THE HOLISTIC PORTRAIT

By Peter Michael Hornung, Editor and Art Critic at "Politiken"

Like other artists in our chaotically picture rich modern age, the painter Ralph Heimans also owes a professional debt to the art that preceded his own work historically. However, though he may have turned to it, asked it questions and drawn inspiration from it, he has never copied it. On the other hand, though, his personal standpoint as an artist is a result of the inspiration he drew from it.

No one can create anything lasting and valuable without swearing some sort of oath to history, and any artist, even the most rebellious and experimental (or the opposite), must inscribe his or her work in a development, in which he or she serves as a link between past and future: between what went before and maybe influenced them, and what will come after and perhaps be coloured by them.

This applies particularly to any artist who has chosen portrait painting as his or her sphere. In this field, the models extend far back in history. The need to be portrayed has existed for as long as there has been people with power and influence: people who wished to be notably present, not only in their age, but also for posterity. Portraits are like memories. With the right degree of likeness they possess the special capacity to make absent people present. Consideration for this likeness is also the reason why people still allow themselves to be painted, modelled, photographed, sketched etc.

Heimans' success as an artist in this historic genre lies not only in the fact that his paintings present a 'likeness', as it is referred to in the profession: in other words, that there is a clear and visible correspondence between the character appearing in the painting and the person who was the reason for that painting, and whom the painting must either remind us of or introduce us to.

When we take a good look at all the paintings, particularly the commissions, which today constitute Ralph Heimans' oeuvre, we notice that, despite his relatively young age and his cultural affiliation, he has certain chosen affinities with older European art. The fact that Dutch art in particular played a role for him is easily explained. He has Dutch blood. Yes, he was born and grew up in Australia in suburban Sydney and was also educated there. However, his father, Frank Heimans, a director of documentary films, originally came from the Netherlands.

A number of Dutch portrait painters from the 17th century relate particularly to the way Heimans works: painters such as Pieter de Hooch, Jan Vermeer van Delft, Bartholomeus van der Helst, Gerard Dou, Gerard Houckgeest, Gabriel Metsu, Nicolaes Maes and, of course, Rembrandt, who is particularly close to his heart. Because all these artists went far beyond the simple act of executing a portrait of the person to be painted.

Consider Your Ways: Portrait of Madeleine and Douglas (detail)

They knew, and proved in their painting, that a portrait can extend far beyond the person, which the painting sets out to depict and thereby presents to us. Behind the person, and around the person, a painter can create an entity of consciously selected details, which both together and individually have something important to say. This is the simulated/imitated level that exists deep inside the painting's fictive, illusionistic space. For the sake of simplicity, let us refer to it as "the background" or "the setting". This setting is the space that serves as the context for the person being painted. It is incorporated into the entirety of the painting to reveal something more than what the features of a face can tell us. This is where an artist can consolidate more observations of, and truths about a person than simply that person's exterior.

Of course likeness is the name of the game, but in this context likeness relates not only to physiognomy, but also to a larger context. We can regard this setting as an individual or social geography: a special universe with precise references to the person in the portrait, which would otherwise be concealed and untold.

Nor is the background ever merely decorative. It plays a special, characterising role, about which Ralph Heimans has written: 'Context plays such an important part of my portraiture, so finding the context and collaborating with the subject, finding a meaningful setting, is a very important part of the process.' (*The Rover*, p. 19)

In a classic portrait a model often literally stands *in front of* something that model actually stands *for*. This applies to so-called status portraits, in which a king is depicted in front of his court or castle, the landowner in front of his estate, the learned scholar in front of his library, the victorious general in front of the battlefield etc.

Jan van Eyck: The Arnolfini Marriage, 1434.
National Gallery, London

What we refer to as 'likeness' does not necessarily end with the likeness to a person's physicality or his or her physiognomy. It can also encompass a greater context. Because the context will tell us what the person identifies with, and what he or she is interested in or wishes to be associated with. It can help pinpoint what sort of person the subject is, what his or her province is, where he or she is, has been or hopes to be. This background is like a backdrop in a theatre performance. The stage is also a perfect place to reveal a character through the set design that is chosen for that character's environment.

We know of countless examples of this in the history of art. One of the best known is *The Arnolfini Marriage* (1434) by the Dutch painter, Jan van Eyck. The painting is a double portrait of the Italian merchant, Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife. What we know about the two people and their relationship we know by virtue of what the room – their immediate surroundings – tells us.

The artist who allows the presentations in his portraits to play out against an architectural background also has to account for the spatiality. He needs some knowledge of perspective and of how, on a surface that consists of two dimensions, you can also create the illusion of a third. But chiefly he must possess some knowledge of people in general and, in particular, his own models.

THE FIRST ROYAL PORTRAIT

In a kingdom, everyone knows what the members of their Royal Family look like, even though the majority of us have never actually met them or stood in the same room as them. What we know about their appearance comes from photos in newspapers and weekly magazines, TV programmes etc. We retain that knowledge. When it comes to official portraits, it is not just that we expect correspondence with the photographic image we associate with the person; we almost insist on it. Likeness is an unconditional requirement. But, as already mentioned, in Ralph Heimans' portraits there is more than merely an external likeness to the person being portrayed. This particular quality was also the reason that the people of Denmark first got to hear about Ralph Heimans.

On 7 April 2006, a new and fairly large portrait of Crown Princess Mary was unveiled (p. 12-13). The ceremony took place at Frederiksborg Castle, where the picture became part of the Museum of National History's Collection. It hangs there to this day. Now, twelve years after the unveiling, the painting will not only have company, but also the most obvious and natural company imaginable. It will be joined by a portrait of Crown Prince Frederik, Mary's husband, commissioned from, and painted by the same painter, but for a very special occasion: the Crown Prince's 50th birthday (p. 18-19). The two paintings of the Crown Princess and the Crown Prince are also exactly the same size. After all, they are companions: two portraits of two royal personages.

The unveiling of the portrait of Crown Princess Mary was a national event. People observed that, despite its affiliation to Denmark and its significance for the history of Denmark, the portrait was not entirely Danish. Because it was painted by an Australian and alluded to the time when the person in the picture, Crown Princess Mary of Denmark, was not yet Danish at all, but a British-Australian young woman by the name of Mary Elizabeth Donaldson who was born in Hobart in Tasmania.

In a way it made perfect sense for the first official portrait of Crown Princess Mary of Denmark not to be painted by a Danish artist. Everything that relates to such a representative work of art reflects some special objectives and is governed by an agenda. Very little in them is the result of accident. Even the choice of artist is significant. It certainly was in this case. Because the fact that the Crown Princess ended up being immortalised by a painter from Australia was nothing to do with a lack of Danish artists who would be quite capable of rising to such a challenge and more than happy to do so.

It was more about strengthening the international bond between the country 'down under', where Crown Princess Mary was born on 5 February 1972, and the small nation up north, where one day she will be Queen. So the idea was to find an artist from the Crown Princess's own country to paint the portrait. On one hand, the museum wished to establish a focus on her homeland and, on the other, to introduce Australian portrait art to the people of Denmark. Finally, everyone would be able to see that the woman in the painting had a different

national background from that of the many other prominent personages already hanging in Frederiksborg Castle and serving as gold framed images for the continuing chronicle of Denmark.

In order to come up with the best possible artist, the Director of the Museum of National History, Mette Skougaard, contacted her colleagues at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra about a potential collaboration. She then travelled to Canberra to assess with her own eyes what the options were. The project convinced the National Portrait Gallery that they too should own a portrait of Crown Princess Mary. So, by the time Mette Skougaard returned to Copenhagen, the original project had turned into two projects: one Danish and one Australian.

That also meant that there were now two Australian portrait painters in the running for Mette Skougaard to present to the Royal Household. Jiawei Shen, a slightly older painter of Chinese background, would deal with the portrait of Mary for the museum in Canberra, while Ralph Heimans was entrusted with the task of painting the picture for Frederiksborg.

AN OUTSIDER IN RED

At that time (in 2005) Ralph Heimans had not yet received commissions of the same significance as the portrait of the Crown Princess. They did not come until a few years later, particularly as a result of the reception, which this, his first official portrait of a royal personage, was given by the general public.

But he had painted pictures that were important in an Australian context. One of the most notable was the portrait of the Honourable Michael Kirby, AC, CMG (p. 112). He painted the picture in 1997, one year after Michael Kirby had left his position as Chief Justice for the New South Wales Court of Appeal to take up a position as a Justice of the High Court of Australia. Michael Kirby had served as Chief Justice in the Court of Appeal for eleven years. Now was the time to immortalise him in the official, ceremonial costume worn by members of the country's highest judicial authority. It consists of a crimson gown edged with fur. The long white wig is another feature of the office.

Radical Restraint was the title of Heimans' portrait. It is a reminder of the critical and consistent attitude, which Michael Kirby was to represent during his term in office. He was not like the vast majority of judges, but very much a man with his own opinions. The fact that he often expressed dissenting opinions led to his nickname: 'The Great Dissenter'.

In other areas too he differed from what the Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen called the 'compact majority'. In 1984 he came out publicly as a homosexual and committed himself wholeheartedly to defending the rights of gay people in society. At the time, more than thirty years ago, while declaring one's sexual tendencies was a human right that was protected by law, it was not something, to which most people reacted favourably. The fact that Kirby was profoundly religious, describing himself as 'Protestant Anglican Christian' did not prevent him

from openly criticising a couple of Australian bishops who, in his opinion, were opposed to the rights of gay men and women.

At first sight, Ralph Heimans' portrait of Kirby comes across as a group portrait. It is the depiction of a profession. But one person stands out in the small assembly of judges. He is the only one turning towards the painter and, ultimately, towards us. Nor is Kirby wearing a wig. His colleagues are, though. They are grouped together. They apparently have something in common and are talking to one another. But Kirby is not. He is facing us. He is his own person: by virtue of his convictions a loner. But the painting is not merely a depiction of him. It presents a person in a tangible context, which helps characterise him.

That is why Heimans chose the large landscape format. This particular format enables the setting to play a role, providing the picture with enough space

The Badminton Club, 2003.
Private Collection

for its total narrative. It is these backgrounds that make Ralph Heimans' portraits so different. Because Heimans is also a person who wants to stand out via the pictures he creates.

For such representative portraits of individuals, an artist generally selects a format, in which the height of the picture is greater than its width. But in Ralph Heimans' portraits the opposite is usually the case. Heimans has often returned to landscape format in a series of major private portrait commissions in Australia, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong: for example, *The Badminton Club*, *Consider Your Ways*, *Joshua Tree*, *The Jungels*, *Paula* and *The Boyers*. But he also used the landscape format in the most publicised part of his oeuvre: the official portraits of the Crown Princess of Denmark, Queen Elizabeth II of England and her husband, Prince Philip. The fact that he also used the format in his most recent commission for the Museum of National History at Frederiksborg Castle, the portrait of Crown Prince Frederik, was not unexpected.

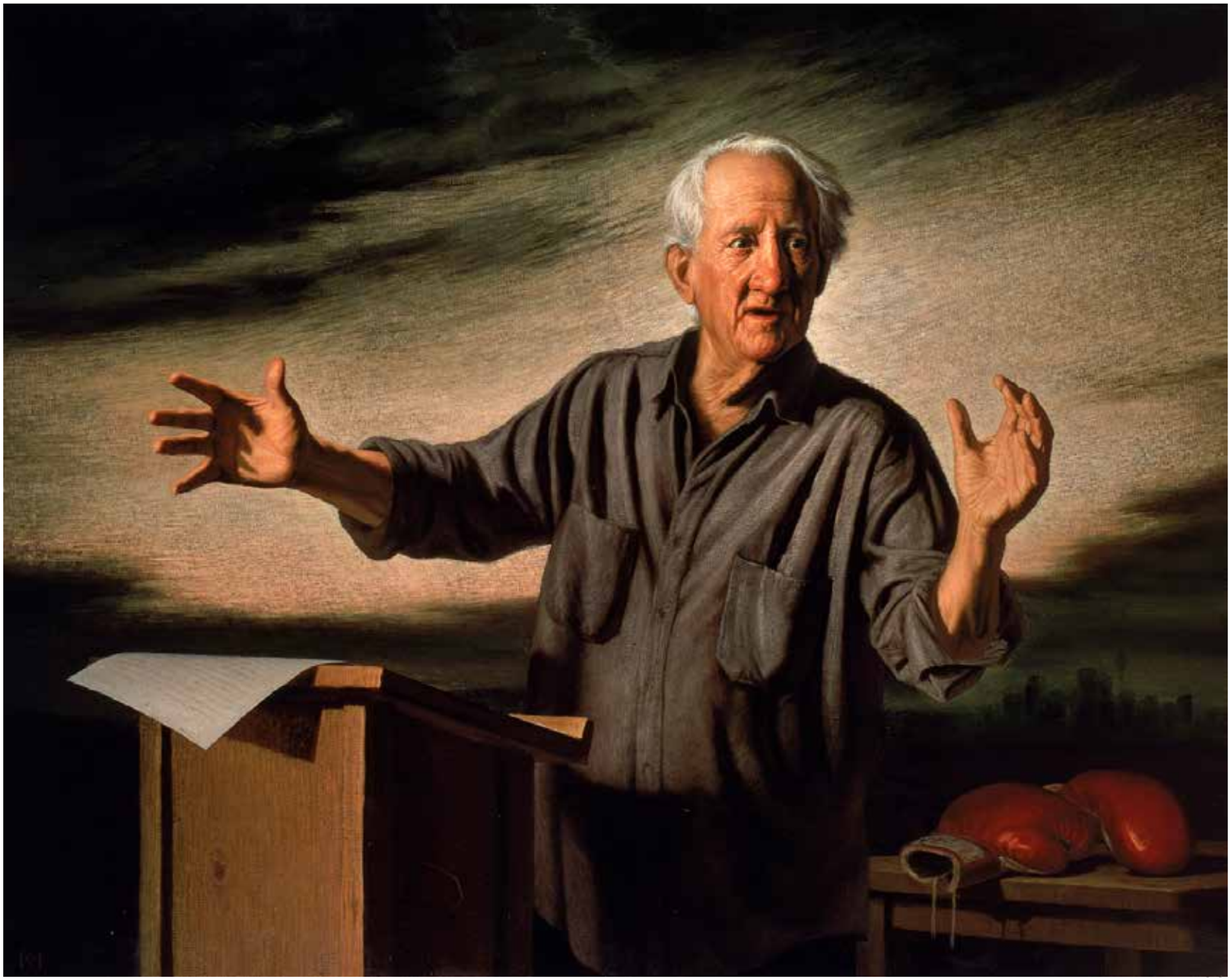
THE PORTRAIT AS A HISTORY PAINTING

Heimans calls portrait painting "a collaborative process": between the artist and his partner, the person to be painted. That is why it is important for Heimans to meet his model before taking on the task of painting that person's portrait. This is also how the artist gets to know as much as possible about the person he will portray. He wants to know his subject.

He then thinks about how the portrait should be painted. The literary term, *genius loci* (the spirit of a place) seems very apposite in this context. The idea for the composition of a picture is never something that merely happens. The composition is conditioned by the place, in which the person being portrayed is most natural: in other words, the place, in which the setting will reveal the most about a person's background and character. So it is important for Heimans to amass all the knowledge that will make it easier to place such a person in the world. Once the artist knows how his model should be placed in this world (in other words, society at large), he also knows more about how to place the model in the picture he is going to paint.

Heimans always wants his portraits to tell a story. For the same reason he regards his paintings as something akin to history paintings. That does not mean that they have to be set up and consciously staged. He wants to stay free of what he calls "the self-consciousness of a portrait": portraits, in which the model consciously poses to assert, or create the illusion of a portentousness that is perhaps not entirely justified. On the other hand, he is very happy for the person to look as if he or she is about to do something that could change the situation in the painting. That is one of the aspects of Rembrandt's portraits that continues to fascinate Heimans: they often contain an action or an event, in which the people being portrayed are the protagonists. That applies particularly to *The Night Watch* in the Rijksmuseum.

Making sure he has space to depict this or that action or event is the reason why Heimans favours the panorama format. Compared to other official portraits, this can be considerably large. But the format is the artist's supreme decision. He often refers to his "cinematic approach" to pictures and painting them. This special fascination with a cinematic approach did not come from nowhere. Both his parents worked in the film industry. While a film requires time to tell the whole story, a picture requires adequate space. Only then is there an opportunity to express a story in its entirety.



Gloves Off (Tom Uren), 1996. National Portrait Gallery, Canberra (purchased with funds from the Basil Bressler Bequest)

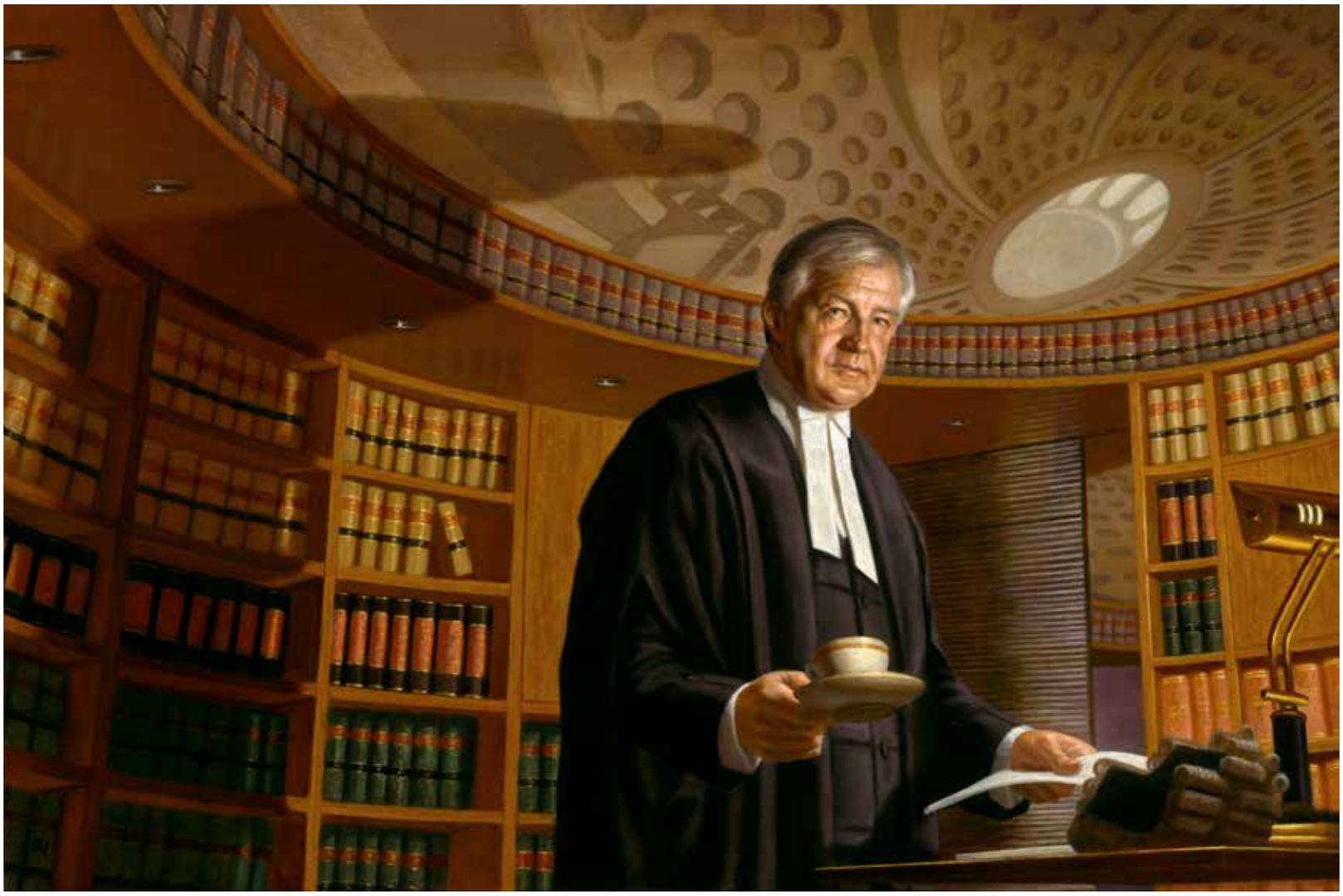
Portrait of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, 2006.
Private Collection

Study for the portrait of the Queen, 2012.
Private Collection

Pelham Crescent, 2001.
Private Collection

After Heimans had been commissioned to paint the portrait of the Crown Princess, he came to Denmark, where he was shown round Fredensborg Palace. After the visit he was in no doubt as to where in the Palace he should paint Mary: the Garden Room. The Garden Room originally had a Baroque interior, but in the 18th century King Frederik V transformed it into a dazzling Rococo interior with decorative ornamentations and gilded furniture in the period's richly embellished style. It was also in this room in the late 19th century, in which the Danish artist, Laurits Tuxen chose to paint the entire Danish royal family assembled with their closest European relatives.

However, in his painting of Crown Princess Mary Heimans has replaced the inlaid paintings of the Garden Room (the ruin landscapes of the theatre and decorative painter Jacopo Fabri) with a huge mirror, which reflects a picture show-



ing Constitution Dock in Hobart, the capital of Tasmania and the native city of Mary Donaldson. Heimans has also transformed the ceiling of the Garden Room into one, which actually belongs to one of the halls at Frederiksborg Castle (The Angels' Hall). But the couch is the same couch, in which Frederik and Mary sat, when they were photographed on the occasion of their engagement.

In other words, the room in the painting is not entirely identical to a real room. It is a constructed setting, a symbolic space that contains various references: to the Crown Princess's past (Hobart), to her future (Fredensborg) and to the picture's future (Frederiksborg Castle). But the space is principally a reflection of the person being immortalised. As far as Heimans is concerned, everything in a portrait should possess meaning.

The portrait of Crown Princess Mary shows her standing in an interior, in which lighting effects, shadows and reflections are refracted so intricately that

Portrait of a QC, 2004. Private Collection

it is hard to separate reality from illusion. If it were not for the sunlight beaming in from the right as if from a well-angled spotlight, she might not have been the first element you noticed. She is not standing in the centre of the picture or in the immediate proximity of its central axis. In fact, she is standing in the centre of the picture's right-hand half. Nevertheless, the Crown Princess is also present in the left-hand half. Because, had it not been for the shadow, which the back of the Crown Princess's body casts in the mirror on the wall, the fact is that two thirds of the picture would not have contained a trace of her.

The painting of Mary is somewhat reminiscent of a couple of portraits by the Danish 18th-century painter, Vigilius Erichsen, particularly that of Dowager Queen Juliane Marie (1776) (National Gallery of Denmark): not only because the person in the portrait is standing in a royal setting, but also because both these pictures are slightly more than just portraits. They also include a small action.

In the art of painting, mirrors and mirror effects go back a long way. In the past they could be symbols of many different situations and properties: for example, purity, integrity or a human soul (which is why vampires do not have reflections!). But mirrors can also play a narrative role. Artists often used mirrors in their portraits to show two different profiles of the person being portrayed. This is what Vigilius Erichsen did in his portrait of the Empress Catherine II (at the Hermitage). By using a mirror, you can literally turn the picture of a single figure into a picture of several figures.

With the assistance of mirrors, Heimans presented Mary partly from the side, and partly from behind. Without this effect it would not have been possible to place Mary herself so far to the right. Then the composition of the painting would have been subverted (just try covering the image of Mary with her back to us!). A mirror like this also enables us to see much more of the room, in which the subject is standing. The same also applies to the new portrait of Crown Prince Frederik. The Crown Prince is also standing in a room, where a huge mirror enables us to see what the Crown Prince is looking at and, consequently, what he is thinking about: his immediate family – Crown Princess Mary and the couple's four children, Prince Christian and Princess Isabella, and the twins, Prince Vincent and Princess Josephine.

Heimans has also used reflections in other paintings. He used a similar effect to that in the picture of the Crown Princess in his portrait of the Governor-General of Australia, Dame Quentin Bryce, who was the first woman ever to hold this position (p. 118). Here the glass façade of the building, which the Governor-General is about to leave, reflects more than merely her back. The façade also reflects the trees in the landscape, which are adjacent to the building. Heimans also used the duplicating effect of a mirror in his painting, *Islay*, a private commission (p. 111).

With the help of a mirror, our gaze can wander through the spaces that are located outside the frame and outside the picture plane. We can see the chambers spreading with a depth that is only present as an illusion on the surface. These openings and the daylight provide us with an explanation of why, in the portrait,

Consider Your Ways: Portrait of Madeleine and Douglas, 2015. Private Collection

Crown Princess Mary is putting gloves on. She is about to leave the Garden Room at Fredensborg Palace.

In visual art, something as innocent and mundane as a glove can also have multiple meanings. The glove can be associated with aristocracy, with the distance of rank and with dignity. But in the art of ancient times, in the context of certain religious subjects, the glove can also symbolise sincerity, incorruptibility and the purity of heart that characterise the chosen one. On one level, this little detail in the painting reveals that the Crown Princess is putting something on: the glove. On another, more symbolic level the very same movement implies that she is taking on a task and going to work: work that is defined by the official duties incumbent upon a member of the Royal Family.

THE RETURN OF TRADITION

We have already touched on the importance of likeness. But an important portrait comprises more than that. Likeness also refers to the artist's style. Heimans is a master of his craft: a craft with historic roots, because he was determined to learn this craft.

He has mainly acquired his competence through the projects he has taken on. But his education in Australia also played a part: first he studied Architecture, Fine Arts and pure Mathematics at the university. Later he studied at one of the oldest art schools in the country, the Julian Ashton Art School.

Heimans had long been searching for an art school, which could give him a more thorough knowledge of old painting methods and techniques. He also wanted to learn about anatomy and perspective. But none of the European academies he contacted could offer this knowledge. Their interests were completely different. Their view was that these painting traditions had long outlived their relevance to contemporary art.

At the Julian Ashton Art School, though, they had held on to the belief that creating good art still depended on mastering good craftsmanship, in particular trusting one's own eyes. The founder of the school actually said to his successor: "Teach the students to see. To see the beauty of shape and tonality, and the colour of the world that surrounds them. And teach them to transfer this to paper and canvas. Individuality in art must always emerge from the knowledge that technique is a tool, which the creative spirit makes use of."

It was at this school that Heimans learned to hone his drawing skills. Heimans often makes sketches of his models' faces on toned paper. The coloured paper enables him to play with light after determining the shape in lines and adding shadow sections. He can then indicate the facial highlights with white, and due to the character of the coloured paper the white of the eyes comes out immediately. This was the same procedure the Baroque masters used when sketching preliminary studies.

Joshua Tree, 2010.
Private Collection

P. 104-05:
Joshua Tree (details)

In addition, Heimans also wanted to take private lessons with a painter, who had been trained in an artistic tradition that was almost completely absent in the West. This knowledge came from a Polish immigrant. He introduced Heimans to

techniques which resembled those, which the Dutch masters had practised 500 years previously. He achieves the deep, almost golden tone that is so characteristic of his pictures by using transparent or semi-transparent glazes and painting and by painting from a dark prime building up the picture with lighter colours.

But there is more to it than that. Just as crucial for the result is Heimans' interest in mathematical structures, which can make three-dimensional shapes such as architecture believable on a picture's surface. His in-depth knowledge of architecture helps Heimans in making the settings behind the people in his portraits, giving each picture a great individuality. They are all very different.

In 2001 he was commissioned to paint the couple, Kira and Michael Blaustein. The couple were a clinical psychologist and prominent financial advisor, who at the time resided in London with their young daughter. As the setting for his picture he chose Pelham Crescent, the family's home (p. 94). Pelham Crescent is a famous place in London. The buildings were designed in 1825 by the architect, George Basevi, a student of the eminent English architect, Sir John Soane. The formidable curve, with which these white Neoclassical façades front the square, mark one of the grandest residential neighbourhoods in South Kensington.

The composition of the picture is reminiscent of that, which Heimans was to use some years later in his portrait of the lawyer, Robert Stitt, though that painting has an interior setting. Robert Stitt is one of Australia's most prominent QCs. The title of the painting is actually just *Portrait of a QC* (p. 95). QC stands for 'Queen's Counsel', a title that until 1980 was awarded to particularly respected members of the Bar. Receiving this title was the highest honour a lawyer could achieve. Robert Stitt QC is standing in a circular room, which virtually encapsulates his body, and he is surrounded by shelves that follow the curve of the room, which is just about covered with bound volumes, probably statute books and legal literature. The QC is holding a cup of tea, and on the table in front of him lies the wig, which as a barrister he wears during trials, and which in this context he has taken off.

THREE COMMISSIONS

Three works in particular stand out amongst the Heimans recent commissions. One is the portrait of the two teenagers, Madeleine and Douglas Kowitz, entitled *Consider Your Ways* (p. 96). When Heimans visited the Kowitz family's home, a converted castle in Hastings, he could not fail to notice the large boat with faintly glowing lights hanging in the centre of the stairwell. It is this boat, which the artist used in his picture: not so much as an exotic prop to attract the eye, but as a symbolic vessel for two young people in a broader existential context. Metaphorically, the boat will transport its passengers, in this case Madeleine and her brother Douglas, on their journey out into the world.

He also noticed this phrase "Consider Your Ways" engraved in the plasterwork of the Castle stairwell. The phrase is a quotation from Chapter 1, Verse 5 of

the *Book of Haggai*, one of the last books in the Old Testament: "Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways." (The King James Bible). So it became the title of the painting, *Consider Your Ways* represents both admonition and encouragement prior to the life journey that is about to begin.

The other painting, *Joshua Tree* belongs to a private collection in Hong Kong (p. 99), and tells a particularly tragic history. The picture was commissioned by Christina Hellmann in memory of her son Joshua, who had died in 2007 after a protracted period of severe illness. Josh, as he was known, was ten years old when the first symptoms appeared. He suffered from a rare disorder known as MELAS syndrome (Mitochondrial myopathy, Encephalopathy, Lactic acidosis and Stroke). It is a fatal and progressive disease, in which the patient suffers repeated strokes, eventually losing sight, hearing, motor function, learning ability etc. When Joshua died he was just 15 years old.

In the painting a tree has been given a central position and a particularly symbolic significance. The picture is a posthumous commission, but Heimans chose not to depict Joshua himself. Instead, Joshua is indirectly present. The person who is absent from the picture is given presence.

The artist had been told that Joshua loved sitting at the base of this tree, and that he was also buried here. Heimans happened to see Joshua's two sisters on the branches of the large tree and got the idea for his picture. In the foreground he painted Christina Hellmann and the family's dog with their backs to us, and behind them the sun, which colours the sky above them as it sets over the South China Sea. The family is gathered around the person, whom they miss and who is no longer physically present. Christina Hellmann is looking up at the girls in the tree. It is they, through whom the family will live on.

The third major project, which Ralph Heimans took on, was maybe particularly important for him. It was the portrait of Vladimir Ashkenazy (p. 54). The idea of painting the portrait of such a prominent musician really inspired him. That is because Heimans is passionate about classical music and is a huge admirer of Ashkenazy. This was the very first time this internationally renowned conductor and pianist had agreed to be painted, and the portrait consumed more than six months of Heimans' life. The fact that the maestro agreed to be painted in such a relaxed garment as a polo neck sweater is a reflection of the particular dress code he prefers when standing on the podium. Audiences virtually never see him perform in full evening dress, which is what conductors and orchestral musicians usually wear. The fact that he insists on such informality is also one of the reasons he is so popular with musicians. That is also how he comes across in the portrait: informal, spontaneous and relaxed.

Ashkenazy started his career as a pianist and later became a conducter. He is one of the most widely acclaimed musicians of our time. In an interview he described the reservations he initially harboured about having to stand in front of a huge orchestra, giving them instructions about how they should play. It was neither something for which he was professionally educated nor a privileged posi-

tion for which he had competed. In fact, it was something that came about by accident. It was the musicians who gave him the courage to persist. What he lacked in terms of the necessary technical skills for his new pursuit, he made up for with his direct ability to communicate simply, clearly and enthusiastically. Musicians in England, Iceland, Switzerland, Japan and Australia love working with him. It is said that he always puts his heart into everything he does as a musician, and that may very well be why in the painting he has his hand on his heart.

This spontaneity and straightforwardness are qualities that characterise the man with the white polo neck sweater and the thick grey hair. In front of him is the score he is in the process of studying. It could be orchestral music by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Sibelius or Shostakovich. Late Romanticism has been his stamping ground. But what about the context chosen for his portrait? Because this setting, a piece of modern architecture with countless transversal sequences of lines and irregular spaces is rather complicated and cool, and may simply be there as a contrast. But the architecture, with its encounter between various rhythmic structures, can also be read as a metaphor for the complex musical compositions which any conductor has to tackle: 'a visual fugue'.

The setting is taken from the interior of Australia's best-known building: the architect Jørn Utzon's Opera House in Sydney. It was here, in the Sydney Opera House, that the Sydney Symphony Orchestra – Ashkenazy's orchestra – performed concerts when it was not touring abroad. Originally his appointment with the orchestra in Sydney was only intended to last four seasons, starting in 2009. The painting was unveiled in 2011. It accompanied the announcement that Ashkenazy's contract with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra had been extended by another year. Today the portrait belongs to The National Portrait Gallery of Australia in Canberra.

THE CORONATION THEATRE

Heimans' largest project to date is his full-length portrait of Queen Elizabeth II of England (p. 22-23). Not only is Elizabeth II the Queen and Head of State for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. She is also the head of fifteen other Commonwealth countries, including Australia.

The reason for the portrait was the Queen of England's eagerly awaited jubilee of her reign. As one of the longest-living monarchs, Elizabeth II has been her country's ruler since 6 February 1952. On 2 June 1953, a little more than a year later, she was crowned in Westminster Abbey in London. Now, 60 years on, the time had come not only to commemorate this remarkable event, but also for her to look back. It is this dual situation that the picture sustains.

Only one English ruler before had celebrated a Diamond Jubilee. That was Queen Victoria, who on 22 June 1897 celebrated her 60 years on the throne. When the English painter, Andrew Carrick Gow was appointed to immortalise the event, he chose to depict the moment when the ageing Queen's coach draws up in front

of Saint Paul's Cathedral. Because of the huge turnout of subjects, the Queen herself makes little impact in the context. Tumultuous turnouts of people feature in other portrayals of coronations and royal jubilees. Obvious examples include: Carl Gustaf Pilo's huge painting, *The Coronation of King Gustav III of Sweden* (The National Museum, Stockholm); Jacques-Louis David's painting of the coronation of the Emperor Napoleon and the Empress Josephine in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame (1806-07) (The Louvre, Paris); Adolph von Menzel's painting of the coronation of King Wilhelm II in Königsberg in the 1860s; and Laurits Tuxen's *The Marriage of Princess Maud of Wales, 22 July 1896* (The Royal Collection, London).

For his painting of Elizabeth II, Heimans chose a solution that could hardly have been more different from tradition. He chose to make the English queen the only figure in a painting, which measured an impressive 250 x 342 cm, thereby matching the magnitude of the unique event. He presented her in solitary majesty: in an introverted moment, looking back on her exceptionally long life as Regent.

Heimans had just one hour in the company of Queen Elizabeth II. The meeting took place in March 2011 in Buckingham Palace in the Yellow Drawing Room. Despite the fact that the Queen of England is diminutive in stature, the artist was impressed by the dignity and dedication to the task, which this small, yet powerful woman displayed, sixty years after her accession to the throne. He had no time to sketch, but he took as many photos as possible of his royal sitter.

For Heimans, taking photographs is not much different than taking notes. He regards photography as a tool or resource to support the process whenever necessary. But he never bases his preliminary drawings or the finished painting directly on his photographs. In the process he mixes the shots he has taken with his sketches and observations, while also trusting his memory and intuition. The expression in a painting is always a combination of diverse impressions and never taken from any particular photograph.

As the setting of the portrait Heimans chose Westminster Abbey. In the history of England, the Abbey is a national monument and its history dates back centuries. During the day he was not able to access the enormous space. He had to work at night, when the Abbey was closed to visitors. Heimans had been granted permission to photograph the interior of the Abbey, including the mosaic floor, which dates back to the 14th century.

Since 1066, all coronations in England have taken place in Westminster Abbey. In his attempts to recreate this vast space and its complicated Gothic architecture, not to mention its equally complex lighting, it helped that a few years previously Heimans had faced similar challenges when working on *The Badminton Club* (p. 89). For that commission he had to paint the interior of the Royal Courts of Justice: a Neo-Gothic building on the Strand in London, which dates from the 1870s and also houses one of the biggest courtrooms in Europe. If the patterns of that building's mosaic flooring in perspective foreshortening made huge demands on Heimans' structural preliminary work and artistic discipline, the demands of

Self Portrait in the Metro, 2004.
Private Collection

Stand on the Right, 2005.
Private Collection

Westminster Abbey were even greater. The vast floor area with its marble mosaics in various geometric patterns is one of the most impressive works of the Cosmati family of Rome: a family of highly skilled architects and sculptors.

What is more, he had less time for this huge and highly demanding job than he had imagined. Under normal circumstances, a picture on such a scale and of such importance would require a year of work. Heimans had only half this time at his disposal and the project did not admit any deferments. So the process involved much longer working days than he was used to: between 18 and 20 hours. He did not get much sleep during this period. But there is no sign of this exhausting, highly stressful process in the result.

The Coronation Theatre: A Portrait of Her Majesty Elizabeth II, the official title of the picture, was well received by the public. It achieved even more awareness when a vandal spray painted it, just one month after it was first shown to the British public in May 2013 in Westminster Abbey. But the damage whilst shocking was quickly remedied.

In 2017 Heimans also completed a portrait of Prince Philip (p. 24-25). It was of course not the first portrait of Prince Philip. In 1983 the Prince was painted by the English artist, Bryan Organ in a work that is now owned by the National Portrait Gallery in London.

It is hard to imagine two more fundamentally different portrayals of the same person. Organ's picture is in upright format and rigidly symmetrical, with Prince Philip positioned directly in the picture's geometric centre, sitting front on, against a dark background of classic, beaded wall panels.

Heimans' portrait of Prince Philip is in the large, panoramic landscape format, which we usually associate with him, and which he favours. Instead of shutting out the background to allow the figure of the Prince to dominate the picture's space, he chose to have his model standing in the Grand Corridor of Windsor Castle, a large, richly decorated gallery with several references to the Prince's own history. This background was the artist's own suggestion. He felt drawn to what he called the gallery's "dramatic perspective" and the interaction between the windows on one side of the space and the row of glowing white busts on the other side.

Even though the rich setting of the painting is eye-catching, it also helps to illuminate the portrait's protagonist, but not only in the literal sense with the inflow of light from the windows. Because it was in the Tapestry Room at the end of the Grand Corridor that Prince Philip's maternal grandmother, Princess Victoria, and later his mother, Princess Alice were born. The Prince is also standing in front of the artist Laurits Tuxen's painting of Queen Victoria and her huge family gathered in the Green Drawing Room of Windsor Castle to mark the occasion of her 50th jubilee.

Prince Philip is a member of the House of Glücksburg, born Prince of Greece and Denmark and great-grandson of King Christian IX. In Heimans' portrait there is yet another sign of the Danish Royal Family's connection. That is the Order of the Elephant, the oldest and noblest chivalric order in Denmark, which the Prince is wearing, draped from his left shoulder to his right hip.

At the time of writing, Heimans is putting the finishing touches to two major royal commissions : the portrait of Crown Prince Frederik, heir to the Danish throne; and the portrait of Prince Charles, Prince of Wales and heir to the British throne

SIMPLICITY AND ENTITY

When we choose to regard this or that phenomenon as an unconditional entity rather than merely the sum of its parts, this is known as holism. In his portraits Ralph Heimans insists that a person should never be alien to his or her surround-

Mr. Philips' Projection, 2001. Private Collection

Islay, 2007.
Private Collection

ings. The subject should preferably emerge from them, or they from the subject. This is the perception that he aims to communicate in his paintings.

However different Heimans' paintings are, they are interconnected by the premise or the artistic conviction that there must be a link between the person portrayed and the environment or location that surrounds him or her. If such a connection did not exist, a picture would consist of random coincidences, of stand-alone, unconnected phenomena. Ralph Heimans tends to refer to holistic portraits when he talks about what he constantly strives for in his painting.

Holistic portraits are an expression of the structural entity, which we often unsuccessfully seek in reality, but which we can rediscover in painting, perhaps as an act of will. It is this quality that can elevate painting above photography. A painting can seem as if it is being perceived by many eyes. It can consolidate many observations and many moments within the same frame. Photography cannot do that. A photo is definitively bound by the unique moment when it is shot.

The official portrait has not lost as much ground to photography as the portrait painters of the previous century feared or expected. What for a time seemed to be painting's worst competitor has actually turned out to be its best assistant. In the past 120 years or more, portrait painters in particular have relied on photographs, but without being restricted by the photo's distinguishing feature.

In our modern age and a society, in which everyone can take portraits of one another if they have a camera or mobile phone, a portrait in oil on canvas might seem trivial or something exclusive for people of a nostalgic nature. But that is not the case. The painted portrait lives on. Because it is still the exponent of a special complexity. In the work of Ralph Heimans the portrait is also the only place where so many different truths about one and the same person can come together in a way that is both harmonious and meaningful.