

ABOUT FACE: Compelling Portraits

April 20 - June 1, 2013

The Brush Art Gallery & Studios, 256 Market St., Lowell, MA 01852

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Because of the many different forms they take, portraits can be used for a variety of dynastic, commemorative, personal, and propagandist purposes. They can be purely documentary or a means of addressing complex social and cultural issues. Portraits can be considered aesthetic objects, but they can equally be seen to act as a substitute for the individual they represent, or as conveying an aura of power, beauty, youth, or other abstract qualities. Portraiture's extraordinary longevity and resilience as a genre is a testament to the power of the interaction among the subject, the artist and the viewer.

About Face: Compelling Portraits, and exhibition of portraits at the Brush Art Gallery & Studios, Lowell, MA, explores this fascinating art form in the work of Glenn Szegedy and Janet Wolohan. Szegedy and Wolohan have each created a body of work specifically for this exhibition. Their pieces are very large, filling the walls almost from ceiling to floor, making for a very dramatic show.

Janet Wolohan's work explores three dichotomies in portraiture: the balance between the expressiveness of the face and the figure, the tug-of-war between drawing and painting, and the relationship between the artist and the subject.

The majority of Wolohan's paintings are of artists in her studio community at Western Avenue. The subjects were given only the directive to sit briefly while she took a few quick photographs. The aim was to get a natural, instinctive pose. The musicians depicted are people she encountered while traveling and she photographed them spontaneously as they played. They were minimally aware of her.

The large scale of Wolohan's works strengthens the individual's sense of "presence." Also, working large requires the involvement of the painter's whole body. Wolohan states, "My whole self is working with the subject's whole self. Artist and subject engage as equal partners in the process."

Szegedy creates huge faces. He states, "These works are primarily explorations of the incredible variety of feelings and emotions the face expresses. Each face has a foundational archetypal, even exaggerated feel to it. They convey a full range of emotions: shame, sex, aggression, wisdom, grief, shock, humility."

He works in pastels on large, un-mounted canvases which he push-pins on the wall to preserve their raw state. Rather than seeing the assembly line, framed, "finished" state of a work, he wants the viewer to experience some of the image's progression from concept to completion. An old box of pastels initiated Szegedy's first work in this series. Having only odd colors to work with, he was forced to use color combinations he would not normally have chosen, particularly for portraits. Greens, lavenders, bright oranges and purples complement and assert his faces.

"The combination of raw canvas and pastel proved to be a wonderful union. While researching how to 'fix' the pastel on the canvas I discovered that this medium combination was popular during the Impressionist period, and used by artists like Degas and Renoir." says Szegedy. Apparently this process is being revived by present-day artists.

About Face: Compelling Portraits at the Brush Art Gallery & Studios from April 20 - June 1, 2013. **Artists' reception** on May 4, 2 – 4 pm. **Artists' talks** on May 18, 2 – 4 pm. Regular gallery & studio hours Tuesday through Saturday, 11 – 4 pm, Sunday, 12 – 4 pm.