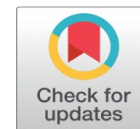


## DR. YASHODHAR MATHPAL'S PORTRAIT AS A DOCUMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Whenever we look at an artwork, we often don't know about what the difference is in between, seeing and observing. We often perceive the overall effect created by that work of art, without noticing the details. Off course, the effect created by that artwork in total plays an important part in evoking both positive and negative emotions. But there are few images which speak to the mind and inner self within minutes or seconds. In Visual Art the artists have been recording, incidents, ideas, and messages. The reason why it has been labelled for documenting, illustrating and narrative qualities. There is no possible way in which we understand a work of art through magic. We cannot imagine reading novel/ book just by looking at its cover. With the same note we should conclude that every painting has some hidden message to it. Which cannot be seen all at once, unless and until if one tries to look. By looking I mean observing carefully and with enough curiosity, to understand the characters and the story that it narrates. There can be no ascertain way where we see that certain paintings affect us deeply while others leave us cold, no criteria for a painting as to why it becomes a famous work of art, later known as a masterpiece to the world.

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“Look at the paintings, if you want to write well”  
-Ernest Hemingway.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although portraits in itself are not a Universal concept, but the expressive character can be found in each and every facial anatomy of a person. While we assert this expressive character, we see that's portraits have been documenting a person's life over the time. Stylistic changes that art has gone through over the centuries, but the act of perceiving reality that the artist tries to express continue over the years.

### 2 PORTRAITS AS A DOCUMENT

'Documents', give us insights into the transformation of a civilization, culture, the growth and sometimes it helps us to reconstruct the history of a person through these Portraits even if there is no written material available to us or even if available might be written in some unknown language.



When we talk of **Portraits as a Document**, while exploring the self-portraits of Dr. Yashodhar Mathpal. I perceived that exploring more and more of his self-portraits did change my idea to interpret the same image over considerable time. I know I cannot go back in history to relive the time when these portraits were produced: but all I have is these documented portraits which reflect his life journey with changing interpretations of it. In a certain way when I look at them, I might feel that I am in the same time period as I relive the moments through the psychoanalytical review of his self-portraits. We all have read and seen in the history of arts that certain paintings are more relevant to us than to others. Only our observation and keen understanding can help us understand the complexity of the painting, that is where we must re-interpret each time, we look at the self-portrait.



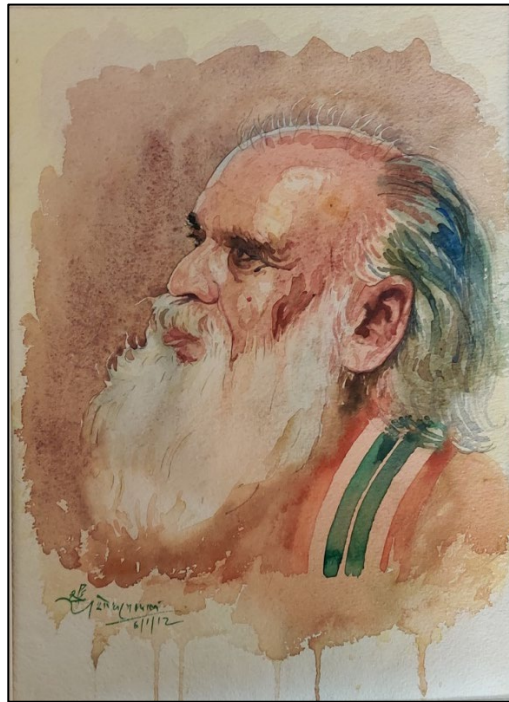
**Figure 1** The artist with his self-portrait in his studio

That is where 'Contextualization' is considered a crucial term to understand how images are created. The portrait is unreadable outside its historical, emotional, and social circumstances. This also include the attitude of the viewer towards the author-i.e., the artist. The artist here is the author of his own autobiography that he paints through these self-portraits. We have read and seen it in the history of arts, that the artists paint their self-portraits to capture themselves, identity, self-impression, thereby increasing self-awareness by increasing their perceptions about their visual characteristics. This activity allows the therapeutic aspect of self-expression to the artist. These self-portraits appeal towards personal expression rather than just their physical features. Artist enjoys being his real self rather than thinking about others and their concepts. The individual who self- scrutinizes himself/ herself, as artist has no need of motivation and ideas because the already have the ideas all they have to do is to express to them. Self-portraits when documenting life of the artist are merely a reflection of his inner self. To put these personal real life experiences at this level to showcase them through self-portraits and the portraits of the loved one's is more significant than to write about them. That is where the artistic 'genius' comes into action. That is when the artist plays a

role of author documenting his life through the portraits and self-portraits. [Cavallaro \(2000\)](#),

As a reader of this visual book, the portraits are merely a product of interpretation that I draw from the vision of the artist himself. Interpretation must definitely be added but should never be conclusive. Any artwork in the world does not have a single meaning to it, it rather offers vast signs and galaxies that can be followed in many directions. The term 'genius' describes a person who has exceptionally intellectual and imaginative powers. The artist has had the same characteristics that qualify him as a genius being on this planet. Coming from the pre-historic to contemporary time artist being radically the same. Aimed to express on a deeper level as he communicates his ideas and emotions through images. A visual documentation through paintings. [Funch \(1997\)](#)

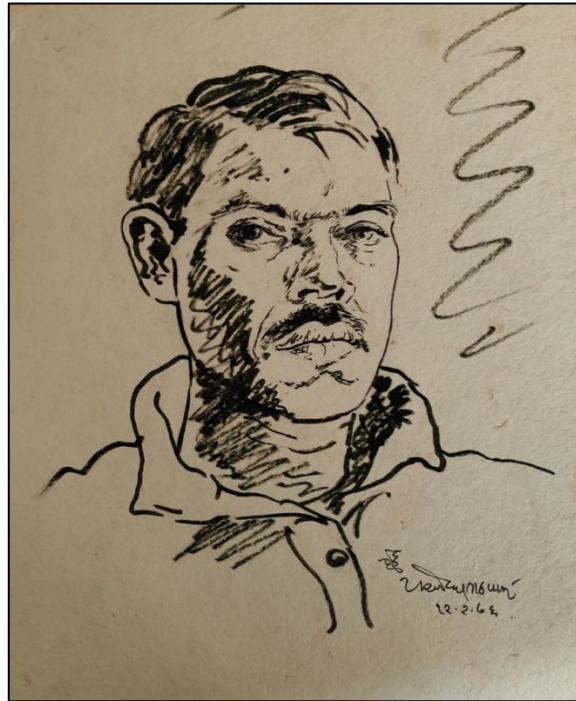
The artist who develops flexibility towards the attitudes has more freedom in order to carry forward his/her ideas. Artist Dr. Yashodhar Mathpal has used his diverse nature to accept the flexibility of each medium thereby creating his self-portraits and portraits from both two-dimensional to three-dimensional forms. Making a choice of using different mediums combined effectively to offer his viewers to develop a sense of adventure to understand and develop sense with his self-portraits and portraits. Each work of art has a message to the contrasting characters of the artist if painted or casted. [Myers \(1994\)](#)



**Figure 2** Self- Portrait of the artist in watercolor

While writing this a question clicks my mind. Does the use of variety of materials change the meaning of how we look at a work of art? Of course, it highlights the artist genius to combine mediums to find a unique way in which he tries to express himself. Combining new ideas and material could possibly be a satisfying means to express himself. As a researcher I must dwell into the environment in which the artist himself lives to get the firsthand experience of these self-portraits that he created. Experience the changing patterns in his life, learn from

them, and discuss it with him for a better interpretation of his artwork. [Pollock \(2013\)](#)



**Figure 3** Self-portrait of the artist in ink

Art as being interpreted is a way of revelation, where through the access of medium-i.e., paint, drawing, sculpture the artist transcends the existence of the artwork. These techniques encourage the artist to express his intuitive ideas, the mental image that he creates in his mind. There might be times when the artist might not know about his source of inspiration. There could be failures in an attempt to try to express his mental image(vision). Possibly times when he would contemplate his own work. [Sharma \(1944\)](#), [Wilson \(1981\)](#)

### 3. CONCLUSION

Revelation of a portrait or self-portrait is not a show to another world, it is the actual experience through which the artist himself goes while he paints then and looks at them after years passed by. Once the experience has been felt by the artist, he knows that the viewer might experience the same as it reaches through communication. The artist has this power where he might heal his neurosis on his own, by indulging himself into another artwork. This absolute integration of the artist and himself, in the process of self-portraits is another indispensable quality of portrait painting. A truly integrated self-portrait can give rise to the artist's peak experience while he paints it, also with viewer genuinely. The total effect of portrait might not necessarily show up in the first encounter. At times instantly and at times gradually, depending upon perception of the onlooker. Likely to be said that expression and feeling go hand in hand. In order to express oneself, the artist must feel. The artist had the opportunity to comprehend his story through his recreated self-portraits. In other words, he was able to give a new dimension to his image and form of documenting his life with the available that he was able to collect from the past. The documentation of few of his self-portraits have been done to record the

important events. Artists from the history experienced many wars and tragedies but not many of them painted them. Instead of copying the disasters recreate them in a positive manner that is the power of art. This is how an artist expressed his life through the documentation of his self-portraits and the portraits of the loved one's.

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