FACE FORWARD

PORTRAITURE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

image by: **JIMMY BAKER**

A **portrait** is a painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artistic representation of a person, in which the face and its expression are predominant. The intent is to display the likeness, personality, and even the mood of the person. For this reason, in photography a portrait is generally not a snapshot, but a composed image of a person in a still position. A portrait often shows a person looking directly at the painter or photographer, in order to most successfully engage the subject with the viewer.

This book is made in conjunction with the exhibition "Face Forward". The show takes place from February 18 through March 10, 2008 at the LeRoy Neiman Gallery. The gallery is located in and part of Columbia University in New York City.

As an MFA student at Columbia, I was given the opportunity to organize and curate an exhibition. I chose to do a show that would take a close look at portraiture in contemporary art. Portraiture has been part of visual art since its beginning. It is still very present in art today. Artists such as Elizabeth Peyton, John Currin, Lucian Freud, and Cindy Sherman are just a few people who continue to keep this art form alive and relevant in today's art world.

My desire for this project is to showcase the mediums, styles, and artists that are actively taking part in the dialogue of portraiture. In order to best show the diversity of work within this genre, it seems most appropriate to use a single format: the bust. The head-and-shoulders image, with the subject looking straight on, is the most standard format for portraiture from Da Vinci's Mona Lisa to Chuck Close's standard framing.

This format also has a strong presence in the broader field of contemporary culture. This is the framing used in any visual form of identity: the pictures used on a driver's license, school and work I.D. cards, and so on. This is also the visual standard for the new generation's "social networking" with online profiles such as MySpace and FaceBook. With a new generation of young people using these types of images to create a "virtual identity", this format has once again made itself a priority.

All the artists I asked to participate in this project have previously created many portraits in this format, and are invested in this dialogue of portraiture. This was not an open call, nor was it artists trying to make it fit into their practice. This is a collection of young and early to mid-career artists from a variety of backgrounds who, as a group, are pushing the portraiture format forward in exciting new directions.

- Seth Scantlen

JIMMY BAKER
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print

Feeling in the Air 1
oil, resin, and screenprint
on panel.
24" x 19"
2007