

# Self-ish Portrait (Chen Hongshou)

by Aimée Anderson

When selecting an artwork I was drawn to the peaceful yet powerful atmosphere that the painting creates. The clothing creates a sense of serenity through its warm colours and lack of harsh details. We are led to think that this artist feels powerful because of their expression; one that suggests they are content with their position, one that neither shows happiness nor sadness but instead something that suggests peace within themselves. The lack of detail around the iris' allows for the viewer to be drawn to the face, specifically the eyes, in which the viewer is forced to make eye contact with this artist, through a painting as a result of the figure having been painted to have such a harsh and direct look towards the viewer. This invites us to spend more time investigating Bracey's artwork but also question the context behind the piece. Alongside this, I was drawn to the lack of a painted outline, an absence of paint that creates its own outline showing the separate areas of the piece. The outline allows us to see the piece as a whole due to it naturally connecting to the background. As well as this, each area individually creates different areas through the use of its negative space. The stance of the figure suggests they are one of wisdom, someone who is willing to fight for what's right. Encouraging calmness, the atmosphere of the piece builds a sense of trust between the figure painted and the viewer.

Naturally the most obvious difference between Bracey's painting and Chen Hongshou's 1635 'Self-portrait' is the way in which they were painted. Hongshou's piece looks as though it was created using inks or watercolours whereas Bracey's piece was created using oil paints, in a way that shows the brush strokes. I think one of the most noticeable differences for me is the eyes, in Bracey's the figure is making direct eye contact that you feel almost obliged to withhold, whereas in Hongshou's it's more like the artist happens to be glancing in your direction but still pulls you into the piece. A quite noticeable difference is the colour of the clothing, with it being a more muted grey in the original portrait. Although this also creates a sense of calm, a sense of peace, it contrasts with the colour that Bracey chose to use, one that creates a sense of calm and peace but also hope and optimism. To me, the artist portraying themselves within a natural environment suggests this is what they care for, what means the most to them, and where their peace originates from, something that is missed in Bracey's work.

Having spent time getting to know these pieces, simply by looking and observing the detail within them, I turned to my trusty friend 'Google' to delve deeper into who the figure is. Born in 1598, Hongshou was born during the Ming dynasty. At age 9 his father passed away. Despite this, his uncle ensured his education remained consistent in which he passed government examinations in 1645. Just a year later he became a Buddhist monk, however this caused internal conflict for him, due to the contrasting Buddhist retirement ideals and Confucian government ideals. Specialising in painting peculiar human figures, landscapes and other natural scenes, I feel Chen's self-portrait is a true reflection of both his work and his beliefs. Personally, I feel that the way in which he painted himself shows that he is set in

what he believes and will go back to the ideals he has set for himself, even when following a specific religion, this is due to the neutral expression laid across his face, as well as the powerful yet relaxed stance he has within the painting. Although I feel that Bracey's painting is also achieving this, I believe that he has created this through the face rather than through the placement of Chen within a natural background and the use of neutral-coloured clothing.

Aimée Anderson is a Lincoln based artist, currently studying Fine Art at the University of Lincoln. Aimée has previously sold animal portraits within a local pub in her hometown, later having one of these in the 'Letchworth Open' at the Broadway Gallery.