

Our Grace
An exhibition of recent paintings

About three years ago I was more aware of how engaged I would be in the act of painting, if I was painting a portrait. I decided to paint some figurative work independent of the constraints of the formal or commissioned portrait. All seven of the paintings currently on show are portraits of people who are regulars at my local, the Grace Emily Hotel. Thank you all for your generosity and bravery, it has been a fascinating collaboration.

By 2007 I had worked my way towards a closer understanding of how I was trying to paint these works. All the people I was painting were depicted at a scale which was slightly larger than life. Most people have an instinctive understanding of their own scale in relation to others and any shift in this perception is immediately noticeable. The shape of the canvas was dictated by the stance of the sitter and was cropped close to the figure which creates both a sense that the figure is dominating the pictorial space and the distance which separates a viewer is narrowed. All paintings have a similar, relatively minimal background although all are varied; once again the focus is on the person who is being painted. The way I painted these works required me to subtly alter my technique, the handling of paint is lighter and looser, and the paint is much thinner and has a matt finish. As I am painting I am drawing with paint much more, shifting lines, making marks, depicting textures & making structural connections, leaving much more evidence of the making of the painting creating a much more open and adaptable surface.

Asked for a description of my current work I'd say that they were large scale portraits of people I know, who are naked. I don't really like the term "Nude", it is too generic and whilst it may be succinct seems less apt. I wanted these works to be fairly straightforward, naturalistic and direct. When I use the word naked I do not mean to suggest abjection at all. I see it as a way of portraying the personal history that the "Nude" has tended to erase. This includes tan lines, tattoos, injuries and scars, body hair, piercings, the difference between a sunburnt forearm and pale torso even to the temporary markings made by underwear on the skin or shadows cast across the body. Where the "Nude" seeks to create the universal I prefer the specific.

Less specific and infinitely more intriguing were the private and public aspects that took place during our collaborations. All sitters are mature adults with a sense of their own self-image and place in the world. I needed to balance this view with my own perception of them and the requirements of the painting, these works should be thought of as having been painted with empathy tempered by practicality, they are after all my friends. As such the genesis of these works fundamentally belongs to portraiture.

Daryl Austin
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