INTROSPECTIONS
A Self-Portrait Invitational

Thirty-seven artists explore the parameters of what constitutes a self-portrait.

March 1 - April 14, 1991

Community Gallery of Art
College of Lake County
There is something particularly compelling about an artist's self-portrait. Because of its intimate nature, we expect it to disclose something profound about its subject. Standing before it, we are both voyeur and confidant, anticipating some inner truth to be revealed, or some secret to be shared.

Yet in looking at it, we see only what the artist wants us to see. If we accept it as a personal and private confession, we also must realize that it is a masquerade. Confronting the artist's self-portrait we do not necessarily see the artist as he or she really is, but only as he or she allows themself to be seen.

The 37 artists invited to show their likenesses in Introspections differ greatly in their approach to the self-portrait. Ranging from the realism of Alex Mitchell's riveting, powerful stare to John Edgcomb's abstract wall relief and Militza Loving's mandala installation, they not only continue a dialogue with the historic al self-portrait, but push at the very boundaries of its definition.

Historically, one of the most popular themes in self-portraiture has been the artist at work. In Judith Roth's Vanitas we see the artist sitting before an easel, her brushes and palette in hand, wearing a smock, plastic gloves and what appears to be a house painter's hat. Everything about the picture confirms her identity as an artist. Yet the painting within her painting is the portrait of a skeleton and it is wearing the same hat she wears. To paint oneself, it has been suggested, is to challenge mortality. Playful, often self-mocking images, frequently masking more serious undertones, are also a part of the self-portrait tradition.

Patrick Farrell may lend his own features to a figure of St. Sebastian in the same way as the Quattrocentro painters did in the 15th century, but he also has dressed the martyred saint in a pair of cut-off blue jeans and stuck him with rubber suction-cup tipped arrows. Audrey Niffenegger won't reveal her face to us, just the back of her eccentric, swept-up, Tornado Head hair-do. John Deom, hiding beneath a newspaper hat, obscures his face with his hand, his shy, boyish clowning contrasting dramatically with the crisp, corporate blue suit he wears.

Still life and genre, in which the artist's likeness may take on secondary importance or in some cases be absent entirely, have also become crucial ways in which the artist explores the self.

Each of the objects in Steve Jones' Great Expectations relates to a significant moment in his life: a book on the history of France - where he studied painting and met his future wife, a gold wedding band and cascading pink and blue ribbons that anticipate the birth of his child. The painter's own image, seen as a small reflection in the curve of a silver bowl, seems almost like an incidental glimpse. Similarly in Anne Kratz' small painting Vase, an unidentified woman turns her back to the viewer, but the empty baby carriage at her side, the cross motif in the leaded window and the hourglass pattern on the dingy wallpaper is all that is needed to convey her telling psychological self-portrait.

Although the mirror has served as the traditional vehicle for the artist's self-portrait, the photograph also has been widely used. Today artists are exploring and adapting 20th century technologies. Carolyn Neuhaus-Jones, for instance, has generated her likeness by using computer graphics. Dan Ziembo, portraying himself in a number of guises, including the Giza Sphinx and Gainsborough's Blueboy, experiments with the possibilities offered by video animation.

There will always remain, however, something magical about the notion of the artist alone in the studio peering into the looking glass. By looking at the pictures created by these artists while they, in turn, were looking at themselves, we become acutely aware of the complexities inherent in the simple act of seeing.

Garrett Holg

Garrett Holg is a Chicago correspondent for Art News and is a regular contributor to the New Art Examiner and the Chicago Sun Times.
1. Gabrielle Bakker, 1989
   "Self-Portrait"
   oil on board
   12" x 10"
   Collection of Anthony Sigel, Chicago
   (Reproduced on cover)

2. Maribeth A. Coffey, 1988
   "I Feel I Know the Answers, I'm Just Having a
   Problem Understanding All the Questions"
   hydrocal body cast, cotton & preserved bird
   16" x 60" x 60"

3. Reginald Coleman, 1991
   "Intrinsic Delineation"
   mixed media on canvas
   42" x 108"

   "Self-Portrait"
   mixed media sculpture
   30" x 16"

5. John S. Deom, 1988
   "ZAP! Lightning Turns Woman into a Man"
   mixed media on canvas
   54" x 46"
   Courtesy; J. Rosenthal Gallery, Chicago

   "Birth and Death"
   spackle and metal on masonite
   38" x 30" (triptych)
17. Anne J. Kratz, 1989
“Vase”
technique mixte
8” x 12”

“Field of Trance(s)formation”
collage/assemblage
(mirror, photos, acrylic & canvas)
48” x 36”

“Self-Portrait, 1946”
oil on masonite
18” x 16”
“Question of Light”
oil on canvas
48" x 60"

21. Alex F. Mitchell, 1989
“Self-Portrait”
oil on panel
24" x 20"

(untitled)
oil
24" x 18"
23. Ramona Mitchell, 1988
"Fragmented"
monotype
22" x 30"

"Transformations"
oil on paper on board
49" x 62"
Courtesy: Oskar Friedl
Gallery, Chicago

"Sixth Generation"
computer graphic
(Mac II CX in adobe photoshop)
11" x 8.5"

26. Audrey Niffenegger, 1987
"Tornado Head"
graphite on paper
21" x 13.5"
Courtesy: Printworks LTD., Chicago

27. David Ottinger
"Self-Portrait"
oil on linen
48" x 42"

28. Gay Riseborough, 1982
"Self-Portrait"
graphite & prisma color
on paper
40" x 30"
29. Joan E. Robertson, 1980
"Self-Portrait with Cyclamen"
colored pencil on paper
30" x 22"

30. Judith Roth, 1986-89
"Vanitas"
oil on canvas
72" x 48"

31. Barbara Shapiro, 1990
"Self-Portrait"
oil & collage on canvas
30" x 24"

32. Harold Sudman, 1991
(untitled)
oil on canvas
22" x 22"
33. Linda Talaba, 1987-88
   "Self-Portrait Biography"
   ink & graphite on paper
   48" x 48"

34. Skip Wiese, 1991
   "Self-Portrait, A Sum of Many Parts"
   pastel on paper
   32" x 40"

35. Stephen Wilber, 1985
   "Self-Portrait"
   oil on canvas
   12" x 16"

36. Dennis Wojtkiewicz, 1990
   "Dialog (Portrait of Artist & Wife)"
   oil on panel
   36" x 36"

   "Ramblings"
   computer generated/animated video
The Community Gallery of Art is a project of the College of Lake County Foundation, and is funded in part by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

Community Gallery of Art
College of Lake County
19351 West Washington Street
Grayslake, Illinois 60030-1198
(708) 223-6601, Ext. 240

CURATOR: Steven Jones