RECENT

PORTRAITURE

February 27 - April 2, 1977

The Renaissance Society at
The University of Chicago
1010 East 59 Street
The growing recent interest in contemporary portraiture on the part of critics, connoisseurs and collectors in America is probably best seen as an aspect of a larger development of modern taste and appreciation which is, to say the least, an extremely complex phenomenon. Naturally, this change or evolution reflects the concerns and practice of recent artists. In the past fifteen years there has been a gradual shift away from the primacy of the picture plane in painting, a new and enhanced independent validity accorded to drawing in all media, an increasing expressive employment of photographic and electronic visual and audio technologies, and a freer, less restrictive attitude toward the varieties and uses of sculptural materials.

The present exhibition at The Renaissance Society has focussed on perhaps the most familiar of these areas, painting and drawing, since the areas of video, performance and environmental art, photography and sculpture concerned with portraiture clearly require separate exhibitions in order to be presented fully and meaningfully. However, the several examples from these disciplines which are included here all make telling points about the interest and variety of these fields, and it is to be hoped that future shows might present them more extensively.

The range of recent American portraiture includes, over the whole spectrum of individual artists' stylistic modes, most of the traditional types of portraits familiar in the art of the past. Besides the expected formats of head, bust, half length, three quarter, full figure (and their combinations) there are the further types of portraits of record, expressively interpretive portraits, the symbolic and even imaginary portrait. In all of these there are sub-orders of exotic and unusual types: these are some of the most challenging and fascinating works in the present show.

The principle behind this portrait exhibition is not so much the omnium gatherum approach as it is the selection of striking, unusual and memorable modern essays in the genre. Particularly interesting are the group of assertively modern pieces which have a distinct and intentional connection with antecedent historical examples (not necessarily portraits) in art. For example, Sylvia Sleigh's arresting portrait of the young musician Paul Rosano takes up the relatively rare type of the (seated) full length nude portrait in which is embodied the image Manet selected for the Corpus in his Dead Christ Supported by Angels in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. As Manet's figure itself seems a conscious if
not too obvious reflection of the central figure in Ingres’ Jupiter and Thetis (itself based upon an engraving of an ancient source), the train of historicity (including the Whistlerian palette) is a major theme in Sleigh’s picture.

Chuck Close’s connections with fourth century Roman colossal portrait heads are another manifestation of this linkage with the past, in his case crossing over from painting to sculpture, and a similar involvement with Mannerist grandiose scale and formal presentation appear in Jack Beal’s Self Portrait drawing and again, in a different fashion, in Philip Pearlstein’s Portrait of Gilda Buchbinder.

Modern sculpture, too, has conscious involvements with visual precedent: Robert Arneson’s self-portrait bust Poorly Limed entertainingly alludes to the late Baroque whimsicalities of eighteenth century Austrian and German decorative architectural sculpture. Marisol’s Andy Warhol exhibits still more playful explorations of serious artistic problems by ringo changes on different aspects or modes of reality in art by having the facial likeness drawn on four sides of the head block (block-head?) in full face, three quarter, profile and from the back; these are just the sort of drawn views a sculptor would require to work three dimensionally on the portrait of a sitter he had never seen but only knew through art. Furthermore, the hands are fully plastic, perhaps alluding to the artist’s own practice (she was early a ceramic sculptor) but the feet, or rather shoes, are not representations but the things themselves. Definitely they are not "of clay".

Kit Schwartz’ taped and transcribed interview of Warhol approaches the issue of the "real" and the likeness more intagibly but yet manages to concretize the nature of her involvement and response to her subject (and vice versa) since all the expressive potential of verbal inflection, vocal hesitations and the like are captured exactly on the tape.

Perhaps self-portraits above other kinds offer possibilities of expressive interpretation and revelation. Lucas Samaras’ Photo-transformations ingeniously and ironically enter this area within that supposedly most "realistic" medium, the photograph. By manipulating this "real" kind of image, the artist opens a number of provocative possibilities. He both alters the "actual" self (paradoxically mechanically produced) and introduces a sense of his hand in a technique itself regarded as impersonal. Variants of this idea appear in Andy Warhol’s "paintings" which are
actually photo-silkscreens stencilled on canvas; here painting, photography and the print are all bound together in an examination of the real, a process similarly echoed in Bruce Nauman's holograms.

In Robert Barnes' Tristan Tzara and Ed Paschke's ironically titled Portrait of a Lady the forms of the symbolic and allegorical portrait appear in new transformations. Barnes' painting presents a complex private iconography spun off the artist's vision of the poet, his writings and career. His free invention of the figure's setting and accessories in a glorious Manet-like explosion of virtuoso paint handling is certainly a modern highpoint in the combination of invention and observation. Paschke's Lady refers, as does the Barnes, to photography in the facial likeness of the subject, then sets the tone of the picture through an intricate variety of symbolical accessories. Paschke's subject at first seems drawn from the world of girlie show posters, but further viewing brings out bizarre suggestions of a self-titillating Leda through the swan-like arm and downy stole enveloping the figure. The artist presents a kind of simultaneous double image in sharp focus where the fantastic realm of mythological creatures is mingled and equated with a modern icon.

While an obvious division of modern portraitists may be drawn between those artists who are principally concerned with the straightforward transcription of their own vision (Paul Georges, Philip Pearlstein, Sylvia Sleigh, Jack Beal and Alfred Leslie) and those others, such as Marisol, Roy Lichtenstein and Kit Schwartz whose connection with things as they are seen is intentionally tenuous, this distinction is not terribly useful. The portrait in contemporary American art has clearly become a form for the expression of metaphysical positions of the artists. These frequently are ironical or paradoxical, such as Lichtenstein's exactly similar dapper clichés standing for two well known personalities in the art world, Ivan Karp and Allan Kaprow, or Alice Neel's unhesitating presentation of the vulnerabilities of her boldly (too ?) confident sitter. This concern with philosophical meaning in different kinds of modern American art is ultimately as significant as the stylistic variety that is its vehicle.

Dennis Adrian
CHECK LIST

1. Robert Arneson
   Poorly Limed, 1976
   Ceramic sculpture
   22" x 13" x 13"
   Lent by Allan Frumkin Gallery, Chicago

2. Robert Barnes
   For T. Tzara, 1965
   Oil on canvas
   84" x 67½"
   Lent by Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York

3. Jack Beal
   Self Portrait with Visor, 1974
   Charcoal on paper
   25½" x 19 3/4"
   Private Collection, Chicago

4. Ellen Carey
   Untitled, 1976
   Black and white photograph
   20" x 16"
   Lent by the Artist

5. Ellen Carey
   Untitled, 1976
   Black and white photograph
   20" x 16"
   Lent by the Artist

6. Ellen Carey
   From Black Hole in Space
   Series, 1976
   Black and white photograph
   20" x 16"
   Lent by the Artist

7. Chuck Close
   Self-Portrait / 58,424, 1973
   Acrylic and ink applied with airbrush and pencil grid on paper
   71" x 59"
   Lent by Bill Bass, Chicago

8. Llyn Foulkes
   General Juarez, 1974
   Mixed media
   15½" x 13½"
   Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Gerald K. Silberman, Glencoe

9. Paul Georges
   Portrait of Dennis Adrian, 1965
   Oil on canvas
   72" x 56½"
   Lent by Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York

10. Leon Golub
    Chou En Lai (1973), 1976
    Oil and charcoal on canvas
    20 3/4" x 18"
    Lent by Walter Kelly Gallery, Chicago

11. Michael Hurson
    Study for Portrait of Jennifer Bartlett, 1976
    Crayon and pencil on paper
    18 3/4" x 26½"
    Lent by Blum Helman Gallery, New York

12. Alex Katz
    Study for Self-Portrait, 1969
    Oil on plywood
    16" x 11½"
    Lent by Mac McGinnes, Chicago

13. June Leaf
    Studies of Claes Oldenburg, 1957/58
    Folio from sketchbook, pencil on paper
    11" x 8½"
    Private Collection, Chicago

14. Alfred Leslie
    Anne Hertzfield, 1976
    Graphite on paper
    40" x 30"
    Lent by Allan Frumkin Gallery, Chicago
15. Roy Lichtenstein
   Portrait of Allan Kapro, 1961
   Oil on canvas
   24" x 20"
   Lent by Bill Bass, Chicago

16. Roy Lichtenstein
   Portrait of Ivan Karp, 1961
   Oil on canvas
   24" x 20"
   Lent by Bill Bass, Chicago

17. Marisol
   Portrait of Andy Warhol, 1963
   Mixed media
   56 1/2" x 17 1/4" x 29"
   Private Collection, Chicago

18. Bruce Nauman
   Holograms (4 works), 1968
   Hologram
   26" x 26" (each)
   Private Collection, Chicago

19. Alice Neel
   Portrait of Edward H. Weiss, 1976
   Oil on canvas
   45 1/2" x 33"
   Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Edward H. Weiss, Chicago

20. Ed Paschke
    Portrait of a Lady, 1975
    Oil on canvas
    48" x 34"
    Private Collection, Chicago

21. Philip Pearlstein
    Portrait of Gilda Buchbinder, 1976
    Oil on canvas
    60" x 48"
    Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Henry M. Buchbinder, Chicago

22. Larry Rivers
    Portrait of Susan, 1965
    Pencil on paper
    15 3/4" x 14 3/4"
    Lent by Young-Hoffman Gallery, Ltd., Chicago

23. Lucas Samaras
    SX-70 polaroid photograph
    3" x 3" (each)
    Lent by The Pace Gallery, New York

24. Peter Saul
    Judge Julius Hoffman and Bobby Seal, 1969
    Chalk on paper
    31" x 28"
    Lent by Irving and Natalie Forman, Chicago

25. Kit Schwartz
    Portrait: Andy Warhol, 1977
    Audio and graphic
    5' x 5'
    Lent by Marianne Deson Gallery, Chicago

26. Sylvia Sleigh
    Paul Rosano, Seated Nude, 1973
    Oil on canvas
    56" x 42"
    Lent by Barbara and Russell Bowman, Chicago

27. Andy Warhol
    Self-Portrait, 1966
    Synthetic polymer and silkscreen on canvas
    22" x 22"
    Lent by Bill Bass, Chicago