

DRAWING UPON THEMSELVES: WOMEN'S SELF-PORTRAITS IN A
MAN'S WORLD

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Drawing Upon Themselves: Women's Self-Portraits in a Man's World

A man can do well depending only upon himself
and can brave public opinion; but a woman who
has done well has only accomplished half her task;
for what others think of her counts no less than
what she in fact is (Radisch 441).

As long as people who call themselves artists have depicted others, they have also created images of themselves. As far back as Hildegard von Bingen in the twelfth century, and probably before, almost every artist or artisan who has picked up a pen, a brush, or a chisel has been concerned with the depiction of self. Male artists have had the ability to present themselves as they are, as subject and artist, without a division between the two. Women artists have historically traveled a slightly different, and considerably rougher path than their male counterparts. How women view themselves, and consequently how they present themselves in their own self-portraits, has also differed greatly from men. Beginning with women artists of the early Renaissance and following through time to the present day, women have often felt that they must give themselves roles in their self-portraits for them to be taken seriously in an art world that has been dominated by males.

The artistic depiction of women has historically been one that centered around the idea of the beautiful object. The women depicted were often beautiful centerpieces, allegorical figures luxuriously lying about upon their satin beds, such as in Titian's The Venus of Urbino (Figure 1). She is shown nude, gracefully draped across fine fabric looking teasingly out at the viewer, her maidservants in the background. At her feet is a small dog, a symbol for her own loyalty. The painting speaks nothing of the woman herself, but only of her beauty and the resemblance she shares with the personality of the dog. Of course we must accept this depiction as a product of the times; it is a beautiful painting and was meant for

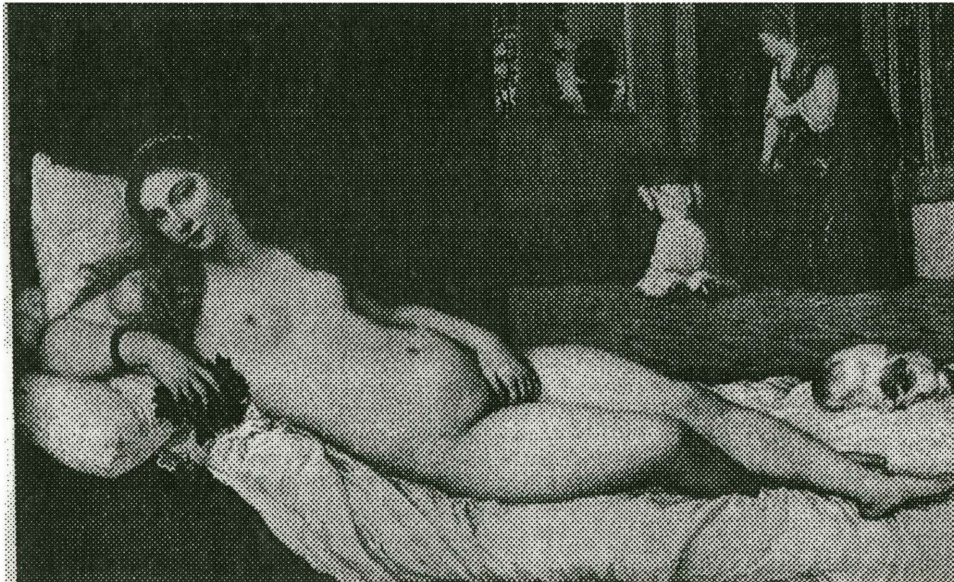


Figure 1. Titian, The Venus of Urbino, 1538. Oil on canvas, 46 7/8 x 65 in. Uffizi, Florence.

beauty's sake. An artist's concern during the Renaissance would have been for an image that communicated the ideas that he or she was looking to convey, not sincere representations of personality. But would a Renaissance artist have painted a male figure languishing about on satin, completely nude, a small dog

curled up at his feet to show his dedication to his lady? Men generally did not fall into the realm of beautiful objects, ornamentation was a woman's calling. Women could also be depicted in religious connotations, as the Virgin, or as the Penitent Magdalen (Figure 2). These paintings were not about the women themselves but about the religious lessons that they symbolized, and because of these examples the female figure took on many different meanings to the viewer.



Figure 2. Claude Mellan, Penitent Magdalen, 1629 - 30. Engraving, (?), Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

Women who were depicted in their own right were often presented as the property of men, beautiful objects to be owned by others, often without personality and as a display case for the jewels or wealth of the family as a whole. In Antonio Pollaiuolo's Portrait of a Young Woman (Figure 3) he shows a beautiful young woman in profile, her hair tightly coiffured and draped with pearls, her shoulders

covered with heavy brocade. All these adornments were meant to show the wealth of the family, and often such a portrait was painted as an advertisement of sorts, hoping to show the beauty of the daughter of a wealthy family to attract possible suitors. Women had lost the right to own land after the Middle Ages, and had little if no control over their own destiny. In their portraits as well as their lives, women were without power or influence in a man's world.

With the new theoretical thinking of the Renaissance, a few women artists managed to rise above the constraints placed upon them by the male dominated society. Sofonisba Anguissola (1532?-1625) was born to



Figure 3. Antonio Pollaiuolo, Portrait of a Young Woman, date unknown. Tempera on panel, 18 1/8 x 13 in., Museo Poldi - Pezzoli, Milan.

aristocratic parents in the early sixteenth century, a time when art was dominated by men and women were raised to be good wives. Against the beliefs of the time, Sofonisba's parents made sure that she was well educated, not only in art and music, as were other women of high social standing, but also in history and other areas that were strictly the domain of men. It was believed that the scandalous Greek and Roman histories were too lewd for the delicate constitutions of women and that the knowledge of these things would decrease their desirability in

betrothal. Women's most important characteristics were chastity and charm, not intelligence and acquired knowledge (Perlingieri 32). Anguissola studied under Michelangelo and was court painter to King Philip II of Spain, making her a very well known and successful woman in her own time. She painted many self-portraits, but these were met with varied reactions, almost always making less of her talents than she deserved. Annibale Caro, a self proclaimed connoisseur of art during the time, wrote to Sofonisba's father exclaiming that he took special pleasure in self-portraits by women artists, and especially Sofonsiba's, because he could exhibit them as "two marvels," the work itself, and the image of the beautiful young woman ("Here's Looking" 567). Regardless of her fame at the time and of her talent, she could not paint a self-portrait without being viewed as a beautiful object. So in an effort to be taken seriously, Anguissola painted Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola (Figure 4). The painting is dated around the late 1550's, and depicts Sofonisba's teacher energetically painting a large portrait of his student. The painting depicts Campi peering at us, as though we were the model, and a much larger Anguissola gazing confidently at us from the canvas. By this time she was no longer working with Campi, he had moved to Milan in 1549 and left her to work on her own. Was the painting a tribute to the teacher she had learned so much from, or, as Mary D. Garrard suggests in "Here's Looking at Me," was Anguissola actually putting herself in a higher position than Campi by saying that she was so amazing that even her teacher was commemorating her identity by painting her (560)? Garrard mentions the relative sizes of the two figures, assuming that Sofonisba considered herself much more important than Campi because of her



Figure 4. Sofonisba Anguissola, Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola, 1550(?). Oil on canvas, 43 11/16 x 43 5/16 in., Pinacoteca Nazionale, Sienna.

towering presence. He seems almost timid compared to her confident confrontational gaze, and his figure seems to be swallowed by the shadows.

Campi received a letter from Francesco Salviati in 1554 after the latter had viewed some of Anguissola's work in Rome. Salviati praised Campi, called Sofonisba Campi's "creation" and said that her work was the product of Campi's own intellect, a "contribution to his already well-established artistic reputation" ("Here's Looking" 561). Was her painting an extension of this belief, actually showing Campi 'creating' Sofonisba? Or was it simply an attempt to finally have one of her self-portraits taken seriously, to actually show it being painted by a man? Even if the Renaissance viewer knew that the painting was actually by Anguissola, on the canvas they would see a man, an established teacher, painting her. Could this fact alone cause the painting to be taken more seriously than her other self-portraits which were often taken as expressions of her own vanity? If Campi found her important enough to paint, even if only in a rendered painting, perhaps others would find her own image important also.

Garrard also goes on to say that the image that Campi seems to be painting is not a very good image, and that she believes that Anguissola was making a statement about the incompetence of her teacher by showing him painting her quite badly. He is also shown using a mahlstick, of which she claims that, "in Renaissance art the mahlstick sometimes connoted artistic timidity or preoccupation with detail". She goes on to suggest that by depicting Campi using a mahlstick Sofonisba was pointing out that he was an uncreative imitator ("Here's Looking" 564). Why, with her own name on the painting and her reputation as a fine artist growing, would she purposely paint a 'bad' painting? The attitude taken in her

portrait and in the way she approached the figure of Campi himself do appear to be different, but it is more likely that she was merely trying to imitate Campi's own style to make the illusion seem more real, as if he had actually painted her instead of this being a self-portrait. It was later said that Anguissola "broke new ground and offered new directions in an age when women were considered decorative objects" (Perlingieri 16).

In 1630 another young woman painter also created a rather revolutionary self- portrait. Artemesia Gentileschi (1593-1652) was the daughter of an artist and she, like Sofonisba Anguissola, was highly educated and strongly supported by her family. In her Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting (Figure 5) Gentileschi combines her own image with what had become a fairly well known image in art, the allegorical symbol of painting. Since the early 1500's artists had been depicting the personification of painting as the image of a woman, but this was the first time that that allegory had actually been combined with an artist's own image simply because the allegory of painting was always understood to be female. In the early Renaissance, all of the 'liberal arts' were thought to be of female persuasion. This may have been because artists were primarily men and, according to Garrard, "the male artist was presented as the creative shaper of the material model that he turned into art, just as man was understood to inseminate woman physically with his life force" (Artemisia Gentileschi 572). Consequently, the allegory of painting must be female for the male artist to have the ability to mold her as he wished and for them to join to form a great work of art. But Artemisia became the allegory herself, painting personified.

The Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting is the only surviving self-portrait that Artemisia Gentileschi is known to have completed. She has all of the



Figure 5. Artemesia Gentileschi, Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting, 1630. Oil on canvas, 38 x 29 in., Kensington Palace, Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, London.

characteristics of the true allegory of the time, the necklace with a mask on it symbolizing imitation, unruly locks of hair symbolizing the divine frenzy of the artistic temperament, and garments with changing colors which allude to the painter's skills (Artemisia Gentileschi 337 - 339). She is struggling with her canvas, stretching to reach it while completely oblivious to her viewers. This is not necessarily the allegory of painting, but an active view of the artist herself, quite possibly painted as an allegory simply for the chance to depict herself as she is without fear of being called vain or being treated like a beautiful object. Perhaps by calling herself the allegory of painting, she gave validation to her own image without having to apologize for it. If she had simply painted her own features in a posed manner, the viewer of the time may have confused the 'object' of Artemisia the model and Artemisia the painter, and perhaps she would not be taken as seriously as she was.

The one artist who quite possibly painted more self-portraits than any other woman artist was Elisabeth Louise Vigee-LeBrun (1755-1842). She was immensely popular during her lifetime, a socialite who traveled extensively and whose galas were the toast of Paris. She was one of Marie Antoinette's favorite painters and completed many portraits of the Queen and her family before the Revolution. Vigee-LeBrun painted countless portraits of the aristocracy of several different countries, many of the people who traveled in the same circles she did. She was a very beautiful woman, scandalous rumors were whispered about her all around Paris, and many artists wanted to capture her glamorous features. She painted numerous portraits of herself, including the Self-Portrait of 1782 (Figure 6). This self-portrait is different from most of hers in that she is simply sitting, facing the viewer, her hair natural, her dress a loose flowing empire style that was quickly



Figure 6. Elisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, Self-Portrait, 1782. Oil on Canvas, 25 1/2 x 21 1/4 in., Kimball Art Museum, Fort Worth.

replacing the laced corsets of a few years before. It is quite possibly a romanticized look at herself, yet a realistic one. But the critics were scathing in discussing the painting. They liked the work itself, but this only further fueled the rumors that were circulating Paris concerning Vigee-LeBrun's opinion of herself. Simone de Beauvoir later wrote of this self-portrait in Le Deuxieme Sexe:

Instead of devoting herself generously to the work she undertakes, a woman (artist) too often considers it as a mere adornment of her life. The book and the painting are just an unessential intermediary allowing her to publicly display the essential reality, her own person. It is thus her own person which is the main--sometimes the only--subject which interests her. Mme. Vigee LeBrun never tires of consigning to her canvases her smiling maternity... Of course the self is not always despicable.... Narcissism in a woman, instead of enriching, impoverishes her. By indulging in nothing more than self-contemplation, she annihilates herself. Her own love of self becomes a stereotype, she does not discover in her (works) her authentic experience, but an imaginary idol built on clichés (Baillio 46).

In simply trying to show her own appearance, Vigee-LeBrun attracted scathing criticism attacking the ego that others obviously perceived within this self-portrait.

When approached in the same manner a self-portrait can bring praises to a man. One hundred years earlier, a young Rembrandt van Rijn portrayed his own image in much the same way in Self-Portrait with Hauberk and Gold Chain (Figure 7). Here, in one of his many self-portraits, the famous painter appears as a young man of about twenty-seven. He has the same loose tousled hair, slightly parted lips and draped costume as Vigee-LeBrun displayed later, but the critics viewed him as “questioning and enigmatic....in his gaze we see the ageless artist direct and uncompromising” (Grohn preface). Thus, the same characteristics that make Rembrandt an enigma made Vigee-LeBrun narcissistic.

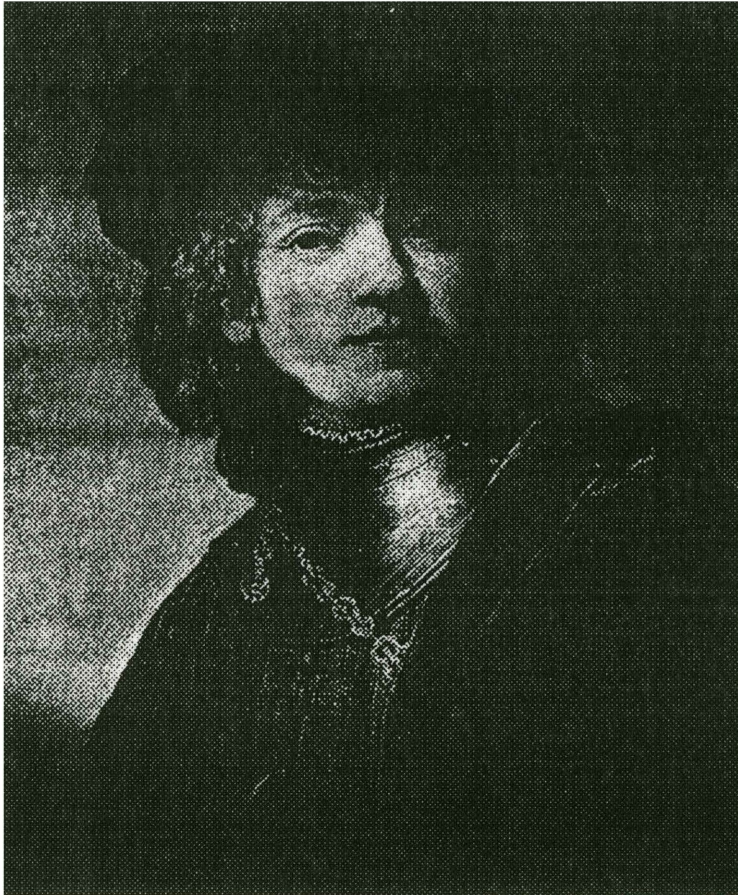


Figure 7. Rembrandt van Rijn, Self-Portrait with Hamberk and Gold Chain, 1633-34. Oil on panel, 24 4/5 x 20 4/5 in., Florence, Uffizi.



Figure 8. Elisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, Self-Portrait, 1790. Oil on canvas, 45 x 34 1/2 in., Uffizi, Florence.

In most of her remaining self-portraits, Vigée-LeBrun looked at herself a little differently. So that there was no mistaking who the artist was, she painted herself holding her palette in front of a partially finished canvas (Figure 8). She would often paint herself with her daughter Julie, so that her paintings had an overwhelming aura of motherhood and attention no longer focused on her looks (Figure 9). She completed large self-portraits of herself and her students, so that she could assume the role of teacher in the portrait and no one could ascribe a meaning that was not necessarily there. Vigée-LeBrun had already shown the viewer her own likeness in the role she wanted them to believe she was playing. Her earlier experiences with criticism caused her to place herself into prescribed roles each time she portrayed her own image.

These women artists seem to have felt forced into portraying themselves in new roles to give a type of rationalization for depicting their own images. Not wanting to be disregarded as vain and narcissistic and no longer wanting to simply be beautiful objects, they wanted to create paintings that would serve to validate their own images. After the time of these ground-breaking artists, women throughout art history have had to deal with the same concerns. Women, who have for so long been the objects of male artists' attentions, are now artists themselves, but the questions haven't changed. In the twentieth century, female artists have attempted to control the interpretation of their work differently than women before them, yet still not in the same way as their male counterparts.



Figure 9. Elizabeth Louise Vigee-LeBrun, Portrait of the Artist with Her Daughter, 1789. Oil on Canvas, Musee du Louvre, Paris.

A feminist artist who refused to call herself a feminist, Alice Neel (1900-1980), experienced a troubled personal life that had quite a bit to do with the way she portrayed herself. Never relating well to other women, Neel married young and traveled to Cuba to live with her new husband. Her first child died of diphtheria when she was less than a year old, and after Neel returned to the United States with her second daughter, her husband took the child and returned to Cuba.

Children became very important to her, and she had two more sons from later relationships. She had a series of horrible relationships with men, one who mistreated her children, and one who was an alcoholic who burned all her paintings and drawings. These episodes all had an influence in how Neel viewed herself in her work, where she rarely painted a likeness of herself, but concentrated on how she felt in situations in which she was living. In one of her early paintings, The Intellectual (Figure 10), Neel pictures herself with three arms and three legs because she was so busy chasing children. The other women in the painting seem oblivious to how frustrated she seems, and the work becomes more about her frustrations and insecurities as a mother than anything having to do with her own image. Most of her self-portraits have to do with her role as a mother, and different



Figure 10. Alice Neel, The Intellectual, 1929. Watercolor, 10 1/2 x 15 in., Collection of the Artist's Family

situations within that role. Well Baby Clinic was painted a few years after the death of her first child (Figure 11). It shows Neel in the center of a very chaotic hospital room. She is dressed in a shining white dress, that is extremely clean in the midst



Figure 11. Alice Neel, Well Baby Clinic, 1928. Oil on canvas, Collection of the Artist's Family.

of all the death and pain. The woman on the left is smiling sickeningly, seemingly unaware of the desperate situation all around her. Again, this self-portrait is more about Neel's role as a mother and a specific scene in her life than anything concerning her own image. Neel's feelings about motherhood became very clear through the changes and distortions she created in her own figure, more so than if she had simply portrayed her own likeness. This abstraction was an early step towards less literal translations of likeness in self-portraits of the next few decades.

One can contrast the self-portraits of Alice Neel with those of a male artist of the same time period, Lucian Freud (Figure 12). Freud appears almost confrontational, as if asking what the viewer is doing intruding into the artist's space. Here, as in almost all of his work, he has paid utmost attention to the facial expression and to the delicate color changes in his skin. The painting concerns how the artist looks and attempts to convey information about him simply through his appearance. He is, above all, himself.



Figure 12. Lucian Freud, Reflection (Self-Portrait), 1981-82. Oil on canvas, 22 1/8 x 25 7/8 in., Collection of the Artist.

During the twentieth century, and specifically in the past few decades, women artists have changed the concepts behind their self-portraits until they are no longer simply representations of their physical body. Some women have based their art on more abstract ideas, including using their own bodies as symbols to convey deeper meanings. These symbolic self-representations are concerned more with what the artist wants you to think and feel than what she looks like on the outside. Although there are women who are simply concerned with appearance and conveying their own image, the idea of roles and the strictly symbolic self-portrait still seems to be a stronger characteristic with female artists than with males. These twentieth century women artists have found new ways to say things about themselves and their situations through the use of their own images in extremely varied ways.

The reigning queen of role playing is Cindy Sherman(1954-). This is true in almost all of the series she has created to date, especially in her “Untitled Film Stills Series”. Although her images are photographs she does not consider herself a photographer, she simply serves as creative director and model for most of her ‘situations’, some of which are not even photographed by her. Each photograph in this series is taken under the pretense of a movie still, an advertising gimmick from the 1970s when theaters would place black and white glossies on their kiosks to promote each film. The stills were not necessarily frames taken from the action of the movie, but posed recreations of specific scenes designed to entice viewers into imagining how spectacular the remainder of the film was and convince them that they must see the rest.

To understand Sherman’s images we must first think about how our relation to art has changed in the past fifty years. Pop art brought a new revelation

to us, the realization of the sublime within the ordinary, and how our everyday situations could be raised up to the level of 'high art.' Warhol took a soup can that held some kind of meaning for all people, whether it was home, kitchen, mom, or comfort, and made it into the icon for an era. This admiration of the ordinary is one of the basic statements in Cindy Sherman's work. She takes everyday situations and places herself within them. Typically the situations lead us to something else, to a larger story that we can begin to build in our imagination after viewing each still. "The still must tease with the promise of a story the viewer of it itches to be told" (Danto 9). We may not see the situations every day, but we understand the connotations and can relate to the feelings, or at least to the 'character' Sherman seems to attempt to typify in each.

In Sherman's Untitled Film Still #11 (Figure 13), we are suddenly reminded of a twentieth century version of Titian's Venus of Urbino (Figure 1). Sherman shows herself draped across a bed with the objects of modern day life around her, and a faraway look on her face. Behind her, there is even a pillow that has the same small dog prancing on it as the faithful, ever loyal dog in Titian's Venus. But in Sherman's work there is a difference, we have a feeling that this is a very small piece of a quite elaborate puzzle. The still itself really is not as important as the intricate weavings of story line that take place in our heads after viewing each one.

There is quite a bit of argument about whether Sherman's photographs are actually self-portraits. In the most obvious sense, they are, for it is Cindy Sherman's face and figure that we see before us. If she does not necessarily set the timer and take the photograph, can the result actually be called a self-portrait? Since she is responsible for the manipulation of what will result in the making up of the picture itself, including concept, actual arrangement of the objects within the frame, and

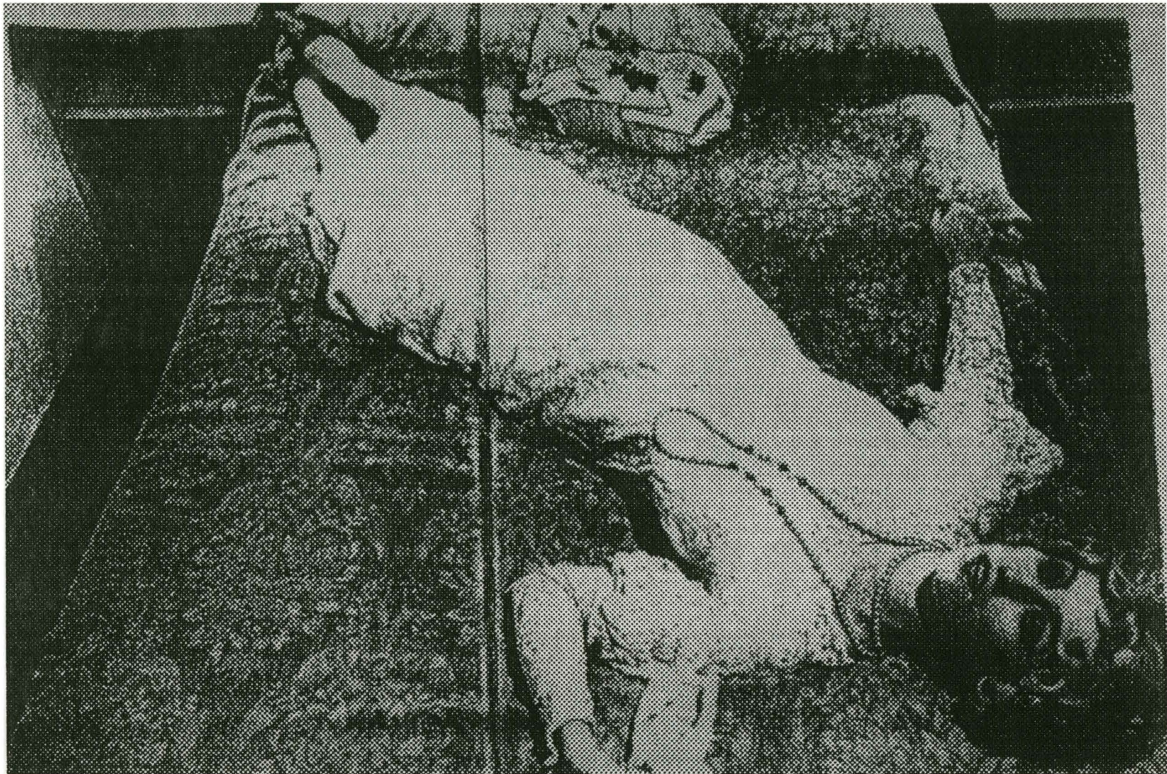


Figure 13. Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still #11, 1978. Photograph, Collection of the Artist

placing herself within that context, the works could easily be considered self-portraits. But in each of these, Cindy Sherman is not playing herself, she is like an actress who is convincing within a role, so that the actress' identity becomes one with the character she is portraying. Sherman gives herself many roles and many faces within her work, just as Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi and Elisabeth Vigee LeBrun felt they must do to have their own images taken seriously.

Although Cindy Sherman's work is quite different from any of the earlier women artists discussed here, her 'self-portraits' would not mean as much to us as viewers if they were simple forthright explorations into the appearance of her face. "... the stills do not compose a sequential exploration of her own features, nor do they stand as a monument to feminine vanity" (Danto 10). The viewer would be caught up in the image of the woman, whether she was beautiful and blonde or brunette and how someone who looks like her could or could not be taken seriously as an artist. Unfortunately, a woman's appearance still interferes with the way that people perceive her ability to complete a task, whether she is an artist or an attorney.

Sherman's photographs would not have the same effect on the viewer even if she used a model. There is something about knowing that she is the instigator, she has all the ideas and situations in her head, and that it is her image that we see when we view her work. We wonder what is taking place, and realize that only 'the girl' in the photograph knows (Figure 14).

In the modern era there have been many artists who spent entire careers dealing with, among a limited amount of other subjects, primary images of



Figure 14. Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still #27, 1979. Photograph, Collection of the Artist.

themselves. Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) was a Cuban artist who was sent to the United States when she was thirteen to escape the atrocities that her country faced under the influence of Castro. She was raised in an affluent family, yet suddenly found herself in an orphanage and reform school in Iowa. Years later, she attended the University of Iowa, but she never forgot the feeling of being 'ripped from the womb of nature' (Lamagna 72).

Mendieta never forgot her relation to Cuba, nature and the spirit realm. Much of her work and beliefs were based in Santeria, a religion combining Catholicism with African Yoruba beliefs. These influences caused her to not only miss the country of her origins, but to feel as if part of her were missing, left behind in Cuba. Through her work she tried to relate her own figure to the earth with which she felt so close, often combining her own silhouetted image with actual dirt, grass, sand, blood, water and flowers. Her work is meant to be transient and fleeting, and it wasn't until later in her short life that Mendieta actually completed work that could appear in galleries and withstand time.

Many of Ana Mendieta's works were earth/body sculptures, which were her own invention combining earthworks with performance art. Several female artists of the 1970's had turned to performance art because it was quite new, and the women were not encumbered by a history of male predecessors (Jacob 3). In 1974, she dipped her hands and arms in blood and made large gestural marks on the walls of a gallery, from standing position to kneeling. She believed that these marks, being blood, carried life through nature, spirit, and matter. Ana also believed that because the marks were made by her own arms and motions, these marks became a part of her and were a very personal connection between her spirit and the earth itself as a type of abstract self-portrait. This performance has been compared with

one done by Yves Klein when, in 1964, he used a female body as a living brush, covering it with paint to complete his works. There is an important difference, though. In Klein's work the woman was a "dehumanized and easily manipulated marker" (Jacob 12) while in Ana Mendieta's work, her body is the essence of what the work is about, not simply the tool with which the art is executed. The work would not be as important without Mendieta's individual connections to the earth and the meanings that such marriages of body and earth meant to her.

Mendieta took this connection between herself and the earth even further. While she was still at Iowa, she began to use her physical body, and later her own silhouette, as part of her art work. In her Arbol de la Vida 1977 (Figure 15) she covered herself with mud and grass, then leaned against the tree in a posture reminiscent of one of praise. It was her attempt at becoming one with the tree, rejoining the earth that she felt so close to through her religion. Mendieta would later say that she had been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body through her own silhouette (Leval 74). She felt by doing this she could be reunited with the earth, and consequently, her homeland.

Ana Mendieta, through her earth/body performances, brought women's self-portraits into the realm of the abstract. Her works were the essence of the self-portrait; she took her image even though it was vague and used it to say something very deeply personal about herself and her past. Mendieta's and Sherman's work are like opposite sides of the same coin. Mendieta used a female image that seems rather vague in identity to say something profoundly personal, and Sherman used what is obviously her own image to make comments on rather universal situations that we could all recognize and understand.

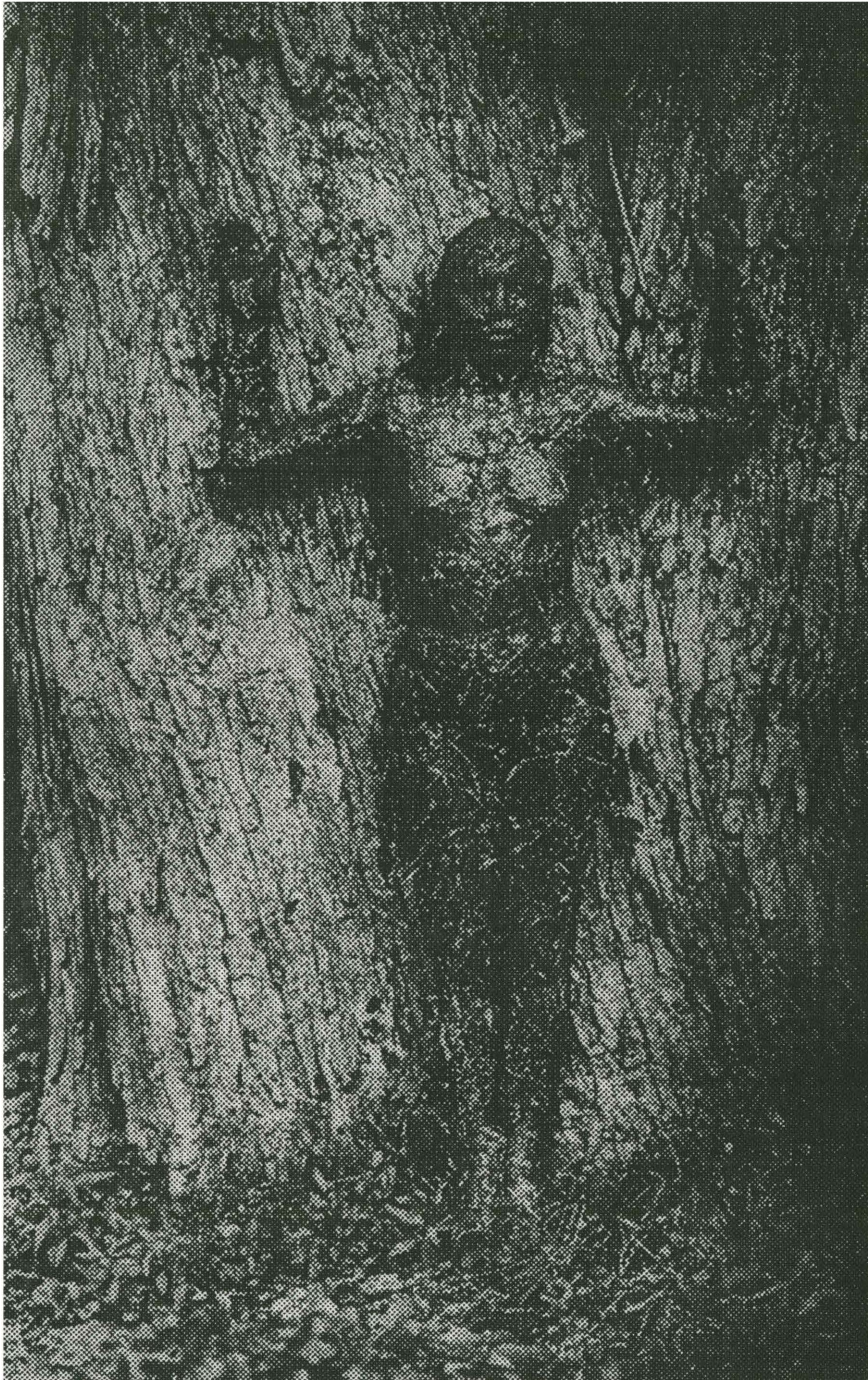


Figure 15. Ana Mendieta, Arbol de la Vida, 1977. Earth/body work with tree and mud, Executed at Old Man's Creek, Iowa City, Iowa.

We cannot make broad and sweeping generalizations about the context of these modern women's self-portraits without comparing them to a male counterpart. Chuck Close (1940-) has completed many self-portraits in his career, along with many portraits of others. His work seems similar to the portrait of Lucian Freud discussed earlier in that it is very confrontational and includes only his shoulders, neck and head. As in his Self-Portrait/White Ink, 1978 (Figure 16), we are overwhelmed by the face in the painting; it seems to be intently studying us as we are studying him. All of Close's work from this period has this feeling, as if the head has become an entity of its own detached from the identity of the artist and is almost threatening.

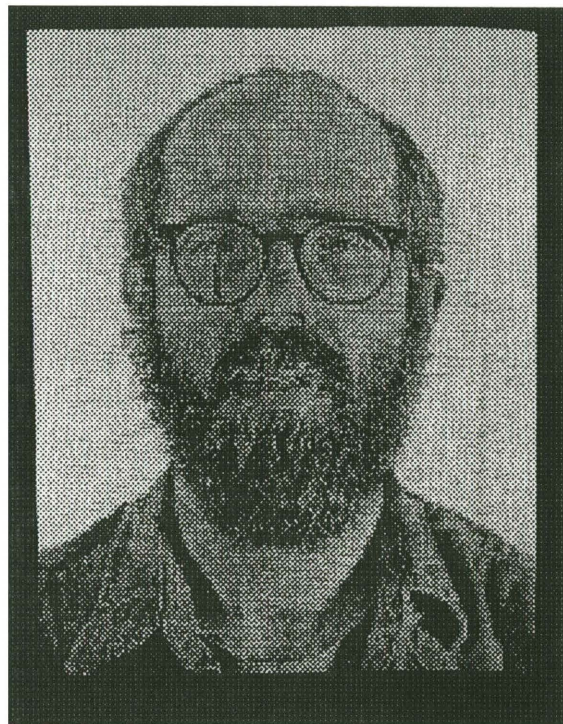


Figure 16. Chuck Close, Self-Portrait/White Ink, 1978. Etching with Aquatint and engraving, 44 3/4 x 35 3/4 in., Collection of the Artist.

Could the women artists discussed have presented themselves in their work in the same manner as Chuck Close? Would a realistic view of Ana Mendieta's neck and face relayed the same messages to the viewer as her earth/body works did? Even if she had attempted to convey the same meaning as Close does in his work, simple views of Mendieta's face would not create the same feelings as Close's self-portraits do. Once again, we would be tangled in the old images of appearance and the hidden meanings that a woman's face might carry. As a

society we like to believe that we are beyond certain gender-related preconceptions, but they are as ingrained into our psyches as our realization of the physical differences between men and women. Our preconceptions are ingrained by hundreds of years of inscribed roles and misconceptions of our gender's place in society.

There are many women artists who create realistic mirror images of themselves. Women have no problem seeing themselves as they appear, but how the viewer will feel about women's images and how the individual image will be interpreted is beyond the control of the creator. To lessen this ambiguity, women artists have felt they must place their own image into some type of situation which creates a role within their work. This role can be mother, artist, or any other character she may chose, or it may be utilizing her own image in some way to influence the interpretation of the viewer. If she creates the role for her own image she will be seen as she desires. She is safe from misinterpretation and is free to speak as she pleases.

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