

# The New York Times

## Seeing and Being Seen, Across Millenniums

### A Review of 'Eye to I ... 3,000 Years of Portraits,' at the Katonah Museum of Art



Works in from "Eye to I ... 3,000 Years of Portraits" include, clockwise from left: "The Krakoffs" (2006), by Eric Fischl; Picasso's "Tête d'homme barbu à la cigarette" (1964); "Toufic" (2010), by Michael Ferris Jr.; "Head of Amenhotep III, New Kingdom Dynasty XVIII" (1390-1380 B.C.).

Faces are everywhere at the Katonah Museum of Art. Some gaze boldly across the galleries, cheery, confrontational, sly; others turn aside, pensive and enigmatic. All hold stories of humanity, a gathering of characters, cultures and colors.

"Eye to I ... 3,000 Years of Portraits" is an exhibition of 65 artworks assembled to explore the multitude of ways that people perceive people. The portraits span 30 centuries and six continents, and include paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, prints and installations by artists as diverse as Pablo Picasso, Diane Arbus and Lucas Cranach the Elder. There are portraits commissioned to create likenesses of loved ones or to commemorate historic and religious figures, portraits embodying ethnic or political ideals, portraits and self-portraits expressing universal emotions and traits.

But this diversity of expression is not limited to the artists. The organizers of "Eye to I" asked 124 community members to write personal responses to specific pieces. It is these entries, rather than traditional curatorial copy, that appear alongside images of the artwork in the show's catalog and on the exhibition's website.

The public, too, is invited to add commentary to the website (comments can be submitted later or right at the museum via touch-screen kiosks and iPads). "We want this show to be a validation of multiple voices," said Ellen Keiter, the museum's director of exhibitions and one of three curators of "Eye to I." "We want to demonstrate that there is no one true interpretation of a work of art."

In the galleries, each portrait is identified by title, artist and date, but further details are relegated to the website and the back of the catalog. "We encourage visitors to spend time looking and to consider their own responses before reading those of others," Ms. Keiter said.

Observant museum-goers may find unexpected connections among the pieces. The oldest portrait in "Eye to I" is the ancient Egyptian "Head of Amenhotep III, New Kingdom Dynasty XVIII," from 1390-1380 B.C., a small sculpture of the young ruler during one of Egypt's most prosperous periods. The handsome but slightly chipped king is displayed beside Auguste Rodin's "Mask of Madame Rodin (Rose Beuret)," a bronze head of the artist's longtime lover and housekeeper, completed in the early 1800s. Though the two works are separated by time, culture, material and intent, when they are placed side by side, parallels emerge in the subjects' frontal stances, dignified carriage and impenetrable expressions.

Similar connections might stretch across the galleries. In "The Krakoffs," Eric Fischl's 2006 portrait of Delphine and Reed Krakoff, a New York design couple, Mrs. Krakoff rests her chin on her fist, a bracelet slipping down her forearm. Her eyes peer from the canvas toward an early-20th-century Nigerian Igbo "Maiden Spirit Mask." Both faces — one painted, the other carved from wood — are pale, elongated and elegant; each stares directly ahead. Are they looking at each other?

Museum-goers can look at themselves in Daniel Rozin's 2013 "Mirror No. 12," a digital projection that uses custom software to convert whatever passes in front of it into an ever-changing composition of moving lines. Ms. Keiter described the resulting imagery as "digital but incredibly painterly." "I love that it incorporates the viewer into the artwork," she said.



Daniel Rozin's "Mirror No. 12" (2013), a digital projection.

The relationship between viewer and artwork is examined from a scientific perspective in the exhibition catalog essay, written by Eric R. Kandel, a Nobel Prize-winning neuroscientist whose newest book, "The Age of Insight," investigates how the brain understands art. In his essay, Dr. Kandel explained how the human eye processes information, particularly faces, and introduced the concept of the "beholder's share," which deems a work of art incomplete without the "perceptual and emotional involvement of the viewer."

Viewers can become actively involved in Felix Gonzalez-Torres's 1991 "Untitled (Portrait of Dad)," one of the show's more conceptual pieces. It consists of a triangular heap of thousands of individually wrapped white mints pushed into a corner. The weight of the mints, 175 pounds, matches that of Mr. Gonzalez-Torres's father. Visitors may take candy from the pile, which is continually restocked: a sweet cycle of loss and regeneration.

Like this work, many portraits in "Eye to I" provide glimpses into the artists behind them. "Toufic," for example, is Michael Ferris Jr.'s larger-than-life sculpture of his father's Lebanese uncle. The man is presented from mid-thigh up, arms at his sides, rumpled shirt tucked into belted pants. His bald head is cocked a little; his face carries a mixture of kindness and fatigue.

The figure's surface is an ornately patterned mosaic of countless small, hand-shaped pieces of wood with brightly colored pigment in between. Mr. Ferris, who lives in the Bronx, attributed the inspiration for his process to two intricately inlaid Syrian backgammon tables in his childhood home. "I grew up around them," he said during a telephone interview. "They trickled into my unconscious."

Mr. Ferris admitted that all of his portraits contain elements of his own experience along with his knowledge of his subject. Each one, he said, "is a merger of my feelings about the individual and my feelings about myself."

*"Eye to I ... 3,000 Years of Portraits" is on view through Feb. 16, 2014, in the Beitzel and Righter Galleries at the Katonah Museum of Art, 134 Jay Street (Route 22), Katonah, N.Y. Open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, 12 to 5 p.m.; daily tours at 2:30 p.m. Exhibition website: [eyetoi.org](http://eyetoi.org). For more information and a schedule of related programming: [katonahmuseum.org](http://katonahmuseum.org) or (914) 232-9555.*