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The painted portrait in the twentieth-century in the works of Edvard Munch, Francis Bacon, and Marlene Dumas

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Representations of Irrepresentability:
The Painted Portrait in the Twentieth-Century in the Works
of Edvard Munch, Francis Bacon, and Marlene Dumas



Timea Andrea Lelik

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ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,

in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel

op donderdag 15 oktober 2020, te 13.00 uur

door Timea Andrea Lelik

geboren te Arad

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Designed and Typesetting by Carolina Banc

On the front cover: Edvard Munch, *Street in Åsgårdstrand*, 1901.

On the back cover: Francis Bacon, *Study of Nude with Figure in a Mirror*, 1969.

It is accepted as a certainty that Foucault, adhering in this to a certain conception of literary production, got rid of, purely and simply, the notion of the subject: no more oeuvre, no more author, no more creative unit. But things are not that simple. The subject does not disappear; rather its excessively determined unity is put into question. What arouses interest and inquiry is its disappearance (that is, the new manner of being which disappearance is), or rather its dispersal, which does not annihilate it but offers us, out of it, no more than a plurality of positions and a discontinuity of functions.¹

1. Maurice Blanchot, "Michel Foucault As I Imagine Him," in *Foucault/Blanchot. Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside and Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1987), 76-77.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is the result of many years of research, publications, talks, and conference participations where I have questioned the role of portraiture as a genre in art history, but also in our daily lives. This book proposes different interpretations of portraiture in the work of three significant artists of the twentieth-century, but I equally hope that it opens up a space to consider why painted portraits are still relevant today and how these can impact us, the viewers.

This project would not have been possible with the continuous and unconditional support of Prof. Dr. Ernst van Alphen. Ernst's seamless supervision together with his encouragements, patience, prompt and precise comments have made this long journey intellectually stimulating and highly rewarding. I am also profoundly grateful to Prof. Dr. Christa-Maria Lerm-Hayes for agreeing to supervise a project already in progress. Her birds-eye view and overarching comments have helped finalize and sharpen my arguments. I am grateful to the committee members for their time and patience in reading and evaluating this manuscript, and

also to all those who helped review and edited parts of this study when preparing them for previous publications.

I am deeply grateful to my family – my mother, father, sister, and grandparents – who always support me in any project I choose to pursue, and to Byron (and the other lovely pets we've had throughout the years) who always inspired me by imparting their sheer joy. I am very thankful to Yassine for his much-needed encouragements, love, and support in this final stage of the project.

My sincere thanks go to Geoff for helping me edit and proof-read countless pages of this manuscript (and several others) and for always understanding how important it was having the material corrected right away; to Bogdan for always being there to talk about this project and for suggesting interesting ideas that might have slipped my attention otherwise; to Dan for hosting me for several months in the past years to be able to do my research in my favorite city – Paris; also to Joanna for the same reason; to Moulari for being my friend and personal coach whenever it was needed, to Shahfira for always being there; to Annick, for helping with all Dutch translations, but also for being a great colleague, eager to listen to any problems over a cup of coffee; to Laura, for always trying to be helpful in some way; to Ingrid, for her creative pushes; to Anca, for her support in the last stages of this process, to Cori for the lovely design of this book; to Simon for his thorough work on the final manuscript, and to several other friends, colleagues, and people who inspired me along the path: Carmen, Anca, Norbi, Sophia, Serena, Mihaela, Lavinia, Ana, Cristina, Anca, Judith, Lynn, Maria, Paul, the Bali fund contributors, and all my fellow Ph.D. colleagues.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

When looking at a particular portrait for the first time, we are all tempted to ask ourselves “Who is the person depicted?” In such instances, it is all-too easy to surrender to the instant gratification achieved through identification – usually by looking at the explanatory label on the wall. This exercise often leaves viewers dissatisfied, for it entails merely consuming information, not elaborating on it. The whole experience of viewing and understanding the genre of portraiture could change, however, if we were to revise the way in which we look at depictions of human subjects, or rather, the questions that we pose when attending to such depictions. What if, instead of seeking to identify the person depicted in the portrait, we were to ask how we as onlookers relate to the portrait itself? What happens to us, the viewers, when gazing at these compositions?

In this study I propose asking this very different question the moment that we encounter a representation of a human subject. Inquiring into the relationship between viewer and portrait, I propose, propels us toward answers that transcend traditional notions of portraiture, which revolve around the recognizable identity of the subject depicted.

Through close readings of selected works by Edvard Munch, Francis Bacon, and Marlene Dumas, this study explores how and by what means the traditional genre of Western portraiture has changed in the twentieth century. Drawing out the different ways in which these artists conceive of and practice the genre of portraiture, I analyze each of their distinctive approaches. The chosen artists, I argue, challenge in novel and innovative ways the notion of representation as something that reflects an external, stable reality. And in transgressing received art-historical concepts of representation, they construct new forms of portraiture.

This study emphasizes the ways in which the selected artists expose, deconstruct, and replace socially constructed identities in order to reevaluate the relationship between subject and subjectivity. In doing this, the aim is not to establish similarities and differences between the works of the chosen painters, or other artists of their generation, rather, the study focuses on how selected works by Munch, Bacon, and Dumas problematize – in divergent, often conflicting ways – the notion of portraiture. To this end, the portraits studied here will not be analyzed in isolation for the meaning they convey, but rather for what they do for portraiture more broadly, and how they change or develop the traditional function of the genre. While there are a number of other noteworthy artists who have also challenged and transformed the genre, the three artists central to this study have each brought ground-breaking innovations that have radically transformed the manner in which we perceive modern and contemporary portraiture. By refusing to deliver a coherent or unified picture of the subject's outward appearance and inner life, the three artists have all transgressed traditional conventions of portraiture, opening the form up to be radically rewritten.

Portraiture is a topic of significant interest to scholars of twentieth century art. Traditionally a highly regarded genre, due to rapidly changing concepts of the subject and of subjectivity, combined with the disintegration of traditional pictorial categories, over the last hundred years it has lost much of its value and status.² As a result, the concepts of

the portrait, the portrayer, and the portrayed have drastically changed. Considering these developments, portraiture can best be understood as an amalgam of social, cultural, and political factors. While most studies on the topic focus on a portrait's own internal logic, and its various historical and social contexts, my research is concerned with the ways in which portraits function in relation to the onlooker. In this way, the portrait is not a passive object, but rather an engaging and creative element that invites the viewer to become an active participant, interacting with the subject depicted.

In order to establish the working definition of portraiture on which the remainder of this study will rely, it is important to attend firstly to the fundamental question of what constitutes a traditional, Western, painted portrait depiction. Taking this question as a starting point, the study will go on to investigate how notions of portraiture changed in the twentieth century, and how the work of Munch, Bacon, and Dumas contributed to this change. To this end, I will analyze a selection of portraits from the three artists' oeuvres, and examine how these portraits departed from conventional understandings of the genre. By focusing on the new forms of portraiture that emerge through the selected portraits, how the portraits function in relation to the viewer, and what the repercussions of these developments might be for the genre more widely, this study will argue that the portraits of Munch, Bacon, and Dumas are rich sources for understanding a new type of portraiture that developed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The study will argue that through a close analysis of the selected portraits, subjectivity is no longer understood as an individual phenomenon, but rather as a relational process. I will also contend that subjectivity in these portraits is no longer presented as authentic and inherent to a unique subject, but rather as an active and performative act.

In order to develop a considered approach to this new type of portraiture, this study will adopt the framework offered by Critical Theory, which problematizes attempts to construct unique subjectivity in traditional portraiture. In combining with other necessary discussions of form,

2. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the Ends of

Portraiture," in *Face-Off: The Portrait in Recent Art*, ed. Melissa E. Feldman (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 54.

materiality, context, and discourse – themselves informed by ideas, concepts, and approaches from a variety of fields – Critical Theory enables an illuminating critique of traditional and outdated Cartesian notions of inner essence and unique subjectivity. My analysis is influenced by the work of those who critically question the portrait's boundaries, and notions of individual identity closely related to this. By proposing alternative interpretations of the portraits considered here – rather than attributing specific meanings to them – I intend to open up a space for comparative, dialogic, and improvisational reflection that is not reliant on the pursuit of a single, fixed meaning. My intention here is not to exhaust the meanings of the portraits, but rather to offer novel means of understanding the genre of portraiture through these artists' oeuvres.

The approach adopted by this study shares similarities with Umberto Eco's method of viewing modern artworks, as put forward in his book *The Open Work* (1962). Eco argues that modern works have in common a desire on the part of the artist to leave the arrangement of certain constituents either to the public or to chance. In this way, the works do not convey a single definitive meaning, but rather a multiplicity of possible interpretations.³ These characteristics of modern art have been said to mark a radical shift in the relationship between artist and public, asking of the recipient a much greater degree of collaboration and personal involvement than was ever required before.⁴ Similarly, this study – which homes in on a new type of portraiture that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century – argues that the viewer plays a crucial role in deciphering and creating meaning for the selected portraits, instigating an interactive process between artwork and viewer.⁵

3. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), IX.

4. Idem, X-XI.

5. Ariella Azoulay similarly argues in her analysis of Edward Steichen's exhibition "The Family of Man" (1955) that through the manner the photographs are presented in Steichen's exhibition these remind the viewers of their ability to participate in updating the meaning of the displayed artworks: "[the viewers] are invited to make the photographs speak or project onto them their own thoughts and experiences. [...] They bear traces of an encounter of multiple participants and they – whether subjects or viewers – cannot be entirely subjected to any single person's intentions."

George Didi-Huberman proposes another manner of understanding the openness of the artwork in *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (1990). Didi-Huberman argues that he is not referencing openness in the same sense as Eco does when referring to a work's communicative and interpretative process; rather, he contends, an artwork's structure is rend, open, torn at the crucial part of its unfolding.⁶ Didi-Huberman explains that art history has used a "neo-Kantian tone" to interpret all artworks, with words "whose specific usage consists of closing gaps, eliding contradictions, resolving, without a moment's hesitation, every aporia proposed by the world of images to the world of knowledge."⁷ He argues that in opposition to this authoritarian method when looking at an artwork, one needs to consider its visual qualities as well. Works of art include the realm of the visible (imitation) and legible (iconography), but also the visual (an irregular net of processes nowhere fully described). He contends that it is precisely the breaking at the center of the artwork's unfolding that creates an interplay of forces that exist and create openness, where "the representation that 'is opened' can show us something more in what we usually call the representations of painting."⁸ Didi-Huberman proposes a dialectical approach that includes at the same time thesis and antithesis,

Ariella Azoulay, "The Family of Man – A Visual Universal Declaration of Human Rights," in *The Human Snapshot*, eds. Thomas Keenan and Tirdad Zolghadr (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 33. Concerning the openness of interpretation of an artwork, Pascal Gielen explains that such "ambiguity" has a positive outcome in artworks because the viewers do not yet know what to expect from the ambiguous, therefore they stand open to it. Gielen argues that "hun ambigue praktijk opereert in een tussengebied van nieuwe mogelijkheden, een wereld zonder vaststaande feiten en (politieke) identiteiten, een wereld van rammelende causaliteiten." My translation: "their ambiguous practice operates in an intermediate area of new possibilities, a world without fixed facts and (political) identities, a world of rattling causalities." Pascal Gielen, "Laten we proberen onze fundamentele ambiguïteit te aanvaarden. Over de kwestie 'identiteitspolitiek'" *De Witte Raaf*, March-May 2020.

6. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 142.

7. Idem, 6.

8. Idem, 155.

an approach where knowledge and not knowledge can exist at the same – a place of contradictions that open up the work to an interplay of meanings. This study similarly aims to look at the works from a place of contradiction, where these not only have several interpretations, but sometimes offer divergent and contradictory meanings between the known and unknown, the visible and the visual.

In analyzing the selected artworks, I will conduct a close reading from a visual, rather than biographical, perspective. Whilst I will include for consideration a number of quotes from the artists themselves concerning their work, I will not limit my analysis to the content of these quotes. The study does not follow biographism, a traditionally dominant model of criticism that considers an artwork to be a direct result of the artist's life and intentions. Rather, I base my analysis on the visual qualities of the selected artworks, and how these interact with, and impact, their viewers.

Recent Notions of Portraiture

Conventional literature on portraiture – such as Roland Kanz's *Portraits* (2008) and Shearer West's *Portraiture* (2004) – trace a history of the genre from century to century, discussing how portraiture has changed over time, how portraits have represented their subjects, and how these works have been interpreted.⁹ While both authors problematize the genre's elevated status, and the implications of this, they do not offer an in-depth theoretical framework regarding the function of the genre itself. In light of this, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (1997) offers a useful collection of essays that critically discuss some of the major issues facing the genre, and includes a variety of contributions that challenge the traditional Western dualist notion of the form.¹⁰ Joanna Woodall's introduction offers an enlightening critical outline of the changing concepts of portraiture from the Renaissance to modern times.¹¹ Ernst van Alphen's essay is particularly illuminating

in its consideration of changing notions of self and individuality. He argues that while portraying someone in a realistic manner that seeks to depict their unique identity has been completely dismantled as an approach, several artists, including Dumas, have taken on the project of revitalizing the genre, creating new conceptions of subjectivity through their portraits.¹²

Showing that the genre of portraiture has been a fertile ground for artistic innovation, Anne Collins Goodyear's essay, entitled "On the Birth of the Subject and the Defacement of Portraiture," in the exhibition catalog *This is a Portrait If I Say So* (2016) discusses the contemporary renunciation of physiognomic portrayal in favor of developing relational structures to describe the ever-changing self. Collins Goodyear proposes an understanding of the subject as relational, rather than as a concrete structure, arguing that contemporary portraiture:

Deliberately constructs a self that is not absolute, but contingent, grounded not in appearance but in the evocation of presence, not demanding recognition as much as acknowledgement, not imposing one mode of being, but rather manifesting an openness to reconsideration and reformulation in the eyes of its other: the audience.¹³

Ideas such as those proposed by Collins Goodyear have also been applied to portraits from the seventeenth century through a contemporary lens. In his essay "Rembrandt, or the Portrait as Encounter" (2016) Didier Maleuvre proposes a contemporary rereading of Rembrandt's portraits and self-portraits as places of encounter between

9. Roland Kanz, *Portraits* (Cologne: Taschen, 2008); Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

10. Joanna Woodall, ed., *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

11. Woodall, "Introduction: Facing the Subject," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1-25.

12. Ernst van Alphen, "The Portrait's Dispersal: Concepts of Representation and Subjectivity in Contemporary Portraiture," in *Portraiture. Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 239-256.

13. Anne Collins Goodyear, "On the Birth of the Subject and the Defacement of Portraiture," in *This is a Portrait If I Say So*, eds. Anne Collins Goodyear, Jonathan Frederick Walz, and Kathleen Merrill Campagnolo (Brunswick, New Haven and London: Bowdoin College Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2016), 93. This exhibition catalog examines specifically modern and contemporary portraiture in American art in the past century.

fluid and multiple subjectivities.¹⁴ He argues that a person's likeness is not in fact related to the person themselves, but rather to an external image that viewers hold of that person, suggesting that whilst "at first blush a portrait presents the likeness of a person; on consideration this likeness cannot pre-exist the portrait [...] thus portraiture is essential to having a likeness, of looking like oneself."¹⁵

However, this likeness shifts from the individual to the interpersonal, as one's likeness relies on creative witnessing by others. As a result, the likeness does not belong to the person portrayed, but rather to the observer, and their ability to make a mental portrait of the living person. Maleuvre further notes that this also has consequences for the notion of personal identity: "if identity assumes being identical to oneself, and if such similarity is construed by an observer, then identity will surely involve a strong interpersonal element [...] it takes at least two persons to look like oneself."¹⁶

Concerning Rembrandt's portraits, Maleuvre argues that urban mercantilism brought a degree of social mobility, and therefore a more fluid, contingent and changeable experience of selfhood, in which identity was no longer a fixed allocation. He elucidates this theory by comparing Dutch bourgeois society to the Italian aristocracy. While aristocratic identity was an accomplished matter, social identity for the bourgeoisie was a work in progress. Through portraits, the depicted subjects required social validation, trust, and reputation. This meant that identity was

achieved through interaction, and was dependent on the gaze of others.¹⁷ Because of this, Maleuvre suggests:

A portrait is much more than a channel of communication; it is an act of creation. A mirror relays a pre-existing likeness, whereas a portrait creates one. Moreover as intimate and personal as a self-portrait may be, it is never a 'private dialogue.' There is little about a portrait that is merely inward or private.¹⁸

Portraits are always therefore interpersonal, dialogic, and relational.

The notion of portraits as relational, as well as the ways in which this affects the viewer's experience, is a major thread running through my analysis of the portraits presented in this study, drawing on the work of Jean Luc Nancy as put forward in *Portrait* (2018). Based on Nancy's extended and amended Heideggerian critique of the Cartesian subject of self-certainty, the book comprises two essays that discuss the aims of portraiture. While Heidegger emphasized authentic solitude, Nancy stresses a relational existence with others. He explains that the aim of the portrait is not to identify but to expose "the structure of the subject: its subjectivity, its being-under-itself, its being-within- and so its being-outside-, behind-, or before-itself ... its ex-position."¹⁹ According to Nancy, "this ex-position is neither a simple objective given nor a pure self-positing subjectivity, [...] as it involves and includes the ex-position of others (principally the artist and the spectators)."²⁰ This structure leads to what Nancy calls the portrait's autonomy – a term he defines in a somewhat unconventional manner. Nancy explains that a portrait's autonomy is constructed through the portrait "putting (in) to (the) work of the autos or of the self, of being-to-itself," going on to argue that, the portrait's identity is wholly contained within the portrait itself;

14. Zygmunt Bauman proposes another manner of looking at the idea of fluid identity in *Liquid Modernity*. He considers that fluid identity is a direct consequence of contemporary society (which he names "liquid modernity"), thus attributing the idea of a fluid, constantly changing identity to contemporary times. For Bauman, the consequences of this move to a liquid modernity can most easily be seen in contemporary approaches to self-identity, which is never a finished product, but rather in constant fluctuation and change. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2006).

15. Didier Maleuvre, "Rembrandt, or the portrait as encounter," in *Imaging Identity: Media, Memory and Portraiture in the Digital Age*, ed. Melinda Hinkson (Acton: The Australian National University Press, 2016), 16.

16. Idem, 20-21.

17. Idem, pp. 24-25.

18. Idem, p. 29.

19. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Portrait (Lit Z.)* trans. by Sarah Clift and Simon Sparks (Fordham University Press), Kindle Edition.

20. Ibidem.

the portrait refers to itself alone.²¹ Here, Nancy argues that a portrait is both self-reliant – the portrait is not the representation of a subject, but the very expression of subjectivity or selfhood – and always relational – the portrait paints a subject only by setting it in relation with itself, the painter, and the spectator. He therefore understands the aim of the portrait to be the presentation of a presence that lacks a unique, Cartesian subjectivity, exposing subjectivity in relation to itself and others.

In her book *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (2006), Catherine Soussloff proposes portraiture as a function of imagination, and the result of the social engagement between subject, artist, and viewer. Soussloff contends that portraiture gained a new role and significance in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century by extending the possible relationships between those portrayed, the viewers, and the artists – producing a new type of subject in art. Positing that portraiture's fundamental characteristic is identification through resemblance, Soussloff uses Sartre's argument in *The Psychology of Imagination* (1991) to define the portrait as the “visual instantiation or material evidence of the desire for resemblance and connection, of the very function of the imagination.”²² By taking Sartre's argument a step further, she goes on to explain that the portrait and its representation in modernity represents:

A desire on the part of the sitter, artist, and viewer for social connections through visible means. The portrait makes visible what we imagine of others. The consciousness of the other displayed in the genre of portraiture gives rise to the useful understanding of portraiture as social engagement.²³

For Sartre, an image is nothing other than a relationship. Soussloff develops this theory from a social perspective; in this way, the portrait

becomes a social activity between its three main protagonists: subject, artist, and viewer.²⁴ While I also contend that there is a close relationship between the three – and particularly between subject and viewer (with the artist only leaving a trace of their presence in the materiality of the work) – this is not a social engagement in the sense of a socially and historically constructed self that can only be understood in relation to the other, but rather an active, performative act that constructs new subjectivities via each interaction.

Judith Elisabeth Weiss' contribution to the catalog *Inventing Faces: Rhetorics of Portraiture Between Renaissance and Modernism* (2013) also tackles a particular form of portraiture with which this study is concerned.²⁵ Weiss proposes an alternative reading of portraiture that posits itself somewhere between mimetic representation and the search for uniqueness, and the notion of the portrait as emptied of all subjectivity. By referencing artists such as Alberto Giacometti, Weiss argues for a form of portrait that comes into existence through the imagination of the viewer. Portraiture cannot claim to be able to capture one's individuality – this emerges only through the working together of the seen and the imagined in the mind of the onlooker. Ultimately, this argument is similar to that which emerges through Soussloff's interpretation of Sartre (although without the further social implications), as well as through Maleuvre's argument that one's own likeness relies on another person's creative witnessing.

Edvard Munch's Hybrid Portraits

Taking into consideration Weiss' reading of modernist portraiture in the work of Alberto Giacometti, I propose a similar reading of Munch's

21. Ibidem.

22. Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 13.

23. Idem, 13-14.

24. Bauman also references Sartre when explaining that people are not born into their identities but rather are charged with the task and responsibility of creating one. “As Jean-Paul Sartre famously put it: it is not enough to be born a bourgeois – one must live one's life as a bourgeois. [...] Needing to *become* what one *is* is the feature of modern living.” Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 31-32.

25. Judith Elisabeth Weiss, “Before and After the Portrait: Faces Between Hidden Likeness and Anti-Portrait,” in *Inventing Faces. Rhetorics of Portraiture Between Renaissance and Modernism*, eds. Mona Körte et al. (Berlin and Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2013).

paintings from the turn of the century, approximately half a century before the emergence of the Giacometti's "stick figures" (or walking men). I refer to the works by Munch selected in this study as portraits, although they have not previously been considered and analyzed as such. While the style of Munch's painting changed radically throughout his long career – with stylistic variations also visible across his more classic, commissioned portrait compositions – significant attention has not been given to the role of portraits within his oeuvre as a whole. One reason for this relates to the fact that many of his portraits were either commissioned, or emerged from friendships, and followed conventional norms of presentation (full focus on the sitter and his physical traits, attention to psychological aspects of the subject, and so on), leading many scholars to conclude that Munch might have been compromised in his execution of the works. Nevertheless, as Øystein Ustvedt points out in one of the most recent and elucidating articles on Munch's portraits, while these works seem to follow conventional norms of portraiture from the turn of the century, they already attest to Munch's unconventional style of painting. Unusual standing poses, combined with hastily executed parts of the canvas, differentiated Munch from his contemporaries, and eventually led to his much-debated success.²⁶ Conversely, Munch, like Bacon, is considered to have been a tormented artist whose anguish and distress fully materialized in his work.²⁷ Jay Clarke explains that "critics and viewers have long placed the artist in an interpretive straightjacket, regarding him solely as a figure of existential angst and leaving out many nuances that make his work compelling."²⁸ Consequently, Munch's other compositions that include human figures have mostly been analyzed according to

26. Øystein Ustvedt, "Edvard Munch's Portraits. Artistic Platform and Source of Renewal," in *Edvard Munch 1863 - 1944*, eds. Mai Britt Guleng, Birgitte Sauge, and Jon-Ove Steihaug (Milan: Skira, 2013), 232-233.

27. There are numerous scholarly essays supporting this view. See for example Iris Muller-Westermann, *Munch by Himself* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), 15: "His self-portraits revealed the fundamental feelings of alienation and existential isolation of modern people."

28. Jay A. Clarke, *Becoming Edvard Munch. Influence, Anxiety, and Myth* (New haven and London: Yale University Press New, 2009), 8.

their perceived themes and their significance, rather than in terms of the genre of portraiture, and how this functions within the works. For this reason, it is of crucial importance to further scrutinize these compositions in relation to portraiture, exploring how, through them, Munch drastically changed the form and function of the genre.

Iris Muller-Westermann's book on Munch's self-portraits aims to present the artist's views about himself and the world around him through his works, acting as a kind of visual autobiography. While Munch's self-portraiture offers a valuable key to understanding his portraits of others, this study will not consider these through an autobiographical lens. Rather, following Jon-Ove Staihaug's arguments concerning Munch's performative self-portraits, this study analyzes the manner in which they are orchestrated. Munch produced a very large number of self-portraits: more than seventy paintings, around twenty graphic works, and more than one hundred watercolors and drawings. In addition, almost two thirds of the photographs he ever took were of himself. Self-portraits, then, offer a valuable insight into Munch's "hybrid portrait" genre, which will be the main focus of my argument.

As mentioned above, this study will analyze and categorize as portraits works that previously have not been named as such. I argue that whilst these are not conventional portraits (as defined above), they can be understood as "hybrid portraits:" compositions that undermine formal structures of both conventional portraiture and landscape painting, juxtaposing elements of both to create a hybrid genre. Munch's highly experimental way of working has been noted by many scholars. As Dieter Buchhart points out:

Experimentation as an – albeit risky – enterprise with an uncertain outcome was part of his artistic concept, and motivated both his unconventional handling of the materials and his disregard for the conventional boundaries between the technique of printed graphics, drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, and film.²⁹

29. Dieter Buchhart, "Edvard Munch: Signs of Modern Art. The Duality of a Material-based Modernity," in *Edvard Munch. Signs of Modern Art*, ed. Dieter Buchhart (Riehen / Basel: Fondation Beyeler and Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 11.

To this, I would add his significant transgression of traditional boundaries between different genres of painting. Besides the mixture of landscape and portraiture, taking as a starting point Mieke Bal's argument as put forward in *Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic* (2017), this study also considers the cinematic aspect of Munch's hybrid portraits, and considers the ways in which the implied movement engages the viewer in a physical act of viewing.³⁰ As Bal explains, Munch imbues his works with a cinematic effect that denotes a multitude of observation angles which oblige the viewer to actively participate in the act of decoding the painting. Besides the physicality of the visual movement, Bal also argues that the viewer experiences an emotional response that materializes into thought-provoking action. The imitation of physical movement is therefore able to "move" the viewer when looking at the artwork.

This emotive means of moving the onlooker parallels Van Alphen's theory that viewers of Bacon's works experience a "loss of self." I will elaborate on this theory – and how I make use of it when discussing Bacon's works – later in this introduction, and again more thoroughly in Chapter Three. While I argue that there is a direct interaction between portrait and onlooker in the work of both Munch and Bacon, in the case of the former this interaction does not go so far as it does in the latter. In Bacon's work, I argue, the viewer identifies with the subject of the portrait.

In their book *Edvard Munch – Francis Bacon, Images du corps* (2009), Frédérique Toudoire-Surlapierre and Nicolas Surlapierre argue that Munch's work inculcates a similar kind of self-identification between subject and object as I suggest is manifested through Bacon's work.³¹

30. Mieke Bal, *Emma & Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*. (Oslo: Munch Museum and Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2017).

31. Frédérique Toudoire-Surlapierre, Nicolas Surlapierre, *Edvard Munch – Francis Bacon, images du corps* (Paris: Orizons, 2009). In their introduction they explain that "Par différent procédés picturaux, par le choix de motifs physiques et/ou d'attitudes corporelles significantes, le peintre renvoie au spectateur une honte effective (réellement vécue), de sorte que l'émotion ressentie *correspond* à l'émotion représentée." (15) My translation: "By different pictorial processes, by the choice of physical motives and/or significant bodily attitudes, the painter returns to the spectator an effective shame

They argue that the gaze of the spectator is reflected by the painting, which raises the viewer's awareness of being looked at:

The perception of the viewer (his gaze) is reflected in this 'object-look' that a painting necessarily is, raising awareness to that of being looked at. Because the gaze refers to oneself, that it is an intermediate vision between one and oneself, significant of the duplicity of the reality that it proposes to us, the question arises for a spectator who is given to see bodies: what does it mean for me to be seen? To put the spectator in an undesirable position precisely underpinned by the desire, is the subject, if not the stake, of painting the body in Munch and Bacon's works.³²

They argue that because these works encourage the onlooker to ponder the implications of being viewed, they induce a situation in which the viewer is forced either to identify with, or, on the contrary, to reject the subject. In either case, it is an interaction that the spectator cannot escape.³³

The body of the spectator is a support of visibility for the image, it participates in a process of semiotic communication (nonverbal) that Munch anticipates in *The Scream* by integrating his reaction

(actually lived), so that the emotion felt corresponds to the emotion represented." This comes close to Van Alphen's argument about how Bacon's work can be understood: in terms of what they do, rather than what they represent.

32. Idem, 147-148. Original text: "La perception du spectateur (son regard) se trouve reflétée dans cet 'object-regard' qu'un tableau est nécessairement, suscitant une prise de conscience, celle d'être regardé. parce que le regard renvoie à soi-même, qu'il est une vision intermédiaire entre soi et soi-même, significative de la duplicité du réel qu'elle nous propose, la question se pose pour un spectateur à qui l'on donne à voir des corps: que signifie pour moi le fait d'être vu? Mettre le spectateur dans une position indésirable précisément sous-tendue par le désir, voilà le sujet sinon l'enjeu de la peinture de corps de Munch et Bacon..."

33. "Tout corps en peinture *implique* celui du peintre et/ou de ses proches, celui du spectateur, qu'il soit pensé ou refoulé, mettant en jeu un processus d'identification – ou son contraire, le rejet." (19) My translation: "Each body seen in painting implies that of the painter and / or his relatives, that of the spectator, whether thought or repressed, involving a process of identification – or its opposite, rejection."

in the body represented. A visible and visibly spectacular effect, Munch gives us a view of the effect produced by his painting on the viewer, taking advantage of the fact that every body image involves the spectator's body in a double perspective that is both spectacular and semiotic: because it corresponds to him – the viewer recognizes himself or identifies himself even if subject does not resemble him – and because he responds to what he sees by the look he bears, by his affects and his reactions and by the posture of his body.³⁴

As mentioned above, this argument shares many similarities with Van Alphen's reading of Bacon's work, focusing on the sensations the viewer might experience whilst observing the work, rather than the sensations addressed in the paintings themselves. The authors contend that the figure in *The Scream* is a representation of the viewer, who – despite the figure's deformity – still manages to recognize himself in the image. Munch uses this projection – which, according to Toudoire-Surlapierre and Surlapierre, is inherent to figurative painting – to take the viewer by surprise, and to confront them with a reflection of their own fragmented self.

In Munch's work, it seems clear that an inescapable interaction is provoked between the artwork, that I refer to as a hybrid portrait, and the viewer. I argue that the hybrid portrait is necessary in Munch's work as a means of inducing an ongoing moment. This feeling of a present occurrence – achieved through the introduction of landscape into portraiture, the use of cinematic imagery, and the unfinished nature of the canvas – is what creates unexpected and direct connections between subject and onlooker, propelling the viewer to novel interpretations of the work. It is in Bacon's case, I contend, that the viewer is "framed" to identify with the subject of each painting.

34. Idem, 148-149. Original text: "Le corps du spectateur est un support de visibilité pour l'image, il participe d'un processus de communication sémiotique (non-verbale) que Munch anticipe dans *Le Cri* en intégrant sa réaction face au corps représenté. Effet visible et visiblement spectaculaire, Munch nous donne à voir l'effet que produit sa peinture sur le spectateur, profitant que toute image corporelle implique le corps du spectateur dans une double perspective à la fois spectaculaire et sémiotique: parce qu'il lui correspond – le spectateur s'y reconnaît ou s'y trouve alors même qu'il n'est pas ressemblant – et parce qu'il répond à ce qu'il voit par le regard qu'il porte, par ses affects et ses réactions et par la posture de son corps."

Francis Bacon's Portraits

In analyzing Bacon's works, I depart from one of the most common interpretations of his oeuvre that focuses on the existential themes of violence, despair, and hopelessness. As Michel Peppiatt explains, "Bacon tends to be presented, in textual commentaries as well as in most retrospectives of his paintings, as a kind of monolith whose cry of anguish went up with the Tate's famous orange triptych of 1944 and continued crescendo in ever more accomplished compositions throughout a long career."³⁵

Van Alphen has argued that although such readings are not completely beside the point, they fail to tackle the most important aspect of Bacon's works, namely the violence done to the viewer, rather than the violence contained within the paintings.³⁶ As Peppiatt puts it: "It was not so

35. Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon. Studies for a Portrait. Essays and Interviews* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1. Other scholars who interpret Bacon's work in these terms are Marente Bloemhevel and Jan Mot who see Bacon's subjects as "human beings in situations of conflict and violence. His distorted, dissected figures, locked in abstracted environments suffer and cry out in pain. The source of their suffering is not revealed in the picture and it seems as though life itself is the cause." Marente Bloemhevel and Jan Mot, "The Particularity of Being Human" in *Marlene Dumas. Francis Bacon*, eds. Marente Bloemhevel, Jan Mot and Ida Gianelli (Milan: Charta, 1995), 19; or Ina Conzen similarly argues that "[...] his ever-present focus on the hopelessness of human existence in the face of death stamped and intensified Bacon's approach to life as well as to his art." Ina Conzen, *Francis Bacon: Invisible Rooms* (Munich: Prestel, 2017), 28-29.

36. E. van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), 10. Another interesting way of understanding the "violence" in Bacon's works is proposed by Marcel Finke who similarly argues that it is insufficient and reductionist to interpret Bacon's works as sole expressions of violence, horror or pain. Analyzing the photographic sources from Bacon's studio, he argues that the "violence" done to the paintings in fact has its root in the "violence" that incurred on the photographic sources of the subjects depicted. Finke explains that the creases and dents seen in photographs account for materiality – the materiality of the photographs, but also of the paintings. "The disfiguration of the painted heads thus originated from Bacon's creative exploitation of the material changeability of his working document. Therefore, the latter served as a physical tool to explore the body's entanglement with the medium in which it is represented. Bacon realized that the material alternations of the picture inevitably result in change of the depicted body's appearance. The artist's appreciation of this medial imperative opened up a

much the ‘violence’ suggested by many of these images that interested Bacon as the shock of their unexpectedness.”³⁷ This study, then, will distance itself from the idea that Bacon’s portraits are violent expressions of general torment, and focus rather on what the works contribute to portraiture as a genre. Like Bacon, I will focus on the particular and not the general, “the fact” that is presented in his portraits.³⁸ It is well known that Bacon was a vocal artist who spoke much about his work. While this study will quote Bacon when analyzing his portraits, it will go beyond simply interpreting the artist’s own statements. The study’s argument will be structured around what the works do, and how they influence the viewer, ultimately demonstrating that they push the boundaries of portraiture further even than Bacon himself suggested in interviews.³⁹

fertile potential that is not sufficiently apprehended in terms of violence or injury.” Marcel Finke, “‘I don’t find it all that violent myself.’ Francis Bacon’s Material Practice and the Human Body,” in *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, ed. Logan Sisley (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), 131.

37. Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon*, 37.

38. When talking to Sylvester about the subjects and the way these were interpreted by viewers, Bacon held that they were portraits of people he knew, who tormented as they were, emanated an aura of distress. Sylvester explained that the idea that his city-suited men were establishment figures triggered the interpretations that they represented contemporary society. Bacon however insisted that they were simply portraits of individuals he knew. “Replying to a question whether he was aware that his pictures of men alone in rooms conveyed a sense of claustrophobia and unease, he answered, referring tacitly to Peter Lacy: ‘I’m not aware of it. But most of these pictures were done of somebody who was always in a state of unease, and whether that has been conveyed through these pictures I don’t know. But I suppose, in attempting to trap this image, that, as this man was very neurotic and almost hysterical, this may possibly have come across in the paintings.’ This is to say, he was dealing with the particular, not the general. He was not making declarations about the human condition; he was painting out of his own life.” David Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 70-72.

39. Most literature dealing with Bacon’s interviews relies on the ones conducted by David Sylvester, however I have found very helpful also the ones with Michel Archimbaud, *Francis Bacon in Conversation with Michel Archimbaud* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993) and Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

An important starting point for this analysis is Van Alphen’s *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (1992). In it, he explains that Bacon’s work directly impacts the viewer through its “affective” qualities, analyzing Bacon’s work in terms of the violence done to the onlooker.⁴⁰ Van Alphen argues that whilst Bacon’s work opposes narrativity in the obvious sense of a linear story, it does not fully rid itself of all forms of narrativity. While the paintings are not narrative, they are experienced as such because they appear to be in motion. As a result, the viewer experiences the figures as moving, in such a way that they themselves are “moved” in the same way as the subject. Further, the deformations that can be witnessed in the paintings are not only inflicted on the subjects, but also on the viewer. The ways in which Bacon’s work directly impacts the onlooker forms a major part of this study. However, I argue that instead of experiencing a “loss of self,” the viewer in fact identifies with the subjects depicted in these works. I further this argument by drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s theory regarding Bacon’s work, as put forward in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), and on Buddhist thought, arguing that understanding Bacon’s portraits through Buddhist practices opens up the possibility of a complete transformation of the concepts that have traditionally shaped portrait making.

Dealing in a similar fashion with Deleuze and spirituality in Bacon’s works, Darren Ambrose has argued that one of the crucial aspects of Deleuze’s study is his refusal to approach the paintings in a naïve manner, as though they are simply representational, and that deformity and mutilation act solely as a depiction of existential horror and suffering. Instead, he offers a deeper and more thoughtful meditation upon Bacon’s work.⁴¹ Deleuze suggests that Bacon’s figures are not mere vectors for recording literal cruelties; rather, they become:

A visceral means for recording and transmitting with a necessary immediacy the violent intensity of lived and embodied sensation. By breaking the organic norms of the represented human form in

40. Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon*, 11.

41. Darren Ambrose, “Bacon’s Spiritual Realism – The Spirit in the Body,” in *Francis Bacon New Studies. Centenary Essays*, ed. Martin Harrison (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), 11.

his work Bacon is seeking to explore and communicate the intensity of real existence.⁴²

While Ambrose also deals with spirituality, he proposes a different approach to understanding the work of Bacon, as one of the great spiritual realist painters. Taking Deleuze as a starting point, Ambrose argues that Bacon pushed beyond normal organic forms in order to engage in a unique kind of spiritual athleticism that conveys with profound immediacy the intensities of life, matter, and becoming. As Ambrose puts it, Bacon's aim is to "convey sub-representational spiritual depths, and push into a fully atheistic and materialist spirituality of the body that brings him [Bacon] into proximity with a post-Christian thinker such as Nietzsche."⁴³ Ambrose's argument concerning Deleuze's theory of the Figure escaping from itself and returning to its immaterial (infinite) original state parallels my argument regarding self-transcendence, yet while both Ambrose's and Deleuze's discourses remain within the field of the painting, I argue that the figures transcend themselves in order to become one with the viewer. There is significant crossover here in relation to accessing a space of infinity, but in my argument the figure's movement is outward rather than inwards, and besides eliciting a presence, it helps push forward to achieve self-transformation.

In addition to Van Alphen's theory regarding the "loss of self," other scholars have argued that Bacon's portraits go beyond the surface of the painting in order to directly impact the viewer. Ina Conzen's discussion of Bacon's cage structures makes an important observation about how these cages act: "opening up towards the front they directly engage the viewer who becomes a fellow actor in the painting."⁴⁴ She argues that the structures and glass create a distance between work and viewer that paradoxically forces the onlooker to interact with the work, with the viewer:

Becoming aware of himself as an outsider and yet affected observer – like the voyeur Bacon occasionally incorporates into his pictures.

42. Idem, 12.

43. Ibidem.

44. Conzen, *Francis Bacon*, 25.

The intensity with which the passion of life is revealed or 'caught raw and alive,' has – and was meant to have – its strong effect on the observer or the viewer.⁴⁵

Conversely, this study will argue, the gap between the work and its observer is bridged through the way in which the glass reflects the image of the viewer, creating an identification between subject and onlooker.

In discussing the similarities between Bacon and Picasso, Olivier Berggruen questions whether paintings, and specifically portraits, can provoke ambivalent feelings regarding what constitutes the self.⁴⁶ He argues that when looking at certain portraits, the viewer feels as though they are not confronted by dead things, but rather by bodies like theirs that take on organic shapes through the organization of paint marks.⁴⁷ He further argues that Picasso and Bacon have similar conceptions of the role of the viewer, namely that they are not simply a passive observer, but an active participant in the meaning making process. Taking as a starting point Van Alphen's theory of the "loss of self," Berggruen argues that the viewer of Bacon's work experiences a loss of identity in which they become accomplices, tempted to turn away from the image before them, but ultimately stay locked in an exchange with the subject of the artwork. To view the work of Picasso, on the other hand, is a more straightforward act of voyeurism. Berggruen argues that "to a large degree, Bacon's images act like mirrors, albeit of a different kind. They are reflections of the beholder rather than a mere likeness of the artist or

45. Idem, 43.

46. Olivier Berggruen, "Picasso & Bacon: Painting the Other Self," in *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art*, eds. Wilfried Seipel, Barbara Streffen, and Christoph Vitali (Milan: Skira, 2003), 72.

47. Michel Leiris makes a beautiful and compelling argument about how Bacon's works emanate a strong presence in his essay "What Francis Bacon's paintings say to me," in *Francis Bacon. Recent Paintings* (London: Marlborough Gallery, 1967), 13-24. He argues that the presence he finds in Bacon's works seems to "be living, yet quite distinct from both inanimate objects and from any human being I might happen to meet." (13) This presence is described to draw Leiris out of his all "too usual neutrality" and leads him into "an acute awareness of being there, rendered in some way present to [himself] myself, by the lure held out to me." (15)

the sitter.”⁴⁸ He argues that the primary aim of Bacon’s work can be seen in the manner in which the images perform a new role; the work acts like a kind of mirror, and the viewer who sees themselves in the painting starts to:

Question the integrity of the metaphysical self that constitutes his everyday presence in the world. In this sense, the painting is capable of effecting a reversal between object and subject. Bodily presence becomes an object of inquiry, an inquiry that is prompted by none other than the subject – the sitter – of the painting. It is the moment of exchange – extending beyond the boundaries of the canvas – that gives Bacon’s paintings their poignancy.⁴⁹

This study argues that the quality of Bacon’s portraits outlined here is central to his work as a whole – namely, the full identification of the viewer with the subject of the painting. Through the presence they have, the figures are able to fully engage the viewer, absorbing them into the composition. While Berggruen acknowledges this blurring of the boundaries between subject and object, his analysis stops here. This study extends the point, arguing that this exchange is necessary to Bacon’s fundamental remodeling of conventional notions of portraiture.

What exactly, then, is Bacon doing with his portraits? What is happening when we look at them? And how do they redefine traditional notions of portraiture? To begin answering these questions, we might turn to Bacon himself:

Great art is always a way of concentrating, reinventing what is called fact, what we know of our existence – a reconcentration [...] tearing away the veils that fact acquires through time. Ideas always acquire appearance veils, the attitudes acquire of their time and earlier time. Really good artists tear down those veils.⁵⁰

48. Berggruen, *Picasso & Bacon*, 79.

49. Idem, 83.

50. Hugh Davis and Sally Yard, *Francis Bacon* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 23.

As Van Alphen suggests, the word reconcentration is of crucial importance here. He argues that:

This implies not only a reversal of the active-passive relation, but also a different mode of articulating the relation between artist and predecessor: not in terms of what they have in common, of what the later artist shares with the earlier one, but in terms of how the artist is different from the predecessor on whom he allegedly modelled himself. For, reinvention implies difference as well as sameness. The pertinent neologism ‘reconcentration’ gives the reinvention a specific edge: the emphasis, focus, stakes and thrust is shifted.⁵¹

Drawing on Van Alphen to discuss the manner in which Bacon “reconcentrates” the work of his predecessors, I contend that he also “reconcentrates” the traditional notion of portraiture as a whole, instigating a new and unprecedented form, through which the painting becomes an active rather than passive form of depicting a subject. For Bacon:

The sitter is someone of flesh and blood and what has to be caught is their emanation. I’m not talking in a spiritual way of anything like that – that is the last thing I believe in. But there are always emanations from people whoever they are, though some people are stronger than others [...] with their face you have to try and trap the energy that emanates from them.⁵²

This emanation – “the pulsation of a person” – is the energy one has, palpable through bodily sensations. Taking this a step further, I argue that these sensations are ultimately what dictate action. Through Buddhist philosophy and the ancient meditation practice of Vipassana, the subject is able to understand these sensations and remain equanimous in their presence. As these forces are continuously acting

51. E. Van Alphen, “Reconcentrations: Bacon Reinventing his Models” in *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art*, eds. Wilfried Seipel, Barbara Steffen, and Christoph Vitali (Milan: Skira, 2003), 60.

52. Sylvester, *Looking Back*, 174-175.

upon the body, they are in fact what constitute “the true self.” However, these sensations – sometimes of aversion, sometimes of pleasure – are always changing, never the same. The sensations transform into the pulsations of a person, representing the contradictions that, according to Milan Kundera, harbor one’s essence (should such a thing exist).⁵³ These contradictions make up the “uniqueness” of an individual, a uniqueness that the viewer recognizes when looking at Bacon’s subject. The onlookers can identify with the subject’s contradictions, as they recognize in themselves the same contradictory sensations. Therefore, I argue, this new kind of portraiture – seen in Bacon’s work – does not simply represent the subject, it goes a step further.

Female Subjectivity in Marlene Dumas’ Portraits

Portraits depicting female sitters have had a different trajectory than those depicting men. Woodall explains that, historically, female subjectivity has been regarded as decidedly inferior to that of men, resulting in different standards of representation.⁵⁴ While the notion of the inferior female identity had not altered for several centuries,

53. In the first section of his book *Encounter* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 3-5, Milan Kundera repeats a passage first published in the French periodical *L’Arc* in 1977, just after his emigration from Czechoslovakia. Kundera recounts that when Michel Archimbaud was preparing a book on Bacon’s portraits, the artist had asked for a piece by Kundera for this catalog. Bacon explained that Kundera’s 1977 essay was one of the only ones in which he recognized himself. This story describes the author’s meeting with a girl in a Prague apartment shortly after her multiple interrogation by the police. Due to her psychological distress, the girl had lost her innate calmness and had to frequently use the toilet. Otherwise a neat and articulated person, her acute fear pointed to her contradictory nature as a human being. Kundera mentioned that this contrast provoked a sudden urge in him to rape the girl (yes, rape her, not make love to her), as he “sensed that all those contradictions harbored her essence: that treasure, that nugget of gold, that diamond hidden in the depths. I wanted to possess her, in one swift moment, with her shit along with her ineffable soul.” This search for essence is what Kundera sees in Bacon’s portrait as well: “The painter’s gaze comes down on the face like a brutal hand trying to size hold of her essence, of that diamond hidden in the depths.” This hidden depth full of contradictions is what Kundera considers to be “the essence” of human being and what he thinks Bacon is trying to depict in his paintings.

54. Woodall, “Introduction,” 10.

when discussing the work of female artists at the turn of the twentieth century, Patricia Matthews argues that Suzanne Valadon’s depiction of women interrupted for the first time the culturally dominant norms of female (nude) representation. Although these works break with the conventional objectification that was dominant up until the nineteenth century, they do not offer clear alternatives for female subjectivity.⁵⁵ It is in this context that I propose an examination of Dumas’ portraits, that not only break with traditional representations of women in art, but also create new identities for the subjects depicted, albeit a century later.

The last chapter of this study will specifically focus on, and analyze, three portraits by Dumas: one depicting Marilyn Monroe, and two paintings from a series of portraits entitled *Magdalena* that Dumas created for the 1995 Venice Biennale. The works from the Magdalene series are inspired by the biblical figure of Mary Magdalene whom, for centuries, has posed a great paradox of representation. An adulteress who converted into a saint, she has been depicted countless times as a sensual, white woman whose repenting gaze shies away from the onlooker. While depictions of Magdalene present her in her reformed life, there are often many remnants of her past life as a seductress. Compositions showing scenes from Magdalene’s life are often highly sexualized, encouraging a voyeuristic gaze. Dumas’ depictions of Magdalene have very few of these characteristics. Her tall, confrontational Magadelenes gaze directly into the onlooker’s eyes. Although they are naked, there is nothing sexual about their appearance. Rather than being seductive, their long hair covers their intimacy, making the viewer aware of their own voyeuristic intentions. Further, some of the women do not even have long hair or white skin, making them unrecognizable without the artworks’ titles to refer to.

As Diana Apostolos-Cappadona explains, there is no specific biblical reference suggesting that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, or that she had a sinful life. In her book *In Search of Mary Magdalene: Images and Traditions* (2002), Apostolos-Cappadona elaborates on the factors that led to this stereotyped representation of the character. This study will argue that Dumas’ portraits set out to demask the stereotype by creating diverse

55. Patricia Matthews, “Returning the Gaze: Diverse Representations of the Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon,” in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (September 1991), 415-430. I elaborately reference and explain Matthews’ theory in Chapter One.

representations of female subjects in all their complexity – capturing, in a Kunderian sense, their “essence,” which is a mass of contradictions – to explore their non-identifiable identity, at the same time as dismantling the concept of the female as a passive body. My reading of Dumas’ *Magdalenes* draws on Van Alphen’s interpretation of Dumas’ series of work *Models*, and subsequently of the *Magdalene* series. In his book *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (2005), he argues that much of Dumas’ work is concerned with the relationship between female identity – or subjectivity – and representation.⁵⁶ Elaborating on this to discuss *Models*, Van Alphen explains that while models do not have a face – only a façade and a body – Dumas, by presenting portraits that are only faces, sets out to rewrite the way in which we understand and interpret female subjectivity through art. He argues:

The viewer arrives at her confrontation with the impossibility of looking according to [this] traditional model. Dumas’s reassigning subjectivity to women by returning a face to models (as in *Models*) and a body to faces (as in the *Magdalenes*) forces the viewer to reflect on the question of why this was necessary.⁵⁷

In light of this, it becomes pertinent to ask how Dumas exposes the creation of the cultural stereotype, and in what manner she reclaims the subjectivity of the depicted character.

Dumas’ representations of *Magdalene* transgress traditional depictions of the character in a number of ways. Two of the most striking transgressions are the subjects’ nakedness, and their direct, confrontational gaze. Starting with an analysis of Edouard Manet’s painting *Olympia*, and the reason why this naked courtesan shocked the Parisian public of the time, I will argue that by appearing naked in frontal and confronting positions, Dumas’ *Magdalenes* transform the historically invested genre of the female nude from a passive body into an active one. Another notable transgression can be seen in the painting method,

56. E. van Alphen, *Art in Mind. How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 142.

57. Idem, 160.

that implies the use of wet on wet materials. This not only means that the works can change at any moment, but also that many times – due to these sudden changes – the artworks take on the appearance of sketches. This further alludes to the fact that these compositions are not final representations of a fixed identity, but rather that they construct a new identity with each work, taking pleasure in the impossibility of depicting fixed subjectivities.

Another example of Dumas contravening the conventional representation of the subject in order to offer an alternative to her stereotypically fabricated persona can be found in *Dead Marilyn* (2008). In this composition, Dumas depicts an unrecognizable version of Marilyn Monroe, refusing to deliver the glamorous image that viewers have of her. In analyzing the origins of the term “icon” and how it functioned – and continues to function – as a cultural model, this study will interpret the meaning of “iconic portraits” in works that represent religious figures, such as Mary Magdalene, and glamor icons, such as Marilyn Monroe, evidencing the ways in which Dumas exposes the fact that cultural images represent collectively-created stereotypical identities, voided of their subjectivity and identity.

By discussing the anthropological concept of “liminality,” and analyzing how it functions in painting, I further argue that Dumas unmasks the stereotyping power of iconicity by depicting her iconic subjects in states of transition and “in-betweenness,” allowing her to rewrite and reclaim the subjectivity of the figures. Taking as a starting point Dumas’ own state of “in-betweenness,” Marlene van Niekerk has argued that several of the artist’s compositions are depicted in a state of transition, which she further reads as liminal modulations imagined as being on the threshold of passing from one state to another.⁵⁸ The term “liminality” – coined by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 in *Rites de Passages* – relates to threshold passages what are used in the rites of small-scale societies. Half a century later, Victor Turner rediscovered the concept and adapted it to modern societies. Liminality was thus replaced by “liminoid experiences” which, for Turner, implied

58. Marlene van Niekerk, *Seven M-blems for Marlene Dumas* (New York: Zwirner & Wirth, 2005), 20-21.

that creativity unfolded in art and leisure activities.⁵⁹ Van Niekerk furthered this argument by saying that in modern society, ritual passages transmute into secular artistic forms in which individuals have the freedom to experiment with new ideas, images, and words. In the case of Dumas, she argues, the artist portrays some of her subjects in liminoid states in order to open up contemplation on topics that are mostly absent from contemporary visual culture, and through which deep emotions can be felt by the viewer. This study builds on these arguments to contend that Dumas' representation of icons such as Mary Magdalene and Marilyn Monroe not only propel the viewer to thought and reflection, but also revolt against predetermined social constructions, creating new self-referential subjectivities that are voided of stereotypical fabrications. By applying Turner's notion of "liminoid experiences" to painting, and in particular to the genre of portraiture, I argue that the concept of "in-betweenness" offers the possibility of creating countless new types of portraits, opening up multiplicitous subjectivities.

Munch, Bacon, Dumas

As mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, the main scope of this study is not to identify similarities and dissimilarities between the chosen artists; rather, it is to investigate the manner in which their portraits radically changed traditional concepts of portraiture as a genre. Nevertheless, there are notable parallels between the work of the artists considered in the study, which I will briefly mention here.

Marente Bloemheuvél and Jan Mot highlight commonalities between Bacon and Dumas in the exhibition catalog of the Bacon/Dumas exhibition from Castello di Rivoli (Torino) in 1995. They suggest that one important affinity between the two artists is that neither paints from life, using living models, but rather from existing imagery combined with chance and imagination. While less is known about Munch's working methods, he too used his own photographs as

59. Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology," *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies*, 60, no. 3 (1974).

sources of inspiration.⁶⁰ Although a number of Munch's subjects bear mimetic resemblance to people the artist once knew, recognizing their identity is not what is at stake in these paintings. In contrast to Bacon and Dumas, his works are not based on images from the media.

Bloemheuvél, and Mot further argue that both Bacon and Dumas differentiate themselves from traditional notions of portraiture, explaining that:

The classical portrait is the perfect expression of a typically bourgeois Western belief that art is a reflection of an objective, accessible exterior reality combined with the idea of uniqueness – uniqueness in the form of an original interpretation of reality, but also the representation of a single, specific individual. In other words, the portrait genre is based upon the notion of representation on one hand, and the belief in the unique individual on the other.⁶¹

Referencing Roland Barthes' notion of the *doxa* – discussed at length by Van Alphen in *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* – they explain that the subject can only achieve an identity via the unifying gaze of the other. This gaze, nevertheless, is a destructive one in that it objectifies the viewer and translates or transforms them into a known stereotype. Therefore, Bloemheuvél and Mot argue, "the question [of] how to pierce the stereotype in order to generate meaning runs through all [of] Dumas' works."⁶² This is, of course, broadly similar to trends in Bacon's work. Throughout his oeuvre, Bacon tried to evade mere illustration. Bloemheuvél and Mot argue that Dumas' work, like Bacon's, has at its heart the problematic notion of representing human beings. Dumas is also "conscious of the fact that representation can no longer be direct but

60. Buchhart argues that "The photos have a working character of their own, though they acted as preparatory studies or as sources of inspiration for paintings. Without assuming for this reason that there need be a pictorially ideal concord between painting and photographs, the later did indeed act as a model during the actual inspirational and creative process, and as such bear witness as indices to their photographic origin." *Edvard Munch*, 18.

61. Bloemheuvél and Mot, "The Particularity," 20.

62. Idem, 22.

takes place via 'the already-named,' the stereotypes and simulacra mass media which stand in the way of a direct view of a naked reality." Dumas fights against this, aiming "to portray people in all their complexity and never-identifiable identity."⁶³

As discussed earlier, Bacon attempts to capture his subject's presence, an emanation that constitutes a possible "essence." In his essay on how Bacon's works affect the viewer, Michel Leiris explains that trying to convey a living presence without losing the life essential to it is similar to:

[Trying] to pin down that which cannot and should not be pinned down because to do so is to kill it. So the work of art which does this can never – however 'worked over' – avoid the allure of a sketch: an allure either effervescent or plodding depending on whether the capture of the image was immediate or long drawn-out. And the artist will never treat it as a work which he could one day consider more than an essay – never as something finished, successful, 'achieved' and which, now transfixed, has gone over to the other side of life – but as an enterprise to be taken up again, not necessarily on a different basis, and of which each new start will be a new adventure.⁶⁴

Bacon, like, Dumas, often represents several studies of the same subject. His portraits are almost never titled "*Portrait of...*," but rather "*Study for a Portrait of...*." While Dumas' titles are more suggestive and poetic, she also paints several versions of the same subject. The Mary Magdalene series analyzed in Chapter Four emphasizes that there is no singular, final version of a subject; rather, each painting represents an independent variation. As Klaus Schröder suggests, "in Munch's case, 'several different tries' means numerous variations, all of which were equally important to him. A different decision could be made and thus a different solution found at any given time and depending upon his disposition."⁶⁵ The idea of sketching, of work in

progress, and eventually of seriality is therefore an important aspect in all three artists' work.

Leiris further explained that an artist's presence in a work of art can be seen in their personal stamp; that is, in the movement that was undertaken to paint the canvas and which:

Makes the thing alive, instead of being the dead thing it would be if it had been reproduced without the patent intervention of his subjectivity. And the more the artist is present (not in his search for a style but in his own particular way of 'doing' applied to a concrete theme, in his way of placing a series of brush strokes whose power will depend not only on their value as significant whole, but on the fact that they stem visibly from a hand working towards an end whose achievement can only be problematic) the more the picture will be alive: there on the canvas, where those two realities meet, the artist and the thing he wanted to represent, or, rather, peremptorily present, in a manner free from all religiousness and without the ambiguous layer of symbol.⁶⁶

Leiris, then, argues that Bacon's method of working, and the way in which paint was applied to the canvas, accounts for the artist's presence when viewing the work. Dumas shares a similar approach, visible in the materiality of her canvases: "She paints openly, movingly and hardly formalized. The way in which the paint is applied betrays a bodily action and an emotional and sensual involvement. The paint suggests representation without entirely merging with it. Paint here is ambiguous and leads its own life."⁶⁷

Ulrich Loock has argued that Dumas, through her methods, manages to bring back this lost corporeality in her works.⁶⁸ Griselda Pollock suggests that Dumas' retranslation of the subject depicted, by

63. Idem, 21-22 and Marlene Dumas, ed., *Miss Interpreted* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1992), 42.

64. Leiris, *What Francis Bacon's Paintings Say to Me*, 23.

65. Klaus Albrecht Schröder, "Edvard Munch – Theme and Variation," in *Edvard Munch*.

Theme and Variation, eds. Klaus Albrecht Schröder and Antonia Hoerschelmann (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 21.

66. Leiris, *What Francis Bacon's Paintings Say to Me*, 17.

67. Bloenhevel and Mot, "The Particularity," 23.

68. Ulrich Loock, "A Sense of Touching: Marlene Dumas," *Cura*, no. 9 (2011): 74.

means of powerful painterly gestures that are registered on the canvas, confers energy to the work which eventually translates into intimacy.⁶⁹ This intimacy, achieved through painterly motion, further strengthens the work's ability to gain presence.

The most important commonality between the work of these three artists, then, is the fact that they each offer intriguing alternatives to traditional notions of portraiture. As this study will demonstrate in detail across the following chapters, throughout the works of these artists the portrait is never a finished product that viewers are intended to passively "read." As Bloemheuvel and Mot discuss in relation to Dumas' works, "meaning remains a future event, never a fulfillment. It only occurs in relation to the contemplator, who approaches the image from the outside. The meaning changes according to the spectator and the context."⁷⁰ This study extends this argument to both Munch and Bacon, maintaining that in the oeuvres of all three artists, portraiture is never a passive recording, but rather an active, performative genre.

The interpretations and connections presented in the following pages constitute a much-needed starting point for developing a new type of portraiture, one which presents and explores the impossibility of depicting fixed identities – proposing radical, performative, and transcendental renderings of subjectivity. This study, therefore, constitutes an original and valuable contribution to the scholarship and practice of portraiture, as well as establishing the genre's importance in the oeuvres of the three artists considered here.

69. Griselda Pollock, "The Missing Wit(h)ness: Monroe, Fascinance and the Unguarded Intimacy of Being Dead," *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 16 (3) (2017): 265-296.

70. Bloemheuvel and Mot, "The Particularity," 23. Talking about meaning, Dumas explains: "Because I also use Surrealist (and other) methods, such as chance and sudden ideas beyond my control, it is never a case of: here is my intention and I translate that into an image and there is only one correct interpretation. The image is a combination of sudden flashes. I can describe various areas of meaning, but the final content comes about after the work is completed and not before, often at the expense of my first idea. The point is the impossibility of certainty, not defining a concept." Dumas, *Miss Interpreted*, 18.

Structure

Chapter One presents an overview of traditional notions of Western portraiture, and of the existing literature on the subject. The chapter will establish how the genre of portraiture was historically reliant on the objective representation of the accessible exterior of the subject, with Western belief revolving around the individuality of the sitter and the possibility of mimetically capturing his or her uniqueness. The chapter will go on to explain the consequences that the emergence of the dualist notion of subjectivity had on the genre, discussing the ways in which artists began to challenge mimetic representation and replace it with formalism, whilst nevertheless still relying on the notion of the stable, inner self. The chapter will then move on to discuss the female painted portrait, which has had a markedly different trajectory from those representing men.

Chapter Two analyzes Munch's compositions that depict human figures, which have not previously been considered as portraits. As demonstrated in his most iconic composition *The Scream* (1893), Munch's work shows a complex entanglement between the subjects depicted and their surrounding environment. Evading conventional artistic categories, these compositions undermine formal structures of both portraiture and landscape painting in order to juxtapose elements of both, creating a hybrid genre of the two. In addition to the introduction of landscape into portraiture, the hybrid portraits also make use of cinematic qualities that induce a sense of physical and emotional movement, and the materiality of the paintings, in order to prompt a sense of immediacy when interacting with the artworks. Taking paintings from the turn of the century as examples, the chapter will analyze the ways in which the canvases depart from conventional art historical genres in order to surpass passive contemplation in favor of direct engagement with the viewer.

Chapter Three will discuss Bacon's portraits, and how these hint that portraiture sacrifices the subject for the sake of representation. For this reason, for Bacon, portraiture as a genre needs to redetermine the conditions that originally shaped it. Through a close analysis of the manner in which Bacon depicts his subjects, the chapter will demonstrate that his portraits blur the boundaries between object and subject, portrait and viewer, in order to remodel conventional notions of portraiture. By drawing on Gilles Deleuze's work on Bacon, I will

reinterpret Bacon's works through the prism of Buddhism, arguing that understanding the works through Buddhist practices opens up the possibility of a complete transformation of the concepts that have traditionally shaped portrait making.

Chapter Four goes on to analyze the role of portraiture in Dumas' work, focusing on the manner in which her work transgresses conventional notions of representation in order to deconstruct and replace stereotypical depictions of female subjectivity. To do this, the chapter offers close readings of two works from the *Magdalena* (1995) series – *Magdalena (Newman's Zip)* (1995) and *Magdalena (Manet's Queen / Queen of Spades)* (1995) – arguing that these portraits transgress art historical categories of representation in order to challenge stereotypical depictions of female subjects and predefined racial identities, at the same time as dismantling the concept of the female as a passive body. Scrutinizing the iconic status of Dumas' subjects, I additionally analyze a further portrait depicting a deceased Marilyn Monroe. The second part of the chapter further refers to and discusses the anthropological concept of "liminality." By analyzing how this concept functions in relation to painting, the chapter argues that Dumas depicts iconic subjects in states of transition and "in-betweenness" in order to allow her to rewrite and reclaim the subjectivity of the characters she paints.

CHAPTER ONE

Western Notions of Portraiture

WESTERN NOTIONS OF PORTRAITURE⁷¹

The Painted Portrait

Western notions of the portrait have traditionally revolved around the creation of a likeness, ultimately aiming at generating a faithful representation of the sitter. The word portrait derives from the Latin *protrahere* – to draw forth – alluding to the quality of a person or object to be identifiable at any given time. In his treatise on painting from 1435, Leon Battista Alberti connected the need for portrayal with the notion of narcissism and the legend of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection and wished to capture it in the most precise image possible.⁷² Commemoration – for personal, social or political reasons – was thus a chief function of portraiture.

71. Parts of this chapter have previously been published in “Framing the Viewer: Edvard Munch’s Hybrid Genres,” *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*, Leiden University, Issue 7 (2019); “Unmasking the Icon. Marlene Dumas’ Liminal Portraits,” *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture*, no. 23 (2019); and “To Model or Not to Model: Transgressive Portraits of Mary Magdalene by Marlene Dumas,” *Breaking the Rules: Artistic Expressions of Transgressions*, *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*, Leiden University, Issue 5 (2017).

72. Kanz, *Portraits*, 6.

Richard Brilliant has argued that such portraits might be considered “iconic,” not in the sense that they depict objects of worship, but because they show a strong likeness between the image and its subject. He argues that “iconic portraits rely heavily on the presentation of the recognizable face and body as the primary vehicles of the portrait repertory.”⁷³ The word icon originates from the Greek *eikon*, denoting a likeness or image, and traditionally refers to representations of divinity, or of saints. While traditional Byzantine icons did not bear a naturalistic resemblance to their subjects, they were standardized images of Christ and the saints. As authenticity was a prerequisite for such images, only icons that were allegedly painted from real life were considered truly authentic. One such example is the icon of the Virgin Mary in Venice (originally from Byzantium), supposedly painted by Saint Luke, who was present at the nativity.⁷⁴ The notion of a precise likeness was further strengthened by the Veil of Veronica, considered the image of images – the *vera iconia* – an authentic image of Christ that had not been made by human hands. Legend has it that Christ left an impression on a cloth that was handed to him by Saint Veronica on his way to the Cross. The image imprinted on this was considered the true and undisputable likeness of Christ, paving the way for artists to use the image as the basis for portraits of the Savior. As a result, a transition took place from the standardized sacred icon to portraits of sacred subjects, both of which were principally based on the creation of a faithful likeness.

Whether or not a religious image was considered “iconic” was determined by the degree of recognizability, and certain representations of saints became recognizable through the repetition of specific poses and physical attributes. Should they not be recognizable, they would fail to achieve their principle function of educating and communicating with worshippers. Interestingly, the irreconcilability of the Eastern and Western Churches during the 1054 schism was partly based on

73. Richard Brilliant, “Portraits: A Recurrent Genre in World Art,” in *Likeness and Beyond: Portraits from Africa and the World* (New York: The Center for African Art New York, 1990), 15.

74. Cynthia A. Freeland, *Portraits and Persons: a Philosophical Inquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 54.

their iconographic misunderstandings, the papal legate declaring that they were unable to pray at the other’s icons as the saints depicted were unrecognizable.⁷⁵

While icons were clearly religious products, they surpassed a straightforward religious function. As Hans Belting suggests, “holy images were never the affair of religion alone, but also always of society, which expressed itself in and through religion. Religion was far too central a reality to be, as in our day, merely a personal matter or an affair of the churches.”⁷⁶ Their representation functioned equally as a cultural model, in which saints were seen to lead pious lives that believers were expected to model their own behavior on. The representation of saints was thus intended to educate worshippers in the manner desired by the church. In order to convey the chosen messages, saints were depicted in characteristic poses and instances of their lives, recognizable to all. This created an image with specific features, leading to iconic – recognizable – representations of the saint.

In the Middle Ages, it was predominantly saints who would be the subject of iconic representations – and on occasion certain worshipping donors. However, the Renaissance catalyzed a renewed interest in ‘man’ and, with it, a transition in focus from the religious icon to the human subject.⁷⁷ According to Belting, the transition began when the Veil of Veronica appeared in several works by Flemish masters living in Flanders, where the modern portrait had begun to emerge.⁷⁸ Christ’s face, isolated on a veil, was depicted in a number of works by Jan van Eyck (Fig.1) and Rogier van der Weyden. As this icon had achieved the status of authenticity in terms of its relationship to the represented character, Van Eyck created a portrait based on the resemblance. At the same time, portraits of non-divine subjects were being created according to the

75. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: a History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

76. Idem, 3.

77. While there are little records about portrait making from the Medieval period, there are a few similar notable exceptions such as the monumental mosaic figures from the sixth century depicting Emperor and Empress Justinian and Theodora in Ravenna at San Vitale.

78. H. Belting, *Faces: une histoire du visage* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 181.



Fig.1. Copy after Jan van Eyck, *Vera Icon*, 1439

same principal, where the subject would be attentively scrutinized by the artist and represented in what was taken to be their true likeness. As representations of saints and ordinary people began to go hand in hand, the distinguishing characteristic of both kinds of portrait became the gaze. At first, religious portraits maintained a distant gaze (*regard absolu*), while human subjects looked out in a manner that would directly interact with the viewer (*regard limite*). The gaze, originally an attribute of the religious icon, helped to manifest the essence of the subject, whom through the act of gazing shed its objectual character and became an extension of the real face of the person being portrayed.

Through the gaze, then, a fundamental analogy formed between the subject of the portrait and the viewer. Belting remarks that the gap between the religious icon and the human subject approached its end with Antonello da Messina's *Salvator Mundi* (1465) (Fig.2), in which Christ was represented not with a cold and distant look, but rather blessing the viewer warmly. Furthermore, Christ's features in the painting point to the fact that it was based on a real studio model. In this way, religious icons began to merge with social portraits, with both fashioned around the idea of likeness and recognizability.

While a faithful representation of the subject was strongly desired, and considered an indication of the great talent of the artist, the idealization of the sitter had begun to gain significant attention. During the Renaissance, the scope of portrayal shifted from mere faithful representation, beginning to focus instead on the glory of the portrayed. In accommodating patrons' wishes, portraiture reflected the socio-po-

litical positions and ambitions of the sitter.⁷⁹ Because of this, portraits increasingly adopted an "intensely illusionistic, closely observed facial likeness, including idiosyncrasies and imperfections, to represent elite figures."⁸⁰ Physiognomic likeness was combined with "generalizing visual devices [...] or the analysis of face and body in smooth, consistently lit geometrical shapes," depicting sitters in a universal, idealizing manner with close adherence to contemporary beauty standards.⁸¹ The postures adopted in portraits also began to resemble universal depictions of exemplary figures, so that in bringing the idealizing format together with realistic representation, a form of identity was constructed which relied on "identification with authoritative predecessors."⁸² To cement the process of emulation and appropriation of authority, a specific visual repertoire was established during the Renaissance which included costume, decoration, background, references to social roles, and even the inclusion of subal-



Fig.2. Antonello da Messina, *Salvator Mundi*, ca. 1465 - 1475

79. The social status of the person portrayed and the context which gave the portrait meaning were equally important as commemoration. According to Kanz, because of the importance of the subjects portrayed, portraiture as a genre gained a high status in the hierarchy of image genres, but also earned much criticism as the same time. *Portraits*, p. 9.

80. Woodall, "Introduction," 1.

81. Idem, 2.

82. Ibidem.

tern figures that would confirm the depicted figure's authority. In this way, identity was created through resemblance to a virtuous model, through which the subject emulated the attributes that made him authoritative. In this manner, the gap between a sitter and their powerful predecessors was narrowed, along with the perceived gap between the sitter and the portrait itself. Since the portrait had the capacity to "mirror and expand the system of personal patronage," portraiture was theorized as being unmediated realism.⁸³ As a result, the real was confused with the ideal, the representation with the represented, and in this way the portrait became a substitute for the sitter.

The Renaissance is generally considered to be the turning point in the history of portraiture; the period heralded a renewed interest in representations of the human figure. Due to social and economic changes – as well as the professionalization of European portrait painting – portraits became highly fashionable, and were in demand for novel purposes that extended beyond the representation of influential patrons. Artists such as Jan van Eyck and Hans Holbein extended their services to anyone who could afford the cost of a commission. As a result, sixteenth century portraits depicted a greater variety of sitters than had previously been the case, with tradesmen, courtiers, ecclesiasts, and even servants all given full-length portraits in detailed settings.⁸⁴ The seventeenth century not only saw a rise in commissions for portrait artists, but the works produced also had to be in keeping with the modest aesthetic of patrons' houses, transforming the portrait into a highly accessible art form. Northern Europe became a major center for portraits of the newly-formed middle class, who had enough wealth to commission outstanding artists to paint them.⁸⁵ Sitters were mostly represented in informal settings, giving great attention to ex-

pression and gesture. This tendency was continued into the eighteenth century, which – particularly in France and England – is often regarded as the apogee for the genre of portraiture. Portraiture from this period displays a great variety of work, from refined domestic conversation pieces to depictions of progressive intellectuals, and from evocations of illustrious monarchs and lords to mythological scenes, as well as masquerades with actors. By the nineteenth century, the diversity of sitters had broadened further still, to include portraits of members of the working class.

Portraits were significantly influenced by the desires of the patron, and it became evident that this did not enrich the art of portraiture as a whole. As a result, the significant contribution of the painter became increasingly clear, as they were assigned the task of transforming the humble portrait into a piece of high art.⁸⁶ As Brilliant explains, "the portrait artist's task [was] to make the invisible, yet essential elements of character visible, and so bring together into a single image its corporeal and incorporeal substances."⁸⁷ The portrait thus became more than a passive rendering of the sitter; it was seen as vital for the painter to make visible the sitter's intangible and elusive characteristic qualities. According to the standard view of the time, a successful portrait confronted the viewer not only with the original subjectivity of the person being portrayed, but also that of the painter; thus, the viewer would encounter a harmonious meeting of two subjectivities.⁸⁸ Ernst Van Alphen explains that the "uniqueness" of the resulting portrait did not "belong to the portrayed subject or the portrait or portrayer, but to the mode of representation which makes us believe that signifier and signified form a unity."⁸⁹ The sitter's subjectivity was defined by their individuality and uniqueness, and the portrait was understood to provide a faithful, unique, and ultimately "true" representation of the subject.

83. Idem, 3.

84. West, *Portraiture*, 16.

85. As mentioned in the introduction, when discussing Rembrandt's portraits, Maleuvre argues that together with urban mercantilism came social mobility and consequently a more fluid and change-prone experience of personal identity. While aristocratic identity was an accomplished matter, social identity for the bourgeoisie was a work in progress. This needed to be reaffirmed for social validation purposes through visual evidence such as portraits.

86. Kanz, *Portraits*, 9.

87. Brilliant, "Portraits," 15.

88. Van Alphen, "The Portrait's Dispersal," 239.

89. Idem, 241.

Van Alphen goes on to explain that in traditional portraiture, there was an illusion of unity between the sitter's outer form (their posture, facial expression and so on) and their inner essence – a phenomenon that was thought to bestow further authority and exceptionalism on the genre. This illusionary unity dictated the construction of the traditional portrait, which relied on a mimetic mode of representation to demonstrate its authenticity.⁹⁰ As Woodall argues, “physiognomic interpretation was predicated upon a ‘symptomatic’ relationship between external appearance and an invisible, internal self which was the ultimate subject of interest.” As a result, the main goal of portraiture was to achieve mimetic resemblance, realized through the faithful depiction of physiognomic features that were understood to account for the sitter's inner essence.⁹¹

Given that Western notions of portraiture revolved not only around the subject's appearance, but also around their identity, it comes as no surprise that as conceptions of identity and subjectivity developed and shifted, the forms taken by portraits also began to change. The belief that the representation (the portrait) was a manifestation of the represented (the subject) was first challenged in the seventeenth century, when the concept of dualism arose. Proponents of dualism argued for a clear distinction between inner subjectivity and the material body, separating the two into distinct categories. As Woodall contextualizes:

Historically, this separation between the body and identity corresponds with the consolidation of the Protestant Reformation, which asserted a space between sign and prototype. [...] The definitive formulation of dualism in its oppositional sense is credited to the French philosopher René Descartes (1596 -1650), for whom personal identity was located in a concept of the mind or thinking self. As pure, divine intellect, the mind was quite separate from the machine-like, material body. Others would define identity in terms of the soul, virtue, genius, character, personality, subjectivity. The

90. Idem, 242.

91. Woodall, “Introduction,” 7.

crucial point about dualism was the stress on the distinction between identity and the material body.⁹²

In this way, dualism challenged the idea of likeness being inseparably linked to one's inner identity, asserting a separation between the inner self and the physical body.

From the nineteenth century onwards, the notion of an objectively portrayed body became less and less appropriate as a means of visualizing the self. The notion of achieving a true likeness was no longer seen as valid, and portrait making came to be understood as referential rather than representational. As a result, more attention was given to form than content. “In the work of Impressionists,” Woodall expands, “visible and varied brushstroke became part of a visual mode which subverted the distinction between sight and insight, object and subject.”⁹³ Works such as Manet's *Bar at the Folies Bergères* (1881-2) even questioned the presumed identification between individualized physiognomy and personal interiority, throwing into doubt the foundational assumption that “resemblance to a living or once-living model is necessary or appropriate to the representation of identity.”⁹⁴

Van Alphen illustrates this shift with examples from Picasso's cubist works that do not represent the subject mimetically, but rather through different signs that work together to create meaning; “This new mode of representation is based on an economy in which no signifier forms a fixed unity with the signified.”⁹⁵ This meant that there was no longer a clearly defined manner in which to represent a sitter – identity could be constructed through interchangeable signs that brought forth a certain subjectivity when rendered together. The avant-garde American artist Katherine Dreier stated that mimetic representation was an imperfect way of conveying the essence of a person, with evocation constituting a better means of conveying the sitter's qualities.⁹⁶ Yet, as West argues,

92. Idem, 10.

93. Idem, 6.

94. Idem, 7.

95. Van Alphen, “The Portrait's Dispersal,” 242.

96. West, *Portraiture*, 202.

“the descriptive and referential qualities of twentieth-century portraiture subsume even the most radical stylistic departures within portraiture’s traditional revelatory, celebratory, and mimetic traditions.”⁹⁷ Whilst avant-garde portraiture had challenged the traditional notion of mimetic representation within the genre, it still relied heavily on the idea that the subjectivity of the sitter could somehow be brought forth through the act of painting.

This avant-garde, referential, non-mimetic approach to portraiture fell out of favor in the period immediately following the First World War, as attention shifted towards new social and political realities. Whilst still adhering to the creation of likenesses, portraits by George Grosz and other painters in the “New Objectivity” movement in Germany, and by Regionalist painters such as Grant Wood in the USA, altered traditional representational forms, emphasizing and exaggerating physical imperfections.

After the Second World War, however, new shifts in understanding regarding identity had a significant impact on the genre of portraiture. Kathleen Merrill Campagnolo recounts that in the United States, the generation of artists working after the Abstract Expressionists were in search of a more cerebral engagement with art, rather than one guided by subjectivity and inner emotions.⁹⁸ She states: “Portraits from the 1960s tend to veer away from attempts to express an interior, emotive self in favor of exploring the idea of identity as a construct.”⁹⁹

Attempting to demonstrate that identity is not an inherent, fixed state, but rather a constructed projection, Andy Warhol created numerous portrait series depicting cultural icons such as Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley. He flattened and simplified his representations of the figures in order to create generic yet recognizable structures, exposing the pre-fabricated nature of such imagery and

97. Idem, 196.

98. Kathleen Merrill Campagnolo, “In the Company of Cultural Provocateurs. Radical Portraiture in the 1960s”, in *This is a Portrait If I Say So*, eds. Anne Collins Goodyear, Jonathan Frederick Walz, and Kathleen Merrill Campagnolo (Brunswick, New Haven and London: Bowdoin College Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2016), 61-62.

99. Ibidem.

its ultimate emptiness. Melissa Feldman has argued that, “Warhol’s multiplication of an image reflects the mediated life of his subjects to feed and promulgate the public’s obsession with them.”¹⁰⁰ Now that the notion of the self had been liberated from absolute structures – and replaced with a mutable, socially and politically constructed identity – the portrait was no longer contingent on mimesis or evocation, but rather open to perpetually new types of representation and interpretation.

The emerging notion that identity might be unstable gave birth to the idea that portraiture could perhaps also be defined in any manner. In 1961, Robert Rauschenberg created the radical work *This is a Portrait of Iris Clert if I Say So* (1961), a telegram that simply presented its titular sentence on an otherwise blank piece of paper. This blew wide open the possibilities of the genre of portraiture. As Benjamin Buchloh writes:

Barring even the last trace of found-photographic representation from his definition of the portrait, Rauschenberg now fully shifts the representation of subjectivity into the register of the performative declaration, reenacting and reradicalizing, of course, the Duchampian principle operative in the readymade. Yet, in the process of doing so, he not only articulates one of the first instances of postwar conceptual art, he also asserts subjectivity as a concept of instantiation and iteration, as a continuous process rather than a status, as a performative rather than a representable object condition.¹⁰¹

Rather than the creation of a faithful likeness of the sitter, portraiture had become contingent instead on the artist’s intention and the viewer’s perception, thus becoming a performative action. Individual selfhood was now understood as being constructed, multiple and mutable and, as such, there was no longer a specific manner in which

100. Melissa E. Feldman, *Face-Off: The Portrait in Recent Art* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 17.

101. Buchloh, “Residual Resemblance,” 59.

identity ought to be represented. The portrait could take any form the artist desired.

The Photographic Portrait

The notion of identity as a social construct was also closely tied to discourses surrounding the photographic portrait.¹⁰² In 1888, Alphonse Bertillon invented the modern “mug shot,” featuring both full-face and profile views of the subject, with standardized lighting and shooting angles. This very specific style of photograph rapidly cemented itself as the official medium for determining an individual’s identity through the seemingly objective representation of their face. Closely linked to the state and to official manifestations of power, this mode of photography imposed an institutionalized form of objectivity, as a result of dissent against which photography and the creation of photographic likenesses became the locus of critique and deconstruction.

Cindy Sherman addressed the stereotypical presentation of female identity in photography in her black and white *Untitled Film Stills* series, that showcased female characters (always represented by Sherman herself) in different roles from 1950s Hollywood movies. While the works are highly reminiscent of existing scenes, they are in fact artificially constructed in order to evoke a feeling of familiarity in the viewer. They are, as Rosalind Krauss has put it, “copies without an original,” through which Sherman unmask the illusory quality of identity. Jean Baudrillard examined this notion in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) in which he describes “simulacra” as copies that either have no original, or for which the original no longer exists, and “simulation” as the process by which the imitation of real life occurs. Baudrillard claimed that contemporary society had replaced reality with symbols, suggesting that simulacra are not simply mediations or reflections of reality, but have come to replace it entirely. The simulacrum is not that which conceals the truth, then, but rather that which conceals that there is none. In this sense, the simulacrum becomes the only truth available to us.

102. This is not an exhaustive overview of the subject in photography but rather a brief outline of a contemporary treatment of photographic portraits in certain artists work.

Kaja Silverman starts her analysis of Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills* by building on Arthur Danto’s reading of the works. Danto proposes that Sherman’s images “reverse our usual way of thinking about the photograph, which assumes that the photograph references the real world [when in fact] Sherman’s images posit the world as somehow referential of the photograph.”¹⁰³ Reality, then, is constructed through the photographs, and not vice versa. Danto also implies that these profilmic stills necessitate both the camera and the viewer’s gaze, becoming a “would-be” photograph due to the poses adopted. It is from these poses that Silverman’s analysis of Sherman’s work begins. Silverman argues that the *Untitled Film Stills* show women posing in a manner that calls to mind supposed ideals of femininity. That the women are posing in self-idealizing ways, she argues, implies the existence of a camera – but one which does not always show the subject in the way she wishes to be seen. In offering a close reading of a selection of the works, Silverman suggests that posing in a self-idealizing manner ultimately fails, as these women are not represented in as flattering a way as they might be. She argues that Sherman presents herself in this way on purpose, in order to encourage the viewer to identify with the women they see, just as Sherman herself did when enacting the characters. According to Silverman, this identification between viewer and subject is only possible because the characters are depicted falling short in their attempts to emulate the idealized images. In this way, the experience of viewing the works “involves acknowledging through identification with Sherman’s women the abyss that separates us and always will separate us from ideality.”¹⁰⁴ Given that the ideal can only ever be approximated, rather than falling into binary notions of “sufficiency/insufficiency” or “ideal/failure,” the *Untitled Film Stills* series proposes something that is simply “good enough.”¹⁰⁵ This, then, illustrates the ways in which photography, as a medium, falls short of capturing a reality that is itself as unstable and mutable as identity. In Sherman’s work, photographs do

103. Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1996), 207.

104. Idem, 225.

105. Ibidem.

not reference reality, but construct it according to a predefined set of expectations. The photographic portrait is thus exposed by Sherman as being unable to express an existing, unique subjectivity.

Collins Goodyear illustrates the inherently biased nature, and ultimate emptiness, of photographic representation through reference to the work of Glenn Ligon. Analyzing Ligon's *Self-Portrait Exaggerating My Black Features / Self-Portrait Exaggerating My White Features* (1998), Collins Goodyear shows the manner and extent to which identity is understood based on how images are framed by language. The work shows two images of the artist, standing in the same posture and wearing the same outfit. Under one photograph is the caption "Self-Portrait Exaggerating My Black Features," and under the other a caption reading "Self-Portrait Exaggerating My White Features."¹⁰⁶ The work shows the ways in which the identity of a person is framed according to circumstance, and the arbitrariness of social and political understandings of race. Ligon's work is a response to "the cultural norms that contribute to a social construction of the self [in which] cultural translation, like any other translation, is always involved with loss, the untranslatable, excess meanings, [and] the indecipherable."¹⁰⁷ Transparency, even in photography, is not possible; the self is always defined in response to existing social and political norms.

Given all this, it was no longer possible for the genre of portraiture to maintain the semblance of a stable form; like identity, it is in a continuous state of flux. From the erosion of the single, coherent identity, Krauss argues, a decentered, multiple personality emerges.¹⁰⁸ Within the genre of portraiture, traditional, singular depictions of the subject shall be replaced by multiplicitous works with myriad interpretations. Figured in this way, portraits are not clearly-defined, immutable systems, but amalgams of relational structures and interactions between subjects and subjectivities.

106. Collins Goodyear, "Birth of the Subject," 95-96.

107. Idem, 99.

108. Rosalind Krauss, "Who Comes After the Subject" in *The Life & Work: Art and Biography*, ed. Charles G. Salas (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 32.

The Painted Portrait in the Twentieth-Century: Edvard Munch and Francis Bacon

The emergence and proliferation of new media in artistic production during the twentieth century limited the production of painted portraits. Nevertheless, painted portraits have continued to be produced throughout the last century, up to the present day. This study analyzes the significance of painted portraiture in the work of Munch, Bacon, and Dumas, and emphasizes how their practices have shaped and re-written contemporary understandings of the genre of painted portraiture.

As Weiss recounts, from the early modern period to the twentieth century, the genre of portraiture has oscillated between concepts "that emphasize the presence of the person, the search for the sitter's 'authenticity' [...] and, on the other hand, concepts of portraiture that privilege the disappearance, slipping away, revocation and obliteration of the face, which testify, as it were, to its emptiness, absence, and loss."¹⁰⁹ In her study of portraiture, she investigates the "portrait before the portrait" – the birth of the autonomous portrait, as it has come to be known today, from the early modern period – and the "portrait after the portrait" – a notion she defines with reference to Max Imdahl's *Relationen zwischen Portrat und Individuum* (1988). Building on Imdahl's writing, Weiss proposes an alternative reading of portraiture as something that occurs between the search for uniqueness and the loss of individuality. Taking portraits by Alberto Giacometti as case studies, Imdahl reads the works not by trying to recognize that which is already known, but rather by trying to synthesize the unknown into a visually constructed presence. Giacometti's "dissimilar portraits" aim to render without imitating nature, and to evoke through the imagination of the viewer. Weiss explains that Imdahl "uses the non-mimetic portrait that follows its own rules to oppose the equating of image and person, by which they become one observable fact, something that is attended by the danger of the image being confused with the person portrayed."¹¹⁰ In Giacometti's elongated figures, the presence of the sitter is solely constructed through the viewer's

109. Weiss, "Before and After," 135.

110. Idem, 141.

imagination. There is no inherent presence in the work itself, even if it vaguely resembles an existing person. “We can be certain that the man did not look like this,” Indahl notes, adding that, as possible responses to the works, “confusing the image with the person or else the depiction with the image of the person can be excluded.”¹¹¹ Weiss builds on this to argue that, in Giacometti’s work, the presence of the sitter is achieved through the inseparable working together of the seen and imagined. She argues that an understanding of the non-depictability of the human being is a cornerstone of modern portraiture:

Human individuality can only be pictured in a non-depicting portrait whose indeterminate nature stimulates the individual imagination of the viewer. In other words, while the classic portrait aims at the distinctiveness of the individual, the modern portrait posits that its visual representation cannot be mistaken for the individual and opposes any identification with a perceived substantial self.¹¹²

In parallel with this reading of Alberto Giacometti’s modernist portraits, this study proposes a similar reading of Munch’s paintings from the turn of the century, around fifty years before the emergence of Giacometti’s stick figures. While still creating physical likenesses of their subjects, Munch’s portraits evade attempts to represent the sitter’s unique identity. Whilst Giacometti’s subjects are either isolated or placed in neutral backgrounds, Munch’s figures are part of complex compositions, where landscape, subject and other pictorial devices work together to directly engage the viewer.

Across Munch’s career, there were two predominant forward-thinking tendencies in the genre of portraiture. The first was an increased interest in using the human face and body for its formal aspects, rather than as a container of deeper inner meaning. Besides the works of the Impressionists, this was also present in the oeuvre of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, known for his aversion to sentimentality in painting. Finding a parallel between art and music, Whistler’s compositions with

human subjects were entitled “arrangements” or “harmonies,” emphasizing the primacy and importance of tonal qualities over the “subjectivity” of the sitters. His most famous composition, entitled *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1* (1871), depicted the figure of his mother as an auxiliary compositional element that helped him to achieve the desired formal structure for the painting. While still referencing traditional mimetic representation, Whistler diminished the relevance of the sitter to the point that his portraits almost resembled still lifes. Grasping the fact that the appearance of the sitter was not linked to their inner essence, his portraits were devoid of the liveliness that could be expressed by living beings.

The Munch works that this study will analyze in the coming chapter are also compositions that represent human subjects in a mimetic manner. In a similar fashion to Whistler, Munch’s works do not depict the inner subjectivity of the characters presented. Yet, whilst they remain unnamed, these figures’ humanity is not objectified or annulled, rather it escapes any form of pre-defined identity that inheres within mimetic portraits.

The second tendency within avant-garde portraiture at the turn of the century was the loss of faith in the notion of a unity between the sitter’s external appearance and their inner essence, as had been evident in referential, realist portraiture. Both of these tendencies, however, still led to works which relied on conveying some form of subjectivity, even if that just meant recognizing the identity of the sitter, as in Whistler’s work. Yet whilst Munch depicts his characters in a way that is reminiscent of likenesses, he does so with minimal attention to their personal traits, achieving nothing more than the illusion of a person who might once have existed. There is no emphasis on individuality within the works, and no sense of unity between outer appearance and inner essence. Since the works do not bear a strong physiognomic likeness to real human figures – nor do they feature referential characters, created through the inclusion of signs that allude to the identity of a specific sitter – they neither represent nor evoke a predetermined subjectivity. Rather, through the careful use of compositional devices that will be discussed in the following chapter, Munch stages a direct interaction between the depicted figure and the viewer; in this way, the subjectivity, identity, and presence of the figure is continuously constructed anew when each viewer interacts with the

111. Max Imdahl quoted by Weiss, “Before and After,” 141.

112. Weiss, “Before and After,” 141.

work. Munch's portraits bring a performative aspect to the genre, further underlining the notion that identity is mutable, in continuous flow, and continuously reconstructed. The possibility of multiple identities is also present in Munch's self-portraits. Throughout his career, he depicted himself in a variety of ways, none of which seems specific enough to have created a consistent image of him as a person. Just as in his portraits of others, subjectivity in Munch's self-portraits is re-created with each new depiction of the subject.

Munch makes use of innovative compositional devices to render his subjects in an unconventional manner, with the viewer being propelled into a direct interaction with the composition. Despite this, there remains a clearly determined relationship between viewer and portrait, in which the two remain entirely separate entities. The performative aspect found in Munch's works is taken a step further by Bacon's portraits. These paintings evade conventional mimetic representation and, through the manner of their execution, blur the boundaries between object and subject, portrait and viewer, in order to open up in the genre of portraiture the possibility of self-transcendence. In Bacon's works, the figures are not presented in a moment that speaks of their individuality, nor are they captured in a moment of complete absence of individuality either, but rather in a state of transition. Neither subject nor object, Bacon's portraits enter a state of in-betweenness in which the possibility is opened up of the viewer experiencing a moment of complete identification with the portrait, through which predetermined parameters can be re-defined. The moment the viewer identifies with the portrait, the manner in which a portrait is understood is re-determined. In this moment, the painting does not fall back on the concept of a clear distinction between portrait and viewer, rather it becomes one with its viewer. In this way, Bacon's work opens up new possibilities for the genre of portraiture, in which the painting does not represent, evoke or engage, but rather becomes the locus of transcendence.

The Female Painted Portrait: Marlene Dumas

As outlined above, the genre of portraiture is closely connected to the construction of identity. Until relatively recently, however, female portraiture has been more closely connected to a lack of identity. Historically, female subjectivity has been regarded as decidedly inferior to that of men. Woodall explains that, during the Renaissance:

The psychology of gender was explained in terms of the proportion of the four elements in the body. Men were spiritual, passionate, intellectual and active because they were made up primarily of air and fire. Women, on the other hand, were liable to animality, material concerns and lethargy because they were constituted mostly of earth and water.¹¹³

Throughout the centuries, this resulted in different standards of representation for men and women.

During the Renaissance, the majority of male portraits were dynamic, chest-length, three quarter images, while female portraits were static and predominantly completed in profile. Female portraits were mostly created to celebrate weddings or engagements, and were executed according to strict codes of female conduct.¹¹⁴ A revealing example can be seen in Davide Ghirlandaio's double portrait of a married couple, *Portrait of a Man and Woman* (ca. 1490). The husband is depicted, turned three-quarters towards the viewer, with the world behind him, while the wife is depicted in profile, in front of a domestic backdrop. Frank Zollner explains the gendered hierarchy of such portraits by distinguishing between the right-side profile – considered to be the masculine, and therefore more valuable angle – and the left-side profile – which was less respected, and therefore reserved for women. These organizing principles, in which the feminine is constructed as being inferior to the masculine, have been integrated into representational forms since antiquity, and prevailed well into the following centuries.¹¹⁵

Zollner argues that an early transgression in female portraiture can be found in Leonardo's *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* (ca. 1479/1480), in which the female sitter is turned with her right side three-quarters towards the viewer. Leonardo chose to depict Ginevra in this manner because she was not posing in the domestic role of a bride or wife,

113. Woodall, "Introduction," p. 10.

114. Frank Zollner, "From the Face to the Aura: Leonardo da Vinci's Sfumato and the History of Female Portraiture", in *Inventing Faces. Rhetorics of Portraiture Between Renaissance and Modernism*, eds. Mona Körte et al. (Berlin and Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2013), 69.

115. Idem, 70.

but rather as a poetess, of equal rank with her male counterparts. It is interesting to note that while the portrait is not only concerned with capturing the subject's likeness, her beauty is strongly emphasized, and is closely tied to her virtue. *VIRTUTEM FORMA DECORAT* – noted on the back of canvas – directly connects Ginevra's beauty to an expression of her virtue.¹¹⁶ This was a clear indication that a woman's supposed physical beauty directly reflected her inner beauty – also known as virtue – making physical attractiveness the most desirable quality a woman could possess. Because, during the period of the Renaissance, the notion of identity was intimately connected to appearance and status, painted representations of women became highly flattering, idealizing the sitter.

Raphael described the process by which he arrived at the conception of a beautiful woman: "In order to paint a beautiful woman I would have to see several beautiful women... But since there are so few... I make use of a certain idea which comes into my mind. Whether it carries any excellence of art I do not know, but I work hard to achieve it."¹¹⁷ Raphael did not see real faces as beautiful enough; his painting aimed at going beyond the natural towards an ideal essence of beauty. Many Renaissance artists took as inspiration sources from Greek and Roman art, which they believed to embody canonic and timeless ideals.¹¹⁸ Supporting Raphael's approach, Giorgio Vasari argued that "he who has not drawn much nor studied the choicest ancient and modern works cannot [...] improve the things that he studies from life, giving them the grace and perfection in which art goes beyond the scope of nature."¹¹⁹ For Vasari, improvement was to be achieved through the study of principles and proportions from antiquity, rather than through mechanical reproduction of what could be seen in the real world. Reproduction was understood as the work of craftsmen, whereas the "true genius" on which art depended came from the creators. Alexander Sturgis describes how these canonic ideals, upheld by the Academy of Arts, prevailed for several centuries in Western art,

116. Idem, 69.

117. Raphael quoted in Alexander Sturgis, *Take a Closer Look. Faces* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 16.

118. Sturgis, *Take a Closer Look*, 16.

119. Vasari quoted in Sturgis, *Take a Closer Look*, 17.

and embraced not only the art of the ancient world, but eventually the work of Renaissance masters as well. Raphael's vision of female beauty became a canonical reference itself, and its influence can be seen in later works, such as in Guido Reni's depictions of the Virgin, as well as – much later – in the works of the Impressionists. While Renoir was not trained at the French Academy and was considered, alongside the Impressionists, to be rebelling against academic standards, his female subjects from works such as *The Umbrella* (1881-6) share certain ideal beauty standards with Raphael's Madonnas, which he had seen during a trip to Italy.¹²⁰

Whilst the notion of dualism had already arisen in the seventeenth century, throwing into question the unity of mind and physical body, this discussion revolved exclusively around masculinity. By the eighteenth century, female subjectivity was described as a negative and inconsistent suite of opposites. As Woodall explains:

Treatises on human character articulated a conception of femininity which was, although absolute, the very opposite of the developing dualist ideal. It was the *lack* or *absence* of the personal uniqueness, constancy and interiority which constituted true virtue. Feminine virtue was ultimately a contradiction in terms, a fragile alliance always liable to fall apart and release its erotic, self-engulfing opposite.¹²¹

As Kathleen Nicholson remarks in her essay on eighteenth century allegorical female portraiture, given the context of the Enlightenment's emphasis on naturalness and the valuation of the self, this posed a paradox of representation.¹²² Nicholson explains that during this period in France, the "genre's mainline development was marked by an increasingly acute depiction of physiognomy, gesture and ambiance that calls

120. Idem, 20.

121. Woodall, "Introduction," 11.

122. Kathleen Nicholson, "The Ideology of Feminine 'Virtue': the Vestal Virgin in French Eighteenth-Century Allegorical Portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 52.

attention to one's uniqueness and personal identity."¹²³ Nevertheless, eighteenth century allegorical depictions of women show the sitters devoid of personality or distinguishing traits, with exotic backdrops that encourage a frivolous reading of the subject.¹²⁴ Contemporary theories agreed that the objective of portraiture was the achievement of faithful representation; however, women were part of a different category – their character was considered inferior to that of men, and therefore not worthy of honest depictions. Woodall recounts: "Questions of likeness and authenticity, which became so crucial to portraiture's continued capacity to re-present an immutable, immortal self, lost their urgency and significance when applied to figures whose femininity denied them the true, fully realized humanity claimed by the dualist subject."¹²⁵ Women were seen as superficial, solely interested in appearances, lacking men's inner substance. In terms of representation, academic theory was also applied differently to female portraits. When representing femininity, "*colore* was liable to be considered more appropriate than *disegno*, idealization preferred to objectivity, flattery to resemblance, myth to reality, frivolousness to exemplarity."¹²⁶ Unsurprisingly, *disegno* – with its characteristics of stability and steadiness – was considered superior to *colore* – which represented the fleeting and deceptive.

Explaining Roger de Piles' theory of women's lack of individuality, Nicholson discusses the importance of skin color in eighteenth century portraiture. As inner character was expressed through physiognomic features of the face, the sitter's skin tone was of crucial importance in depictions, as this varied from person to person, making each subject unique. Women, however, were depicted in a highly fashionable and idealized manner, with their skin covered by a mask of white makeup, often rendering their faces indistinguishable from one another. This type of representation re-affirmed and strengthened the theory that women lacked an essential uniqueness, reducing female subjectivity solely to superficiality.

123. Ibidem.

124. Ibidem.

125. Woodall, "Introduction," 11.

126. Ibidem.

Despite all this, Nicholson presents an interesting argument concerning the commissioning of allegorical portraits by women themselves. She argues that such works "opened up a space in which women might question the notion of the limitations of which they are accused," going on to suggest that, in this way, "the sitter could reconfigure selfhood or identity as a process of continual invention, open to amendment."¹²⁷ Certainly, the fact that women in high positions such as Madame de Pompadour commissioned such portraits indicates at least a degree of complicity on

their part. Arguably, the fact that she commissioned portraits of herself adopting a variety of different personas indicates a desire to escape the notion of a singular role or identity. This could be read as being amongst the first examples of women using the genre of portraiture as a means of escaping predefined roles, and acknowledging the malleable and unstable construction of identity. Nicholson's article ends with a brief comparison between Madame de Pompadour's commissioned portraits and the art of Cindy Sherman. Indeed, Sherman even depicted herself as Madame de Pompadour (*Untitled #193*, 1989) (Fig.3), making her panoply of identities a useful starting point in deconstructing derogative assumptions regarding the nature and expected societal roles of women.

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.

Fig.3. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #193*, 1989

127. Nicholson, "The Ideology," 57.

By the end of the nineteenth century, notions of female identity had scarcely developed, and women were considered to be controlled by their instincts, emotions, and biology, situating them closer to the realm of nature, caprice and unpredictability.¹²⁸ As a result, a certain degree of “complicity” was still required on the part of women who were trying to fight gender stereotyping through the portrayal of female subjects. In light of this, it is interesting to take a closer look at Suzanne Valadon’s work, which, whilst adhering to contemporary modes of painting, succeeded in transgressing conventional methods of representing female subjects. In their articles discussing the work of Valadon, both Patricia Matthews and Rosemary Betterton argue that due to her unique background, she was able to move between her roles as an artist’s model and a painter, creating works that suggest that she is both an insider and an outsider at the same time. As Matthews suggests:

We collaborate in the creation of our own position, developed according to the models available to us and the potential resistances within and between those models. No better example of this could be given than objectified images of the female nude painted by a woman. We have already seen the many alternatives offered in Valadon’s works [...] She stands both inside the conventions of representation and outside of them as well.¹²⁹

Matthews’ article offers a close reading of several nudes by Valadon, remarking that it was exceptional for a self-taught female artist to choose to spend so much time working in a male-dominated genre. Marcia Pointon notes that the nude cannot rightfully be labelled as a “genre,” as amongst scholars it has not been fully accepted into the genre system.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, since the sixteenth century there have been specific conventions for representing the female body as a passive, seductive and

highly idealized presence, transforming the nude into a well-established painterly subject. Matthews argues that from the Renaissance to the present day, there have been few changes in the ways in which men typically represent the female (nude) body:

Based on the conventions of this genre, paintings of the nude fairly consistently (with some exceptions) have fashioned the female body according to male desires and fantasies, without regard for women’s experiences of their own bodies [...] During the early twentieth century, when Valadon painted many of her nudes, an extremely aggressive and hostile manifestation of this genre was prevalent.¹³¹

Valadon’s works do not defy traditional painterly conventions as much as the work of many of her male counterparts, such as Modigliani, but the mere fact that – as a woman – she chose to paint the female body already transgresses the conventions of the time. Matthews argues that “there is no parallel tradition and there are very few precedents in which women used the female body to express their own desires and needs.”¹³² When considering Valadon’s unique position, a parallel emerges between her and two other female painters of the time, Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt. Both of these female artists belonged to the upper-middle class, as a result of which their works were constrained into certain conventional class definitions of gender. For Valadon, who in this sense was an outsider, there were fewer limitations regarding what she could paint, but also fewer consequences as to how this would be perceived.

Whilst Valadon’s unusual choice of subject matter, and the manner in which she depicted it, might have been a consequence of her unique background, it nevertheless disrupted the genre’s aesthetics of idealized female beauty. Her choice to depict women in unflattering poses, and with large, unidealized features, broke with contemporary beauty standards. In offering a close reading of a selection of these

128. Patricia Matthews, “Returning the Gaze: Diverse Representations of the Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (September 1991): 422.

129. *Idem*, 427.

130. Marcia Pointon, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12.

131. Matthews, “Returning the Gaze,” 417.

132. *Idem*, 418.

works, Matthews points out that whilst the subjects are naked, they are in fact active, engaged in various activities. They do not confront the onlooker, but neither are they bothered by their gaze. Through their active bodies, they display a variety of non-stereotypical emotions and attitudes, escaping the status of decoration that women were given by the bourgeois value system. Matthews goes on:

Throughout the nineteenth century in France, working-class women were fairly consistently represented by the middle and upper classes as sexualized and sexually available. A number of social historians note the way in which understandings of sexuality are linked to class from the sixteenth century on and especially in the nineteenth century. In representations of the nude, lower-class women were most often represented as ciphers of sexuality. This was exacerbated in images of women of color.¹³³



Fig.4. Suzanne Valadon, *La Chambre bleue*, 1923.

In works such as *La Chambre bleue* (1923) (Fig.4), Valadon not only transgresses conventional representations of working-class women, but also attributes intellectual roles to her subjects. Depicted in the familiar, reclining position we normally associate with the nude, the woman in *La Chambre bleue* is in fact fully dressed, nonchalantly smoking a cigarette. By depicting a “clothed nude” with highly individualized traits, the work turns contemporary conventions of portraiture inside-out. The viewer is welcome to gaze at her, but there is no sexual tension in the interaction. She is turned away from the onlooker, but this appears to be a sign of dismissal rather than shyness. Matthews distinguishes this representation from Manet’s transgressive nude, *Olympia*. While specific class clues seen in her clothing and hairstyle allude to the fact that this woman may be a prostitute, other elements, such as the books on her bed, suggest that she is engaged in intellectual activity. In this way she represents a new type of woman, resisting codified notions of femininity and heralding in a new era of female intellectuals, such as Gertrude Stein.¹³⁴

Valadon’s works, then, both participate in and contradict traditional notions of female subjectivity. By representing women as both subjects and objects, “she vacillates in her attitude toward the body and the subject as her various concerns interrupt the culturally dominant, given norms of such representations.”¹³⁵ It is in this interruption that Matthews sees Valadon’s potential for creating a revolutionary form of female imagery, yet still missing a decisive alternative to female objectification.

Valadon does not seem to propose an alternative to the conventional objectification of the female nude. The bodies of women in her images are not overwhelmed by the dominating forces or decorative impulses so common in male versions of the genre at the time, but they offer no empowering object of identification for women either. The works appear to be concerned generally with the realism of modern life, not in Courbet’s overtly political sense, but in the day-to-day realism of Degas, the realism of artists’ models making

134. Idem, 425.

135. Ibidem.

a living in a modern world devoid of idealism. The women in these images consciously inhabit their bodies, but they do not take obvious pleasure in them. Nevertheless, her images are radical in their very lack of a controlling gaze, a lack that shifts them out of traditional categories of the female nude.¹³⁶

In order to achieve new modes of representing femininity, it is necessary for women to resist bending to the desires of the male gaze. Through her critical approach to representation almost a century later, Dumas' images of women not only escape and confront the gaze of the onlooker, but propose an alternative means of understanding female subjectivity. Chapter Four of this study will provide a close reading of several representations of female subjects in Dumas' work, specifically focusing on her series entitled *Magdalena* (1995). Whilst referencing the biblical figure of Mary Magdalene, the series avoids explicit allusion to her historically shaped persona. These works can be regarded as portraits (their focus lies on depicting a specific subject), but can also be categorized as nudes. However, they transgress traditional understandings of both genres, deconstructing existing notions of Western portraiture and evading stereotypical depictions of female subjects, dismantling in the process the concept of the anonymous, passive female body.

A sinner converted into a saint, Mary Magdalene poses a paradox for those attempting to represent her. Conventionally portrayed as a beautiful and sensual woman with light skin and fair hair, she is mostly shown in a state of repentance, shying away from the viewer's gaze. Nonetheless, the penitent Magdalene is depicted with a highly sexualized aura. Dumas' works, on the other hand, do not possess any of these features. In fact, without the works' titles – *Magdalena* (*Newman's Zip*) (1995) (Fig.36) and *Magdalena* (*Manet's Queen / Queen of Spades*) (1995) (Fig.35) – one would be unable to recognize the subjects. Dumas alters Magdalene's appearance to expose her pre-defined, culturally created image. The most striking aspect of her figures is their lack of sexuality, especially as they are represented in the nude. Dumas removes the sexualized aura of the saint as a way to lay bare

the predefined, social constructions of her body. In a similar fashion to Valadon, Dumas interrupts the conventional reading of the nude. While Valadon's works contravene norms of idealized beauty, Dumas' canvases go a step further, transgressing female representations through painterly methods more broadly. *Newman's Zip* is a direct reference to Barnett Newman's zip paintings, which represent large monochromatic canvases interrupted by a vertical band of color, named "zip." Magdalene's hair in this composition is represented by two large zips that traverse almost the entire canvas from top to bottom, interrupting and abstracting not only the subject's sexuality, but also the painted surface. By deconstructing and transforming the stereotypical image of Magdalene, Dumas creates a new image of female subjectivity, one which further questions cultural representations of the female body.

Additionally, Chapter Four will examine an unrecognizable portrait of Marilyn Monroe. The chapter will draw on the anthropological concept of "liminality" in Dumas' work, arguing that she depicts iconic subjects in a state of transition and "in-betweenness" in order to rewrite and reclaim the subjectivity of the depicted characters. Ultimately, the multitudinous means through which Dumas represents Magdalene and Monroe deconstructs the notion of fixed identity inherent to traditional portraiture. She opted to do this by depicting figures that were specifically known for their fixed identities; here, Dumas not only exposes the socially constructed notion of femininity (in the case of Mary Magdalene, that of the Madonna–Whore dichotomy), but also alters the very history of female representation. Dumas' portraits do not pretend to evoke a singular subjectivity of any kind, but instead to offer a number of alternative perspectives on subjects whose representations have long been dominated by culturally constructed, stereotypical imagery.

136. Idem, 429.

CHAPTER TWO

*Framing the Viewer: Edvard Munch's
Hybrid Portraits*

FRAMING THE VIEWER: EDVARD MUNCH'S HYBRID PORTRAITS¹³⁷

Introduction

The previous chapter offered a general introduction to the notion of Western portraiture, integrating the portraits of chosen artists into a broad overview of the role of the genre within art history. In the following three chapters this study will discuss in detail each artist's work in individual sections.

Munch's works resist clear classification in terms of traditional genres of art. His canvases are idiosyncratic interpretations of existing categories that demonstrate Munch's ingenious ability to manipulate pictorial traditions and the perception of onlookers alike. This chapter analyzes compositions that have not previously been categorized as portraits, but because of the attention bestowed to a central figure in the composition, these could be read as such. These paintings, however, undermine formal structures and conventions, as they juxtapose

137. Parts of this chapter have previously been published under the title "Framing the Viewer: Edvard Munch's Hybrid Genres," *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*, Leiden University, Issue 7 (2019).

elements of portraiture and other genres, thus creating what I will refer to as a “hybrid portrait genre.” I will, therefore, argue that the manner in which these paintings depart from conventional art historical genres – by introducing compositional techniques such as the mixture of landscape and portraiture; the imitation of cinematic movements; and the materiality of the paintings – successfully creates unexpected and direct connections between painting and onlooker.

The following subchapters will examine the devices employed to achieve this direct confrontation. Firstly, I will analyze the manner in which the introduction of landscape into portraiture is used as a tool to trigger the viewer to partake in a direct confrontation with the painting.¹³⁸ Secondly, I will analyze the importance of the cinematic aspect of the chosen works, and how this induces physical and emotional movement that has the ability to inculcate “political,” thought provoking reactions in the viewer. Thirdly, I will analyze the materiality of the paintings to argue that the texture and surface of the canvasses prompt a sense of immediacy when interacting with the artworks.

I will argue that Munch's fascination with transient subjects such as emotions (melancholy, anxiety, jealousy, and so on) render the works as present experiences; they do not ponder on past or future stories, but rather focus on the depiction and experience of an ongoing moment. Their dedication to rendering current emotions is what anchors the works in the present. The devices that I will identify as inducing the feeling of an ongoing moment in the hybrid portraits – the introduction of landscape into the genre of portraiture; the cinematic image; and the manner of execution – are part of the mechanisms that I call “framing the viewer,” the device that transforms these canvases into lived experiences for the onlooker.

The portrait is an essential tool in creating this lived experience, and I will therefore structure my analysis around works that can largely be referred to as such, even though Munch's portraits cannot be categorized as one homogeneous group of works. I will begin by categorizing the chosen canvases as portraits based on commonly accepted assertions

about the genre in Western art history. Jean M. Borgatti explains that the genre of portraiture has traditionally emphasized individuality, with the face and body dominating the image:

Western art features representation, and the portrait canon stresses physiognomic likeness—incorporating the idea that personality may be communicated through idiosyncratic facial features and expression. Thus we accept nameless but representational images as portraits, whether or not we have the documentation to provide us with a specific identity.¹³⁹

The conventional canon of portraiture stresses that as long as the main depicted character shows traits that could be related to his or her “personality” or inner self, the representation becomes a portrait. It is therefore of secondary importance whether the existence of this figure is factual; as long as the composition shows a figure with recognizable physiognomic traits, we are looking at a portrait. West explains in the introduction to her detailed study on the genre that:

Portraiture can be distinguished from other art categories such as history, landscape, and still life by its relationship with likeness. All portraits show a distorted, ideal, or partial view of the sitter, but portraiture as a genre is historically tied to the idea of mimesis, or likeness.¹⁴⁰

Therefore, according to conventional assertions regarding the genre, even if the main figure of the composition is depicted in an unconventional manner – compositionally or in terms of their physiognomy – as long as this subject bears likeness to an individual, the representation becomes a portrait. This is the first condition through which I will identify the works that I categorize as portraits. However, the scope of this chapter is to demonstrate that the analyzed portraits transgress

138. In this chapter I will specifically refer to the use of landscape as an interactive prop and not as background or “locus amoenus.”

139. Jean M. Borgatti, “Constructed Identities: Portraiture in World Art,” in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 306.

140. West, *Portraiture*, 12.

conventional notions of the genre in order to propel the viewer towards novel interpretations of portraiture. Firstly, therefore, I will closely examine Munch's traditional portraits and note some of the transgressions that can be seen in these works. I will further demonstrate how, at the beginning of the 1890s, Munch's work transitions from classically themed compositions towards a hybridization of several genres, which will eventually result in the hybrid portrait genre. I will argue that this new type of hybrid portraiture gives Munch's compositions a performative quality, transgressing the notion of portraiture as mere mimetic representation of likeness, and propelling the viewer to construct anew the identity of the subject each time they view the canvas.

Munch's Portraits

Essays discussing Munch's portraits almost always revolve around his large, standing portraits that comply with conventional requirements of the genre. In one of the most detailed recent articles discussing portraiture in Munch's oeuvre, Øystein Ustvedt focuses on Munch's full-length male portraits, explaining that many of Munch's conventional portraits have been excluded from thorough studies thus far because many of them were commissioned works, which implied compromise in their execution.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, Arne Eggum has argued that in fact Munch created many such works of his own accord, and ended up keeping them in his own collection.¹⁴² These portraits mostly depicted single characters on a neutral background, typically without too many pictorial distractions. Ustvedt explains that such portraits can be found throughout the artist's oeuvre, from the very beginning of his career, and that in addition to those which were commissioned, many were paintings of Munch's friends.¹⁴³ Commissioned works were one of the main sources of Munch's income, whilst creating portraits of friends consolidated social relationships. Ustvedt clarifies that there was a strong interest in portraiture during the period in which Munch matured as an artist:

141. Ustvedt, "Edvard Munch's Portraits," 232-233.

142. Arne Eggum, *Edvard Munch. Portretter* (Oslo: Munch Museum, 1994).

143. Ustvedt, "Edvard Munch's Portraits," 232-233.

The *artist* portrait would dominate in particular, carried out by his somewhat older colleagues who had recently agitated for the importance of art in society. Large paintings of artists, writers and Bohemians are testimony to increased self-confidence on behalf of this social stratum. Such works celebrated the artists themselves, both as free outsiders and as significant participants in the cultural sphere.¹⁴⁴



Fig.5. Edvard Munch, *Portrait of Hans Jaeger*, 1889

Though the article focuses on more conventional portraits from Munch's oeuvre, the author remarks on the unconventional manner in which the characters are depicted. Unusual standing poses, combined with hastily executed parts of the canvas – pasted on a almost undifferentiated background – brought Munch his much-debated success.¹⁴⁵ One of the earliest such portraits depicts the writer Hans Jaeger (1889) (Fig.5). While the style is

144. Idem, 233.

145. Idem, 234.



Fig.6. Edvard Munch *Portrait of the Painter Jensen Hjell*, 1885

infused with the painterly realism of the time, the unconventional position of the figure, combined with the careless treatments of the legs, prefigures Munch's rather sketchy future style.¹⁴⁶

Ustvedt's article clarifies that soon after Munch's breakthrough as an artist in Germany, many more commissioned portraits followed, especially of the newly-formed social class, including art patrons and collectors, and other prominent figures such as writers, philosophers, and businessmen. According to Ustvedt, one of the paintings that played a significant role in Munch's breakthrough was his portrait of Karl Jensen-Hjell from 1885 (Fig.6). Without breaking from the dominant realism of the period, Munch transgressed subjects that were conventionally represented in portraits of the time. By depicting an artist in a similar position to a nobleman, Munch transferred the nobleman's respectability onto the subject. Further transgressions can also be noted

in the rough application of paint onto an undifferentiated background, as well as in the arrogant position of the subject. While the full-length portrait imposed a somewhat rigid structure, Munch "developed perpetually new solutions in the articulations of the relationship between

the figure and the background," which made the portraits appear as several variations of the same topic.¹⁴⁷ Munch's commissioned portraits depicting the new social class – represented by affluent individuals such as art collectors and patrons – emphasized his determination to represent the characters using his own painterly methods. As a result, many of these portraits were not totally satisfactory to their sitters. One example is the full-length portrait of Consul Christen Sandberg (1901) (Fig.7), whose portrait Munch ended up keeping himself. A similar situation may also have occurred when Ludvig Meyer refused to accept Munch's group portrait of his children, a situation that ended in 1894 with a law suit against the barrister.¹⁴⁸



Fig.7. Edvard Munch, *Consul Christen Sandberg*, 1901

Nevertheless, portraits such as that of Christen Sandberg, although executed in a seemingly conventional manner in relation to capturing the sitter's likeness, transgress conventional notions of portraiture in a manner I will explain later in this chapter.

Whilst one can note that even Munch's commissioned work was created in a rather unconventional manner, his originality in portraiture can mostly be observed through his juxtaposition of different compositional devices, leading his works to evade strict genre categories. Consequently, in this chapter I will focus not on full-length portraits, but rather will analyze compositions that revolve around a central figure that bears phys-

146. Ibidem.

147. Idem, 235-236.

148. Idem, 236-237.

iognomic likeness to an individual, but that nevertheless go beyond attempting to represent the subjectivity or inner self of the depicted figure.

The compositions that I refer to as portraits have not all been previously categorized as such, even though they represent subjects that bear possible likenesses to real people. Therefore, the subjects discussed are not sitters in the conventional sense of a clearly identifiable person who once sat for the artist. I will demonstrate in the following chapter that in Munch's oeuvre, the genre of portraiture gains a new performative dimension that transgresses the notion that the establishment of the subject's identity is dependent on the creation of a mimetic likeness. As I argued in the previous chapter when discussing Western notions of portraiture, modern portraiture posits that the representation cannot be mistaken for the represented, therefore any identification of the subject depicted with a substantial self is not desirable. In the canvases that I identify as hybrid portraits, Munch takes compositions with unknown subjects as a starting point; nevertheless, their individuality is not contingent on identity recognition, rather their identity is being built anew every time the viewer engages with the composition. In this case, the portrait no longer depends on the likeness of the subject, but gains a temporal, performative aspect. For this reason, I will refer to the depicted characters as *subjects* rather than *sitters*, as their identity will be redetermined anew each time a viewer engages with the work.

Munch's Hybrid Portraits

One of the first devices used by Munch to induce the feeling of an ongoing moment is his reinterpretation of the traditional genre of portraiture that converts landscape from an auxiliary element into a vital part of the composition. As Poul Erik Tøjner remarks, even in Munch's early canvases the surrounding environment plays a crucial role in understanding the function of the figures.

Irrespective of the distance there seems to be between the melancholic introspection of the earlier pictures and the seemingly transfigured and more action oriented life of the later ones, the basic thread that runs through Munch's work is the inscrutable relationship that

exists between man and the world that surrounds him. In this chemical blend the particles can no longer be separated.¹⁴⁹

In the late 1880s, Munch began experimenting with the placement of the figure within the surrounding background. While *Summer Night: Inger on the Beach* (1889) (Fig.8) follows conventional rules of portraiture, with a centrally depicted figure that is recognizable as the artist's sister, Inger, it is a work that anticipates the importance the landscape will gain in much of Munch's later oeuvre. In the painting, one can already note the subtle absorption of the subject into her surrounding landscape. At first glance, the subject appears to be a solitary character on a shore, looking to a distant point outside the picture plane. Nevertheless, by maintaining a soft color palette of grey and blue hues, neither subject nor landscape makes a particularly strong visual impact on the viewer. Figure and background form a homogeneous unveiling of anthropomorphic forms. Not only does Inger's hat replicate the color of the rocky landscape she is depicted in, but her dress also emulates the shape and texture of the stones she is resting on. Her pensive facial expression is



Fig.8. Edvard Munch, *Inger on the Beach*, 1889



Fig.9. Edvard Munch, *Melancholy*, 1892

149. Poul Erik Tøjner, *Munch: In His Own Words* (Munich and London: Prestel Publishing, 2003), 19.

complemented by the gloomy mood evoked by the landscape, transforming the figure and the surrounding landscape into a single entity.

Melancholy (1892) (Fig.9) is a similar work that further prefigures a hybridization of genres that begins in the mid to late 1890s in Munch's work. While the head of the subject seems to have taken the shape of the stones next to him, transforming him into a harmonious continuation of the pebbly landscape, this work also shows certain characteristics of classical portraiture. Though highly stylized, the facial features could permit recognition of a character. Furthermore, his melancholic state could offer indications about his personality and general mood. Upon

closer inspection of the painting, as well as of several variations of the image in Munch's other works, one can see in the distance on a bridge the vague silhouette of two figures, one dressed in white and one in black, loosely resembling a male and female. The deep melancholy expressed by the central subject seems to have been caused by his encounter with the figures in the far distance, potentially transforming this into a sentimental genre painting. Nevertheless, the predominance of the landscape, combined with the focal point that emphasizes the face of the main subject, mean that compositions such as *Melancholy* evade strict genre categorization.

While the blurring and melting together of subject and landscape in these compositions is achieved through subtle transformations, in works such as the iconic *The Scream* (1893) (Fig.10), these elements are presented as one entity in a much more confrontational manner. Formally, the lines that underpin the entire composition continue and complement each other; in this sense, there is no distinction between the manner in which subject and land-



Fig.10. Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1893

scape are executed. Thematically, the work depicts a scream – an expression of anxiety and nervousness – complemented and invoked by the use of blood-red and orange hues in the background. The reason behind this fusion of subject and background could be read as an attempt to create a unified landscape of interior and exterior. The landscape is not a depiction of existing scenery, but rather of “interiority;” all compositional elements, including the surrounding landscape, metamorphose into the physical manifestation of a present moment and state of mind. Rather than an external depiction of the subject, the composition is a glimpse into a moment inside the character's psyche:

All the techniques Munch experimented with up until 1910 were employed in an effort to achieve direct representation of something that is almost impossible to represent – Munch's strips, halos, and lines of force all are means used to visualize, in particular, the dynamics of an intrapsychic play of forces in a world drama charged with energy.¹⁵⁰

Munch's subjects never seem to be clearly involved in any concrete action, and do not speak of the events that have happened or are to follow; rather, they suggest an ongoing present moment. The figure in *The Scream* is engaged in an act of screaming, yet there is no clear reason for this – there is no menace



Fig.11. Edvard Munch, *Anxiety*, 1894

150. Christoph Asendorf, “Power, Instinct, Will – Munch's Energetic World Theater in the Context of Fin de Siecle,” in *Edvard Munch. Theme and Variation*, eds. Klaus Albrecht Schröder and Antonia Hoerschelmann (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 89.



Fig.12. Edvard Munch *Red Virginia Creeper*, 1898-1900

visible anywhere in the close surroundings. Reconstructing the same Ekeberg hill setting as *The Scream, Anxiety* (1894) (Fig.11) is a composition showing several subjects confrontationally marching towards the viewer. The faces of these figures are simple outlines, and except for the three most prominent characters, all figures in the background are lost in the dark. The expressionless faces in the foreground appear to be staring, hypnotically, directly at the viewer, while engaged in a continuous march towards an undetermined destination. Where these figures came



Fig.13. Edvard Munch, *Street in Åsgårdstrand*, 1901

from, or where they are heading, is not relevant to the composition; the focus is rather on their current engagement with an ongoing activity:

Munch has the skill of a poster painter without actually being one. [...] He stamps out his subjects, and even though they may be executed with the most slovenly of brushes, they are still astonishingly accurately balanced, and seem almost able to talk. He seems to have captured his subjects at the decisive moment in a long conversation – they are painted at exactly the right moment, capturing a kind of taciturn eloquence.¹⁵¹

151. Tøjner, *Munch*, 22.

This sense of an ongoing present moment that characterizes so many of Munch's compositions from the early 1890s is central to understanding the emergence of his hybrid portraits: in order to be able to represent the un-representable, Munch needs to subvert conventional roles of different genres. By unifying elements of portrait, landscape and other narrative genres, he propels the viewer to engage in a different, more direct reading of the canvas.

While *The Scream* and other compositions that rework the same theme, set in a turbulent landscape, anticipate the construction of the hybrid portrait, compositions such as *Red Virginia Creeper* (1898-1900) (Fig.12) and *Street in Åsgårdstrand* (1901) (Fig.13) exemplify Munch's subversion of the genre of portraiture. Both compositions depict a "main" character showing individual facial traits that allude to a real person but, most importantly, the figures in both paintings are the trigger points of the composition. Just as in traditional portraiture, these characters are the focal point. Their frontality and the manner in which they return the gaze of the viewer makes them undeniable subjects. I interpret these works as portraits because of the "curated" and attentive attention bestowed on the central character. While the subjects are depicted in every day circumstances, the focus does not lie on documenting everyday activities. As previously argued, the emphasis lies on the ongoing moment experienced by and through these figures. Furthermore, in contrast to genre painting, in which the action develops in a detached manner in front of the viewer, and where the onlooker is a distant observer, in these hybrid portraits the viewer is not detached from the work, but rather fully confronted and engaged by the subject.

As these works employ similar compositional elements to many of Munch's photographic and painted self-portraits from around the same period, I will first discuss the role of self-portraiture in Munch's oeuvre. In 1902, Munch purchased his first small Kodak *Bull's Eye No.2* camera. Clément Chéroux explains that from the 1880s onward cameras became easier to use due to the development of silver-gelatin bromide; consequently, many artists of the period took up photography.¹⁵²

152. Clément Chéroux, "Write your life! Photography and Autobiography," in *Edvard*

Bonnard, Vuillard, Vallotton, and Khnopff were among the artists who, besides their painting, also became amateur photographers. However, what differentiated them first and foremost from Munch was the number of images taken: Munch took a total of only 226 shots of 183 different subjects, of which almost two-thirds were self-portraits.¹⁵³



Fig. 14. Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait on a Trunk in the Studio*, 82 Lutzowstrasse, Berlin, 1902

In a recent study discussing Munch's painted self-portraits, Jon-Ove Steihaug explains that they were principally made in a self-performative manner. Munch used these portraits to stage a specific representation of himself, that would consequently contribute to the general image the public would have of him.¹⁵⁴ Focusing mostly on his painted self-portraits, Steihaug explains that the artist intentionally depicted himself in situations and contexts with innate psychological drama: in Dr. Jacobson's rehabilitation clinic; sick in bed in his private quarters; naked in what appears to be the flames of hell. In this way, Munch was actively placing himself in contexts in which he wished to be seen.¹⁵⁵

Munch, The Modern Eye, eds. Angela Lampe and Clément Chéroux (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 57.

153. Idem, 58.

154. Jon-Ove Steihaug, "Edvard Munch's Performative Self-Portraits," in *Edvard Munch*, eds. Mai Britt Guleng, Birgitte Sauge, and Jon-Ove Steihaug (Milan: Skira, 2013), 13.

155. This performative aspect can be seen in other parts of his life as well. When discussing Munch's writing and letters, Haugland explains the manner in which Munch has assumed different roles in relationship to the people he was



Fig.15. Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait in the Garden at Åsgårdstrand*, 1903

Steihaug's theory is also applicable to many of the Munch's photographic self-portraits. One of the first images he took of himself with his analogue camera presents him in a somewhat theatrical manner. *Self-Portrait on a Trunk in the Studio*, 82 Lutzowstrasse, Berlin (1902) (Fig.14) shows the artist in his studio in Berlin surrounded by elements that speak to his occupation, such as his palette and his well-known work *Evening on Carl Johan Street*. However, he is caught in a contemplative moment, which seems to be staged, considering he had orchestrated the taking

of the picture himself. More interesting from a compositional perspective (since the image in the studio might still pass for a "documentary shot") is his *Self-Portrait in the Garden at Åsgårdstrand* (1903) (Fig.15) in which the artist is portrayed walking in the garden among seemingly randomly-positioned artworks. Behind Munch we can see *Girls on a Bridge*, and on the right edge of the photo we can see the outline of another work. Even though the artist is positioned in the center of the composition, this image does not represent a conventional photographic portrait, nor a documentary shot of the surrounding elements. Choosing to depict himself in the picture while walking through the garden indicates that such compositions were directed in such a way as to reflect his role and ambitions as an artist. Munch's photographic and painted self-portraits alike, then, were meant to directly engage the viewer.

Tøjner explains that the key to understanding Munch's aesthetic lies in analyzing the enclosure found in all his works, and the outgoing

movement that flows from this. He argues: "In all [Munch's] pictures, there is movement outwards, a movement which inevitably involves the viewers, going on to suggest that:

It is not difficult to recognize this aspect of confrontation in Munch's pictures, because as you look at the picture, it catches sight of you. You are hit by it, you become the object of its approach – you are the one to release the picture from its internal tension. In a way, the viewer takes over the position which has previously been held by the painter. The viewer completes the relay.¹⁵⁶

To elaborate further, Tøjner draws a parallel between Munch and Monet, comparing the contemplative aesthetics of Impressionism and the confrontational aspects of Post-Impressionism, and Expressionism:

Impressionism draws the sensitive person into the endless depth of the picture, as a sponge absorbs water. [...] However, this is not particularly relevant to Munch's work. Looking at his work, one does not travel anymore; one is immediately fixated in front of the painting. There is nothing before and nothing after that has any real significance when you look at Munch's work. That sudden moment of discovery, and the extreme confidence with which the painting is executed, are hallmarks of his work.¹⁵⁷

Therefore, human and landscape become one in order for the depiction of the ongoing moment to become possible. The immediacy created by the continuous moment fully engages the viewer, leading to a similar type of staging as is created in his self-portraits.

I term this technique "framing the viewer," rather than "staging *for* the viewer." Munch does not create a dramatic image of an existing subject, but rather orchestrates a dramatic set-up for the viewer to interact with the main figure in the composition. Instead of creating a dramatic

communicating with, consciously adjusting his self-image in accordance to the recipient of his letters. Ashild Haugland, "...this chaos of letters I have collected..." in *eMunch.no – Text and Image*, ed. Mai Britt Guleng (Oslo: Munch Museum, 2011), 53-66.

156. Tøjner, *Munch*, 22.

157. Ibidem.



Fig. 16. Edvard Munch, *Rue Lafayette*, 1891

understanding *of* the subject, he sets up a dramatic encounter *with* them. Attracting the viewer by using traditional genres, he subtly subverts these with interchangeable props which eventually confront the viewer, leaving them with no escape from the inevitable confrontation with the artwork.

The characteristics of Munch's confrontational aesthetics are made visible in how he depicts both the figure and the landscape. Munch "plans the space with a characteristic sloping forward. The pictures dip, they are like a chute sending the depicted subject straight into the arms of the viewer."¹⁵⁸ The subject is not painted in a landscape, rather the

landscape is constructed in such a way as to enhance the position of the subject in a way that traps the viewer's attention.

Munch had been developing this compositional strategy for several years before reaching the subtlety of construction in works like *Red Virginia Creeper* and *Street in Åsgårdstrand*. His first experiments with diagonals can be seen in *Rue Lafayette* (1891) (Fig. 16), inspired by the work of the impressionists. Here, the solitary figure leaning over the balcony rails to gaze onto the busy city is pushed to the back of the composition. In the period that immediately followed, Munch made several sketches showing a lonely man leaning over a fence, eventually shifting the man to a central position. Even though this figure does not face the viewer directly, he is pushed forward to a point where he dominates the composition. The strong diagonal provided by the rail which crosses the composition from background to foreground

gives the sensation that the viewer will immediately encounter this figure, creating a moment of interaction between the two. While *Rue Lafayette* draws clear inspiration from Gustave Cailebotte's *Un Balcon au Boulevard Hausmann* (1880), Munch had in fact fully integrated the use of steep diagonals into his own compositions the following year, in works such as *Despair* (1892). Just as in *Rue Lafayette*, *Despair* depicts a solitary character (as opposed to the two men in Cailebotte's composition), but in the latter the lonely figure is highly accentuated, enlarged, and depicted on the canvas in the nearest point to the onlooker, leading to a direct interaction with the subject of the work.

Red Virginia Creeper (Fig. 12) and *Street in Åsgårdstrand* (Fig. 13) further manipulate the viewer to engage in this interaction; these "frame" the viewer in such a way that they become part of the interaction. In *Red Virginia Creeper*, the plant that covers the house in the background seems to be in a slow and continuous moment of melting down from the house onto the curving road in front of it. The road, rather than a straightforward diagonal, takes the shape of an undulating and curling flow of lines that organically lead to the figure at the bottom of the composition. In traditional portraiture, the subject conventionally occupies a central role, making him or her easily graspable by the gaze of the onlooker. In this painting, however, the subject is positioned at the bottom of the composition, safe from the first glimpse of the viewer, at the point of the canvas closest to the onlooker. Munch stages a natural flow for the viewer's look: the house covered in the red Virginia creeper first arrests the attention. The way in which the plant slowly flows into the curved road lures the viewer's gaze in an undulating, gentle way straight to the bottom of the canvas, where they encounter the frenetic stare of the standing figure. The viewer can only see the head of the figure – who we assume has made his way from the red house to the end of the road – which leaps out of the picture plane directly in front of the onlooker. There seems to be no avoiding this interaction, which occurs almost out of the canvas; the viewer must participate in the escape of the character. As the viewer has no direct clues as to what might have happened, what might have made the figure want to leave the picture plane, or where he might be heading to, the encounter freezes the viewer and makes

158. Idem, 24.

them part of the scene, even if only for a moment. Trying to read the work, the gaze organically flows from the top of the canvas to the bottom, only for the onlooker to realize that they have been framed to take part in this eerie moment of direct confrontation.

In the construction of this composition, the other element required to fully engage the viewer is the subject's staring gaze. It is a common trait of Munch's work that main subject stares directly at the viewer, with the gaze becoming an inextinguishable point of contact between picture and onlooker.¹⁵⁹ Munch needs a focal point through which to release the painting, and he does this through the gaze, making this another direct bridge that reaches out to the viewer.¹⁶⁰ It is therefore of crucial importance for Munch to make use of the genre of portraiture for creating direct interaction between canvas and onlooker, as the gaze of the subject is what locks in the viewer's immediate attention. In stark contrast to genre paintings, these works fully engage the viewer, who is not a detached observer, but rather an active participant in the ongoing action of the present moment. In Munch's hybrid portraits, it is not important whether or not the onlooker identifies the subject of the painting; rather, what is at stake is the interaction created between viewer and subject.

Similar compositional elements are also at play in *Street in Åsgårdstrand*. The background represents a dense, almost abstract landscape, with a descending, undulating road that broadens up in an exaggerated manner right in front of the onlooker. Cropped in the lower part of the canvas, the viewer's gaze is engaged by the direct stare of a female figure. Her blue hat marks the center of the composition, as well as the focal point of the painting, making the transition from background to foreground. This piece of clothing also takes on the shape of the rocky formation behind the figure, creating – once again – a homogeneity between subject and landscape. The way the composition is constructed propels the main character into the arms of the onlooker; however, the intensity of the encounter here also stems from a new element. The reading direction of the composition

is again organically conducted from background to main character; however, the landscape is tamer, and fully focused on guiding the gaze of the onlooker. What is different here from *Red Virginia Creeper* is the introduction of another group of subjects along the curving road that leads to the main character, and eventually to the viewer. On their way to meet the woman's obtrusive gaze, the onlooker acknowledges the undetermined and ongoing activity taking place amidst the group of women in the background. It is a rather unusual scene, as there is, once again, no indication of the reason for this seemingly spontaneous gathering. Neither is there any hint as to whether this lonely female figure had been an active participant in this group, and has either left or been sent away. The fact that she is now placed between the group and the viewer directly engages the onlooker in what becomes a relationship triangle. In this way, the viewer is framed to take part in this ongoing experience, engaging them directly with the energy of the composition. Again, while the main subject bears a resemblance to what could be a real individual, recognizing her identity is of no importance to understanding the work. Through her positioning and direct gaze towards the onlooker, she engages in a direct interaction that bestows on her an identity simply through being recognized as a human subject.

Given that the direct interaction happens through the encounter with a main character in these compositions, we can see that the genre of portraiture was an essential device in creating the works. While the compositions discussed here demonstrate certain features of traditional portraiture – such as the focus on a main character, his or her possible resemblance to a real individual, and the direct gaze towards the viewer – other traditional elements of the genre are undermined by the introduction of compositional devices such as the landscape, which becomes an integral part of the work. The portrait, then, is not used by Munch to represent the identity or subjectivity of the main character; rather, the representation of a human subject, and their direct gaze, are necessary tools for creating the desired interaction between canvas and onlooker.

159. Ibidem.

160. Idem, 26.

The Cinematic Aspect in Munch's Hybrid Portraits

These hybrid portraits go beyond the juxtaposition of traditional painterly genres and further experiment with the potentiality of their medium to frame the viewer to directly engage with the work in the present moment. They remediate cinema into painting, or moving image into still image. The painting is therefore not solely a static image, but one that moves together with the gaze of the viewer. As Mieke Bal explains in *Emma & Edvard Looking Sideway: Loneliness and the Cinematic* (2017), several of Munch's works are described as being "strongly cinematic."¹⁶¹ Bal points out that the term cinematic, here, first and foremost refers to movement, in Munch's case both bodily and emotional movement.

Cinematic qualities can be seen in Munch's work through the representation of movement, and the onlooker's engagement in the physical act of viewing. Depictions of walking, running, and galloping are all actions that indicate an activity in progress, and therefore a moving image. Besides the imitation of movement, several other devices work together to create a cinematic effect. Framing and cropping, used to depict figures cut in half and from unusual perspectives, deliberately reflect on the medium itself. Transforming the image into a snapshot, the compositions evoke the agency of painting, rather than a supposed objective realism. Montage – or what is described to be the cutting up and editing of clips so that cuts are visible – is also a key aspect of the cinematic image. The multitude of observational angles obliges the viewer to make an active decision in decoding the painting. When making this choice, the viewer is fully engaged in the act of editing. In order for this to happen, movement is necessary to unite the incoherent scene, thus engaging the viewer in the montage. "Mistakes" – defined as deliberate painterly errors – play the role of drawing attention to the ambiguities of painting, but also generate specific readings of it. By reworking the same theme, or serializing specific themes, Munch offers the viewer the possibility to look at different paintings as if they were frames, animating a situation of movement and transformation.

This cinematic characteristic is visible in both *Red Virginia Creeper* and *Street in Åsgårdstrand*, despite these works not having been specifically

referred to within the scholarship as being representative of Munch's cinematic works. As described in the previous section, movement is a key element in both compositions. Undulating curves and swirls, such as the road traversing the canvases or the downwards flowing of the red Virginia creeper, are integral compositional techniques used to construct these paintings. Both images attract the gaze of the onlooker into an immersive, decoding action that activates interpretation. Painterly "mistakes" can be seen in the form of large patches of color without clearly defined shapes, representing rocks and stones. These paintings are part of a larger group of works depicting similar scenery, and it is interesting to note that the rocky formation seen on the right side of the canvas in *Street in Åsgårdstrand* changes shape, color, and format in each new depiction.¹⁶² It is as if, with each depiction, the viewer can familiarize themselves with a different angle of this natural formation that is in a continuous state of change. Cropping and framing devices are particularly evident in these paintings, as the main figures in the compositions are depicted in unusual parts of the canvas, and seen only partially. Bal explains that "the format of the canvas that cuts figures in half suggests a camera that is limited in what it can frame, as well as figures who are moving out of the frame. Viewers are compelled to make up what will happen next or what has just happened, as if watching a movie."¹⁶³ The cinematic qualities of Munch's work can thus be understood as a way of inculcating an interactive way of looking at images that builds up a relationship between painting and viewer, directly involving the viewer by triggering thought.

The cinematic experience seen in the analyzed hybrid portraits is another element that plays a crucial role in the framing of viewer. The framing happens through the physical movement triggered by assembling the cropped parts of the composition. However, this fragmentation plays an emotive role as well. Bal argues that Munch's use of the cinematic image is a way for him to create political art, which she defines as that which directly engages thought-provoking action. Besides

161. Bal, *Emma & Edvard*, 12.

162. Other examples of works depicting the same street are *Village Street in Åsgårdstrand* (1902) and *Street in Åsgårdstrand* (1901). For *Red Virginia Creeper* see *House with Red Virginia Creeper* (1898-1899).

163. Bal, *Emma & Edvard*, 12.



Fig.17. Edvard Munch, *Workers on Their Way Home*, 1913-1915

the induced physicality of the visual movement, the viewer also experiences a mental response when engaging with the artwork.

A useful definition of political art can be found in the work of Chantal Mouffe, who argues that:

By 'the political' I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political.¹⁶⁴

Political art is thus understood as art that instigates active thought construction.¹⁶⁵ To explain the manner in which the cinematic serves political art, Bal provides a close reading of one of Munch's most well-known canvases, *Workers on Their Way Home* (1913-1914) (Fig.17). She argues that by depicting each main figure from a slightly different angle and perspective, "the painting 'explains' that even in a crowd – a social group unified in a particular respect – each member is different. The men are workers, but we must not see them as conflated; as a class."¹⁶⁶ Individualism takes as its starting point multiplicity. In order to assert the individual, one needs to be able to differentiate them from the mass. Bal goes on to explain that, in looking at the painting:

164. Chantal Mouffe quoted in Bal, *Emma & Edvard*, 58.

165. In the first preface to *The Open Work*, Eco similarly explains that contemporary art offers new ways of seeing and understanding society, making art political in its own way, without necessarily having an explicit political content, XV.

166. Bal, *Emma & Edvard*, 59.

The viewer is called upon, not to recognize in the cognitive, iconographic sense, that the men are a mass of workers, but to give recognition – in the validating sense of the word – to their individuality in, or in spite of (a productive ambiguity) their occupation as workers. And Munch deploys form – the cinematic montage – to do this.¹⁶⁷



Fig.18. Edvard Munch, *Children Playing in the Street in Åsgårdstrand*, 1901-1903

Bal, then, argues that Munch succeeded in depicting individuality with the aid of the cinematic imagine. This lies at the core of the political potential in Munch's work, which, through these cinematic devices, triggers direct engagement from the viewer. "Readiness to act" lies at the heart of the political image, implying that encountering the artwork directly affects the onlooker. Bal sees the imitation of physical movement as succeeding in "moving" the viewer when experiencing the work.

In *Street in Åsgårdstrand*, besides the physical movement experienced when reading the composition, "political" questions also come to mind when analyzing the role of the main figure. Seemingly separated from the group in the background, the isolation of the female subject stands out to the viewer. This segregation from the group can be interpreted as focusing on, and questioning, the role of individuality within a community. The canvas can therefore be read in a similar way to another composition from the same period, depicting children in Åsgårdstrand.

Children Playing in the Street in Åsgårdstrand (1901-1903) (Fig.18) shows a very similar background to the one in *Street in Åsgårdstrand* (1901) (Fig.12). However, the fence undulating along the road indi-

167. Idem, 60.

cates that this canvas might be depicting a different street from the one in the previous work. Similar compositional devices are employed in both works, framing the viewer so as to directly interact with the young girl cropped in the right corner of the painting; an undulating, descending road that broadens to completely take over the lower part of the canvas brings to the fore the resting bodies of three boys who are observing the girl. She is depicted in such a way that the viewer can only see her upper body, her dress and lower arms being washed into the surrounding landscape. In a similar way, the little boys' bodies and clothes are almost indistinguishable from the road they are resting on; figures and landscape almost become one. As the reading direction of the composition is organically constructed from background to central subject, the composition again propels the girl directly into the arms of the onlooker. When meeting the unswerving gaze of the girl, the viewer has already been framed to directly interact with the figure. Nevertheless, the fact that the three boys are also staring at the girl makes the viewer question her situation. Why has she become the subject of contemplation for the three boys? In trying to answer this question, the viewer is actively taking part in decoding the work, which encourages "political" thought about the role of the girl.

The devices employed by Munch in these hybrid portraits – the introduction of landscape, and the use of cinematic techniques – lead to a direct engagement with the onlooker, and what I term "framing the viewer." As in *Red Virginia Creeper* and *Street in Åsgårdstrand*, this work uses the genre of portraiture to capture the viewer's attention, and to set up a direct engagement with the canvas. The importance of a main figure, combined with the release point of the painting through the figure's gaze, make it necessary for the artist to rely on modes of representation traditionally employed in the genre of portraiture. Nevertheless, portraiture's role in these compositions goes beyond mere identification. Through innovative devices, Munch taps into the performative potential of the genre and evades predetermined readings of the paintings, by framing the viewer in such a way as to experience the work at the moment of encounter through the creation of a subjective and unique experience. With this direct engagement, Munch transforms the genre of portraiture from one that is encoded with a fixed meaning to one that becomes particular to each new reading of the work.

The Paint as Experience in Munch's Hybrid Portraits

A third device used by Munch to express the ongoing moment that directly engages the viewer through his hybrid portraits can be seen in the physicality of the canvases. His painterly style makes use of visual effects such as broad brush strokes, random smears of paint, sketchiness and impasto, implying to the viewer the impression of a work in progress. Through its manner of representation, subject matter, and painterly execution, the canvas is anchored in the present moment and becomes directly available to the viewer as a lived experience, rather than a passive contemplation of the past.

The lived experience is invoked by "choosing [...] to concentrate upon existing situations and the fascination of transience."¹⁶⁸ As already seen in his early work depicting a sick child (Fig.19), Munch is not concerned with the cause of the illness but rather with the experience of being sick. To accurately convey the heavily pressurized feeling of sickness, the surface of the canvas has been ravaged; between 1885 and 1886, Munch painted, scrubbed out, and repainted the image several times before he reached a final version. The work was poorly received by the public, mostly because of its pictorial harshness, which departed from refined technique and clear compositional lines. Through its abrasive surface, the work lacks any touch of the ideal, and delivers a truthful depiction of experiencing a disease. This brought the canvas into an unconformable present moment, and could not be



Fig.19. Edvard Munch, *The Sick Child*, 1885-1886

168. Tøjner, *Munch*, 14.



Fig.20. Edvard Munch, *Morning*, 1884

interpreted differently than through the experience of being unwell. Its deliberate sketchiness (Munch had also named this first version a “study”) was also indicative of an ongoing creational process, inducing the feeling that the artist had not finished the canvas, which still needed considerable reworking to be aligned with accepted standards of contemporary painting. Nevertheless, Munch described this canvas as a breakthrough in his art: “most of what I have done since then had its origin in that picture.”¹⁶⁹

While earlier compositions had also shown Munch's interest in transient moments, they had not pushed the limits of physical representation in the way that he achieved in *The Sick Child*. *Morning* (1884) (Fig.20) is another example of a highly criticized work by Munch, even though the manner of execution aligns with the naturalistic style of the time. While the painting is more delicate in execution, it depicts a girl in an unconventional and intimate moment of her daily routine. She is caught in contemplation while putting on her stockings, with her blouse still unbuttoned and the bed unmade. Departing from conventional portraits of female characters that present their subjects in a neat and orderly manner, this painting shows a real woman engaged in a private ritual. Several of Munch's other depictions of female figures bring forth this “reality effect,” again addressing a personal and ongoing present moment.

The Sick Child transgressed contemporary modes of representation not only through its subject matter, but also through its painterly methods. The work abandoned naturalism in favor of raw expressionism, and presented “sketchiness” in lieu of finished painting, adding a new di-

mension to the concept of retouching. Not only had Munch reworked the topic of the sick child on numerous occasions, but he also partially overpainted the first version of the painting in the 1890s. Munch's interventions, during several painting sessions spread over large periods of time, kept these works strongly anchored in the present.

Several of Munch's compositions share an unfinished quality, seemingly still waiting for the painter to come back at any moment for a final retouching. It was not uncommon for Munch to paint the facial features of characters in the forefront, and leave faces in the background unfinished. In *Anxiety*, the furthest character forward shows clear facial definition: we see the woman's nose, mouth, eyebrows, eyes, and even pupils. Although the male figure immediately behind her has a moustache and large, round eyes, his nose is completely washed out and on closer inspection his eyes are mere black dots below two lines, alluding to thin eyebrows. The following male figure, while placed in the background, has clearer facial traits. We see his nose and mouth, and it is only his eyes that are small black dots under his top hat. For the rest of the composition, all the figures that follow have lost any facial individuality; their heads are depicted with hastily rendered smears of paint.

Similar painterly practices can be noted in the depiction of the children from *Children Playing in the Street in Åsgårdstrand* (1901-1903). The main figure in the composition, the girl on the right, has clearly defined facial features. As this is the character through which the viewer is framed to interact with the painting, and as the direct point of connection is achieved through her gaze, her eyes are depicted with precise accuracy. We can clearly see the girl's blue eyes and note that one eye is directly looking at the viewer, while the other is gazing to a point outside the composition. We see her nose, lips and ears, and even reflections of light on her forehead. At odds with this detailed rendering of her facial features is the depiction of her body. Firstly, we only see this partially, a choice that can be read as part of the previously discussed device of cropping and framing. What stands out is the manner of execution of her arms. Her right arm is depicted with similar colors to those used to represent her face; however, her left arm is almost completely washed out, towards the lower part of the canvas. It almost appears as though the artist has not yet finished painting the left arm, and will continue his work on finishing this corner of the

169. Muller-Westermann, *Munch by Himself*, 23.



Fig.21. Edvard Munch, *Murder on the Road*, 1919

canvas at a later date. Yet a similar unfinished quality can be seen in the depiction of the three boys on the left side of the canvas. The first two boys have been depicted with sketchy facial features, represented by lines and dots. While the third boy's head has a similar shape and color to the first two, he has not been given any facial features. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as a way of rendering perspective, by means of which the last and furthest figure would be depicted in the sketchiest manner. However, just as in the case of *Anxiety*, this illusion of perspective is not entirely true. Of the three boys, only two of them have somewhat defined arms (used to rest on the ground): the first and the last. The second, middle boy, while showing facial individually, has no arms: the only element we notice is the blue shirt that forms his entire upper body. His lower body and legs are defined, but no arms can be noted. These intentional painterly "mistakes" give the work

an unfinished feeling that makes the viewer feel as though the artist might one day return and finish painting.

Other works by Munch take the unfinished details a step further, even leaving dripping paint as an integral part of the composition. The focal point of *Murder on the Road* (1919) (Fig.21) is the head of a dot-eyed figure rushing out of the picture plane. As the "murderer" in the composition, one would expect for this figure to receive more painterly definition. Nevertheless, his skin is translucent and takes the color of the road he is leaving, while his eyes, that strongly gaze towards an outside point, seem to be pouring down the canvas in an intentional "mistake" of excessively watery paint. Munch thinned the paint with so much turpentine that the color was left with almost no adherence. The corpse, seen as an ill-defined, murky smear, might already be decomposing, given its barely human shape. All details of the painting indicate that it has been made hastily. The viewer is left hoping for the canvas to be retouched, before the sketchy figure leaves the frame for good; given how far he has made it from the scene of the crime, that might happen any moment now. The viewer is therefore propelled to expect further interaction, not only with the work of art, but with its creator as well.

Physicality is achieved through the surface; the emotion depicted is experienced by the viewer through the abrasiveness, or elusiveness, of the surface of the canvas. The unfinished touch further instils a continuous moment of interaction – it gives the feeling that the required retouching might occur any moment now. Through these painterly devices, the viewer is further forced to experience the ongoing moment that results from this direct interaction.

Before concluding, I will briefly return to Munch's more traditional, full-length portraits, discussed at the beginning of this chapter. I will specifically refer once again to Consul Christian Sandberg's towering full-length portrait, executed in 1901. Given that this was a commissioned portrait, Munch did not experiment with the position of the figure in the landscape. Nevertheless, he did make use of some of his developing painterly devices – such as the sloping diagonal – to create an outward movement that directly involves the viewer. The figure in the painting seems to tilt slightly forward, with his left shoulder directed towards the onlooker. His left leg is stepping forward, and is

in fact outside the background in which the subject is placed. The foot seems to be placed at the point where the inside and the outside of the painting convergence; the physical boundary between painting and onlooker. It seems as though if the subject were to take another step, he could fall out of the picture plane. As previously suggested, this can be read as Munch's device for framing the viewer in such a way that they partake in a direct confrontation with the artwork. Furthermore, intentional painterly "mistakes" that give the work an unfinished quality are at play in this work as well. The execution alternates between "large washed-out sections contrasted with elements of impasto and a more three-dimensionally modeled face. It all seems hastily done [...] where large areas of the canvas in the background are left unpainted."¹⁷⁰ After its completion, the painting was shown with the legs of the consul cut off at the bottom. When it was exhibited again two years later in a new version, the changes only involved stretching the work onto a new frame, with the image still ending above the man's knees. Nevertheless, several years later, in 1909, a strip was added to the bottom of the canvas, giving Munch enough space to paint the left leg. Given that, in the final version of the painting, the foot is still hovering between two physical spaces, it was clearly a deliberate decision on Munch's part to leave the added strip almost entirely unpainted, and to use the space as a place to create an impact through the subject's pose, maintaining at the same time the unfinished look of the canvas. Munch's work, even when commissioned – and when following more conventional modes of representation – actively transgresses conventional pictorial categories in order to open up new meanings within the genre of portraiture.

Conclusion

Previously, scholars have chosen not to categorize as portraits compositions that did not formally fit traditional requirements of the genre. But in not addressing these works, the number of possible interpretations of Munch's rich and versatile oeuvre is severely limited. In this chapter,

I have argued that several of Munch's compositions evade strict genre classification; works that have not previously been regarded as portraits can in fact be read as such. Taking as a starting point the traditional understanding of the genre of portraiture, the chapter has showed that Munch successfully subverted conventional assertions regarding the genre in order to bestow new meanings on his hybridized compositions. The previous pages have specifically focused on the newly created hybrid genre of portraiture, and discusses the ways in which the construction of this new type of composition propels the viewer into a direct, performative interaction with the works.

The first chapter, which discussed traditional ideas of Western portraiture, outlined that the conventional notion of portraiture relied on likeness and mimetic representation in order to depict the stable identity of an individual. Whether or not the existence of the individual was factual was of secondary importance; as long as there was an ideal, partial or distorted representation of a sitter, the work was considered a portrait. Throughout his career, Munch made several seemingly conventional portraits, either commissioned or from his own initiative. However, even these apparently more conservative works triggered much discontent among their commissioners. Nonetheless, the individuals represented sat for the artist, and their representation conveyed a certain degree of likeness. *Red Virginia Creeper*, *Street in Åsgårdstrand*, and *Children Playing in the Street in Åsgårdstrand* have not previously been categorized as portraits, as they do not represent a clearly identifiable individual who once sat for the artist. Nevertheless, these canvases share various compositional techniques inherited from traditional portrait making, such as depicting a principal character with individualized facial traits, and the positioning of the subject as the main focal point of the composition. Their frontality, and the manner in which they return the gaze of the viewer, makes them undeniable subjects. Nevertheless, their subjectivity is not contingent on identity recognition. Munch manipulated these compositions to transgress the meaning of portraiture as a tool used to convey mere likeness. Instead, these hybrid portraits add a performative aspect to the genre through the devices thoroughly analyzed in the previous pages.

I have argued that, from the late 1880s, Munch's experiments with the placement of the figure in its surrounding landscape – as

170. Ustvedt, "Edvard Munch's Portraits," 237.

seen in works such as *Inger on the Beach* – resulted in compositions that created a hybrid genre between portraiture and landscape. This type of composition succeeded in escaping a clear, linear narrative, which led to the representation instead of an ongoing moment. This ongoing present moment is a key element of the hybrid portrait genre, and Munch made use of multiple compositional devices to achieve this. In works such as the famous *The Scream*, what came before or will come after the depicted scene is not important. Rather, all the attention is focused on the present; all compositional elements are subordinated to the current moment. The confrontational aesthetics visible in his portraits and landscapes alike, combined with the self-staging techniques used in his (photographic) self-portraits, are key elements of Munch's technique that I termed as "framing the viewer." Through such compositional devices, Munch orchestrated the way in which the viewer encounters the subject of his works to create an inescapable confrontation:

Munch is a diligent director, who in a masterly way utilizes his fine-tuned repertoire on all levels to achieve an equally precisely calculated effect on the viewer. The picture solutions vary greatly in their details, but they have the viewer's meticulously defined role in common. The viewer is inevitably drawn into the picture's force field.¹⁷¹

Landscape in Munch's portraits thus becomes one of the many attentively constructed devices that helps to frame the viewer in directly engaging with the composition. The cinematic qualities visible in Munch's hybrid portraits – montage, cropping, seriality, and painterly mistakes – result in an interactive attempt to decode the paintings, creating a direct relationship between work and onlooker. Further, the bodily movement triggered by the visual act of decoding also activates an emotional movement, which results in active thought construction taking place in the present moment. The ongoing, present-tense quality of these

canvases is further enhanced by the unfinished touch, noted in the paint layers. The broad brush strokes, seemingly random smears of paint, sketchiness, and impasto give the impression of an unfinished work in progress that anchors the viewer in the present moment, decoding and experiencing the canvas. The hybrid portrait, then, is created through the merging of all these elements in order to frame the viewer so that they directly engage with the composition. Whilst, on the one hand, these paintings rely on traditional concepts of the genre, on the other, they twist traditional conventions of portraiture and add a performative aspect to Munch's hybrid portraits. The hybrid portrait genre – created by Munch – achieves performative effects in portraiture that surpass passive contemplation, in favor of direct engagement experienced when looking at the artwork.

171. Nils Ohlsen, "Edvard Munch's Visual Rhetoric – Seen Through Selected Interiors," in *Edvard Munch 1863 - 1944*, eds. Mai Britt Guleng, Birgitte Sauge, and Jon-Ove Steihaug (Milan: Skira, 2013), 206.

CHAPTER THREE

Blurred Boundaries:

Francis Bacon's Portraits

BLURRED BOUNDARIES: FRANCIS BACON'S PORTRAITS¹⁷²

Introduction

In the first chapter of this study I explained that the genre of portraiture traditionally relied on the mimetic representation of the unique identity and subjectivity of the person portrayed. The illusion of implied unity between the sitter's expression (outer form) and their inner essence was the condition that was thought to bestow uniqueness and authority to the genre. Once the concept of dualism arose, the idea of likeness being inseparably linked to one's inner self was challenged. Consequently, mimetic portraiture became less of a priority, and was replaced by formal (compositions with depictions of people used as form bestowing elements) or referential portraits (compositions where the subjects were evoked by referential symbols and not portrayed in a mimetic manner). Nevertheless, well-defined conventions, such as the ability to catch and depict the inner essence of the sitter, remained as the basis of portrait creation.

172. Parts of this chapter have previously been published under the title "Blurred Boundaries: Francis Bacon's Portraits," *World Literature Studies*, volume 11 (2019).

In discussing Munch's portraits, I proposed a reading that goes beyond the search for a stable subjectivity, paralleling the understanding of Alberto Giacometti's "stick figures." I mentioned that Giacometti's "dissimilar portraits" aim to render nature without imitating it, by creating the work in the imagination of the viewer. As a result of this mental construction, there can be no confusion between the portrait and portrayed; no visual representation can be mistaken for the individual, and any identification with a substantial self is opposed. When analyzing Munch's work, I similarly argued that his hybrid portraits avoid representing unique identity. However, these go further than stimulating the imagination of the viewer in order to create a presence in the moment of viewing the artwork. Through specific compositional devices, Munch creates a hybrid portrait genre that stages a direct interaction between the depicted subject and their viewer, giving the portrait a performative aspect through which the subjectivity of the central figure is continuously constructed anew when each viewer interacts with the work. While the portrait is not rendered in a traditional manner, there are formal remnants of classical compositional elements. In Munch's portraits, however, there is a clearly determined relationship between viewer and portrait; though an interaction is staged between them, the two remain fundamentally distinct from one another.

When looking at Bacon's portraits, the viewer is challenged to recognize the subject depicted. While there are visible traces of elements that call to mind the subject's appearance (Bacon famously stated that he wanted his works "to look as if a human had passed between them, like a snail, leaving a trail of a human presence") his works are not faithful depictions of the subjects portrayed.¹⁷³ In this chapter, I will analyze a number of Bacon's portraits, arguing that by evading conventional mimetic representation, and by making use of specific visual tools, Bacon blurs the boundaries between object and subject, portrait and viewer, in order to remodel conventional notions

173. Sylvester, *Looking Back*, 33. Brilliant has categorized Bacon's works as portraits that bear clear traces of the artist's personal style that "can penetrate so deeply into the work that the portrait undergoes a peculiar deformation, recognizable as a sign of its maker." Brilliant, "Portraits," 26.

of portraiture that rely on faithfully representing likeness with the aim of evoking subjectivity. I will first analyze the significance of portraiture in Bacon's oeuvre by scrutinizing several selected works, and will further reference Ernst van Alphen's theory of the "loss of self" experienced by the viewer when looking at Bacon's paintings. Offering a close reading of Gilles Deleuze's *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, I will reinterpret his theory through the prism of Buddhism, arguing that understanding Bacon's works through Buddhist practices opens up the possibility of a complete transformation of the preexisting concepts that have traditionally shaped portrait making.

Although previous comparative studies have examined the philosophical similarities between Gilles Deleuze's writings and the philosophy of religion, literature touching upon Deleuze and Buddhism is still relatively limited.¹⁷⁴ Two essays draw specifically upon conceptual similarities between Deleuze's ideas and Buddhism – Simon O'Sullivan's essay "A Life Between the Finite and Infinite: Remarks on Deleuze, Badiou and Western Buddhism" (2014) and N. Robert Glass's essay "The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Deleuze and the Positivity of the Second Light" (2000) – however, these discuss similarities between his general writings and Buddhist practices. This chapter will specifically refer to similarities between Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon's works, and Buddhist philosophy, before going on to discuss the ways in which reading Bacon's work through this lens opens up new potential functions for the genre of portraiture.

Francis Bacon and Portraiture

I will begin by explaining the role of portraiture in Bacon's work by elucidating what it is not. In his book *Face and Mask: A Double History* (2017), Hans Belting explains that in a traditional Western portrait, the represented face is reduced to a fixed state and therefore transformed into a mask. Diminished to a rigid format that can no

174. Dublin Trinity College has inventoried Bacon's personal library that included approximately 1000 books. This list does not record books related to eastern religions or philosophy, however did include a copy of Deleuze's book on Bacon's work: https://www.tcd.ie/History_of_Art/research/triarc/bacon.php

longer change expression, the face is exchanged for an image that can only be represented through a facade. As the “real face” is ungraspable, fleeting, transitory, and multifaceted, the mask can never become a living face. When portraits become masks, they reference an outside state that they cannot reproduce. Belting considers the first time that the mask became a self-referential object (that was not referencing an outside source) to have been at the end of the nineteenth century, when the new death mask emerged. Belting elucidates this concept with reference to *L'Inconnue de la Seine* (Unknown Woman of the Seine), whose death mask was reproduced countless times around 1900, in plaster and photographs, because of the seeming beauty and deceptive smile it carried. The death mask did not reference the dead person, but rather an image of death itself. In this case, the face became the image, and referenced only itself – as there was no other thing to represent, given that the face it was modelled on no longer existed. “Only when the face is transformed into its own mask can it become – and remain – entirely an image.”¹⁷⁵ Belting goes on suggest that this image is fascinating:

Because it creates an insoluble puzzle: it represents a presence that can only emerge through the absence of that which it represents. A death mask is thus the mask taken of a face that, in death, had become a mask in its own right, in other words the mask of a mask. It is cast from a face no longer capable of any expressive activity, which rather possesses an expression that transcends all possible facial expressions. It thus casts a spell on us, even though we know that mask makers may have actively tampered with the corpse and conjured the peace of sleep from the face of the departed.¹⁷⁶

In this way, clarity has finally been reached through a stability that was missing from the face of the living. “The death mask became a totemic object that permitted the creation of a nostalgic cult of the timeless,

175. H. Belting, *Face and Mask. A Double History*, trans. Thomas S. Hansen and Abby J. Hansen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 78.

176. Ibidem.

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.

Fig.22. Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait II (after the Life Mask of William Blake)*, 1955

authentic face.”¹⁷⁷ Belting cites Maurice Blanchot in claiming that “in the otherness of the corpse one could also see that of the image, which produces a new kind of similarity, by referring to nothing more than itself.”¹⁷⁸ Given the context of a historical period in which the face’s claim to authenticity was being questioned, this type of self-referential image offered a new refuge.¹⁷⁹

In opposition to the mask, most of Bacon’s portraits seem to be depicted in a deformed – or deforming – motion, rather than rendered in a fixed state. I will explain later in this chapter why and what is being depicted through this motion, with reference to Gilles Deleuze’s theory about Bacon and the depiction of bodily sensations. Yet, not all of Bacon’s works are depicted through deformations. In stark contrast to most of his other portraits of the period, Bacon’s series of death masks after William Blake’s life mask do not seem to have undergone strenuous bodily deformations (Fig.22). As noted by Belting, when painting the mask, Bacon did not change much from the original. Nevertheless, everything seems to have come out differently in his works. Van Alphen argues that Bacon’s representation seems to be imbued with life, rather than death, through the use of expressive details such as the mouth slit, and the eyelashes. While Blake’s mask freezes life in a rigid state, Bacon’s work revolts against the mask, and through his signature style creates the appearance of life.¹⁸⁰ Bacon’s works, therefore, cannot be considered as traditional portraits that transform faces into masks, but through motion and blurring, they transcend a rigid fixity to create a new type of portraiture that I will discuss further later on.

To further understand Bacon’s relationship with the genre of portraiture, I will also draw on Van Alphen’s analysis of *Two Studies for*

a Portrait of George Dyer (1968) (Fig.24), a work depicting George Dyer, fully clothed, posing in front of a canvas that shows a nude depiction of himself. Van Alphen explains that by presenting the posing George Dyer as naked and pinned down to the canvas, Bacon is hinting that Dyer has been sacrificed for representation. The naked painted portrait in the background seems to suggest the sacrificial nature of portraiture, and hence that of conventional representation.¹⁸¹

Three Figures and Portrait (1975) (Fig.25) is another example that furthers this reading. The three moving figures are seen in clear opposition to a nailed down portrait; while the figures seem alive, the representation is static and immobilized by the nail in the wall – fixed and inert. These examples seem to suggest that portraiture, through representation, attempts to nail the body down, meaning that the genre, with its traditional conventions, is not able to render subjectivity, making it imperative that portraiture as a genre redetermines the conditions that originally shaped it.

While Bacon’s work critiques mimetic representation – and therefore traditional portraiture – as an attempt to annihilate subjectivity, his works still make use of the genre. Why does he fall back on portraiture, if portraiture is not able to render subjectivity? Bacon himself offers a hint at how to interpret his work by referencing Diego Velazquez’s *Rokeby Venus* (1644) (Fig.23), stating that: “If you don’t understand the *Rokeby Venus*, you don’t understand my work.”¹⁸²

There are several competing interpretations of Velazquez’s painting, but it is well-known that most viewers at first glance do not grasp the painting’s subtle details. The scene shows Venus lying in her bed with Cupid holding up a mirror in front of her. Given the manner in which the mirror is held, as well as the pink decorative elements, there is no doubt that the mirror is used for grooming or admiration purposes:

The problem is that the vantage point from which the scene is represented (as well as the vantage point of the viewer, were they

177. Ibidem.

178. Idem, 80.

179. Ibidem. Nancy similarly uses Blanchot’s idea about portraiture and the death mask: “that, in some way, every portrait functions like a death mask: it converts the absence of the person who is present into the presence of the person who is absent. There is the presence of a mask here, more than there is a masked presence; that is, at issue here is a presence that recovers nothing and expresses nothing but the hollow of its entire volume.” *Portrait*, Kindle Edition.

180. Belting, *Face and Mask*, 156.

181. E. van Alphen, “Making Sense of Affect,” in *Francis Bacon: Five Decades*, ed. Anthony Bond (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012), 70.

182. Francis Bacon quoted in *Bacon’s Women* (New York: Ordovas, 2018).



Fig.23. Diego Velázquez, *The Rokeby Venus*, 1644

to differ) is different from the vantage point of Venus. Therefore, if we see Venus's face nicely framed inside the mirror, she must see something quite different. If the painter reproduced what he saw, then the model must have seen the painter in the mirror.¹⁸³

This means that Venues is looking at the viewer, who is looking at Venus; the whole work revolves around the act of looking, and being looked at.

In *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, Van Alphen discusses in detail Bacon's subversion of Western motifs such as the mirror and the lamp. In Bacon's work, both the mirror and the lamp – objects that Van Alphen refers to as tools of vision – are not used according

183. Marco Bertamini, Richard Latto, and Alice Spooner, "The Venus Effect: People's Understanding of Mirror Reflections in Paintings," *Perception*, volume 32 (2003): 593-599.

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Fig.24. Francis Bacon, *Two Studies for a Portrait of George Dyer*, 1968

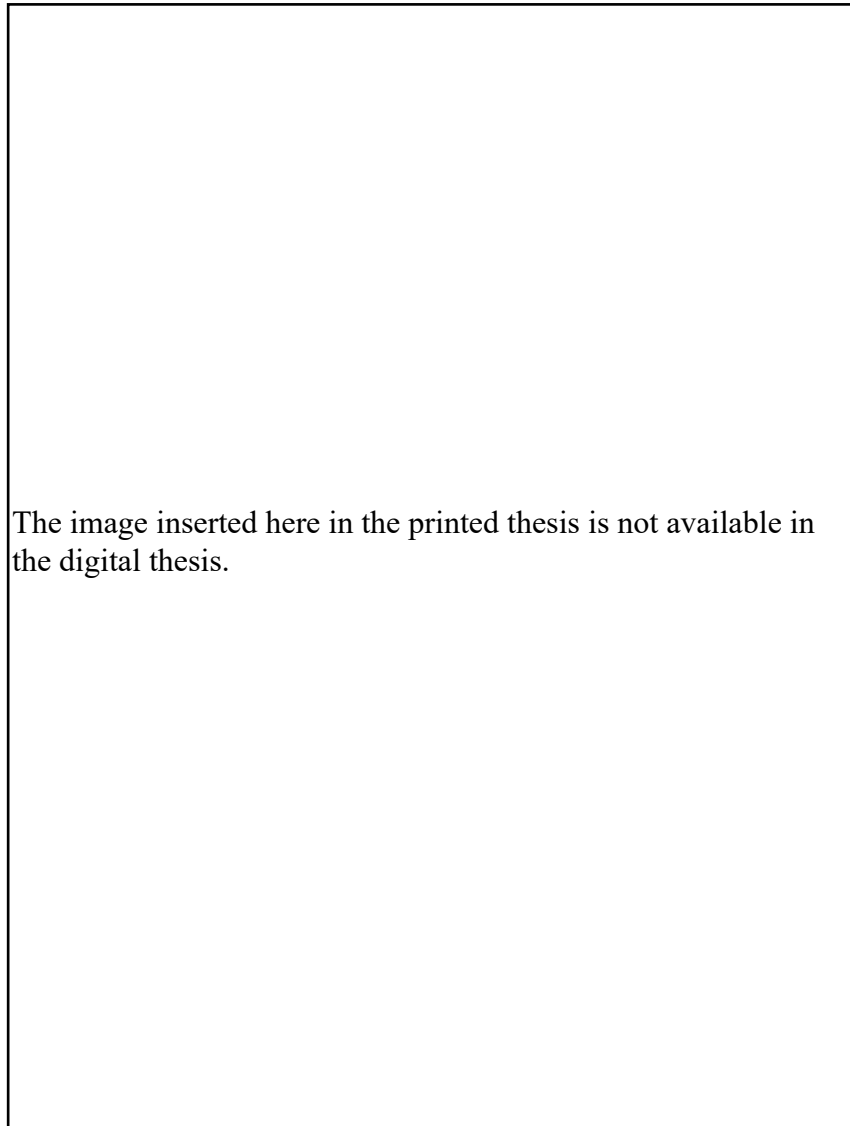


Fig.25. Francis Bacon, *Three Figures and Portrait*, 1975

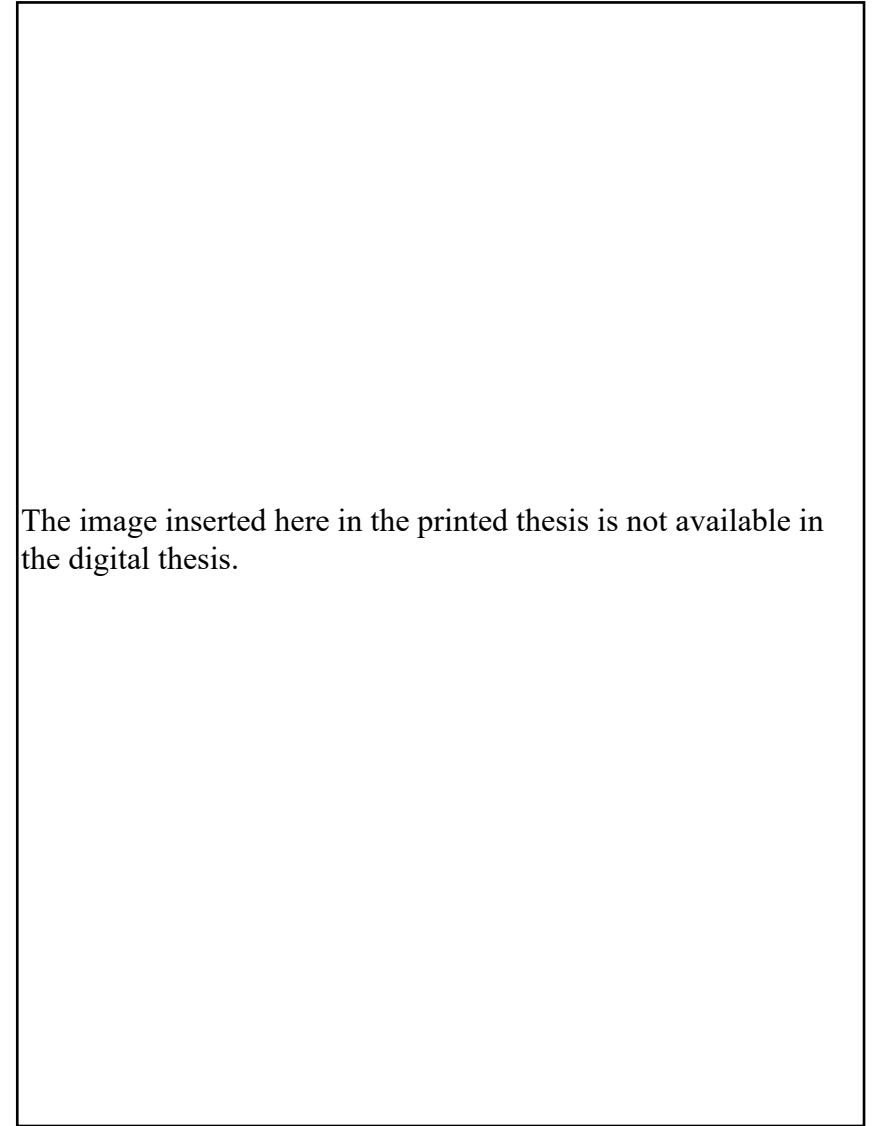


Fig.26. Francis Bacon, *Study of Nude with Figure in a Mirror*, 1969

to Western tradition, to reflect or illuminate. The mirrors in Bacon's works do not reflect or reproduce accurately, neither do the lightbulbs illuminate the bodies, in a similar way to *chiaroscuro* tradition. This is reinforced by a close reading of *Study of Nude with Figure in a Mirror* (1969) (Fig.26), a work which poses a double critique of the Western tradition. The work shows a nude woman exposed to the gaze of the viewer; however, the mirror is not turned towards the woman, but rather towards the viewer looking at her. The mirror therefore does not reflect the woman, but a seated man, who seems to share the same position as the viewer, indicating an identification between man and onlooker. The woman is not depicted according to traditional conventions of the nude as a subordinate subject on display for the enjoyment of the voyeur. Moreover, the positioning of her legs seems to replicate that of the man's in the mirror, the similarity of the pose suggesting that the reclining woman and the seated man are very much alike. The result of this technique is that the viewer, who identifies with the reflected man, also identifies with the reclining woman; there is no clear separation between the figure and the subject viewing the figure. As Van Alphen suggests, "the male onlooker, far from being on the safe side of the image, is contaminated by what he sees, and adopts the woman's pose as if to demonstrate the extent to which the viewer is dependent on, constructed by, the figure."¹⁸⁴

The situation is further complicated by Bacon's specific instructions on always presenting his works behind glass. David Sylvester argued that "ambiguity and obscurity are also introduced by the reflections in the glass that Bacon insisted on interposing between picture and spectator."¹⁸⁵ Bacon explained to Sylvester that due to the flat manner in which he painted, the glass acted as a unifier for the picture. While Sylvester attempted to get Bacon to admit that he positively liked reflections, Bacon denied it. Nevertheless, even when better quality, non-reflective glass had been invented, Bacon was still not satisfied. Sylvester thus argued that it could be inferred that the paintings were meant to be displayed behind reflective glass. Reflections, therefore, prove to

184. Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon*, 172.

185. Sylvester, *Looking Back*, 23.

greatly enrich the paintings, as they "scramble painted fragments of reality that have been frozen with reflected fragments of reality that are still in motion. The suggestions of movement within the picture are complicated and enhanced by the real movement of the reflections."¹⁸⁶

When the works are viewed behind glass, at first sight, the viewer sees themselves. It takes much effort, a lot of movement, and good positioning to see the figures behind the glass, and even so, the viewer is continually confronted by their own reflection. I refer to this aspect of Bacon's practice in the same manner in which I previously discussed Munch's hybrid portrait genre – as "framing the viewer." Reflection theory, as well as the physical reflection of the painting when viewed behind glass, is a crucial tool for understanding Bacon's portraits. In this way, we can see that he frames the viewer to become part of the composition, eventually identifying with his figures.

In *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, Van Alphen accounts for the viewer's identification with Bacon's figures through a discussion of the "affective" quality of Bacon's work, and in particular the violence done to the viewer: the particular moving quality, in a literal sense.¹⁸⁷ Van Alphen argues that whilst Bacon's work opposes narrativity in the sense of conveying a story, it does not fully rid itself of all narrative qualities. He suggests that Bacon's works focus on the activity of the narrative process. "This process is not repeatable; it cannot be iterative because it takes place, it happens, whenever 'story' happens."¹⁸⁸ He goes on to argue that while the paintings are not narrative, they are experienced as such because they appear to be in motion, asserting that "Bacon's narrativity, the illusion of narrative his work arouses, does not so much involve the representation of a perceived sequence of events, but the representation of perceiving as a sequence of events, which are embodied, not illustrated, by the figures."¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the viewer experiences the figures in motion, in such a way that they are "moved" in the same manner as the figures.

186. Idem, 24.

187. Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon*, 11.

188. Idem, 28.

189. Idem, 30.

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.

Fig.27. Francis Bacon, *Three Studies of Lucien Freud*, 1969

By providing a close reading of the triptych *Three Studies of Lucien Freud* (1969) (Fig.27), Van Alphen points out the manner in which the faces of the two figures are split into two, arguing that such a split can be read as a split within the figure itself. This division means that the figure is simultaneously looking and being looked at, describing the inner world of the subject. The direct stare of the other eye contaminates the viewer's experience, with the work thus proposing a "pragmatics of vision as the narrative of perception."¹⁹⁰ He further argues that:

190. Idem, 46.

Bacon's works do not allow a safe distance between the viewer and the unified image. They involve the viewer bodily and directly in the act of production. The resulting 'affect' is the event that constitutes the narrative. This is not a 'third person' narrative which [...] tells itself, proclaiming the exclusion of the viewer. Rather it is a personalized narrative in which the roles of first and second person threaten constantly to be exchanged.¹⁹¹

As mentioned, the mirror and the lamp are not used by Bacon in accordance with Western traditions. Regarding the problematic reflection of the mirror images, Van Alphen discusses the possibility of negative hallucination, either from the viewer or the subject. Nevertheless, because the question of whose hallucination it might be remains unanswerable, he relates the instability of vision to the instability of identity. "Identity, selfhood, seems to depend on who sees what. When the mirror image is stable, the figure has a demarcated identity. Identity gets blurred when the mirror image cannot be identified as mirror reflection."¹⁹² This identity crisis is further reflected in the motif of the double, the 'doppelgänger': two identical figures signify too much identity.¹⁹³ "In opposition to the lack of identity between mirror reflection and mirrored object, and the eroded identities of the deformed dissolving bodies, the motif of the double can be read as an artificial strategy for establishing or reinstating identity."¹⁹⁴

Identity is unachievable for Bacon's subjects, as they are confined to closed spaces, and to positions that do not allow them to see their own bodily (self-) perspective in the surrounding world. Because of fragmentation – both bodily and spatial – Bacon's figures can neither

191. Idem, 56.

192. Idem, 75.

193. E. Van Alphen, "Reading for Affects: Francis Bacon and the Work of Sensation," in *How to Do Things with Affects: Affective Triggers in Aesthetic Forms and Cultural Practices*, eds. Ernst van Alphen and Tomáš Jirsa (Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2019), 174.

194. Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon*, 76.

be perceived as whole by the viewer. Wholeness depends on the gaze of the other; as soon as one is seen by the other, one becomes whole. But since, in this case, neither figure nor viewer can become whole, they both experience a loss of self. "He leaves figures, as well as onlookers, with their lack of self, which is paradoxically the only situation in which the idea of self, not defined by others or by the surrounding space, can be felt and kept alive."¹⁹⁵ This would suggest that a way of maintaining one's subjectivity is by clear delimitation from the other.

This understanding of self corresponds with Roland Barthes' notion of the *doxa*. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, he explains that each person is condemned to always have a fragmented view of themselves, as one never sees oneself as a whole. The only way in which to become whole is through the eyes of the other; nevertheless, this relationship is seen as negative, since when the other determines the wholeness of the subject, the subject transforms into the already-said, already-known public opinion: what Barthes refers to as the *doxa*. Van Alphen argues that the only thing that a subject can do in order to fight the *doxa* is to place oneself in an ongoing activity. "Only the practice of representation as an ongoing bodily activity, with no special object as its goal besides the representational movement itself, succeeds in destabilizing the objectifying transformations of the other."¹⁹⁶ By interpreting Bacon's work through this notion, he argues that the figures are in constant deforming motion, that result in the fragmentation of their bodies. And since the bodies are fragmented, they cannot be perceived as a whole by the onlooker. Since the viewer cannot see the other as a whole, they aren't able to perceive themselves as whole either. Nevertheless, not being perceived as whole is what succeeds in maintaining one's subjectivity, uncontaminated by the *doxa*. However, this chapter proposes an alternative manner of creating subjectivity, namely one that is achieved when identifying with the other. I will later argue that considering the formation of subjectivity through Buddhist practices takes this process a step further. Through

positive self-identification with the other, subjectivity can be created anew in a beneficial manner, transcending the already-known platitudes of predetermined opinion: the *doxa*. Whereas Barthes' notion of the *doxa* is understood as a negation and refusal of wholeness, through Buddhism one can go a step further and transcend oneself through identification with the other.

When discussing Munch's strategy of "framing the viewer," I argued that through carefully chosen compositional devices such as the insertion of landscape into portraiture, the cinematic aspect, and the materiality of the canvases, Munch frames the viewer in such a way as to directly interact with the subject of his hybrid portraits. In these compositions, the landscape is intelligently constructed around the subject so that it propels the figure into the arms of the onlooker. In Bacon's case, when dealing with landscape and portraiture, Van Alphen has argued that there is no delimitation between the figure depicted and the surrounding landscape. In works such as the studies for his portraits of Van Gogh, both figure and landscape are executed with large strokes of thick paint, whereas normally Bacon clearly delineates between the figure and its perfectly smooth surrounding. Van Alphen argues that in these compositions, Bacon makes the space that surrounds Van Gogh a metaphor for the body – "the landscape is in fact a bodyscape" – where the two form a single continuity. The lack of differentiation between body and space blurs the line between the conceptual categories of inside and outside.¹⁹⁷ "The space of representation is an ambiguous zone. Just as the line between inside and outside cannot be drawn, so also the distinction between model and representation is fluid."¹⁹⁸

The ontological ambiguity of Bacon's work can be elucidated by closely reading *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne* (1967) (Fig.28). The represented female figure is seen three times in the composition: inside and outside a room, as well as pinned down to a wall. "The image on the wall encapsulates the tensions produced by the painting of which it is a part. As in many other Bacon paintings, it is as if the represented

195. Idem, 162.

196. Idem, 165.

197. Idem, 142-147.

198. Idem, 152.

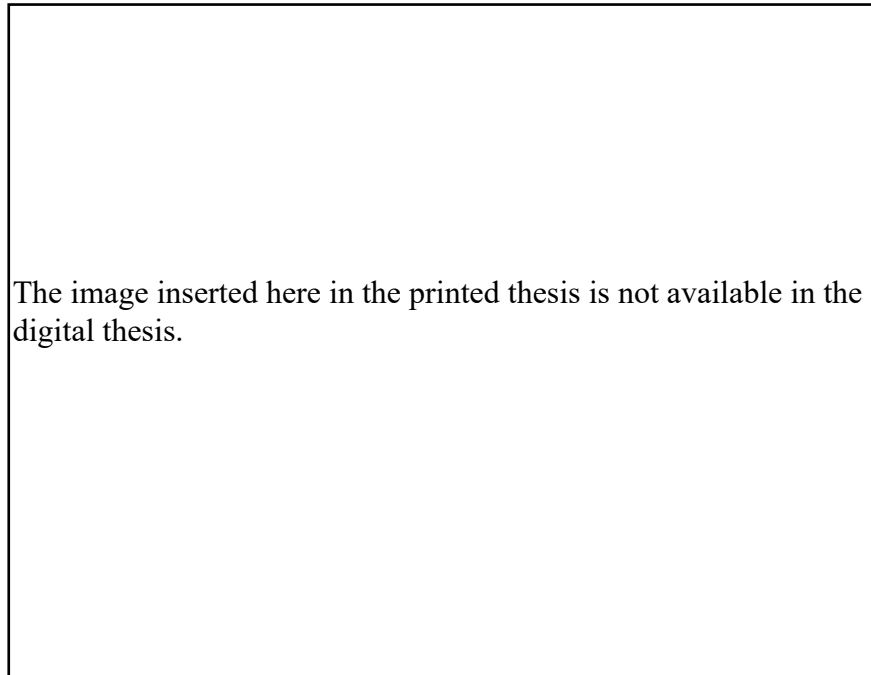


Fig.28. Francis Bacon, *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne*, 1967

figure is coming out of the image; or, the other way around, as if the figure is sucked into the image. The figure is both inside and outside the image on the wall.”¹⁹⁹ The presence of the inside and outside space could further be read as analogous of the relationship between figure and viewer who, while in two different spaces, seem to share the same surface. In fact, it is unclear as to whether they are in the same space or not; they are in a physical, or spatial, zone of indiscernibility, but also a subjective space of indiscernibility. The third representation of the figure – the portrait pinned to the wall – again accounts for Bacon’s

199. Van Alphen, “Making Sense of Affect,” 70.

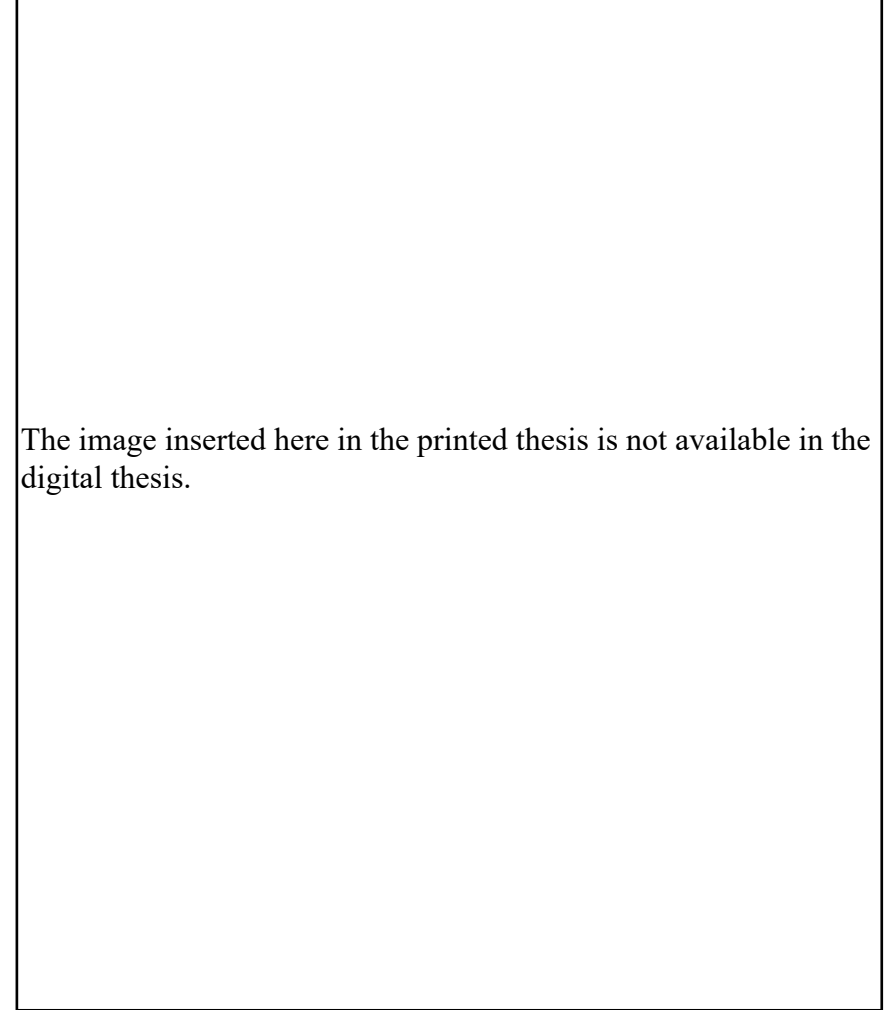


Fig.29. Francis Bacon, *Portrait of Henrietta Moraes on a Blue Couch*, 1965 - behind glass

interpretation of the sacrificial nature of traditional portraiture, where the body is nailed down and immobilized in the name of representation.

Portrait of Henrietta Moraes on a Blue Couch (1965) (Fig.29) furthers the discussion around the ontological spaces in Bacon's work. In this composition, Moraes is depicted on a blue couch that seems to be at the same time both inside and outside of an opening door which is made out of two parts. There is a circular object on the pillow that might be a mirror, which, even if it does not reflect anything, could allude to Velazquez's *The Rokeby Venus*. Here, again, we are brought back to the act of looking, and of being looked at, but in this case the viewer cannot tell whether the subject is inside or outside of the painting. As the work is behind glass, the viewer also sees themselves reflected in the canvas, becoming part of the composition through their representation inside the picture frame. Depending on the angle, the gallery space in which the painting is hanging is also reflected in the work, creating the impression that the reclining female figure is in the same physical space as the onlooker. Bacon, therefore, frames the viewer to appear in the same ontological space as his figures: the viewer's image appears next to the image of the figure, or the figure appears next to the onlooker. Both are *in* the portrait, rendering them both *as* portraits.

Bacon sees mimetic representations as sacrificing the subject, therefore he evades this by representing his subjects in motion. Besides the moving bodily deformations experienced by the figures, Bacon manipulates the way his figures are perceived by the onlooker. Nevertheless, he does not stop here, but further stages a direct identification between the figure and the onlooker by making the viewer part of the composition; the viewer becomes part of the portrait. But what do these portraits depict, and how do they influence and manipulate the perception of the viewer?

Gilles Deleuze and Francis Bacon

In this section, I will further draw on Gilles Deleuze's book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981) to explain the states the subjects of these portraits are experiencing. Deleuze starts by explaining the lack of narrativity in Bacon's work. In order to avoid the illustrative and narrative, Bacon isolates his figures. To escape the figurative would entail a turn towards pre-form, abstraction, or the purely figural through extraction or isolation. Deleuze references Lyotard's use of "figural" – as opposed to figurative. Where the figurative implies narrative relationships between the represented objects, the figural is the extracted information, that must be presented in isolation. Isolation is, according to Deleuze, the simplest means – yet still not sufficient – "to break with representation, to disrupt narration, to escape illustration, to liberate the Figure: to stick to the fact."²⁰⁰ The question posed by Deleuze, then, is: what is the point of having figures (in couples or alone) if there is no narrativity in the paintings? Deleuze calls the resulting relationships *matters of fact*, as opposed to intelligible relations of objects or ideas.²⁰¹

What occupies the rest of the painting then, besides the figure, if the point is to avoid narration? The rest of the canvas is occupied by large fields of uniform color that co-exist with the figure; not below, beneath, or beyond it, but on the same level. These two have a common limit, the contour.

The contour, as a "place", is in fact the place of an exchange in two directions: between the material structure and the Figure, and between the Figure and the field. The contour is like a membrane through which this double exchange flows. Something happens in both directions. If painting has nothing to narrate and no story to tell, something is happening all the same, something which defines the functioning of the painting.²⁰²

200. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 2.

201. Idem, 4.

202. Idem, 12.

This ongoing action is what Deleuze calls a matter of fact.

For Deleuze, Bacon's paintings are the coexistence of three basic elements – Structure, Figure, and Contour – where the contour is the vehicle through which the passing from one level to another – through deformation – takes place. Deleuze describes the deformation of the Figure as a result of its movement towards the material structure surrounding it, part of a dual relationship between Structure and Figure. “The Figure,” he writes, “is not simply the isolated body, but also the deformed body that escapes from itself.”²⁰³ This movement constitutes “passages and states that are real, physical, and effective, and which are sensations and not imaginings. [...] An intense movement flows through the whole body, a deformed and deforming movement that at every moment transfers the real image onto the body in order to constitute the Figure.”²⁰⁴ Deleuze explains Bacon's work by suggesting that “sensation is what passes from one ‘order’ to another, from one ‘level’ to another, from one ‘area’ to another. This is why sensation is the master of deformations, the agent of bodily deformations.”²⁰⁵ While abstract and figurative painting stay at the same level, and can only implement transformation of form, the figural can pass through the nervous system, through deformations.

Deleuze further asserts that the deformations undergone by the figure create “the animal traits of the head.” He explains that this association “is not the animal as a form, but rather the animal as a *trait*. [...] In place of formal correspondences, what Bacon's painting constitutes is a zone of indiscernibility or undecidability between man and animal.”²⁰⁶ Humans, just like animals, are simply meat. He exemplifies this theory by quoting a passage from K.P. Moritz that touches upon the “strange feelings” one of his characters experiences the moment when he witnesses the execution of four men. The character feels that the discarded cadavers are part of himself – as if he was the one being executed. Deleuze reads this as the character's “certainty that in

some strange way this event concerns all of us, that this discarded meat is we ourselves, and that the spectator is already in the spectacle, a ‘mass of ambulating flesh.’”²⁰⁷ The zone of indiscernibility experienced by the character is, according to Deleuze, a deeper identity – more profound than any sentimental identification, and is actually the process and reality of *becoming*.²⁰⁸ The spectator does not identify on a formal level with the scene, rather becomes part of the scene.²⁰⁹ Deleuze had already mentioned Bacon's attempt to eliminate the spectacle (in the form of narrativity), and consequently the spectators. He asserted that “Bacon needs the function of an attendant, which is not a spectator but part of the Figure.”²¹⁰ Therefore, the bodily sensations experienced by the figures are at once *becoming* (in the sensation) and *happening* (through the sensation); “one through the other, one in the other. And at the limit, it is the same body which, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation. As a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed.”²¹¹ As a result, Deleuze interprets the works not by what they mean, but rather by how they work, suggesting that the deformation undergone by the figures has a visceral effect on the viewer, who, at the time of viewing the work, feels part of it rather than outside it, as a simple spectator might be. This identification with the figure is what Deleuze calls *becoming*, or deep identification – as opposed to “sentimental identification,” which would mean only sympathizing with the figures from the outside.

Bacon's work, then, captures matters of fact that are not intelligible relationships between an object and an idea, but that are, rather, invisible forces acting upon the body that have real and visible consequences

203. Idem, 13.

204. Idem, 18-19.

205. Idem, 26.

206. Idem, 21.

207. Idem, 24.

208. Idem, 25.

209. Since his childhood Bacon was fascinated with meat and talked about a type of identification with dead animals in a butcher's shop: “If I go into a butchers shop I always think it's surprising I wasn't there instead of the animal.” Bacon quoted in Martin Harrison and Rebecca Daniels, *Francis Bacon: Incunabula* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 8.

210. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 13.

211. Idem, 35.

that directly involve the viewer. Deleuze explains that in Bacon's works, everything relates to force:

It is force that constitutes deformation as an act of painting: it lends itself neither to a transformation of form, nor to a decomposition of elements. And Bacon's deformations are rarely constrained or forced; they are not tortures, despite appearances. On the contrary, they are the most natural postures of a body that has been reorganized by the simple force being exerted upon it: the desire to sleep, to vomit, to turn over, to remain seated as long as possible...²¹²

Since everything in Bacon's work can be read as a force made visible, Deleuze poses a question regarding the necessity of acknowledging these. Why confront these invisible forces? His answer is that in this struggle, the body has the possibility of triumphing over these forces, which was not possible as long as the forces remained "hidden in a spectacle that sapped our strength and diverted us. [...] When the visual sensation confronts the invisible force that conditions it, it releases a force that is capable of vanquishing the invisible force, or even befriend[ing] it."²¹³

To summarize Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon's work, one could say that Bacon avoids the illustrative in order to escape narrative stories that would appeal only to the viewer's intellect. Instead, Bacon appeals to the figural, isolating the figures in large fields of uniform color that coexist on the same level as the figure. Their common limit, the contour, is the place of double exchange between figure and structure. This exchange results in movements: passages and states that are real, physical and effective, and which manifest as sensations rather than imaginings. Bacon's goal, therefore, is to record the fact – what Deleuze terms the "sensation" – which is what is transmitted directly to the senses, avoiding the detour of the story, which passes through the brain. When the figure experiences sensations, a zone of indiscernibility arises, which, according to Deleuze, creates a

212. Idem, 59.

213. Idem, 62.

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Fig.30. Francis Bacon, *Two Studies of George Dyer with Dog*, 1968

moment of deep identification with the figure – more profound than any sentimental identification – which is, ultimately, the process of becoming. He concludes that what is rendered in Bacon's works are invisible forces made visible, which we need to acknowledge in order to accept them, rather than be distracted by them. Through this visibility, the body affirms the possibility of triumphing over these

hidden forces.

Before reinterpreting Deleuze's reading of Bacon's work through the prism of Buddhism, I will first provide a close reading of *Two Studies of George Dyer with Dog* (1968) (Fig.30), in order to concretely exemplify Deleuze's theory of becoming in Bacon's portraits. One of the first elements I noticed when viewing the work was the overall ambivalence of the painting; it took a while to see George Dyer's second study – as promised in the title – in the front lower part of the canvas. At first glance, this second head resembles a dog, seen from behind, carefully approaching the seated George Dyer. The brown smudge of paint at the top of the figure resembles the furry head of a dog. At the opposite end, the pronounced brown line could indicate the dog's tail. The body seems to comprise a collection of patches of different colors, that only metamorphose into a human face upon close inspection. The back of the dog, in fact, resembles a human face.

Given its central position, the seated representation of George Dyer is the first to capture the viewer's attention. The next most prominent element is what seems to be his shadow – an anthropomorphic green figure reflected on the ground on Dyer's left side. What seemingly starts out as a reflection of the seated figure – considering the humanoid lower half – transforms in the higher part into an indeterminate creature. The title of the work mentions a dog, yet, besides the appearance of a panting tongue – there is not much physical resemblance to a dog. Seen from behind, the second study of Dyer's head is more canine than the green shadow.

The rendering of shadows in the painting further complicates our attempts to read the work. The chair on which Dyer is sitting has a clear and determinate shadow on the left side of the canvas; however, there is no sign of Dyer's shadow. The next logical conclusion might be that his shadow is the reflection on the other side of the canvas – yet, we have just established that this is in fact the canine presence. George Dyer – in both representations – is therefore left without a shadow, suggesting that he might not even be alive. Given the ambiguity surrounding the exact correlation between the three represented figures, we could read the painting through Gilles Deleuze's theory of becoming between man and animal. At first, we have a clear representation of George Dyer that leaps into an anthropomorphic, canine-resembling figure, before

coming full circle to a dog-shaped figure with human facial features. This presence seems to be the sum of the other two, indicated by the fact that it is isolated from them. The seated George Dyer, and the anthropomorphic dog, are depicted in the same round field, whilst the combination of the two is seen on its own, placed on a pedestal right in front of the viewer.

Another interesting element to remark upon is the cage construction in which the two figures are placed. The bottom part is fully sealed off from the rest of the canvas. The lines above this indicate a glass structure that would separate the two figures inside from the rest of the canvas. Yet the seated George Dyer seems to be in front of the grid, rather than behind it; floating between two spaces, between inside and outside, he is trapped in a process of transcending, and of becoming. The placement of the figure furthers the ontological ambiguity of Bacon's work, as also seen in *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne* (1967) and *Portrait of Henrietta Moraes on a Blue Couch* (1965). The seated George Dyer is both inside and outside of the structure at the same time. Further to this, the seated Dyer and the metamorphosed Dyer are in the same space – the canvas of the painting – and yet not in the same space, as one is in the caged structure and the other on the pedestal. Through the glass that covers the work, the viewer sees their reflection in the composition, and therefore gets involved in Dyer's becoming. There is also a further analogy between the head study, placed in front on the lower part of the canvas, and the viewer. The head is placed on a small wooden pedestal that is not represented in its entirety. This seems to be a continuation of an object that begins just outside the painted canvas, from a space shared with the viewer of the work. The fact that the second study of the subject only shows a head on an object that exists in another space indicates that the body still resides in the same space as the remaining part of the pedestal. Returning to the reflection in the glass, when the viewer moves around to see the head, they would crouch in such a way as to see the painted head in the place of one's own head, rendering the viewer's body as the body that George Dyer's head is lacking in the study. The second portrait study, then, comes full circle; the viewer becomes George Dyer, and George Dyer becomes the viewer.

Gilles Deleuze and Buddhism

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, there have been previous attempts to read Deleuze's writings through the prism of religion. Few of these studies have made a parallel with Buddhism; however, Simon O'Sullivan traces similarities between the two philosophies in an article interpreting Deleuze's reading of Bergson and Spinoza, entitled "A Life Between the Finite and Infinite: Remarks on Deleuze, Badiou and Western Buddhism." He starts by explaining that Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* has explicit resonances with contemporary Buddhism, with an emphasis on pragmatics:

A Thousand Plateaus is a book to be used and not just read, advocating for the subject's transformation which affirms *Becoming* over *Being* – *A Thousand Plateaus* has profound resonances with Eastern thought in general, and, indeed, Deleuze and Guattari reference Taoism in the especially constructive and pragmatically orientated plateau 'November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?'²¹⁴

O'Sullivan's definition of Buddhism references concepts such as the ontological condition of existence, and the transitory state of being, rather than a strict religious doctrine indebted to a Buddha (or any other form of God or Divine being). "Buddhism offers an ethical programme aimed, ultimately, at a kind of self-transcendence, at least of a self that is fixed and set against the world."²¹⁵ O'Sullivan links this to Deleuze's writing in *Difference and Repetition* (1995), and brings these ontological terms together under the concept of immanence. "In Deleuzian terms we might say, Buddhism provides instruction on how to access – and in a sense determine – this groundless ground of our being: meditation, for example, that allows for a contact with an infinite potentiality that lies behind our habitual, and finite, being."²¹⁶ He goes on to suggest that

214. Simon O'Sullivan, "A Life Between the Finite and Infinite: Remarks on Deleuze, Badiou and Western Buddhism," *Deleuze Studies*, 8.2 (2014): 257.

215. Idem, 258.

216. Idem, 259.

Buddhist meditation allows access to an outside realm from which our subjectivity has itself been formed and it is at this convergence of inside and outside that meaning is produced. In Deleuze's reading of Bergson, it is suggested that this point can be accessed through the gap between stimulus and response:

It is this gap that defines the human since it implies the possibility of moving beyond pure animal reactivity. Similarly, in Buddhist terms we are in contact with the world through our sense organs (and mind is also considered a sense organ in this understanding). This contact involves perceptions which then produce sensations. [...] These sensations are themselves accompanied – we might even say, at this stage, are followed – by feelings, of either pleasure or pain. In the Buddhist understanding of the conditioned self (our transitory mode of being) all this is given. The feelings, the sensations, the perceptions, indeed, even the sensory organs themselves are the result of previous actions and volitions (they are 'old karma'). The next stage, however, is crucial: feeling produces craving and aversion, which then produces grasping and so the whole wheel of rebirth – or 're-becoming' – continues (we set up the same conditions which in the future will produce the same reactions). We might say that this is the point at which signification comes in (with the articulation of desires, or simply the affirming/negating of the world). It is also the installment of a judging subject.²¹⁷

This in-between point – between action and reaction – is the key moment in which the cycle of unsatisfactory, self-repeating actions can be broken. Meditation cultivates awareness of the bodily sensations occurring continuously at any given time, and the mindful observation of events – called insight or vipassana – is what leads the meditator to liberating themselves from an ongoing world-process.²¹⁸ By not reacting to the sensations, or by generating a sense of "hesitancy" to react, in Bergsonian

217. Idem, 260.

218. Charles S. Prebish, and Damien Keown, *Introducing Buddhism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 120.

terms, a certain creativity replaces the old impulsive-reactive modes of behavior, liberating the organism from predetermined patterns of action:

Buddhist meditation, this time as insight practice (*vipassana*), allows an experimental encounter with this other place – of forever changing elations of intensities – that in itself produces a self-overcoming [...]. This 'knowledge' – of impermanence-insubstantiality-interconnectedness – is not solely intellectual but is, precisely, bodily. It is a direct experience, registered on the body – of the rising and fallings, the comings and goings, of sensation.²¹⁹

Deleuze interprets the bodily deformations in Bacon's work as a reaction to sensations experienced by the body. Buddhist practices also engage in the observation of sensations that are acting at all times on the body. In Deleuze's reading, experiencing these sensations creates a zone of indiscernibility (the animal trait of man – man is just meat), which has a transcendental potential, both between man and animal – man becomes animal – and between the viewer and the figure – the viewer identifies with the figure, meaning the two share the same experience. Similarly, in Buddhist practices, meditation allows an experimental encounter with another place that produces a self-overcoming. In this sense, Deleuze's reading of Bacon's work shares many similarities with Buddhist ideas.

In another essay comparing writings on art and the Buddhist *puja*, O'Sullivan proposes a case study of what the *puja* does, rather than what it is (a concept that is similar to Deleuze's understanding of Bacon's work, in terms of what the paintings do rather than what they mean). The *puja* is a ceremony centered around an arrangement of objects related to the figure of the Buddha. It is both a ritual and an immersive space in which all the senses are engaged, one that operates as a portal to other worlds in which the invisible (that which lies outside the human register) can be made visible.²²⁰ Besides sensations, the *puja* also involves processes of becoming. Buddha, understood as a presence, "works as a border guard/guide between worlds

219. O'Sullivan, "A Life Between," 261.

220. S. O'Sullivan, "Writing on Art (Case Study: The Buddhist Puja)," *Parallax*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2001): 116-117.

and also as a manifestation of the possibility of moving into these other worlds. [...] The Buddha then is the possibility of what we can become (a vision and aspiration). [...] Human but also *transhuman*."²²¹ Meditation, the ground for the arising of "enlightenment," leads to the self-overcoming that is the goal of the *puja*. In this ritual, there is a certain surrendering of one's self to that which lies beyond oneself. The *puja* "celebrates this line of flight from the self as an affirmation of the potentiality of all beings to become more than what they are (to transform themselves)."²²² What the *puja* and Buddhist practices add to the possibility of self-overcoming, then, is the potential for complete change or transformation, a moment of unbounded creativity that allows a rewriting and a redetermination of the old self.

Returning to Bacon, the state of indiscernibility achieved in his work, and identified by Deleuze, corresponds to the key moment between action and reaction in meditation practice, in which the cycle of self-repeating unsatisfactory actions can be broken; both refer to a *self-transcendental potential*. In Buddhist practices, this point between action and reaction goes a step further, as it is the moment in which predetermined conditions can be redetermined. At this point, one can create oneself anew, no longer accepting already created and accepted values and assumptions. As Bacon's works are mostly portraits, it is the portrait that opens up the possibility of self-overcoming within his oeuvre. What Bacon's works add to the genre of portraiture, when read through the prism of Buddhist practices, is an opening up of new access points and, with them, the potential for a complete transformation of predetermined conditions.

Traditionally, the representability of the sitter's subjectivity in portraiture was fully accepted, rendering the portrait a faithful representation of a unique subject. It was assumed that there was an implied unity between the sitter's outer expression and his or her inner essence, an illusion that dictated the construction of the traditional portrait. As such, representing the subject in a mimetic manner was the main goal of the genre, as this captured the real essence of the sitter. Late nineteenth century avant-garde artists began to challenge the conventional notion of the mimetic portrait, arguing that outward form was not representative of the inner essence of

221. Idem, 117.

222. Idem, 118.

the subject. For this reason, portraiture at the turn of the century became referential rather than representational. Nevertheless, it still aimed to bring forth the unique subjectivity of the sitter. The genre, then, relied on the idea that each subject had a clearly understandable subjectivity that could be fully grasped from the outside, and that this identity could be rendered in such a way as to be read and understood by the viewer. This led to a standardized way of interpreting portraiture, in which the viewer reads or understands the portrait, just as they would read a book; concrete, graspable information is given about a stable subject. When one looks at a portrait, one receives concrete information about the person depicted, information which determines an objective view or interpretation of the subject's character.

In Bacon's work, however, there is no attempt to represent one stable and identifiable identity. In his compositions, mimesis is discarded in order to show that there is no sum of factors that can be painted to depict a complex, stable essence. As a result, his subjects seem to be in transitory states. As the reader can no longer decipher a clear and stable inner essence due to fragmentation, the role of the portrait opens up for new interpretations. Taken a step further with the framing of the viewer, who sees literally himself as part of the composition, Bacon blurs the line between the sitter's subjectivity and that of the viewer. When the portrait and the viewer become one, they undergo the same experiences. If we understand this through Buddhism, and through Deleuze's theory of becoming, both portrait and viewer are experiencing this in-between moment that opens up the possibility of reinterpretation. Bacon's portraits thus become tools for creating a new subjectivity for their figures, through their becoming with the viewer, and vice versa.

Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon, and Buddhism

If we examine Bacon's work through Deleuze's interpretation, and its similarities to Buddhist practices, we understand that the figures' bodily deformations are a result of them experiencing the continually arising and passing sensations occurring in the body at any given time. The deformations, just as the sensations, are continuously changing, and therefore materialize in diverse bodily distortions. The whole body – or “emanation,” as Bacon describes it – is a continuous flow of energy.

The body, itself a mass of energy, is in continuous interaction with the outside world through its sense organs, interaction which triggers a bodily reaction. Once a sensation has occurred – of aversion, or pleasure, for example – and has been interpreted as positive or negative, an immediate reaction will follow. For example, if I were to hit my leg, I would evaluate that this sensation hurts me, and as a result I might scream out in pain. If this reaction were to be represented in painting, it would be a narrative, or a narrative sequence, as whatever would be painted would be the direct effect of a cause. The reaction would entail a movement that would lead to a logical course of action. As Bacon's figures seem to be in movement, they are interpreted as reacting to a situation, or occurrence, in which they are involved. Bacon's figures, however, are not responding to such external actions. As Deleuze explains, the movement they are undergoing is a result of the sensations exerted upon them; however, they do not engage in coherent action. The facial expressions and grimaces the figures display inform the viewer of the type of sensation they are experiencing. Bacon seems to have depicted a great number of figures experiencing sensations that create aversion, hence the screaming and grinding of teeth so often encountered in his paintings. Nevertheless, these expressions are motionless: they are mute screams; screams that simply mimic the action of screaming. Sylvester has remarked that Bacon's depictions of screams:

Do not invariably appear to be uttering a cry. Often there does seem to be a scream of pain and anguish or complaint, but sometimes the sound could be a scream of ecstasy and sometimes there seems to be no sound at all: the mouth could be that of an animal in a threatening pose, or a defiant one, or that of a triumphant athlete, or that of an asthmatic gasping in a struggle to breathe. The more one looks, the more they become open mouths that one doesn't trouble actively to read. Desisting from interpretation avoids both the attribution to the protagonists of particular nameable emotions, such as panic or rage, and the attribution to the imaginary of unconscious symbolism, such as that of *vagina dentata*. It leaves the form to work more directly on the nervous system.²²³

223. Sylvester, *Looking Back*, 29.

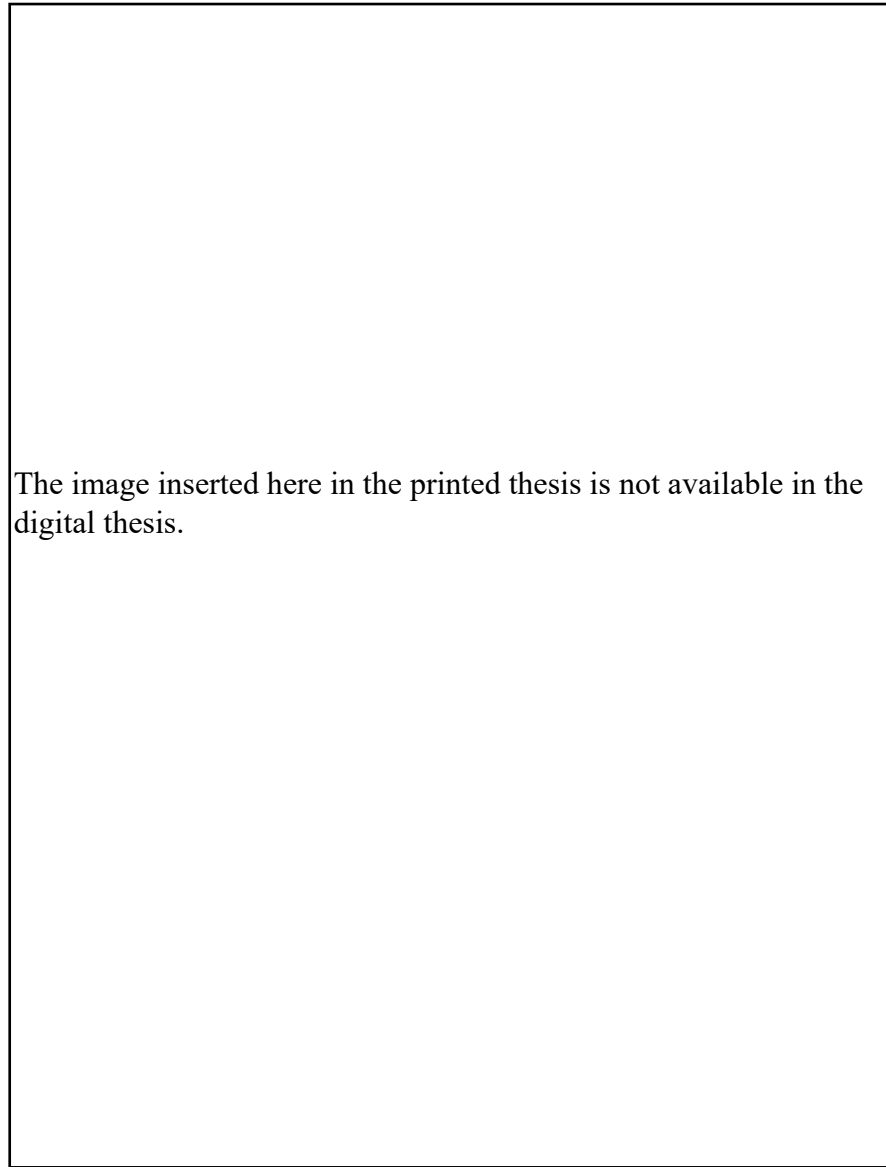


Fig.31. Francis Bacon, *Study After Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953

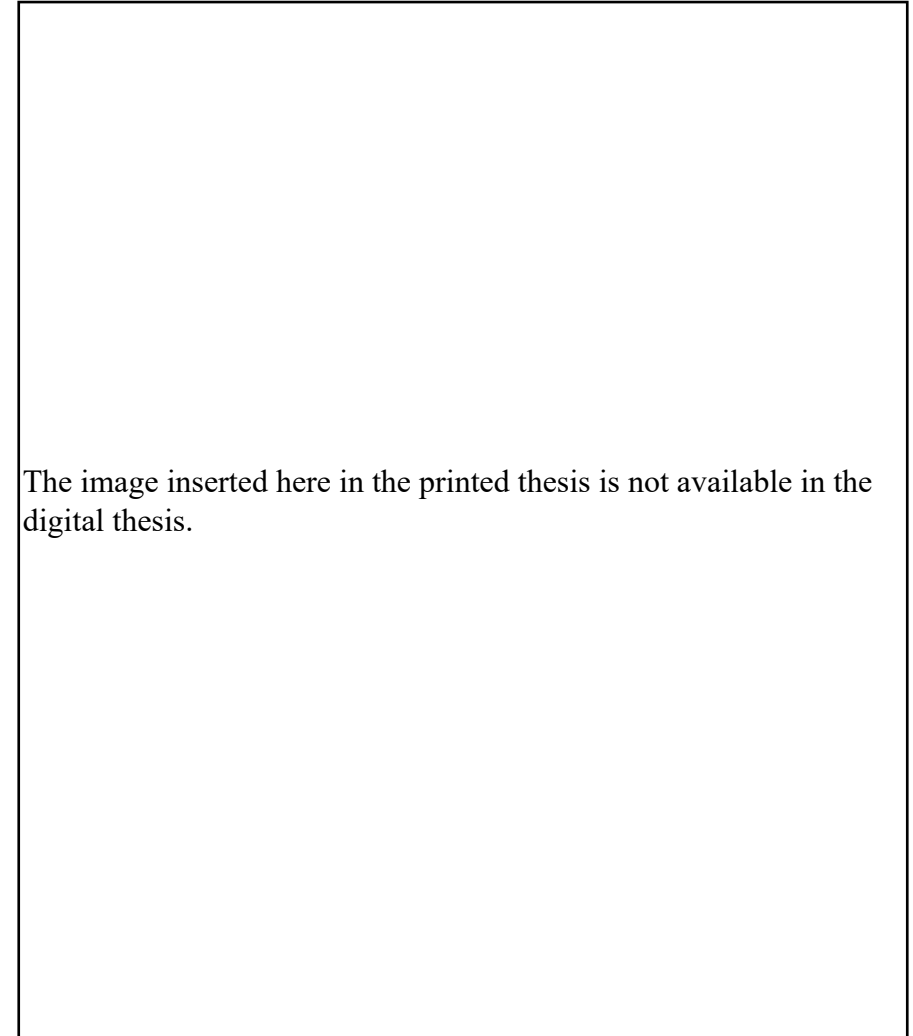
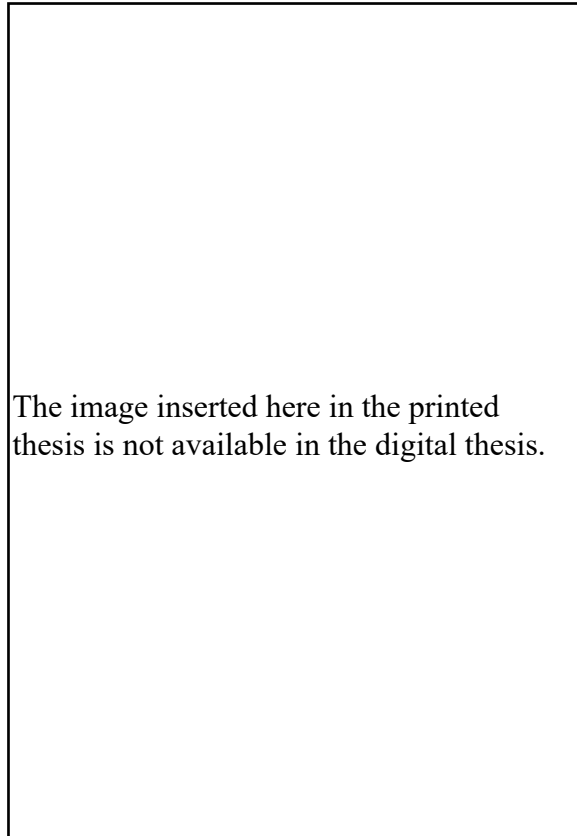


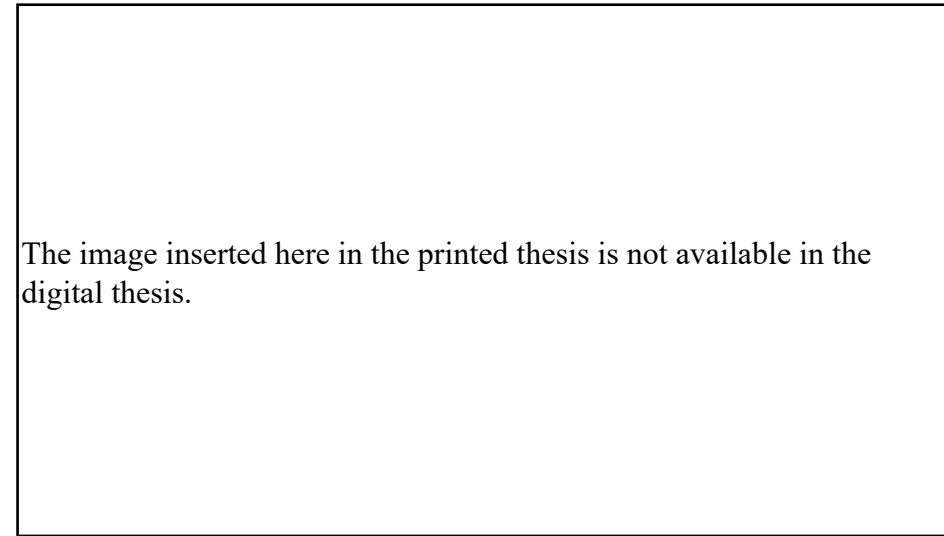
Fig.32. Francis Bacon, *Study for a Portrait of George Dyer*, 1967

Fig.33. Francis Bacon, *Study After Velazquez*, 1950

Deleuze explains: “What fascinates Bacon is not movement, but its effect on an immobile body: heads whipped by the wind or deformed by an aspiration, but also all the interior forces that climb through the flesh. To make the spasm visible.”²²⁴ In works such as *Landscape with Pope/Dictator* (1946 – work which is believed to have been the first one to depict a “screaming” Pope), *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (1950) or

224. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, XI.

Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X (1953) (Fig.31) – the scream is immobile on the figure's face. When one screams in pain, one's face will be contorted to accommodate the very physical act of screaming. Bacon's figures, however, only open their mouths to mimic the way in which a scream would occur. These figures receive the sensation, they evaluate it, but nevertheless they do not fully act out the reaction. They observe what the sensation does to their physical

Fig.34. Francis Bacon, *Two Studies for a Portrait*, 1990

body, and move on. At times, Bacon's figures seem to experience positive sensations as well. In *Study for a Portrait of George Dyer* (1967) (Fig.32), the depicted head has a peaceful emanation. There are many forces acting upon the face that create contortion, deformation and movement, but the head remains still, with the eyes closed, in what seems to be a serene moment of contemplation of the forces exerted upon it. Whether good or bad, it is this moment of intense experience and observation that seems to be the focus of Bacon's work.

The question remains, then, as to why figures such as *Study After Velazquez* (1952) (Fig.33) or *Study for Head* (1952) seem to be actively

engaged in the act of screaming, with contracted facial muscles completely absorbed into the action. Deleuze explains that “in the end, Bacon’s Figures are not racked bodies at all, but ordinary bodies in ordinary situations of constraint and discomfort. A man ordered to sit still for hours on a narrow stool is bound to assume contorted postures. The violence of a hiccup, of the urge to vomit, but also of a hysterical, involuntary smile...”²²⁵ When comparing this reading to Buddhist meditation practices, one knows that while complete awareness and equanimity are desired in meditation, physical pain, even if closely monitored, can still emerge. These are the moments during meditation when one changes position, sneezes, coughs, cries, or laughs. These works could therefore be interpreted as studies that capture the moment of distraction that escapes close scrutiny, and which allows for the acting out or experiencing of the sensation exerted upon the body.

As one advances in the meditation practice and becomes more familiar with the technique, one gains more control over the reaction process and becomes less distracted by strong sensations. In the 1940s and 1950s, Bacon’s figures seem to be at the beginning of their meditative process; they are depicted as blurry, murky, and agitated. By the end of Bacon’s career, his figures had become much clearer in execution, as we can see in *Study for a Portrait of John Edwards* (1988) and *Two Studies for a Portrait* (1990) (Fig.34). There are fewer distortions and contractions, and less movement. It seems that, with the passing of years, these figures are able to better contain their reactions, remaining more neutral in the face of their bodily sensations. Deleuze accounted for this as the affirmation of the possibility of victory over invisible, deforming forces that, now visible, are therefore graspable. “When the visual sensation confronts the invisible force that conditions it, it releases a force that is capable of vanquishing the invisible force, or even befriending it.”²²⁶

225. Idem, X.

226. Idem, 62.

Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon, Buddhism, and Portraiture

To develop this argument further, I propose considering this common moment of in-betweenness that Bacon’s figures are caught in as the very moment at which change can occur. The instant that Deleuze identifies as the moment of becoming (as exemplified in K. P. Moritz’s text), and which in Deleuze’s reading of Bacon’s work concerns a deep identification between man and animal, figure and viewer, corresponds in Buddhism to the moment of maximum awareness, where self-transcendence can be taken to a completely new level. This is not only a self-transcendent moment of interaction with another, as Deleuze suggests, but also a moment in which one can access an outside realm from which subjectivity itself has been formed; it is at the convergence of inside and outside where pre-conceived concepts of a stable and depictable subjectivity can be completely re-modeled. When one looks at a portrait, one tries to understand it based on a pre-given set of rules for interpreting portraits. Nevertheless, in this moment of becoming, there is the possibility of redetermining the manner in which a portrait can be understood. This begins at a formal level, where the figures are neither figurative nor abstract; they are rather in a state of indiscernibility which Deleuze refers to as “inhumane,” because it is still unknown to human nature – similar to stuttering, a language that is not yet a language. In Bacon’s portraits the subject is captured in this in-between moment, thus transforming the work into what Deleuze calls neither subject nor object. In Bacon’s work, the figures are not presented in a moment that speaks of their individuality, neither are they caught in a moment of complete absence of individuality, but rather in a state of transition, of becoming. Neither subject nor object, the portrait enters a state of in-betweenness, where its predetermined parameters can be redetermined. In this moment, the portrait does not need to represent or evoke its subject for the viewer, nor to solely engage or interact with the viewer. Rather than consigning the figure to immobility, on the contrary, the portrait renders sensible a kind of progression, an exploration of the figure’s potentiality. In this moment of redetermination, the portrait does not fall back on a clear distinction between artwork and viewer, rather it becomes one with its viewer.

In his essay “Making Sense of Affect” (2012), Van Alphen explains that the invisible reality made visible in Bacon’s works touches the viewer as much as the figures, through affect: “that is, by the surface layers, which are senseless as such, but are put into motion by the painter in such a way that they touch us.”²²⁷ For Van Alphen, affects and percepts within Bacon’s work activate and stimulate the viewer’s senses to the point where the “viewers are touched directly and almost violently by the material presence of his paintings. It is as if our skin is penetrated by affects generated by the presence of what we see: not a mediated story, but the material reality of the painting.”²²⁸ The deformations going on in the painting, therefore, are not only directed to the figures, but also to the viewer. Van Alphen further explains that “how he wants to affect the viewer [implies] that the figures in Bacon’s paintings can be seen as representing viewers: the bodies in the paintings exhibit the kind of responses that the viewer is also intended to have. His figures are *hit* by sense perception in the same way as the viewers of Bacon’s paintings are.”²²⁹

Bacon’s portraits do not represent, they create. By entering the painting – like entering the *pūja* – both the viewer and the figures have the capacity to transform themselves – to become more than what they already are. The portrait is no longer a fixed point, a reassuring mirror of one’s own subjectivity, but an experiment in exploring what lies beyond a fixed subjectivity. The portrait is a place of transformation, an aesthetic zone in which boundaries between subjects and objects are blurred. In Bacon’s work, as well as in Buddhist practices, one is interested in affects rather than meanings, experience rather than understanding, and transformation rather than representation. All of this calls for participation, to access something outside one’s own boundaries of subjectivity. This does not limit the decoding of the portrait, but rather opens it up for further interpretation. The portrait becomes an event, where determinate relations between artwork and viewer disappear. This type of portrait calls for a new kind of relational subjectivity, where the boundaries are blurred between subject, object,

227. Van Alphen, “Making Sense of Affect,” 67.

228. Idem, 66.

229. Idem, 73.

and viewer, and where the portrait becomes a process with no original meaning, and no end goal.

Subjectivity, then, is achieved through transformation, because there is no fixed and stable identity. One can only hint at the shifting nature of identity through change – one needs to transform, to become, in order to grasp this. One can only grasp transformation when one transforms oneself: through the act of becoming, when looking at these portraits. Portraiture, therefore, does not remain a stable composition that can render a fixed notion; rather, it becomes a fluid process that adapts with the viewer. These portraits show subjectivity in transformation as a way to reflect reality. No portrait can sum up the subject’s inner features or characteristics with complete accuracy. The portrait is something that is in continuous change, that cannot be pinned down, or captured. The only way to create a truthful portrait is to render this sense of change, and the only way to understand this change is to identify with it. Through becoming – in a Buddhist sense – one transcends one’s own self. One does not any longer perceive subjectivity as something stable, as belonging to oneself, but rather as relational and in continuous movement.

Conclusion

What are Bacon’s portraits, then? We can at least determine what they are not, and that is traditional portrait depictions. They do not simply require a straightforward effort of decoding signs from the maker in order to decipher the unique essence of the subject depicted. To conclude this chapter’s analysis of Bacon, I will make a last parallel between Deleuze’s interpretation of Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, and Bacon’s portraits. Bacon was a great admirer of French literature. Particularly keen on Proust, he appreciated the author’s ability to analyze human passions and behaviors, which he himself set out to do in his own works.²³⁰

Deleuze explains in the opening pages of *Proust & Signs* (2000) that the search, for Proust, is not a simple effort of recalling, but rather a

230. Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon*, 11.

means of seeking the truth.²³¹ This does not imply solely a narration of involuntary memory, but is rather a process of learning. Proust's characters do not know or understand much in the moment at which the action happens to them; rather, they will learn this later on, in the future. This process of learning is essentially concerned with signs (worldly signs; signs of love; sensuous, material signs; and signs of art) that need to be deciphered and interpreted. By doing so, the characters go in search of the truth. According to Proust, no-one – regardless of the purity of their mind – sets out to seek absolute truth unless they are forced to do so by their circumstances. “Who searches for the truth? [...] There is always a violence of signs that forces us into the search, that robs us of peace. The truth is not to be found by affinity, not by goodwill, but is betrayed by involuntary signs.”²³²

Likewise, Bacon did not consider that traditional representation could render truth. Reading his work through Deleuze's perspective, Bacon chose to render his figures in the moment of experiencing extreme bodily sensations, as he considered that this could bring them closer to a true state of being. Experiencing these sensations, then, becomes necessary for the figures in order to search for, and to understand, the truth. Sensations are rich signs which provide plentiful material to be decoded. Through *becoming*, the viewer identifies with the figures, and therefore undergoes the same violent sensations, leading them, likewise, on a search for truth. Through Bacon's portraits, instead of a fixed composition with pre-given information – similar to the notion of the *doxa* – the viewer, together with the figures, embarks on a quest to find subjectivity, having experienced the violence of sensations. One must experience the violent effect of a sign to be forced to seek the sign's meaning. The experience is therefore understood only afterwards, at a later moment, as one learns by interpreting the signs, rather than by assimilating objective content. The subject, therefore, gains subjectivity only after experiencing the signs, and not before; the portrait becomes an “after experience” – something that will happen in the future.

231. G. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard, eds. Sandra Buckley, Michael Hardt, and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3

232. *Idem*, 15.

If Bacon's figures did not experience the violence of bodily sensations, they would not have the urgency to seek the truth. Likewise, if the viewer was unable to identify with the figures, they would not embark on the same search. And if both figure and viewer were not caught in this moment of in-betweenness – between action and reaction, a moment in which everything we know can be rewired – they would not be able to redetermine the abstract conditions they were initially shaped by. By identifying with each other whilst undergoing an experience that propels them both to search for the truth, in a moment when everything can be rewritten, both subject and viewer create a new type of subjectivity. It is a form of subjectivity the viewer did not understand when first looking at the portrait; it is not a given subjectivity, but a newly-created one. Just as for Proust's characters, Bacon's subjects are not oriented towards the past and the discovery of an existing image, but rather towards the future and the process of creating. Similarly, the viewer of Bacon's portraits does not have certain information to begin with, but gradually comes to understand that they themselves are like the figures they see. Their subjectivity – like that of the subject – is in constant movement.

CHAPTER FOUR

Marlene Dumas' Iconic Portraits

MARLENE DUMAS' ICONIC PORTRAITS²³³

Introduction

Many of Dumas' works can be categorized as portraits, as they represent human figures. Moreover, most of these works are either facial, bust, or full-length representations of well-known individuals. The fact that the compositions are titled simply *Magdalena*, *Marilyn*, or *Phil Spector*, for example, can be interpreted as a promise to transform the canvases into authentic portraits of the named individuals. As discussed in Chapter One, in its original form, a traditional painted portrait aimed to deliver a faithful representation of the unique identity of the subject portrayed. Yet the figures depicted in Dumas' work – such as Mary Magdalene, Marilyn Monroe, Phil Spector or Naomi Campbell – are often unrecognizable. By depicting iconic cultural and religious subjects in unusual and unexpected ways, Dumas' work comments on the role and function of iconic figures in contemporary culture.

233. Parts of this chapter have been previously published in two articles titled "Unmasking the Icon. Marlene Dumas' Liminal Portraits," *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture*, no. 23 (2019) and "To Model or Not to Model: Transgressive Portraits of Mary Magdalene by Marlene Dumas," *Breaking the Rules: Artistic Expressions of Transgressions, Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*, Leiden University, Issue 5 (2017).



Fig.35. Marlene Dumas, *Magdalena (Manet's Queen / Queen of Spades)*, 1995



Fig.36. Marlene Dumas, *Magdalena (Newman's Zip)*, 1995

On the occasion of her 1995 Venice Biennial presentation in the Dutch Pavilion, Dumas created a series of eight works, entitled *Magdalena*. The figures presented in the series take as a starting point the biblical character of Mary Magdalene, who holds a singular position in Western art history as a figure of controversy and opposition. Known in Christian iconography as a sinner who became a saint, depictions of her have traditionally attempted to incorporate elements from her life both before and after her conversion. She has been consistently depicted as a beautiful and seductive woman, with long hair and light skin, seeking penance. The resulting imagery thus portrays her with an erotic aura, shying away from the viewers' gaze, encouraging a voyeuristic reading of the subject. Given this context, Dumas chose to present a series of different – and not easily recognizable – versions of Mary Magdalene. Consisting of three-meter tall canvases depicting naked female figures in an upright position, directly confronting the viewer, Dumas' paintings challenge conventional understandings of Mary Magdalene. As Emma Bedford argues, Dumas' series encompasses the full range of what it means to be a woman, offering at the same time incisive commentary on cultural constructions of womanhood.²³⁴



Fig.37. Carlo Crivelli, *Mary Magdalene*, ca. 1480-87

This chapter will first focus on two paintings from this series, namely *Magdalena (Newman's Zip)* (1995) (Fig.36) and *Magdalena (Manet's Queen / Queen of Spades)* (1995) (Fig.35), arguing that the selected portraits transgress traditional art historical depictions in order to challenge stereotypical representations of female subjects and predefined racial identities, at the same time as dismantling the outmoded concept of the female as a passive body. By closely reading the paintings and contextualizing them with reference to other works by Dumas, as well as works by other contemporary artists, I will analyze the means by which these portraits transgress conventional readings of female subjectivity to explain how they employ portraiture as a way to deconstruct conventional Western understandings of the genre.

To deepen and extend my argument about Dumas' usage of portraiture, I will further scrutinize the iconic status of her portraits of Mary Magdalene. In addition to the *Magdalena* series, I will also examine a portrait depicting an unrecognizable version of Marilyn Monroe. By analyzing the term "icon," and how this functioned – and still functions – as a cultural model, I will interpret the meaning of "iconic portraits" in reference to works that represent religious figures such as Mary Magdalene, as well as glamour icons such as Marilyn Monroe. In doing this, I will demonstrate the manner in which Dumas exposes the fact that cultural images represent collectively created stereotypical identities, voided of their own subjectivity and identity. I will further reference and use the anthropological concept of "liminality," and how this functions in relation to painting, to argue that Dumas depicts her iconic subjects in a state of transition and "in-betweenness," which functions as a process of rewriting and reclaiming the subjectivity of the depicted characters.

234. Emma Bedford, "Questions of Intimacy and Relations," in *Marlene Dumas*:

Intimate Relations, eds. Marlene Dumas and Emma Bedford (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2007), 38.

Mary Magdalene

While traditional representations of Mary Magdalene would have been categorized as biblical scenes, and therefore included in the broader category of history paintings, Dumas' depictions can nevertheless be included in the genre of portraiture. History paintings depict a moment in a narrative story, with a well-defined setting and, often, numerous characters. Representations of Mary Magdalene depict either narrative scenes from her life taken from the Bible, or single her out in allegorical scenes, where she is represented with elements alluding to her identity, such as her long hair or an ointment jar (Fig.37). Dumas' works evade the category of history paintings because these portraits do not focus on scenes from her life. The figures are also stripped of all background and auxiliary elements that could allude to their identity. The close-up and blow-up methods aim to create a present moment of tension with the viewer, rather than represent an unfolding moment from the past. While these depictions of Mary Magdalene can therefore be categorized as portraits, they also go beyond conventional notions of the genre, as they do not set out to create a mimetic representation of the subject, nor to capture the inner essence of a stable self.

Dumas' portraits of Mary Magdalene break with conventions, as they do not refer to a character's inner essence, nor do they strive for mimetic reality. Nor are Dumas' characters sitters in the literal sense, since her paintings are explicitly inspired by cultural imagery, rather than being taken from live models. Depicting Mary Magdalene in various non-representative instances, Dumas transgresses art historical conventions of representation, as well as standard notions of the genre of portraiture, by departing from notions of individual identity.

Although there is no specific biblical reference to Mary Magdalene being a prostitute, or that she led a sinful life, she is generally known in Western culture as a sinner who converted, and became a saint. Consequently, it is not surprising that representations of her throughout art history have resulted in numerous paradoxes and ambivalences. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona explains that the reason for this confusion is that the Gospels do not offer a clear or definitive picture of who Mary Magdalene

was in the context of Christ's life.²³⁵ The misunderstandings are also a consequence of the common use of the name Mary in early Christian scriptures, making the distinction between characters impossible at times. The earliest identification of Mary Magdalene, and the one on which Evangelists agree, occurs when she is the first person to see the empty tomb, and then Christ, resurrected. The Gospel also mentions her as one of the earliest and most devout followers of Jesus (Luke 8.2-3), from whom he cast seven daemons (Mark 16.9; Luke 8.2). While there is no evidence that any of the seven daemons had anything to do with unchastity, Apostolos-Cappadona explains that the confusion might have arisen from her geographic epithet, alluding to the city of Magdala. During the life of the Christ, Magdala was a large and wealthy town on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee, which was destroyed by the Romans as a "result of its citizens' alleged moral depravity."²³⁶ Over time, the confusion between the sins of the town's inhabitants, and those of Magdalene herself, could have been the source of her image as an adulterous sinner. While scriptural disputes over Mary Magdalene's identity were ongoing throughout the first centuries AD, since Gregory the Great's proclamation (c. 590-604), Western Christian tradition has acknowledged Magdalene as being both a sinner and a penitent.²³⁷

While this image of Mary Magdalene is not based on historical sources, it is encouraged by the Church as it shows believers that, no matter how much they have sinned, there will always be the possibility of redemption in the eyes of God. Esther de Boer argues that there might have been a more complex relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene than simply disciple and teacher, which may have triggered the jealousy of other disciples, leading them to subvert her image.²³⁸

Consequently, the notion of Mary Magdalene as an adulteress spread in Christianity from its early stages, and can be traced back at least to

235. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *In Search of Mary Magdalene: Images and Traditions* (New York: The American Bible Society, 2002), 10.

236. Idem, 11.

237. Idem, 14-15.

238. Esther de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up: the Sources Behind the Myth* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 14-20.

Ephraim the Syrian in the fourth century.²³⁹ As a result, art historical imagery depicted her as a beautiful, sensual woman with long, light hair and fair skin. Her beauty and long hair, as well subtle religious references such as the ointment jar, make her easily recognizable in depictions from throughout the centuries.

Mary Magdalene's ointment jar is a symbol of metamorphoses. Depending on the depiction, it can take various shapes, including an alabaster container, a liturgical vessel, or a perfume bottle. Alluding either to her previous sinful life of pleasure, or to her redeemed persona, the anointing oils represent her cleansing and her break away from evil and sin. While her long flowing hair has been used to anoint Jesus' feet, it also represents the iconography of a sinful woman. As Apostolos-Cappadona explains, hairstyle had significance in the classical world, where only unmarried young women allowed their hair to flow freely down their shoulders. Married women had their hair covered as a symbol of their social status, and to preserve their beauty for their husbands. Courtesans braided their hair, decorating it with "bejeweled or flower ornaments alluding to the female personification of profane love."²⁴⁰ Furthermore, light hair was typical of the personification of Venus, the goddess of love, and symbolized sexuality.²⁴¹

Daniel Arasse argues that hair is Mary Magdalene's key feminine attribute, just as the phallus would be for a male.²⁴² Analyzing imagery that depicts Mary Magdalene with loose, unarranged hair, he notes that

the hair becomes a metaphor for another specific symbol. While her extravagantly styled hair is a symbol of her previous life as a seductress, her long hair loosely flowing over her body must therefore represent the opposite. I have already noted that loosely flowing hair was reserved for innocent, young, unmarried girls who were, most importantly, virgins. Clearly, Mary Magdalene does not fall into this category. As Magdalene was not a virgin, her loose hair could only represent the manner in which she would most likely wear it in intimate circumstances. Yet, during the period, women were not allowed to appear in public with disheveled hair, as this would have been indicative of the untidy lifestyle that Mary Magdalene had already left behind. Mary Magdalene's untidy hair is nevertheless fully accepted in traditional depictions of her character, and, according to Arasse, this had metamorphosed into her pubic hair. Arasse calls this technique the "considerations of representability," when one cannot represent something because it is taboo, and replaces it instead with something that resembles it in one way or another. Mary Magdalene's highly sexualized aura is maintained and fueled by her long, unarranged hair. Left to loosely curve around her body, her long hair becomes a metaphor for pubic hair, which calls to mind the habits of her previous, sinful life.²⁴³

Dumas' works *Newman's Zip (NZ)* and *Manet's Queen (MQ)*, on the other hand, have almost none of the characteristics discussed above. Neither figure is light haired or fair skinned – moreover, *MQ* does not even have long hair. Cutting off Mary Magdalene's hair would be, according to Arasse's argument, taking away her preeminent sexual attribute, and denouncing at the same time her background as a sinner. Furthermore, neither of the two figures is depicted in repentance or shying away from the viewer's gaze – both are standing upright and looking the viewer in the eye. While Dumas' Magdalenas are inspired by supermodels such as Naomi Campbell and Claudia Schiffer – "[Magdalena]... is a fusion of Naomi Campbell's legs in *Vogue* with the face and torso of another" – it is not only their seductive bodies that are at stake in these paintings²⁴⁴. Going beyond the stereotypical

239. Richard J. Hooper, *The Crucifixion of Mary Magdalene: the Historical Tradition of the First Apostle and the Ancient Church's Campaign to Suppress It* (Sedona: Sanctuary Publications, 2008), 81.

240. Apostolos-Cappadona, *In Search of Mary Magdalene*, 20.

241. Another patron of churches and monasteries who is remembered for her long hair is Lady Godiva, Countess of Mercia, who died between 1066 and 1086. The legend about Godiva dates back to the thirteenth-century, and recounts that covered only by her long hair, the countess rode naked through the streets of Coventry to gain a remission of taxes that her husband Leofric, Earl of Mercia, imposed on the citizens, *The Oxford Dictionary National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

242. Daniel Arasse, *Take a Closer Look*, trans. Alyson Waters (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 75.

243. Idem, 87.

244. M. Dumas "Magdalena (Who?)," in *Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations*, eds.



Fig.38. Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863

image of the fashion model, Dumas attempts to alter the perception of submissive female identity by transforming the anonymous body into a present and active one. It is almost as though, without knowing the titles of the works, the viewer would not be able to identify the subject of the paintings. Nevertheless, titles are important guides for Dumas' works, and she uses them to direct and intensify the impact of the paintings. According to the artist, "titles give direction to the way a picture is looked at. Desire is depicted, deficiency is central. The whole becomes more complex."²⁴⁵

Marlene Dumas and Emma Bedford (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2007), 82.

245. Bloemhevel and Mot, "The Particularity," 19 and M. Dumas quoted by Paul Andriess in *The Eyes of the Night Creatures* (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriess, 1985).

The Naked

MQ references Edouard Manet's famous painting *Olympia* (1863) (Fig.38), first exhibited at the 1863 Paris Salon (Dumas even said: "I see my Magdalena as an Olympia on the catwalk"²⁴⁶). The canvas instantly drew much criticism from the public as it included several indicators that the character depicted was a naked prostitute. While the female nude has been a common subject in painting throughout the centuries, until *Olympia* was shown in public, it had always been depicted in a highly idealized manner. The female nude was used for depicting allegories, virtues, and goddesses, romanticizing the idea of the female figure. First and foremost, *Olympia* scandalized the French public simply because it depicted a real woman, in her probable surroundings. She was not depicted as a nude – which would have been indicative of a studio model – but rather appeared as simply naked. Her nakedness meant that the viewer was confronted with the unclothed and unmasked body of a courtesan, which, when placed in the public sphere, embarrassed its viewers. It altered and subverted identities that the culture wished to keep fixed, chiefly those of the nude and of the prostitute, and as a result the painting was harshly mocked and criticized.²⁴⁷ Art, at that time, was not supposed to confront its viewers with realities, but rather with ideals. Therefore, by stripping the nude of the idealized forms of the female body, it simply became a naked woman.

Kenneth Clark starts his survey of the history of the nude in art by explaining the difference between the nude, and the naked. While he defines being naked is being deprived of clothes – accompanied by feelings of embarrassment – the nude, on the contrary, does not experience shame of discomfort. "The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenseless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body re-formed."²⁴⁸ According to Clark, the nude departs from the naked in the sense that it represents an ideal, and not an imitation of reality. He therefore argues that the nude becomes a perfected version of reality,

246. Ibidem.

247. T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 100.

248. Kenneth Clark, *The Nude* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 1.

created by the artist from his imagination, combined with the study of mathematical proportions. While Manet's *Olympia* draws clear inspiration from Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538), it adds one element which changes the entire history of female nude representation. As Clark mentions, the most shocking aspect of the work was the placing on a naked body of a head which displayed so much individual character, jeopardizing the whole premise of the female nude.²⁴⁹ Aware of her nakedness, *Olympia* meets the gaze of the onlooker, looks back directly at the viewer, and eventually dismisses his presence. She confronts the spectators that intrudes into her private quarters, and punishes them by making them aware of their role as voyeurs. In fact, in gazing back at the spectator, *Olympia* challenges male control over the female body, denouncing the idea of the contained and passive non-interactive female nude.

Van Alphen also explains the consequences of unconventional renderings of the female nude. Direct confrontation, he suggests, precludes the traditional objectification of the female body in male desire and visual pleasure, as the gaze becomes self-endangering. Without being able to enjoy what it sees, its function becomes one of unmasking his voyeuristic position. Pursuing a different attitude from Manet's *Olympia*, that dismissed the viewer, Dumas' female figures engage the viewer in a provocative, confrontational way, making them aware of the difficulty of his position.²⁵⁰

In *Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, Lynda Nead argues that one of the principal goals of the female nude has been the regulation of the female sexual body.²⁵¹ Through Western art and culture, the female body has been framed so that it becomes contained and controlled. "The transformation of the female body into a female nude is thus an act of regulation: of the female body and of the potentially wayward viewer whose wandering eye is disciplined by the contentions and protocols of art."²⁵² Embracing Manet, Dumas explained:

I don't want the nude, I want the naked. But I do know with the

description of things, as with the Magdalene paintings, that I was deliberately not looking for seduction, but rather for confrontation, and for a long time that was the case with my other depictions of figures. Maybe I thought that confrontation was closer to nakedness than seduction.²⁵³

Both *MQ* and *NZ* are naked, aware of and accepting their own sexuality. They overtly show this to their viewer, whom they also confront with a direct gaze. Dumas anoints the shocking, naked body with qualities that had previously been attributed to the nude, namely the reformed-body. Dumas' portraits of Mary Magdalene show the naked body as a confident, balanced entity, therefore entirely transforming the category of the female nude.

Given this, it is interesting to analyze another painting by Dumas, namely *The Particularity of Nakedness* (1987) (Fig.39), because of the way in which it explores the tradition of the male nude. Depicting a male nude horizontally, the work attracted much criticism, as it was unthinkable for a male figure to be depicted in such a way, deprived of a traditionally masculine, vertical, authoritarian position. Moreover, as the nude was reserved for the female figure since early Modernism, this was seen as being an unnatural image, prompting the public to associate this figure with homosexuality. Silvia Eiblmayr has pointed out that the most significant conclusion is not sexual orientation, "but rather the traditional identification of the passive, erotically displayed and readily available body with what is female and its concomitant depreciation."²⁵⁴

The Mary Magdalene figures, on the contrary, denote authority. By depicting Mary Magdalene standing upright, directly gazing at the viewer, the passive body is transformed into an active one, thus challenging not only the stereotypical representation of the female nude, but also of the female figure in portrait depictions more broadly. By deliberately playing with the size and format of her works, the artist

249. Idem, 165.

250. Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon*, 174.

251. Lynda Nead, *Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.

252. Ibidem.

253. Marlene Dumas, Andrea Buttner, and Jeniffer Higgie, "To Show or Not to Show," *Tate ETC*, 33 (2015): 52-53.

254. Silvia Eiblmayr, "The Eyes of the Night Creatures. On the Non-Domesticated Gaze in the Pictures by Marlene Dumas," in *Marlene Dumas Models*, ed. Marlene Dumas (Stuttgart: Oktagon, 1995), 12.



Fig.39. Marlene Dumas, *The Particularity of Nakedness*, 1987

actively transforms the roles given to her characters. As both paintings are three meters tall, the viewer's gaze lands firstly at crotch level, inviting a sexualization of the image. Nevertheless, the imposing size of the Magdalenas propel these figures to gaze down on the spectator, who becomes small in their presence. Regardless of the onlooker's standpoint, they always have to gaze up to the figures, giving the Magdalenas an air of superiority. The *Magdalena* series combines verticality with authority, challenging the historical notion of Mary Magdalene as a repenting sinner, who conventionally shies away from the gaze of the onlooker in shame. By accepting their sexuality whilst obstructing the voyeuristic gaze, Dumas' figures are no longer passive; they become active subjects, challenging historical pictorial depictions of female subjects.

Painterly Methods

Besides the compositional elements mentioned above, Dumas' Mary Magdalenas also transgress stereotypical representation through the artist's painterly methods. Dumas explained that nature can be understood better when it is turned and twisted, resulting in a work

that is not a mere reproduction of real life.²⁵⁵ "Art is not a mirror," she asserts, but "a translation of that which you do not know, but of what you want to convince others or rather, that which no one knows."²⁵⁶

Her method of painting implies the use of wet on wet materials – such as ink with a great deal of water, or diluted oil paint – giving the works the possibility of abrupt change at any moment. The artist intervenes continuously in the creational process, with fast gestures. "I like my medium slow and my gesture fast," she explains, accentuating the importance of spontaneity in the painting process.²⁵⁷ While these paintings carry the impetuosity of their development, they are in fact the products of intense study and laborious studio time. Consequently, their raw, and at times unfinished and sketchy look, is part of Dumas' artistic process.

Like sketches, these works seem to be studies of the same character, developing ideas for a final work. Closely related to the term *modello*, a sketch can also imply a smaller, precursory version of the final work. Yet Dumas does not create a final, referential work around the subject; each of these representations of Mary Magdalene is an individual work in itself. These are not models for other works, but rather models for themselves, constructing a different identity for each of the Magdalenes they represent. Their sketchiness also evades stereotypical representations and pre-set rules. Through these transformed Magdalenes, Dumas evades predefined cultural images of the character, undoing stereotypical representations.

The transgression of representation can also be noted in the figures' race and skin color. Across Dumas' oeuvre, the characters' skin becomes a bearer of meaning. In these portraits, Dumas plays with the double meanings of colors, attributing new meanings to the multiple skin tones. In relation to the color of the Mary Magdalene series, it is noteworthy to mention two other paintings, *Cupid* (1994) and *Reinhardt's Daughter* (1994), made approximately a year before the

255. Statement made in a conference dedicated to Svetlana Alpers in Amsterdam on the 7th of May, 2010.

256. Maria Hlavajova, "Ik is een allochtoon. A conversation with Marlene Dumas," in *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example*, ed. Rosi Braidotti et al. (Zurich and Utrecht: BAK and JRP | Ringier, 2007), 114.

257. Dumas, Buttner, and Higgie, "To Show or Not," 50.

Mary Magdalene series. Both works are based on the same image of the artist's sleeping child, the only difference between the two being the color or race of the infant. While *Cupid* alludes to a baroque figurine from a church decoration, *Reinhardt's Daughter* alludes to a dark-skinned child, positioned on a somber background. In reference to these works, Dumas has written: "You change the color of something and everything changes (especially if you are a painter)."²⁵⁸ These works represent an investigation into the meaning of the color black, and its consequences on the reception of the work. Dumas also references the American abstract expressionist painter, Ad Reinhardt, most famous for his monochrome black paintings from the 1950s and 1960s – entirely black canvases created from a multitude of shades of black. Interested in Reinhardt's distinction between black as a symbol denoting the negative (e.g. of race, or evil), and black as a color devoid of any of these negative associations, Dumas continues her investigation into what it means to be black, and how this affects perceptions of the self and of the other.

Dumas' Mary Magdalenes are inspired by African tribal women, as well as by the bodies of supermodels such as Naomi Campbell, thus transgressing the tendency to stereotypically represent white women in art. In her own writings about *NZ*, Dumas questioned the notion of the white model. "Where does the white model come from? From a cool, transparent place called Western Art?"²⁵⁹ Noting the dominance of depictions of white women in Western art history, Dumas proposes a novel interpretation of the female model. By doing so, she continues what Paul Gauguin started with his painting *Ia Orana Maria (Hail Mary)* in which he depicted the Virgin Mary and Jesus as Tahitians. The non-homogenous skin color, combined with the transgression in representing biblical figures, points towards Dumas' search for what she calls a "bastard race," which would encapsulate all human races, indicating that in fact there is no such thing as a superior race or skin color.²⁶⁰

258. Marlene van Niekerk, "Reinhardt's Daughter," in *Marlene Dumas The Image as a Burden*, ed. Leontine Coelewijn et al. (London and Amsterdam: Tate Publishing and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2014), 72.

259. M. Dumas, "Magdalena or the Megamodel meets the Holy Whore," in *Marlene Dumas Models*, ed. Marlene Dumas et al. (Stuttgart: Oktagon, 1995), 28.

260. Idem, 23.

Dumas is known for using the blow-up and close-up method, and for isolating her figures on a neutral background: "for me the close-up was a way of getting rid of irrelevant background information and, by making the facial elements so big, it increased the sense of abstraction concerning the picture plane."²⁶¹ Through these techniques, the narrative character of the paintings is decreased, and the images are freed from the burden of being straightforwardly decoded. Dumas' enlarged and focused compositions of Magdalene create a direct connection with the viewer, relying on their intimidating effect. "I have used the close-up only for the human face. This method achieves an intimidating and confrontational effect, which was what I intended. Images combining intimacy (or the illusion of that) with discomfort."²⁶² Stripped of her religious connotations, Mary Magdalene appears as a threatening woman, ready to overturn the spectators' voyeuristic gaze in an overt act of upheaval.

Models

Dumas describes Mary Magdalene as the meeting point of two types of model: the fashion model, or "Megamodel," and the religious model, or "Holy Whore;" thus, the notion of the *model* is a key concept in her investigation into the cultural image of female subjectivity.²⁶³ As she paints from existing photographs, her characters are not models in the traditional art historical sense (in that they have never modeled for her); rather, the artist uses already existing representations to create a new representation. It is important to note, here, that being a model does not require subjectivity; one with subjectivity is called a sitter, and therefore the label "model" alludes to anonymity. In remaining anonymous, the model is emptied of their individuality.²⁶⁴ Given that

261. M. Dumas, "Artist's Writings. Larger than Life," in *Marlene Dumas*, eds. Dominic van den Boogerd, Barbara Bloom, and Mariuccia Casadio (London: Phaidon, 1999), 116.

262. Idem, 120.

263. Dumas, *Models*, 23.

264. Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, 143.

conventional art historical depictions of Mary Magdalene are based on a pre-defined identity, portraits of her are also emptied of individuality, as each representation becomes a social construct. By deconstructing these cultural stereotypes and transgressing the culturally accepted image of Mary Magdalene, Dumas exposes constructions of female identity in cultural images.

Mary Magdalene, then, is not fundamentally different from a fashion model, as her image in art history became a cultural standard. In works such as *Models*, Dumas exposes the cultural image of fashion models, which people model themselves around.²⁶⁵ Mary Magdalene functions in the same way as a fashion model, as the onlooker has to model themselves after her – not just for her holy persona, but also for her culturally constructed image. Dumas demonstrates that the fashion model is a new articulation of an existing construct – the religious model – and in doing so, she foregrounds the similarities between cultural images and art images. By transgressing stereotypical representations of existing characters, Dumas deconstructs cultural images through transformation, battling the power of existing stereotypes. She understands, and unmasks, the fact that cultural images do not represent identity, but are rather representations of culturally created identities, designed to represent ideals rather than reality.

In this sense, Dumas' practice is similar to Cindy Sherman's endeavors in her early *Film Stills*, in which Sherman demonstrates that the notion of authentic identity is an illusion. Sherman's *Film Stills* are not based on an original image. Since the scenes she depicts have not been previously seen in movies or other media, they have no original. "The condition of Sherman's work in *Film Stills* – and part of their point, we could say – is the simulacral nature of what they contain, the condition of being a copy *without* an original."²⁶⁶ Portraying an array of stereotypical Hollywood or New Wave heroines in ways that are reminiscent of 1950s film noir, Sherman produces what Rosalind Krauss refers to as generalized memories

and remembered fantasy of fictional characters, a stereotypical view of a certain female persona. Drawing attention to the proliferation of images, and the way these become idealizations of the character depicted, Krauss explains that Sherman aims to unmask the process behind the creation of what we commonly refer to as a stereotype.

As a major discursive strategy, the stereotype is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place," or already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.²⁶⁷ Homi Bhabha argues that this process of ambivalence is central to the stereotype, as it produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proven or logically construed.²⁶⁸ He exemplifies this through reference to "the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved."²⁶⁹

The stereotype is thus an amalgam of repeated thoughts and opinions that coagulate into an essentialized version of the subject. The essence captured becomes universal truth; this is how the stereotype operates. Krauss argues that the:

Myth is an act of draining history out of signs and reconstructing these signs as "instances"; in particular, instances of universal truth or of natural law, of things that have no history, no specific embeddedness, no territory of contestation. Myth steals into the heart of the sign to convert the historical into the "natural" – something that is uncontested, that is simply the way things are.²⁷⁰

In her Mary Magdalene series and elsewhere, Dumas similarly unmasks the consumption of the myth of her subject. By transgressing stereotypical modes of representation, she "demystifies" the myth of Mary Magdalene

265. Idem, 146. Van Alphen reads Dumas' Magdalene series in a similar fashion to *Models*. For an elaborate explanation see *Art in Mind*, 140-148.

266. Rosalind Krauss, *Cindy Sherman: Untitled* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 17.

267. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question...The Stereotype and the Colonial Discourse," *Screen*, Vol. 24, Issue 6 (1983): 18.

268. Ibidem.

269. Ibidem.

270. Krauss, *Cindy Sherman*, 25.

as a repentant sinner, which cannot be historically proven. Taking the process a step further, besides unmasking the stereotype, she also breaks the underlying codes of the construction of her cultural image. Krauss explains that none of the roles and the characters depicted in Sherman's film stills are independent or free-standing, but produced through the unification of separate codes referencing gender, age, position, and so on. Therefore, when the viewer comes to recognize the character, it is through a process of interpreting the given codes:

What is being masked is that the name [of the character in *Film Still*], rather than pointing to a primary entity in the "real", is an effect of the vast already-written, already-heard, already-read of the codes; it, the denotation, is merely the last of these codes to be slipped into place. The consumer of realist fiction, however, buys the pitch and believes in the "character", believes in the substance of the person from whom all the rest seems to follow as a set of necessary attributes – believes, that is, in the myth.²⁷¹

Mary Magdalene's "codes" are her long hair, the ointment jar, and her pious attitude – features which are mostly lacking from Dumas' depiction of her. Indeed, even when recognizable attributes such as the long hair are included, these turn into different signs, as previously noted. While Sherman's *Film Stills* are an extreme example of masquerading, aimed at exposing the social construction and power of stereotypes, Dumas goes beyond unmasking cultural stereotypes by replacing them with alternative constructions that analyze and criticize notions of gender, race and sexuality, encouraging the viewer to adopt a different understanding of female subjectivity.

Norman Bryson argues that a constructivist view of the body renders it a social construction, rather than an anatomical constant.²⁷² "Entirely subsumed into the sphere of the cultural work, indeed apparently becoming the principal arena of cultural activity, it sheds at last its

primitive character and is fully assimilated and civilized."²⁷³ He goes on to further explain that, since the Enlightenment, the body has been made to disappear, as it is considered solely to consist of its representations. "It is by virtue of being built by culture that the body comes to be an object of historical inquiry, that it comes to exist at all."²⁷⁴ In the case of Mary Magdalene, it is not her individuality that artists sought to represent, but rather her historically created persona, which metamorphoses into the body of a beautiful woman:

The sense of identity – of each image as bodying forth a different presence – becomes manifestly a product of manipulation of the complex social codes of appearance, a pure surface. Which is to say that identity – the interior depths supposed to stand behind or within the surface of appearance – is only an identity-effect, the semi-hallucinatory transformation of material surface into imaginary profundity.²⁷⁵

Thus, taking away the sexualized aura of the saint, Dumas exposes the predefined social constructions of her body. By deconstructing this stereotype through transformation, she creates a new image of female subjectivity that further questions cultural representations of the female body, enabling at the same time the simultaneous presence of contradictory character traits, creating a complex, changing identity. As a result of this, Dumas' subjects become more "real."

Taking stereotypical, pre-defined cultural images as a starting point, Dumas deconstructs and replaces them with unusual and unexpected constructions. In her series of portraits depicting the famous music producer Phil Spector, for example, she starts painting from already existing photographic imagery. However, the work soon departs from socially constructed understandings and images of the convicted criminal:

271. Idem, 32.

272. Norman Bryson, "House of Wax," in *Cindy Sherman: Untitled*, ed. Rosalind Krauss (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 218.

273. Ibidem.

274. Idem, 219.

275. Idem, 218.

Some people don't know who he is, but he produced all this beautiful music that was important to me when I was younger, songs like 'You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling.' Here was a guy with all this talent who goes and murders a girl and – whether or not you think it was an accident – he tragically ends up in prison.²⁷⁶

In naming one of the portraits *To Know Him is to Love Him* (2011) (Fig.40), Dumas references Spector's first pop music hit, which was inspired by his father. Relating his persona to his relationship with his father, she brings to attention a different side to Phil Spector – largely unknown to the public – that contrasts with stereotypical descriptions of him as a convicted murderer.

The representation of the human figure is predominant in Dumas' painterly practice, with compositions consisting of enlarged faces or full-sized bodies, referred to as portraits. Attempting to deconstruct the portrait by challenging its main characteristic – namely, to catch and depict the inner essence of its sitter – Dumas fights stereotypical representations of identity, remodeling at the same time the conventional notion of portraiture.

Iconicity in Marlene Dumas' Portraits

The creation of social and cultural icons functions in a similar way to that of religious ones, by creating a cult around an individual who stands for desirable characteristic that should be emulated by the rest. In order to create an iconic representation of the subject, a consistent image of the person must be proliferated until they become instantly recognizable to the public. An iconic portrait, then, becomes the most recognizable representation of the person in question. Nevertheless, the potential for iconic portraits only exists in representations of "iconic" subjects, namely those who have already achieved at least a degree of international recognition, or "stardom."

As many of Dumas' subjects are known internationally, her work has the potential to further feed into iconic representations of the



Figure 40. Marlene Dumas, *Phil Spector - To Know Him is to Love Him*, 2011

276. M. Dumas, "Interview," *Time Out London*, December 21, 2011, <http://www.marlenedumas.nl/wp-content/uploads/D-2011-Forsaken-Time-Out-london.pdf>

Fig. 41. Marlene Dumas, *The Producer (For Phil Spector)*, 2010Fig.42. Marlene Dumas, *Phil Spector - Without Wig*, 2011

figures. Nevertheless, such subjects in Dumas' works undergo radical transformation, often to the point that they become unrecognizable. While it could be argued that certain of Dumas' works have become iconic creations in their own right (that is, that they are recognizable as having been created by her), the representations themselves do not depict their subjects in iconic instances. The uniqueness of Dumas' representational style comes from the fact that she reworks her original photographic sources into new creations. She explains: "there is the image (source photography) you start with and the image (the painted image) you end up with, and they are not the same. I wanted to give more attention to what the painting does to the image, not only to what the image does to the painting."²⁷⁷

Dumas' representations of Mary Magdalene are good examples. Contrary to her iconic image, Dumas' series of Magdalenes depict a

277. Kit Messham-Muir, "You Start With the Image: Marlene Dumas at Tate Modern," *The Conversation*, February 20 (2015).

Fig.43. Marlene Dumas, *Dead Marilyn*, 2008

dark skinned, at times short-haired, confident women, who stands up straight and confronts the onlooker. Without knowing the titles of the works, the viewer would not be able to identify the subject of the paintings. The same goes for her representation of Marilyn Monroe (Fig.43). While Andy Warhol famously repeated the same image of Marilyn Monroe, instantly recognizable to all, Dumas chose to depict her as cold, dead, blue flesh on a coroner's slab.²⁷⁸

278. The painting is based on a post-mortem morgue shot published in a Dutch newspaper in 1985 reviewing Monroe's biography *Goddess*.

Marilyn Monroe

Marilyn Monroe shares a similar fate to that of Mary Magdalene. After a professional career that lasted just fourteen years, and an early death at the age of thirty six, Monroe's life has been told and retold in countless magazines, newspapers, and books, with the myths surrounding her life continuously interpreted and embellished. Marilyn Monroe's name, like Mary Magdalene's, is a social fabrication. In addition to minor cosmetic surgery, the heightening of her hairline and the bleaching of her hair, Norma Jean Baker took on the name of Marilyn Monroe in August 1946 to reflect her new femme fatale persona. "She was getting acquainted with her new identity, saying 'Marilyn Monroe' as if tasting a piece of candy."²⁷⁹ Her newly created identity wholly revolved around sexuality, transforming her into the number one sex symbol of her time. While she became a glamour icon during her lifetime, her sudden death was the key factor that immortalized her iconic persona.

Just as in the case of Mary Magdalene, there was no directly comparable figure to Monroe during her time. There have been other famous Hollywood actresses, but none of them had Monroe's sexual appeal, which she always seemed able to manipulate in her own favor. While penniless and struggling for recognition, she accepted \$50 to do a nude photo shoot with a glamour photographer. One of these nude pictures ended up in a calendar, and even though no names had been given, her identity was under scrutiny. Under pressure from her production studio, Monroe rose to the occasion, confirming her identity as the model, and presenting herself as "an impoverished and blameless victim with nothing to be ashamed of," turning public opinion in her favor²⁸⁰. Rather than ruining her career, this incident further established her as "Hollywood's hottest property," and the calendar sold 8 million copies by 1963.²⁸¹ Monroe had therefore been pardoned for her early mistakes and, by admitting what had happened, became a model who was both desired and looked up to.

Given her premature death, there was not enough time for the public to fully exhaust the concept of Marilyn Monroe. A frenzy surrounded her public image at the time of her death, an event that further fueled speculation around her public figure – now without any consent needed from Monroe herself. The iconic images of her that circulate to this day are the images the public wanted; they depict the ultimate sex symbol, for men and women alike. What constitutes Monroe as a cultural icon is thus a generalized and romanticized amalgam of shared thoughts and opinions that coagulate into an idealized version of her persona. Never before had the icon, Marilyn Monroe, been further away from the original, Norma Jean Baker.

In Dumas' representation of Monroe, however, the viewer finds no trace of the iconic star known to them. Just as in her portraits of Mary Magdalene, the figure is unrecognizable without reading the title of the work (*Dead Marilyn*, 2008). Even after reading this, the image viewers are confronted with could not be further from Marilyn's stereotypical appearance. Again, just as with her depictions of Mary Magdalene, Dumas demystifies the glamour icon. Painting her dead and bruised on the coroner's slab, Dumas writes a new story for Marilyn Monroe. By depicting her dead, Dumas brings back her humanity. Cornelia Butler has argued that it is only in death that Monroe is permitted what she was not during her lifetime, namely a break from the carefully crafted image of beauty and desirability.²⁸² By becoming mortal, she transgresses her immortal iconic aura, becoming once more a common woman, as she was before the invention and popularization of her mediatized persona.

Concerning portraiture itself, Dumas' representation of Marilyn Monroe transgresses traditional notions of the genre by failing to deliver a coherent and unified picture of the inside and outside of the subject. It fails to deliver the glamorous image viewers are used to when thinking of Monroe, and refuses to further sediment the public idea viewers have of her. Through portraiture, Dumas creates a new image of Monroe, that does not evoke any pre-existing subjectivity

279. Robin Muir, *The World's Most Photographed* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publication, 2005), 117.

280. Ibidem.

281. Ibidem.

282. Cornelia Butler, "Painter as Witness," in *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*, eds. Cornelia Butler, Jane Hyun, and Elizabeth Hamilton (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 2008), 73.

but offers instead an alternative to her stereotypically fabricated persona.

Marlene Dumas' "Liminoid" Portraits

By referencing Dumas's own state of "in-betweenness," exemplified by statements such as "I'm always 'not from here'," van Niekerk argues that several of Dumas' works can be read as liminal modulations imagined on the threshold of passing from state to another.²⁸³ Dumas' comment, that she is in a continuous state of "not being from here" and of not belonging, parallels the notion of liminality in the sense that her status is in constant flux.²⁸⁴ Emma Bedford has described this status as a "liminal space between exile and integration – a critical space from which to observe and respond to the politics, society and culture of apartheid South Africa and Western Europe."²⁸⁵ "In-between" can therefore be read as a synonym for liminal, as both entail a state of mutability, where certainties are removed, and change can occur. In the light of the above, I will further argue that Dumas unmasks the stereotyping power of iconicity by placing her subjects in an intentional state of transition, from which new ideas and forms can emerge.

The term "liminality" – coming from the Latin "limen" meaning threshold – was first coined by Arnold van Gennep in his 1909 book *Rites de Passage*, which explored the concept of liminality in the rites of small-scale societies. When Victor Turner rediscovered this work half a century later, he extended the concept to non-tribal and modern societies, eventually realizing that "liminality served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences: the way in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and

the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience."²⁸⁶ At a practical level, Turner further suggested that liminal experiences in modern societies are replaced by "liminoid" experiences – a term coined by Turner himself – where creativity unfolds in art and leisure activities.²⁸⁷ I shall consider Turner's notion of creating "liminoid" experiences in art in relation to Dumas' paintings, where this state is used to present human subjects in transitional phases (moving from one state to another) by rendering them in an indeterminate space of "in-betweenness" that opens up the possibility of rewriting their story.

Van Niekerk explained that in modern, post-industrial societies, the products of ritual passages transmute into secular artistic forms, where individuals have the freedom to experiment and play with radically new ideas, image, and words. She argues that "liminoid activity can be subversive in the way that it proposes metalanguages with which to reflect on everyday language or images with which conventional attitudes, values and symbols can be invested with modified or surprising content."²⁸⁸ Referring to Dumas' work as an example of bringing a liminal dimension to portraiture, she interprets works such as *The Deceased* (2002) (Fig.44) as a portrait that represents a liminal state, on the threshold between death and decomposition. She argues that such compositions act as stimulators of emotion, opening up a space for strong feelings to be investigated rather than literally suffered by the viewer.²⁸⁹ While *Dead Marilyn* also depicts a corpse in a liminal state, I argue that the transitory state in which the subject is depicted does more than trigger the viewer's thoughts and reflections on the theme of death and mortality (and its absence from popular visual culture, which is permeated with female beauty icons); it fundamentally breaks with stereotypical understandings of the depicted subject. Here, Monroe gains a new, self-referential identity.

283. Van Niekerk, *Seven M-Blems*, 20-21.

284. M. Dumas, "Not from Here (I) and (II)," in *Sweet Nothings*, eds. Marlene Dumas and Mariska van den Berg (Cologne: Koenig Books, 2014), 86-87 and Cornelia Butler, "Painter as Witness," 43.

285. Bedford, "Questions," 34.

286. Bjørn Thomassen, "The Uses and Meanings of Liminality," *International Political Anthropology* Vol. 2, No. 1 (2009): 14.

287. Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology," *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies*, 60, no. 3 (1974).

288. Niekerk, *Seven M-blems*, 19.

289. Idem, 20.

Ulrich Loock has argued that while Dumas' work is based on photographic imagery, its purpose is not the continuation of an endless proliferation, but rather to interrupt that which Loock argues to be the flatness of photography. He states that in exchange for the promise of extending the realm of the visible, photography had to renounce its corporeality. He further argues that Dumas, through painting and her painterly methods, manages to bring back this lost corporeality in her works. He even goes as far as to say that the painting of a dead woman appears "less dead" in the works:

Depending on the painter's physical movement, her manual labor, the placing of the hand, the trail of paint traces the picture, follows the anatomy of shapes and forms to assure that the paint is nestled up against the object in analogous way. All of this underlines the involvement of the painter's body and a claim to the corporeality of the pictured object – painting aims at the embodiment of an image, it does not content itself with signifying its referent.²⁹⁰

As a result, the image that Dumas creates not only breaks with its original source and referent, but brings a new corporeal dimension to the figure portrayed. When discussing *Dead Marilyn*, Griselda Pollock has argued that Dumas' retranslation of the subject by means of powerful painterly gestures that are registered on the canvas, confers an energy on the work which eventually translates into intimacy.²⁹¹ This intimacy, achieved through painterly motion, further strengthens the work's ability to gain presence.

The "liminoid" experience depicted in such works as *Dead Marilyn* is the element of Dumas' work that further opens up the possibility of radical change. Not only does Marilyn escape a flat representation (through painterly gestures, she is made to look "less dead"), but also through the state of transition she finds herself in – both from life to death, and from death to life; that is, from an empty icon to a real

290. Loock, "A Sense of Touching," 73-74.

291. Griselda Pollock, "The Missing Wit(h)ness: Monroe, Fascinance and the Unguarded Intimacy of Being Dead," *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 16 (3) (2017): 265-296.



Fig.44. Marlene Dumas, *The Deceased*, 2002

female presence, and from the flat image of a corpse to a presence that rejects the historical proliferation of empty imagery. Dumas fights the stereotypical image people hold of Monroe by replacing it with a newly-created, human, self-referential existence.

Turner argues that initiatory passages "tend to 'put people down' while some seasonal rites tend to 'set people up'; that is, initiations humble people before permanently elevating them, while some seasonal rites (whose residues are carnivals and festivals) elevate those of low status transiently before returning them to their permanent

humbleness.”²⁹² We can see in Dumas' painting of Monroe that there is a clear representation of the former, visible in the handling of the flesh as bruised patches of bluish, murky surface. While Monroe's character is literally and metaphorically “put down” by showing her lying dead on the coroner's slab and through the brutality of the depiction, this transitory state in fact helps her to escape her previously empty, stereotypically constructed identity as a popular icon and, by confirming her mortality, elevates and restores her to the status of a human being. The materiality of these bruises, and the murky skin, are what Loock refers to as making the subject appear “less dead” – this transitional state is what brings her presence a new life. Although she is shown dead, she is now more alive than she used to be, as she has been depicted with humanizing characteristics, rather than empty imagery.

Dumas' series of paintings depicting Mary Magdalene share many similarities with Turner's arguments about the characteristics of liminal societies, in which:

Liminal initiands are often considered to be dark, invisible, like a planet in eclipse or the moon between phases; they are stripped of names and clothing, smeared with the common earth, rendered indistinguishable from animals. [...] Sharp symbolic inversion of social attributes may characterize separation; blurring and merging of distinctions may characterize liminality.²⁹³

Just as in *Dead Marilyn*, the Mary Magdalene series plays on the threshold of such characteristics: the Magdalenes are both black and white, at times with blurred skin colors. *MQ* depicts a dark-skinned woman, yet her feet change color, becoming considerably lighter than the rest of her body. *MZ* depicts a white woman, but the middle part of her body is murkier than her head, and her legs below the knees. The darker Magdalene's face, through its rigidity, resembles a mask. Masks are items often used in rituals to symbolize and to aid passage, further anchoring this character in a liminal state. The blurring and

merging of facial characteristics are evident in Dumas' portrait of Monroe, where bruises seem to take over her face. Further, her face shares many similarities with her white hair, which is rendered in the same bleached shades as her forehead, eyelids, cheeks, and lips. Through these visual changes, Dumas' subjects – just as individuals passing through rites – “undergo a ‘leveling’ process, in which signs of their preliminal status are destroyed and signs of their liminal non-status are applied.”²⁹⁴ At a first glance, the term limen:

Appears to be negative in connotation, since it is no longer the positive past condition nor yet the positive articulated future condition. It seems, too, to be passive since it is dependent on the articulated, positive conditions it mediates. Yet on probing, one finds in liminality both positive and active qualities, especially where that ‘threshold’ is protracted and becomes a ‘tunnel,’ when the ‘liminal’ becomes the ‘cunicular.’²⁹⁵

When thinking about Dumas' representations of Mary Magdalene, the liminal situation is, just as Turner argued, both positive and active. Dumas deconstructs traditional representations of Mary Magdalene, abolishing the previous, stereotypical understanding of the character. Through the manner in which she depicts Magdalene – as a confrontational and threatening woman – Dumas renders her body as active rather than passive, battling the canon of Western female nudes. What further transforms these works into “liminoid” experiences is that, while there are still visible remnants of her old fabricated identity – such as the long hair, sexuality, sensuality, and beauty – she reuses this in a new configuration; we see change in progress. Long hair gradually becomes short, fair skin becomes dark, shyness becomes confrontation. These elements have not yet reached their final stages, but it is exactly this “in-between” state in which they are caught that opens up the realm of endless possibilities for rewriting. Mary Magdalene can become a mixed-raced woman, a

292. Turner, “Liminal,” 57.

293. Idem, 58-59.

294. Idem, 59.

295. Idem, 72.

threatening woman, a confrontational woman, or simply a woman who does not want to engage with the viewer looking at her.²⁹⁶

Turner borrowed Brian Sutton-Smith's term "anti-structure" – referring to the dissolution of normative social structures and statuses – and applied this to his own notion of liminality. He quotes Sutton-Smith, saying that when "the normative structure represents the working equilibrium, the anti-structure represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it."²⁹⁷ Turner adopts the notion of a paradigm shift in the liminal and liminoid situation; through a "revolt" against the normative structure, one encounters cultural potential that feeds new symbols, goals, aspirations, and structural models. In Dumas' works, by depicting her subjects in liminoid situations, she breaks away from normative structures concerning the representation of iconic characters, as well as of the female nude, and subjectivity in general. Through their lack of iconicity and recognizability, these works revolt against predetermined social constructions, creating a new, self-referential subjectivity, voided of empty, stereotyping fabrications. What Turner identifies as occurring in liminal situations as a change of structure – namely the "anti-structure" – can be transposed to liminoid activity in painting, as this, too, means deconstructing the status-quo – namely predetermined identities – and depicting the subjects in states of transition, where certain elements can be reused to construct a new structure. According to Pascal Gielen, who discusses liminality in terms of identity and politics, these in-between moments are the only ones that are not based on defined identities, and the only periods in which unthinkable possibilities and practices that are both ideologically and legally prohibited can unfold.²⁹⁸ Therefore, a state of "liminality" offers the perfect cradle for radically rewriting old, normative structures. The importance of the "in-betweenness" is

further strengthened by the fact that not only does it fight against old/ antiquated structures, it also offers a myriad of possibilities for new and radical constructions that do not have predetermined characteristics, while at the same time not necessarily excluding past elements either. These elements can be used and reused with absolute freedom, and, in the case of a painter like Dumas, whose medium does not always allow for precise, predetermined compositions (particularly given her wet on wet painterly methods), they open up endless possibilities for creating new subjectivities. For this reason, in larger series such as *Magdalena*, we see works that sometimes depict a wary female figure, at times white and at other times black, a seductive female body, a threatening female presence, and so on. Whilst some of these figures resemble iconic images of Mary Magdalene, others embody the exact opposite to the characteristics for which the subject was historically known.

Conclusion

By creating several versions of the same subject with distinctive representational codes, Dumas deconstructs the notion of a fixed and stable identity that is inherent in traditional portraiture. She deconstructs the idea of an implied unity between the sitter's appearance and inner essence – conditions that were thought to bestow uniqueness and authority to the genre. She demonstrates that Mary Magdalene is a socially fabricated cultural image, as the viewer is unable to recognize her without her original trademarks, such as her long hair and the ointment jar. Dumas also exposes the impossibility of mimetically representing Mary Magdalene, as the lack of historical information about her makes such an attempt uncertain. Thus, by refusing to depict Magdalene's culturally informed "inner essence" – represented by her repentant nature – as well as her outer characteristics – such as her long hair – Dumas destabilizes the genre of portraiture, giving new meaning to female subjectivity.

Whilst, on the face of it, the Mary Magdalene series engages with a religious subject, Dumas' avoids religious controversy. Her innovative interpretation of the biblical figure only serves to reconfirm her endeavors in challenging stereotypes in the representation of gender, race and sexuality. As Matthias Winzen suggests:

296. In the Mary Magdalene series Dumas also created a version of the subject that turns her back on the viewer – for further reference see Marlene Dumas, *Mary Magdalene 3*, 1996, in the collection of Tate Modern, London.

297. Turner, "Liminal," 60.

298. Gielen, "Laten we proberen."

The naked female body often appears in Dumas' work, but never as a passive body, either erotically presented to the male gaze or – equally passively – as feminist evidence of the abused body. Instead, Dumas' images confront us with self-aware, complex presentations of the female, in which there is a totally new configuration of depicted figure, viewer and author.²⁹⁹

Consequently, Dumas' Mary Magdalenes challenge the traditional representation of the passive, objectified female nude, and propose a re-evaluation of female subjectivity through the traditional genre of portraiture. Across Dumas' oeuvre, portraiture thus becomes a tool used to expose pre-defined, stereotypical female identities, whilst also being employed to create alternative images of female subjectivity. By transgressing conventional modes of representation through elements of composition, format, size, color, and painterly methods, Dumas actively fights the notion of the submissive female body. Her portraits of Mary Magdalene, then, defy existing stereotypes, unmasking the emptiness of idealizing cultural images and replacing them with self-referential constructions.

By taking away Mary Magdalene and Marilyn Monroe's iconic characteristics, Dumas exposes the fact that well-known images of such iconic figures are culturally determined creations, rather than factual reality. Her works represent their own interpretations of female subjectivity, that transgress stereotypical representation of gender and sexuality. By depicting these characters in "liminoid" states, that is, in states of transition and passage – in which Mary Magdalene moves away from her sexualized and repenting aura to become a self-assured, confrontational, and active female subject, and in which Marilyn Monroe leaves behind her image as the ultimate sex symbol to become a human presence – Dumas abolishes their past conditions and opens up a radical space for the creation of new, self-referential identity, voided of existing stereotyping fabrications. As Richard Shiff puts it, through these representations, Dumas raises dead clichés to a

higher form of life.³⁰⁰ Through her portraits, she re-writes her subjects' complex and non-identifiable identities.

299. Matthias Winzen, ed. "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman," in *Marlene Dumas Female* (Cologne: Snoeck, 2005), 35.

300. Richard Shiff, "Less Dead," in *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*, eds. Cornelia Butler, Jane Hyun, and Elizabeth Hamilton (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 2008), 163.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

At its outset, this study proposed that, when viewing depictions of human subjects, we attempt to ask ourselves a different set of questions. Rather than enquiring as to who is represented, it was suggested that we ask in what ways we as viewers might relate to a portrait, in order to escape the conventional referential understanding of the genre in terms of subject identification. Through a close analysis of the works selected here for consideration, the study has examined how portraiture can function more expansively as a genre, unpacking the ways in which these works differ from traditional portrait depictions. What, then, is our relationship to portraits, and what might it become?

Chapter One outlined traditional understandings of Western portraiture, which promised to deliver a faithful, objective representation of the unique subjectivity of the sitter. Whilst the belief that the representation was one with the represented was challenged in the seventeenth century, the Cartesian notion of inner essence and unique subjectivity persisted long after this period. From the nineteenth century onwards, the “objectively” portrayed body was seen less and less as an appropriate means of visualizing the self. The concept of a supposedly

true likeness was no longer taken as valid, and portrait making departed from attempts to mimetically represent the sitter. As a result, increasing attention was given to the form that portraits took, as opposed to merely the content. Yet despite the fact that these portraits were no longer striving for mimesis, the works still aimed to represent the unique subjectivity of the sitter.

This study has demonstrated that by the turn of the twentieth century, a number of artists had begun to challenge the Cartesian belief in a unique subjectivity, creating portraits that transgressed conventional boundaries of the genre in order to propel the viewer towards new conceptions of identity and subjectivity. The study focused primarily on how these new kinds of portraiture functioned in the work of Edvard Munch, Francis Bacon, and Marlene Dumas. By shifting away from a reading of identity as fixed and stable, and towards one in which it is understood to be in a state of continuous flux, a form of portraiture emerged in which each composition is given meaning according to its own context, and each unique interaction with the viewer. By shedding light on this shift, the study has demonstrated the ways in which these portraits are performative, rather than static, reproductions. It has shown that portraits are not clearly-defined, immutable systems, but rather amalgams of relational structures between subjects and subjectivities. By focusing on the interaction between subject and object, the study has shown that portraiture is capable of redefining and reinventing itself through new articulations of subjectivity, made manifest through the painting's interaction with the viewer.

In analyzing Munch's portraits from the turn of the twentieth century, the study demonstrated that while these compositions have not previously been categorized as portraits, they can be productively considered as such. Across Munch's oeuvre, the genre of portraiture gains a new dimension, transgressing the notion that the subject must be presented in mimetic likeness in order to be bestowed with an identity. The study referred to this work as hybrid portraiture, in which elements of both landscape and portrait painting were juxtaposed in order to successfully subvert conventional depictions of the human form, creating unexpected and direct connections between painting and onlooker. The devices employed to create this direct confrontation – which I termed “framing the viewer” – consist of, firstly, the introduction of landscape

into portraiture; secondly, the use of cinematic qualities that induce a sense of physical and emotional movement, potentially triggering “political,” thought-provoking reactions in the viewer; and, thirdly, the materiality of the paintings, which – through their texture and surface – prompt a sense of immediacy when interacting with the artworks. Each of these elements works to induce a present moment that fully engages a viewer who is no longer a detached observer, but rather an active participant in the ongoing encounter. Through the use of these devices, Munch taps into the performative potential of the genre, and evades predetermined readings of his paintings by framing the viewer in such a way that they might experience the work, subjectively and uniquely, in the moment of encounter. By utilizing this direct form of engagement, Munch transforms the genre of portraiture from one that is highly codified to convey a fixed meaning, into one that becomes particular to each new reading of the work. Because of this, the hybrid portrait genre created by Munch achieves effects that surpass passive contemplation in favor of direct engagement. As a result, portraiture transgresses its traditional function as memetic representation of its subject's likeness, and propels the viewer to construct anew the identity of the subject each time they view the canvas.

Whilst in Munch's hybrid portraits the viewer is propelled into a direct interaction with the subject of the composition, the portrait and the viewer nonetheless remain separate entities. Bacon's portraits take this performative aspect a step further. As this study has shown, by evading faithful mimetic representation, Bacon blurs the boundaries between object and subject, portrait and viewer, opening up the possibility of self-transcendence within the genre. As the study describes, Bacon saw the traditional genre of portraiture as guilty of sacrificing its subject for the sake of representation, reasoning that portraiture thus needed to re-determine the conditions that originally shaped it. Accordingly, Bacon does not represent his subjects in a moment that speaks of their individuality. Yet neither are they shown in a moment of complete absence of individuality, but rather in a state of transition. Neither subject nor object, the subjects of Bacon's portraits are found by the viewer to be a state of in-betweenness, through which predetermined parameters can be redetermined. In this way, Bacon's portraits open up the possibility for the viewer to experience a moment of complete identification with

his portraits, a moment in which predetermined conditions – such as a passive contemplation – can be re-determined. This study reinterprets Bacon's work through the prism of Buddhist practices, arguing that the sensations acting upon the bodies in Bacon's works – elaborated by Deleuze – are similar to the way in which bodily sensations are experienced in the ancient Buddhist meditation technique of Vipassana. The study further evidences and discusses similarities between Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon's works and Buddhist philosophy, and demonstrates that reading Bacon's work through this lens can open up new possibilities for the genre of portraiture. As a result, Bacon's work creates new meaning within the genre of portraiture; his portraits do not simply represent, evoke, or engage, but become the locus of transition towards a new form, in which the viewer identifies with the subject.

As outlined at the beginning of this study, female portraiture had a different trajectory to that of men, as for many centuries women were considered inferior to their male counterparts. Whilst traditional depictions of female subjectivities were challenged and destabilized at the end of the nineteenth century, these were not replaced with alternative constructions. Given this context, this study has argued that Dumas' portraits of female subjects offer viable alternatives to the traditionally submissive, passive, and sexualized images of female sitters. By analyzing her depictions of iconic subjects such as Mary Magdalene and Marilyn Monroe, the study has shown how Dumas' portraits set out to demask the creation of stereotypes by creating diverse representations of female subjects in non-representative ways, that more fully account for the complexity and multiplicity of their identities. The study further refers to and applies the anthropological concept of "liminality" to Dumas' paintings to demonstrate the ways in which the artist exposes the stereotyping power of iconicity by depicting her iconic subjects in states of transition and "in-betweenness," in which unthinkable possibilities and practices can unfold. Consequently, this allows Dumas to radically rewrite and reclaim the subjectivity of her subjects. Dumas' portraits, as with those of Munch and Bacon, deconstruct the notion of fixed identity that is inherent to traditional portraiture. Across her works, Dumas not only exposes socially constructed notions of femininity, she alters the history of female representation. By offering new ways of depicting female subjects through the alternative construction of their

subjectivity, her work erodes long-dominant, culturally constructed, stereotypical images of women.

As outlined in the introduction, the main scope of the study has been to investigate the ways in which the selected artists' portraits have changed and rewritten traditional conceptions of the genre. By offering close readings of a number of portraits, and scrutinizing how they function in relation to traditional understandings of the genre, the study proposes a new mode of portraiture that abandons the Cartesian notion of a unique and stable self, and replaces it with a form of identity achieved through interaction, change, transformation, becoming, and self-transcendence. Such portraits are not passive, mimetic renderings of a subject, but rather they create subjectivity anew with each interaction. This approach is aligned with the alternative understandings of the genre of portraiture proposed by Ernst van Alphen, Jean Luc Nancy, Didier Maleuvre, and Catherine Soussloff. The common thread running between these theorists, and the work in this study, is an engagement with alternative and altering readings of portraiture that actively involve the viewer, transforming them from passive contemplator to active participant. Such approaches are based on, and attest to, new notions of subjectivity that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, and that renounce stable, fixed identities in favor of relational forms of subjectivity.

Through the approach to analyzing portraiture proposed in this study, it becomes possible for modern and contemporary portraits to shed traditional notions of the subject, and of subjectivity, in order to explore relational rather than individual identity. The subjects of these portraits are no longer unique individuals; they are, rather, figures that acquire subjectivity through direct interaction with the viewer. Through their compositions, Munch, Bacon, and Dumas depict their subjects without a predefined identity that one can simply read; instead, they present us with a continuously changing subjectivity that rewrites itself through each new relational interaction with the viewer. These portraits, as this study emphasizes, operate in the present moment of encounter with the viewer. Munch's hybrid portraits create the feeling of an ongoing moment, in order to instigate direct and unexpected interactions with their viewers; viewers of Bacon's work are able to identify with the portraits, becoming one with them; and Dumas' portraits are depicted

in limonoid situations which create novel subjectivities through each new interaction with a viewer. This study ultimately contends that portraiture, as with the subjectivity it presents, is an interpersonal, relational encounter that takes place in the present moment, in the eyes of each new onlooker.

Just as for Blanchot literature begins the moment when literature becomes a question, for Nancy, the portrait begins at the moment at which the genre of portraiture is brought into question. Nancy argues that through challenging, changing, and questioning the genre of portraiture, rather than disappearing, the portrait will in fact becoming more accurate. By continuously questioning it, we are demanding new answers and novel modes of thinking that push us to explore new dimensions and possibilities of portraiture. As Buchloh argues, portraiture as a genre does not cease to exist.³⁰¹ Rather, it offers a plurality of new positions, both complementary with, and contradictory of, one another. These positions, as Didi-Huberman contends, propose dialectical approaches to the several interpretations, divergent and contradictory between the already known and unknown.

Whilst the theories and analyses proposed in this study constitute a much-needed starting-point in developing new kinds of portraiture and portraiture theory, they do not exclude other possible interpretations. As Peppiatt argues of Bacon's work, each of the portraits examined in this study "remain essentially ambiguous, and much of their force comes from the unanswered questions they trail behind them. Like the ancient oracles, they are open to quite contrary interpretations."³⁰² It is this openness, in fact, that gives them their strength.

301. Buchloh, "Residual Resemblance," 54.

302. Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon*, 40.

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Fig.31: Francis Bacon, *Study After Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953, oil on canvas, 153 x 118 cm, Des Moines Art Centre, Des Moines, USA.

Fig.32: Francis Bacon, *Study for a Portrait of George Dyer*, 1967, oil on canvas, 35,5 x 30,5 cm, Private Collection.

Fig.33: Francis Bacon, *Study After Velazquez*, 1950, oil on canvas, 198 x 137,2 cm. Destroyed by the artist.

Fig.34: Francis Bacon, *Two Studies for a Portrait*, 1990, oil and aerosol paint on canvas, diptych, each panel 35,5 x 30,5 cm. Location unknown.

Fig.35: Marlene Dumas, *Magdalena (Manet's Queen / Queen of Spades)*, 1995,

oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig.36: Marlene Dumas, *Magdalena (Newman's Zip)*, 1995, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig.37: Carlo Crivelli, *Mary Magdalene*, ca. 1480-87, tempera on panel, 152 x 49 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Fig.38: Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, oil on canvas, 130 x 190 cm, Musee d'Orsay, Paris, France.

Fig.39: Marlene Dumas, *The Particularity of Nakedness*, 1987, oil on canvas, 140 x 300 cm, Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, The Netherlands. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig.40: Marlene Dumas, *Phil Spector - To Know Him is to Love Him*, 2011, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm, Private Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig.41: Marlene Dumas, *The Producer (For Phil Spector)*, 2010, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm, Private Collection, The Netherlands. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig.42: Marlene Dumas, *Phil Spector - Without Wig*, 2011, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm, A. Clayton, Private Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig.43: Marlene Dumas, *Dead Marilyn*, 2008, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm, Private Collection, New York. Photo: Peter Cox, Eindhoven. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig.44: Marlene Dumas, *The Deceased*, 2002, oil on canvas, 110 x 130 cm, Private Collection. Photo: Peter Cox, Eindhoven. Courtesy of the artist.

SUMMARY

Representations of Irrepresentability: The Painted Portrait in the Twentieth-Century in the Works of Edvard Munch, Francis Bacon, and Marlene Dumas

This study proposes an understanding of the genre of painted portraiture that reaches beyond traditional notions of representation based on the Cartesian belief in a unique subjectivity. The study analyzes how this new type of portraiture functions in the works of Edvard Munch, Francis Bacon, and Marlene Dumas – emphasizing the novel ways these three artists challenge the notion of representation as something reflecting an external, stable reality. By transgressing conventional art-historical concepts of representation, they construct new forms of portraiture which explore the impossibility of depicting fixed identities – proposing radical, performative, and transcendental renderings of subjectivity.

Chapter One discusses traditional understandings of Western portraiture, which promised to deliver a faithful, objective representation of the unique subjectivity of the sitter. The illusion of implied unity between the sitter's face (outer form) and inner essence was the condition thought to bestow uniqueness and authority on the genre. The concept of dualism challenged the idea of likeness as inseparably linked to one's inner self, thus mimetic representation became less of a priority, replaced by formal or referential portraits. Nevertheless, well-defined sets of rules – such as the ability to catch and depict the inner essence of the sitter – were at the basis of portrait creation. Female portraiture had a different trajectory to that of men, as for many centuries women were considered inferior to their male counterparts. Whilst traditional depictions of female subjectivities were challenged and destabilized at the end of the nineteenth century, these were not replaced with alternative constructions.

Chapter Two analyzes compositions by Edvard Munch that had not previously been categorized as portraits, however, considering the attention bestowed on a central figure in the composition, these can be read as variations of the genre. These paintings undermine formal structures of conventional portraiture, as they juxtapose elements of landscape and portraiture, creating a “hybrid” genre of the two. At the turn of the century, Munch had already questioned traditional values inherent in the genre of portraiture, such as the ability to capture a sitter's substantial identity in a mimetic or referential manner. As a result, this study demonstrates that Munch's hybrid portraits evade representing unique identity to recreate this anew each time the viewers interact with the works, adding a performative aspect to the genre. In addition to the introduction of landscape into portraiture, these hybrid portraits also make use of cinematic qualities that induce a sense of physical and emotional movement, and the materiality of the paintings, in order to prompt a sense of immediacy when interacting with the artworks. I have termed this direct confrontation achieved through the above-mentioned painterly devices as “framing the viewer.” Through the framing of the viewer, the hybrid portrait genre created by Munch achieves effects that surpass passive contemplation in favor of direct engagement. As a result, portraiture transgresses its

traditional function as a mimetic representation of its subject's likeness and transforms these canvases into lived experiences for the onlooker.

Chapter Three discusses the manner in which Francis Bacon's portraits renounce conventional norms of mimetic representation to unmask the irrepresentability of human subjectivity. In his oeuvre, Bacon hints at the fact that traditional portraiture sacrifices the sitter for the sake of representation. For this reason, portraiture as a genre needs to re-determine the conditions that originally shaped it. Analyzing the manner in which Bacon depicts his subjects, this study argues that these portraits blur the boundaries between object and subject, portrait and viewer, in order to remodel conventional notions of portraiture. Reinterpreting Gilles Deleuze's understanding of Bacon's works through the prism of Buddhism, this study demonstrates the possibility of a complete transformation of preexisting concepts that had traditionally shaped portrait making, creating a direct identification between the subjects of the portraits and the viewer.

Chapter Four analyzes portrait depictions of the iconic subjects Mary Magdalene and Marilyn Monroe in the work of Marlene Dumas. The artist takes as a starting point existing iconic personae, whom she depicts in unusual and unexpected manners to unmask the fact that cultural images represent collectively created stereotypical identities. Historically, the figure of Mary Magdalene poses a paradox of depiction. A sinner converted into a saint, she is conventionally portrayed as a beautiful and sensual woman, with white, delicate skin and light blond hair. As a saintly model, she is attempting to deny her sexuality, in repentance. Nevertheless, the penitent Magdalene is depicted in such a way as to encourage a voyeuristic gaze. Marlene Dumas' Magdalenes, on the contrary, appear naked, and confront the viewer with their direct gaze. While sexually appealing, these subjects do not engage in the seduction of the viewer. This study argues that such portraits transgress art historical canons of representation in order to challenge stereotypes of female subject depiction and predefined racial identities, while at the same time dismantling the concept of the female as a passive body. In addition to the *Magdalene* series, this study further scrutinizes an unrecognizable portrait depiction of Marilyn Monroe. Applying the anthropological concept of “liminality” to Dumas' paintings, this study

evinces the manner in which the artist exposes the stereotyping power of iconicity by depicting her subjects in states of transition and “in-betweenness,” where unthinkable possibilities and practices can unfold. By depicting these iconic subjects in “liminoid” situations, Dumas deconstructs the notion of fixed identity that is inherent to traditional portraiture, rewriting and reclaiming the subjectivity of the characters.

This study demonstrates that portraits are not clearly-defined, immutable systems, but rather amalgams of relational structures between subjects and subjectivities. By focusing on the relationship between subject and viewer, the study has shown that portraiture is able to redefine and reinventing itself through new articulations of subjectivity made manifest through the painting’s interaction with the viewers.

SAMENVATTING

Representaties van onvoorstelbaarheid: het geschilderde portret in de twintigste eeuw in de werken van Edvard Munch, Francis Bacon en Marlene Dumas

Deze studie biedt een begrip van het genre geschilderde portretten dat verder reikt dan de traditionele idee van representatie op basis van het cartesische geloof in een unieke subjectiviteit. De studie analyseert hoe dit nieuwe type portretten functioneert in de werken van Edvard Munch, Francis Bacon en Marlene Dumas – waarbij de nadruk wordt gelegd op de nieuwe manieren waarop deze drie kunstenaars het idee van representatie als iets dat een externe, stabiele realiteit weerspiegelt, uitdagen. Door conventionele kunsthistorische concepten van representatie te overtreden, construeren ze nieuwe vormen van portretkunst die de onmogelijkheid onderzoeken om vaste identiteiten weer te geven - door radicale, performatieve en transcendente weergaven van subjectiviteit voor te stellen.

Hoofdstuk Een bespreekt traditionele opvattingen over westerse portretten, die beloofden een getrouwe, objectieve weergave te geven van de unieke subjectiviteit van de geportretteerde. De illusie van eenheid tussen het gezicht van de geportretteerde (uiterlijke vorm) en de innerlijke essentie was de voorwaarde die het genre uniciteit en autoriteit zou verlenen. Het concept van dualisme daagde het idee van gelijkenis uit als onlosmakelijk verbonden met iemands innerlijke zelf, dus mimetische representatie werd minder een prioriteit en vervangen door formele of referentiële portretten. Niettemin lagen goed gedefinieerde regels - zoals het vermogen om de innerlijke essentie van de geportretteerde te vangen en weer te geven - aan de basis van het maken van portretten. Vrouwenportretten hadden een ander proces dan dat van mannen, aangezien vrouwen eeuwenlang als inferieur werden beschouwd ten opzichte van hun mannelijke tegenhangers. Terwijl traditionele afbeeldingen van vrouwelijke subjectiviteiten aan het einde van de negentiende eeuw werden uitgedaagd en gedestabiliseerd, werden deze niet vervangen door alternatieve constructies.

Hoofdstuk Twee analyseert composities van Edvard Munch die niet eerder waren gecategoriseerd als portretten, maar gezien de aandacht die aan een centrale figuur in de compositie wordt besteed, kunnen deze worden gezien als variaties op het genre. Deze schilderijen ondermijnen de formele structuren van conventionele portretten, aangezien ze elementen van landschap en portret naast elkaar plaatsen, waardoor een 'hybride' genre van de twee ontstaat. Aan het begin van de eeuw had Munch al vraagtekens gezet bij de traditionele waarden die inherent zijn aan het genre van portretkunst, zoals het vermogen om de wezenlijke identiteit van een geportretteerde op een mimetische of referentiële manier vast te leggen. Als gevolg hiervan toont deze studie aan dat de hybride portretten van Munch de unieke identiteit ontwijken om deze telkens opnieuw te creëren wanneer een kijker interactie heeft met de werken, waardoor een performatief aspect aan het genre wordt toegevoegd. Naast de introductie van landschap in portretten, maken deze hybride portretten ook gebruik van filmische kwaliteiten die een gevoel van fysieke en emotionele beweging opwekken, en de materialiteit van de schilderijen, om een gevoel van directheid op te roepen bij de interactie met de kunstwerken. Ik heb deze directe

confrontatie die door de bovengenoemde schilderkunstige methoden is bereikt, 'de kijker in beeld brengen' genoemd. Door de kadrering van de kijker bereikt het hybride portretge n re dat door Munch is gecreëerd, effecten die passieve contemplatie overtreffen ten gunste van directe betrokkenheid. Als gevolg hiervan overtreedt portrettering zijn traditionele functie als een mimetische weergave van de gelijkenis van het onderwerp en transformeert deze doeken in doorleefde ervaringen voor de toeschouwer.

Hoofdstuk Drie bespreekt de manier waarop de portretten van Francis Bacon afstand doen van conventionele normen van mimetische representatie om de onmogelijkheid van het representeren van menselijke subjectiviteit te ontmaskeren. In zijn oeuvre verwijst Bacon naar het feit dat traditionele portretten de geportretteerde opofferen ter wille van de representatie. Om deze reden moet portretkunst als genre de voorwaarden die het oorspronkelijk had, opnieuw bepalen. Deze studie analyseert de manier waarop Bacon zijn onderwerpen weergeeft en stelt dat deze portretten de grenzen tussen object en onderwerp, portret en toeschouwer doen vervagen, om de conventionele noties van portretkunst te hermodelleren. Deze studie herinterpreteert Gilles Deleuzes begrip van Bacons werken door middel van het prisma van het boeddhisme, en toont de mogelijkheid aan van een volledige transformatie van reeds bestaande concepten die traditioneel vormgegeven portretten hadden, waardoor een directe identificatie ontstaat tussen de onderwerpen van de portretten en de toeschouwer.

Hoofdstuk Vier analyseert portretafbeeldingen van de iconische onderwerpen Maria Magdalena en Marilyn Monroe in het werk van Marlene Dumas. De kunstenaar vertrekt vanuit bestaande iconische personages, die ze op ongebruikelijke en onverwachte manieren afbeeldt om te ontmaskeren dat culturele beelden collectief gecreëerde stereotiepe identiteiten vertegenwoordigen. Historisch gezien vormt de figuur van Maria Magdalena een paradox van uitbeelding. Als zondares die in een heilige is veranderd, wordt ze conventioneel afgeschilderd als een mooie en sensuele vrouw, met een witte, tere huid en lichtblond haar. Als een heilig model probeert ze berouwvol haar seksualiteit te ontkennen. Niettemin wordt de boetvaardige Magdalena zo afgebeeld

dat een voyeuristische blik wordt aangemoedigd. De Magdalenas van Marlene Dumas daarentegen lijken naakt en confronteren de toeschouwer met hun directe blik. Hoewel ze seksueel aantrekkelijk zijn, laten deze onderwerpen zich niet in met de verleiding van de kijker. Deze studie stelt dat dergelijke portretten in strijd zijn met de kunsthistorische canons van de representatie om stereotypen van de afbeelding van vrouwelijke subjecten en vooraf gedefinieerde raciale identiteiten uit te dagen, terwijl ze tegelijkertijd het concept van de vrouw als een passief lichaam ontmantelen. Naast de Magdalene-serie wordt in deze studie een onherkenbare portretafbeelding van Marilyn Monroe verder onderzocht. Door het antropologische concept van 'liminaliteit' toe te passen op Dumas' schilderijen, toont deze studie de manier waarop de kunstenaar de stereotyperende kracht van iconiciteit blootlegt door haar onderwerpen af te beelden in staten van overgang en 'er tussenin', waar ondenkbare mogelijkheden en praktijken zich kunnen ontploffen. Door deze iconische onderwerpen in 'liminoïde' situaties weer te geven, deconstrueert Dumas de notie van een vaste identiteit die inherent is aan de traditionele portretkunst, door de subjectiviteit van de personages te herschrijven en opnieuw op te eisen.

Deze studie toont aan dat portretten geen duidelijk gedefinieerde, onveranderlijke systemen zijn, maar eerder een amalgaam van relationele structuren tussen subjecten en subjectiviteiten. Door te focussen op de relatie tussen onderwerp en kijker, heeft de studie aangetoond dat portretkunst zichzelf kan herdefiniëren en opnieuw uitvinden door middel van nieuwe articulaties van subjectiviteit die tot uiting komen in de interactie van het schilderij met de kijker.

PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS

This study includes parts of previously published peer-reviewed articles along with unpublished material, that are prefaced, introduced, linked, discussed, and concluded together to form this study.

Parts of Chapter One have previously been published in the articles "Framing the Viewer: Edvard Munch's Hybrid Genres," *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*, Leiden University, Issue 7 (2019); "Unmasking the Icon. Marlene Dumas' Liminal Portraits," *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture*, no. 23 (2019); and "To Model or Not to Model: Transgressive Portraits of Mary Magdalene by Marlene Dumas." *Breaking the Rules: Artistic Expressions of Transgressions*, *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*, Leiden University, Issue 5 (2017).

Parts of Chapter Two have previously been published under the title "Framing the Viewer: Edvard Munch's Hybrid Genres," *Journal of*

the LUCAS Graduate Conference, Leiden University, Issue 7 (2019), <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/69716>.

Parts of Chapter Three have previously been published under the title “Blurred Boundaries: Francis Bacon’s Portraits,” *World Literature Studies*, volume 11 (2019).

Parts of Chapter Four have been previously published in two articles titled “Unmasking the Icon. Marlene Dumas’ Liminal Portraits,” *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture*, no. 23 (2019), <https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2019/23-the-force-of-women/unmasking-the-ic> and “To Model or Not to Model: Transgressive Portraits of Mary Magdalene by Marlene Dumas,” *Breaking the Rules: Artistic Expressions of Transgressions, Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*, Leiden University, Issue 5 (2017), https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/45210/JLGC5-04_ToModelOrNot.pdf?sequence=1.