

The Longue Durée

Robert Priseman

S e a b r o o k P r e s s

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Essay by Jia Huiming

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The Longue Durée

In 1976 the American painter R. B. Kitaj was asked by the Arts Council of Great Britain to curate an exhibition by British artists for display at the Hayward Gallery, London. Kitaj titled the show, *The Human Clay*, and said of his selection: "*I was looking mostly for pictures of the single human form as if they could be breathed on, whereupon they would glow like beacons of where art has been and like agents of a newer life to come.*"

Kitaj believed the human figure created the foundation on which all great art is formed and argued that art's core mission lay in unearthing the reality of significant and sacred human experience. Part of the reason for this may be that the figure, and more specifically the face, is the very first form we recognise and respond to by sight. And as we grow we develop skills which enable us to interpret what someone is thinking and feeling. In 2016 Howard Halle, the chief art critic for Time Out New York, wrote a short piece on what he considered to be the top ten paintings of all time. Three of the works in Halle's list fit Kitaj's criteria beautifully. They are: *Mona Lisa*, by Leonardo da Vinci (1503–19), *Girl with A Pearl Earring*, by Johannes Vermeer (1665) and *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1*, by James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1871).

So, in the 21st century what could be left to say by the painter who wishes to draw a simple portrait? For Kitaj the answer lies in the simple desire to return to the origins of creative practice and find again that which is original. In his introduction to *The Human Clay* Kitaj observed how Piet Mondrian had developed an agenda for emotional separation when he conceived art to be a 'life substitute'. Kitaj explained that "*Mondrian has been a great source for one of the pervasive ideas in much of our art – the idea of detachment – an art which has been urged towards autonomy.*" He

objects as the growth of a process which gives rise to the birth of memory, development of symbolization and creativity. It seems to me that photographs can act in a way as a very sophisticated kind of transitional object which is then evolved much further in the act of drawing and painting. In this way a work of art can occupy a space somewhere between the attachment to emotional sensitivity Kitaj sought and the 'life substitute' Mondrian desired.

For my subjects I have chosen close family and friends who range in age from 13 to 92 years old and invited each of them to be photographed separately at my home, each under exactly the same lighting conditions. I enjoy the use of photography as it enables me to feel close to the masters of the past who I admire like Holbein, Vermeer and Velázquez who made extensive use of the camera obscura. The photographs I take act as the source material to produce the drawings from, which in turn do not seek to mimic photographs, but instead strive towards capturing a feeling I hold for each person. In fact, the sense of the hand of the artist being a visible aspect in enabling the production of each work is important to me, as it seems to help create a sense of the picture as a transcendent object. It is as if the artwork itself somehow captures the emotion and period of meditation and holds it there for the viewer to witness.

It is a theory which is also deeply embedded in the traditional eastern techniques of ink painting, where artists not only respond spiritually to the world they see around themselves, they also allow areas of the paper to remain blank so that the viewer may emotionally enter and engage with the work.

Robert Priseman 2018

End notes:

Catalogue preface to *The Human Clay*, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976

<https://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/top-famous-paintings-in-art-history-ranked>

Catalogue preface to *The Human Clay*, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976

<https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2000/feb/06/focus.news>

Exhibition History for the Series

"The Long Durée" series went on display in its entirety for the first time in June 2018 at Yantai Art Gallery, Shandong Province, China.

It subsequently toured as an exhibition to Tai'an Art Museum, Tai'an, the Weihai Art Museum and Suochengli Library, Shandong Province, China.

The works 'Mum' and 'Dad' were acquired by the Yale Centre for British Art in December 2018.

'An Invisible Man', 'Aaron', 'Pearl', 'Huiming' and 'Anne' went on display at the National Museum of Poland, Gdansk in the exhibition 'Made in Britain' in 2019.

肖像的绵延

肖像绘画作为一种艺术传统在西方源远流长，悉数现存的对人类文化和精神产生过深远影响的艺术作品，有很大一部分来自肖像绘画。这种现象并非偶然产生，从文艺复兴时期的人文主义思想到现代佛洛伊德的精神分析学派，各种观念激励着艺术家从不同角度对“人”的形象进行探索和表现，也孕育出达芬奇、维米尔、培根等伟大艺术家风格迥异却同样震撼心灵的肖像作品。

艺术家罗伯特·普利兹曼先生此次展出的肖像绘画系列作品没有刻意回避这个业已承载着厚重历史的艺术形式，他通过追溯传统而在当代艺术实践中创造出新的意义。罗伯特深受上世纪活跃于伦敦的美国肖像画家基塔伊艺术理念的影响，意在通过绘制单人肖像来追溯艺术的本源。那么，在喧嚣的后现代艺术思潮中，重新回归肖像绘画到底意味着什么？

不同于西方艺术史中为宫廷贵族或英雄人物绘制肖像的传统，罗伯特此次展出的肖像作品中的人物形象源自现实生活中的亲朋好友，以此构建出以亲情友情为纽带的图像谱系。他致力于通过艺术的方式探索普通人的生存状态，这些作品也可以看作是融入了主体情感的对当代生活的真实记录。最初的创作素材取自于艺术家为每位人物在相同光照条件下拍摄的照片，这些记录人物瞬间的照片成为一种复杂的“过渡性客体”，在作画的过程中它们成为艺术家沉思默想的观照对象，通过最传统的铅笔素描的方法将其感受凝固成视觉形式。不同于摄影被动的记录现实的手段，艺术家在创作中主动捕捉每个人物的情绪，赋予每幅画作以独特的品质，即本雅明所说的“光晕”——昭示着绘画在时空中的独特存在。这些外表看上去客观冷峻的肖像作品却饱含着艺术家的情感体验，远远超越了原初摄影的功能。这些由细微敏感的笔触交织而成的人物形象，实现了从外在形貌到内在心灵的全面观照，常常具有一种触及灵魂的力量，而这在机械复制的照片中根本无法体验到。

现代抽象画家蒙德里安曾主张，要将情感从绘画中抽离，得到形式上平衡而

完美的“生命替代品”，并由此实现绘画的“自律性”。相反地，肖像画家基塔伊认为，绘画应当成为情绪和感受的依附物。艺术家罗伯特似乎在这对立的两级之间进行不懈地探索。这些肖像作品一方面来自对现实生活中真实人物的体验，并通过客观而理性的素描风格表现出来，画面摒除了黑白灰之外的色彩，整个系列更像是由图像构成的人物档案，在形式上具有高度的统一性和纯粹性；另一方面，形象之中所蕴含的复杂微妙的个性心理刻画以及人物之间潜藏的关系纽带，却又触及到情感和伦理的层面，成为这些作品赖以存在的私密语境。

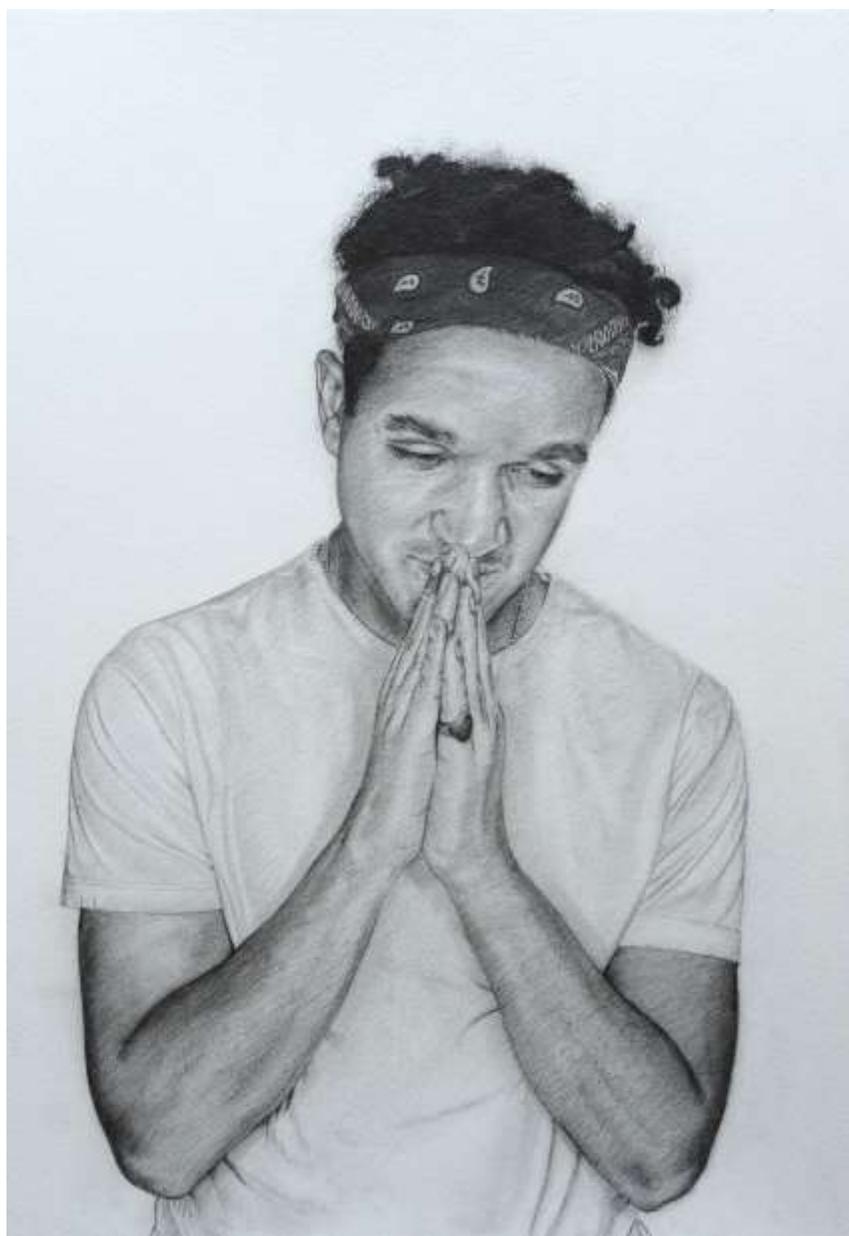
写实肖像是西方艺术传统中的一种典型形式，罗伯特先生却将他对于东方传统艺术精神的独特感悟也融入到创作中，并从中汲取了无限的灵感。他推崇的是东方传统水墨作品从精神层面回应时代的独特表达方式，擅长在艺术中捕捉日常生活中富有诗意的瞬间。正如传统水墨作品中的留白可以将观众和艺术家通过想象的无限虚空联系起来，这些抽离了背景的人物肖像所呈现出的富含情感和张力的状态，同样召唤着观众参与到这种对于他人和自我的静观和内省。这些肖像既是对不同个体的呈现，却又折射出这个时代普遍具有的精神症候。艺术家通过这组图像将碎片化的经验整合在一起，构成了有关当代人类生存状态的精神景观，相信观众们会从中感受到既陌生又熟悉的气息，获得一种精神上的共鸣。

即使是在数码技术高度发达的今天，肖像绘画的魅力也从来没有消减过，依然持续地带给我们心灵上的启悟。这也许是因为，艺术对于内在“人性”的探索，超越了时代、性别、阶级、民族等因素，成为一种绵延不断的人生实践。在这个变化无常的时代，我们更希冀在艺术中寻求一种精神的永恒。而这些流淌着鲜活的时代血液的肖像作品，彰显了人生的意义和存在的价值，散发着一股超越时空的人性光辉，启示着人们发现并缔造更好的自己。

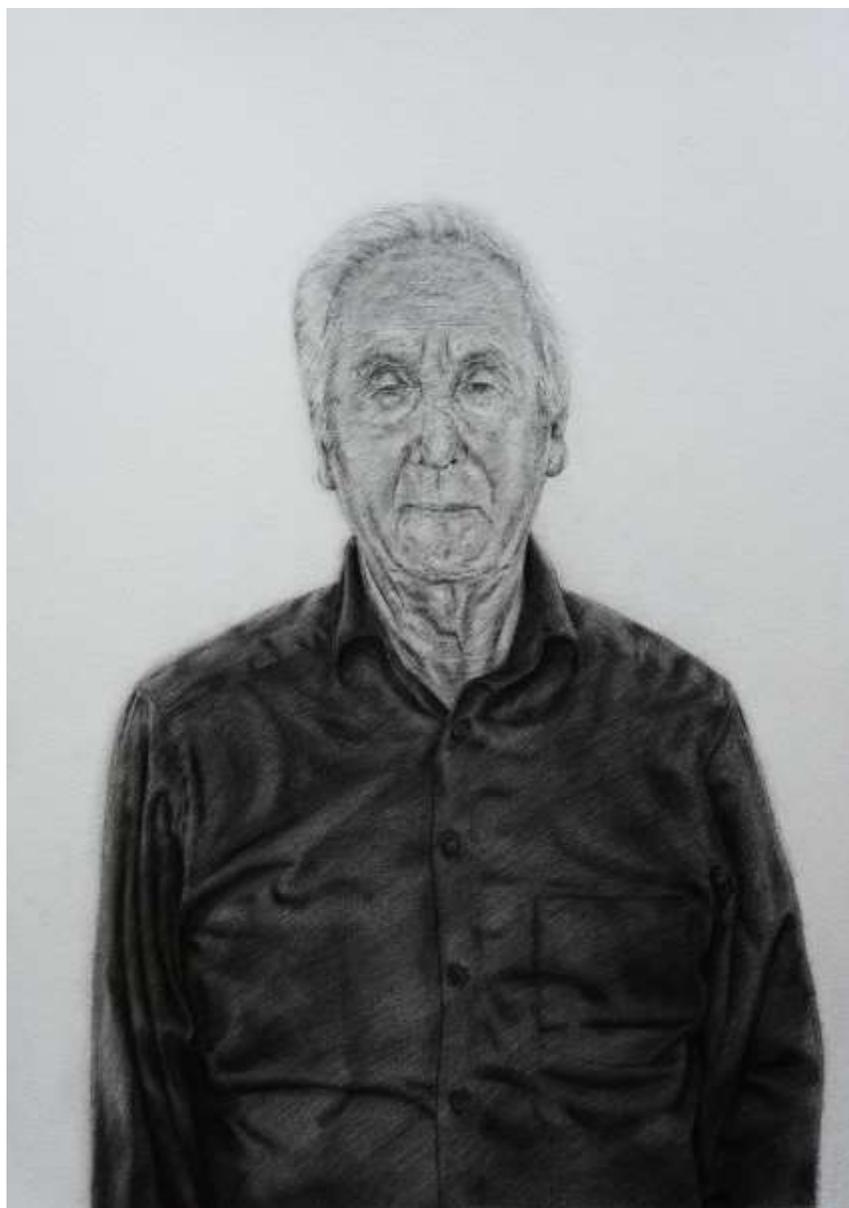
贾慧明

2018年3月5日写于山东曲阜

The Drawings

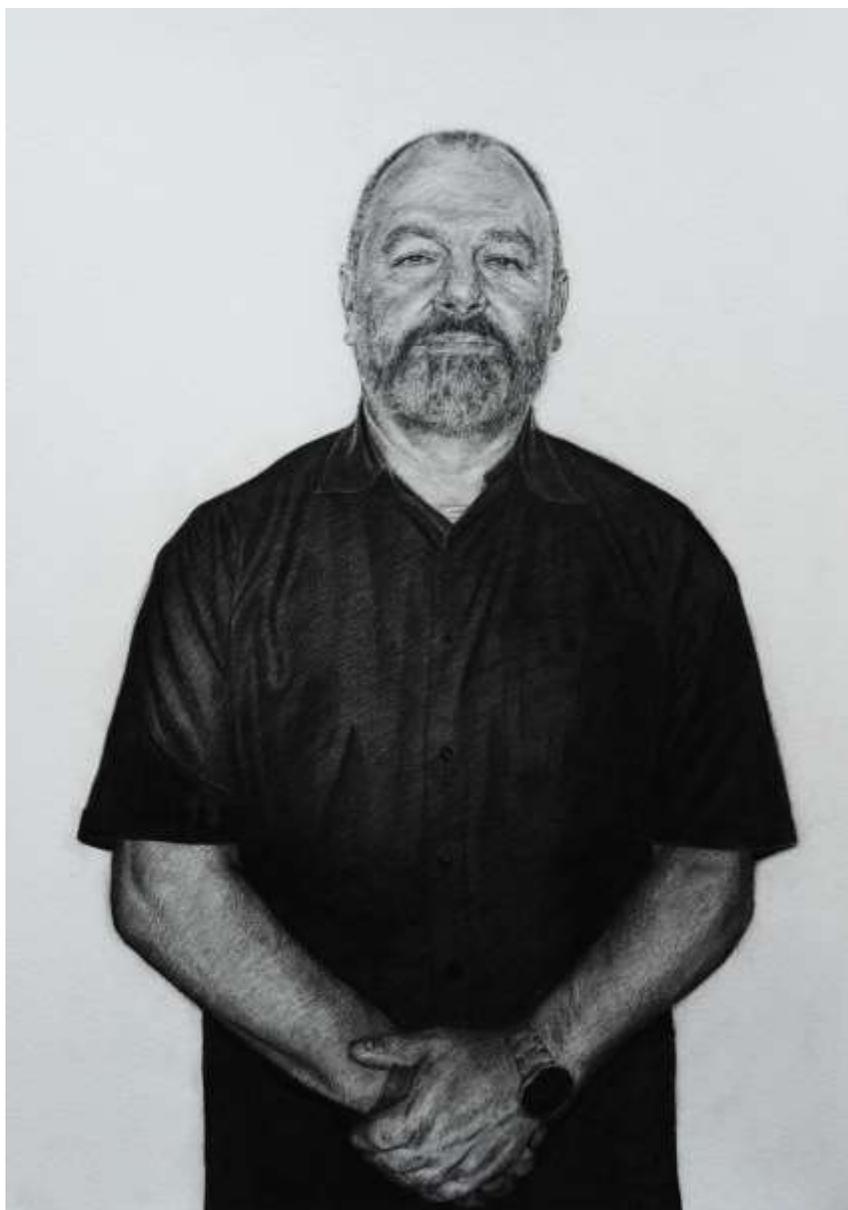










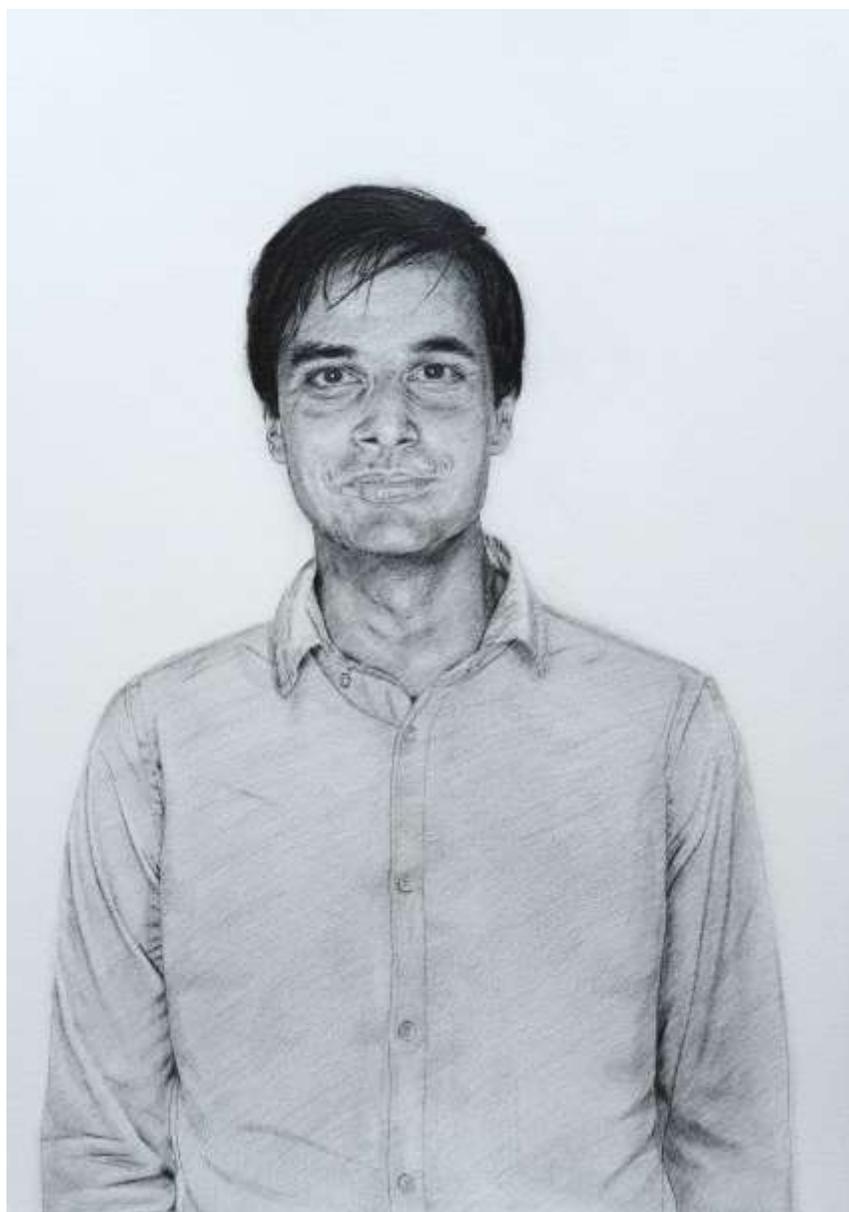




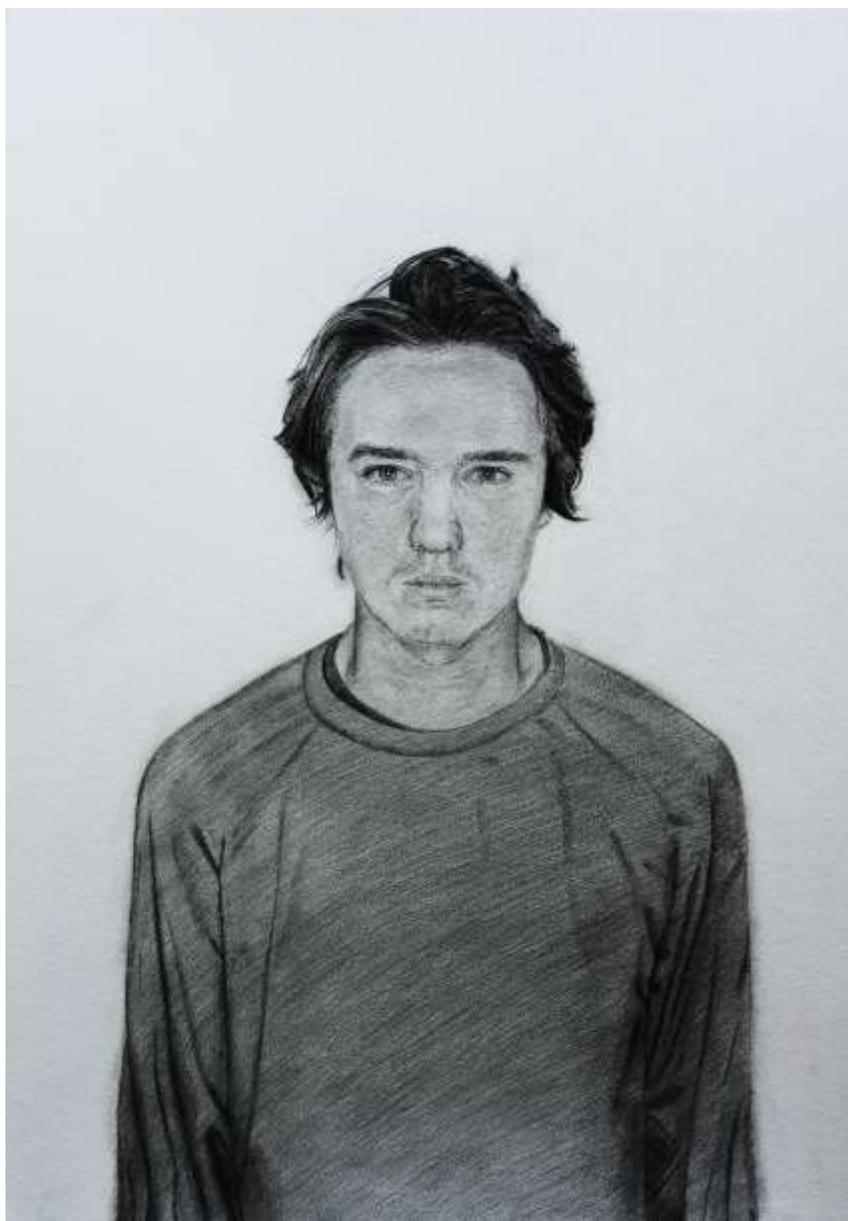


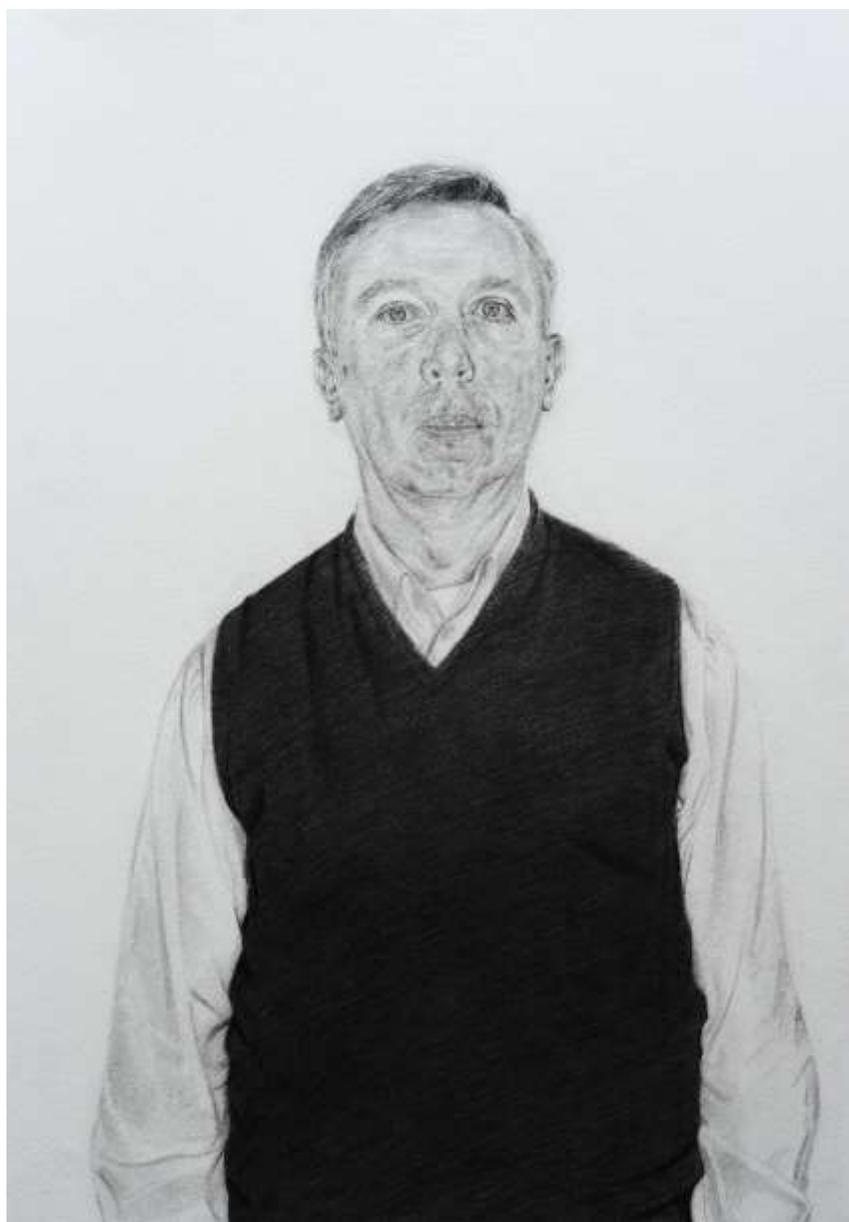
























Notes on the Drawings

Each work presents a single human figure on a single sheet of paper measuring 594 x 420 mm (A2). The paper is 140lb Daler-Rowney Langton watercolour paper and has been produced using 2H, HB, B, 2B, 4B and 6B Staedtler Mars Lumograph pencils. This has been further enabled by the use of Staedtler Mars plastic 526 50 erasers, Winsor & Newton medium kneaded putty rubbers, Winsor & Newton Artists' Fixative, an American Line Smart-Grip 9mm snap-off knife and a Swann Morton scalpel with #11 blade.

I began using Staedtler Mars Lumograph pencils in 1984 and have maintained and refined the same practice for drawing ever since. With each drawing I first create a delicate outline depicted in 2H. Then, I work a flat and consistent tone over the whole area before working in the detailed dark shaded areas. I then go back over the surface of the dark areas with the 2H pencil before applying fixative and then picking out highlights with a scalpel.

Robert Priseman, 2018

About the Artist

Over 200 works of art by Robert are held in art museum collections around the world including the V&A, Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Musée de Louvain la Neuve, The Allen Memorial Art Museum, The Mead Art Museum, The Royal Collection Windsor, Honolulu Museum of Art and The National Galleries of Scotland. He has exhibited in New York, Miami, San Francisco, Christchurch, Nanjing, Xi'an, Hangzhou and London.

He also collects paintings by British artists he admires and owns the Priseman Seabrook Collection of 21st Century British Painting which first went on museum display at Huddersfield Art Gallery in 2014. This has subsequently toured to The Yantai Art Museum, Jiangsu Art Museum, Artall Nanjing and the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts Museum in China.

Robert has given talks on painting at Wolfson College Oxford, The University of Leeds, Xian Academy of Fine Arts, Amherst College Massachusetts, Whitebox Arts Centre New York, The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, The University of Essex, Arch 402, London, The Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts and The Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

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