

October 2012

# *art* MATTERS



***"Keith"***

***"Keith"*** is one of the striking images on display in the exhibition **"Peter Miraglia – Portraits"**, showing at Saint Joseph's University Art Gallery from October 1 through November 2.

# ***Photographic portraitist par excellence***

***Burton Wasserman***

Across the centuries, the special area of human portraiture, whether historic or contemporary, continues to be a source of endless fascination for visitors to art exhibitions

Like a magnet attracting iron filings, the esthetically expressive sight of a living face arouses and captures the interest and curiosity of spectators. With a boundless desire to explore beneath the outer surface, they seek to identify with the inner being and psychological basis driving the person represented in a moving work of art.

All of these facts are evident in the current solo exhibition of **Portraits by Peter Miraglia**, on view this month of October in Philadelphia. They are installed inside the St. Joseph's University Art Gallery in Merion Hall just off of City Line Ave, 376 North Latches Lane, Merion Station, PA.

For the past several years, Miraglia has been exhibiting portraits made earlier on trips to Africa and India. Since returning to his home and studio in Philadelphia, he has been making new pictures of individuals living in his immediate domestic surroundings. Residents of the region might recognize them as people they have encountered at work, in church, or when they go shopping for food or gasoline. Clearly, the focus is local and highly diversified with respect to age, gender, neighborhood, vocation and station in life.

The eyes in the selection called **"Keith"** are quite far apart from each other. They counterpoint the umber colored skin, braided dread-locks and soft, rose-toned lips of a man staring straight-on, at you. Caught in the vise-grip of his gaze, you feel his sense of iron-will and unusual capacity for sustained concentration. Though the picture undoubtedly details the features of its subject, you can't help wondering how much it might also reveal characteristics of the artist who made it.

Within the picture titled “Elizabeth”, the face of a woman asserts her existence as a living presence. With absolute insistence, her appearance demands that you know she is not a meaningless envelope of remains left behind haphazardly in the midst of some forgotten yesterdays. Instead, she is alive here and now, vigorously involved with the challenges and the demands of her world.



***“Elizabeth”***

The view of a young boy called “**Wolfgang**” doesn’t document some esoteric point of view. Unlike an advertising illustration, it isn’t trying to sell you something. Instead, it illuminates the innocence of childhood with unabashed grace, directness and surprise. Neither pretense nor phantasy mar its open-eyed look of curiosity and puzzlement.



**“Wolfgang”**



***Phaedra***” is a close-up study of someone with nerve, muscle, tenderness and the patient strength to endure, no matter how difficult her circumstances might be. The face has been composed with the model situated close to the framing edges of the overall image. The basic pictorial ingredients of sharp and blurred focus, light, shade and the tilt of the head have all been adroitly managed with just the right combination of no-nonsense know-how and exceptionally sensitive thoughtfulness.



***“Phaedra”***

Few artists in the region of the Delaware Valley have pursued portraiture with all the concentrated commitment, artistic consistency and sheer philosophical integrity of Peter Miraglia. His honesty of approach and remarkable technical virtuosity are absolutely second to none. As an amazingly gifted expert in his chosen genre, he searches for and defines the complexity and mystery of the human face in passages of brilliantly nuanced color, light and texture. Together, they convey a tangible measure of physical solidity, flashes of intuitive insight and extraordinarily expressive fluidity.



***“Caitlin”***

In the pursuit of his *oeuvre*, Miraglia makes expert use of posing and lighting the people he sets up in front of his camera. In a similar way, he employs such techniques as cropping and enlarging to effect a resonance of eloquent drama. Employing these measures with exquisite control, he brings images into existence that are never obvious, corny or tiresome.

Avoiding approaches that are either trite or stereotypical, he structures deeply moving pictures of completely credible human beings. They stay attached to the receptive memory of your eyesight long after you leave the gallery where they were initially installed and observed.



***“Lance”***

Invariably, the faces you find in these photographs remind you of people you’ve met and know from past experience. Simultaneously, they each also manifest a distinctiveness that lends authenticity and uniqueness to their being.

The differences seen in the many photographs on view are truly staggering. They reminded me of the wide assortment of facial types you see on the many figures Michelangelo brought together in his paintings on the ceiling and altar wall of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The more you take note of this consideration, the more you appreciate the vast range of individual variation there is in the appearance of living people everywhere.

Unlike simplistic snap-shots, the photographs of Peter Miraglia are fascinating stories without words. Rich with artistic appeal, they speak in the language of design to unlock additional details filed away in the recesses of your brain. There, they kindle profoundly moving insights into appreciating the meaning and worth of an ever-present human condition.