“Selfies”: Depicting the Self, 1500 to the Present Day

Yale College Summer Session
HSAR S284
Tuesday/Thursday 1:00-4:15
Session A (June 7 - July 9)

Instructor: Judith Stapleton
Office Hours: Wednesday 10-11:30
Email: judith.stapleton@yale.edu

*Syllabus subject to change

Course Description:

What does it mean to picture the self? This course will look at the long history of artistic representations of the self in western art before and after photography. We’ll explore the selfie as a uniquely modern form of self-expression, economized self-promotion, and political subversion at the same time that we consider its roots in the broader history of self-portraiture in the arts. Spanning a period bracketed by contemporary selfies on one hand and Albrecht Dürer’s 1500 self-portrait on the other, we’ll consider how artists have historically framed and pictured the self in painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts. This course will draw on objects from the Yale University Art Gallery and the Yale Center for British Art as well as from major art collections worldwide. At the same time, we’ll explore self-representation on social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. In examining depictions of the self across such varied media, we’ll determine how notions of self-
presentation in the arts intersect with questions of individualism, identity, commodity culture, and self-promotion from 1500 to today.

Course Expectations:

Attendance

Because this is an accelerated course, unexcused absences are not permitted.

Readings:

All readings will be available as PDFs on Canvas.

Accommodation:

If you are in need of accommodation or special assistance, please contact the Student Accessibility Services. Accommodations are kept confidential.

Academic Integrity

Any forms of plagiarism will be strictly penalized. All information taken from external sources must be properly cited according to MLA or Chicago guidelines. If you have questions on how to properly cite information or about plagiarism in general, please see the Center for Teaching and Learning’s website Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism, particularly the section “Warning: When You Must Cite.” All students will take the Poorvu Center’s Plagiarism Quiz before submitting their first paper.

Yale takes all instances of academic dishonesty seriously. Penalties can include suspension from the university or lowered or failing grades. Please review Yale’s Statement on Academic Integrity.

Grading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
<th>Attendance and Participation</th>
<th>Reading Responses</th>
<th>Flash Presentation: Selfies</th>
<th>Paper 1 (Visual Analysis)</th>
<th>Paper 2 (Research Paper)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Late Assignments:

Late assignments will result in a reduction of one half of a letter grade (A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B, etc) for each day the assignment is late.

Extensions must be approved by me in advance of the due-date. I understand life is unpredictable, especially at the present moment. In the case of an emergency, I will do my best to accommodate for your situation, but I cannot be of assistance unless I am aware of your situation. Please stay in contact.
Remote Teaching

- All course sections will take place on synchronously zoom. Our goal will be to reproduce the best elements of live, in-person teaching. To that end, please honor the following zoom etiquette.
- Treat your zoom class-time as if it were an in-person meeting. Come prepared to engage in active discussion. Avoid distraction by closing all windows, programs, and message notifications not being used for class.
- Please make a good-faith effort to keep your camera on during class. Participation and class engagement drops exponentially when cameras are turned off. If you anticipate technical difficulties, please let me know in advance of class so that I know to expect issues.
- In order to promote a safe environment for all intellectual discussion and to protect the privacy of your fellow students do not photograph or record any part of class meetings.

Participation:

Participation will account for 20% of your final grade. To receive full marks for participation, students must demonstrate that they have done the readings and must engage in fruitful, generative discussion over the course of each class. If a student does not participate in class, either by speaking or using the chat feature to comment on salient points, he or she cannot earn credit for that day’s participation. Learning to participate in and shape an active discussion is one of the key aims of this course.

Reading Responses: (1-2 paragraphs, 15% of grade):

Each student is expected to do the readings in advance of lecture. For each module, you will submit a short response to one of the assigned readings on Canvas. Your response should address any aspect of the reading you felt was compelling or problematic. Responses should be submitted by midnight before class.

Flash Presentation (5 minutes, 10% of your grade):
Due Tuesday, June 15th

Find a selfie online or through social media which you think is intriguing or offers insight into questions of identity, self-expression, or self-marketing. In five minutes, analyze the selfie for your classmates, pointing out key features and explaining their significance. This presentation is intentionally concise, so keep your analysis focused and to-the-point.

Writing Assignments:

Visual Analysis (2-3 pages, 20% of grade):
Due Friday, June 25th

Find a self-portrait dated from 1500 to 1970 that you wish to analyze. This self-portrait will be the basis of your final paper. It can be of any individual, but makes sure the content is interesting enough to merit a 2-to-3-page visual
analysis of the image. You should present and analyze the formal construction of the image. Consider line, color, shape, use of space, composition, form, media, visual rhyming, texture, materiality, symmetry or balance, dynamic force, etc. Although your paper should consider iconography, this should not be the only element of your analysis. This assignment is geared towards sharpening your observational and analytical skills. Make sure to have sent me your chosen image by June 22nd.

**Final Paper (8 pages, 40% of grade):**
Due: Friday, July 9th

Choose a theme that has emerged over this course. Examples may include narcissism, gender, race, sexuality, beauty, ugliness, activism, consumerism, nudity, truth, deception, violence, kitsch, or performance. Other themes are welcome as long as the topic has been approved by me. The final assignment will ask you to craft a thesis-driven account of how this theme is explored in a particular set of self-portraits. Your paper should have a strong thesis statement that showcases a nuanced and considered stance. Your paper can either be fully historical or weave together contemporary and historical examples of self-portraiture.

**Schedule:**

**Week 1:**

1. **Selfies and Self-Portraiture: An Introduction**
   Tuesday, June 8th

   authorship | agency | audience | self-portraiture: critical terms and contexts

   **Readings:**


   **Class Activity:**

   Jamboard Discussion: “Functions and Possibilities of Self-Portraiture”
2. The Narcissus Question
Thursday, June 10th

Narcissus stories: from Ovid to Freud | self-expression | self-promotion | the self in the mirror

Readings:

Michael Wilson, “Rebels and Martyrs” pp 7-28 and the one-page blurbs:
- “Romantic Hero” 45
- “Romantic Myths” 71
- “Bohemia” 89
- “The Dandy and the Flâneur” 119
- “Priest, Seer, Martyr, Christ” 139
- “Creativity and Sexuality” 163

Optional Reading:

Class Presentations:
Student Flash Presentations: Selfies

Week 2:

3. Photography and the Indexical Self
Tuesday, June 15th

photographic identities | indexicality | fantasy | truth

Readings:


Class Activity:
Techniques of Visual Analysis

4. **Self-Portrait as a (Female) Artist**  
   Thursday, June 17th

   the gaze | tradition | gender | sexuality

   **Readings:**


   **Class Activity:**  
   Discussion of final paper assignment

Week 3:

5. **Queer Visibilities**  
   Tuesday, June 22nd

   femininities | masculinities | queer visibilities

   **Readings:**


   **Additional Readings:**

6. **Race and Ecologies of Resistance**  
   Thursday, June 24th

   resistance | protest | glory | manifesto


Robert R. Shane, “I longed to cherish mirrored reflections”: Mirroring and Black Female Subjectivity in Carrie Mae Weems’s Art against Shame,” Hypatia, 33: 500-520. https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12391

Additional Reading:

Friday June 25th:

Visual Analysis Due

Week 4:

7. Staging the Self: Historicism, Costume, and Theatricality
Tuesday, June 29th

performance | display | the mask | theatricality and identity |
#tussenkunstenquarantaine

Interactive Assignment:

Browse these hashtags on social media: #tussenkunstenquarantaine or the #gettymuseumchallenge. Find a self-portrait that has been restaged. Consider how the recreation sheds new light on the original self-portrait and makes you notice new or exciting things. Email me with your selection by midnight on Wednesday.

Readings:

Valérie Morisson, “Yinka Shonibare, MBE and Sartorial Parody: Costuming as Subversive Practice,” Études britanniques contemporaines. 51, 2016, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.3401

8. On Staring: Beyond a Rhetoric of Beauty
Thursday, July 1

beauty’s others | illness | stigma | the stare | disability | fetish

Readings:


Additional Readings:

Week 5:

9. Censorship, Nudity, and Self-Portraiture Today
Tuesday, July 6th

Naked or nude? | taboos | the forbidden | the Kardashians |

Readings:


10. Final Paper Presentations
Thursday, July 8th