

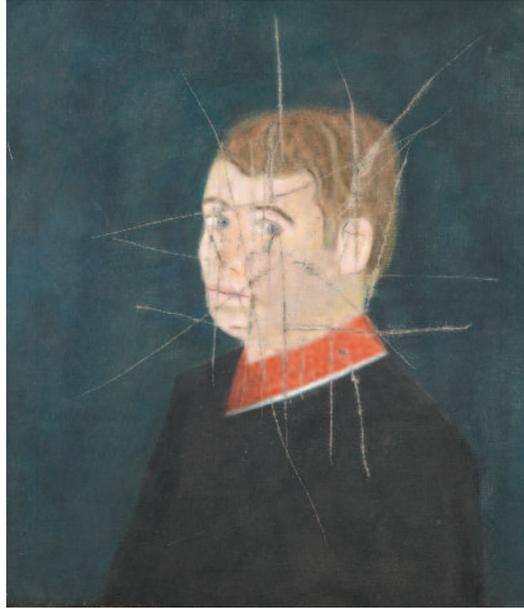
## Self-Effacing

In the late 1950s or early '60s, Scottish painter **Craigie Aitchison** stabbed his only known self-portrait about 18 times, after a fellow artist visiting his studio suggested that Aitchison had portrayed himself in a flattering light. "He was absolutely mortified because self-aggrandizement couldn't be further from his instincts," explains **Paul Moorhouse**, curator of 20th-century portraits at London's National Portrait Gallery, which recently purchased the defaced picture.

Aitchison, who died in 2009, was best known for his serene, pared-down depictions of lambs, dogs, birds, and religious themes in vibrant colors. "He was a very diffident, shy, self-effacing

person who shied away from the glare of publicity and was entirely immersed in his own work," Moorhouse says. The identity of the artist whose criticism prompted the attack on the 24-by-20-inch painting is unknown.

Some four decades later, Aitchison apparently had a change of heart about his self-portrait and agreed to allow it to be restored by **Martin Wyld**, head of conservation at the National Gallery, on condition that the gashes remain visible. Indeed, they dominate



**Craigie Aitchison's self-portrait still bears slash marks from when he stabbed it in the 1950s or '60s.**

the composition, giving a hesitant-looking Aitchison the air of a modern-day martyr,

with long, vicious slashes driving into his head from every angle.

On the artist's death, the work came up for auction with his estate. "As soon as I saw it, I knew that we had to try and get it," says Moorhouse, due to its rarity and "this unusual iconoclasm which was part of the image." The gallery, which already owns three photographic portraits of Aitchison, paid £36,512 (about \$57,500) for the painting, acquired with the help of donors.

—**Elizabeth Fullerton**