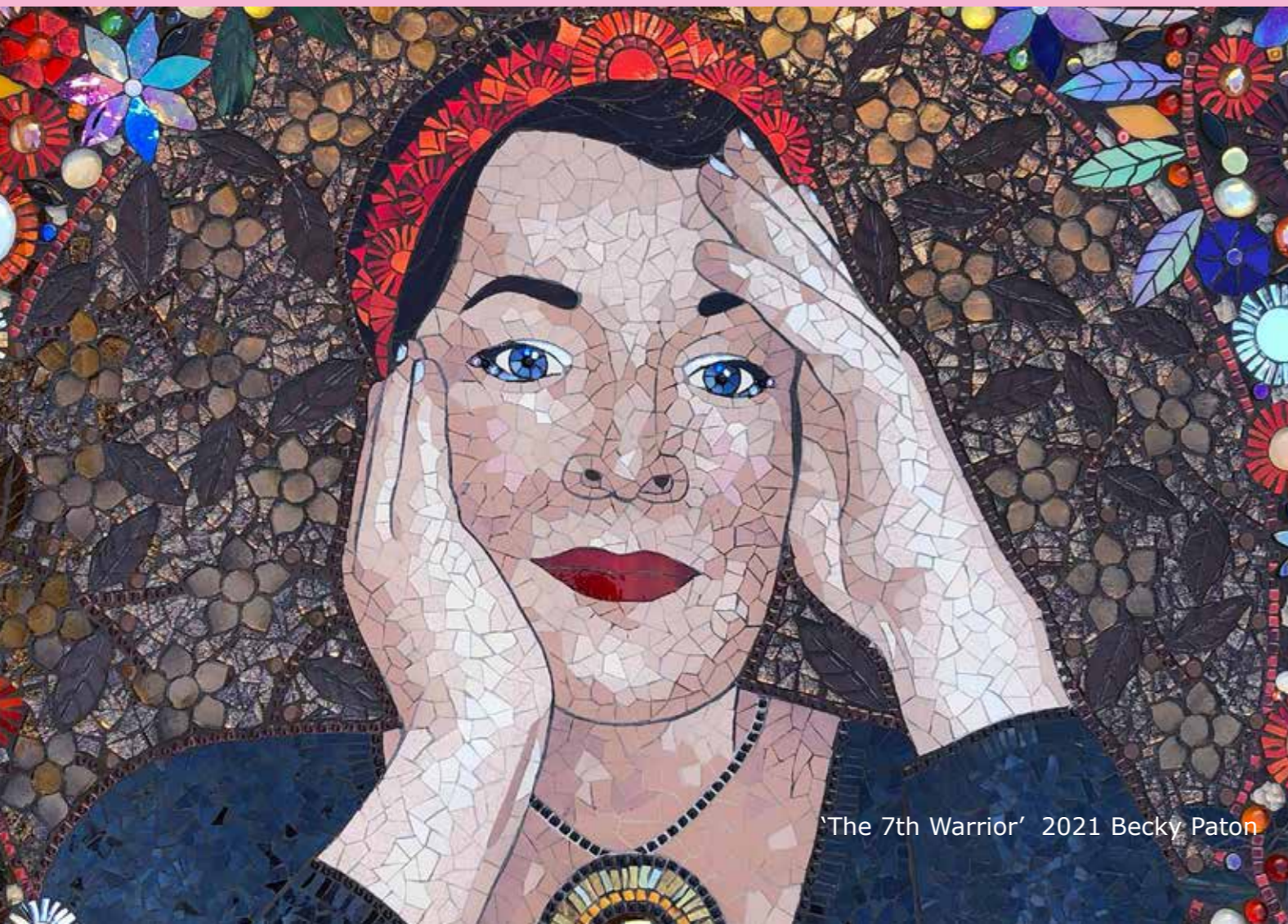


The Art of Reflection

Opening and closing twice in 2020 due to the Covid pandemic, The Ashmolean Museum Oxford's 'Young Rembrandt' exhibition displayed early works charting the first decade of the working life of the artist. It showed his tentative beginnings and rapid development of skill, leading to his emergence as a prolific master of painting and print-making. The exhibition was the starting point for the COU COU 'JONG' exhibition, as curator Clare Carswell invited mid-career artists to reflect on themes in the exhibition, as well as on works from the early stages of their own careers.

Many of Rembrandt's early works are self-portraits, a form which offers the most intimate perspective a viewer can get of an artist. By linking creativity to self-hood, an artist is able to incorporate clues to their own identity as well as leaving tangible evidence of their thought processes and their technical development. Unsurprisingly, it is these aspects of the 'Young Rembrandt' exhibition that portrait painter Robin Danely, identifies with. She presents self-portraits in the 'JONG' exhibition, spanning the years between 1996 and the present. In exhibiting self-portraits of her younger self alongside the recent 'Dutch Self Portrait' 2021, Robin is not only showing her increased skill as a painter, but offers an insight into her own origins. She has included a bold visual reference to her personal history as in the picture she is wearing a collar crocheted by her grandmother, connecting her to her family of Dutch immigrants to the United States in the nineteenth century. It also refers to the decorative collars of Rembrandt's time.

Becky Paton, a mosaic artist, was also inspired by the 'Young Rembrandt' exhibition to examine the connections between her practice and self-portraiture and to determine the sources of inspiration for her vivid glass and ceramic works. She observes her desire to capture particular moments, or memories in her works, psychologically marking the importance of an occasion, the works functioning as a cornerstone for each stage of her career. For the 'JONG' exhibition Becky has made a large self-portrait, 'The 7th Warrior' 2021, echoing the jewel like qualities of the paintings of the master. It is one of a trio of self-portraits exhibited that represent her creative journey, as well as encapsulating within them personal memories and signs of her interest in the natural world.



'The 7th Warrior' 2021 Becky Paton



'Feed Me Now' 2021 Juliet Eccles

The 'Young Rembrandt' exhibition revealed the importance of experimentation in shaping Rembrandt's later practice, his earlier works showing his struggles with drawing and etching as well as his improvement and acquisition of skill in depicting the effect of light. Vicky Hirsch concluded that for her, the process of making is as important as the outcome, fuelling new discovery and development. Taking time to pause and reflect helps artists to follow their intuition, essential for finding sources of inspiration, and progressing artistic practice beyond mere reproduction. Vicky's works for the 'JONG' exhibition are copper plate etchings, paying homage to the young Rembrandt's dedication to the bettering of his etching technique. Vicky documents the link between experimentation and artistic maturing, taking as a starting point a photograph of herself with the ceramic pots, also included in the exhibition, which she made as a younger artist. She has produced a series of etchings 'My Younger Self I - V' 2021 that act as a linear narrative of her own progress.

Rembrandt's early works show him exploring new and innovative subjects, bringing a reality and earthiness to his depictions of real women with sagging flesh rather than idealised forms. His honesty and determination to represent life in its rawest forms is also seen in works of peasants urinating and defecating, demonstrating that he chose not to shy away from the ordinariness of everyday life. Juliet Eccles shows powerful photographic and video works which are similarly honest images of the experience of living with disability in all its 'grubbiness'. She is interested in mortality and in how extended periods of illness have marked her. Her response to the works in the 'Young Rembrandt' exhibition echoes Rembrandt's desire to show the fragility of life and human vulnerability. Her photographic works 'Feed Me Now', 'Feeding Myself', 'Nil By Mouth' 2021, reference the act of feeding, stripping away the elegance of manners to show the primal struggle of achieving it for oneself and the discomfort of depending on others to help you. Her works, as Rembrandt's do, communicate with us as living breathing human beings sustained by connection and our shared frailty.

It is evident from the responses that the four exhibiting artists in the 'JONG' exhibition have made, that looking back and learning from the work of those who went before is as vital as self-reflection for an artist. Both processes lead to greater understanding of creative inspiration and the source of the subjects which endure for them. Evident are signs of experimentation, improved technical skill, and the best representation of the ideas that pervade the work. The willingness to learn and to meet the challenges within artistic practice echoes the fearlessness of the young Rembrandt. Such courage and thoughtfulness can be usefully applied to life more broadly. We can perhaps all take inspiration from the themes of the 'Young Rembrandt' exhibition to learn the 'art' of reflection.



"Circus" Lidded vessels & beakers 1983 Vicky Hirsch

'Dutch Self Portrait' 2021 Robin Danely



JONG

/YOUNG

Artists revisit their early works and respond to themes in The Ashmolean Museum's 'Young Rembrandt' exhibition

13 - 28 November 2021

Fri - Sun 12 - 5 or by appointment

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Image: Becky Paton

COU COU is pleased to present the 'JONG' exhibition of works by Robin Danely, Juliet Eccles, Vicky Hirsch, Becky Paton in November 2021

The 'Young Rembrandt' exhibition at The Ashmolean Museum in 2020, gave insights into the early years of the master, revealing his hesitant beginnings and progression as he found his authentic style. It prompted me to re-meet my younger self, to identify subjects that endured, as well as skill that grew and the influences on me during my development as an artist. I hoped that other mid-career artists would be similarly interested in reviewing their early years and I began to plan for the 'JONG' exhibition. It faltered immediately with the arrival of Covid and is happening twenty months late.

I am appreciative of the commitment that Robin Danely, Juliet Eccles, Vicky Hirsch and Becky Paton have brought to this project. It delights me as curator that my enthusiasm for the subject should have inspired them to make new works in response to young Rembrandt, as well as to their young selves. It has been fascinating watching them become their own historian as they did so.

Leiden is the birthplace of Rembrandt and I am pleased that we are at last able to realise the 'JONG' exhibition as part of the 75th Anniversary celebrations of the Oxford-Leiden Link association. I would like to thank John Chipperfield and the members of the committee for their support.

I am grateful to art historian Hope Collinson for her insights and contribution to the catalogue text.

Most of all I want to thank the artists for their wonderful work and for their patience as this exhibition came together in fits and starts whilst we lived through a uniquely challenging time.

Clare Carswell MA(RCA)

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