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## Perception? Perception in mirrors? Self-perception in mirrors? Perceiving ourselves in mirrors???

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The title for this exhibition is 'Self-perception in mirrors' as it refers to how individuals see themselves in their own reflections and how our minds twist the image that is reflected back at us to make our flaws and insecurities stand out. The important message to take from this exhibition is to judge yourselves less harshly as well as to remember to look for your strengths rather than making your negative features stand out. The artists and artworks that highlight this concept and whose work will be exhibited are '*Girl at Mirror*' and '*Triple Self-Portrait*' by Norman Rockwell (1954; 1960), '*Girl Before a Mirror*' by Pablo Picasso (1932), '*Crimson*' by Jonty Hurwitz (2019) and '*You Are Not Yourself*' by Barbara Kruger (1981). The theories that will be discussed that reinforce this idea of self-perception by Jacques Lacan (1966), Michel Foucault (1984) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945).

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Self-perception is described as 'a person's view of their self or of any of the mental or physical attributes that constitute the self' (American Psychological Association, n.d.) and is becoming more apparent due to content on social media. This leads many individuals to be overly harsh on themselves which is why this exhibition aims to highlight this obsession that humans have with their own appearance. In addition, it is to break this barrier to show that you do not need to judge yourself so harshly and only focus on your flaws when looking in the mirror and thinking of yourself. Many of these artworks depict how mirrors have become a way of over analysing ourselves and rather than seeing our appearance as it truly is, mirrors are a reflection of our inner thoughts and emotions. As humans, we are always thinking and worrying about how others see us and over analyse and judge ourselves over it which according to Lacan (1966) starts as early as the age of 6 months old. His theory, the '*Mirror Stage*', explains that the idea of self-perception begins when the infant realises

that they are their own person and no longer believe they are attached to their mother. This shows that self-perception begins to control our lives from a very young age and is something we must learn to grow to evolve away from.

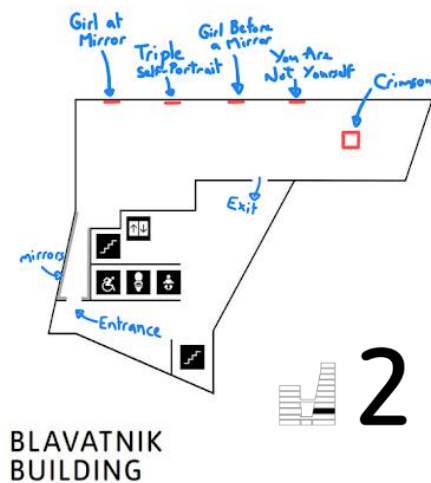


Figure 1: Map of the exhibition (adapted by author from Tate, n.d.)

This exhibition will take place in an exhibition room on the second floor of the Blavatnik Building in the Tate Modern as this museum has a huge influence on art and culture as well as its central location in London and therefore accessible to a wide range of people. This room fits the exhibition perfectly due to the section by the entrance where mirrors will be placed so that the audience is surrounded by mirrors as they walk in. This gives them time to observe themselves and understand who they are so that they are able to let go of their insecurities as they walk through the exhibition. This area is also somewhat isolated from other exhibitions as it is the only exhibition room on this building's floor meaning coming here is intentional and purposeful. This means it gives the audience time to react and let the concept sit with them before they move on to other exhibitions and it gives them time to reflect on themselves and how they perceive themselves.



Figure 2: Girl at Mirror (Rockwell, 1954)

This concept of self-perception is seen in this artwork '*Girl at Mirror*' (Rockwell, 1954) which depicts a young girl who rather than being interested in her doll as she should, she is obsessing over her facial features while looking at a photo of the model Jane Russel. This shows the vulnerability of the girl, especially due to her age which is represented through the white nightgown she is wearing which is a symbol of her innocence, youth and purity. Rockwell chose to make the girl appear identically in the mirror so the audience sees her worried face as she peers at herself and longs to be more like Russel instead. This highlights our own self-perception as we see that this girl is beautiful as is and makes us reconsider our view on ourselves and makes the audience reflect on how they see themselves when they look in mirrors. This draws on this quote 'Everything around us drives home the intimacy of perception, action and thought.' (Andy Clark, n.d.) as it shows that on her own, the girl is beautiful, however in this setting, she is so focused on the image of Russel that all her thoughts are driven to her own flaws and what she would like to change, that she is unable to see her own beauty and therefore to wrapped up in her own self-perception and judgements.



Figure 3: Triple Self-Portrait (Norman Rockwell, 1960)

This oil on canvas painting, *'Triple Self-Portrait'* (Rockwell, 1960), is another example of self-perception where the piece shows 3 representations of the artist: the artist himself, his reflection and his perception of himself. In this case, Rockwell adapted his self-portrait drawing to show himself in a more flattering way like making himself look younger. This was created as a critique of artists where he made a traditional self-portrait but with his added critique and the painting has a humorous purpose exploring the idea of artist identity however, as you look at it deeper, you can see the critique that artists shape their personas and only show what they want to show their audience. This can be seen here as Rockwell is known for his meticulous and detailed work however in this work, there is clutter around him with scattered paint brushes. Therefore as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) stated 'We must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive.' This reflects this art as we are able to see Rockwell's true reflection as well as the way he is interpreting it through his drawing. This shows that the drawing is the way he perceives himself and the way he views the world and more specifically himself.



Figure 4: Girl Before a Mirror (Picasso, 1932)

Unlike Rockwell's (1954) piece, where the mirror reflects what the girl really sees, this girl in '*Girl Before a Mirror*' (Picasso, 1932), is reflected as the way she perceives herself. In her true unreflected state, she has pale smooth skin with blond hair but in her depiction in the mirror, her darker textured skin covered in shadows emphasises that we rarely use mirrors to highlight our positive features but they are instead used to highlight our flaws due to mirrors being a way to see into our inner thoughts. Self-perception is apparent through the piece due to the way the girl's reflected image is contorted and therefore reflecting the way she sees herself. Foucault (1984) wrote that 'when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there'. This describes that mirrors are heterotopias due to being able to see them as they are but also as a way for our eyes and mind to twist what we see showing the way our brains perceive ourselves in mirrors much like what is seen in this painting with the girl unable to see her true self due to her self-image that deforms the reality she sees in the mirror.



Figure 5: Crimson (Hurwitz, 2019)

For the final two pieces of the exhibition, two slightly different artworks were chosen so that the audience is able to reflect upon themselves rather than on the pieces as they exit the show. This piece '*Crimson*' (Hurwitz, 2019) is the reverse effect of self-perception as it breaks down the wall individuals put up around themselves as it shows that there are different ways of seeing yourself. It shows that you don't always have to be perfect but it also shows the mask people are hidden behind because you only see the hand perfectly in the mirror at a certain angle but as you move around the sculpture, the image shifts and you see under the mask of perfection. The form only reveals its true identity when it is seen in its reflection in the mirror. Hurwitz designed this piece as a metaphor of hidden realities and the power of perspective. This leans on the theme of self-perception as it relies on perspective and how individuals see themselves and the features that they focus on and are self-conscious about as well as the image they present of themselves as a perfect flawless person. This piece is a symbol for an individual's internal realities that are hidden by the external self that we present, much like Rockwell's (1960) work which explores how artists present their personas.

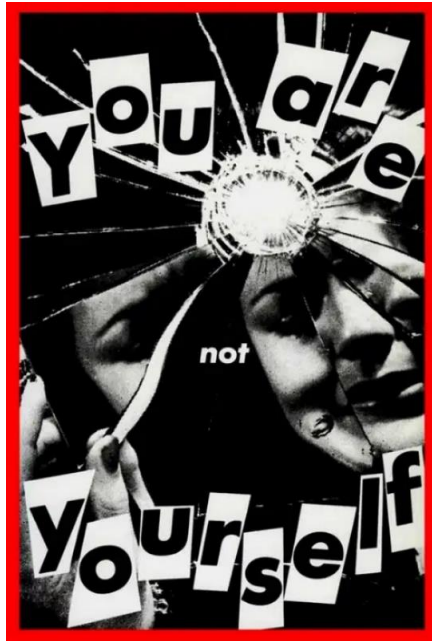


Figure 6: You Are Not Yourself (Krugger, 1981)

Ultimately, *'You Are Not Yourself'* (Krugger, 1981) was chosen as it directly causes the audience to reflect upon themselves due to the direct address in the text meaning the piece directly targets the individuals viewing it. This work was placed last as the other pieces don't directly affect the viewer personally but here it ties the concept together so that they are now forced to look and reflect upon themselves if they haven't started to already. Here the smashed mirror represents that you shouldn't believe what society is telling you about yourself and how you should look or be like. It gives the audience a chance for freedom from their internal thoughts as well as an escape from external voices pushing individuals to be someone else similar to the young girl in *'Girl at Mirror'* (Rockwell, 1954).

Overall this exhibition shows that self-perception consumes our lives and was created to break down the barriers built by individuals regarding her self-image. This drives individuals to be able to live more freely without the restrictions of their own judgements and not constantly be obstructed by their self-perception.

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**Everything around us drives home the intimacy of perception, action and thought.'**  
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*Everything around us drives home the intimacy of perception, action and thought.*  
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<https://sentient.art/crimson>

THEORIST ON CURATION/ Book on curation

Figures:

Figure 1: Tate, n.d. *Tate Modern*. [pdf] Available at: <[https://media.tate.org.uk/aztate-prd-ew-dg-wgtail-st1-ctr-data/galleries/TM\\_map.pdf](https://media.tate.org.uk/aztate-prd-ew-dg-wgtail-st1-ctr-data/galleries/TM_map.pdf)> [Accessed 25 April 2025].

Figure 2: Rockwell, N., 1954. *Girl at Mirror*. [oil on canvas] (Stockbridge, USA: Norman Rockwell Museum)

Figure 3: Rockwell, N., 1960. *Triple Self-Portrait*. [oil on canvas] (Stockbridge, USA: Norman Rockwell Museum).

Figure 4: Picasso, P., 1932. *Girl before a Mirror*. [oil on canvas] (New York, USA: Museum of Modern Art).

Figure 5: Hurwitz, J., 2019. *Crimson*. [mixed media].

Figure 6: Kruger, B., 1981. *You Are Not Yourself*. [appropriation art] (Washington, D.C., USA: Hirshhorn Museum).