

Brenda Zlamany

Recently I began a portrait of a child. A peculiar situation where the mother views her child as a series of fragmentary moments ... Here is the story.

The child's mother, a friend of a friend, called me and asked if I would make a painting of her child. She had been following my work and was familiar with an intense painting I had done of our mutual friend, Peter, who is HIV-positive. Portraits have a way of serving one's mortality up on a plate, especially if you are already thinking about it. Anyway, this woman and Peter had another friend who died of AIDS. He left some money to the child. Before he died, they had discussed using the money for a painting of the boy by me.

I never knew this guy, but this is the sort of thing from a karmic point of view that one says yes to ...

It was also interesting to me that the woman, after looking at my work, felt that her child looked like a subject from a painting by me. I had never seen him ... My subjects tend to be intense, sometimes morbid. She sent me photos. He was unusual ... in a Holbein way. I saw what she meant.

I began the painting ... meeting the child ... taking hundreds of photos of him ... sketching ... I had a couple of good directions ... I called a meeting to show her the material. This is something I never do. My source material is private. But this situation was different - it was more personal.

So we met at the photo lab ... I spread all the photos out on an enormous light table ... She looked them over and said casually she was going to break it down to the parts. What she was talking about ...? She then began explaining how in various images there were individual

parts and characteristics that I should note. She was specific ... These were his lips, full and pouty, in one photo but with a slight smile from another but with the lighting from yet another and the rosininess of another and the dampness of another and the slightly parted lips in another ... that was just the mouth ...

There was something strange about this. She did not view her child in single moment ... It reminded me of cubism - simultaneity. If I built her this virtual child, it would not look anything like him. It is physically impossible, for instance to have a pout and a smile at the same time ... I began to think about how to approach this ... I need to know the parts and the parts of the parts separately as individuals or as events. I need to see her child as she does: as fragments. I began to draw.

