



The Intermediary 2014 oil on linen Courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY + dianne tanzer gallery

OBSERVATION
POINT

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A portrait is rarely a painting done for the artist themselves. It involves a subject's agency, and is thus a compromise between what the artist perceives and how the sitter perceives themselves to be. One must soon ascertain whether the sitter is unselfconscious,

pretentious, vain, whatever. Then there's the function of the portrait. Is it an official thing, meant to memorialise an occasion, or perhaps a deeply personal depiction of a loved one? The role of the sitter and their character are vital considerations.

I like to construct a 'straight' portrait so that it looks naturalistic and effortless, but making something look effortless is often extremely difficult. I usually construct the final painted image from a loose assortment of many impressions, drawings, and photographs, then work hard to integrate them seamlessly. It is important to me to create a portrait as one might experience the person over time, rather than in a photographic snapshot.

When painting a self portrait, some of these factors must be considered,

but ultimately you're at war with how you perceive yourself to be, and how you perceive what is actually there. The preconceptions and biases you carry around as defenses must be torn down. The first few self portraits are very confronting, especially when you realise just how you've been unconsciously lying to yourself. The benefit is that you can be so much harder on yourself than you can on any other subject, and thus it is far easier to be honest.

So you can imagine that after two decades of painting full time, I've developed all manner of complicated ways of thinking about what I do. Take this painting here, *The Intermediary*. In it, such considerations of portraiture are thrown into a messy amalgam with ruminations

on what it means to meet the medium. In this case, it is oil paint.

Here the subject of the portrait is partly the self, but mostly it's a portrait of the medium as an entity. Imagine the process of painting; the mind, body and medium interact to produce a result that cannot be predetermined if you allow chance to play a part. I think that art should aspire to be surprising, especially to its creator. In this work, the figure itself is the medium personified; an unknowable shape shifter, who throws up the unforeseen.

This is a painting about the conflicted role one's agency plays in creation. You are simultaneously in control, while being at the mercy of the medium's whims. Paintings are always a compromise, no less so than with oneself. ▣