

Carole Freeman





previous spread, *Demoiselles* (Series: *The Green Couch*), acrylic on linen, 52" x 64"
 left (large), *Her* (Series: *Dear Art World*), graphite and acrylic on mylar, 72" x 42"
 left (small) top, *Artist Holding Picture of Artist, Father* (Series: *Portraits of Facebook*), graphite and acrylic on mylar, 7.5" x 7.5" on 8.5" x 11"
 left (small) bottom, *The Connoisseur* (Series: *Dear Art World*), graphite and acrylic on mylar, 7" x 6.25" on 8.5" x 11"
 right, *Axe* (Series: *Dear Art World*), graphite and acrylic on archival paper, 60" x 40"

Surprise Appearances

written by Gary Michael Dault

Once asked to define "portrait," virtuoso society painter John Singer Sargent replied, rather sardonically, "a portrait is a painting in which there is always something wrong about the mouth."

But suppose there were nothing at all wrong about the mouth. I wonder sometimes if a painter who dextrously manages to capture a likeness, whole and convincingly, regards this happy entrapment – this pinning of a human

butterfly to the wheel of a painting – as deeply satisfying. Or as just something to be expected. Is the portraitist as surprised by verisimilitude as anyone else?

Frankly, I doubt very much that Winnipeg-born, Toronto-based painter Carole Freeman has much doubt about the accurate and persuasive way she manages to capture likeness. Indeed, her remarkable facility in that regard, many years in development, is now winning her kudos and commissions at home and internationally.

Given her solid, bedrock skills and high representational (one hardly dare say "old-fashioned") abilities, it is both surprising and absorbing to discover a perhaps unlooked for aspect of Freeman's practice. That being her unabashed romancing of the dizzying, high-speed world of social media.



left top, Critic Not Looking (Series Portraits of Facebook), graphite and acrylic on mylar, 7.7" x 7" on 8.5" x 11"
 left bottom, Arts Administrator, Green (Series: Portraits of Facebook), graphite and acrylic on mylar, 7.5" x 7.5" on 8.5" x 11"
 right top, Artist Sharing (Series: Portraits of Facebook), graphite and acrylic on mylar, 7.25" x 5.25" on 8.5" x 11"
 right bottom, Canadian Journalist (Series: Portraits of Facebook), graphite and acrylic on archival paper, 7.5" x 7" on 8.5" x 11"
 right page, Man with a Blue Scarf II (Series: Dear Art World), graphite and acrylic on archival paper, 8.25" x 11"



left, After Vigee Le Brun: Russian Business Woman as Marie Antoinette (Series: Dear Art World), graphite and acrylic on mylar, 8.5" x 7.25" on 8.5" x 11"
right, After Van Der Weyden: American Collector as a Lady (Series: Dear Art World), graphite and acrylic on mylar, 7.25" x 6.25" on 8.5" x 11"



After Bronzino: American Philanthropist as Cosimo De Medici (Series Dear Art World), graphite and acrylic on mylar, 7.5" x 6.2" on 8.5" x 11"

Going Social

It's true that Freeman still works frequently with live sitters in the traditional, time-honoured way. But more and more, she finds her subjects and their visages wherever they turn up. And they often appear, fleetingly, in the rapid, impalpable e-realms of 'New Media' on Facebook and Instagram.

Freeman's recent fearlessness about social media has been serving her well. Her rich array of celebrity portraits (painted in oil on Mylar), mounted in both 2010 and 2011 at the Toronto International Film Festival, put her effectively on the New Media map. Her subjects were celebrities who had worked in the films being screened, or were actually attending the festival; luminaries such as Helen Mirren, Juliet Binoche, Judi Dench, Stephen Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, Julian Schnabel and Helena Bonham-Carter.

The TIFF successes led straightaway to a 2011 solo exhibition called *Friend Me: Portraits of Facebook* at Toronto's Edward Day Gallery. Freeman describes it as a "taxonomical

collection of 196 portraits of members of the international art world." She goes on to note that by "utilizing the social networking website Facebook as a frame of both reference and access," she was able to "source profile photos of 'friends' to paint a body of work in direct dialogue with the digital age." Freeman adds that "Though the focus of each portrait was the individual, the exhibition functioned as an installation, portraying a slice of the Facebook community and a wealth of humanity."

The exhibition, which drew a huge amount of media buzz, was officially opened by Jordan Banks, Managing Director of Facebook Canada. *Friend Me: Portraits of Facebook* became, for Freeman, not only a smart, revelatory essay in the anthropology of the present, but "an effective marketing and delivery tool." Her uploading of the portraits onto her online profile, and tagging and messaging all the "friends" she had painted, resulted in a huge and immediate global response, "resounding with the appearance of blogs,

posts, newsletter articles, friend requests from international galleries, an invitation to a residency in Romania, and Likes, comments and messages about my work that continue on a daily basis."

Freeman talks, for example, about a chat at four o'clock in the morning with photographer Dido Fontana (son of legendary Italian artist, Lucio Fontana), who loved his Freeman portrait. She believes "the most profound communication" generated by the exhibition was a discourse with David McAdam Freud, "who was having his first exhibition titled, *Losing Lucian*, after the death of his father, painter Lucian Freud." Clearly, Facebook was not the faceless, distancing medium she had once taken it for.

"I actually like to paint"

The enormous success of her exhibition resulted in Freeman being invited in the spring of 2012 to participate as a panelist in a discussion at the Canadian Arts Summit in Banff, Alberta, titled "Arts Leadership in the Age of Social Media."

Freeman announced clearly at the outset of her talk (her session was devoted to *Making Art in the Age of New Media*) that she was "not a video, iPhone or iPad artist, animator or gamer." In fact, she confessed to the social-savvy audience that she actually liked to paint. "To me," she said, "paint is a vital, sensual medium, something you can touch, feel and smell."

She was, after all, academically trained to paint. Her credentials in that regard are impeccable: An M.A. in 1980 from the School of Painting, Royal College of Art in London, and a residency thereafter at the Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris. Her teachers and tutors are among the finest to be had: E.H. Gombrich, Norbert Lytton, Philip Rawson. In London, critic and art historian John Golding supervised her thesis. The mercurial surrealist painter Matta was artist-in-residence, and had a studio next door. Francis Bacon sometimes weaved through the neighbourhood. American Pop artist James Rosenquist took her to dinner. And there were her travels in Europe –



particularly, a nourishing sojourn in the Greek Islands. All in all, she wasn't exactly suffering the swooning deprivations of La Boheme.

But it is an utterly changed world now. Freeman, the painter, talks about coming to social media "with great skepticism." She thinks of herself as "a tourist rather than a resident" who has discovered uses for digital technologies which are beneficial and enriching to her art practice. "The way I've come to see it," she says, "you don't need to be born into that digital world to visit, and, like a good traveler, to take something worthwhile back home with you."

There's something about Winnipeg

Speaking of taking something memorable back home with you, Freeman has been working diligently for some time towards an ambitious exhibition called *Something About Winnipeg* for Gurevich Fine Art, her Winnipeg dealer. The exhibition will open in October of 2016.

Freeman's capacity for absorbing experience and, at the same time, revisiting the poignancies of the past, the piquancies of memory, is extraordinary. Her Winnipeg exhibition begins with a virtuoso miasma in paint (a death, Van Gogh and a pirate) that offers a discontinuous array of objects and experiences culled from the artist's Winnipeg past. The Van Gogh self-portrait, for example, is a bittersweet evocation of a Van Gogh exhibition at the Winnipeg Art Gallery that her mother took her to, shortly after her father's death in 1961.

Freeman says the painting is an intentional "copy" of a painting by Canadian painter Margaux Williamson called *At night I paint in the kitchen*, albeit with her own charged, mnemonic images substituted for Williamson's. In the Freeman, there are emblems of her childhood – glass animals, figurines (Cinderella and her Disney-prince), pots of paint-by-numbers paint, opulent flowers "from the chintz fabric decorating my pink bedroom," and so on. The vast, talismanic painting is a Freeman-esque memento mori.

After that personal, dream-play overture, *Something About Winnipeg* then has recourse to various forays into documentary, history painting, a city's sociology, its social anthropology, its vivid past-ness. Her residency in e-imaging now serves Freeman exceedingly well, as she draws her historicized content not only from books and other "real" sources, but also from "our present-day encyclopaedia, the internet."

Her project virtually anatomizes Winnipeg. The "history painting" phase of her project – for which she often works in grisaille (painting in shades of black, white, grey, brown) – encompasses images incarnating the Winnipeg general strike of 1919, the 1950 flood, Louis Riel, the Selkirk Settlers, "the true story of Winnie-the-Pooh" and many more.

She will also be featuring a suite of paintings called *48 Portraits*. This is Freeman's very personal painterly



In 1933 the Gallery moved to the Music Auditorium at the corner of Main and Broadway (built in 1932 and now housing the Winnipeg Art Museum). Its former location on the third floor was dedicated to the Winnipeg Art Museum. Its former location on the third floor was dedicated to the Winnipeg Art Museum. Its former location on the third floor was dedicated to the Winnipeg Art Museum.



previous spread, *Sleep of No Reason* (Series: *The Green Couch*), acrylic on archival paper, 50" x 70"
 left top, *48 Portraits* (Detail: *Minnie J. Campbell*) (Series: *Something About Winnipeg*), acrylic on mylar on panel, 48 panels 7" x 5.5"
 left bottom, *WAG Women's Committee*, *Muriel Richardson* (Series: *Something About Winnipeg*), acrylic and inkjet on mylar, 11" x 8.5"
 right, *Something About Winnipeg* (Detail: *Louis Riel*) (Series: *Something About Winnipeg*), oil on canvas, 60" x 110"





previous spread left, The Duchess and Duke of Winterpeg (left panel)
(Series: Something About Winnipeg), oil on linen, 18" x 12"

previous spread right, The Duchess and Duke of Winterpeg (right panel)
(Series: Something About Winnipeg), oil on linen, 18" x 12"

above, Found (Series: Something About Winnipeg), oil on linen, 20" x 20"

right, It began with a death, Van Gogh, and a pirate (Detail)
(Series: Something About Winnipeg), oil on linen, 2 panels 55" x 42"

response, first, to Gerhard Richter's famous 48 portrait suite for the German pavilion of the 1972 Venice Biennale (grey-painted images of cultural leaders Freeman has described as being from "the solely white European cultural past") and, second, to Austrian artist Gottfried Helnwein's 48 portrait cycle from 1991-92 depicting, in bright red, historically influential women.

Freeman's 48 Portraits melds the work of her illustrious artist-predecessors, into a suite of uniformly-sized, grey-scale paintings which, while "addressing contemporary issues of rights and equality," folds them into an array of figures "having been born, lived in, or associated with Winnipeg, thus elevating the significance of place and people, even those from a seemingly insignificant city, and a historically young, less important country."

There is a great deal more to Something About Winnipeg, including "The Duchess and Duke of Winterpeg," people in the landscape, summers at the lake, horizon studies, skies. The series ends with a strange and moving portrait of Freeman's surgeon father, showing him flanked by skulls, each of them emblazoned with "two of more than 30 dental appliances he developed and made from the plastic (Perspex) windows salvaged from wrecked Canadian training planes. These splints were used to mend the broken facial bones of the flyers injured in the crack-ups."

Freeman's Something About Winnipeg is an epic undertaking. It is, in the end, the Summa of a city. And will be the jewel in the crown of Carole Freeman's career as an artist.

Carole Freeman is represented by:

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