

## Interview January 2012

### Sandro Kopp Connects via Computer

By Brienne Walsh

For "There You Are," his solo exhibition at Lehmann Maupin, Sandro Kopp has taken the idea of the mediated portrait into the digital era. Consisting of a series of real-time portraits that Kopp did of subjects that sat for him not in the flesh, but rather via Skype, the exhibition marries the practice of 19th-century oil painting with modern communication. "I'm such a nomad, so it would be impossible for me to sit with each person in real life," Kopp explained. "With Skype, even though I'm not physically with the person I'm painting, there's still an element of presence."

The exhibition reads like a modern-day portrait gallery of the cultural elite, consisting of small, intimate portraits rendered in loose brushstrokes and muted tones of blue, gold, gray, tan, and black. Subjects of the works include the eponymous Waris Ahluwalia, who was Kopp's first muse for the project, along with Michael Stipe, Ryan McGinley, Frances McDormand, and Willem Dafoe, among others. "I've had some very deep moments with these people," Kopp stated. "Sitting for a portrait can be a really incredible experience."

Painted during the periods that Kopp virtually communed with each of his sitters, usually for two or three hours at night, the portraits are simulacra of a digital image of an actual person relayed in digital writing over the non-space of the Internet. With the exception of a few small signifiers—a hanging plant, a brick wall—they offer no context of place or time. Because of the disconnect from the original, each work bears an austerity of posture that recalls the distance of traditional death portraits created after a subject has already left the physical world. "They are done anywhere from Cambodia to New York to Germany to Scotland," Kopp said. "I've done paintings sitting in a hotel bathtub, with the sitter on my computer outside of the door of the bathroom."

Perhaps the most intimate—and voyeuristic—of the portraits is the one Kopp did of his girlfriend, Tilda Swinton. Unlike the rest of the compositions, which present the subject looking directly head-on at the viewer, Swinton is presented asleep on a pillow, looking characteristically otherworldly. It is the largest work in the exhibition. "I love watching her sleep, it's a very sweet thing for me," Kopp says. "I put the computer on the pillow beside her, arrange her a little bit, and then go upstairs to my studio. Then I paint her until she shifts her position."