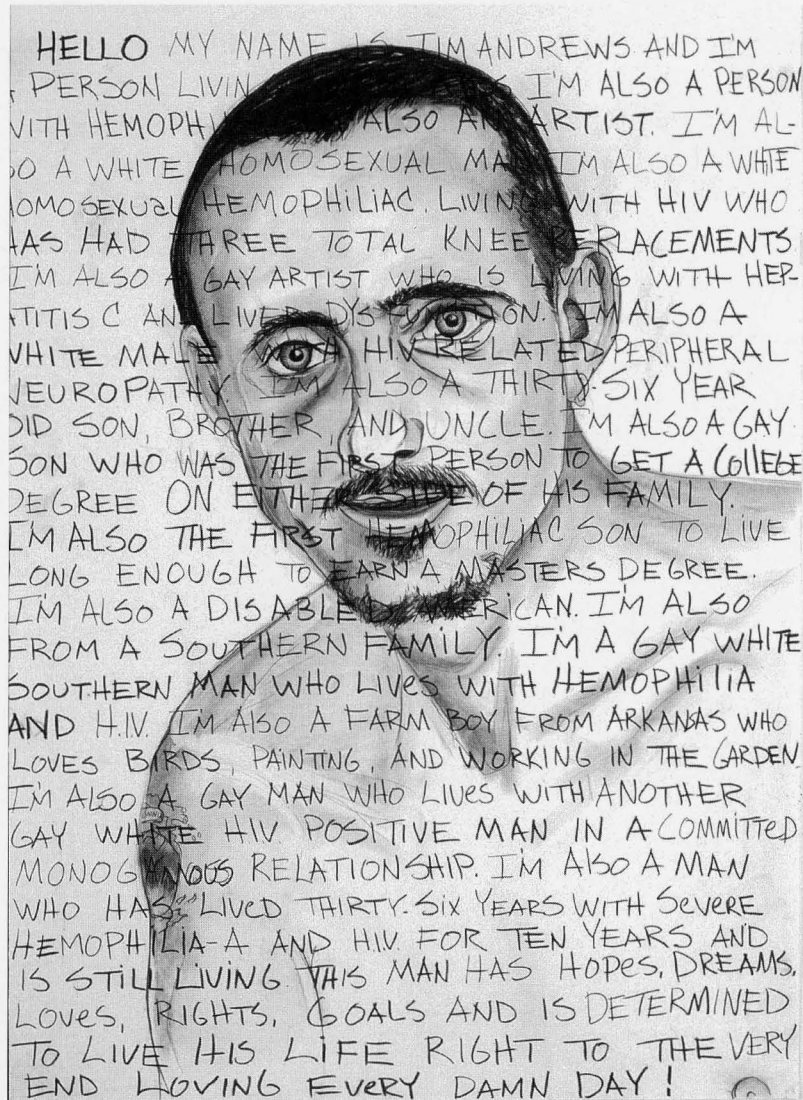


Tim Andrews: Glancing Back in the Mirror

November 22, 1997 - January 30, 1998
Clough-Hanson Gallery, Rhodes College



Looking Through My Identities, 1997, charcoal on paper, 22" x 30"

The self-portraits featured in Tim Andrews's solo exhibition, *Glancing Back in the Mirror*, are more than merely a reflection of the artist's life over the past four years. Although they certainly document the central experiences of his life—art student, hemophiliac, person living with HIV, gay male, gardener—they also reveal the tensions at the center of portraiture. As both objects of his engaged vision and subjects viewing from within his own body, the portraits oscillate constantly between works of art to be looked at, and personal points of view suggesting how we in turn might perceive the world if, even momentarily, we shared Andrews's vision.¹ To do so is to take up the provocative offer of these paintings, and therefore to treat them as propositions. We might find, as he suggests in *Looking Through My Identities* (1997), that subjectivity depends on the verbal and visual languages through which we articulate our world.

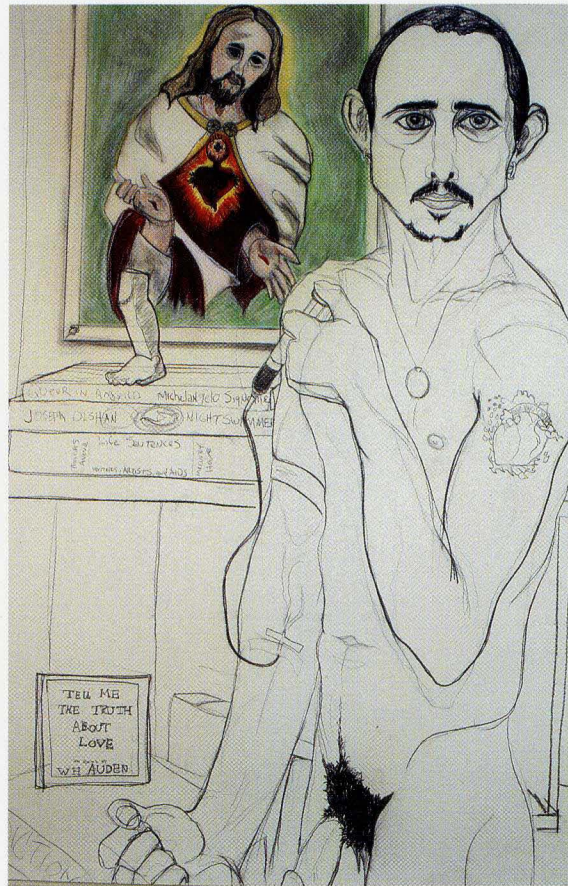
Indeed, the question of language draws atten-

tion to two salient facts: One, portraiture is entirely conventional, a constant visual language with a deep history dating to the classical world. Relying on standardized formats such as the bust or full-length rendition of its subject, portraits

exalt individuals for their actions and contributions to human civilization. Two, when conceived as a self-portrait, the genre can become a unique inflection of this language, articulated through an individual sensibility. We can think of the difference as analogous to that between language and speech, with the former signifying a relatively stable and collective pattern of communication, and the latter demonstrating the possibility of personal variation.²

Clearly the series of self-portraits Andrews has produced since 1993 have been conceived within a

collective language of culturally shared meanings. Although the large, self-portrait nudes executed while he was completing his master of fine arts degree at the Memphis College of Art may at first seem startling to some viewers, they have an



Life Remains a Blessing Although You Cannot Bless, 1995, charcoal and pastel on paper, 32" x 47"

impeccable art historical pedigree dating at least to Albrecht Dürer's undressed self-portrait from 1503. Like this Renaissance prototype, Andrews's paintings serve two purposes. The first, quite obviously, is the desire to draw from the human figure, although here, through the use of a mirror, Andrews can transform himself into a model. The advantages of this act include unimpeded access to the human body. One can set up the artist/model relationship in virtually any space affording privacy and a full-length mirror. This method also bypasses the necessity of paying modeling fees. The second purpose is more complex. Stripping the body to the flesh often serves to deny it the outward signifiers of class, ethnic, and other identities. For Dürer, and for more contemporary intellectuals, such as the late poet Allen Ginsberg, stripping was a means of acknowledging the life of the body, which ages and withers with time.

Almost without exception, Andrews's self-portraits contain skulls or skeletons, reminding us of earthly transience. Nakedness, a state in which the physical may quickly cross over into the spiritual, can be a confession of vulnerability before forces greater than oneself. Then again, it can also be a powerful and aggressive assertion of one's existence. Andrews's student self-portraits thus rework a common idea in Western art: keeping the language alive in our own time by investing it with the force of a strong personality.

By the fall of 1995, the focus of Andrews's self-portraits had shifted from his role as student to that of medical subject. A hemophiliac who is HIV positive, Andrews's relation to his own body is necessarily different from that of most people who do not have to monitor their physical health constantly. In a series of pencil and charcoal drawings that include *Life Remains a Blessing Although You*



Letting Go, 1997, paint on paper, 24" x 48"

Cannot Bless and Stare, Stare in the Basin and Wonder What You've Missed, Andrews positions himself not as a victim, but as a veteran of many years of medical attention. Sometimes alone in administering an injection or ingesting a pill, or sometimes found with a nurse, Andrews records the routine maintenance of his body. At once vulnerable and heroically stoic, the portraits argue for an unapologetic acknowledgment of his life.

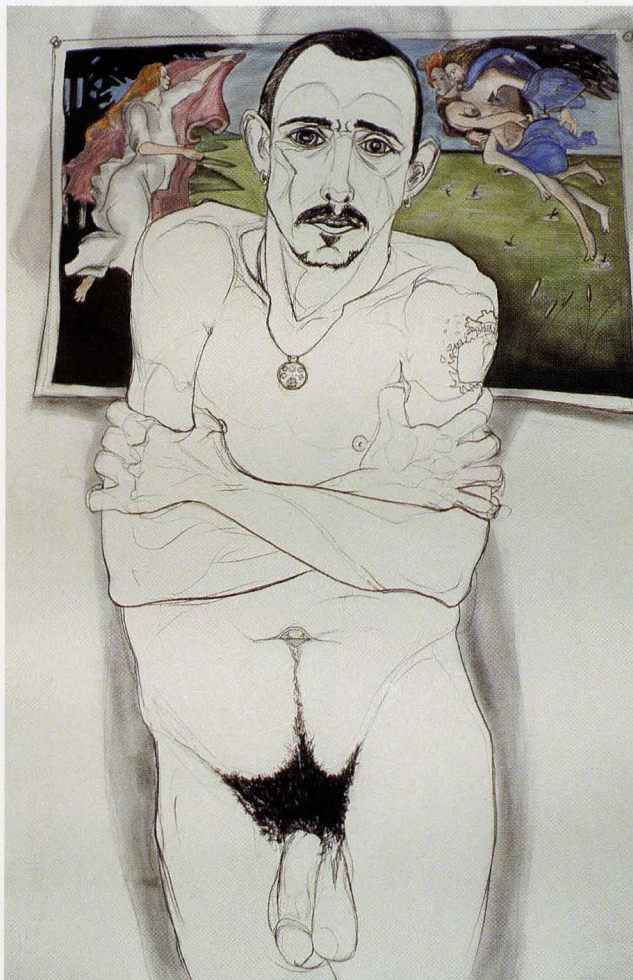
The titles of these drawings were taken from W.H. Auden's poem "As I Walked Out One Evening."³ The poem celebrates fleeting moments of consciousness within the flow of time by contrasting the erotic desire for human connectedness with the passing of the seasons. By drawing visual and physical parallels between himself and the Christian Messiah in *Life* or by likening himself to Venus, the Greek goddess of earthly love, in *Stare*, Andrews invokes a cultural heritage to further explain the difficul-

ties of living with HIV, particularly in a society often too quick to judge those persons living with the virus. His art historical reference to Sandro Botticelli's famous painting *Birth of Venus* (ca. 1482) adds to the question of Andrews's

vulnerability in his placement of himself between the buffeting winds of passion and the protective cloak of reason. The small wings appearing in shadow form, above and behind the painter, seem more a wish than a reality, but nonetheless remind us how art making can serve to confront and articulate the complexities of living with this virus.

Letting Go, a recent painting, is both eloquent and direct in confronting these difficulties. Here

the artist placed himself in a bust-length pose with hands raised in the midst of his garden, one known throughout Memphis for its variety and



Stare, Stare in the Basin and Wonder What You've Missed, 1995, charcoal and colored pencil on paper, 30" x 40"

vibrancy. An untrained observer might read the gesture as one of surrender or even benediction, especially because of the lawn ornament of the Virgin Mary placed over his right shoulder in the distance. However, the raised hands draw attention to a recent development in Andrews's medical history. Damage to the cells of the peripheral nerve system in his hands and feet, a condition known as peripheral neuropathy and possibly traceable to the drugs he must take, makes it difficult for him to stand or hold pencils and other objects for more than twenty minutes. Yet, despite this adversity, we still find Andrews in the center of his creative world, surrounded by the objects of his labor, inviting us to share in a vision made manifest through his art.

As Tim Andrews tells us quite forcefully in *Looking Through My Identities*, he is many people living in one body. A southern male, a loving partner, a farm boy—he is more than any single label can contain. Above all, he is a talented artist whose self-portraits demand our attention and respect. They remind us that individuality is both a creation and a gift that should be shared wholeheartedly.

David McCarthy
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Rhodes College

Notes

1. Richard Brilliant draws a distinction between portraits as art objects and as human subjects in *Portraiture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 7.
2. Here I follow the explication of these terms by Laurie Scheider Adams. See *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 134.
3. Reprinted in *W.H. Auden: Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1976), pp. 114–15.

Tim Andrews

Education

- 1994 Master of Fine Arts, Memphis College of Art, Memphis, TN
- 1987 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Memphis College of Art, Memphis, TN
- 1987 Alumni Traveling Fellowship Award, Memphis College of Art, Memphis, TN

Teaching Experience

- 1990-97 Memphis College of Art Saturday and Summer School Programs
- 1994-97 Memphis College of Art Advanced Placement Class

Selected Exhibitions

- 1997 Consider the Tomato, Lauderdale County Council of Arts, Ripley, TN
- 1997 Body and Soul, exhibition in conjunction with the Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts 1997 Conference, Emory University, Dobbs University Center Art Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 1995 Diary, Metaphor, Mourning and Rage, Delta Axis Contemporary Art Center, Memphis, TN
- 1994 MFA Exhibition, Marshall Arts Gallery, Memphis, TN
- 1994 Dark Humor, juried exhibition, Plan B Gallery, Memphis, TN
- 1992 A Leap of Faith, one-person exhibit, Working Space Gallery, Memphis, TN
- 1990 Group show, Goldsmith Civic Garden Center, Memphis, TN
- 1988 One-person show, Kathy Albers Fine Art Gallery, Memphis, TN