

features

Revealed: A portrait



A Yorkshire-born academic has brought together and published a stunning collection of self-portraits by artists, including work by David Hockney, Joash Woodrow and David Tindle. Arts reporter Nick Ahad spoke to Philip Vann.

IN the late 1950s, art-lover Ruth Borchard set out on a task that would occupy her for more than two decades and result in a collection of work that would possibly be one of the most revealing ever collated.

She wrote to artists of differing degrees of reputation and asked for a self-portrait and, in an astonishing act of bravado, set a ceiling cost of 21 guineas, no matter the artist.

She collected 100 self-portraits. Half a century on and Leeds-born academic Philip Vann has set about redoubling the stunning collection in a newly released book *Face to Face* and putting together his own collection of portraits that he believes are exceptional.

"I was commissioned to write a book about this exceptional collection of portraits collected by Ruth Borchard, who was a German-Jewish refugee," says Vann. "Her methods were incredible - she would find artists that she simply liked the look of - she didn't read reviews or anything like that as she wanted to remain unbiased, she simply contacted artists who she personally admired and asked for a self-portrait - setting the limit of 21 guineas.

"Some of the artists are well known, like Anne Redpath and Keith Vaughan and some were just students who she found and happened to like their work."

Although the reputation of the artists varied, one thing in the Borchard collection that remains a constant is the 21 guineas ceiling. It led to some amusing exchanges between artist and collector, as Vann, when researching the book, found.



of the artists



Face to Face by Philip Vann, above, is out now, published by Sansom & Co. The hardback copy of the book is £45, the softback £29.95. To buy a copy from the Yorkshire Post Bookshop, call free on 0800 0153232. Post and packing costs £1.50.

"She wrote three letters to Michael Ayrton in the mid-1960s, the first tells Ruth that he is busy, but would like to create a portrait for her, in the second he says 'haven't been able to do a self-portrait especially for you, but I have found a tolerable pencil drawing which looks like me and is a respectable piece of work. Would that do? When I say pencil drawing, I don't mean a little sketch, it's quite highly worked. It would cost £40 in the normal way. If you let me know, I'll send it'."

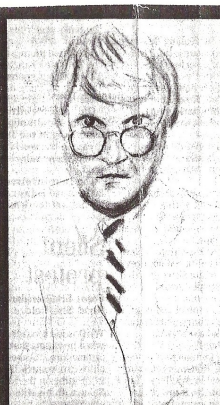
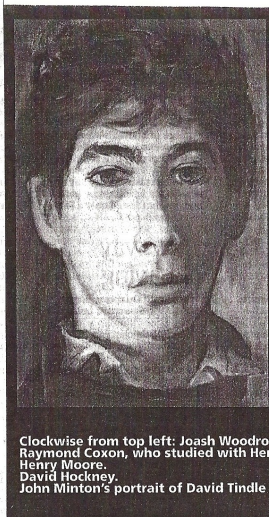
"In the third letter, Ayrton tells Ruth 'I will accept the 21guins and I much admire anyone who can obtain so many works for no more than that figure per work'."

"Researching the collection, I found many other letters like this that had passed between the author and the collector."

There is another one from Jean Cooke when she complains that 'I am not a feminist but to have only three women painters out of 91 (the tally at the time) makes rather poor odds so 21guins it is. Are you going to come and pick up the painting?'"

The book also features a strong representation by Yorkshire artists, including two by David Hockney, one by Raymond Coxon, who studied alongside Leeds sculptor Henry Moore at the Leeds School of Art from 1919 to 1921, two by Henry Moore himself, David Tindle and a piece by the reclusive Joash Woodrow, whose paintings were only discovered in recent years when he was forced to leave his home to live in a Manchester nursing home.

Vann, a Leeds Grammar School pupil who went on to study English at Magdalen College, Cambridge, became a writer on visual arts and arts history in 1984 and says it has been a joy to study the portraits. "It was amazing



Clockwise from top left: Joash Woodrow 1926. Raymond Coxon, who studied with Henry Moore at Leeds School of Art 1919-1921. Henry Moore. David Hockney. John Minton's portrait of David Tindle 1950.

that Ruth built up this extraordinary collection, she had a real interest in the work and collected it almost compulsively," said Vann.

"The wonderful thing about the collection is the enormous range that is there.

The work stretches from some very academic work, some are very poetic and it goes right through to quite outrageous and abstract work."

As well as writing an essay on

each of the painters that Borchard chose for her own collection, Vann was given licence to put in the book some of his own favourites, another task he greatly enjoyed.

In a preface to the book, Dr Robert Travers writes: "This scholarly monograph is a timely addition to the growing interest in self-portraits, which could be described as the most intimate and self-revelatory images an artist

can make. In this book, Philip Vann has done justice to a collection of portraits, largely unseen by the general public, that warrant celebration."

"Placed in the context of a further one hundred or so self-portraits, many of which are familiar and much-loved works, his book comes alive with the very personality of the artists who dominated and fashioned their era."

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