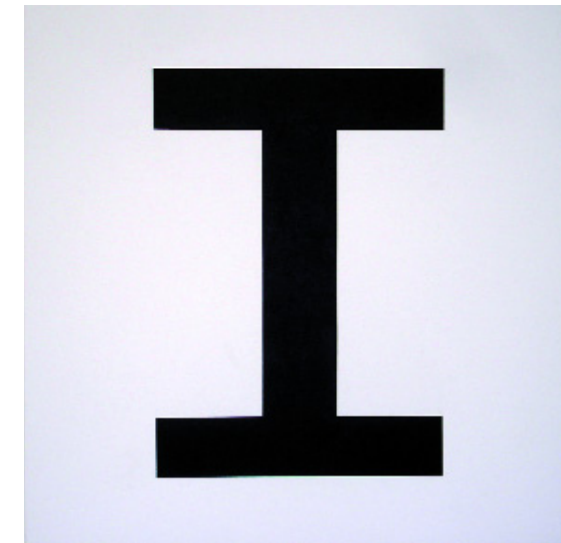


Left: *Pink Narcissus* (2008)
by Tim Noble and Sue Webster

Below: *Self-Portrait (Lucida Console Bold Minor)* (2007)
by Mark Wallinger

SURROGATE SELF-PORTRAITS ME MYSELF AND



Whether it's as a little owl, a computer font or a cluster of penises, artists are consistently finding new ways to depict themselves

WORDS: Paul Carey-Kent

For some time now, the self-portrait has been straying ever further from its conventional form – namely, how the artist sees his or herself, albeit with an eye on their inner state. Increasingly, artists have shown themselves as other, in character or disguise: Cindy Sherman's photographs, Ashley Bickerton's paintings and Tamy Ben-Tor's films, for instance, all feature the artist adopting roles. But another approach is to declare as a self-portrait something which has no apparent physical resemblance to the artist at all. And it is this latter form – the self-portrait by other means – which is the subject here.

Commentators have read non-objective self-presentation into pre-modernist works by artists such as Van Gogh, whose paintings of his and Gauguin's chairs are often cited as depictions of the conflicting personalities of the artists. In work before the Dutch post-Impressionist master, it is unlikely to have been a conscious strategy, but any artwork inevitably contains aspects of its maker, whether intentional or not. Since Van Gogh's time, however, deliberate alternative presentations of the self have become something of a

tradition, by turns playful, emotional and analytical.

Max Ernst, for example, presented himself in playful style as the bird-like Loplop – impresario, actor and ironic enlightener – in order to delve into the relationship between pictorial reality and the viewer's reality. Ansel Krut's *Self-Portrait in Bendy Balloons* (2007) is in that mode. The remarkably prolific Swiss artist Dieter Roth made many self-portraits which reflected his interest in shifting identities by avoiding reference to his appearance, for example in his *Self-Portrait as a Lion* (1971). This sculpture is made from chocolate, a characteristic Roth material which, however sweet and rich, also cracks and turns rancid with time... just like flesh. Maybe not so funny after all.

Many of Tim Noble and Sue Webster's works are double self-portraits just on the edgy side of playfulness. And they do actually look like them, or at least like their shadows, which are cast by light falling on apparently randomly composed sculptures. These shadow plays act as a contemporary twist on Giuseppe Arcimboldo's vegetable portraits. It's as if they see themselves everywhere – though with little vanity, as they have emerged from piles of rubbish, scrap metal, stuffed

“What do these self-portraits by other means have in common? Maybe it’s something about the difference in perception between the inside and the outside”

animals and, as our example shows, more knowing imagery.

In a more directly emotional register, Joseph Beuys used a felt suit as a sculpture which stood in for himself: not just because he wore a similar one, but for its link to his personal myth of being wrapped in felt after an airplane crash in the second world war, and its ongoing connection with spiritual as well as physical warmth. Other current examples include Polish sculptor Mirosław Balka, who typically marks human presence by representing himself (and hence humanity in general) through the dimensions of his work: so it was that his recent walkway installation at White Cube, 190 x 90 x 4973 (2008), had walls of his height: 190cm or 6’3”. Our examples of works by Tracey Emin, Sam Taylor-Wood and Gillian Wearing also foreground an emotional quality.

More analytically, the mirror is inevitably linked to self-portraiture, as the means by which the thing had to be done in the pre-photographic age. That may be part of why Roy Lichtenstein preferred to present himself as a mirror in a self-portrait from 1978, replacing his face with one of the benday [printing] dot looking-glasses which reflect nothing and are a recurrent motif in his work. Lichtenstein hides himself, yet teasingly he doesn’t replace himself with the viewer, as many artists have done by incorporating real mirrors into their work. Jim Dine’s empty gown and Mark Wallinger’s semantic take on the self fit in here. And a scientific twist is also possible: Inigo Mangano-Ovalle has made portraits, including one of himself with his parents, by turning DNA into abstract patterns. Some of our choices are more mockingly pseudo-scientific: Tom Friedman stretched beyond recognition, Mark Manders reading himself into architecture.

So what do these self-portraits by other means have in common? Maybe it’s something about the difference in perception between the inside and the outside. Philosophers have puzzled for centuries over how to penetrate reality, given that the world is a function of our perceptual apparatus as well as of how it is in itself: how much is there objectively, how much is down to our own subjectivity? And perhaps that’s what these self-portraits are really about: how it feels for me in here rather than how it looks for you out there.

ANSEL KRUT



Self-Portrait in Bendy Balloons (2007)
Oil on canvas, 120 x 90cm
Ansel Krut admits that a self-portrait head made out of balloons “is ridiculous”, but suggests that it is also

sinister, as “no matter how many times you puncture and deflate it you know it will leeringly inflate again, rather like the murderous psychopath you are convinced you have finally drowned in the bath but who rises up again the moment your back is turned.”

TIM NOBLE AND SUE WEBSTER



Pink Narcissus (2008)
Pink silicone rubber, wood, light projector, 32 x 36 x 38cm
For more than a decade Tim Noble and Sue Webster have been fashioning self-portraits from the shadows cast by

piles of junk. This piece, a clear reference to Bertelli’s Continuous Profile (1933), adds another twist to how they emerge from shadows – the sculptural element is created from a mass of repeated partial self-portraits: Webster’s fingers and the Noble cock yield two double self-portraits.

GILLIAN WEARING



Self-Portrait as My Father Brian Wearing (2003)
Black and white print, 164 x 130.5cm
In 2003 Gillian Wearing photographed herself in hyperrealistic masks, wigs and body suits, recreating family

portraits, from a 1990 snapshot of her topless, hairbrushing brother to this portrait of her tuxedo-clad dad. In all the works, only her eyes are visible – they are less self-portraits than questionings of what leads to the self, and of how much we can read into its appearance.

SAM TAYLOR-WOOD



Self-Portrait as a Tree (2000)
C-type print, 75.6 x 91cm
Taylor-Wood refers here to the Romantic tendency to identify with nature and also pictures herself as isolated and exposed. Self-Portrait as a

Tree is one of a number of veiled self-portraits which include solitary images, such as animals in Poor Cow and Bound Ram (both 2001). Here, the tree is prophetic, perhaps, of leaving a high profile marriage and finding your dalliance with a teenager on the front pages.

JIM DINE



Tonight There is Weather (1979)
Oil on canvas, 260.4 x 205.7cm
In 1964, American Pop artist Jim Dine saw a New York Times advert featuring a bathrobe which, he said, “looked like me”.

Ever since, he has represented himself with the robe, shaped as if containing him, but empty. Portrait as anti-portrait? One could view the robe as a tactic to avoid having to put forward a positive self. And yet that very vacancy has become curiously distinctive.

TOM FRIEDMAN



Untitled (1998)
Chromogenic print, 61.6 x 116.8cm
American artist Tom Friedman will turn anything into art, including an aspirin into which he carved a self-portrait and a line-up of his bogeys

providing a variant. Love me, love my snot. For this Untitled work, Friedman scanned a full-length photograph of his body, and then stretched a thin slice horizontally, to produce an apparently abstract self-portrait akin to a barcode.

MARK MANDERS



Staged Android (reduced to 88%) (2002)
Iron, wooden chimney, rubber, wood, sand, 383 x 270 x 230cm
For more than 20 years, Dutch artist Mark Manders has been engaged in a

long-term project, Self-Portrait as a Building, in which the concrete structures of architecture function as a mental space which contains objects which form a portrait of their owner. But this parallel existence isn’t quite reality: it is played out at around 80% of life size.

TRACEY EMIN



Little Owl – Self-Portrait (2005)
Etching, 31 x 36cm including frame
Tracey Emin’s work is all about herself, and her most famous work My Bed (1998) could be read as a self-portrait at a particularly low moment. Emin’s

work is frequently about her insecurities, so it is no surprise that she should self-anthropomorphise a vulnerable-looking little owl in one of her characteristically scratchy drawings. Though you need to be careful: even the smallest of owls has very sharp talons.

MARK WALLINGER



Self-Portrait (Tahoma) (2008)
Acrylic on canvas, 183 x 113cm
Wallinger reduces the genre of selfhood to the letter I set in black in various fonts against a white

background. They play with minimalist language and also introduce a linguistic element which invites puns: perhaps he is playing with I-dentity, or with the unique distinctions made by the artist’s eye. They also hint at the ultimate impossibility of representing the true self.

VINCENT VAN GOGH



Wheatfield with Crows (1890)
Oil on canvas, 50.5 x 103cm
Van Gogh is, of course, famous for relatively orthodox self-portraits. But Wheatfield with Crows (1890), which has been thought – wrongly – to be

his last painting, is often held to reflect his state of mind. With its forbidding sky filled with crows, and its three paths for past, present and future and for choices to be made, there is an undoubted (if somewhat literally interpreted) psychological aspect akin to self-portrayal.

Ansel Krut: courtesy Dono Baal, London; Wearing: portrait by Johmie Standbydd; Tim Noble & Sue Webster: © Tim Noble & Sue Webster and courtesy the artist; Sam Taylor-Wood: © Sam Taylor-Wood and courtesy White Cube; Taylor-Wood portrait by Johmie Standbydd

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