

DIALOGUE

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William Ramage Self-portraits

The significant aspect of William Ramage's large scale, highly detailed self-portraits is the process of perception and separation. As the model is his mirrored face at a distance of four or five inches, the physical limitations require that he concentrate upon and subsequently draw only one small portion of the face at a time. As a result, the drawings are a compilation of parts, rather than a series of parts subordinate to the whole; the subject matter is not the face but its particulate information. The image is the product of the process of perception and separation.

In this context interest in the human face is neither subjective or humanistic, but centers on the variables which the artist is able to draw from close scrutiny of texture, lighting, and shifting perspective. For Ramage, the shifting planes and textures of the face are the most visually exciting material available. "At that proximity," Ramage says, "you become aware of the texture and the texture changes. You become aware of the tone, the way the light is reflected off the tissue of the skin...The shape is distorted at that proximity...contours and parts of the face change their relationships depending on a slight change in the angle of the reflection."

Perceiving the face to be in a constant state of flux, he concentrates on very small units of information in order to study perpetual change and consider its potential in relation to the whole. His technique overrides the tendency to see in generalized terms. Every piece of information on the drawing is a direct result of perception and selection preventing the imposition of general notions about what is seen.

Generated from a close-up view, the work is best seen from that view point as well. Further, because the parts are more important than the

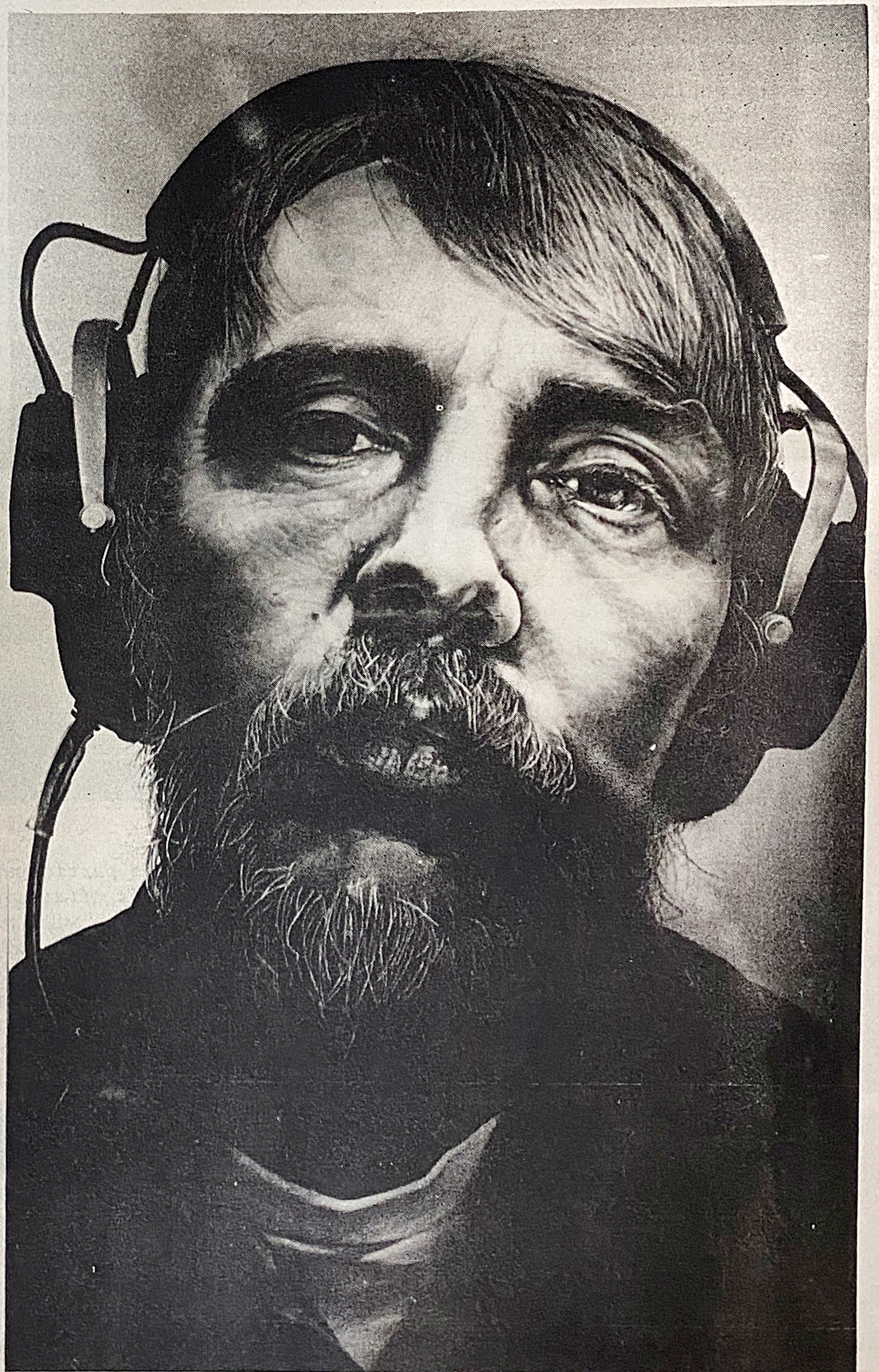
whole, and the process more important than the image, it is not necessary to see the image as a whole. In fact, to simply understand these drawings, or to reduce them to images is to deny the process involved in their creation. The artist considers the image secondary, something imposed on the information he perceives, which is not so much a product of the information but a context within which to place it. Thus understanding requires a denial of the urge to reconstitute the image.

These self-portraits go beyond the figurative, show-

ing a coalescence of process in the development of a drawing. In this work concentration upon detail promotes a high level of abstraction which paradoxically results in work with a powerful emotional impact.

Ramage, educated at the Philadelphia School of Art, has taught at Ohio State University; Middlebury College, Vermont; and Castleton State College, Vermont. His work is represented by the Allen Stone Gallery in New York City; his home-studio is in Brandon, Vermont.

By Donna Hamm



William Ramage, Self-portrait, 5' x 10', 1979