

# FACES OF DISCONNECT



## An Interview with PATTY HORING

**ALISON WEAVER:** Your work seems to be a commentary on the state of relationships in our society today. They are not just portraits. Many of your subjects appear detached, disconnected and/or melancholy. Can you talk a bit about this?

**PATTY HORING:** You've hit on it—most of my pieces address the challenge of emotional, physical, and virtual connectivity. I seek to portray specific individuals, not merely as subjects of portraits, but in ways that might resonate with viewers on a more universal level when it comes to the angst, humor, self-involvement, etc. emanating from the scene. In general, my paintings depict people who often look right at the viewer, a compositional strategy that forces a further layer of connection between viewer and subject.

I have deep ambivalence about the role technology has come to play in our daily lives and how it affects our personal relationships in ways that, I think, are both very good and very bad. Our devices help us stay in close and regular touch with friends near and far, yet they also facilitate a kind of self-absorption and distraction from our immediate surroundings, and from the people who are right next to us. Some of my paintings address that contradiction head-on (see: 'The glare at the beach house made playing difficult.').

Overall, I like to think of my paintings as psychological-humanist portraits that are equal parts loving and critical.

**AW:** Yes, that's why I was so drawn to them. It certainly comes across in the faces of your subjects. And as a mother, the role of technology

*Mother & Daughter, 2013, Oil on panel, 44 x 48"*

in our children's lives is a huge issue on so many levels. 'The glare at the beach house made playing difficult' really resonated with me.

So your inspiration comes from people?

**PH:** I've always been deeply curious about other people, and I think it's this desire to know and know about people that drives me to paint them. I actually cycled through several modes of working abstractly before I worked up the nerve to paint people, but once I got there, it stuck. As a girl I was very into acting, and when I paint someone now I often feel as if I am channeling him/her in some way, the way I used to feel when acting a role. It's something that happens naturally, and it helps bring a certain level of emotionality and empathy into the work. Also, I studied art history long before I made art, and I draw particular inspiration from the work of people like Lucian Freud, Alice Neel, Henri Matisse, David Hockney, Egon Schiele, and Paula Rego. Beyond that, I am inspired by anything that makes me laugh, by the little contradictions and ironies of family life ("all happy families are alike"), and by the excesses of privilege that our society affords the lucky

few. Visually, I still respond to color and pattern (which was the crux of my early abstract work). Finally, I love to think about people's stuff as symbolic extensions of their self-crafted identities, so I often include those objects in my paintings.

**AW:** You gained success as an artist after having a few other careers right? How did that happen?

**PH:** Painting is my third act. I worked in as a partner in a marketing/PR agency for years before quitting to be a full-time parent of two. During the early Mommy Years, I was deeply involved in an intense two-year community effort to prevent an Ikea retail development from displacing a low-income neighborhood in New Rochelle, NY. We won—  
Ikea pulled out abruptly—and I found myself burnt out and yearning for something quiet and introspective to do, so I started taking a painting class. And it was like a window opening up in my head. I surprised myself by how intensely I wanted to make art, and I became increasingly committed to experimenting and developing an active practice. My office was transformed into an art studio and I spent a solid decade working and showing on my own, until two



Zombieland, 2014, Oil on panel, 40 x 36"



Single Again, 2014, Oil on canvas, 30 x 46"

The glare at the beach house made playing difficult.



The glare at the beach house made playing difficult, 2010, Oil on panel, 20 x 36"