The University of Queensland

National Artists’ Self-Portrait Prize 2013

remix. post. connect.

19 October 2013 – 16 February 2014
Foreword

The University of Queensland National Artists’ Self-Portrait Prize is the flagship project in the UQ Art Museum’s biennial calendar. Conceived as a progressive response to an agreement with a major donor to build a collection of artists’ self-portraits, the Self-Portrait Prize has gained a place in Australia’s cultural landscape. The inaugural Prize was held in 2007 and was won by Ben Quilty. The second in 2009 was won by Julie Reap, and the third in 2011 by Domenico de Clario.

The Self-Portrait Prize, which is entered by invitation only, encourages artists to reflect on their identity in expanded terms. Through it, the Art Museum provokes its audiences to consider identity as a pervasive social issue, and to question personal identity as a moral dilemma. Exhibitions are framed with themes designed to explore contemporary concerns, and to foment artist’s ideas. For this exhibition, the curator Samantha Littley considered the relevance of self-portraiture in relation to today’s image-saturated, self-focused and media-driven society.

I am delighted with the penetrating responses the artists have submitted. Given that it is impossible to anticipate the form these responses will take, the nature and cohesion of the resulting exhibition is scarcely known until the works are delivered. The 2013 exhibition is powerful and stimulating, and I sincerely thank Samantha for her vision and leadership in this project. I am grateful to Dr Blair French from the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, who has been the Judge of this year’s Prize. He has engaged with the theme and the artists’ works with a considered and generous mind. I acknowledge my team in the Art Museum for the remarkable collaborative spirit that exists between them, and the excellent results that arise. My thanks also go to the artists who have given so much of themselves to this project.

Finally, I wish to congratulate Nell for winning the Prize, and for her willingness to participate with us in the public engagements that her achievement has generated. We are excited to receive her work into our Collection.

Dr Campbell Gray
Director
Historically, an artist’s self-portrait distinguished them – only artists and their wealthy patrons had the means to have their likeness painted. Photography levelled the playing field; digital photography has opened the floodgates. In an age where technology has transformed the way we live, and interpret our lives, images of the self are more malleable and transferable than ever before. The ubiquitous ‘selfie’ is a commodity in a global social network; the internet is the portrait gallery of the twenty-first century.

The prevalence of the self-image in social media, on reality television and in everyday life has generated an audience primed to consume personal information. Whether an artist today operates from a digital platform or not, their self-portrait is likely to be understood within this broader framework. remix. post. connect. explores the impulse to manipulate, present or communicate aspects of self through artworks in a range of media. The exhibition acknowledges that identity is fluid, and that we comprise complex and contradictory characteristics informed by our heritage, experiences and the social circles we create.

The invited artists adopt various approaches that do not always conform to traditional notions of self-portraiture. Some employ narrative; others are less overt. All the artists have disclosed something about themselves, whether fictional or ‘real’. The exhibition celebrates this diversity in a display that challenges preconceived ideas: an oversized iPhone that frames an image of the artist as nineteenth-century proto celebrity, the Countess da Castiglione; a black dog that reveals something of the artist’s state of mind, and experience of racial prejudice; a bicycle that stands as a statement of self, and is documented in a blog that extends its reach beyond the museum. What differentiates the self-portraits in this exhibition from other, more popular forms is the artists’ engagement with discourses around self.

Samantha Littley
Curator
In her introductory notes to this highly impressive exhibition, curator Samantha Littley talks about the new prevalence of the self-image in what now constitutes our public realm – on-line, in social media and in reality television. As she notes, where once the self-portrait was an exclusive means by which an artist might claim a certain social status, and perhaps secure posterity, now, and I quote, ‘the ubiquitous selfie is a commodity in a global social network’.

So, we could ask, what territory might the self-portrait stake out for itself in and as art in the current moment? Portraiture more generally thrives in the public imagination as an immensely popular art form. This popularity might also be treated as another indication of the collective narcissism of a celebrity-obsessed age. But portraiture; through the modern period and beyond has also been an immensely potent representational means through which to grapple with the various psychological, social and experiential doubts we in the Western world in particular have developed around our own identities – our sense of selfhood. Whether considering the individual, or a collective, we tend to treat identity as being in constant flux, unstable, constituted and reconstituted over and over again. And this is where visual artists have led the way. Think of now classical modernist painters considering the constitution of the social subject in a network of looking, or seeking to produce anew the sensation of the complex, contradictory, even traumatised self. Think of those very many photographic essays of just a few decades ago positing the subject within more intimate, more immediate social settings of their own production, or parallel work with the lens that sought to analyse the self through visual refraction and fragmentation. More recently we’ve seen work in which present-day selves are formed in explicit reference to historical conditions, often the violent contestations of colonialism. And now as video has become a ubiquitous medium, we encounter so much work in which the subject is formed in play and performance.

In short, art reminds us that we are always up for reinvention.

This is where I believe this particular selection of artists and this exhibition is so apt, so timely. The theme of ‘remix. post. connect.’ – written as if a sequence of screen instructions – invites artists to consider how the self is in effect regenerated through processes of mediation; how the self of self-portraiture is always the result of acts of manipulation, perhaps of remove, certainly of careful aesthetic framing.

The artists in this exhibition have taken up that invitation – that challenge – with great energy, deep consideration and sophistication. The exhibition, as we could expect, ranges across media. It’s playful in parts; contemplative in others; unsettling, even disturbing at moments. I’m particularly struck by the differing degrees to which artists have advanced, withdrawn or sublimated their own presence in the works. There are quite direct encounters with subjects such as the strangely delightful domestic performances of Chris Bennie, or in Adrienne Doig’s

Judge’s comments
beautiful patchwork pieces, or Yavuz Erkan’s photographs. There are works in which the figure of the artist’s body is partial, obscured, inscribed or refracted – the photographic piece by Eugenia Raskopoulos for example, Natascha Bierer’s intriguing iPad scale painting, and the heavily remediated film as painting by Jess MacNeil.

Subjects are doubled, in direct conversation with themselves such as in David M Thomas’s Alienation video, or fictionalised as in David Griggs’s wild Sexpat idiot cowboy. Artists adopt borrowed personas such as Archie Moore appropriating his pejorative childhood nickname of ‘Black Dog’, or Anastasia Rose mimicking the artist Marina Abramović or, most poignantly in this regard, Jennifer Mills’s channelling of actress Barbara Feldon, the ‘Agent 99’ from Get Smart – a ‘borrowing’ or projection of the self that says so much about childhood awe, hope and aspiration.

In many cases the artist is apparently absent altogether. This can and has made for two compelling works in the exhibition. Darren Sylvestor’s video presents vignettes of commercially branded couples sitting in a park at night engaged in the most banal of exchanges regarding the human condition in the age of social media. I found it excruciating to watch at first, but gradually came to realise that not only was this, on one hand, the point, but that on the other this work painfully captured and crystallised the confused profundity of a generation trapped in a world where the only constant point of reference is the self – the world of ‘me’.

In a very different video work, Half brother, David Rosetzky presents a mesmerising formal dance performance as filmic event that abstracts but concentrates certain actions and qualities that the artist associates with his dead father.

Good portraiture is inextricably bound with a consciousness of time and transience. Nothing more intimately represents the passage of time than changes in the human body or the marking, lining and weathering of the human face. Portraiture can attempt the inevitably futile pause of time, often to great effect. Or it can embrace its complexity and inevitable hold on our experience. Self-portraiture can also be a means by which to track the formal and conceptual development of an artist’s work through time.

This is brought to mind by the video work by Neil in this exhibition, SUMMER 2012. Neil presents us with a symbolic cycle of life, death and rebirth. Shot in a fixed frame, single take, the work pictures the artist taking a cricket bat to one her earlier works – a large sculpture of a fly – in an act of formal, ritual destruction that is also raw and immediate. The demise of work enables the creation of another.

SUMMER has a cathartic quality not just apparent to, but felt by, a viewer. The work is angry and tender all at once. You can see this in the first tense, then uncoiling, body of the artist, in the internal conflicts that flash across her face, in the edge to her voice goading herself as much as the target of her violence. It’s a form of double portrait, the artist confronting but also strangely honouring her past self in order to open up a new future. SUMMER is a beautifully conceived and produced work that connects artist and audience in a shared recognition of the fragility of life. As such it is the deserving recipient of The University of Queensland National Artists’ Self-Portrait Prize 2013.

Blair French
Assistant Director, Curatorial & Digital Museum of Contemporary Art Australia
Nell

SUMMER 2012
digital video, sound, edition of 10
duration 00:03:00
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

Nell is an artist whose work eludes categorisation. Her practice ranges across media, and includes the darkly humorous tombstone *Happy ending* 2006 located at the entrance to UQ Art Museum, a neon-light sculpture of her name, and a performance in which she was driven around on the back of a flatbed truck with AC/DC blaring. She has said, ‘I’m different every day. I think people end up with signature styles, kind of an accent in a way, but my accent is just who I am.’ Her entry in the Self-Portrait Prize documents her destroying a work she made previously, an ironic act given her Buddhist practice, which advocates non-violence. The artist says,

The fly in this video was made for an exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2002. Fly as high as me was as long as I am tall, and was an odd take on a self-portrait. In the amplification of the uniqueness and singularity of one obscure blowfly is the ‘flyness’ of all flies – just as the ‘humanness’ of all humans is tangible in any decent artistic portrait.

Fly as high as me was later exhibited at Newcastle Regional Gallery, The Queen Victoria Building in Sydney, and at Ipswich Art Gallery. But, after 10 years in storage, it was time for the fly to die. So I killed it. Seasons come. Seasons go. As the Bible says, ‘There is a time for everything, and a season for everything under the heavens’ (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Life is fragile – every living thing will die. And yet … life goes on. What was once a sculpture is now a video. *SUMMER* is therefore a double self-portrait in which I am concurrently living and dying. I wear all red to signify the bloodiness of birth, the bloodiness of life and death. With a blowfly and cricket bat, *SUMMER* is distinctly Australian – the mindless swatting of flies, and the bloody mindedness of violence.

Winner
The University of Queensland National Artists’ Self-Portrait Prize 2013
Chris Bennie

Video for The kissing swans 2013
digital video, edition of 6
duration 00:10:03
Courtesy of the artist

In his reflective, gently humorous videos, Chris Bennie captures everyday experiences that would otherwise slip by unnoticed. Interested in authenticity, his ‘eye for the ordinary’ leads us to contemplate a world we know, but have not, perhaps, paused to consider. Of this work, he says,

This year I have been busy transforming caravans into sculptures. They’re from Bundaberg, which was hit by three natural disasters in three days in January this year. The council thinks they are casualties of the Finemore and Riverdike Caravan Park closures. One of them has a pair of kissing swans hand-painted above the back window. I’ve called the caravan The kissing swans. To give it new life, I’ve projected a series of videos of myself and my partner Nea inside it.

Video for The kissing swans meditates on the domestic to explore how an object may be intimate. It has an allegorical quality.

Without The kissing swans caravan though, it’s clear that Video for The kissing swans is an artwork about me. Dancing, swimming, Nea, my hair – these things (in no particular order) are my personal loves. They are daily rituals: Sunday morning potterings and mid-week frustrations. While these things are performed and made with a flooded caravan in mind, what you see is very much me.
Natasha Bieniek works on a scale that recalls the miniature portrait paintings popularised in sixteenth-century Europe, and the photographic portraits now exchanged on smart phones.

Working with a traditional medium, a Baroque sensibility, and an eye to contemporary culture, she sees a correlation between the traditional keepsake, and the value we currently place on the self image. As she explains,

"We live in a culture consumed by digital media. More so than ever, we use images to facilitate our need to connect and communicate with the outside world. Social networking sites enable us to share a part of ourselves in a deciphered way: sometimes honestly, and at other times with a fabricated version of our existence. This is also inherently common when it comes to portrait painting."

"We are able to segue between fact and fiction. My self portrait, Royal gala, endeavours to take traditional painting methods to an extreme, with an emphasis on image culture and audience connectivity."

"The physical nature of my work aims to mirror the form of a modern technological device. My painting's iPad-like scale seeks to form a one-on-one relationship with the viewer. Such intimacy is typical of the way we often view pictures today. The regular use of handheld devices places images within a miniaturised context. I'm interested in sharing a link between how we perceive images in contemporary culture, and how we have done so in the past. By reconstructing traditional elements of oil painting with a less formal composition, I have aimed to form a juncture between scale and representation within a present-day context."

Natasha Bieniek

Royal gala
2013
oil on wood
15.0 x 20.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and diane tanzer gallery + projects, Melbourne.
In her spectral photographs, Jane Burton frequently uses the female nude to express aspects of her identity. Moody and atmospheric, Burton’s images are at once otherworldly, and based on personal perceptions. Of this work she says,

“All my work has been an exploration of self, whether I have photographed other women, interiors or landscapes. I have sought self in the other.

To depict oneself directly is rife with uncertainty, as the possibilities are myriad and our choice is inevitably self conscious, and reveals more than we would like.

I felt, however, that I could not satisfactorily depict myself as a static, singular self, preferring to align myself with Surrealist concepts that subvert the notion of self as having a core, of being whole, natural and stable; a belief that the self – the body/the mind/the unconscious – is in constant transformation and unrest, where fragmentation and rupture are recurring phenomena.

I have always felt this fragmentation: that we present different selves to the world, that we have many faces, many guises – some repressed, some revealed.”
Thea Costantino’s interest in historical representation is expressed in a practice that ranges across drawing, photography and installation, but is united by a sense of the macabre. Informed by her research into the grotesque and Post-Colonialism at Curtin University, her strange composite faces and figures draw us into dialogue with the past, and cause us to consider rituals that hover on the periphery of our consciousness. In this work, she applies her trademark ghoulishness to her own image, presenting us with a vision of herself laid out in death in a mourning dress from the 1890s. Of her entry in the Self-Portrait Prize, she says,

My practice investigates the representation and interpretation of history through the frame of the grotesque. In sculptural work, I mine the long association of wax with the representation and commemoration of the dead, whether through populist history exhibits (such as Madame Tussauds), anatomical models, or funeral practices such as the death mask.

Effigy quotes the ancient tradition of funerary portraiture to present an anachronistic and grandiose self portrait that alludes to histories of British imperialism, and its legacies in the present day.
Paula do Prado mixes media in a practice that weaves photography with painting, textiles with installation. Never predictable, she shakes things up visually, and metaphorically, offering us images of herself that resist prevailing categories. Her ethnic background and her perspective as an ‘outsider’ in Australia, a country with its own cultural baggage, provide her with the impetus to redress social typecasting.

Odalisque is a Turkish word used to describe a female slave or concubine in Ottoman households. A fetishised form of the odalisque featured in the ‘Orientalist’ work of nineteenth-century Western painters, such as Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, and persisted as a theme in the work of twentieth-century artists. As do Prado explains, Odalisque continues my exploration of identity and authenticity through self-portraits that interrogate racial, cultural and gender stereotypes. Specifically I am interested in exploring representations of the brown female body, the mulatta or jazelle, the half-caste of ambiguous origin whose outward appearance defies easy ethnic classification.

I combine, remix and reframe these constructed roles, which have in this case been loosely drawn from Orientalism, and the works of Henri Matisse and Eugène Delacroix. The process of repositioning and re-working these images provides a space in which to question and confront the taboo.

My work draws on my experience as an Afro-Uruguayan woman with both European and African ancestry, and as a migrant living in contemporary Australian society.
James Dodd
Born 1977 Adelaide, South Australia. Lives and works Adelaide, South Australia.

Search online for Jimmy's Tallbike Adventures 2013
bicycle frames, bicycle components, steel, MDF, pine
175.0 x 230.0 x 100.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Ryan Renshaw Gallery, Brisbane.

James Dodd’s artworks have graced the nation’s laneways and back alleys, and the hallowed walls of the National Gallery of Australia. As a street artist, his distinctive style can be read as a self-portrait – graffiti is an analogue form of social networking. For this installation, Dodd combined his love of the ubiquitous ‘pushie’ with his art practice, literally ‘taking it to the streets’. Extending the premise of the work, he documented his bike adventures in a blog that speaks to the reach and relevance of social media, as he explains,

In many ways we understand people and develop ideas about them via the objects in their lives. We also find ourselves in a contemporary context where our understanding of a person is developed via interactions with social media, often through content and nuance generated by the individuals themselves. These perspectives form the basis of my project.

As a passionate cyclist I have spent my life surrounded by bikes and bike culture. Most recently this has manifested in a passion for ‘freak bikes’. These bikes expound the ideals of DIY, punk and alternative lifestyles, highlighting the politics of being a cyclist in Australia. I have found these bikes incite a sense of wonder, as to the machine, its potential, its riders and its creator.

This project has allowed me to expand the ways in which I view cycling, an art practice, and their potential intersections. The bike has become a catalyst and site for exploration on many levels. I have documented my experiences in a blog, and used social-media sites such as Facebook to engage people with the content. These platforms allow for the rapid and wide dissemination of ideas, and engage audiences who, in the past, may have been restricted by the physical and social constraints of the gallery space. http://jimmystallbike.blogspot.com.au
Adrienne Doig  

Like ME, LIKE me  
2013  
patchwork, appliqué and embroidery  
two parts, each 121.0 x 170 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.

The self portrait has engaged Adrienne Doig since 2001, when she commissioned ten doll makers from around the world to make dolls bearing her features. Displayed in the exhibition Truth and likeness at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra (25 November 2006 – 8 April 2007), My life as a doll explored the multiple ways in which the self is constructed and received. Doig frequently works with embroidery and appliqué to create quilts and other fabric-based work with precedents as grand as the Bayeux Tapestries, and as prosaic as tourist tea towels. In signature style, the title of this work is a play on words, in this case, the language of Facebook, as Doig explains, The inherent vanity and affectation of portraiture is revealed as I present myself posed in an everyday setting. The image is ‘like me’, but is also an appeal to the viewer, suggesting our current obsession for sharing and liking images in media and online. For this work, I have overlayed and pieced together the remnants of found, unfinished patchwork quilt projects, to transform the patterns into something that is more than simply decorative. Within the patchwork are fragments of old clothing, feed sacks, bed sheets and even handkerchiefs, all saved and lovingly stitched together to create something useful and precious. Here the characteristics of patchwork quilting, the patterns, the textures, along with its improvisational ‘make do’ qualities, combine to represent a fashioning of the self.
Yavuz Erkan

I am not perfect, I am flawed 2013
three pigment prints
each 50.0 x 50.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist.

Yavuz Erkan’s interest in non-conformity and the status of the outsider finds expression in his photomedia work. His performative practice frequently allows us access to staged moments of intimacy, in which we are drawn to observe him, and to question the veracity of what we are being shown. The flamboyant poet, playwright and enfant terrible Oscar Wilde is something of a role model for Erkan, and it is Wilde’s quip, ‘be yourself; everyone else is already taken’, which acts as a touchstone for Erkan’s entry in the Prize. The artist says of the triptych, I am not perfect, I am flawed rejoices in flawed facial appearances and gestures, undermining the constant struggle to look ideal. Societal self-awareness intoxicates our souls with hypocrisy, but privacy liberates the true self within. Paying homage to an exponentially increasing number of DIY photographs and videos posted in social-media platforms, I have documented myself doing the kind of ordinary things I only do when I am unaware of the onlooker’s gaze. This paradoxical blend of the monotonous and the concealed is unnecessary; I do not mind being watched. I am not perfect, I am flawed.
Fiona Foley belongs to the Wondunna clan of the Badtjala people whose Country, Thoorgine, is now referred to by the European placenames Hervey Bay and Fraser Island. Her matrilineal heritage informs her work, as seen in early self portraits such as Badtjala woman (two sets of beads) 1994, based on a photograph from 1899. Foley has spoken of ‘... the camera’s central role ... in transforming, but really stereotyping, our culture’, and of the need for Indigenous people to regain control over their own images ‘... firstly replacing the documenter, then creatively reinterpreting their photographic history.’

In this video, Foley continues to explore historical encounters between First Nations people and Europeans. The work relates to her series of photographs ‘The oyster fishermen’ 2011, in which an Indigenous woman falls prey to a group of colonial men. In her work for the Self-Portrait Prize, her focus is on the breakdown of ‘promised marriages’ that ensued when white men took possession of Indigenous women. For her artist’s statement, Foley has selected quotes from Germaine Greer’s book, On rage (2008), which inform the video:

A lubra is one of the greatest pioneers of the Territories, for without her it would have been impossible for the white man to have carried on.

The white bosses contrived to drive a wedge between the Aboriginal man and the Aboriginal woman.

Prostitution was unknown in pre-contact Aboriginal societies, but then so was suicide.

In 1900 at Ardock Station in Queensland, nine Aboriginal women were kept in a fenced compound for the use of the white station hand.

White men have made huge fortunes in outback Australia, but their black co-husbands live in poverty. There would have been no stolen generations if the white man had kept his hands off Aboriginal women.
Through photographs and the moving image, Katherine Griffiths explores identity and the manipulation of self. In a previous series, ‘Naturally beautiful’, she photographed girls on the cusp of adolescence, showing how susceptible they are to preconceived ideals. Here she uses her own image to examine the contemporary impulse to modify the self, explaining,

We have never had so much control over our own image as we do today. Hyper-aware explores the ability to construct, manipulate and influence the concept of identity.

Through social media we have access to the lives of others. Pictures, posts and background information allow viewers to make quick judgments. These platforms also allow individuals to pick, choose and manipulate their personal details. This heightened sense of control can result in a hyper awareness of the self, and ambiguity for the viewer.

These elements do not always work in harmony and one’s sense of self can get ‘lost in translation’. Hyper-aware challenges the traditional conventions of portraiture by removing the face, yet still presents the illusion of gaze, expression and mood.
David Griggs

Sexpat idiot cowboy 2013
digital video, sound
duration 00:10:57
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

In a wide-ranging practice, Sydney artist David Griggs embraces an edgy aesthetic to comment on popular culture and, frequently, on the social, political and economic issues affecting Manila where he currently lives.

In this video, Griggs is the self-proclaimed character of the work’s title, providing a running commentary on his exploits, as below:

I am a Sex Addict with a serious Shabu problem who dreams of being a Cowboy! Is there is no better place than Manila for a Sexpat Drug Addict? Manila Vice, we call it!

Putting all my vices aside, this work is, in truth, an accurate short film about myself. I am the Sexpat, the Idiot, the Cowboy. No acting here! The two girls? I fuck them! The clown guys? I exploit them! The dog? It’s mine! The beautiful Scarface sunset backdrop? As if I painted that! I don’t have to do anything to be an artist these days. Wait! I’m writing this artist’s statement. Guess I still have to do some things myself. ‘Tropical Depression’ is a term for a typhoon; there ain’t no Depression In my Tropical World. Shit! 500PHP to f**k a sexy 18-year-old girl all night. 1000PHP for 2 grams of Shabu.

Am I Australian? Am I American? Am I Filipino? Who knows, and who cares. What I do know is I am not an artist; I may be autistic but not artistic. It’s all just bullshit! Sexpat Idiot Cowboy?? What sort of boring crap is that? However, as long as it keeps me sane and stops me from starving, I will keep making ART. Dennis Hopper once said that if his films fail now, all that means is that his audience has not been born yet. He also said in his film American dreamer (1971) that society deems him a criminal because he smokes weed. BTW if you are wondering if this film and Hopper’s The last movie (1971) were pegs for my film, [the answer is, yes]. Why? Simply because those two films are complete genius! I love them! But now is not the time to explain why I love them. This is time for my artist’s statement right?

My real statement is this: Everything is a joke!
Enjoy the film!
Thanks!
The title refers to the writing of the Austrian-born American psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, The restoration of the self (1977). He came to my attention a few years ago and I thought there was a connection between his idea that we are continually putting ourselves together, and the way my paintings over this same period were forming in their making.

I choose this painting to represent me, as we strive for cohesion between our private and social selves, so this painting attempts a cohesion of its pictorial parts. The search for the self can lead to the idea of being part of a larger human identification present in others.

When is the face the face of the painting? When is it that the depiction of someone flips over into being the depiction of the work itself? Some of the British painter Francis Bacon’s portraits do this, the painting becomes itself.
Petrina Hicks’s high-gloss images comment on commercial photography, borrowing from its conventions while simultaneously destabilising them. The immaculate surfaces of her staged photographs are belied by their disconcerting subject matter, which has seen her work interpreted as a contemporary expression of the Baroque, and referred to as ‘grotesque perfection’. Hicks, who has explored stereotypes around the female image in previous work, says of this photograph,

The earliest representations of women in art relate to the female as life giver, fertility symbol and child bearer.

The conch shell has traditionally been used as a symbol of fertility across many cultures; the spiral formation of the conch shell is also symbolic of infinity.

Venus explores the representation of women in today’s image-focused culture. Here the conch shell overwhelms the woman’s face, masking her identity.

As a ‘self portrait’ Venus explores my own feelings of being overwhelmed by the over-sexualised and unrealistic images of women we are exposed to. Venus is my response to these images.
Multidisciplinary artist Anastasia Klose has commented previously on the visual clichés that proliferate on social-networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram. In a series of photographs from 2008 that began with My boyfriend dumped me on Facebook, she asked us to identify with her through digital ‘snaps’ captioned with Twitter-style text that may, or may not, have related to her life. Her turn as the lovelorn girl was not, however, as comic-book victim but involved agency. For her entry in the Self-Portrait Prize, Klose has cast herself as performance artist Marina Abramović. As she explains, this portrait is my homage to Marina Abramović, self promotion, and life under late capitalism. Here, I adopt Marina’s intense stare, while holding two mugs I made online.

These mugs are for sale at the National Gallery of Victoria exhibition Melbourne now from 22 November 2013 to 23 March 2014. They are going cheap at only $25 each. If you are interested in purchasing one, please contact anastasiakloeshop@gmail.com for prompt service.
Michael Lindeman finds nostalgia in old technologies. He frequently uses text from newspapers as a source for paintings that critique the process of art making, and the rise of the internet. In this work, he has committed his own hand-written letter to canvas in a direct form of communication that belies the impersonality of new media. He says,

I am interested in making conceptual ‘text paintings’, and in bringing a cerebral approach to the field. My recent work includes a series that translates intimate gestures – hand-written letters addressing various personal experiences – into amplified replica paintings on canvas.

The paintings have a warm aesthetic and contain personal content based on real interactions within the world – they are perhaps a type of self portraiture. While relying on deadpan humour as an entry point into my work, the paintings seek to distil many sentiments. They are loaded with conflicting vibes, including an awkward sense of slapstick and melancholy, sarcasm and sincerity, the absurd and a deep seriousness.

I am committed to creating paintings that question perceived notions of what painting can be, and its current relevance within the broader territory of visual culture. Ultimately, I aim to provoke discussion and interest in contemporary painting.
Mistakes were made
(And not all were beautiful
But some remained)
And I'm here.
2013
oil, watercolour, pigmented gesso, gouache and synthetic polymer paint on canvas
150.0 x 200.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist.

Jess MacNeil’s multidisciplinary practice shifts between painting, photography, installation and video – she is often inspired to use existing work in one format as the starting point for new work in another format. Her experience of place and space, and her study of people as they navigate public forums, provides her with material that she uses to consider perception. Often the remnants of an exchange are what interest her. Of her entry in the Self-Portrait Prize, she says,

… in sourcing my subject matter I have tended to focus outwards, looking at the ways the world seems to work, and questioning what I find, how I see, and possible ways of understanding it. There is plenty of my ‘self’ in my work, given shape through the processes I use – my selections, decisions, revisions, omissions, mistakes. Previous works I’ve positioned as self portraits include the installation Grotty little corner (Self portrait) 2004 and the series of paintings ‘Self portrait as a city’ 2008–2009. For this portrait, I’ve decided to focus directly on myself, while continuing to imbue subjectivity through process.

The work was originally conceived as a 16mm film with a sculptural element. The final self portrait is a painting, the composition of which has been generated from drawings made from video footage taken as preparation for the film, mediated through the computer, and eventually through various alchemies of painting in the studio. The influence of the original film idea persists, and the painting has been composed of fragments of images accumulating and changing over time in response to one another.

Like 16mm film, painting is ‘indexical’: it carries a direct record or ‘trace’ of its contact with the physical world. The methods undertaken in making the work permeate its surface, along with the image portrayed. My treatment of the self portrait reflects personal events and their consequences but, instead of being present in a narrative sense, these accumulated experiences have influenced my perspective(s) on my subject (in this case myself).
Jennifer Mills

In the echo chamber 2013
watercolour, gouache, ink and graphite on paper
18 parts, overall 116.0 x 284.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

Jennifer Mills’s luminous watercolour drawings provide a vehicle for her study of self. In a previous work, What’s in a name? 2009–2011, Mills scoured the internet looking for ‘Googlegangers’, or internet alter egos, with whom she shares a name and, in some instances, serendipitously, other character traits. In this self portrait, the artist pays homage to the 1960s television series Get smart, choosing as her proxy actress Barbara Feldon as Agent 99 in the ‘Groovy Guru’, Series 3, Episode 15. As a girl, Mills was addicted to the program, and identified strongly with the mod heroine.

Among these images are two of Mills, one of her as a child, the other of her as a teenager sporting a version of 99’s hallmark bob, and wearing a t-shirt printed with graphics from the Hoochoo Guru’s 1984 album Stoneage Romeos, which features the song ‘In the echo chamber’. The other personal reference is to Mills’s son, whose autism makes him intolerant to noise – in the ‘Groovy Guru’, Max and 99 are, Mills explains, ‘trapped in a sound booth and exposed to extreme amplified sound. Throughout the ordeal she looks amazing and manages to extricate them from the predicament. 99 always escapes.’

Mills’s statement for the work is an excerpt from the script:
Agent 99: What kind of a room is this?
Groovy Guru: It’s a room from which there is no escape ...
[With Max and 99 trapped in the ‘echo chamber’, the evil Guru offers the parting words]
Groovy Guru: ... I forgot to tell you, I’ve got a transmitter set until the sound gets higher and higher, until the vibration from your heartbeats are going to blow your brains apart … Pow! I kind of envy you; it’s a groovy way to make a big drop out.
Kate Mitchell documents the illogical aspects of everyday life. She sets herself tasks that highlight the futility of action, while simultaneously rejoicing in it. The feats she performs are often thankless, yet she sets about them with zeal. Getting through it relates to the mythic trials of the Greek king Sisyphus who, for his persistent dishonesty, was condemned to forever push a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down again. She explains, in this video I perform the repeated ritual of climbing a ladder with no end. It is a Sisyphean task that speaks to the monotony and relentlessness of the work-life cycle.

In Albert Camus’s text The Myth of Sisyphus (1942), he makes a link between these labours, and the meaningless of life. For Camus, though, Sisyphus is nevertheless happy and joyful. I am interested in the absurdity of our lives, which are all part tragic, part comic. In all of my work, there is an underlying respect for the struggles of my fellow humans. Here, it’s as though a carrot dangles in front of me, prompting me to struggle on like an ass. Life is hard grind but that doesn’t mean it isn’t enjoyable. This work is a literal getting through the absurd but beautiful action of being human. If I could get out of my own way, life would be excellent.
Archie Moore

Black dog 2013
taxidermy dog, raven oil, shoe polish, leather and metal collar
67.5 x 36.0 x 67.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Spiro Grace Art Rooms, Brisbane, and The Commercial, Sydney.

Archie Moore uses language to recast and redress the racist insults he endured as a child. Working with a range of media that includes sculpture, drawing and installation, he speaks of cross-cultural tensions, and challenges us to reconsider the power of words. This self portrait is Moore’s comment on a childhood nickname, and a play on the phrase ‘black dog’ or ‘bête noire’, which is a euphemism for depression.

Black dog resurrects a portrait of me as a racist joke – something I discovered long after it had started. (I guess you have to be in the ‘in crowd’ to hear the ‘in joke’). It was a personal experience, but one that is universal to marginalised people. The work revives feelings and memories. Memories of similar stories told to me by Uncles and Aunty’s, histories of bodysnatching and grave robbing in the name of Darwinian science – people turned into anthropological curiosities and seen as subhuman, newspaper articles about the repatriation of the Indigenous resistance fighters Jandamarra’s (Bunuba people) and Yagan’s (Noongar people) heads, which were once seen as trophies, recent instances of racism against musician Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu and AFL player Adam Goodes.

This is an image of me that I internalised for some time. I became that black dog and the black dog came to me. It is known that prejudice creates mental health problems and, as the horror of racism and the zombie black dog returns again and again, nipping at your heels, you wonder if it can ever be killed. I believe these ideas are perpetuated in sport, where a slur is still seen as a bit of larrikin jibing that is harmless. I may have hunted it down and captured it but, just when you think it’s dead, it’s brought back to life. These slurs don’t have the impact they once did but, like the taxidermy head, they are both dead and alive, pacing up and down a cage inside my skull.
Shaun O’Connor

Untitled 2013
Plywood, adhesive, resin and enamel
46.0 x 120.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist.

Shaun O’Connor investigates the poetry and politics of mark making, and the relationship between public space, signs and popular culture. His text-based works are frequently informed by graffiti, which he sources and reconceives. O’Connor speaks of graffiti as something of a universal language, in that the same ideas, sentiments and symbols recur no matter where it appears. Here, he has borrowed from iconography associated with the tattoo, minus the content that ordinarily tells us something about the bearer’s identity. Rather than being prescriptive, however, O’Connor lets the motif read as an emblem of self, leaving us to inscribe the scroll with our own thoughts.
Tom O’Hern

TROLL 2013
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
215.0 x 152.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Bett Gallery, Hobart.

Tom O’Hern’s practice encompasses street art and zines, drawing, painting, and installation, and celebrates ‘all things feral and savage’. Embracing an irreverent grungy aesthetic, he works predominately in black and white to explore themes around masculinity, suburbia and the outsider. Here O’Hern rebuts the current obsession with ‘connectedness’ in a neo-goth, ‘wild man’ fantasy in which he retreats into an alternate universe, as he explains.

This work is my self portrait as a troll, a failed attempt at primitivism in a cold wet studio rather than a tranquil cave surrounded by the friendly animals of Mount Wellington, Tasmania. It is dually the future primitive troll, smashing his computer, burning down his flat and living under the Derwent Bridge, and the troll who just scrolls through Facebook at one in the morning only to realise he doesn’t even know and/or like half these people. The work explores the contradictory urges to connect and disconnect entirely.
In a multidisciplinary practice, Ryan Presley addresses post-colonial issues that, as an artist with Danish and Indigenous heritage, affect him deeply. Descended from the Marri Ngarr people from the Moyle River region of the Northern Territory, Presley is forthright in condemning racial prejudice. For his self portrait, he has focussed on an aspect of his heritage common to both his Indigenous and European ancestors: their strength as warriors. Painted in ochre tones and incised with designs based on Danish motifs, the spears affirm his identity, as he explains,

"This work deliberates on the concept of the ‘warrior’, and societal ideas of status, violence and masculinity. By using my combined racial heritage, I explore contrasts between Scandinavian and Aboriginal constructs of ‘the man’, and the traits of masculinity that are valued or popularised. I have carved contemporised and blended designs onto the spears, which reflect the mixing, and interlocking, of my far-flung bloodlines. The segmented coloured blocks echo the mapping of an individual’s genome, to indicate I am a product of my ancestry, and my environment. I have used spears to consider how one might employ a device that has been crafted since time immemorial, by many peoples, to signify a particular personal position, and as a weapon. It is a commentary on me and the aims, desires, failures, limitations and success I have experienced. By using an ancient implement and reworking it with cutting-edge technology, I acknowledge my place in a long, sprawling history, and how it has affected my present. This is how I seek to work and use my artistic practice, as a means of visual communication, one that may be enticing but also elicits commentary and questioning. The spears are shown decorated but still functional, piercing through the wall. Yet they are strewn to imply a body print or silhouetted human target. I am, at the same time, the spear and the wall. It has been my experience that the energy and actions you exude will often be reflected back in unexpected and incomprehensible ways."
Eugenia Raskopoulos

Time of shooting 10.08 pm 2013
pigment print on metallic photo paper
208.0 x 110.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist, William Wright // Artists’ Projects, Sydney and Arc One Gallery, Melbourne.

Eugenia Raskopoulos’s practice revolves around language, the body and the translation of words. In performative videos and photographs she uses a variety of media to inscribe language in a physical sense, and to highlight the gap between communication and understanding. Double meanings and duality are central concerns, as she describes,

The notion of a self-portrait demands a definition; however, for me, it is never settled. The self is a site of masking, displacement, conflicting desires, fragments and disruptions. The sense of self exists in more than one space and this, for me, is a hyphenated self. Connecting through the use of technology such as SMS, on mobile phones, or emails via the computer is based on the binary code. In this work, I translate ‘Eugenia Raskopoulos’ into binary language. Through the use of mirrors and codes, I simultaneously reveal and conceal myself.
Victoria Reichelt is dedicated to her project to enshrine the outmoded. In previous work, she has focussed on the book, now a symbol of past modes of presenting and disseminating information, which has taken on the aura of the archaic. Her winning painting in the Sir John Sulman Prize 2013, After (books) 2013, was one of a series that considers the changing roles of library spaces. Here she considers the history of the photograph, preserving the qualities of the original, and underlining the distance between analogue and digital, as she explains,

“My practice is concerned with the representation of objects that are in danger of becoming obsolete or are in states of flux. Objects that are either threatened or superseded by twenty-first century culture and technology are examined through painting, so reflecting people’s changing interests and examining broader cultural concerns.

For this exhibition, I have made two small paintings based on photos of me when I was a child. These works approach the self-portrait from an historical context, and allow me, as the maker, an important degree of distance from the image. In viewing them, I can’t refute my presence in the past, but I also can’t recognise or relate to myself at the age of two or three in the same way as I do when I see recent images of myself.

While the images I am reproducing are old photos with a dated look to them, they are also firmly grounded in 2013 due to phenomena like Instagram. These programs, software and apps attempt to wind back the clock on technological developments that give us high-quality photos, and deliberately give photos old qualities that place them in another time. In these paintings, I deliberately draw attention to the aspects of the photograph that date it technically – colour, light and format. In doing so, the tension between painting and photography comes full circle, where the oft-threatened medium of painting is able to reveal photography’s constant testimony to an earlier time.
Tobias Richardson

The giant museum  2013
wood, hardware, wire, acrylic, glass, rope, snake, found balls and bone
300.0 x 300.0 x 150.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Raft Artspace, Darwin.

Tobias Richardson works in a range of media to construct a practice broadly reflective of self. An autobiographical thread runs through his drawings, paintings and installations, which rely on the potential that objects have to evoke memories. Place, space and the built environment are important aspects of his work, which often takes three-dimensional form. In this sculpture, the artist references two artworks with personal significance made 40 years apart, as he describes,

Alberto Giacometti’s surreal The palace at 4 a.m. 1932, and a childhood drawing of a giant museum that I made around 1972 are the inspiration behind this teetering wooden structure. Inside are objects and relics that offer a psychological portrait of me: a model of Neil Young’s guitar ‘old black’, a childhood toy tank, the original cross from the burial of Mopsy the guinea pig, a red-bellied black snake, and a dolphin’s spine.

Tobias Richardson
Look at the giant museum c. 1972
crayon and pencil on paper/school notebook
19cm x 20cm
Collection of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
Stuart Ringholt
Born 1971 Perth, Western Australia. Lives and works Melbourne, Australia.

Preceded by a tour of the show by artist Stuart Ringholt, 6–8pm. (The artist will be naked. Those who wish to join the tour must also be naked. Adults only.)

2012 pigment print, edition 1/3
66.5 x 100.0 cm
photographer: Nick McGrath
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Something of a court jester, replete with requisite melancholy, Stuart Ringholt involves himself and others in situations that are frequently absurd, and often embarrassing. In one performance he walked around Palazzo Vecchio, Florence with toilet paper hanging from his pants, an act informed by past experience; in another, he wore a prosthetic nose for a day. A multidisciplinary artist, Ringholt concerns himself with “dissolving ego”, and the phenomenon of being looked at.

This photograph is part of a series that document Ringholt’s ‘nude art tours’, which he has conducted at various venues, including the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, and MONA (Museum of Old and New Art), Tasmania. The performances aim to counteract anxiety and embarrassment, and are part of the artist’s study of his own emotions. Of past work he has said, “I tried to understand how fear manifests in the body, and how it debilitates you.”
David Rosetzky

Half brother 2013
digital video, colour, sound, edition of 6
duration 0:10:09
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.
Centre for Contemporary Photography commission, supported by Irene Sutton, on the occasion of the exhibition ‘True self’

David Rosetzky is known for videos and photographs in which he explores the possibilities of contemporary self portraiture. In work that emulates the high-gloss finish of commercial photography and advertising, Rosetzky navigates the spaces between the personal and the public, drawing us to consider how our actions inform those of the people around us. He frequently works with actors who stand in for, and translate, aspects of his own experiences, as he explains,

My video Half brother was made, in part, in response to the process of sorting through my father’s things after he died. Being a graphic designer and an artist, he had stored large stacks of different types of papers and printed material, as well as job samples, catalogues and artwork. This video refers to aspects of my father’s creative process: sorting, dividing, layering, and so on, but it also includes my own experience of sorting through his possessions. I wanted to draw the two processes together. The work’s basis is in memory and observation but I also wanted to open it up to new thematic possibilities. The experimental performance-based video involves a cast of three professional dancers/performers, Gideon Obercanek, Alisdair Macindoe and Josh Mu. Together, with choreographer Jo Lloyd and the performers, I spent a number of days in a workshop devising a series of simple movements using stacks of paper. These included a variety of physical negotiations between the performers themselves, and the material of the paper – sorting, stacking, tearing, folding, cropping, etc. I am seeking to create a variety of rhythms and speeds of movement, and to explore the boundaries between self and other, anxiety and comfort, intimacy and desire, to present different ways of thinking about the self and the body.
Multi-media artist Khaled Sabsabi works to confound cultural stereotypes. The Lebanese-born, Sydney-based artist creates socially engaged work, and seeks to foster an appreciation of diversity. His winning entry in the 2011 Blake Prize, Naqshbondi Greenacre engagement 2011, offered insight into Islamic Sufi rituals. Of his work in the Self-Portrait Prize, Sabsabi has said, ‘The other I’, a second self, a double life, an altered state of consciousness; Cicero in first-century Rome was the first to use the term alter ego, and described it as ‘a second self, a trusted friend’.

Sufis say the ‘self’ is an aspect of the spirit, which can be viewed along a continuum to the innermost part in which divine revelation is experienced.

I was born in Tripoli, Lebanon, and since the late 1980s I’ve worked to present arts projects that explore the experience of people across social, political and ideological spectrums.

I am interested in associations that continue from a source, bringing into focus an understanding of how diverse conversations could be connected through the traditions and stories of people.
Glass artist Yhonnie Scarce was born in Woomera, South Australia, and is descended from the Kokatha people from the Lake Eyre region, and the Nukunu people from the Port Lincoln area. Her practice has become increasingly interdisciplinary, and incorporates ‘installation, ephemeral, and time-based work.’ The artist’s delicate hand-blown glass pieces frequently mimic organic forms imbued with personal significance. In the installation, Florey and Fanny 2011, for example, glass replicas of bush plums, a traditional food, protrude from the pockets of aprons that signify the domestic servitude the artist’s great-great grandmother and grandmother were placed into by Europeans. These objects symbolise Scarce’s broader concerns around Australia’s contested past, as she explains,

My practice comments on the social and political mores of historical and contemporary Australia, referencing the ongoing effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people. Through research into my family’s experiences post colonisation, I have recently incorporated in my work archival images of my family members, which were discovered at the South Australian Museum. The title of the installation lists numbers attached to the photographs, which were used by the anthropologist Norman Tindale when documenting them. This work highlights the legacy of white settlement in the name of science, creating a dialogue between past and present.
Nalda Searles is a fibre artist whose career spans 30 years. Using cloth and a range of plant-based materials, she weaves a practice that speaks of her relationship with the Western Australian landscape in which she lives, and of a lifetime of experience. Of this work, she says, Wanting to place my sense of self in the well-worn country of my body and its familiars, I have constructed a type of map. Here is both the map of body, and map of land.

Nothing says ‘just born’; all the signs say ‘here is a body that knows life’; the recycled linen cloth was soaked for several months in dyes made from plants; the kangaroo paw flowers were cut from a salvaged blanket (Australian made); the hair, representing both the roots of the flowers and the triangular-shaped pubes, just visible through the netting, comes from my own head, gathered over years; the wool outline of the dress is fungus-dyed wool felted onto linen. Fine pieces of longer hair are suspended across the surface of the canvas: life.

‘Tor and wodjil’ is an expression used by zoologist Dr Barbara York Main who has studied regions of the eastern wheat belt where I have spent many years. Tor means a rocky outcrop; wodjil is a Noongar word used to describe the type of original vegetation that still exists in pockets throughout the wheat belt.

Any effort we make is a type of self portrait – the signature of a movement is a shadow of oneself.

I embrace tor and wodjil, and we become as one.
In an age where digital printing has revolutionised the production of three-dimensional forms, Alex Seton remains a resolutely analogue artist. He works with marble, meticulously sculpting objects that belie their source: flags, t-shirts, plastic bags. *Soloist* was cast from a marble figure carved by Seton that is part of the larger work, *Elegy on resistance* 2012. He says of this self portrait, *Soloist* is a bronze sculpture of me in a hooded jersey or ‘hoodie’. The hoodie references both the benevolent hoods of monks, and the malevolent head coverings worn by hoodlums and street gangs. It prompts questions around trust, surveillance, personal and public identity, which have surfaced in recent years. The hoodie is interesting as the egalitarian garment of our times.

Although *Soloist* is a self-portrait, the faceless anonymity of the figure evokes questions about the act of identification, and the act of being watched. The figure is titled *Soloist* as I am the central performer in the act of being viewed. Modelled on my own body, this is an ambiguous figure with a hollowed-out hood. The jersey hood and pants are unmarked, and the flesh of the figure underneath is concealed. The seated position is self contained and restrained, but not relaxed – neither participating nor surrendering to the external world. This protagonist tries to find a sequestered space under which a right to anonymity and privacy may still exist, a figure of passive resistance.

I like to create works that act as a litmus test for the disposition of the viewer. *Soloist* can be interpreted as anywhere from menacing, all the way through to peacefully reassuring, depending on the nature and inclination of the viewer. Either way, the figure demands answers to the greater reflective question: ‘In what am I participating?’
Sancintya Simpson

**Blood-link** 2013
digital video, sound
duration 00:03:10
Courtesy of the artist.

Sancintya Simpson’s work speaks to her mixed heritage. Her parents are migrants to Australia: her mother, who is Indian, comes from South Africa; her father is an Anglo-New Zealander. Through photographs and the moving image, Simpson highlights the roles that are created for us based on gender and race, and questions their validity. She says of this work,

Blood-link stands as a visual metaphor for the relationship my mother and I have with each other through our matrilineal line. Through a combination of traditional Indian miniature painting, and the modern techniques of digital compositing and stop-animation, the symbolism of these stories is dissected; stories of sacrifice, chastity and duty.

The red sari is representative of marriage, the wedding sari and saptapadi, the ritual of tying the bride and groom’s cloth together. Red is the colour worn by married women, brides and mothers. The cloth becomes a red snake, a cross-cultural reference to the king of Hindu gods Indra and his distribution of his sin to the earth and, in particular, to women (in the form of menstruation). This snake is then engulfed in sacred fire, referencing Sita’s trial by fire to prove her chastity, the goddess Sati’s self immolation, and the marriage ritual of circling the fire seven times. These painted symbols are repeated, and looped as we morph from one to the other.

I watch,
My Mother.
She carries a heavy weight.
She received it from her Mother,
And shares it with me.

She is kind.
She is caring.
She does her duty too.

My Mother, just like her Mother,
And her Mother too, all share
Something more, than blood,
They share it with me too.

Sancintya Simpson
Jacqui Stockdale  

Selfie  
2013  
Duratrans and lightbox  
100.0 x 50.0 x 9.0 cm  
technician: Luke Stockdale  
Courtesy of the artist and Helen Gory Galerie, Melbourne.

In her drawings, photographs, paintings and collages, Jacqui Stockdale borrows from history to comment on cultural identity, ritual and masquerade. Here she makes a playful nod to a photograph of the Countess da Castiglione by Pierre-Louis Pierson, *Scherzo di Follia* c.1861–67, printed c.1930. Considered one of the beauties of her day, the Countess (Virginia Oldoini) collaborated closely with Pierson over a number of decades to craft and promote her self image, attaining a level of celebrity unusual for the nineteenth century. Of her own photograph, Stockdale says,

My challenge was to create a self portrait as both a painter and photographer, symbolising the fusion of two major genres in my practice. This nostalgic, perhaps surreal photographic portrait is presented as one of the most popular contemporary icons, the iPhone. The mobile phone has become a portal into a world beyond my studio. It provides immediate responses to postings of images and ideas; a forum for information, a portable office, and a social calendar. Such an electronic masterpiece can be marvelled at. It also has the power to be a major source of distraction.
Darren Sylvester is a multidisciplinary artist whose works reproduce the slick look of commercial photography and advertising, yet retain poignancy. The internet’s seductive, though frequently false, promise as a social network has been the subject of previous work. Here, Sylvester looks at technology’s power to homogenise, as he explains.

Self image is curated. What we present to the world through our online avatar is complete artifice and, when we do interact with humans, it is often by text alone. We identify and like others that are similar to us from around the world, collecting and sharing opinions that all slowly become so analogous that, as characters, we end up interchangeable.

Me is a sitcom-length video that features an array of transposable characters engaged in that ‘old-world’ performance of conversation, scripted by a professional writer who has used my artwork titles, song lyrics, short stories and interviews as a starting point for a portrait that reflects us all. The characters are a present day Adam and Eve, branded and stranded in an endless discussion around Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tupac, holograms, the death of MySpace, Friendster, Andy Warhol, CCTV, reality TV, handbags, Viagra, The Simpsons, The Smiths, and internet dating.

Self creation is the self portrait of now, so it makes sense that I never appear in the video, yet we all do. In this narcissistic time, what better way to view self portraiture than as something that reflects the viewer as well? We all want to see ourselves, don’t we?
TextaQueen

Expecting (Self portrait) 2013
Fibre-tipped pen on Stonehenge cotton paper
127.0 x 97.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney.

TextaQueen works exclusively in fibre-tipped pen or 'texta' in a practice that combines gender identity and politics with humour. What began as an exercise for a soft-porn manga website became a larger project around the female nude that culminated in the TextaNude portraits of 2003–2013. Recent self-portraits suggest a move away from a previous reluctance to be defined on the basis of sexuality or race, a position that prompted the artist to adopt the superhero persona TextaQueen. Describing this work, the self-proclaimed ‘queer person of colour’ says, “Though I was born and raised far from many of the cultural traditions of my heritage, my body holds memory of these connections that I would pass on if I continued my bloodline. In imagining pregnancy, I connect to my ancestry. As I sit on the Goan shores of India, a tiger cub sleeps in my womb representing unknown potential, while milk shooting from my breast mixes with the water flowing from the coconut I hold. These liquids flow down around me, carrying the representation of my kin (as do the 'Chicos', or chocolate gummy babies, I ate as a child) to meet my astrological sign’s Sagittarian constellation, which flows from between my legs, and into the ocean waters of Goa. Creating a life feeds infinite cycles.
David M Thomas plays with ideas around self portraiture, and the desire to unravel persona through videos, photographs, installations, sound-work, paintings and performances. In this two-channel video, he conflates images of himself in the roles of Larry David in the television series *Curb your enthusiasm* (2000–2011), and Don Logan in the film *Sexy beast* (2004). Thomas overlays these sequences with a mock YouTube video that mimics the ‘how to play the guitar’ tutorials that proliferate on the web, though frequently omit to identify their creator. The music provides a soundtrack to Thomas’s ruminations on, in his words, “alienated states of the self.”

You have every right to be here. Your thoughts and feelings about the work are as valid as anyone’s. You know as much about the world and everything in it as the artist, and the curator of this exhibition. Please think and feel anything you like about the work. Never forget who you are, what you are doing, or why you are here. But please remember, the work is here for you, and whatever you think or feel about it is greatly appreciated. Thank you for being here, and for being you.

David M Thomas
Min Wong  

Liminality 2013  
digital print on stainless steel, digital print on glass, acrylic, wood, found objects  
installation, dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist.

Through her work, Darwin-based artist Min Wong offers insights into her Chinese-Australian heritage, and her feelings of cultural displacement. During her first trip to China in 2009, Wong travelled to her father’s hometown Guangzhou, where she met relatives and participated in family rituals. In her multidisciplinary practice she explores ideas around distance and belonging. Of this work, she says,

Death is an unavoidable personal experience, which remains beyond an individual’s grasp throughout their life. As the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has theorised, “Whenever we ‘imagine’ ourselves as dead, we are irremovably present in the picture as those who do the imagining; our living consciousness looks at our dead bodies.”

The veneration of the dead honours ancestors and creates a tangible connection with the ethereal layers of the past and present. Ceremonial acts and ritual nurture kinship, filial piety, family loyalty and the continuity of family lineage. They allow us to reflect upon how we construct, transmit and inherit cultural identities and, in turn, foster notions of cultural identity, cohesion and belonging.

Rites of passage or, in the words of French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold Van Gennep, ‘rites of separation from a previous world’, link individuals to the community, and the community to a broader and more potent spiritual world. During a ritual’s liminal stage, participants ‘stand at the threshold between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way, which the ritual establishes.’
The University of Queensland National Artists’ Self-Portrait Prize 2013 is the fourth in the history of the biennial, invitation-only $50,000 acquisitive award, which was inaugurated in 2007. The winning work enters The University of Queensland’s National Collection of Artists’ Self Portraits, which established in 2004 as an important Collection focus.

Previous winners:
2007 Ben Quilty
2009 Julie Rrap
2011 Domenico de Clario