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Galleries: Photographers reveal what's in a face - and in their heads

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Facebook's endless supply of anonymously taken "friend" profile portraits can mesmerize. Besides the absorbing true-to-life contemporary shots of those you haven't seen in years, there are the entertaining pictures of adult people as young children, as long-haired hippies, even as Mona Lisa or a Cavalier King Charles spaniel.

Walking through Gallery 339's large group exhibition of disparate photographic portraits, however, you are quickly reminded of the command of the practiced professional in the making of a portrait. In fact, what's often most compelling in the works of the 24 photographers in "About Face" is their revelation of the photographer's own humanity or aesthetic through the blank canvas of an anonymous face.

Some of the faces in "About Face" aren't even alive. **Rita Bernstein's solemn black-and-white portrait of an antique doll's cracked and peeling face is, in its way, more poignantly expressive of life's harshness and brevity than any live child's face could be.** The same could be said, more or less, for Andrea Modica's straightforward black-and-white still life of the skull of an otherwise unidentified 56-year-old male. Neil Winokur's portrait of Andy Warhol, taken in 1982, captures the pop artist (the only immediately recognizable face in this show) in Winokur's own pop-inflected style, nattily dressed in jacket and tie and isolated against a monochrome sky-blue backdrop. It's an image that used to suggest the taxidermied creatures of a natural-history museum diorama when the artist was alive, but now, eerily, seems to foretell a premature death. Phillip Toledano's portraits of his nonagenarian father, including one of him embracing his dementia-afflicted dad, are, in effect, slowly thumbing through the pages of the photographer's diary.

The pieces in this exhibition that made me feel the photographer's presence most keenly were George Krause's life-size print of a young black woman against a monochrome white backdrop, *Waitress, Anguilla* (2003); Tina Barney's *Jill and I* (1963); and Donald E. Camp's two portraits from his "Dust Shaped Hearts" series (one of which portrays the writer Lorene Carey, the show's only other familiar subject). The effect was probably due not only to their enormous scale, but also to the subjects' direct forward gazes. I had seen all three portraits before, but their impact here, surrounded by more modestly scaled prints, was even more startling.