



Self-Portrait

David Bomberg

On display**Title/Description:** Self-Portrait**Artist/Maker:** David Bomberg**Born:** 1930**Object Type:** Painting**Materials:** Canvas, Oil paint**Measurements:** Unframed: (h. 400 x w. 300 x d. 1 mm) Framed: (h. 545 x w. 455 x d. 55 mm)**Accession Number:** 437**Historic Period:** 20th century**Production Place:** Britain, England, Europe**Copyright:** © Estate of David Bomberg. All rights reserved / DACS

David Bomberg, the son of an immigrant Polish-Jewish leather-worker, was born in Birmingham and raised in the East End of London. He demonstrated his artistic talents early, and was supported in this by his mother. From 1911 to 1913 he studied at the Slade, where his independent (and pugnacious) nature immediately drew him into radical circles, and even before he had left he was part of the group that was to be at the centre of Vorticism.

By 1929 his mature style had begun to emerge. Essentially representational, his approach employed thick, expressive paint, underpinned with a structural sense deriving from his experience with abstraction. In the early 1930s, in the face of continuing financial difficulties and his wife's opposition to his teaching, he attempted to support himself through portraiture, and he executed a series of self-portraits that in tonality and unflinching demeanour recall both Rembrandt and Sickert.

The nervous, flickering brush strokes of the present work differentiate it from later self-portraits, which relied upon broader, dragged strokes. Here, the near side of the face is rendered in waves of overlapping paint, giving the effect of being viewed through a heat-haze. Most striking is the unequal treatment of the eyes. The nearer of the two appears glazed and opaque, the other dark and hollow - an influence, perhaps, of Sickert's 1929 self-portrait *The Servant of Abraham*, which also features strangely disparate eyes, and which Cork (1987: 193) suggests Bomberg probably saw at the Savile Gallery in 1930.

Bomberg largely abandoned self-portraiture after the mid 1930s (an exception being the majestic *Last Self-Portrait* of 1956), but if, for the artist himself, portraiture was something of a diversion, the legacy of his heads of the 1930s can be seen in the work of his students, notably Leon Kossoff and

Frank Auerbach (see no. 184).

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).
