JONATHAN O'HARA GALLERY

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Facing
Family

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Facing Family

COVER: *Portrait #69 (Pink Brat)*, 2003
Oil on panel, 12 x 12 in.

PAGE 1: *Warhol Flower #12* (portrait of *Portrait #69 [Pink Brat]*), 2003
Oil on panel, 12 x 12 in.

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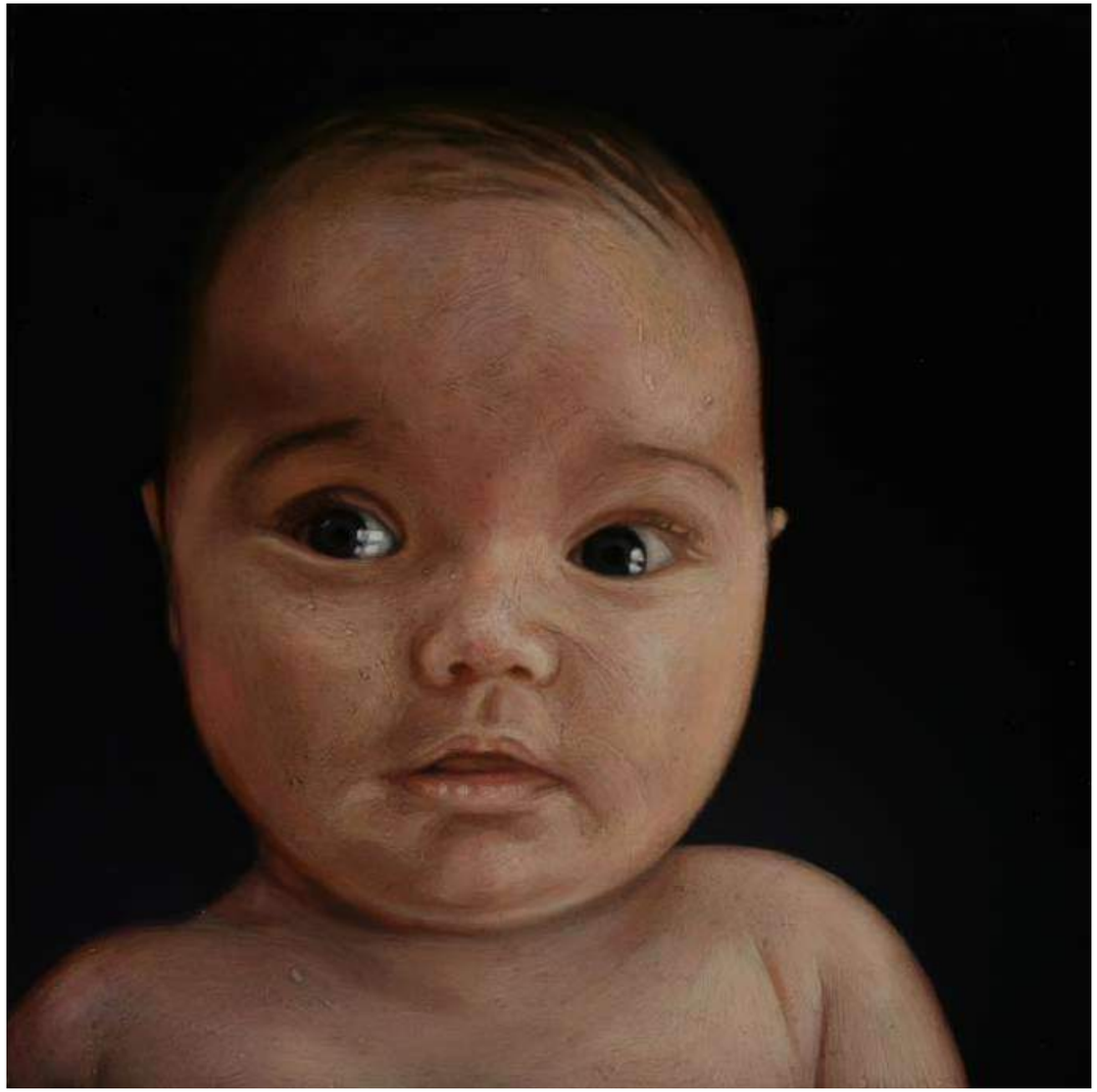

Portrait #60 (*Oona #1*), 2001
Oil on panel, 11 x 11 in.

Between what I see and what I say
between what I say and what I keep silent
between what I keep silent and what I dream
between what I dream and what I forget

— Octavio Paz

conversation

20 December 2006

Brenda Zlamany *and* Vincent Desiderio

VD I think the work is really beautiful, beautifully painted, and the thing that strikes me most about it is that there's no cynicism. Paintings that are done with such finesse, such attractiveness and lushness, are generally done with a safety net of irony underneath.

BZ I know what you mean. And in earlier bodies of work, like the first group of portraits, of twelve bald male artists (*Twelve Men & Twelve Birds*), I was more insecure about painting well, so I felt I needed other agendas. With the bald men, it was a sort of feminist agenda, reversing the traditional male gaze at the female subject and playing a bit with male vulnerability through the baldness. That took the portraits away from being just a painting project. But this particular group of paintings I made for myself. These are the hardest paintings you could make, paintings of your family, for yourself. How do you deal with your parents, your child? In a funny way the art world is an easier audience to please than yourself.

VD I think the art world needs a lot more of this particular kind of attention to the subject and the manner in which the subject is presented.

BZ Because these paintings weren't made to be exhibited, they have no agenda for the audience.

VD Which brings us to one of the amazing things about this exhibition. The work is not for sale. You're showing work that is strictly to be seen and understood.

BZ I wanted to be back in the dialogue because I haven't had a one-person show in New York since my daughter was born.

VD But your work has gotten stronger than ever in the last six years. So it certainly wasn't time spent away from painting.

BZ No. I've had the same eight-hour workdays. I just haven't had the socializing. It's been a one-person universe where I've gotten to develop these paintings. And it's been great having the privacy.

VD I think it's always the best idea to retain that privacy in the sanctity of your studio, for the work you do there. It's a problem all artists face. They make this work in their studios, and then they put it out there, it gets discussed critically, it enters the dialogue, as you say. But it's pretty important for all of us to remember that our obligation, in terms of satisfaction, is primarily to ourselves.

BZ Still, when you put your work out, it is communicating. It becomes part of a discourse. So it's been a luxury having it *not* be in the discourse, just things you make for yourself. I would never have painted my parents with the intent of exhibiting them, for instance. I did not paint those pictures to put them out in the world. (Laughs) But now I'm kind of excited to find out how they will be seen. It was so difficult to paint them. When I painted my father, I found my kick-boxing class useful. But I can't imagine having painted them for an audience, as opposed to just exploring my feelings about them.

VD I think that gives the paintings a kind of honesty that a person likes to see in artwork. The way you went about this endeavor opens up a nerve, in a sense. You've allowed yourself, for example, to present your daughter as an absolutely precious child. And finesse the paint so it communicates your love of the child. It's different than the way you painted your parents. There's a sort of standoffishness about them. They seem to be looking at you with suspicion in their eyes.

***Portrait #95 (Self-Portrait Pregnant with Snake)*, 2006–07**
Oil on panel, 30 x 60 in.

Portrait #96 (Oona in Her School Uniform), 2006–07
Oil on panel, 24 x 12 in.

BZ They are, aren't they?

VD It's almost, "How dare you paint us like this?" But your daughter just seems to be absolutely at ease in her world and in your world.

BZ Well, the paintings of her are actually for her collection. She gets one painting of herself a year as a birthday present. They're made with her in mind.

VD A lucky child! This painting of you pregnant is also stunningly beautiful. I think you actually captured your face. I notice that you have other images of your face that were done by people like Hockney, and they don't do you justice.

BZ When I was pregnant I did lots and lots of photo shoots with different photographers. One of them was Lyle Ashton Harris, and when I put this image together from that shoot, my face was so distorted from lying on my side that it didn't actually look like me, so I painted the painting vertically while looking in a mirror. It's one of the few times I've been willing to really look in the mirror.

VD This one of your daughter with the black background, in her school uniform (*Portrait #96*), has a doll-like quality which is somewhat disturbing, but at the same time intensely riveting because of its dimensionality. The illusion of form is staggering.

BZ I was trying to get that slice of the collar to be more dramatic, and I think I got a little carried away. I've got to make it cast a less dark shadow. One of the things I want to do is make her hair globes bright and glowing. I don't have specific narrative content, but I'll use the little things I have to tell a psychological story. So that slice of her collar and the globes in her hair convey her interior world.

VD In a number of your paintings you have an object present with the sitter which gets such a degree of attention that it assumes a kind of extra importance compared to the other things in the picture, as if it's imbued with very personal symbolic meaning. And

the portrait becomes a dialogue between the person and the object. The snake in the painting of you pregnant, the little bands in your daughter's hair, the birds she's holding in the other painting—you say you're going to flesh one of them out even more.

BZ The bird on the left (*Portrait #89*; p. 25). I'm going to paint it a little thicker, so your eye goes…That's going to be a direct painting. It won't be glazed. It's straight out of the tube, like icing on a birthday cake.

VD You were talking before about narrative content. That flies in the face of almost a century of people dismissing narrativity in painting. But to me, all works of art are narrative, in a sense. With Dada, and even before, the narrative component was thrust out of the picture. But due to a recent rise of interest in the formal developments within art history, when artists make a work we see that the protagonists they create act within a narrative of art history, and the works exist comfortably within a well-understood, shared idea of historical narrative. Paintings such as yours function that way as well, but at the same time there is *internal* narrative to them, narrative that is internalized in the context of the picture, in the picture plane itself. And even more interesting to me is *technical* narrative. So the technical narrative in your pictures is also very interesting.

BZ Well, I want to say something about the picture with the birds. The reason I want to flesh out the bird in her right hand is because if I make it heavier, your eye will go to it before it goes to her head. And that movement of your eye will change her relationship to the dead birds significantly. When I'm working with narrative, I'm working with small twists of the screw to change the story. So changing the order of what you look at will change the story.

VD I think that's beautiful. It's one of the reasons painting is such an amazing art form. A painter making a picture is cleverly *staging* the visual event, making its information come out at various rates of speed. It's very different from a strictly linguistic presentation of signs present together on a single field, where they have a kind of hieroglyphic relationship to each other.

BZ Right, and when you're making an image stroke by stroke, you have the kind of control where a millimeter of a mark on a mouth can turn a nice person into a murderer. You're responsible for each tiny little mark, and there's a story in every one. But it's really very, very hard to do complicated scenes that illustrate big stories and actually function as great narrative moments in painting. It's very rare when artists can pull that off. *The Night Watch* does and that's why it's a great painting. It's one of those rare, extremely complicated paintings where the more you look at it, the more you uncover.

VD I think the description of representation in the past as storytelling or illustration has been elevated to an unreasonable degree. There was always a dialogue going on between painters, and they were speaking through their technical narrative. And in *The Night Watch* you feel that Rembrandt is using technical narrative to communicate with Raphael's *The School of Athens*, with the whole idea of perspective. And now we're coming out of a time period where conceptualism really held the day. When I was in art school, to be a painter could be seen as suspicious, so we all did conceptual work as undergraduates. I know you did that as well.

BZ Yes. We were even up on stage, you know, Judy Chicago and blood and eggs and clay. (Both laugh)

VD That's what I mean! Many of us have had to find our way from that, and you've done it very beautifully and successfully, without ever turning your back on those influences.

BZ I started art school when I was fourteen. I went to art school for high school. It was one of those

multidisciplinary experimental schools. We all had to do dance, video, theater, painting, and music. So I can be watching a performance and seeing a painting. For me, it's about a moment you can find in anything, and it informs your painting. I'm not interested in figurative painting for itself. I'm interested in specific moments. And they occur in the most unlikely places.

VD Well said. What makes your work impressive is that you can see within it so many references to the general fracture of things that went on in the twentieth century. And they find a kind of resolution in your paintings. It reminds me of how Cézanne, working in solitude for so many years, was able to incorporate the bizarre dislocation that was happening in French art into a new, classical whole. I think I feel the same way you do, I feel that influences from film, from performance, from all sources…But I think critics and curators have made a very big distinction over the last fifty years between things that fall within the conceptual camp and things that are outside it.

BZ I think this is a confused time, and the critical writing is not often that great. It's hung up in post-Duchamp. Usually things are not organized that well in museums. It doesn't allow you to see how things really work. And art history, the writing, trying to group conceptual versus nonconceptual…it needs to be more visual, less theoretical. Categories, I think, are best ignored.

VD Totally wise.

BZ I'll tell you how I got into the portraits. I knew a curator named Bill Arning, who ran White Columns, and when I was first in New York, for every artist, whether they were figurative or conceptual, it was the place. Everybody had their first show there in the eighties. I wanted to paint portraits, and I thought if I painted Bill, because everybody liked Bill, my painting would be liked, and people would forget that it was an "icky figurative painting." So I did a painting of Bill and hung it in a gallery, and people loved it because they loved Bill. It let me get away with portrait painting. In the beginning I was always painting portraits of specific people, like Larry Weiner. I was always trying to challenge the viewer away from categories when I picked my subjects. Larry Weiner was the model of the "cool conceptual artist"—I mean he works with *words*. So how could anyone say my painting of him was not cool? In the beginning, when I was insecure about portraiture, I did that. And then I just started painting my friends and my family.

VD Were those paintings illustrations of the historical narrative?

BZ Yes, but I got to paint the paintings I wanted to paint, we're talking about the eighties and early nineties, when things were much more iffy for figurative painters than they are now. I felt that if I strategized who I painted, the viewer would be open to the style I was painting in.

VD Very clever!

BZ The first portrait show I had was well received because if you hated my paintings you were also hating my subjects. So in a way I was supported by them. But they also were terrific subjects.

VD Chuck Close does that too. He makes many, many portraits of art world luminaries.

BZ But they're people he likes, his friends. One of the most exciting things about portraiture is that there's also the viewer's relationship with the subject, and there's a tension between that and the painting itself.

VD Those were all public figures you were painting. But the paintings in this show are all figures only you and your friends know. By and large people are not going to know who these subjects are.

BZ They won't. For instance, my parents—nobody knows the real story behind them. But I think they'll get it by looking at the paintings (pp. 18–19). The UPS man was over here looking at the paintings, and he said, "Oh, my God, what are they like?" And I knew that the story was told.

VD That's remarkable. Getting back to technical narrative, there's a handling of the subject that's not just a matter of expression, but of *factness*, especially in your mother's portrait. I'm interested in your fascination with minimalism. You're placing these figures on a simplified field. In your mother's portrait, certainly her placement on the canvas is important, all the extravagant flowers at the bottom, the absolute blankness at the top. It's beautifully composed. But the handling of her face and her expression is the only thing there is to read. She's so psychologically *there* that I almost get the shivers.

BZ Yes, me too. It's very creepy with her. And talking about the space, someone was looking at the paintings of Mom and Dad recently and said, "That's interesting, they're not to scale. He's placed much higher in the rectangle than her." I think in the end she has become more vulnerable. In a way, my parents are terrifying to me, but I'm stronger than my mother, and I think that's what the blank space above her is. But he is still scary for me.

VD He's scary to me too.

BZ She was a beauty queen in the fifties, Miss New York… She's unhappy with this painting. But he loves his painting.

VD There's a tremendous difference in the way you paint your daughter. The love just pours forth, unashamedly. And yet you pull it off in the pictures without either cloying sentimentality or cynicism.

BZ Well, they're about more complicated things than just love. The pink one on the floor is called *Pink Brat (Portrait #69)*. You've got a lot of kids, so you know

Warhol Flower #12 **(portrait of *Portrait #69 [Pink Brat]*), 2003**
Oil on panel, 12 x 12 in.

Portrait #69 (Pink Brat)**, 2003**
Oil on panel, 12 x 12 in.

that moment when they put their faces just a little too close to yours and they could do anything…you know that look?

VD But still, there's love in the portrait.

BZ I love my Pink Brat, but you know that moment… I find it hard to paint her because I'm always trying for something more. Like in the one with the dead birds. I was breeding canaries, and when they died she would take them and play with them.

VD Oh, lord.

BZ She didn't know the difference between a stuffed animal and a bird that was alive five minutes ago. So the painting's about her, but it's also about that moment when children don't know what death is. That was kind of hard. My first idea for this painting was, "Can I paint pink on pink?" And then, "OK, what am I going to paint pink on pink?" And then I noticed the dress, and one thing led to another. In this painting, *Portrait #73 (Oona and Mo)*, I was interested in cadmium yellow deep. Mo is a cadmium-yellow-deep canary. So can I make him show up on his own color? Sometimes ideas like that get a painting started, and the narrative comes next.

VD I like that idea a lot, because it's born of painting, and painting has a remarkable way of thwarting our conscious minds, *lulling* us into a sensual state where things become available to us that would be unavailable without that slight disconnect from consciousness. And that's what makes it so *un*conceptual. There's a fundamental difference between conceptualism and the act of painting.

BZ But I think *that's* a concept.

VD We have different definitions of conceptualism.

BZ Yes.

VD That's not the issue here. This figure (*Portrait #73*) looks a little more cut out than many of the other pictures.

BZ I think it's the opposite. If you squint at it, she's actually a keyhole, and the yellow is forward.

VD Yes, but what I mean is there's a sort of disconnect between the ground and the figure, more so than in any of the other ones, the pink on pink, even the one here where you have a solid black background for your daughter.

BZ It's not black, actually, but it's dark.

VD And you have her so light, and yet she seems to be…

BZ She's in the space. But she might be glazed into it more.

VD Let's talk about glazing for a minute.

BZ I'll show you my notebook. Every painting's in here.

VD (Thumbing through notebook) This is utterly compulsive. (Laughs) What have you done so far in the self-portrait? How are you going to glaze that? How do you make a distinction between a glazed painting and a dry painting?

BZ Well, I didn't have a choice until recently, if you want to know the truth. *Oona #2* has seventeen layers of glaze, in order to get that color.

VD They're tinted with glaze, mixed with white.

BZ No, mixed with burnt umber, ultramarine violet, ultramarine blue, alizarin crimson, hooker green…

VD Are these transparencies or scumbles?

BZ They're transparencies. Each day I cover the completed underpainting with a different color of tinted glaze, which I wipe out or rub in, until the painting is finished.

VD Do you ever paint white on top of that?

BZ You can touch in highlights. I can paint with different colors of tinted glaze on a small brush. But you can't go in with paint straight out of the tube. It won't sit in the same plane because that plane is further back.

VD In the window.

BZ Further back in the window. Whereas my parents, which are among my first unglazed paintings, are right in front of you. I would never have done that if it was a painting I was planning to show, because

***Portrait #73 (Oona and Mo)*, 2003**
Oil on panel, 36 x 20 in.

it's too scary to have an image that close. But once I saw how it worked, it became a possibility. So now whether a painting is glazed or not glazed becomes part of the technical narrative. Which to me is the psychological content.

VD That's true, it does come across as a surface that has been acted upon by you. And you're painting more pictures that are not glazed now, you said.

BZ About half now.

VD You said earlier that the better your drawing is, the less you have to glaze.

BZ Before, I would get the illustration in the underpainting. It looked like the thing it was supposed to look like. With the tinted glazes I built up the tones which determine how the eye moves around the image, and that actually gave the painting resonance or soul or content. And now, after twenty years of painting, I can actually draw sort of OK and I can get it in the underpainting.

VD It's funny, in 1990 Claudio Bravo came to my studio, and he said, "How old are you?" And I said, "I'm thirty-seven." He said, "When you are forty-two, you will not glaze."

BZ Well, isn't that interesting! Because I was forty-two when I started seeing glazing as optional. (Both laugh) But I didn't think the unglazed paintings would be accepted, because people got used to that look. I haven't shown an unglazed painting, but I had Alex Katz over when he was posing for his painting, and he said, "Oh, I'm so happy you're not glazing." He felt it got in the way. But there are times when the glazing works. I'm not using glazes to resolve the drawing anymore. Before, I would finish the underpainting and then cover it with all these glazes and risk losing the image every time, and I liked the high drama of "What was it going to turn into?" And now I prefer to control my image from the start and know what I'm making.

VD Do you think there's any possibility that you will eventually incorporate direct painting and glazing in the same process?

BZ You mean go back and forth? I don't know. I was teaching myself, and I didn't get it right. So what I ended up with was this notebook. I can't decide.

VD Well, glazes flatten everything out, first of all.

BZ Do they?

VD Yes, that's why it should be glaze, scumble, glaze, scumble. You don't end with a glaze, because it flattens it out. This remarkable head of your daughter is preciously painted. I just want to die looking at that far side of her face, how it gets lighter—that is going to flatten if you end with a glaze. I used to glaze the hell out of things, and then, just like you, I figured out how to model it better from the beginning, how to manipulate the paint to get closer to where you want to be, sooner. And that's a normal process.

BZ But, OK, take this pink one, *Portrait #69*. It has only three layers of glaze on it, and see what the glaze does? It picks up the brush strokes and lets you see this gunky cool stuff. Do we like that?

VD (Referring to *Portrait #96*) But look at how solid this thing is painted.

BZ So you don't think this painting needs to be glazed?

VD I don't. This is an ongoing technical growth. It makes a direct impact. You can do such amazing things without using glazes.

BZ Yes, like in the painting of my mother. What I did was put a drawing on the panel and then coat it with a green tint, because I like to work on green. So this is actually the original drawing on the panel that you see on her shirt. I sketched the flowers in with paint, and I really liked them. You know how in Holbein the pattern on the clothing does not define the form? The face is painted really realistic, but the pattern is just sitting on the surface. Most people never notice that the pattern is flat. And I was thinking if Holbein can do that, I can too. I can just stop here.

VD It's incredibly refreshing. This is not to say anything categorical. I will not say, "Don't glaze it." I will not say, "Glaze it." You just go on from there. Basically, there's a relationship between glazing and scumbling which gives you an infinite range of effects. There's a robustness to it, and it's a complex technical narrative. And by leaving things less glazed, you're experiencing the beauty of doing something as much as possible, as soon as possible.

BZ But it's still not that soon, in the end. Even though an image is not being glazed, I still have to repaint it six or seven times, start to finish, to get it right. And the background has to be adjusted four or five times to get the right color. (Referring to *Portrait #89*) This color is actually mars violet and white. I don't use mars colors in my figures. I find them too strong and I can't get them to work, but I use them in my grounds. Because I didn't have much training with this kind of figure painting, I would read things and then I would misinterpret them. With the flesh tones, I am only able to use cadmiums and ultramarine violet and ultramarine blue and raw umber. I'm never able to bring in another color and get it to work. But I know how to do everything with these colors. And white.

VD You say over and over, "I didn't know what I was doing. I just taught myself how to do it." And do you know what? You're in perfectly good company, because for all of us, nobody was there to teach us.

BZ But what I did learn from teaching at the academy is that there are a lot of tricks and shortcuts. For instance, I didn't know how to oil out. Before I knew how to do that, I had to repaint the whole painting every time I wanted to add one mark. Chuck Close gave me this retouch spray that you just put on, and then you can add one mark in a painting and it will sit on the same plane with the others. But I spent the first fifteen years not knowing that.

VD I didn't know what broken color was.

BZ What's that?

VD When you break a color, it's also graying the color. You take an orange and a blue, and you get a form of gray.

BZ Right.

VD And I can see you know this already, you're doing it instinctively. But the name for it is broken color, a broken palette. We all do it instinctively.

BZ I don't use any black. I don't even *own* black. What I've noticed in museums is that the black in paintings is often cracked. In Rembrandts, the black hats are cracked. So that's why I always stay away from it. I tend to use mixed-up darks.

VD What else is there about your work that you would like to mention? I can't paint a portrait of someone unless I love them and I want badly to paint them.

BZ I have some tricks. You have to create an alternate reality where you almost fall in love with the person. Like when I was painting Jeffrey Dahmer for *The New York Times Magazine*.

VD You fell in love with him?

BZ I did fall in love with him! And there was a perversion to it, especially because his lips were so beautiful, and I had to get away from it at night because it was so scary. But if you can fall in love with a subject, even if it's not their reality that you are in love with, and they enter your dreams, then you have access to them, and you can do a really good portrait. Once I had to paint a Flemish collector who didn't speak English, and I had, like, ten minutes with him. All I knew was that he had seventeen grandchildren, and he had a certain look. So I had to create a fantasy, make something more out of those facts. And it's one of the best paintings I've ever done. I've had this discussion with David Hockney. He feels you have to paint people that you know and love, and he paints his friends. But I feel you can paint anybody. You have to create a fantasy about the person that haunts you, that you take to bed with you and you're painting it in your sleep. When I was painting Osama bin Laden for *The New York Times*, that was hard, because he was so real to me. I was lucky because they didn't want me to vilify him. The article was about his charisma, him as the iconic leader. So it allowed me to project more complicated stuff, other than just hating him. And what got me through Jeffrey Dahmer was to keep saying, "He liked boys, and I'm a girl, so I'm safe."

VD You mean he liked to eat them.

BZ Yes, and that was the hard thing about the lips. But he wouldn't be eating me. So it gave me the distance to fall in love with him. And that's the trick.

VD That's a beautiful idea, creating an alternate universe where you love the subject, and he haunts your dreams so you feel you've entered into him. The portraitist enters the subject and then replicates the experience of existence within the subject, on the canvas, so that the experience is projected outward to us.

Portrait #94 (*Dad*), 2005
Oil on panel, 36 x 24 in.

Portrait #80 (*Mom*), 2004
Oil on panel, 36 x 24 in.

Portrait #97 (Oona and Sallie), 2006–07.
Oil on panel, 30 x 60 in.

conversation

28 December 2006

Brenda Zlamany *and* Alex Katz

BZ Do you make personal paintings for yourself? When you paint someone that you're really close to, like your wife, do you feel that you're setting out to do something different than when you paint someone you don't know as well?

AK Well, it's harder. If you're more involved with someone it's a little harder. I feel pretty detached from everything I paint.

BZ So in a way it's irrelevant who the subject is.

AK Yes.

BZ It's more about how it's painted than…

AK Than what the image is. The liveliness of the image is what interests me.

BZ Not the psychology of the image.

AK No, I'm not interested in psychology or any of that. It's like the appearance of an image.

BZ That's interesting. I mean, for someone who paints portraits, that's an interesting thing to say.

AK Yes. It's a switch. A lot of historical portraits—Titian painted the young Englishman, that man with the beard, and actually he's trying to paint a handsome man. You know? And we relate to it as "it's a handsome man." Not who the particular person was. And an image of a handsome man is a problem—that he doesn't get too brutish or effeminate. A male model has to look like Cary Grant. Most of them look stupid or effeminate. It's very hard to hit it right. And Titian did it right, he did it with that portrait of an Englishman, so it isn't a particular Englishman, it's Titian painting a certain idea.

BZ Yes, but I think any portrait that's good is going to do that. It's going to be outside the specific sitter.

AK Well, it has to relate to painting in general, because you are painting. I think your work goes a little toward Lucien Freud. It's very particular.

BZ About the subject?

AK Yes. You have all that naturalistic detail, and it doesn't get a chance to become too generalized.

BZ But I think the ones that work are about a bigger idea than the individual sitter.

AK Well, it is still a painting, you know. It is not just a collection of naturalistic detail. With the kind of obsessive painting you're involved in, there's an intense energy. I don't have that obsessive energy. Cézanne and Mondrian have it.

BZ People are always asking me why I don't have cynicism or irony in my work, and I can never answer the question because I don't think about it in that way.

AK I think cynicism and irony are sort of second-class values. It's very nice not to have them in paintings. People want to read paintings rather than look at them. If you make it cynical or ironic, and people understand that, they don't have to bother with the painting itself.

BZ Because it's not visual.

AK It's literary. I think that the art audience that looks at paintings is smaller than the art audience that reads them.

BZ One thing I really like about your paintings is you make everybody look so glamorous. In Lucien Freud's paintings, I always feel like the people are smelly, and the studio smells. Do you know what I mean?

AK Yeah, well, his things are all grimy.

BZ Everything's dirty and sweaty, and it seems like the mattresses might have a smell if you were in that room. I always feel vaguely intoxicated by the smell of them. In the end, I guess it's more about the artist than the subject. It's more about the style.

AK Good point. I don't see any difference between five hundred years ago and now, in a way. There are some things that are only two years, one year, out of fashion but very remote. Whereas in the show at the Guggenheim, *Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso*, those Goyas are in my present tense.

BZ Yes. I also love the Zurbarán painting of the sheep.

AK He's kind of a real obsessive painter.

BZ Especially the single figures.

AK He can't do groups at all.

BZ I agree.

AK I think obsessive painters usually can't do groups…

BZ …because they get too hung up on illustrating the story…

AK …and in all the details.

BZ And then it doesn't have any abstract qualities that carry the narrative.

AK It's very strange with Zurbarán, who's so terrific with those…

BZ The monks?

AK The monks. And some of the women he does are just gorgeous. And they're wonderfully decorative at the same time. Beautiful paintings. The monks look great.

BZ He manages to get so much out of the placement of the single figure.

AK And when he has those ones with a lot of figures in them…

BZ They're awful! (Laughter) I also liked seeing Picassos with the Goyas, because I always have trouble with the usual way everything is organized according to the time it was made. I wish I could see more of that.

AK We've been damaged by art history. And also damaged by Hegelian thinking about something new being better than something old. It's not progress, it's just change. The hemline goes up, it goes down—it doesn't make the dress any better.

BZ The problem, I think, with art history is that it's nonvisual.

AK It's removed from painting quite a bit.

BZ Yes. I like seeing the Picassos in that group a lot.

AK Oh, the Picassos are fabulous!

BZ I think the paintings of the blonde, Marie-Thérèse, are among the sexiest…

AK Yes, but there's nothing in the way—it's not just a sex painting.

BZ But they're very erotic.

AK There's a sensualness in them you don't get in porn.

BZ I always feel embarrassed when I see those paintings with a group of people because I think they're so sexy, and I wonder, Does everybody else see it?

AK There's examples with Titian, who was really into sensuality. He did a painting of Flora, and someone else did the same subject and showed you more breast, vulgarized it. But the surfaces weren't as good. Titian got the sexiness by making the flesh and hair and cloth all sensual. That's what you're referring to in the Picassos of Marie-Thérèse. They're sensual…

BZ Yes, and he catches some moment, also, in the pose. When I was in Kraków, I saw Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine*.

AK It's an amazing painting.

BZ I sat with it long enough to try to figure out how it works.

AK Well, the ermine is sort of snaky…it's sexy.

BZ There's a triangle, a fold in the cloth, and she's looking away from you, not meeting your gaze, and it looks as if the ermine is about to enter this fold. And she's turning away to let you look. Which is so naughty, in a way, getting you to be a voyeur.

AK Certainly with Leonardo, if you can think of it, you can be sure he did it first.

BZ All the action is in that ermine.

AK And it's sloping, there's no angularity to her forms, and the way it goes into the shoulder, off the ermine… It's all kind of soft.

BZ It's a beautiful painting. It's like a movie. When you sit with it, you start to be taken somewhere. I wonder why there aren't more paintings by him.

AK He was doing a lot of different things.

BZ But what I don't understand is how he could paint so well, and only have painted, like, twenty paintings?

AK Twenty sounds right. I've seen most of them. They're about ideas or conceptions. They're not like Monet, who goes out in the field every day and does a great painting. But Monet is very simple compared to Leonardo, who's always working on some kind of an idea. But when I first saw his paintings, the technical part of the painting didn't seem so hot. It didn't seem as if they were painted, actually.

BZ It's weird to hear you say that, because your own paintings are not so…

AK Right. It has to do with fluid painting and strokes, as if the paint has a life of its own. All of his painting goes into the image, not the paint. It doesn't really have a life of its own. So I was kind of disappointed in the painting, but the images stayed with me forever. And when I looked at the Mona Lisa in the Louvre, I said, "It's very peculiar: the eyes are wild, the smile is dead." That was the first thing. And then I said, "Hey, it looks like she's wearing a mask. That's him behind those eyes!" And then, years later, some Englishman wrote the same idea. And I knew that if I thought it, Leonardo's so smart, he thought of it first.

BZ Yes.

AK That it was true, in other words. The painting is doing a lot of different things all at once. But that was one of them.

BZ I think he does intend for you to see it. It's not a hidden trick. It's there, if we take the time.

AK Well, his paintings are in pursuit of an idea rather than in pursuit of painting.

BZ Because maybe the idea is in the drawing and the composition.

AK They form it, but he has an idea of the image he wants to make.

BZ Yes, and it's not just—like that woman with the ermine, it's not just a girl holding her pet…

AK No, it's a lot of different things

BZ Least of all that, in a funny way. But that was pretty exciting to see.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Portrait #89 (Oona Playing with Two Dead Birds)*, 2003–04
Oil on panel, 45 x 30 in.

Self-Portrait with Oona Nursing, 2003–04
Oil on panel, 48 x 32 in.

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Oil on panel, 11 x 11 in.

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Warhol Flower #12 (portrait of *Portrait #69 [Pink Brat]*), 2003
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Portrait #73 (Oona and Mo), 2003
Oil on panel, 36 x 20 in.

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Oil on panel, 45 x 30 in.

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Oil on panel, 48 x 32 in.

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Portrait #80 (Mom), 2004
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Portrait #94 (Dad), 2005
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Portrait #95 (Self-Portrait Pregnant with Snake), 2006–07
Oil on panel, 30 x 60 in.

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Portrait #96 (Oona in Her School Uniform), 2006–07
Oil on panel, 24 x 12 in.

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Portrait #97 (Oona and Sallie), 2006–07
Oil on panel, 30 x 60 in.

PAGE 33
Portrait #98 (Dad in Red Suspenders), 2006–07
Oil on panel, 24 x 12 in.

Brenda ZLAMANY

Education

1984
Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, ME
1981
Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT (BA)
S. W. Hayter's Atelier 17, Paris

One-Person Exhibitions

2007
Jonathan O'Hara Gallery, New York City
2002
Art Upstairs @ GHB, East Hampton, NY
2001
Fine Arts Center, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA
1999
Galapagos Art and Performance Space, New York City, "Unveiling of *Portrait #41*"
1998
Stux Gallery, New York City
1996
Jessica Fredericks Gallery, New York City
1995
Sabine Wachters Fine Arts, Brussels, Belgium
1994
E. M. Donahue Gallery, New York City
Galerie Quintessens, Utrecht, Netherlands
1993
Sabine Wachters Fine Arts, Knokke, Belgium
1992
E. M. Donahue Gallery, New York City
1991
E. M. Donahue Gallery, New York City
1989
Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo, NY
1981
South Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

Selected Group Exhibitions

2007
Salmagundi Club of New York, "The Beholder's Eye: Contemporary Art Invitational" (*curated by Katherine Chapin*)
2006–07
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, "Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition Exhibition"
National Museum in Gdańsk, Poland, "New Old Masters/Nowi Dawni Mistrzowie" (*curated by Donald Kuspit*)
2005
DFN Gallery, New York City, "The Woods"
2004
DFN Gallery, New York City, "Animal Tales"
DFN Gallery, New York City, "People Places and Things"
2003
Marella Arte Contemporanea, Milan, "Supereal" (*curated by Lauri Firstenberg*)
Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn., "The Alumni Show" (*curated by Nina Felshin*)
The University Galleries, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT, "Williamsburg Salon"
2002
Artists Space, New York City, "Painting as Paradox"
Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, CO, "POPjack: Warhol to Murakami"
DFN Gallery, New York City, "Tribeca Works on Paper Show"
New Gallery, Houston, TX, "20th Anniversary Celebration: Stefan Stux Gallery"
2000
Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent, Belgium, "The Pillow of Melancholy"
Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, FL, "The Swamp: On the Edge of Eden"
New House Center for Contemporary Art, Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, N.Y., "The Figure: Another Side of Modernism" (*curated by Lily Wei*)
1999
Susquehanna Art Museum, Harrisburg, Penn., "Changing Nature: New Visions and Altered Lands"
Jim Kempner Fine Art, New York City, "Contemporary Portraiture"
Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, CO, "Sans Titre: Works from the Collection of Peggy Scott and David Teplitzky"
New Langton Arts, San Francisco, CA, "In Your Face"
1997
Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, Germany, "Von Kopf bis Fuss: Fragmente des Körpers" (*curated by Peter Weiermair*)
Stux Gallery, New York City, "Sex/Industry" (*curated by John Yau*)
John Michael Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, WI, "In Memory of Pleasure"
1996
Apex Art, New York City, "Ceremonial" (*curated by Barry Schwabsky*)
James Graham and Sons, New York City, "Portraits" (*curated by Valerie McKenzie*)

James Graham and Sons, New York City, "Anima Mundi"
Jessica Fredericks Gallery, New York City, "Everything Is Real" (*curated by Andrew Freiser*)
1995
Fine Arts Center, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, "Nature Studies"
Zoller Gallery, Penn State University, University Park, PA, "Terrestrial Bodies"
Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY, "Crossing State Lines: Twentieth-Century Art from Private Collections in Westchester and Fairfield Counties"
James Graham and Sons, New York City, "Contemporary Still Life"
Sabine Wachters Fine Arts, Brussels, Belgium, "Gallery Artists"
1994
Stux Gallery, New York City, "Summer Review '94"
O'Hara Gallery, New York City, "The Seer" (*organized by Christopher Sweet*)
Littlejohn/Sternau Gallery, New York City, "In a Budding Grove" (*curated by Stephanie Theodore*)
1993
Sabine Wachters Fine Arts, Brussels, Belgium, "Accrochage International"
Blum Helman Gallery, New York City, "The Bestiary"
Stiebel Modern, New York City, "Infancy & Image"
1992
Stiebel Modern, New York City, "Small, Really Small, Tiny"
Artists Space, New York City, "Neurotic Art: Return of the Repressed"
1991
Art in General, New York City, "Close Scrutiny"
1990–91
Edith C. Blum Art Institute, Bard College, NY, and New-York Historical Society, New York City, "Art What Thou Eat"
1990
Jack Tilton Gallery, New York City, "Detritus: Transformation and Reconstruction"
White Columns, New York City, "Dumb Animals?"
Rosa Esman Gallery, New York City, "Objects on the Edge: Contemporary Still Life"
1987
White Columns, New York City, "New Nature Again"
1984
Four Walls, Hoboken, NJ, "Before and After"
Jack Tilton Gallery, New York City, "Collaborative Projects, Inc."
1983
Public Image Gallery, New York City, "Red Show"
Jack Tilton Gallery, New York City, and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, "Collaborative Projects, Inc."

Selected Commissions

2007
Portrait of James D. Wolfensohn. World Bank, Washington.
2005
Portrait of Osama bin Laden. "Taking Stock of the Forever War," by Mark Danner. *New York Times Magazine* (11 Sept.): cover.
2002
Portrait of Slobodan Milosevic and Mira Markovic. "The Family Milosevic," by Blaine Harden. *New York Times Magazine* (20 Jan.).
1996
Portrait of Marian Anderson. "Grace under Fire," by Jessye Norman. *New York Times Magazine* (24 Nov.): 59.
Portrait of Fred Woolworth.
1995
Portrait of Jeffrey Dahmer. "Staring into the Heart of the Heart of Darkness," by Ron Rosenbaum. *New York Times Magazine* (4 June): 36–45+.
Portrait of Dr. Martini. Martini Library. Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

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2007
New Old Masters/Nowi Dawni Mistrzowie. Essay by Donald Kuspit. Gdańsk: Natl. Museum in Gdańsk. 92–96. Illus.
2006
Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition Exhibition 2006. Essay by Dave Hickey, "The Lost World." Washington: Natl. Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Inst., in assn. with the Univ. of Washington Press. 15, 76. Illus.
2004
Donald Kuspit. *The End of Art*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press. 183.
2003
Alessandre Quattordio. "Supereal." *Flash Art* (Dec. 2003–Jan. 2004): 119.
Eleona Battiston. "Supereal." *Segno anno*, vol. 28, no. 193 (Nov.-Dec.): 44. Illus.
"Sexy e pulp ecco i nuovi i perrealisti." *La repubblica* (28 Nov.), folio 1: 10.
Marion Wolberg Weiss. "Honoring the Artist: Brenda Zlamany." *Dan's Papers* (28 Mar.): cover, 39. Illus.
2002
Michael Paglia. "Hello Andy! American Pop Meets Japanese Neo-Pop at Denver's MCA." *Westword* (7 Nov.).
Marion Wolberg Weiss. "Honoring the Artist: Brenda Zlamany." *Dan's Papers* (4 Oct.): cover, 41. Illus.
Darius Yektai. "At Horowitz, Charting an Artist's Development." *Southampton Press*, eastern ed. (15 Aug.): B9. Illus.

2001

Brenda Zlamany: Color Study. Forty-two-page illustrated catalog of recent works. Interview with Chuck Close. Essay by John Yau. Amherst: Fine Arts Center, Univ. of Massachusetts.

Eileen Tabios. "How Painting Transcends Painting." *Reviewny.com* (15 Feb.). Illus.

2000

Joyce B. Korotkin. "The Figure: Another Side of Modernism." *NY Arts Magazine* (Dec.): 16–17.

Christian Viveros-Fauné. "The Figure." *New York Press* (25–31 Oct.): 43.

The Figure: Another Side of Modernism. Staten Island: Snug Harbor Cultural Center. Illus.

Joannes Késenne. *Het oorkussen van de Melancholie*. Ghent: Museum voor Schone Kunsten. 42. Illus.

Kerry Oliver-Smith. *The Swamp: On the Edge of Eden*. Gainesville: Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art. 28, 31. Illus.

1999

Donald Kuspit. "Going, Going, Gone." *Artnet.com* (16 Sept.). Illus.

Brenda Zlamany. "Painter of Modern Life." *aRude* 12: 64. Illus.

1998

"Brenda Zlamany." *New Yorker* (21 Dec.): 16, 18. Illus.

Mark Daniel Cohen. "Brenda Zlamany at Stux Gallery." *Review* (1 Dec.): 14–16.

Douglas F. Maxwell. "Brenda Zlamany at Stux Gallery." *Review* (1 Dec.): 16–17.

Brenda Zlamany. Forty-eight-page illustrated catalog of recent works. Essay by John Yau. New York and Los Angeles: Stefan Stux Gallery and Muse [X] Editions.

"Brenda Zlamany, Pheasant, Dove and Duck (1997)." *On Paper* 2.2 (Mar.-Apr.).

1997

Heather Hewett. "In Memory of Pleasure: John Michael Kohler Arts Center." *Art Papers* (Sept.-Oct.): 74.

Nadine Wasserman. "In Memory of Pleasure: John Michael Kohler Arts Center." *New Art Examiner* (June): 44–45.

Von Kopf bis Fuss: Fragmente des Körpers. Zurich: Stemmle. 42–43. Illus.

1996

"Brenda Zlamany." *New Yorker* (25 Nov.): 32.

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John Mendelsohn. "'Ceremonial' at Apex Art." *Artnet.com* (7 Nov.).

George Melrod. "Openings." *Art and Antiques* (Oct.): 30. Illus.

Holland Cotter. "'Everything Is Real' at Jessica Fredericks Gallery." *New York Times* (9 Aug.): C23.

Richard Johnson. "Peck on This." Page Six. *New York Post* (26 June): 8.

1995

Eddy Devolder. "Brenda Zlamany at Sabine Wachters." *Flash Art* (Oct.): 121. Illus.

"Brenda Zlamany bij Wachters." *Ons Brussel* (Apr.): 22. Illus.

Interview. "Brenda Zlamany: J'ai le sentiment d'être un chasseur de têtes." With Pierre-Yves Desaive. *Flux-News* (Apr.): 11. Illus.

Guy Gilsoul. "Une portraitiste d'aujourd'hui." *Le vif/L'express* (31 Mar.): 89. Illus.

Stéphane Rey. "Portraits d'hommes." *L'écho de la Bourse* (4 Mar.): 15. Illus.

Patrik Kindermans. "Flanelles bruxelloises." *Flux-News* (Jan.): 3.

Barry Schwabsky. "The Rustle of Painting." *Lacanian Ink* 9: 47–57. Illus. Rpt. in *The Widening Circle: Consequences of Modernism in Contemporary Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997. 84–94.

1994

Phyllis Herfield. "Brenda Zlamany: 12 Men & 12 Birds." *New York Review of Art* (Dec.): 21.

Lucio Pozzi. "Che ve ne sembra dell' America? Lettera da New York di Lucio Pozzi. L'artista e il suo doppio." *Il giornale dell'arte* (Dec.). Illus.

Robert C. Morgan. "Individual Issues: Bald Guys, Dead Birds...." *Cover* (Oct.): 38. Illus.

Lauri Brett. "Art for the Masses: 12 Men & 12 Birds." *Pretty Decorating* (Oct.): 16. Illus.

"Brenda Zlamany." *New Yorker* (17 Oct.): 29. Illus.

"Brenda Zlamany." Voice Choices. *Village Voice* (27 Sept.).

"Brenda Zlamany." *Kunstwerk* (Apr.-May). Illus.

"Eigenzinnige Diertaferelen van Brenda Zlamany." *Kunstbeeld* (Apr.). Illus.

Christopher Sweet. *Fallen Idylls: American Figurative Painting*. Exhibition catalog. Illus.

1993

Deidre Stein. "Bestiary / Blum Helman." *Art News* (Dec.): 133.

Eddy Devolder. "Brenda Zlamany: Une histoire presque sans histoires." *Avancées* (Nov.): 31.

David Ebony. "Brenda Zlamany at E. M. Donahue." *Art in America* (Feb.): 110. Illus.

Barry Schwabsky. "Brenda Zlamany/E. M. Donahue Gallery." *Artforum* (Feb.): 99–100. Illus.

1992

"Brenda Zlamany." *New Yorker* (30 Nov.): 26.

1991

Janine Cirincione. "Brenda Zlamany at E. M. Donahue." *Cover* (Mar.): 17. Illus.

Donna Gustafson et al. *Art What Thou Eat: Images of Food in American Art*, ed. Linda Weintraub. Mount Kisco, NYw: Moyer Bell. 162, 165. Illus.

Collections

Cincinnati Art Museum, OH
Deutsche Bank
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York City
Museum of Modern Art, Houston, TX
Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY
World Bank, Washington

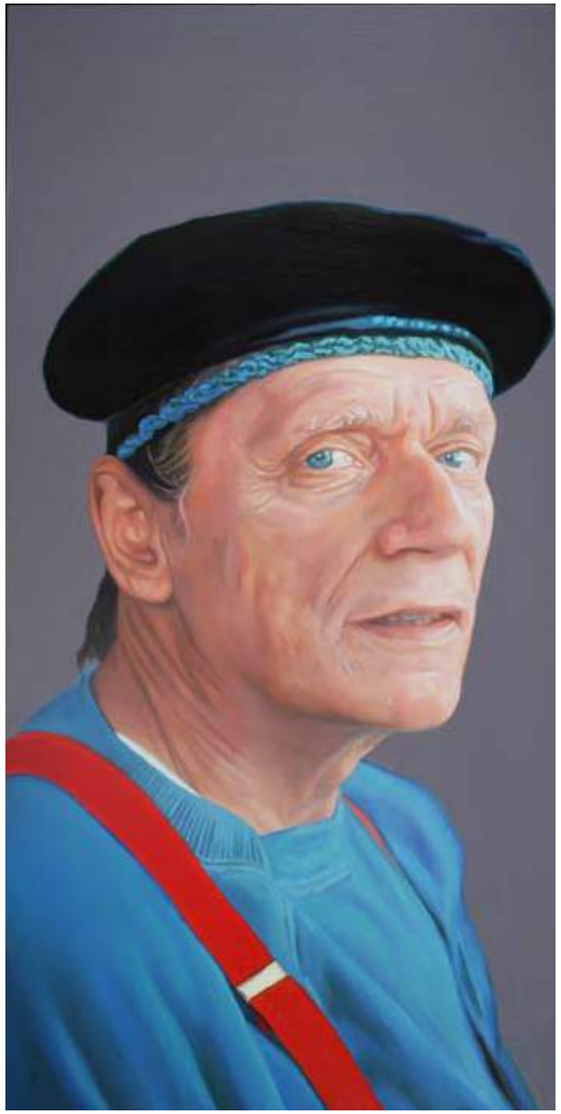
Grants, Residencies, and Fellowships

2006–07
Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant

1997
Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, NY

1995, 1992, 1986
MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, NH

1981–82
Jerome Foundation Fellowship, Printmaking Workshop, New York City



***Portrait #98* (*Dad in Red Suspenders*), 2006–07**
Oil on panel, 24 x 12 in.

JONATHAN O'HARA GALLERY

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NEXT VERSO: *Warhol Flower #22* (Beccafumi, *Stigmatization of St Catherine of Siena*), 2006
Oil on panel, 20 x 20 in.

Portrait #64 (*Oona #2*), 2002
Oil on panel, 17 x 17 in.