Original Article

How Students View Themselves: Use of Self-Portraiture as an Avenue for Expression of the Self among Diploma Art Students at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

Dr. Kamau Wango, PhD[1]*

[1] Kenyatta University, Department of Fine Art and Design, P. O. Box 43844 00100, Nairobi, Kenya.
* Author for Correspondence Email: kamauwango@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

When students create portraits, they approach the assignment with an open mind, with the basic purpose of creating a picture bearing a significant likeness of the subject. It is subsequently presumed that when they draw their self-portraits, this quest to portray an accurate likeness is enhanced and attracts their specific interest. This study sought to find out whether, in the formative Diploma stage in drawing, students were able to meet the basic expectations of portrait drawing. Although this was not designed to be a comparative study with other units at the degree level, it also sought to find out whether the level of entry was a factor in the definition of quality of work as defined in portraiture. The study selected 24 self-portrait drawings that were deemed to have attained a significant level of completion within the time frame allocated. The level of completion here referred to a holistic depiction of the self that was adequate to enable analysis. The drawings were analysed using formal analysis through the examination of regular elements such as line, shape, light and shade, and texture, as well as the application of principles such as proportion and balance. Students were encouraged to draw using freehand. The analysis also included the basic approaches to drawing portraits, such as placement and alignment of eyes, nose, mouth, hairline, cheekbones, chin, and facial edges. The analysis also included the presence of the concept of likeness, which is a critical factor in the essence of portraiture; the self must appear as the self to a significant extent for self- gratification It can be deduced from the study that students emanated significant satisfaction in creating self-portraits through drawing particularly in attaining a certain degree of 'self-likeness'. It can also be deduced that self-portraits bear the visual tendency to provide a veneer of self-examination akin to peering through a mirror. The study concluded that this incursion into the self was an important visual assessment of how students ultimately viewed themselves, although they understood their innate personalities from the onset.

INTRODUCTION

What is Portraiture, and Why is it Still Relevant in Drawing or in Painting?

In the context of this study, portraits, whether drawn or painted, carry narratives that translate into dialogues between the subject and the viewers. These narratives are non-verbal and are referred to as visual narratives. Though a portrait is silent, it contains the visual ability to convey profound messages and engage the viewer in a very intense way. It is not necessary, as some have argued, that it has to be accompanied by an element of verbal interpretation or explanation; it exists as a visual entity that carries its myriad of interpretations. Hence, portraits carry the innate ability to depict an underlying story, to depict feelings and emotions that ultimately become a parallel avenue for the expression of human experience. For example, there are portraits that depict an intriguing feeling of melancholy or even nostalgia; others that suggest a sense of foreboding, expectation, and optimism, and yet others that depict the more familiar expressions of joy, laughter, and anger. Wade (2024) observes that, "A well-executed portrait captures not just the physical likeness of a subject but also their emotional state. The careful study of facial expressions, body language, and even the subtleties of light and shadow can communicate everything from quiet contemplation to profound grief." Facial expressions, hence, play a significant role in the realm of social interaction since they are closely intertwined with human perception.

When both the artist and viewer study a face, certain aspects of facial characteristics become important indicators of commensurate human traits that people easily associate with. A smile can convey warmth and compassion, a frown can convey worry or discontent, and a gaze can convey detachment or emptiness. When drawing portraits of subjects who are familiar, artists are often left in a dilemma of knowing too much about the individual and hence depicting expressions of who they think they know, rather than what they are studying. Self-portraits have been known to carry the artist's manifestation of pain, sorrow, inner suffering, self-pity, as well as other emotional struggles, all contained in the expressions of the face. When portraits are studied side by side or collectively, they portray an intriguing spectrum of human experience. These aspects of the human experience are seen as 'visual' manifestations and are extractible from the portrait itself and are hence not pegged to psychological interpretations. If in a picture, a 'scream' is a part of the visual narrative, then it becomes a specific indicator of the actual feeling of 'horror'; that is what the viewer takes away and interprets as the narrative of the portrait, and hence the usefulness of the expression. Self-portraits can add an angle of intrigue to this assessment since the artist also doubles as the subject. It becomes interesting to see how artists view their image and study their likeness

with the intention of expressing their emotions and feelings, and propagating a personal narrative that peek into their character. Viewers, on the other hand, endeavour to have an outsider's interpretation of the artist as an artistic individual entity.

The Essence of Portraiture

Portraiture as an artistic endeavour, whether in drawing, painting, or sculpture, has fascinated artists for many centuries and continues to do so in modern dispensations. The holistic essence of portraiture has always been to first and foremost capture the likeness of the subject (or the person posing to be studied) with utmost accuracy. In the process of capturing the likeness of the subject, the purpose of the portrait is to simultaneously delve into the personality through focused visual study of the person to decipher their broader identity, characteristics, and 'character'. Before the age of photography, particularly during the Renaissance, when portraits became significantly lifelike, the painting of a subject or the 'sitter' was a mark of prestige and affluence and was the only way of immortalising prominent individuals and portraying something about their character. In terms of the fundamental essence of painted portraiture, Pound (2022) contends that "Portraiture has a unique place in the history of art.

By looking at who was portrayed, and how, we to gain insights into social, cultural, and political history that no other type of painting can offer." It is imperative, therefore, to internalise the role of portraiture in telling a story, the ability to bear contextual expressiveness, and helping the audience to read into the subject. Edwards (2023) notes that "By definition, portraiture goes beyond mere representation, aiming to delve into the subtleties of human emotion and expression, exposing vulnerabilities, joys, sorrows, and contemplations. Understanding the way in which portraits convey emotion is important. It unveils a multifaceted dialogue between the artist, the subject, and the observer, enriching our comprehension of the human condition." In terms of the specific reference

to the relationship between the individual artist and the creation of self-portraiture, Rohan (2024) observes that, "Creating self-portraits allows artists to delve into their own identities, emotions, and experiences. Through the process of observation and interpretation, artists can explore aspects of their personality, psyche, and physical appearance, leading to a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world."

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The study applied formal analysis as a basis for critical observation of the compositional essence of the portraits. It is itself described as a technique for organising visual information as applied in most artistic endeavours. There was the use of elements such as line, shape, light and shade, and texture that enhanced the individual portraits, and principles that guided the placement and description of the portraits within their spaces. Lines helped to describe everything in the picture, from the construction of the facial structure to the nature of the pose and gestural connotation. Shapes helped to describe the accuracy or the naturalistic face in tandem with the desired likeness of the mirror image to the individual artist. Light and shade were useful in creating the three-dimensional image that enhanced the sense of realism and humanised the portrait itself in the image of the artist. For example, in the case of the use of texture, Deguzman (2023) notes that "It adds visual interest to the artwork, drawing the viewer in and creating an emotional connection with the artwork.". In addition to the use of elements and application of principles, the analysis took cognisance of various approaches to the creation of a portrait in drawing.

These include aspects of facial features and how these are placed within the oval outline of the face. These include the placement of the eyes, nose, and mouth that have to be symmetrically aligned, irrespective of the angle of view. All three body parts are uniquely important to the specificity of the face and its ultimate description. The eyes, for instance, are widely described as the windows to the

inner being or the soul of the individual. The nose and lips, on the other hand, have been perceived to even bear racial connotations. Other considerations that impact the quality of the portrait include appropriate detailing, gestures, attire, and even such unique attributes as the gaze in the eyes, which is a critical aspect of non-verbal communication. Others include the visual description of the hairline, cheekbones, chin, and neck, which are crucial in defining the face itself. The focused examination of the nature of facial quality certainly involved the array of facial expressions. These are important because they form the basis for the eventual interrogation of identity and probable character of the subject.

Although the portraits in this paper were self-portraits, the viewer in the context of the analysis was an integral part of how the portrait was perceived and regarded outside the subjectivity of the artist as the subject. Munsterberg (2008-2009) observes that "The purest formal analysis is limited to what the viewer sees. Because it explains how the eye is led through a work, this kind of description provides a solid foundation for other types of analysis. It is always a useful exercise, even when it is not intended as an end in itself."

Analysis of Work

Plate 1: Mwenja Wanjihia. Pencil Drawing, 2024.
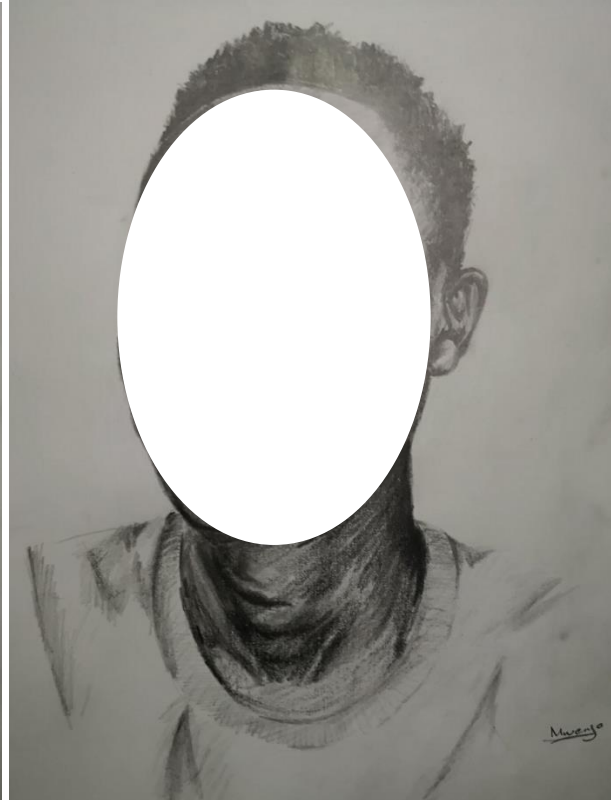
*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

Facial structure forms part of how a portrait is viewed in terms of basic accuracy and ultimately how that portrait is interpreted. Basic accuracy refers to whether the artist has grasped the definitive concreteness of facial contours, edges, and angles.

When this is achieved, one gets the flow of the face and the placement of its components within the whole. In Plate 1, the artist achieves this basic accuracy even though the portrait itself is not executed in shaded detail. The picture is presented

slightly at an angle, but the eyes still achieve a captivating gaze. The straight-angled angled elongated nose is placed with an almost straight line, marking a unique feature of the portrait. The thick lips are another feature of the face that is important for its definition. The open mouth helps the face to break into a mild smile, which is enhanced by the suggested folds on the sides of the mouth. The artist employs only the necessary shading to consolidate the facial structure into a fathomable entity that ultimately suggests the subject's personality. The entire face is placed within an oval shape (Plate 1b), which is the basis for any portraiture.

Plate 2: *'Bosire Gichana*. **Pencil Drawing, 2024.**
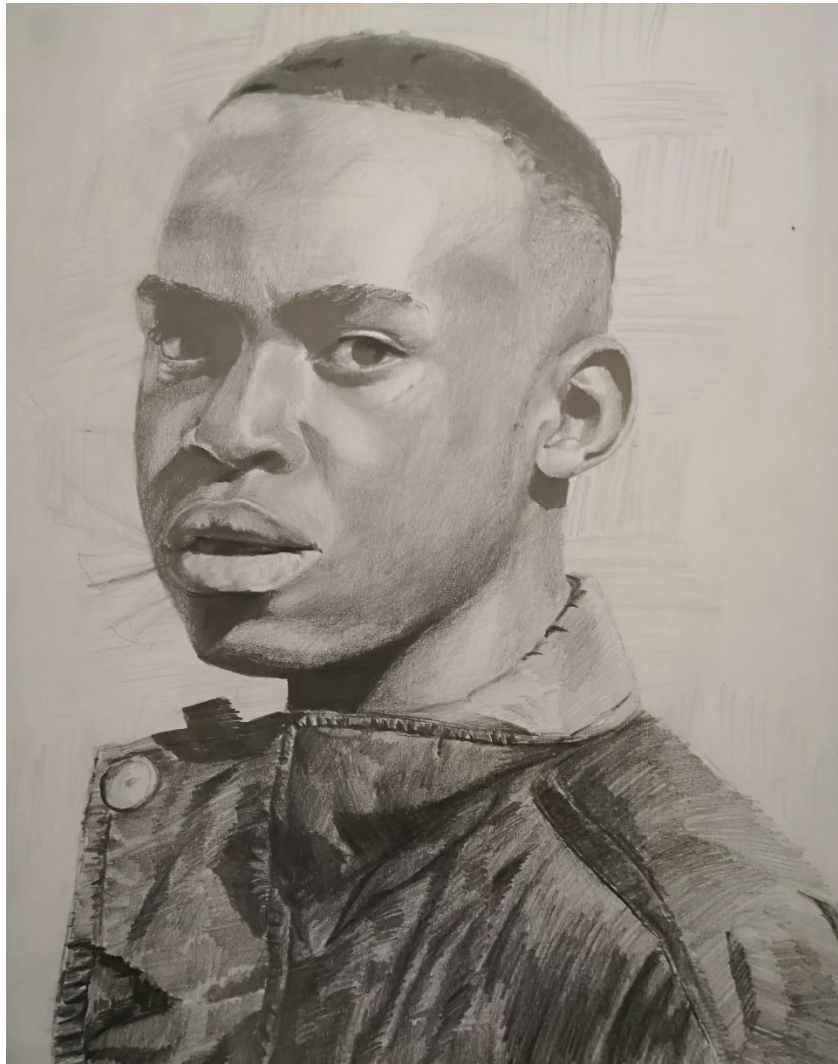
*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

In plate 2, the portrait is well executed with adequate shading details, including the use of shadows and textures, as well as a description of the attire. In capturing the likeness of the subject, artists endeavour to study certain pertinent details that give the subject his or her individuality. In this self-portrait, the artist captures a facial expression that is unsmiling yet inquisitive, with a steady gaze focused back upon the audience. The hairstyling and smoothness of the face capture the notion of youthfulness.

Plate 3: Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

Apart from the portrait itself, the posture and attire of the subject can depict glimpses of how the individual wants to be viewed and perceived. When combined with a simple gestural pose, the artist presents himself as a modest and amiable youthful personality. The drawing depicts a very well finished portrait of a smiling self with the gaze of the eyes looking directly at the viewer. The stretched forehead depicts the unique nature of the facial structure that specifically defines the individuality of the artist. The pencil shading is executed very well with varying tones and the use of shadows. Textural effects are also well executed from the hair to the specific nature of the attire. As stated, the face and the attire give a holistic view of the artist's perception of his visual personality.

Plate 4: Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source***: Department of Fine Arts)*

Textural effects can be used to depict the suggested personality of the subject through aspects of the attire, headgear, hairstyle, jewellery, and other personal mementoes. All these can be used in a self-portrait to propagate beauty as described by the artist herself. In Plate 4, the artist uses a convincing textural effect to depict the nature of her hair styling, which, together with the scarf, helps to enhance the holistic outer facial profile of herself. The artist then proceeds to extract the effect of the gaze in the eyes, which focuses on a slight downward angle. The captivating twist of the open mouth forms part of the facial gestural pose that gives the entire look an engaging appearance. Portraits, including self-portraits, can also denote some form of describable beauty and the light shading may imply the light skin of the artist.

Plate 5: Grace Murugu - Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

In plate 5, the portrait in a side view angle shows a measured smile with somewhat inquisitive eyes gazing at an unknown entity. The intensity of the side view gaze suggests a level of eye contact or interaction between the artist and a third party. The gaze is, however, charming and disarming, and the smile is cautious but accommodating, making the whole face very engaging. Self-portraits can communicate or suggest a facial attitude through lines and shading mainly because the artist 'feels' her personality and internalises the nature of its content in what this study can describe as the 'content of personality'. Through keen placement of pertinent facial details, the student artist can perceive herself as amiable, relatable and engaging.

Plate 6: Pencil Drawing, 2024.
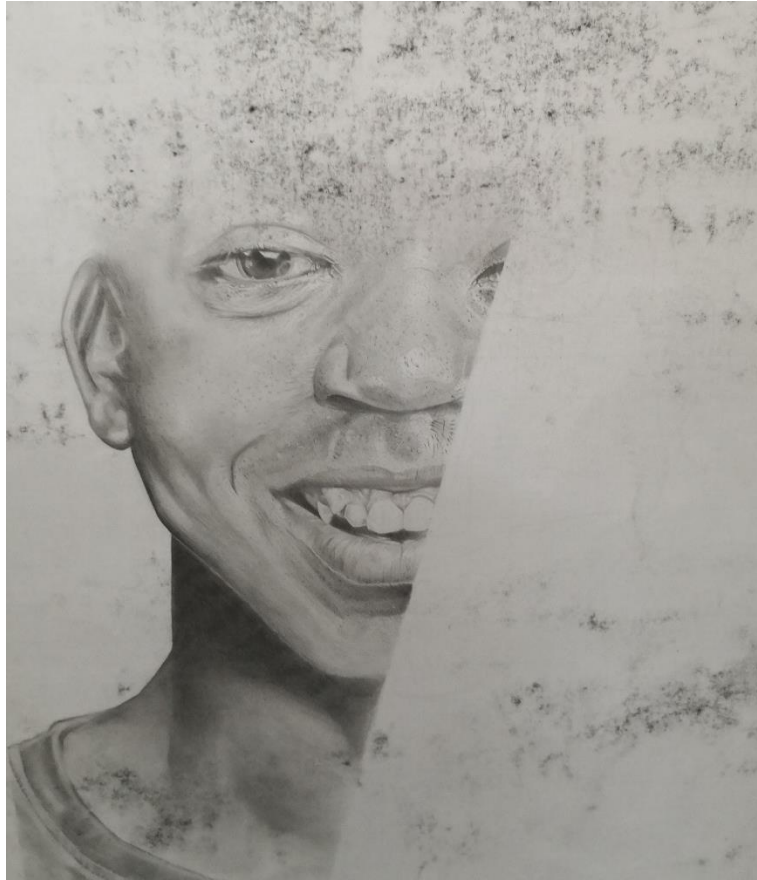
*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

In plate 6, the idea of the half face hidden behind the veil draws interest to itself because visually it tells half the story, if it can be argued that a face does indeed tell a story, or does it? It also eliminates the strength of the textural description of the hair and cuts away the holistic facial structural description, including the forehead, all of which are important components of facial description. The artist, however, meticulously draws the face using adequate detail of pencil shading and application of shadows to subtly describe the expression and feeling of the 'self'. The viewer's eye, though, constantly searches for the complete face behind the veil. In portraiture, this drawing invites the question of how much facial exposure is enough or necessary in a facial study to draw some form of conclusion about the subject's nature; is half a smile all that it takes to render the joyful disposition of the subject? Could it be that a single eye can emanate a gaze that is as penetrating as would be in the case of two eyes? Although about half the face is hidden behind the veil, could it be that the half-portrait is adequate to describe the nature of the personality? In this self-portrait, the student is almost playful in the way he presents himself, face half hidden away, a suggestive half smile, but an eye that depicts a very strange sense of joy.

Plate 7: Wangari Muhoro. Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

When students draw their faces in self-portraiture, they seek to capture the basic characteristics of themselves as they physically 'see' them. This physical determination of the face as it appears is informed by certain pertinent features that are unique to the individual, and when these are captured in significant detail and accuracy, the holistic portrait starts to emerge. Other supportive details, such as the nature of hair and attire, add to this wholeness. When this is done successfully, then it is possible to start to 'describe' or to 'deconstruct' the face. In plate 7, in drawing her image, the artist places the eyes and draws them with adequate detail, adding the necessary shading to make them almost sparkle with life. In addition, the placement and shading of the mouth and nose, as well as the enhancement of the cheeks through the use of heavy lines, create a sparkle of happiness or what is referred to as a 'happy face'. It is possible at this point, through these visual details, to suggest that the artist views and perceives herself as youthful; hence wishes to further describe her character as charming and engaging.

Plate 8: Moses S. Kisilu. Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

Plate 9: Ndumia Wambui. Pencil Drawing, 2024.
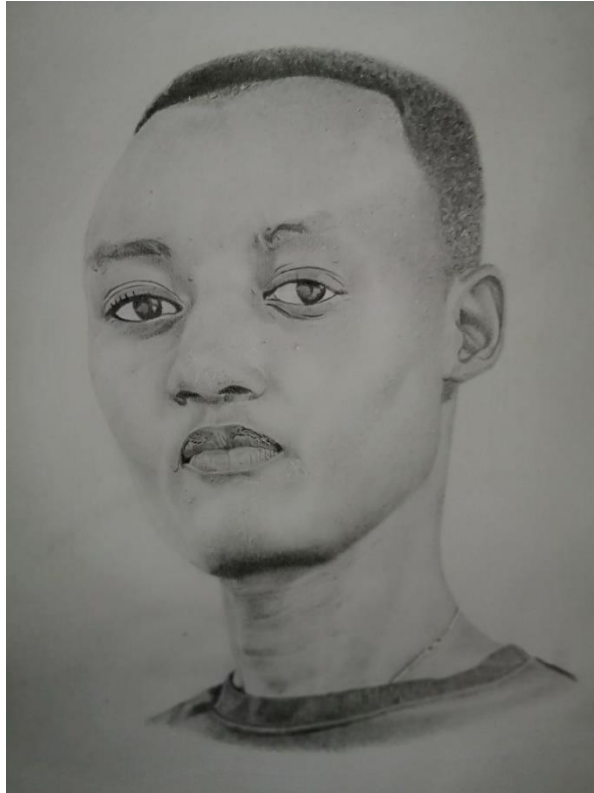
*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

It has often been argued that a portrait can portray a suggestive character through expression and poise. The term 'suggestive' is often used in the context of portraiture as a precaution, since the concept of character is not visually determinable, as it is a psychological phenomenon. However, when an artist studies a face, there is always the fascination to derive its uniqueness through its features and expression to construct its visual worth, but most importantly to peer into what could be contained in the inner self; what could be construed to be the real character of the subject. In Plate 8, the artist portrays a serious, serene face of himself with a straight, unflinching gaze; again, the gaze becomes a crucial component of the suggestion of character. The facial features are well studied with the necessary details. Artistically, it would be unusual not to perceive the facial demeanour of the artist as he presents himself without the presumed possibility that he could indeed be of a serious, thoughtful character.

Some portraits can depict an inquisitive nature by both pose and poise, or what can be construed to be visual body language. In Plate 9, the artist creates a convincing study of himself, suggesting an inquisitive personality; this is done through the slightly concealed eyes that still seem to peer through the spectacles, as well as the tight lips. The gaze in the eyes is, however, still evident and focused on the viewer as if emanating some kind of enquiry. The portrait is well-detailed, showing good use of pencil shading, spots of reflecting light, shadows, and textural effects in the hair and attire. The artist also takes note of a section of earphones suspended around the neck. These personal items or paraphernalia can be useful in determining the circumstances or environment in which the portrait was done.

Plate 10: Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source***: Department of Fine Arts)*

Plate 11: Otido V. Makokha. Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source***: Department of Fine Arts)*

Just like in Plates 14 and 21, the artist portrays herself as an embodiment of the 'happy girl' effect. Some faces ordinarily seem to beam with outward joy through the open smile and amiable facial expression. The attire and gestural pose that features crossed hands add to the pleasantry of the holistic portrait. The face is well shaded with good use of lighting effect, well-placed shadows that enhance certain areas of the drawing, as well as textural effects on the hair and pullover. The right shoulder may be slightly stretched out at an angle, but it does not affect the general outlook of the portrait. Self-portraits, in what this study has described elsewhere as self-propagation, can be used to portray a pleasant personality; it cannot, however, be known to the viewer about the actual character of the artist, but it is presumed through visual association or visual deduction as presented or propagated by the artist in the self-portrait.

In most faces, the gaze in the eyes is a profound, subtle cue into reading the mood of the subject and even further into their probable state of mind. The eyes themselves are important in enabling a viewer to fathom what is going on in the subject's mind. When the sparkle in the eyes combines with the specific facial expression, which may comprise a twist of the mouth, a half smile, or a partial frown, the viewer may be led to certain conclusions about the nature of the subject's immediate state and extended predicament. In Plate 11, the artist creates a very intriguing portrait of himself. He displays a keen study of the eyes; the gaze and slight sparkle, the twist of the lips suggesting a subtle smile, yet perhaps the smile is absent. The face is subsequently pleasant yet mysterious, unrevealing yet penetrating, toying with the psyche of the viewer. The artist applies very well-executed facial balance,

light and shade, as well as textural effects, to show the nature of the short dreadlocks of hair.

Plate 12: Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

Portraits may not always carry measured accuracy in terms of facial balance, but still, facial characteristics permeate through the aspects necessary to give the viewer the gist of what the personality of the subject may amount to. For instance, in Plate 12, the eyes of the personality behind the spectacles are not aligned, but the facial expression is satisfactory to depict the personality of the subject as perhaps jovial and inquisitive. The depiction of personal paraphernalia, such as the earphones, is important to depict such details as intricate preferences.

Plate 13: Pencil Drawing, 2024.
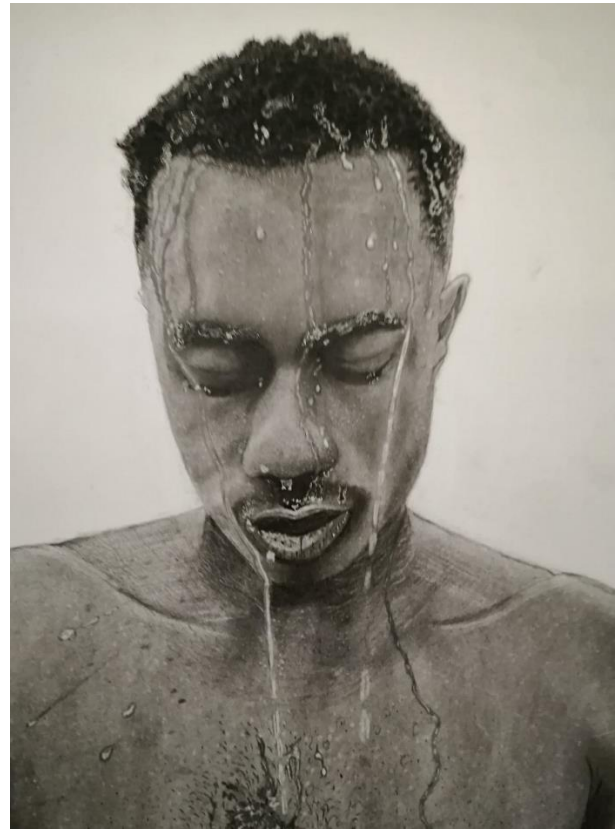
*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

'Water portraits', as they may be referred to, are usually interesting because of the visual effect of dripping water upon the surface of the face or body. The visual effect of water on a face tends to disrupt the rhythm upon which the viewer's eyes view the portrait itself, and hence, the perception of what the subject's personality may be like is equally disrupted. In Plate 13, the artist depicts the effect of water dripping upon his face, which is the most visually captivating aspect of the portrait. The artist, however, looks down, and there is, therefore, no direct eye contact with the audience, which is the conduit for any facial interaction. The shading is very well done with shadows and textural effects showing the well-laid-out facial structure. Faces that look down are, however, often a suggestion of inner thought, turmoil, or aspects of melancholy.

Plate 14: Irene Akinyi. Pencil Drawing, 2024.

(Source: Department of Fine Arts)

In Plate 14, an obvious happy face is the first visual impression of this portrait, suggesting that the subject bears pleasant qualities. Again, this comes through the smile, the nature of the innocent gaze in the eyes, and the serene, visually harmless face. The viewer can conclude that this subject is indeed a 'happy local African girl', engaging and yet at the same time, innocently inquisitive. It could be a real possibility that this is indeed how the artist views herself and wishes to propagate that point of view to the audience. In order to bring out this personality, the artist adds the necessary details to the self-portrait, such as the texture of the hair and the attire that gives her the sense of youthful exuberance. The pencil shading and use of light and shade, as well as the gestural pose, including the placement of the hand gently against the side of the face and the nature of attire, are consistent with the concept of self-propagation in self-portraiture.

Plate 15: Indika Omutayi. Pencil Drawing, 2024.

(Source: Department of Fine Arts)

The use of the gaze is often of pertinent importance in portraiture. It is used to portray aspects of melancholy, awe, adoration, solemnity, or even insobriety. It is often portrayed through the focus of the eyes into space, which is observable in a drawing or painting. The gaze is often accompanied by other features like a tilted or bowed head, a mouth that is slightly ajar, or a given gestural pose. In this self-portrait, the artist makes a surprisingly detailed study of his face that focuses on the gaze; the almost symmetrical division of his face into light and shadow adds to the aura of melancholy, and his slightly ajar mouth suggests an element of indescribable awe. The prominent hairstyle helps to enhance his facial description and probable personality, and the attire helps to enhance the overall pose. Self-portraits can turn out to be an amazing way of peering into the self, and this artist seems to have stepped out of himself to make an incredible study of himself as a subject and perhaps a glance into his mysterious world.

Plate 16: Sunday Wandera. Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

Some portraits depict facial structure in a very definitive way, which also helps to bring out the expression on the subject's face. Some faces are unique because of certain facial features like facial skin folds, facial scars, size of nose and lips, cheekbones, eye brows, as well as the placement of eyes. In plate 16, the artist portrays a smiling face shown by the open mouth and facial folds on the side of the mouth that enhance the smile itself. These folds also overlap with and lift the cheekbones into further folds, giving the subject his suggested sense of joy. This is all brought out by the use of shading and patches of light. The facial structure is also enhanced by the hairstyle, and hairstyles are themselves often used to define the overt physical definition of the individual, such as

youthfulness or general age determination. The box-like hairstyle is, in this case, associated with youth. All these details in the self-portrait help the artist to propagate a certain perception of the 'self', which enables the viewer to conduct a visual interrogation of the subject to build a 'visual attitude' towards that individual.

Plate 17: Omwansa F. Basweti. Ball Pen Study, 2024.

*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

A portrait may entail a detailed study of attire as part of the description of the holistic personality of the subject. When viewed alongside the facial details of the subject, the viewer grasps the necessary visual details desired by the artist. In Plate 17, the artist creates an engaging self-portrait, including the large piercing eyes that focus their gaze directly upon the viewer. She wears an unsmiling yet inquisitive face that also portrays her youthful demeanour. The portrait features a headscarf that is fastened around her hairline as part of general attire, and the artist

also takes time to study the blouse and jacket that she is wearing. This is done with very good suggestive shading and textural effects. Just like other portraits in this study, it can be said that the level of study and detail is commensurate with the level of accuracy; in self-portraiture, the artists are specifically entrusted with attaining significant likeness to enable the viewer to attain the necessary level of confidence.

Plate 18: Marlyn Adeya. Pencil Drawing, 2023.
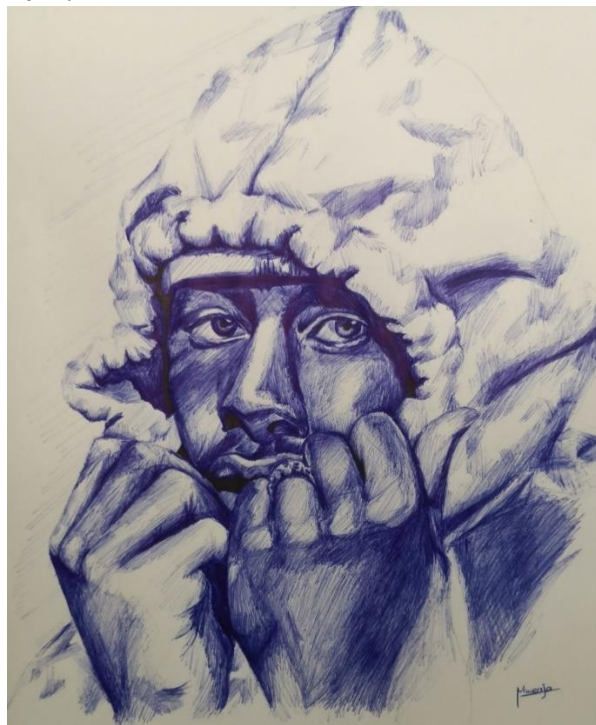

*(**Source***: Department of Fine Arts)*

Portraits can often depict youthfulness, just like they can depict ageing. In Plate 18, the youthful demeanour of the individual is easily recognisable. This is mainly through facial and head structure, placement of components such as the eyes, short nose, full lips, and the type of spectacles. The artist uses well-executed fine textural effects and shading using a ball pen to bring out the attire, face, and hair. The use of the shining effect of light and shadows adds to the three-dimensional allure of the drawing. The childlike demeanour of the self-portrait, as unsmiling but still containing the gaze into the distance, is both captivating and intriguing.

Plate 19: Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source***: Department of Fine Arts)*

Some students prefer to study their side profiles and present them as their preferred self-perception. Side profiles bear identifiable facial characteristics that describe the individual accordingly. For example, the concept of thoughtfulness may be best captured in a side profile. Side profiles bear certain characteristics that depict the probable suggestion of personality or even character. In Plate 19, the artist depicts the serene side view of the face with the various components such as the eye, nose, and tight lips placed reasonably well within the facial structure, dropping into the neck and shoulder area. The texture of the hair, which contributes to the facial character of the individual, is presented as zigzag parallel flowing lines placed on a lighter background and tied up behind the ear. The eye still contains the gaze into the distance, and the pencil shading with patches of shining light makes the portrait rounded and convincing.

Plate 20: Mwenja Wanjihia. Ball-pen Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

Some portraits are dramatic in their pose and expression. The pose or gesture is often combined with actual facial expression to denote a certain feeling, perhaps of fear or uncertainty. Certain types of attire can be added to the portrait to enhance this feeling. In plate 20, the gaze in the eyes is profound in its suggestion of fearfulness and uncertainty. The gestural pose of clasping the hands together and holding onto the hood is an age-old visual expression of seeking self-solace. The artist concentrates his study on the face, especially the captivating eyes and open mouth, as well as the positioning of the hands, all of which he captures by focused shading, insertion of shadows, and textural effects. Self-portraiture is invaluable in generating an integral visual perspective of introspective thought; when students draw their images, they have the opportunity to view themselves from a removed position, studying themselves for the first time and examining what they perceive as their strengths as well as what might be perceived as their weaknesses and fears.

Plate 21: Pencil Drawing, 2024.

*(**Source**: Department of Fine Arts)*

The break of a smile can define a face and the perception of character. This portrait of a 'happy girl' is simple but profound. It denotes the basic visual argument that a portrait can indeed suggest a pleasant personality and, by extension, the perception of an amiable character. The captivating self-portrait captures the sparkling eyes, the smile, and the feminine facial structure. The beautifully textured and shiny short hair, as well as the shading and texture of the pull neck attire and the face itself, wrap up the portrait, making it attractive and interactive to the viewer. It is interesting to note that students do successfully try to capture their likeness in a way that suggests their probable personality as well as their quest to self-propagate.

Observations and Overview

It was observed in this study that in drawing their faces, the students sought to capture pertinent details in pencil that described the fundamental

facial structure as they observed it through mirror drawing. Although the level of detail varied from drawing to drawing, it was observed that the students captured adequate details to underscore the distinctiveness of their faces as seen for the first time. In this regard and in a very intriguing way, they became their referent persons. The faces bore certain expressions that underscored the students' keenness in extracting their likeness, which described their personality as viewed from the outside themselves. Whether portraiture does indeed help the viewer to delve into an individual's innate personality has been the subject of endless debate and controversy for years. However, how certain facial structures and expressions are studied through art can visually suggest the possible personality of the referent person, which is consistent with the development, essence, and need for portraiture. It should be noted that although these were self-portraits, they were available to viewers and hence the artists themselves, although studying their faces, became 'subjects' and therefore the portraits were subject to regular analysis. It was also observed that students displayed different levels of skill, and some of the drawings bore admirable levels of accuracy. However, different levels of skill and accuracy in the use of realism did not necessarily affect the essence of the portrait itself, and many of the portraits reflected, to a large extent, what the students saw in themselves. Students were also able to relate visual and verbal descriptions of their drawings. For example, in Plates 7 and 14, the student artists described themselves as 'happy', and the two portraits clearly show the expression of the individual faces bearing deliberate structural contours and elements of purposeful shading that made the faces break into a visual mode of happiness, which was ultimately observable by the viewers. In analysing the portraits, this study identified the following aspects as important tenets in portrait analysis within the wider analytical framework.

Use of Details in Portraiture

In this study, the portraits were executed using pencil, and students used varying details according to their level of skill. All students used realism to capture their faces. One of the objectives of the study was to ascertain whether students were able to produce a portrait that adequately resembled the referent person and capture the personality of that person. They just happened to be the referent persons through self-study. Various degrees of detail helped to make the portraits presented in this paper relate to the artists who produced them as well as the viewers who viewed them. The portraits themselves became a reference point that connected and communicated with viewers by way of some measure of visual interrogation. Ajayan 2025 observes that, "Portraits evoke an emotional connection between their subjects and viewers. They capture the essence of the person and make you wonder about them. The artist achieves this through details such as drawing facial features, expressions, poses, clothing, and setting."

Use of Facial Expression

It was observed that students took time to study their facial expressions in their drawings. Expressions help to determine the circumstances surrounding the particular person, whether sad, reflective, happy, annoyed, or aloof. By extension, they may help the viewer peer into the person's qualities or even character. Jain (2024) notes that, "The subject's facial expressions are the most prominent element in most portraits. Good facial features add to the beauty of an image, giving the viewers an essence of the subject's qualities. The primary purpose of a portrait throughout the centuries has been to show a particular person's originality. While making a strong portrait, the artist focuses not just on the physical appearance but on giving their viewers a glimpse of their subject's inner self." In Plate 5, the artist depicts a rather enigmatic expression of a wary smile accompanied by very inquisitive eyes. This expression is further enhanced by the angle of a side view, as if the person was responding to something

and adopting a higher moral pedestal. Expressions are, therefore, capable of eliciting opinions and points of view and even specific reactions such as emotions.

Accuracy in Portraiture

In portraiture, the term 'accuracy' could be construed as misleading since accuracy could be interpreted differently and could imply different things to different people, including the viewers and the artists themselves. In realism, however, accuracy ordinarily refers to the level of likeness to the referent person or the subject that is easily recognisable by the viewer as being significantly representative of the referent features of that individual. The description of this accuracy usually ranges within a realism continuum from a beautiful, suggestive drawing to super-realism, which is therefore ultimately tied up with the style of execution adopted. This study posits that accuracy is important only to the extent that the portrait is deemed to embed pertinent features of the subject and that the inherent expression contained in the picture can elicit the necessary emotive reaction from the viewer. Specifically, in self-portraiture as presented in this study, accuracy is hence self-prescribed, and the individual attempts to depict himself or herself in the best way possible, where the image contains the level of likeness that attains self-approval. This self-approval is mandatory if the portrait is to be seen to be of significant personal visual value. It can be concluded from the portraits presented in this study that the levels of visual details, though varying according to the style of execution of each picture, were adequate and that students approved their self-developed images.

Gestural Pose/Posture

Some portraits bear certain gestural poses, which means that they exhibit certain gestures that are frozen in given poses. This may not always amount to much, but in some instances becomes part of how the subject is holistically viewed and perceived by the viewer. Plates 3, 14, and 20 all display gestural

poses that help to enhance the nature of the self-portrait. In plate 20, the tight grasp of the hood around the mouth is a common gesture of despair and uncertainty that depicts the wider concept of fear and despondency. This is further enhanced by the gaze in the eyes as well as the placement of the entire hood upon the head. The gestural pose in Plate 14 helps to draw the viewer's attention to the self, which, together with the detailed shading, makes a compelling case for the self-study and perhaps the personality of the individual.

Use of the Gaze

In self-portraiture, the concept of the gaze becomes a new revelation to the individual who studies his or her own eyes for the first time, akin to looking at oneself in the mirror. The face, though, remains an interesting point of study to the viewer who sees the subject from an outsider's perspective. These different perspectives, hence, become an important aspect of the study of portraiture. The eyes are a pivotal part of portraiture and are determined to be an important determinant in suggesting the personality of the individual. When eyes seem to be directed towards a certain point of focus, that transfixed look is artistically referred to as the 'gaze' and could lead to multi-interpretations of personality since eyes, as has often been stated, are a window to the soul. The gaze and its various levels of intensity can suggest certain emotive underpinnings such as awe, adoration, sadness, deep melancholy, self-pity, expectation, and studiousness, underscoring the essence of visual penetration. The gaze then underscores the nature of the entire face that gives it its visual definition. The self-portraits in this study were not only an interesting testimony of how the student artists viewed their faces, but also how they perceived themselves as individuals and wanted the viewers to see and extract the same perception. In self-portraiture, eyes seen through their intriguing gaze, intense stare, or strange melancholy can be profoundly introspective, reflecting the artist's inner thoughts and self-perception, and most

importantly, certain tenets of truth and self-realisation.

Attire in Portraiture

Attire forms part of the description of the subject in any portraiture; the holistic nature of the subject is seen through the attire and other personal paraphernalia that help the viewer peer into what kind of individual the subject could be. This is particularly important when studying the portrait of an individual who is essentially unknown to the artist. In the case of a self-portrait, the individual is already known to herself or himself, and attire is therefore only part of self-description.

Melo (2023) notes that. "Artists use their attire to amplify personal expression, much like their art speaks to their innermost thoughts and emotions. Every garment, accessory, or hairstyle becomes a brushstroke on the canvas of self-presentation, conveying their unique perspective." Therefore, how artists present their attire in self-portraits is not a passing or momentary interest; it is indeed what they wish to be associated with as part of their overall personality. The use of attire as an enhancement tool is most evident in Plates 3, 4, 10, 17, and 20, among others.

Concept of 'Visual Personality' in Portraiture

In this paper, visual personality can be described as the perception of personality as seen through the visual essence of the portrait itself. The eyes of the viewer scan through the facial features and all other aspects of the holistic picture with a view to extracting a description of the subject's personality as a human being. Central to this quest is the nature of the eyes and the type of gaze that emanates from them. Other essential cues are facial features like cheekbones, forehead, chin, folds, hairstyling, nose, mouth, poise, and mien, all of which play a part in this visual/physical description. In self-portraits, artists often wish to present themselves as proponents of certain personalities through which they would wish to be perceived and understood. Though they know themselves and comprehend

their personality in a fundamental way since it already exists and manifests in their minds, they often go out of their way to present a carefully constructed persona through the facial anatomy emanated through self-portraiture. In Plate 5, the side view portrait bears an almost coy gaze and a somewhat cautious smile, suggesting an amiable personality. The artist presents herself as an engaging and friendly individual. In Plate 7, the artist presents herself as sociable and engaging, while in Plate 8, the artist is viewed as a 'no-nonsense' individual.

Portraits as an Avenue for Expressing Emotions and Turmoil

Self-portraits can be used to depict the individual emotions of the artist as they manifest in his or her mind and soul. Drawing a self-portrait is an engaging undertaking because one is obliged to study and capture their face and bring forth their physical likeness, then in a way that is self-interrogative and brutally honest. The need to depict emotions as they manifest temporarily overrides the need for self-grandeur, and hence, portraits of this nature are very revealing in what can be described as a silent conversation with the self. In plate 15, the self-portrait features a distant look with eyes staring blankly into space, emanating a sense of melancholy. The distinction must be made here between what one thinks of himself or herself and what one is currently embroiled in. Emotions and turmoil are not packaged into an amorphous, faceless occurrence; they are expressed spontaneously with a facial expression that is precise and genuine. In Plate 20, there is a clear suggestion of the turmoil of uncertainty seen in the facial expression, particularly in the eyes and gestural pose. In this quest for the essence of self-portraits, Vishakha (2024) observes that, "One of the most compelling reasons artists create self-portraits is the opportunity for self-exploration. A self-portrait allows the artist to turn their gaze inward, exploring their identity, emotions, and experiences in a deeply personal way. This act of

introspection is not merely about capturing a likeness; it's about understanding and expressing who they are at a particular moment in time."

Self-portraiture and the Quest for Identity

In examining the portraits, this study found that students were very keen on the subject of self-identity through drawing their self-portraits. The portraits provided an urge or opportunity ostensibly to peer into themselves, so that the portraits created a bridge that led them inwards into themselves. Pivac & Zemunic (2020) observe that "The self-portrait is a reflection of the personality in a visual, physical sense, as a concrete form, a summary of the external characteristics of the artist, but also in a psychological sense, when the self-portrait becomes a mediator of communication with the self, a medium of self-investigation. In this way, the self-portrait exists as a means of self-reflection, self-awareness, and acceptance of the Self." Although their study was based on Primary school children, their basic observation of the purpose of self-portraits has a profound bearing upon this study.

Self-portraiture and the Quest for Self-description

In self-portraiture, the quest for identity might emanate first from the quest for self-description in the execution of a self-portrait, which indicates that the two are symbiotic, one psychological and the other artistic. Through the myriad of self-portraits, this study found that the student artists were very keen on how they perceived themselves through accurate depiction of their faces, their facial details that they never fathomed before, gestural poses that they never associated with their faces, and even facial expressions that surprised them. This study ultimately allowed them to peer into themselves, to step out of themselves for a moment to see how they appear as their own 'subjects', in which case they studied their images and captured through their drawings what they saw without artistic bias. From this perspective, the portraits became profound references of self-description and perhaps how the student artists wished or sought to be perceived by the audience. One of the pertinent ways in which the student artist discovered themselves was through the gaze in their eyes; one never comprehends the power of their gaze until they see it focusing upon them in some form of eerie introspection. The power of the gaze and what it might contain in retrospect is evident in Plates 5, 8, 15, 17, and 20, among others. Other aspects of self–description that are an integral part of self-portraiture can be identified as facial expressions that contain suggestions of potent personality traits. These include smiles (Plates 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 14, and 16) and other opaque facial expressions that carry a myriad of underlying possibilities of inquiry (Plates 2,4,9,11,12, and 18). Others may bear traces of melancholy, such as Plates 13 and 18.

Concept of Self-propagation in Self-portraiture

The concept of self-propagation is intricately related to the age-old human quest to visually present themselves in the best way possible, including the tendency towards self-adoration. Just like the amount of care taken to prepare for a visual presentation in photography, so do self-portraitists take care to look presentable, including the exclusion of blemishes. Whether in gestural poses, static poses, attire, or other personal or symbolic paraphernalia, a self-portrait may contain many aspects that underscore this deliberate search for this quest. In plate 8, the artist presents himself as a no-nonsense individual, perhaps incorruptible and dependable. Self-propagation is hence attained by facial expression and what emotions it elicits from the viewer and what character traits it may subsequently evoke. The issue that arises is whether artists, through self-portraits, are simply just keen on presenting themselves in a certain way or deliberately go out of their way to 'construct' a personal image that influences the viewer. In self-portraiture, the argument about self-propagation has mainly been between the quest to genuinely self-examine and the tendency towards self-obsession.

Level of Knowledge of Elements and Principles

In this study, there was an adequate demonstration of the use of elements and how they are applied in portrait drawing. The use of line, shapes, textural effects, and shading was used effectively in helping the student artist to undertake their self-portraits. As observed before, it is through the keen study of self-likeness and facial expression that certain personal feelings and emotions were determined to be significantly highlighted. For example, in Plate 15, the use of lines and shapes, as well as the vivid use of light and dark areas, illumination, shadows, textural effects, and folds on the attire, are all testimony to the artist's knowledge of the essence of elements in the construction of a portrait. The students also demonstrated adequate knowledge of the use of principles in the composition of their portrait drawings. In this regard, the arrangement of the components of each portrait including the eyes, nose, ears and mouth fitted well within the picture plane; there was balance in the presentation of the portraits within the oval of the face, rhythmical effects in the way the viewer's eyes scanned the portraits and found essence in the power of the eyes as placed in the face as well as the gestural poses.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that portraiture in whatever form continues to interest and fascinate contemporary artists, with experimentation with new techniques and styles. Portraits are still used as an avenue for the expression of human feelings and emotions in a way that is memorable and profound. It is conceivable that portraits tell a story without the prospect of verbalising the story itself. The beauty of viewing, relating to, and interacting with a portrait is the essence of delving into the individual subject, his or her personality, fears, reservations, unhappiness, and joy through facial expression. Contrary to the pessimism that has often been expressed about the communicative ability of portraiture, these feelings and emotions are detectable and extractable from the construction of the portrait, including the use of colour, shading, light and shadows, textural effects the gaze in the eyes as well as the nature of facial muscles even though there exists no verbalization. This study concludes that the communicative ability of portraits is therefore silent and subtle; it need not be verbalised to underscore the myriad of human emotions and feelings since these are already manifested in the way the face is constructed and presents itself. In this regard, portraits leave ample opportunity for interpretation in the case of the study of a subject and introspection, as in the case of self-portraits. It can also be concluded that self-portraits in particular remain intriguing avenues for introspection; they help attain a level of self-examination since they help the individual artists peer into themselves in a way that is profound and infinitely memorable. This study found that the relatively accurate presentation of the concept of likeness in the portraits had a direct positive effect upon the student artist being able to present a modicum of their personality as perceived by the self and presented as such to the viewer. It can also be concluded in this study that student artists apparently seemed genuinely interested in portraying themselves as they perceived themselves and did not seem overly concerned with self-obsession.

REFERENCES

Ajayan, M (2025). '*Ultimate Guide to Portrait Drawing: Types, Ideas and Methods*' Whataportrait.com. Accessed January 23, 2025 https://www.whataportrait.com/blog/portrait-drawing

Deguzman, K (2023). '*What is texture in Art – Definition, Types Explained.*' Studiobinder.com. Accessed February 6, 2025 https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-texture-in-art-definition/

Edwards, A. (2023). 'The Power of Portraits /An Analysis of Human Emotion in Fine Art' Angelaedwards.co.uk. Accessed January 31, 2025

https://www.angelaedwards.co.uk/the-power-of-portraits-an-analysis-of-human-emotion-in-fine-art/

Jain, K. (2024). '*What are portraits and portraiture in Art: An Overview*' Whataportrait.com. Accessed January 23, 2025 https://www.whataportrait.com/blog/portraits-portraiture-art-overview

Melo, G (2023). '*The art of dressing as an Artist*'. Medium.com. Accessed March 10, 2025 https://medium.com/@wellbeingux/the-art-of-dressing-as-an-artist-b993293f9206

Munsterberg, M. (2008-2009) *'Writing about Art'* Writingaboutart.org. Accessed June 1, 2025 https://writingaboutart.org/pages/formalanalysis.html

Pivac, D., Zemunic, M. (2020) *'The Self-Portrait as a Means of Self-Investigation, Self-Projection and Identification among the Primary School Population in Croatia'* Files.eric.ed.gov. Accessed March 13, 2025 https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1284156.pdf

Pound, C. (2022). '*Why portraits have fascinated us for Millennia*' BBC.com. Accessed January 31, 2025 https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20220204-why-portraits-have-fascinated-us-for-millennia

Rohan, P. (2024). *'Self-Portrait as a Gift'* LinkedIn.com. Accessed June 2, 2025 https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/self-portraits-gift-rohan-patrick-h3ckc

Vishakha (2024) *'The Enduring Significance of Self-Portrait Paintings'* Teravarna.com. Accessed March 15, 2025 https://www.teravarna.com/post/the-enduring-significance-of-self-portrait-paintings

Wade, B. (2024). '*What Kind of Art Conveys Intense Emotions? Exploring Watercolours and Surrealism.* Thespottedwhimsy.com. Accessed February 6, 2025 https://thespottedwhimsy.co m/blogs/news/what-kind-of-art-conveys-intense-emotions-exploring-watercolors-and-surrealism?