Self-Portrait at 27

I am looking straight at the viewer. Nothing to hide, I am telling you. Look at my face; it's not angled slightly to the side, like it's a yearbook photo, or a classic Medieval portrait i.e. Albrecht Durer's *Self-Portrait at 26*, but instead is aimed directly at you, more like a passport photo, or Albrecht Durer's slightly later work *Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight*, or more precisely, a portrait that not only follows in the tradition of Durer's *Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight*, but just as demonstrably, departs (as Durer himself did) from the tradition of Durer's *Self-Portrait at 26*. Because this is *Self-Portrait at 27*, you're looking at now. And at 27, like the great self-portrait artist at 28 before me, I'm looking ahead, straight at you, to the future.

I am not wearing my glasses that (for those of you who know me) you know I sometimes wear. This is my only self-portrait, my first and possibly my last, so the stakes are enormously high; I can't risk wearing glasses. If a person views a portrait of a man with glasses, the first detail that person absorbs are the glasses, out come all the unconscious associations that glasses evoke, and from then on, the glasses become inseparable from the identity of the subject. For this is not simply a man, the viewer can't help but think, but a more specific man: a man with glasses. All other details, little hairs, wrinkles or scars in his face, seem to diminish in importance, his whole identity reduced to his sex and single accessory. And I can't have that. Should this portrait be my lasting image in history, I would like my face to be remembered not as the face of a man with glasses, not as a face you can already picture upon reading "man with glasses," but as the face of a man with many features.

So here I am: neither shaven nor bearded, but stubbled. About five days' worth of stubble. Stubbled mustache, stubbled beard, and stubble on

my neck that thins out around my throat. My hair is long, not long like Albrecht Durer's lion's mane in *Self-Portrait At 28,* (not yet), but long like I could be on the cover of The Beatles' *Rubber Soul*, or to make a reference more relevant to my own generation, long like Harry Potter's hair in *The Goblet of Fire* movie, or to make a reference more relevant to me, as I've never seen *The Goblet of Fire*, only read it, and this is, after all, a self-portrait, then I should say that it's actually like Stephen Malkmus's hair on the cover of his debut solo album, the self-titled *Stephen Malkmus*.

I am smiling slightly, not enough to show my teeth, and certainly not enough to show my only dimple, but enough to show that I am pleased to be here, pleased to sit as the subject of a portrait, anybody's portrait, even a self-portrait.

It doesn't look like I chose my clothes carefully. True to character, I'm dressed more for basketball than anything else: white t-shirt with red writing on it, indecipherable and evoking blood stains, sleeves torn off at the shoulders revealing a lifelong farmer's tan.

My eyes are blue, my left eye a little bloodshot. At least more so than my right.

A brown birthmark on the right side of my neck. Some would say a mole. I say birthmark.

And on the white wall behind me, over my right shoulder, is a print of Albrecht Durer's *Self-Portrait at 26*. Over my left shoulder is a print of Albrecht Durer's *Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight*.

And on my left shoulder, not so subtly, painted in a different style (which style this is, the artist may decide) than everything else, is the slim hand of a woman, who is a step behind me and off page, to the right (my left). In real life, it's no one's hand, no one yet, or not hers anymore, but I can put it in here because this is a painting, after all, not a photograph.