Portraits tell stories in various formats

By Christopher A. Yates
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

A statement by celebrated American photographer Richard Avedon underscores the essential dilemma of portraiture.

"A portrait is not a likeness," he said. "The moment an emotion or fact is transformed into a photograph, it is no longer a fact but an opinion. There is no such thing as inaccuracy in a photograph. All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth."

When looking at portraiture, we are — without fail — explicitly confronted with the problem of interpretation. Is the portrait a truthful record of the sitter, or is it a fictitious construct of the artist?

In "Here's Looking at You: Portraits in Ohio," curated by Kay Koeninger, 14 artists use the portrait to tell stories about the human condition. The portraits range from direct and fanciful observation to allegorical and mysterious.

Some of the strongest works in the exhibit come from photographer Chas Ray Krider.

Every image in his "Motel Series" seems like a movie still. In them, he orchestrates bits of information into suggestive, voyeuristic moments. In "Paisley ps-cs," a young woman's gaze is straightforward and directed at the viewer. She is partially dressed and sits by a small television and a lamp. On the television, a man and woman kiss. The image is a study of desire and fantasy.

Using a child's toy camera, Francis Schanberger's "Mis-Taken" series consists of several large-scale, grainy black-and-white images. All are close-up views of faces. Yet, because of the process, it's difficult to really see whom the photos depict. Details are blurred and distorted. The faces are strange, ghostly and fragmented. What seems like a truthful display of identity suddenly becomes a metaphor for the inherent fragility and temporal nature of memory.

Chun Arthur Wang's "Everyday People" series mixes Western and Eastern traditions, and consists of five oil-painting studies of ordinary people observed in China. The paintings, unions of caricature and accurate observation, suggest specific personalities and attitudes.

By placing human figures in compelling natural environments, Marcella Hackbardt points to an uneasy relationship between man and nature. In "Earthbound," a boy kneels by a man-made water trough. He holds a slippery frog's nest in his hands. A surrogate for all of us, he plays a role — as either a destroyer or an inquisitive naturalist — that remains unclear.

Other noteworthy works include "Portrait of Michael Stone," a sensitive charcoal drawing by Leslie Adams; "Portion," a study of fragmented family memory by Ellen Price; "Barry Bonds," an illustrative pen-and-ink drawing by James Pate; and "S.S. St. Louis," a complex shell collage by Ruth Finley.
Local artists in ‘Portraits’ exhibit

By Pamela Dillon
Contributing Writer

People striking the same poses as their clay counterparts, gals as cats, “photographers” showing just how grainy self-images can be, a clay face stuffed with eggs. These are among the offerings at an upcoming exhibit at The Riffe Gallery in Columbus, “Here’s Looking at You: Portraits in Ohio.”

The exhibit also will showcase works with a more serious tone, prompting conversations about sexuality, aging and the seven deadly sins.

Four of the fourteen Ohio artists featured in the exhibit are from Dayton: Amy Kollar Anderson, Leesa Haapapuro, James Pate and Francis Schanberger. Haapapuro is showing works from her three-year series, “Portrait Project: dimensions variable,” and also will be sculpting from two live models during the opening reception on Jan. 27. Her exhibit will be a work in progress, as she has several portraits in various stages of completion.

Anderson is showing five acrylic paintings of anthropomorphic feline goddesses, recently exhibited at Gallery 510: Baset, Diana, Mafdet, Shasti and Ixchel. James Pate is presenting “Shaquille O’Neil,” “Albert Einstein,” and “Barry Bonds” in pen and ink. Schanberger is presenting “mis-taken,” a series of Fisher Price Fun Photo-maker two-sided self-portraits on Tyvek.

“I believe it is worth the trip to Columbus to see the diverse use of materials and new approaches to what makes a portrait unique,” Anderson said. “Especially for Daytonians, you will have a chance to see some of our great artistic talents in one space.”

The Ohio Art Council sponsors this exhibit, which includes Leslie Shiels of Cincinnati, Ellen Jean Price of Oxford, and these Columbus exhibitors: Sid Chafetz, Chas Ray Krider, Marty Shuter and Chun Arthur Wang. The exhibit also includes art by Ruth Finley and Baily Litton of Cleveland, Leslie Adams of Toledo and Marcella Hackbardt of Mount Vernon.

“The 14 Ohio artists in the exhibition stretch the idea of what a portrait can be. Through their eyes we see not only the world, but ourselves and others in a transformative new light,” said curator Kay Koeninger, a Sinclair art history professor. “They are not constrained by a past art form but are energized and profoundly inspired by it.”

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