

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

March 8, 2007

a quote for Portrait Week

Filed under: [portraiture,quotes](#) — alecsothblog @ 1:36 pm

"A portrait is a picture in which there is just a tiny little something not quite right about the mouth." John Singer Sargent



John Singer Sargent (1865-1925) in his Paris studio with his famous painting Madame X, a portrait of Madame Pierre Gautreau. Madame X created a scandal at the Salon of 1884. French society was shocked by her deathly white pallor, hennaed hair, and provocative dress. Sargent kept the painting in his Paris studio, and later in his London studio. More than twenty years after the Salon, he exhibited Madame around the world and finally sold it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1916. More [here](#).

4 Comments

1. [...] Mr. Alec Soth officially declares it to be 'Portrait Week'. In honor of this declaration, I thought I'd pick out a portrait that I love—Harry Callahan's beautiful portrait of his wife, Eleanor, in Chicago. [...]

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2. what a great quote!

one thing i remember studying about this painting that isn't usually written about is that the fact that madame x's ears are flushed signified to viewers at the Salon that she had just been engaged in sexual intimacies, and that part of what was scandalous was to paint that, show that, and have the allusion being that it might have been the painter Himself that had caused her ear (and presumably elsewhere) to flush such a noticeable shade of pink...

Comment by [stacy](#) — March 9, 2007 @ [7:12 am](#)

3. 2 images are crossing my minds when you speak about portraits. The first one is the painting of Velasquez "Les Menines" and its multiple portraits inside the painting : autoportrait of the painter, portrait of the queen and the king in the mirror, portrait of the children looking at the queen and king being painted. About this masterpiece, the best text I have ever read is the one written by Michel Foucault as an introduction of his book "Words and things".
The second image is the "Picture for Women" from Jeff Wall done in 1979. On this picture we can see Jeff Wall with his camera and his model standing on his right. They are both looking at themselves through a mirror.
Those two images are raising a lot of questions about the relation between the artist and his model, the relation between autoportrait and portrait and how in a way a portrait is always an autoportrait...

Comment by [Alexandre Guirkinger](#) — March 12, 2007 @ [6:25 am](#)

4. [...] First, Alec Soth's Portrait Week in early March, which I'm bringing up again in April because this image really resonates with the John Singer Sargent quote Alec cited. [...]

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