Patrick Bade | Michael Leonard Illustrator and Royal Portraitist

– We have two portraits here by Michael Leonard. His most famous portraits by far of course, is the one he made of Queen Elizabeth II in 1986. And on the right you have the very last portrait he ever made, which was actually of me. I was quite touched and flattered when he said he wanted to include me in a series of portraits that he calls Portraits in Time. I'm going to talk about those later. These are portraits where he would depict somebody in the period, in the style to which he thought they belonged. I was a bit regretful that he waited till I was middle-aged to do my portrait, 'cause by the time he did it, he saw me as a I suppose, a slightly porky English aristo as though painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence. I thought, well, if he'd done it 20 or 30 years earlier, I could have been a contender to be a French romantic character depicted by Angler or Delacroix. Anyway, more about that later.

The portrait, as I said of Elizabeth, is certainly his best known work. People don't necessarily know his name but everybody knows this picture. It's probably the picture in the National Portrait Gallery that sells more postcards than any other. Michael was always very... I won't say modest. He was very critical of his own work. He's very honest in his assessment of his own work. And he would always be the first to say that this portrait was far from being his most interesting or original creation. Nevertheless, he was proud of it 'cause as he told me on several occasions, to receive a commission to paint the portrait of the Queen, it's a poisoned chalice. She's probably been painted more than any other woman, certainly in the second half of the 20th century, and certainly being painted more often, more badly. There are endless, terrible, terrible portraits of Queen Elizabeth II. Michael always said that he thought the best portrait of her by anybody was the first of the two Pietro Annigoni portraits. The one dating from 1955, which you see on the right hand side. And he greatly admired this. He'd say, "Yes, this is the best portrait made of her." 'Cause she was working. That was 1955. His portrait is 1986. It was commissioned by Reader's Digest, and then presented by them to the National Portrait Gallery. 'Cause by the time he painted that she was a middle aged woman. She had, I suppose, lost something of the allure that she still had in 1955 when Annigoni painted his portrait. But in its own terms, I think it's a very successful picture. If you want to know more about it in the book that was recently published on him, which I contributed the main text, there is a text by him about his experience of painting this portrait. She was actually wearing a pink dress, but he wanted to make a quasi-wislerian harmony of gold and cream. And so you can see he's put her in a yellow dress that fits into this colour harmony, along with the Louis Kaz sofa and the Corgi dog. So despite his tremendous respect for the Queen and for Annigoni's first portrait, that didn't prevent him from rather wickedly parodying it for a portrait of Idi Amin that

he did for the Sunday Times Colour Supplement in 1975 which you can see on the left. And he certainly didn't like this portrait, the second of the Annigoni ones. But even that of course is light years better than many of the absolutely terrible subsequent portraits of the Queen. I'm afraid when our dear queen departs, if anybody has the bright idea of creating an exhibition of all the portraits made of the queen, it's going to be a complete horror show. There's Ralph Harris on the left hand side. Surely the worst picture that Lucian Freud ever painted, in the middle, and Dan Llywelyn Hall on the right hand side. So this is the cover of my book which came out last year. Was long time in the making. I've known Michael I suppose for 40 years. That would've 40 years. It's so long ago. I can't actually remember who introduced us, but I think it was probably was the art critic, John Russell Taylor, since he was a mutual friend. And we got on well and I admired his work. And we would meet from time to time, maybe two or three times a year. He would invite me to go and eat with him in a local restaurant in southwest London. I would not claim that we ever had a close friendship. We had a cordial relationship rather than a close one. In fact, I think it's... Really, the idea of having a close friendship with Michael is almost impossible. He's a complicated, rather distant character. He has a brother who is severely autistic. And I suspect that Michael himself is somewhere on that spectrum. Despite the endless conversations I had with him over the years and particularly preparing this book, there were aspects of his life, his personality, that I knew absolutely nothing about. I know nothing about his love life, nothing about his personal relations, nothing really about his emotional life, other than some stories he told me about his relationship with his mother. So I would go over there. We would meet in the same little Italian restaurant. Then later after that closed, we met in a Turkish restaurant. He would choose what I was going to eat. That was very clear. I had no choice in the matter. I wasn't fussy. I like whatever was put in front of me, really. But it was also a clue about his personality, his need of deep, deep psychological need to control absolutely everything that is going on around him. This is the most important thing really to understand about his art. This is the interior of his flat, where over a period of couple of years, whenever I was in London, I would go to him. By this time he had mobility problems.

So for the last few years, when I met him, I always took dinner with me to his flat. And it was always the same dinner. He did not want to deviate from it in the slightest detail. So he would start with and Parma Ham. Then we'd go on to shepherd's pie with some green beans, and then we'd finish with tiramisu, and he would drink beer and I would drink wine. And he did not like surprises. A couple of times I tried to try something different, he really didn't like that. And this sense of needing to be in control of everything, it also expressed itself very much in his apartment. Nothing deviated in the many years that I went there. Everything had its place. He had a well-trained cleaning woman, same cleaning woman over many years. She knew not to

move anything by so much as a fraction of an inch. Everything was perfect. Everything was created by him, curated by him. There were flowers and plants. There were artificial flowers and plants. He did not want real flowers. He did not want real plants 'cause they might change. They might deviate some way from his idea of perfection. The photographs I'm showing you now were not taken by me, they were taken for the book and I think very much under his control. I mean, they're composed photographs. They're composed rather in the very formal way that his paintings were composed. This is a photograph taken by me. Of course you can see me in the mirror in the background. And it feels actually like an intrusion into his personal life. This is taken in his bedroom. As you can see, once again, there are artificial plants, artificial flowers. And there are mementos, personal mementos of his biological father, his stepfather, his mother, the big picture is of his mother, and various other relatives. And he was born in British India in 1933. I think that's quite important too, actually. I mean, his biological father died soon after his birth. His mother remarried in British India. And they came back of course at the time of Indian independence. I can remember as a small child, my sister and I, 'cause we grew up in our early childhood in a military background. And I can remember these people who'd come back from India, and how we regarded them as being very odd and very peculiar and not really properly fitting in. They'd led such a different life. They were waited on hand and foot. They were surrounded by people they looked down upon. And I think they all found it really quite difficult to adjust to post-war, relatively egalitarian Britain. So when he came back... the family were Catholic, so he was sent to a Jesuit college. We had some similarities in our background, 'cause I was sent off for a truly ghastly nightmare year in a Benedictine monastery. I hated every moment of it. Absolutely loathed it. And it gave me a complete loathing of all of that. It was different. Very different for him. He actually fitted into the discipline of life in a Jesuit institution very comfortably as he did afterward. He left school, he did military service and the same thing. I mean, luckily, I didn't have to do military service. I would've hated it. But for him, he was comfortable with all of that. Oh, here is his mother. He did speak warmly about her. She encouraged him. When he spoke about her, he talked about how she really entered in a way, into his fantasy world. When he was creating his illustrations for books or magazines, she was happy to dress up and model for him, and very happy to encourage him in every way. He had a much more distant relationship I would say, with his stepfather. This is a painting on the right hand side of his mother and his stepfather. Obviously, I think quite again, I'd say cordial. It certainly wasn't a warm relationship. He never spoke about his stepfather very warmly. But they were I think reasonably wealthy. They had a house in the posh St. George's Hill area of Weybridge. Again, coincidentally, my sister and I, we spent part of our childhood in Weybridge, but a far less posh area of Weybridge. And this painting on the right hand side, to me tells quite a lot about the relationship of his parents and the kind of life they led. I don't get a sense of a

warm loving couple in a warm, loving environment, from that painting on the right hand side. And I think the positioning, the way they're turned in different directions and so on, reminds me rather of an artist that Michael greatly admired, which is Edward Hopper, which you see here on the left hand side. Incidentally, my conversations with Michael over the year. I mean, two or three times a year was probably enough 'cause the whole evening, he was completely, completely, how can I say it? Solecistic completely, like a lot of artists, slightly monomaniacal. So however much you may have tried to turn the conversation to something else, it always came back to him and his art, even though it was very impersonal. No, it was more about his art than it really was about him. And he was very insightful, interesting things to say about his paintings. So when I came to write the book, certainly that was immensely useful. And the other thing that made my evenings with him actually quite compelling, was that he was incredibly insightful and interesting about... I mean, you get him to talk about an artist he greatly admired, Duggar, Edward Hopper, who else? Almost any artist. He'd looked at everything, and always in a very, very intelligent, insightful way. So I do feel I learned a tremendous amount about him. I've so often over the years, in lectures about all sorts of different artists used insights that he gave me about those artists. This is an illustration to a sort of pulp thriller novel that he made quite early in his career as an illustrator. And the man sitting in the chair is actually his stepfather. His stepfather was a businessman in the city of London. And the novel was set in the city of London so he just simply used. This is what an office looked like I suppose, in the late 1950s in the city of London. A telephone, something to speak into, maybe a dictaphone but no computer of course. He had a great talent as a draughtsman and he wanted to go to art school. He had to make choices. He came from a very, very bourgeois background as I did. And he thought, no, no, to be an artist, to struggle to live in a attic and to struggle to make a reputation as an artist. He wanted to make a living. And he said there were two choices. He could become a portraitist. You can always make a living as an artist by making portraits. There's always a demand for them. Although he became a wonderful portraitist, particularly his late series of Portraits in Time that I'll talk about later. They're really extraordinary, because in those he's 100% in charge. He chose who he was going to depict. The person had absolutely no choice in how they were going to be depicted. He was totally in control. That's not usually the case with portraitists. You're totally at the mercy of the sitter. Even a portrait like Sargent. He had to put up with people saying, "Oh, can't you take a bit off my nose." Or, "There's something not quite right about my mouth." Well, he wasn't going to put up with that. So instead he enrolled at St. Martin's School on Charing Cross Road, for a course on commercial art and illustration 'cause he knew he could make a living at that. And he was there from 1954 to 1957. This is a sketchbook he made as a student. One of the exercises he was given was to go out in the area, that's Charing Cross Road in Soho, and make

drawings of what he saw on the street. It's unique in his work. It's a pity in a way I think that he didn't really follow up on this 'cause I think these sketches are really wonderful. And I like them also 'cause well, I came to London as a student in 1969, and this was an area of London, I lived quite close by and I came very often to Charing Cross Road and to Soho to visit bookshops. As I told you already, I was always going to, call it, Russian bookshops in search of Russian LP. So I knew this area very well. And for me, these drawings are incredibly nostalgic. I walked through Soho recently and was really depressed by it. It's become so incredibly bland and touristified. Michael absolutely captures the untidy, cluttered, slightly sleazy atmosphere that Soho had from certainly up until the 1980s, and full of junk shops 'cause all these kind of little shops have long since been priced out of the area. And the kind of street furniture, the telephones, the public toilets, the Victorian lamps, sadly, all of that has been swept away. That's a sort of special episode really in his training. Any artistic training up to this point, I call it the absolute tail end of it in the 1970s when I used to go to life drawing classes also at St. Martin's. But students in the 1970s, after the 1960s, they just weren't interested in this. So the backbone of any artistic training, particularly for an illustrator, was life drawing, drawing from the nude. So he made countless drawings of these, of this type of thing. And you can see he was very, very good at it. The one on the right hand side is interesting 'cause he's got a curious feature. The man seems to be wearing socks. I certainly can't remember any model in a live drawing class, anybody wearing socks. Anyway, as you can see, the limbs are cut off where the socks start. I think he's been looking of course at Egon Schiele, this Michael drawing. Egon Schiele, really not very well known in the 1950s. I mean, you could have brought Egon Schiele for next to nothing in the 1950s. But he picks up on Schiele very much, very quickly. And he learns, well, there's this odd feature of truncating the limbs that he picks up from Schiele. The other thing I think he's learned from Schiele... Somebody made a comment when I talked about Basked recently, and I should have talked about it myself, so I was glad when the person brought it up at the end. About his skill in placing the figure on the sheet. And this is also something that Michael is very, very conscious of. I think ultimately, this very self-conscious placing of the figure in the composition on the sheet, is something that comes from Japanese wood cut prints. Again, for comparison, this is Michael on the left. Egon Schiele. This kind of pose where the person is lying on the floor and the artist is standing up and looking down on them. That's again a very Schiele thing. And another artist he was certainly very aware of, a bit more naughty, I suppose, is Jean Cocteau. Jean Cocteau, very brilliant artist actually, very brilliant draughtsman, develops a style which derives from Picasso, but it's somewhere between Picasso and gay pornography. That's Cocteau on the right hand side, Michael on the left. This Cocteau was very outrageous. Not just because of the exaggerated depiction of the male genitalia in erection and so on. But also, I mean, something I think that Michael would've done quite

different, is the fact that it's derived from Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling. So very naughty. Actually really quite blasphemous.

Now, a theme that obsessed him throughout his life, and this develops even as a student at St. Martins, is dressing and undressing. So it's quite rare for him to show a nude. And again, you could link this with Basked. I made that point about Basked. Basked really only gets his creative juices going, 'cause Basked is interested almost exclusively in the female nude. And Michael is interested almost exclusively in the male nude. But in both cases, it's the partial dressing, the figure that is partly concealed and partly revealed by the clothing. That's what really gets them going. And in Michael's case, 'cause he's encyclopaedic in his knowledge of the art of the past, and very aware of the common theme in western art of the baptism of Christ, which was for many old masters, an excuse to depict the male body. This is Ruben's on the right hand side with this rather chunky Arnold Schwarzenegger nude, who seemed to be in the middle of a workout in a gymnasium. And a painting of course he was very familiar with 'cause he was constantly going to the National Gallery, is the Baptism of Piero della Francesca. So he starts his career quite modestly. He's very successful and in demand from the very first. And his early illustrations are in simple technique of pen and ink. The one on the left is a drawing illustrating... I'm not sure if it's a play or a novel, by JM Barry, who wrote of course, Peter Pan. And he wrote a sequel, which is called Afterthoughts. Rather creepy actually, sequel about Wendy having grown up and having children of her own and Peter Pan coming back and wanting to abduct them. And then on the right hand side, a drawing illustrating a popular children's book of the time called the Kingdom of Carbonel, came out in 1957. A very simple pen and ink technique that I think is very directly inspired by the technique of E.H. Shepherd who illustrated Winnie the Pooh and Christopher Robin. One of the things about Michael is that he was always experimenting with techniques and what you can do with them, what you can get out of these. Anything new that came along, he wanted to try it out. And there were these watercolours called Dr. Martin's watercolours that he discovered quite early in his career. The way he worked in them is that you make your drawing, and then you change it by dropping blobs of water onto the drawing that you've made. He described the technique to me. It sort of alarms me. I thought, "Oh my God, that is such a tricky technique." You've got to know exactly what you're doing, how to control that drop of water when it goes onto your drawing so it doesn't actually completely ruin your drawing so you get the effect that you want to get from it. This here is an example of that, and another. And you can get the most wonderfully atmospheric effects with this technique of dropping the blobs of water onto the surface of a watercolour drawing you've already made. Then he moves into colour. And he's really in demand in the 1960s and throughout the '70s. And doing a huge variety of work. He did lots of covers or reissues of classic novels that were sold in supermarkets. So this is Great Expectations on the left hand side and Bali Raj on the right

hand side. And something he emphasised to me, "He said, "When illustration, commercial illustration is all about selling something." So you've got to make an image for the front of the book that sells the book, grabs the attention of somebody walking past. And he is certainly very, very good at that. And he was not at all snobbish about... He loved the challenge of any particular commission that he got. It didn't matter whether it was some kind of bills, mills and boons schlock, as these clearly are for, or Shakespeare or Dickens. For him, it's the same challenge, the same interest. And he's very keen to adapt his style. And so he's multifaceted in his style. He's really chameleon in the way he can change his style according to what he's illustrating. These are illustrations for a novel by Victoria Holt. She was popular romantic novelist, historical novelist. It's called The Queen's Heart and it's about Mary Antoinette, so set in the 18th century. So he was rather like Verdi. Verdi, when he set an opera in a historical period which he knew the same. Verdi said, "From the first note, if it's set in the 18th century, it's got to have an 18th century what Verdi called tinto, colour." And if it's mediaeval, it's got to have a mediaeval colour. So Michael agreed with this. So this is an 18th century story, and so it has rather pastel sweet colours that you would associate with the 18th century. The other point I want to make about these, is how cinematic they were. Michael was avid, avid, avid film lover. We had very long conversations about films and visual aspects of films. He could have been a great film designer in the golden age of Hollywood. He somehow missed out on that. And a lot of his illustrations look like their storyboard designs for scenes in a movie. So this is, as I said, the Queen... No, it's called The Queen's Secret. That's right, The Queen's Secret by Victoria Holt. And this is around the same time, but very different in style. And this one is called The King's Pleasure and it's about Henry VII, so this is set in the early 16th century. And you got a very different palette of colours. You have these strong, intense colours. And he wanted these images to be reminiscent of stained glass windows. So you have quite strong contours as you would have in stain glass window, and the kind of intense colours also, that you would get in a stained glass window. And these are illustrations to Homer, The Odyssey. And for these, he's devised quite again, a totally different style or rather primitivist, rather sculptural style. One of the things that Michael was most proud of as an illustrator, was inventing the processional cover. That is a processional illustration that wraps itself right round the book. And it looks like a processional relief sculpture. And he loved doing these kind of things. I mean, Michael, talking to him about this, I used to enjoy talking about his illustrations because I took pleasure in his pleasure. For him this was all a big game. He said, "Oh, this was such fun to do and such fun to devise." Now, the idea of processional relief is an ancient one. Goes right back to the ancient Greeks, to the Parthenon. And it's taken up by the Romans. This is a relief from the notorious Arch of Titus that was built to celebrate the triumph of the Romans over the Jews, ancient Jews. The destruction of Jerusalem and the looting of Solomon's temple. Of course it's

extraordinary. To this day it's still standing there in Rome. And you can see this image of the Roman troops carrying off the contents of Solomon's temple in a triumph of possession. This idea of the triumph of possession is taken up again in the Renaissance. This is Mantegna's Triumph of Caesar in the Royal Collection. So again, something that would've been very familiar to Michael. And he was a bit vague about this, but I said, "Oh, you must have taken a look at the Gilbert Bayes relief sculpture on the Odeon Cinema in Shaftesbury Avenue." It's like a less than 10 minute walk from where he was studying. He must have walked past it on countless occasions. I think the way you can see in the lower photograph, that how the Gilbert Bayes has sculpted this, so it wraps itself around the corner of the building.

Now, in fact, Michael wasn't the first artist, as he believed, to use this idea of the triumph of possession on a cover of a book. There was a whole series of French books that came out in the 1920s and '30s about the stories and legends and mythologies of different parts of the world. And they're all illustrated by the same artist who's called Josef Kun Renier, Josef Kun Renier. All these names by the way, are on my list as usual. I mean, it's a very similar idea. The difference though, I suppose you could say it's a crucial difference, is that the Josef Kun Renier illustrations, like the one you see on the right hand side, they're on the front and on the back of the book, but it's not a continuous thing, the image that wraps itself around the book. Michael did a lot of these. You can see again, The Odyssey of Homer, and this is one of his drawings for that. And you can see how he adapts his style again, according to the period of the book. Canterbury Tales, middle age, ages, Turgenev, First Love, set in the mid 19th century. This was the one he was most proud of. He loved this one, Beowulf. And I said there's a playful, witty, clever side to Michael's work as an illustrator. And for this one, he devised, I mean, a sort of trompe-l'œil effect, that the freeze is carved in ivory and inset with Cabochon jewels. So it's a trompe-l'œil effect. He loved trompe-l'œil effects. Now, as I said, he understood that the whole purpose of commercial art is to sell something. And he was very good at making images that catch your attention. So not only did he design many book covers, hundreds of book covers probably, in his heyday, but it's interesting. He's one of those artists, I mean, Tamara Pitts does another whose paintings have been used again and again by publishers because they know that this is a striking image that will attract attention from the other side of the bookshop. So I'm going to just show you some examples. Lincoln Kirstein, who's one of the founders of the New York City Ballet. Michael knew him quite well. He described him as a rather sinister character. He was a great cat lover, had lots and lots of pet cats. He had this amazing profile with this sort of eagle nose. So this portrait, it was a independent portrait. It wasn't painted to go on the cover of the book, but you can see it makes a very effective cover. Here are two more books where the publishers decided to use images of preexisting works by Michael. More of the same. More of the same. This one is interesting because this novel,

which was I think quite a bestseller for a short time. It was American writer. And he had seen this drawing by Michael, which is entitled Vanitas. Vanitas is a sort of memento warrior reminder of death. It's one of the whole serious that Michael made in the 1980s that I think consciously or unconsciously are about the AIDS epidemic. And they're all so very beautiful men, but these men are doomed. So Joseph Olsen actually wrote the whole novel inspired by... The whole plot of the novel revolves around this drawing as actually inspired by the drawing. So Michael, he was so prolific. The stuff was turning out of him. This is actually the very, very first thing by Michael I ever saw. I would've been in my mid-teens when I saw this. And it was a design for a cover of a reissue of the famous recording of Pagliacci with Beniamino Gigli. And I had this in my collection. I can't find it now, the original LPs. I may have given it away sadly, but this was what? In the 1960s I bought this. And I went to my local record shop where the owner of the shop was a great mentor for me. I've mentioned him before, had a huge influence on my musical taste. he disapproved of Leoncavallo and Pagliacci. And when I went to the shop and ordered this, he just never came. He was not going to sell it to me. I actually had to go up to London to buy this. So it really stuck in my memory. The other thing where I became aware of Michael's work without knowing his name, was through the Sunday Times Magazine. Now, this was an entirely new development in the newspaper industry in the 1960s, The Colour Supplement, and their Sunday Times led the way. It had the most wonderful, catching, brilliant covers and wonderful illustrations. And Michael played a very, very big role in this development in the newspaper industry. This dates from 1968 when there was an article in the Sunday Times Colour Supplement about an ancient Roman woman who was a great beauty, and she had lots of lovers, but she wanted perversely for her lovers to treat her as though she was a prostitute. She insisted of being given money after sex. It was two page illustration. 1968. I would've been 16 or 17. I just thought this was so sexy. I just loved this picture so much. I cut it out and I had as a pin up and I kept it for years and years. And I was really gobsmacked of course. 30 years later or whatever it was, I discovered that it was Michael who'd painted it. I still think it's wonderful. And in fact, I bought the original. It's in this flat in the room next to me. And I think it's so clever. It's a witty. It's so well constructed as a composition. And the fact, of course, in Sunday Times Colour Supplement, even in the lush 1960s, you couldn't actually paint male genitalia. So he very whittly and cleverly, the way the man is clutching the money bag. Well, and even the little ribbon, it's almost like an ejaculation. I mean, it's a very clever, witty little piece of sexiness. This is also from a series in the Sunday Times Colour Supplement about the Ancient Britains. He didn't know many other artists. He was particularly friendly with theatre designers and he often got them to help them help him. Remember, this is long before the internet. So when he recreates historical-like scenes, scenes like this, he'd have to go to the library, he'd research it in books in the library. He'd also consult his friends in the theatre, theatre

designers. And they concocted as far as they could historically accurate clothing or the clothing here was made up of all rugs and bits and pieces. Some of his greatest successes coincided of course, with Margaret Thatcher's time. Again, I'm not really, really sure about his political allegiances. I don't think he ever voted for Margaret Thatcher. But he was commissioned to make portraits of her. This one for Time Magazine. He also did them for Sunday Times Colour Supplement. And he went to the House of Hollands commons. He had to wait in a corridor outside her office. And then eventually the door opened slightly, and Margaret Thatcher peered out and she gestured with a finger towards him to come over. So he went into her office, and she said in that incredibly artificial baritone voice that she had. Her advisors thought she was too strident so they made her lower her voice. And she said, "How do you want me?" Well, I never voted for Margaret Thatcher and I wasn't keen on her politics, but everybody I know who ever met her personally, had nothing but good to say about her. One of my great friends who was a kinder transport child and lost his family, arrived in England, was apprentice to Mark Spencer's. As a teenager, rose to be head of shoes of Mark Spencer's. I think the biggest thrill of his entire life actually, was going to House of Commons and doing shoe fittings with Margaret Thatcher. And he absolutely adored her. This is slightly less reverential of course. You can see after a year in office. And once again, he's parading a famous old master painting. That's Ingres Joan of Arc on the right hand. Very naughty. This is very sort of spitting image really, the way he's shown all the members of her cabinet as little cherub and more cherubs flying around behind her. Now, Margaret Thatcher, like the queen, she was I think problematic for artists to depict. Of course, in some ways she was an absolute gift for caricature. It's a scarf on the left hand side and the unforgettable, brilliant, incredibly funny puppets that were made for spitting image like the one on the right hand side.

This is Rodrigo Moynihan, who's not a bad artist. He's actually, I would say a good artist. But he's certainly painted an absolutely horrible picture here. The first version of this, she didn't like 'cause she thought it made her look too fierce. And she said, "Can't you soften that bit? Make me look a bit softer." And it reminds me of the famous miteram comment about her that she had the eyes of Caligula and the lips of Marilyn Monroe. So this really doesn't work I don't think on any level of a portrait. This, oh God. For me, this is the best portrait of Margaret Thatcher ever. Michael was commissioned to do this for a cover of perhaps the Sunday Times. She was going to be as Medusa, those terrifying eyes, the eyes of Caligula that could turn you to stone. But the article was cancelled and he never finished it. And he showed it to me and he was actually about to throw it out. And I said, "Don't throw that out. It's so brilliant." In fact, it's in a private collection now from somebody who's a great Margaret Thatcher admirer. But whoever owns it, if anybody knows them, I would urge them to... This needs to go into the National Portrait Gallery collection.

It is such a wonderful... I have a version of it here in my flat in Paris that's just a reproduction. It's the brilliant detail, isn't it really? This is Ben-Gurion. This was commissioned by Reader's Digest in 1967. And why is this so effective? Why is it so good? And I think it's that tiny detail of the wisps of hair. It's also the placing, isn't it? That it's not placed centrally, it's placed asymmetrically. And the way the hair intrudes over the border. It's a key detail that makes this image so effective. Now, one of the successful books he was commissioned to illustrate was by Dr. Alex Comfort about the process of ageing. And he was commissioned to make portraits of people who were considered to have aged well and had a successful old age.

So this is Helena Rubinstein. These portraits, they're derived from old photographs. They're from a wide range of sources. But he's using again, this technique of the Dr. Martin's watercolours where he's dropping the blobs of water onto the surface of the drawing. This is Russell, philosopher. Wonderful, Verde. This is so extraordinary because, well, I think I must have seen every portrait ever made a Verde, and ones that were made from him. But even the famous portraits made by Boldini that were made from life, to me, they're not as alive. This is extraordinarily alive, this portrait. Verde could speak to you from this portrait. Again, he achieved that through this very special watercolour technique. Another series that actually won him a prize was where he was taking people who were famous, glamorous people of the time in the late 1960s, and imagining how they would age. So this is Jackie Kennedy. Annacis. Well, I'm showing you the pictures of how they did age. This is Brigitte Bardot, who is still of course a babe in the 1960s and gorgeous. And he was imagining how she would look when she was older. Michael Kane. Towards the end of his career as an illustrator, one of his best known successes really, was illustrate. This came out I think at the end of the 1960s. So actually not quite at the end 'cause he had another 10 years of illustrating books. So this is The Joy of Gay Sex. It was very daring, very cutting edge. Think that sex between consenting adults, male adults, had only just been legalised a year or also earlier. But he made a series of drawings for this book that I think are actually very beautiful drawings, very discreet, not at all brilliant or pornographic. It cost him a slight problem of course, when a few years later, he was commissioned to paint the Royal Portrait, Queen's portrait in the Daily Mail. Obviously they made a certain amount of mischief about the fact that the queen was being painted somebody who'd illustrated the joy of gay sex.

Now, it was in the late 70s that Michael had an epiphany. He went with a great friend to the National Gallery, another artist called Roger Coleman. And they stood in front of this picture, which is by Hussah of the worship of the golden calf, obviously a biblical story. He said what he saw here was a revelation to him. He saw an orderly sequence of forms and spaces. "It dawned on me that this underlying sense of order was the element that I was seeking in my own work." And this

came at the point where he actually stopped taking commissions for commercial art and he wanted to be a serious artist with a This is his portrait of Roger Coleman, who went to the National Gallery with him on that occasion. And you can see in the background, there is a print after another painting by Hussah, the same kind of sense of order. And there is a Hussah self-portrait in this use of the rectangles of the frames in the background, is a device that Michael would use frequently from then on. Now, probably his best known pictures from this phase in the 1970s, are a series of scaffolders. He observed workman on a building. He'd had a top four flat in a block of flats in South Kensington. And he watched these workers, he photographed them, he made meticulous drawings. They noticed that he was watching them, and one of them actually climbed the building and suddenly he found one of the workman standing on the balcony looking at what he was doing. So these pictures, they're very self-conscious, very tightly, very deliberately constructed references to old masters. That's Piero della Francesca, top right hand corner. You can see the use of the scaffolding, obviously reminded him of Michelo and the Battle of San Romano. These are documents he made. He's such a self-conscious artist. So he made these documents to show... Actually, wouldn't we love to have something similar for say, Velasquez Las Meninas or Rembrandt Night Watch to understand the artist's thinking in every stage of the process of creating such a complex work of art. You've got the colour samples at the bottom with which he created the colour harmony of the picture. You can see nothing is accidental, everything is minutely thought through. Here is another one of these documentations of the creation of a painting.

Now, I'm going to rush through these 'cause I'm running out of time. And I have to tell you that for me, his switch from commercial art to this very conscious Art with a capital A, it came at a price. Well, he knew this and we actually discussed it. That many of the qualities that had this angle on the left, Michael on the right, all these references, as I said to the art of the past. As I said, this change came at a price. For me, the joy of his commercial art is the fact that he's having such fun with it. The the illustrations are so witty, they're so clever, they're so inventive. And I feel some of that is gone with these paintings. Michael on the left, Duggar, one of his great. Here it is on the right. A lot of his nudes, the faces will be hidden or cut off. It's like Rodda deciding that Saint John the Baptist, the head and the hands got knocked off in his studio and he relaunched it as a sculpture. And I think Rodda understood that somehow without the head and without the hands, it had a universality, had a kind of a power, a new kind of power. I'll go through this quickly. The technique, the drawing technique or using a very soft pencil or crayon on a textured paper. That's something he's learned from George Soha that you see on the left-hand side. And there are a lot of double figures where they're ballets. He's very interested in dance, very interested in ballet. And these double figures are choreographed really. Something he learned also from Van Dyck who did

a lot of these double portraits where there's a kind of counterpoint in the poses of the figures. In this painting of the Lord John and Lord Bernard Stewart, it's not on the National Gallery in London by Van Dyck. There was a story about this picture in Charles Dellheim's brilliant book. I've referred to it many times recently, Belonging and Betrayal. It's about Jews in the art trade in the late 1930, 20th century. And his story about this picture just made me laugh out loud when I read it. It was sold by Bernard Berenson, of course, the Jewish art dealer, to Frick of the Frick Collection. It was hanging on the wall in the Frick Mansion, but Berenson was called in and he was told by Mrs. Berenson, "We don't like this picture. We don't like the noses of those two boys. They look too Jewish." So Berenson had to take the picture back. I'm glad for Mrs. Berenson's stupid antisemitism 'cause now the picture is in the National Gallery. I love this picture. I love the treatment of the drapery. That's another thing. Look at that sweep, the drapery of the arm. And drapery is an integral part of many of Michael's nudes like this one, which has echoes of course, of the Atonement of Christ. There's a 17th century Atonement on the right hand side. Go on. I think I'll move on.

Now, I'm going to finish briefly with his portraits in time. And these were done over a number of years. And collectively, they form a marvellous portrait of the art world in London from the 1970s to the early 2000s. This is Roy Strong, who is director of VNA. You see the VNA in the background. Roy Strong. But I would've liked to have been an angler, but anyway, I suppose Roy Strong is thinner than I am better suited. There is a real angle on the right hand side. I love these drawings because they're so witty. They're so clever, they're so playful. So these qualities, which to me were essential qualities of his illustration. So that he lost in his paintings to some degree, he could still exploit these qualities in these wonderful drawings. This is Lincoln Kirstein on the right hand side with references to Piero della Francesca and to Leonardo. Brian Sewell, the art critic on the left, Edward Lucy Smith on the right hand side, both seen as very, Brits will remember Brian Sewell. He was actually I think a very sweet man when you got to know him. But one of those people that people love to hate, and he was very sort of (speaking in French very Ancien Régime. And that's how Michael has shown him. These are two women who I actually know very well or knew. In the case of Jillian Jason on the right hand side, she's an art dealer who sadly died recently. She's as a Ramsey. And this is Marina Vazi who used to be at the time. She's a very dear friend. I'm very incredibly fond of her and I know her very, very well. And what amazes me, these are excellent likenesses, but there's so much more than a simple likeness, is really, really core. That is so Marina, that is so much her personality on the left hand side. Katai, somebody who he actually personally intensely disliked. But I think that is a brilliant portrait of Civil War general on the right hand side. Peter Blake, pop artist on the left, who becomes a obine.

Go through this quickly. Oh, this is an interesting one. This is Doris Saatchi. Now, writing that book was not a doddle, I can tell you. And eventually Michael and I really, we fell out quite badly 'cause he's controlling thing. I go there and I'd talk to him for hours and I'd write it all down and I'd write it up. And then often, without even consulting me, he rewrote what I wrote. I really didn't like that. He was a witty, funny, clever acerbic man. And he would say these things and I'd think, "Oh, that's wonderful, that's got to go in the book." But when he saw it in black and white, he said, "No, that comes out." And this Doris Saatchi, well, she arrived at his studio absolutely caped with makeup. And he said, "Well, I can't do anything with that. That's not a face, it's a mask." So he ordered her, who really couldn't say no to Michael? To scrub off layers and layers and layers of makeup. And he said, "Oh, all the makeup came off, this mask disappeared. And what did I find underneath? A rather beautiful expressive Jewish face." So I wrote that down. Those were the words he said. But when he saw it in black and white, he said, "No, no, that comes out. You can't say that in the book." I personally don't find that... I don't see it as a negative. I think it's a rather nice thing he said about there actually. This is John Weinstein as clamped. He often did pairs. He would do a husband or a wife or partners. And this is Anthony Sher and Greg Doran, who of course were, were a pair, they were married. And usually when he painted pendants, he would try to paint them as though by the same artist, which would be the historical case. But he said, "No, Anthony's Sher and Greg Doran, they just were so different ." Anthony Sher with his rather Mediterranean, maybe Semitic looks. Greg Doran had this incredibly flo-blondish Northern European looks. He said, "I just couldn't conceive them as being by the same artist." Anthony Sher is by Antonella, and of course, Greg Doran is by Van Dyck. And his own self-portraits. Well, over a period of what? 20 something years probably or more, every Christmas he would send out a Christmas card, which was a self-portrait in a different historical style. So here is six of them. I must have dozens of these things in boxes in my house in London.

So I'm going to finish here and see what you've got to say about all of this.

Q & A and Comments

Good. Thank you, Myrna.

The portrait of me, by the way, I don't know if you can see it. It's actually behind, just over my shoulder on the wall. Well, she posed, but he made a whole series of photographs. That's what he did and also for the Portraits in Time. But of course he was taking the photographs. And even then, if you compare the photograph with the final picture, there are many significant differences. Quality of obtuse. Not quite sure what you're saying there. Yes, London in the

'50s. Yes.

Q: Did any other painters drop blobs of water?

A: Yes, they did of course. Turner did. Or another techniques which was related, a water colour technique, is to actually dampen the paper, and then to put the paint on the paper and the colour bleeds into the paper. I'm not sure if there's a specific name for those techniques.

Yes, definitely. The Homer ones were inspired by Verde's painting as well as relief sculptures.

Q: Why is the bit missing from the top of Thatcher's head?

A: Well, he was going to do snakes. That's why. And it's unfinished. And that's why he actually wanted to throw it away because Medusa had snakes in her hair.

Right. Thank you, Judith. Thank you.

Piero della Francesca, he did so many of these things. Yes. Well, of course, Jillian and Neville, I knew them very well over the years. And they're both dead, very sadly. They're not drawings.

The creasing is a piece of trompe l'oeil. The drawings aren't creased at all. That's an illusionistic technique. Yes, that's right. The torn, defaced, it's all part of the big joke really. Thank you, Susan.

Thank you all for your very kind comments. Yes, I'm off to Italy next week, so I won't see you for about I think another take 10 days. Hockney, yes. You're right, Maria. I think the organisation Hockney does a very similar thing. Actually I think probably Michael got there first. He's a bit earlier. Barbara, the Bangorian portrait, it was commissioned by Reader's Digest. So I would think they probably have the reproduction rights. Right. Thank you very much everybody, and I'll see you in a little while.