ABOUT FACE

Portraits by 72 artists at the Mpls Photo Center take the genre all around the world.

ART REVIEW MARY ABBE

Everyone loves a portrait, and rightly so. A good one pins a life to a page and lays someone's hopes and possibilities out for all to see.

Dreams are there, along with doubts and losses and the deck that's stacked for or against them. Good portraits show more than what their subjects look like. There's a hint of where they come from, what they do and think and believe. Always, the eyes have it, carrying the emotions and the none-too-hidden messages of the character within.

Out of 1,600 portraits submitted by artists from around the world, guest juror Andrea Mellard picked 75 for "The Portrait: Up Close and Personal," a vividly engaging show on view through Aug. 19 at the Mpls Photo Center. As exhibition curator at the AMOA-Arthouse, a contemporary art museum in Austin, Texas, Mellard brought a well-trained eye and a generous spirit to her task.

Her choices range from crisp black-and-white street shots to contemporary color experiments. There are even a few antique processes, including a collodion ambrotype and an albumen print. Everything is meticulously printed and simply framed, factors that help to smooth out a jumble of sizes ranging from notebook to 3 feet square.

Youth and age

Most important, Mellard welcomed subjects of all ages taken in myriad places and circumstances — from Charles Hezsely's wistful "Eyes of Blue," a close-up of a dreamy preteen girl in a sequined cap at the Minnesota State Fair, to Sandra Chen Weinstein's "Child Shiva," a brown-eyed

◀ "George the Painter, Sturgis Motorcycle Rally" by Lacey Criswell and Amanda Hankerson

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girl of similar age made up as a blue-skinned, ruby-lipped goddess in Pushkar, India. Vulnerable and a little lost, the girls look to be psychological twins separated by half a world of culture and geography.

David Noah Bau's portrait of "Bau 14, 86 lbs," a boy boxer in Bangkok, Thailand, is a bleak picture of desperate determination. By photographing him in stark light against a bare white wall, Bau monumentalizes the sweaty boy in his dirty, oversized shorts and gloves, a kid who seems simultaneously scared, exploited and cunningly mature.

There's a similar toughness in the child Philip Lawrence of Brisbane, Australia, depicts in "Walk a Mile in My Shoes." Prosthetic legs and feet protrude from the boy's shorts as he stands proud, troubled and defiant on a street corner, encircled by shadow. The steely play of light and darkness gives "Walk" the crucial dignity of a great image, and saves it from mawkish exploitation of the afflicted.

At the opposite end of the age spectrum, Michael Schmidt's "Elderly Surfer" is a monochrome masterpiece of compressed action, a crystalline wave flicking off the surfer's bronzed shoulder as he powers into dark water on a gleaming day. Also working in black-and-white, Walter Horishnyk lets a softer light play up the crinkles in the smiling face and fake fur cape of "Princess of the Four Winds, Barbara Ellinger." In her color portraits of Twin Cities architect Ralph Rapson and a sturdy farm woman holding produce, Minneapolis photographer Judy Griesedieck puts her subjects in context (tubes of architectural drawings, a field of heavy-laden tomato plants) and softens their worn features with tender, late-day light.

Art and the ordinary

Often, the hardest portraits to make are those of ordinary, pleasant people who have lived quiet lives. What's a camera to do with an elderly lady, neatly dressed, in a tidy apartment? Faced with that conundrum of banality, Anne-France Dubois of Brussels, Belgium, rose to the occasion with "Elise Crucke," a two-panel ode in beige. On the right Elise sits in her tweedy wing chair, watery eyes smiling beneath a gaily ribboned hat; at left is a bed-top collection of pastel dolls and stuffed animals surrounded by modest mementoes of faith and rectitude (a tiny crucifix and floral needlework).

A few perfectly executed art shots deserve mention. Aspen Hochhalter's untitled self-portrait pretty well nails the toned, distressed-negative, collage style of Guatemalan photographer Luis González Palma. In "RS and Hydrangea," Leigh Kane from Kutztown, Pa., offers a totally conceptual portrait of delicate blue blossoms next to a tumble of coarse, tawny hair. And in "Odalisque (After Ingres)," Niki Grangruth and James Kinser do a perfect sendup of 19th-century French painter J.A.D Ingres' famous "Grande Odalisque," although their male model evidently lacks the three extra vertebrae that critics said gave Ingres' lovely nude her notoriously elongated back.

There are many more in myriad formats, all worth scrutinizing. The only thing missing is one of those banal corporate-official pictures, and maybe some photo-booth strips, but they're no loss.

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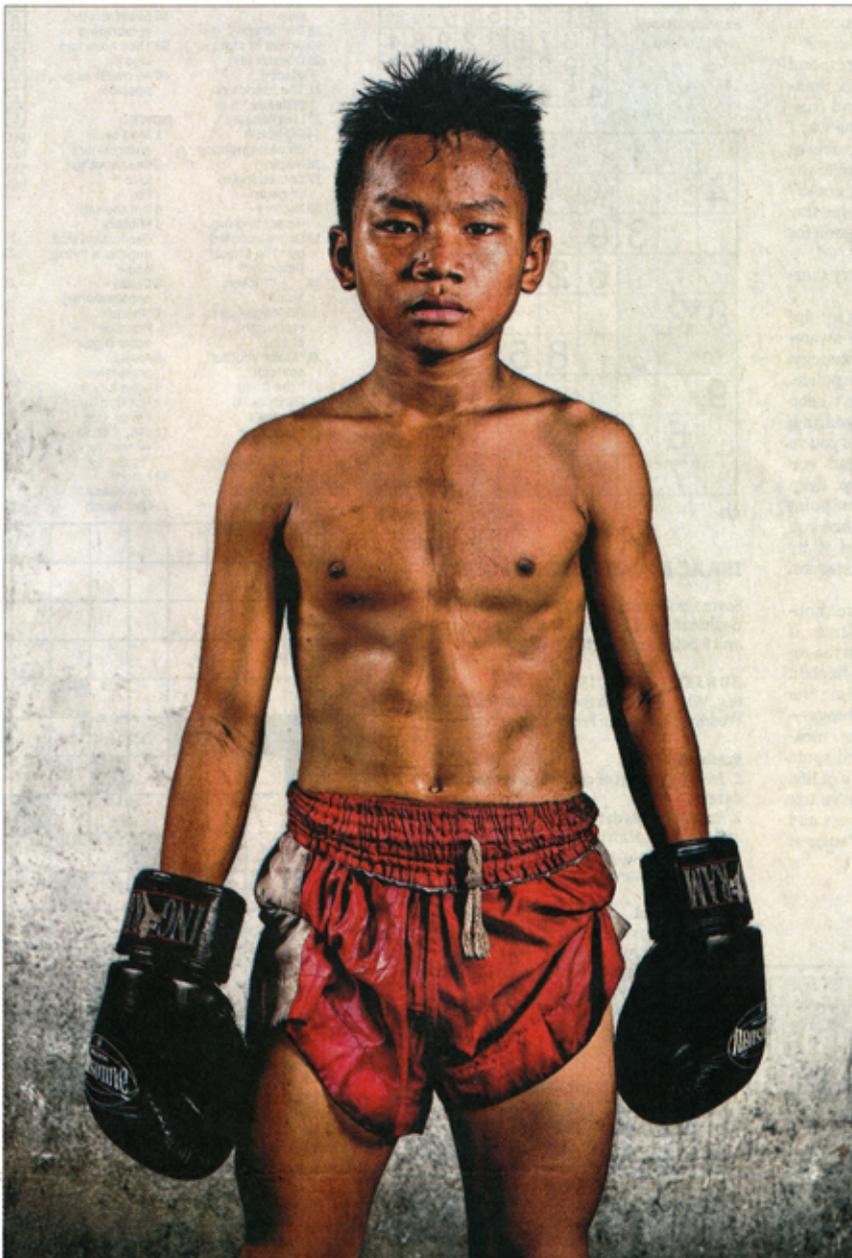
"Bau 14, 86 lbs." by David Noah Bau.

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