

How to

Katie Lyle and Bridget Moser at G Gallery

How to draw a face

Start with the basic shapes, the structures of the skull and jaw. Work in loose circles, broad strokes. Never begin with detailed features, like the eyes or the mouth.

Katie has been interested in how-to guides for drawing and painting, the so-called structure behind artistry. It's that funny genre of literature that still presupposes that creativity follows a formula, that verisimilitude is always the right way to go. Her work *Double Wonderful* is a folded canvas face made in marker and oil, stacked on a plinth, a layer of concrete, and a found book. The visible fragments of the book's cover—its swirling blues matching her drawn face's contours—offer such a promise: "Improve Drawing and Painting." The book's cover image? It's mostly obscured but still recognizable: a self-portrait of Van Gogh.

And then there's Bridget: the connection to Van Gogh is a clear one. In *About Face* she is singularly fixated on his *Starry Night* ("I love this painting and I am not fucking around.") It decorates her full outfit, and even acts as the backdrop to her thrashing dubstep rendition of the Smashing Pumpkins' "Bullet with Butterfly Wings." Yet Bridget is also concerned with a face's so-called "correct" proportions. *About Face* involves her conversing with a 3D-printed mask of her own likeness, generated from a computer amalgamation of two photographs. Digitally rendered, it's her true Neutral Face. When she puts it on, she speaks from a computer-generated female voice, spouting sitcom catchphrases ("Bazinga! How you doin'?"—is this our true Neutral Language?).

Katie's portraits are also amalgamations, in a way—never meant to reproduce a particular person. Yet they don't feel neutral like Bridget's uncanny-valley likeness: they aren't smoothed over, they carry evidence of Katie's work, of transformation. Both Katie and Bridget understand the strange shifting grounds on which we evaluate the human face: as pristine ideal, as communicator of feeling, as trigger for memory, as self-awareness.

To quote Bridget: "Like I had memorized the lines on my face and then one day realized that they had all changed. An unpredictable script."

How to get from A to B

Sit with it. Study the options carefully. Map your trajectory. Be precise. Bridget sits in front of a blue-LED-lit decorative frame, watching a pleasant wintry scene as skiers and snowboarders float flatly across its surface. She draws a corresponding horizontal line on her complimentary Delta Hotel notepad.

A line that brings you from A to B. A line of paint can form the curve of a woman's profile, a line of yarn can be knitted into a blue sweater with too-long sleeves. Katie's paintings balance the easy simplicity of a drawn line with hints of her extended labour; patches of colour that peek underneath to traces of unfinished work, accumulated like layers of skin or geological sediment. Whole compositions are scraped away in order to start semi-fresh, but it's never wholly clean again. Katie's work keeps its history present; it makes its effort known. Bridget's effort is also clear: she struggles to open a fold-out couch, flails while trapped behind a translucent curtain. She is finding her way through this Delta Hotel room, moving past obstacles, working and reworking her path.

Getting from point A to B doesn't necessarily imply a movement from start to finish. Katie's paintings have no conceivable endpoint, they're perpetually open to revision and renewal. Bridget's labour is also without conclusion. She ends *How Does It Feel* exactly as she starts it; tucked in her hotel bed, she studies LED-lit skiers floating slowly across a wintry horizon.

How to be alone

Find a quiet place, a familiar place, a neutral place. *How Does It Feel* is the first video of Bridget's I've seen that is entirely devoid of any language, music, or voice-over narration. Watching her wander through a pristine Delta Hotel room, it's remarkable how alone she seems. Sure, she is not engaging with a large and responsive audience like in *About Face*, nor is she text-conversing with her own true Neutral Face ("new phone who dis?"). Her blank stares and frustrated efforts feel different when unaccompanied by the structure, the direction that her language usually supplies. There's an intense intimacy in that silence.

Katie's paintings also carry an intimacy that's difficult to pin down. Maybe it's the small scale of her works—most measuring only 12 x 16 inches, some smaller—a woman's face usually taking up the full plane of the picture. They exist in a one-to-one relationship with Katie herself (and us, by extension); there's a deeply felt connection between painter and subject. Despite having visited her studio, somehow it's easy for me to imagine Katie painting in her bedroom: a place of quietness, of introspection, of imagining new ways of being. It's a place of productive solitude.

Bridget's hotel room is also a place for solitude, a place to try things out. Yet the Delta's pristine surfaces and neutral décor seem entirely opposed to Katie's layers of painting, her steady sedimentation of work and feeling. Hotel rooms can't showcase their accumulated history; it's a business that relies upon the illusion that you are the first (and only) person to exist here, that this room is for you and you alone, at least temporarily. Instead, Bridget pushes and wiggles, flails and climbs; she forms wrinkles in the Delta's neutral veneer, and it offers her new directions in return.

How to think through things

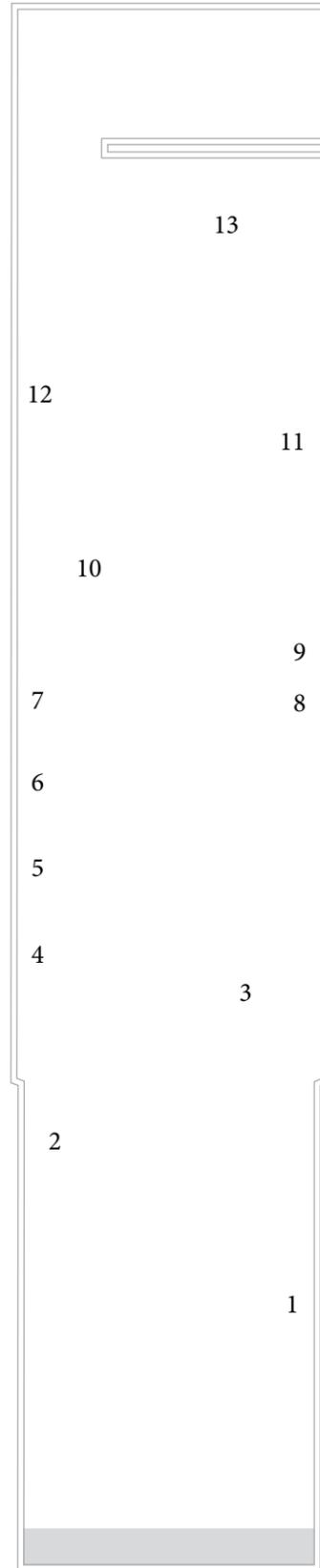
Look around you, find anything that might be useful. Something that might stand in, something that could stand out. Some of Katie's newer paintings embed other materials into their surfaces: she incorporates external objects into her logic of portraiture. In *The Mimic*, a series of metal studs block out the placement of a profile's eye, ear and mouth. For *The Painter in Disguise*, a paintbrush bristle becomes a line of blonde bangs. They're everyday things, transformed and made human in Katie's painted figures. Yet they also retain their flatness: stuck on the surface of canvas, the illusion of portraiture as promised by countless how-to manuals is never fully realized in Katie's work.

To quote Bridget: "What if I told you that I am the real thing? I could be the real thing. The surface is a part of the thing."

When she performs, Bridget's body also becomes a surface upon which other things are put to use. In *About Face*, she dances concealed under a chair's slipcover, in *How Does It Feel*, she slides herself into a lampshade. The props around her transform as frequently as her own personas, her own shifting frames of reference. As the computer-generated amalgam of her face is 3D-printed, her own likeness becomes an object, too. Yet it's an object that speaks back to her, one that she wears, texts with, soliloquies at, cradles in her arms, puts to rest. The configurations between prop and body, thing and surface, figure and ground: for both Katie and Bridget, they're perpetual.

Here are Katie's sediments on canvas, building up the contours of a human face. Here's Bridget's brushstroke-cloaked *Starry Night* t-shirt and leggings, another kind of portrait in layers of paint. In *A Face or a Script Where the Lines Keep Changing*, a portrait is a process: one where the rules and instructions are in constant revision, renewal, and total, wonderful disregard.

Daniella Sanader



List of Works

1. *The Mimic*
Katie Lyle
canvas and oil paint with metal studs
2016
2. *How Does It Feel*
Bridget Moser
HD video - 9 min 37 sec
2016
3. *How to*
Daniella Sanader
exhibition text
4. *Eyes on the canvas*
Katie Lyle
oil and acrylic on canvas
2016
5. *The Lagging Mirror*
Katie Lyle
oil on canvas
2016
6. *The Painter in Disguise*
Katie Lyle
oil on canvas with paintbrush
2016
7. *A good time was had by all*
Katie Lyle
acrylic on canvas with eyelashes
2016
8. *Don't talk to me or my son ever again*
Bridget Moser
digital print on adhesive wall vinyl
2016
9. *The Mirror Has Two Faces*
Bridget Moser
digital print on adhesive wall vinyl
2016
10. *Double Wonderful*
Katie Lyle
canvas and oil paint with metal studs
2016
11. *A portrait with two figures*
Katie Lyle
oil on canvas
2016
12. *Heavy Buzzing*
Katie Lyle
oil on canvas with shirt collar
2016
13. *About Face*
Bridget Moser
documentation of performance - 37 min 32 sec
November 6th, 2015
ARTSPACE Contemporary Art Projects

Thank you to Stefan Harhay, Daniella Sanader, Paul Tjepkema, and Yuula Benivolski.

This exhibition was made possible with the support of the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, Erin Stump Projects, ARTSPACE Contemporary Art Projects, and The Walter Phillips Gallery.