

Above The Fold

# 'FACES II' subverts traditional forms of portraiture

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Roger Cutforth, Portrait of Sherrie Levine, 1984. Images courtesy of Hal Bromm Gallery.

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Featuring artists like Jimmy DeSana, David Wonjarowicz, and Roger Cutforth, the second iteration of a two-part exhibition at Hal Bromm Gallery explores the multifaceted nature of the face

A portrait has the capacity to transcend time and space. It's a means of understanding the complexities and intricacies of the person portrayed, of the artist behind the portrayal, of the atmosphere of a particular period. Renderings of faces should lean into that quality of multiplicity—the distinct perspectives that they capture.

The second iteration of a two-part exhibition at Hal Bromm Gallery, *FACES II* features 30 works by artists across a range of mediums who challenge the singularity typical to portraiture in a classical context. Featuring artists like Jimmy DeSana, David Wonjarowicz, Tim Fite, Gary Schneider, Pamela Sneed, Roger Cutforth, Frédéric Amat, and Ted Rosenthal, the exhibition capitalizes on its gallery's history, drawing on the relationships Bromm has been nurturing since the '70s, when his space first earned a reputation for championing unexpected talent.

"Our face, and by extension, our self, is not only the face we see perfectly reproduced from one angle in a photograph," Bromm muses. "It is every image of our face from every angle, it is every remembrance of our big ears or small nose, it is every first impression anyone will ever have of us. It is the unedited, unflinching, intimate knowledge of an imperfect, greasy pimply face."

The gallerist joins Document to explore the multifaceted nature of the face, examining its history of representation in art, and the creatives who are expanding our understandings of it for the future.

Left: Frédéric Amat, *Papiers de cendra*, 2018. Right: Ted Rosenthal, *Mussolini Flushing Himself Down the Toilet*, 1984.

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“The face is not a single, perfect image, but a flowing thing, alive and pulsing in every moment with changes minute and exaggerated.”

Tim Fite, *Swan Songs*.

Megan: How did you go about selecting artists for this show, and what narrative were you hoping to build from the pieces?

Hal: At the outset, the goal was to let the works create a narrative, rather than having to select artists or works that fit within set parameters. *FACES* avoided obvious choices and well-known names in favor of younger and fresher faces, a gallery hallmark.

Artists whose work involves observation on the world around us—political commentary and personal struggle—are among those selected. Many faces in the exhibition challenge our perceptions and question the status quo. Simple but powerful portraits of murder victims become memorials to those killed at the hands of police in the recent watercolors of Pamela Sneed, while David Wonjarowicz's work, showing him buried alive but for his face, recalls government indifference to the AIDS crisis; the artist died of AIDS within a year of its creation. Deborah Kass's 2016 riff on Trump's image, urging 'Vote Hillary,' harkens back to Warhol's famous neon-tinged face of Nixon—a perk for donors to the McGovern campaign—championing support of that candidate. Ted Rosenthal's *Mussolini Flushing Himself Down The Toilet*, rendered in steel plate and spray paint, packs a humorous punch.

Perhaps every work of art, as a reflection of its artist, functions as a self-portrait to some degree.

Megan: Has spending time with these experimentations on the portrait altered the way you experience people, or their faces, in your everyday life?

Hal: Faces are windows into our personalities, where feelings and actions come alive. Lucio Pozzi's ink on paper works give us the living face, in motion and action. In his work, he reminds us that the face is not a single, perfect image, but a flowing thing, alive and pulsing in every moment with changes minute and exaggerated.

The nine faces in Tim Fite's *Final Breath*, a group of wax and ink drawings on wood, seem to introduce a politically powerful display of how a face has been reduced and pummeled under the boots and blows of work. Perhaps it belongs to a victim of advanced capitalism: the face of a man seen as a life-down tool, a cog in a great rusting machine that is nearing exhaustion under an iron hand.

Megan: Have any pieces in the show challenged the way you conceive yourself, or the way in which you present your individuality?

Hal: The works on view have not challenged how I conceive myself, but they underscore how perceptive artists can be in portraying the face—not necessarily challenging what one sees, but the manner in which it is seen.

Gary Schneider and Pamela Sneed's works, in particular, have challenged the notion of perception. In Schneider's work, one sees the importance and beauty of oils in the face, of blemishes—things that, in popular portrayals of the face, are ferreted out like plague. In Sneed's pieces, we see the translation of outside perception and memory at work; over time, memory erodes faces, and reproduces previously insignificant details that somehow become central to the remembering. These mutated faces in our memory are just as real and significant as our 'actual' faces—those 'realistic' images of faces captured in photographs or classic portraits.

There is also the distance of outside perception. Seeing a face as a stranger, for the first time, the image our mind produces may as well be a caricature. Our face, and by extension, our self, is not only the face we see perfectly reproduced from one angle in a photograph. It is every image of our face from every angle, it is every remembrance of our big ears or small nose, it is every first impression anyone will ever have of us. It is the unedited, unflinching, intimate knowledge of an imperfect, greasy pimply face that only a lover could have.

Left: Gary Schneider, *Mayra Davey*, 2020. Right: Pamela Sneed, *Young Maya Angelou*, 2022.

*FACES II* is on view through March 31, 2023 at Hal Bromm Gallery in New York.

Tags

Art

Faces II

Hal Bromm