

Max's reaction to his portrait

[Music]

Max: Oh my good lord. What a huge portrait.

Susan: You wouldn't want it in your bedroom, would you?

[They laugh]

Max: I don't know. Sue, that's immense.

Susan: They are whoppers aren't they!

Max: I'm piecing it together. So, are those my hands crossed?

Susan: Yes.

Max: Did I sit like that or did you ask me to pose like that?

Susan: No, I made you pose like that because I wanted it to look heraldic.

Max: Ah huh. [Reading from the picture] Magna Carta 1215.

Susan: That was photographed off your studio wall.

Max: Good lord. And those are my eyes? Those devilish... [Laughs]. They're rather sinister aren't they!

Susan: They are limpid pools.

Max: [Laughs]

Susan: And see that funny mark that goes down and round ... it looks like a sort of dragon's head upside down. That's my brain scan blown up because I thought, I'm looking at you and so it's a way of signifying some sort of interpretation. And again it's reflected in the bottom, under your feet.

Max: Yes.

Susan: Which, look a bit like a crucifixion.

Max: They do. In fact they seem to have a....

Susan: Nail mark through that one.

Max: Yeah. How did that happen?

Susan: I don't know. It's just in the photograph. The technique I've used here to get the photograph of your face, your hands, your feet and your eyes is something called chine-collé. In this case it's digital photographs and because I've put it through the press at the same time I am using the etching plate, the paper's wet and the photographs have got glue on the back of them, it becomes like a seamless whole and when the paper dries, it looks like it has all come off one image.

Max: It's clever.

Susan: It is clever. It's tricky.

[Sound of electrical currents in the brain]

Susan: And then these are EEG's that go along here and they actually break out into words from the Magna Carta.

Max: How do you mean, they break out? I can't see that.

Susan: If you go close, you can see there are actually there's Latin words in them.

Max: Oh yes, I see what you mean. I feel as though I've been ambushed by this. Taken completely by surprise. It's an astonishing work. I'm trying to imagine, for instance, why you decided to put my head in the middle?

Susan: In the centre of you?

Max: Yeah.

Susan: Because, I think, you're a very cerebral person, so I decided to put the head in the centre of you. Sometimes those decisions are quite literal but they are also compositional because a head would have looked very funny if I had put it in that top phase. Once I had decided on the shape of the portrait, your head just fitted in the middle better. It's quite a risky picture. When I was selecting it, I knew it wouldn't be the picture your mum or Cazy would like.

Max: [Laughs]

Susan: It seemed to me, to capture you trying to capture your thoughts about what it felt like to have epilepsy. It was a lot to do with memory and I think this is a man in contemplation.

[Music]

Susan: It doesn't give anyone proper eye contact. But also, if you stand back, there is a bigger face there. Where the eyes are the eyes, the face is the nose and the feet are the mouth. It has a sort of very abstract second face within it all as well.

Max: Oh yes. Now I see that.

Susan: It was very hard in the planning because it's so big. I had to plan the whole thing and then divide it up into nine sections because that is the biggest plate I can get through an etching press.

Max: Ah.

Susan: The constriction in size began to drive me crazy but then it also became quite interesting because it seemed to me that one is so multifaceted as a person, that why shouldn't a portrait be built up of smaller elements.

Max: But it's like an explosion actually.

Susan: It is an energetic piece of work and I planned it over a couple of weeks. I made the whole thing in three days, which was very, very hard work.

Max: I think it's wonderful Sue.