Self
Imag(in)ing

marisa georgiou
kristian fracchia
chloe waters

(I)mage

The visual depiction of self is no new practice. Portraiture as an art form has a history thousands of years old, with the term 'self-portrait' arising in the 17th century. Driven by the Western pursuit of individualism, self-portraits have been a way for individuals, particularly those with wealth and status, to express their identity and position to the world. Originally dependent on the specialised skills of the artist, their use has been rapidly democratised through the development of technology such as the camera and other digital recording devices. Now in the digital age, with social media and the 'selfie', self-portraiture has again evolved.

A fundamental currency of online communication, self-portraiture underpins the way individuals connect and communicate on nearly all social media platforms. With profile pictures the point of contact, a weight has been placed on the individual to visually represent themselves with one image. A commodification of the self, these images function to sell each person's brand of individuality and thanks to complex algorithms, provide data about who they are and what they like and do, to companies and governments. Easily changeable, profile pictures offer individuals the opportunity to define and redefine themselves for online audiences again and again and again.

Self Imag(in)ing is an exhibition exploring contemporary self-portraiture in the digital age. Addressing themes of identity, gender and sexuality, the show draws together work from Brisbane artists, Marisa Georgiou, Kristian Fracchia and Chloe Waters. Reflecting on the perpetual reimaging and reimagining of identity, these artists reclaim the authority artists once had as the arbiters of visual identities, to unpack aspects of contemporary society's relationship with self-portraiture.

In Georgiou's work, *Afternoon Fountain Routine* (2016), a slow-motion video projection, the artist is seen performing as a water fountain. Cross-legged and poised, Georgiou fills her mouth with water flowing from the end of a garden hose, repeatedly spurting it out onto a collection of pot plants lining an urban balcony. Slowed down to a meditative pace, the performance, sexual in nature is more ritualistic than seductive. Georgiou's juxtaposition of the primal within the urban-domestic, highlights the way individuals fetishize and romanticize their relationship to nature in online profiles. Through this ironic ritualizing of the banal task of watering plants, Georgiou not only comments on an urban experience of nature, but takes a humourous glance at the way nature is curated by some individuals online.

Curation and compositional construction appear as reoccurring themes throughout the exhibition. Using illusion to explore the construction of both digital and physical images, Waters employs visual tricks intended to both confuse and entertain her viewers. In her two separate works, she borrows the visual language of the selfie, assembling it as a physical scene of surfaces. Her work, *Collarbone* (2016), a print release image of her collarbone, is creased, giving shape to the picture plane and physicality to the body depicted in the image. In her installation work, *Untitled (Cecilia)* (2016), Waters projects an image of herself onto canvas draped along a bed in a constructed bedroom scene. In both works, Waters is seen to be reducing herself to a 2D image before attempting to re-physicalize it. A process that emphasizes the fragility of self and image, Waters work considers how the perpetual reimaging of oneself might affect internal perceptions of the self. Furthermore, using her own identity and body as subject matter, Waters draws attention to those perceived as most vulnerable to this distortion of self, young women.

Just as attuned to gender is Fracchia's *Channel series* (2016), three painted portraits that explore Australian representations of masculinity. Monochromes sensitively rendered of himself in swimming cap and goggles, Fracchia combines icons of Australian masculinity, 'the convict', 'the draughtsman' and 'the sportsman', in order to reflect upon his own masculinity. Framing 'the sportsman' as both criminal and war hero through the use of a mug shot, Fracchia's self-reflexive portraits demonstrate his awareness of the representations his identity exists amongst. As if attempting to escape these hyper-masculine associations, Fracchia depicts himself eyes shut and peacefully centered. A calm rejection of this form of masculinity, Fracchia's paintings challenge stereotypical Australian representations of masculinity, opting for a more nuanced portrayal.

Self Imag(in)ing demonstrates that although easily created, curated, recreated and disseminated, contemporary visual representations of the self continue to be problematic. Fundamentally floored representations of real people, Self Imag(in)ing illustrates the limitations of images, and their capacity to both empower and disempower individuals. Exploring the complexities of contemporary portraiture in the digital age, Self Imag(in)ing is part of the important dialogue artists must continue to explore surrounding the visual representation of the self.

Jenna
Green

our conflicted selves.

In his seminal essay *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins,* Jacques Derrida deconstructs the self-portrait through an analysis of our senses. What emerges is a relationship between shedding tears and knowing ourselves. Derrida arrives at the term "tears that see", asserting that until we have seen through our own tears we remain blind to who we are.

Tears evidence the haptic, the perceptual movement over, across and around an object or subject that informs a dynamic relationship between the object/subject and the perceiver. The works in this show evidence tears, the relationships in flux are those between the artists and the identities they struggle with. Wrestling with who we are, over the surfaces of our unease, loss, ignorance, agony, grief and even joy, will unearth paradoxes within us and these artists willingness to share their struggle warrants our attention. As with all things haptic our actions as viewers will reveal the history of our own tears.

Continuing her critique of the domesticated bush, Marisa documents her occupation of euclidean space during a suburban back yard summer. She toys with a dribble of relief from an unknown water source and the uncooperative bush watches from the sides. Our love of the wilderness, that lover we have long romanticized, is unrequited. Still we embrace her/him/the idea of wilderness and hope for rest and restoration. Marisa confronts the desires we project into another and her uneasy honesty provides a momentary glimpse of the haptic texturing the concrete that shapes our urban identities.

Kristian's concern is with the visual representations of masculinity. He has bared himself to the piercing scrutiny of our silence before, and as before it's his body that we see again. In these works he refuses to return our gaze, and if the eyes are the window to the soul this is a soulless body. He provides us nothing but his surface in an environment to consider. The person presented senses his body independently of sight and we have no access to his inner being. Kristian asks us to look into ourselves, to draw from the touching, hearing and smelling of our own bodies to understand what his thoughts might be. These are concerns often overridden in bodies shaped for sight, and in drawing them to the surface he confronts us with our struggles for identity.

Chloe's tears are twofold that echo the paradox of the metamodernists, our illusionary world of beauty and the confines of language that imprison us there. This is a raw and exposed struggle for identity in a culture where difference is commodified, consumed and discarded under the banner of authenticity. Chloe's honesty is difficult to join with, the haptic identity is a struggle and at times the contradictions that pervade who we are overwhelm our balance.

These three portraitures do not succumb to the optic. Resisting projected identities they reveal a perpetual struggle; with desires, bodies and contradictions that are the artists' and our very selves

tim mosely

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