

While researching this article, I didn't find any reference to self-portraits with dogs from classical antiquity. Only during the Renaissance, with its renewed interest in secular art and the individual as a subject, did self-portraits become popular.

This article will be limited to paintings with dogs that can be identified as a breed or type.

Self-Portrait With Dog

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A Type of Business Card

Self-portraits with dogs were probably first seen in the Netherlands, but the custom spread over the whole of Europe as a means of advertising an artist's work, especially in portraiture.

Generally speaking, when a dog was included in a self-portrait, it was owned by the painter or the painter's family. What could be the reason for painting a self-portrait with a dog owned by somebody else? In some cases, the dog's ownership was emphasized by, for example, a hand on the dog's head or an arm around its body: *This dog is my dog*.

From Leonardo da Vinci in the 15th century to Antonio Ligabue in the 20th – here is a look at six ages of artists and their dogs.

Leonardo da Vinci (Italian), *Self-portrait with Dog* - ca. 1475

The earliest self-portrait with dog I have found was painted by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). A Florentine architect, philosopher, inventor, painter, mathematician, engineer, scientist, writer, composer and sculptor, da Vinci is considered a *homo universalis*.

Da Vinci worked for wealthy Milanese and Floren-



Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)
Self-portrait with Dog
Painted between 1475 and 1480
(National Gallery of Art, Washington)

tine families such as the Sforzas and Borgias. His best-known work, the *Mona Lisa*, hangs in the Louvre in Paris.

One of da Vinci's self-portraits shows the artist with a small white dog. Several authors have stated that the dog could be the forerunner of the Volpino Italiano. In the 15th century, small Spitz-type dogs with a white or red coat were popular with the Italian nobility and artists. Another name for Volpino Italiano is Volpino Quirinale; "Quirinale" refers to one of Rome's seven hills.

Da Vinci's somewhat dark self-portrait was made between 1475 and 1480 when the artist was about 23 years old.

Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch), *Self-portrait in Oriental Attire* - 1631

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-69)

was a master at painting self-portraits; he made almost a hundred of them.

In 1631, 24 years old, Rembrandt painted a portrait of himself dressed in an oriental costume. Although he often dressed in unusual clothing, the combination of oriental and dog was exceptional. Quite exceptional,

Creating a self-portrait is a time-honored tradition among painters. Including their own dog in a self-portrait implies a special bond between artist and dog.



Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-69),
Self-portrait in Oriental Attire - 1631
The dog was added in 1633.
(Musée des Beaux Arts, Paris)

stature of his disguise.” (from Edwin Buijsen, exhibition catalogue *Rembrandt by himself*, National Gallery, London, with the Mauritshuis, The Hague, 1999)

On the other hand, the dog could be a forerunner of the Spanish or Portuguese Water Dog. During the Dutch Revolt from 1568-1648, Spanish soldiers occupied the Netherlands for decades and it is very well possible that they had their dogs with them. At that time, Rembrandt was not yet skilled at painting dogs; the forelegs compared to the body are coarse, and the feet have enormous toes.

There is no communication at all between dog and master – not surprising, since the dog was added to an existing portrait.

**Alexandre-François Desportes (French),
Self-portrait in Hunting Dress - 1699**

This self-portrait of French painter Alexandre-François Desportes (1661-1743) is now very popular in Europe as an illustration in articles and books about hunting. Desportes was a specialist when it came to working dogs.

Self-portrait in Hunting Dress demonstrates his virtuosity with a paint brush. He was a master of detail; look, for example, at the expression on the faces of both dogs, and the texture of the beautiful blue coat. Desportes’ knowledge of canine anatomy can be seen in many of his other paintings. When he went hunting, the painter always took along a small sketchbook. His clients chose from the sketches and Desportes worked the chosen sketch into a painting.

This painter was a bit of a dandy, but he did well by it. The French kings Louis XIV and Louis V were some of his royal clients.

because the dog was added two years later, in 1633.

The dog is a “water dogge,” possibly a poodle; you can see that its hindquarters have been shaved. “As hunting was the prerogative of royalty and the nobility, the poodle became a sort of status symbol. Thus, several French sovereigns owned poodles and Prince Rupert, the son of Frederick V, the Elector Palatine known as the ‘Winter King’ who sought refuge in The Hague, had a poodle that answered to the name of Boy. So it is possible that Rembrandt chose the breed to enhance the princely

The dog on the left is a sighthound of Greyhound type. In art-historical descriptions, the dog on the right is identified as a Pointer, but it’s likely one of the many French *braques*. It has a white coat with black ticking and patches. It could be a forerunner of the French Grand Gascon Saintongeais or Braque d’Auvergne, or the Ariegeois.

**William Hogarth (English),
The Painter and his Pug - 1745**

In English painter William Hogarth’s (1697-1764) self-portrait, the dog is at least as prominent as its master.

After apprenticing with a goldsmith, Hogarth began producing engravings and paintings – satirical and moral works as well as portraits and Biblical scenes. At 48, he painted a self-portrait with one of his two Pugs – Pug and Trump. Trump always stayed close to its master and is the dog immortalized here.



Alexandre-François Desportes
(1661-1743)
Self-portrait in Hunting Dress - 1699
(Louvre, Paris)



William Hogarth (1697-1764),
The Painter and His Pug - 1745
(Tate Gallery, London)

Pugs became popular in England when King William III, viceroy of the Netherlands, and his English wife, Queen Mary II, took their Pugs with them from Holland to England. Everybody knew that the Pug was the favorite breed of the House of Orange.

Apart from his dog, Hogarth included several attributes in the painting: his palette, with the text “The line of beauty and grace” referring to his theories about art and the serpentine line; and a stack of books by William Shakespeare, John Milton and Jonathan Swift, a reference to Hogarth’s favorite writers, or to emphasize that he was a man of wide reading.

**Gustave Courbet (French),
Courbet with a Black Dog - ca. 1842**

In Hogarth’s self-portrait with his Pug, the artist is modest and stony-faced; Gustave Courbet’s self-portrait with a black



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dog is quite the opposite.

Courbet (1819-77), a French painter, was a marked socialist who addressed social issues in his work and painted the reality of everyday life without romanticizing his subjects. Courbet courted controversy and his later nudes in particular caused a scandal. He is counted as a leader of Realism and a forerunner of Impressionism.

His self-portrait with a black dog was painted in the Romantic style between 1842 and 1844, at the beginning of Courbet's career. In 1844 it was accepted for exhibition at the influential Salon de Paris.

A description of this painting reads: "His elegant clothes with the coat carefully turned back to reveal the dashing yellow lining, his fashionable English Spaniel, and the lofty perch from which he can cast a rather superior gaze down upon the world beneath him, identify him quite clearly as a dandy. The image of the dandy is fused with that of the country boy that Courbet in fact was, the fellow who goes on long tramps in the woods and fields with his faithful dog and his briar stick, taking a rest now and then to enjoy his pipe." (gustave-courbet.com)

He has taken his walk with a book, and knowing that the subject is a painter, we might assume this is a sketchbook. Master and dog are looking at us and it seems that one is no more important than the other. The details of the black dog can hardly be seen, but it's not "a fashionable English Spaniel" as we know



Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *Courbet with a Black Dog* - between 1842 and 1844 (Musée des Beaux Arts, Paris)

English spaniels today; it would have been better described as a fashionable spaniel from England.

Dogs occur in many of Courbet's paintings. Art historians state that black dogs in myths and popular belief have a link with the devil, but I think it's just his black spaniel. He painted another self-portrait with a black spaniel in 1842. It is the same dog, but only its head is visible.

Miroslav Kraljević (Croatian), *Autoportret sa Psom* - 1910

Croatian painter, engraver and sculptor Miroslav Kraljević (1885-1913), who was active at the beginning of the 20th century, is seen as the father of modern Croatian art. His works are Impressionist, Pointillist and Expressionist in style. His *Autoportret sa Psom* (Self-portrait with Dog) shows the characteristics of Impressionism with its open composition.

After studying in Munich, Kraljević returned to his parents' house in Požega, Croatia, and was staying there in 1910-11. Therefore, we may suppose that Kraljević painted *Autoportret sa Psom* in his parents' house, and the dog belonged to his parents. The painter looks out of the corner of his eyes with a stony ex-



Miroslav Kraljević (1885-1913)
Autoportret sa Psom - 1910
(Moderna Galerija, Zagreb)

Baroque – a period of artistic style that used exaggerated motion and clear, easily interpreted detail to produce drama, tension, exuberance and grandeur in sculpture, painting, architecture, literature, etc. The style began around 1600 in Rome and spread to most of Europe.

Expressionism – a modernist movement, initially in poetry and painting, originating in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century. Its typical trait is to present the world solely from a subjective perspective, distorting it radically to evoke moods or ideas.

Homo universalis – a man who has broad intellectual interests and is accomplished in areas of both arts and sciences.

Impressionism – a 19th-century art movement that originated with a group of Paris-based artists. The name derives from the title of a Claude Monet work, *Impression, Sunrise*.

Oriental – imitation or depiction of aspects of Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures by writers, designers and artists.

Pointillism – a technique of painting in which small, distinct dots of color are applied in patterns to form an image.

Realism – the general attempt to depict subjects truthfully; a 19th-century painting movement.

Renaissance – cultural movement from the 14th to 17th century beginning in Italy in the Late Middle Ages and later spreading to the rest of Europe.

Salon de Paris – beginning in 1725 was the official art exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

Surrealism – a cultural movement that began in the early 1920s. The aim was to "resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality."

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pression; the dog's expression is soft, almost melancholy.

There is no doubt about the breed: a German Shepherd Dog, whose type fits exactly the drawings of Kraljević's contemporary, Richard Strelbel, a well-known German writer.

In 1911, Kraljević received a government grant that allowed him to study in Paris. A year later, he returned home because of the first symptoms of tuberculosis, but continued to paint. After two months in a sanitarium, he died in Zagreb in 1913, only 27 years old. Kraljević's *Autoportret sa Psom* is considered one of his best portraits.

Pyotr Konchalovsky (Russian), Self-portrait with Dobermann - 1933

Russian painter Pyotr Konchalovsky (1876-1956) was born in what is now Ukraine, and studied in Moscow, Paris and St. Petersburg. Konchalovsky began painting landscapes and still lifes, influenced by French painter Paul Cézanne; his first solo exhibition was in the Tretyakow Gallery in Moscow. Later, he specialized in portraits that were considered examples of "socialistic realist" style. A productive worker, he is known to have created more than 5,000 paintings.

In his 1933 self-portrait, the winter landscape and his fur coat and hat suggest his country, Russia. There's no doubt about the breed: a Dobermann.

In 1949, Konchalovsky made another painting with a Dobermann, held on leash by his grandson Andron Konchalovsky, dressed in shorts, a checked shirt and red neckerchief. Andron was a member of the Russian Pioneers, a sort of Boy Scouts, set up to mould young people into useful Communists. No doubt the Dobermann was a family dog.

Frida Kahlo (Mexican), Autorretrato con Changuito - 1945

The work of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907-54) has been described as naive or folk art, but also as Surrealist, a label Kahlo rejected.

When she was 18 years old, Kahlo was seriously injured in a bus accident and bedridden for months. To pass the time, she painted dozens of self-portraits.

In 1929 she married the Mexican painter Diego Rivera. Both had numerous extramarital affairs, including Kahlo's with Leon Trotsky after he fled Russia and gained asylum in Mexico in 1937.

Frida Kahlo's house swarmed with ani-



Pyotr Konchalovsky (1876-1956)
Self-portrait with Dobermann - 1933

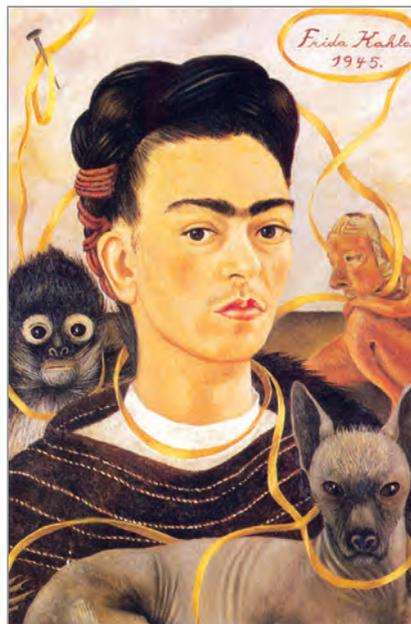
note in her diary in 1954 were the last acts of her short life.

Rolf Stoll (American), Pater Familias - 1947

Although considered an American painter, Rolf Stoll (1892-1978) was born in Heidelberg, where he attended a military academy and developed an interest in art. His first training was at the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart, both in southern Germany. In 1912, Stoll emigrated to the United States; after studying at the National Academy of Design in New York, he moved to Cleveland, where he worked as a commercial artist before becoming known as a talented portraitist. As well, he painted figure subjects and floral still lifes, and views of the Ohio countryside, Canada and Spain, all in a Realist style.

Stoll was certainly not a prolific dog painter; apart from the self-portrait with his two Dachshunds, I have not been able to find another example with a dog. The portrait – named *Pater Familias* – was painted around 1948 in the Realist style. His two Smooth friends look in different directions and it seems that one of them is interested in Stoll's art. The artist is smiling and holds a pencil to emphasize his artistic calling.

The American Kennel Club describes the Dachshund as a lovable, playful com-



Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)
Self-portrait with Monkey - 1945
(private collection)



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Rolf Stoll (1892-1978)
Pater Familias - 1947
(The Cleveland Museum of Art)

ian province of Reggio Emilia.

His childhood was turbulent and characterized by misbehavior and a talent for drawing. He led a roving life as a farm hand. In 1919, he was expelled from Switzerland. In 1920, he was offered a job on the banks of the River Po and began to paint. He was committed several times to psychiatric hospitals over the course of his life; his temperament was slightly violent. Ligabue's nickname was *Al Matt* (mad man).

Ligabue was self-taught. His style is identifiable; the colors orange and green occur frequently. Apart from self-portraits, he painted wild animals, landscapes, horses, birds, poultry, dogs and scenes from farm life.

After 1946, art connoisseurs became interested in Ligabue and his work, which was classified as native art. A catalogue with his paintings was published in 2002, and in 2008, a solo exhibition was organized in the Palazzo Reale in Milan.

Auroritratto con Cane (Self-portrait with Dog) was painted in 1957. Antonio knew about dogs and made beautiful, modern paintings of setters in the field. He painted himself as he looked: expressive eyes, a large curved nose and large ears – it's almost a caricature.

There is no doubt about the breed of the big dog with pendulous

panion... an ideal pet for many homes. Dachshunds can be Standard or Miniature size, and come in three coat varieties – Smooth, Wirehaired or Longhaired.

Antonio Ligabue (Italian), *Auroritratto con Cane* - 1957

We started with Leonardo da Vinci in Italy and end our journey back in Italy with Antonio Ligabue (1899-1965; his real name is Lacabue). Ligabue was born in Switzerland; his father (unknown) came from the Ital-



Antonio Ligabue (1899-1965)
Auroritratto con Cane - 1957
(private collection)

German Shepherd Dog – Alsatian

The German Shepherd Dog was first AKC-registered in 1908. When America entered WWI in 1917, the breed's name was changed to Shepherd Dog for several years. The French renamed the breed Chien Berger d'Alsace. (Alsace is located on France's eastern border, adjacent to Germany and Switzerland.) In 1919, The Kennel Club (U.K.) renamed the breed Alsatian Wolf Dog but dropped "Wolf Dog" after 1926. In 1977, the name was changed to German Shepherd Dog (Alsatian); "Alsatian" was removed in 2010.

ears and a coat with orange spots. The Bracco Italiano is *his* dog. The breed standard requires a white coat, or a white coat with patches of varied size of an orange or more-or-less dark-amber color, or white with more-or-less large chestnut patches, or white speckled with pale orange (*melato*), or white speckled with chestnut (*roano-marrone*).

The Bracco's coat is short, dense and glossy, finer and shorter on the head, ears, front part of the legs and feet. A symmetrical facial mask is preferred, but the absence of a mask is tolerated.

Antonio Lugabue died in 1985 in Gualtieri, Italy.

From the 15th century to the 20th: six ages of self-portraits with dogs. The 15th-century small white dog by Leonardo da Vinci and the 20th-century white-orange gun dog of Antonio Ligabue prove *there is nothing new under the sun*.

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