



This is the most recently discovered portrait photograph of the young Vincent van Gogh. Research suggests that it was taken when Vincent would have been between 16 and 20 years of age.
(Courtesy of Richard van Dijk)

"These photographic portraits wither much sooner than we ourselves do, whereas the painted portrait is a thing which is felt, done with love or respect for the human being that is portrayed."
Van Gogh to his sister Willemina

In the course of four years, between 1885 and 1889, Vincent van Gogh (1853-90) painted more than 40 self-portraits. This is a unique and an extraordinary achievement, not just in terms of artistic expression and experiment, but as an intimate record of the pilgrimage through life of a human being.

Van Gogh's intense visual self-analysis was spread over a short time - four years - and on the whole this work is deeply interrogative. He had always been suspicious of photography, even as an instrument of record. Only three portrait photographs of him exist, all taken before the age of 21, and he does not face the camera in the few other photographs known of him.

His first moves into portraiture were mostly motivated by economic

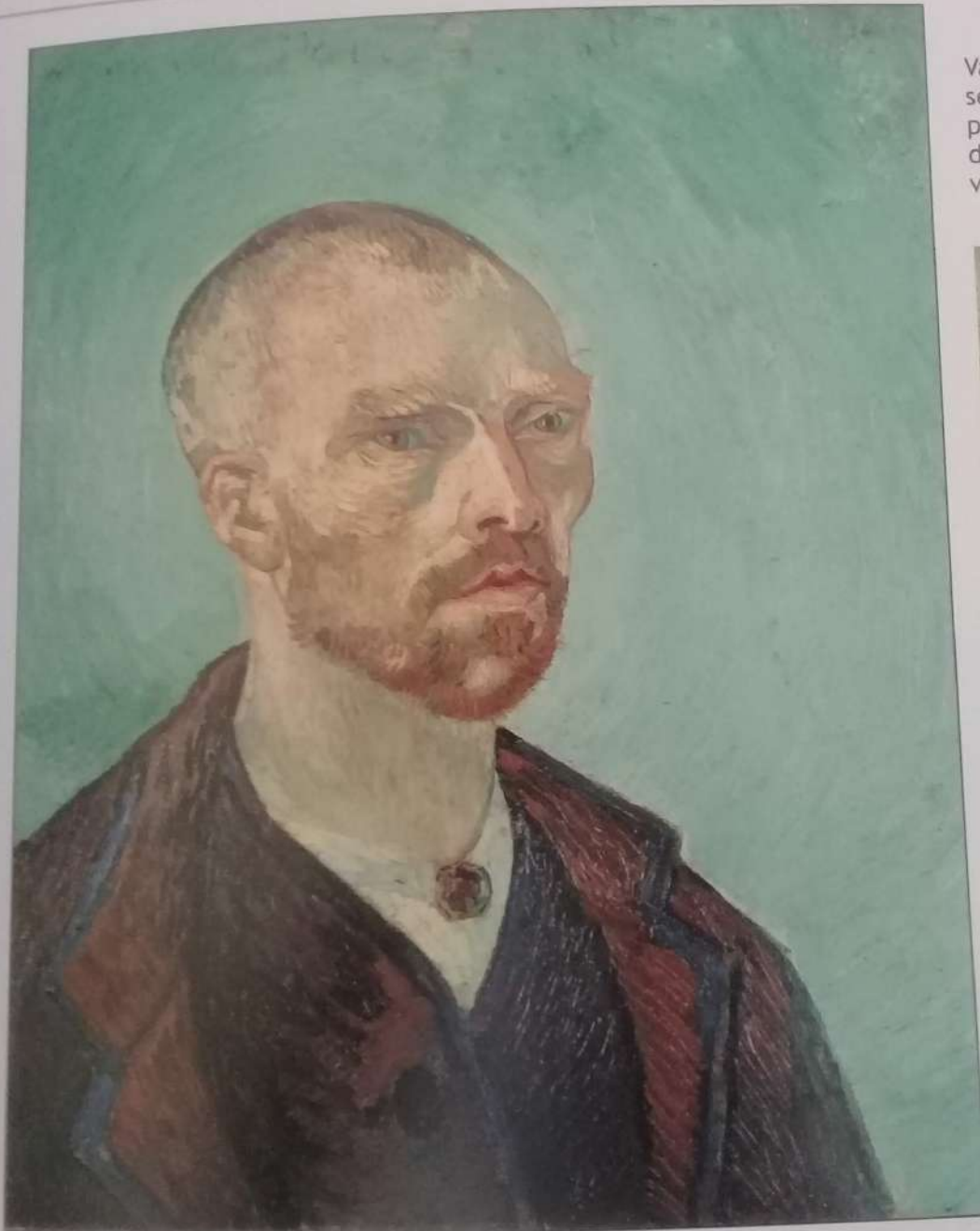
incentives, and towards the end of 1884 he felt that he could make a living by painting portraits. It was at this time that Vincent started painting self-portraits. His reasons for doing this were mixed. Foremost, there was the question of expense: models needed to be paid in one way or another, and it cost nothing to paint himself.

It would, however, be a total misapprehension to see in van Gogh's pictures of himself nothing more than exercises in studied self-presentation. Few men have shown so painstakingly, in their writings and in their paintings, the search for the nature of their identity. The very number and diversity of his self-portraits is proof of this endeavour.

Vincent van Gogh, Self-portrait
inscribed "à mon ami Paul G".
Arles, September 1888
Oil on canvas
61 x 50cm (24 x 19½ in)
Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Van Gogh painted more than 40 self-portraits over a four-year period. On the following pages are details of 18 paintings chosen for viewpoint and costume.



Self-portrait as an artist
Paris, early 1888
Oil on canvas
65.5 x 50.5cm (25¾ x 20in)
Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam





Search for identity



Self-portrait.
Saint-Rémy, September 1889
Oil on canvas
40 x 31cm (15¹/₄in x 12³/₄in)
Private collection, Switzerland

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These lightly sketched, but sharply observed, drawings from life became the basis of a whole series of subsequent oil paintings. These drawings are the only surviving examples of preliminary work on Vincent's own portraits, which he usually approached directly on the canvas. They do, however, give the lie to those critics who accuse van Gogh of technical incompetence.



Self-portrait sketches
Paris, 1886-7
Pencil on paper
Pen and ink on paper
Vincent van Gogh Foundation
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

In a letter to his brother Theo, he wrote:

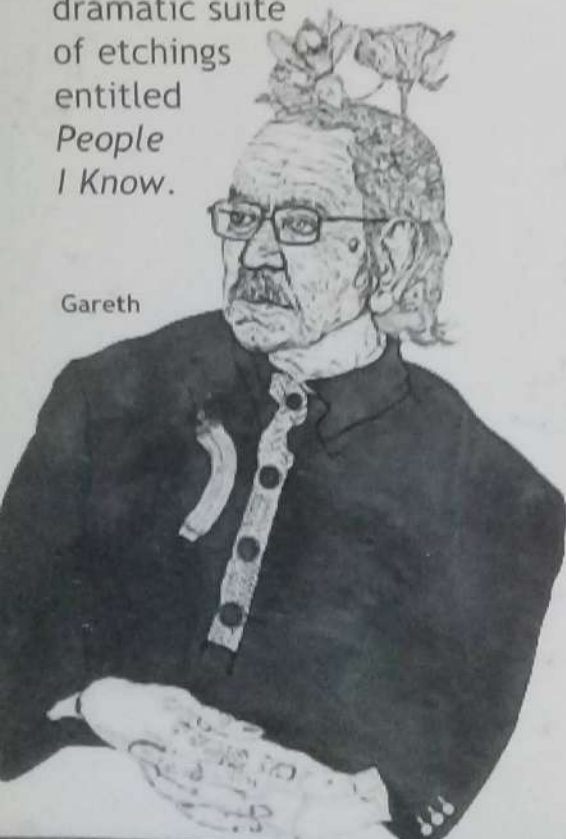
"In a word, [painting] is more gratifying than drawing. But it is absolutely necessary to be able to draw the right proportion and the position of the object pretty correctly before one begins. If one makes mistakes in this, the whole thing comes to nothing..."



As an artist who works directly from life on copper plates, Gemma Anderson says: "My portraiture is a very particular art and one that needs a constant supply of models." To nourish her quest to represent the truth fairly about someone, a supply of willing people is essential and she has turned to friends and family as the subjects of her huge-scale, dramatic suite

of etchings entitled *People I Know*.

Gareth



When Gemma began these portraits she says her starting points were "*the people I know and the things I imagined inside them*".

Anderson's portraits are meticulously careful and she is very skilful in gaining a likeness of the person in front of her, but on closer inspection the viewer will often see curious things going on, things that are not initially apparent.

At first glance what may appear to be a double portrait is really the sitter with their secondary or alternative personality, which Anderson sees, physically emerging alongside. Vegetation grows out of people's heads, objects are held in hands, emblems and symbols appear on clothing. Normally invisible veins and organs become discernible. The artist says: "I started making these life-size etchings of people I know, but gradually introduced forms

that both physically resemble their anatomy and metaphorically represent something about their character, their personality and their idiosyncratic self."



James Unsworth

Etching people

"People have mostly been documented in art through painting and photography. The natural history and medical context of etching interests me as its strong descriptive line is perfect for comparing the anatomies of people, plants, and animals, and these etchings also become emotional maps of the sitter."

See also
Working with a model, pages 22-23
Glossary of terms, Etching, page 183

Art directions

People I know 127

Ed Pearman



Gemma Anderson

Hand-coloured etchings, 2007,
all 100 x 80cm (39½ x 31½in)
in editions of 10

No mistakes

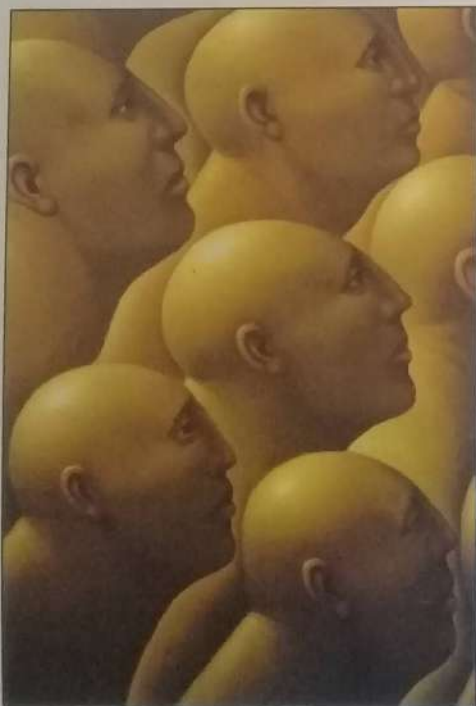
"Working directly onto the copper plate from life was challenging as I would carry the plate to meet the sitter, the plate being very big and heavy, and prop the plate up on a chair ad-hoc style. Drawing onto copper allows for no mistakes; each line I draw is etched, so there is an excitement to the process which intensifies the line. Once I have captured the form of the person I then over-draw any idiosyncrasies of anatomical details, symbols, and objects particular to the sitter, and then I etch the plate and print it."

Laura Hern



George Underwood is an artist who has always been concerned with portraying the human face, and faces have become a major recurring subject in his work. He has developed this in a much more imaginary way than in straightforward observational portraiture.

George says, "One of my current themes is - for want of a better description -



collections of heads and faces. These people mostly seem to come from different eras and backgrounds. I have no conscious idea who they are, where they come from, or to what age they may belong." George recalls that as far back as he can remember he always wanted to draw or pick up a paint brush, and when he was very young he enjoyed drawing faces with his finger on the steamed-up kitchen window.

One of the artist's first art heroes was Salvador Dali, and when he was about 13 he started to consider art as a serious career option. At the age of 16 he went to art school. "Back then," he says, "the general belief was that there was no money to be made in just painting." So he was channelled into "commercial art", pursuing an early career as an illustrator during which he

George Underwood

Shades of Green, 2007 (right)

Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 76cm (36 x 30in)

The men (left)

Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 63.5cm (36 x 25in)

Eighteen paintings (following pages)

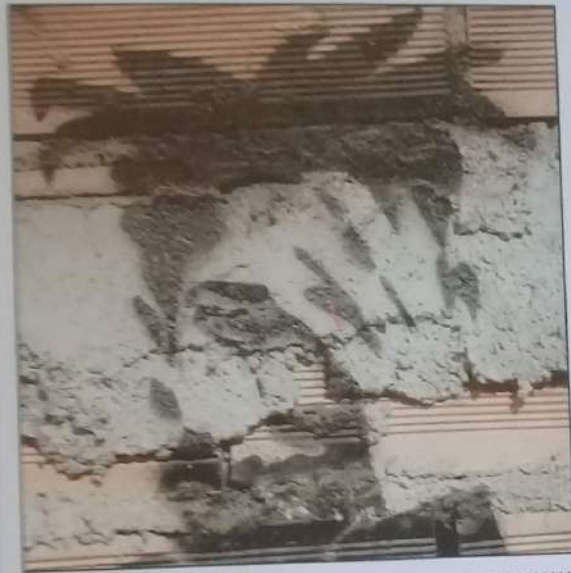
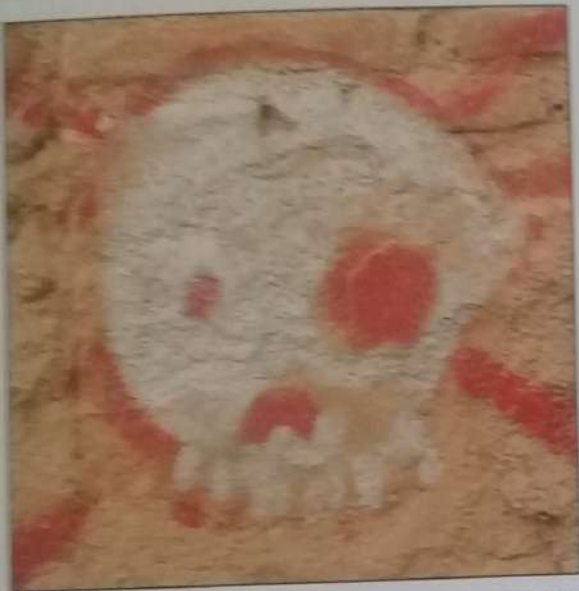
Oil on canvas (*details*) (various sizes)

produced literally thousands of book covers, LP and CD sleeves, adverts, portraits, sculptures, and drawings. This gave him the valuable opportunity to experiment with many different subjects and materials, although he says, "painting was what I really wanted to do all along - just draw and paint and be good at it".

George started painting in oils in the early 1970s and now often exhibits his work in impressive one-man shows and group exhibitions, such as The Royal Academy in London. He is fascinated by the way certain artists have mixed fantasy and realism in their work and acknowledges the influence on him of the 20th-century artists of the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism, as well as late-medieval Flemish visionary painters such as Brueghel and Hieronymous Bosch.

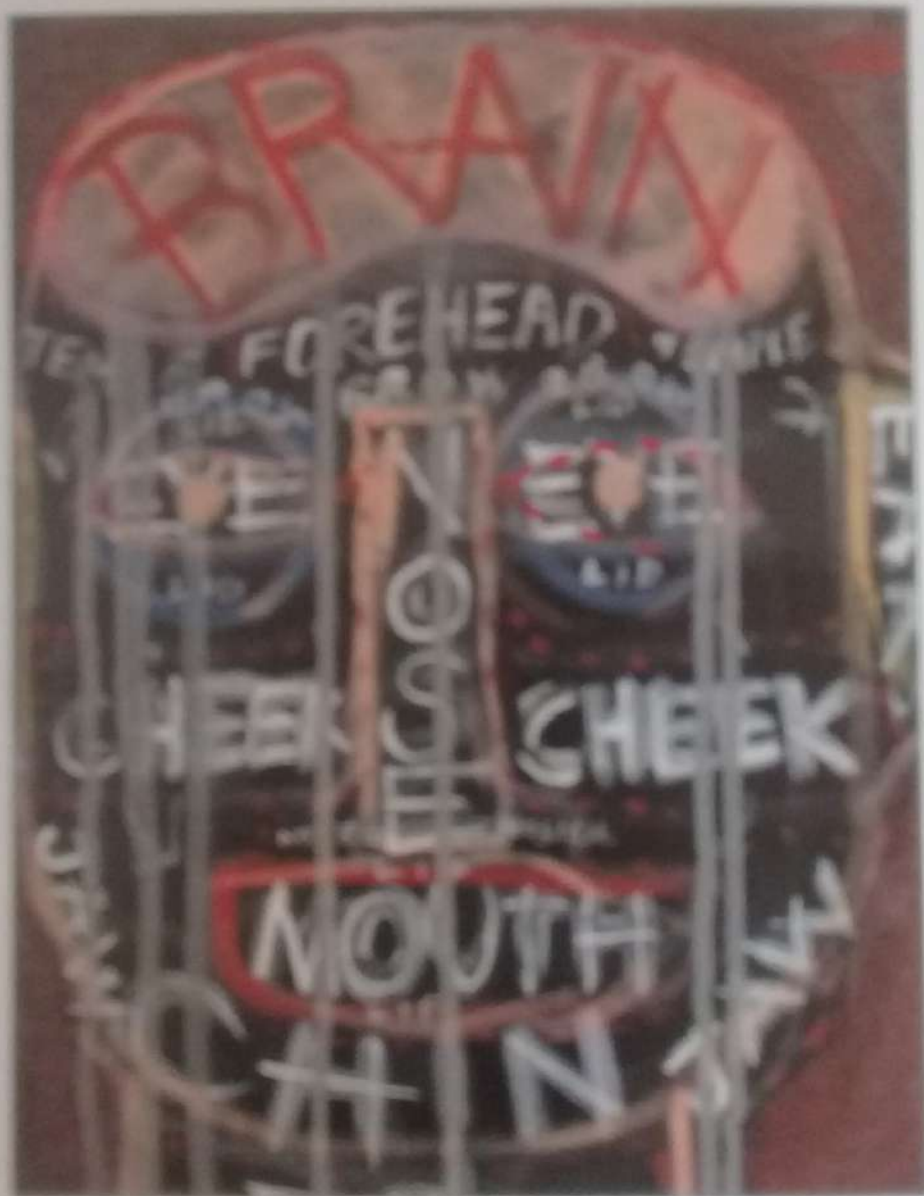








The artist explores image ideas inspired by the New York graffiti artists of the 1970s and 80s. Here, text, or "tagging", is combined with loose and spontaneous brushwork in paintings that pay homage to the American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-88).



Sign survey (1960)
Henry Dreyfuss

Henry Dreyfuss (1904-72), an American industrial designer, was a pioneer of rational, harmonized design systems as a practical aid to communication and greater international understanding. He conducted a huge visual survey of pictographic signs in the 1950s in his work to create a non-verbal graphic language.



From left to right

X-Ray department
Hazardous/Danger
ENT department



Shower room
Drinking fountain
(two versions)



Music room
Theatre
Press interview room



Television room
Group meeting room
Hairdresser (female)



Sign language

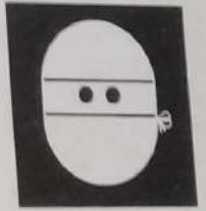
Examples of the human head and face from Dreyfuss's archive of over 20,000 signs and symbols collected from around the world.

From left to right

Head nurse
Laryngology dept.
Neurosurgery
Speech and hearing



Phonetics/speech
Head of department
Neurosurgical dept.
(Encephalography)
General surgery



Hard-hat area
Wear ear protection
Wear eye protection
Wear respirator



Baggage handling area
Customs inspection
Food preparation
Physiotherapy dept.



Modernist eyes

Museum studies based on works of
some masters of 20th-century art.

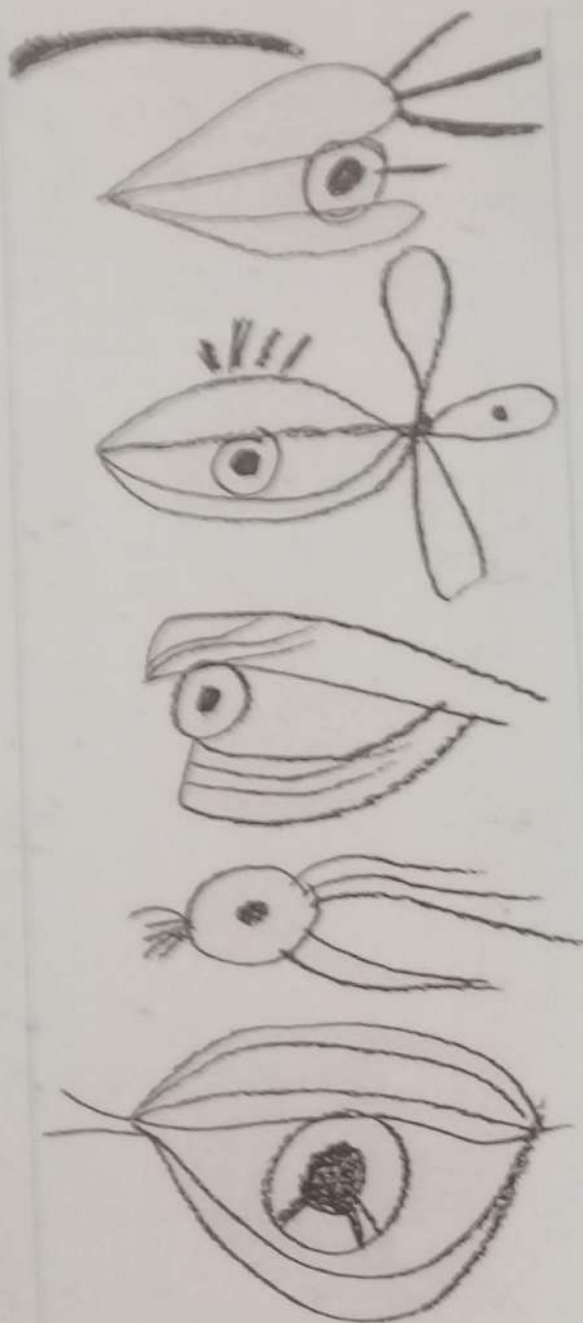
Charcoal in sketchbook

Original page size:

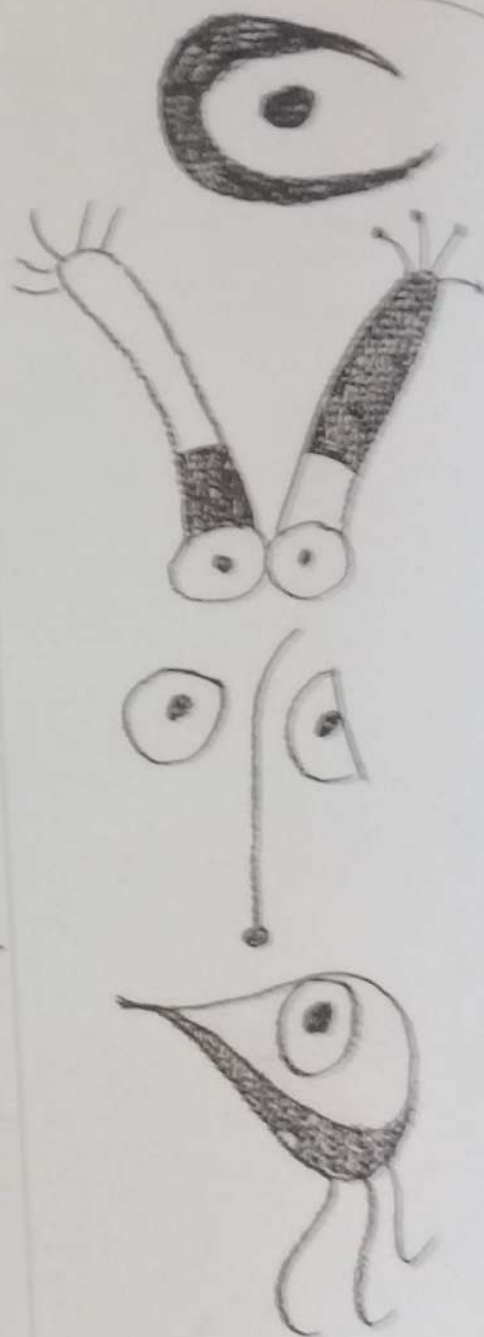
21 x 30cm (8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ in)



modigliani



Picasso



chirico



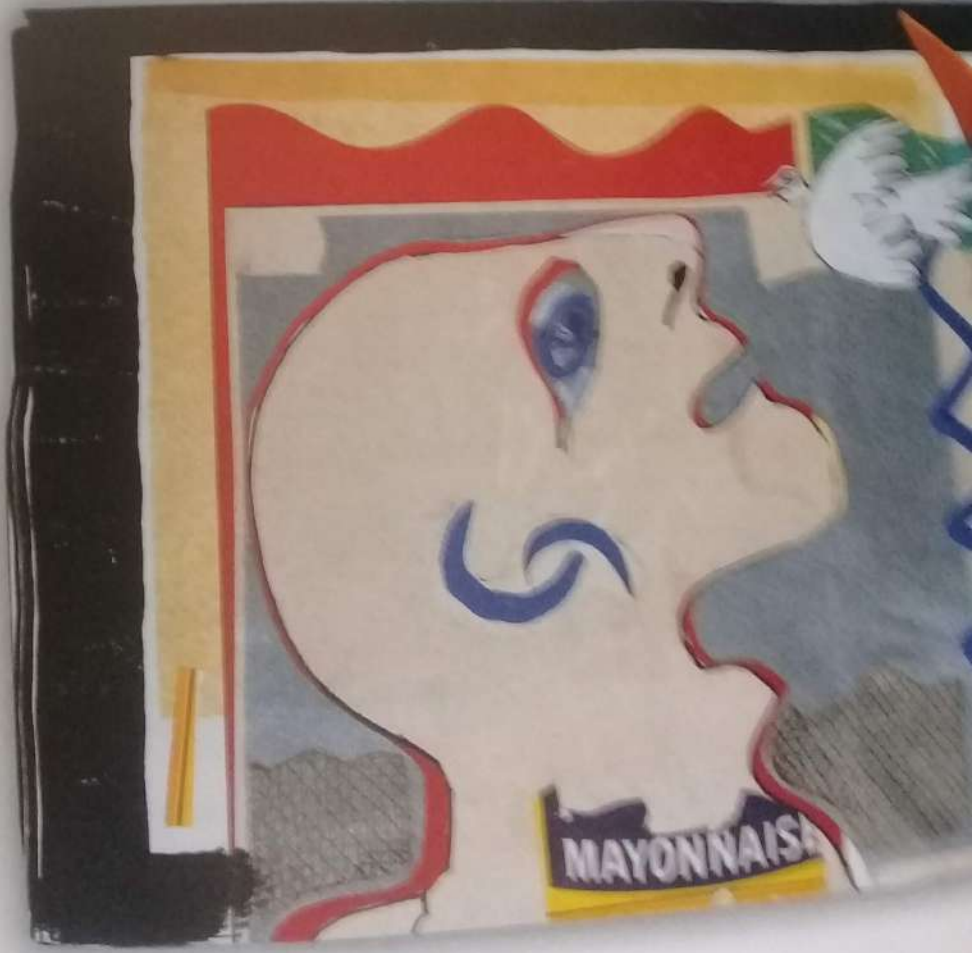
Abstracted eye
(after Picasso)
Coloured glazes on ceramic tile
15.3 x 15.3cm (6 x 6in)

Different perspectives

From the moment of the invention of the photographic negative in the early 19th century, and the ability to fix a photographic image more or less permanently on a surface, photography as we know it today was born. Many contemporary observers commented that "from this moment on painting is dead"; and photography undoubtedly

challenged the academic notion of realistic figurative painting, and allowed artists to look at the world from different perspectives. This approach in turn influenced the great modern-art movements of the 20th century, leading to Cubism, Futurism, and Surrealism, of which artists such as Mondrian, Picasso, and Miró were exponents.

Eyes to the future
Abstracted portraits influenced by the 'Modernist art' movements of the 20th century



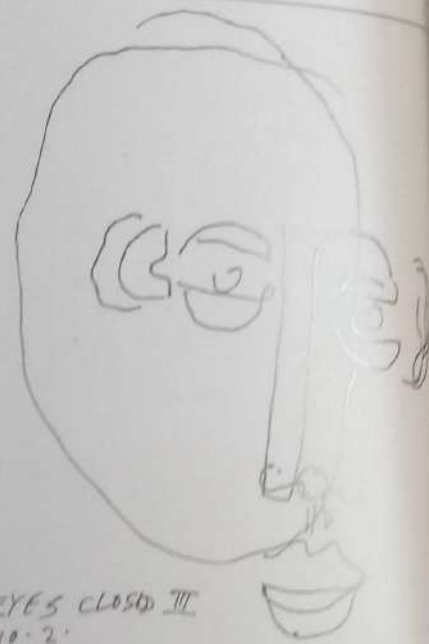
144 | Drawing with your eyes closed



Art teachers employ many techniques to help their students "loosen up" and to approach their work in a more spontaneous, instinctive and unselfconscious way.

One of these techniques is known as "blind drawing", where the artwork is made either by attempting to make a drawing while keeping one's eyes closed throughout the whole drawing process, or alternatively by keeping one's eyes fixed on the model and never looking at the paper on which you are making the drawing.

Both techniques can lead to some fascinating and uninhibited results as the artist has little control over composition and the placing of the elements on the paper, and is therefore unable to correct or alter the unpremeditated marks.



EYES CLOSED III
10-2'

Visual memory
Blind drawing techniques have the added advantage of reinforcing visual memory, and the more you do them the better the drawings can become. The fragmented results that come about through chance and accident are often surprisingly interesting and redolent of the work of the 20th-century Cubist and Surrealist artists who challenged conventional notions of composition and photographic reality.

150 | typewriter portraits

"I am not really a computer person.

I am a typewriter and photocopier person."

Nadine Faye James is an artist who has discovered the joys and eccentricities of an original metal-type printing press. This finding inspired her current enthusiasm for traditional letterpress printing, and to appreciate the physicality of the type forms.

She says she was not particularly passionate about typography in the traditional sense - except to say she was

curious about the playful typography of concrete poets and the work of experimental Constructivist typographers such as El Lizzitsky - it was the shapes of the individual characters that really attracted her and she began exploiting these letterforms in her artwork.

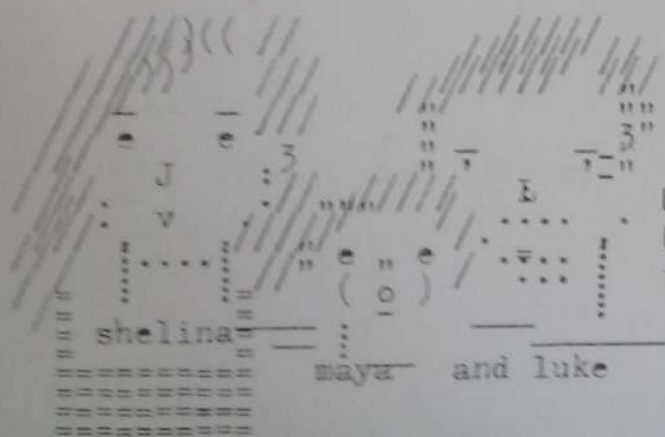
She started by making art that integrated large type forms with areas of tone and texture made of smaller "typewriter" areas, and it was about this time that she began making playful little portraits of her friends using only the typewriter. These portrait drawings have become very popular.

The artist says there is a formula for obtaining a good likeness: "I have to look very closely at the face of the sitter, particularly at the nose and the hair.

Some people require a slash and an underscore for their type of nose, others need a capital 'L' or 'J', and with others I can just use two commas for nostrils.

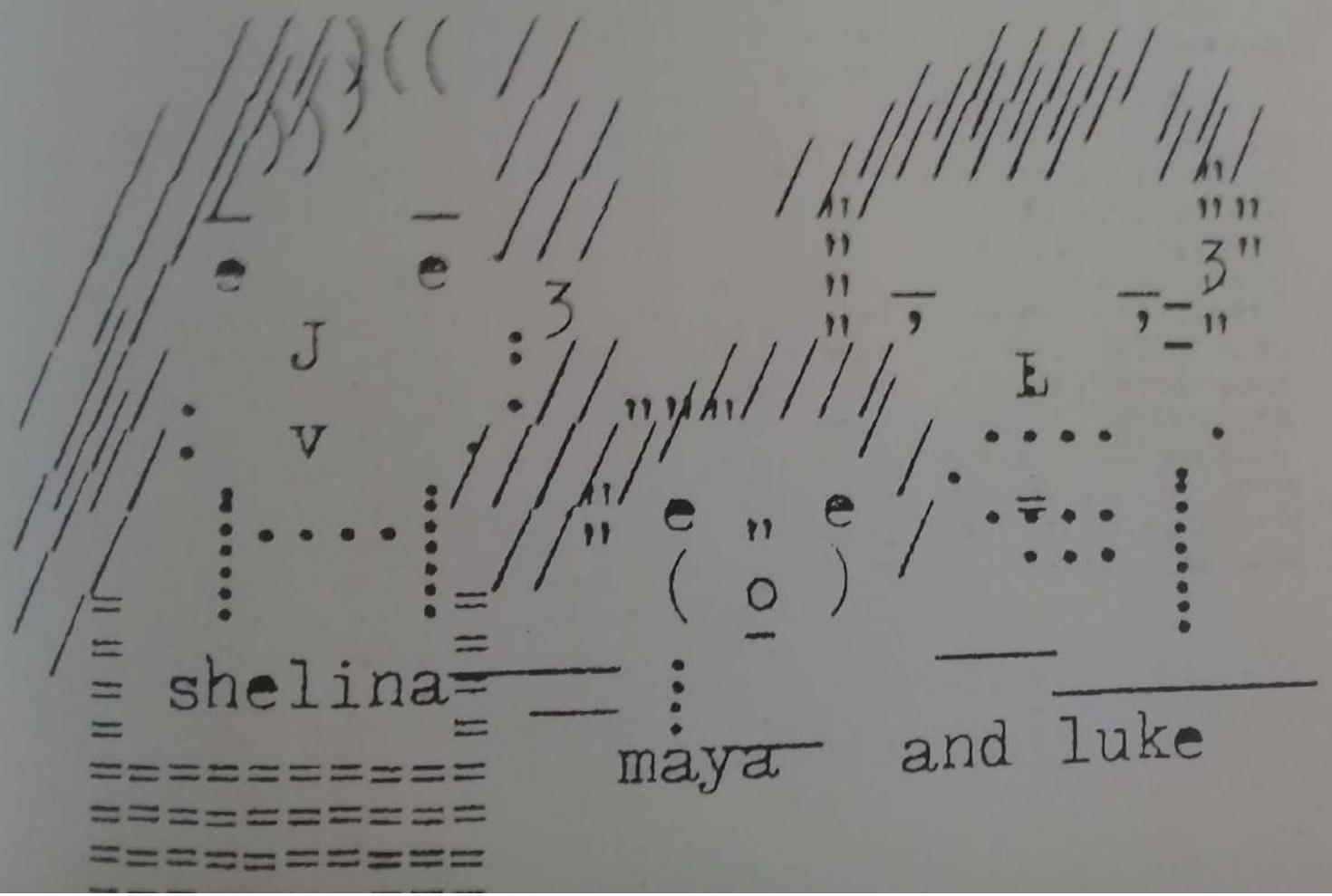
I have learned to pose the model in a position that suits the sitter's face type and the typewriter's typeface. Hair can be a problem as there are no vertical lines in typewriter fonts, but some people are perfect for the typewriter treatment, particularly those with curly hair and big eyes.

It is important to get the space between the sitter's hairline and eyebrows right. Children, with their bigger eyes, require minimal treatment, but older sitters need more character and lines to the eyes and nose; I use a diagonal slash for these. Some older sitters occasionally get quite upset seeing wrinkles."

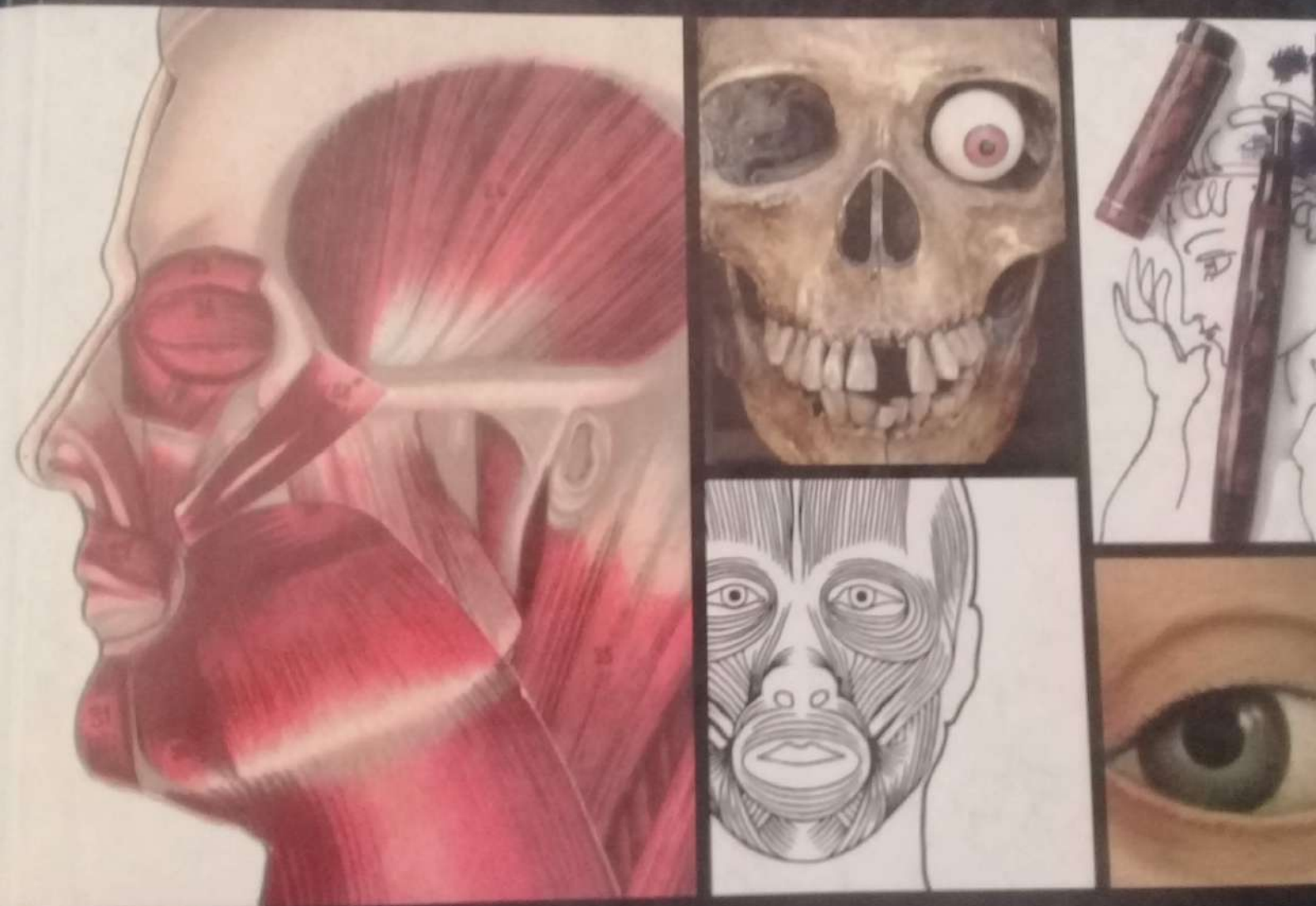


Index Type Lines
Triple portrait, 2667
Manual typewriter
on cast-roller roll
Shrinkage: approximately 25 per cent
ink: opposite page is original size

Art directions
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FaceParts



a practical source book for depicting the human face | Simon Jennings