

**THE
WRITTEN
PORTRAITS
POEMS**

**ADRIÁN
DOZETAS**

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Foreword
Navigating wrinkles

Portraying is a spontaneous act. From the child's drawing house-mom-dad-tree-me to the animals painted in caves like those of Altamira. I have a distant memory, sitting face to face with my grandfather. My grandfather was a bohemian from the Czech Republic. He was a sorcerer, magician, mentalist, tarot reader, mattress maker and writer of tango lyrics. At my grandparents' house they played poker in the afternoon. Around the living room table there were old men with giant faces and cigarettes in their mouths who hated to work and loved life, read tarot cards and had Dionysian banquets. It was normal for my grandfather to do magic tricks and games that to any boy or girl with a creative interest would expand the horizons of what they considered normal.

My grandfather and I would each sit in front of a sheet of paper and the game was to say a number from one to ten that the other had to write on the paper, and to join with lines those numbers randomly distributed on our sheets to form faces that theoretically were portraits of us, of my grandfather and of me. At the end we would give each other the drawing.

When the Written Portraits were born, when I spontaneously made the first portrait with words, fifteen years ago, I didn't imagine that portraying people with words would have any impact. I did not imagine that today my poem-portraits would be framed on the walls of so many people in different parts of the world. It sounds like a joke. Or a cheesy movie.

The Written Portraits were, and maybe still are, an idea that was born in the back of a house in an atelier in Buenos Aires. In

2005 I lived in Los Angeles, USA, lost in fantasies of being a guitarist. But in 2007 I was back in Buenos Aires still lost. I was working in a call-center, selling internet services to ignorant people in English-speaking countries. To say I was selling is an euphemism, because in three months I must have sold only one product and the boss was already threatening to fire me. One day I hung up the phone in the middle of a conversation with a customer who was insulting me, and leaned my head on the desk. My colleague looked at me. She said: "Do you know what you have to do? Study photography."

Why not. I got into photography under the wisdom and protection of an old Italian photographer I knew who, through people like Richard Avedon or Nan Goldin, awakened in me a fascination for the portrait genre. Shortly thereafter, I was touring ateliers of Argentine artists and

portraying them while they were working. I did it out of love for the portrait genre but also as an excuse to know what it meant to live as an artist.

At that time, on Wednesday nights I would meet with my friend the artist Federico Fernández. He painted formless shapes and I attempted against the word by writing horrible poems in surrealist prose. We shared a humid and rotten room, beers and ideas that we still don't make today. One of those Wednesdays he decided to make a portrait of me while I tried again to write difficult poems that no one would understand. And in that moment, in that rain of words and fugue of ideas, it occurred to me to direct the focus of my verbs towards him, to direct that storm in my head to talk about my friend who was there with his tongue out and his hair tousled, drawing my face on a piece of paper. When he finished his

drawing he passed it to me and I passed him my poem. A written-portrait, I said with my cigarette hanging from my smile.

This accident had no relevance. The next time was just as spontaneous. At a friend's house killing time staring at the ceiling in the January heat, I found a typewriter in her room and I opened it and told her: I'm going to make a written-portrait to you. I finished the poem, signed it, gave it to her, she read it and said: it's a piece of shit.

And I did it in private settings, also by accident or evasion, without the slightest intention of making a performance or gaining anyone's sympathy. As a real introvert, almost every time there was a typewriter at a party I sat down and wrote. Hiding behind the written word allowed me to observe and socialize less.

At those house parties I would portray no one, I would play at portraying something like the aura of the party, to talk about what I felt was happening at that party on a perceptual level and without literal descriptions. This method, later, today, became the introductory poem I write every time I start a Written Portraits session. It is my way to enter the character and open my input filter, to break my comfort of perception, that comfortability that seeks to normalize the senses and only perceive the unknown as the already known.

It is normal that when we show a poem to someone that person says: it reminds me of such and such an author. It is again that desire for things to be as we know them and not as they are. It is too much effort to see each day as a new day. And it is precisely this spirit that is needed to make a performance like Written Portraits,