

fancy selfies

autodérision,
troubles
& dévoilements



12 rue Lamoricière, 44100 Nantes
Ouvert du mardi au samedi, 14h - 19h

CHECHU ÁLAVA, YANA BACHYNSKA,
ÉMILIE BROUT & MAXIME MARION,
SOLENE CHAPPELLE, NINA CHILDRESS,
YANNICK GANSEMAN, LÉANN KERRIEN,
JACQUES LIZÈNE, JULIEN MEERT,
CAMILLE PICQUOT, MOLLY SODA,
APOLONIA SOKOL, PIERRICK SORIN
ET ANDY WARHOL



© images from Bouchay/Arts, Self-portrait de Andy Warhol, 2005

16.06 →
9.09.23

ZOO
GALERIE

Zoo galerie bénéficie du soutien de la Ville de Nantes, de la Région des Pays de la Loire, du Conseil Départemental de Loire Atlantique et du Ministère de la Culture (Drac des Pays de la Loire).

ZOO GALLERY, CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

Founded in 1989 in Nantes by a collective of artists, critics, architects, teachers, and students, Zoo Gallery is dedicated to the emergence of French and foreign artists. It offers its space for the first solo exhibitions of young artists and also initiates group exhibitions, collaborations with international institutions, and symposiums.

In 2022, Zoo Gallery becomes a contemporary art center by moving to its new space at 12 rue Lamoricière, Nantes.

In addition to its artistic activities, a micro-library is open, offering a selection of reference books in the fields of contemporary art, aesthetics, poetry, and new writings.

Zoo Gallery thus promotes its own editorial line with its publishing house, Zéro2 éditions, and its quarterly free bilingual magazine, 02, dedicated to the latest news in contemporary art, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2022 with its 100th issue.

Under the direction of Patrice Joly, the director and editor-in-chief of the magazine 02, Zoo Gallery continues its policy of international prospecting for emerging artists.



Display window of Zoo Gallery's art center showcasing the artwork « Même pas peur » (Not Even Scared) by Tania Mouraud, Pionnières exhibition, 2022.



Interior view of the Zoo Gallery space: the micro-library featuring books from Zéro2 éditions.

16.06 → 09.09.2023 / OPENING 15.06 AT 6PM

FANCY SELFIES

SELF-DERISION, DISRUPTION & REVELATIONS

A group exhibition featuring Chęřhu Álava, Yana Barhynska, Émilie Brout & Maxime Marion, Solenne Chapelle, Nina Childress, Yannick Ganselman, Léaani Kerrien, Jacques Lizène, Julien Męert, Camille Pirquot, Molly Soda, Apolonia Sokol, Pierrick Sorin and Andy Warhol.

Curator & text : Patrice Joly

Translation : Cynthia Gonzalez-Bréart

In the renowned and dense introduction to *Les mots et les choses* (The Order of Things), Michel Foucault analyses *Las Meninas*, an extraordinarily complex painting from within which the figure of Diego Vélasquez emerges. Before his appointment as royal court painter, the Spanish artist was already considered one of the most distinguished portraitists of his century. Among the reasons this painting has been—and continues to be—referenced so often over the course of history, is the fact that its author appears, in full-length and more prominently than, the commissioners of the painting: that is, the royal couple themselves. This artwork is remarkable for a number of reasons; it not only signifies a fundamental break with the painting of that century in that it situates the presence of the artist on the same level as that of the royal couple, through a decidedly calculated construction, but it also heralds the end, to a certain extent, of an era where the only legitimate “subjects” of representation were those belonging to the aristocracy—up to this point, painters had been considered mere executants.

The status of the self-portrait has radically evolved since the occurrence of this fundamental development; today’s self-portraitist’s intentions no longer resemble the motivations of someone searching to describe the modern condition in the 17th century. The self-portrait has evolved alongside History with all its revolutions, never fading from view. Whereas the stakes were once emancipatory in nature, now they are geared toward the exploration of identities. Self-portraits have also become a viable option for other disciplines as painting began to lose its status as the only medium capable of fulfilling a desire for self-reflexivity. Photography followed in its footsteps, then video.

Nowadays, the self-portrait has reached the status of near-mainstream practice; there is no

longer an element of risk involved for the author, save perhaps for the fact that the practice subjects the “image” to a double exposure: first to the gaze of the art critic, then to the incisive eye of the psychologist. While today’s contemporary artists may no longer run the risk of a backlash, with court censorship and its ensuing repressiveness, the ‘dangers’ now being faced are of a different nature—they have shifted with the unveiling of the private domain, where the exhibitionism of a complex self is accompanied by the choice to occupy a societal or political position. The troubled self-portraits of Cindy Sherman therefore serve as a theatre for the fractured self, protesting the consumerist objectification of femininity in America which relegates women to the status of cleaning woman—when Andy Warhol dresses in drag for the lens of his Polaroid, it is from a position of true faith. For these two renowned and influential late 20th century artists, the self-portrait has no equal—this practice has allowed them both to assume powerful positions in a society where they have attempted to break taboos.

While younger artists may lack some of the expressive impact which drove their predecessors, self-portraiture nonetheless remains a site for much more than mere aesthetic gesture: in the work of Camille Picquot, facial traits are blurred, while the artist’s face and outline become imperceptible, melding with the surrounding urban landscape. The reference to a silhouette’s relationship to the chaos and flux of the city resonates with an identity which is receptive to the overall porosity of the big city.

For Nina Childress, the self-portrait is clearly an occasion for self-mockery. The artist depicts herself, face lost in a pair of women’s underwear in one painting, signaling the release of some of the symbolic tensions surrounding the self-portrait by downplaying expectations inherent to the genre. The incessant eroticisation of women is also being deconstructed here, through the revelation of the mechanisms behind representation. Jacques Lizène photographs himself with an exaggerated pompadour which inevitably brings to mind Tintin; this wink and a nod to the Belgian comic book hero is a playful attempt to knock the figure down from his pedestal through a bit of gentle goading. Pierrick Sorin films himself equipped with the flirtatious and stereotypical accoutrements of the femme fatale, appraising himself with a “That’s all very cute,” putting the viewer in the awkward position of voyeur; we are unsettled by the spectacle of an impossible identification with another gender coupled with an extreme narcissism, to the point where it becomes uncomfortable to watch.

Self-portraiture has nonetheless managed to maintain its confrontational associations despite its now relative mainstream status. In Chechu Alava’s reappropriation of Balthus’ portraits of young women where the artist replaces the faces with her own, as well as in Apollonia Sokol’s nude self-portraits which clearly expose her scars from a Caesarean section, there is a spirit of protest against the recurrent exploitation of women; the excessive eroticisation carried out by battalions of male painters over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. For Léann Kerrien, working in a vein similar to that of Nan Goldin, this emancipatory project involves exposing herself, literally, in order to take stock of the ambiguous ravages of a youth spent in the trenches of addiction. Affirmative posturing like Yannick Ganseman’s

self-portrait with child appears to go against historical traditions of religious genre painting, with its representations of the Virgin with child, giving fatherhood an unexpected makeover by way of tenderness and fragility. The self-portrait remains an arena for the playing out of tensions and rebellions contemporary society is actively grappling with; the artist acts as promoter of these events. Julien Meert's animation self-portraits shows the viewer a world which appears radically disenchanted—through the artist's eyes we are privy to an existential torment whose public airing could possibly produce therapeutic effects. In Émilie Brout and Maxime Marion's video self-portraits, the duo features against a pristine domestic background which is ruled by digital technology, full of connected objects and screens, it brings us to the brink of a dystopian future where every movement appears in sync with the rhythm of a machine, a world where emotions are kept tightly reined in for the sake of maximum efficiency. Solenne Chapelle's fragmentary self-portraits, on the other hand, show the artist all wrapped up in different materials—from plastic shrink-wrap to crocheted tablecloth, the commercialisation of the female form is referenced here, riffing on the clichés this type of instrumentalisation relies upon. For the non-binary Ukrainian artist Yan Bachynski/Yana Bachynska, currently living in Germany under refugee status, the self-portrait is more than a self-referential pose, it is the glorious affirmation of a high-stakes search for identity.

The arrival of the digital age, along with the widespread use of smartphones and the internet have come to characterise our era, leading to the apparent democratisation of the self-portrait; anyone can now become an artist. However, there is no guarantee that artists are made with the simple, almost nonchalant click of a button on a screen. The artistic self-portrait—charged with an emotional, aesthetic and political intensity whatever the medium—contrasts with the selfie, which may at times seem like a prop grenade lobbed half-heartedly at consumer culture and destined to become obsolete, leaving behind the family photo album which on the other hand, was once an important memorial archive. In the work of Amalia Ulman and Molly Soda, for instance, the Internet is treated as a tool to carry out performative, long-term self-portraits which are closer to journal entries and play themselves out over extended periods of time.

With Fancy Selfies, Self-Derision, Disruption and Revelations, Zoo Gallery offers a new perspective within which the artist has assumed a lower-key position, given that the need to prove themselves worthy of subjecthood has now been relativized, giving way to new stakes. Existential, feminist or identity-based in nature, they are approached in a playful, self-mocking way. The situations which arise in these artistic self-portraits are no less preoccupied with social implications, despite there being no comparison with the stakes of *Las Meninas* at the time it was made. Fancy Selfies highlights a practice which has never ceased to reinvent itself, questioning the role of the artist within a society whose overabundance of self-produced images made using digital technology cancels out any intellectual engagement with the dissemination of these images.

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INFOS PRATIQUES

Zoo Gallery, contemporary art center
12 rue Lamoricière, 44100 Nantes
Tuesday to Saturday, 2 PM - 7 PM
Closed on Sundays and Mondays



How to get here?
Tram 1: Chantiers Navals stop
Bus C1, C3, 23: Lamoricière stop
Bus 11: René Bouhier stop



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Soutenu
par

