



SERENDIPIA

Kosmos – Polykosmos – Psykokosmos

THE BEAUTY AND THE TRUTH

Lars Physant as a portrait painter

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I have never portrayed a person that I haven't had a certain liking for. My aim is actually quite the opposite of projecting my own political and moral beliefs into the face of another human being. This is not my intention at all. I want to establish a complex situation that brings me and the work of art to another place. Respect, I think, is the essence of my approach. Not necessarily love or affection for the sitter, but always respect. As Jacques-Louis David and later his pupil, Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, put it: 'Voir beau et juste.' Do not sacrifice the truth on the altar of beauty, and do not sacrifice the beauty on the altar of truth but seek to find a combination of the two opposites in one single work.

To sit for Lars Physant is an intense and heartwarming experience but it is also an experience with a touch of ritual solemnity. Both as a person and as an artist does Lars Physant possess a great sensitivity that manifests itself in a sincerely felt wish to come close to his sitters. And then it is up to the sitter to be willing – and bold enough – to open up to him in a similar way. In the case of Lars Physant it is not hard to open up as a sitter and sharing honestly with him the way you look – on the outside as well as on the inside – and allow what to most people is an unfamiliar and awkward situation to be in, where every little wrinkle, pimple, scar and blemish is being studied and analyzed for hours.

As an art historian specialized in portraiture I have posed for several portraits – be they painted, drawn, sculpted or photographic – and it is nothing new that portrait artists do everything they can to make the sitters show their feelings as freely as possible in order to create a work of art that is not only a clinical copy of some outer traits but ideally contains traces of the sitter's inner life as well. What is different – and can be quite surprising in the beginning – is the fact that Lars Physant during the sittings opens up for his own feelings just as freely as he hopes his sitters do. It is clearly a moving and demanding process for him totally to surrender himself to the universe of another person and, so to speak, for a while carry the joys and the sorrows of this person on his shoulders and transform all these impressions to one single expression on paper or canvas.

The many times I posed for Lars Physant I found that these mental efforts of his bring about a situation, where you as a sitter are not afraid to let go of the reins and hand them over to him because you feel confident that he is going to control the process. During a particular sitting Lars Physant became so overcome by the moment when he felt he had 'caught' me on paper that his eyes filled with tears. It was an intense moment – not just for him but certainly for me, too. It was the first time, I guess, that I experienced and understood the inner drama of art. The fact that creating art is a veritable battle that involves unspoken and indefinable expectations, and where the fear of disappointing your own as well as other people's expectations is enormous.

The first time my model sits for me I am drawing. Usually there is a period of about twenty minutes where it is a kind of mirroring, where I see myself on the paper, although I am drawing the other

person, simply because I don't sense the other person yet. But then this wonderful moment comes when I no longer relate to myself but to the model. It is a magical moment. It is beyond my control when it occurs, and if it doesn't occur I have failed. This has happened a couple of times but otherwise I am happy to say that I am nearly always able to see and feel my sitter during our first encounter. I have always regarded the process of creating a portrait as a unique opportunity to get close to another person. I don't think that you can get too close to your sitters. I don't think that we can ever get too close to each other. For the brief moment we are here we are supposed to get to know each other. Not only in the particular situation of making a portrait, but in general. During the small span of years that I am here, that I am me, the whole idea is certainly not to create distance. On the contrary.

Lars Physant's struggle with and against his medium is sublimely illustrated in his suite of self-portraits which were inspired by composer Carl Nielsen's four temperaments (Symphony No. 2, Opus 16, first performance 1902). Lars Physant has depicted himself in sixteen self-portraits divided up into four groups that both in their colors and through the artist's facial features symbolize Nielsen's four temperaments: the choleric, the phlegmatic, the melancholic and the sanguine temperament. As to the symbolic use of color, the choleric temperament is represented by the heated yellow color, the phlegmatic temperament by the green color of hope, the melancholic temperament by the blue color of sadness, and the sanguine temperament by a bright red color.

In addition we have Lars Physant's impressive achievement of having depicted himself in nothing less than sixteen lifelike self-portraits – all with various facial expressions and moods. In no other work it is so obvious how far Lars Physant will go to reach the core of his art. Here all the aspects of portrait painting – the model, the artist and the beholder – are united in one battle which makes the overall impression all the more powerful. In the suite of self-portraits Lars Physant has played the role of the judge as well as the defendant, the hunter as well as the prey – he has surrendered himself not only to the mercy of the public but very much to his own mercy as well. This display of courage has resulted in a very fine piece of art, and it has also shown how far Lars Physant is willing to go to reach the very essence of his creative work. It is the same courage that makes him able to open up to his sitter just as much as he wishes the sitter to open up to him. Thus the painter and the sitter – the observer and the observed – are two sides of the same coin.

It is frustrating when my models can't find the time to sit for me, or if they only have time for a few sittings. It generates a kind of negative intensity, a kind of extra adrenalin, when I don't feel there is time enough to get under the skin of the person that I am going to portray. Many years ago I agreed to paint the girlfriend of a friend of a friend. It was supposed to be at surprise and I don't really know why I agreed to do the job when I didn't have the opportunity to meet her, for that picture should never have been made. When I later met my model it was an awful experience because the distance between what my portrait represented, and what I saw in front of me was very obvious. I felt bad about it and I will never do it again.

Apart from the big emotional engagement that Lars Physant invests in his portraits and his models there is another thing about his working process that is unusual, and which I haven't encountered before in any other portraitists. For each work Lars Physant makes a lot of different sketches – drawn, painted and photographic – and many of these sketches, especially the painted ones, often have the quality of finished works in their own right. It is not becoming to admit it, least of all by the writer of this article, who often defends the portrait as an art form, but it is a well-known fact that a great many artists engaged in making portraits are doing it for the money. It is an old but persistent cliché that landscapes are painted out of passion whereas portraits are painted out of need. A landscape or a still-life can be left standing unsold in the studio for years and commercially be a wasted piece of work, while commissioned portraits are considered to be a safe income, and the money is paid on delivery.

As a result many portrait artists display a somewhat uninspired and nonchalant approach to the genre. And even if I won't go as far as Nicolai Abildgaard who called Jens Juel's successful studio a 'portrait factory', it is nevertheless characteristic that many portrait painters nowadays create their works based on only one or maybe two sittings and a stack of photographs of varying quality. As to Lars Physant, quite the opposite is the case, which makes him stand apart from the majority of his colleagues. For each portrait he produces numerous drawings, and on the basis of those numerous paintings that serve no other purpose – as if that wasn't purpose enough – but to give him the opportunity to get closer and closer to his sitters, and through this tireless repetitive approach, by painting the same eyes, the same nose, the same lips, the same hair again and again, to achieve a physiological as well as psychological knowledge of the sitter's unique features.

While Lars Physant was working on my portrait it was a mystery to me why he kept asking me to sit for yet another sketch. By now he must have decided on a composition and a pose, I thought. Why was it necessary to be drawn several times from different angles? And what was the point of all these sketches? "Is this the final composition?" I asked him every time he showed me the day's work, and every time he gave me the same answer: "Maybe." Compared to what I knew from other artists this working process was very strange, and I have to confess that for a long time I found Lars Physant's constant demands for more sittings unnecessary.

It is possible that I might be able to create my portraits without all the sketches, but I love to work on them. The sitter is the same person, but he or she still looks different from sitting to sitting – also mentally. I have the opportunity to discover and record the microscopic differences when I make the sketches. It is just like a photographer who may take one hundred pictures in order to find the best, the one that ends up being the final, chosen photograph. Whether you are a painter or a photographer it is the same thing: the more photos or sketches you are producing the more likely you are to be spot-on. In short, the more you work with your sitter the more qualified your portrayal.

At the time when my portrait was made Lars Physant created his perhaps most famous work of art: the portrait of Queen Margrethe II of Denmark. The walls in the studio were plastered with drawn and painted studies for this picture, and they were all different although they were based on the same two poses: one in profile and one full face. In some of the studies the background was self-colored, in others it was decorated in the pointillistic painting style that is characteristic for Lars Physant, in others again the background was realistic with a paneled wall from Fredensborg Palace, while yet others were almost surrealistically adorned with details of cutouts by Henry Matisse. All the studies seemed finished and appeared to be original portraits, but for Lars Physant they were only to be considered as traces on the way to the final work, as clues and hints.

I let several of my sketches develop into works of their own. Not because they are going to be sold – nearly all of them end up in my drawers – but because I simply can't stop working on them. My sketches are like a journey I set out on each time I am going to paint a portrait. It is part of the process to get lost, to be on the wrong track, to seek and find, to change the perception of the sitter and find a new one. Many people regard the final work as the most important thing, but to me it is rather the journey itself that is interesting.

It is typical for Lars Physant's working method that he produces these studies without prejudice and with an open mind. All the studies get the same amount of attention, and they are all the result of his aim to find the truth about his sitter. The eight studies in this article were also included in another article I wrote about Lars Physant's portrait of the Queen in a little book published by The National Museum of Denmark (2015). The interesting thing about this book is that whomever I show it to will find their own favorite depiction of the Queen among the eight studies, and with no two of them having chosen the same yet. One person can see the sitter most clearly in one picture, while another finds another picture to be more lifelike. Some think that the Queen's smile is closer to reality reality in one sketch, while others recognize the smile far better in one of the other sketches. It does Lars

Physant credit that he is able to evoke the looks and the essence of his sitter in every single study, and this is probably the best evidence of the results of his great diligence.

Lars Physant is an artist, who takes all the time he needs in order to do his utmost, even in the case of commissioned assignments. A great many portraits are being produced in his studio, but it is not like a factory at all. Not a single work is allowed to leave the easel before he has infused it with life and soul. Without any exceptions! Furthermore the many studies are a guarantee for Lars Physant that all his portraits obtain a very high degree of physical likeness with the sitters. The art scene in the 20th century has been experimenting with everything else but physical likeness, but according to Lars Physant this is essential for a good portrait.

Especially when it comes to portraiture I think there has to be a strong resemblance to the sitter. I can't compromise with the likeness of the portrait. It has to be there for me to be able to answer for my work as a portraitist. You can do all kinds of experiments with abstract portraits or aura reading, but there has to be a likeness. Otherwise the value of the work is reduced exactly because it is a portrait, a depiction of a person.

When you look at Lars Physant's portraits and compare them with portraits by other artists, the most striking difference is not the preparatory work with the sketches, for usually the beholder doesn't know anything about that. The most striking thing is the canvasses that the portraits are painted on. Or rather the relief structures, for they have not much in common with the classical type of canvasses used by painters for centuries where a piece of cloth is fastened to a wooden frame. Lars Physant creates his works on relief structures with many surfaces that overlap each other in seemingly random patterns and are a kind of patchwork of fragmented squares. This generates a living picture surface, and it is up to the artist to create order and balance in the motif on the uneven surface, which at first invites to do the opposite. Lars Physant has created his paintings on relief structures for many years, and they give his motifs a unique and very original quality.

The relief structures are made of wood, which is partially covered with different types of canvas. They are created by Lars Physant's wife, the sculptor Silvia Magrinyà-Costán. Though this article is about the oeuvre of Lars Physant, it would be unfair not to mention Magrinyà-Costán's contribution because it is an important part of the distinctive feature of his works. The relief structures come in nearly all shapes and forms – from simple plain squares to round dynamic forms – and they are characterized by a remarkable sculptural beauty that makes them works of art in their own right. This is best seen in the artist couple's home in Barcelona where the relief structures – painted white in their raw form – are hanging on the walls. And even if they are just waiting to be painted on by Lars Physant, they attest to Magrinyà-Costán's understanding of the harmony and inner peace of the form achieved by a delicately displaced symmetry. The truly great art is created as a result of the collaboration between Physant and Magrinyà-Costán, because the two art forms – the oil painting and the wooden sculptures – do not compete with each other about the attention of the beholder. On the contrary they complement and 'sublimate' each other exactly like the two artists and spouses.

The collaboration between me and Silvia means everything to me. We discuss the works intensely, and we are very good at listening to each other. Silvia is far too modest to take any credit for my works, but she deserves to get some credit. It is amazing to be married to someone, to share your life with someone, who also shares your passion, who understands the creative process and has a deep appreciation of art similar to that of your own. I am a very lucky man.

A very fine example of this artistic partnership is the portrait of Queen Margrethe II (2015). The setting of the portrait is the Queen's study in Fredensborg Palace – in the little corner by the window where she likes to sit and read. The room is dominated by a large collection of small royal portraits from the 18th century, all painted on copper and symmetrically mounted on the wall as part of the panel decoration in Louis XVI style. Lars Physant didn't want to include this otherwise historically very interesting wall in his portrait, because its richness in colors and details would have taken the wind out of his work. Instead he chose to replace the gallery of family portraits with a map of the

excavations in Jelling supplemented with symbols of the most important archaeological findings in Denmark.

By doing that the portrait is raised to a metaphysical level that distances it from a more concrete, realistic interpretation, but on the other hand it places the Queen in a wider symbolic, almost abstract context, which puts her in line with Gorm the Old, the founder of the Danish royal family. This metaphysical level is brilliantly emphasized by Magrinyà-Costán's relief structure which like the symbolism of the portrait can be perceived and interpreted on several levels. In this case it is also obvious to compare the relief structure with the Queen's decoupage works. Both art forms are based on the collage, and they both operate with an almost cubistic perception of the motif, where the feeling of a specific time and space is more or less replaced by a timeless universe.

Silvia has made the relief structure that measures 154 x 154 centimeters and is eight millimeters thick. The twelve parts – you can talk about twelve 'pictures' or 'universes' forming a 'multiverse' that makes up the whole surface of the painting – consist of twelve different types of canvas, and they were put together in a composition made by Silvia. I only made it a condition that the Queen's face should be placed in the composition, so that her right eye is the exact center of the work.

The portrait of the Queen clearly shows how important Magrinyà-Costán's relief structures are for the works of Lars Physant. The division of the picture in many squares not only provides the motif with a dynamic effect, it also makes it a complex reality, a shattered world that has now been put together again and thereby opens up for a new perception of the motif as well as time and place. It is a displaced reality where the many surfaces seem to keep moving towards a final place in the composition. In that way the portrait seems living and organic – at the same time inquiring and concluding. It is not very often that you are given as much room for making your own interpretation as in Lars Physant's portraits, because they – thanks to the fusion with Magrinyà-Costán's relief structures – are playing with the physical and metaphysical worlds.

Moreover the portrait of the Queen is a fine example of Lars Physant's preference for the technique of pointillism: countless spots imitate an actual form when viewed at a distance. In the portrait it is seen in the window recess where one relief naturalistically depicts part of the window frame while another relief imitates this motif by using pointillistic spots. This trick not only intensifies the tension in the motif, it also underlines the above-mentioned combination of imagination and reality, naturalism and surrealism.

In the portrait of Ole Schiøth (1999), Lars Physant has focused his attention on something else: the light. Ever since he began to paint Lars Physant has been occupied with light and its effect on form and color, but it was not until his meeting with the Mediterranean light that he began more extensively to explore the effects of light and light intensity. Schiøth and his wife, Birgit, are standing in a window recess framed by light, which due to reflections is being cast around in the room and upon the sitters. Lars Physant has very accurately depicted the many lines and diagonals that are created by the light and the shadows. As a result we have a very sophisticated setting that is also a little bit confusing because the actual light source is quite hard to identify. Regarding the coloristic approach the portrait is a study in the colors of the sea: green and blue and all the nuances in between those two in the color spectrum. The colors are a feast for the eye, and along with the powerful effects of light and shadow they make the portrait an overwhelming, expressive work of art.

My use of color has become more Mediterranean – more intense – since I took up residence in Barcelona. My Mediterranean life has had the effect that I have become far better at handling the colors, more able to understand the colors and put them together, but first of all less afraid to use colors. As a Scandinavian it takes a lot of courage to use colors. Here I also work a lot more with light contrasts. The light and the shadow and the contrast between the two are so strong here in Spain that it has affected my perception of my motifs. The contrasts of light intensify the colors, and I find that very interesting.

The portrait of the former chairman of The Danish Society of Engineers shows him and his wife standing by the window on top of the headquarters of the society on Kalvebod Brygge. Only in a few other works has Lars Physant come so close to his great artistic example, Johannes Vermeer, as in this portrait. In particular two of the old master's works – 'The Astronomer' (1668) and 'The Geographer' (1669) with their strong contrasts between light and shadow – have always been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for Lars Physant, and in the portrait of Schiøth he has clearly allowed these two works to lead the way as well. The coloristic emphasis on the color blue is the same, and even the golden hue from the window that lights up the faces of the sitters and gives them life is inspired by the works of Vermeer. Like Lars Physant, Vermeer lets light play a leading role in his works, and you get the impression that both artists had a strong belief in light's ability not only to illuminate a motif but to animate it, too.

My choice of color is based on feelings. The colors depend on my perception of the sitter. I never decide on the colors before I begin to work on a portrait. I do not think that it could be exciting to paint a blue picture or to play with the nuances of red. It is not like that. I do not choose the colors until I meet the sitter. In this respect one might say that my pictures are just as 'felt' as they are thought-through.

When you look at Lars Physant's portraits you will probably still find them, if not thought-through then at least very carefully prepared. You have to have a good grasp of the situation to arrange big compositions, and in addition to that Lars Physant supplies the composition with symbolic features in many of his pictures. Furthermore he often places his sitters in settings – interiors or exteriors – which he finds suitable for the atmosphere of the portrait, or which match his perception of the sitter's personality and character. The foremost ambition for many portrait artists is to depict their sitters as natural and unfeigned as possible. Therefore they let the sitters decide how to place themselves and pose in the way they find comfortable and natural. For Lars Physant, however, there is more at stake, and his portraits are usually created according to a more elaborate plan where composition, symbolism, colors and items are supposed to form a synthesis. It requires an overall view, and it is a process Lars Physant prefers to control himself.

I always intervene a lot when it comes to the poses of my sitters. When I get a portrait commission I usually have a pretty good idea of the composition, and how the sitter should be dressed. I don't paint the sitter in the way that the person happened to sit the first time he or she posed for me. As far as the composition goes I know what I want with my portrait. But far more important than the set-up and the clothes is the lighting. I have an idea about the effects of the light in the portrait, and from that I build the composition.

In two of Lars Physant's major portrait works from 2011 and 2015 it is easy to see how much work he invests to make them as thought-through and well-composed as possible. The picture of the Grand Master of the Danish Order of Freemasons in Copenhagen, Walter Schwartz, from 2015 is probably the most symbol-laden of all Lars Physant's portraits. Though it is a picture of only one person it is still a double portrait because Schwartz is represented twice in the composition. In the foreground he sits in an armchair and is gesticulating as if he is in the middle of a discussion with the beholder. His face is cheerful and vivid, and there is no doubt that Schwartz is engrossed in a subject that fascinates him. Placed in a gilded frame in the background we have another portrait of Schwartz, this time in a more formal and distant version, where he gravely looks the beholder right in the eyes. The sitter is wearing the ceremonial apron of the freemasons in both depictions, but the two situations are very different: we have the lively, debating doctor and the stern, solemn freemason.

Lars Physant thus tells the story about how we are all made up of many facets, and how we are able to navigate among these facets in our different life situations. It is the man and the mask, the private life and the public position united in one picture. The portrait has another symbolic layer when you realize that the landscape-like motif behind Schwartz that looks like a moonlit night sky seen through the naked trees is actually a human heart with arteries and veins. This quite unexpected motif – the

view seen through a human heart – is a reference to the freemason-motto of the sitter: ‘See with the heart.’ And this again can be seen as a rewriting of the above-mentioned motto of Lars Physant: ‘Voir beau et juste.’

In another double portrait, ‘Allegory of Otto Johannes Detlefs’, Lars Physant has painted Otto Setlefs and his wife Annie sitting in a room with a view to the headquarters of OJD. Apart from the two sitters the picture is filled with objects and locations that according to Lars Physant have been significant for the portrayed couple and are able to contribute to our understanding of them. By including all these symbols Lars Physant has inscribed himself in the long row of artists – from Hans Holbein’s portrayal of the merchant Georg Gisze in the 16th century, over the genre painters of the Dutch Golden Age in the 17th century to the British conversation piece-artists in the 18th century – that have depicted the homes and the artifacts of their models. It can be anything from a certain room in the model’s house to furniture and carpets, china and silver, arts and crafts and so on. In short, the whole idea is to depict the private life of the models, and as a beholder you get a kind of voyeur role that is a little bit prying when you run your eye over all these objects that normally belong to the private sphere.

In the Detlefs portrait, however, we are dealing with a complex, symbolic reality where the sitters are placed in a room from the apartment on Store Kongensgade in Copenhagen, while the view from the window shows the factory in Solrød Strand. On the back wall Lars Physant has created a surrealistic arrangement of physical objects which as a kind of collage bear witness to Detlefs’ interests and life. His favorite work of art, Jens Ferdinand Willumsen’s ‘Bjergbestigersken’, owned by The National Gallery of Denmark, is here accompanied by another Willumsen work, which belongs to Detlefs’ extensive collection. And this is by the way also the case with Godtfred Eickhoff’s beautiful sculpture of a naked woman, ‘Guapa’. Underneath these works are enlarged photos from Detlefs’ life: the railway bridge over the Kiel Canal at Rendsborg where he spent his childhood, and ØK’s headquarters in Copenhagen where he served his apprenticeship. Detlefs and his wife are placed in a room that is realistic as well as highly surrealistic, and they are smiling at the beholder. One can ask why Lars Physant wants to incorporate such an array of physical objects in his portraits when at the same time he makes a supreme effort to get a grasp of the psychology of the sitters of their inner life.

I think it is exciting to create a space around my sitters. It is the same thing with music. If the face of the sitter is the solo instrument at a concert then at the same time there are many other instruments in the concert hall, and they all back up the soloist. It is the same thing with the props, clothes, buildings and objects in my portraits – they all back up the face of the sitter and make sure that the work as a whole becomes harmonious.

In Lars Physant’s portraits these concrete objects thus gain a value-laden quality that raises them to the same level as the more metaphysical symbols like the heart behind Schwartz and the map of the Jelling Mounds at the Queen. This contributes to making the analysis and perception of Lars Physant’s works open for interpretation on many levels, and at the same time it gives you an opportunity to discover new details and symbols every time you look at his works. In this way Lars Physant raises the portrait genre above its basic function as a mere registration to a more analytic level of interpretation. And this is badly needed at a time when people often look down their noses at the portrait because the prejudice against the genre is that it does not challenge and intrigue the beholder in the same way as other art forms.

I have tried to describe Lars Physant’s approach to portrait art, and from this it appears that his approach is multi-faceted and on certain points self-contradictory. On the one hand he wants to depict the sitter’s physical features and mental life as truthfully and unprejudiced as possible, on the other hand he wishes to place the sitter in large symbol-laden and ‘material’ contexts. In other words he is aiming at the intimate as well as the grand, the near as well as the far. Yet for reasons that to me are still hard to comprehend Lars Physant manages to combine these two opposites – opposites that are

impossible to combine on the face of it. We have probably all seen portraits where we have been fascinated either by a deeply felt characterization of the person or by a grand composition, but it is not very often that we find both the intimacy and the grandeur in one single work. That we can find in the works of Lars Physant, and this is quite impressive.

A very good example is Lars Physant's two portraits of Princess Benedikte of Denmark. One of them is a large official work where the Princess is standing in a room in Amalienborg next to Knud Nellemose's bust of her father, King Frederik IX, while the other is a privately owned painting that shows the Princess posing against a neutral background with her arms crossed. The large portrait is depicting a realistic room and an actual object (the bust), and the Princess is placed way back in the picture space, so one might think that the attention of the beholder would be moved from the sitter to the context, but this is not the case. Lars Physant has succeeded in painting his sitter with so much empathy that the surroundings and the props do not outshine her, but instead back her up and visually carry her forth. In exactly the same way – but in reverse – the smaller portrait of Princess Benedikte seems both intimate and grand. In this work the compelling depiction of the face is combined with a confronting body posture that along with the vertical striving of the wooden panels underlines the authority and integrity of the sitter. The two portraits of Princess Benedikte show very clearly that Lars Physant is a master of both the near and the far, the obvious and the enigmatic. In his portraiture the sitters do not shine in spite of their surroundings and history, but because of them. In his portraits it is possible to find the grand in the modest and the modest in the grand.

I have often experienced that my sitters have a lot of complexes because of their looks. They find it difficult that I am going to study them and paint them. In these situations I have done everything in my power to make them feel as beautiful and 'correct' as possible. And the truth is that there are no people that do not possess a certain beauty. At least I haven't met any. The sitters should have the feeling that I am doing it for their sake. That I do not scrutinize them in order to find flaws or to expose them, but that we are going to create something good together. Portrait painting is a close collaboration between the painter and the sitter, and it is important that the sitter feels that he or she is an equal partner in this work. To be one-on-one with a sitter is a very intimate and intense experience – an experience I find beautiful. Actually there are not many other situations in our lives where you can isolate yourself with another person to such an extent, keep eye contact and sit still in each others' company without necessarily having to talk or entertain.

For me it has been an eye opener to meet Lars Physant. Through his work with portraiture he has proven that the portrait is definitely not anachronistic and extinct, which otherwise seems to be the general verdict of the art history of today. Through his very serious approach to the portrait and the process of creating a portrait he has demonstrated time and again that when you work with the art form in a responsible, thorough and loving way there are still many triumphs to be expected. He has never seen the limitations of portrait painting, only the challenges, and that is clearly the strong point of his works. His portraits are like animated mirror images where you as a sitter are able to recognize yourself very clearly. And it is recognition both on a physical and on a mental level.

My meeting with my finished portrait occurred one lovely, sunny morning in July 2016. The sittings at Lars Physant's studio the year before took place at a time when I lived through a period of stress and a massive workload. In that period I couldn't recognize myself and, even worse, I couldn't see which course my life would take. What on earth could Lars Physant read in my face? I was afraid that my state of mind had made it impossible for him to see me – to feel me – and I knew from our conversations that this was the purpose of the sittings. For a moment I stared at my own face – dumbfounded. The traits were sad, surely, but there was also a little smile. A timid smile that held a good promise for the future. It was as if I had not only been seen – I had also had my fortune told. The title was: 'Always dauntless' ...

In my view a good portrait is a work of art that encapsulates the meeting between the soul of the sitter and the soul of the painter. The fusion of the two souls on the canvas is what makes the work

*interesting. The portrait painter cannot stand alone, and the model of the portrait cannot stand alone.
Yet together they can create great portrait art.*