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Few subjects are as compelling in art as the human form, especially the body's signature, defining feature; the face. Egyptian pharaohs, medieval madonnas, Renaissance burghers, Andy Warhol's Hollywood icons, photo-booth headshots and contemporary portraits by the score—in art, depictions of the human face are immortal. No matter what art's current fashion, artists and viewers always seem to be moved by images of fellow members of the family of man.

"The face is the most intimate subject," notes Jim Torok, a Brooklyn-based painter of tiny portraits (many

Teun Hocks, "Untitled (Man on Chandelier)," 2003, oil on silver print, 58 1/4" x 47".

measure four by five inches) who savors the "immediacy" of the genre. "People enjoy looking into other people's faces," adds Richard Piloco, who also paints in a realist mode. "There's a certain genetic response to that kind of 'face time'; we feel connected to others on the most basic level."

These days, in many precincts of the art world, artists are revisiting the portrait—on canvas, in photographs or in photo-based, mixed-media works. Against this backdrop, in a photo-dominated, digital age, the painted human form often can feel more hand-crafted and more intriguing than ever. "What's more interesting than a face, especially one's own?" Torok asks.

Similarly, German artist Till Freiwald observes, "A face is something everyone can decode and read." Torok, Freiwald and Piloco take different approaches to making portraits. So do Canadian Paul Fenniak and Dutch-born artist Teun Hocks. Directly or indirectly, they all have investigated the thematic and technical scope of portraiture through inventive techniques and styles.

Torok first studied art in Indiana before doing graduate studies at Brooklyn College, where famed American realist painter Philip Pearlstein served as his faculty adviser. Over time, Torok recalls, he found himself "reinventing certain techniques" (like letting white undercoats show through more transparent, watery layers of color) as he formulated the working methods that led to his



Teun Hocks, "Untitled (Man at Waterfall)," 2003, oil on silver print, 55 3/4" x 50 1/2".



Jim Torok, "Julie Anderson," 1999, oil on archival polymer on wood, 5" x 4".