

Accessories should play the same role in a picture as confidants do in tragedies.

D. INGRES

The 'self-portrait,' both visible and invisible. The portrait, the sitter and the mirror are perfect likenesses of each other, although no one can say which one conferred its likeness on the other. The mirror -the invisible guest - has been eluded, conjured away. The portrait of the painter by himself, for seven centuries from manuscript margin to the black nights of the future where self-images will spread across galaxies. Portrait of the painter by himself 1450, 1498, 1527, 1538, 1564, 1587, 1606, 1634, 1638, 1787, 1783...1824...1918...1954...1988. The names change: Lippi, Raphael, Bandinelli, Rubens. Rembrandt, Gauguin, Mondrian, Man Ray. Is the self-portrait of a mirror? Which mirror is it that poses for the portrait?

The self-portrait may be the recurrent portrait of Narcissus, a monotonous repetition. Did Apelles never portray himself? Did Phidias bequeath his likeness? Did Archedemos of Thera? Pausanias, Pliny and Boccaccio declare they did. But Tiepolo was to paint himself as Apelles, Rembrandt as Zeuxis, and in 1827 Ingres painted Apelles as Raphael's guide. Their absence was to remain an obsession. The painter advances from the margin of manuscripts to the borders of frescoes and altarpieces. One painter wears a certain type of cap, another wears a dark ribbon round his wrist. Yet another parts his hair in the middle. There are those who surround themselves with miscellaneous objects scattered about the painted space; and not one of the objects is neutral. The costume, the written words, the altitude, none of these is a matter of chance. It is all cipher, bearing the seal of identity. Cézanne painting Cézanne is painting more *a* Cézanne than a portrait *of* Cézanne, whereas the portrait of Dürer is first and foremost a portrait *of* Dürer before it is a Dürer *by* Dürer. Which of the two, Dürer or Cézanne, speaks more of painting? The portrait of the painter by himself is dual: it is *of* and *by*; it concerns the identity of the painter *and* is about painting. Which comes first? The painter painting himself looks in a mirror at the model he constitutes and it is the mirror that he paints. The painter paints the viewer, the person is looking at himself. When the mirror is eluded, the portrait looks at me. What the portrait of the painter by himself reveals is the look itself; and what it reveals belongs to an entirely different sphere, that of narratives and anecdotes. In the same way as the reconstruction of a crime may tell us nothing of the motive, a commentary or an inventory of a portrait remains powerless to penetrate the silence of the painted lips. Raphael, who no doubt is "listening" to the discussion between Ptolemy and Zoroaster, is present, beside Sodoma, in the *School of Athens*. Filippino Lippi "witnesses" St. Peter's condemnation as Masaccio does his glory.

Vasari, in the *Lives* of 1568, mentions eighty painters who are present in the frescoes or altarpieces they painted. These painters are present in their works even if their presence is like that of Dante - whom Virgil is guiding through hell - "*I know not, in truth, how I entered here ...*" Obstinately, ceaselessly, unrelentingly, we are dealing with a mirror. The mirror is misleading. It is a place of interrogation. Leonardo observes: "*A mirror with a flat surface contains a true painting at its surface.*" To paint himself, the painter proceeds through this mirror. To portray oneself, to paint a portrait of oneself, to "do" one's portrait, is to paint a mirror. And this mirror trails myths behind it. Alberti saw Narcissus as the inventor of painting. The painter is portraying himself. In front of his easel he is posing and painting. The canvas stands in front of him, stroke by stroke the look appears. He may refuse to see the 'object', he may see only the tone of the tone, the shape of the shape, the colour of the colour. But the look gradually emerges. This look scrutinizes him, it confronts. To his left or his right is a mirror, he views a painter seated in a room used as a studio who is turning away from the canvas placed before him. A face remains, a look remains; he is aware that they are his own. He knows that they are those of a painter; but there they are, unaccompanied by any attribute. The look he examines stares at him. It is this look that accosts him: it is precise, incisive, relevant and immediate. Then the painter turns away towards the canvas on the easel. He is viewing the same features which, uncertain, roughed out, trait for trait are those of the face he was examining a moment ago. The look is the same, a direct look, and now in the nearby mirror it turns away. He moves his paintbrush closer to the pupil of the eye watching him under the eye-lid that is yet only a line. He paints this look as he had just seen it in the mirror a moment ago.

The painter paints this look that summons him; he stares at it; he compels it to appear before him. This painted look is no vacant stare; it isn't the look of waiting that a pose held so often puts on a sitter's face. The look the painter is painting on the canvas is that of the painter in the act of looking; it is the look that only a few moments before was searching the mirror. On the easel the portrait is finished. The painter looks at the portrait, at the mirror; at the portrait, at the mirror, mirror and portrait are similar - the look and disposition of the face in each arc alike. Then, maybe, this labour complete, the painter gets up and returns to its usual place the mirror he has taken the time to paint. The portrait remains, an authentic copy, a surrogate for the mirror now removed. The portrait is a record of the mirror; ephemeral and mobile, the reflection is frozen. The portrait looks at the painter. Painted in what was present time, the portrait watches the painter grow older, the portrait watches the face it once was become wrinkled with age. Indifferent, the portrait watches time, which from day to day discovers death.

The painter is dying.

The painter is dead.

The portrait alone remains, the last element of what was formerly this triangle in which the look, from reflection to reflection, from painter to mirror, from mirror to painter, from painter to canvas, the look resolves and discovers itself commonplace, inasmuch as it belongs to three paths: the painter's, the mirror's, the canvas's. I ("I" is the present reader) am looking at the canvas. I am looking at this other person whom I know to be a painter; I observe it. I consider its look, it catalogues me as I catalogue it. This look from 1496, 1639, 1787 or 1849, one month ago, yesterday, is present. I belong to a different period of time, and yet our eyes meet. We are one looking at each other squarely, standing face to face. The moment created by these looks cannot be placed within any chronology and acts as a delusion. What delusion is this "other" time? The eyes watching are the eyes in a painted mirror in which I am looking at myself. Back and forth from like to like go the looks, but like differs from like and this to and fro is a delusion. The satisfaction and dissatisfaction of a gaze are but one. This is no longer Narcissus gazing at his reflection, but reflected eyes gazing at Narcissus. The painter paints himself, using a mirror. Speculum, mirror. Speculum, to speculate, speculation. Philosophers, thinkers and poets speculate. Studies, theories and theorems are speculations. Speculation defined the liberal Arts: Grammar, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry, Astronomy. The painter has no muse: neither Clio, nor Urania, nor Melpomene, nor Thalia, nor Terpsichore, nor Calliope, nor Erato, nor Polyhymnia, nor Euterpe had anything to do with painting. Mnemosyne, memory, their mother, forgot painting. The painter is a museless orphan who by eluding his specular portrait lays claim to a higher status.

Mirrors are abysses.

To paint oneself is to paint the portrait of a man who is going to die. Relationships are mirrors. The painter looks into the mirror to paint himself, the lover looks into his lover to love himself. *"They are madly in love; He with himself, She with herself."* She sits on my lap a reflection of my aesthetic addictions; a reflection in a reflection. The painter reflects upon the reflection. The woman reflects upon the painter reflected. I am thinking of your wife, priest; of your woman friend, art historian. And you, the one holding this paper with good humour, with irritation. I am thinking of that woman, you know the one. They could all be on my lap in these paintings. I am no longer young, less fit than I was, a little over-weight and grey-haired; and I still mean what I say. It is not me that annoys or threatens. It is the knowledge in the heads of my companions (my companions in arms), my doubles. And if your smile of recognition, your smile of humane resignation is the smile I hope it is; then you are my double too.