

# What is a Portrait?

Kingston Prize

Faces of Canada Education Program

Artist Nancy Douglas

# Portrait Painting

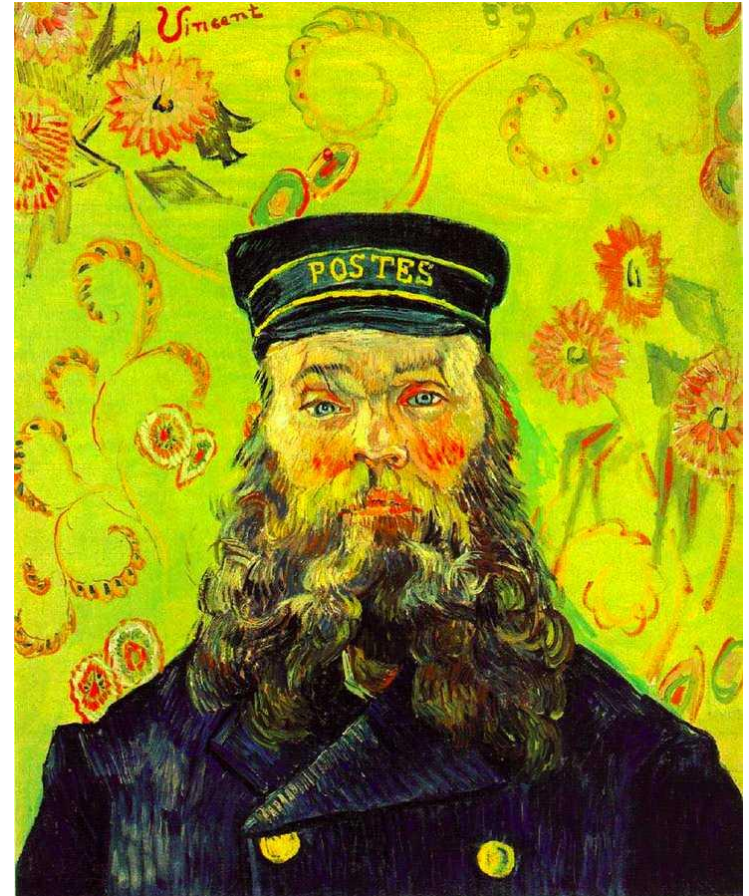
- The term “Portrait Painting” is used to describe an artwork that depicts a human. Often the goal is to represent the person accurately.
- Throughout history portraits were painted of people who could afford to hire an artist (the ‘rich and famous’).
- Portraits often tell a story, either about the person in the painting or about a specific time period.
- The viewer can discover this story and come to understand the person in the painting by careful looking. Clues left by the artist can be analyzed.
- Some portraits contain a mystery that may never be solved.
- Some portraits are more about the artist or an idea than about the ‘sitter’.
- Portraits, like books, can be ‘read’ years after the artist and the person portrayed are gone.

(Artists paint themselves sometimes too!)



**Self-portrait** as an Artist  
Vincent Van Gogh,  
1888, Oil on Canvas

VS.



**Portrait** of Joseph Roudin  
Vincent Van Gogh,  
1889, Oil on Canvas

## Terms to remember!

A **Portrait** is a likeness of a person, made by an artist



A **Symbol**  
represents something else—  
an idea, concept or event

The **Sitter**  
is the person or people  
in the portrait

*Attach* by Paul Robert Turner,  
2007, Oil on Canvas  
2007 Kingston Prize-Honourable Mention

# How to Read a Portrait



## Careful Looking

**Sitter:** Describe the sitter's pose.

**Symbols:** What objects do you see?

**Adjectives:** Describe the sitter.

**Clothing:** What is the sitter wearing?

**Medium:** How was the portrait made?

**Setting:** Where is the sitter?

## Analyzing Clues

**Sitter:** Who is the sitter?

**Symbols:** What do the objects tell us?

**Artist:** Who painted the portrait?

**Date:** When was it made?

**History:** What was happening at that time?

**Biography:** What is the sitter's life story?

# More Clues:

- How does the portrait make you feel?
- What colours are used?
- What is the sitter doing?
- What emotions does the sitter display?
- How is the sitter placed in the portrait?
- Are symbols/objects used to describe the sitter?
- What do you think the artist is telling us?

# Analyzing a Portrait

Using the handout, see what you can discover.

The portraits will appear twice-

- *without* the artist's statement. This is your chance to look for clues, and
- *with* the artist's statement. The artist reveals what they were thinking.

An artist statement gives insight into the artist's intentions.

Title: Personal Surveillance  
Artist: Andrew Valko,  
Home: Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Media: Acrylic on Canvas  
2009 Winner Kingston Prize





## **Artist Statement:**

For some time I have been exploring, in my work, the relationship between people and today's technology and how the use of computers, digital cameras, camcorders, and cell phones has changed the way people communicate with each other and how they look at themselves and the world around them.

**Andrew Valko**





Title: Not Monday but Tuesday  
Artist: Joe Coffey  
Home: Victoria, British Columbia  
Media: Oil on canvas  
2015 Honourable Mention,  
Kingston Prize

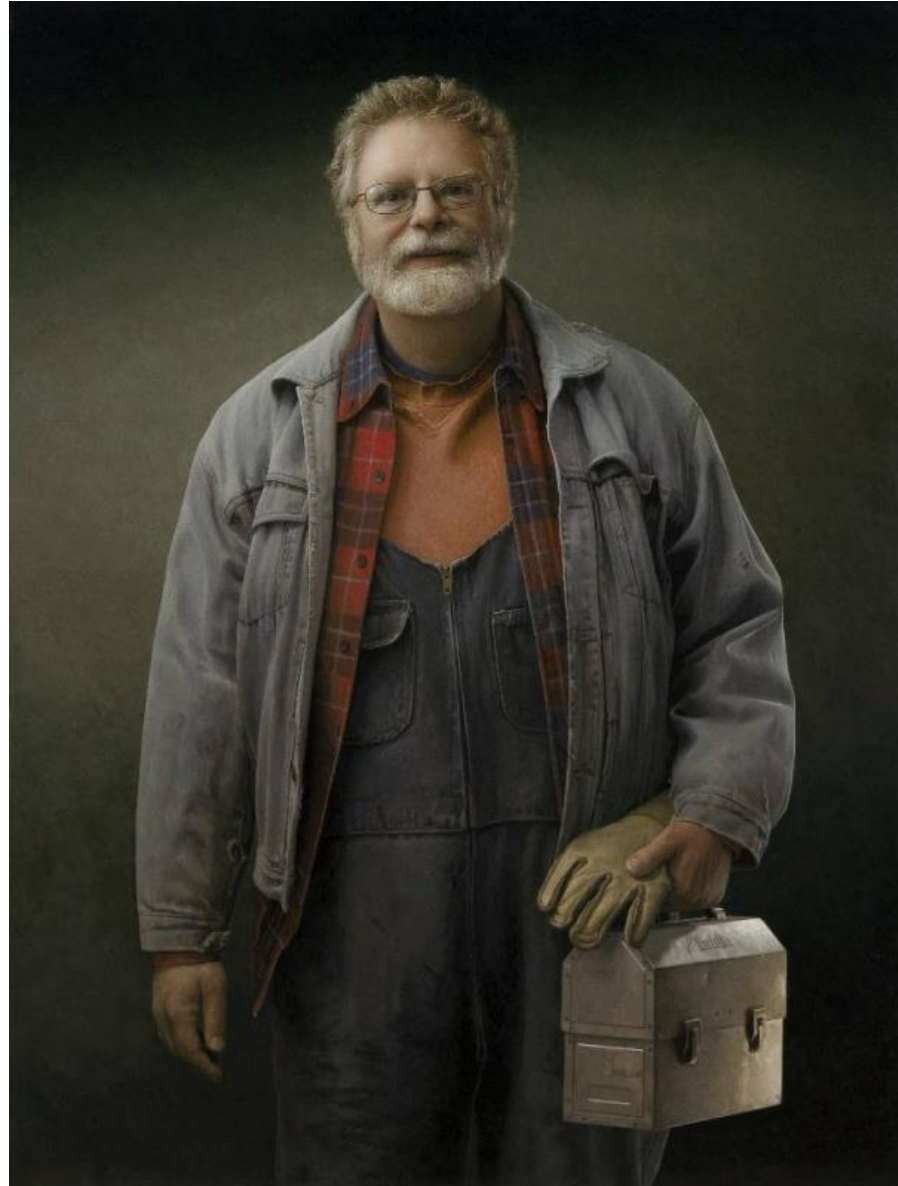


### **Artist Statement:**

I don't know why a particular face fascinates me. When Colin plays his harpsichord any concern with the physical world drains from his features and his face reminds me of something I might see perched in the arches of a basilica, a biblical face. I have known Colin for years like I have known this expression for years and I became fascinated with it, perhaps because it evoked something in my memory?

**Joe Coffey**

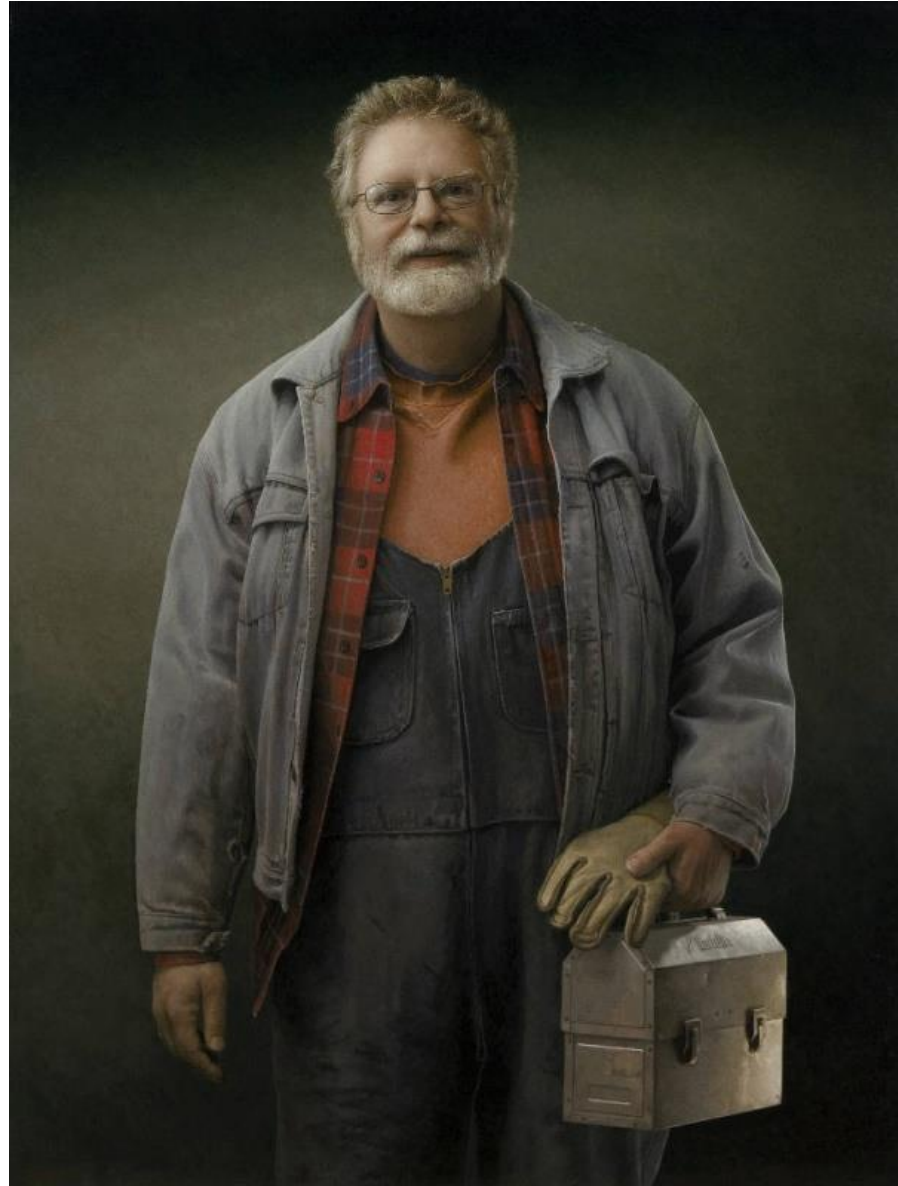
Title: Aladdin  
Artist: Richard Davis  
Home: LaHave, Nova Scotia  
Media: Oil over tempera  
emulsion on honeycomb panel



## **Artist Statement:**

This is a portrait of a friend, Nigel Field, a Parks Department employee for the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia. It shows him as he is dressed for work, complete with work gloves and lunch pail (with Aladdin embossed on it, the source of the painting's title). The Painting is essentially realist in intent, with no attempt to gloss. The crooked stance, slight smile and inquisitive look is typically Nigel. An underlying element, however, might be implied from the painting, the dignity of work and the nobility of the working man.

**Richard Davis**



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During a Prize year: “30 Days Has September”  
Is an exciting way to begin your day! A new finalist is revealed each day of the month! Use what you’ve learned about *Looking* and *Analyzing* with each day’s reveal!

Or view Kingston Prize portraits from year’s past!