

Concealments and Revelations in the Self-Portraits of Female Painters

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“Le donne son venute in eccellenza
Di ciascun’ arte or’ hanno posto cura.”
Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, Canto XX, Stanza 2

This essay provides a general introduction on the nature of female self-portraiture in painting from the sixteenth century to the present, as depicted by Sofonisba Anguissola’s *Self Portrait* of 11552 (Boston Museum of Fine Arts) and Lavinia Fontana’s *Self Portrait* of 1595 (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Fig. 1), in contemporary painters Howardena Pindell’s *Autobiography* of 1980 (Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, Fig. 2), and Julie Heffernan’s *Self Portrait* of 2000 (Artist’s Private Collection, Fig. 3).

Although my focus is on self-portraits of female painters, I will compare and contrast female self-portraits with male self portraits of the same era, to show that 1) there are no differences between the female and male creative minds, and 2) there are different themes in female self-portraits that are not found in male self-portraits, in terms of maternity, abortion, and aspects of puberty transformation

The portrait can be defined as "a human image, individualized by physiognomic specification, subjected to artistic and psychological interpretation, presented as a work of art, and affected by the changing circumstances of perception"¹: or as the image of "the absent...made present to their friends, the dead...seen by the living many centuries later."² There are a number of factors that must be considered in analyzing a portrait in order to comprehend its full meaning. For example, the identity of the person represented and the motive for painting the work must be considered. The role of the background of the work and the period in which it was painted is another factor. The setting, attire, coiffure, ornamentation, gestures and expression reflect the taste and style of the era.

The context of the portrait is also important: it may serve as an introduction of a young woman or man to a potential spouse, a glorification of a monarch or hero, a *memento mori* or likeness of own who has died. The portrait may embody a claim to kinship or friendship, an advertisement of an artist's skill, or a demonstration that the artist is up-to-date on the latest modes of dress and symbols of gentility.

¹Lana De Girolami Cheney, ed., *Self-Portraits by Female Painters* (Washington, DC: New Academia, 2010); Liana De Girolami Cheney, ed. *Essays on Women Artists: "The Most Excellent"* (London/New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 2 Vols.; Ernest Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), a fundamental book on the links between the legend of the artist in all cultures and the human psyche. See also Richard Brilliant, "On Portraits," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 16 (1971), pp. 11-26, and Wendy Slatkin, *Women Artists in History: From Antiquity to the Present* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Publishers, 2005), for a general overview of female art.

²Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture: The Latin Texts of 'De Pictura' and 'De Statua'*, ed. trans. Cecil Grayson (London, 1972), p. 61.

Other aspects to consider when viewing a portrait are the representations and expressions of the sitters and the reactions of viewers to the image. Has the painter created, for example, a likeness, a counterfeit or an idealized image of the sitter, a painting with hidden symbolism or the declaration of the subject's allegiance to a cause or principal? What is the function of the portrait? Who commissioned it and why? These are only a few of the questions that can be raised regarding portraiture.

Problems of interpretation, identification and attribution are always a challenge in art history, and they are even more so with portraits. The portrait, like all art, is bound to history and its social conventions. Its stylistic and conventional representation escapes the temporal and spatial limitations it is, at once, a portrayal of the past, present and future. Despite questions of objective and subjective resemblance, it is judged, first and foremost, as a work of art.

When looking at a portrait, the viewer is interested in understanding the hidden clues or attributes provided by the artist. Some portraits contain actual writing, an inscription that explains or complements the visual image, such as found in Catherina van Hemessen's *Self-Portrait* of 1546 (Öffentliche Kunstsammlung in Basel) or in Albrecht Dürer's *Self-Portrait* of 1495. Role playing in portraiture can refer to a literary text outside the painting itself, such as in Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait* of 1530-40 (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden) and Lavinia Fontana's *Self-Portrait* of 1595 (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Fig. 1).

Signs or symbols (iconography) are employed by painters, especially in a painter's self-portrait; e.g., the mirror used by the sitter may become an attribute of the personification of Art or Painting, such as seen in Annibale Carracci's *Self-Portrait on an Easel* of 1600 (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) and Artemisia Gentileschi's *Allegory of Painting* of 1620 (Queen's Picture Gallery, London). The sitter might be engaged in playing the piano, sewing or painting denoting her occupation, for example, Lavinia Fontana, *Self-Portrait at the Clavichord* of 1577 (Accademia di San Luca, Rome) and Sofonisba Anguissola's *Self-Portrait at the Easel* of 1556 (Muzeum Zamek, Lancut).

Views of involvement vie for attention in the portrait, e.g., the artist's own involvement, his or her view of the sitter, and the sitter's desire of how he or she wishes to be portrayed. The finished portrait can be seen as a record of what compromises were reached in the commission. The artist has the power of artistic skill, and the sitter, the power of the purse to assert his or her own viewpoint. Successful portraitists must know how to make sitters look their best; otherwise, potential patrons will ignore them.

In self-portraits, however, these issues are irrelevant. The variety of functions of a portrait or self-portrait is intriguing. The most common type of portrait was commissioned, and the self-portrait is no exception, as demonstrated in the collection of self-portraits for the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, the Accademia of San Luca in Rome, the Académie de France, the Académie Royal in Paris, the Royal Academy of Arts in London, the Academy of the Arts in Vienna, and National Portrait Galleries in London and Washington, D.C.

Before the 17th century, fathers' trained female artists. In the 17th and 18th centuries by their female artists and mentors, in the 19th century, the various academies of the arts permitted female

artists to draw, first separating the genders, and later in the 20th century, and today this division was no longer valid.

The self-portrait is a unique work of art, an intimate record of a sitter's personality. It is an acknowledgement of worth, an exercise in technique, and a denominator of era, style and likeness. It is a revelation and a confession. It can be a study in expression or a document in a history of aging. In sum, the self-portrait is far more than a likeness, although that aspect is clearly important. It is a declaration of who the painter is and how he or she wants to be seen: the persona, a personification by the depiction of attributes; an occupation demonstrated by the depiction of materials used in the profession—pencils, brushes, color pigments, a surface, and, of course, a mirror—are employed. Dependence on the mirror presents the painter with a challenging dilemma, since the reflected image is reversed. Unless the artist uses a second mirror to right the reversal, the self-portrait is, in a sense, a counterfeit (Figs 1 and 4).

In Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek, Etruscan and Roman times polished metal "mirrors" provided only indistinct reflections. Although the face can be mirrored in smooth water, as with Narcissus, leaning over a pool to see one's features is hardly a convenient posture for painting. Once careful observation was introduced in self-representation, artists began to analyze and judge their creations, providing a self-referential and auto-criticism that contributed to the intellectual, spiritual and psychological self-imaging.

Another factor to consider in trying to trace early self-portraiture is the role of the mirror in producing a likeness of the artist challenging nature "to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."³ The mirror provided the painter with an invaluable image, the reflection of the self, which the artist used to immortalize the self. Until its manufacture in Venice around 1300, the glass mirror, as we know it today did not exist.⁴ Venetian glass mirrors were circular similarly to the French ivory mirrors. In the thirteen-century in Paris, mirrors were produced with two reflecting surfaces: clear glass or polished metals for mirroring the recto beautifully decorated with an ivory setting on the verso.⁵ In the polished metal mirrors of Egyptian times, it was very difficult to see oneself clearly. The only alternative was a reflection in still, dark water, and, aside from the possible distortion of the image, the posture of bending over a pool is not conducive to producing a work of art. Then artists before the invention of the mirror lacked an essential tool to create an accurate self-image a significant reason why there are so few self-portrayals from antiquity and the Early Christian and Medieval periods.

There are many self-portraits by female painters that represent competent and interesting presentations. In studying self-portraits, one dilemma that plagues researchers is whether the

³W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, III, ii, 19-20.

⁴It is interesting to note that in ancient China the idea of the mirror was registered on oracle bones and bronzes in the eleventh century BCE. See Eugene Yuejin Wang, "Mirror, Death, and Rhetoric: Reading Later Han Chinese Bronze Artifacts," *Art Bulletin* LXXVI (September 1994), pp. 511-34.

⁵Paul Williamson, et al, *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Institute of the Arts, 1997), for ivory mirrors illustrations, and Brigitte Buettner, "Circular Arguments," a paper presented at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, May 8, 1997, where she discusses the splendors of ivory mirrors in the thirteen-century in France, making them the best selling item.

painting is actually a self-portrait. Obviously, one way of identifying a self-portrait is by noting its title. But while titles such as "Self-Portrait," "Portrait of the Artist" and the various translations of the concepts are a good beginning, the acceptance of such titles does not guarantee that a given painting is an authentic self-portrait, since owners, art dealers, sellers, and recorders of inventories, wills and other documents have often invented titles to promote their own interests. Compounding the dilemma, discrepancies often occur in nomenclature. To remedy such attribution problems, it is useful to compare when possible an artist's other self-portraits to the painting at hand or portraits of the artist by contemporaries.⁶ Another way to aid in determining the authenticity of a self-portrait is by comparing it to a physical likeness of the artist, as revealed by commemorative medals, engravings, photographs, or written descriptions or records of the artist.

Still another source of identification can be the artistic and critical writings of contemporary artists, theoreticians and travelers, such as the ancient Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*,⁷ Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*,⁸ the Mannerist Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the most excellent painters, sculptors and architects*,⁹ and Karel van Mander's *Dutch and Flemish Painters*.¹⁰

Female self-portraits are as complex as the society in which they lived. Their intimate revelations as exposed to the viewer include the desire to be discovered, appreciated, and admired for themselves as human beings and for their creativity and inventiveness, and beauty. This incorporates physical, intellectual and spiritual beauty, as well as the many psychological and social roles they experience. By observing themselves as objects of beauty and admiration, female painters expand their role as creators of life into artistic creators. If a self-portrait is painted by the artist for herself and not for a patron, it portrays the female interest in assertion and self-advertisement, as seen in Sofonisba Anguissola's *Self Portrait* of 1552 (Boston Museum of Fine Arts) and Lavinia Fontana's *Self Portrait* of 1595 (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Fig. 1).

The self-portrait begins as an image of the creative process. The image of the painter (*naturam imitandam esse*—nature imitates herself) recorded in the ancient writings may be regarded as an acquisition of classical culture and connoisseurs, an era where only the names of Greek painters are known.¹¹ Following Plato's theory of art as *mimesis* (mimic or parody), as the imitation of nature, self-portraits of ancient painters can be seen as artists' copies of nature, and, therefore, their self-images are imitations and not the original of the self.¹² The painted image,

⁶After 1839, of course, with the assistance of artists' photographs, the identification is readily available, but in many cases this source does not exist.

⁷Translation from *Naturalis historiae*, 79, AD, Book 35.

⁸Translation by Earl Jeffrey Richards with a foreword by Marina Warner (New York: Persea Books, 1982).

⁹Translation from *Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori*, Florence, 1550 first edition, 1568 enlarged second edition with woodcuts portraits.

¹⁰Translation from *Het Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem, 1603-4, first edition or 1618, second edition), by Constant van de Wall (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

¹¹Kris and Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, p. 5.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 39.

self-portrait, too, is a magic creation, as seen in the paintings of Zeuxis, Apelles, Marcia and Timarete, then, the painter might be considered a magician.

In the Middle Ages, the self-portrait was rooted in the biblical tradition and the process of divine creation, *Deus artifex–divino artista*, and representation.¹³ The dual characterization of the artist, at once both admirable and dangerous, was reflected in the medieval theory of art, where the magic quality of the self-image remained mythified, and where a capricious, but benevolent ruler became the Creator in the Judeo-Christian concept, God. God, then, was the first painter and invented the first self-portrait. Examples can be seen in Christ's self-imaging in Veronica's veil and in the appearances of the Virgin to Saint Luke.

In both the Renaissance and Mannerism eras, the notion that the self-portrait reflects God's artistry passed into the artistry of Nature. The artist's virtuosity became regarded as *artista divino* (divine artist), demonstrating the superiority of the artist, as exemplified by Leonardo and Michelangelo. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the admiration for *nature as artist* extended even to the practice of art itself, as honored by the academies. The ways in which the artist either borrowed from Nature or improved upon it, was of particular concern in the eighteenth century, serving as a basis for theoretical discourses.

The representation of identifying art with sister arts or the principle "ut pictura poesis" ("as is painting, so is poetry") derives from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, with painting and poetry as sister arts.¹⁴ With the interest in Greek culture, this allegorical parallelism (*paragone*) was appropriated and assimilated in the Renaissance and Mannerist periods,¹⁵ reiterated and elaborated during the Baroque era,¹⁶ and continued on into the eighteenth century.

In portraying themselves artists' first love is the self (Figs. 1-4). The representation of the artists' love for their model is seen in Corinthian maiden. While the traditional image of the painter is male, legend proclaims it was a Corinthian woman who invented portraiture, when, in her pain of separation from her lover, she drew his likeness with a piece of charcoal on her father's studio wall. Later, Pygmalion's love for his carved statue, Galatea, became a romantic subject in the nineteenth century. In the 20th century, with the impact of the psychological theories of Freud and Jung, the self-portrait became a revelation for the unseeing and seeing personality of the painter, society and the cosmic consciousness (Figs. 2, 3 and 5-8).

Thus, it is a matter of significance to examine how female painters of the sixteenth century were viewed and recognized during their era, as illustrated in engravings and commemorative medals, as well as how female artists thought about themselves. The significance of this topic occurs on three levels: How did female painters reveal themselves to the viewer? What persona did these artists assume and why? And how did these self-portraits provide new insight about the artists' conception of themselves as creators?

¹³Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁴Horace on the Art of Poetry, ed. and trans. by Edward Henry Blakeney (New York: Freeport, 1970).

¹⁵Norman E. Land, *The Viewer as Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press) and Leatrice Mendelsohn, *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi's "Due Lezzioni" and Cinquecento Art Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982).

¹⁶Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967).

This study is concerned with the function of female self-portraiture in the 20th century as a source of revelation, not merely signature, for such works. It is not an exercise in iconographical reference, but rather an interpretation or statement of the artist's character and self-definition and her relationship to her milieu.¹⁷

In comparatively analyzing the self-portraits of male artists with those of their female counterparts in the sixteenth century, it can be observed that both are concerned with portraying themselves as inventors and creators, that is to say, as artists. Therefore, the concept of persona emerges as the same for both genders, reflecting the impact of the revival of classical values on the individual and the Neoplatonic philosophy of the Renaissance, which provided a nurturing atmosphere for humanistic awareness of the self.¹⁸ However, the difference between self-portraits of male and female artists depends on the presentation of the occupation or interest of the individual - male or female.¹⁹ Self-portraits of male artists focus on status or specific occupation, whereas self-portraits of female artists add this educational or cultural accomplishment.²⁰ For example, the female artist is rendered as a musician, a poetess, a teacher or a collector (Fig. 1).

In the 16th century, female artist expands her role as natural creators (nurturers) into that of artistic creator by observing herself as an object of beauty and admiration.²¹ Since the self-

¹⁷Recently several books have appeared on Renaissance women painters, for example, Vera Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana, 1552-1614* (Milan: Electa, 1994); Mina Gregori, ed. *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle* (Milan: Leonardo Arte, 1994); Valeria Moretti, *Le più belle del reale* (Rome: Nouva Editrice Spada, 1993); Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, *Sofonisba Anguissola* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992); M. T. Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana Bolognese*, (Milan: J. Sapi, ed., 1989); Flavio Caroli, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1987); Nancy G. Heller, *Women Artists: An Illustrated History* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987); Charity C. Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984); Anna Banti, *Quando anche le donne si misero a dipingere* (Milan: La Tartaruga Edizioni, 1982); the pioneer work of M. Masciotta, *Autoritratti* (Milan: Electa, 1955); Liana De Girolami Cheney, ed., *Self-Portraits by Female Painters* (Washington, DC: New Accademia, 2010); and Liana De Girolami Cheney, ed., *Women Artists: "The Most Excellent Women Artists,"* 2 vols (London/New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003).

¹⁸John Pope-Hennessy, "Humanism and the Portrait," in *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), pp. 64-100, and Jean Alzard, *The Florentine Portrait* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 221-27.

¹⁹L. M. Sleptzoff, "Men or Supermen," in *The Italian Portrait in the Fifteenth Century* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1978), pp. 126-39; Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: the gaze, the eye, the profile in Renaissance Portraiture," *History Workshop Journal*, 1988, pp. 4-29, with an excellent bibliography; and, Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers, ed., *Rewriting the Renaissance, The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Catherina King, "Looking a Sight: Sixteenth-Century Portraits of Woman Artists," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 59, 3, 1995, pp. 381-407.

²⁰Pope-Hennessy, "The Cult of Personality," in *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, pp. 3-63 and Gottfried Boehm, *Bildnis und Individuum (Über den Ursprung der Porträtmalerei in der italienischen Renaissance)* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1985).

²¹For the theory of female beauty in Italian Renaissance art, see Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women: Parmigianino, Petrarchismo and the Vernacular Style," *Art Bulletin*, 58, 1976, pp. 374-94; Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Differences in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 175-90; Mary Rogers, "The Decorum of Women's Beauty: Trissino, Firenzuola, Luigini and the Representation of Women in Sixteenth-Century Painting," *Renaissance Studies*, 2, 1988, pp. 47-87; and, Agnolo Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women, 1548*, trans. and ed. by Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

portrait is painted by the artist for herself and not for a patron, it portrays a female interest in self-gratification and self-aggrandizement.

The Renaissance (Quattrocento and Cinquecento) notion of woman depended on the ancient perception and definition of "femina: imperfectior mare (woman: inferior male)," or in vulgate texts equivalent to the words *mulier* (wife) and *femina* (woman). In this era, the idea of female inferiority continued its previous long history, although Humanism did much to enhance the dignity of man, was long in liberating the "man foemine" from her subordinate status.²²

Most artists in the early Renaissance came from an artisan or working-class background and were members of guilds. Since documentation of female participation in the guilds is not yet clearly demonstrated, it is reasonable to assume for now that the guild regulations in Italy excluded women from membership. In Florence, though, during the reign of the Medici in 1530s, we see the involvement of women in the labor force, in particular in the textile industry as men shifted employment to luxury crafts, involving ceramics, books, jewelry and furniture for export to European aristocracy.²³

At the same time that women were excluded from the labor force, they were praised for their domestic feminine skills, painting, playing an instrument, spinning wool and flax, needlework, and housekeeping. This new type of ideology during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries created by the aristocracy promulgated domestic confinement for the women painter. "All the advances of Renaissance Italy, its proto-capitalist economy, its states, and its humanistic culture, worked to mold the noblewoman into an aesthetic object; decorous, chaste, and doubly dependent on her husband as well as prince,"²⁴ and the father, we may add. Women's legal rights remained limited.

In general fathers or husbands administered matters and made decisions. For most women of all classes, marriage and motherhood were expected roles. If convent life was not chosen, then marriages were arranged by parents as an economic contract or alliance between families or countries. The importance of female chastity was a prerequisite, regardless of class structure, for any contractual marriage. Almost all sixteenth century treatises on women praised and view them as chaste and obedient wives. Paradoxically, on the one hand the female artist, usually of the upper class, was encouraged to be gentle, passive, docile, and delicate, while on the other hand, she was required to be an educated person.

In the beginning of the fifteenth century (Quattrocento), a few humanist scholars influenced the education of a small group of noblewomen, at first in the courts of Italy, then

²²Ian MacLean, *The Renaissance notion of woman: A study in the fortunes of scholasticism and medical science in European intellectual life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 92, and 6; P. R. Ackroyd, ed. *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1063-70), III, pp. 79-93, 213-17; and, Baldassare Castiglione, *Il cortegiano (The Book of the Courtier)* (Venice 1528), Book 3, for a dialogue discussion for and against female inferiority.

²³Judith Brown, "Woman's Place was in the Home: Women's Work in Renaissance Tuscany," in Margaret W. Ferguson, et al., (eds) *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourse of Differences in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 209.

²⁴Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, eds. *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), pp. 160-61.

spreading throughout Europe. These noblewomen included Laura Cereta and Isotta Nogarola, who achieved fame for their learning²⁵ as well as Maria Ormani in Italy and Levina Bening Teerling in Northern Europe, were known for their painting. But at the same time among the men there was a competitive feared of her intellectual education. A popular comment was: "nothing must be allowed in the training of her mind that would encourage or enable her to compete on even ground with men."²⁶ For her education, as Patricia Simon explains, "even though restricted, did not consist only of being a skilled and domestic wife but also in fostering the instruction in religious principles women's virtuosity, such as moral beauty, but as well in counseling in aesthetic beauty such as learning to read, in particular, the classics, write, paint, play an instrument, and attend to her physical appearance—thus, creating internally and externally a *bella figura* (a beautiful form, Fig. 1)".²⁷

Self-portraits of female Renaissance artists distinguish themselves in the history of portraiture by the emphasis on the self-image as an object of beauty; by the emphasis place upon that a single image portraying the artist's occupation; by the repetition or serial depiction of the self-image represented in drawing and painting; and, by the representation of the female artist as a educated *nobil donna* and humanist. These women's self-portraits give access to the viewer to a personal situation in which we see the female artist at close quarters from a privileged position in the place of the artist, and through her own eyes, the female artist portrays herself, out of curiosity, to explore both her outer and inner image. The Renaissance self-portraits are a contrast as well as a prelude to the daring 19th century and 20th century self-portraiture as seen in Rolinda Sharpless's *Self-Portrait* of 1820 (Art City Gallery and Museum, Bristol, UK, Fig. 5), a self-imaging with her mother, teacher and mentor; Suzanne Valadon's *Abandoned Doll* of 1921 (National Museum of Women's Art, Washington, DC, Fig. 6), imaging herself with her mother during her puberty phase and its transformation; Paola Rego's *Rabbit (Telling her Parents of her Pregnancy)* of 1938 (Artist's Private Collection, Fig. 7), a painting announcing to her parents that she with child and unmarried, a violation of proper woman's conduct in a Christian society; and Catherina Murphy, *Self-Portrait–Pregnancy* of 1970 (Fourcade Droll Collection in New York, Fig. 8), one of the first self-portraits depicting a self as a pregnant female in front of an easel. In sum, the self-portraits of Renaissance female painters provide the viewer with another level of aesthetic awareness, beauty, and artistic excellence through the manifestation of the self, while the modern and contemporary self-portraits depict the female predicament and vicissitudes in a woman's world. Traditional aesthetic beauty, intellectual and artistic accomplishments are

²⁵Margared L. King, "Books Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance," in Patricia Labalme, ed. *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), no pagination. See also Mary Beth Rose, ed. *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspective* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986),

²⁶Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana, ILL: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 77, see also p. 59.

²⁷Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds. *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 39-45, Jordi Vigué, *Great women Masters of Art* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 2002), pp. 30-32; and Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), Chapter 13.

substituted with aesthetic realism, practical literary and artistic survival in modern and contemporary depiction of self-imaging.

The history female self-portraiture demonstrates how many female artists treated this genre throughout the ages. Obviously, significant variations in style and technique among the female painters of history exist. These images are of the individual artist's time and place as well as of her social and political status. Nevertheless, their interest in self-portraiture remains constant from the earliest recorded instances up until the present. What establishes the unique quality that the viewing public can derive from viewing these works is the fact that the self-portraitist always must emerge as one who projects the integrity, veracity and awareness of the universal connection between art, medium and artist.

From the beginning female's self-portrait artists express their quintessential uniqueness. She concerns herself with the establishment of her physical beauty and the beauty of her soul. Both of these qualities are essentially societal perspectives and derive from established societal and aesthetic values (Fig. 1). By Modernism and Postmodernism, the artist has liberated herself from such society-imposed constructs and constraints. She now comments on her society from a more gender-aware, psychological plane (Figs. 2, 3 and 5-8). It is however, important to stress here that female self-portraiture is not limited by gender-related dictates and dictum because, above all else, the desire of artists to bond themselves with their art, so that they can leave an understandable legacy for posterity prevails over developed perceptions.

The 20th century modes of self-imaging has a time of constantly evolving new styles, with one following another in rapid succession as if they were tied to the increasing speed of production and technological innovation. Fauvism, German Expressionism, Cubism, Orphism, Purism, Non-Objective Art, Dadaism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Op Art, Minimalism, Photo-Realism, Feminist Art, Neo-Expressionism, Post-Modernism, and Neo-Geo have all played out in the drama of conflicting styles and ambitions in the course of the century.²⁸ This diversity of styles can also be found in female artists' self-representations.

One of the difficulties in presenting 20th century and 21st century self-portraiture is that there is a general lack of portraiture and figuration in its avant-garde art. Although there are abstract works specifically labeled self-portraits by their creators, in general abstract art in its many varieties does not encourage self-portraiture. Artists may also be limited by their chosen subject matter, which excludes figurative representations such as landscapes and still-lives of Georgia O'Keeffe. An artist whose primary interest falls outside figurative reference or representation is less likely to do a self-portrait or self-representation of significance.

In spite of this, great variety and innovation prevail in female artists' self-portraiture in the 20th and 21st centuries. During the first decades of both eras, old and new styles co-exist, as witnessed by a Pre-Raphaelite portrait of Kate Bunce as *Melody* of 1897 (Birmingham Museum

²⁸Wendy Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), Chapters on Modern and Postmodern Art; Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-Portraits* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998); Liz Rideal, ed., *Mirror, Mirror: Self-Portraits by Women Artists* (London: Watson-Guption Publisher, 2002); and Nancy Heller, *Women Artists* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2003 revised edition), for a discussion on modernism and contemporary female's art.

and Art Gallery, UK) close in time to German Expressionist self-portraits of Paula Modersohn-Becker, Gabriele Muntet and Marianne Werefkin. The understated reticence of Gwen John's *Self-Portrait* of 1900-1905 (Tate Gallery, London) is in the same time span as Suzanne Valadon's unorthodox portrait with her lover and later husband André Utter as *Adam and Eve* of 1909 (Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris), while Cecilia Beaux's Edwardian elegance *Self-Portrait* of 1894 (National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC) is countered by a Cubist *Self-Portrait* of 1917 (National Museum of Women's Art, Washington, DC) by Alice Bailly.

All the movements of 20th century art are represented in female's self-portraits with Marie Laurencin's *Self-Portrait with Picasso, Apollinaire and Others* of 1908 (MoMA), Vanessa Bell's Bloomsbury *Self-Portrait* of 1915 (National Portrait Gallery, London), Lyubov Popova's Russian Constructivist self-portrait drawing, German Expressionist portraits by Käthe Kollwitz, Dadaist collages by Hannah Hoch, and Surrealist visionary portraits by Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, Meret Oppenheim, Leonor Fini, Frida Kahlo and Marianne von Recklinghausen Bowles.²⁹ Self-portraits by Lee Krasner, Elaine De Kooning and Grace Hartigan show their representational work before their later Abstract Expressionist canvases.

This is also a period of serial self-portraits extending over a continuing life history in the emotional works of Käthe Kollwitz, Paula Modersohn-Becker and Frida Kahlo especially, where the artists reveal different personae and physical characteristics. The self-portrait becomes less of a quest for likeness and more of a vehicle for self-exploration and experimentation. The tragedy of war and the disintegration of Germany's social and economic fabric is revealed in Käthe Kollwitz' drawings, prints and sculpture, while the personal tragedies of Kahlo's life unfold in her self-portrait imagery. In this era, there are also significant self-portraits by African American artists, such as Elizabeth Catlett and Lois Mailou Jones, which combine different media in their representations, including prints and sculptures.

In contemporary art and presently in 21st century art, the greatest latitude for self-portrayal is evident, from abstract configurations to photographically realistic work, namely, in Pop Art, Photo-Realism, and Post-Modernism. Many break troughs in representation exist, with daring and unconventional views of female artists and artists' personae (Figs. 2, 3 and 7 and 8).

In this time span unusual self-portraits are seen by older artists such as Alice Neel's nude *Self-Portrait* of 1980 (National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC), or the dramatic depiction of the self as body part as in Kiki Smith, *Symbolic Self-Portrait* of 1992 (Guggenheim, Bilbao)³⁰ and Ana Mendieta employing her own body as a vehicle to identify with nature as in *Tree of Life* of 1976 (Collection of the Artist) and *Goddess of the Wind* of 1977 (Mari and James A. Michener and The Judith Rothschild Foundation, 1999). Postmodernist painters such as Audrey Flack's Photo-Realism self-portraits show the transition from photographic likeness to symbolic representations in *Queen* of 1975 (Meisel Family Collection, NY) and other vanities still-lives. In Barbara Chase-Riboud's abstract sculpture, *Confessions for Myself* of 1972 (University Art

²⁹Wendy Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Marianne von Recklinghausen Bowles' Symbolic Triptychs," in Cheney, ed. *Most Excellent Artists*, pp. 107-23.

³⁰Joyce Cohen, "Kiki Smith's Scissors, Paste and Fire," in Cheney, ed., *Most Excellent Artists*, pp. 125-42.

Museum at Berkeley, CA), hard and soft materials co-exist, both in actuality and in a symbolic juxtaposition of the traditions of African and Western cultures.

Postmodernist and Contemporary artists offer a totally new adaptations of the self-portrait in such representations as Elizabeth Murray's compressed shaped canvas of 1983, *More Than You Know* (MoMA), which has both autobiographical elements and art historical references, including a reference to Eduard Munch's *Scream* of 1898 inserted in her cubistic collage. Mythological identifications are made in art of the present in such works as Susan Boulet's *Amazon Moon* of 1989 (Artist's Private Collection) where myths of the past are both re-interpreted and re-integrated into the art of female today. Furthermore, Feminist self-portrait imagery becomes a revelation as evident in Yolanda M. Lopez's *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe* of 1978 (Collection of the Artist) as well as in the use of nontraditional materials in the self-portraits of Howardena Pindell's *Self-Portrait as Water/Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* of 1979, 1988 (Wadsworth Athenaeum of Art, Hartford, CT, Fig. 2.), combines both abstract and figurative elements that explore the artist's history and experiences in her *Autobiography* series.

The era of Postmodernism has encouraged great variety in materials, in stylistic references, and in unorthodox presentations. Unlike the Modernist period, which endorsed one style of art such as Cubism or Abstract Expressionism, Post-Modernism has been characterized by a variety of types of expression and openness to diversity. This has encouraged multi-cultural and multi-ethnic art, and has given female artists more visibility. Still it is difficult for female artists to get gallery representations or to equal male artists' incomes. But it has been acknowledged in answer to Linda Nochlin's famous 1971, "Why have There Been No Great Women Artists?" that, in spite of discrimination against women in art education, exhibition opportunities, patronage, and social expectations of the role of women, there have been many great female artists.³¹ They have originated stylistic change and inspired followers and imitators.

The expansion of the definition of art that is characteristic of the contemporary art climate has allowed for inclusion of entire new genres of art, many of which grow out of women's traditional art forms, such as weaving, fiber art, quilt making, stitching, and installations with domestic furnishings and props. Our ideas of what constitutes a self-portrait are evolving and changing, moving away from narrow forms of likeness to realms of imaginative reconstruction. In many of these areas women are at the very vanguard of the discourse. The mirror image takes on a meaning beyond narcissism into the dimension of inner explorations of self and psyche. In works such as Howardena Pindell's *Autobiography* of 1980 (Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT), and Julie Heffernan's *Self-Portrait*, 2000 (Artist's Collection, Fig. 3)³² series the viewer is included in the artist's experiences, history, fears, dreams, and hope. The female

³¹Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Westview, 1982); Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York; Harry N. Abrams, 1996); and Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, ed., *The Power of Feminist Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993).

self-portrait is no longer a mask, but rather a revelation, a sharing of the dark journeys of the spirit and the courage of the quest. Heffernan's *Self-Portraits* of 2000-2010 combine the quest of the creative and magic aspects of art, the subliminal inquiry on the psyche as well as the historicity of the past. In her paintings, Heffernan pays homage to Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527-1593)'s magical imagery, which captures the alchemical and emblematic symbolism of the court during the reign of the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolph II in Prague as seen in *Personification of Spring* 1570s (Musée du Louvre, Paris, Fig. 9).³³ Arcimboldo's whimsicality is transformed into phantasmagorical optical illusions of incongruous fantastic flora and fauna. Heffernan's *Self-Portraits* transform physical reality into metaphysical reality, where all is possible in a creative state.

Today in Contemporary Art, the Feminist Surrealist painters, such as Julie Heffernan, integrate imagery of the past with the complex culture of the 21st century. While tapping on the subconscious mind, the female self-portrait still reveals the power of the imagination and reveals the romantic nature of the individual, as well as the power of the female creativity.

Published by the Forum on Public Policy

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³²Mark Moore Gallery, *Julie Heffernan: What Holds Up?* (Santa Monica, CA: Mark Moore Gallery, 2007); Julie Heffernan, *Everything that Rises* (Albany, NY: University of Albany Art Museum, 2010); and Chris Al-Aswad, "Julie Heffernan's Posting in Escape into Life," 2010, <http://escapeintolife.com>

³³Liana De Girolami Cheney, *Giuseppe Arcimboldo: Magical Paintings* (Paris: Parkstone Press International, 2008).

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Fig. 1. Lavinia Fontana's *Self Portrait* of 1595

Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

Photo courtesy: Scala/ Art Resource, NY



Fig. 2. Howardena Pindell's *Autobiography* of 1980
Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT.
Photo courtesy: Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY

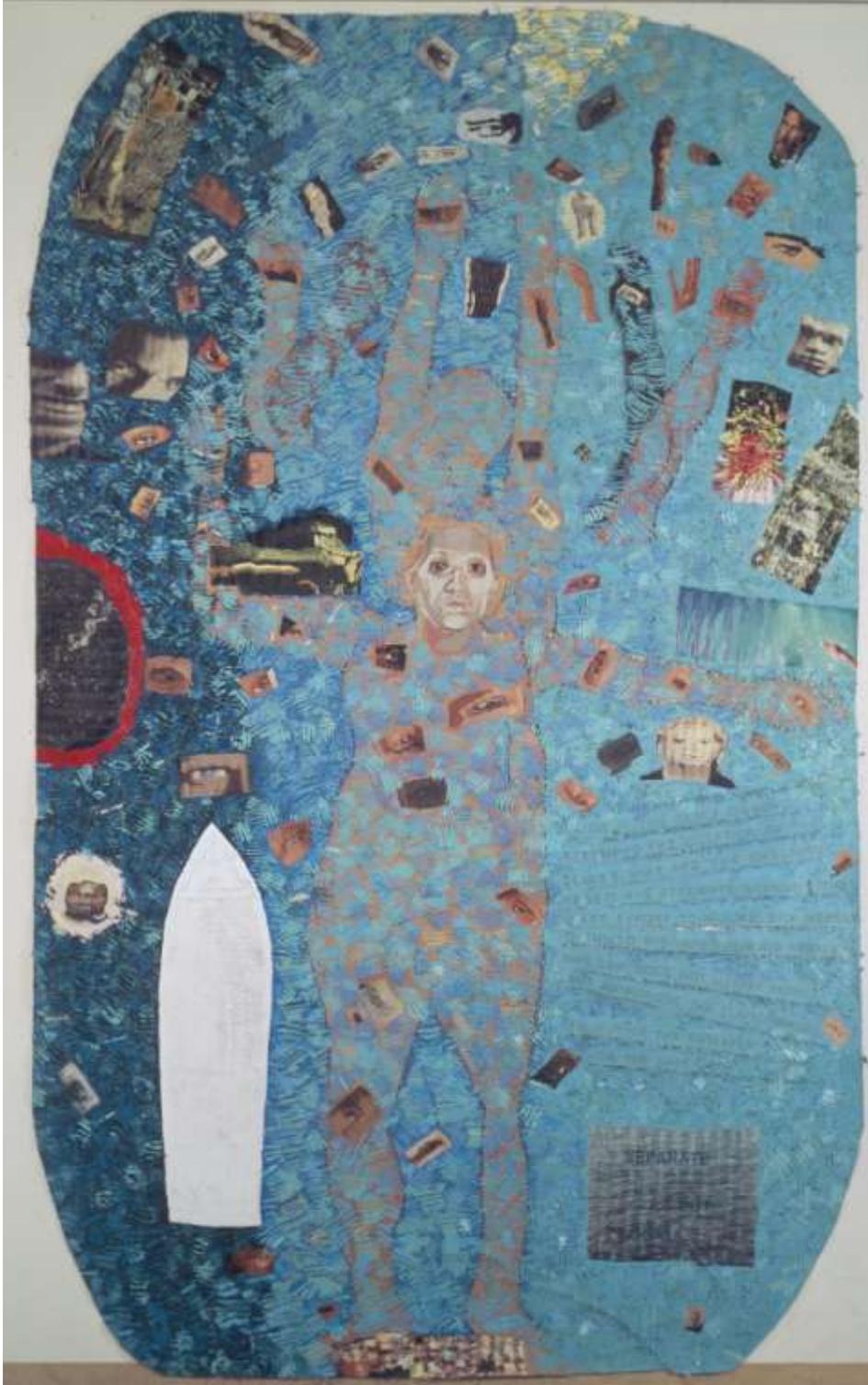


Fig. 3 Julie Heffernan's *Self Portrait* of 2000
Photo courtesy: Artist's Collection



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Photo courtesy: Eric Lessing/Art Resource, NY



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Photo courtesy: Art City Gallery and Museum, Bristol, UK



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Photo courtesy: National Museum of Women's Art, Washington, DC



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Photo courtesy: Flickr from Yahoo! Renzodionigi's photostream 25, 144.



Fig. 9. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Personification of Spring, 1570s
Musée du Louvre, Paris
Photo courtesy: RMN/Art Resource, NY

