



ARTS PROJECT AUSTRALIA

PortraitExchange

Curated by Lindy Judge



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PortraitExchange

Portraits are an expression of our fundamental desire to connect with each other. They are evidence of a relationship of one kind or another. It may be fleeting or established, it might even be the result of a commercial transaction. Every portrait tells a different story. Painting a portrait can be a way of paying homage to someone we admire or may be a study in technique, but this inherently intimate process always requires that a connection be made between the artist and the sitter. It is this social aspect of portraiture that was the initial focus of *Portrait Exchange*.

Painting pictures of people is a feature of the work that occurs in the studio at Arts Project Australia. Some of these are portraits from life; artswriters, volunteers and other studio artists make convenient models. But studio portraits are most commonly painted from photographs, often of famous singers or actors. The extensive visual library of magazines and books which is available in the studio has been the inspiration for many of these. Cameron Noble's portrait of Christine Aguilera or Lisa Reid's portrait of Kylie Minogue, inspired by a record album cover, is painted as homage to the tantalising world of celebrity.

In 2007 Lisa Reid's picture of Arts Project patron Peter Fay was entered into the Archibald Prize and hung in

the Salon des Refusés. The Archibald requires that entrants paint portraits of those in the public eye from life. But while more able artists may have the means and ability to seek out and meet their subjects this is more difficult for artists at Arts Project. None of the artists drive and many are restricted in other forms of travel by their physical and intellectual disabilities.

Artists from outside the studio have always been encouraged to visit and engage with Arts Project. Many visitors are struck by the energy and creativity in the studio and begin working as volunteers and some artists also move on to become artswriters within the organisation. *Portrait Exchange* recognises the value of visiting artists working in the studio and aims to extend the exchange of ideas that occurs during this process by inviting particular artists to work together in a more collaborative way. Fifteen artists from around Melbourne were invited into the studio to take it in turns to be both subject and artist in an exchange of portraits.

Some of the artists invited to participate in this project have had a previous connection with Arts Project. Catherine Bell has collected the work of Cathy Staughton; Jim Pavlidis exhibited with Steven Aizenberg at the Arts Project gallery in 2005. Other artists were invited because of their general interest in portraiture. Geoff

Newton's series of portraits of gallery dealers was shown at Block Projects in May; Godwin Bradbeer is well known for his studies of the human face. Godwin also knew Valerio Ciccone through the drawing department at RMIT where Valerio attends life drawing sessions.

Some artists had not met each other before and were introduced because of a shared interest. Alan Constable and Nino Ellison both share a fascination with photography. Sarah Menelaus and Paul Hodges both like to work from life. Sarah's group of works reflect her weekly visits to the Arts Project studio as she sought to capture a 'likeness' of Paul. Her drawings and paintings strive for understanding as she and Paul worked to develop a meaningful relationship. Annalea Beattie also met Cameron Noble for the first time through her involvement in this portrait exchange. With the focus on getting to know each other the pair used collage and drawing in a collaborative way to explore together the possibilities of portraiture.

Sitting still while a portrait is painted or drawn can be hard work. Lisa Reid drew her detailed drawing of Arts Project volunteer Rob McHaffie from a photograph over a period of three months. The attention to detail and deliberate use of pattern to highlight this is a feature of Lisa's work. Rob also used photos as a reference in

his picture of Lisa, but in a less literal way, introducing elements which add to the overall composition of the work and to our understanding of who Lisa is.

Sometimes a photo can restrict our vision. As we strive to reproduce an image the work can become overly technical. But this is rarely a problem in the studio at Arts Project as artists apply their own unique ways of seeing the world. When Jodie Noble painted her expressionistic portrait of me from a photo she took in the studio it was completely transformed. Jodie identifies certain features from the photo and exaggerates them to form a caricature. The subject in her portrait is immediately identifiable but not realistic.

The generosity of the artists invited to take part in this exhibition has opened up new possibilities for art making in the Arts Project studio. Through this project the studio artists have experienced the support of the broader art world - a world which can be difficult for artists with a disability to access. The artists involved in *Portrait Exchange* have shared materials, techniques and ideas in what has been a mutually rewarding process. The final exhibition of portraits are of people who inhabit very different worlds but are united by their love of art making.

Lindy Judge 2010

"Every portrait tells a different story."



Steven Aizenberg Jim 2010
watercolour and pencil on paper 38 x 27cm



Jim Pavlidis Steven 2010
monochrome 45.5 x 35cm



Catherine Bell Apple of My Eye 2010
graphic on paper 42 x 29.7cm



Cathy Staughton Catherine Bell 2010
acrylic on canvas 71.5 x 60cm



Above: Lisa Reid Rob McHaffie 2010 colour pencil on paper 46 x 38cm

Front cover: Rob McHaffie Lisa Reid 2010 oil on linen 50 x 40cm



ARTS PROJECT AUSTRALIA

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