



Anne Harris: Thirty-nine Eyelids
January 19 - February 29, 2020

The Eyelid as Metaphor

by Anne Harris

I had a break-through in my painting when I began thinking metaphorically. It started with a vein in a forehead, then the realization that everything could be vascular. So tendrils of hair became capillary, as did tendrils of light, stripes in a shirt were arterial, a scrunchie hairband a thrombosis. This was a key for me to unlocking invention.

Since then, I know I'm rolling when I'm painting inside a metaphor. The eyelid has been a favorite for many years. After all, what is an eyelid? A beautiful surface that is also visceral, a flap of skin, a membrane—it's fragile, yet designed to protect something even more so. It's formless, taking its shape from the thing it covers. When closed, dry covering wet, I imagine the fluid beneath compressing, sliding downward. It functions as opaque but is translucent from the inside, light glowing through, and transparent from the outside, tiny blood vessels on view just under the surface. Stare at a shut eyelid and see pure passivity; but suddenly open—we're shocked.

I want my paintings to function like an eyelid, veering from dry to wet, inside to outside, opaque to transparent, form to formless, mute to aggressive, space curved outward toward the viewer, held in by fragile surface tension, the picture plane as membrane, the entire painting an eyelid.

I've wished that I could paint the world's best eyelids. For me, *Ginevra de' Benci* holds that title. Regardless, I am at my most content when painting the skin and flesh that covers and surrounds eyes. I see this as metaphorically functioning in many of the paintings I love. Take Ginevra's neighbor, Van der Weyden's *Portrait of a Lady*. The space is like a lens, shallow pressurized depth pushing against a curve. Paint, skin, and of course her depicted head dress, are veils drawn over emotion, obscuring inner life while still implying its existence. Everything arches forward, the bell of her hands, her forehead, chest, her bowed mouth, the plane behind her, all of it held in check by her inward gaze.

I am mesmerized by work that floats within this realm of transition and contradiction. Connected to human presence, it exists beyond subject matter. I've had this same swelling hypnotic experience in front of, among others, Goya and Ad Reinhardt, early Brice Marden, Milton Resnick, Duccio, and Dieric Bout's *Mater Dolorosa*, which I visit weekly. She has, I believe, the saddest eyelids ever painted.

This essay, "The Eyelid as Metaphor," was originally written for The Tilted Arc and then republished by The Finch. Below are links to the essay online.

<http://www.tilted-arc.com/2015/04/02/anne-harris-eyelid-as-metaphor/>

<http://thefinch.net/2016/07/16/anne-harris-the-eyelid-as-metaphor/>



Portrait (Pigtails), 2019, oil on panel, 12 x 12"



Portrait (Someone), 2019, oil on muslin mounted on panel, 12 x 12"

On Self-perception

Text by Anne Harris for *Anne Harris: The Mind's I*, Julius Caesar Gallery, Chicago, IL, 2012

There's a point of recognition, that moment in the distance when someone we know transforms from anonymous to recognizable. Picasso observes that Giacometti paints his brother Diego at that exact moment. It's one thing we'll never know about ourselves, the wholeness of what makes us known to others. Although I've been painting and drawing what are essentially self-portraits for thirty years, I still don't know what I look like. I'm intimately familiar with my parts, but my whole is an imagined assemblage. This has given me great freedom to redesign myself, to discard likeness as a requirement, to contemplate what it means to look out from inside the container of my own skin, at my own reflection trying to look back in. This allows me to get down to the business of finding places where scrutiny and invention mesh.



Portrait, 2019, oil on panel, 12 x 12"



Portrait (Blonde), 2003, oil on linen, 12 x 12"

Artist Bio

Anne Harris has been painting slowly, and drawing quickly, variants of self-portraiture for the last thirty years. She has exhibited at venues ranging from Alexandre Gallery (NYC), DC Moore Gallery (NYC) and Nielsen Gallery (Boston), to the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institute, The Portland Museum of Art, the California Center for Contemporary Art and the North Dakota Museum of Art. Her work is in such public collections as The Fogg Museum at Harvard, The Yale University Art Gallery and The New York Public Library. Grants and awards received include a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship and an NEA Individual Artists Fellowship.

Harris teaches at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She heads the Riverside Art Center's Exhibition Committee and has curated numerous exhibitions there. She is also the originator of *The Mind's I*—a traveling expanding drawing conversation about the universality and malleability of self-perception and drawing. This project began at Julius Caesar Gallery in Chicago (2012) and most recently took place at Espacio Andrea Brunson in Santiago, Chile (August 2019).



Portrait (Gold Hair), 2019, (detail), oil on panel, 16 x 12"

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**Front Cover: Portrait (Gold Hair), 2019, (detail), oil on panel, 16 x 12"*

**Back Cover: Portrait (Purple Girl), 2019, oil on panel, 11 x 14"*

Design by Nicole Gardner

