Personas

Among genres of art, portraits offer the most direct connection between subject, artist, and viewer, and no art form is more profoundly concerned with the core question of identity. In this museum, portraiture provides perspectives on the individual and on Jewishness at a particular moment and from a specific view.

The Jewish Museum's collection includes portraits dating from antiquity to the present, most either by Jewish artists or of Jewish sitters. It thus offers a historical view of Jewish identities in all their many facets, addressing religion and secularity, ethnicity and universality, fantasy and materiality, otherness and self-assertion.

Artists on Artists

Artists on Artists reflects the interconnected world of art in a variety of visual perspectives, traditional and novel. Portraits are historically concerned with spatial setting and include recognizable props that give clues to the identity, status, and significance of the sitter. Artists have challenged and adapted these typical characteristics of portraiture using the techniques of modern and contemporary art movements or those of their own making.

Hannah Wilke produced her self-portraits from interlaced smears of paint in a precisely dated sequence, fixing the fatal passage of time as she was treated for cancer. Through serial representation Andy Warhol conveyed the superficial nature of contemporary experience in an age of mass media. The concept of multiplicity is adapted in the work of Deborah Kass as a poignant homage to the commodified star and to Warhol as the artist's predecessor.

In the contemporary culture of images, appropriation, repetition, recycling, and spin-offs abound. The depictions of Jewish artists and subjects express a range of perceptions related to the human fascination with identity and our sense of the self and the collective.