

DISTINCTION

Five Centuries of Portraiture

A portrait seems straightforward enough; it is a likeness of an individual. However, the ways people present themselves, the ways they wish to be represented, and the ways artists choose to portray their sitters are much more complicated than they may seem. This exhibition challenges the basic definition of a portrait as a likeness, by considering the meaning behind the image—how physical form and individual identity are conveyed in various poses, attitudes, emblems, and artistic styles.

An assumption about portraits is that they show how an individual sitter looked. While an attempt to convey appearance is true to an extent, we can never know how accurate a depiction is without having seen the sitter ourselves. We should approach portraits as interpretations of appearance, whatever their degree of verisimilitude or abstraction. They are, after all, still representations even if they are naturalistic—such as those by Hans Mielich, George Caleb Bingham, Gavin Hamilton, and Thomas Hart Benton—or claim to be drawn “from life”—for instance, William Hogarth’s *Simon Lord Lovat*. Even with examples of photorealism—seen here in works by Andy Warhol, Chuck Close, and Willie Cole—photographs have been manipulated to communicate particular ideas about their subjects.

Each work of art displayed here is more than a suggestion of a sitter’s features and comportment, but also a statement about what makes an individual distinct from his or her peers. Using aesthetic and cultural cues, these images communicate the status, character, or significance of those they depict. Posture, clothing, hairstyle, insignia, and text—all of these are points of decision-making for both sitter and artist. Style and technique also affect perceptions of the subject: a modernist style conveys a different meaning than a traditional or classical manner.

The Museum’s collection is rich in its number and diversity of portraits, from ancient through modern. This exhibition explores trends in portraiture and self-portraiture from the early modern period until today, featuring twenty-nine European and American artworks drawn mainly from the permanent collection. Highlights include a number of recent acquisitions and several works that have never been displayed before.



*Fran.^{co} Goya y Lucientes,
Pintor.*

Francisco Goya (Spanish, 1746–1828)
Francisco Goya y Lucientes, Pintor, 1799

Printed 1918–1928

Etching, aquatint, engraving, and drypoint on paper

Gift of Mrs. Renato Monaco in memory of Alexander and Elsa Mohr (91.294.1)

Francisco Goya was the foremost graphic artist of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This self-portrait is the frontispiece to his earliest print series, *Los Caprichos* (*The Caprices*), a suite devoted to satirical images of human vanities and vices. Goya portrays himself as a gentleman, wearing a top hat, wide-lapelled coat, and high-necked shirt. The near-profile view lends the image an air of formality. However, Goya deviates from the traditional profile by peering out at the viewer. His sideways glance reflects the artist's role as a social critic who observes and contemplates his surroundings.



James Abbott McNeill Whistler (American, 1834–1903)

Soupe à Trois Sous, 1859

Etching on paper

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2016.7)

The setting for this piece is most likely based on the Café des Pieds-Humides (“Café of the Wet Feet”), an often flooded Parisian eatery where soup could be purchased for three cents. The clientele was usually made up of local laborers. Hats are worn low over their faces and coats remain pulled tight against the chill. While the men may sit at the same table, they appear solitary and unengaged.

Whistler inserts himself into this humble scene at the far left-hand side, making eye contact with the viewer. His confident gaze, ample jacket, stylish tie, and distinctive curls are a stark contrast to the disheveled, slumped patrons sitting at the other tables. The artist’s graffiti-like signature is scrawled on the center of the wall below a burning gas lamp. Dangling from the ceiling may be Whistler’s butterfly, a symbol with which he often signed his works. Committed to realism, he rejected the tendency to romanticize subjects but rather sought to convey a truth to life. With this design Whistler portrays himself as the consummate realist, capturing the experiences of the everyday around him as they happen.



Käthe Kollwitz (German, 1867–1945)

Self-Portrait, 1921

Etching on paper

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2015.15)

Käthe Kollwitz's life spanned the Franco-Prussian War, World War I, and World War II. These devastating conflicts and the human suffering they wrought are central motifs of her work. After she lost her son, Peter, in World War I, she fell into a profound depression from which she may have never fully recovered. Her grandson, also named Peter, was killed in action in World War II.

Kollwitz completed several intensely introspective self-portraits throughout her life. The pose in her self-portrait at the left reflects her distress, as the weight of her head rests on her supporting hand. This gesture symbolizing melancholy can be seen in works of art going back centuries, and her work may refer to Albrecht Dürer's famous example, *Melancholia I* of 1514 (*illustrated here*).



Albrecht Dürer (1472–1528)

Melencolia I, 1514

Engraving on paper

New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. nr. 43.106.1.



Käthe Kollwitz (German, 1867–1945)

Self-Portrait from the Front, 1923

Woodcut on Japan paper

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (90.126)

The self-portrait at the left was made the same year that Kollwitz completed her poignant woodcut series, *Krieg* (*War*). In this print, the graphic lines cutting across her face, her heavy eyes, and her lank hair contribute to the sense of spiritual fatigue and deep emotional scarring.



Roman Johnson (American, 1917–2005)

Self-Portrait, 1947

Oil on canvas

Gift of Museum Associates (2013.10)

Although he was a resident of Columbus, Ohio, for most of his life, Roman Johnson painted this self-portrait when he lived in New York City. There he studied with Edwin Dickinson (1891–1978), who is known for his numerous self-portraits. Johnson recalls that Dickinson was painting a self-portrait the first time he visited his mentor's studio. The ten years Johnson worked in New York were influential for the rest of his career. "In the forties and fifties when I visited the Museum of Modern Art [in New York], I never saw any art by or about Blacks," he reported. "So I decided to do...paintings in an effort to enhance or continue the culture of Black people." He became a mentor when he returned to Columbus, where he taught painting classes for the Red Cross and Veteran's Administration and gave lessons to students in his predominantly Black neighborhood.



Earl Cavis Kerkam (American, 1890–1965)

Self-Portrait No. 1, ca. 1957

Oil on Masonite

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Martin H. Stein (68.424)

In this highly abstracted representation, Earl Cavis Kerkam bridges Cubism — an early twentieth-century style that inspired him — with Abstract Expressionism — a mid-twentieth-century style that he helped inspire. Like the Cubism of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, this image is fractured into geometric fragments that suggest his facial features. Light and shadow allude to three-dimensional form, while lines drawn on the surface organize the shards of color into a grid system, reinforcing the work's two-dimensionality. This self-portrait gives homage to Kerkam's formal predecessors while also situating his place within the legacy of European-American modernism. Abstract Expressionists like Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, and Mark Rothko regarded his work highly and considered him one of the finest painters in America.



13/50 Self Portrait with Hat

Philip Evergood

Philip Evergood (American, 1901–1973)

Self-Portrait with Hat, 1961

Lithograph on wove paper

Gift of Mr. Warren Robbins in honor of President C. Peter Magrath (85.168)

Most of Philip Evergood's artworks address injustices he saw around him, and he called himself as "a social painter." He cited the satire and realism of Francisco Goya and William Hogarth (*both included in this exhibition*) as greatly influential to his work. He remarked that his mother may also have inspired his social consciousness through her sympathies for the impoverished. "So maybe I got something from her in that way that made me interested in helping people who had this struggle," he reflected, "I don't know for sure. I'm just searching and trying to find out myself why." The numerous self-portraits he made later in his career suggest a deep introspection of his roles as artist and activist.



Antonio Frasconi (Uruguayan and American, 1919–2013)

Self-Portrait, 1966

Woodcut on paper

Gift of Joseph O. Fischer in honor of Dr. Saul Weinberg (77.120)

Antonio Frasconi became the foremost woodcut artist of his generation, so it is fitting to contemplate an image of himself in this technique. According to him, his destiny was established as a youth when he saw Paul Gauguin's woodcuts exhibited at the Louvre in Paris. Frasconi's descriptions of working with wood often refer to the capriciousness of the material, as if it has a personality: "Sometimes the wood gives you a break, and matches your conception of the way it is grained. But often you must surrender to the grain, find the movement of the scene, the mood of the work, in the way the grain runs." He printed several woodblock self-portraits over the course of his career, in a sense aligning his identity with the material.



Salvador Dalí (Spanish, 1904–1989)

***Surrealistic Portrait of Dalí Surrounded by Butterflies*, 1971**

Etching and color lithograph on paper

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Small (79.111.12)

In this transgendered portrayal, Salvador Dalí combined his own features with two Renaissance portraits of women. He superimposed his 1954 *Self-Portrait as the Mona Lisa* (in which he gave Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting his eyes and distinctive handlebar mustache) onto a reproduction of Bartolomeo Veneto's *Portrait of a Woman as Flora*, 1519. This print may refer to the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, which greatly influenced Dalí and other Surrealist artists. Freud claimed that individuals learn to identify themselves as male or female in childhood and that many subconsciously question their socially constructed gender identities. Dalí's self-portrait also playfully refers to an iconic image of the Dada movement, which was closely related to Surrealism: Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), in which the artist irreverently drew a moustache and goatee on a postcard of the *Mona Lisa*.



Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975)

Self-Portrait, 1972

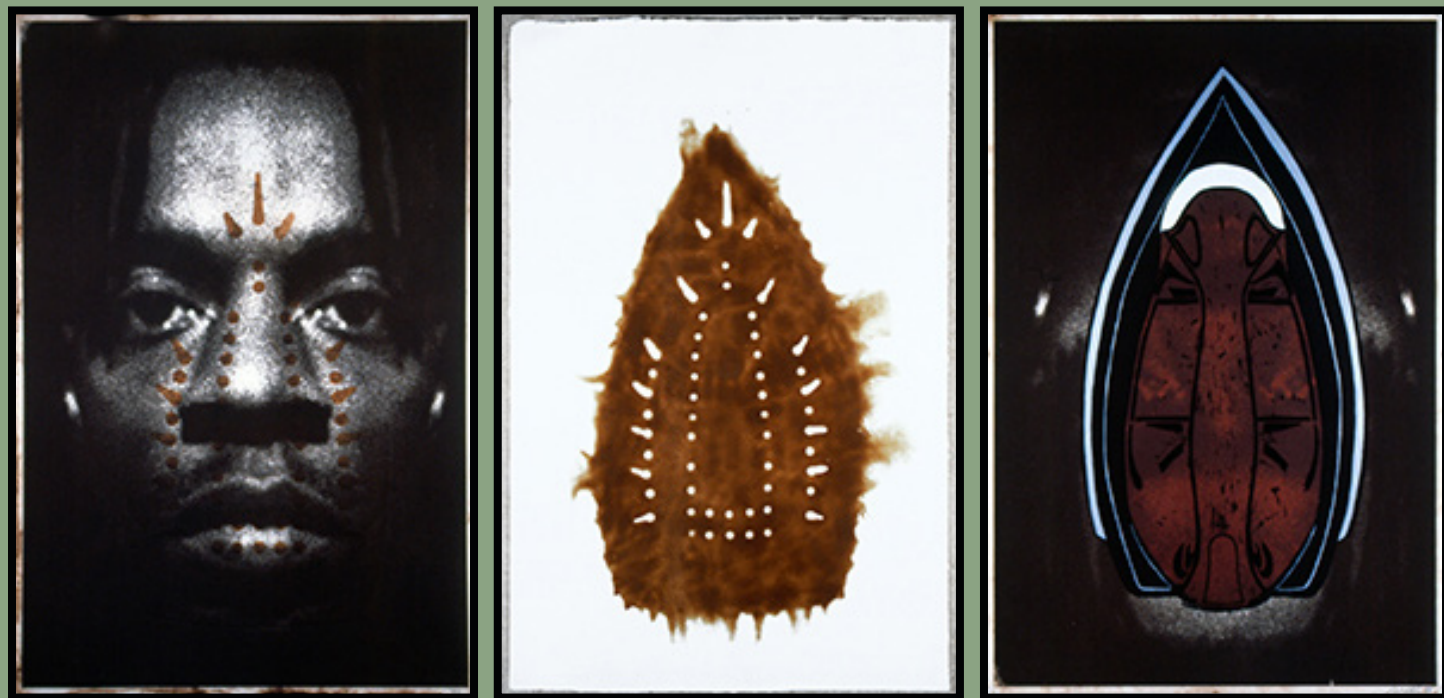
Lithograph on paper

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2015.9)

This lithograph is based on a self-portrait Thomas Hart Benton painted near the end of his long career. It emphasizes his role as a painter, as he stands in front of an easel with paintbrushes in hand. The print and painting are notably similar to an earlier self-portrait that Benton painted in 1925 and that appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1934 (*illustrated below*). Both the earlier and later works show the artist with his tools and gazing out directly at the viewer. However, in this later self-portrait, the vantage point is shifted down, changing the viewer's perspective to be below Benton. This later work also emphasizes how the artist has aged with deep furrows in his brow, grey hair and mustache, gnarled hands, and a hefty paunch. This aged self-portrait may be a reinterpretation of his image from the prime of his life, reflecting on a long life dedicated to his art. He died at work in his studio in 1975.



Cover of *Time*
December 24, 1934
© Time Inc.



Willie Cole (American, b. 1955)

Man Spirit Mask, 1999

Mixed media (photo-etching, woodcut, serigraph, scorching, embossing, hand coloring, and hand-painting with lemon juice on paper)

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2000.6)

One of the most persistent sources of imagery in Willie Cole's work is the steam iron. In the panel on the left, the image of a scorch alludes to ritual scarification, as he superimposed the pattern of holes from a steam iron over a photo-etching of his face. Although he used his self-portrait, he manipulated the photograph by copying and flipping the left side of his face to create the right side, making an ideal image of "Man" with perfect symmetry. The scorch in the center panel represents the notion of a spirit as an imprint of the invisible power of the iron's intense heat. In the right panel, an overhead view of an iron simulates the abstracted form of a mask, a cultural object that contains a spirit.

Cole's appropriation of the steam iron as an image and image-making device is also powerfully symbolic as a reminder of the domestic servitude of his ancestors and so many African-Americans as well as the branding of slaves. Scorches and printings of flattened ironing boards also appear in his art as haunting suggestions of diagrams of slave ships of the horrific Middle Passage.