

SELF - PORTRAIT WITH AN ASSIST

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW DANSON

The best photographic portraits are often those in which the photographer is particularly sensitive to the subject, eschewing any preconceived notions of what the picture — or the person — ought to look like. The end result could almost be termed a collaboration, however indirect, between the person behind the camera and the person in front of it. Toronto photographer Andrew Danson decided to take this idea of collaboration to its logical conclusion. In 1984, he arranged to photograph a number of politicians — but with a twist. Danson set up the mechanics of each photograph — the location, lighting and so forth — and then left the subject alone to press the shutter. The result was an elegant, entertaining and sometimes surprising series of shots, published as *Unofficial Portraits* in 1987.

We recently asked him to use the same technique with a handful of Canadian artists. Danson found the process involved even more shared decision-making where artists were concerned. "Politicians are always very busy," he says, "so I usually had to pick the place. But since artists are a lot more visually sensitive, I consulted with each subject quite closely about where and how they wanted to photograph themselves. I still left them totally alone, though, when it was time to take the picture." The results — and what they may or may not reveal about the artists concerned — you can see here.

MICHAEL SNOW





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