

DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
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Collection Count + Care

Count + Care seeks relationships within and conversations across the collection.

What stories does the collection tell?

2022

Portraits as Portals, DisplayCult (Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick)

SPEAKER

Jennifer Fisher

Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick comprise DisplayCult, a curatorial collaborative devoted to rethinking aesthetics and practices of display from sensory, affective and paracuratorial standpoints.

Portraits as Portals comprises an exhibitionary output of *The Medium in the Museum*, a research-creation project by Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick, supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

FEATURED WORKS

Portal 1:

Monogrammist IS, *An Old Woman Singing*, around 1638, oil on panel. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2014

DisplayCult, *Readings for an Enigmatic Painter*, 2022, video 4K, 14 min

Portal 2:

Unknown Artist, *Portrait of a Woman Wearing a Top-Knot*, 1693, oil on canvas. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 1991

DisplayCult, *Readings for an Anonymous Artist*, 2022, video 4K, 20 min

KEYWORDS

Psychic, Reading, Unattributed Artworks, Medium

TRANSCRIPT

Jennifer Fisher: What can we know about artists whose names have been lost to art history? For this curatorial experiment, we commissioned professional psychics to perform readings of portraits by artists whose names are unknown. We asked the psychics to look out through the eyes of the portrait subject to see what they could perceive about the artist in the act of painting. In this way, the portrait becomes a portal into the past. While some of the readings offer potentially verifiable details...

Psychic: I believe he might have been British. He wasn't well known.

Jennifer Fisher: ...more often, the readings operate on an affective level, transmitting energies and feelings that touch on the artist's emotional states and motivations.

Psychic: He himself is coming from a family that has experienced some of the things that she is experiencing. And so this is why he's captivated by her.

Jennifer Fisher: The videos invite viewers to enter into the flow of the reading.

Psychic: Because what comes through, and right away I'm quite moved, even moved to tears, is the painter is a very beautiful man, very, very emotional, very honest man.

Jennifer Fisher: The positioning of the bench in the gallery welcomes viewers to commune with the artworks, encouraging their own intuitions. Our intention with *Portraits as Portals* is to honour the aspirations and lives of these artists, while exploring how intuitive methodology can be applied in the study of art history.