

Representation, Reflection and Invention: The Complexities of the Self

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the complexities of the 'self' through representation, reflection and invention. With an emphasis on the mirror and how our reflection has created a fascination with the self, which is now a continued interest through our phones, the 'selfie' and social media. Our reflection has inspired theories of the self over recent centuries, from Sigmund Freud's theories on the subconscious inspiring Surrealist artists, phenomenology and Hegel, to Donald Winnicott's concept of the 'false self', and Carl Jung on the 'persona', which shows how our self can turn fake as we become under pressure to live up to social ideals.

Self-portraits can offer a rare glimpse of another's inner self as proposed in Jasper Johns' 'watchman and spy' theory. Focusing on how five women and non-binary artists have taken control of their representation; looking at the work of Artemisia Gentileschi, Zanele Muholi, Cindy Sherman, Claude Cahun and Lady Gaga. These artists have used themselves in their work in different ways to express, invent and question representation and gender identity, supported by theories by Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir. With Michel Foucault's proposed ideas of self-invention, they encourage breaking through historical limits and societal pressures to invent the self, and with the use of technology and film techniques, we can express and further inspire our inner selves and spaces.

Self-representation is important as it provides other crucial representations not built upon stereotypes. It takes back control of representation that has been largely in the hands of men, where women and anyone considered 'other' have been objectified or scarcely been represented at all.

This research relates to my ongoing practice and interest in self-representation, self-reflection, and self-invention. Exploring the ever-evolving self, questioning identity and producing self-expressive works.

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Author's Declaration:

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Introduction

In recent decades there has been a call for greater representation, for people to be depicted faithfully, not built upon stereotypes. Representation has largely been in the control of men, thus it has been limited. The representation of women has been one dimensional and through the male gaze, depicting women as passive beauties, and anyone considered 'other' has been objectified or scarcely been represented at all. With a focus on women and non-binary artists, this thesis explores how they have used themselves in their work. As theories grew aiming to understand the complexities of the self, we have begun to look more closely at ourselves, and our reflection, and have contemplated our sense of self. This has made us question our identity and the way we present to the world and represent ourselves through art, as well as on social media. We have become fascinated with the 'self'.

Through exploring the complexities of the self, this thesis firstly looks at representation through Artemisia Gentileschi, with emphasis on the mirror as an object, as a metaphor and as a tool. And how our reflection has created a fascination with the self not just on the surface, but as a way of contemplating the inner self and simply reflecting on who we are.

Second; how women and non-binary artists have taken control of their representation. The self-portrait can offer a rare glimpse of another's inner self as proposed in Jasper Johns' 'watchman and spy' theory. Focusing on Zanele Muholi and Cindy Sherman at how they have used themselves in their work in different ways and how a self-portrait can be something other than a self-representation. This

provokes questions of identity and the plasticity of the self and gender performativity as theorised by Judith Butler.

Thirdly; with the popularity and accessibility of the mirror, our reflection has inspired theories of the self over recent centuries. The Surrealist movement of the early twentieth century was inspired by Sigmund Freud's theories of the subconscious, artists like Claude Cahun, explored and challenged our ideas of the inner and creative true self. However, Donald Winnicott's concept of the false self can show how we can be pressured to live up to social ideals, which Carl Jung takes further in his ideas of the persona.

This will lastly look at Lady Gaga, the performed expression of the self, and how the use of technology and film techniques express and further inspire our inner selves and spaces. As Michel Foucault's proposed ideas encourage breaking through historical limits and societal pressures to invent the self, implying that we are less about self-discovery and more about self-invention through our creative inner self. Self-representation is important and it opens up ways of creatively exploring and inventing the self.

Chapter 1: Seeing Ourselves

“Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.” (de Beauvoir, 2015)

Representation has been in the control of men thus women have been depicted through the ‘male gaze’. In their hands, women became their muses. The muse originated from Greek mythology as “[..] The nine female companions of Apollo [...] acted as intermediaries between the gods and humans and whispers in the ears of poets and musicians, actors.” (Abdelouahab, 2012). However, artists turned to real women as their muses; a source of inspiration, idealised beauty, and reduced to a male fantasy. Thus women became passive beauties, objectified and one-dimensional. Even when some muses were collaborators, many have not be credited enough or even at all, compared to their male contemporaries.



Figure 1: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1620



Figure 2: Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1598-99

Early women artists were scarce but Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-c.1652) (Rudd, 2021) was recently ‘rediscovered’ and adopted by the second-wave feminists of the 1970s. (Treves, *et al*, 2020) Her work stood out as she reframed our ideas of representation of women of that period, (Treves, *et al*, 2020) portraying biblical characters as emotive, passionate and strong women such as in *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1620). “No male artist could have created such potent paintings of female fury, fear, ecstasy, pride, bewilderment and cunning.” (Wullschläger, 2020) Artemisia’s famed representation of Judith; the widow who enters a drunk Assyrian General’s tent and slays him before his hellbent destruction of her hometown. She is shown as being strong and confident in her actions. It is brutal and compared to Caravaggio’s interpretation painted 10 years earlier. His Judith is weak, reluctant even, and seems timid, whereas Artemisia’s Judith is a powerful character within the painting, her stance, her build and her sleeves rolled up.



Figure 3: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susannah and The Elders*, 1610

As well as Judith, Artemisia's interpretation of *Susannah and the Elders* (1610) includes a more reactionary Susannah to the Elders' advances. As Susannah baths, she is subjected to the Elder's gaze and advances. This is clearly from a woman's perspective as her body twists away from the Elders with a distressed expression. Artemisia produced multiple versions of this painting throughout her life which reflected her own experience of being raped. These hold powerful and disturbing representations from a woman's experience and position in society.

In comparison to Tintoretto's *Susannah*, she is passive and unaware of the Elders' gaze. She has even joined them as she holds the mirror gazing at herself. As John

Berger states, “The mirror was often used as a symbol of the vanity of women. [...] however, was mostly hypocritical.” (1972) as it is “morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure.” (Berger, 1972) With the mirror being a symbol of vanity it ‘allows’ the viewer to gaze upon her with the Elders to objectify her as she is doing herself. This has been painted from the male gaze.



Figure 4: Tintoretto, *Susannah and the Elders*, 1555-56

As Wulfschläger contemplates,

“It’s impossible to stand before them without wondering: if art history had been different, if more female artists had painted and had depicted women, could women’s position in history itself have been different?” (Wulfschläger, 2020)

Artemisia provides a powerful representation that has the power to dismantle the stereotypes of women.

The mirror has been used as a tool and metaphor, and as its availability grew, it inspired “ideas of the self and identity that were beginning to take shape” (Kellond, 2019) around Europe during the Renaissance. (Kellond, 2019) The mirror offered the ability for us to examine ourselves not just physically but also contemplate our sense of self. (Kellond, 2019) “I think, therefore I am” Rene Descartes professed in 1637. (BBC, 2015) As self-portraits become more popular with the use of the mirror – the question arises; How do we represent the self and what is it? Although it would take until the 19th and especially in the 20th century fuelled by the feminist movement, more women would get the opportunity to take on their own representation and produce self-portraits. The mirror becomes a common object in women’s self-portraits as an investigative tool. “The mirror becomes a symbol of this search for the truth behind the surface. Finally throwing off its link with vanity, it is now used to suggest the complexity of being human.” (Borzello, 2016) And unlike Tintoretto’s Susannah, they are not passive, but confident and hold the power. Women turn the gaze on themselves beginning to explore their identity and their sense of self. Frances Borzello argues that women’s self-portraits are a genre of their own due to their position in society which produces representations that are unique as many do not have male comparisons.

“They were not merely interested in what their bodies looked like, but also seem to have been reaching for some kind of inner reality.” (Borzello, 2016)



Figure 5: Zanele Muholi, *Bona*, Charlottesville, 2015

Here, Zanele Muholi (b.1972) uses the mirror as a literal and metaphorical self-reflection. Their poised facial expression suggests questioning. They are deep in thought. This image provokes questions of identity and sexuality as they are situated on a bed. They are analysing themselves, closely inspecting, and critiquing themselves and their representation. Elvira Dyangani Ose compares Muholi's mirror to that of Carrie Mae Weems (b.1953) as "... the portraiture [...] articulates notions of beauty, visibility and storytelling – poignant political tools that [...] critiques the patriarchal historical imagery of Black women [...]" (2020) Previous representations

have largely been in the control of white men, limiting depictions of anyone considered 'other', they have either been objectified or scarcely been represented at all.

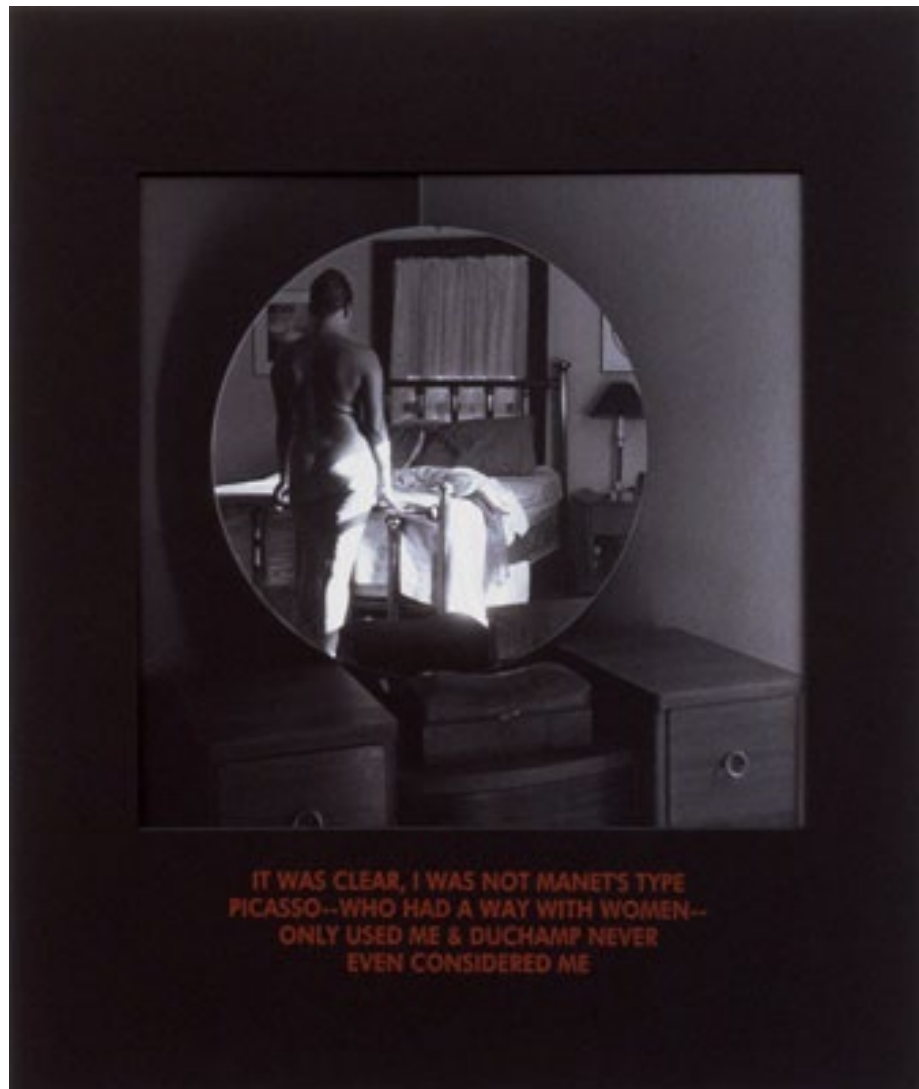


Figure 6: Carrie Mae Weems, *Not Manet's Type*, 1997

'It was clear, I was not Manet's type,
Picasso – who had a way with women –
Only used me & Duchamp never
Even considered me'

Weems's photo signifies beauty from the use of a vanity mirror but through the combining of the text, she is in control and puts forward questions of race and beauty. Many previous representations of women have been made through a predominantly white, cis-gendered, straight male gaze. For centuries the beauty ideal has been the white muse. Both Muholi and Weems use the mirror to reflect on representation, as well as provide their own. And, Muholi as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community takes it further to include people whose representations have not been widely seen previously, creating a more diverse representation.

Chapter 2: The Self-Portrait

Photographer Zanele Muholi's work is providing a representation of queer black people in South Africa, establishing their existence through capturing self-portraits in their ongoing series 'Somnyama Ngonyama'. Their photos evolve, responding to experiences, places and family history. (Dyangani Osc, *et al*, 2020) Their use of common objects provides a narrative and places them in everyday life which emphasises their presence, as well as photography as a method of capturing a real person, it is powerful in its accuracy and sentiment. John Tagg states the importance of portraits for representation as it is "a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity." (Tagg, 1988)

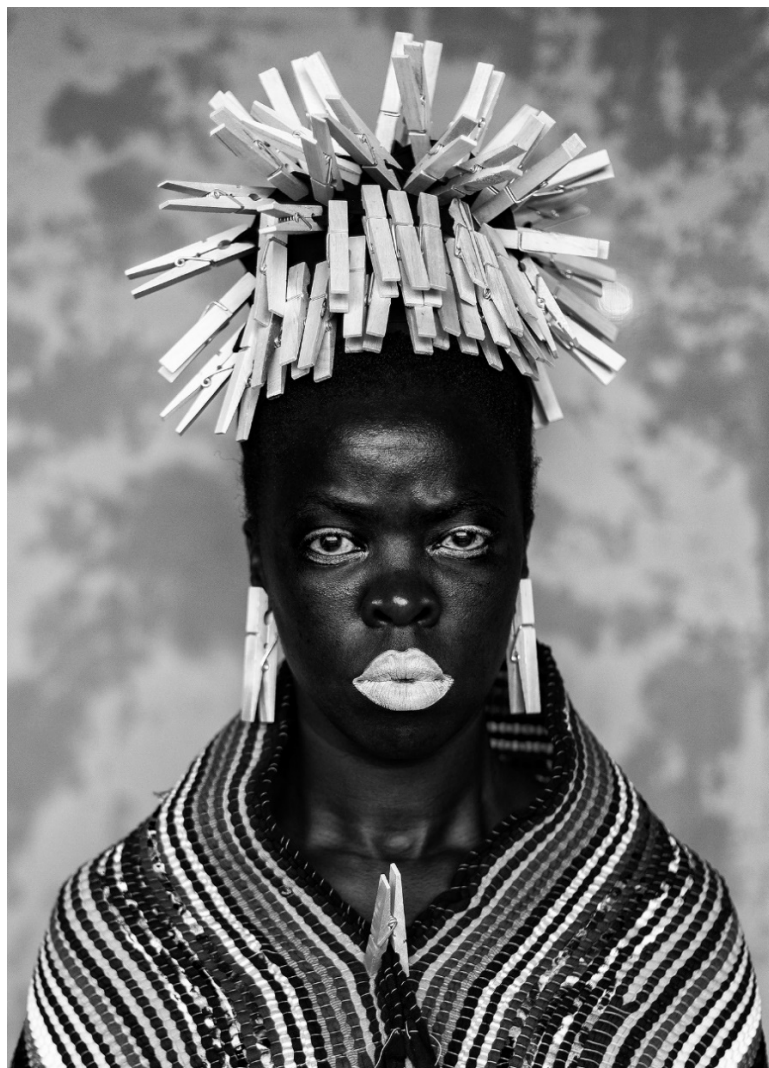


Figure 7: Zanele Muholi, *Bester I, Mayotte*, 2015

As well as photographing themselves they capture other people and other stories of black South Africans in LGBTQIA+ communities. Muholi states,

“We cannot be denied existence. This is about our lives, and if queer history, trans history, if politics of blackness and self-representation are so key in our lives, we just cannot sit down and not document and bring it forth.” (Dyangani Osc, *et al*, 2020)



Figure 8: Zanele Muholi, *Faces and Phases*, 2007-2013

Muholi prefers to call themselves a 'visual activist' over an artist and their subjects; 'participants', acknowledging the collaborative aspect. Muholi is just a capturer of images giving them control over the participants' own representation. The participants stand firm and meet the viewer's gaze. We cannot deny their existence.

Sobieszek explains Jasper John's 'watchman and spy' concept from *Sketchbook Notes and Interviews*; that Johns' 'watchman' is the capturer of the image and that the 'spy' seeks to reveal something in the person. However, to capture a self-portrait the artist is both 'watchman' and 'spy'. "[...] The artist is both watchman and spy; and nowhere is this duality more apparent than in the self-portrait, to which Johns alludes." (Sobieszek and Irmas, 1994) The self-portrait offers a rare glimpse of when the inner and outer self is both made present for others to see. So the artists' role is "to penetrate beneath the surface of things and adjust whatever secrets of the self are discovered for representation on that surface." (Sobieszek and Irmas, 1994) It's a curated representation, with the artist in control of what is revealed and what is hidden. When it comes to representing another, the subject needs to be represented respectfully, especially when it comes to representing others. An inaccurate or one-dimensional representation disguised as a wholly truthful one can become problematic. However, a portrait is not always a representation of the subject. What we see is not always true. Many self-portraits are not self-representations. A self-portrait can intentionally deceive or portray the self as something other; the artist as allegory, concept, political issue, protest, etc. (Borzello, 2016)



Figure 9: Cesare Ripa, *Painting* (from '*Iconologia*'), 1603



Figure 10: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting*, 1638-39

Artemisia Gentileschi often used herself as a model in her work and painted herself as the personification of Painting. In *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (1638-39), it is thought that she was inspired by 'Painting' as depicted in Cesare Ripa's book *Iconologia* (1603). (Rudd, 2021) Ripa's book contained personifications and as "all abstract concepts were considered female", (Rudd, 2021) "with this powerful and original image, Gentileschi invented a self-portrait type that no man could possibly inhabit." (Borzello, 2016) Her flowing hair representing imagination and the mask representing imitation. (Rudd, 2021) The mask represented imitation in this case as the job of an artist, however, Artemisia also becomes 'Painting' imitating the original illustration.

"But the self is also something that can be constructed, created, or assumed and thereby invariably falsified."
(Sobieszek and Irmes, 1994)



Figure 11: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #13*, 1978

Unlike Muholi, Cindy Sherman's work is not a representation of the self. Like Artemisia, Cindy Sherman (b.1954) donned guises over three centuries later. Sherman portrayed stereotypes of women in 'B' movies in her *Untitled Film Stills* series. (Rudd, 2021) Working in the 1970s during the second-wave feminism movement, her work was seen as feminist as it questioned women's representation in the media. (Burton, 2006) As "film works by using stereotypes" (Finkelstein, 2007) we are conditioned to believe and associate people with these stereotypes. Sherman is emphasising these images for us to question. Her series of photos of women depicted through the 'male gaze' are tragic, powerless, beauties. We watch these women through the male gaze. We are observing and she is unaware as we are objectifying her. (Sprague-Jones and Sprague, 2011)



Figure 12: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #2*, 1977

In this photo, Sherman's relationship with the mirror is closer to that of Tintoretto's *Susannah and the Elders* rather than Muholi's mirror. Here the mirror is used as a symbol of vanity and objectification. However, we can also look at this as Sherman posing and performing a character in the mirror, alluding to how we perform the self. Sherman is not depicting herself but she is performing. (Baker, *et al*, 2016) Her work is questioning representation and our ideas of the self. Judith Butler argues that gender is performative as we enact societal norms of man and woman. (2006) This is evident in entertainment as we see examples of performed gender in cinemas and theatre, from Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* (1959) and Blake Edwards' *Victor/Victoria* (1982), to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, (1602) to more blatantly, drag performers and pantomimes. (Finkelstein, 2007) Some of the characters are using it

as deception as a part of the plot, others as it being traditional for a man to play a woman in theatre, or the case of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*; both. Into the twentieth-century mass media has "promoted the idea of the self as a plastic commodity," (Finkelstein, 2007) as there is a fascination with the transformative self in story-telling and advertising. Much of it relies on the idea that the self is evolving and self-inventive. (Finkelstein, 2007) Drag plays into this idea of dress-up while it also challenges the gender binary. RuPaul's "You're born naked, the rest is drag" (Vanity Fair, 2019) reflects Simone de Beauvoir's "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (2015)

Muholi states they not performing as they are not performing either binary gender and as they are focused on representing their true self. (Dyangani Ose, *et al*, 2020) They explain, "I began Somnyama Ngonyama; it is a continuous journey of self-discovery and self-expression." (Dyangani Ose, *et al*, 2020) Muholi represents themselves, whereas Sherman is about the performativity of the 'self'. Sherman's recent work posted on Instagram reflects the current issues of self and performativity. The platform is mixed with healthy self-expressions and unhealthy performed societal ideals. Sherman uses filters and editing through popular apps like FaceTune that people use to meet beauty standards, whereas Sherman distorts herself creating a mockery of these curated and edited versions of selves on Instagram. (Church Gibson, 2018) The result is surreal and not a realistic depiction of anyone. Here Sherman's work reaches another audience and culture of the self and self-representation. As Laura Mulvey writes on Sherman's work as a whole, "her representations of femininity were not a return, but a re-representation, a making strange." (Mulvey, 1991)



cindysherman



Figure 13: Cindy Sherman, *Got my blonde on*, 2018

Chapter 3: The Selves

As Surrealism started in the late 1910s into the early 1920s, it attracted not just artists but also writers, philosophers and psychologists. (Ades, *et al*, 2015) Artists were heavily inspired by Sigmund Freud's popularised theories of the subconscious. (Ades, *et al*, 2015) They identified that the 'self' must be more than one entity, before Freud, Hegel,

“[...] showed how the person is not an entity existing in and of itself, which establishes an identity unique to itself, but is rather formed through encounters in the world which are constantly changing. This offered a double sense of otherness: one internal, the other external.” (Ades, *et al*, 2015)

Also known as a 'double consciousness', we are able to see ourselves from another's point of view. (Prickett, 2021) Our outer consciousness influences our inner affecting how we see ourselves. (Prickett, 2021) The inner self and the subconscious opened up ideas for Surrealist artists and psychologists into the early 20th century. People began to further question the self. A true self. The “reaching for some kind of inner reality” that Borzello speaks of. (2016) Through the surrealist movement, artists were inspired by dreams creating surreal spaces and selves, questioning the self, and pushing the boundaries of the imagination.

Associated with the Surrealists, Claude Cahun (1894-1954) produced writings exploring the self as well as photographs, which they often produced with their partner Marcel Moore. (Rudd, 2021) Claude Cahun, fifty years before Sherman, experimented with gender performativity, embraced by second-wave feminists in the 70s and later Butler's theory of gender performativity, Cahun's work has challenged gender still to this day. (Shaw, 2017)



Figure 14: Claude Cahun, *I am in training, don't kiss me*, c.1927

Cahun played 'dress-up', here combining both symbols of masculinity and femininity, with clothing that created the look of a bare male chest but with the hearts and lipstick coded as female. Cahun performs them both. As well as experimenting with the superficial, they question the natural self by making us unable to discern male or female. (Shaw, 2017) Cahun wrote, "Shuffle the cards. Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me." (Rudd,

2021) Cahun's photos are performed flicking between being coded masculine and then feminine or neither.



Figure 15: Claude Cahun, *Self-portrait (reflected image in mirror with chequered jacket)*, c.1928

This photograph resembles Muholi's as Cahun is challenging our gender norms. There is strong defiance in their eye contact with us. The mirror acts as a question of identity or even a double self. It is not a traditional feminine-coded image but a more masculine and direct one. Jennifer L. Shaw wrote that "The image reverses the traditional imagery of the toilette [...] a woman gazing at herself in the mirror and her reflected image seductively enticing the viewer." (2017) Making it the opposite of

Tintoretto's Suzannah. Cahun as well as artists now like Muholi are challenging gender norms. Their work disrupts the canon, defying societal expectations.

"[...] Our culture so dominates who we are, and who we believe ourselves to be, it is difficult (though, as we shall see, not impossible) to step outside it." (Prickett, 2021, p. 11) The self has become more individual over time and as Prickett states, our identity previously was in

"[...] reference to external things: their family, their clan, their tribe, even to their station in life as an aristocrat, a soldier, a hunter a craftsman or a servant. Even one's fate in the afterlife was originally a collective one, and only later made personal." (2021, p. 4)

What we see as our identity has become more personal and an inward self-reflection. We have always found our identity through a sense of belonging. However, we put ourselves in boxes, suppressing what can make us truly, us. (Prickett, 2021) Imagination is important for our sense of identity and self. Cahun created individual self-expressions of their identity by looking at the inner self, informed by imagination. As artists tapped into the subconscious through dreams inspired by Freud's theory of the subconscious it shows how deep and expansive our imaginations are. We create ourselves from within. (Barresi, 1999) As Barresi states

"it does not matter whether this self that we attribute identity to through time is metaphysically real or mere psychological fiction, what matters is that it is essential to our phenomenology of self, and without it, we scarcely could consider ourselves as persons, with a past, present, and future." (Barresi, 1999)



Figure 16: Claude Cahun, *Self-portrait (full-length masked figure in clock with masks)*, c.1928

Cahun used their work as a way of self-expression as well as questioning and challenging our preconceived notions of sexuality, gender and identity. Cahun used masks which were popular with surrealists as the mask related to the theories of an inner and outer self. The masks in Cesare Ripa's personification of Painting represented imitation, here Cahun used the mask literally, the mask being the performance of imitating gender. Cahun stated, "Under this mask, another mask. I will never finish removing all these faces." (Rudd, 2021) acknowledging the need for self-expression and a search for the inner and true self. They warned that "with horror, you see that the flesh and its mask have become inseparable". (Rudd, 2021)

in their book *Carnaval en Chambre* in 1926. Cahun's writings were often personal breaking boundaries and challenging the concept of 'self'.

Donald Winnicott put forward the theory of a 'false self', explaining that it arises to protect the true self and adapts to the environment imitating others' behaviour.

(Kellond, 2019) This false self may appeal to others but it can suppress the true self and creativity, as Winnicott writes, "only the true self can be creative and only the true self can feel real". (Winnicott, 1960) Like Sherman, we're not quite sure which is Cahun but unlike Sherman, Cahun was exploring and expressing themselves and challenging the real and fake in search of their true self as evident in their writings. (Shaw, 2017)

"Where is your authentic body? You are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image: you never see your eyes unless they are dulled by the gaze they rest upon the mirror or the lens [...] you are condemned to the repertoire of its images." (Barthes, 1977)

Chapter 4: The Invention of The Self

Carl Jung presented the theory of the 'persona'; the name is inspired by Ancient Greek masks used in dramatic stage productions. (Fawkes, 2015) The persona is an enacted ideal for being able to "meet societal demands". (Fawkes, 2015) On societal expectations, Jung states, "[...] no one could completely submerge his individuality in these expectations; hence the construction of an artificial personality becomes an unavoidable necessity." (Jung, *et al*, 2013) Today it seems persona is used as something people make intentionally for publicity, but Jung seems to be suggesting otherwise, being like Winnicott's 'false self'. The persona also is not just about fitting in but standing out. It is a "[...] kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual." (Jung, *et al*, 2013) The persona is appealing to others but it is also rigid and one-dimensional. The persona is a simplified self to fit in and not disrupt the canon. (Jung, *et al*, 2013) If we are multiple things that do not usually go together, contradict each other or are simply different, we are seen as 'unpredictable' and even 'unreliable'. (Jung, *et al*, 2013)



Figure 17: Lady Gaga, *Poker Face* [music video still], 2009

However, we know that we are more than one thing at once, and that “the lone explanatory image can appear an unsatisfactory way to sum ourselves up.” (Borzello, 2016) We are complex selves forever changing with no real fixed identity. (Borzello, 2016) A performed self in an artistic sense can be a form of self-expression. Sherman is acting as another, however, Cahun is expressing. The performed persona like the one of Lady Gaga (b.1986) is not fake as such, and she is the opposite of what Jung suggests a persona be. Gaga is performing an ideal but not society’s ideal but her own. (Fuse, 2017a) Gaga is not a persona by Jung’s definition; she wants to stand out not fit in, and be a role model, yes, but also enacts self-expression and encourages it. (Zaleski, 2022) Gaga closer resembles an enactment of the ‘ideal self’. “Rogers believes that the real self is a self-concept that a person might experience, whereas the ideal self is the one that person would like to achieve.” (Yazdani and Ross, 2019) She is a product of self-invention that is forever changing. Her chosen name is ambiguous and she can be many things at once. An enigma. “I am half fantasy and half reality. And I am endless in my ability to transform and I am also always in a constant state of journey and I am married to the process”, as Gaga explains her album cover of *Born This Way* (2011). (Fuse, 2017b)

“Underpinning Lady Gaga’s performances is an emphasis on the ways in which the gaze becomes a public-driven or self-imposed zone [with] the potentialities of renewal.” (Radia, 2014)

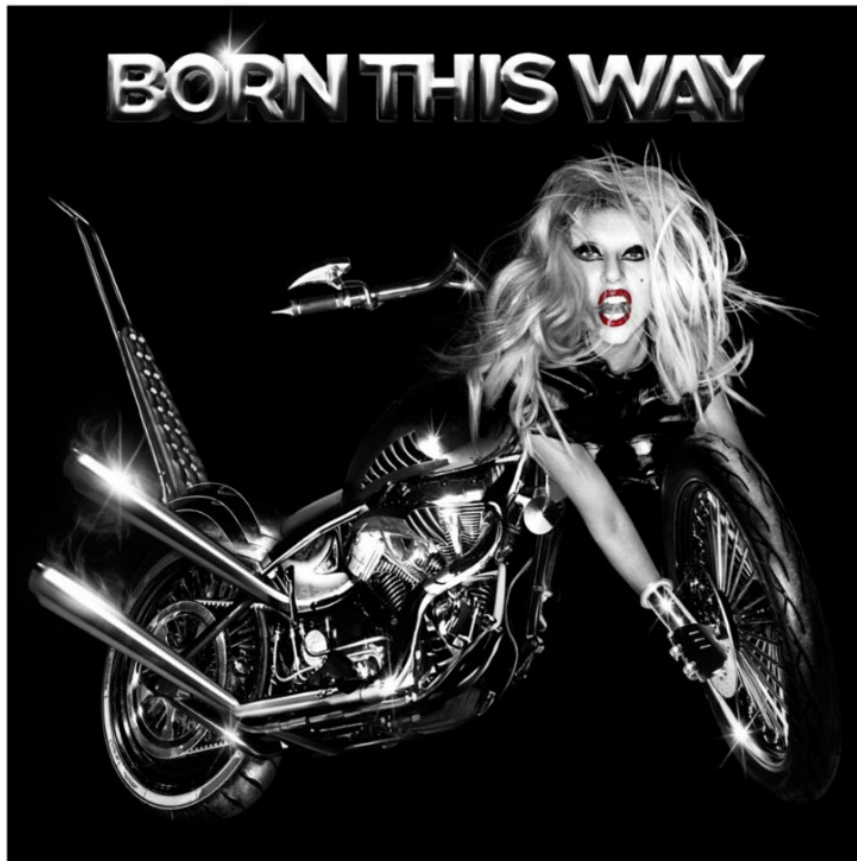


Figure 18: Lady Gaga, *Born This Way* [album cover], 2011

As much as she is known as a singer she is also a living work of art created for public view as a celebrity. She is known to perform when she's not on stage and is aware of the audience. From walking out of hotels as the audience consists of fans and the paparazzi documenting the performance. (British Vogue, 2021) "I am the sculpture, I am the art piece, I am an expression of my artistic ideas." (Fuse, 2017b)

Gaga as well as Artemisia uses her image as self-promotion (Treves, *et al*, 2020) but also makes herself into art, as seen more literally through photography and video. As well as representing herself she presents herself as a concept or political issue as she did in 2010, bringing attention to LGBTQIA+ rights by wearing her infamous

meat dress, stating, "If we don't fight for our rights, pretty soon we're going to have as much rights as the meat on our bones." (Zaleski, 2022)



Figure 19: Lady Gaga, *Meat Dress at the 2010 MTV VMAs*, 2010



Figure 20: Lady Gaga, *Lady Gaga outside the Langham Hotel, London*. [paparazzi photo], 2013



Figure 21: Lady Gaga and Jeff Koons, *ARTPOP* [album cover], 2013

Gaga also plays with the self as a commodity as she collaborated with Jeff Koons on the ARTPOP album cover, whose artwork is made to be commercial. Gaga described her 'reverse Warholian' ideas of putting art in pop compared to Warhol's pop in art. (Zaleski, 2022) Gaga is also putting the art *on* the soup can rather than making art *of* the soup can, putting art on Gaga as the commercial good made for a consumer. She is now the artwork being sold, she is aware and in control. The concept of being a 'brand' is one dimensional and for a persona, however, Gaga makes her 'brand' herself which is constantly evolving using technology, fashion and music to express her inner creative self.

Culture can limit us to what we see as possible. It can set boundaries and ideals but it can also inspire imagination and provide inspiration. (Prickett, 2021) Our inner spaces have expanded over time with the popularity and availability of others' stories from news to books, theatre and film. We have accelerated and inspired each other's imagination and thus our inner spaces and selves. (Prickett, 2021) Technology has expanded what we previously thought was possible and has opened up a way of representing an inner space. The 1950s saw the popularisation of the 'close-up' in movies as it "asserts the existence of a ruminative interior or self", (Finkelstein, 2007) and captures characters' thoughts and feelings visible by the subtlest facial expressions, as well as the superimposed inner voice. (Finkelstein, 2007) With the use of technology, we can create and represent our inner spaces and selves like never before. Digitally editing photos and videos, through numerous tools, software and even Artificial Intelligence. It has pushed our reality and our representation of the self. As Joanne Finklestein writes it has "the effects of rearranging time and the space and blurring distinctions between the interior and the exterior, the private and the public." (2007) We can transform, distort, fashion ourselves however we desire, and even create new worlds.



Figure 22: Lady Gaga, *Chromatica Ball Tour opening visuals*. [video], 2022

“[...] it is the inner world of the imagination that was seen as central to any kind of self-exploration.” (Prickett, 2021, p.217)

To try and invent the self is a fairly recent idea, (Prickett, 2021) but with a continued fight for self-representation and social media as creative platforms, people have this opportunity. We have control of what we present to the world as our identity, whether an “invented identity or a genuine reflection of self depends on how far we can be said to be the product of our own imaginations.” (Prickett, 2021) Foucault proposed that we are “not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth” but instead one “who tries to invent himself”. (Ratiu, 2021) ‘Dandyism’ reflects this idea of self-invention and as the dandy liberates themselves from current aesthetics he practices freedom of the self. (Ratiu, 2021) If we imply this idea to not just men; we are an enigma waiting to be invented. Maybe we are our own muse, closer to the original sense of the word. As the nine female goddesses whisper into artists’ ears, our inspiration can come from within; the artist as muse. As Finkelstein states, “Art is evidence of the freedom of the intellect; it is a sign of human invention.” (2007) Art is an invention and self-expression thus we can be a creation of ourselves.

Conclusion

We are complex selves and we should have the freedom to invent ourselves through art, whether it be we are the walking artwork throughout our lives. Self-representation provides new ways of seeing the world and inspiration for expressing ourselves. In a world based on stereotypes, it is important to break through our historical limits and our societal ideals of who we should be. Through the self-portraits discussed, Artemisia Gentileschi, Zanele Muholi, Claude Cahun and Lady Gaga, have explored and expressed themselves, challenging gender and sexuality, and providing more complex representations of women and non-binary persons. They challenge our ideas of what we think we know about ourselves and others while breaking stereotypes. Cindy Sherman and Claude Cahun have also challenged our ideas of the self, showing its plasticity and how we perform to meet external pressures and norms as supported by Judith Butler. As theorised by Donald Winnicott and Carl Jung, false selves and personas can repress the creative inner self. We all have these inner selves and spaces waiting to explore as we continue to invent them. But these artists' work also shows how malleable we are, forever evolving and open for invention and reinvention.

This thesis has shown that we are hard to define in one image as we are constantly evolving, but we have endless inspiration from our inner self and our ability to invent ourselves. Theories of the self vary showing how complex we are. Surrealists questioned the self and identity and explored the subconscious popularised by Sigmund Freud, showing how powerful and creative our inner selves can be. The Surrealists inspired further theories, explorations and representations of the self in the rest of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. These self-portraits provide a variety of complex representations of women and non-binary artists.

The mirror has made us fascinated with the self and our phones have continued this interest through the 'selfie' and social media. We represent, perform, and curate images of ourselves. Through that, we must express ourselves and not give in to fake selves and personas. Foucault's ideas of self-invention can inspire us to embrace and express our creative space. Inventing allows us to truly express ourselves and have freedom from societal pressures.

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