

"Notes for my self-portrait", in the exhibition *Yo, etcétera*, Carolina Rojo Gallery, 2014.

What would be the simplest way of describing the process of painting to a child? Perhaps we could say that it involves using a stick with a few hairs stuck to the end of it. Those hairs are smeared in some liquid and pigments. Then that mixture is smeared onto a piece of cloth that is wrapped around a stretcher to make an image.

From the artist's point of view, the process of painting is about the brain sending messages to the body that tell it how to move the paint around the canvas. The eyes tell the hands which colours to use and, as if by magic, the liquid and pigments are converted into liquid thought. Little by little, the canvas becomes a register of movements and gestures. The finished product preserves the memories of the mind and body that painted it.

What really amazes me is how this essentially primitive activity can transform these simple elements into an image capable of conveying emotions and thoughts. The painting transcends its physical reality; it is more than the sum of its parts. The final product suspends the viewer's disbelief, it makes them feel and it makes them think.

I use the medium of painting not only to help me understand the world we live in, but also as a tool for self-knowledge. This is especially true when painting a self-portrait. My self-portrait included in the '*I, etcetera*', exhibition looks at you as soon as you walk into the gallery; it is as if I have been waiting for you.

Most self portraits look intensely at the viewer. Painted portraits are the nearest analogy to life itself, paintings behaving like people. Eye to eye contact—a stare is the purest form of reciprocity. With portraits, there is always that sense of coming face to face with the life-model. In this case it is I confronting you. Here I am, the portrait painter, contemplating myself with no pretensions, making you see me through my own eyes.

Lucien Freud talking about self-portraits said, "The difficulties of painting yourself are psychological; you have to paint yourself as another person". I completely agree with him and demonstrate why—I have to confess I had a really hard time painting my right eye in this portrait. In fact, if you look at that eye side-on you'll see it is slightly raised as there are at least ten eyes painted and re-painted underneath. I had to think of that eye as if it were an abstract shape never seen before; I had to look at it from a different perspective, as if it were a stranger. All preconceptions must be erased. In this sense, a self-portrait can be thought of as an aid for the diagnosis of 'who am I'.

I have learned a lot from viewers' reactions to my portrait. "Why the sad face?", "You look at me with disdain", "It doesn't look like you" or "You've made yourself look much older". It has been an interesting experience as it has taught me a lot about the difference between what the viewers see, what the viewers want to see, and about what should be made visible to them.

I believe that in order for a realistic version of life to be represented, there must be some acknowledgement of life's darker side; that its sufferings and sorrows deserve equal representation in order for any depiction of life to ring true. Our capacity to experience and our response to difficult experiences are what really define our self-image.

Nowadays, the age of the selfie on social networks, it seems we need to appear happy and healthy at all times. What is clear is that we are less transparent and more superficial than ever before. One of the most important functions of art is that it provides us with a 'reality-check' on life.

We are therefore in need of art to help us understand our own neglected hurt, to grasp everything that does not come up in casual conversation. Knowing how to express our melancholy is just as healthy as expressing our happiness. **[Louisa Holecz]**

