

The Bronx Museum

The Bronx Museum at Home
Art Studio

THE SELF-PORTRAIT

By Alicia Grullon

This course introduces students to the idea and practice of creating self-portraits, with an emphasis on using different tools and platforms to create and share them (e.g. video, photography, social media.)

Vocabulary: selfies, self-portraits, indexicality, the gaze, context, genre, snapshot, Kodak Brownie



Alicia Grullon, *Woman with Egg Eyes*, Digital inkjet print from celluloid negative, 9" x 11", 2005

From the Oxford Dictionaries, a selfie is "...a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media."

Critical inquiry within self-portraits as it pertains to the anti-narrative, indexicality and the gaze will be investigated. We will look at the historical and material specificity of different work and the ways they influence their viewing in photography and video. This general survey will also include discussion of the aesthetics of platforms such as social media and the selfie. Selected artists from the last 50 years actively using the self portrait as their form of expression will be assessed. The examples artists' work focus on various methods, alternative cultural contexts, and national and international perspectives to investigate conceptions and practices of creating self-portraits.

At the start of the course, students will be asked to begin thinking of ideas they would like to explore. In addition to discussions of readings and viewing artists' works, class time will be devoted to learning basic use of photo and video tools and apps. In the second half of the course, students will present their projects for open discussion within the group.

Lesson 1

The Self-Portrait in Art

Guiding Questions:

What is a self-portrait?

What is a selfie?

How are they different?



Alicia Grullon, *Portrait of a Lady*, Traditional C-Print, 13" x 13", 2017

From [Why every self-portrait is not a selfie, but every Selfie is a photograph](#) "Looking back into the history of photography, the cheap and easy to use Kodak Brownie cameras around 1900 gave rise to popular and amateur photography, introduced the snapshot, and established a tradition of family photograph albums. Similarly, around 2010 we saw a rise of a new kind of image-making device, the smartphone with a built-in camera and wireless connection to the Internet. Availability of such devices on the mass market was followed by a formation of new sub-genres of popular photography, such as the selfie."

Reading: Kandice Rawlings, "[Selfies and the History of Self-Portrait Photography](#)," November 21, 2013.

Close look: the work of Alicia Grullon (American conceptual artist b. 1973), Bronx Museum of the Arts AIM alum. aliciagrullon.com



(right) Alicia Grullon, *Laughing Cavalier*, Traditional C-Print, 13" x 13", 2017
From series [Unsettling the Postcolonial Condition of my Being](#)

**SERIES: PHOTOGRAPHER,
SUBJECT, AND GAZE**

Alicia Grullon



Alicia Grullon, *Photographer, Subject, and Gaze 1*
Digital inkjet print from celluloid negative on cotton rag, 17" x 21"
2005



Alicia Grullon, *Photographer, Subject, and Gaze 2*
Digital inkjet print from celluloid negative on cotton rag, 17" x 21"
2005

**SERIES: BECOMING MYTH:
AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY**

Alicia Grullon



Alicia Grullon, *Woman in Riverdale*
Digital inkjet print from celluloid negative, 9" x 11"
2005



Alicia Grullon, *Woman in room with reflector*
Digital inkjet print from celluloid negative, 9" x 11"
2005



Alicia Grullon, *Woman with wasp's nest*
Digital inkjet print from celluloid negative, 9" x 11"
2005



**SERIES: REVEALING
ETHNOGRAPHY: HARLEM**
Alicia Grullon

Alicia Grullon, *Revealing Ethnography: Harlem*, Archival digital prints, 4" x 6", 2007



Alicia Grullon, *Revealing Ethnography: Harlem*, Archival digital prints, 4" x 6", 2007

Lesson 2

Looking at Self-Portraits and Selfies in Art History

Guiding Questions:

Whose work do you connect with? Why?

From what we have looked at so far, what do you think: Is this a selfie or a self-portrait?



Vincent Van Gogh, *Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear*, Oil on Canvas, 1889

From [Google Arts and Culture](#) - How did artists paint self-portraits?

“Rembrandt’s self-portraits were created by the artist looking at himself in a mirror, and the paintings and drawings therefore reverse his actual features. This is one reason why the hands are usually omitted or “just cursorily described” in his paintings as they would be on the “wrong” side if painted from the mirror.”

Reading: Reading: John Chiaverina, [“How this 71-year old video artist pioneer became a Tik Tok Star,”](#) November 19, 2019

Close look: self-portraits and selfies in art history

[Frida Kahlo \(Mexican painter, 1907-1954\)](#)

[Self Portrait with thorn necklace and hummingbird, Oil on canvas, 1940](#)

[Vincent Van Gogh \(Dutch post-impressionist painter, 1853-1890\)](#)

[Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear, Oil on canvas, 1889](#)

[Carrie Mae Weems \(American photographer b.1953\)](#)

[From the Kitchen Table Series, Silver Gelatin Print, 16” x 20”, 1990](#)

[Cindy Sherman \(American photographer b.1953\)](#)

[Untitled Film Stills series, #21 \(“City Girl”\), Silver Gelatin Print, 8” x 10”, 1978](#)

Lesson 3

Create Your Own Self-Portraits and Selfies

Guiding Questions:

What ideas do you want to work with?

What are topics that interest you?

What's happening now in your life that makes you want to do a self-portrait?

How are you making your self-portraits or selfies?

Will you be using TikTok or IG?

Will it be a series or one piece?

Color or B/W? If video, how long will it be?

If on IG, how will you share them as a series on one upload or scattered throughout a period of time? Why?

Challenge:

Create your own self-portraits and selfies and share them with us!
@bronxmuseum or email to education@bronxmuseum.org



Alicia Grullon, *Woman between map*, Digital inkjet print from celluloid negative, 9" x 11", 2005