Blink

At some point over the preceding two years this body of work became in my mind's eye, a collective group of individual portraits, placed together, communicating visually and silently amongst themselves and to a crowd of imagined viewers.

Initially, I'd been fascinated by the images of friends taken on a mobile phone, how awkward they were, caught mid speech, eyes half closed, able to seem both transitory and permanent, how like the early 19th century photographs of people they seemed. They were mostly caused by the delay on mobile phones between depressing the button and the actual photo being taken. We'd look; laugh and friends would protest and insist that I delete them, which I would do. Yet, they'd fascinated me.

The earliest paintings in this group of work still retain something of this quality, I'd ask someone to sit in front of a camera and talk to me while the camera took multiple frames at high speed. The early work "Blink (Daryl 1)" manifests an explicitly photorealist viewpoint. Sitters for the earliest works were quite uncomfortable with the finished paintings, too much camera based reality leads to a response not unlike the delete response.

I then asked the next group of sitters to sit quietly with their eyes closed whilst I took photographs, asking them to move their heads to the sound of my voice or I'd ask a number of sitters in the spring and summer months to sit with eyes closed and move their faces towards the sun. This produced a different result in the images concentrated, seemingly thoughtful or calmer, almost beatific, sometimes quite ambiguous. What was not happening, at least overtly, was the sort of social presentation that a more formalised portrait would carry (This is who I am, how I want to be presented.). The initial responses of people looking at this group of works, unable to feel the portraits explicit social engagement (I am looking at an image of someone who is not looking back) did express or project a sense of engagement with the sitters internal life, (That's exactly how Johnnie looks when he's thinking!) picking up minute changes of gesture or expression, a trait all people have a great ability to do, in fact, part of our brain is devoted to facial recognition.

I had also begun concentrating on a sense of animation and presence. Once the external social presentation of the portrait is reduced other qualities are heightened. My response was to amplify the sense of form, embedding greater structural indicators within the image, allowing brushwork to animate and move around the surface of the broad forms. This moves beyond the reality of photography (at least with my ability), allowing me to retain "likeness" yet move into (to my mind) something more solid, with its own presence. It is these qualities, anima, solidity, presence, more than likeness, which offers the way forward to a constructed portrait using multiple processes which evinces its own reality.

Daryl Austin May 2012