

## Who Would You Like to

### Paint Your Portrait?

By Kathy McShane

I asked which artist, dead or alive, you would most like to have your portrait painted by. I got answers. Wow, lots of great responses. Thank you, VAC members. The answers ranged from some of the old masters to our own very talented Dataw artists. So here goes (no names associated with the responses, just in case).

Hands down, the most popular choice was John Singer Sargent, an expatriate American portraitist (and, later in his career, landscape artist). Realist but ethereal, as one VAC member described his work. Sargent (1856-1925) has been described as the leading portrait painter of his generation. Sargent painted many distinguished personalities of his era, including himself, the author Henry James, Claude Monet (with whom he painted in plein air), Theodore Roosevelt, John D. Rockefeller, and Robert Louis Stevenson. A prolific artist, Sargent produced more than 900 oil paintings.

Among his most famous paintings is *Portrait of Madame X*. Madame X was, in reality, Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau, an American expatriate and Parisian socialite. When the painting was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1884, it caused outrage because it showed one of the straps of the subject's gown falling off her shoulder. Although Sargent repainted the strap, the scandal it caused resulted in Sargent receiving no further portrait commissions in France and moving to London, where he became one of the most well-known portraitists of the British and American upper classes. In 1916, some 30 years after the completion of the painting, Sargent sold the painting (which he considered the best thing he had ever done) to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC for 1000 pounds (roughly \$14,000 in today's money). Recently, a Sargent painting has sold for close to \$25 million at auction.



John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Madame X*, 1884, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC

For the rest of the choices, I am going to proceed chronologically.

### Old Masters:

Two VAC members wanted their portraits painted by **Leonardo Da Vinci** (whose birthday is this month).<sup>1</sup> Da Vinci (1452-1519) was the quintessential Renaissance man: sculptor, painter, inventor, architect draftsman and military engineer. Despite his prolific talent, fewer than two dozen paintings are attributed to him, most likely because his interests varied. The best known of da Vinci's works of art are *The Last Supper* (c. 1495-1498), *Mona Lisa (Gioconda)* (c. 1503-1506), and *Vitruvian Man* (c. 1487).

The painting below depicts Ginevra de' Benci, a young, aristocratic Florentine woman. It was most likely commissioned to commemorate her betrothal. Da Vinci would have been in his early 20s when he painted her.



One of our members chose **Michelangelo**, not so much because he wanted his portrait painted, but because he wanted to discuss deep philosophical issues with him, particularly the burning question: How did you keep paint from dripping on yourself while you were painting the Sistine Chapel? He didn't; in a 1509 letter to a friend, the artist said, "My brush, above me all the time, dribbles paint so my face makes a fine floor for droppings!"

Michelangelo (1475-1564) was an Italian sculptor, painter, poet, and architect, like Da Vinci, a true Renaissance man. Among his best-known sculptures are *David* and the *Pietà*. He did not consider himself a painter; he created one of the most influential frescoes in Western art: the scenes from Genesis on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. The 1956 film *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, starring Charlton Heston as Michelangelo revolves around the conflict between the artist and the pope while Michelangelo is painting the Sistine Chapel.

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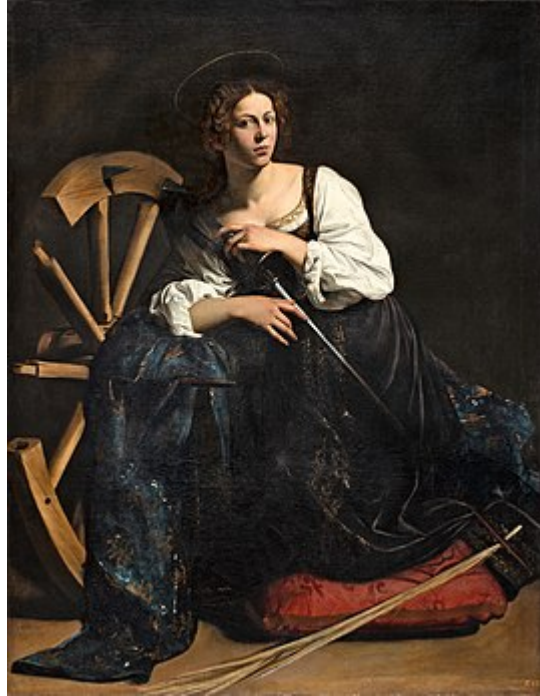
<sup>1</sup> For more discussion of Da Vinci, see my piece April 15 2022: Leonardo Da Vinci's 570<sup>th</sup> Birthday at [Dataw.art/blog/The Art Connection](http://Dataw.art/blog/The%20Art%20Connection).

The picture below is a detail from *The Last Judgement*, a fresco painted on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel (1536-1541). The central figure is Saint Bartholomew; the flayed skin in the saint's hand is Michelangelo himself.



**Caravaggio** was an unexpected choice (think *Medusa* or *Judith Beheading Holofernes*). But, as was pointed out, Caravaggio (1571-1610) was a master of dramatic lighting. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (Caravaggio is the name of the artist's hometown in Lombardy) was, according to the National Gallery in London, "Arrogant, rebellious and a murderer." His tempestuous temperament is evident in both his behavior and his art. He was arrested repeatedly for various violent offenses; a swordfight over a woman resulted in the death of his opponent. But his work was famous, though controversial: he frequently used the faces of ordinary, rough-hewn characters as the models for his portraits of saints. The model for his portrait of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, shown below, was the well-known courtesan Fillide Melandroni.

Several films have been made about Caravaggio's life, including the 1986 fictionalized biopic *Caravaggio*, in which the director uses lighting to try to make the film "look like" a Caravaggio painting.



Caravaggio, *Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, c. 1598-1599, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

The same member also opted for **Albrecht Dürer** (1471-1528), a German Renaissance artist. A painter, draftsman, and writer, Dürer was best known for printmaking. He is considered the first European painter to have painted and drawn self-portraits, his first at the age of 13, 13 in all.

His most famous, shown below, was painted in oil just before his 28<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was considered unusual because the artist is squarely facing forward, a position generally reserved for Christ.



Albrecht Durer, *Self-Portrait*, 1500, Alte Pinakothek, Munich

Another VAC member chose **Vermeer** for her portrait. Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) appears to have produced only about 40 paintings (that we know of), primarily portraits of people involved in everyday activities. The Dutch painter achieved some success during his lifetime, but fell into obscurity after his relatively early death. It wasn't until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when a French art critic wrote an enthusiastic review of Vermeer's work, that Vermeer began to achieve broad renown. Today, virtually everyone recognizes *Girl With a Pearl Earring* (the subject of the 1999 novel by Tracy Chevalier and the subsequent 2003 film of the same name).

Among the other paintings attributed to him is *Girl With a Red Hat*. This painting underwent exhaustive investigation of authenticity, partly because it was painted on wood panels rather than the canvas that Vermeer commonly used. However, the National Gallery of Art determined, using specialized imaging technology in preparation for a 2022 exhibition, that it is indeed a Vermeer (supported by other experts).



Johannes Vermeer, *Girl With a Red Hat*, c. 1669, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century

One of our members chose **Édouard Manet** (1832-1883), the French modernist artist. She liked that he didn't succumb to the Impressionists, keeping his own style of painting the common man and taking creative risks. In her view, his palette was superb, and she particularly liked how he used black.

His last major work is a scene depicting a barmaid conversing with a gentleman who can be seen in the mirror behind her. Critics long debated whether the perspective shown in the mirror was even possible. However, a reconstruction in 2000 demonstrated that the scene could be reproduced as Manet had painted it.



Édouard Manet, *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère*, 1882, Courtauld Gallery, London

**Claude Monet** (1840-1926), considered to be the founder of Impressionism, was also selected. Although we tend to associate Monet with haystacks, waterlilies, and cathedrals, the artist painted many portraits. His first wife, Camille (née Doncieux), features in some 50 of his paintings, including one on her deathbed at age 32. Camille also modeled for Renoir and Manet.

Stephanie Cowell's novel *Claude and Camille* (2010) is not only a portrait of the rise of Impressionism but also Claude and Camille's love story.



Claude Monet, *Springtime*, 1872, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

Another artist chosen from the same period was **Pierre-Auguste Renoir** (1841-1919), a close friend of Monet's. Renoir was crucial to the development of Impressionism, though he later turned to a more classic approach to painting, particularly his paintings of women. His entire body of work reflects the artist's celebration of beauty and feminine sensuality. The most extensive single collection of Renoir's work can be found at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia: 181 of the several thousand paintings he produced. Among his most famous paintings is *La Loge*, pictured below.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *La Loge*, 1874, Courtauld Gallery, London

Monet and Renoir were not the only Impressionist artists selected. One of our members chose **Mary Cassatt** and said she would like to be painted in a garden by the sea. Cassatt (1844-1926) was an American artist who spent most of her adult life in France, where Edgar Degas invited her to join the independent artists later known as the Impressionists. Cassatt often created images of women's social and private lives, with particular emphasis on the intimate bonds between mothers and children.

I tried to find a painting with both a garden and the sea but was unsuccessful. Instead, below are two of Cassatt's portraits, one in a garden and one by the sea.





Mary Cassatt, *Woman Reading in a Garden*, 1880, Art Institute of Chicago



Mary Cassatt, *Children Playing on the Beach*, 1884, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Two members chose **Vincent Van Gogh** (1853-1890). One specified she would like a lovely night sky or yellow flowers, both reminiscent of some of Van Gogh's best-known work.<sup>2</sup> Van Gogh's career as an artist lasted fewer than ten years, from 1881 when he decided he could simultaneously be an artist and serve God, to his untimely death by suicide in 1890. Though his artistic career was short, he left a legacy of 850 paintings and 1,300 works on paper. He painted portraits throughout that period, including 36 self-portraits.

The portrait below is the only one I could find with real flowers (and one of them is indeed yellow). It is a portrait of Agostina Segatori, an artist's model for the French painters Manet and Corot, who opened the Café de Tambourin in Paris, which catered to artists.



Vincent Van Gogh, *The Italian Woman*, 1887, Musee d'Orsay, Paris

### Late 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Century

**Gustav Klimt**...another great choice. Who wouldn't want to be painted in the style of the *Woman in Gold*? Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) was an Austrian symbolist painter whose work focused on the female body, frequently in an erotic manner. *Portrait of Adele Bloch Bauer I* (1907), also known as *Woman in Gold*, was commissioned by her husband, a Jewish industrialist and art patron. The painting was completed during Klimt's "Golden Phase," reflecting the influence of the Byzantine mosaics in the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna. The painting was stolen by the Nazis in 1938 and, for decades, hung in Vienna under the name *Woman in Gold* to conceal the identity of the sitter. It was ultimately returned to Maria Altmann, a Bloch-Bauer heir, after years of legal wrangling, including a hearing before the U.S. Supreme Court. The story of Maria Altmann's efforts to achieve restitution is chronicled in the 2015 film *Woman in Gold*, starring Helen Mirren.

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<sup>2</sup> For my in-depth discussion of Van Gogh, see *Vincent Van Gogh: The Archetypical Tortured Artist* at [dataw.art/blog/The Art Connection](http://dataw.art/blog/The Art Connection).



Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Adele Bloch Bauer I*, 1907, Neue Gallerie, NYC

Modigliani was another interesting choice. **Amedeo Modigliani** (1884-1920) was an Italian painter and sculptor who primarily worked in France. He suffered from ill health from childhood. As an adult, he overindulged in alcohol and drugs, most likely to mask the pain of his illnesses (he died of tuberculosis at age 35). Modigliani's only solo exhibition during his lifetime (1917) was shut down for obscenity.

Modigliani's portraits are often recognizable by the abnormal elongation of faces, necks, and torsos. Among his portraits are more than 20 of his lover and mother of his daughter, Jeanne Hébuterne. These portraits are considered to be among his best work.



Amedeo Modigliani, *Jeanne Hébuterne with Hat and Necklace*, 1917, private collection

Another unusual choice was **Pablo Picasso**, backed by logic: Picasso's portraits are bewildering, and that's how our VAC member felt. Picasso (1881-1973) was one of the most influential artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Spanish by birth, he spent most of his life in France. He was active in many mediums: painting, sculpting, ceramics, printmaking, collage, and theater design. His life's work is sometimes categorized into periods: the Blue Period, the Rose Period, the African-Influenced Period, Analytic Cubism, and Synthetic Cubism.

Along with Georges Braque, Picasso co-founded Cubism. Picasso has more museums devoted to him than any other artist. He is also one of the most forged artists in history.

The painting below is of Dora Maar, one of Picasso's mistresses.



Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Dora Maar*, 1937, Musee Picasso, Paris

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century

One of our members recently returned from a trip to Venice, where she decided her favorite artist was **Mariano Fortuny**. Mariano Fortuny (1871-1949) was a photographer, painter, inventor, and fashion designer. Fortuny came from a family of artists. His father, also named Mariano Fortuny, has been called the most internationally celebrated Spanish artist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the elder Fortuny's untimely death at age 36, the family moved from Granada to Paris to Venice.

Fortuny is particularly well-known for his fashion designs, which often drew upon influences from ancient Greek garments. His former home and factory in Venice, Palazzo Pesaro degli Orfei (usually called Palazzo Fortuny), is now a museum. As described by *Condé Nast Traveler*, "As a museum, it's a tribute to his opulent and eclectic taste: Rooms, draped in a patchwork of luxurious textiles or painted in floor-to-ceiling frescoes, are filled with art, antiques, and decor from his collection." Closer to home, Fortuny's gowns can be viewed at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Featured below is a portrait of Fortuny's wife, Henriette (née Negrin), who created fabrics and clothes alongside her husband.



Mariano Fortuny, *Portrait of Henriette*, 1915, Palazzo Fortuny.

**Maxfield Parrish** was a new name for me. Parrish (1870-1966) was an American painter, printmaker and illustrator. He was known for his prints and paintings of whimsical mythological scenes. During his career, Parrish produced works for Harper's Bazaar, Life, and illustrated books by L. Frank Baum of Wizard of Oz fame. His signature color was a shade of cobalt blue that became known as Parrish Blue. According to the National Museum of American Illustration, in 1925, one-quarter of American households had a Maxfield Parrish print on a wall of their home.

The artwork below is a 1929 print entitled *Ecstasy*, which was featured on a 1930 calendar for General Electric Mazda (Mazda was a trademark name for incandescent light bulbs).



**Georgia O'Keeffe** was a challenge because she was not known as a portrait artist. O'Keeffe (1887-1986) is one of the most significant artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As early as 1920, O'Keeffe was recognized as one of the most important and successful American artists, known for her skyscrapers and enlarged flower paintings. After her death, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum was established in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The museum has nearly 150 O'Keeffe paintings and hundreds of works on paper. O'Keeffe and her husband, the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, were the subjects of the 2009 biographical drama TV show *Georgia O'Keeffe*, which received numerous Emmy nominations.

The portrait below is of Beauford Delaney, an American modernist painter of the Harlem Renaissance era. Delaney was one of only two people whom O'Keeffe depicted in her career. The other was the niece of Alfred Stieglitz. O'Keeffe drew five portraits of him in the early 1940s, three charcoals and two pastels.



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Beauford Delaney*, 1943, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.



**Andy Warhol**, the master of pop art portraits and pop culture objects, was the choice of another VAC member. Andy Warhol (1928-1987) was created in several mediums: painting, silk screening, photography, film, and sculpture. Warhol was fascinated with popular culture and fame, which resulted in many screenprint portraits of celebrities in which he experimented with variations in color and seriality. To create some of his portraits, Warhol would shoot his subjects with a Polaroid camera, blow up the photos and convert them into negatives, and trace the subject's features onto canvas to create a silkscreen print.

Among the celebrities immortalized in Warhol's work are Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Queen Elizabeth II, and Mao Zedong. Many of his original works can be seen at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, the largest museum in North America devoted to a single artist. The picture below is of Liz Taylor based on a closely cropped promotional photo for the film *Butterfield 8*.



Andy Warhol, *Liz*, 1964, Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC

**20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Alex Katz** was another name I needed to familiarize myself with. Katz (1927-present) is an American figurative artist whose work includes paintings, sculptures, and prints. Katz's paintings are pretty evenly divided between portraiture and landscapes. He is known for his large paintings, using heightened colors and simplicity. With hindsight, these early works are considered precursors of Pop Art. His minimalist approach partially reflects the influence of the 18th-century Japanese woodblock artist Kitagawa Utamaro. Katz's wife, Ada, who has been married since 1958, has been the subject of more than 250 of his portraits. Works by the artist can be viewed in many prestigious museums throughout the United States. One of his most famous paintings is shown below.



Alex Katz, *Blue Umbrella #2*, 1972, Private Collection

One of our members chose **Hope Gangloff** for her beautiful technique, meaningful narrative, and non-traditional presentation of the subject—Gangloff (1974-present). Gangloff’s work tends to be large-scale, has been described as color-saturated, and often features personal and intimate depictions of the everyday. She usually incorporates bits of paper into her paintings, which become almost indistinguishable from her brushstrokes. The artist tends to paint the same subject matter over and over, which she explained as follows in a May 2017 interview for *Vogue*:

“An outsider who doesn’t look at a lot of art might not understand why I paint similar things repeatedly... But there are always micro-movements. I’m always working through problems. Rock climbers look for little changes in rocks to help them climb and keep going. When I look at a painting, I also look for the move that will set off something else. The whole painting is like a problem I’m trying to solve.”



Hope Gangloff, *Vera*, 2013, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri

### 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Century and Closer to Home

Three of our members, Mary Ann Berger, Pat Blumer, and Billie Halaburt, chose Dataw artists to paint their portraits.

**Mary Ann Berger** was the subject of a recent *Celebrating Dataw Artists* piece by Marie Doyon.<sup>3</sup> Ann Marie told Marie that she had been most inspired to paint by the human figure and family. Now 92, Mary Ann was inspired to paint her portrait at age 90 after seeing the self-portrait of the American artist Alice Neel, who painted herself nude at age 80. Mary Ann chose to paint herself clothed.



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<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://dataw.art/celebrating-dataw-artists-mary-ann-berger/>

**Pat Blumer's** art journey began with art journaling, where she toyed with inks, acrylics, and textures. This morphed into experimentation in mixed media and later with watercolor, which she found a more contemplative medium. After taking a couple of classes devoted to sketching and painting faces, Pat began exploring interesting characters to paint. She finds that children are beautiful to paint but hard. Adults' faces are more forgiving. Watercolor is her preferred medium - the toothy paper appeals to her tactile nature, and the flow of water and pigment puts her in a calming and contemplative mood. Pat's mother, a painter, said, "One can become wonderfully lost in painting." Pat knows that is true.

The painting below is of Pat and her granddaughter, Bentley.



Last but not least is **Billie Halaburt**. She was chosen by a VAC member who said she would be honored to have Billie paint a miniature pastel portrait of her and called her art fun and refreshing. Billie is primarily self-taught and has been diving heavily into the arts since she retired from the corporate world. Her primary focuses are pastels and acrylic painting. She recently painted Grinch for VAC's "It's Hard to be Green" exhibit. She also did a portrait of our bar manager, Ricky, which he gave his mother as a gift. Check out Billie's website at [www.happyartstudio.net](http://www.happyartstudio.net). The photo below is Billie's portrait of her daughter, Melanie.

