of subject. I returned - for the summer - to the carving I was doing before this MA course started. (Carving outside classes is a summer activity, as the workspace is the unheated garage). When working in three dimensions I'm particularly conscious of the need to assess each little bit of work I do, with whatever source I'm working from. Sculptural work needs to be moved around; I need to move around it, and work from different angles. Otherwise, if you work on just one side, from just one angle, you will get it wrong: it is a process of constant correction, a different form of return to basics for doing representational work.

When Colin St-John Wilson was sitting for his portrait by William Coldstream, he observed the way Coldstream took sightings with measuring tools like a plumb line – as a sculptor might - and balanced each brushstroke in one area with another elsewhere on the canvas. They discussed Adrian Stokes' insights into working, that putting on the paint felt as deliberate as carving, as chisel strokes,



Figure 8: *Dead Hero: the Duke of Wellington* (ash wood)

delineating the figure (St-John Wilson, 1994, p. 26).

For me sculpting refreshes the process of representing, making art. It's not just that it's useful to do three-dimensional work to be able to give illusion of depth in two dimensions. I find it as satisfying to work in three dimensions as two, even though as the materials are so much less tractable it tends to take far longer: when working three-dimensionally you have to take such care in looking and checking what you're doing, each time immersed in the basics of eye to hand. Different modes of work support each other, so that each change is refreshing.

A landscape painting from a slight sketch from the previous year-was a good exercise in digging into my memory for the cue and emotion jotted down, and visual recall of the structure and texture of a place and the light of a time of year. (As it happened to include sailing boats, I had to work as hard on their angles and placing as on any head or figure for a likeness).

A local portrait competition gave an opportunity to do a type of portrait in a formal setting, an opportunity that I found intense and taxing. The length of time spent standing at my easel in a draughty place on one day and in public view, was artificial; I found working as entertainment stressful rather than constructive. The painting on a canvas I had prepared in advance with a coloured ground started well, laid in quickly with the knife for liveliness; a curtain backdrop suggested a baroque swagger.

However, the morning's work became muddled in the afternoon as I tried to fill in colour and detail; the vivacity was lost as I tired, so I ended frustrated.



Figure 9: Memory, oil on canvas, morning end

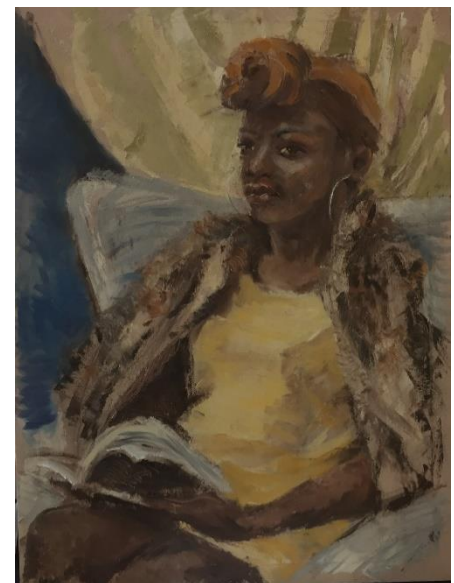


Figure 10: Memory, afternoon end



Figure 11: Memory, completed

Over the winter months I re-worked the portrait until it came back to a finish I was happy with - and so was the competition organiser, who bought the picture. The process of working through to recover a piece that had lost its way was useful learning.

Slowly, as I put in time at the Portrait group or life classes, I feel sketches are becoming more assured in drawing and

colour, the compositions more adventurous and the handling livelier as I take more risk. Alternating between these and three-dimensional work helps me to look for the core structures that time reveals, underlying changes to skin and muscle in ageing and currents of fashion (as the reconstruction modellers find).

As I end this study and try to find my own path, I look back at what I find applicable to me. The hieratic aim of a timeless mask, as in various official portraits, is adequately done by the passport photograph, our rites of remembrance do not need it; it is not for me. Nor do I aim for the snapshot's passing, sometimes distorted, expressions that cannot be held for direct observation, though I do watch while working for flickers of animation that can bring the sitter to life. I could wish my work to have the craftsmanship and insight of a Hogarth, Andrews or Williams.

Whether a portrait is successful as a likeness is less important than whether it works as an image, and this is in the end more to do with composition and vivacity of the work than catching the face. That is dependent on the accuracy of the drawing and observation, though people don't always look most like themselves when holding a pose; the stillness must not fade into dullness. Poor drawing, weak composition, insipid or overwrought colour, dull working, can all be assessed, worked through, set aside. When my work is not apparently successful just as a likeness, I shall find support in the attitude of Freud or Williams: maintaining my right to my vision, but also keep in mind Coldstream's right to strike out what has pleased another. I find unnecessarily arrogant Freud's exaggeration of aspects that the sitter didn't like, but Williams' approach combining a strong will holding his vision, with a willingness to re-work to find the core of the sitter's personality, will be more useful to me. Previous acquaintance with the models always helps, as I try to bring out the characteristic expressions or catch a typical posture, as I tried to do with my own family. When occasionally models remark that they see themselves in my work I feel successful. When they see a likeness to some relative I don't know, this is also a form of success: I have reached down into their family faces.

## Conclusions

Working on the Family Face triptych I have learned to use photographs and studies of people I know as a way of making portraits of them: a practice that in the use of drawn studies goes back to antiquity, but which I had not done before. The use of photography as a resource has been a shift in my own practice; it is commonly used by many artists for portraits, from Degas or Sickert who explored the potential to show a subject who was not present or in an unfamiliar pose, or to enliven compositions through unexpected cropping of the figure. The information we use to build our idea of what someone looks like, and who they are, is always incomplete so, like facial reconstruction, we use our knowledge of structures to make up a resemblance that is at best an aspect at a point in time. I have been developing more skill in understanding what photographs and other studies can lend to enable portraiture, and need not feel constrained to be over-literal in interpreting them. I assert that portraiture gains over most photographic images in the depiction of the emotion of the sitter, and the rapport between the artist and sitter. Someone who looks at the subject at a different point in his or her life may have another view, for which mine is just one interpretation at a given time.

Others, like Coldstream, Freud or Williams, have rejected the use of photography because it cannot give what they need; a record of light falling on features is insufficient for understanding the appearance or stance of individuals, and how they express emotion. For that, for those artists, the portrait is built up by a lamination of observation and memories over many sittings. I respect this, but my instinctive feeling that this reliance on the presence of the sitter as a source is a preferable way to work has been questioned deeply, and I no longer consider this needs to be a constraint.

Portraiture in whatever medium is a response to the presence of another person, a reaching for recognition of who and what that other person is (or was), whether actually present or drawn from other sources. When looking at another, we try instinctively to place their features and emotions, and understand their place in time. The use of photography is no longer an either-or – if it ever was

– but other forms of representation have rich possibilities of handling and texture which offer a great depth of engagement, and so elicit a response from all. This is surely why portraiture has reasserted its place in the range of artistic opportunities, and is now even more diverse in its representation, and is as important as it ever was.

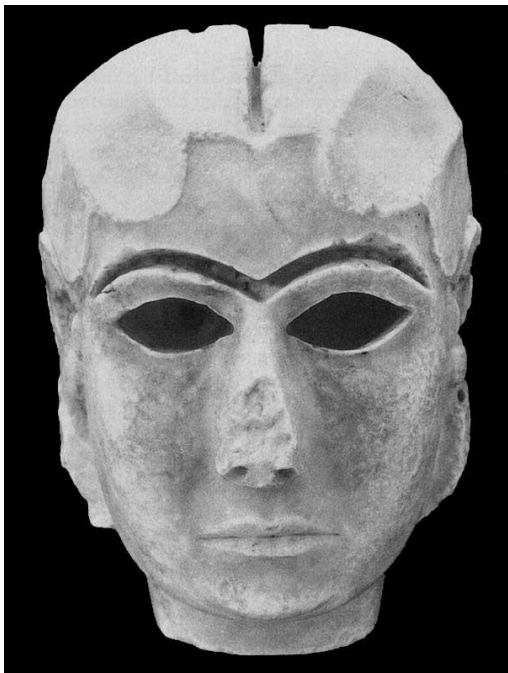


Plates:



**Marc Quinn: *Self***

Blood (artist's), liquid silicone, stainless steel, glass, perspex and refrigeration equipment, 2006



**Warka or Uruk Head**

Marble, approximately 20 cm (8 inches) tall, probably incorporated in a larger wooden cult image.



**The Narmer Palette**

Siltstone, c 64 x 42 cm, Egypt, C.31<sup>st</sup> century BC.



**Head of Akhenaten**

A relief portrait of Akhenaten. Egypt, New Kingdom, Amarna period, 18th dynasty, circa 1345 B.C.

[Redacted online]

**Gold Stater of Philip II of Macedon**, showing Alexander as Apollo, c.340-336 BC.

### Capitoline Brutus

Bronze portrait head, glass-inlaid bone eyes, late 4th to early 3rd centuries BC, on a 16th-century bronze bust.



[Redacted online]

**Giuseppe Castiglione, *Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor on horseback***

[Redacted online]

**Giuseppe Castiglione, *Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor***

In traditional Chinese format

[Redacted online]

John Prag and Richard Neave, Reconstruction of the face of Philip II of Macedon.

Mixed media.



British School, 16th century: *The Family of Henry VIII* Oil on canvas, c. 1545. | 144.5 x 355.9 cm.



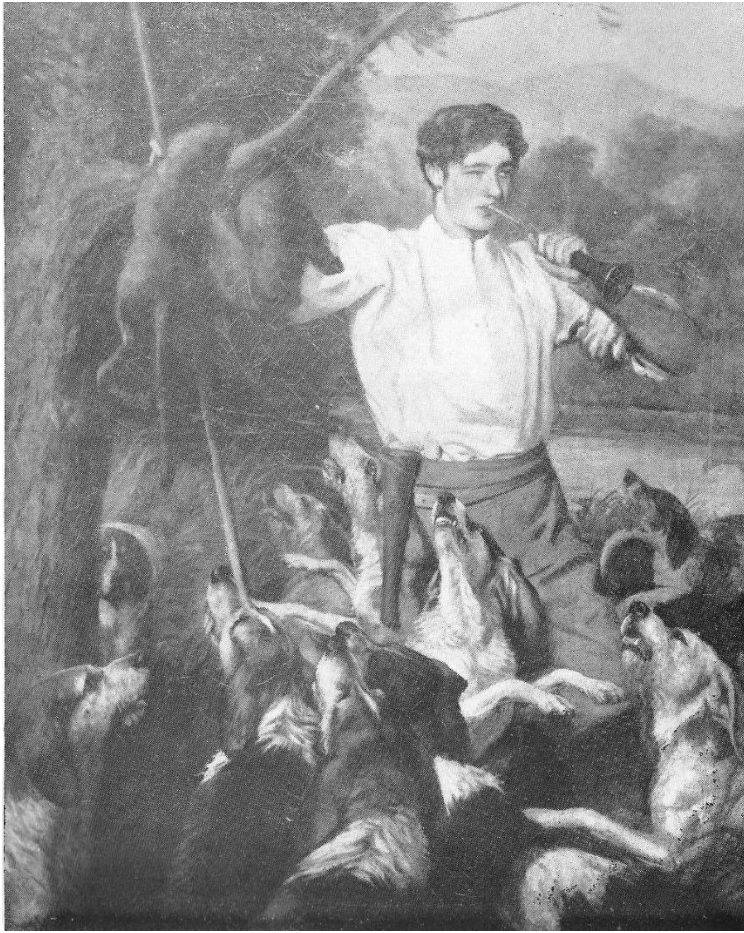
**Michael Andrews, *The Lord Mayor's Reception in Norwich Castle Keep on the Eve of the installation of the first Chancellor of the University of East Anglia* (1966-7)**

Mixed media, detail.

[Redacted online]

**William Hogarth, *The Graham Children*,**

Oil on canvas, 1742



**Charles Henry Augustus Lutyens, *C.B. Lutyens with Otterhounds*,**

Oil on canvas, c1870.

[Redacted online]

**Henry Tonks: Left to right: 'Pvt. Ashworth before Surgery' 'Surgical Diagram for Pvt. Ashworth' and 'Pvt. Ashworth before discharge'**

Pastel, ink, c1916-1918.

## Illustrations Sources:

**Marc Quinn: *Self***, NPG 6863. National Portrait Gallery, © Marc Quinn. Photography by Todd-White Art Photography, courtesy (formerly) White Cube, London, now MarcQuinn.com.

**Warka or Uruk Head**, National Museum of Iraq. Anonymous photo - own photoshop, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3871659> (Accessed: 27 April 2018);

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**Giuseppe Castiglione, Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor** in traditional Chinese format. Palace Museum, Beijing, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15172620> (Accessed: 20 June 2017) courtesy The Palace Museum, Beijing



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**Michael Andrews, *The Lord Mayor's Reception in Norwich Castle Keep on the Eve of the installation of the first Chancellor of the University of East Anglia* (1966-7)** Photo: Norwich Museums Service, © Estate of Michael Andrews (courtesy James Hyman Gallery).

**William Hogarth, *The Graham Children*, 1742.** Photo: © the National Gallery, London.

**Charles Henry Augustus Lutyens, *C.B. Lutyens with Otterhounds*, c1870.** Photo from catalogue: C.H.A. Lutyens, 1829 to 1915: Paintings & Drawings Exhibited at Eastbourne, the Towner Art Gallery, July 17 to August 31, Winchester, the Guildhall, October 1 to 31, 1971, catalogue no.6, photo Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne.

**Henry Tonks: Left to right: 'Pvt. Ashworth before Surgery' 'Surgical Diagram for Pvt. Ashworth' and 'Pvt. Ashworth before discharge'.** Beautifully Hideous, from wellcomehistory, © College of Surgeons, London.

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