

Intimacy

Zoe Bray

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University of Nevada, Reno

Essay by Rachel Armstrong, Curator

Intimacy is a complicated notion. The portrayal of intimate scenes more so. Zoe Bray's paintings relate with a sensitivity and subtlety that lay the viewer to search for depth. It is often in our moments of solitude that we are able to confront ourselves and recognize our own humanity, and in lieu of the tradition of the solitary artist, it is quite another thing to be left alone with another person, and yet this is the essence of Bray's work. This humanity becomes the vehicle through which we can begin to understand one another.

As she sits with her models for hours on end, often eye-to-eye, Bray translates her impressions into quiet and subtle the viewer to follow her into her exchanges with the sitter. The process is a type of communion, a prolonged engagement. "We're working at something together," Bray says, each one collaborating to create the piece. The focus of her attention leads the viewer to the true life of her subjects, but there is an even greater depth to Bray's audience.

*Art has historically played the role of presenting models for how individuals in societies should and should not act, what they should be and how they should present themselves. Bray's paintings not only reference this artistic and anthropological history, but in addition act as an active window into the life of an individual. Each piece is a moment caught, a still frame of a conversation, one page of a memoir. When we are confronted, face to face with an image of a person, our reaction should be a general reminder of the subject in which our notion of individual identity is rooted in our visual perceptions. In *Body/Space* Matthew's discussion of art and anthropology also notes that "on an intuitive level, one feels that human figures made by the artist of a society tell us something about themselves... something of a people's ideas of what it means to be a human being. These are renderings of what is, not what should be. They are meant to, as Bray puts it, "evolve the person and life as it is, slowly and without artifice, and still with beauty".*

The efficacy of intelligent self-expression has forced many artists away from their primary historical roles, roles that are vitally important to the health of our societies. These are the roles of artist, historian, preserver and purveyor of culture, psychological and sociological knowledge, visionary. These essential positions are what define us. It is through these means that we know who we are and where we have been, and find insight into our future.

Portraiture is intrinsically the intersection of history, biography, and artistic process. In each of her paintings, Bray explores a moment, a feeling, a truth that socially becomes history. Each is a moment just, but it is from such as these that our past and reaction is constructed. It is in these interferences that anthropology, too, finds its purpose. By valuing the humanity, the unconscious, and the immediately through which we consistently move, these images lead the psyche offbeat the individual and the culture. In this way, Bray's references to traditional portrait-painting activities with her interest in "telling stories about the human condition".



Zoe Bray painting the artist from her knowledge after hours at home in 2012



The Beginning of the End, from her knowledge after hours at home in 2012

Zoe Bray

Realist Artist and Social Anthropologist

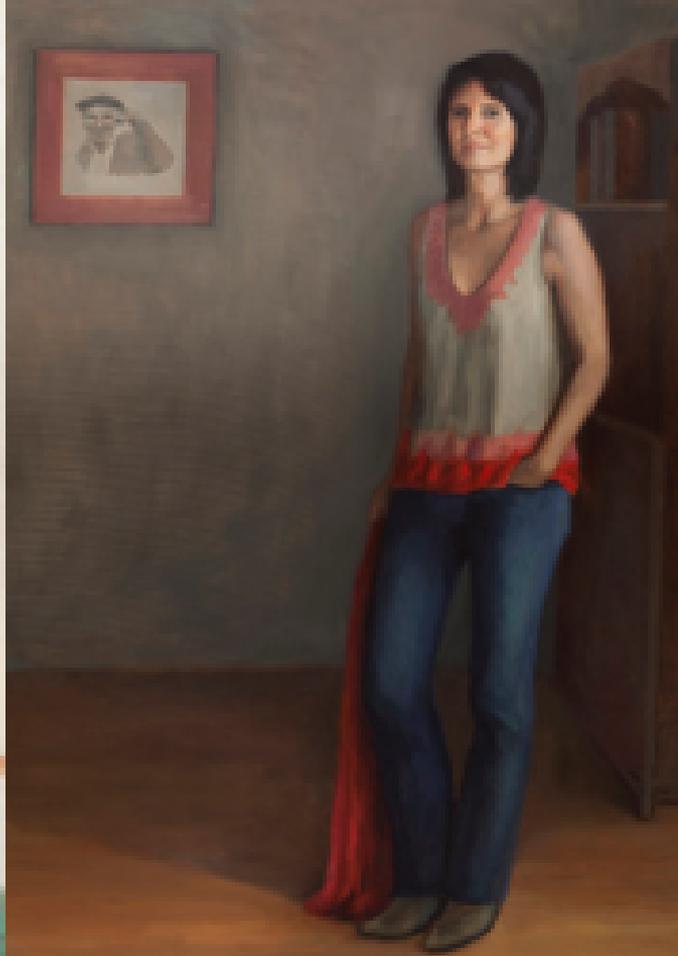
Zoe Bray is an artist and a social anthropologist from Europe, working in the realist and naturalist tradition. She paints in oils directly from life. Her work can be found in public and private collections in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, Brazil and the USA.

Website: www.zoebroy.net

Blog: zoebroynew.blogspot.com



Portrait of an Italian woman in Florence, oil on canvas, 2018, 2020



Portrait of Maria Louisa Labouliery, owner of J's restaurant in Miami, oil on canvas, 2010, 2012



Ulrich Lassnig, *Man in a Light Shirt*, oil on canvas, 47x33, 2010



Portrait of an Italian and rocking chair, oil on canvas, 31x43, 2008



Portrait of Izan Antzokolaga, artist, oil on canvas, 20x21, 2012



Marie Jauregui, oil on canvas, 20x21, 2012



Portrait of Marcos Rodriguez, oil on canvas, 2008



Chloroform, oil on canvas, 2007



Portrait of a woman artist in Florence,
oil on canvas, 41x68, 2020



John, an artist in Florence, oil on canvas, 20x24, 2024



Zoe Bray paints Intimacy

Identity is central to the work of Zoe Bray, who recently moved to Nevada from Europe to take on a position as assistant professor at UNR's Center for Basque Studies, where she researches and teaches on Art and Politics. Bray paints her subjects directly from life, seeking to go beyond surface appearance and representation to grasp their beauty, spirituality and psychology. Amongst the portraits on show are some notable figures of contemporary Basque culture, including the sculptor Xabier Euzkaterena, famed in the American West for his creation of the Basque National Monument to the Sheepherder, located at the foot of the Peavine Hills north of Reno. Other individuals Bray painted in different settings, in the United States and in Europe, some in the intimacy of their homes and some in her studio. Most recent, is the portrait of Reno-based contemporary artist Joan Arribasoloaga, famed for her fantastical sculptures relating to gaming and gambling.

Bray comes to Nevada by a roundabout way. Born in Paris, she has lived in the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Mexico and Germany. Just before Nevada, she spent a year between London, the Basque Country, and Berlin where she had her painting studio. This peripatetic life has led Bray to identify with a variety of cultures beyond her French and British citizenship and to become fluent in various languages. After obtaining an

MA in Social Anthropology from the University of Edinburgh and a PhD in Social and Political Sciences from the European University Institute in Florence, Bray trained as a painter, following the tradition of etching that also inspired many early 20th century American painters, notably John Singer Sargent and Cecilia Beaux, but which has largely been lost since. She has also worked with the internationally acclaimed realist painters Antonio Lopez Garcia and Guillermo Muñoz Viera in Spain.

Bray stands out for her unusual combination of ethnography and art. In her quest for deep connection with her subjects, she acknowledges a debt to the traditions of painting, going back to the grace and sensitive delineation of form of the Florentine Renaissance artists. The portraits of Spanish 18th century painter Diego de Velázquez, and especially his depictions of individual members of the Royal Court, have also inspired Bray in her own approach to portraiture, as a frank face to face with her subjects. Many of her



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portraits have the quality of engaging directly with her audience as the subject's eyes attract those of the viewer. Her sympathetic realism also links her work with that of the American Alice Neel, whose own approach to painting was ethnographic, born out of a desire to directly experience and evoke human life in all its rawness. Beyond this, art for Bray is a continuous search for beauty, all the while grounded and in touch with real life and real people.

Essay by Christian Trause, PhD



Zoe Bray painting the artist Fleur de Dibart in Florence, 2009

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Intimacy

Zoe Bray

Curated by Rachel Armstrong

Exhibition: January 21 - February 14, 2015

Artwork open: January 21, 2015 10am - 6pm
 (with a few exceptions - see website for details)
 Reception to follow - Shannon Contemporary

The installation and programming for the Shannon Contemporary Gallery is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts through the University of Nevada, Reno and the University of Nevada, Reno's National Endowment of the University of Nevada, Reno. University of Nevada, Reno's College of Liberal Arts, Department of Art, the Graduate Student Association, and Friends of Shannon Contemporary Gallery.

Zoe Bray holds UNR's College of Liberal Arts for its support through a Faculty and Creative Activities Research and a recent Faculty Research Award in 2014.

Graphic Design by Ryan Edgar Roberts

Photography by Bruce Burton, Miranda Segreoni,
 and Zoe Bray's studio

