THE CONSTRUCTION OF LIKENESS IN SOME CONTEMPORARY HIGH PORTRAIT PAINTING.

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ABSTRACT

Likeness is a central issue to the tradition of portrait painting. This dissertation examines the notion of likeness in some contemporary high portrait painting. Likeness is viewed as constructed socially through the complex relations between artist, sitter, and viewer.

Faced with the problematic notions of realism and naturalism and their philosophical ramifications, the dissertation confronts the question of what in our world can be regarded as natural or given, and what is constructed or acquired. The discussion, framed by the debate set up between Nelson Goodman and E.H. Gombrich, leads to the conclusion that the 'natural' and the 'real' are not neutral, they are highly constructed. The differences between various conventions; various ways of representing others, are extrapolated from the debate, and once acknowledged, the final position taken is a less linear conventionalist stance.

The constructed nature of likeness is tested against the portraits by American artist, Andy Warhol and British artist, Lucian Freud, contemporary painters working in direct antithesis to one another. The aim is to show that both of their portrait-likenesses, whether private or public, painterly or mechanical, are embedded within socially constructed conventions. Recognition of the conventions can guide the viewer in deconstructing the work and locating the meaning.

I discuss my own work in relation to the contents of this dissertation.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

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(Joni Brenner)

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INTRODUCTION

We cannot undo those parts of our pasts that are determinate, but our selves are constantly being made more determinate as we go along in response to the way the world impinges on us. [1]

The interactive relations between persons, and those between persons and environment, seem to me to be primary activities. In reflecting these changing relations, the portrait provides a means for questioning or examining such interactions.

My initial involvement with portraiture took the form of using photographic reference material rather than of having people sit for me. The subjects were all people that I knew personally and it was my aim to imbue the portraits with some sense of their private identity. However, I came to recognise that this process of working from photographs of the subjects seemed to freeze the manifestation of what really interested me about painting people: the continuous change both of an individual's physical make-up and of an individual's shifting moods and expressions.

As a result of the photographic distortions which arise, for example, because of the angle from which the photograph has been taken, and as a result my recognition that many of the photographs simply did not look, to me at least, like the subject that I knew, the question of what likeness is, kept emerging as a theoretical question which was impacting itself on my own artistic development.

When I began painting from life-sittings the complexity of creating a likeness immediately became apparent. Grappling with exactly what likeness is, and realising that likeness is limited by the common understanding of it as 'objective accuracy' - impossible as that is - my practical output underwent many shifts and transformations, in pursuit of (re)presenting likeness in a way which challenges previous (mis)conceptions of what likeness is. The portraits from this present period of research become more and more obscure, and more about reflecting a relationship between myself and the sitter, than about accurately reproducing the physiognomic features of the sitter. The portraits also embody a more conscious and critical use of particular mediums, styles and their 'accepted' or associative meanings.

Intrinsic to the developments in the practical research are the theoretical issues relating to the question of likeness. Issues of perception and representation, the way

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[1]   Dennet, D.C. "Why Everyone is a Novelist", *Times Literary Supplement*, (1988:1028).

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one constructs oneself, and the power relations between artist, sitter, viewer and image, are all at the core of a theoretical inquiry into likeness, which is represented by this dissertation.

Primarily, a portrait image is itself a site of human interaction: the way one person has seen and represented another. This fundamental interaction - of looking and being looked at - is at the root of why portraits are so compelling. This reflexive action, implicit in the process of making portraits, operates on many levels and I would like, at this point, to suggest some of the complexities, inherent in the creation of a portrait likeness, which are examined in this body of research.

To begin with, the sitter is the subject who is looked at, first by the artist who is the primary viewer and mover in the act of image-making. The complexities of likeness arise when one considers the following: the sitter, though being looked at, has her or his ideas and expectations of how she or he looks, and probably sits in partial expectation of the *confirmation* of that identity. The artist, though the primary viewer, also is aware that the act of making a portrait creates an object - some form of *embodiment* of her or his personhood or identity - which will be (re)viewed. The objecivity of *any* likeness is thus highly questionable, by virtue of the fact that the creation of a likeness involves at least two people, each with their own presence, history and expectation.

The portrait itself subsequently becomes the primary object of the viewing process, a dual embodiment - of the artist and the sitter - an embodiment in which the identity of the original sitter has been mediated by the portrait-making process.

Once the portrait is looked at, it provokes comparisons between the present image of the sitter to alternative impressions which the subject may evoke. Viewers interact primarily with the portrait itself but this will be mediated also by their knowledge of the sitter, regardless of whether such knowledge is private and/or public. The viewer's response to the image is often guided by the knowledge available about the sitter. In the cases of the two artists in the present study - Lucian Freud, the English painter, and the American artist, Andy Warhol - the amount of knowledge available differs significantly.

Responding to the *image* of the sitter, the viewer reflects on the initial interaction, that of the sitter viewed by the artist. The portrait reveals particular ways in which the artist has mediated her or his view of the sitter. With each image that the artist creates, she or he also establishes a personal identity, establishes a body of work - an oeuvre -

which reflects her or his presence. The artwork functions as a sign of the artist's existence, of the artist's self.

The viewer's response to the portrait is then also mediated by her or his understanding of a particular image in relation to the artist's other works. The portrait is also necessarily viewed in relation to historical and contemporary trends in portrait painting, in other words it is viewed in a specific context, which is never neutral.

Whilst viewers respond to the artist's 'primary view' of the sitter, to the relationship embodied by the image, viewers also may have an imaginative identification with the person-who-is-observed, and thus respond - with outrage, understanding, amusement - to the sitter's possible responses to having been represented in such a fashion.

As a viewer of the portrait one may be inclined to sympathise or radically disagree with the sitter's own evaluation of the image. Harry Diamond, a well known photographer who sat for Lucian Freud in the 50's and 60's, provides an example of just such a response:

> The first [portrait] - *Interior in Paddington* - was the only one I felt slightly miffed about. People come up and say what a great painting it is, and I say, 'Yeah, but I don't really have short legs.' In point of fact my proportions are very good.[2]

Finally the viewer responds to the artist's modulation of the *image* she or he is creating *of her or himself* via the portrait-making process. Often, the persona of the painter becomes paramount in the portrait's dual embodiment of artist and sitter, and the artist is sometimes recognised before, or more immediately than the sitter.

The intended relationship between the portrait-image and the human original is intrinsic to portraits. The issue of likeness is consequently a central concern in portraiture. The likeness of portraits is invariably altered by the different viewers - artist and sitter included - who have different experiences of the subject.

Thus, the nature of likeness in portraits proves to be complex. As Nelson Goodman points out:

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[2]   Harry Diamond quoted in Gayford, M. "The Duke, The Photographer, His Wife, and The Male Stripper", *Modern Painters*, Vol 6.3, (1993:24).

'To make a faithful picture, come as close as possible to copying the object just as it is.' This simple-minded injunction baffles me; for the object before me is a man, a swarm of atoms, a complex of cells, a fiddler, a friend, a fool, and much more. If none of these constitute the object as it is, what else might? If all are ways the object is, then none is *the* way the object is.[3]

Goodman clearly questions the value of the traditional and commonly accepted concept of likeness as an 'objective' and impartial copy of nature.

Richard Brilliant proposes that, far from being a timeless and absolute representation,

[a portrait] directly reflects the social dimension of human life as a field of action among persons with its own repertoire of signals and messages.[4]

Griselda Pollock takes this line of thinking even further, arguing that a 'naturalistic' likeness is itself a convention, and that *any* likeness is necessarily embedded within social conventions, when she states that

the individual artist does not simply express himself but is rather the privileged user of the language or his culture which pre-exists him as a series of historically reinforced codes, signs and meanings which he manipulates or even transforms but can never exist outside of.[5]

This research works with and through assertions that likeness in portraits is constructed via the manipulation and the transformation, or extension of social conventions, as well as through the complex transactions between artist, sitter and viewer.

Chapter one explores the idea that realistic or naturalistic representations are themselves no more than constructed conventions, and the limitations of naturalistic likenesses are considered. In light of Richard Brilliant's contention that likeness itself

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[3]   Goodman, N. *Languages of Art*, (1969:6).

[4]   Brilliant, R. *Portraiture*, (1991:8).

[5]   Pollock, G. *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, (1981:116).

implies difference, in that if two things were identical there would be no question of likeness, the degree of resemblance necessary to establish a likeness is thrown open to dispute. As Roger Scruton puts it,

> the aim of [portrait] painting is to give insight, and the creation of an appearance is important only as the expression of thought. While a causal relation is a relation between events, there is no such narrow restriction on the subject-matter of a thought. [6]

Both the second and the third chapters work with a concept of likeness based on the premise that we both construct and are constructed by our environment.

The second chapter looks at likeness as a *social* construction, based in particular sets of social codes and conventions:

> Portraits exist at the interface between art and social life and the pressure to conform to social norms enters into their composition because both the artist and the subject are enmeshed in the value system of their society (Brilliant, 1991:11).

Chapter two picks up on the unavoidable, age-old and on-going debate between what in the world is natural, or given, and what is conventional, or acquired. The discussion of this argument - between staunch conventionalists such as Nelson Goodman and Norman Bryson, and those conventionalists who propose areas of theory-neutral perception, such as E.H. Gombrich - helps to establish, in the end, a less linear approach to conventionalism. By this, I mean that the discussion establishes the possibility that *some* areas of perception and recognition may indeed be innate or theory-neutral.

Extrapolating from the debate, my argument suggests that whilst seeing itself is natural, and that recognition too might well have its origins in instinctual behaviour, in art-making these processes are then built on, using conventional means, which *are* constructed. It is precisely at the point of *re-presenting* such primary processes - such as that which we see - that the use of conventions is unavoidable and that the cepts of perception, recognition, and likeness itself move into the realm of ventional and symbolic representation, and may be used as a means to evoke, rather an to describe.

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[6]   Scruton, R. "Photography and Representation", *Critical Inquiry*, (1981:587).

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The discussion in chapter two reveals that 'realistic' descriptions and also more obscure evocations of the sitter's likeness, are in fact both rooted in convention. The discussion uses this idea to question notions of likeness in portraits and to firmly establish the constructed nature of likeness.

The way is thus cleared for a discussion - in chapter three - which firmly establishes the multiple power-plays and the exchanges between artist, sitter, viewer and artwork as vital components of likeness and its construction. Power is considered as residing in images which challenge the reader to respond, images which invite viewer-participation, images which are ambiguous. The *process* of constructing likeness and how it gives tangible form to the relations between artist, sitter and viewer is examined.

The fourth chapter uses the theory of the previous chapters in order to examine what it reveals in selected portraits by the English artist, Lucian Freud and the American artist, Andy Warhol. Freud and Warhol have been chosen for the way in which their images exemplify two very different forms of likeness. This contrast is useful in showing that the likenesses, whilst seeming very different, are equally constructed.

My analysis of both artists' portraits is iconological in that implications of the images are extracted from an *interpretation* of what is visible in terms of the subject matter, the medium, the style.[7] In traditional portrait painting there has been an emphasis on the capturing of physiognomic likeness. Whilst in some ways revealing the sitter, this emphasis on 'face values' in many ways conceals hidden complexities, as Joseph Conrad notes:

> When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality - the reality, I tell you - fades. The inner truth is hidden - luckily, luckily.[8]

This being so, whilst this chapter considers the surface configurations of the portraits in question, it draws on all of the ideas generated in the previous chapters in an attempt to reveal the 'secrets' or the extended inner meaning of the portraits.

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[7]   Panofsky, E. *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, (1970:51-67).

[8]   Conrad, J. *Heart of Darkness*, (1983:67).

It is just this expansive 'reading' of images which Eco's theory - connecting 'systems of expression' to 'systems of content' - advances (refer chapter two: 24-25). Embedded within this theory is the idea that the relationship between an image - expression unit - and the meaning or understanding - content unit - with which we infuse it, is coded or constructed and that this relationship between image and meaning is therefore temporary and variable. Eco thus forwards the idea that images will have different meanings to different readers or viewers.

In relation to the portraits of Freud and Warhol, I propose that a careful examination of the way in which a particular artist mobilises the signs and conventions available, is capable of suggesting the preoccupations and drives which give rise to the use of such combinations and help to suggest the *possible and mutable* meanings of the work.

My own interpretation of their portraits is thus exactly that - a subjective interpretation. Such an examination involves looking at how the artists' choice of medium, style, process and subject can serve to inform the viewer of the artists' relationship with the sitter.

The fifth chapter considers my own practical output and considers how the issues raised in the previous chapters are reflected in the work which I have been doing. It is my intention that the images themselves be considered as intrinsic to the research. In the same way that theoretical research is a systematic inquiry, a search for understanding, so too the images were made *not* in order to complement or illustrate the written component of the dissertation, but in the textural exploration of the same ideas. Each area has impacted on the other and questions in the theory have drawn attention to areas of practice while practical issues have profoundly influenced the course which the theory has taken.

Finally, I have included a photo-essay, which is purely pictorial and consists of selected images which were not included in chapter five - for want of space.

CHAPTER ONE

LIKENESS

1   Pablo Picasso, *Nude with Hat in the Studio*, 1954, India ink on paper, (*dimensions not provided*).

"A style - any style - is by definition no more than a series of conventions."
Linda Nochlin [1]

The issue of likeness has been one of the central concerns of an entire tradition of Western art history and aesthetics since the time of Plato. Plato examined the issues of mimesis, truth, reality as well as notions such as objectivity and subjectivity. All these ideas relate directly to the notion of likeness. The traditional, Western definition of the concept usually given equates it with a mimetic realism, or a truthful, objective copy of nature or the human subject. Such a view is demonstrated by the 1863 *Barnes vs Ingalls* case, involving the work of a portrait photographer. The judge stated:

> A most important requisite of a good portrait is, that it shall be a *correct likeness* of the original; and although only 'experts' may be competent to decide whether it is well executed in other respects, *the question whether a portrait is like the person for whom it was intended is one in which it requires no special skill in, or knowledge of, the art of painting to determine....*The fact of likeness or resemblance, is one open to the observation of the senses, and no peculiar skill is requisite to qualify one to testify to it[2] (Italics added).

A brief look at Realism and its pursuit of the 'objective' will reveal that its conception of 'truth', 'the real' and 'the natural' are a set of conventions which are constructed socially. This being so, we are directed towards a clearer comprehension of the concept of likeness; that it then too is rooted in convention; that it is consciously constructed by the artist and the choices she or he makes regarding style, medium, process and subject matter.

Whilst Realism is used to define a stylistic category in the visual arts, the term is also closely connected to central philosophical issues. The primary aim of Realism was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world based on meticulous observation of contemporary life (Nochlin, 1971:13). Because this principle was by far the most important tenet of the Realist tradition, Realism also provides the clearest example for highlighting the problems implicit in the pursuit of a 'styleless' and 'value-free' world view.

All forms of Realism, regardless of time or place, are marked by a desire for verisimilitude of one kind or another. While the 19th Century Realists came to equate belief in objective

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[1]   Nochlin, L. *Realism* (1971:51).

[2]   Brilliant, R. *Portraiture*, (1991:25).

factual reality - whatever that might be - with the total content of belief itself, the realism of all its predecessors, for example, Van Eyck, Caravaggio, Gericault and Titian, believed in the reality of something other and beyond that of the mere external, tangible facts they saw before them (Nochlin, 1971:45). However, there can be no perception in a cultural vacuum and certainly no notational system for recording it, unaffected by both the coarser and the subtler variants of period, personality and milieu (Nochlin, 1971:51). The obsession with critical observation and the belief in the 'facts' as the sole basis of truth, are themselves values (Nochlin, 1971:53).

Realistic observation can provide the materials for art but it cannot be that art itself.[3] As soon as one's perception of reality is translated into an image, the use of conventions is inevitable. Further, the artist must structure his material and thus imposes himself on it. He cannot achieve complete objectivity (Stromberg, 1968:xviii). Realism is then only ever possible within the boundaries of a particular style with particular aims and values.

Central to this process of sorting, sifting and organising is the mind of the artist, his or her purposes and intentions, ideologies and psychic peculiarities. This art of selecting is based on an understanding of what is or isn't important, and the selection may or may not be based on an accepted value system (Stromberg, 1968:xviii-xix):

> The painter makes real to others his innermost feelings about all that he cares for. A secret becomes known to everyone who views the picture through the intensity with which it is felt. The painter must give a completely free reign to any feelings or sensations which he may have and reject nothing to which he is naturally drawn. *It is just this self-indulgence which acts for him as the discipline through which he discards what is inessential to him and so crystallises his tastes* (Lucian Freud, 1954:23) (Italics added).

All work is thus related to a particular world view, to a context of interdependent beliefs and ideas about what is good and bad; true and false and about the nature of existence and the means for investigating it. The realist ideal then, of 'pure' perception and its accurate notation, their choice of subject matter, the medium and the style of their painting *could not be freed of all previous knowledge.* There are no 'value vacuums' in human history (Nochlin, 1971:53) (Italics added).

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[3]   Stromberg, R. (ed) *Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism* (1968:xviii).

The commonplace notion that Realism and Naturalism[4] are transparent or 'styleless' styles, acts only as a barrier to understanding these movements as historical and stylistic phenomena (Nochlin, 1971:14). The claim that Realism and Naturalism reflect a world without values, possessing "reality" and nothing more, or "nothing but" the facts, is, in itself confused. Realism and Naturalism must be defined by their historical content and the cultural phenomena of the times (Stromberg, 1968:xix); for example, the Realists reacted to the historical and cultural phenomenon of the Romantics. Realistic and naturalistic likenesses should be regarded as particular styles of painting which are no more 'real' or 'natural' than, for example, abstract or even conceptual art-making. A style - any style - is *by definition* no more than a series of conventions (Nochlin, 1971:51)(Italics added).

Having maintained that the representation of the real or the natural are no more than constructed conventions, this research centres on the investigation into the question of what the constructed conventions associated with likeness are in the creation of a portrait-image. Central to the investigation is the understanding that likeness is a construct of the artist, 'varying as each perception of another [person] may vary'.[5]

The construction of a likeness is often a direct manifestation of the artist's relationship to the subject and of a whole set of intricate relationships between artist, subject and viewer. Further, the relationship of the artist to her or his context and social environment, as well as the use of medium, style of painting and choice of subject matter are components of this construction.[6]

This chapter now looks at the notions of resemblance and recognition which help to define the nature of portraiture in relation to concepts of likeness. It notes the limitations of the traditionally accepted understanding of likeness (refer Barnes vs Ingalls finding, p.10) and briefly considers other methods of identification and representation in portraits.

If one is dealing with portraiture, one unavoidably has to deal with the issue of likeness. *The characteristic which distinguishes portrait-painting from any other kind of painting is the*

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[4]   Stromberg writes that Naturalism was often regarded as a subdivision or offshoot of Realism. In his text, *Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism*, he often conflates the two.

[5]   Brilliant, R. "Portraits: The limitations of Likeness" *Art Journal* 46.3 (1987:172).

[6]   The use of conventions come into play when these relations between artist, subject and viewer are translated into an image. These transactions and their implications are explored in the theory sections. The presence of these issues in the work of Freud and Warhol is explored in a more expansive fashion in chapter four, and also in relation to my own work, discussed in chapter five.

intended relationship between the image and the sitter. This intended connection makes the issue of likeness and its portrayal, a central concern.

Richard Brilliant contends that - paradoxically -

> even the notion of likeness assumes some degree of difference between the portrait image and the person, otherwise they would be identical and no question of likeness would arise (Brilliant, 1991:25).

He questions the possibility of exact reduplication, thus throwing open to dispute the degree of resemblance necessary to establish a likeness.

If resemblance, as philosopher David Hume suggests, is dependent on the memory which raises up the image of past perceptions, then the resemblance of the image to the subject may be determined more by the shared perceptions of the viewer and the artist, than it is by descriptive exactness.[7]

Supporting Hume's argument, E.H. Gombrich suggests that perception always stands in need of universals, and that we could not perceive and recognise our fellow creatures if we could not pick out the essential and separate it from the accidental:

> consider what is involved in this perceptual feat of visually recognising an individual member of a species out of the herd, the flock or the crowd. Not only will the light and the angle of vision change as it does with all objects, the whole configuration of the face is in perpetual movement, a movement which somehow does not affect the experience of physiognomic identity.[8]

One is able to infer that

> if detail is not essential for recognition in daily life, then one should imagine that it is also unnecessary for recognising faces in portraits (Brilliant, 1991:110).

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[7]   David Hume, "Of Personal Identity" in 5th ed. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.VI (eds) Green, T.H. & Grose, T.H. (1898:541)

[8]   Gombrich, E.H. "The mask and the face: the perception of physiognomic likeness in life and in art" in Gombrich et al *Art, Perception and Reality* (1972:3).

However, it is the *referentiality* of portraits which subjects them to an evaluation of their veracity as portrait images. The portrait image as a simulacrum, though it is dependent on its source of reference, or its subject, to be regarded as a portrait at all, must stand independently and must be deliberately differentiated from the human original, since, as Plato understood, it can never be anything more than a false copy (Brilliant, 1987:171). Andrew Benjamin qualifies this when he states that

> any representation must lack authenticity in its striving to be authentic, in that
> a painting of a bowl of oranges can never be the same as a bowl of oranges.[9]

So it seems that 'falsity' or the failure of complete correspondence, is an essential ingredient in the concept of likeness and that portrait images need to be consciously 'false' with regard to their subjects, if they are to have validity as works of art (Brilliant, 1987:171-2). This is perhaps, all works of art can hope to have since they cannot be the subject. However, it remains crucial that *some* resemblance between the subject and the image exists.

Even with the highly constructed and fragmented nature of Cubist painting, for example, portrait-images always retain some reference or resemblance to their subjects. The elimination of traditional chiaroscuro and perspective, and the highly analytical and faceted nature of cubist paintings clearly admit their nature as constructed images.

Noting the difficulty implicit in the fixed nature of images intended to resemble or convey life, philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), echoing the words of David Hume, stressed *the role of duration in experience*: with the passage of time an observer accumulates in his memory a store of perceptual information about a given object in the external visible world, and this accumulated experience becomes the basis for the observer's conceptual knowledge of that object. This process is analogous to the cubist methods of 1908-10 (Fry, 1966:38). Whilst distinctly constructed, the simultaneous presence in a cubist painting of multiple perceptions from discrete points of view, implies movement and the images consequently assume a distorted, non-perspectival form (Fry 1966:32)[10]. However, these structures or components of Cubist movement paintings are pursued in an effort to realise a greater or more complete 'reality', necessarily extended beyond the boundaries of illusionistic

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[9]   Benjamin, A. "Lucian Freud's Self-Portraits", in *A.D.British Art Now* (1988:26).

[10]   The attempt to suggest movement and the resulting distortion will be picked up again at a later point with reference to the work of Francis Bacon.

2   Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Wilhelm Udhe*, 1910, oil on canvas, 81 x 60 cm.

representation. For example, Picasso's *Portrait of Wilhelm Udhe* (1910),[11] whilst essentially non-illusionistic and divided into multiple fragments, still retains a reference to the human original. There is a revealing story of how Udhe was recognised 'in the flesh', for the first time, by someone who had only seen Picasso's portrait of him.

Later Cubism did not include *all* the qualities of a given object, but only those which characterised it sufficiently well - its characteristic form, colour, texture, silhouette - to permit unequivocal recognition (Fry, 1966:39). The inclusion of 'clues' - words, letters and numbers prevented their paintings from appearing to be absolutely flat abstractions (Fry, 1966:23). Cubism also addresses the notion that visual perception of an object is not necessarily the way that it is, or all that it is. Perhaps the roots of conceptual portraiture are to be found here. Maurice Raynal wrote in 1912 that

> the quest for truth has to be undertaken not merely with the aid of what we see, but of what we conceive.[12]

Both stages of Cubism maintain an ultimate reliance on the visual world, (Fry, 1966:26) and show attempts to render the subject more 'truthfully', albeit in a less literal or optical manner. Cubism engages with new ways of addressing the external world, and offers, perhaps, a more comprehensive interpretation.

The portrait-image remains a representation of and distinct from the subject. The construction of the portrait-image unavoidably involves the artist's own interpretation of his or her subject:

> People are driven towards making works of art, not by familiarity with the process by which this is done, but by a necessity to communicate their feelings about the object of their choice with such intensity that these feelings become infectious (Lucian Freud, 1954:23).

Gombrich notes, that as viewers,

> we tend to project life and expression onto the arrested image and supplement from our own experience what is not actually present (Gombrich, 1972:17).

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[11] Wilhelm Udhe was a German critic and a collector of cubism. He was also one of Picasso's dealers.

[12] Raynal, M. "Conception and Vision", in Fry (1966:94).

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A quotation such as this seems to confirm Gombrich's assertion that likeness in a portrait image, as intended by the artist, is understood *through the shared perceptions of the artist and the viewer*. Perhaps Gombrich's statement goes as far as clarifying the importance of *the viewer's role in completing the image for her or himself*. It illustrates part of the complicated set of transactions which arise between the artist, the sitter and the viewer as a result of the creation of a portrait, and all the complexities involved in constructing a likeness.

An added difficulty in deciphering authenticity in a portrait, even, and perhaps especially when one is dealing with a 'mimetic-descriptive' approach, lies within the stillness of an image:

> If a man stands still and immobile, he is never as much like himself as when
> he moves about.[13]

The advent of the camera and snapshot photography visually exposed the paradox of trying to capture life in a static image. The fixed quality of an image negates the elements of time and movement which are intrinsic to our relations with others. Photographed images, and even some painted images, where photographs have been used as source material, capture split second instances. These instances are isolated from a flow of animated, active, dynamic sequences of light, motion and time, which is how we know others. These split second instances then appear to the viewer to be uncharacteristic and *unlike* the subject. Perhaps one could go so far as to say that the greater the mimetic description, the more acute one's awareness is of the stillness or momentary quality of the portrait and of one's feeling that the degree of likeness between image and subject is greatly reduced. As Socrates notes, since images are very far from having qualities which are the exact counterpart of the realities which they represent, one must find some other principle of truth in images.[14] Therefore, an extended interpretative aspect is required by the image in order to develop it beyond the mimetic or purely optical. In other words, a portrait which reveals to the viewer some kind of non visual element such as a feeling or a mood can greatly add to our interpretation of the sitter. For example, the images of Francis Bacon are intended to convey just such an extended interpretative aspect:

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[13]   Domenico Bernini, son of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Quoted in Wittkower,R. *Charlton Lectures on Art: Bernini's bust of Louis XIV* (1951:7).

[14]   Plato, (trans: Jowett, B.) "Cratylus", in *The Dialogues of Plato*. 4th ed. Vol.3 (1953:96).

...one wants [an image] to be as factual as possible and at the same time as deeply suggestive or deeply unlocking of areas of sensation... (Bacon)[15].

Bacon's portrayal of likeness in a portrait image is thus bound to creating that likeness in a very oblique way:

I'm always hoping to deform people into appearance (Bacon in Sylvester 1987:146).

The use of distortion, or disruption can be seen to relate to Bacon's desire for form to be at once very precise and very ambiguous (Sylvester, 1987:118). Bacon's use of distortion and the particular fluidity of his paint, as well as his use of the triptych and images in series, serve to suggest a sense of movement. Perhaps it is in the distortion which occurs in the split second instance of a photographic image which Bacon picks up on and transforms, in his painted images, to imply movement rather than to simply render an arrested moment. Bacon states that

...facts themselves are ambiguous, ...appearances are ambiguous, and this way of recording form is nearer to the fact by its ambiguity of recording (Sylvester, 1987:57).

Having examined the fugitive nature of appearance and the problems of distortion, movement and truth regarding likeness and its representation, one would conclude that *the veracity of portrait images is not restricted to their degree of mimetic description or surface likeness.*

People move and people also change, at least in their external appearances. Picasso clearly understood this. Regarding his *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (1906), and the objections to the likeness, or lack of it, he said

everybody thinks that the portrait is not like her, but never mind, in the end she will look like the portrait.[16]

Alternatively, Gombrich suggests that the portraitist who wants to compensate for the absence of movement in an image must so exploit the ambiguities of the arrested face that the multiplicities of possible readings result in the semblance of life (Gombrich, 1972:17). In this

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[15]   Sylvester, D. *The Brutality of Fact - Interviews with Francis Bacon* (1987:56).

[16]   Boeck, W. and Sabartes, J. *Picasso* (1955:136).

way, portraits can concentrate many images of one person into a single image, they can consolidate many representations into one consolidated image. The pursuit of capturing movement in a painting may help to achieve a greater likeness to the original, despite the fact that the image itself remains static.[17]

Clearly, the concept of likeness is both complex and limiting. Because of these limits and the failure of even the most mimetic description to render 'authenticity', many artists have rejected a rigid descriptive surface likeness, challenging the assumption that easy visual recognition is an essential requirement, and searching rather, for the expression of some essential quality - a visual equivalence for the inner character of the subject. This equivalence can bring the viewer nearer or further from the perception of likeness. Art historian, Allen Wardell, goes further and suggests that

> although some form of physical resemblance is an element, even a dominant one, in many portraits, its rendition is by no means the only method by which the individual qualities of a person can be effectively represented. Such devices as the use of emblems, symbols, name, costume, pose and surroundings are sometimes even more important than likeness in creating a successful portrait.[18]

He goes on to note that

> solutions to the problem of the depiction of individuals extend far beyond representation of physical characteristics... (Wardell 1990:9).

This is especially true when an individual's persona, or even a single facial feature which embodies that persona, offers more immediate point of recognition than a complete image of the individual might of in the case of Mick Jagger or Hitler, for example, the association of images ena recognition in that a very large mouth, can represent Mick Jagger or a narrow moustache can represent Hitler. Associative identification operates on

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[17] Freud seems to fight against the notion of likeness, which implies difference in much of the literature, maintaining that he would wish his portraits to be 'of' the people, not 'like' them, and that for him, the paint is the person. This equation of flesh and paint will be elaborated upon in the fourth and fifth chapters.

[18] Taken from Introduction written by Wardell, A. in *Likeness and Beyond: Portraits from Africa and the World* (eds) Borgatti, J. and Brilliant, R. (1990:8).

3   Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Emile Zola*, 1868, oil on canvas, 144 x 113 cm

verbal level as well. By way of example, few would contest the oft-quoted reference to 'his child-bearing lips' as a 'direct' allusion to Mick Jagger. Of course this kind of recognition is dependent on a fairly high degree of familiarity with the icons of a particular society. Conversely, it is the use of constructed personae or 'social facades' which allow actors, through the use of costume or mask, to adopt or suggest another personality, their own features remaining essentially unchanged. Personae are not limited to the famous, and the artist's use of such symbols or signs to represent a non-public figure, would then limit the recognition of the person to a few close associates.

Evidently, *recognition does not depend on the imitation or description of individual features so much as it does on a configuration of clues.*[19] At this point the discussion approaches the area of caricature and whilst this dissertation does not examine this area in depth, caricature is indeed a significant way of illustrating the discovery of like in unlike.

Emblematic portraits and other types of portraiture such as generic portraits,[20] which expand on the conventional and sometimes inadequate understanding of portraits as likenesses primarily, whilst interesting and important in the study of portraiture, cannot be investigated here. However, certain examples of such portraiture will be examined in so far as they relate to the concept of recognition which is necessarily dealt with within the parameters of this dissertation.

As already mentioned, in portraits, recognition is not necessarily reliant on detail. It is sometimes reliant on suggestion, or it is based on the identification, by the viewer, of some kind of sign or symbol which has come to represent the subject. These do not always refer to the facial features. Emblematic elements often occur in portraits as complements to the subject portrayed. They can extend our understanding and knowledge of the person represented.

In Manet's *Portrait of Emile Zola*, for example, the inclusion of books, pamphlets, papers, quills and various art images including a photograph of Manet's earlier painting, *Olympia* (1863), make a fairly obvious reference to Zola as writer, as art critic and, perhaps more obscurely, as defender of Manet's talent. From what I understand of the literature, it is

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[19]   Gombrich, E.H. "The Experiment of the Caricature" in *Art and Illusion* (1960:345).

[20]   Generic portraits refer to specific individuals, but the physical features are standardised. Thus, unless such portraits are accompanied by information as to identity, either a name or a given context, they are not recognisable as individuals to an outsider because the features are generalised (Borgatti and Brilliant, 1990:103).

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4   Armand Arman, *Portrait of Warhol*, 1987, mixed media on board, 185 x 90 cm.

possible that the likeness, or the viewer's recognition of Zola is reliant almost entirely on the 'still life' component of the painting. George Heard Hamilton writes that

> it is in the accessories rather than in the face and figure that the interest of the painting lies, for neither here nor elsewhere did Manet display any particular gift for revealing the psychological personality of his male sitters.[21]

Further, it has been suggested that Manet transferred to Zola a large measure of his own physical distinction and sartorial elegance, and that the portrait is more highly charged with Manet's personality than it is with Zola's.[22]

So it would seem that Manet's portrait of Zola is not based solely on descriptive exactness and the viewer's recognition of the subject is reliant, to a large degree, on the inclusion of the 'accessories' or symbolic elements. Thus with this evocation of his own presence through the portrayal of Zola, Manet has fashioned an abstract, non-descriptive, but pertinent characterisation of himself (Brilliant, 1991:83).

> An artist's personal style can penetrate so deeply into the work that the portrait undergoes a peculiar deformation, recognisable as a sign of its maker.[23]

Jane Austen's novel, *Emma*, plays on just this ambiguity. Intent on making an eligible bachelor fall in love with her friend Harriet, Emma paints a portrait of Harriet for the man. The matchmaking is foiled, however, when the young man takes the portrait not as an image of Harriet's charms but as an expression of Emma's talent. He falls in love with Emma. Austen's fable indicates that the portraitist may be telling more about herself than about her subject.[24] Brilliant adds, with reference to Bacon that

> the strength of this personal vision of the 'other' characteristically reshapes Francis Bacon's portraits, no matter who the subject is (Brilliant, 1990:26).

Sometimes, the emblems or symbols stand in for the subject altogether. This is clearly illustrated in Armand Arman's *Portrait of Warhol* (1987). This assemblage is a collection of

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[21] Hamilton, G.H. *Manet and his Critics* (1986:115).

[22] Faison, S.L. "Manet's Portrait of Zola" *Magazine of Art* Vol. 42 (1949:162-8).

[23] Brilliant, R. "Portraits: A Recurrent Genre in World Art" in *Likeness and Beyond, Portraits from Africa and the World* (eds) Brilliant, R. and Borgatti, J. (1990:26).

[24] Steiner, W. "Postmodernist Portraits" *Art Journal* 46.3 (1987:173)

the tools of the subject's trade as an artist, his characteristic uniform, and his distinctive trademark, the shock of white hair, without which Warhol would not be 'Warhol' (Brilliant, 1990:27). His 'paraphernalia' makes a more immediate reference to 'Andy Warhol' than an image of his own face would. Significantly, when Henry Geldzahler interviewed Robert Rosenblum about Andy Warhol, one of the questions which he asked was:

> When you see a portrait of Marilyn Monroe by Andy Warhol, who do you think of first, Andy or Marilyn?[25]

Warhol was more widely known for what he did and was more directly identified by his work and by his own constructed personal image, than by his actual facial features. Depending, then, on one's perception of likeness, this portrait is as much, if not more, like Warhol as any other.

To sum up, while the notion of likeness assumes some degree of difference between the portrait image and the person, the portrait genre itself has necessarily been extended into areas which re-address the importance of issues such as recognition and the purely optical versus the conceptual portrait. All kinds of portraits attempt in some way to represent the 'other'. The use of distortion both to imply or suggest movement and change, and the relationship of distortion to caricature with its discovery of 'like in unlike' are some ways in which the portrait genre is extended. Caricature in turn relates to the idea of the persona or constructed image, and along with other issues, these have become vital elements or considerations in the construction of a portrait likeness. No portrait, however 'realistic' is simply and solely a representation of physical characteristics (Wardell, A. in Borgatti and Brilliant, 1990:9).

Concretising the notion that likenesses are highly constructed, the next chapter deals with some aspects of perception, intellectual construing and recognition, and their relationship to the ongoing debate between what is natural and what is conventional, or constructed.

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[25]   Geldzahler, H. "Andy Warhol: Virginal Voyeur" in *Andy Warhol, Portraits* (eds) Geldzahler, H. & Rosenblum, R. (1993:13).

CHAPTER TWO

PROBLEMS OF PERCEPTION AND REPRESENTATION
IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF LIKENESS

"No fact is without its fiction."
Ira B. Nadel [1]

Chapter one suggests that likeness itself is an unfixed concept, constructed and bound by specific sets of conventions and relations, intentions and attitudes. This chapter explores the idea of image-making as social construct; of art-making as a system of signs and of the recognition of images as societal. I would like to suggest that the way in which - and the degree to which - we understand likeness in an image is related to our recognition of these signs or social codes.

2.1   Nature and convention

Likeness is constructed by the artist using representational conventions which are themselves socially constructed. Codes of recognition are formed dynamically through continuous usage and successive change. As indicated in chapter one, the test of a truthful likeness is never simply 'the real world' but some standard construction of the world. This is the position which Nelson Goodman assumes in his seminal text *La. guages of Art*. He states that

> realistic representation ...depends not upon imitation or illusion or
> information' ..t upon inculcation,[2]

and is thus based on a kind of social consensus. E.H. Gombrich who has been the most outspoken critic of this conventionalist or relativist position held by Goodman and others such as Norman Bryson, regards this position as extreme. In his text, *Art and Illusion* (1960), Gombrich stresses that *some* of our reactions, and those of animals, are instinctive or given in that we are programmed with a survival instinct. Thus he questions *which part* of our response to the world is 'natural', i.e. entirely instinctive, and which is conventional, i.e. acquired.

Gombrich's position is most interesting. He has amassed a great deal of evidence to show that the way we see and depict depends upon and varies with experience, practice, interests and attitudes. Yet his position shifts to one of arguing against this

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[1]   Nadel, I.B. "The Biographer's secret" in *Studies in Autobiography*, (ed) Olney, J. (1988:24).

[2]   Goodman, N. *Languages of Art*. (1969:38).

relativist or conventionalist consensus which he helped to form. By setting himself up against a purely conventionalist position Gombrich manages to establish a nuance in their argument which they have failed to acknowledge.

Working against the conventionalist position, Gombrich argues for distinctions between two kinds of representation - pictures as opposed to maps, and images as opposed to texts - suggesting that the former are natural and the latter are conventional.

Goodman, on the other hand, argues that the difference one perceives, is, in effect, between kinds of convention. The sign systems of reading and mathematics, for example, are fundamentally the same as those of painting; based on an understanding of codes and the ability to use them:[3]

> the boundary line between texts and images, pictures and paragraphs, is
> drawn by a history of practical differences in the use of different sorts
> of symbolic marks, not by a metaphysical divide.[4]

Thus, the differences between sign-types are matters of use, habit, and convention. In later work, Gombrich apologises for undermining the distinction between images which are 'naturally recognisable' *because they are imitations*, and words which are based on conventions and recognisable through learning.[5] He changes his line of thinking and his distinctions are then no longer between that which is conventional and that which is innate or natural, but between those *signs* which are natural and those *signs* which are conventional.

It is at this point that Gombrich's argument is most useful: having conceded that all images are based in convention, he argues that some images - or some conventions - are more 'natural' than others. This argument is hinged on Gombrich's belief that one-point-perspective - upon which Western illusionistic representation is based - is the formal convention closest able to reflect or capture the way in which he believes that

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[3] Bryson, N. "Semiology and Visual Interpretation" in *Visual Theory*, (eds) Bryson, N. Holly, M.A. Moxey, K. (1991:64-5).

[4] Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. (1986:69)

[5] Gombrich, E.H. "Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation" in *Image and Code*. (ed) Steiner, W. (1981:11).

vision happens. He ther fore sees the convention of perspective as more 'natural' than other conventions.[6]

In opposition, supporting the idea that different sets of conventions are used for representing different things, Goodman offers

> That a picture looks like nature often means only that it looks the way nature is usually painted (1969:38-9).

This chapter elaborates upon some of the issues in this debate, which establishes much of the theory foregrounded in the discussion in chapter four. Indeed, many of the questions which I ask in the fifth chapter, with regard to my own practical research have their foundations in this debate.

The next section discusses the nature of painting as a system of signs. It motivates - as the sub-heading suggests - a conventionalist approach to painting. The section thereafter re-considers Gombrich's argument which does much to unsettle the conventionalist assertion of the purely 'social nature of signs' - which is the sub-heading of that section. My own position with regard to the nature-convention issue is also reviewed in that section.

2.1.1   Painting as a system of signs

The portrait as a genre involves a number of apparent contradictions. Most importantly, it is both a work of art and a document. Thus, the portrait poses the general artistic problem of the aesthetic versus the referential as an overt conflict: it represents a real person whose actuality it announces through its title and through 'individualizing' detail: at the same time, it presents itself as a work of art - often framed, highly structured, of interest in and of itself.[7]

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[6]   In the end, one-point-perspective and its allusion to one-moment-in-time is the paradox that likeness hinges on: the fixed moment is less 'like' than those representations of likeness which account - in some way - for the duration of time and mo ement, such as in Cubism.

[7]   Steiner, W. *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance- The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein.* (1978:4-5).

5   Encaustic portrait on a wrapped mummy, Romano-Egyptian, ca. 200 AD, detail.
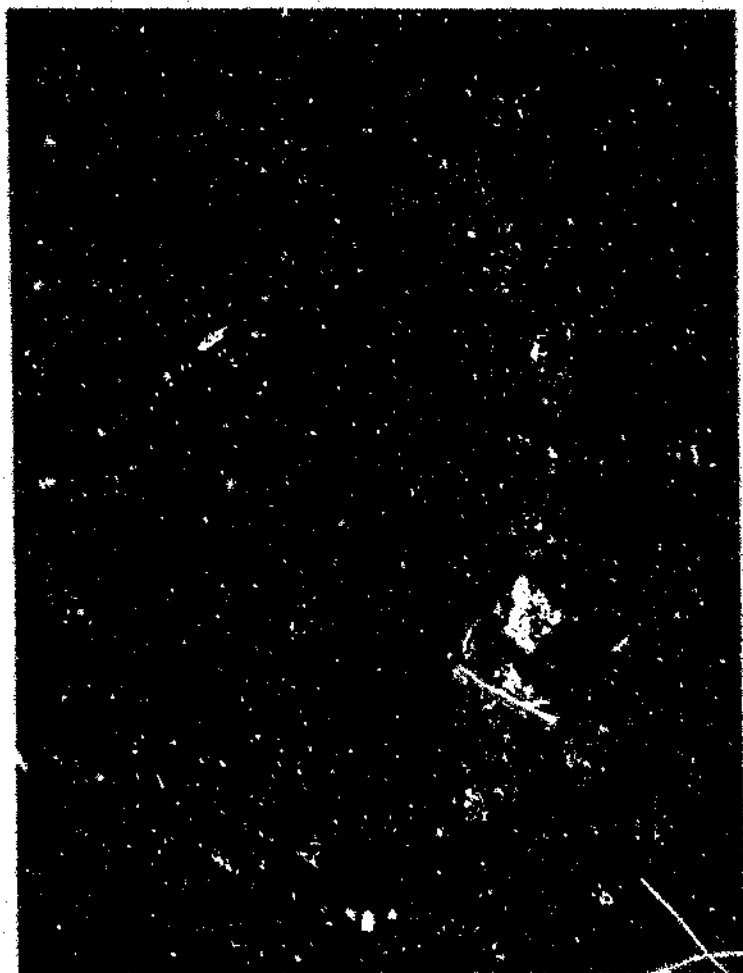
The fact that neither a mug shot nor an allegorical painting, neither a police description nor a play of humours[8] is a portrait, indicates that the co-presence of artistry and reference to specific reality is essential to the portrait genre (Steiner, 1978:4-5).

Wendy Steiner writes that this double property of the portrait-image as both artwork and referent, can be seen to be exploited in the earliest portraiture of ancient funerary masks and statues, which aimed at both a representation of the deceased and a direct experience of her or him through the work. Portrait silhouettes and miniatures also create this magical presence, putting a loved one, whether dead or absent, constantly and intimately in touch with the wearer of the likeness. More practically, portraits or photographs of officials are used in public places such as courts of law and post offices to summon up the authority of the official, to endow the place with his characteristics. This ability of the portrait to 'render its subject present' is, in fact its most central characteristic (Steiner, 1978:5). Thus, that a portrait can 'stand for' a particular human being, allows for the image to be seen as a sign. Steiner quotes R.G. Collingwood, who states that

> the true definition of representative art is not that the artifact resembles an original, but that the feeling evoked by the artifact resembles the feeling evoked by the original. When a portrait is said to be like the sitter, what is meant is that the spectator, when he looks at the portrait, 'feels as if he were in the sitter's presence. Seen in this way then, the portrait is a sign for its subject (Collingwood in Steiner, 1978:5).

Thus, it is in relation to a socially determined body of codes, and not in relation to some immutable 'universal visual experience', that the realism of an image [or the likeness of a portrait] should be understood.[9] To see a portrait as a sign is to see it as a social construct. A semiological approach to art would start from the observation that, as complex social creatures who live in a world of elaborate and nuanced social meanings, our visual experience is far more complicated than models of simple visual identification suggest. Portraits, and by logical inference, their likenesses are thus constructed social'y, a view which is semiological or conventionalist in that it regards painting as a system of socially constructed signs.

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[8] I presume that a 'play of humours' refers to the kind of caricature which is based on satire.

[9] Bryson, N. *Vision and Painting- The Logic of the Gaze*, (1983:13)

In *A Theory of Semiotics*, Umberto Eco outlines just such a coded approach to the understanding of images. His line of reasoning is divided into a theory of codes or systems of signification and a theory of sign production which is the process of communication.[10] Codes are sets of conventions which connect systems of 'expression' to systems of 'content'. In other words, codes enable us to recognise a word, a gesture, an image as standing for a particular meaning. Both kinds of system are structural: the identity of every unit depends entirely on its relations with other units in the same system (Eco, 1976:48-51).

Semioticians have usually accepted Charles Peirce's distinctions between symbols, indices and icons. In all three cases something is seen as standing for something else: with the symbol the 'standing for' relationship is arbitrary and therefore coded; with the icon the 'standing for' relationship is one of resemblance; with the indexical sign the 'standing for' relationship is causal; the index is understood to be connected to the real object, causally. The content or meaning of icons and indices thus depends on their relationship with the real world, whereas that of symbols does not.[11]

Eco, however, rejects this trichotomy and substitutes for Peirce's notion of the sign that of *sign function*. He writes that whenever something is perceived as standing for something else a sign function occurs, and whenever a sign function occurs, it depends on a coded relationship between a unit of expression and a unit of content. Thus what Eco refers to as a sign function is the encoded meaning which is found in the correlation between an expression unit and a content unit. For Eco these sign

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10   Eco, U.   *Theory of Semiotics*, (1976:4).

11   Silverman, K. *The Subject of Semiotics*,(1983:14-25). Peirce writes that a symbol is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law; natural languages and notational systems of all sorts are pre-eminently symbolic (20).
        'Indexes' have an intrinsic relation to the referent, like smoke to fire. Another example which Peirce cites as an indexical sign is a symptom: the signifying capacity of the symptom inheres not in its physical residence within the patients body, but in its ability to assist the physician in making a diagnosis. Because the indexical sign is understood to be connected to the real object, it is capable of making that object conceptually present (19-20).
        An iconic sign's 'resemblance' need not aim for optical illusionism. A blueprint and a photograph of a house are both iconic signs of a house. Convention plays a central role in iconic signification in that we need to be schooled in systems of representation before certain signifiers will reveal their iconicity to us (24).

functions are temporarily encoded relationships, changing as cultures change. In no case does the meaning or content of the unit of expression depend on its relationship with the real world (Eco, 1976:48-51).[12] Seen in this way, Eco's position can be linked closely to the conventionalist views of theorists such as Nelson Goodman, for whom there is an absolute plasticity in the world:

> There is no way the world is, there are only the conventions of its organisation. There is no innocent eye. The eye is tainted by the original sin of cognition.[13]

Representation or image-making is linked both to our perception and to our conception of reality. The representation of our perceptions will involve the use of some kind of medium. It is at this point that codes and conventions come into play.

> The convergence between picture and model, between thought and world, is not easily attained. The mind does not jump directly from the perceptual notion of spatial continuity to a conceptual or representational schema able to express this.[14]

Representation - of any kind - can therefore be seen to be reliant on a system of conventions and will thus always be coded.

A system of conventions such as a language, is discussed in Hal Foster's article, "The Expressive Fallacy" where he discusses the idea of *expressionism* as a specific

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[12]   e.g. when we recognise the picture of a dog as a picture of a dog, we establish a relationship not between an image (unit of expression) and a real animal, but between an image and a cultural unit (unit of content)- the idea of a dog. Its significance derives entirely from its relationship with other cultural units, not from its relationship with the real animal kingdom. This is a structuralist definition (Eco, 1976:66-8).
Eco's theory is regarded in greater detail in chapter four with specific reference to the works of Freud and Warhol and to the process of understanding or reading images.

[13]   Danto, A.C. "Description and Phenomenology of Perception" in *Visual Theory* (eds) Bryson et al (1991:207). This view stems from Ruskin. It is also held by Gombrich (1960:297-8). References to this idea can also be found in Goodman (1969:7-10)

[14]   Gablik, S. *Progress in Art*, (1976:35).

language.[18] He writes that expressionism is first and foremost a paradox: a type of representation that asserts 'presence'- of the artist, of his existence in the real world. He notes that this presence is by proxy only; the expressive marks of the artist, the indexical traces of the hand. He goes on to say that

> it is easy to fall into the fallacy: for example, we commonly say that an expressionist like Kandinsky 'broke through' representation, when in fact he replaced (or superposed) one form with another - a representation not oriented to reality (the coded, realist outer world) but expression (the coded, symbolist inner world). After all, formlessness does not dissolve convention or suspend mediation (Foster, 1985:60).

Foster argues the conventionalist position. It is important to note that whilst the view that 'all is convention' might equalise varying forms of representation insofar as they are all mediated, it does not equalise them in terms of their meaning or their impact on the viewer. For example, one might read and respond to a gestural or expressionist style as more primal, understanding at the same time, that it is nonetheless still coded. Foster elaborates his argument by comparing expressionist representation with classical representation. He suggests that the material elements in classical painting, especially the traces of the artist, merely function to substantiate what the painting represents, and are used so as to deliberately avoid any feature or quality which would cause viewers to focus on the material elements themselves. In Norman Bryson's words,

> With classical painting of the West, the image is thought of as self-effacing in the representation or reduplication of things (Bryson, 1983:6).

In expressionist painting, by way of contrast, the material elements tend to be subsumed by what the painting expresses, by its subjective reality. In other words, the expressive content is foregrounded and the medium is intrinsic to the style. Both types of representation are codes: the classical painter suppresses non-naturalistic marks so as to simulate (a staged) reality; the expressionist 'frees' such marks of naturalism so as to simulate direct expression (Foster, 1985:60-1). The use of such codes will be illustrated in a later analysis of the works of Lucien Freud and Andy Warhol. Their critical reinterpretations of past traditions help to identify and stretch certain

conventions of painting in new directions. Foster's argument thus confirms and expands upon Nochlin's statement cited in chapter one:

> A style - any style - is by definition no more than a series of conventions (Nochlin, 1971:51).

If one holds with Nochlin's conventionalist position, painting must then be viewed as a system of signs. The power of such a semiological model is taken to lie in its ability to question, radically, a mimetic model of art (Bryson, 1991:75). The recurring dream of European painting - to perfectly reduplicate the world - must continually suppress the overt visual trace of the painting process itself and the status of painting as a system of signs (Bryson,1983). Eco argues that traditional or 'classical' art was largely unambiguous.[16] Although it could give rise to varying responses, its nature was such as to channel these responses in a particular direction. Eco maintains that much modern art, on the other hand, is deliberately and systematically ambiguous. Such works invite, acknowledge, and thematize the activity of the viewer, and can thus be seen as social works, deeply connected to an interactive relationship with the viewer. This interaction accounts for the possibility of an exchange of power. For Eco, ambiguity is the product of the contravention of established conventions of expression.[17] The power in painting can then be found whenever an image meets the existing discourses and moves them over, finding its viewer and changing him or her.

Generally, semiological models of art position themselves against Perceptualist[18] or Universalist approaches. Supporting conventionalism, Michel Foucault takes a position against linear origins and against the authority of history. He suggests that

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[16]   In the next chapter this argument is analysed more closely in an effort to determine whether in fact the ambiguity or 'openness' of a work doesn't lie with the viewer's context or predisposition, as opposed to being inherent within the work itself. Perhaps 'openness' is not then limited to modern artforms.

[17]   Eco, U. *The Open Work*, (1989:84-6;94-5).

[18]   The Perceptualist account is a conception of image-making based on the key processes of 'schema', 'observation' and 'testing', with the aim of reduplicating the natural world. Gembrook's text, "Art and Illusion" is viewed by Bryson as

humankind's point of departure for self understanding ...begins today, not in some hypothetical beginning of historical time. Each day we make ourselves anew in fresh formulations.[19]

An important aspect of conventionalist or relativist theory is the idea that we continually construct our own system of structures for understanding and defining ourselves. We ultimately represent ourselves according to these structures.

Representation is often regarded as 'mere appearance' in relation to reality (refer 'bowl of oranges' discussion in chapter one:14),while Norman Bryson's argument suggests that the real and the natural are themselves conventions, constructed socially through history.

2.1.2   The social nature of sign systems

According to Bryson, Perceptualism is a type of image-making which omits reference to the social formation, for in the perceptualist account the painter's task is to transcribe perceptions as accurately as he can (1991:63). Bryson writes that, crucially, the perceptualist account leaves no room for the question of the relationship between the image and power, since power is accounted for in painting whenever the viewer is an active participant (1991:63).[20]

It takes one person to experience a sensation, it takes (at least) two to recognise a sign. And when people look at a representational painting and recognise what they see, their recognition does not unfold in the solitary recesses of the sensorium[21] but through their activation of codes of recognition that are learnt by interaction with others, in the acquisition of human culture. One might put this another way and say that whereas in the perceptualist account the image is said to span an arc that runs from the brush to the retina, an arc of inner vision or perception, the recognition of painting as sign spans an arc that extends

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19   Hutton, P. "Foucault, Freud and the Technologies of the Self" in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, (eds) Martin, L. Gutman, H. Hutton, P. (1988:134).

20   The question of power is taken up again in the next chapter.

21   sensorium· the seat or organ of sensation, *The Cassell Pocket English Dictionary* (1990:756).

from person to person and across inter-individual space (Bryson, 1991:65).

Bryson's semiological approach to painting gives rise to a view of painting as socially and historically constructed. Bryson argues that the traditional perceptualist approach tends to discuss visual representation as if it were constituted by ahistorical constants based either in human perception or in the universal conditions of human experience. As a consequence, it fails to come to terms with the issues of power which are necessarily historically and culturally defined (Bryson et al, 1991:2).[22] In other words, Bryson posits that all representation is a matter of convention and is wholly defined by its historical conditions of origin and reception. Since the reality experienced by human beings is always historically produced, there is no transcendent and naturally given reality (Bryson, 1983:13).

Gombrich, on the other hand, argues against such extreme conventionalism. In his essay, "Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation", Gombrich comes to suggest that we can read an image because we can recognise it as an *imitation* of reality within the medium (Gombrich, 1981:11).

Though Gombrich later concedes that any kind of pictorial representation is made up of conventions - accounting, at the same time, for non-representational images which must be conventional in terms of our reading of them - he still refuses to accept that notions of reality are entirely relative, varying according to how those notions or realities are constructed and by whom. Gombrich writes that in past styles, images were frequently made with the aid of conventions which had to be learned. So, whilst he may concede that there are numerous ways of referring to reality, he still believes in the 'naturalness' of realistic representation as we know it in the west, which is based on one point perspective.

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[22] Perhaps it is possible, however, that the perceptualist approach to painting did not regard overt reference to the conventions of a particular socio-historical context as either interesting or important. Perhaps their concerns were to do with image-making within a particular set of *other* ideas, outside of extending or challenging art-making conventions. On the other hand, perhaps this view of the 'perceptualist' approach to painting - as failing to come to terms with issues of power - is merely the way in which we - as modern viewers - see painting which in its day had equal social significance or power as that with which we bestow contemporary 'semiological' painting.

On the other hand, the relativity of realism, as Nelson Goodman discusses in his book *Languages of Art*, affords us the realization that we may find an ancient Egyptian representation unrealistic because we have not learned to read it. Understanding realistic representation is then also a matter of conditioning. But Gombrich continues to insist on the traditional empiricist separation of mind and reality (Gablik, 1976:170). Here, it seems as though Gombrich is arguing for his belief that we are all predisposed to seeing in the same way, but that we build upon this predisposition in varying ways according to what we know and believe.

Yet, in his "Limits of Convention" essay it seems clear that Gombrich regards the claim for the "naturalness" of illusionistic painting since the invention of perspective as a literal truth, not as a figure (Mitchell, 1986:83). In other words, Gombrich does not concede that perspective is also a convention - the same as any other - and that our understanding of such pictures depends on a certain amount of conditioning. In short, he holds that one point perspective is more than simply one way of mapping the world; it is successful in mapping not only *what* we see from a given point, but also in terms of *how* we see it.[23]

Gombrich's distinction between natural and conventional signs leads him, eventually, into a position where he seems to be supporting a qualified view of the conventionalist position. He goes to great lengths to prove that the images of nature are not conventional signs like the words of human language, but show a real visual resemblance, not only to our eyes or our culture but also to those of birds or beasts (Gombrich, 1981:21). It seems that Gombrich proposes a kind of 'natural code'. He locates the source of this natural equivalence in our biological make-up:

> We cannot regard the visual environment as neutral. Our survival often depends on our recognition of meaningful features, and so does the survival of animals.[24]

It is according to Mitchell, (1986:79) the fact that there are natural signs which can be decoded by lesser beings ('savages, children, illiterates and animals', sic) leads Gombrich to deduce that if the image involves a code, it is not an arbitrary or

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23   Gombrich, E.H. "The 'What' and the 'How': Perspective Representation and the Phenomenal World" in *Logic & Art: Essays in Honour of Nelson Goodman*, (eds) Rudner, R. and Scheffler, I. (1972:148).

24   Steiner, W. (ed) *Image and Code*, (1981:3).

conventional one, but something like a biological program.[25] It is probably because of their recognition of the usefulness of this facility for example, that Indian woodcutters have used human face-masks on the backs of their heads, in order to avoid being attacked by Bengal tigers, who only attack from the back (Brilliant, 1991:44).

> The way the language of art refers to the visible world is both so obvious and so mysterious that it is still largely unknown except to artists themselves who can use it as we use all languages - without needing to know its grammar and semantics (Gombrich, 1960:9).

Gombrich's statement here is ambiguous in that one *has* to know the grammatical and semantic construction of a language, even though one may not necessarily be able to talk about what one knows. In a similar vein, whilst one might know exactly what something looks like it is often difficult to find the words which describe it adequately. Nonetheless, when Gombrich makes the above statement it seems as if he is arguing for a theory which is part nature and part convention.

Another attempt to retrieve the force of the natural is found in his claim that

> we not only have a nature (physis), but what in English parlance is so aptly called 'second nature', our personality which is formed by our cultural environment (Gombrich, 1981:21).

Gombrich argues for the existence of a 'nature' which we are all predisposed to, *and* for a 'second nature' which is built upon this natural predisposition - that which is so habitual as to seem natural. Thus his distinction is between that which *is* natural and that which *seems* natural, but is rooted in cultural conventions.

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[25]   While Arthur C. Danto acknowledges that language at every moment penetrates perception (in Bryson et al. 1991:9) he also concedes that *there may be an area of theory-neutral perception*. His evidence is in the observed behaviour, in connection with pictures, of animals that cannot be supposed in the first instance to have language. The fact that they can recognise pictures (photographs and drawings) of particular humans and of particular members of their own species, implies that this facility is innate, in both man and beast. Danto writes, "All I want to insist on is that the ability to note minute differences is innate, probably for good adaptational reasons, and we can be conditioned to make finer and finer discriminations..." (Danto, 1991:209-10). There is reasonable inference that the recognition of images, in so far as there are relevant isomorphisms, between pictures of things and things themselves, may be innate or theory-neutral.

Behind Gombrich's theory lurks the idea of a progressive 'fit' or match between the representation and its real counterpart in nature. For Gombrich, art proceeds by mimetic conjecture. The conjecture is then exposed to criticism to find out whether or not it is like the real world (Gablik, 1976:154)[26] Affirming his initial belief in the *construction* of likeness, Gombrich states that

> the *correct* portrait ...is an end product on a long road through schema and correction. It is not a faithful record of a visual experience but a faithful construction of a relational model (Gombrich 1960:78) (Italics added) .

Such an argument still supposes that there is indeed one 'correct' model of representation, one 'correct' set of rules. Clearly, we see Gombrich's very articulated notion of how the natural and the conventional work together. He concedes that we can never wholly eliminate the 'subjective element' in perception and that in painting, there are limits to objectivity. He also claims that perception already stylises and that art is always an interpretation, never a pure recording of facts (Gablik, 1976:169). That he then asserts that the undeniable subjectivity of vision does not preclude objective standards of representational accuracy is a clear example of his belief in the supremacy of representation in terms of one-point-perspective.[27]

Gombrich insists on the existence of *one* 'natural code', overlooking the possibility that human predispositions allow for the construction of *many* 'natural codes' which might arise from genetic variations and development. Up until this particular point, Gombrich's nuanced argument has proved extremely helpful in terms of my own understanding of the nature-convention debate. However, his insistence on perspective as the *only* 'natural code' is the point at which my own thinking in terms of representation and 'the natural' moves away from Gombrich. Parallels can be drawn, for example, with the human capacity for language, a capacity which manifests as many different languages. Similarly, what seems to be a natural way of visual representation in the West, is in fact only one form of 'natural' representation.

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[26] References to Gombrich's theory of making and matching can be found intermittently throughout the text of *Art and Illusion*, (1960). It is succinctly explained on page 321. It links to a Popperian method of scientific discovery through probing and testing. This is explained in the same text, page 28-9.

[27] Gombrich, E.H. *Art and Illusion*, (1962:xi)

Gombrich's distinction between natural and conventional signs is not without flaws:

> first it is images in general that are natural signs in comparison to the
> conventional signs of language... [and] then it is certain kinds of
> images (Western illusionistic paintings, photographs) that are natural
> compared to the relatively stylized and conventional images of
> Egyptian or Far Eastern art (Mitchell, 1986:84).

The difficulties in his distinction lead us to ask why Gombrich insists on trying to isolate *any* kind of sign as the natural one. However, he manages to convince us that images are more natural than words... they are more easily learned; they are the sign we share with animals... they are naturally fitted to our senses; they are grounded in the strategic perceptual skills that man must have for survival in a hostile 'state of nature' (Mitchell, 1986:88-9).

At times Gombrich's argument is highly problematic, yet I think it is *because* of his attempts to differentiate or unpack the distinctions between sign types that he manages to unfold nuances or areas within a purely conventionalist position which exposes the difficulties with such an extreme stance. Gombrich's argument deals with issues and objections that cannot be ignored. It raises questions which create discomfort in a completely social approach to conventionalism which tends to oversimplify the complexity of the perception process, both cross-culturally and across the lines of species, as well as of its role in the formation of convention.

2.2   Perception and recognition

A Perceptualist position would argue that human perception is universal and that there are forms of convention which are more isomorphic with the processes of perception, and thus more 'natural' than others. The broad issue in the debate seems to be

> to what degree are perceptual processes cognitively penetrated by
> conceptual or descriptive structures? (Danto, 1991:208).

Put more simply, 'to what degree is what one sees penetrated by what one comes to know?'

Suzi Gablik offers that the way in which we understand images is constructed rather than given; the human mind is an active, 'orming participant in what it knows; that the

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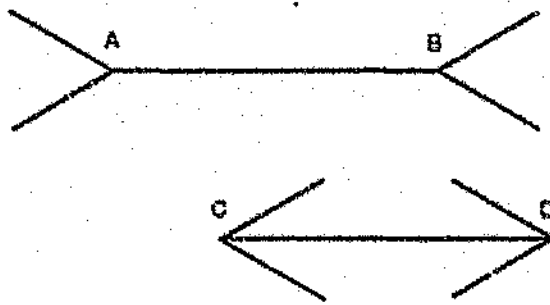
6   The Muller-Lyer illusion. Although line AB appears to be longer than line CD, the two horizontals are equal.

evolution of conceptual frameworks must be accounted for both in the individual and, by extension, historically as well (Gablik, 1976:11). This view stems back to Piaget who suggests that the reality behind appearance is not perceived by the senses but conceived by the intelligence (Gablik, 1976:27).

> Our notion of reality is not an empirical given but is a continuous
> mental construction... (Gablik, 1976:27).

The notion of reality as continuous mental (re)construction also allows for the idea that criteria of truth and reality change with the progress of science, and every culture has its own norms which enter into the perception of reality (Gablik, 1976:80). Gombrich's making and matching theory, however, seems to focus on a quest for some kind of ready-made reality which the act of cognition itself does not substantially transform. The separate yet co-operative functions of the eye and the mind are illustrated by the Müller-Lyer illusion whereby our knowledge that the lines are identical in length fails to disrupt our perception of them as of different lengths: no matter how much we know, we continue to see things as we do see them, as if our perceptual system were invincibly resistant to knowledge (Danto, 1991:208)..

If one's account of human perception is sufficiently minimal or reduced, if it attends exclusively to the elementary kinds of recognition that all human beings (and animals) are able to perform in all cultures and eras, it will indeed appear that the perception which art engages is trans-historical and universal. Further, if the visual processes are presented as unaffected by historical determination, then the art which embodies them will seem to exist outside history, in a timeless realm of aesthetic contemplation (Bryson et al, 1991:9). Thus, whilst certain perceptions are rooted in innate features of the cognitive apparatus, the issue which is of greater relevance in this context, is the extent to which physical knowledge can be regarded as penetrating perception and how the perception of a work of art is of a different order altogether (Bryson et al. 1991:9-10).

The fact that there exist pairs of objects perceptually indiscriminable but which have different philosophical identities and, in consequence, different properties, has to do with the idea that art embodies the power of thought. Once one accepts the possibility that a Brillo box by Warhol is a work of art, while an ordinary Brillo box is not, it is plain that the differences are not of a kind that simply meet the eye (Danto, 1991:213).

What we see and what we know *work together* in the way we represent things, in the way we create images. Whilst mechanisms of perception may be innate, we all have

differing sets of associations which will colour our perceptions. Thus, the way we see things is dependent on what we have learned and on our understanding of particular sets of social codes and conventions. Without the recognition or our understanding of, socially constructed codes and conventions we become computer-like, construing the world in an 'identiti-kit' way: by means of key features and schematic relationships.

Recognition is thus related to the memory of past experiences and thus, perception works together with conception to enable recognition. The word 'recognition' itself stems from the Latin 're-cognito', which translates 'think again'. 'Re-cognito' could read as 're-think' or 'remember'. With reference to the social nature of recognition, the phenomenon of visual agnosia is interesting. Certain disorder of recognition and perception have been termed 'agnosia', the partial or total inability to recognise objects by use of the senses. Prosopagnosia is the inability to recognise visually the faces of familiar persons who continue to be normally recognised through other sensory channels. This breakdown in visual recognition is due to a complete failure to evoke memories pertinent to specific faces.[28]

A neurological model of facial learning and recognition has been posited which includes various steps from perception to the arousal of past visual perceptions, to the activation step whereby multiple memories are evoked and finally to a readout of concomitant evocations which result in the experience of familiarity. Prosopagnosia cannot be explained as being due to an impairment of the basic perceptual step. Nor can it be explained by an impairment of associated memories because they can be easily evoked through other channels. Tests on patients with prosopagnosia, based on the use of electrodermal skin conductance response indicated that despite the patients' inability to experience familiarity, they still carry out some steps of the recognition process for which there is a spontaneous or autonomic index.[29] On these grounds Daniel Tranel and Antonio Damasio posit that the defect may be explained by an impairment of the activation step (1985:1453-4). The study of such rare disorders has

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[28]   Tranel, D. and Damasio,A.R. "Knowledge Without Awareness: An Autonomic Index of Facial Recognition by Prosopagnosics" *Science* 228. June 21 (1935:1453).

[29]   autonomic: (Biol.) occurring involuntarily, spontaneous; pertaining to or mediated by the autonomic nervous system.
autonomic nervous system: the part of the vertebrate nervous system that regulates the involuntary actions of the heart, glands and some muscles. *The Cassell Pocket English Diction* p.51.

been useful in positing a definite order of relationship between processes of perception, memory and recognition.[30]

Thus, the ability to recognise an image neither involves nor makes inferences towards the isolated perceptual field of the image's creator. It is rather an ability which presupposes competence within socially constructed codes of recognition.

In the fourth chapter I will attempt to 'decode' some of the conventions used by Freud and Warhol in order to further understand the images, particularly in terms of their construction of likeness, and in which respects the portraits *are like* their human counterparts.

> The apprehension of a work of art is the result of a kind of visual exposure to its colour, its texture, its arrangement, and its reference. This reference may often be subliminal, an underwater contact between artist and spectator ...Comprehension is something else. In this the spectator for the moment throws off the (sensuous) involvement and discerns what he is qualified to discern: methods, techniques, influences, subtle intrusions.[31]

In other words the understanding of an image is reliant on the de-coding of the conventions used.

The language of visual art, as in that of verbal description is a translation of ideas. Neither artist nor spectator exists in a vacuum. The objective viewpoint is thus greatly undermined. Heather Martienssen suggests that *the subjective is not necessarily the personal, and that it may be as near a valid generalisation for all sensate humanity as it is possible to get* (Kossick, 1984:46)[32]. We are all subjects, directing and redirecting the flow of power, creating ourselves and recreating others, and it is this complex of relationships that will be extended and elaborated on in the next chapter.

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[30]   Dr. Oliver Sacks writes extensively about visual agnosia in his book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, (1985), esp. the title essay.

[31]   Kossick, S.G. (ed) *Insights - selected essays of Heather Martienssen*, (1984:85).

[32]   This might be exactly what Gombrich means when he suggests that the subjectivity of vision does not preclude objectivity in terms of representation (see page 35).

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSACTIONS, THE SELF AND THE OTHER - THE WAY WE ARE DEFINED

"The only portraits in which one believes are portraits where there is very little of the sitter, and a very great deal of the artist."
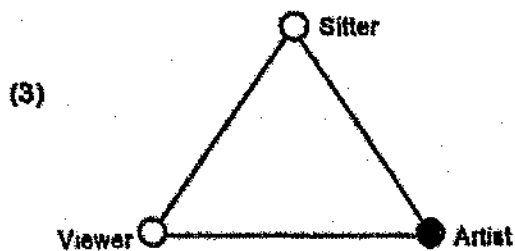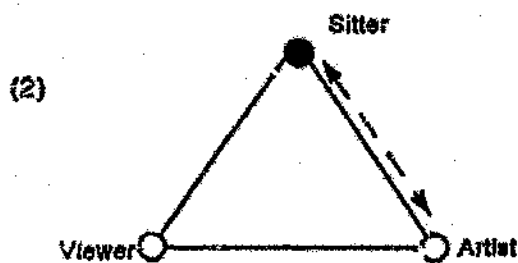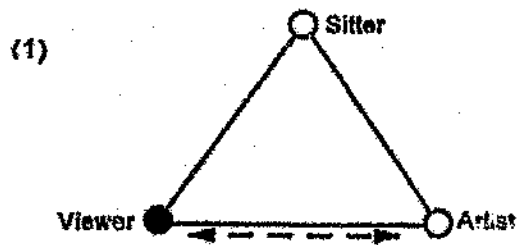Oscar Wilde [1]

Chapter two has explored the idea that whenever something is perceived as standing for something else, the use of signs is inevitable. That a portrait image 'stands for' its human counterpart in the world, enables us to view the portrait as a sign. Sign systems are explained as social in that they are reliant on the recognition of particular, agreed-upon codes and conventions which have been built up through social consensus. That which we learn to know socially works together with the innate structures of perception in order to create recognition. It is clear then, that recognition is rooted in our understanding of these socially-constructed codes and conventions. In both the reading and in the creation of a portrait these codes and conventions are at play. The likeness, then, is also constructed socially through the interaction between artist, sitter and viewer. In chapter two the social construction of the portrait-likeness was established.

This chapter examines more closely the interactions in the relational triad presupposed in the creation of the portrait, that is, the relations between artist and sitter, artist and viewer and between sitter and viewer. The construction of these relationships as presented *through* the portraits has varied over time, and the nature of these relationships has reflected at which point in the triad power is seen to be the most focussed.

In this chapter the interaction between persons and the environment is also discussed, since this interaction plays a primary role in the social construction of the portrait. To recognise that the act of painting a portrait-image is to engage with the notion that the body itself is always modified by the social construction attributed to it by a particular society at a particular time. The artist may simply perpetuate the dominant social construction, or challenge some aspects of that construction - a situation which sometimes can be sufficiently powerful to open up new areas of representation, which then frequently become assimilated into the subsequent social construction of the body. A brief exploration of some ways in which I feel that my own work challenges certain dominant modes of representation in portraiture, is discussed with particular reference to the relational triad between artist, sitter, and viewer.

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[1] Wilde, O. "The Decay of Lying". *The Artist as Critic*, (ed) Ellmann, R. (1969:304).

(1)
Sitter
Viewer
Artist

(2)
Sitter
Viewer
Artist

(3)
Sitter
Viewer
Artist

Power-tension

7   Artist, sitter, viewer relational triads. The power-tension line indicates the site of tension in terms of power, whereby the artist primarily determines the image but is subject to the approval - and fiscal power - of the patron

Ultimately then, in portraiture, the artist is faced with dealing simultaneously with the image constructed by the sitter her- or himself in accordance with the societal pressures and possibilities which the sitter has perceived - consciously or unconsciously - the self to be subject to; the range of 'permitted' artistic constructions for the portrait open to the artist; the artist's own perceptions and desires for expression in the light of the other forces in the portrait-making situation.

This chapter, having looked at the relational triad, briefly considers a special case - that of the missing sitter - where likeness is constructed without the urgency of the aesthetic, in the identi-kit portrait. The special nature of this relationship between artist, viewer and 'sitter' is unpacked in order to illuminate the social - *constructed* - model of art proposed by Bryson and Eco and which is reviewed in the last section of this chapter. This last section examines power as an interplay between the image and the viewer.

The next chapter looks at the transactions between artist, sitter and viewer as present in the construction of artworks by two particular artists. It examines the portraits of Lucian Freud and Andy Warhol. How and why these artists choose their sitters and the part which their sitters play in the portrait-making process will be discussed as a way of providing the reader with an access to the idea of the works as social productions, or as images which are created within the social fabric and which actively reflect and/or resist it.

3.1   The historical transformation of the transactions in portraiture

There is a clear historical shift in the power relations within the relational triad upon which the construction of portraiture is based. The basic movement is that of the artist as being - in some senses at least - subject to the (dis)pleasure of the patron, to the situation where artists have claimed the power largely to determine the nature of the power relations between themselves and the sitters - and the viewers.

The first two triads illustrated opposite are variations on the traditional power-tensions which exist between the artist and the patron, who might be either the sitter or the viewer (as in the instance of the portrait of *Nell Gwynne* by Sir Peter Lely (1618-80) - commissioned by Charles the Second). The third triad locates the greater power with the artist, which is generally the case in much modern portraiture. Freud and Warhol's work are both representative of this third form of triad of relations, albeit with very different aspects of the artist-sitter-viewer relationship or power-tensions being challenged.

Nowadays the sitter tends to be chosen by the artist and not vice-versa, but, because the artist *requires* the sitter to serve as the starting point in the creation of her or his work, the relations are not so much 'power over' one as they are transactional: between two people. The shift of power from external forces such as patronage, to a field of activity whereby the relations between artist and sitter are *transactional*, is obviously central to the work of Freud and Warhol, especially with respect to the way in which they are both involved, in different ways, in the democratisation of the image.

For Freud, the image is deliberately democratised by his generally *not* choosing sitters who are generally well known. His images also tend towards the ordinary and the mundane rather than the glamorous or heroic – qualities which would traditionally be highlighted in portraiture-for-patronage. Warhol, on the other hand, retains the traditional notion of celebrities as sitters, and continues to glamorise the sitters, but in a way which ultimately suggests artificiality, the constructed quality of the sitter's projected image and perhaps even a certain tawdriness. Warhol's images, on the other hand, undercut traditional notions of uniqueness and originality – which contributed to the monetary and artistic value of the traditional portrait – by being produced in multiples, via techniques such as silk-screening. In many ways the sitter, as subject, moves far closer to object-status – as viewed by the artist, and becomes subject to her or his preoccupations.

Freud and Warhol thus both undercut values of power and authority and this undercutting is linked in many ways to the transformation of the transactions between artist and sitter, including the traditional power-relations. [2]

3.2   Acknowledging the interplay between self and context

It is clear how important, and how telling the relationship between the artist and the sitter is. The relationship is – in part – physically manifested in terms of a resulting image. When considering the portrait as a point at which socially-constructed codes and conventions are at play it becomes impossible to ignore the reciprocal relationship between the social construction of the self and the individual's concurrent construction of society: we construct ourselves within a context or environment which inevitably deeply affects the simultaneous construction of the self. In other words, our natural

[2]   An extensive discussion of the art of Freud and Warhol is the subject of chapter four.

world is continually being constructed and re-constructed in terms of *our* changing understanding of it. This, in turn, affects our understanding of our own location:

> The categories of who we are - gender, class, nationality, historical specificity, social location, institutional affiliation, religious or ethnic identity - the ways in which we define and redefine ourselves are themselves constructed systems which structure our manner of seeing the world.[3]

In other words, the basic forces of psychic organisation are articulated and structured within the rhetoric of a time, an age, a gender, a class:

> We bear the weight of our place in history: this weight helps shape who we believe ourselves to be, and we act upon this belief (Gillman, 1991:15).

Foucault argues for the body as a site of power, which, situated in the social strata is continually shaped and reshaped by it. He stresses the need for power to be considered, not in terms of domination, but as a productive network which runs through the whole social body:

> power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain... never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth.[4]

To claim a history for the body requires that we take seriously the ways in which the environment and the typical activities of a body may vary historically and create its capacities and limitations and even its desires and its actual material form. Socially defined roles and conventions profoundly affect appearance and behaviour, thereby establishing the historical construction of the person within a social context (Brilliant and Borgatti, 1990:12). By drawing attention to the context in which bodies move and recreate themselves - as artists do when they create a portrait - attention is focussed on this complex dialectic between bodies and their environments (Gatens, 1992:130).

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[3]   Gillman, S.L. *Inscribing the Other*, (1991:14)

[4]   Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other writings 1972-71*.(ed.) Gordon, C. (1980:98).

For example, the social norms and fashions of the Victorian era encouraged the wearing of corsetry for women and resulted both in a particular appearance or style of dress but also in the distortion of the actual posture of the body. Thus, this social construction of the body impacted directly on the way in which Victorian nudes were represented visually in portraits.

Deborah Drier elaborates upon the discomfort and the painful effect of such fashions for the body:

> ...tight-lacing surely is an esthetic, and just as surely involves castigation of the flesh.....[the pursuit of a seventeen inch waist] *involves a transfiguration of the self*, a me   sical transaction between self and other *in which flesh is deformed to be perfected*, as a saint is perfected in martyrdom (1994: 12)(Italics added).

The role which corsetry and fashions play in physically changing the shape of the body, the various ailments and health problems it consequently becomes prone to, as well as the moral problems, is taken up by Ronald Pearsall in his book, *The Worm in the Bud* (1971):

> The sociological, even philosophical, implications of the corset were not lost. It kept woman in her place, in every imaginable sense ...One of the implications of the corset and of the incredible amount of stuff the well-dressed woman had piled upon her and built around her was that such a woman was certainly incapable of doing work (Pearsall, 1971:135).

Clearly the Victorians' social construction of the female body shaped not only its physical appearance but also functioned as a means of limiting its range of activity just to those possibilities that suited the patriarchy.

Current social attitudes towards the female body continue to reflect a preoccupation with appearance, manifested in an obsession with slimness and the condemnation of any degree of overweight as undesirable and ugly.[5] Many feminist writers have ascribed the dramatic increase in the cases of anorexia and bulimia, both disorders which completely distort the shape of the body and which affect mainly women, to

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[5] Bruch, H. *Eating Disorders*. (1973:88).

these 'insane social realities'[6] with which contemporary women feel compelled to contend because these realities have been so strongly internalized.

Whist power has generally been conceived as something which is intimately connected with authority, domination or exploitation, Foucault has pointed out that relations of power are not purely and simply a projection of power over the individual: they are the changing soil in which power functions (Foucault, 1980:187), and through which all people regardless of gender, continually need to redefine themselves.

Portraiture, in its preoccupation with likeness to the human face and body, forms an important record of the changing conventions which have governed body types. It can, however, also serve to challenge accepted forms of depiction, inviting the viewer to take a fresh look at the body by undercutting or negating the currently accepted conventions.

Freud and Warhol, from a male perspective, have both challenged traditional concepts of portraiture and their work can be seen as representative of that relational triad which moves away from patron-commissioned portraiture. However, as mentioned, within the expression of the triadic relationship in both Warhol and Freud's work, the sitter in many ways is treated as being of object status, as a living object viewed by the artist.[7]

Nowadays - but perhaps even previously - the artist takes on a certain power or authority over the subject when she or he sets about constructing an image. Thus, whilst the identity of the subject is first constructed by the subject her - or himself, it is also constructed by the artist. Harold Rosenberg once wrote:

> Portraiture involves a consensual ritual encounter which is both trusting and wary: the subject submits to the artist's interpretation while hoping to retain some control over what the interpretation will be.[8]

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[6]   Wolf, N *The Beauty Myth*, (1990:163). Susie Orbach's book, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, (1978) deals with eating disorders as a social disease, a response to the socially determined inequality of the sexes.

[7]   An in-depth analysis of a work by Freud and one by Warhol is included at the end of chapter four.

[8]   Cited by Brilliant, R. *Portraiture*, (1991:90).

Sitter

Viewer · Artist

8   Relational triad in which boundaries between artist, sitter and viewer are
     significantly reduced.
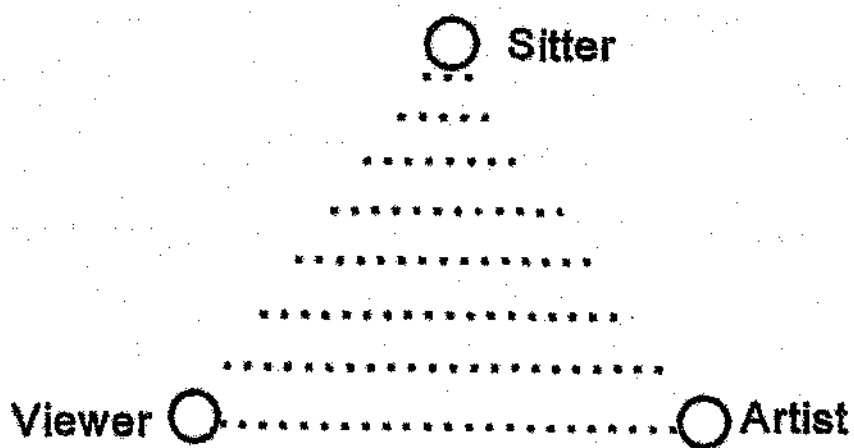
3.2.1 Negotiating transformation in my own work - towards capturing an intersubjective reality

My own practical work struggles with the challenge of neither being subject to the demands and expectations of sitters nor of reducing the sitter to the object of my artistic endeavours. The aim of my work is to dissolve traditional relations of power and to capture some quality of the essentially egalitarian, intersubjective reality which exists between myself and the friends who have sat for me. Towards this end, the portraits become increasingly about reflecting a *relationship* between artist and sitter - recognition moves from the visual to the sensory as the portraits aim to create a sense or a feeling of both the sitter *and* the relationship between artist and sitter.

Recognition can be easily triggered by 'information' other than facial details. The following extract from the novel *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* by Peter Høeg eloquently illustrates the employment of different modes of perception in viewing, and the shifting perspective of detail as a means for recognition:

> In a big city you adopt a particular way of regarding the world. A focused, sporadically selective view. When you scan a desert or an ice floe, you see with different eyes. You let the details slip out of focus in favour of the whole. This way of seeing reveals a different reality. If you look at someone's face in this manner, it starts to dissolve into a shifting series of masks.
>
> With this way of seeing, a person's breath in the cold - that veil of cooled drops that forms in the air in temperatures under 8°C - is not merely a phenomenon fifty centimetres from his mouth. It's something all-encompassing, a structural transformation of the space surrounding a warm-blooded creature, an aura of minimal but definite thermal displacement. I've seen hunters shoot snow hares in a starless winter night at a distance of two hundred and fifty metres by aiming at the fog around them (Høeg, 220 -21).

The description, in relation to my own work[9], highlights the shift away from a singular, defined image of the sitter, towards an attempt to express an egalitarian, intersubjective reality (illus 8). With this shift it seems to me that the power relations

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[9]   The development of my practical work towards reaching this dissolution of traditional power-tensions by way of dissolving physical boundaries which separate artist, sitter and viewer, is carefully traced in chapter five.

involved with one person fixing the image of another, are themselves dissolved, or at least significantly lessened.

3.3   The theory of power in terms of interplay

> Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships, ...but are immanent in the latter. Power is exercised in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations.[10]

It is precisely this transactional nature of power relations which enable us to view power itself as something which is both socially generated and which works on a *shared* basis between people.

In order for a man or woman to be constituted as a subject, he or she must first be divided from the totality of the world, or the totality of the social body. For a 'me' to emerge, a distinction must be made between the 'me' and the 'not-me'. The boundaries of the self are those lines that divide the self from all that which is not the self. The first and essential move in the constitution of the self is division.[11] Having divided the 'me' from the 'not-me,' the 'me' discovers itself apart, separated, isolated, alone. Although the first reward of constituting oneself as a subject is a feeling of centrality and well-being, an inevitable consequence of that constitution, which depends upon division, is isolation. All selves lead double lives as object as well as subject (to be a subject is to be able to see oneself as an object) (Gutman, 1988:109).

The self cannot perceive itself any more than a camera can take a picture of itself. The idea that the freedom and independence of an individual is a given, derived from the boundaries and demarcated wholeness of her or his body, is now reversed and the self is reliant on the gaze of the other for its wholeness (Van Alphen, 1992:115).

Thus there is the division of human experience into self and other, 'me' and 'not-me' or individual and society. The self is not known in isolation or by itself. It is always and only known in relation to the world. One does not see oneself as one is seen by

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[10]   Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality*, (1978:94)

[11]   Gutman, H. "Rousseau's *Confessions*" in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, (eds.) Martin et al (1988:107).

'Sitter'

Viewer O————————————O Artist
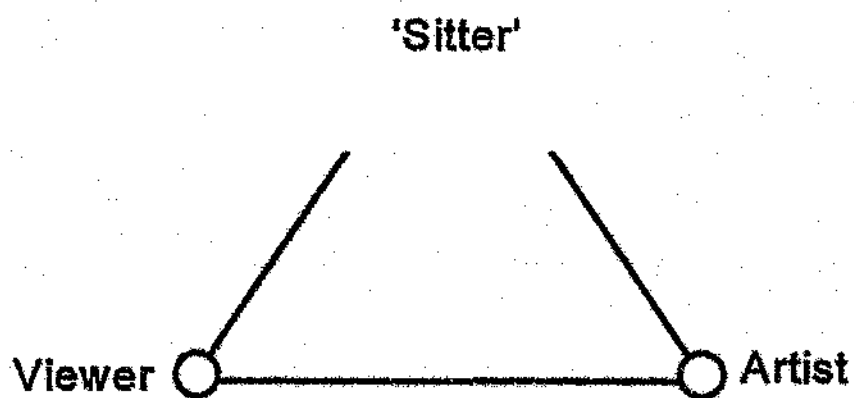
others. While others see the subject's body as object and as whole, the subject has only inner experiences or fragmented outer views of her or his body.[12]

As an image is completed by the viewer, similarly the self is completed by the other. Both sets of relations allow for the flow of power. In portraiture these two relationships are compounded.

At least at the beginning of an exchange, collusion is the end result of the way one person represents her or himself and is so understood by another (Brilliant, 1991:89). Notions of identity and of the self are both dependent on this collusion. It is clear then that the existence of power relations in the transactions between artist, sitter and viewer are inevitable, but that the exact nature of the relationship is not necessarily unvarying.

3.4   Constructing likeness - the case of the missing sitter

By looking at a portrait image, the viewer can retrieve a great deal of information about the artist, the sitter and the nature of their relationship. Added to this, the portrait and its particular aesthetic also provides information about the social milieu within which it was created.

With police identikits, the aesthetic quality of the portrait is not of great concern. The aim, or the information which one can glean from the image is solely concerned with 'catching' the likeness - and the 'sitter', who in this case is absent (illus 9). In light of these special circumstances, there is a very specific set of relations between artist, 'sitter' and 'victim' / viewer.

A system of likeness-creation called 'photo-fit', is often used as an aid in the construction of suspect likenesses. Penry, its inventor, believed that in order to perceive and remember a human face it was necessary to abstract from it the various features and categorise these systematically. Photo-fit comprises a box containing sets of features, such as a large number of chins, noses, eyes, types of hair and so on, all taken from actual photographs, which can be put together to construct a face. By putting together combinations of such features it is possible to produce a very large number of different faces, and it is claimed that, given a skilled operator, it is possible to reproduce any given face. The idea behind Penry's photofit is reminiscent of the 'lip books' which Warhol had made and from which he would select the lips he thought

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[12]   Van Alphen, E. *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, (1992:114).

10   An identi-kit constructed using the *Sirchee* method whereby the witness selects the appropriate features from a variety of given components.

would be most flattering for a given portrait.[13] With this particular practice Warhol seems to mock the constructed nature of the sitter's image, while at the same time using the practice to his advantage in that his 'customers' would be glamorised and satisfied. The images would still be recognisable, even though the mouths or eyes had been changed. This same 'constructed' approach to creating an identi-kit, however, employs rather different power-plays to those which exist in usual portraits. Here the potential for power-plays can become increasingly complex, given the likely emotional bias of the viewer - often the victim - and her or his need to 'catch' the - or perhaps any - suspect.

Producing likenesses of suspects for 'wanted' posters is a peculiar form of creating likeness, since the artist is required to construct a likeness of a person she or he has never seen. Capturing likeness is difficult enough when the subject is in front of the artist. However, using information and descriptions from witnesses or victims, the artist pieces together an image in much the same way as a jigsaw puzzle is put together (see illus.10 and 11). The collaboration is difficult for artist and witness alike. The features of a face, even a face one knows well from years of frequent observation, can be maddening to convey with the precision an artist needs ...'Have I got the eyes the right distance apart?'....'Is there more space between the top of the eye and the eyebrow?'. The witness is helplessly uncertain, and it is quickly apparent that the problems of creating such a likeness lie in the realm of the memory and articulation of the witness.[14] The artist is working on somebody else's perception of the subject, and the artistry could be said to lie with asking the right questions.

Even in such identikit descriptions, and this could be said of other portraits too, an exact likeness is neither the objective nor is it necessary. The drawing will nevertheless present a great deal of information about the suspect and eliminate many others. As discussed in previous chapters, a compendious attention to detail is not necessarily essential for recognising people and thus one should imagine that it is also unnecessary for the recognition of portraits. A few salient features often hold the key to recognition; as with cartoon or caricature. Similarly, we might recognise a person because of their particular gait or expression without consciously knowing that it is this particular element which enables our recognition.

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[13]   Fremont, V. "Andy Warhol's Portraits" in *Andy Warhol Portraits*, (eds.) Henry Geldzahler and Robert Rosenblum (1993:30).

[14]   MacDonald, S. " 'Wanted' Art: Meet a Man Who Draws Shady Characters" *The Wall Street Journal*, August 3 (1984:5).
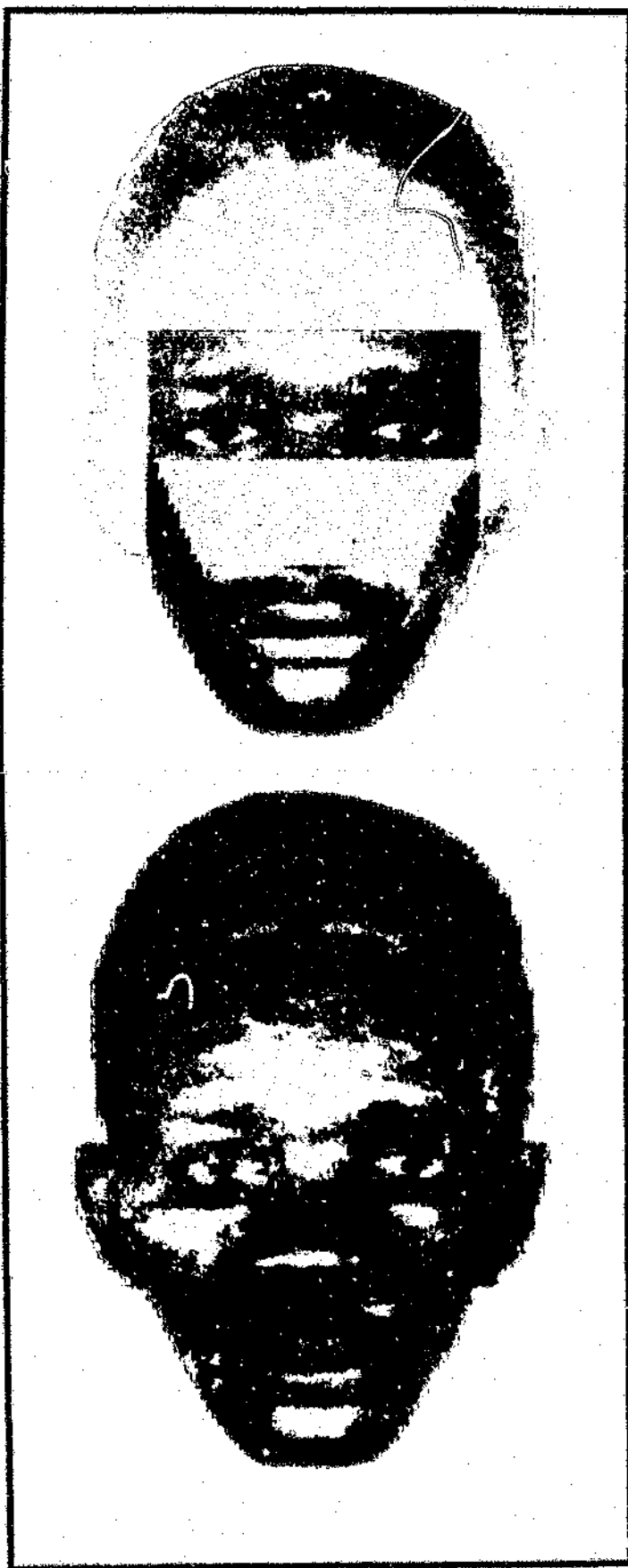
11 Computerised identi-kits comprised of selected facial features - before and after tonal adjustments.

3.5 A social model of art - viewing power as something within the image and within the viewer

The special nature of the relational triad at work in the construction of an identikit portrait highlights the very constructed nature of portrait-making processes. With this very clear understanding of the way in which portraits are constructed, one is able to situate power as something within the image itself and within the viewer.

Without an image or a description, either visual or verbal, one person has, in a very real sense, no power over another individual: one cannot easily identify or even attempt to locate a person without this information. The power of portraits may thus be seen to be linked to the power of recognition, based on the view that

> the recognition of an object implies the colonization, the possession of it.[15]

And since recognition itself is rooted in memory and association and that which one comes to know socially, Norman Bryson rejects a perceptualist account of representation. He argues that such an approach tends to discuss visual representation as if it were constituted by ahistorical constants (Bryson, 1991:2). Bryson suggests that we relocate painting into a field of power from which it has been excluded - a field of *socially generated codes of recognition*. At the same time, Bryson offers this semiological approach merely as *a* tool which we might use in our interpretation of a work. In this, Bryson acknowledges the inevitability of interpretation - a characteristic that tends to remain veiled in those views that insist that representation depends on a purely perceptual base.

Whilst Bryson might suggest that some works are indeed made in such a way as to encourage a perceptualist - and in his view, limited - reading, he does not ascribe the existence of power in art specifically to *modern* artforms - which is a view that Umberto Eco advocates. Eco views modern - or open - works as those which are essentially ambiguous and which contravene current or established conventions of expression. Modern forms of art are said by Eco to mark a radical shift in the relationship between artist and public, by requiring of the public a much greater degree of collaboration and personal involvement than was ever required by the traditional art of the past (Eco, 1989: x - xi).

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[15]   Lee, R. "Resisting Amnesia: Feminism, Painting and Postmodernism", *Feminist Review*, (July 1987:19).

It is precisely this process of interaction between image and viewer which resonates with Bryson's semiological or social view of art which - opposing the Perceptualist tradition - hinges upon the notion that if a painter views painting as a system of signs, and assumes the society's codes of recognition, then it becomes possible to think of the image as discursive work which returns into the society, often displaying new combinations of the sign and also refreshing and challenging currents of discourse. By way of such an open approach - making images which deliberately facilitate an exchange of ideas, images which invite active viewer participation - the power of painting will then be found in the thousands of gazes caught by its surface, in a matter of local moments of change and that

> such nge may take place whenever an image meets the existing
> discourses, and moves them over; or finds its viewer and changes h'm
> or her (Bryson, 1991:71).

I would like to suggest here, however, that Eco's open theory and Bryson's semiological view of art have indeed established relations between - some forms of - art and power, which have provided us with a discourse - the tools or the means with which to talk about power and power relations in art-making. I would like to stress, however, that these transactional relations of power must surely pre-exist any theoretical attempts to understand them. The continued and changing tradition of portraiture must lie within a *history* of artists who have challenged existing power relations and stretched the boundaries of current conventions. Openness, or the relationship between art and power cannot then be a part of modern works alone. Whilst some works can be seen to encourage viewer participation, and therefore as more open than others, this openness must reside, as Bryson intimates, in the personal disposition of the viewer at least as much as it lies within the work itself.

When an *image* is multivalent or open to multiple interpretations or possibilities in terms of its reading, it empowers the *viewer* in that she or he is required to complete the image individually[16]. When an image displays a contravention of existing conventions, whereby old ideas are challenged and replaced, it begins a process which gradually shifts the viewer's perceptions from what they were initially (refer chapter 2 page 30). To be a spectator is thus to fulfil a pivotal role in realising - activating - the

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[16]   Whilst on one level, 'open' images can be seen to empower the viewer, on another level, this same feature can work to inhibit or alienate or disempower a viewer, who is faced with an unfamiliar type of image - especially if that image is not based in illusionism.

power of the image. Ultimately then, the full power of an image lies *as much* with the viewer who chooses to either respond or not to respond to the image. So, the premise of Eco's open theory should surely be equally based in the degree of openness of the viewer. The meaning of a work therefore changes with the shifting responses of viewers through time. Perhaps one could even go so far as to suggest that the degree of openness of an artwork resides in the disposition of the viewer and the fact that certain works seemingly *encourage* openness on the part of the viewer. The significance of the viewer in completing the image lies in the fact that a sign is not a sign until it completes the projection; meaning comes *to* the sign *from* the place it projects itself to (Bryson, 1991:72).

Eco's theory of the open work and Bryson's semiological position both locate the openness of the power of art within a social reading of the work. Undoubtedly this reading will vary from viewer to viewer within a particular age, and on another level, the collective response of viewers to works of their own age and to works of previous ages will also vary through time. These responses will affect the continued sense of relevance of the work.

Chapter one showed that likeness itself is a construction. If we are to accept the constructed nature of the self and of identity, then a portrait construes or reconstructs an already constructed identity. Warhol's celebrity portraits, for example, are largely paintings of persona's. His portraits of Marilyn Monroe, made-up and glamorous, are different to how a portrait of Norma-Jean Baker without make-up would appear. Warhol has constructed an image based on an already constructed 'image'. Furthermore, a portrait is created by the artist's interpretation of particular attributes or qualities of the sitter which are construed from the artist's relationship with the sitter. So, the portrait can then be viewed as a meeting of the artist's and the sitter's identities - a physical manifestation of the quality of the transactional relationship, including the issue of power relations between the two.

This chapter has stressed the constructed nature of the self, the way we are defined and how we define ourselves. Transactions as an integral part of these constructions acknowledges that the individual actively defines her or his self and context, and is so defined by her or his environment and by others.

Considering the portraits of Freud and Warhol in the next chapter allows us, in a sense, to step into the studio, to look at the work, finding the ways in which the

painted or silkscreened images embody such issues as the relationships between artist, sitter and viewer, and how the use of particular conventions conveys these relations.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PORTRAITS OF LUCIAN FREUD AND ANDY WARHOL - ARTIST, SITTER, VIEWER

12   Top: Lucian Freud. *Reflection (self-portrait)*, 1985, oil on canvas, 56,2 x 51,2 cm.

Bottom: Andy Warhol. *Self Portrait*, 1964, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, two panels, each 50 x 40 cm.

13   Top: Lucian Freud, *Francis Bacon*, 1952, oil on canvas, 17,8 x 12,8 cm.

Bottom: Andy Warhol, *Lana Turner*, 1985, Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas, 101,6 x 101,6 cm.

"What if anything, lies behind the mask can only be inferred by the viewer from the clues provided by the mask, which may mislead as well as inform through the use of conventions of representation " (Brilliant, 1991:115).

Umberto Eco offers the idea of an interpretative co-operation between reader and text, or in this instance, between viewer and image. It is a co-operation that brings into play not only unchanging universal[1] structures of the mind, but also - and in particular - sets of presuppositions that vary with the passing of time. The power in images is accounted for in this way in that, according to Eco, this kind of image is an 'open' work: the artist's decision to leave the arrangement of some of the constituents of the work - and indeed the interpretation of the artist's intentions - to the public or to chance, gives them not a single definitive order but a multiplicity of possible orders.

Open works thus presuppose the activity of the spectator in her or his completion of the image using various cultural codes which have been assimilated. The viewer then is assumed to be an active reader of messages rather than an uncritical contemplator. Thinking of works as 'open' functions on the premise that because the work of art can be viewed as a system of socially constructed signs, its 'readings' by people can also vary.

The ambiguity, and the contravention of accepted conventions in the work of the selected artists, Lucian Freud and Andy Warhol, is established in this chapter. Their works can consequently be viewed as open. This chapter also analyses the role of power in terms of the construction of the relations between artist, sitter and viewer.

Andy Warhol and Lucian Freud have been selected for the way their images exemplify markedly different forms of likeness. Analysis of their portraits helps to show, in a precise way, that likeness is constructed by the transactions between the artist, the subject and the viewer, and that likeness can be regarded therefore largely as a matter of convention. The analysis will be dealt with in four sections: 1) Process, Style, Medium and Subject; 2) The Contravention of Traditions[2]; 3) Re-defining the Portrait Genre in terms of the above section

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[1]   refer to the debate in chapter two (esp. pages 33-4) whereby it is established that basic structures of the mind are indeed given or natural, but that sets of presuppositions are then built upon such structures in varying ways, using conventional means, which are constructed. See also introduction:6.

[2]   In this context, 'traditions' are interchangeable with 'conventions' in that both arise from continued usage and social consensus.

and 4) A visual analysis of a painting by Freud and one by Warhol. There are links between the sections which will become clear in the discussion.

4.1 Process, style, medium and subject: reflecting on approaches to likeness.

Both artists' particular choice of subject reflects something of their individual attitude towards likeness. The styles of their portraits are directly linked to their chosen medium, and together, the style and medium reinforce the artists' views about likeness.

4.1.1 Choice of subject, the relationship between sitter and painter, and the relationship between sitter and viewer.

The subjects of Freud's paintings are mostly people from his immediate personal life; wives, daughters, close friends. Some are fairly high profile people such as Leigh Bowery, a performance artist and Francis Bacon, but these people are also Freud's personal friends. Occasionally there are commissions, such as *Man in a Chair* (1983-5), a portrait of the collector Thyssen-Bornemisza, but paintings such as these are few and far between, partly, I think, because Freud is not dictated to by the demands of sitters.

The identity of his models often is kept private, as paintings are referred to as *The Big Man* or *Naked Portrait*. The anonymity of the titles highlights both the very private nature of Freud's work and the fact that the images are about a private sense of identification. This sense of privacy - which is maintained despite the public exhibition of the works - can be at once enticing and distancing for the viewer. For the viewer, recognition of the images seems to be about an identification with what it is to be human rather than about identifying individual human beings. The subject's identity generally remains unknown to the viewer.

On the other hand, Warhol's 'sitters' are people who present themselves as images to the artist and to the world, - as images already made up and groomed. The people Warhol chooses as subjects are generally to be found within the realm of high society, where wealth, fame and glamour are the criteria for recognition. Warhol knew some of his subjects, but it is of interest to note that many of the portraits were made after the death of the subjects. The creation of portraits after the death of the subject, or of those portraits whose subjects Warhol did not know, announces clearly that Warhol's portraits are about images - more precisely   ed or final images.

In these instances, Warhol's portraits are reliant on publicity photographs from the past. This fact, and the endless repetition of the images allude to notions of propaganda. Affirmation of

14 Warhol, A. *Turquoise Marilyn*, 1962, silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 101,6 x 101,6 cm.

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this idea is found - most obviously - when the images which are so multiplied and extended into our space, are indeed images of political 'heroes': one is reminded of Warhol's 'Mao' series and of his portraits of Lenin. That Warhol produces images of soup-cans and flowers in as much abundance as he does 'heroes' says much about his understanding of the propagandist nature - or potential - of mass-produced imagery. Warhol's portraits seem rather to exist in the category of social commentary.

With the portraits which are created from past publicity images, Warhol re-awakens the subject, creating portraits in memory of the subject and reinforcing public images or images of public people. With this process of posthumous portrait-making, Warhol confronts 'head-on', so to speak, the role of memory and time contained within the portrait: he evokes the past, making it present. This is a reversal of the usual portrait-making procedure whereby the portrait is made in the present, and in time comes to evoke the past. Warhol turns time inside-out, and in so doing makes apparent a chief function of the portrait, namely that of recording the passing of time.

His portraits can be seen to be images of images, each as constructed as the other and for this reason it is immaterial whether Warhol knows his subjects or not:

> As knowable personalities go, Marilyn Monroe and Mao Tse-tung, whom (Warhol) never met, are less remote to him than some of his 'sitters'.[3]

The viewer, in turn, is also familiar with the image or the persona rather than with the private person.

> That Warhol's titles - Marilyn, Jackie, Liz - are first names, sometimes even nicknames, suggests the familiarity of public figures with their audience: everyone knows who Liz is (Steiner, 1987:175).

Of course, the permanence of this familiarity is questionable as surely the 'stars' will date and for generations to come will not be quite so readily identifiable.

With the portraits of high profile celebrities the public sense of identification, *which is based on the recognition of an image*, is more significant than any detailed reference to the subject's actual physiognomy. It is exactly this which contributes to the limited time-span of these portraits: that recognition is based on the social conventions of a *specific* time which are continually shifting and changing.

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[1]   Bourdon,D. "Andy Warhol and the Society Icon" *r t in America*, Jan/Feb (1975:43).

15.   Freud, L., *Man in a Chair*, 1989, oil on canvas, 150 x 102 cm.

4.1.2 The approach to the making of the work, and medium.

The approach to the making of the portrait and the choice of medium again serves to comment on the relationship between painter and sitter. Freud's style of painting can best be described as gestural. It is as if he were modelling from clay, pinching and prodding the paint int the shapes which structure the form. The oil painting process involves the direct application of the paint to the surface and the painter's unique presence or impression is captured in every brushmark. The communication of Freud's feelings about his subjects

> only b come apparent through [Freud's] exhaustive looking - a process of examination that can last six months or a year, and sometimes for eight hours a day. Expressionistic or romantic emotional splurge would be too easy - a mere self indulgence, not the true feeling. Truth emerges from the 'closest observation ...day and night' with a completeness 'without which selection itself is not possible'(Freud, 1954:23) ...This approach explains many things about the Freudian method. The arduous nature of the process, for example, and its slowness - the painting growing imperceptibly, as one model puts it, 'like the hand of a clock'.[4]

Given this, it could be said that Freud's slow technique of painting from life allows for the painter's particular attitude to be communicated subjectively:

> one advantage of painting slowly is to register chang , because people change slowly too - the texture of their skin, their mood, their weight. I pay attention to that all the time.[5]

The painted image thus functions as an extended recording of the relationship between painter and subject and allows the images to extend beyond purely optical likenesses of the sitters, becoming images which embody both the painter and the sitter - images which intrinsically reflect the power relations in this transaction.

The scale of Freud's work is generally quite small. Viewing is conditioned by the scale in that such a scale demands that the viewer moves in close to the image. The fleshiness and the physicality - both of the paint itself and of the bodies portrayed - further draw the viewer in

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[4]   Gayford, M. "The Duke, The Photographer, His Wife, and The Male Stripper", in *Modern Painters*, Vol 6.3 (1993:22).

[5]   Taken from "On the Couch with Freud", *Sunday Telegraph*, London, 5/9/93.

towards the image. The viewer is thus compelled to experience the works from an intimate viewing distance.

Warhol's approach to the portrait, on the other hand, is somewhat different. Usually, his models would arrive at the 'factory' for a fifteen minute photo-shoot. Warhol would then work alone on the image, altering it as he saw fit. Warhol's style of portraiture has been arguably described as 'cosmetic' - a skin deep treatment of surfaces. It nevertheless reflects a relationship between artist and subject. The artificiality of the portrayals of his sitters as society icons, as dehumanised and heavily made-up, masked 'individuals', glamorous and blemish-free may be seen as reflective of Warhol's belief in the superficiality of his subjects and the triviality of his relationships with them. Therefore, his mechanical style can be seen, not as a limitation, but as a reflection of his perception of the quality of his relationships with his sitters. His images bear a likeness to the sitters in that they are *like* the images or personae the sitters present of themselves.

Warhol's photographic and serigraphic medium results in a mechanical and uniform style which reinforces the sense of distance between Warhol and his sitters. Paradoxically, this sense of distance which is enforced as a result of the mechanical style, also affords the images a certain accessibility by virtue of their reference to mediated images which we digest everyday. The speedy reproduction processes, though very flat, very commercial and very depersonalised has become very much a hallmark of 'Warhol' - his presence or aura can be immediately felt through the use of these techniques.

Roland Barthes offers some insightful comments on the nature of photography which help to explain the impact behind Warhol's photographically based portraits:

> The age of photography corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private
> into the public, or rather into the creation of a new social value, which is the
> publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly. [6]

The scale of Warhol's works is also public, and his work is often as large as billboard advertisements[7]. The viewing process is conditioned by the large scale in that the works can be seen from some distance. Whilst the bright and shiny broad areas of slick colour might arguably seduce the viewer into moving closer towards the image, this mediated quality of the

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[6]   Barthes, R. *Camera Lucida.* (1984:98).

[7]   One thinks of Warhol's 1964 *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* which was a 388 foot-square mural, and of the many images which were transformed into wallpaper, covering large gallery walls. Many of his works are over 2 metres in height.

works might also allow the work to be digested at a quick glance, allowing the viewer to move on.

Warhol's portraits and their obvious reference to mediated - advertised - imagery, evoke a strong sense of the publicity of the private.

4.2   The contravention of convention

Freud and Warhol both make portraits which work against certain conventions of the genre. I would like to re-cap some of the conventions which are challenged before going on to examine the effect which such contraventions hold for the portrait genre.

The way in which Freud uses the oil paint medium for instance, obviously announces the paint *as medium* and this is different to the way in which classical painters concealed their paint medium in an attempt to create a simulacrum of reality (refer Hal Foster's argument in chapter two, page 28). In Warhol's work, the use of his particular medium, especially in conjunction with his specific set of sitters - the rich and famous - serves to undercut notions of originality, usually associated with conventional portraiture. Freud's sitters, by way of contrast, are personal friends, unknown to the larger public and in this again, Freud's choices are in opposition to the assumptions of traditional society portraiture.

Both Freud and Warhol's approach to the *process* of creating a likeness contravene convention. Warhol's fifteen minute photo-shoots with sitters, from which an image would be selected, 'touched-up' and transformed into a painted silkscreen - with the potential for an endless series of the same image, and Freud's arduous and draining process of scrutinising his often-naked sitters, are both very different from any conventional process whereby the artist would be dictated to by the demands of the sitters - probably in terms of time as well as in terms of the resulting portrait.

By challenging its convention, Freud and Warhol re-define the portrait genre and the power relations which they have set up between themselves and their sitters, between themselves and the viewers, and between themselves and their relationship to the genre of portrait - making itself.

Freud and Warhol clearly challenge and use conventions in rather differing ways. For example, whilst they both worked within the traditional genre of portraiture, their particular

portraits deliberately denature and rupture the human form, one through gesture, the other through mechanical means. In this, their portraits are imbued with a new relevance:

> Modernism, - Expressionism included - represents a challenge to authority, specifically to the authority vested in dominant cultural modes and conventions. Today, however, modernism has itself become a dominant cultural mode, as the quotation of modernist conventions in pseudo-Expressionism testifies ...Thus the contemporary artist is trapped in a double bind: if the modernist imperative is obeyed, then the norm is simultaneously upheld; if the modernist imperative is rejected, it is simultaneously confirmed ...In other words, today the modernist imperative to transgression can be neither embraced nor rejected.[8]

This statement, though in context of Modernism, is in fact an archetypal dilemma rather than a purely Modernist one. The 'trap' in the struggle against preceding styles of painting is

> part of the poetics of artists themselves, whose very vocabulary betrays the cultural influences against which they are reacting (Eco, 1989:87).

Whilst it may be a conventional route to overthrow existing or previous traditions, the use of such conventions to *reinvent* traditions, can give the works a fresh impetus; a new meaning. It is naive to assume, for example, that a 'classic' work of art meant the same thing to the artist's contemporaries as it does to us. Images which now seem conventional, were once almost certainly revolutionary. Assuming that their meaning is unchanging would be to deny the successive reappropriation and reinterpretation of works of art by each successive generation (Owens, 1983:11).

Both the work of Freud and that of Warhol confronts the difficulty of challenging convention and the impossibility of transgression. Their attempts to do so therefore inevitably contain ambivalence and contradiction.

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[8]   Owens, C. "Honor, Power and the Love of Women" *Art in America*, Jan (1983:11).

4.3 Re-defining the portrait genre in terms of medium, subject-matter and approach.

4.3.1 Medium

Freud uses the convention of gestural brushmarks as part of his pursuit to render paint as flesh, to mould the paint on the canvas as flesh is moulded around the bone structure:

> I want paint to *work as flesh*, 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 the look of the sitter, *being* them. As far as I am concerned the paint is the person. I want it to work for me just as flesh does.[9]

Evident in most of the later portraits, is Freud's manipulation of the paint, the swirling, swiping brushmarks which define and redefine the form, leaving granular residues of pigment which describe the texture of the skin and reveal the struggle and labour of the painter. Freud's portraits are painted as if they were modelled, and though it is his desire that the paint becomes flesh, the portraits do not ever break through their own boundaries, in the way that portraits by Frank Auerbach do, sometimes reaching a three dimensionality which is exceptional in oil painting.

The sometimes rigid illusional quality of Freud's images, and the way that the paint is so clearly used to describe a form, paradoxically both announces and maintains the equation between paint and flesh. The paint is thus prevented as such from 'becoming' flesh, it is all the time admitted as an *equivalent* for flesh. Perhaps it is when we can no longer identify the form clearly or immediately, that the paint begins to work on our senses as something other, perhaps as flesh ?

Freud's gestural marks are expressionist, as though the gestures contain the presence of the artist through his direct translation of sight into mark, and thus communicate the intensity of his relationship with the model's body. In his use of gesture, the form is ruptured, and this is in complete antithesis to naturalist or classicist traditions of depicting the body, in which the marks of the artist are concealed, and the body made to appear 'natural'. The deposits of paint granules which collect on the surface of Freud's portraits can also be viewed as something which ruptures the form. Thus it is in Freud's particular use of the oil paint and in his very specific approach to his sitters that one locates the 'double bind' of the contemporary artist:

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[9]   Lucian Freud in conversation with Sir Lawrence Gowing, in Gowing, L. *Lucian Freud*, (1982:190-91).

Freud works both within and against the genre of portraiture in that although he does re-evaluate the tradition of portraiture, 'undressing' previous values to expose others, he nonetheless upholds certain conservative ideals such as the evidence of artistic skill, illusionism and labour.

Warhol ruptures the human form through mechanical means. Ideals of originality and uniqueness, which are linked to the values of wealth and status, are challenged through Warhol's use of the photographic and serigraphic mediums and their inherent reproducibility. Whilst Warhol's portraits appear to valorise traditional portraiture, the properties of his chosen medium afford his paintings a criticality which negates the ideals of previous portraiture. Warhol's portraits also challenge the ideals of precision, or the preciousness of much society portraiture: the deliberate offsetting of lip or eye colour, for example, alludes to the idea of 'mistake' and also underlines the process of construction. Here Warhol is deconstructing while constructing.

The images are repeated, sometimes with differences of colour, focus and print articulation. In this way Warhol disrupts our belief in photographic accuracy or 'truth'. He also deliberately and obviously alters the photographs, removing wrinkles, thinning necks and so on:

> The portrait was Andy's idealized interpretation of the person. Around 1980 Andy even had 'lip' books made; clothbound books containing many pages of silkscreened lips in various shapes and shades of red. If he thought a woman should have a certain look he would sometimes refer to these 'studies' of lips; they were his 'sketchbooks' (Fremont, 1993:30).

The obvious alteration of the photographic image works to expose conventional notions of 'photographic truth' as being constructed too.

The mechanical processes of reproduction, the deliberately constructed nature of the subjects and of their representations, denatures the human form and offers instead, depersonalised icons of twentieth century symbols. These icons, including such celebrated stars as 'Marilyn' and 'Liz' paradoxically sustain the value system which prizes wealth, fame and stardom, even in their attempt to comment upon the value system which sustains them.

Warhol's work challenges past conventions of art-making. His understanding of such conventions is made clear in the following anecdote: Henry Geldzahler remembers saying to Warhol about the 1974 portrait that he had recently completed of him:

16 Warhol, A. *Henry Geldzahler*, 1979, silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 101,6 x 101,6 cm.

'But Andy, I don't want it, it's nothing but a blown up version of the polaroid. You've left out the art!'[10]

A few years later, in 1979, the portrait was redone. This time the portrait has many juicy brushstrokes on it. It seems clear that Warhol used violent 'impassioned' brushmark as a sign of artistic mastery. Such simulacra of mastery testify, however, only to its loss.[11] Perhaps this is exactly what Warhol intended, with his 'anybody could do anything' attitude.

4.3.2 Subject-matter

Freud is seemingly neither concerned with flattering his subjects, nor with their happiness or unhappiness with the finished image. For the most part his paintings are not commissioned portraits, and this entails a renegotiation of the artist/subject relationship in that the artist retains more control over how the sitter is to be represented. The artist is not subject to the requests of sitters. While it is true that Freud requires models whose 'aura' must be the 'starting point for his excitement'[12], he observes that before the work is completed, the models themselves seem to drop away, and the

> picture is all he feels about it, all he thinks worth preserving of it, all he invests
> it with (Freud, 1954:24).

In a way, Freud sees his models as objects; as vehicles for his work, which is primarily about the nature and quality of flesh and not the individual person.

> A painter must think of everything he sees as being there entirely for his own
> use and pleasure (Freud, 1954:24).

In a conversation with James Kirkman, an ex-dealer of Freud, I asked if Freud painted only those whom he knew well so that he could capture an inner or metaphorical likeness. He answered that he thought since Freud is a very private and shy man, that he likes to secure his

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[10] Geldzahler, H. "Andy Warhol: Virginal Voyeur" in *Andy Warhol Portraits*, (1993:26).

[11] Owens, C. "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" in Hal Foster's *The Anti-Aesthetic*, (1983:67).

[12] Freud, L. "Some Thoughts on Painting" in *Encounter*, Vol.III, No. 1 (1954:24).

17   Freud, L. *Man in a Chair*, 1964-5, oil on canvas, 120,7 x 100,4 cm.

control of the situation, and that his choice of friends as sitters has nothing to do with any kind of search for inner likeness.

Freud's control in the studio can be felt in the poses which his sitters adopt. While Freud has claimed that he never dictates a pose and that he lets the sitters find their own positions, it is interesting that the poses which sitters have chosen are so often defensive positions. Notice for example, the way that the subject in *Man in a Chair* (1989) clasps his hands together over his groin, or the way that the sitter in *Man in a Chair* (1983-5) grips his thighs with his hands. The poses are also often victim-like, in that the sitters crouch, as in *Naked Man on a Bed* (1987) and *Naked Girl* (1985-6). The postures almost always have a certain uneasiness about them and this uneasiness would surely stem from the nature of the power relations set up between the artist and his subjects.

Warhol reproduced a particular profile of the American value system, which was, in a sense, one of a spiritual wasteland. His glamorous and expensive portraits of the rich and famous seem to uphold the values of wealth, power, and status which are traditionally associated with society portraiture. These values have little to do with an understanding of humaneness and much to do with superficiality.

The confusion which Warhol himself created about his work is very much part of the work. The ambiguity of the portraits seems to me to be located in Warhol's joy *and* sadness in the power-plays with which he was involved. On the one hand the glamorous and 'beautiful' society portraits were very lucrative and made him popular, and on the other hand they confirmed the vanity and superficiality of the sitters.

4.3.3 Approach to the portrait genre

The ambiguity of Freud's portraits, particularly with regard to their ambivalent relationship to the traditional genre of portraiture, account for his work as 'open' which allows the spectator to complete the image. Indeed, as Catherine Lampert notes:

> The interpretations that shadow these works are highly subjective, and many art historians would insist they should begin with admissions of our own gender and experience.[13]

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[13]   Lampert, C. *Lucian Freud: Recent Work*,(1993:18).

18   Top: Freud, L. *Naked Girl*, 1985-6, oil on canvas, 81 x 71 cm.

Bottom. Freud, L. *Naked Man on a Bed*, 1987, oil on canvas, 56,5 x 61 cm.

With the removal of the clothing, the setting, and the modesty of his subjects, Freud's portraits unsettle the past traditions of portraiture. Retaining the exclusive use of the oil-on-canvas medium, the portraits have little to do with concepts of role, status, wealth and decorum traditionally associated with the portrait. It seems that Freud questions what lies beneath the decadence displayed in previous social portraiture. Still, embedded in a solid, conservative, English painterly tradition, his fleshy, 'undressed' portraits nevertheless suggest a kind of metaphor for 'the difficult era in which we live'[14], one in which humaneness and vulnerability is exposed and embraced. This point is not without ambiguity either, for the sterile environments in which Freud places his sitters can afford them a certain dehumanised, lifeless, or object-like quality, and yet, at the same time, the nakedness and vulnerability are most human (see also illus. 20).

As much as the images draw the viewer in, as much as the brushwork, for example, implies the presence of the painter and allows us into the process of the image's creation, there is also a certain amount of distancing. One feels disturbed by the challenging and confrontational quality of these exposed figures, but one feels that it is Freud, and not the subject who challenges the viewer. The presence of the artist - the painting as reflective of the artist's self - is paramount and this testifies to the degree of Freud's control. Visually, this control is made manifest in the somewhat rigid definitive edges or outlines which function as boundaries to enclose the figure.

In the end, such an analytical decoding of the artist's intentions often avoids - or simply cannot ever provide - an account of the very powerful impact that these works have on their viewers. Catherine Lampert seems to be speaking of exactly this difficulty with translating the impact of an image when she suggests that:

> Freud really has shaped his painting to join what is by consensus great art by sensibility alone .. His is a sensibility that runs all five senses as if wired up together (Lampert, 1993:13).

Freud's paintings have an eroticism which is difficult to pinpoint. The intensity and the struggle with which they are executed is almost tangible, the artist's scrutiny of the body in front of him and his translation of it into paint, seems to be almost a physical act; the body is described almost as much through touch as through sight. I would like to suggest that the eroticism of Freud's images is perhaps *indirect* in that the eroticism seems to result less from looking at the represented image than it does from the suggestion of closeness or intimacy

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[14]   Flynn Johnson, R. "The Later Works" in *Lucian Freud: Works on Paper*, (1988:23)

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19   Warhol, A. *Sixteen Jackies*, 1964, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, 203,2 x 162,6 cm.

which is implied between Freud and his models, especially given the private nature of the long and naked sittings and the resulting privateness of the images themselves.[15]

It is clear then that both the portraits and Freud's motivation for painting them lie outside the conventional realms of society portraiture.

Warhol's reinvention of the portrait genre - simultaneously glamorising and depersonalising his sitters - is embedded in his own persistently ambiguous persona or constructed image. An apocryphal story tells of Warhol opening two exhibitions at the same time; one he opened, and the other was opened by a look-alike. No one was quite sure who was the real Warhol and who was the impersonator. This episode seems to question the very notion of identity, the original, and points to reasons for his use of repetitive imagery as, for example, in *Sixteen Jackies* (1964):

> Some people must go crazy when they realize how much space they've managed to command. If you were the star of the biggest show on television and took a walk down an average American street one night while you were on the air, and if you looked through windows and saw yourself on television in everybody's living room, taking up some of their space, can you imagine how you would feel? [16]

Warhol's portraits are ambiguous. He strove to challenge conventions of his chosen genre and to radically undermine notions of uniqueness. Yet the rich and famous continued to want and need an 'original' Warhol; an original fake. Warhol's own vagueness about his position with regard to the criticality of his works, evoked a variety of responses from viewers, testifying to the 'openness' of his work. He deliberately cultivates the changes of his original intentions by unwitting associates:

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[15]   Seen in this way, the images are very much about Freud himself and his primary role in the construction of the portrait is asserted. Freud himself, and his relationship with the sitter, is *implicit* in the resulting image. In a sense it is very difficult to view these images as *anything but* a reflection and an embodiment of both sitter and artist and of their - intimate - relationship. Viewing the works one 'feels' the intensity of the relations between artist and sitter, and I think it is here that the images are perhaps erotic.

[16]   Warhol, A. *From A to B and Back Again*, (1975:132).

If people never misunderstand you, and if they do everything exactly the way you tell them to, they're just transmitters of your ideas, and you get bored with that. But when you work with people who misunderstand you, instead of getting 'transmissions' you get 'transmutations', and that's much more interesting in the long run.[17]

It seems as though Warhol uses his power in the situation of portrait-making to the *benefit* of his sitters. He makes them beautiful. The images are so glorious that they do not appear victim-like, until they are all seen toge 'r. It is *then* that their 'sameness' is sadly obvious. Individuality is drained and the sitters can all be viewed as victims of a media-conscious society whereby wealth, fame, beauty and prominence are the most valued commodities. Warhol's stated desire to be accepted in these echelons of fame and stardom confuse the way his portraits are read. They have been understood as *both* a critique and a celebration of such values. It is his very process of making portraits - mechanical, quick and repetitive - which allow him to critique traditional notions of authenticity and originality generally associated with high society portraiture. Warhol works within and against the tradition of portraiture - whilst obviously commenting upon high art, his work is imbued with many of the connotations of such art - and it is in this that the 'double-bind' of the contemporary painter manifests itself.

One can imagine that Warhol's portraits will easily become dated - that in generations to come, 'Marilyn' and 'Liz' will not bear the same force as they do/did in the twentieth century. That Warhol might have been conscious of this limitation - in terms of the timelessness of the portraits - strikes me as merely another way in which Warhol worked both within and against the genre of society portraiture.

Warhol's own persona, epitomised by evasive and ambiguous behaviour, creates confusion in his works with regard to any form of conclusive meaning or implication which they might have. But perhaps it is precisely because of such consistent ambiguity and provocation that one could posit that Warhol is fully in control of all the power plays between himself and his sitters, and between himself and his audience. Again, the irony is that in this, Warhol succumbs to values of power and possession which he appears to be critical of.

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[17]   Smith, P.S. *Andy Warhol's Art and Films*, (1986:189).

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20   Freud, L. *Two Women*, 1992, oil on canvas, 153 x 214,75 cm.

4.4 **Reflecting on *Two Women, 1992* by Lucian Freud and *# 204 Marilyn Diptych, 1962* by Andy Warhol.**

4.4.1 *Two Women, 1992.*

Looking at a painting by Freud, one is immediately aware of the travail involved in its making. One senses, and sees reflected in the worked and re-worked surfaces the many hours of the creation process - the changes which have been made and the traces which they leave of previous decisions now gone back on. It is through this sense of struggle that one can imagine the intensity of the situation within the studio. It is also Freud's sensuous and activated or animated handling of the oil paint which holds the viewer's attention.

With particular reference to *Two Women* the viewer is drawn into the canvas by the deliberate upward tilt of floorboards, which serves to unsettle or unbalance the viewer, who probably expects to retain some distance from the scenes portrayed. The sense of feeling off-balance, created by sloping floorboards, can best be understood through the experience of walking across a wooden floored room carrying a mirror. As one moves, the mirror reflects the floorboards at an exaggerated angle and causes one to feel quite unstable.

The abuse of perspective - in terms of one-point-perspective at least - which is evidenced in the sloping floorboards and in the illogical angle of the window at the right of the canvas, and also in the forward-tilting effect which the raised corner of the room in the centre of the canvas has, forces the viewer willy-nilly to enter the image so that she or he becomes an active participant and is no longer a passive onlooker - the viewer is pitched into the room along with the two women.

However, this participation is counteracted by Freud's simultaneous refusal to include the viewer. This exclusion of the viewer happens primarily through the tight outlines or boundaries which enclose the figures and separate them from the viewer, maintaining the distance.

Further, the lack of interaction between the two women themselves reinforces the sense of lifeless disengagement and the separation both between the two women - who each seem strangely unaware of the other's presence despite the closeness of their bodies - and the separation between the figures and the viewer - who is forced to confront the figures but is prevented from sharing in the experience of the women. It could be argued that the two women whose bodies lie - seemingly divorced from their psyches - on a sterile white bed, in a bare room, evoke an atmosphere of oppressive discomfort, and as John Russell once wrote,

We sometimes wonder if we have any right to be there (Gayford, 1993:22).

In fact, when an image is created and then publicly exhibited, the viewer is not only invited, but is expected to share the experience.

Having either withdrawn so completely into their own inner space, or indeed having no connection with Freud at all, the two women bear no sexual or erotic presence, for without their psyche they are reduced to flesh. Since there seems to be no interaction on any level - between the two women, between them and the viewer and even between them and the artist - the viewer is, in a sense, drawn into and rebuffed from nothing at all: the scene offers no hint of mystery or seduction, the viewer's role is not that of voyeur, since she or he looks in on a scene which displays nothing of the private or that which should not be seen. This forced and refused entry - particularly when there seems to be nothing going on - serves to increase the tensions involved in the viewing process.

And whilst one might indeed ask exactly what it is that the viewer is excluded from, one might also be compelled to ask why Freud chose to paint *two* women. The duality or 'co-existence' of the two women resists any sense of narrative, and I am reminded of the way in which Freud has often criticised Francis Bacon's work for being too narrative. With this in mind, it is possible to assume that Freud might intend this potentially narrative image - in fact - to be devoid of any such possibility.

It is through subjective and personal interpretations of an image that one can imagine a similar kind of tense and uncomfortable interaction between artist and sitter. And whilst one may interpret or invest the image with all of ones own feelings, coupled with sparse information issuing from Freud's studio, one is in the end presented with few certainties. In this instance we are presented with two women and as Catherine Lampert has suggested, any interpretation of Freud's paintings should begin with admissions of our own gender and experience. Of *Two Women*, she writes,

> The air-borne fantasies and long filly-like raised limbs of 'Two Women' 1992
> lets the mood hover into the realm of male connoisseurship so deplored by
> women (Lampert, 1993:23).

My own fascination with this image lies with my sense of these women as somewhat lifeless objects of flesh - which might decrease or increase such 'enjoyment' of the flesh, suggested by Lampert's interpretation .

21 Warhol, A. *Marilyn Diptycn*, 1962, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas. 208,3 x
144,8 cm.
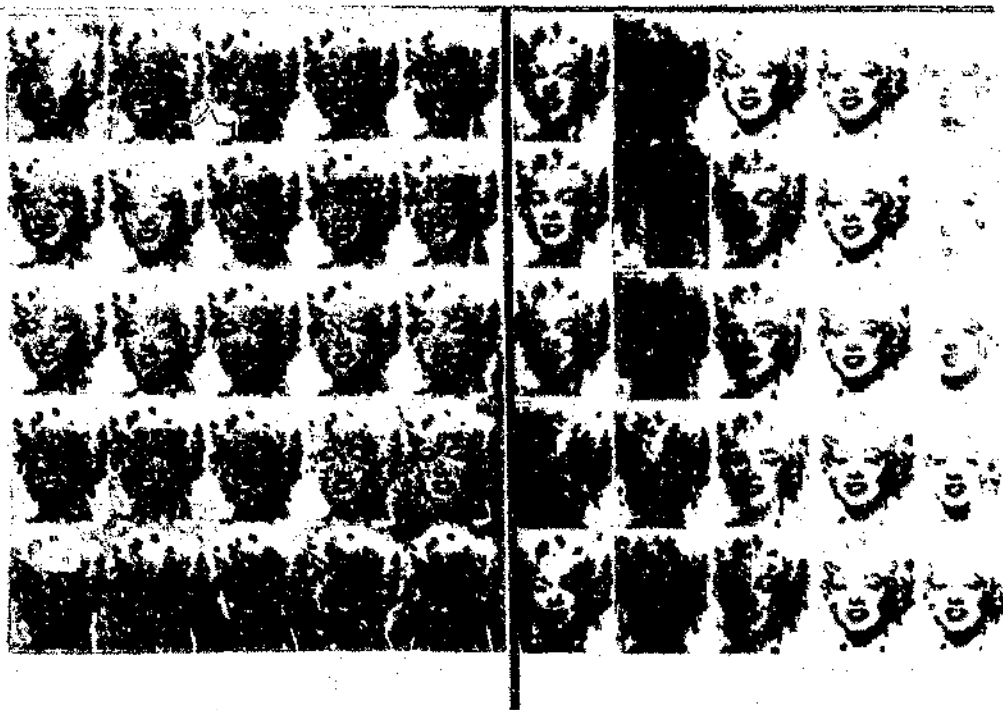
Freud has stated that his interest in the portrayal of flesh was to allow the paint to *be* the flesh - moulding and shaping the figures from paint, as flesh is moulded by the bone structure. At the same time, however, as Harry Diamond - a well-known photographer who sat for Freud - explains, there is more to Freud's portraits than the translation of flesh into paint, or paint into flesh:

> If someone is interested in getting your essence down on canvas, they are also drawing your essence out of you. So [sitting for Freud] was somewhat exhausting. Afterwards one felt depleted, but also invigorated, because he has a stimulating personality (Gayford, 1993:24).

So one can assume that it is also an *individual life* that Freud aims to relay to the viewer, and not only their flesh and the 'objective' portrayal of it. It is thus interesting that my sense of the two women is primarily of their lifelessness - their objecthood. It is possible that this apparant lifelessness is a result of the very nature of the 'Freudian method', and that the energy or essence of the sitters and the situation is transferred rather to the image itself, than to the depiction of the sitters. This might explain Freud's ambiguous statement about the sitter eventually falling away and the picture being all that he feels about it, all that he thinks worth preserving of it, all that he invests it with. It might explain why the two women appear as objects but the image is invested with a great tense energy, a great psychological presence.

The image is then, in its entirety, an embodiment of an inter-relationship between artist, sitters and image. In this way, the image functions less in terms of traditional portraiture whereby the identity of the sitter is primary, and more as a reflection on the portrait-making process as a complicated web of transactions between artist, sitter, image and viewer.

4.4.2   *# 204 Marilyn Diptych*, 1962.

Looking at Warhol's portraits, by way of comparison, is a fundamentally different experience. One is struck immediately by the sense of ease and randomness with which these portraits were made. On another level it is precisely this ease which becomes discomforting: the ease is not evident so much in terms of the fluidity or inevitability of the image as it is in the sense of a systematically produced and reproduced image. The obviousness of this deliberately repetitive and banal process unsettles the ease with which we digest such images, as viewers.

With particular reference to *# 204 Marilyn Diptych* this ease is exaggerated because the image of Marilyn Monroe is an already mediated image - Warhol created this silkscreen painting from a publicity shot of Marilyn, an image which became even more publicised once

Warhol began repeating it. Warhol was aware of how people became images in the first place when he stated that

repetition adds up to reputation (Steiner, 1987:174),

and he exploited this idea visibly in this particular image: the more one's image is repeated, the more of an image one becomes.

The repetition also functions on another level. The repeated lines of Marilyn's portrait allude both to photographic contact sheets and to film strips. This could allude to movement and the passing of time but when one looks closely there is no change at all in the position of the subject: only the colour, the tonality and the shadows alter. So that if one imagined these strips being put into motion, as in film, Marilyn would be stationary and statuesque, as only external factors around her, such as light, changed. Interestingly, many of Warhol's films which he went on to make, such as *Sleep*, display just such a sense of stillness in that not much occurs - *Sleep*, for example is an eight hour long film of a person sleeping. This sense of stillness evokes the 'object' quality with which Warhol invests his sitters.

The sense of stillness, despite the reference to movie strips, reinforces the 'objecthood' of the image, and one's sense of Marilyn, or rather her image, is as a commercial property in much the same way as a can of Campbells soup. The image of Marilyn is repeated so often that it becomes an iconic symbol of 1960's fame, glamour and stardom. Warhol pushes the image to the extent that it becomes - almost - the singular way in which we, today, know Marilyn Monroe: more as a symbol than as a human being.

On the right panel, the image of Marilyn is the same image as on the left panel, only here it is reproduced in black and white. Too much ink is used in some prints and too little in others so that Marilyn is at times blotted out and at times so faded that she is almost non-existent. The left panel shows the conscious aestheticising of an image while the right panel seems to show the de-aestheticising of the same image. Together, the two panels expose the constructed nature of Marilyn's persona and the constructed nature of Warhol's portrait of her. Warhol's portraiture is revealed to be primarily about images, and their construction - of both the persona and the portrait.

Finally, I would like to comment upon Warhol's telling - if not amusing - title for this image. He calls it *# 204 Marilyn Diptych*, and this alludes to the fact that there might indeed be 203 others. We would surely not be mistaken in thinking both that the previous 203 are the same as the present one, and by the same token, that there might be an infinite amount of such images which follow number 204. Here, with the usual Warholian cynical humour, the

boundaries of traditional portraiture are stretched, and the convention of authenticity and the 'original oil' is greatly undermined.

In conclusion, both painters have addressed very specific profiles of the cultures from which they have issued. The social context of an artist, forms a background to many of the decisions made in the construction of an image. In this way, society and environment impinges upon individual sensibility, and is reflected in the work. Warhol's depersonalised, mechanical portraits seem to embody an American value system intent on the new, the slick and the successful. Freud's work, on the other hand, is embedded in a solid, conservative, English, painterly tradition.

Freud and Warhol both use conventions of past traditions critically. changing their meanings and the ways in which we respond to them. It is in this way that their images form a rich dialogue both with the past and with the present. Their works reflect the environments and the social contexts within which they were created, they engage with their audience and they are thus imbued with a life force and a power through which to locate their relevance.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE THEORY IN RELATION TO MY OWN PRACTICAL WORK

"Everything points to transience. Nothing stays as it is. The signs we make are provisional; if one knows it, well and good. Images lose now their firm outlines."
Christa Wolf. [1]

5.1 Introduction

I should like to make it clear at the outset of this discussion that not all of the points raised apply to each individual work. The practical body needs to be viewed as precisely that: a body of work, whereby each piece informs, and reflects on a process. I should thus like to discuss the relationship between the theory and the practice in more general terms, referring at times to particular images. I should like here to provide a brief overview of some of the issues which are discussed at length in this chapter in relation to the image themselves and their relationship to the theory of the previous chapters.

> Contemporary art draws its main value from a deliberate rupture with
> the laws of probability that govern common language - laws which it
> calls into question even as it uses them for its subversive ends (Eco,
> 1989:94).

The ruptures are the most critical aspect or development in each painting. I locate the critical or conscious ruptures in my own work in relation to the use of impasto paint, gestural brushmark and the figure-ground relationship. These and other conventions are used to disrupt traditional ways of reading images. For example, by deliberately confusing the figure-ground relationship, or by using heavy impasto for the spaces surrounding the figure, the viewer no longer reads or looks for an illustration on the canvas, but is encouraged to consciously view the canvas as an art object in itself.

The practical work and this discussion of it, also explores various other ways in which traditional expectations and traditional ways of viewing portraits are subverted. For instance, the shifts from frontal portraits to back views and partial views of the head question traditional concepts of resemblance and recognition as based almost exclusively in the description of facial physiognomy. Also, there is a gradual shift in my work from a traditional oil-on-canvas medium to the later use of clay and plaster-

of-paris to make and cast relief portrait-sculptures. The effect of these different mediums is located in the subsequently different appearances of the portraits: the essentially flat, two dimensionality of the paintings and the thick physicality of the sculptures. The differences between these two forms of portraiture are discussed in terms of the material qualities and the particular references and associations which they evoke.

I later discuss my interest in the objecthood of the images. This objecthood of both the paintings and the sculptures is discussed as arising from two things: the dissolution of boundaries between figure and ground; the positioning of the figure and other objects as extending beyond the frame, in other words, not contained within the format. In both cases the ground, in a sense, becomes a field of activity whereby the clarity of the edges and of the image itself is diminished or confused. With this `confusion' in place, the portraits inevitably become highly subjective *objects* of art, rather than descriptive pictures. The objecthood of the sculptures is further located in their weighty bulk and three dimensionality. The later paintings on fragments of marble have their own objecthood, perhaps because marble is a material associated with sculpture, and sculpture, because of its three dimensionality is more easily associated with 'object'. The dissolution of boundaries is also later discussed with relation to the dissolution of power relations between artist and sitter, and is in fact used to indicate a more empathetic form of portraiture.

Finally, methods of display which underline notions of objecthood and the construction of likeness, are discussed.

It is my intention that the portraits are open to variable interpretation. According to Eco's concept of the `open' work

> the disorder of the signs, the disintegration of the outlines, the explosion of the figures incite the viewer to create his own network of connections (Eco, 1989:103).

My research of the portrait image and, in Lucian Freud's words `dissatisfaction with resemblance', has lead to an approach to portraits which embraces Eco's concept of the `open' work, an approach which acknowledges the portrait as a sign, and image-making as a system of signs, based on convention:

> The freeplay of associations, once it is recognized as originating from the disposition of the signs, becomes an integral part of the work, one

of the components that the work has fused into its own unity and, with them, a source of the creative dynamism that it exudes (Eco, 1989:103).

I am suggesting that my practical work becomes deliberately unfixed or ambiguous so as to allow each viewer to bring to the work her or his own set of associations and to complete it individually in a private and meditative capacity. Viewing the images *as a body of work* inevitably invites a dialogue to be set up - between the works themselves and between the viewer and the extended body of work - which can guide the viewer towards certain associations which are intentional.

The act of viewing an image as an open and variable field of signs from which one extracts meaning, affords the work a power of its own. The work then functions as a source of meaning through the interaction between viewer and image, and in this, allows for possibility:

> 'openness' ...is one of our most precious values, since every aspect of
> our culture invites us to conceive, feel, and thus see the world as
> possibility (Eco, 1989:104).

Arguably, the most open works not only invite possibility but also challenge the degree of openness of the set of signs or conventions. 'Openness' within the work also imbues the viewer with a certain active power in that in such works the viewer is encouraged to extract as many suggestions as possible from the totality of the signs, suggestions and personal responses which may or may not be compatible with the intentions of the artist. I have found this concept of 'openness' useful in relation to my research on portraits, since the research has led me further and further away from a prescriptive understanding of likeness as exact reduplication.

Connections between the images and the theory of the preceding chapters are made throughout this chapter. Whilst the works have an interactive relationship with each other, there is some sort of chronology as to their production and I will briefly discuss this development in the following section. The third part of this chapter looks at the images in relation to each other, as a body of research. This third section clarifies connections between the paintings and the sculptures through looking at modes of display. Section 5.4 draws associations between the body of work and other genres and conventions. The last section of this chapter, 5.5, briefly reviews the relationship between my work and the portraits by Freud and Warhol.

22   Van Gogh, V. *A Portrait of Doctor Gachet*, 1890, oil on canvas, 67 x 56 cm.
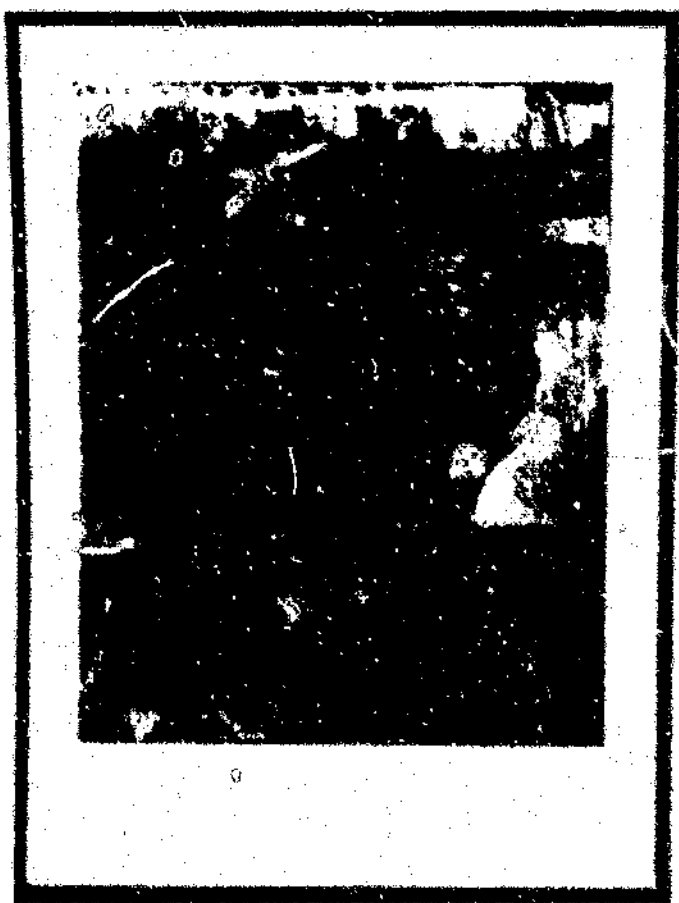
5.2   The history of the images

My process of working has not been linear. Generally, I have not completed one painting before embarking on the next. The process rather, has been organic in that several images are worked on at the same time, some are completed, others are discarded only to be re-worked at a later point. Thus, it is impossible to categorise a strict chronology. I have nevertheless divided the discussion into early, middle, and late phases of work.

5.2.1   The early phase.

Because my exploration was based on a search for a kind of likeness which extends the boundaries of exact or photo-like resemblance, the sitters that I have chosen to work from have all been close friends. My research has been in pursuit of a portrait-likeness which evokes the *presence* of the person. When one knows ones sitters personally, it becomes possible for the likeness to become much more private or subjective, more about the relationship between artist and sitter, and less about capturing likeness with conventional accuracy. Van Gogh takes such an approach to the portrait in a letter which he wrote to his sister in 1890:

> I painted a portrait of Dr. Gachet with an expression of melancholy,
> which would seem to look like a grimace to many who saw the canvas.
> And yet it is necessary to paint it like this, for otherwise one could not
> get an idea of the extent to which, in comparison with the calmness of
> the old portraits, there is expression in our modern heads, and passion -
> like a waiting for things as well as a growth.[2]

In my own portraits, the close relations I have with the sitters is reflected, at first in the expression of particular but subtle moods and then in the gradual dissolution of the boundaries - in terms of the dissolution of demarcated space between us. The portraits serve as a reflection of the relationship between the artist and the sitter. The portraits can give the viewer access to the artist-sitter relationship through the quality or mood which the portrait evokes. The images are thus extended, becoming more than a simple identification of the sitter's identity. I decided to call the paintings, 'A Portrait of ...' and to use both first and surnames of the sitter. Underpinning this decision is the intention that there is less a notion of persona and the public recognition of likeness.

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2   Van Gogh, V. *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, Vol. 3, (1978:472).

23   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Keith Kronmun,* 1992, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm.

than there is an acknowledgement that the viewer is not expected to identify the sitter immediately.
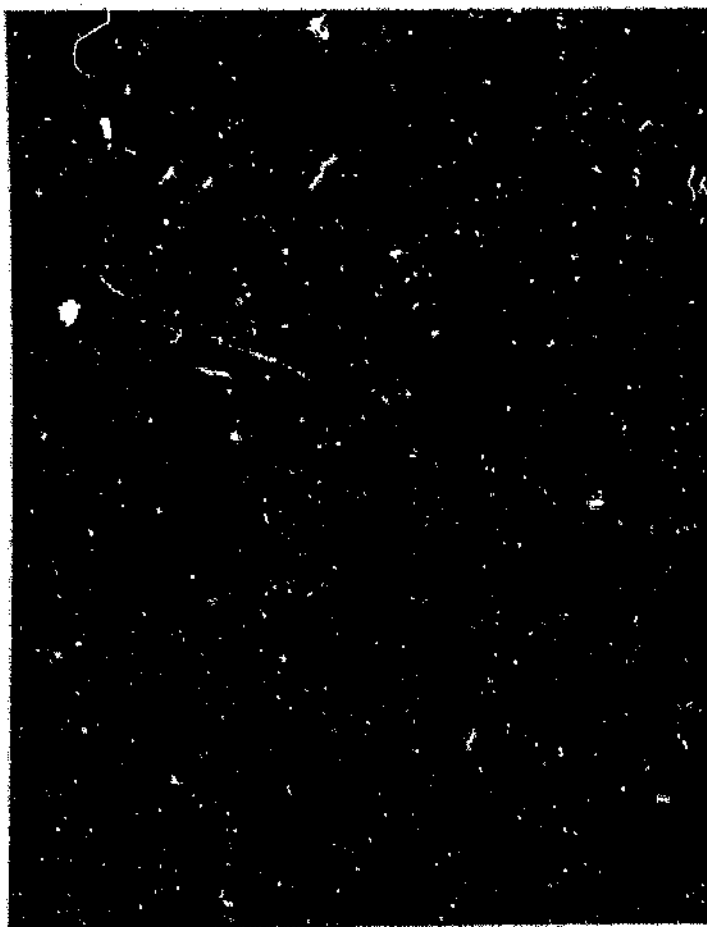
It is not until much later in the research that the images actually lose some of their physical boundaries or outlines. My initial exploration of portraits entailed the sole use of photographic reference material. In other words, there were no life sittings. These portraits consequently convey the static quality of the source material, in that the portraits appeared to be fixed in the moment. The split second instances of photographic images sometimes appear to the viewer to be uncharacteristic, in short, *unlike* the subject, and thus call into question the authority of the camera's scientific objectivity in determining likeness. My reason for talking about these earlier portraits here, is that they exposed the traditional portrait-li' .ness as a trap and encouraged the shift from naturalistic likeness.

The early works following directly after the photograph-based portraits, are still fairly readily recognisable to those who know the sitters, examples of which are, *A Portrait of Keith Kropman* (1992), *A Portrait of Tanya Rosenthal* (1993), *A Portrait of Darryl Katzenstein* (1992), *A Portrait of Merran Roy* (1993) (illus. 23 - 26). These early life-painting sessions provided a framework for the beginning of an exploration of the portrait-making process. It was during these painting sessions that I first had to contend with the movement of the sitter; their breathing, their shifting of their bodies, and often, the change of their facial expressions in conversation. These difficulties, I think, pre-empted the realisation that likeness in portraits is *necessarily* linked to difference, that likeness *implies* difference. It is not possible to capture actual movement in a still image. This recognition has had great impact on the course of the theoretical research and is explored in the first chapter. In practice, tireless attempts to capture such continuous movement led to the later creation of images which became more and more 'fugitive', images which the eye continually lost, and found.

The early life-painting sessions also afforded me direct experience of the power-plays which occur between artist and sitter in such a situation. Working with sitters and listening to their responses to my paintings of them, made it clear to me that sitters come to the studio with particular ways in which they see themselves and which they would thus expect to see reproduced. These post-portrait interactions between myself and the sitter clarified two things: that people *do* construct an image of themselves, which is entirely independent of the image created by the artist; and that the image presented to the artist by the sitter is by its very nature the artist's interpretation of her or his own view of the sitter.

24   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Tanya Rosenthal*, 1993, oil on canvas, 40 x 40 cm.

26   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Merran Roy*, 199 , oil on canvas, 30 x 22,5 cm.

25   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Darryl Katzenstein*, 1992, oil on canvas. 30.5 x 40.5 cm.

It became clear that a portrait-likeness is constructed and mediated through one's own consciousness of self; through grappling with conventions and the challenges they pose, including medium *and* through grappling with the challenge of reflecting the psycho-physical presence of the sitter.

In my interpretation of my sitters, whilst I did not always take into account the requests for 'ruby lips' or 'broader shoulders', I do not think that the power relations operate in the portraits in a way that either objectifies or victimises the sitters. One cannot deny that in creating a portrait of a person, one makes their image into an object in that the artwork itself is unavoidably an object. However, it is in my striving to retain an empathetic relationship with the sitter and in my striving to imbue the portrait with a sense of the presence of the sitter that I believe my portraits challenge - to a degree -the objectification of the sitter which occurs in all portraits. It is just this effort to imbue the portrait with the physical presence of the sitter which ironically, lead to the sculptural embodiments of the sitters in clay and plaster-of-paris, which are more obviously 'objects' than the flat canvasses. This development is discussed in detail later on in this chapter.

Whilst my own presence is obviously part of the portraits - evident in the choice of subject and in the particular decisions taken in the representation of the sitter with regard to medium and style - the portraits are also about my relationships with the sitters. The impact of these transactions and their centrality in the portrait-making process anticipated the theoretical research of this issue, which is located in chapter three. The early portraits were thus crucially important, both in their impact on the theory and on the development of the body of my work.

Many of the early portraits are displayed in thick white frames These frames serve a double purpose: on the one hand they provide a kind of visual relief from the intensity of the worked quality of the painted image. On the other hand, the frames allude to representations of paintings in postcard format which often have just such a white surround, thus admitting to the physical flatness of painted portraits, or their two dimensionality. As much as one would like the portrait to *be* the person, a portrait image is only ever a representation. This dissatisfaction with the flatness of paint was a crucial factor in the development of the practical research.

The creation process of transcribing the features and the shapes into brushmarks on the canvas seemed to me to be almost equivalent to touching the face with one's eyes, or to a blind person feeling the face of another, and in so doing, understanding its structure:
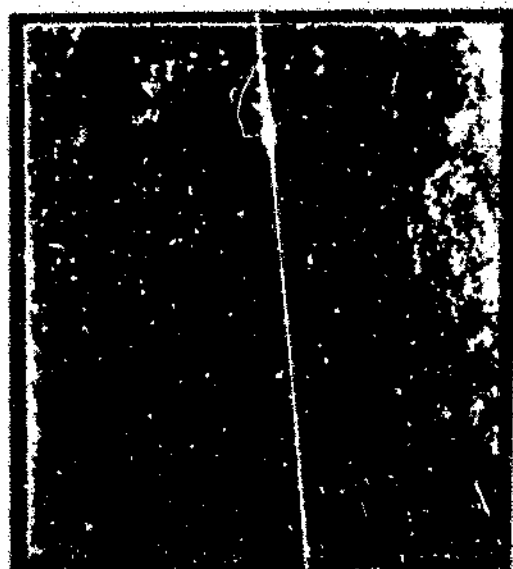
> ...the artist is tracing the detail [of the face] almost as if by touch ...and in each line that is added strengthens the picture but never makes it final. [3]
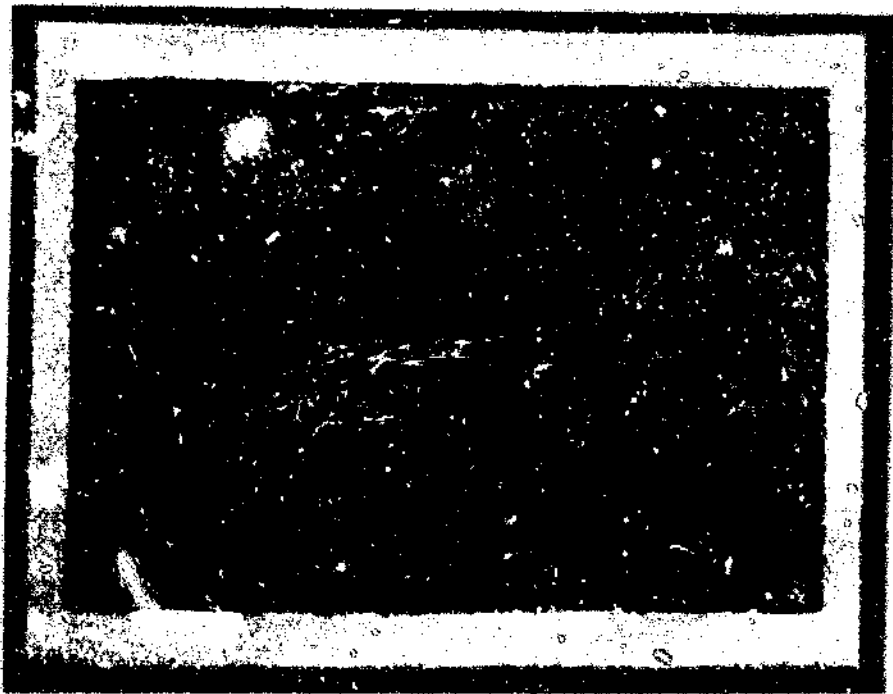
Yet, any attempts to mould the features of the sitter or to try and define the physicality - the fleshiness - of the face through gestural marks of the brush and the paint alone seemed thwarted, certainly while the medium remained oil paint on its own. So, I began to mix the oil paint with marble dust, which created a thicker texture. This texture was at once more 'fleshy', but was at the same time less like actual flesh since the paint was now embedded with tiny flakes of glittering marble. The use of this marble-flecked paint in 'background' areas had two interesting results: it further disturbed the figure-ground relationship, examples of which are found clearly in the later portraits; and it also disrupted the simple equation of thick paint with flesh. In *A Portrait of Andrea Burgener* (illus. 27) for example, the more substantial impasto areas of paint are used in the background, and not to describe the flesh. The paintings, though more 'fleshy', still failed to convey my sense of feeling or touching the face with my eyes.
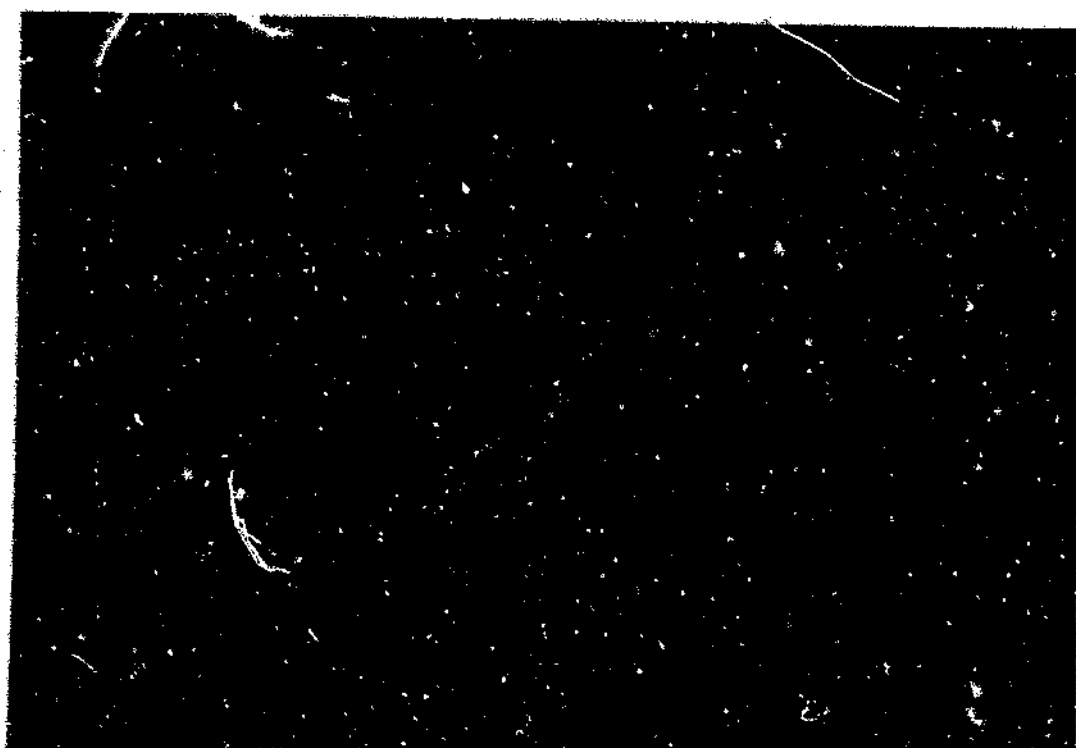
5.2.2 The middle phase

The middle phase can be marked by when I began looking at Rodin's portrait bust of Ms. Fairfax in the Johannesburg Art Gallery. What struck me about this work was the way that the figure seemed to emerge freely from the constraints of the marble block. The roughly 'hacked' block at the back becomes the finely chiselled drape almost without transition. Ms. Fairfax's face seems to have miraculously emerged from the marble block, as if unaided by the rough hacking of the marble with the tools of the sculptor. It is also as if a rubber film has covered her face rendering the features vague and distinct at the same time. I made several paintings from this sculpture using the marble dust. In retrospect, the study of this sculpture had many effects on the course of my work. The plaster casts and the paintings which followed, were all explorations of the ways in which things can be at once so specific, and yet so far from the original in terms of representing the sitter. When the eye is continually challenged, finding a form and then losing it, the way of viewing becomes kinetic and the movement of the figure is in some way accounted for.

After the studies of Ms. Fairfax, the portraits I was working on *began to merge* with their grounds. Sometimes the splitting of the format helped to disrupt the figure-
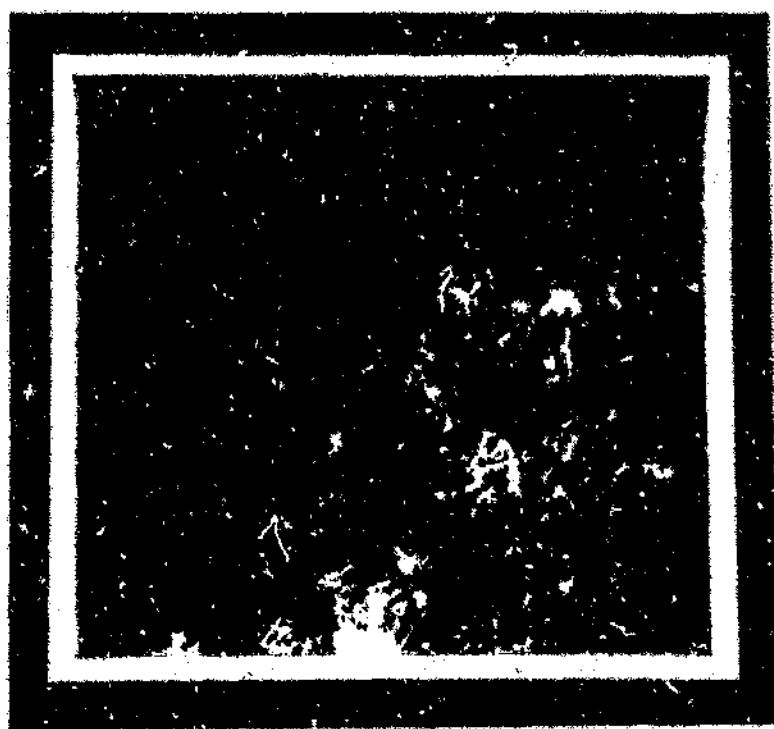
3 Berger, J. *The Ascent of Man* (1973:252)

28   Top: Rodin, A. *Eve Fairfax*, front view, 1907, marble, 54,2 x 58 x 46,8 cm.

29   Top: Brenner, J. *Painting from 'Eve Fairfax' II*, 1994, oil and marble dust on
canvas, 56,5 x 56,5 cm.

Bottom: Rodin, A. *Eve Fairfax*, left profile, 1907, marble, 54,2 x 58 x 46,8
cm.

ground relationship (illus.30) in tha., in this particular work, it is d'fficult to differentiate which panels are figure and which constitute the ground. But it was not until after I had made the plaster portraits that the painted portraits finally lost almost all definition of the boundaries between figure and ground. Only after I had made the plaster casts, did I feel that I found a way of representing the sitters which expressed the intimacy of the portrait-making process. The dissipation of linear contour in the portrait, which happens when one visually removes the division or the space between people, reflects an intimate interaction. There is a direct link between the casts and the paintings which followed, but this connection is discussed later in this chapter. The eradication of the separation between sitter and painter, which I found myself striving for, is well expressed in Paul Valery's account of the exchange of *regards*:

> Once gazes interlock, there are no longer *quite* two persons and it's hard for either to remain alone. This exchange ...effects ...a transposition, a metathesis, a chiasm of two 'destinies', two points of view. You take my appearance, my image, and I take yours. You are not I, since you see me and I don't see myself. What is missing for me is this 'I' whom you can see. And what *you* miss is the 'you' I see. [4]

At about the same time as the Ms. Fairfax portraits, I also made a few paintings of everyday things in my studio and of the cemetery which I can see from the window of my studio. These paintings were important in many ways. They allowed me to concentrate on particular paint qualities and ways of representing things which were *not* flesh. They were quite small images of mops, bricks which I used as makeshift easels for the small paintings, old Winsor and Newton paint boxes. They were details or fragments of things. My initial reasons for making these images had to do with reaching a temporary standstill with the portraits. What I found interesting was that, in context of the body of work, they are as much about *me* as the self portraits and indeed as the other portraits are. These small paintings represent parts of the studio; they are a small view of the room in which the research took place; in a way they make more tangible the process of creation in that they give form to the place of work. These, and the two portraits of me painting in the studio (illus.35 and 64), serve to demystify painting as something glamorous; they admit the work and the effort and the isolation. The subject matter of these two paintings is essentially the *process* of painting and of making images. In this they go against the grand tradition of classical portraiture and they admit the conventions of painting and the construction of a portrait; the studio,

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4   Quoted in Merleau-Ponty, M. *Signs*, (trans.) McCleary, R. (1964:231).

32   Brenner, J. *Cemetery II*. 1994-5, oil on board, 36 x 39 cm.

34 Brenner, J. *Mop*, 1994, oil on board, 21 x 17 cm.

Drawing 1 – In the Studio II, 1994-5, oil on canvas, 70 x 45 cm.

the easel, the brushes.[5] In some sense there is a link between these paintings which illuminate the physical context and the materials of my work, and the way that Arman, for example, constructed a portrait of Andy Warhol using the tools or equipment which Warhol used in the production of his paintings (illus. 4).

5.2.3 The late phase

After making these paintings of the studio, I returned to the portrait but now, for the first time, I began moulding portraits from clay slabs, literally feeling with my hands and tracing into the clay that which I could see with my eyes. This process finally allowed me to translate the human head in a way which, I feel, was liberated from the restraints of the paint medium.

In some ways the process of making the sculptures was similar to the painting process: there was still an intense relationship with the sitter, and I was still closely scrutinising the sitter's face. Instead of my working materials being paint and paintbrushes, they were now clay and my hands. I would begin with a slab of clay in front of me, and using my hands and forearms I would feel, push and pull the portrait into being. At times I used paintbrushes and other tools to work into the clay surface. The clay, as much as the paint, has 'a life of its own'. And whilst I was simply working with and challenging a different medium and a different set of conventions for describing the sitters and my relationship with them, I felt the process to be more intimate and perhaps this has to do with the direct use of touch - my hands in the clay, in the creation process. The explorations in clay were to have a direct impact on the paintings which were to follow. For instance, the clay field from which I 'sculpted' the portrait was one substance, one colour, from which the portrait 'emerged', defined only by my marks in the clay, and by the light and shadow created by manipulating and prodding the clay. The later *painted* portraits also began to 'emerge' from their ground, and this emergence can be seen to be a result of the previous clay process.

Most of the plaster casts were modelled from life, but some were modelled from previous paintings. My reasons for working with clay were in an attempt to 'grasp' the structure of the face. A plaster-of-paris mould was subsequently built up over the clay portrait. When the mould had set, it was overturned and the clay was removed, leaving a negative cast of the initial clay portrait. Plaster-of-paris was then poured into this

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[5]   There is however a stream within the grand tradition of portraiture in which artists *have* represented themselves in the process of painting.
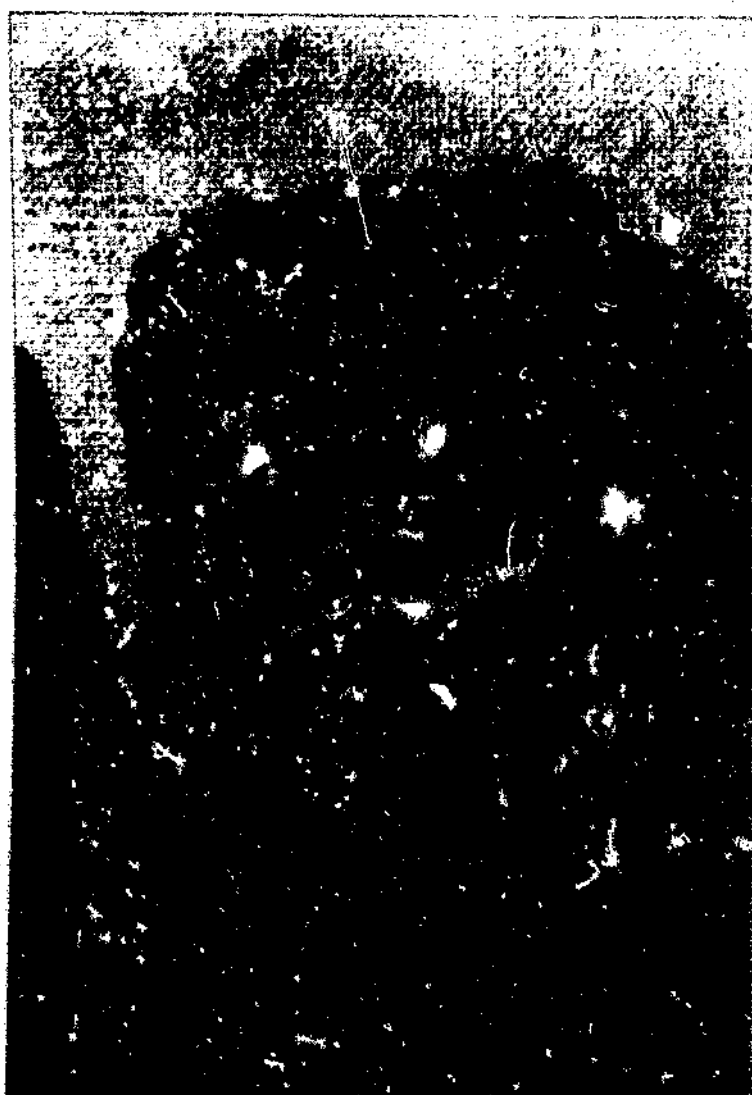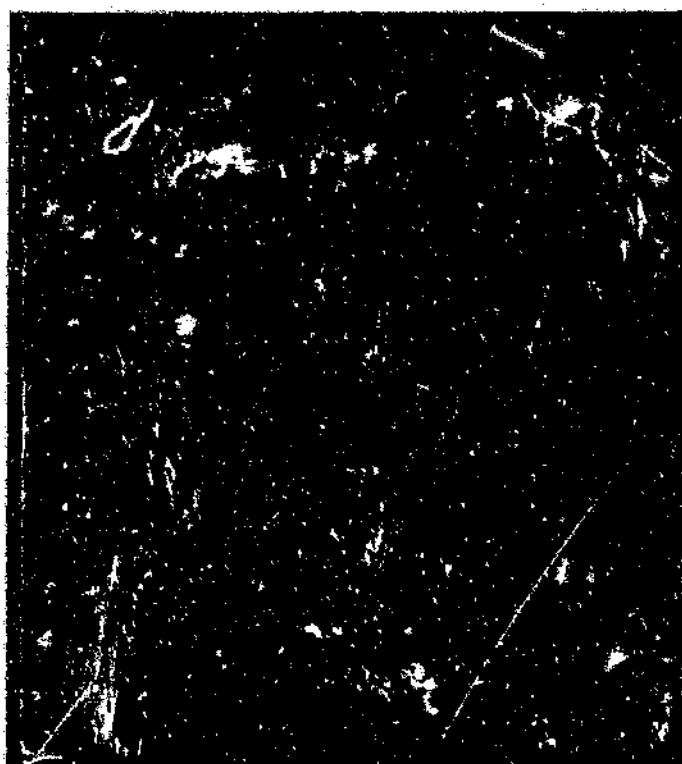
37   Brenner, J. *Painting from 'Self Portrait, 1995'*, 1995, oil on canvas, 45,5 x 40,
       5cm.

38   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Berenice Garb I,* 1995, plaster of paris and oil pa.nt, 33 x 31 x 6 cm.

negative cast which, when set, was itself overturned and the initial plaster-of-paris mould chipped away. This process therefore enabled two things: an initial working in clay, a soft and malleable, 'fleshy' substance, and a final more permanent *positive* cast of the clay image.

The decision to cast the moulds in plaster-of-paris was related to plaster being a traditional casting medium and also because it has the whiteness of marble, and in using this medium, I hoped to allude to the tradition of sculpture, the portrait bust and to ancient relics.

Once the clay portraits had been cast in plaster, and chipped free of the mould, a second stage began. This stage involved working into the plaster in various ways, drawing out some areas and chipping/hacking into the surface in others. In some I used washes of colour, areas of impasto paint and marble dust. In others I added colour using wax, a reference to the death masks or encaustic[6] portraits on mummies during the Ptolemaic and Roman period in Egypt[7] (see illus. 5) and alluding to the 'presence' of portraits through time. Some of the later plaster casts were cast using plaster which had already been coloured. Others were cast with marble dust coating the inside of the mould even before the plaster was poured. The plaster casts finally enabled me to challenge the concept of likeness in a new way. Francis Bacon once said about his painting something which helps explain the way I feel my plaster casts function in terms of likeness:

> When I was trying in despair the other day to paint that head of a specific person, I used a very big brush and a great deal of paint and I put it on very, very freely, and I simply didn't know in the end what I was doing, and suddenly this thing clicked, and became exactly like this image I was trying to record. But not out of any conscious will, nor was it anything to do with illustrational painting. What has never yet been analysed is why this particular way of painting is more poignant than illustration. I suppose because it has a life completely of its own. It lives on its own, like the image one's trying to trap; it lives on its own, and therefore transfers the essence of the image more poignantly. So that the artist may be able to open up or rather, should I say, unlock

[6]   encaustic: a mode of painting in which the colours (coloured clay or wax) are fixed by heat. *The Cassell Pocket English Dictionary*, (1990:265).

[7]   Petrie, W.M. Flinders. *The Hawara Portfolio: Paintings of the Roman Age*, (1913:1).

39   Top: Brenner, J. *Installation I*, 1994-5, shelf: 3 x 350 x 20 cm.

the valves of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently (Bacon in Sylvester, 1987:17).[8]
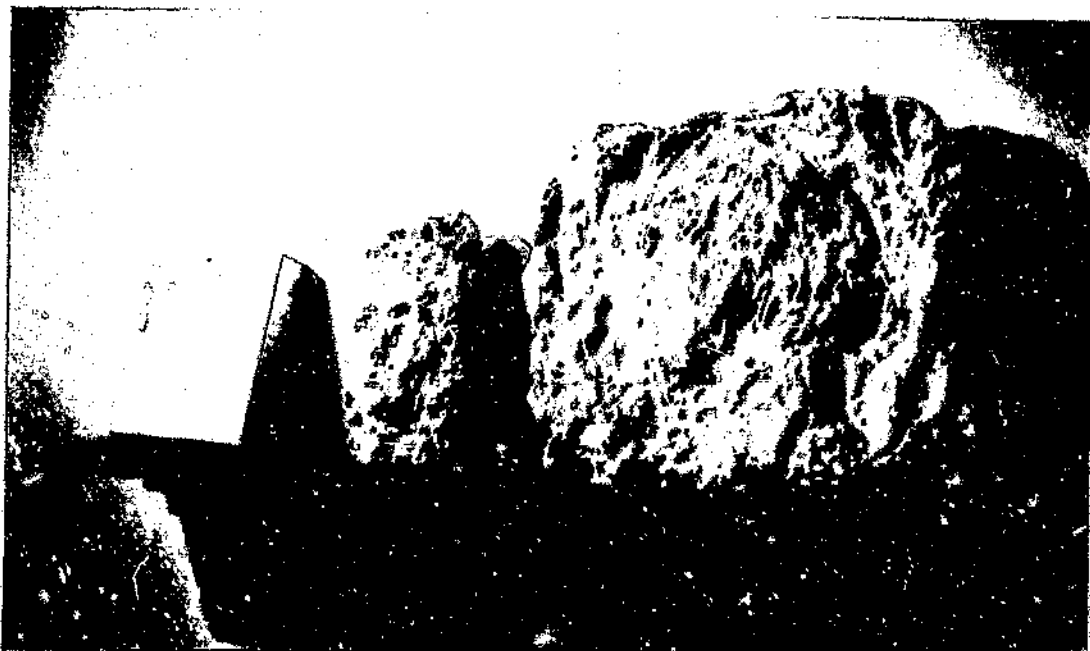
5.3   The images as a body of work.

The conscious manipulation and rupturing of conventions *challenges the degree of openness of the conventions* - or sets of signs - which are, by definition, fixed. This section looks at ways in which the images - both individually and through their relationship to each other - rupture certain conventions of painting and sculpture.

The specific characteristics, and the interplay between painting as against sculpture, become clear when viewed as a whole. This interplay had a great impact on the decisions made with regard to the display of the work, which accentuated these relationships. The method of display heightens the *objecthood* of the works themselves and this helps to contrast my work and traditional portrait-likenesses which helps to reveal some conventions.

There are many formal or physical links between the paintings and the sculptures: areas within the sculptures which are painterly and areas within the paintings which are sculptural. For example, the casts made using coloured plaster seem to have the density of an evenly painted surface; the colour is not applied, but rather emanates from within the form. In this way these particular sculptures allude to 'painting', especially impasto painting, in that the paint colour is not applied to a form, it *is* the form. The casts made using marble dust, though painterly in terms of the gestural marks made, have a surface which is very much like a gritty stone, and in this they allude to sculpture. The use of brushstrokes in the clay portraits, which cast quite clearly as brushstrokes, function fairly obviously as an inversion of a convention; the gestural brushmark, generally linked to immediacy and directness, is here 'trapped' or 'set', twice removed, in plaster of paris, in a mode of sculpture which is neither

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[8]   Bacon, along with Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and some others, formed the basis of a group of figurative painters that came to be referred to as the school of London. Freud and Bacon made portraits of each other, and to a degree, were interested in similar problems; paint, flesh and the capturing of appearance. Bacon often criticised the illustrative nature of Freud's portraits. His articulation of such problems and difficulties in the making of art have been extremely useful in my own attempts to write about likeness and the nature of image-making.

40   Top and Bottom: Brenner, J. *Installation I, details.* 1994-5.

41   Brenner, J. *Installation I, detail*, 1994-5.

42   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Carla Held*, 1995, oil and marble dust on canvas, 25 x 40 cm.
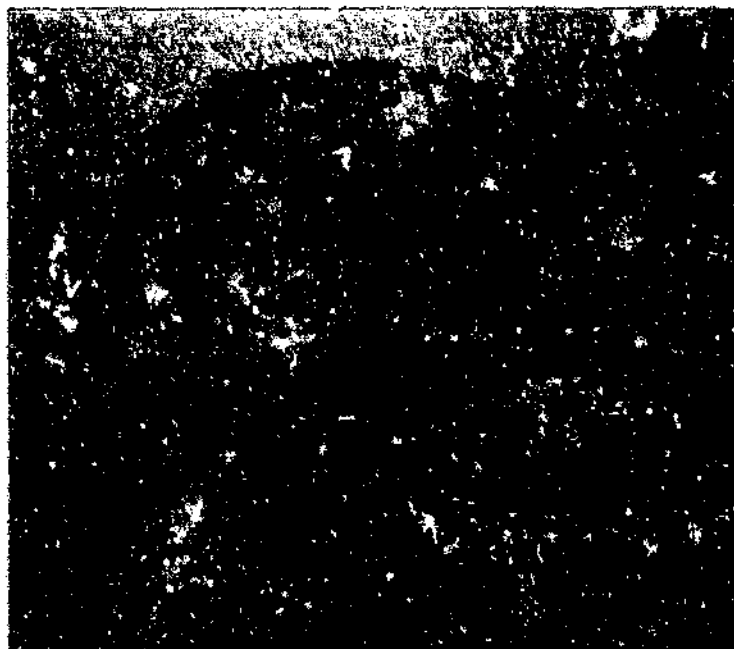
completely immediate nor direct. An irony of these sculptures is that in many ways their fugitive quality affords them a movement which gives them an unfixed liveliness, something which is in contradiction to the hard, fixed and impersonal plaster surface.

Gestural paint marks are used throughout the research. In the early paintings, gestural brushmark was confined to descriptions of flesh and form. When such marks are used in areas which are not fleshy, for example in backgrounds which are increasingly areas of nondescript space, the paintings and the sculptures challenge the equation of gestural mark-making and the description of flesh and form; In fact gesture can, and does, work as an *intervention* in the portrayal of flesh, and images which contravene this convention admit the construction of the correlation between paint and flesh. Hal Foster's discussion in his essay, "the expressive fallacy" examines the constructed nature of conventions, such as the gestural or 'expressive' brushmark to convey immediacy.[9]

The interplay between painting and sculpture is evident again in the paintings which followed the sculptures where boundaries between the figure and the ground are lost in the most extreme way yet. For instance, in *A Portrait of Carla Held* 1995, (illus.42) the close relationship between the figure and the ground prevents the surrounding space from providing a clear and comfortable frame for the figure. These later developments in the painting are a direct consequence of the explorations in clay, and for me the paintings are sculptural in the sense that they allude to these particular plaster sculptures and the initial clay process which facilitated the merging of the figure-ground relationship.

The sculptures or plaster casts, are objects in themselves, especially since they are not immediately recognisable as portraits, and the 'sculptured' paintings, particularly the later portraits, are more suggestive of objects of paint, than of conventional pictures.

One of the motivations for displaying some of the works on shelves was to increase the objecthood of the images and to increase the interplay between the sculptural and the painterly, between physical three dimensionality and illusionism. In this, the viewer can make connections between concepts of portrait, fragment, past, death, life, mask and so on. Such connections are drawn in section 5.4 of this chapter.
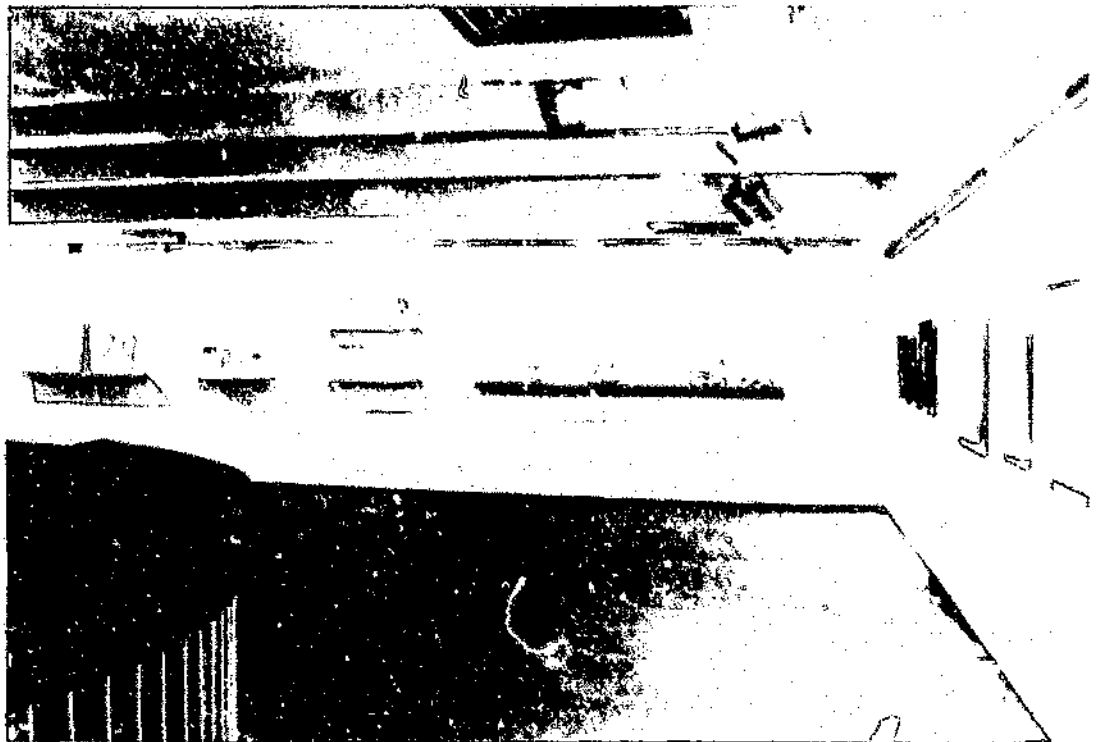
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[9]   Hal Foster's essay, "The Expressive Fallacy" is considered in the second chapter.

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43 Brenner, J. *Painting from `A Portrait of Darryl Katzenstein, 1994'* 1995, oil on canvas, 57 x 57 cm.
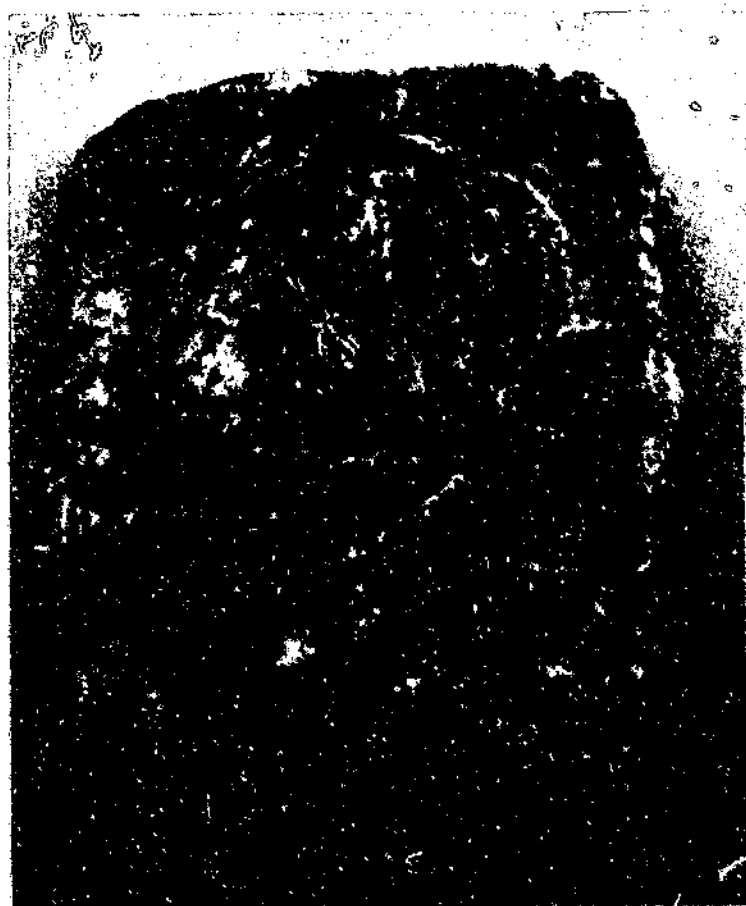
44   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Darryl Katzenstein*, 1994, plaster of paris, oil paint and marble dust, 35 x 31 x 5 cm.

This interest in the 'objecthood' or physical presence of the works, in asserting the portraits as *objects of art* rather than as the human counterparts which they represent, is linked to the basic premise of likeness itself; that a portrait of a person is no more the person than a painting of a bowl of oranges *is* a bowl of oranges (refer chapter one). Thus, viewing the portraits as images existing in their own right, opens them up to a broader range of interpretations.

The paintings of the plaster casts, some on canvas and others on fragments of marble, compound the distinctions and the interplay between sculpture, painting and object: the canvases and the pieces of marble are paintings of the plaster casts, and all are objects. With the paintings of the plaster casts, as with the later portraits, the figure/ground relationships are deliberately disrupted, differently, but with the same purpose in mind: to blur the focus on the figure, and in so doing, to extend the image across the entire surface, making the canvas, or the marble into an object of painting.

The shelves used for displaying the works are painted in various colours and this feature highlights the shelves as being both a considered part of the work, and as punctuating the work. Quite literally, these shelves underline the objects. One could see the objects on this line almost as words which make up a sentence, or images which, through their relationships to each other, form a constructed investigation of likeness. The coloured shelves allude to children's highly coloured Cuisenaire building blocks and so allude to the notion of construction, which this research places behind the concept of likeness. A shelf in itself has a fixed set of associations and functions. A shelf has a domestic function and is often associated with the display of precious objects. Because of this association, the 'objecthood' of the paintings and sculptures is announced. However, these particular objects - clearly not like those objects generally displayed or stored on domestic shelves - have a reference to the museum or gallery context and the types of precious objects displayed in such contexts. In this the objects are imbued with the suggestion of a certain historical value - which connects to the association of the portrait and the passing of time. This idea is elaborated upon in section 5.4.

The display of sculptures and paintings on the shelves underscores the complexity of the conventional relationship of the traditional painting to the wall. On the shelves, the works are contrasted with each other and are forced to relate to each other and this is different to the isolation of a painting hung on the wall. The conventional relationship of the painting to the wall is especially underscored in those instances where some of the sculptures are in fact hung on the wall.

46   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Josch Emnet, back view*, 1995, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm.

The shift that one's eye needs to make in reading the different kinds of images on the shelves, is heightened when one is viewing the works in conjunction with each other. In relation to both the paintings and the sculptures it is a matter of searching for the likeness which one does not often find immediately. In viewing the works in relation to one another, likeness itself is challenged in that it must be found outside exact description.

A further challenge to likeness is located within some of the later paintings, many of which are back views of the sitters' heads. These were made partly in recognition of the fact that, as examined in the theoretical sections, a likeness need not be limited to the facial features; that any image of a person is only a part or fragment of the person and that much information is found outside of the face, which is in itself a fragment of the person. For example, people are often identified at a glance by their hairstyle or by their posture; people's identities are often constructed through fragmentary evidence.

The paintings of the back views are also much 'quieter', or appear more meditative than the frontal portraits. With the consequent removal of eye contact, the tension which exists between artist and sitter is slightly alleviated. I found myself able to concentrate more on the paint qualities and textures, and able to view the canvas in front of me as an object which was fundamentally about painting and about art, but also about an individual sitter. This shift from frontal portraiture and the subsequent effect on both the artist-sitter relationship and on the approach to the actual painting as artwork in its own right, reflects indirectly, the fixed conventional attitude to portraiture as one more about the portrait as facial description and less about the image as 'art' in its own right.

The artist's presence is intrinsic to the image, in the choice of subject and how that is translated into an image. In one last sense, every image an artist makes is a self-portrait, or a reflection of the artist's self, and it is in relation to this idea[10] that the images of and from the studio have their connection to portraiture.

The paintings of the mop have an almost metaphorical relationship to the head, more specifically, the back of the head and the hair, and in these images, the viewer is guided towards the associations between objects and human subjects, and the way that
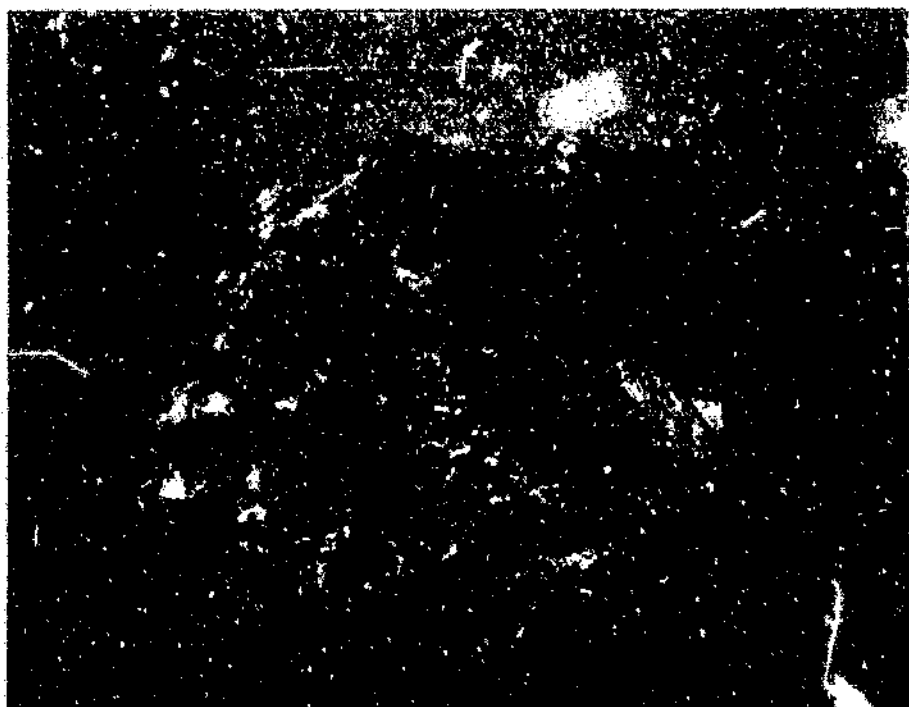
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[10]   In his book *Portraiture*, (1991:141-3) Richard Brilliant discusses the idea that a self portrait requires no more than the representation of the artist's distinctive style and touch.
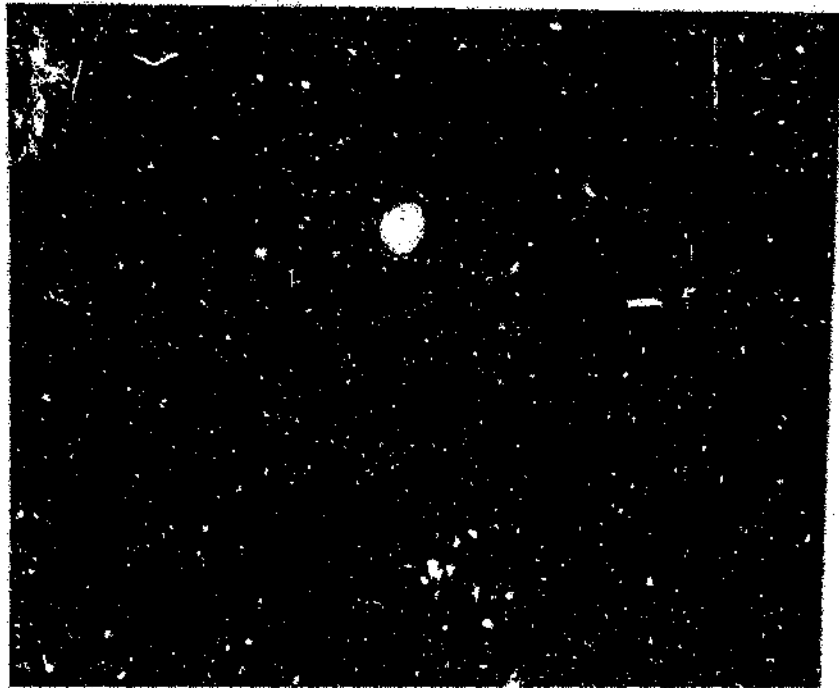
47   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Josch Emnet*, 1995, oil and marble dust on canvas, 30 x 25 cm.

48   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Tom Cohen*, 1995, plaster of paris, wax, marble dust and oil paint, 21 x 26 x 4 cm.

49   Brenner, J. *Head of Clay*, 1995-6, oil and spray-paint on canvas, 29,5 x 39,5 cm.

in the end all the portraits are objects of art. One thinks of the way that Van Gogh's portrait of Gauguin was a painting of Gauguin's empty chair. The chair becomes a sign for both the presence and absence of Gauguin. The cumulative associations at play in the recognition of an individual and the many cases of 'mistaken identity', an extreme of which is discussed in Oliver Sack's article, "The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat", is alluded to in the paintings of the mops, and their similarity to the paintings of the backs of heads. To sum up, viewing the images as a body of work both confirms certain ideas and evokes others.

5.4 The images in relation to other genres and sets of conventions

Viewing the images as a body of work evokes various associations and suggestions which make reference to other genres or sets of conventions.

Particular uses of different mediums, convey or evoke different responses. The exploration of a different medium. i.e. the plaster, helped, by comparison, to clarify properties of the oil paint medium. Experimentation with different mediums helped to clarify that there is much important information which is contained within the medium itself, and conveyed through the medium, by way of the resulting appearance of the image, and from subsequent associations which can be extrapolated.

For instance, some connections can be drawn between paint and the portrayal of flesh and life, and between plaster and the reference to death. The manipulation of the plaster casts and their beginnings in clay, give the appearance of life and the fugitive nature of a person in motion. However, whilst plaster when mixed, is first liquid and in a sense living, once it has set it is dry and cold and brittle to the touch. This is much like the body; soft and pliable when living but cold and hard and brittle when dead. The casts are fragile in that they can be shattered. The oil paint, on the other hand, has a sensuous quality, it is soft and pliable and has the 'give' of plasticity. In contrast to the plaster, oil paint remains wet for many months, forming a skin over the outer, exposed area. I'm sure it is these reasons, and for the way that paint occupies the surface like a living, life-generating and decomposing substance that led the painter Willem De Kooning to state:

Flesh was the reason why oil painting was invented.[11]

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[11]   Sylvester, D. "Flesh was the Reason", in *Willem De Kooning Paintings*, (1994:16).

50   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Josch Emmet with Fist*, 1995, 30 x 30 cm.

50   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Josch Emnet with Fist*, 1995, 30 x 30 cm.

Unlike the fragility of the plaster and its ability to shatter or fragment, the precariousness of the oil paint is in its extraordinary suppleness and in its unpredictability. As Franz Kline put it:

> Paint never seems to behave the same - even the same paint, you know.[12]

David Sylvester elaborates upon this quote and suggests, or confirms rather that paint, in its plasticity or malleability is a living substance which, in a sense, 'answers back' to the proddings of the painter:

> Each situation in the duet between painter and paint was to be met and dealt with as it came along, and the painters' hope was that they [the paints] would not impose their will upon the situation but collaborate in the emergence of something with a life of its own (Sylvester, 1994:29).

The experimentation with different techniques and materials was encouraged by the interplay between painting and sculpture which was becoming evident in my work. The paintings had become quite sculptural in the way they defined the forms, and the sculptures seemed to feel more like aggressive paintings than sculptures. In a sense, the plaster casts allow for an embodiment of form by their sheer bulk and physicality. Whilst the oil paint, and its flatness, might have a connection to skin, the casts have a connection to the body.

In this later phase of work, the physical likeness becomes less important and is so replaced with a 'feeling' of the individual. The irony is that the later sculpted portraits, whilst less about the physical likeness are more physical as objects. A portrait can only ever be a fragment of the sitter; representing a part of their being which is already in the past. In this respect the plaster casts by virtue of their appearance, quite literally illustrate the point. They *look* like archaic archaeological fragments, or remnants of the past. This reference to the past seems to bring full circle important aspects of the portrait in terms of the passing of time and foregrounds the significance of 'likeness' in portraits: if the portrait can, in a sense, be substituted for the subject, be a surrogate for her or him, then likeness is indeed a central concern (Steiner, 1978:6); a portrait is often created in memory of a particular person and portrait-images often create the

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[12]   Franz Kline in conversation with David Sylvester, taken from "Flesh Was The Reason" in *Willem De Kooning Paintings*, (1994:29).

51   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Darryl Katzenstein*, 1995-6, plaster of paris, marble
      dust, spray-paint, oil paint, ink and earth, 32 x 37 x 4 cm

way in which we either remember or have access to an individual; finally, that the portrait represents the subject long after her or his death, establishes a portrait as intrinsically about death or about a substitute presence - about immortalising a life.

In appearance, the plaster casts have a reference to the fragmentary nature of ancient relics; things dug up from the past; things which provide us with clues. The human fascination with lineage, and with giving a face to our ancestors, allows portraits a special relevance. It is in this reference to fragments and to the past that one can find a link with the paintings of the cemeteries. I painted the views of the cemeteries because they were my view from the studio. Looking at them in relation to the rest of the work which deals with flesh and human life, and in relation to the plaster casts which have their own reference to death and the passing of time, the views of the cemetery seem to have their place within the body of work.

Having isolated a portrait as an image which *does* have a human counterpart, an actual referent, it is possible to find some relevance, in context of this dissertation, in Roland Barthes' contemplation of the presence of death in a photographic image:[13]

> In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred.* Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe ...there is always a defeat of time in them [photographs]: *that* is dead and *that* is going to die (1984:96).

In a letter to his sister, Van Gogh expresses similar thoughts on this notion of death, or the return of the dead, as present in portraits:

> I *should like* to paint portraits which would appear after a century to the people living then as apparitions (Van Gogh, 1978:470).

The paintings made *of* the plaster casts, the last series of paintings, are probably the images which are most removed from the original subjects because they are made from looking at images which are themselves of images. The marks used in these

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[13]   Barthes isolates a photograph from *any* other image as the *only* image in which we can be sure that its referent had existed. He writes that the name of photography's *noeme* (essence) is "That-has-been", or "the Intractable" (1984:76-77).

52   Brenner, J. *Inverted painting from 'A Portrait of Andrea Bürgener, 1995'*
(plaster of paris), 1995, oil and marble dust on marble fragment, 49 x 34 x 1,5
cm.

paintings of the casts are much broader and more fragmented than in the painted portraits. Because the image itself is so disrupted, its relationship with the background is confused or integral to begin with, the figure and the ground seem to merge without actually being fused. Occasionally, in the display of some of these images I have inverted them - displaying them on their sides or upside down (illus.52). In a way, this has the effect of further abstracting an already abstracted image. It forces the viewer to find an image on the canvas or marble which was not the intended image, and in this way it encourages the viewer towards her or his individual and 'open' approach. In these works particularly, the 'merging' of subject and ground, seems to echo some scientific findings which suggest that we construct our own reality', that we are, in a sense, linked to and intrinsically part of our surrounding external space:

> 'We are not sure,' they tell us, 'but we have accumulated evidence which indicates that the key to understanding the universe is *you*.' This is not only different from the way that we have looked at the world for three hundred years, it is *opposite*. The distinction between the 'in here' and the 'out there' upon which science was founded, is becoming blurred. This is a puzzling state of affairs. Scientists, using the 'in here - out there' distinction, have discovered that the 'in here - out there' distinction may not exist! What is 'out there' apparently depends, in a rigorous mathematical sense as well · philosophical one, upon what we decide 'in here' ...there is a growing body of evidence that the distinction between the 'in here' and the 'out there' is illusion (Zukav, 1980:115).

A particular painting by Francis Bacon clearly illustrates and articulates one way in which this scientific concept can be given visual form:

> In *Study for Portrait of Van Gogh III* we see Vincent Van Gogh standing still on a road. The road is composed of large strokes of thick paint. The impasto technique is even more strikingly used in painting

53   Bacon, F. *Study for Portrait of Van Gogh III*, 1957, oil and sand on canvas, 198.4 x 13˙,5 cm.

the road than in painting the figure ...The road ...is extremely body-like. The red, pink and white strokes of paint turn it into a meat-like surface (Van Alphen, 1992:143).

There is an ambiguity and a strange tension which is set up between the body and the road and the ways in which Bacon has inverted the 'expected' treatment of these areas.

As discussed in the previous section, the use of shelves as a display method for both the paintings and the sculptures serves to add to the nature of the objecthood of the images. In their reference to the museum space, the shelves as display units heighten the concept of the images as allusions to historical or social references which can be extrapolated from the works. In this there is some connection to the life mask.

In the 19th century, life masks, which were made in the same manner as death masks, became popular.[14] Certain life casts were made as scientific and 'objective' studies of particular races and so transformed human subjects into museum objects. In this instance,

> the exhibited figures were not intended to evoke a presence of the social beings who had been cast at a particular time and place, but instead were presented as generalized examples of a racial type ...separated from their social and historical context, the people who were cast were literally objectivized and reduced to scientific specimens.[15]

On the other hand, life casts and wax effigies such as those found in Madame Tussaud's wax museum, are not based on race or racial scrutiny. Instead, they are often famous and infamous figures, placed in a reconstructed environment, reflecting the subjects social and historical position and cultural context. Yet, both the 'scientific' casts and those at Madame Tussaud's could be said to share the same fascination: the illusion of actual presence, a copy of the original form; on one hand it seems that one cannot get closer to the original, on the other hand, if one considers the

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[14]   *The New Encyclopaedia Brittanica*, 15th edition, Vol.23. Macropaedia (1987:589).

[15]   Davison, P. "Human Subjects as Museum Objects. A Project to Make Life-Casts of 'Bushmen' and 'Hottentots' 1907-1924", *Annals of the South African Museum* (1992-3:178).

54   Death mask of Cecil John Rhodes.
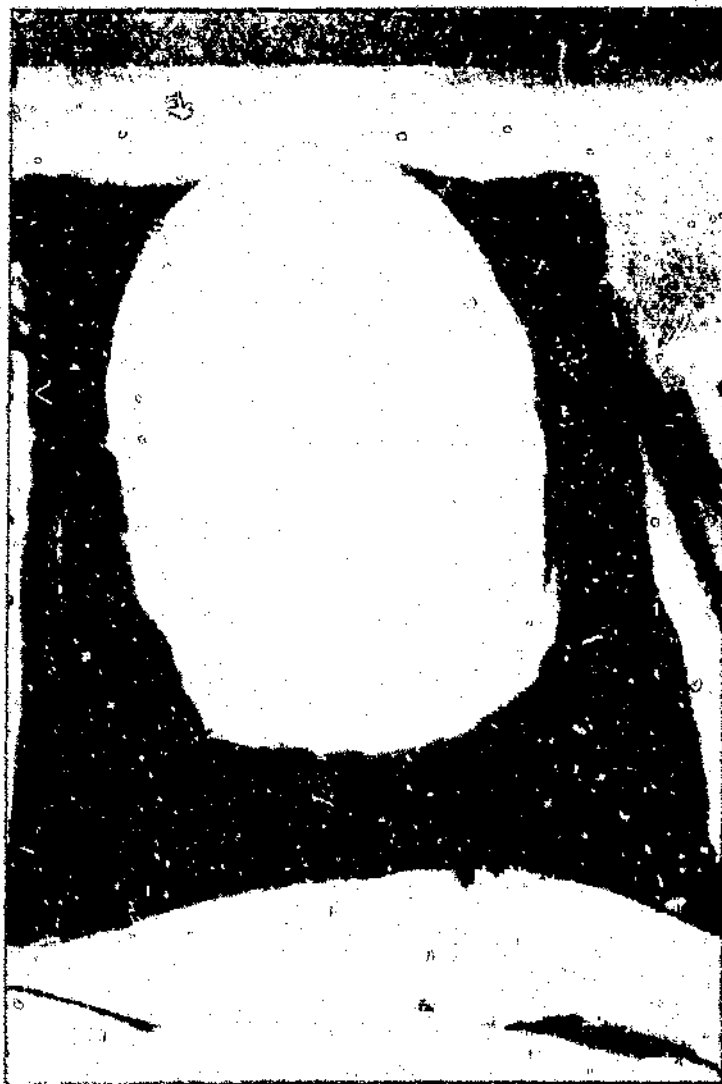
stillness, and the 'object-ness', the life-casts seem deathly, far from the living models. The most one learns from such installations is a particular society's regard for racial difference or celebrity, for example.

My work, displayed as it is, must have a reference to the concepts of life and death masks. Encyclopaedia Brittanica defines a death mask as a wax or plaster cast of a mould taken from a dead face and suggests that

> death masks are true portraits, although changes are occasionally made
> in the eyes of the mask to make it appear as though the subject were
> alive.

Whilst the conflation of the concepts of life and death is acute in death masks, Van Alphen suggests

> the imprint of life is indistinct from the ghost of death (1992:106).

it is my belief that in their difference to such literal transcripts of a face, my portraits offer a challenge to the traditional concepts of likeness which seem to be embedded in the masks and their quest for objectivity or conventionally accurate representation.

> 'The imitator', says Socrates through Plato, 'is a long way off the truth,
> and can do all things because he lightly touches on a small part of
> them, and that part an image' (Martienssen, 1984:11).

One could say that it is in the interactive relationships, such as between artist and sitter, that some living quality of the sitter as social being is imparted to the image and then to the viewer. It is in the presence of interpretation or inter-relations, or in the shift from exact resemblance, that the sitter gains status as something other than mere object, and the image gains status as something more than mere imitation.

The concept of the mask itself is extremely relevant in relation to the portrait, especially when one considers that

> our very faces are living masks, which reflect, to be sure, the changing
> emotions of our inner lives, but tend more and more to conform to the
> type we are seeking to impersonate (Park, 1950:249).

55   Brenner, J. *Self-portrait*, 1994-5, oil and marble dust on canvas, 45 x 53 cm.
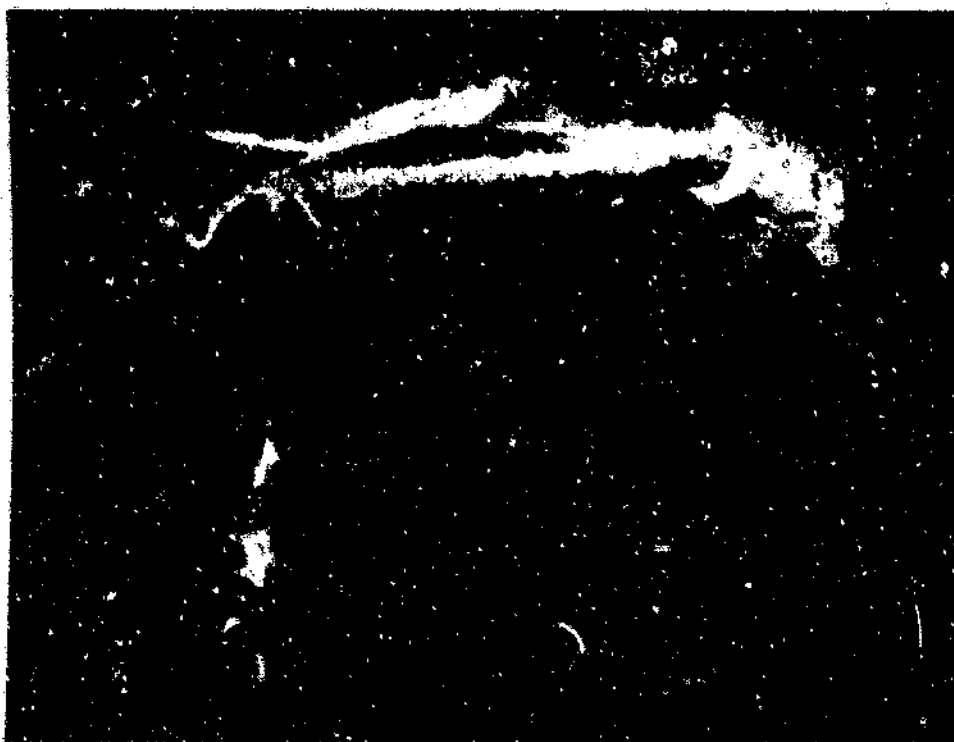
56   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Berenice Garb II*, 1995, plaster of paris and oil paint,
        38 x 31 x 10 cm.

57   Nadar, *Marceline Desbordes-Valmore*, photograph, 1857 *(dimensions not provided)*.

This suggests that our 'masks' both reveal and conceal. The duplicity of the mask as a problem in visual interpretation and interpersonal relations is succinctly explained by Roland Barthes in relation to being photographed:

> In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art (Barthes, 1984:13).

Faces are indeed facades and *any* portrait is an interpretation; a reading of the mask or image which is presented to the artist. As Richard Brilliant notes:

> What, if anything, lies behind the mask can only be inferred by the viewer from the clues provided by the mask, which may mislead as well as inform through the use of conventions of representation (1991:115).

Confirming then, both the relevance of decoding an image in terms of conventions, and that likeness is understood through the shared perceptions of artist and viewer rather than through any fixed definition of 'truth' or 'realistic' accuracy, Barthes offers the following thoughts:

> Who is like what? Resemblance is a conformity, but to what? to an identity. Now this identity is imprecise, even imaginary, to the point where I can continue to speak of 'likeness' without ever having seen the model. As in the case of most of Nadar's portraits (or of Avedon's, today): ...Marceline Desbordes-Valmore [is 'like' because she] reproduces in her face the slightly stupid virtues of her verses... I can spontaneously call them 'likenesses' because they conform to what I expect of them (1984:101-2).

Thus, with the research of portraits one is brought back, again and again, to the transactions between artist, subject, viewer and image.

In conclusion, this chapter on my practical work is intended to provide some direction for the viewer, both in suggesting associations between the works themselves and in connecting the practical body of work to the theoretical study. This chapter serves also to discuss the practical output and the ways in which the works function, challenging the conventions of certain genres in art-making.

58   Top: Freud, L. *Self-portrait (Reflection)*, 1981-2, oil on canvas, 30,5 x 25,4 cm.

Centre: Warhol, A. *Self-portrait with Skull*, 1978, silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 40,6 x 33 cm.

Bottom: Brenner, J. *Self-portrait*, 1996, plaster of paris, spray-paint, dye, 28 x 24 x 6 cm.

The area of theor… al study was born out of the practical investigation and because in Francis Bacon's words,

> I think art is an obsession with life and after all, as we are human beings, our greatest obsession is with ourselves (in conversation with David Sylvester, 1987:63).

The meaning of an image is never static. It is always altered by its changing viewers and its changing context. It is in the transient nature of images and indeed of people that one locates the difficulty of freezing likeness. It is this same transience which has informed the approach to both this body of work and to the writing of it. In other words, I like to think that both the practical and the theoretical research allow room for the personal interpretations of the viewer and reader.

5.5   Freud, Warhol and myself

I would like to review my choice of artists - Lucian Freud and Andy Warhol - whose work in portraiture I have used to create a framework for the discussion of likeness in portraits and for the discussion of my own practical output. To this end, having discussed my own work, I would like to draw some connections and comparisons between their portraits and also between my work and their portraits in terms of my concerns in portraiture.

My initial interest in both of these painters' work can be found not only in their being two of the most prominent contemporary portrait painters despite working in an era which does not seem to value the portrait as a genre, but also in the way that their approaches to the portrait seemed to be not only different, but *opposite*. My interest in these artists was sustained by the answers to my questions about likeness which their portraits helped to provide. My questions relating to likeness were clarified both through the information which is contained within the portraits, and also through the dialogue between the works which was set up as a framework for this research.

Reflecting upon the portraits of Freud *and* Warhol, and playing one off against the other, I was prevented from drawing any conclusions about which kind of likeness I felt to be more 'truthful' and it became very clear that likeness itself - any likeness - is a construction. Finally, the selection of these two artists for discussion was based on the way in which their portraits seem, in a sense, to extend beyond themselves: they are not only likenesses.

For instance, Freud's portraits struck me primarily as paintings in their own right - very much about paint and about the painter - before they are portraits in any traditional sense, and perhaps this has to do with the way that recognition functions in Freud's work. Here, recognition is located outside of 'exact' likeness. Even when one looks at photographs of the sitters, or at different representations of them by Freud, recognition is not immediate. Perhaps it is more so for those viewers who know the sitters personally, or those who know something of the relationship between artist and sitter. Nonetheless it is clear that Freud does not seek 'exact resemblance' in his likenesses, and this separates them immediately from more traditional portraits whereby verisimilitude was the chief criterion.

Warhol's portraits on the other hand, whilst equally about his particular medium and very much about Warhol as artist, struck me as portraits which seem to criticise themselves. Churned out society portraits, they become highly sought after commodity items which undercut traditional values of authenticity and preciousness. They simultaneously serve and mock their subject. And whilst we might immediately recognise the sitters, the superficiality of such recognition is as immediate. Warhol's portraits generally have little to do with either the qualities of flesh or with the representation of an individual's particular physiognomy. Instead, they are cleaned-up, slick versions of prefabricated images and recognition of the sitters is based on the 'trademark' associations which their portraits evoke. Warhol's likenesses are very much about flattering his sitters and whilst this aspect might place his works alongside traditional portraits, his mechanical medium coupled with the 'alterations' which are so obvious and so un-subtle, render likenesses which make a mockery both of themselves and of their traditional referents.

My own work with portraits, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, began with the use of photographic reference material. My dissatisfaction with the resulting flat and static 'lifeless' portraits led me to review the way other pa   had treated flesh. In this regard I was drawn to Freud's work in portraiture. At   one time I was fascinated with Warhol's approach to portraits and their unas med satisfaction of their subject's vanity or pure narcissism. They seemed to be s o blatantly about the ways in which we both see and present ourselves and are in turn seen and represented by others - an interaction which struck me as both primary and central to the portrait-making process.

Looking at two such diverse painters forced me to test my findings with regard to one, against the other. It became clear to me that much of the meaning or intention of the artist is contained within the medium. Also, the choice of medium is directly linked to

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the style of the portrait and that together, they can be seen to reflect a set of inevitable power relations - between artist, sitter, viewer and image - which are intrinsic to the creation of a portrait.

These findings are detailed in chapter four, but they are behind my own explorations in portraiture. The emotive implications of Freud's gestural style of painting formed an initial impact on the direction of my own portraits. This theoretical research into the constructed nature of all likenesses enabled me to move beyond such an approach to portraiture and to stretch the boundaries of my own practical work.

However, the practical research thus far has concentrated almost entirely on bust portraiture. The theoretical research has lead me to recognise that in much the same way that likeness is not necessarily limited to - but is often limited by - a description of the facial features, so portraiture, as a genre, is similarly not limited to - but possibly limited by - the description of head and shoulders only.

In fact, viewing portraiture in terms of the full body must undoubtedly open up an entirely new and perhaps extended area of looking at likeness and the construction both of self and of images which represent the self, and others.

In many senses, my own sculptural explorations of portraits and the sculptural 'embodiment' of the relationship between artist and sitter, seem to me to capture - within the portrait bust - the full sense of the sitter and the spatial as well as the emotional relationship between artist and sitter. Having explored, in this dissertation, the very essence of the portrait-making process, via the portrait bust, it seems as if the very boundaries of the format itself - the edges of the canvas or plaster slabs - now approach the point where they too must expand, or dissolve, or move into areas other than the portrait bust.

CONCLUDING NOTE

"...it is all passing, [and this] is the only reason for wanting to preserve it"
Denton Welch[1].

> ...the in ease, concentrated representation of bodily experiences evokes
> simultaneously the situation of death. Death, then, is not an event which comes
> after life: it is a situation which lurks within the experience of the body (Van
> Alphen, 992:96).

Van Alphen suggests that death is something which is coterminous with life. In portraits this idea
is physically embodied in that the portrait itself, of a living or once-living person, inevitably
contains the seeds of reference to death, the past, change and the passing of time. A portrait's
reference to the passing of time admits the brevity of life, or the approach of death. But then
portraits - ancestral portraits in particular - can also help us to locate our position, and our means
of being in the world:

> Lineage reveals an identity stronger, more interesting than legal status - more
> reassuring as well, for the thought of origins soothes us, whereas that of the future
> disturbs us, agonizes us (Barthes, 1984:105).

Perhaps it is *because* a person exists in a continual state of growth and change that a portrait will
always have a reference to the past and to the passing of time: immediately as a portrait is
completed, it exists both in the present - in its own right as a portrait - and also in the past - as a
particular perspective of a person-as-they-were at a specific time in the near or distant past. The
portrait functions as a sign of a past interaction.

Whilst one might view a portrait of a living person as a representation of the person-as-they-were-
in-the-past, when viewing a portrait of someone no longer living, the portrait is seen as a
representation of the-person-as-they-were-in-*their*-present. This suggests that the portrait itself
gains a new life-force, or a new importance once the sitter has died.

Any work of art is, of necessity, full of contemporary references. So, through looking at artworks
one can move in an era before one's own and share experiences beyond one's own. When one
views portraits, it is possible to have an imaginary experience of what it is to be both the painter -
by looking at the image as representative of the artist's self - as well as the sitter, in the context
of her or his relationship with the artist.

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[1]   Quoted in Burns, R. *Fond and Foolish Lovers*, (1992:44).

A portrait can be a very rich reflection on what it is to be human, and perhaps on what it is to be a particular human. The construction of a portrait operates on many levels.

> The artist draws on all sources: the traditions and conventions of his medium, the perennial quirks of human existence such as love and death, and the temporal world which is his home [2].

Likeness is affected at each level by the interactive relations between the people, and by these interactions between those people and the environment in which the portrait is constructed. My frustration with photo-like or 'naturalistic' likenesses in portraits, and the frustration of viewers' responses being focused, almost exclusively, on the identity of the sitter, formed the initial impetus for this research. I wanted to find a way of presenting portraits which are reflections of *personal relationships* with the sitters, and which are at the same time dependent on, and open to the diverse interpretations of individual viewers, interpretations which extend beyond 'face-value', and which reflect on an interaction between artist and sitter, interpretations which reflect an interaction between viewer and artwork.

The view of likeness as a construction, based in social conventions, provided me with a point of departure from which to question and challenge traditional notions of authority which equate likeness with 'realistic' reduplication. The writings of Norman Bryson and Nelson Goodman were invaluable in this regard.

Such an approach to likeness encouraged various directions for exploration. Most exciting was the way in which a dialogue between the theory and the practice was set in motion. This resulted in an open or expansive method of learning in that unexpected areas were explored both in the creation of the images and in the writing of the dissertation.

My interest in portraiture, and the questions around likeness which kept emerging, helped form the framework for the theoretical area of investigation. In turn, the development of my practical work has greatly informed the theoretical research, and to this end, I was able to fully explore and to expose as constructed, both the way we make images and the way we read likenesses. The symbiotic or dual relationship between theory and practice has fundamentally informed this research. The exchange is a dynamic relationship, facilitating the growth of ideas and possibilities in my work, providing some answers and most importantly, many new directions which await exploration.

Having acknowledged the importance of the relationship between theory and practice, I would

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[2]   Burns, R. *Fond and Foolish Lovers*. (1992:44).

also like to suggest that it is only possible to identify - or understand - this relationship in retrospect. By suggesting this, I am saying that the process of art-making *must* be something more than a purely intellectual endeavour, whereby works are made to elucidate a point. David Sylvester suggests that in creating a painting

> accident is always present and control is always present and there's a tremendous overlap between the two (in conversation with Francis Bacon, 1987:99).

Even when one encourages one's intuition or subconscious to play a role in the creation of an image, a personal investigation, a private act of painting, remains inextricably linked to a shared predisposition in terms of seeing and to the complex codes of perception and recognition which are built upon that predisposition - a framework in which we are intricately enmeshed. The individual is a part of the whole of society, a part of this framework of complex codes. The individual's private set of references which manifest in her or his work, are intricately linked to her or his experience in the world. Ultimately, as Roger Scruton so succinctly words it:

> Art manifests the `common knowledge' of a culture (1981:581).

I would like to suggest, however, that art not only *manifests* this common knowledge, but expands and builds upon this knowledge. Growth and change occur precisely when art challenges existing conventions, using them to *re-evaluate* the `common knowledge' of a culture.

PHOTO-ESSAY

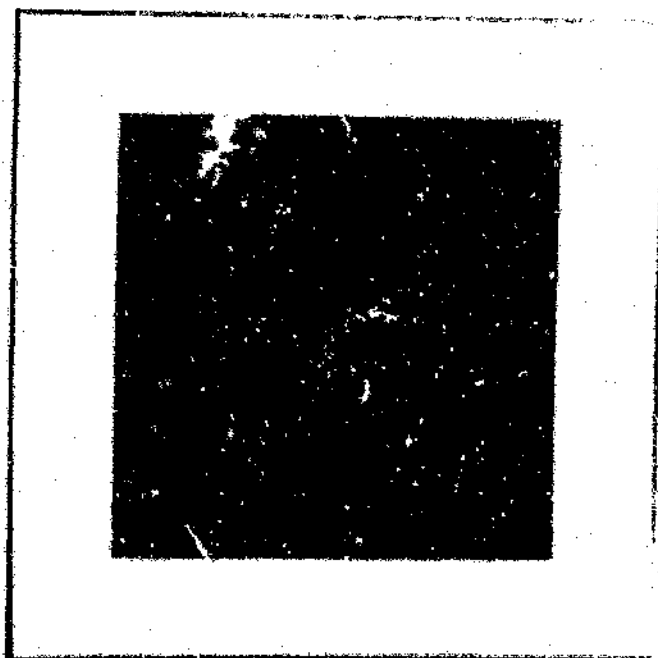59   Brenner, J. *Self-portrait*, 1991-2, oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cm.

60   Brenner, J. *Self-portrait (diptych)*, 1991-2. oil on canvas, each panel: 25 x 20 cm.
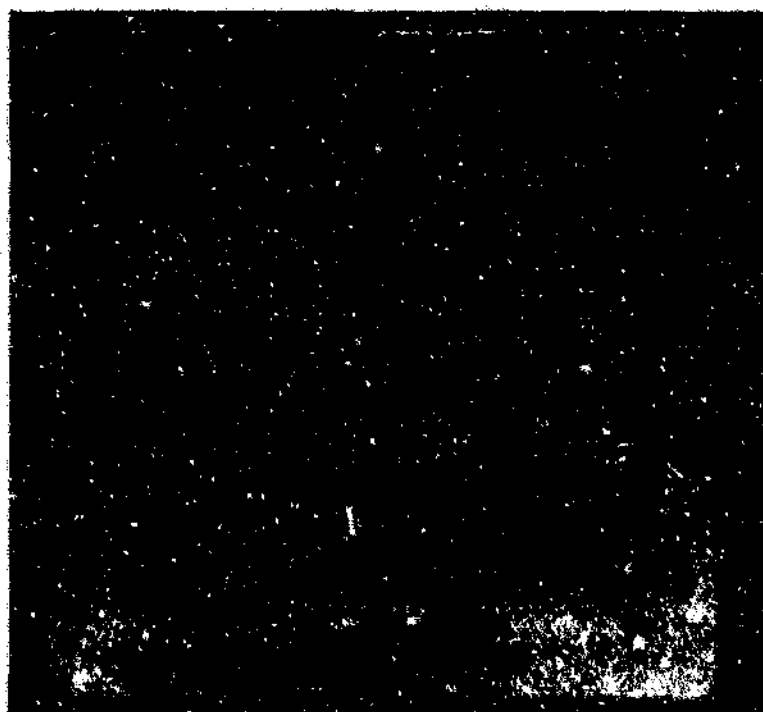
61   Brenner, J. *Self-portrait*, 1991-2, oil on canvas, 56,5 x 56,5 cm.

62 Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Sandy Tasman,* 1993, oil on canvas, 35 x25 cm.

63   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Thea Soggot.* 1993, oil on canvas, 25,5 x 25,5
      cm.

64   Brenner, J. *In the studio, I,* 1994, oil on canvas, 56,5 x 56,5 cm.

65   Brenner, J.   *Artist and Sitter: A Portrait of Myself and Darryl Katzenstein*, 1994-5, oil and marble dust on canvas, 50,5 x 71 cm.

66   Top: Brenner, J. *Painting from 'Eve Fairfax' I*, 1994, oil and marble dust on canvas, 46 x 54 cm.

Bottom: *Painting from 'Eve Fairfax' VI*, 1995, oil and marble dust on board, 15
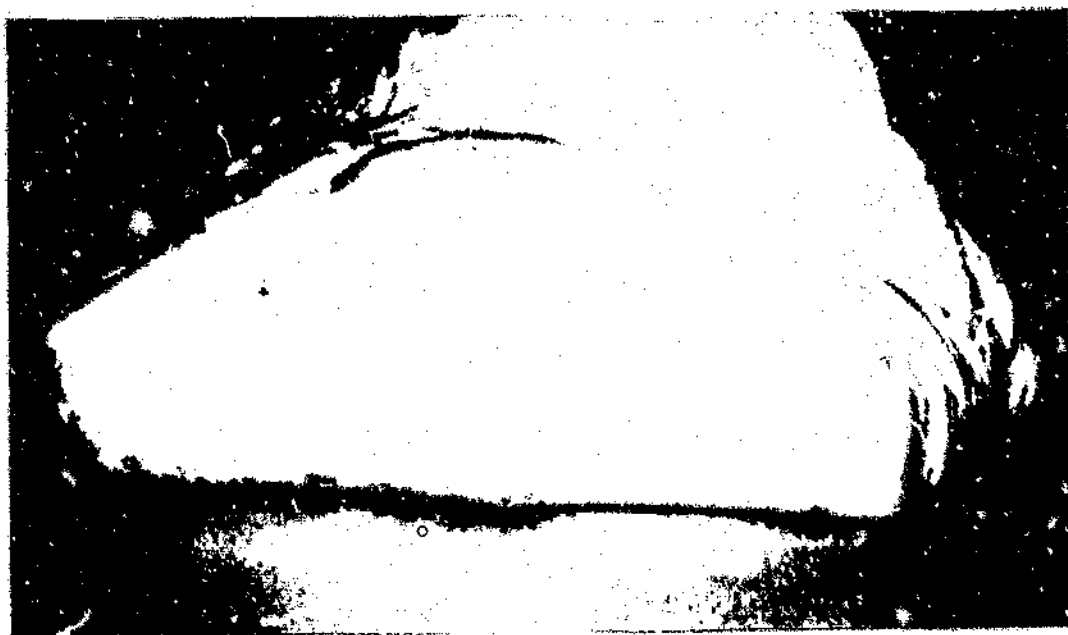
67   Top: Brenner, J. *Painting from 'Eve Fairfax' V, (detail)*, 1995, oil and
      marble dust on board, 16 x 21 cm.

Bottom: Rodin, A. *Eve Fairfax, (detail)*, 1907, marble, 54,2 x 58 x 46,8 cm.

68 Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Josch Emmet*, 1995, oil and marble dust on canvas, 25

69   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Darryl Katzenstein*, 1995, oil and spray-paint on canvas, 25 x 30 cm.

71 Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Wilson Mootane*, 1995-6, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm.
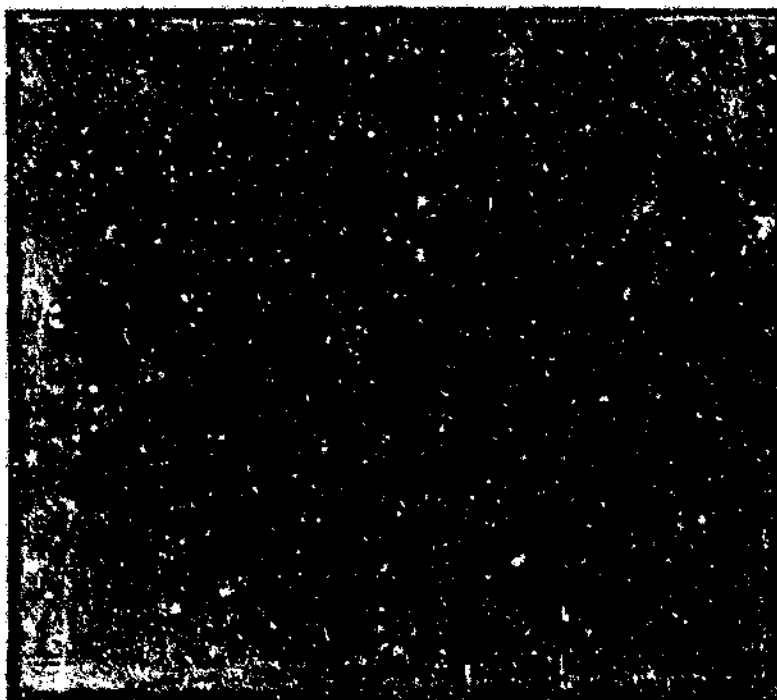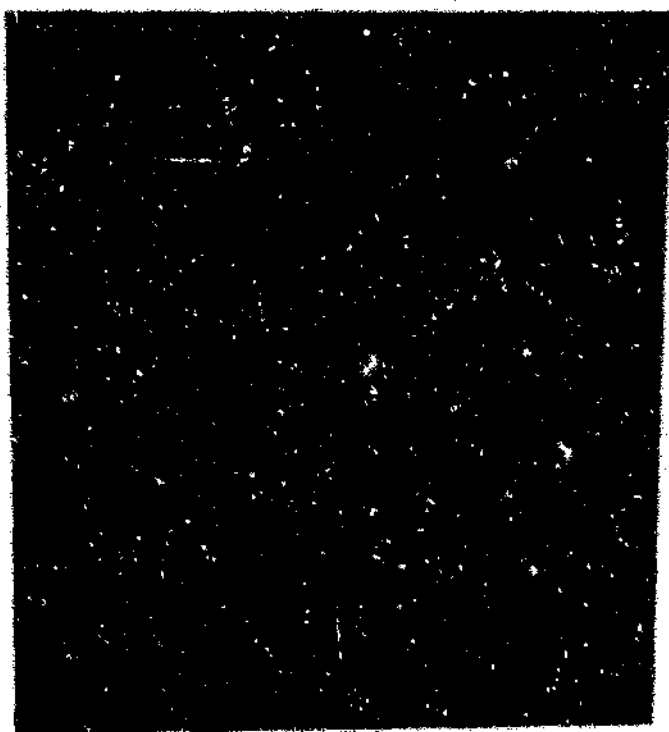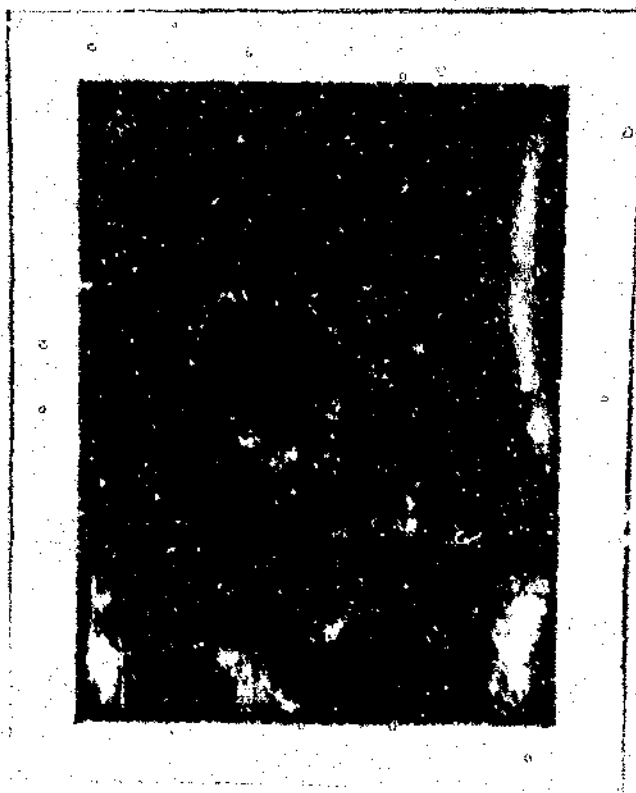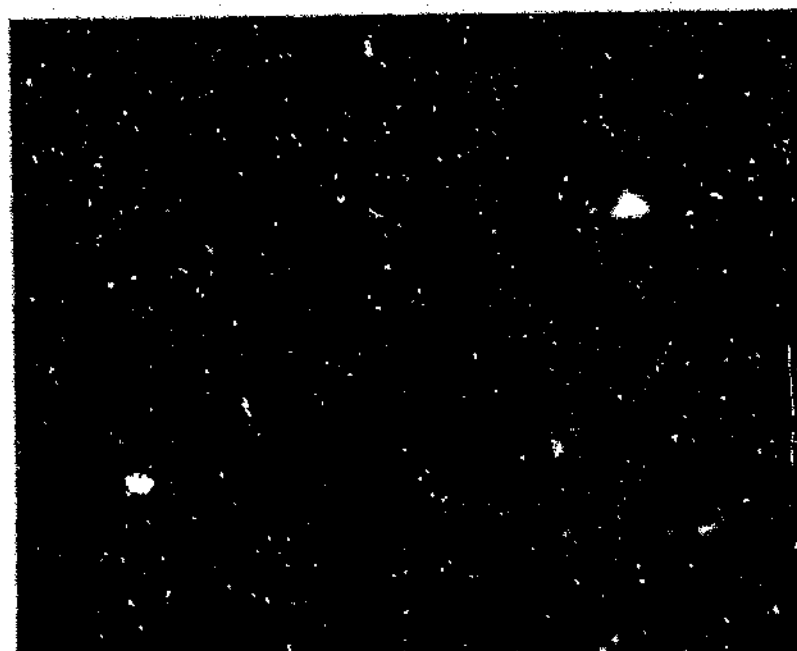
73 Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Berenice Garb.* 1996, oil and marble dust on canvas, 25.5 x 35 cm.
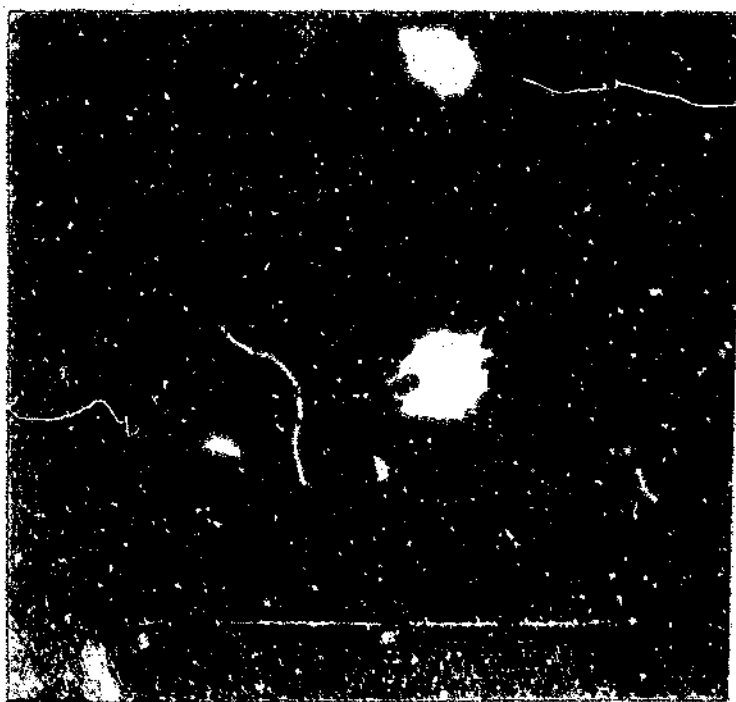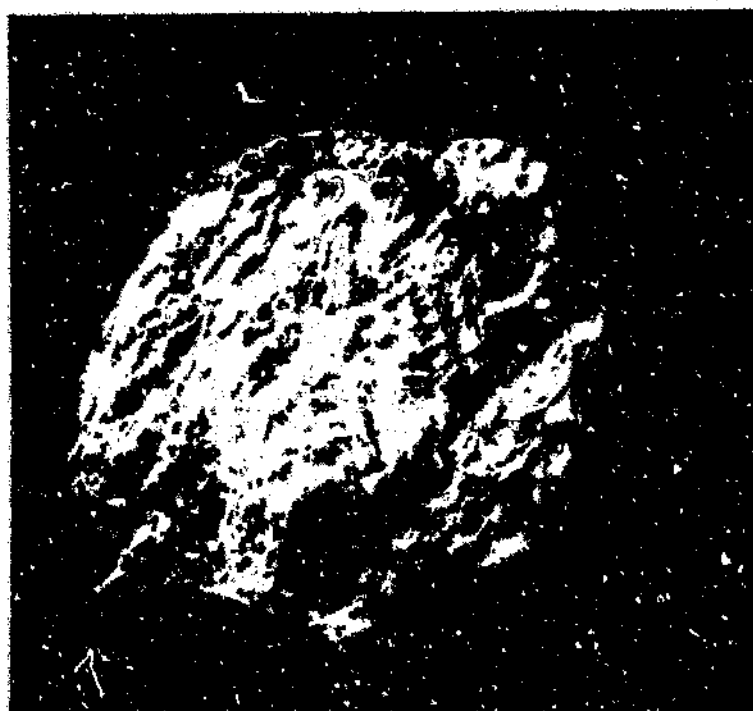
75   Brenner, J. *A Portrait of Darryl Katzenstein*, 1995-6, coloured plaster of
paris, oil paint and ink, 30 x 34 x 5 cm.

INSTALLATIONS
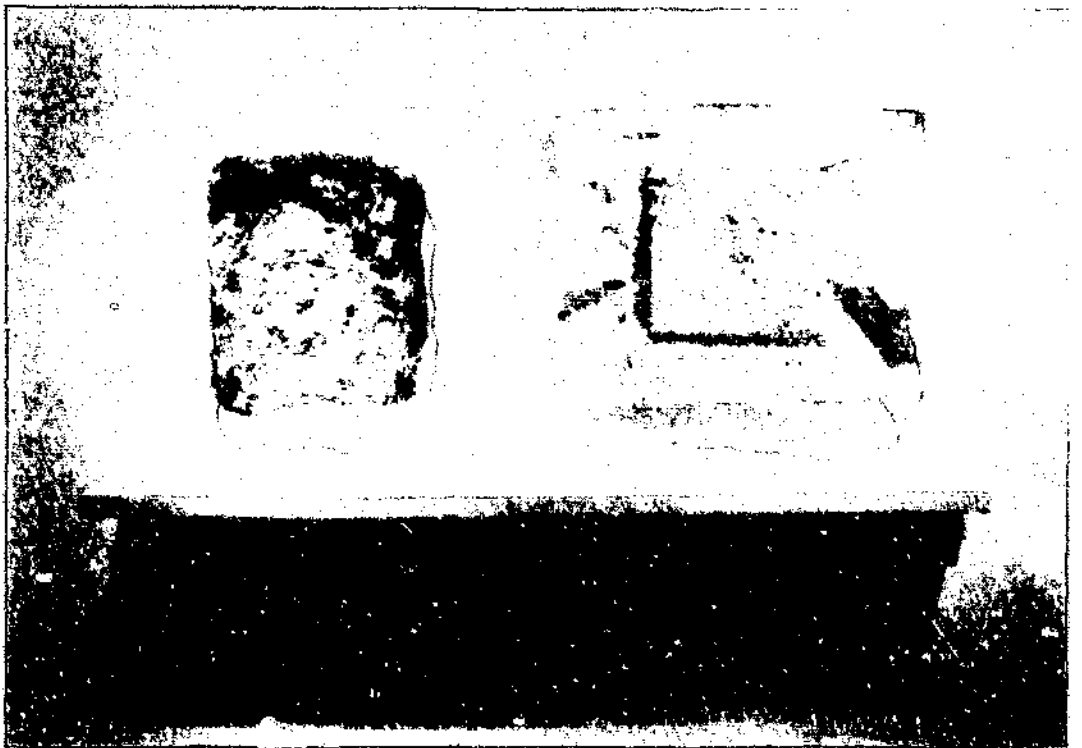
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