

RECENT PORTRAITURE

February 27 – April 2, 1977

**The Renaissance Society at
The University of Chicago
1010 East 59 Street**

The growing recent interest in contemporary portraiture on the part of critics, connoisseurs and collectors in America is probably best seen as an aspect of a larger development of modern taste and appreciation which is, to say the least, an extremely complex phenomenon. Naturally, this change or evolution reflects the concerns and practice of recent artists. In the past fifteen years there has been a gradual shift away from the primacy of the picture plane in painting, a new and enhanced independent validity accorded to drawing in all media, an increasing expressive employment of photographic and electronic visual and audio technologies, and a freer, less restrictive attitude toward the varieties and uses of sculptural materials.

The present exhibition at The Renaissance Society has focussed on perhaps the most familiar of these areas, painting and drawing, since the areas of video, performance and environmental art, photography and sculpture concerned with portraiture clearly require separate exhibitions in order to be presented fully and meaningfully. However, the several examples from these disciplines which are included here all make telling points about the interest and variety of these fields, and it is to be hoped that future shows might present them more extensively.

The range of recent American portraiture includes, over the whole spectrum of individual artists' stylistic modes, most of the traditional types of portraits familiar in the art of the past. Besides the expected formats of head, bust, half length, three quarter, full figure (and their combinations) there are the further types of portraits of record, expressively interpretive portraits, the symbolic and even imaginary portrait. In all of these there are sub-orders of exotic and unusual types: these are some of the most challenging and fascinating works in the present show.

The principle behind this portrait exhibition is not so much the omnium gatherum approach as it is the selection of striking, unusual and memorable modern essays in the genre. Particularly interesting are the group of assertively modern pieces which have a distinct and intentional connection with antecedent historical examples (not necessarily portraits) in art. For example, Sylvia Sleigh's arresting portrait of the young musician Paul Rosano takes up the relatively rare type of the (seated) full length nude portrait in which is embodied the image Manet selected for the Corpus in his Dead Christ Supported by Angels in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. As Manet's figure itself seems a conscious if

not too obvious reflection of the central figure in Ingres' Jupiter and Thetis (itself based upon an engraving of an ancient source), the train of historicity (including the Whistlerian palette) is a major theme in Sleigh's picture.

Chuck Close's connections with fourth century Roman colossal portrait heads are another manifestation of this linkage with the past, in his case crossing over from painting to sculpture, and a similar involvement with Mannerist grandiose scale and formal presentation appear in Jack Beal's Self Portrait drawing and again, in a different fashion, in Philip Pearlstein's Portrait of Gilda Buchbinder.

Modern sculpture, too, has conscious involvements with visual precedent: Robert Arneson's self-portrait bust Poorly Lined entertainingly alludes to the late Baroque whimsicalities of eighteenth century Austrian and German decorative architectural sculpture. Marisol's Andy Warhol exhibits still more playful explorations of serious artistic problems by ringing changes on different aspects or modes of reality in art by having the facial likeness drawn on four sides of the head block (block-head ?) in full face, three quarter, profile and from the back: these are just the sort of drawn views a sculptor would require to work three dimensionally on the portrait of a sitter he had never seen but only knew through art. Furthermore, the hands are fully plastic, perhaps alluding to the artist's own practice (she was early a ceramic sculptor) but the feet, or rather shoes, are not representations but the things themselves. Definitely they are not "of clay".

Kit Schwartz' taped and transcribed interview of Warhol approaches the issue of the "real" and the likeness more intangibly but yet manages to concretize the nature of her involvement and response to her subject (and vice versa) since all the expressive potential of verbal inflection, vocal hesitations and the like are captured exactly on the tape.

Perhaps self-portraits above other kinds offer possibilities of expressive interpretation and revelation. Lucas Samaras' Photo-transformations ingeniously and ironically enter this area within that supposedly most "realistic" medium, the photograph. By manipulating this "real" kind of image, the artist opens a number of provocative possibilities. He both alters the "actual" self (paradoxically mechanically produced) and introduces a sense of his hand in a technique itself regarded as impersonal. Variants of this idea appear in Andy Warhol's "paintings" which are

actually photo-silkscreens stencilled on canvas; here painting, photography and the print are all bound together in an examination of the real, a process similarly echoed in Bruce Nauman's holograms.

In Robert Barnes' Tristan Tzara and Ed Paschke's ironically titled Portrait of a Lady the forms of the symbolic and allegorical portrait appear in new transformations. Barnes' painting presents a complex private iconography spun off the artist's vision of the poet, his writings and career. His free invention of the figure's setting and accessories in a glorious Manet-like explosion of virtuoso paint handling is certainly a modern highpoint in the combination of invention and observation. Paschke's Lady refers, as does the Barnes, to photography in the facial likeness of the subject, then sets the tone of the picture through an intricate variety of symbolical accessories. Paschke's subject at first seems drawn from the world of girlie show posters, but further viewing brings out bizarre suggestions of a self-titillating Leda through the swan-like arm and downy stole enveloping the figure. The artist presents a kind of simultaneous double image in sharp focus where the fantastic realm of mythological creatures is mingled and equated with a modern icon.

While an obvious division of modern portraitists may be drawn between those artists who are principally concerned with the straightforward transcription of their own vision (Paul Georges, Philip Pearlstein, Sylvia Sleigh, Jack Beal and Alfred Leslie) and those others, such as Marisol, Roy Lichtenstein and Kit Schwartz whose connection with things as they are seen is intentionally tenuous, this distinction is not terribly useful. The portrait in contemporary American art has clearly become a form for the expression of metaphysical positions of the artists. These frequently are ironical or paradoxical, such as Lichtenstein's exactly similar dapper cliches standing for two well known personalities in the art world, Ivan Karp and Allan Kaprow, or Alice Neel's unhesitating presentation of the vulnerabilities of her boldly (too ?) confident sitter. This concern with philosophical meaning in different kinds of modern American art is ultimately as significant as the stylistic variety that is its vehicle.

Dennis Adrian

CHECK LIST

1. Robert Arneson
Poorly Lined, 1976
Ceramic sculpture
22" x 13" x 13"
Lent by Allan Frumkin Gallery,
Chicago
2. Robert Barnes
For T. Tzara, 1965
Oil on canvas
84" x 67½"
Lent by Allan Frumkin Gallery,
New York
3. Jack Beal
Self Portrait with Visor, 1974
Charcoal on paper
25½" x 19 ¾"
Private Collection, Chicago
4. Ellen Carey
Untitled, 1976
Black and white photograph
20" x 16"
Lent by the Artist
5. Ellen Carey
Untitled, 1976
Black and white photograph
20" x 16"
Lent by the Artist
6. Ellen Carey
From Black Hole in Space
Series, 1976
Black and white photograph
20" x 16"
Lent by the Artist
7. Chuck Close
Self-Portrait / 58,424, 1973
Acrylic and ink applied with
airbrush and pencil grid on paper
71" x 59"
Lent by Bill Bass, Chicago
8. Llyn Foulkes
General Juarez, 1974
Mixed media
15½" x 13½"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Gerald K.
Silberman, Glencoe
9. Paul Georges
Portrait of Dennis Adrian, 1965
Oil on canvas
72" x 56¼"
Lent by Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York
10. Leon Golub
Chou En Lai (1973), 1976
Oil and charcoal on canvas
20 ¾" x 18"
Lent by Walter Kelly Gallery, Chicago
11. Michael Hurson
Study for Portrait of Jennifer
Bartlett, 1976
Crayon and pencil on paper
18 ¾" x 26½"
Lent by Blum Helman Gallery, New York
12. Alex Katz
Study for Self-Portrait, 1969
Oil on plywood
16" x 11½"
Lent by Mac McGinnes, Chicago
13. June Leaf
Studies of Claes Oldenburg,
1957/58
Folio from sketchbook, pencil
on paper
11" x 8½"
Private Collection, Chicago
14. Alfred Leslie
Anne Hertzfield, 1976
Graphite on paper
40" x 30"
Lent by Allan Frumkin Gallery, Chicago

15. Roy Lichtenstein
Portrait of Allan Kapro, 1961
Oil on canvas
24" x 20"
Lent by Bill Bass, Chicago
16. Roy Lichtenstein
Portrait of Ivan Karp, 1961
Oil on canvas
24" x 20"
Lent by Bill Bass, Chicago
17. Marisol
Portrait of Andy Warhol, 1963
Mixed media
56½" x 17¼" x 29"
Private Collection, Chicago
18. Bruce Nauman
Holograms (4 works), 1968
Hologram
26" x 26" (each)
Private Collection, Chicago
19. Alice Neel
Portrait of Edward H. Weiss,
1976
Oil on canvas
45½" x 33"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Edward H.
Weiss, Chicago
20. Ed Paschke
Portrait of a Lady, 1975
Oil on canvas
48" x 34"
Private Collection, Chicago
21. Philip Pearlstein
Portrait of Gilda Buchbinder,
1976
Oil on canvas
60" x 48"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Henry M.
Buchbinder, Chicago
22. Larry Rivers
Portrait of Susan, 1965
Pencil on paper
15 3/4" x 14 3/4"
Lent by Young-Hoffman Gallery,
Ltd., Chicago
23. Lucas Samaras
Photo-Transformation (6 works),
1973, 1973, 1976, 1976, 1976,
1976
SX-70 polaroid photograph
3" x 3" (each)
Lent by The Pace Gallery,
New York
24. Peter Saul
Judge Julius Hoffman and
Bobby Seal, 1969
Chalk on paper
31" x 28"
Lent by Irving and Natalie
Forman, Chicago
25. Kit Schwartz
Portrait: Andy Warhol, 1977
Audio and graphic
5' x 5'
Lent by Marianne Deson Gallery,
Chicago
26. Sylvia Sleigh
Paul Rosano, Seated Nude, 1973
Oil on canvas
56" x 42"
Lent by Barbara and Russell
Bowman, Chicago
27. Andy Warhol
Self-Portrait, 1966
Synthetic polymer and silkscreen
on canvas
22" x 22"
Lent by Bill Bass, Chicago

