

FOREWORD

Without photojournalists, our insights into much of humanity would be severely limited to the paths and vistas of our own lives. While pictorial backgrounds are essential for context in journalists' photos, I chose to focus almost exclusively on the subjects' faces in the oil sketches which comprise this 'artist's book.' Facial expressions have always drawn me in, and I've always drawn them.

Very early on I learned to interpret my mother's expressions as I first caught them in the morning, as a hint of what the day might hold for me. I think many children learn to do this.

We all know faces speak, even silently. A fleeting expression can convey complex, profound feelings; a long life story can be abbreviated in and around the eyes; a smile can be genuine or false. Because expressions can reveal or hide, they are not always easy to read. Their meaning can even differ somewhat from culture to culture. Yet, with all their limitations, facial expressions are, to me, the most precious glimpse we have into the emotions of others.

In drawing or painting faces I nearly always start with the eyes, and by the time I feel I've begun to catch their expression I've simultaneously begun to fall in love with my subjects, no matter how distracted or angry or joyful their expressions.

My sketches are made of paper, graphite, pigment and medium; yet the connection I feel with the paintings, though they are hardly flesh and blood, makes me think of neurological phenomena scientists observe between two living persons.

When two humans look deeply into each other's eyes, oxytocin (in simplest terms, the nurturing hormone) is often produced in both parties—in the course of my work, oxytocin can only be produced in me, yet the sensation is that I am also being nurtured somehow by the image I'm creating.

And then there are “mirror neurons.” Through brain scans of one person observing another who is performing an action, neuroscientists have learned that a mirror neuronal network causes neurons to fire in the same brain regions of both the observer and the observed. Science is learning how mirror neurons aid humans and other primates in acquiring skills through imitation.

Even more meaningful to me, mirror neurons can cause us to simulate the facial expressions we observe, and to experience similar emotions. As I look at a journalist’s photo and attempt to capture the expression of her human subject, I am often aware that my own facial muscles are mimicking the tautness or relaxation in the subject’s face. As my expression reflects his or hers, I can’t help but identify with that person. I’d like to think there are many routes to empathy. I believe our brains are wired to help us find them.

My hope is that these few sketches might encourage the viewer to look deeply enough into these faces I’ve loved to allow them to convey something personal and singular.