

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGR

IGNORED FACES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in Art,
Studio Art

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August 2012

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ABSTRACT

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Master of Arts in Art; Studio Art

My drawings portray homeless people in Los Angeles. In China, the homeless are neglected by the general population and considered to be a burden on society. I have noticed that most people ignore the homeless that populate the streets of Los Angeles. Perhaps guilt, fear, and disgust compel people to look away. My drawing and watercolor portraits portray these ignored and neglected faces and demonstrate my respect and compassion for them.

My candid approach to photographing encourages these people each person to be him-/her-self. For people who cannot afford a place to live or decent food, my obsessively detailed and interpreted portraits honor the dignity that remains. Each drawing exudes raw character and depth of their personality. As a token of my respect, I take great care with the different shapes, colors, brush strokes, and pencil marks to depict the details of their facial characteristics that I find to be unique and, as a result, beautiful.

Introduction:

Some people believe that art can improve the mind as long as it is beautiful. But beauty is subjective.

Drawing and painting are a beautiful practice and create magic for me. I strive for perfection and try to create a sense of reality in my drawings and paintings. Shapes, colors, anatomical forms and accurate proportions constitute a mysterious and challenging world for me, but solving technical problems and expressing my thoughts in visual form give me ultimate satisfaction and fulfillment.

I try to grasp beauty in the details of the portraits I draw and paint. My drawing techniques and skills are the language I use to express my thoughts, and I prefer to quietly observe the ordinary instead of seeking the thrill of modern spectacles. When the impulse is strong, I draw or paint; it is a labor of love and an attempt to reveal the beauty in ordinary things.

Having studied European drawing and painting masterpieces made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I am most impressed by their exquisitely rendered facial expressions that animate the figures. I realized that a successful portrait reveals a person's psychology from the artist's perspective rather than a literal, physical likeness. As Aristotle stated, "The aim of art is to present not the outward appearance of things, but their inner significance; for this, not the external manner and detail, constitutes true reality."^[1] Nineteenth century British artist Edward Burne-Jones wrote, "The only expression allowable in great portraiture is the expression of character and moral quality, not anything temporary, fleeting, or accidental."^[2]

A successful drawing or painting "speaks" to its audience. In my drawings and watercolor portraits, I interpret the facial expressions of the homeless people I meet, and use color, line, and texture to express this.

In China, the homeless are neglected by the general population and considered to be a burden on society. In America, I noticed that most people ignore the homeless people who populate the streets of Los Angeles as well. Perhaps guilt, fear and disgust compel people to look away. My drawings and watercolor portraits portray these ignored and neglected faces and demonstrate my respect and compassion for them.

I studied and interacted with the different homeless populations that live in Venice Beach, Santa Monica and at the Los Angeles Mission. The photographs I made during my visits serve as reference material to vividly render specific portraits of the people I met. My candid approach to photographing encouraged these people to be themselves. For people who cannot afford a place to live or decent food, my obsessively detailed and interpreted portraits portray the dignity that remains.

Process:

Each drawing or watercolor portrait exudes the raw character and depth of the subject's personality. For instance, in "Homeless #4," I depict one man with missing teeth. The detail of his mouth reveals his poor health, but his smile is gripping and reveals his hope for the future. In "Homeless #6," I portray another man wearing a hat, but the focal point of the composition is his eyes. They are hidden by the shade of his hat, but the sparkle in them reveals his watchful guile. In comparison with this drawing, I used pink paper for "Homeless #11." The compassionate and reverential color reinforces the sad and nervous expression in his eyes.

The human mouth also conveys mood. In "Homeless #9," a man wearing glasses has a slightly open mouth; although silenced in my drawing, he exudes confidence and intelligence through this gesture.

Although graphite drawing is considered to be monochromatic, I try to manipulate this assumption in my work. Black and grey marks collaborate with different drawing surfaces to create negative space and a more layered palette. I use gray paper to enhance the effect of white highlights.

The scales of my drawings and watercolor portraits are smaller than life-size in order to create a more intimate relationship between the viewer and the portraits. The finely rendered details in my drawings and watercolor portraits encourage the viewer to move in closer and observe the faces that are often neglected. As a token of my respect, I take great care with different shapes, colors, brush strokes, and pencil marks to depict the details of facial characteristics that I consider to be unique and, as a result, beautiful.

Compared to oil paint, watercolor has a mysterious, transparent texture. I examine the tones on the homeless people's faces and mix the watercolor to show the

tenderness and delicacy of their expressions. In “Homeless #2,” I depict a homeless woman, her face pale and unhealthy. I added green and blue to her cheeks to enhance this depleted aspect. In the drawing “Homeless #7,” an old man holds a cup of soup, his rough, cracked hands revealing the gravity of his existence. My observation and constant study of daily life allows me to capture these subtle but important details.

I use classical drawing techniques with a contemporary approach. For example, in the drawing “Homeless #7,” I use academic and traditional techniques, but the ubiquitous *Cup Noodles*TM situates the work in the present day. My drawings incorporate nuances of contemporary culture, and I allow these aspects to complement the work rather than dictate it.

Historical Background:

Changes in the way artists observe and represent the figure have signaled revolutions in the history of art. For example, medieval paintings use overlapping shapes to describe perspective and spatial depth. During the Renaissance, architect and engineer Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) invented one-point linear perspective, a revolutionary tool that quickly became standard studio practice up to and including the present time. Swiss painter and sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) constructed his work based on the strange angles and proximities from which he observed the figure. These pioneering artists expanded the visual language of art and inspire and influence my own practice.

Work Cited:

Gordon C. Aymar, *The Art of Portrait Painting*, Chilton Book Co., Philadelphia, 1967, p. 119

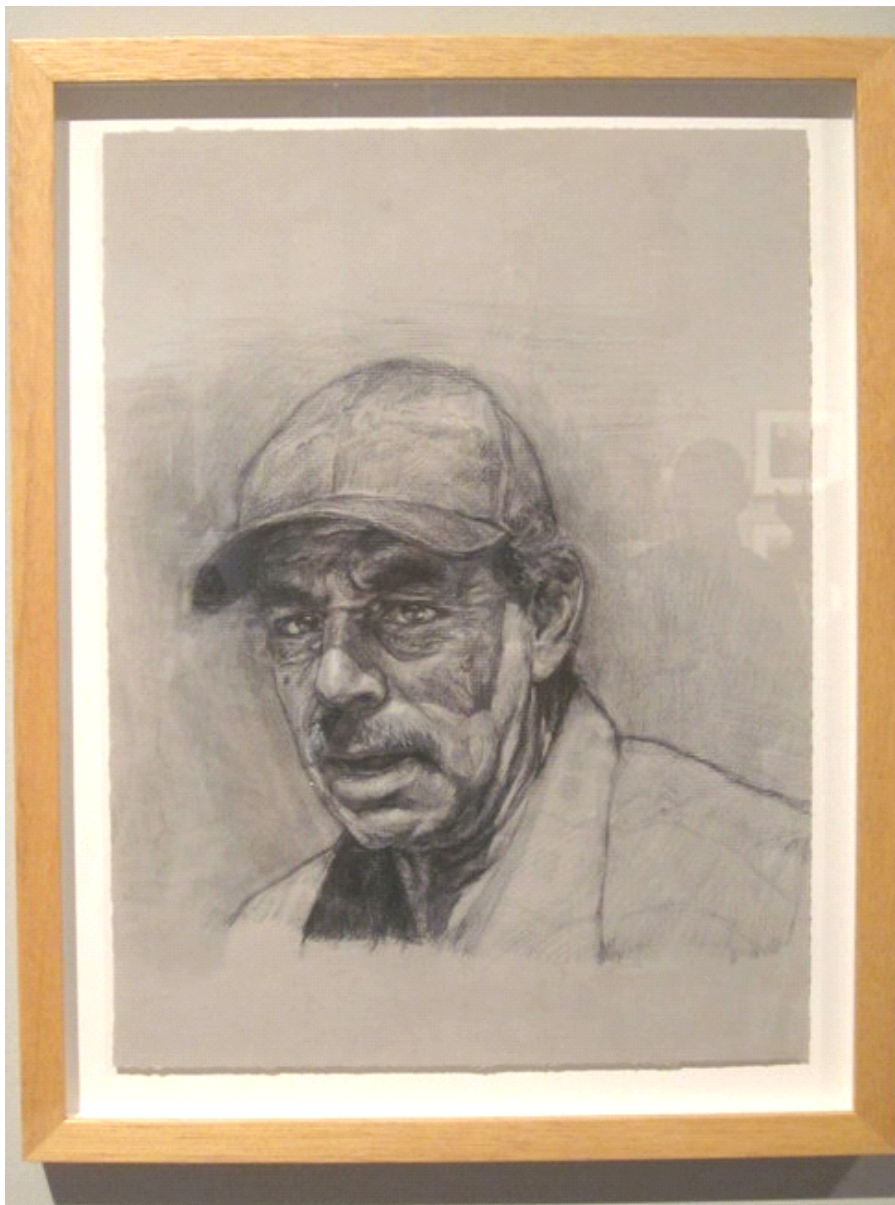
Gordon C. Aymar, *The Art of Portrait Painting*, Chilton Book Co., Philadelphia, 1967, p. 94

Appendix:



Gracy, watercolor, 7"by10", 2011

1. Homeless #2, Watercolor, 7"x10", 2011



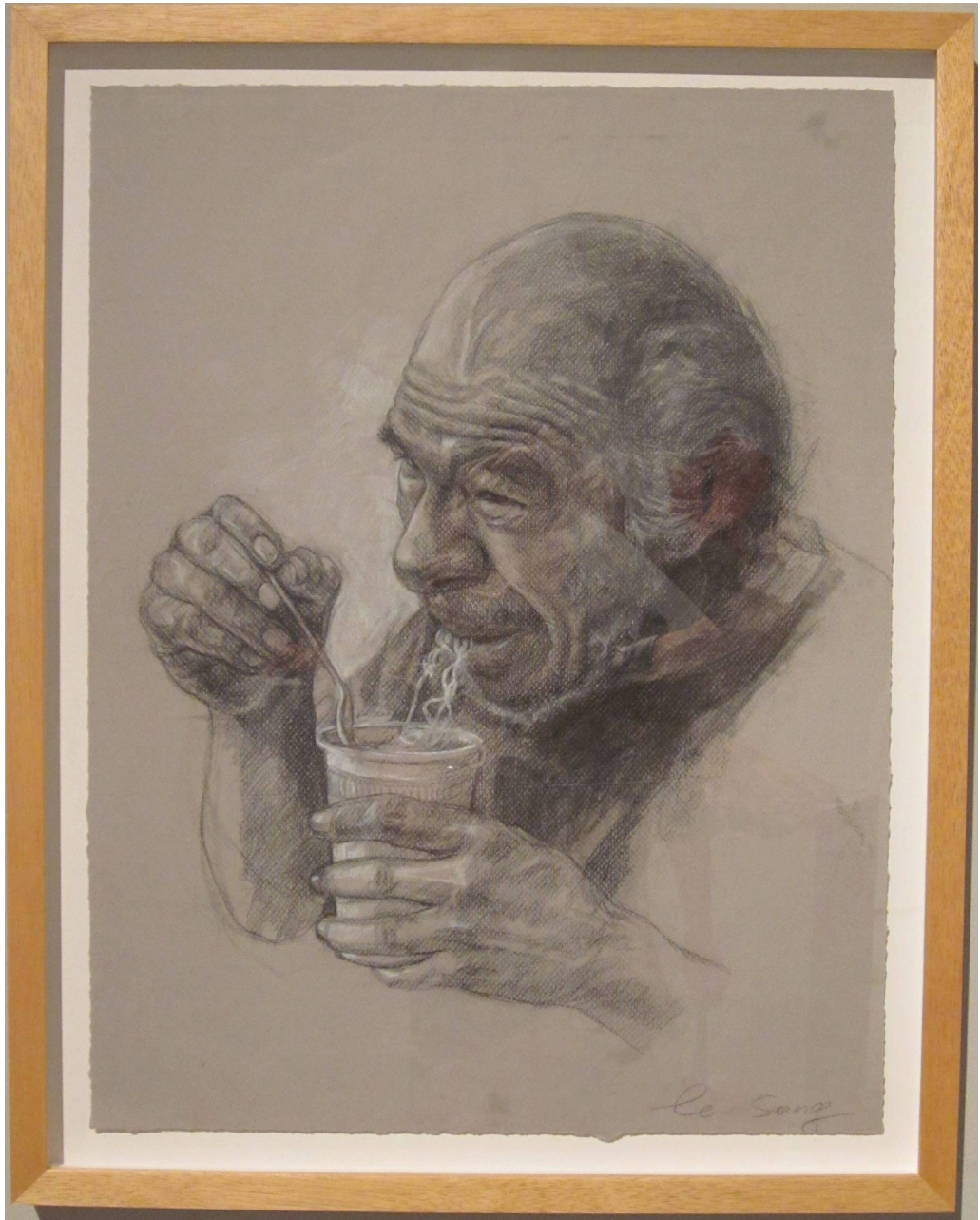
2. Homeless #6, Graphite Drawing, 14"x18", 2012



3. Homeless #9, Graphite Drawing, 14"x18", 2012



4. Homeless #11, Graphite Drawing, 10"x14", 2011



5. Homeless #7, Graphite Drawing, 18"x23", 2012

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