

Social Media Narrative:  
Issues in Contemporary Practice

hosted by The Rutgers Camden Digital Studies Center and Judy Malloy  
and the Rutgers Camden DSC Class in Social Media Narrative:

Lineage and Contemporary Practice  
Facebook, November 16 - 21, 2016

## Transcript: Matt Held



**Matt Held**  
[November 18 at 10:55am](#)

Hello! My apologies for joining a few days late; the last week or so has been a bit of a blur. My name is Matt Held and I am an artist primarily based out of NYC (though temporarily in Seattle at the moment). In 2009, I began a near two year long project painting Facebook portraits

<http://www.heldstudios.com/facebook-portraits/>

At the time, Facebook was fairly new to the general public as it had previously been limited to universities. I was fascinated with this concept of individualism through digital representation and the spread of democratization aided by social networking and began painting portraits as a means to exam that. My original goal was to paint 200 portraits (I made it to 75) and formed a group that connected me to individuals around the globe.

I'm thrilled to have been asked to join this panel and engaging in this discussion.



-Facebook Portraits (2008-2010)

With the development of social networking sites, I've developed an interest in how people take simple or complex snapshots of themselves, post them to their page as a representation of who they are and what they want people to see. It is an interesting form of control and, in a way, self-preservation...

heldstudios.com

## Comments



**Judy Malloy** Welcome to Matt Held, whose much celebrated paintings of Facebook profile images brought the faces of Facebook into the real world!

Matt's bio in the Panel Program is at  
<http://www.narrabase.net/socmedianarrative.html#matt>



November 18 at 1:37pm



**Judy Malloy** Hi Matt, Great to see you here!

November 18 at 1:37pm



**Matt Held** It's great to be here, Judy. Thanks for the opportunity.

November 18 at 2:55pm



**Judy Malloy** Signifying your role as an artist, who has looked at social media through the lens of portraiture -- actually I think a little before selfies became a core part of in the social media infosphere environment -- your Facebook portraits have been exhibited in galleries and museums, for instance your exhibition at Denise Bibro Fine Art --  
<http://platform.denisebibrofineart.com/exhibitions/1279>

From a media archeological point of view, I'm particularly interested in how the art world has approached social media. In addition to your work, Joseph's Delappe's *The Salt Satyagraha Online: Gandhi's March to Dandi in Second Life* performed with treadmill at Eyebeam, for instance.

The role of artworks in social media archeology threads through my recent book on *Social Media archeology and Poetics*. As is sometimes the role of art, do you think that your paintings will outlast

Facebook itself and years from now emerge (from a welter of archived fb profiles) to represent the platform itself?



Denise Bibro Fine Art/Platform - Matt Held

Platform is Denise Bibro Fine Art's dedicated project space fully-focused on showcasing cutting-edge...  
platform.denisebibrofineart.com|By www.artcat.com

November 20 at 3:39pm



**Bree Gibbs** Hi **Matt Held**. I was wondering are your paintings computerized, hand free or both? Also, what has inspired you to do this kind of work?

November 21 at 12:29pm



**Matt Held** **Judy Malloy** - That is a great question and I am not sure how best to answer it. I think it comes down to attention span and relevance. Digital media is evolving at a rapid pace. While I believe it will go through many more iterations and would like to see some archival history, there is such a wealth of information out there, it's most likely the project, and the paintings, will get drowned out with all the other noise.

November 21 at 10:29pm



**Matt Held** Hi **Bree Gibbs** - They are all oil on canvas using the original photo as a digital reference. I'll just reconstruct what my origins of the project were - I was having a painter's block and one day my wife was playing around with the computer, took a picture of herself in iPhoto – her interpretation of what she looked like when she was angry – and posted it to her Facebook page. I loved the shot, decided to paint it and it hit me – what a wealth of source material Facebook could be. Going through the profile shots of some of my friends I started thinking about what the poster's intent is with some of their photos. Choosing a certain photo to post is a form of control and self-preservation. However, whether it's a conscious or subconscious choice to choose a photo as a representation of your 'self' is not something this project addresses rather an examination of the subjects' character and moral quality as part of the social media dialogue.

November 21 at 10:33pm



**Bree Gibbs** Thank you so much for sharing! !

November 22 at 7:46am



[Chris Rodley Matt](#) - I love these so much. When you look back on them now, do you notice a difference in the self-portraits people chose in the early years of Facebook, and the selfies they choose now?

November 22 at 9:41am



[Matt Held](#) Thanks Chris, I think as technology has developed and personal phones have better cameras, the images people use have gotten much more creative and the quality of digital imagery has improved. That's not universal, of course but people can take hundreds of photos and choose the one they think is best. I think curating ones own image is not a new concept. Artists, portrait artists specifically, have had to play to their subjects ego in attempts to achieve the desired effect, an acceptable image of their idea of self.

November 28 at 9:01pm



[Judy Malloy](#) Hi Matt,

A few posts ago, I asked

"As is sometimes the role of art, do you think that your paintings will outlast Facebook itself and years from now emerge (from a welter of archived fb profiles) to represent the platform itself?"

And you responded:

" I think it comes down to attention span and relevance. Digital media is evolving at a rapid pace.

While I believe it will go through many more iterations and would like to see some archival history, there is such a wealth of information out there, it's most likely the project, and the paintings, will get drowned out with all the other noise."

A few short points in response:

Painting is potentially far more archival than digital storage media.

There is no guarantee that Facebook users won't wake up one morning to what Myspace users woke up to a few years ago -- a massive unannounced difficult-to-retrieve removal of their "old" content.

And perhaps most important, as your Facebook painting do, painters divulge something in the subject that screen grabs do not. For example, you can look at old advertisements or even photos of the Chrysler Sebring or the Chevrolet Bel Air, but there is something conveyed in Robert Bechtle's "Bob's Sebring" (2011 oil on linen) or in his "'63 Bel Air", (1973 lithograph) that situates these automobiles in the culture of their era. You do not add the equivalent of Bechtle's houses, lawns, or streets in your images, but nevertheless, your paintings so strongly represent your vision of the people-culture of Facebook that I think they will remain iconic.

It was a pleasure to have you on this panel!

November 28 at 5:18pm