



# Myself

A SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY SELF-PORTRAITURE



University of Nevada, Reno



# ***Myself***

A SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY SELF-PORTRAITURE

**SHEPPARD FINE ARTS GALLERY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO**

January 18 – February 18, 2011

---

CURATED BY

**Marjorie Vecchio, PhD**

PREFACE

**Jeremy Stern, MFA Candidate 2011**

as invited by Howard Rosenberg, Chair, Art Department

ESSAY CONVERSATION

**Joy Garnett and Mira Schor**

---

The exhibition and catalogue is dedicated to the memory of amazing  
young artists Emma Bee Bernstein and Devin Hosselkus.

# A CONVERSATION ABOUT SELF-PORTRAITURE

JOY GARNETT & MIRA SCHOR

JOY GARNETT: I'm trying to remember my last intentional self-portrait; I probably painted it years ago, when I was an art student living in another country. I was learning to express myself in a new language (French), which presented a real challenge for me when defending my work during weekly crits. The whole process, now that I look back on it, was an elaborate self-exploration not unlike self-portraiture, and there was some hunger and deep need involved in this. I routinely made self-portraits back then, incorporating them into still lifes and other kinds of compositions. There was the business of keeping 'likeness' intact, which seemed so important, it was part of the development of a certain kind of acuity that leads past surfaces: tracking the exigencies of the self through likeness. These things were so important to me then!

Lately I have been thinking of the whole process of making art as a kind of self-portraiture, a performance where one repeatedly discovers and renders threads of the self on the spot while working...

MIRA SCHOR: Self-portraiture was an important part of my work at its beginnings. I always say that by the time I left graduate school my agenda was to bring my experience of living inside a female body – with a mind -- into high art in as intact a form as possible. My first interpretation of that was to place a depiction of my body into a narrative and landscape structure. I was doing work somewhat in the genre of Florine Stettheimer just around the time I learned of her work (that is to say, I got to a place and then found out she had gotten there too as had several other important women artists of the surrealist period). My next interpretation was to replace the recognizable self-portrait with a trace of self: my handwriting and diaristic writing as image and subject. In the '80s and '90s my work turned more towards representation of the politically gendered body and of political and theoretical language

– so instead of writing that had a diaristic function my paintings represented the word "painting" or "sign" or "trace" or, in one case, the letters that spelled out "personal writing". So certainly not conventional self-portraiture yet emerging from a consciousness of my "self" as a character in the game art or the game life.

In the past three or four years I've actually turned back towards a kind of self-portraiture, sometimes abstracted, sometimes figurative though not traditionally representational, more like a figure that is an avatar of self.

But because I have this close experience of types of self-portraiture I also can be quite critical of artists who use self-portraiture as a default and unfortunately who just aren't that interesting! There's a particularly contemporary wrinkle to this: just like painters may draw themselves because they are the only model who will sit still long enough, now young artists turn the video camera on themselves doing some task or something to their body. I often find that such work can become insular and kind of boringly generic, the opposite of what you hope for in self-portraiture, and I start to long for the reach of cinema, of fiction used to create a structure, a more complex, layered, exteriorization of thought and experience. So looking at the umpteenth variant of what was interesting (and structured) in early Joan Jonas or Yoko Ono, I crave Kurosawa and Ozu, Truffaut and Godard. Think of Toshiro Mifune as a kind of second identity for Kurosawa, or "Antoine Doine/Jean-Pierre Leaud" as a fictionalized Truffaut and Leaud, again, as a slightly more innocent variant of Godard.

JG: I love Florine Stettheimer...! and I agree with you about what can happen when young artists endlessly turn the camera on themselves. There's a fine line -- or maybe not so fine! -- between propagating a narcissistic 'reality' type spectacle and putting

CHANTAL GERVAIS

*Étude #2 de la série "Les maux non dits"*

inkjet print mounted on Plexiglas

24 x 31 in, 2008

