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Getting Your Portrait Painted Is Trendy Again

Once considered a relic of the photography era, the art of portrait painting is making a comeback—think of it as a selfie that takes weeks to complete.



Hedges poses for Davy. Photographer: Clément Pascal for Bloomberg Pursuits By James Tarmy

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By his own estimation, James Hedges IV, CEO of the hair salon chain John Barrett, owns at least eight portraits of himself. Some—such as the ones by photographers Carrie Mae Weems and Bruce Weber, who shot him and his son—were gifts.

Others he commissioned from artists as different as Vera Lutter, who specializes in pinhole photography, and the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz, who made a portrait of Hedges and his kids out of Hershey's chocolate syrup. *(cont'd)*

On a September afternoon in Brooklyn, N.Y., Hedges, 47, perches on a wooden chair beneath a massive potted philodendron to sit for his ninth. Dressed in a navy blue polo, white pants, and black Nike running shoes, he positions himself in front of TM Davy, an artist who shows his occasionally candle-lit, homoerotic paintings of friends, lovers, and cats at the influential downtown New York gallery 11R Eleven Rivington. “Like this?” Hedges asks, his head turned slightly to the side and his arm over the chair’s back. “Sure,” says Davy, who’s seated in front of an easel with a neat palette of colors laid out beside him. “Whatever feels comfortable.”

Davy’s style, a soft-focus photo-realism, makes faces and bodies look as if they’ve been shot in the most flattering light imaginable—Caravaggio meets John Baeder. Although he’s gained notice for his portraits, Davy prefers to choose his own subjects, and he rarely takes a commission. But when he does, an 8-inch-by-10-inch head study in oil starts at \$3,500; a large, full-figure composition can run from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

For Hedges, getting his portrait done is more than a mere exercise in vanity. “I’m not that interested in seeing pictures of my face,” he says, noting that only the Muniz is on display in his house. Instead, he sees having his portrait done as an opportunity to be a part of the artistic process.



A portrait of Rosselli by Cooper. Source: Courtesy of the Artist