

A Collection of Artists' Self Portraits

in the belief a portrait might show
“...the secret biography written in the muscles of the face...”

"She knew full well that people carry their secret biographies written in the muscles of their faces, and that strangers passing on the street tell us (whether they wish to or not) all their inmost intimacies. If we but look sharply enough, and in the right light, we know whether fear or hope or amusement has tallied the hours of their days, we divine the sources and outcome of their most secret sensuous pleasures, we catch the dim but persistent reflections of those other people who have in turn left their imprints on each one of these strangers in the street."

---from Cordwainer Smith: *The Lady Who Sailed the Soul*, in *The Best of Cordwainer Smith* (1975). New York, p.51.

And so the purpose is to find a way to see in the face and show in the work
the secret biography written in the muscles of the face—

the portrait, or as Vincent Van Gogh said
“Like every work of art, a self-portrait.”

So, look first at a couple of self portraits...



Paul's and Vincent's Self Portraits,
Arles, 1888

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So, look first at a couple of his works of art...



Vincent's paintings of his and Paul's Chairs,
Arles, 1888

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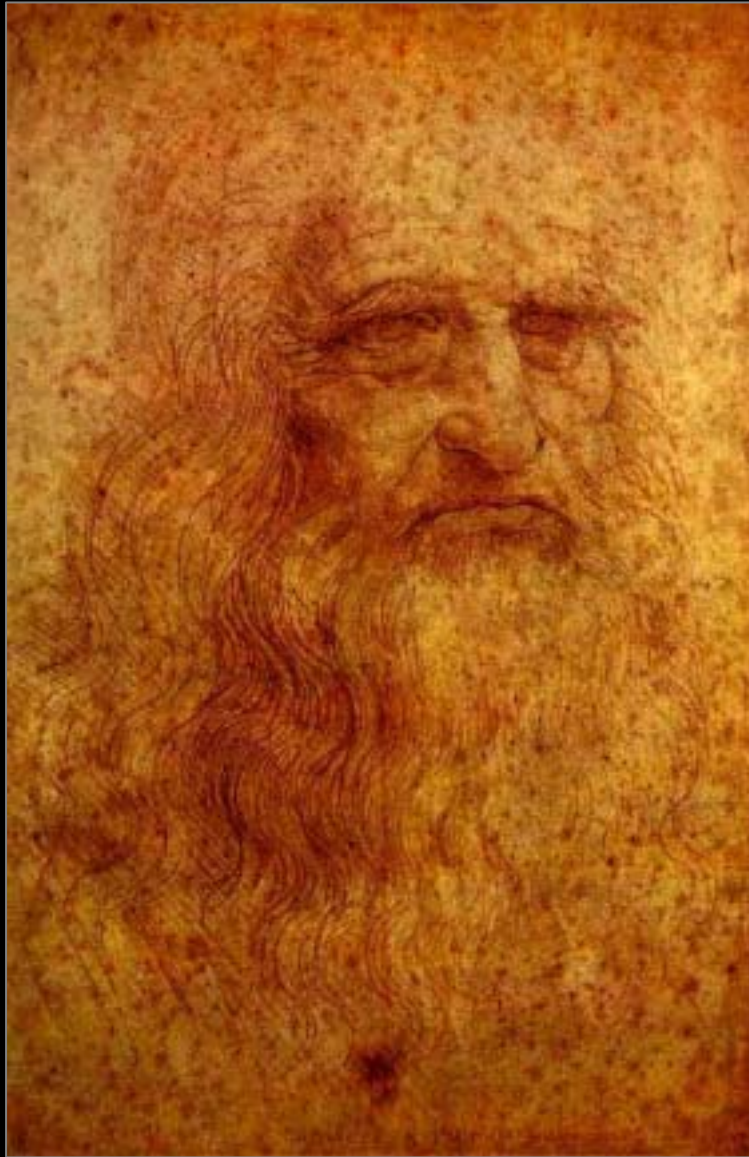
And then one of his and one of his friend Paul’s...
Same place, different person—

“Like every work of art...”



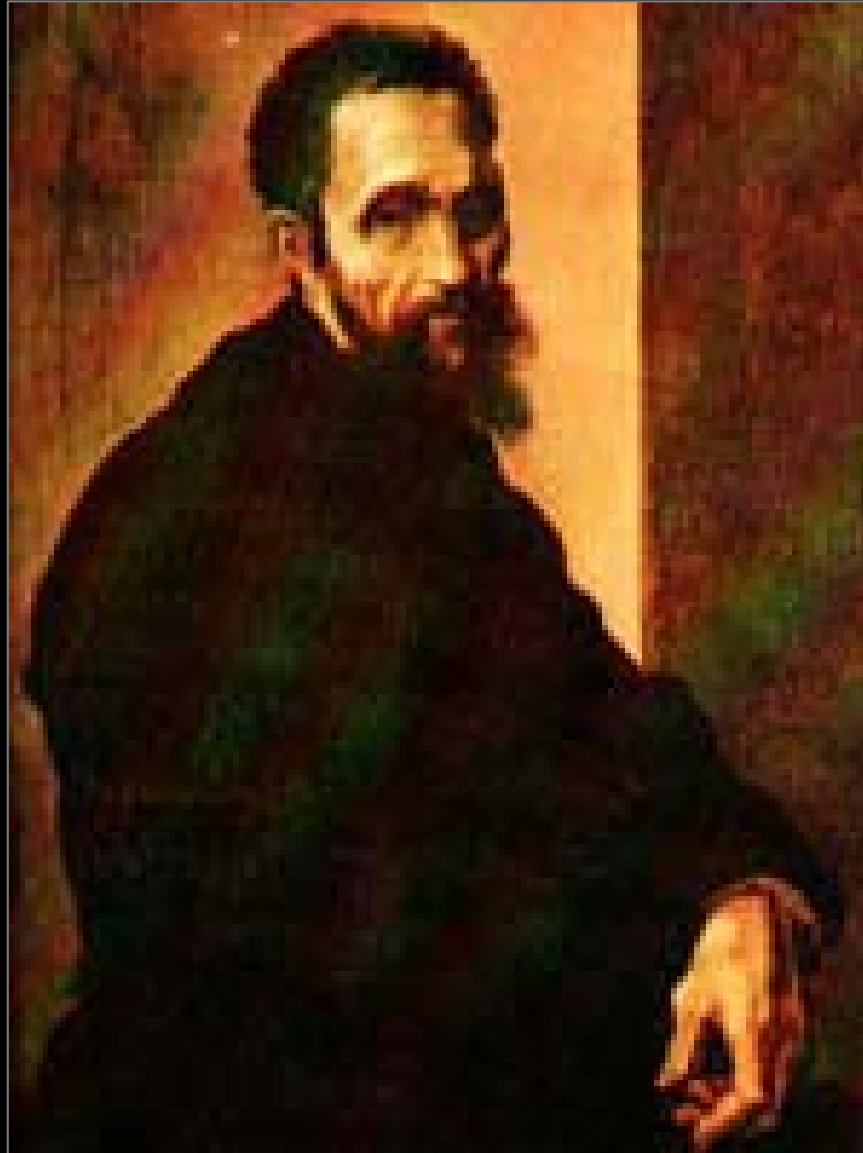
Vincent's and :Paul's Café de la Gare,
Arles, 1888

16th C.



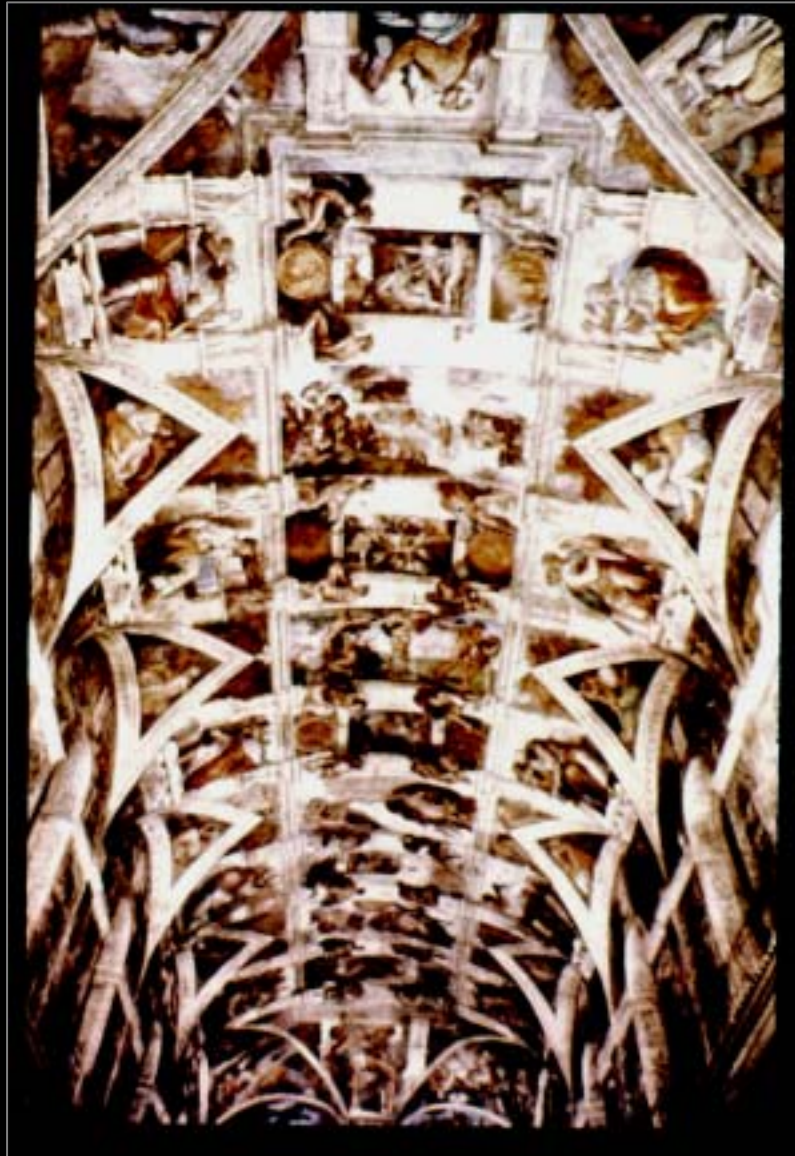
We do not know whether ancient peoples had “souls,”
the unique, irreplaceable self such as we each feel we have.
Leonardo is nearing the end of his soul’s journey,
and it’s only his marking of the muscles of his face are left to show his story...

16th C.



Michelangelo left no self portrait and there's no proof except tradition that this is him.
But maybe the marks are true, and the story they tell is his...

16th C (1508-1512).



No self portrait—except this. If “like every work of art, a self portrait,” then surely this is one.

Io ga fatto ingozzo tenuto stato
 come fa lacca agatti lombardia
 over d'altro paese p'essi invidia
 cha forza breve apichia sotto l'ombro
 Labarba alecio ell'annimorta sento
 in alle scrivino el petto fo d'arpia
 el pumel sopr'alviso eud'ama
 melfa geccando u' rizzo panimetto
 E l'ohi entrati miso nella peccia
 e fo del cul p' ch'etragevo groppa
 e passò senza g'iochi musco i'vano
 Di nazi misalliga lachertoccia
 e p' pregarsi a dietro s'ragroppa
 e addomi Comarche soriano
 po fallace e serano
 in g'io elindicio ch' lameto peron
 ch' mal si p'ra p' Ceriodama coron
 l'anna pictura m'ostor
 de fo di oron giuanni e lenio oron
 no seto v'lo/2 bo me io pictor



And he did write a poem about how awful the job was,
and put a sketch of him working...

16th C (1534-1541).



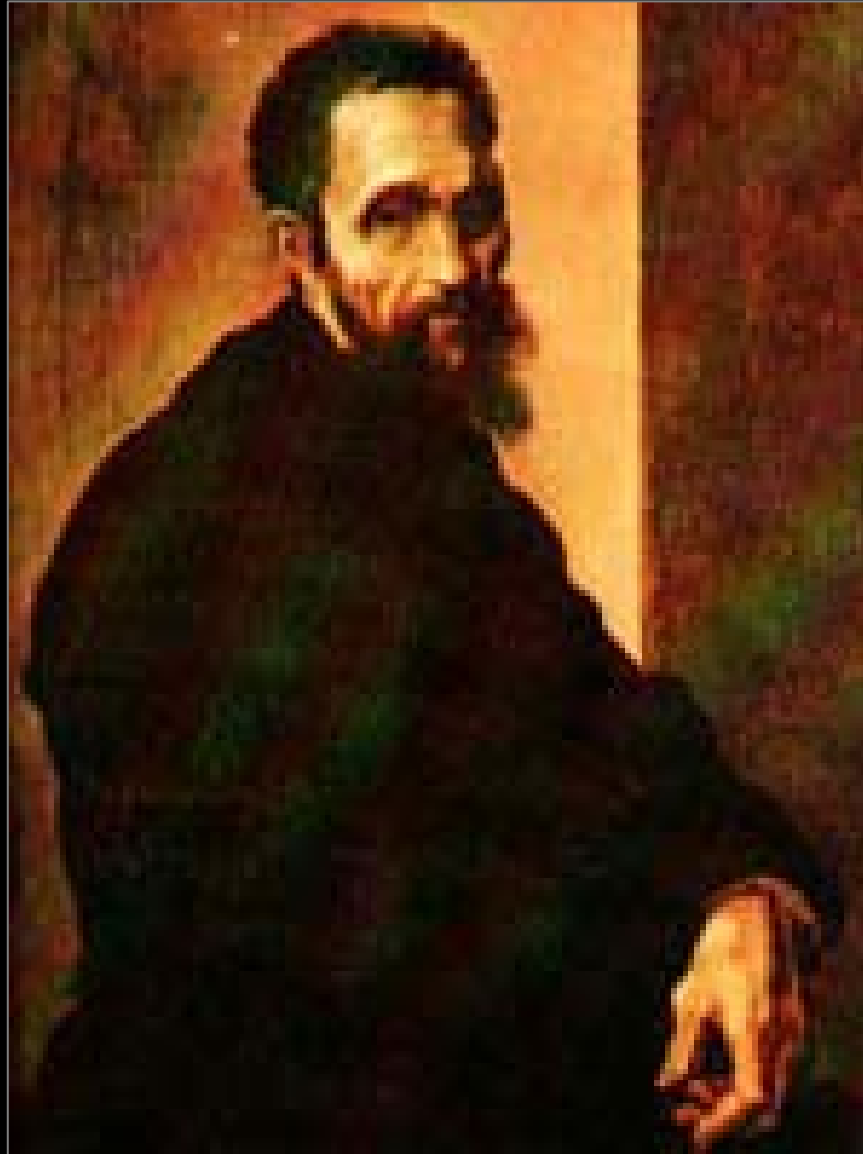
And then, a lot later, he put his skin in his “Last Judgment”...

16th C (1534-1541).



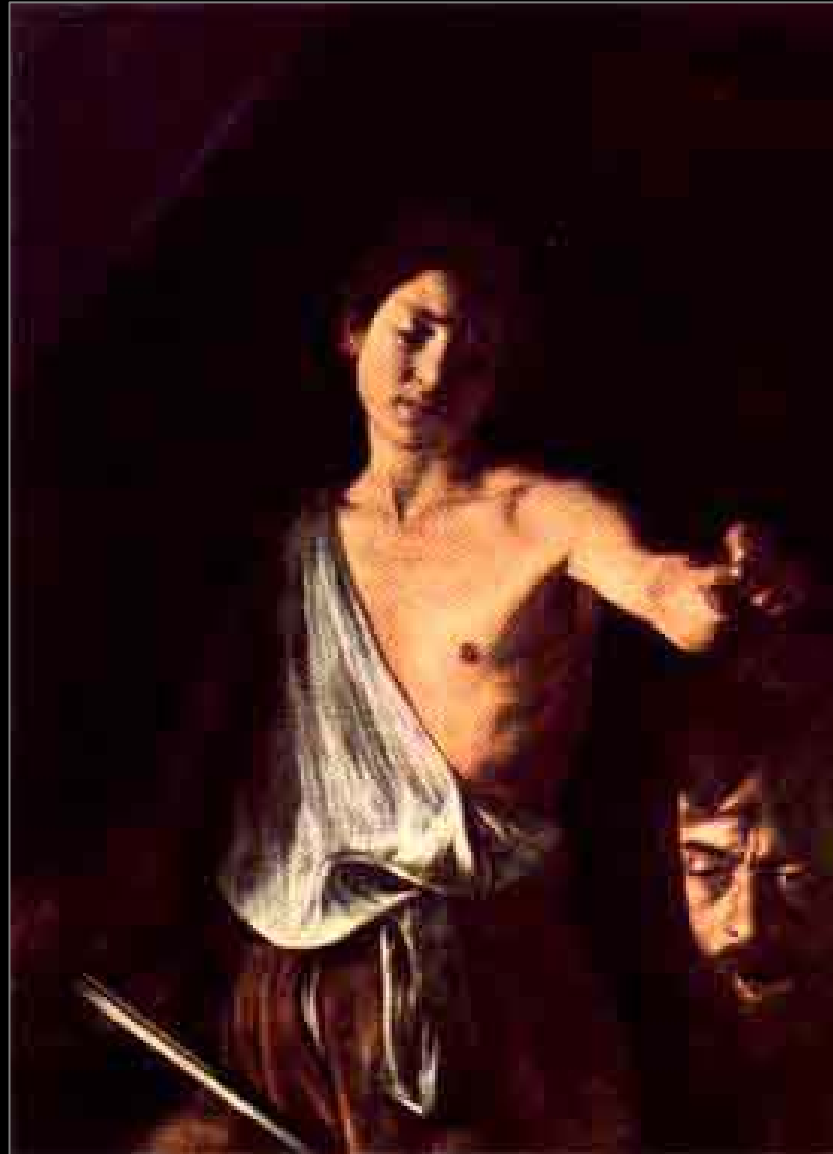
And then, a lot later, he put his skin in his “Last Judgment”:

16th C. (ca.1540)



Michelangelo left no self portrait (except that skin) and there's no proof except tradition that this is him.
But maybe the marks in his face—and hand—are true, and the story they tell is his...

Early 17th C. (before 1610)



Caravaggio painted his with his boyfriend...

17th C. (1630)



Artemisia Gentileschi painted herself as the Muse of Painting.
She did it because she could use painting to tell her story...

17th C. (1620).



17th C. (1632)



Rembrandt made a lot of them. This one to show what a nice young man with good prospects he was...

17th C. (1636)



This one to show what how great it was when he got the girl, bought a big house and made a lot of money...

17th C. (1661)



Well, time passes and things sometimes don't turn out...
What do the lines say?

17th C. (1650)



In France, Poussin was telling his purpose...
What does the “*staffage*” show, and what do the lines say?

18th C. (1782)



A century later, Vigée-Le Brun paints her self portrait...
Clearly, she has a different clientele... like Marie Antoinette...
What do the lines say?

19th C. (1801)



Well, time passes and things sometimes don't turn out...
That had been Paris and Versailles. This is Moscow.
What do the lines say?

Late 18th C.



Goya—He's a good looking young guy with a career to make.
No lines...

Late 18th C. (1795)



Goya—He's been around a lot and is getting lines...

18th C (1790)



*Fran.^{co} Goya y Lucientes
Pintor.*

He's publishing a book about what fools they are...
What do the lines say?

Gericault and Delacroix and the 19th Century Romantics

"She knew full well that people carry their secret biographies written in the muscles of their faces, and that strangers passing on the street tell us (whether they wish to or not) all their inmost intimacies. If we but look sharply enough, and in the right light, we know whether fear or hope or amusement has tallied the hours of their days, we divine the sources and outcome of their most secret sensuous pleasures, we catch the dim but persistent reflections of those other people who have in turn left their imprints on each one of these strangers in the street."

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Early 19th C. (ca. 1810)



Gericault was a nice young 18 year old about town, in a time when it was needful to find a career. He took up painting (and you came to art school). What do the lines in his face say? There aren't any... yet.

Early 19th C. (ca. 1816-18)



Well, a couple years later he got his aunt pregnant and had to leave Paris...
That gave him some lines.

19th C. (1818-19)



He came back to Paris, opened a studio, met some friends, and set out to paint the “Blockbuster” painting.

“Like every work of art, a self portrait.” What do the lines say?

19th C. (1822-24)



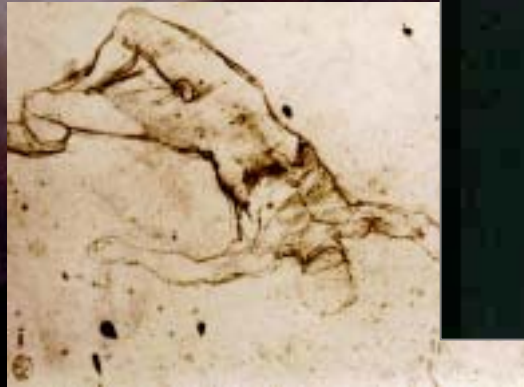
Well, time passes and things sometimes don't turn out...
Nobody wanted the Raft, and he got sick and was dying.
What do the lines say?

Death of Gericault by Ari Sheffer. (1824)



After his death, a friend bought the Raft and gave it to the Louvre where you can see it today.
Gericault's whole career was only 12 years long.





When Géricault was working on the raft, he got some of his friends to pose. He used his younger friend Delacroix for this pose, and also painted Delacroix's portrait...

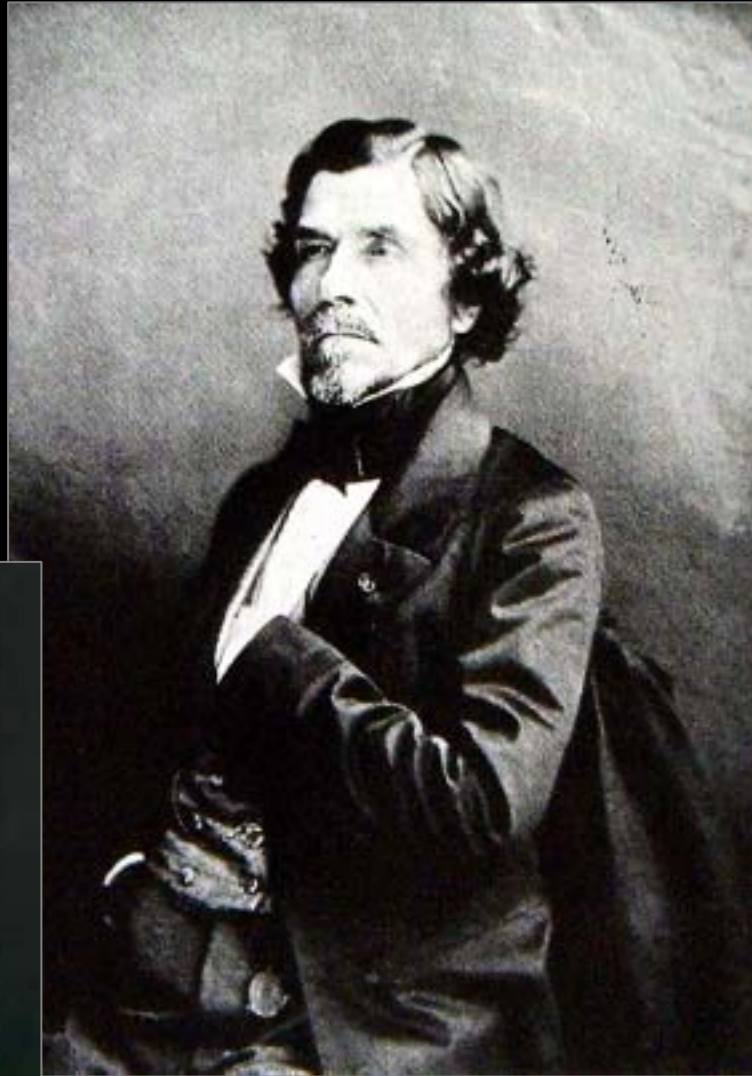
What do the lines say?



In those years, Delacroix painted “The Barque of Dante,” his first big success...
What do the lines say?



Delacroix self portrait when leader of the Romantics against the Classicists...
What do the lines say?



And a photo from 1862. It's been forty years...
What do the lines say?

Courbet and the 19th Century Realists

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Gustave Courbet

The Artist's Studio: A Real Allegory of a Seven Year Phase in my Artistic and Moral Life.

What do the lines say?

Van Gogh and Munch and the late 19th Century Expressionists

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1885

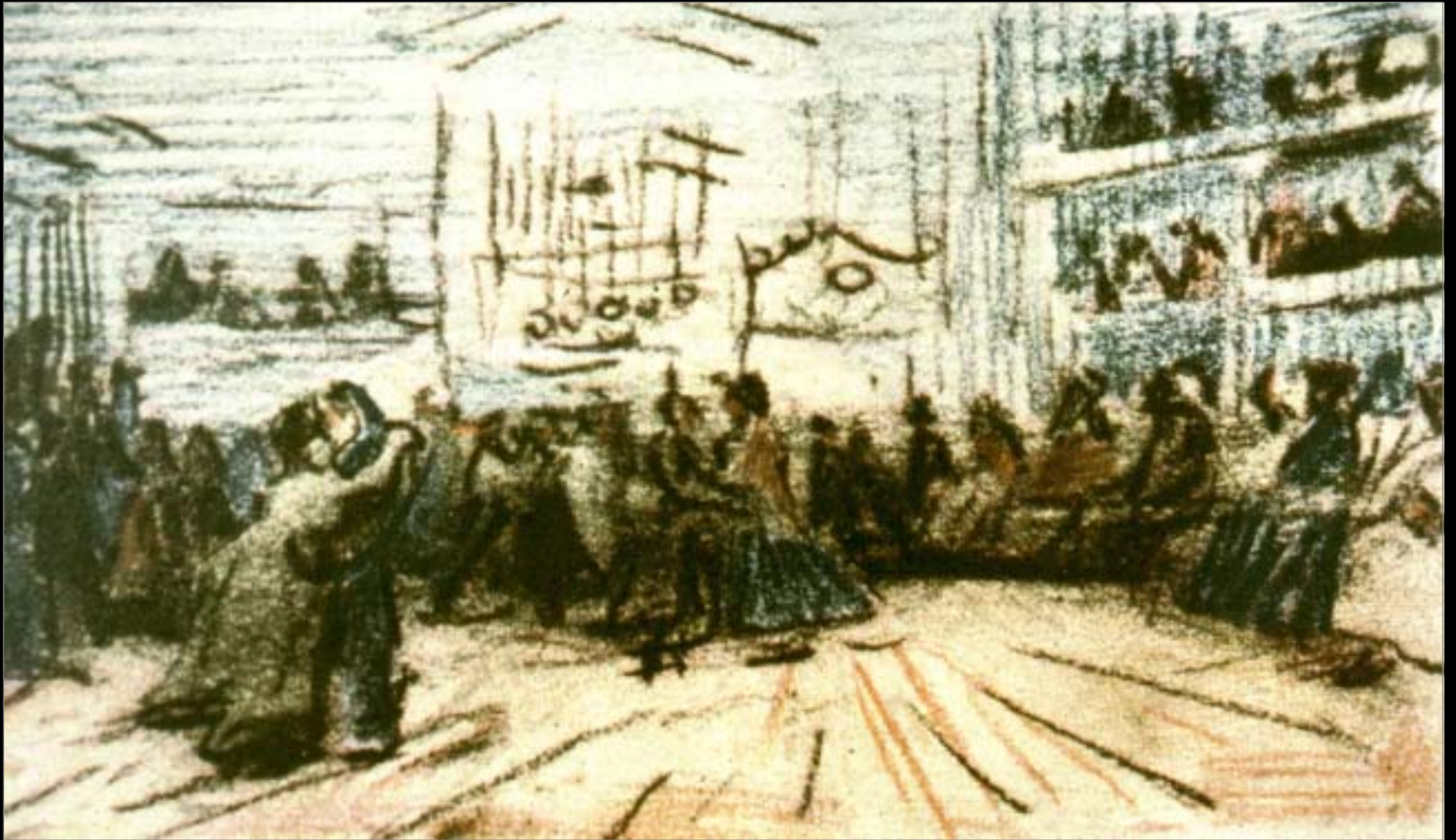


Vincent Van Gogh went to art school and made a self portrait...
What do the lines say, what does the expression show?

1885



He lived in a dump room in an attic...



Spent the nights in dance halls...

*and it's not so much the muscles of his face as the muscles of the place
and the muscles of his body as he draws it...*

1885-6



...smoked and drank too much and had bad teeth...

Maybe no muscles, but what about the bones beneath?



Art school was a bust
—he said the teachers didn't know shit—
and so he took off for Paris, the “city of light.”



Vincent Van Gogh, Self Portrait...
What do the lines say?

1887



He lived with his brother Theo, met all the hot new artists and learned the hot new styles.
The style was called Impressionism and the technique was called “broken color”...

But the hot new artists thought he was as dumb as the shit faculty at art school had said he was.

1888



And he went to the country for springtime and sunrise...



And it was springtime and sunrise and natural (now it's labeled "organic")...

1888



Like before, he hung out in bars...

“With red and green, I have tried to depict those terrible things, men’s passions.”

“I have tried to convey that a café is a place where a man can ruin himself, go crazy, commit a crime.”

And the colors are not the muscles in a face but the sound in a soul.

1888



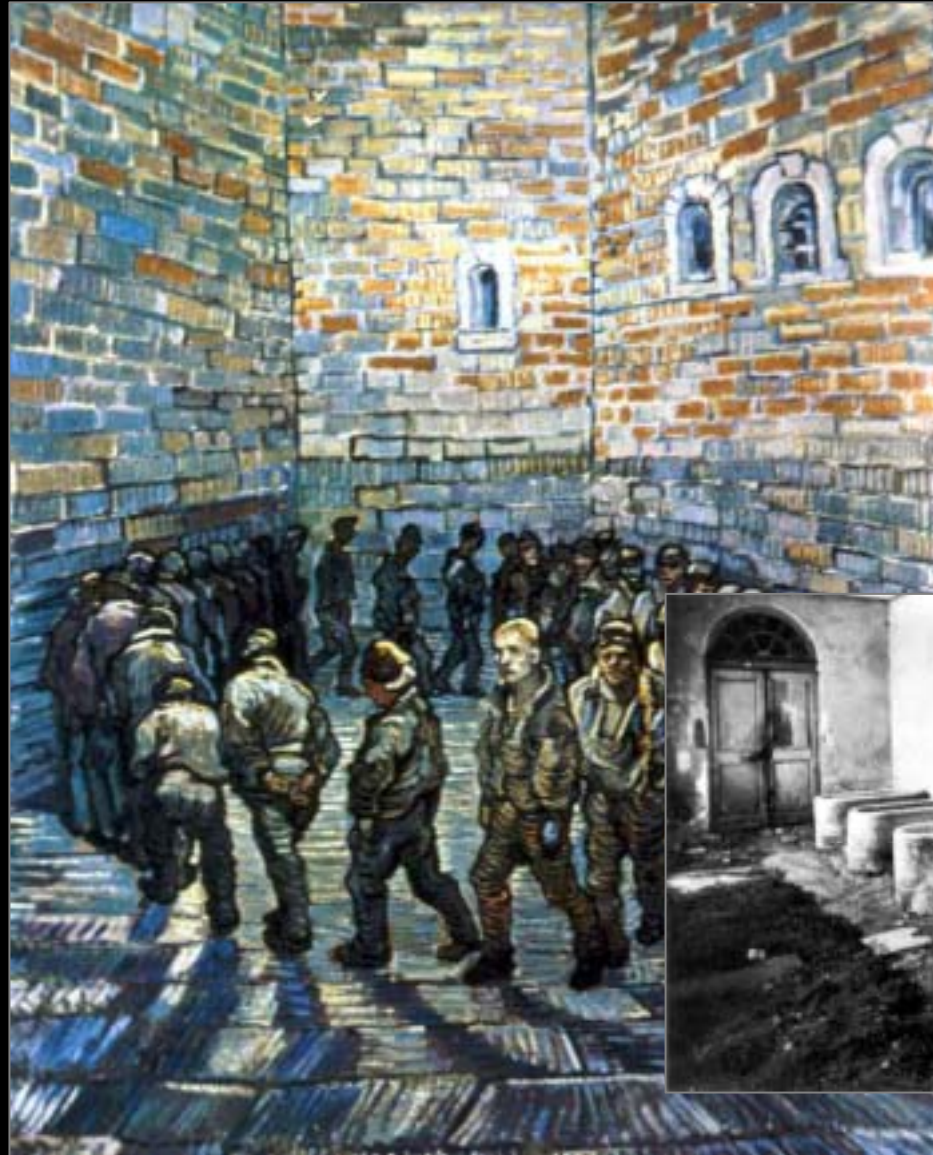
Well, absinthe got him hot...

But the girls in the local brothel didn't like him (no one else ever had either, beginning with mom and dad).

His buddy Paul said "Giver her a present, give her your ear..."

"With red and green, I have tried to depict those terrible things, men's passions."

1888



In those days, the cure was to soak the nuts in tubs to calm them down. Vincent spent a lot of time in one of these when he wasn't walking in circles or painting in his room.



Vincent had said, "Like every work of art, a self-portrait."
After this one, he didn't want to do it anymore.

19th C.



Edvard Munch: The Christiania Boheme...
What do the lines say?



(Munch is 30 years old.)
I Hear the Cry of Nature

Diary entry, dated 22.1.92...

"I was walking along the road with two friends. The sun set. I felt a tinge of melancholy. Suddenly the sky became a bloody red.

"I stopped, leaned against the railing, dead tired—my friends looked at me and walked on—and I looked at the flaming clouds that hung like blood and a sword [over the fjord and city] over the blue-black fjord and city.

"My friends walked on. I stopped there, trembling with fright. And I felt a loud, unending scream piercing nature."

"By painting colors and lines and shapes that I had seen in an emotional mood, I wanted to make the emotional mood ring out again, as on a gramophone."

What do the lines say?

1940-42



Edvard Munch: Between Clock and Bed
What do the lines say?

Kathe Kollwitz and 20th Century art for social purpose

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“From my childhood on my father had expressly wished me to be trained for a career as an artist...

“When in my 17th year I became engaged to Karl Kollwitz (who was then studying medicine), my father...saw his plans for me in danger by the engagement.

“He was very skeptical about my intention to follow two careers, that of artist and of housewife.

“Shortly before our marriage in 1891, my father said to me, ‘You have made your choice now. You will scarcely be able to do both things. So be wholly what you have chosen to be.’ ”



8. Self Portrait, 1891-2



Self Portrait, 1904



Self Portrait, 1910

During the years of work on *The Peasants' War*, Kathe was hired as a free-lance artist for *Simplizicimus*, a satirical progressive publication with a large circulation throughout Germany. Beginning in 1909, the magazine published her drawings under the general title *Portraits of Misery*.



Self Portrait, 1924



Self Portrait, 1933



Self Portrait, 1934



Self Portrait, 1938

Late 20th Century and Francis Bacon and Andy Warhol and art for...?

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Late 20th C.



Well, time passes and things sometimes don't turn out... or do they?
What do the lines—not the lines, the volumes—say?

Late 20th C.



What do the lines—not the lines, the volumes—say about Isabel Rawsthorne?

Late 20th C.



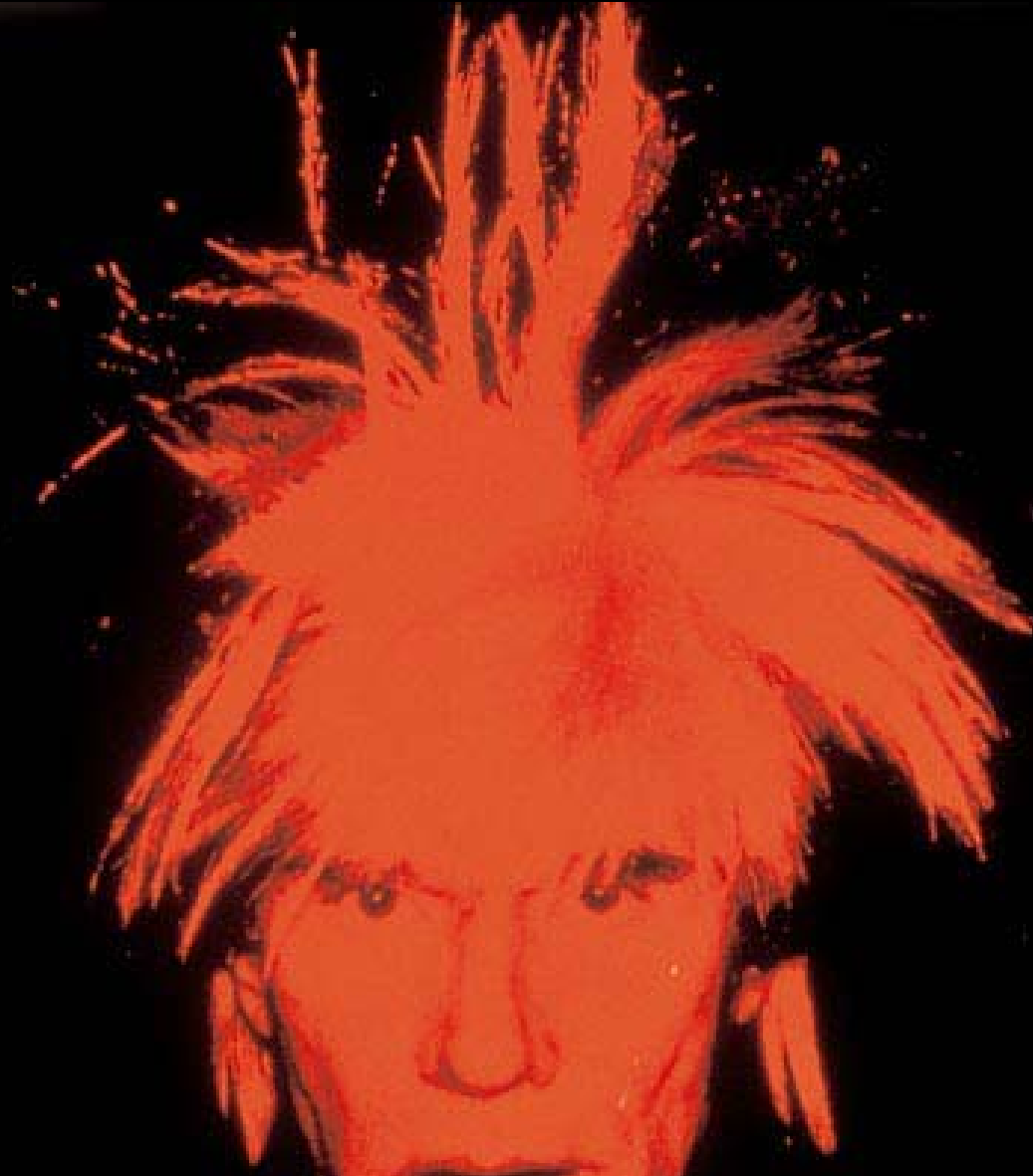
Well, time passes and things sometimes don't turn out... or do they?
What do the lines—not the lines, the volumes—say about George Dyer?

Late 20th C.



Well, time passes and things sometimes don't turn out... or do they?
What do the lines—not the lines, the volumes—say?
What is the story of the late 20th Century now already over?

Late 20th C.



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