

THE SELF-PORTRAIT IS A VENERABLE PRACTICE IN THE HISTORY OF ART. AND YET, IT'S A GENRE THAT MANY ARTISTS—EVEN PORTRAIT ARTISTS—OFTEN OVERLOOK. YOU MAY WANT TO DUST OFF YOUR LOOKING GLASS, BECAUSE THESE SIX ARTISTS MAKE A STRONG CASE FOR THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF THE SUBJECT.



Farris painted *Skepticism* (watercolor on paper 14x10) as a way to study the muscular structure of the face, particularly as affected by various emotions. “My own face seemed the logical choice for the experiment,” she says.

QUICK TIP

After several failed attempts to take a selfie, I found that taking a photo of my reflection in the mirror offered a better perspective.

ALICIA FARRIS THE LOOK ON MY FACE

Although Alicia Farris (afarris.com) is well-known for figurative work, she has painted few self-portraits. Still, she is fascinated by the genre and regularly points students to the examples of Van Gogh, which illustrate how color, composition, texture and contrast can impact the mood of a subject. “Each of his self-portraits could be considered a mirror to how he was feeling at that time,” she says.

Whatever the subject, Farris endeavors to bring emotional power to her depiction. “My personality is evident in everything I paint,” she says. When the subject is herself, however, she does find the experience a bit more intimidating.

“When I created *Skepticism* [left], I decided to focus on a particular mood and develop the story from there,” she says. “I wanted to study and be honest about the shapes in my face that resulted from aging facial muscles.” As someone well practiced in the art of observation, Farris found it only natural to depict her face exactly as she saw it—rather than how she hoped others might see it.

The artist created the painting in 2021, mid-pandemic, when the public health situation continued to shift daily, and fear and skepticism were everyday encounters. “Painting one of my emotional reactions to what was happening seemed therapeutic in a way,” Farris says.

The required soul-searching for a self-portrait, she believes, can be artistically useful. “There’s so much to gain by giving ourselves a creative look inside,” she says. “An artist’s gift is being able to see things in a unique way. Giving our audience a view of our own reflection, though sometimes intimidating, can be intensely gratifying.”