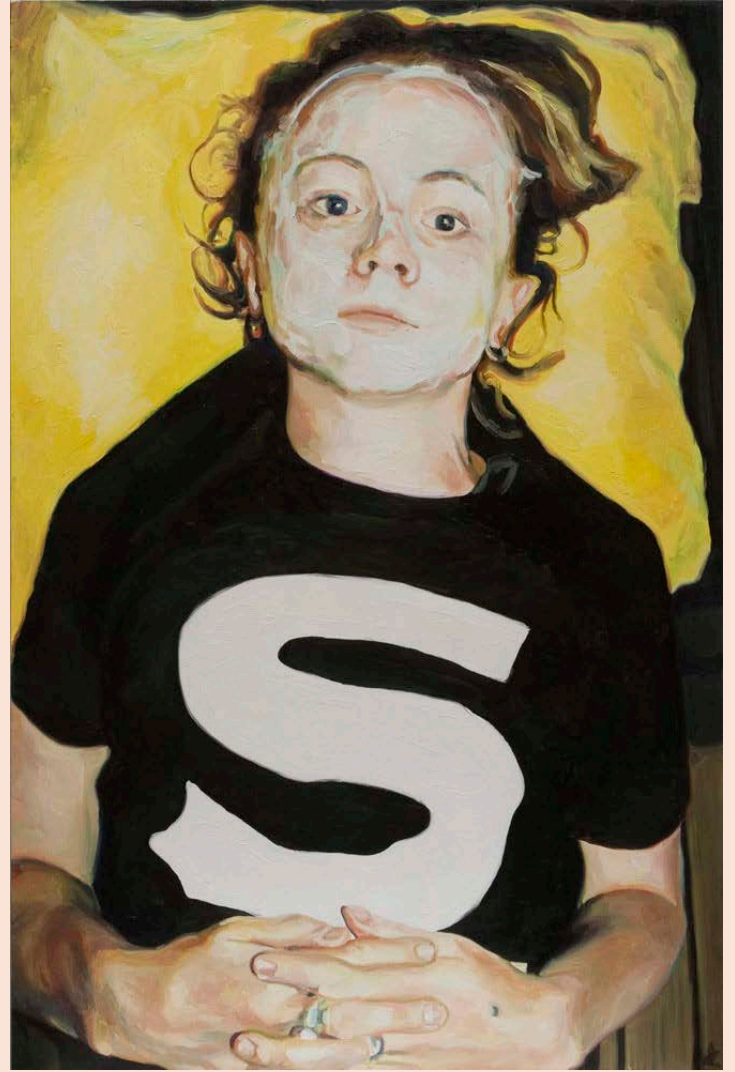


# THE LIKENESS



100 YEARS OF PORTRAITURE FROM  
THE CRUTHERS COLLECTION OF WOMEN'S ART

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY

11 FEBRUARY - 8 JULY 2017

# THE LIKENESS

*The Likeness* is a chronological survey exploring a key theme of the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art (CCWA): self-portraiture and portraiture. Roughly a quarter of the works in the CCWA are portraits or self-portraits. Of these, self-portraits are the most numerous, totalling just over 90. This is largely due to the development by Lady Sheila Cruthers - whose prolific collecting forms the foundation of the CCWA at The University of Western Australia - of a strategy that she referred to as 'the artist and her work': each work would be paired with a self-portrait by the artist (and vice versa) and displayed together in the Cruthers' family home. If a self-portrait could not be located, figurative representations - in particular portraits of the artist's immediate family, friends or artist peers - would instead be prioritized for collection, interpreted as an expanded self-portrait documenting the artist's lived experience or identity.

*The Likeness* cannot pretend to be a comprehensive survey. The very nature of the collection it is derived from makes it inherently partial, but it presents a spectrum of attitudes towards both portraiture and identity. It begins circa 1906 with A.M.E Bale at her easel, and ends in 2009 with Sangeeta Sandrasegar's *Untitled (Self Portrait of Prudence)*, in which the artist pictures herself as a felt silhouette embellished with beads and sequins, contemplating her image in a hand-held mirror, which in 2017 could easily be mistaken for a smartphone. Each artist regards themselves with a critical reflexivity informed by their contexts: Bale by the formal tonal studies espoused by prominent artist and teacher Max Meldrum, Sandrasegar by an approach to image-making inflected with both post-modernist deconstruction and the pleasure of materiality. Between them lie roughly 100 years of artistic practice and a spectrum of likenesses - occasionally rotated throughout the exhibition - each equally informed by both their own unique context and the individuality of their subjects.

The likeness-as-genre, favoured by the Cruthers in their collecting of portraits, has been celebrated in Western art history at least since the European Renaissance. In his *Lives of the Artists* Giorgio Vasari pays Sofonisba Anguissola's portrait of her three sisters an ultimate compliment, noting that "they have all the appearance of life, and are wanting in nothing save speech." An unusual self-portrait by Anguissola from the late 1550s, in which she paints herself being painted by her tutor, the artist Bernardino Campi, encapsulates both the appeal and dilemmas that likenesses, particularly of the self, presented female artists at this time.<sup>1</sup> Renaissance women would have seen themselves frequently represented or *representative* in art - for example, cast as a mythological figures, or emblematic of beauty, virtue or of art itself - but they were infrequently in control of that representation. Representations of individuals made by women, especially images of the artist, short-circuited the abstraction of female experience and signification into a masculine construction, allowing for women to describe their own subjectivities and agency within conventions of genre and symbolism.

Portraiture also offered a sphere in which women could excel as artists given the lacuna in their training. Until the end of the 19th century, women were rarely schooled in anatomy, and were forbidden to attend life-drawing classes - particularly those with male models. This inevitably restricted their achievements in more academically prized genres, such as history painting, that required extensive study of the figure.

But, as much as the production of likenesses offered opportunity, there were other traps to be negotiated. An artistic focus on the self or on family or peers, could be interpreted as vanity, superficiality or a limitedly 'domestic' vision. To avoid reputational damage careful signalling was required to balance the expression of professional ambition, which in previous centuries could be considered 'untoward' in a woman, with other more 'acceptable' traits such as virtue or charity; a professional focus on portraiture could also be coloured by the association of the genre with amateur - mostly women - painters. Even as they produced the self-as-subject, self-portraits also simultaneously presented the self-as-object, to be looked at and evaluated.

Many of these concerns have undeniably carried over into contemporary art, but the more recent century has seen both the genre of portraiture and the social conditions in which women work expand and evolve. Progress made towards gender equality means that female artists are less often expected to sacrifice career for family and have access to the same institutions and training as men, while the limitations of interpreting specific genres, styles and media through the lens of gender have been frequently reiterated by art historians and feminist theorists alike.<sup>2</sup> In portraiture, traditional likenesses are still commissioned and celebrated, but contemporary artists are more frequently interested in exploring new media and its implications for identity, in seeking a subject's 'essence' in abstraction, or in using their bodies and experiences to discuss wider social and political issues. The genre, and art more generally, now accommodates a wider variety of voices and subjects, offering Aboriginal, multicultural and queer Australians visibility and a platform through which to assert and explore identities. Furthermore, as artists have tested the limits of the portrait and the ways in which their selves can become material, platforms on which to produce portraits and self-portraits - better known now, perhaps, as 'selfies' - have boomed. Reflecting on both changes and constants in artistic practice, *The Likeness* asks: what does it mean, now, to produce a likeness, to define through art the analogue boundaries of an individual?

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1. See Mary D. Garrard's long-form analysis of Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola, "Here's Looking At Me", *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol 47, No. 3 (Autumn 1994), 556-622
  2. See Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists", 1971, reproduced on *ArtNEWS*, 05/30/15. <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/30/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists/>





## LIST OF WORKS

**A.M.E Bale**, *Self Portrait*, c 1906, oil on board, 48 x 34.8 cm, CCWA 752

**Clarice Beckett**, *Portrait of Hilda Beckett*, c1929, oil on board, 18 x 26.5cm, CCWA 212

**Elise Blumann**, *Self Portrait*, 1937, oil on canvas, 52 x 62.5 cm, CCWA 37. (Exhibited from 4th April)

**Dorothy Braund**, *Barbara Brash*, 1967, oil on composite board, 91.5 x 122cm, CCWA 900a. (Exhibited from 29th April)

**Dora Chapman**, *Girl With A Long Nose*, 1970, Screenprint 3/42, 38 x 28cm, CCWA 742

**Dora Chapman**, *Teener*, 1969, screenprint 29/50, 28 x 38cm, CCWA 743

**Dora Chapman**, *Fish Girl*, 1970, screenprint, 28 x 38cm, CCWA 744

**Dora Chapman**, *Red Face*, 1969, screenprint, 40 x 28cm, CCWA 745

**Grace Cossington Smith**, *Self Portrait*, 1945, pencil and coloured pencil, 27 x 22.1 cm, CCWA 442

**Stella Dilger**, *Self Portrait*, late 1950s, mixed media, 31 x 23.5cm, CCWA 445. (Exhibited until 15th April)

**Julie Dowling**, *Self Portrait: Djeran*, 2006, oil on canvas, 60.5 x 92 cm, CCWA 851

**Mary Edwards**, *Self Portrait with Hibiscus*, 1949, oil on canvas, 75.5 x 60cm, CCWA 621. (Exhibited until 15th April)

**Nola Farman**, *Nola Farman - Self Portrait By Nora Fleming*, 1995, mirror, acrylic, paper and ink, 43 x 33 x 12 cm, CCWA 591.

**Alma Figuerola**, *Miss Carmen Figuerola*, c 1930s, 47 x 37cm, CCWA 740

**Fiona Foley**, *Native Blood*, 1994, type C photographs (set of 3), 50 x 41 cm, CCWA 895

**Julie Fragar**, *S*, 2004, 2004, oil on board, 91 x 60.5 cm, CCWA 797. (Exhibited until 11th March)

**Nora Heysen**, *Ruth with a Blue background*, 1933, oil on canvas, 75 x 59cm, CCWA 690. (Exhibited until 31st March)

**Elizabeth Kruger**, *Forty Two*, 1997, oil on linen, 46 x 33cm, CCWA 655. (Exhibited until 2nd June)

**Narelle Jubelin**, *Self Portrait*, 1990, Petit point in tramp art frame, 13 x 18cm, CCWA 501

**Bea Maddock**, *Passing the Glass Darkly*, 1976, Photo-etching 3/10, 63 x 90cm, CCWA 519

**Ann Newmarch**, *Self portrait - 1/60th of a second*, 1981, photo-etching 2/2, 35 x 45 cm CCWA 569. (Exhibited from 16th May)

**Freda Robertshaw**, *Standing Nude*, 1942, Oil on board, 110 x 69 cm, CCWA 409

**Sangeeta Sandrasegar**, *Untitled (Self Portrait of Prudence)*, 2009, felt, sequins, glass beads, cotton, 88 x 60cm, CCWA 893

**Arlene Textaqueen**, *Nobody knows what it really looks like (Raquel)*, 200, texta (felt tipped pen) on paper, 75 x 109, CCWA 945. (Exhibited from 14th March)

**Yoshiko Tsushima**, *Self Portrait*, 2004, pastel on paper, 74.5 x 55cm, CCWA 799

**Ruth Tuck**, *A profile*, 1987, watercolour, 72 x 53cm, CCWA 802. (Exhibited until 12th May)

**Yvette Watt**, *Self Portrait*, 1999, oil on canvas, 53 x 47 cm, CCWA 656. (Exhibited from 6th June)

The Cruthers Collection of Women's Art (CCWA) is the only public collection focused specifically on women's art in Australia. The foundation of the CCWA was a substantial gift of artworks made to the University of Western Australia in 2007 by Sir James and Lady Sheila Cruthers. The Cruthers family began collecting women's art in the 1970s, focusing primarily on portraiture and self-portraiture and isolating key areas such as still life, abstraction, early post-modernism and second-wave feminism. The CCWA includes works from the 1890s to the present day in a variety of media and continues to expand through focused acquisition and generous donation, aiming to contribute to and challenge dialogues about Australian women's art through exhibition, teaching, research and publication.

The CCWA is a registered Deductible Gift Recipient and may receive donations of artworks through the Cultural Gifts Program, facilitated by the Australian Government's Department of Communication and the Arts.

## CURATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A.M.E Bale, *Self Portrait*, c 1906, oil on board, 48 x 34.8 cm, CCWA 752. Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia.

Julie Fragar, *S*, 2004, 2004, oil on board, 91 x 60.5 cm, CCWA 797. Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia. © Courtesy of the Artist, Licensed by VISCOPY 2017

Inside image:

Sangeeta Sandrasegar, *Untitled (Self Portrait of Prudence)*, 2009, felt, sequins, glass beads, cotton, 88 x 60cm, CCWA 893, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia. © Courtesy of the Artist



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