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Unveiling the story through portraits - Portraiture in social-artistic work

Kallionpää, Anna

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Anna Kallionpää
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Anna Kallionpää

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli esitellä ja tutkia portraiture-menetelmän käyttömahdollisuuksia taidelähtöisessä projektissa kehitysvammaatyössä. Tarkoituksena oli myös selvittää mitä uutta portraiture tuo taidelähtöiselle sosiaalialalle. Tutkimuksen takana oli vahvasti ajatus tieteellisen ja taiteellisen yhdistämisestä sosiaalisessa kontekstissa, kahden käsitteen jotka usein nähdään etäisinä toisistaan.

Opinnäytetyö on laadullinen tutkimus. Aineistonkeruumenetelmänä oli osallistuva havainnointi, portraiture-projektin raportti, sekä puolistrukturoidut haastattelut. Projektin toteutus tapahtui paikallisessa organisaatiossa Belgiassa syksyllä 2013. Tutkimusta varten haastattelin kahta henkilöä, joilla on kokemusta menetelmän käytöstä. Aineisto on analysoitu teemanalyysin avulla.

Tulokset osoittivat että portraiture on hyvä ja monipuolinen menetelmä kehitysvammaatyössä, koska se mahdollistaa kommunikaation ja dialogin vaihtoehtoisella tavalla, jopa silloin kun yhteistä kieltä ei ole. Kun portraiturea käytetään laajempaan työmenetelmään tutkimusmenetelmän sijaan, sillä on paljon mahdollisuuksia tuottaa arvokasta tietoa, jonka avulla esimerkiksi organisaatiot voivat reflektoida ja arvioida projekteja. Tutkielma osoitti myös että portraiture eroaa muista menetelmistä subjektiivisuudellaan, tutkijan perspektiivin läsnäololla sekä pyrkimyksellä tuoda tutkimus perinteisistä akateemisista piireistä laajemmalle yleisölle helposti ymmärrettävällä tavalla.

Asiasanat: taidelähtöiset menetelmät, luovat menetelmät, kvalitatiivinen tutkimus, taiteellinen tutkimus, narratiivisuus, muotokuvat

Anna Kallionpää

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The purpose of this thesis was to introduce and study the possibilities of using portraiture with people with disabilities in a social-artistic project. The aim was also to study what new portraiture brings to the social-artistic field. Behind the study was strongly the idea of combining art and science in social context, two concepts that are often seen distant from each other.

The study was made by using qualitative research. Data was gathered by participant observations, a report from the project portraiture, and conducting semi-structured interviews. The project was done in the local organization in Belgium, during autumn 2013. For the study I interviewed two persons who have experience from using the method. Data was analyzed with thematic analysis.

The results showed that portraiture is a good and versatile method when working with people with disabilities, because it enables dialogue and communication in an alternative way and even when there is no common language. When using portraiture as a broader working method instead of a research method, it has a lot of potential in producing valuable information, for example to organizations to reflect and evaluate projects. Study showed also that portraiture differs from other methods by being subjective, including researcher's perspective and by aiming to bring the research out of traditional academic community to the public, in a more understandable way.

Keywords: art-based methods, creative methods, qualitative research, artistic research, narrative, portraits

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1 Introduction

Portraiture is a qualitative research method related to a phenomenological paradigm and ethnography, developed by an American sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot. The aim of portraiture is to blend art and science to create authentic narrative portraits that can capture the intricate dimensions and the essence of human experience. I was first introduced to portraiture during my internship in Belgium 2013, when I had the opportunity to make a project in the local organization vzw Wit.h, using portraiture with people with disabilities. During my studies I had familiarized myself with many social-artistic methods and qualitative research methods, but portraiture seemed to resonate with me in a more profound way. In the course of my internship I then decided to write my thesis on the subject of portraiture, and later included the report from the project to serve as a case-study and an example.

The purpose of this thesis is to introduce and study how portraiture can be used in the social-artistic field with people with disabilities. The thesis is widely based on the methodology of portraiture and the book *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis. The book also constitutes a fundamental part of the theoretical framework of the thesis. In this thesis I will explain the key elements of portraiture and compare the methodology to narrative inquiry, visual research and arts-based research. I chose these methodologies because they are very close to portraiture and comparing them helped me to answer my research questions. I will also describe the whole process of the project portraiture, which functions as one example how portraiture can be used in an organization with people with disabilities. In my thesis portraiture is viewed upon both as a research method as well as a more general way of working.

My thesis intends to answer two research questions:

1. How can portraiture be used with people with disabilities in a social-artistic project?
2. What new does portraiture bring to the social-artistic field?

In my thesis I used qualitative research techniques with a case-study-like approach. The data consisted of participant observations, a report from the project portraiture, and semi-structured interviews. Data was gathered during my project in the autumn 2013 and the interviews were done in the spring 2014. For analyzing the data I used thematic analysis.

2 Portraiture

“As a portraitist, I am witness, archeologist, spider woman, storyteller, and mirror...probing—through art and science, empathy and discernment—the layers and subtexts of human experience; listening for the voices and silences, documenting the good, and honoring the chaos and contradictions, the ironies and ambiguities threaded through our lives.” (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2014.)

The word portraiture has usually meant the painting a portrait of a person, or portrait photography. Throughout my thesis however, the concept of portraiture stands for qualitative research method that was developed by an American sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and first used in her book *The Good High School* (1983). In the book she weaves a narrative portrait of six high schools, to answer the question what makes a good school. Lawrence-Lightfoot later co-authored the book *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997) with Jessica Hoffmann Davis, where they explain in detail the methodology of portraiture as a type of inquiry and representation in social sciences. Merriam-Webster (2014) defines the word portraiture as “the art of making portraits”, and portraits are often made with intent to capture the subject’s essence. This is also true with Lawrence-Lightfoot’s portraiture. In *The Good High School* (1983, 3-5) she tells about two personal experiences from her past, of being a subject in a portrait, and how these encounters later influenced her search for an inquiry that could “capture the complexity and aesthetic of human experience.” With portraiture, she wanted the subjects to feel the way she had felt during her experiences: that though the portraits didn’t necessary look like her, they captured her essence. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 3-4.)

Portraiture’s roots are in phenomenological paradigm and ethnography. However, portraiture differs from ethnographic customs by aiming to bring the discussion outside of academia to the public, in its goal of authenticity instead of usual goals of validity and reliability, and by acknowledging the “uses of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting” as well as “interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied.” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 13-14.) The principal aspects of portraiture are context, voice, relationship, emergent themes and aesthetic whole. Here I will explain shortly these five elements.

Context means the setting, e.g. in time or in a certain location or culture, where the phenomenon is taking place. Framing the action in context is crucial for understanding and analyzing the current actions, conversations or expressions. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 41.) For example, a discussion about war and how it effects a person’s life would be very different in times of war and in times of peace, or if the person has experienced war or not. The

context gives perspective, not only the subject's but the researcher's as well. Lawrence-Lightfoot lists five different ways that the context is applied in portraiture and should be taken into account when framing the portrait. First is internal context i.e. physical setting. This can be for example a city or a neighbourhood and the details that are present. The second way is personal context. This includes the portraitist-researcher's perspective; how she is present in the research and in the context. Third is historical context, with all its ideologies and cultures. Aesthetic features like symbols and metaphors are the fourth way to apply context. Well chosen and significant metaphors give richness to the narrative. Lastly comes shaping context, where the actors i.e. the subjects are shaping the context, and how context is never stagnant. A portraitist must be attentive to capture these changes and how the actors affect the environment and the setting. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 44-58.)

The second element of portraiture is voice. The voice of the portraitist is ever-present and heard throughout the portrait. It's in the choices she makes; what questions to ask, which metaphors and stories to include and how the portrait is framed and constructed. At the same time however, the portraitist's voice isn't dominating or suppressing the actor's voices. The voice of the portraitist is subdued, controlled and measured. It's somewhat paradoxical, as the voice of the researcher is all around and at the same time carefully placed. There are multiple ways in which the voice is used in the portrait. First is voice as witness, which emphasizes that the portraitist is a perceptive witness, a stranger observing from a distance. In the second use, voice as interpretation, the portraitist's own understanding and interpretations are added. The third way to use voice is as preoccupation. Here the portraitist reflects on how she sees, understands and documents reality and the interpretations about reality. In using voice as autobiography, the life story of the researcher emerges. The portraitist should use her experiences and perspective, but not again let it be too dominant. The fifth way is voice discerning other voices, i.e. listening for voice. Here the focus is on the voices of the subjects, the actors. It's in the expressions, tone, body language, the way they talk and what they mean. The portraitist has to record all that she hears and sees. The last use of voice is the voice in dialogue. Here it comes to a balance, where both the actor and the portraitist are present in an equal dialogue. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 85-105.)

Third aspect of portraiture is relationship. All that is happening in the process of making the portrait is happening through the relationships. The relationships are never stagnant or fixed as they change and evolve continuously through the process and through the communication between the actors and the portraitist. Portraitist sees the relationships as something a lot more dynamic and complex than just a means to gather knowledge and data. What should be taken into account is that time used and the recurrence of the meetings or the interviews has a huge impact on the relationship, as well as the characteristics and the chemistry between

the actor and the portraitist. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 135-138.) A good example of this came forth in one of the interviews:

“Think about time ... Time is for me the new thing I learned in portraiture and specially working with you and Marieke is... How does it come that I know so much more about Mieke than you can find? It’s very simple; I’ve known her for 20 years. So, for me your product was not that exciting, for me, because I’ve known them for such a long time. So that’s something we are going to work on now, you have the process, you have the product, but you have to think about time, how much time do you have. How much time do you want to take. We have projects here that take years. That’s also something very different.” (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

The depth of the portrait can then be largely affected by the time and the extent of the relationships. Even when—and especially if—the encounters are short and the time limited, it is important to reach for open and trusting relationship, where the dialogue is present and equal.

Emergent themes i.e. searching for patterns is the fourth element in portraiture. This is the part where the researcher starts to bring together the themes, see patterns, and where the data is gathered, organized and examined. It is a “disciplined, empirical process—of description, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis—and an aesthetic process of narrative development.” Emergent themes are constructed in five ways. First is simple, the repetitive refrains, which means all the recurring themes that keep appearing frequently. The portraitist must be observant to see and hear all the themes, phrases or stories that are repeated again and again. The second part of finding emergent themes is by resonant metaphors, where the portraitist searches for symbols and metaphors that are significant for the way the actors experience reality. Institutional and cultural rituals are the third way, in which the emergent themes are discovered through the rituals and ceremonies, traditions and roots. As fourth way to construct emergent themes, the portraitist uses triangulation. Through different ways (for example interviews and observations) and multiple sources the data is gathered, the researcher can identify and piece together the recurring themes. The last part is revealing patterns. Here the researcher brings order to the chaos, finds the harmony and the melody in the variety of voices. She finds and connects the scattered pieces to make a consistent narrative. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 185-214.)

The last key element in portraiture is the aesthetic whole. Here all the pieces, the context, voice, relationship and emergent themes come together. In the process the researcher comes “face to face with the tensions inherent in blending art and science, analysis and narrative,

description and interpretation, structure and texture.” The goal is to create an authentic, coherent portrait, where all the elements blend together and become integrated. This is done through conception, structure, form and cohesion. In conception, the portraitist finds and creates the basis of the narrative, the story, by taking into account the empirical evidence and emergent themes. Conception is the underlying view, the focal point of the narrative. Metaphorically, it can be seen as the tapestry or the canvas that is the basis of the portrait. Structure, as the name suggests, gives support and stability to the portrait. Here the emergent themes and the bigger picture hold the narrative together, serving as a framework. After conception and structure, it is time to give the portrait some texture. This is done by form, where emotions and aesthetics come into play. Form is flexible and complex, including all the different details, hues and subtleties of the narrative. The form makes the structure come alive. Lastly, the aesthetic whole is achieved through coherence. This is where, after conception, structure and form, the narrative is emerging as a balanced, consistent and unified portrait, having a beginning, middle and end. The portrait is authentic with all the voices and perspectives, stories and examples, the empirical evidence and literary themes. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 243-260.)

3 Relating methodologies

While doing research about portraiture, I came upon many similar methodologies that are used in qualitative social science research and that are influenced by the arts. Since my second research question was what new portraiture brings to the social-artistic field, it was important to examine a few of these more closely to make a comparison. Because of the vast amount of methodologies, I chose just a few that were most close to portraiture. These were narrative inquiry, visual research and arts-based research. Here I will explain shortly these concepts, and compare them to portraiture by finding differences and similarities between them.

First is narrative inquiry, because portraiture has a close connection to it in its way of unveiling stories and studying human experience. Narrative inquiry is an approach in qualitative research, where stories are used to gather and produce data and knowledge, and where these stories are seen as way to understand and give meaning to one’s life and life experiences (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2013, 218). Narrative is a form of knowledge that is perhaps the most important tool in understanding time. Through narratives the past can be understood and controlled, people’s identities are largely composed and the actors are directed to the future. Narrative is communication between people, and through narrating and telling stories the experiences are being shared, trust is created and groups are being maintained. Narrative answers the question, who am I. Narratives are never only personal or only subject-

tive; they have cultural traditions, genres and models. Individuality and subjective experiences can only be understood through cultural context. (Hyvärinen 2006, 1-2.)

Portraiture and narrative inquiry are therefore very close to each other, since in both context is important, and stories are a way to understand people's lives and experiences. In narrative inquiry, the stories are often part of the data that is later analyzed, while in portraiture the story itself is the final result, a narrative portrait. In portraiture the perspective and the role of the researcher is more present than in narrative research, because the portraitist's voice can be heard throughout the portrait.

Secondly I wanted to take a closer look at visual research. Where narrative inquiry focuses more on stories and texts, visual research gathers data and knowledge from visual works, for example drawings, paintings, photographs or film. Sandra Weber (2008, 47-49) lists five examples how images can be used in the research process. First is "production of artistic images as data", which means that images are made by the researchers or the participants, for the research. In an example, the researcher, the participants, or both can produce photographs, paintings, drawings, videos or other types of visual data that are fitting to the study phenomena or the research questions. Though this creation of the images is usually already a big part of the research, they can of course generate additional interviews, discourse and analysis. "Use of existing (found) artistic images as data or springboards for theorizing" is the second example, which is basically about using images that are already available, e.g. from museums, books, magazines etc. Images that the participants have made in the past or images that they own, like photo albums or art, also go to this category. The third example covers the "use of visual and object-images to elicit or provoke other data". This is, for example, usage of images or objects as a topic for talks, which often results in flow of thoughts, feelings and other information. "Use of images for feedback and documentation of research process" is a good way for researchers to get another perspective to their research. This can be done e.g. by capturing the process on video or using photography. This also makes the research more transparent. The last example is the "use of images as mode of interpretation and/or representation", which is a good method when words are not enough to represent and demonstrate the results of the research. Weber (2008, 49-50) emphasizes that not all images are necessarily good or accurate, and like words, they can be used in a deceiving manner. When deciding the images that are used in the research, there is need for careful critical thinking and also ethical questions that need to be taken into account.

In my project with portraiture, I used the method in a broader way, which links it strongly to visual research. In the original methodology of portraiture, the finished work is a written narrative, but in my project it was a physical artwork. This way my project could be seen as a collaboration of both portraiture and visual research. Harper (2000, 724-725) writes about

visual narratives. Film or video is the most typical form of visual narratives, but it can also be for example a series of photographs. These narratives emerge from choices and decisions that the researcher makes, to what to include or exclude.

Lastly I wanted to examine arts-based research, because it's a concept that in a way connects all the other methods together. Arts-based research is an approach that uses different forms of art and expression. It tries to enable alternative ways of communication and expression of meanings that would be hard or impossible to describe with words. The aim is to broaden the way we understand things. (Barone & Eisner 2012, 1-9.) Arts-based research can be seen as an "umbrella term" that brings together several methodologies. These change due to participants, location, the way the research is made, numerous ways of representation—for example video, photography, poetry, art installations etc. Because of this, it is hard to define. (Finley 2008, 79.) Arts-based research can be used in all of the different phases of the research process from collecting data to representation. It connects theory and practice to focus on the research questions in a comprehensive and holistic way. (Leavy 2009, 2-3.)

In this way portraiture, narrative inquiry and visual research can all be seen under the concept of arts-based research. The important question is which method to choose, and that of course depends on the research questions or the nature of the project. The amount of methods can be confusing, but I see it also as strength. The variety of different practices gives us opportunities to choose the best for every situation.

4 Conducting the study

4.1 The aim of the study and the research questions

The aim of my thesis is to introduce a qualitative research methodology called portraiture, and study the possibilities of using it with people with disabilities in a social-artistic project. In my thesis portraiture has been taken a step further, since it is viewed upon as a broader, more general way of working, in addition to being only a research method. Still, even as a working method, portraiture aims to produce information that can be used for many purposes e.g. in organizations. I chose this topic because I found portraiture very interesting and promising method and I couldn't find any studies that had researched its use in this way or with people with disabilities.

For my thesis I had two main research questions:

1. How can portraiture be used with people with disabilities in a social-artistic project?
2. What new does portraiture bring to the social-artistic field?

The first question concentrates on the methodology introduced in chapter 2, and is related to the questions how, where and when. I aim to answer this question mainly in chapter 5, where I describe in detail using portraiture in a project. I chose to narrow the question down to using portraiture with people with disabilities in social-artistic project, since I already had first-hand experience and data available from such a project, and this way the question wasn't too wide to answer in a reliable way. The second question focuses on the nature of portraiture. Additional questions to this are: is it in any way original, does it relate to other methodologies and why choose portraiture over something else? The amount of methodologies and methods in social-artistic field is very large and perpetually growing. Because of this I wanted to know does portraiture truly bring something new to it, or is it just another amongst many. For this I chose a few relating methodologies I found closest to portraiture, so I could compare them. These were visual research, narrative inquiry and arts-informed research.

Behind the study is also strongly the idea of combining art and science in a social context, two concepts that are often seen to be distant from one another. McNiff (2008, 34) writes that when comparing artistic and scientific with each other, we should refrain from thinking that either one is more accurate. Instead it's better to try to find what connects or separates them and how they can communicate knowledge from one approach to another.

4.2 Methodology

The study was made by using qualitative research with a case-study-like approach. I chose qualitative methodology because it goes best together with my research questions and it gives a more subjective and in-depth look at the topic. In portraiture subjectivity and perspective is an important aspect, so I wanted to bring that side to my thesis also.

Describing real life is essential in qualitative research, and reality is diverse and varied. The aim of the research is to study the object or the phenomena as holistically as possible, and it is important that the reality isn't randomly fragmented. Because the researcher and the information from the research will intertwine with each other, objectivity in qualitative research isn't achievable in the traditional sense. The results can be only explanations that are conditional, and that are restricted to a certain place or a certain time. Generally it can be said that the goal in qualitative research isn't to verify already existing hypotheses, but more to reveal or find reality. (Hirsjärvi ym. 2013, 161.)

4.3 Data collection and analysis

For my thesis I used data triangulation to get more reliable results. Data was gathered by participant observations, report from the project portraiture, and conducting semi-structured interviews.

Participant observation is a method of data collection where the researcher participates in the action with the subjects of the study, and the interaction happens mostly on subjects' terms (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 98, 100). Participant observations I did during my internship at vzw Wit.h in the autumn 2013. Vzw Wit.h is a local organization in Kortrijk, Belgium, and they work in the social-artistic field with people with disabilities. As a part of my internship I did a project about portraiture. I kept a diary during my internship and also wrote a report from the project, which I have included in this thesis. The report consists of the participant observations, my experiences in the project and informal interviews and visits with the participants.

To balance things out and get a different perspective I interviewed Luc Vandierendonck, the director of vzw Wit.h, who has years of experience in working with people with disabilities in a social-artistic field. Also portraiture has been used a lot in the organization. Secondly I interviewed Marieke Vandecasteele, who also did an internship at vzw Wit.h and used portraiture there and with her thesis. From the many types of interviews I chose to use semi-structured interviews. This method of data collection fitted best for my thesis, because it gave a little but not too much flexibility and openness to the interviews. Also the questions couldn't be exactly the same for both of the interviewees, since the other was more focused on portraiture in organization, and the other was more about using it in a personal project. The interviews were done in the spring 2014, and transcribed nearly word by word shortly after.

Data was analyzed with thematic analysis. According to Alasuutari (2011, 38-39) a qualitative analysis consists of two different phases, abstracting observations and solving the enigma, and the data is often examined in its entirety.

5 Project portraiture

This chapter aims to answer my first research question, how can portraiture be used with people with disabilities in social-artistic project. In this section of my thesis, I will describe the process of project portraiture, which I did as a part of my internship in Belgium in autumn 2013. During my internship I worked once a week in the local garden Baggaertshof, where three women Anne, Ruth and Mieke were doing a project of their own, with an artist who was

guiding the work. My project then was to do an artwork, a portrait of these three women, using methodology of portraiture. Later in November 2013 the artwork was a part of the exhibition *Spiegelbeelden (Mirror images)* in Museum aan de Overkant, which is part of *vzw Wit.h.*

I will explain shortly the different phases of the project, starting with the planning and then moving to the interviews and visits, and finally to the building of the artwork. I also wanted to explain a little about the photos I used in the portrait and the meaning behind them, since they are an essential part of the work itself. I selected a few here for closer examination. Lastly I will describe the outcome of the finished artwork and the project itself, reflect and share some thoughts that came up during the project and afterwards. I will explain the challenges and difficulties I had, and also evaluate my work in the end.

Though my work was in the exhibition and in this report I use the word “artwork”, it is important to know that my work should be viewed more as a case study, though it has some artistic qualities. My work relates somewhat to visual research, but my guidelines at the time came from the methodology of portraiture. However, it is essential to understand that portraiture as a research method is a bit different from my work, since the outcome there is in a written form, and my final work is tangible. In my experience however, the ideas from the book work as well with physical artwork as they do with a written narrative. In both there is a story unveiled, the same principles and values are at the core of the process.

This case study can be seen as an example how portraiture can be used in a broader way, more as a general working method, though it still generates lots of information and knowledge that can be used in later research.

5.1 The process

5.1.1 The planning and the idea of the project

I started my project by doing research and reading the book “*The Art and Science of Portraiture*”, by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis. The book was my first contact with portraiture, and it served as the guideline throughout the project. I quite quickly got my idea for the physical artwork. Since I was doing a portrait of three women working together, I wanted something that was at the same time connecting them, but also showing their individuality. Trees in all forms have always been close to my heart so it felt natural to bring this theme to my work. It was also fitting because their project was taking place in the garden, where they were painting and drawing many pictures of trees and other vegetation. My idea for the artwork then came to be three different trees with their own beginnings and separate roots, but in the middle way they are entwined together until the branches reach out, min-

gled with each other. The roots of the trees would represent the real “roots” of these three women, their backgrounds, their life stories and where they come from. In the middle their trees would get entwined together, which symbolizes their work in the garden and how it connects them and their lives together. With the branches I wanted to get an even broader perspective; how their work in the garden reflects and connects to the society and life around them, and how their work reflects and affects their own lives and them as a part of society. To make the piece I wanted to use painting and photography.

I wanted to use painting in the work, since that was the most evident connection between us all and also the work that Ruth, Anne and Mieke were doing in the garden. Because I found participation to be important in this kind of project, I asked the girls to paint the trees with me. Photography I wanted to use because that’s something very close to me, and a method I’m familiar with. However, while doing research about different kinds of trees and already made artwork, I suddenly had the idea to make the trees three-dimensional, just for making it a bit more interesting in a visual way. After all, aesthetics is an important part of portraiture. I ended up using paper mache clay for these parts of the tree.

“He [Ram Dass] described the experience of going into the forest and appreciating the trees. Despite the fact that there are big ones, and small ones, and straight ones, and crooked ones. Some are thick with leaves, some more sparse. Some look mighty and strong, and some look like they are barely holding onto life. There are fat ones and skinny ones. Some have different coloured leaves or bark. But what we see is a beautiful forest. We see only trees. And if by chance a tree does stand as for a being a little different than the others, usually we see that as interesting, something else to appreciate.” (Louise, 2013.)

It was important that I would try and make the trees represent the characters of Mieke, Anne and Ruth. This was a challenging but an interesting part of the work. Like all the trees in the forest, we are all different and we have our own characteristics and traits, not just the way we look but also how we truly are. I asked the girls to make their own sketches of “What would you look like if you were a tree”, and I scheduled meetings for doing interviews with each of them to get to know them better.

5.1.2 Interviews and visits

For the visits I wanted to take more informal approach, so for the interviews I chose to use semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The purpose of the interviews for me was not just to gather information, but also to get to know the girls; where they come from, who they are, how they see themselves and the world and what things are important to them. In such a

short period of time it's impossible to get to know a person really well, but my goal was always to reach authenticity, even if it's just the little things. To fully capture a person's essence is an impossible task, but it doesn't mean you can't get a glimpse of it, or that it's not genuine and authentic.

I had some themes in mind, to talk about Baggaertshof, art, their families and childhood, but this was in no way strict. We did talk about the themes, but not the same themes with everyone, and sometimes I asked more specific questions than other times.

I went to interview Mieke in De Zandberg, where she worked with her art a few days of the week. De Zandberg is a work place for artists with disabilities, so doing an interview there gave me the opportunity to see Mieke working and to see her art. Since there was a language barrier, an artist who also worked with Wit.h sometimes came along to translate. I came up with the questions as the interview went on, but we did talk about all the themes I had in mind, for example art, project Baggaerts, Mieke's childhood and her likes and dislikes. Because I didn't have my camera with me that day, I went back to De Zandberg later to take some photos.



Photo 1: Mieke working in De Zandberg

Ruth worked in the Gallery, part of Den Achtkanter, which offers different kinds of workshops and projects for people with intellectual disabilities. I went there to interview her, and I also got the chance to see her works and the exhibition there. One of the employees of Acht-

kanter was translating for me. We talked about most of the themes I had in mind, but the official interview with Ruth was a bit shorter than with Mieke, partly because the employee had to get back to work. Ruth speaks some English though, so as we toured the place and she showed me her work, we still continued talking.



Photo 2: Ruth and her works in the Gallery of Den Achtkanter

The interview with Anne was the easiest, because she speaks English fluently. For her interview I went to visit her at her home in Gent. She showed me her atelier, and we talked a lot of her art and her past, her family and the project Baggaerts. The interview with Anne was very different from the others, mostly because of the language and the setting. I think it makes a huge difference also for the interviewed, that they feel comfortable in the place they are being interviewed. This way I also felt that I got closer somehow, since I actually saw where and how Anne lived, and also saw her children and her husband.



Photo 3: Anne and her son Egon

The stories and the information I got helped me later to select the right photos for the work, but I still wish I would have had more interviews in different settings and with different themes. I'm happy with the outcome of the interviews, but they could have been a bit more planned. Then again, I think that semi-structured and unstructured interviews were the best choice for this, as it kept the atmosphere more relaxed and informal.

5.1.3 Photos

I photographed the girls in different environments, for example working in the garden, Mieke in De Zandberg, Ruth in Achtkanter and Anne in her home. I took photos also when we visited a botanical garden in Gent, and I took many photos of Baggaertshof in general. I also photographed the girls when they were painting the trees with me.

All and all there were 43 photos I selected for the final work. Many of the photos were clear portraits of Anne, Mieke and Ruth, but some of the photos I chose were more symbolic. Especially the ones in the branches I wanted to give room for different interpretations. I felt that these kinds of photos, when carefully chosen, can actually tell much more of a story than a picture of the person themselves. Every picture was chosen for a reason, and they all have a purpose and a meaning behind them.



Photo 4: Rainy day in Baggaertshof



Photo 7: Anne painting in Baggaertshof



Photo 5: Spider web

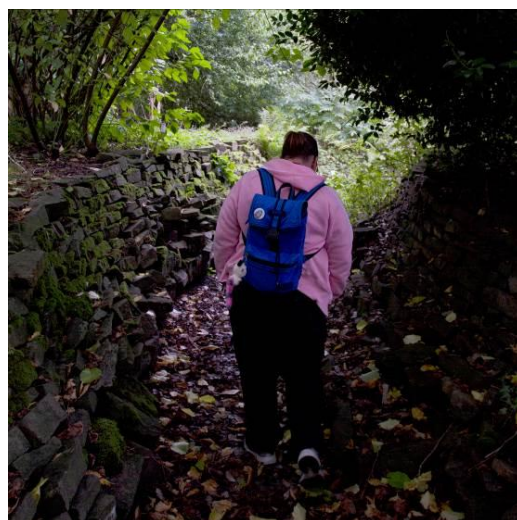


Photo 8: Mieke in the botanical garden



Photo 6: Ruth in the botanical garden

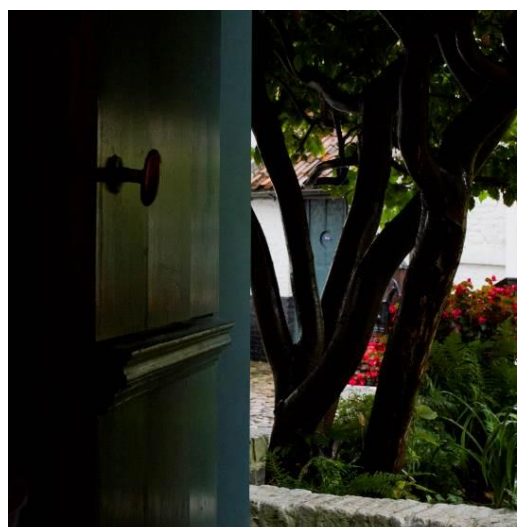


Photo 9: Baggaertshof

I selected six photos here for an example. Larger versions can be found in appendixes 2-7.

For example the photo of Mieke walking on the path alone in the botanical garden, her back turned towards me, told a story of her childhood when she was being bullied in school. The rainy day at Baggaertshof was accompanied by a photo of sun shining through the leaves, which was an allegory of good days and bad days, not just working in Baggaerts but also in all of our lives. The spider web represented a network, society and paths that cross each other. Open door, closed window, three bright coloured flowers or three cactus plants, they all told a story of their own. I wanted to keep a balance and show different sides, not just pretty pictures and good things. Personally I feel that the finished work was quite self-explanatory, but like with all art and creative works there is always various views and perspectives, and everyone sees the work in a different way based on their own knowledge and experiences.

An artist produces a worldview through subjective symbolism, and the worldview is shared through external symbolism. The one who observes the artwork sees it through the symbolism that the artist has formed, and through that the observer creates their own view. Because everyone understands the symbolism in a different way, the meaning of the artwork varies through every viewer. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, 29-30.)

5.2 Guidelines for the project

In the beginning of my project I got an assignment to come up with five words that are the most important for me in portraiture and making portraits. It was for the exhibition, but as I thought about the words carefully, it became clear to me that these concepts are very important for my project in general. I decided to use them as goals for my project, so in the end I could evaluate how well they were realised and how they showed in my actions and in the final product, the artwork.

The concepts I chose were relationship, dialogue, authenticity, perspective and aesthetics. To compare, the main elements in the methodology of portraiture are context, voice, relationship, emergent themes and aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997.) The concepts differ some, but the principles behind them are the same. The original methodology was of course still the frame for my project, but since all projects are different, I wanted to bring up the elements that were relevant in the context that I worked in.

5.2.1 Relationship

Relationship is one of the most important concepts in portraiture, because without it it's impossible to achieve any of the other elements. You cannot reach authentic dialogue or aesthetics without it, and if there is no required relationship between the portraitist and the subject, also the perspective is going to be very one-sided. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997, 135)

writes that in the process of making portraits relationships are essential, since the portraits are made through these relationships, which should be benevolent and constructive. Through the constantly changing and evolving relationship connections are built, knowledge and information is gained and trust is constructed. Portraitist and the subject are trying to find harmony, amenity and truthfulness, as they work together regularly.

The relationship between the portraitist and the subject is not the only one present; there is also the relationships between the portraitist and the work, the work and the one who observes it, the observer and the subject of the work, and finally the portraitist and the observer. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, 30.) I would add to this list also the relationship between the subject and the work, especially in the cases where the subject is actively participating in the process. In my work it was also about the relationship between three different subjects, which can make things a bit more complex, but in my experience also more interesting and better. The web of different relationships can be fragile, but if the relationships are healthy and trust is gained, it can also act as a safety net.

5.2.2 Dialogue

Usually the word “dialogue” means a conversation or discussion between two or more people. Here however it is vital to understand that dialogue can also exist without any spoken or written words. Throughout my project the non-verbal communication was not only important, but necessary. Because of the different languages, verbal communication was often very difficult and sometimes awkward. With gestures, expressions and even drawings, we could immerse in dialogue and enhance the understanding between us. Leavy (2009, 14) writes that arts-based practices encourage dialogue through emotions, which promotes empathy. Empathy in turn is essential for transcending differences and avoiding stereotypes that are destructive.

Important in portraiture is listening for a voice and observing the gestures and movements, but also noticing the silences. Sometimes this kind of communication can be clearer than the words, and for a portraitist it is important to be aware of this. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 99-100.)

The whole project, from the interviews to photographing and finally painting together, can be seen as a dynamic process of dialogue. I noticed that as the time went by, it became much easier to communicate this way. Sometimes there were moments when I even forgot that we don't share the same language. Tears as an indication of sadness and pain, a compassionate touch on the shoulder or a comforting hug are ways to transmit information about our feelings and meanings, even without speaking a word.

5.2.3 Authenticity

Listening, watching and communicating with the people you work with, and describing this process consistently is an important part in the making of the portraits, so the final work is convincing and authentic. This also includes finding the bigger picture and combining different themes to consistent narrative. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 12.)

In my project authenticity was important not only in the final artwork, but also in the whole process. Relationships need to be authentic, to achieve the rest. I wanted the dialogue between us to be authentic, and also to communicate in a truthful way. If the process itself is authentic, it is way easier to achieve the same in the end result.

Authenticity is not always easy to accomplish, the maker of the artwork has to be very attentive and observant. Even when the relationships are good and the dialogue truthful, there are many little things that can escape if the portraitist is not present and observant enough.

5.2.4 Perspective

The artwork is always done in the perspective of the artist, but it doesn't mean that the artist shouldn't seek to see things in another perspective. Like with the relationships, also a mixture of different perspectives can be seen in the final work, especially if there are many participants in the process. The perspective then of course changes again and again, depending on who is observing the artwork. Still, in the process of making the portrait, it is important to acknowledge all the different perspectives and also give them enough room to be realized.

The portraitist tries to understand the perspective, the emotions, ideas, fears and pains of the subjects by listening and communicating with them, and trying to put herself in their place. But also the element of self - the portraitist's perspective, is always present in all aspects of the process. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 146, 35.)

5.2.5 Aesthetics

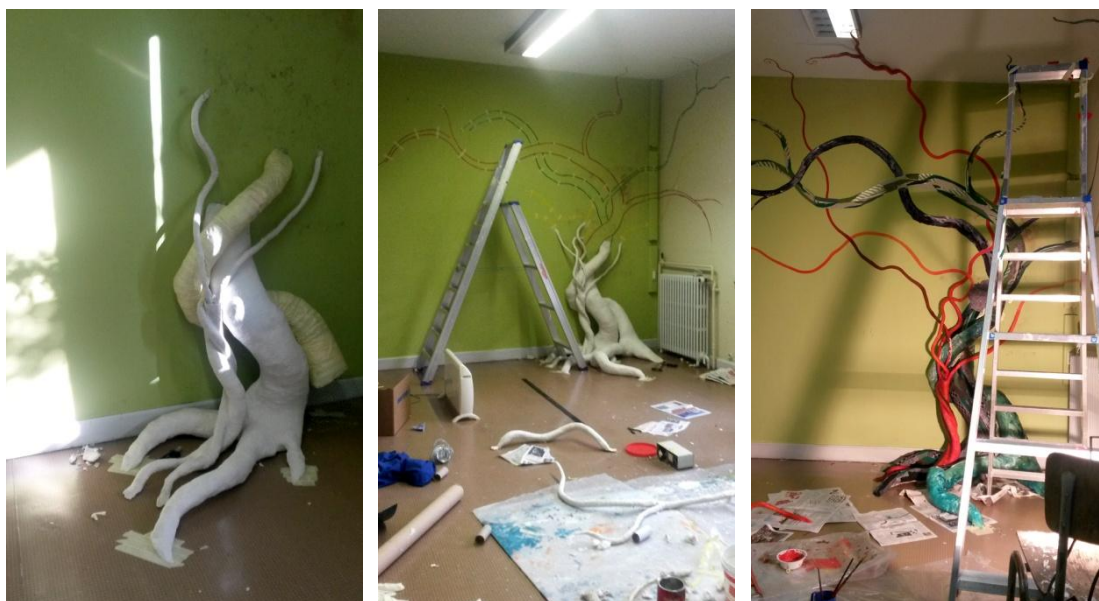
Aesthetics is the last but maybe the most difficult concept to fathom. In portraiture aesthetics doesn't mean that the work should be a showy piece of art, but that all parts of the work are in balance. Davis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 261-262) writes about "the aesthetic whole". By this she means to combine of all the other parts into consistent, authentic work. The portraitist must carefully define and construct all the elements, data and information to a coherent narrative.

In artistic projects like this it is of course an important aspect to try to make the work interesting to observe. There is no harm in trying to make a visually stunning artwork, as long as it doesn't interfere with other elements of the work. The narrative, the story and its authenticity should be as important as the materials, the colours and the methods of doing the artwork. Then the aesthetic whole is achieved.

5.3 Outcome and reflection

5.3.1 The artwork

I did the basic structures of the trees with chicken wire and paper mache clay. After I had the structures ready, Anne, Ruth and Mieke came to help me with their own trees. With Ruth we painted her tree together based loosely on the picture she drew. With Mieke we worked with fabrics, as she wanted. We made a silhouette of her face in fabric, and she stitched it while I glued strips of fabrics to the tree. With Anne we also followed her drawing at least in colours. I didn't have to do much myself, and as a professional painter she worked swiftly.



Photos 10,11 & 12: Photos from the process
(Appendixes 8, 9 & 10)

After the trees were ready and painted, I went to print the photos. I wanted them to look like old Polaroid photos, so I chose to print them on a white background and then cut the edges to get the desired result. The idea was that the photos would look a bit like leaves, but in the end I changed it a bit to get a more balanced result. Choosing which photo goes where and to make it coherent was a difficult task, but I think in the end it worked out well.



Photos 13, 14 & 15: The finished artwork (Appendixes 11, 12 & 13)

The final product of my project, the artwork, came to be a lot how I first planned it to be. There are always points that I could've changed or done better if I have had more time. For example, during the project I broke my foot which led to some time difficulties. Because of this the roots of the trees were not completed, which made me decide to discard them entirely. In general however, I was happy for the result, and I reached my goals.

5.3.2 Reflection on the guidelines

When the work was finished, it was time for reflection and revisiting the guidelines I had made for the project. Here I will evaluate the work itself through the five concepts, and how they are visually present in the artwork.

Relationship was the first concept, and I wanted to show not only the relationship between me and the girls, but also the relationship between them. In the artwork it is distinguishable through the photos and how the trees are entwined together. The relationship between me and the girls is observable through the story that the photos tell, and in the visual appearance of the trees.

The second concept was dialogue. In the finished work I think the dialogue between us all is visible. I tried to reach equality and put myself in a position in which I'm at the same level with everyone. Of course it has to be considered that it was my work from the beginning, but still everybody participated in the process of making the trees. Everyone's wishes were heard and we communicated through working together.

Authenticity was also very important for me to achieve. Every detail in the artwork had to tell a true story. I found it vital to the authenticity of the artwork, that none of the photos were staged; they were all taken in real situations as they happened. Even the photos of objects and plants were taken because we happened to be there at that moment. I never went back or planned to take a photo of a certain thing. The goal was then also to document reality. Even with the more symbolic photos, where every viewer has their own perception, I tried to choose photos that were telling something real.

Perspective however, is always present, and everyone has their own reality. The photos were taken from a certain perspective, mine, but I have no power over how other people perceive them. In the artwork then there are multiple perspectives to be seen, my perspective as a photographer and how I planned the artwork, the perspective of the girls how they wanted their trees to look like, our collective perspective in how it all came together, and finally the perspective of the viewer of the artwork.

The final and the most controversial concept was aesthetics. In the finished work this was realized by planning the photos, the colours, the forms and everything visible in the artwork. Due to perspective, a work that pleases everyone is impossible to do, so the purpose isn't try to make everything as beautiful as possible. To reach the goal of aesthetics, I tried to bring wholeness to the work, to create balance in every aspect.

5.3.3 Self-evaluation

Throughout the project I had many challenges but also many experiences of success. Here I will try to reflect on my actions on a personal level, and see in what I managed well and what I could've done differently.

I feel that all this kind of work is done with personality. To connect with the people, to be equal, and to exchange experiences, the character of the person should be apparent but not dominating. Sometimes I felt that I didn't open up as much as I could have, and I may have been too distant or reserved. For me it had a lot to do with my surroundings, different culture, different language and the unfamiliarity of it all. At times I wasn't that comfortable with my situation, which kept me from truly relating to and interacting with the people I worked with.

During the project but also the whole stay and internship I could've taken more initiative to communicate better, to learn the language and connect with the people. Looking back it would've been a lot better if I had taken some Dutch courses. In such a short time I couldn't

have learned the language that well, but even a few phrases and words can make a huge difference in how people see me and how I connect with them. This point also came out in the evaluation discussion we had in the end of my internship. In the project however I tried my best to overcome the obstacles that the language created and I saw that we learned to interact in many different ways. I feel that I succeeded to form a good relationship with the girls, and we could communicate despite the difficulties.

One area that also needs improvement is my scheduling. I think it's important to make a clear schedule as soon as possible, preferably in the first week of the project. In this project I waited too long to arrange the meetings and interviews, and I could've started doing them earlier on. Of course there can always be things that are not foreseen. The accident and my sick leave was surely an obstacle and made some things more difficult, but with careful planning it would have also been better. Nonetheless, I think I worked well considering the situation, and I completed the project on time.

The project as a whole was a huge learning experience, and though it wasn't always easy, every challenge made me see what I can improve in the future. I think I learnt a lot from the theory and from doing the artwork as well, and all those things I will surely be able to use later on. So in the end I think the project was a success, but it's very important to reflect on what I did and how in similar projects my work can be improved and how I meet challenges in the future.

5.3.4 People with disabilities

One of the important aspects of portraiture is the search for goodness. What I valued and appreciated the most in working at vzw Wit.h doing my project, was the way how people were treated. I never had the feeling that problems or the disabilities of people were the main focus. Of course these are aspects you can't just ignore, because this line of work has its own challenges and sides that should be taken into account. But the way of working wasn't problem-oriented, on the contrary. The "people with disabilities" were seen simply as "people", as individuals with their own personal characters, needs and wishes, just like anyone else. The focus was more on their strengths, assets and abilities. Still there was room for expressing the negative emotions and experiences also.

"I think the big difference, because you could write a whole book about it, I think there are a few great differences with classic measuring or classic science in social work, and the first is the subjective way of working. You must be honest, it's not you, professional, and someone with a problem, that's bullshit. You are also a problem. But you're also positive, you're also human. So who

you are, what you want to do in life, how you want to do in life, is evenly important as the patient, or the client or the handicapped. So for me that's the big difference. It's subjective, it's the way you look the things, the way you look." (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

Lawrence-Lightfoot writes about how social scientists are often focusing on what is wrong, rather than trying to find what is potentially good. This doesn't mean that the portraitist should colour everything positive if it's not. It is important for the portraitist to be broad-minded, discerning, generous and open for challenge. The portraitist inspires the subjects and acknowledges their expertise in their own reality. Portraitist doesn't just support their strengths, but leaves also room for flaws, prejudices, uneasiness and vulnerabilities. It's about search for goodness, while still preserving the balance to portray the diversity of human experience. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 8, 141)

"Portraiture starts from a dialogue between the one who's making the portrait and the one who wants to be portrayed. Also so important. I've seen so much social workers who are not talking with their clients. They talk about their clients or above their clients or behind their clients, but not with their clients and really with their clients." (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

5.4 Thoughts about art in a social context

Art and creativity enables dialogue and interaction that would otherwise be hard or even impossible to achieve. With artistic methods people can communicate at a different level and exchange experiences and knowledge even without common language. In many ways music, painting or drama for example, can be seen as world languages and they don't necessarily require any specific knowledge or skills, although in many social artistic projects also the artistic skills are valued.

"Especially for people with mental handicap, I think, what I see that it's for them, not easy to express. Because their language is, they don't have lot of words. Some people have only 40 words for instance... So their vocabulary is very small. And if you have a small vocabulary in our times, it's not easy to express that you are feeling sad or that you want to do other things in life, because you don't have the words or the rationality, their minds. Portraiture can help them to express who they really are and what they really want in life. Even if it's very subjective." (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

From my experiences from the project portraiture, the outcome is not necessarily more important than the process. Presenting the work is surely an important part of the process, but often the journey itself is where little achievements can be found in ways of self-expression, communication and even failing and trying again. Giving room for failure is very important, as it is an essential part of ordinary life as well. Learning to accept failure teaches people to stand up and try again, and that creates more possibilities for achievements and success. It also teaches that failure is not the end, but just a small detour on the journey towards reaching the goals. When the goals are more about good experiences, improving well-being or connecting to other people through art, the activity on its own becomes substantial. This is why the process can be as crucial as the end product itself.

For example in a social artistic project, it is often all the little things and day-to-day moments that matter the most. These include things like cooking together, sharing the meals or just simple coffee breaks, where it is easier to open up and talk (or even sing together). Sharing a smile, laughter or a hug can be the one thing that gets people through the day, and with all the doors for interaction that art can open, these things can be achieved. The art can be seen as common goal that makes this kind of communication possible. This of course doesn't mean that the artistic value should not be as important. Finishing an artwork and getting a chance to present it, is very important and brings closure. In my opinion, both of these aspects are essential for a successful social-artistic project. There is no one without the other. During the interviews Luc Vandierendonck also emphasized on finding the balance between both elements:

“A few years ago I would say to you that the process is more important, we were... That's a good example of how we grow with vzw Wit.h. But even if you have a good process and you don't have good results, you always feel a little to miss something. And the opposite also you can have a good result with a bad process. ... So it's very good if you find a good balance between the process and the result. I think it's also important... The result for me is in the process.” (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

6 Conclusions

My first research question was how portraiture can be used with people with disabilities in a social-artistic project. Chapter 5 was an example of such a project, partly answering the question. The results show that portraiture is a good method for people with disabilities, because it enables dialogue even through language barriers. For example with painting and photography, it is possible to communicate with symbols and metaphors, which are understood even if the words are not. Portraiture has also power to give a voice to those who are often

more silent or cannot express themselves easily in traditional ways. It can also give positive experiences and feelings of success. This came out in the interview with Marieke Vandecasteele as well, where she talked about portraiture and the experiences her subject had:

“I think they have a voice. For her, for me, my case study it was important afterwards, after the portrait, we showed her film to all people she finds important. And some people, like her teacher from where she lives, she has not so good contact with. And when she showed the film, I saw that the teacher was like oh, you really made it and she gave the compliment to her and she was very proud that she got a compliment from her, because normally she is always like... She is loud and... Always negative. And now she gets a positive compliment. She was very proud for the results. Because it's her film and she can show it to everybody.” (M. Vandecasteele 2014.)

The study also shows that when using portraiture as a broader working method instead of a research method, it still has a lot of potential in producing valuable information for example to organizations. The difference between using portraiture as a working method and a research method lies in the purpose and the goals of the project or the study. Using portraiture will anyhow give birth to many different stories, information and data, which can later be analyzed more carefully to make an in-depth study. Portraiture doesn't have to be limited to the official and formal world of research and science, to be used only by students or researchers. Through portraiture it is possible to reflect on what has been done or for example evaluate different projects. Portraiture can be used in a broad way because the methodology is clear but still flexible, giving a lot of possibilities for expanding it from narrative to different mediums.

“We are very critical to everyone, to the audience, to the public, to society, to community, to politics, to economy. And we were also very critical to ourselves. If we do something we think a lot how we do it and afterward we think what can we do better or what cannot we do. But we saw after 10, 15 years that we forgot to do something with the reflections. Have we written them down? No. Have we written books? No. Did we make big studies? No. Did we ask scientist to follow us and write about it? No. So that part, the part of the reflection, was totally empty. And then everyone start thinking, what can we do to fill it up? And I think that the most important reason why we started with Portraiture is that we have to do something about our reflections. Our professional work is not only artistic work, and exhibitions, but also reflection. That's the most important reason.” (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

The second research question was what new portraiture brings to the social-artistic field. This was a bit more difficult to answer. Since portraiture was first used by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot already in the '80s, it could be said that the method hasn't been new for a while now. In the book *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, Lawrence-Lightfoot herself writes "when I speak about my invention of portraiture, I am not claiming that this form of inquiry and representation is all mine, or all new" and that "there is a long and rich history of dialogue and collaboration between artists and scholars, between novelist and philosophers." (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, 5.)

In the course of doing my thesis and especially after the interviews, I started to question the whole relevance of "new". If there is such a method already that has proven its worth, does it necessarily have to bring something new and special? This of course doesn't mean we shouldn't thrive to find new and better methods and try different practices, in fact, the opposite (I talk more about this in the final chapter of my thesis), but we shouldn't do it just for the excitement and fascination of the word new. Whether using portraiture as a working method or a research method, it should be chosen for that moment because it's best for what is needed, and it gives something that other methods can't.

"First of all it's always a matter of choice. You make a choice and you can only make it on your own experience, and on the things that you think on certain moment, in a certain place. This is the right idea. ... But here the portraiture, and the word is in it, it's a portrait. So it's not about social-artistic, it's not about Luc Vandierendonck or Anna, it's about the person himself. Not people with handicap, it's about themselves. How do they feel, how is their expression how is... On this moment, it's a very good method because of that. Because it's... Not to study about someone, the subject is in the study. But I will be the last to say, this is the one and only, of course it's not." (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

Maybe it's just a choice of words, but instead of asking what new portraiture brings, I would ask why choose portraiture over something else. And this question has to be asked again and again, depending on the project or the study. However, I would say that in general portraiture differs from other methods in its way to include both the researcher and the subjects in the study, in an equal way. The voices of both parties are present and can be heard in the portrait and in the research. Normally the voice of the researcher is not that distinguishable, quite the opposite. Portraiture also has the goal of putting the work out there to the people, outside of academia and traditional ways of scientific representation. It's more open and understandable for an ordinary person, because it speaks through emotions, stories and metaphors. Like Luc Vandierendonck said:

“Why I am happy for it that we find a way, Portraiture, that has so much possibilities at the same time. It's not only science, which is boring, or it's not only written down what's happening in big files that nobody ever will read. No, it's a combination of thinking very clear, writing down very good ideas, make it science, like a scientist, I said you are a scientist, you do not believe but you are. At the same time to do it, something that you can understand. That you can see, you can feel, who has an atmosphere, who has something artistic, something creative. So that's the whole new thing.” (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

7 Ethical considerations

The issue of anonymity and ethics is very important in all research. Normally the identity of the participants in research is well guarded and anonymity is achieved. When working with art and photos however, the boundaries get easily more blurred.

According to Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2014)

“In research, particularly in the humanities but also in the social sciences, it may be justifiable for research purposes and also ethically to present subjects by name in research publications. For example, a study based on interviews with experts can be published without removing the names of subjects or other identifiers. Agreement about this must be reached with research subjects in advance.”

After careful consideration, I chose to ask for permission to use the photos and the names of the participants in my thesis. I sent a consent form (Appendix 1) to all the participants and the interviewees, and they all gave me permission. One reason for using the photos and the names was that the original artwork and the photos were already public and part of the exhibition in Museum aan de Overkant. The second reason was to give credit to the participants. As L. Vandierendonck (2014) said in his interview: “If you like to be a good student and getting points for your thesis, then you must know very well that it is because of Mieke, Anne and Ruth, that you have your points. So you give it to them, you have to give it to them too.” The portrait we made together in the project portraiture was not just about me doing a project, but about them. It was their participation, their voice and their stories that carried the project onward. Lastly, using the names and the photos increases the validity and reliability of the study. Since the topic of my thesis is also not very sensitive or delicate, I came to a conclusion that usage of the photos and the names is justified.

When using portraiture as a research method or a working method, the most important thing relating to ethics is to remember that the work is done on the terms of the participants or the subjects. You have to respect the people you are working with, and be equal with them.

“So for me integrity and equality in portraiture is so important. That’s the big difference. You are professional and she is a mental handicap; you are equal. If you as a professional want to study her, you can only do it if you respect her as who she is. And she will only like you as an educator or a scientist or whatever, on the moment that you are coming down to an equal.” (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

8 Discussion

In this final chapter I want to bring focus and open a discussion about the ways of doing social research, the ways we study or do projects and how it has been for such a long time. I want to raise a question, is this the only good way or is it time to change things? This is an open question without an answer, but I encourage everyone to think about it and to discover ways to find out. The most important thing for me about portraiture is that though it is a scientific method, it actually made sense in a more familiar and worldly ways. It’s easy to understand and follow, and the results are more comprehensible to the people without academic knowledge and understanding.

I think that this is a very important question for everyone working in social sciences, since our clients are from all different social classes and can vary from children to elderly. When we are using only special terminology and speaking jargon, when we drown our projects and our studies and research in all that academic gibberish, we are failing to communicate with majority of the people. Portraiture does the exact opposite. It gives room to be more subjective and intuitive while still getting reliable results and being authentic. It speaks to the public. It tells stories that people can relate to, that they can know through their own experiences, and not only if they take a course in social research. Does “scientific” or “research” have to amount to “boring” or “incomprehensible”? I don’t think so. What I think is that we have to keep in mind, always, that we are working with people and for the people, and that we should try our best to communicate and work in an equal and humane way.

We should work to narrow and eliminate the gap between art and science by accepting that alternative ways of knowing are as good as the traditional ways. Depending on the project or the research, they may even be better. There is a place for both, depending on the understanding we want to achieve.

“Pragmatically, in order for the best researchers to be able to work with these methods as appropriate to their research projects, the institutional context in which research occurs need to change. For instance, arts-based practices cannot be relegated to the status of second- or third-tier methods. These methods cannot be categorized as “experimental,” which serves to undermine and marginalize these practices. In order to advance our understanding of these practices and their potential to add to our knowledge, conference, publication, and funding opportunities need to be available for researchers using these less-conventional methods.” (Leavy 2009, 264)

I want to end my thesis to a quote from one of the interviews with Luc Vandierendonck, because for me it summarizes so well the idea of good way of working, whether it is with portraiture or another method or without any method at all.

“To be honest, to stop, I'm not a big believer in methods. Because, I think, to make the difference in the way of working or in idea, or in vision of an organization, for me it's more about personalities. It's more about you and me, who is he, who is she, how does she tell it. The most important things in culture are not changed by methods; they are changed by people, strong people, by personalities. Who dare take the adventure, to say, maybe we have to do it this way, and please, everyone who wants to come with me, come with me, even if you totally do not understand what it is, because, to be honest, I don't know. But let's go for it, let's go with the flow, with a group of people, and we do believe in a leader, or a curator who makes an exhibition, is someone, the most important part is his personality, not his method.” (L. Vandierendonck 2014.)

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Appendix 1 Release permission form

Release and Permission for use of Name, Photos and Interviews

I, _____, (“the Participant”)
hereby grant permission to **Anna Kallionpää** to use my name, photos and interviews
in her thesis for Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The thesis will be published
also in Theseus - the theses and publications of the Universities of Applied Sciences
on the Internet (<https://www.theseus.fi/>)

If needed, a parent or guardian must sign.

Vrijgave en Toestemming voor het gebruik van Naam, Foto's en Interviews

Ik, _____, (“de deelnemer”)
geef Anna Kallionpään hierbij de toestemming om mijn naam, foto's en interviews te
gebruiken in haar thesis voor Laurea Universiteit voor Toegepaste Wetenschappen.
De thesis zal ook gepubliceerd worden in Theseus - de theses-en publicatiesite van
Universiteiten voor Toegepaste Wetenschappen op het internet
(<https://www.theseus.fi/>)

Indien nodig, moet een ouder of voogd tekenen.

Name/Naam: _____

Signature/Handtekening: _____

Date/Datum: _____

Appendix 2 Rainy day in Baggaertshof



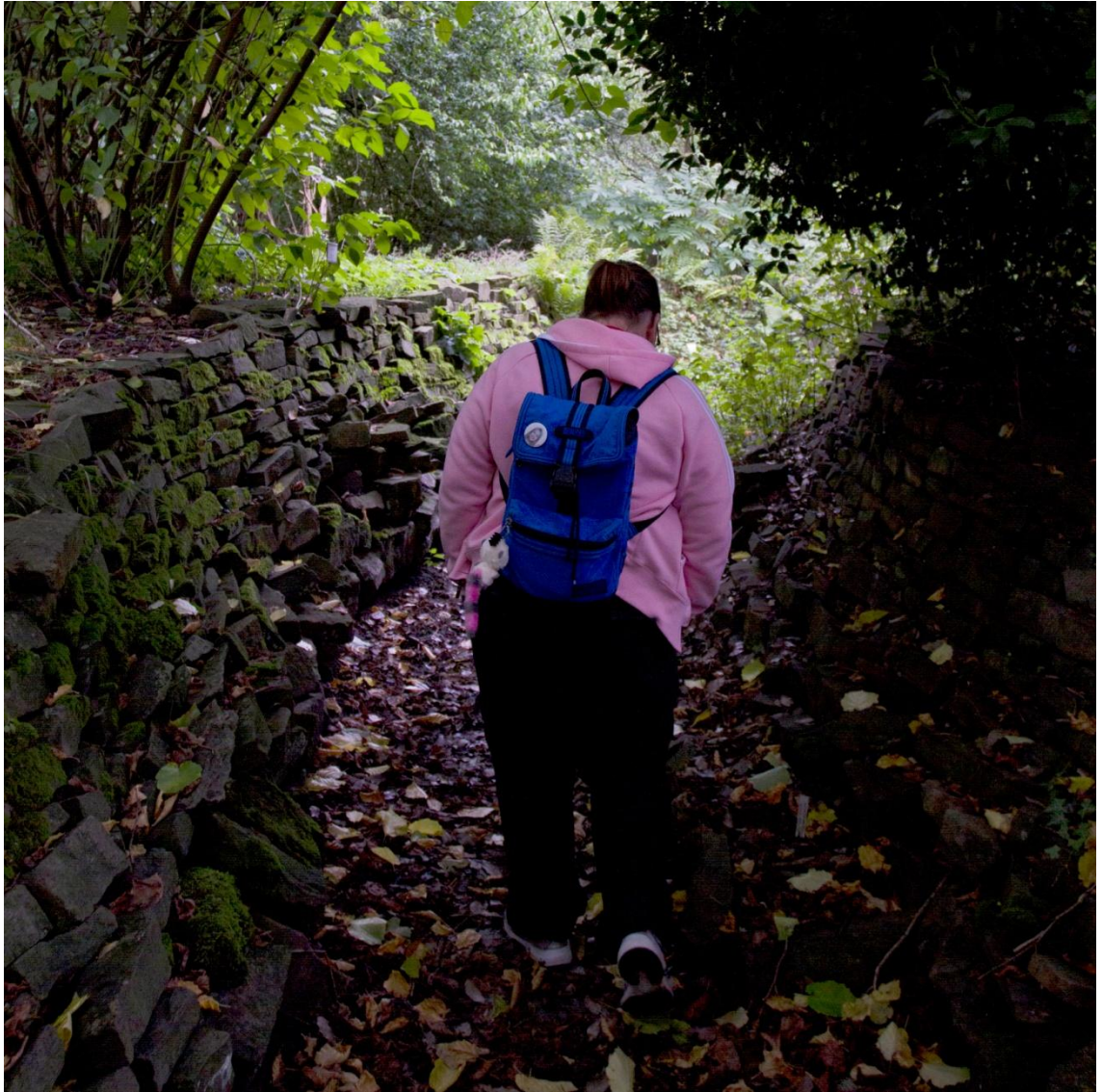
Appendix 3 Anne painting in Baggaertshof



Appendix 4 Spider web



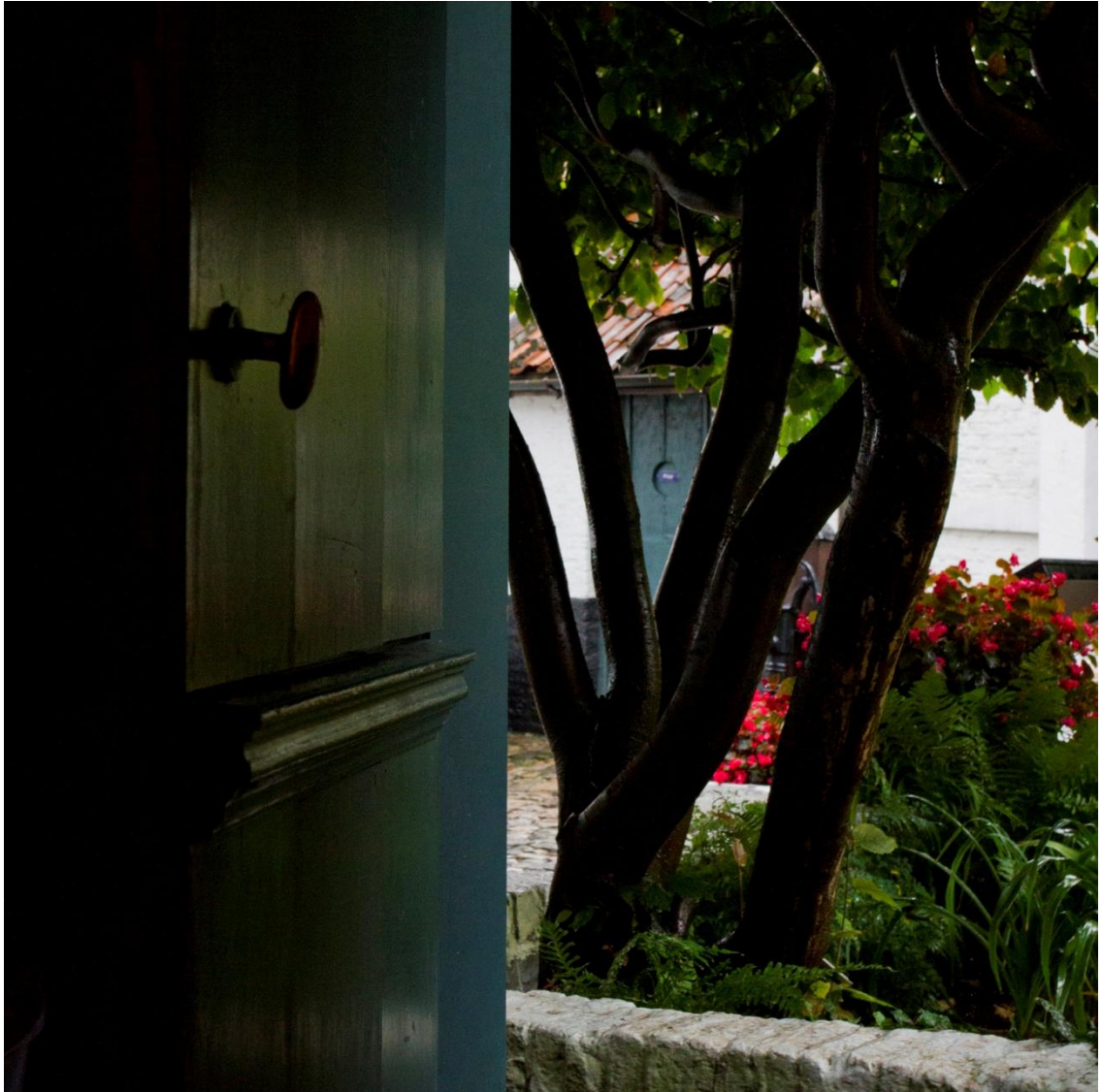
Appendix 5 Mieke in the botanical garden



Appendix 6 Ruth in the botanical garden



Appendix 7 Baggaertshof



Appendix 8 from the process 1



Appendix 9 from the process 2



Appendix 10 from the process 3



Appendix 11 The finished artwork 1



Appendix 12 The finished artwork 2



Appendix 13 The finished artwork 3

