

The Artist Gaze

A Research-from-Creation Based Thesis
on the Selfie and the Female Image

Joan Graves

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By: Joan Graves

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

Dr. Lorrie Blair Chair

Dr. Juan Carlos Castro Examiner

Marisa Portolese Examiner

Dr. Lorrie Blair Supervisor

Approved by Dr. Juan Carlos Castro
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dr. Rebecca Taylor Duclos
Dean of Faculty

Date April 3rd 2017

Abstract

The Artist Gaze:

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A qualitative research-from-creation based thesis studying what possible generalizations may be found of the female gaze when the artist collaborates with the model in order to produce one single image. Using participants Esme, Kayley, Jess, Catherine, Steph, Deborah, Noelle, Marie-Josée and Caroline, the research was to answer the following question: through the study of the painted selfie, what new information may be revealed in order to understand and define the female gaze. The research consists of each participant providing the study with a selfie and the researcher/artist then using the selfies as each portrait's reference of study. General themes retrieved from the analyzed data regard: the rendering of the female image, comparing the concepts of a male gaze with a female gaze, the practice of selfies, and how the self compares to the media's fabricated standards for society. Conclusions drawn from the study suggest the reform of the male gaze concept, a reflection placed upon how the self relates to society, and how art and education may facilitate critical thinking using the concept of the gaze. Rather than the gaze being defined by gender, the research suggests the gaze be defined by how the gaze functions: consumer gaze versus an observer gaze.

Keywords: gaze, male gaze, female gaze, consumer gaze, observer gaze, self, selfie, the female image, research-from-creation, critical thinking.

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Introduction

Always in search of material that may inform my studies of the female gaze, Charlotte Jansen's article "Girl on Girl" (2016) captured my attention. I found the article when reading its advertisement on the cover page of *Elephant: The Art Culture Magazine*, "How a New Generation of Female Artists is Taking the Art World (and the Internet) by Storm." Jansen's stated purpose for writing the article was to inform and create awareness of how young female artists are handling the female image in contemporary art. In regards to the practices of the emerging female artists featured in the article, Jansen's thesis is located in the introductory paragraph:

In this thick-and-fast visual slew of cats, holidays and food, the female image is recurrent, but the internet has decontextualized images: once the feminist knickers leave the bedroom they become transmittable, manipulable data (p.92).

Jansen's thesis is that when an artist is working with such a consumed and manipulated subject such as the female image, the application and process of exposure must be handled with extreme care and foresight to communicate successfully the artwork's intended meaning. Jansen's article consists of interviews with eight female artists who share the attitude that no matter how their work may be interpreted, their work emulates the female gaze. For example, artist Leah Shrager dismisses the art world's lack of approval, believing the art world is incapable of considering sex as a meaningful concept:

As soon as they see a 'sexy' female image, they can't imagine there's anything behind it or that it can have a complex meaning. I attribute this compartmentalization to an inability to understand and appreciate arousal as it relates to a wide array of physiological/psychological realities: sex, lust, desire, hate, motivation, the urge for the sublime, the need to be popular, etc (as cited by Jansen, p. 93).

Another, Aneta Bartos, explains that some people are incapable of conceptualizing beyond the visual aspects of sex when the act is portrayed in art, "it feels that certain people are still unable to go beyond that and discover a whole other spectrum of complex emotions that these images portray" (as cited by Jansen, p. 104). Mayan Toledo shares her artistic practice is "to challenge what is visually and expressively 'expected' as compelling when sexuality is owned by a female

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perspective” (as cited by Jansen, p. 104). Faith Holland explains that her practice of posting pornographic videos online is a form of artistic expression and is not acts of self-subjection, “having sex for a camera and authenticity seem, in some ways, diametrically opposed” (as cited by Jansen, p. 98).

Optimistic in finding a literary source that may discuss and promote the female gaze, I began the article with a predetermined appreciation for the material. Reading it, my assessment of the article’s content had become extremely disoriented. With the assumption that the article would discuss artworks and practices that I may identify with as a female artist, I was surprised to find a series of works exploiting women with an over-sexualized aesthetic, a rendering that I did not identify with as an artist nor as a woman. If the article was demonstrating the female gaze, why did I feel that my gaze did not coincide with what was being presented? Inspired by my own personal confusion over Jansen’s article, I proposed a research-from-creation based thesis to answer the following research question: through the study of the painted selfie, what new information may be revealed in order to understand and define the female gaze. My intention was to explore what possible generalizations may be found of the female gaze when the artist collaborates with the model in order to produce one single image. The study was based on analyzing how the artist perceives the participant, how the participant perceives herself, and how the two experiences intersect to create an image representing a cohesive female gaze. I planned to begin by having each of the five female participants provide a selfie: an image/photograph taken by the participant of herself. Using the selfies as visual reference, I planned to recreate each selfie as a painted portrait. Once the portraits were complete, I would sit individually with each participant in order for the participant to view the completed portrait and record her responses using an interview method. I would be using only female participants ranging between eighteen to thirty-five years of age. Through my research, I hoped to provide some background for developing and integrating contemporary practices of the female gaze into the practice and teaching of art, as well as providing a personal account of an artist’s process of creating portraits inspired by the sitters’ self-regard. This was hoped, what happened altered my perception of the female gaze, and my methods of research, entirely.

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Elaboration of Research Question

My practice as an artist has been to define, communicate and represent a female gaze. Embodying the female gaze through the practice of portraiture entails capturing the immaterial notion of the participant's disposition in a representation that demands the definition of visual form. When teaching portraiture, I employ the familiar instruction of composition, anatomy and texture, which are all approaches to define the physicality of the human portrait. What about my inquiries on the non-physical elements of the human portrait, such as the female experience and a woman's concept of identity?

Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, both psychologists, were the first to introduce the 'self-concept' to Western Europe and North America. Rogers (1942), creator and founder of the "humanistic approach" in psychology, dedicated his practice to helping his patients believe in a positive potential for their existence and encouraged his patients to explore that potential. Rather than studying and prescribing his patients, Rogers worked *with* his patients to improve their view on life. Maslow was creator of the 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs', a theory in which he introduced in his work *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943). He based his practice on five steps in order to help heal his patients: the psychological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Saul McLeod's article "Self Concept", published online in *Simply Psychology* (2008), describes all the facets that form the self-concept. McLeod begins by illustrating that "the term self-concept is a general term used to refer to how someone thinks about, evaluates or perceives themselves" (para. 1).

Janelle Mellamphy's thesis *Youlogy: Self/portraiture, Canada, and Taras Polataiko's YOU series* (1996), describes the practice of portraiture through the following quotation:

The goal of portraiture (and, so, of self-portraiture also) is to attempt to capture the *self* of its subject. The attempt, that is to say, is to depict a self's *identity*: through Identification and Identity, to suggest Illeity, the unknown and unknowable point (p. 85). According to Mellamphy, the term illeity, coined by Emmanuel Levinas (1963), describes the "unfixed, uncategorized, uncategorizable" (p. 85). The investigation of the gaze through portraiture was to explore the undefined aspects of the model's identity that can't be depicted purely through the visual representation of the model's physical form. Like illeity, the female

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gaze is unfixed and uncategorized. In order to decipher and study the female gaze, my point of departure to create a context for my proposal was to understand what the female gaze is not.

Coined by Laura Mulvey (1975), the male gaze can be described through the following quotation:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its [fantasy] on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motiff of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfield to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire (p. 837).

In the article “What Does the ‘Male Gaze’ Mean, and What About a Female Gaze?” (2016), Janice Loreck explains that the male gaze can usually be identified when women are represented in a role existing purely in relation to the heterosexual man’s experience of a woman: lover, wife, mother, daughter, sister, seductress, et cetera. When trying to define a ‘female gaze’, Loreck admits that she believes there is no “direct equivalent of the male gaze” and that “the male gaze creates a power imbalance” between the sexes (para. 21). Taking Loreck’s belief into consideration, would the female gaze then demonstrate the opposite of the male gaze by suggesting a power balance between the sexes? Loreck’s article relates to the main focus of my research for her efforts to decipher and understand the female gaze is the main premise that inspired my thesis. If the male gaze is the consideration of a male experience/perception of the female image, my research was to study the consideration taken to convey the female experience/perception of the female image.

In choosing the selfie to paint and study the female gaze, I believed my research was to be a study of the collaborated gaze made by both the artist and the model. The definition of the selfie is a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media (English Oxford Living Dictionaries n.d.). A selfie is not always intended for social media purposes, but is defined as a picture that you take of yourself by using the camera on your smartphone (Merriam-Webster n.d.). There have been many opinions

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on what drives the practice of the selfie. Lena Dunham, writer, director and actor of HBO's television series *Girls*, describes the selfie as "the art of the vulnerable candid with an unclear purpose" in her biography *Not That Kind of Girl: A Young Woman Tells You What She's "Learned"* (2014, p. 99). In his article "Did Rembrandt Invent the Selfie?" (2014), Sooke explains that the selfie will be the cause of the 21st century being known as the "Age of Narcissism" (para. 1). Art enthusiast, director and actor James Franco, describes the selfie in his article "The Meanings of the Selfie" (2013), as a form of contemporary self portraiture:

Of course, the self-portrait is an easy target for charges of self-involvement, but, in a visual culture, the selfie quickly and easily shows, not tells, how you're feeling, where you are, what you're doing (para. 10).

Although Franco admits the practice of the selfie may be considered narcissistic, he takes the position that the selfie is a form of visual communication and self-expression.

By using the selfie as the visual reference when painting my participants' portraits, I referenced each model's visual self-expression (their selfie), as inspiration for my own iteration of each model's portrait. The model was in control of how she was portrayed in the selfie, and I was in control of the final rendering by painting it. Using the selfie as each model's tool of self-expression, my study analyzed the gaze that was constructed within my painting while studying each selfie. The artmaking portion of the study was having the model's gaze collaborate within the artist's creation. By using this method of portrait study, I studied how the model chose to render her image, and in turn, how I chose to render her rendered image. With the collaboration of both renderings, my efforts were to investigate what form of gaze was present in the final portrait. In her book *From the Centre: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, Lippard (1976) explains how an assessment may only be achieved when properly investigated:

The gap between object and intelligent perception of the object is, of course, one of the prevailing problems of making art at any time in an alienated society. It is a time and space gap filled only when the work is finally shown, discussed, written about, deciphered by an audience- in short, when the moment of communication is at hand (p. 9).

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In completing this exercise/study, I hoped to answer my research question: through the study of the painted selfie, what new information may be revealed in order to understand and define the female gaze.

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Literature Review

A significant source of reference for my proposal was the work by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro (1973). Artists, art educators and co-founders of the Feminist Art Program of the California Institute of the Arts, Chicago and Schapiro are best known for their collaborated installation *Womanhouse* (1972). In their discussion of Georgia O’Keeffe’s paintings, they explain that a woman artist must acknowledge how she defines womanhood and must decide whether she is actively or passively acknowledging her identity through her work in order for her message to be clear. Chicago and Schapiro speculate that O’Keeffe’s intention through her paintings was to create a universal female image:

The central image assumes universality in these works because it is used to define, first the nature of the female identity, and then the nature of human identity and the human dilemma (1973, p. 75).

Hannah Ellis-Petersen’s (2016) “Flowers or Vaginas? Georgia O’Keeffe Tate Show to Challenge Sexual Cliches” explains how at one point O’Keeffe refused to acknowledge her paintings as symbolism of the female sex:

Tanya Barson, who will curate the Tate Modern show, [emphasized] how much O’Keeffe had resisted the sexual reading into her paintings, which began in the 1920s but was then revived by feminists in the 1970s who took her work as a statement of female empowerment (para. 8).

By painting selfies taken by my female participants, I believed I would combine the notions of their self, with the respect I hold for each of them, and then my own experience as a woman. When viewing the work with each model and collecting her response, the analysis of the research data would be to investigate if there are any patterns that may suggest an understanding of female identity, and/or the female gaze.

In the discussion of sexism and the new waves of feminism, Natasha Walter’s work, *Living Dolls* (2010), serves as an analysis of how female identity is currently being portrayed. Through the consideration of pornography, stereotypes, media, and consumerism, Walter emphasizes that female identity is now so corrupt and contorted that even women themselves embrace the female’s over-sexualized persona as a form of empowerment:

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The highly sexualized culture around us is tolerated and even celebrated because it rests on the illusion of equality. Since the idea has taken hold that women and men are now equal throughout society, it is seen as unproblematic that women should be relentlessly encouraged to prioritize their sexual attractiveness (p. 119).

Unconvinced by the media's illusion and humankind's general assumption that there has been improvement and found equality for women, Walter provides a written work that explains how women have adopted the male gaze as their own.

Ariel Levy's (2005) *Female Chauvinist Pigs* describes how much humankind has evolved with the feminist movement, but how much further there is left to go in order to obtain equality. Rather than improving the condemned portrayal of women, Levy shares a comparable view with Walter, that through the efforts to be considered equal with men, women have gone too far and are now rendering their identity with a male inspired sexualized gaze. Their self-portrayal as sexual objects in order to obtain power and respect is not only not solving the problem, but is also in the process of causing further confusion for the woman's self-concept:

The proposition that having the most simplistic plastic stereotypes of females sexuality constantly reiterated throughout our culture somehow proves that we are sexually liberated and personally empowered has been offered to us, and we have accepted it. But if we think about it, we know this just doesn't make any sense. It's time to stop nodding and smiling uncomfortably as we ignore the crazy feeling in our heads and admit that the emperor has no clothes (p. 197).

Having read Walter and Levy's published works, I was prepared for the possibility that the male gaze may be detected in the analysis of my final portraits, even if my intention behind the research was to study the female gaze. Either way, I was athirst for the research's findings.

Valerie Solanas' (1967) radical feminist *SCUM Manifesto* argues against the presence of men and defines women as exceptional. The entire concept of Solanas' Society for Cutting Up Men is for women to unite and exterminate males in order to secure women as the successor of sexes. Although Solanas' work is outrageous and unfathomable, her discussion of culture and the concept of great art introduces an intriguing opinion that demands a pause for reflection.

Accusing art of being animalism in the disguise of emotional expression, Solanas suggests that

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art and culture created by men are simply disguises of men's sexual desires and preferences.

Although I may not fully agree with Solanas' theories, the concept that art has a strong influence on culture, and that culture in turn has a strong influence on humankind, is a relevant concern that should be taken into consideration in discussion of art education.

Discussing topics such as work, culture, religion, sex, hunger, and violence, Naomi Wolf's (1990) *The Beauty Myth* attacks capitalism for organizing a hidden sexual agenda where women are the manipulated goods for sale. Wolf explains that consumer culture uses the female image in order to create desire and appeal, but in turn sets unachievable standards and expectations for women. Wolf advises that there should be more awareness of the female identity predicament in education and that there needs to be a constructed defence against the distortion of reality that culture presents to the public, especially to women. Wolf explains "women are vulnerable to absorbing the beauty myth's intervention in our sexuality because our sexual education is set up to ensure that vulnerability" (p. 155). Jennifer Armstrong shares her opinion on Wolf's work in her article "Revisiting 'The Beauty Myth'" (2013):

I just finished re-reading Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, which I haven't actually read since college women's studies class. It was pretty new then- I distinctly remember Wolf visiting Northwester's campus to fire us all up about the idea of Third Wave Feminism- and it certainly spoke to me, as a budding feminist and beauty product enthusiast. But revisiting it now, 20 years later, evokes an all-too-common feeling I get when reading old feminist texts: Holy shit, nothing has changed. Or, actually, things have only gotten worse, in this case- I couldn't help wondering what Wolf would make of bikini waxes (perhaps they'd warrant their own chapter, as they did in the book I co-authored, *Sexy Feminism*) or "vaginal rejuvenation". At one point she evoked the spectre of sewed-up labia as a possibility in a terrifying future. Welcome to that future (para. 1).

By incorporating Wolf's work in the discussion of art education, the discourse is supported by a thorough analysis and an informed opinion on the motives fuelling the dishonest portrayal of women and a lack of the female gaze in our day to day culture.

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Art Review

To properly describe the production knowledge that is invested in the studio component of my research, I wish to address the history, process and artistic inquiry that has inspired the research. I will be drawing from artists who have experimented with the combination of photography and painting, artists whose main medium is the selfie, and artists who have inspired my own direction with my practice.

To begin, the invention of photography was initially discovered by the attempts of Thomas Wedgwood, and then was successfully practiced by Nicéphore Niépce, but his practices demanded time and his results left room for improvement. In Bob Duggan's (2013) article "How Photography Changed Painting (and Vice Versa)", Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre is said to be the painter who brought the "Daguerreotype- one of the earliest forms of photography", to the world in 1839 (para. 1). Through the following quotation, Duggan describes how Daguerre's invention took hold of the art world:

Daguerre, thanks to the help of Francois Arago (who anointed Daguerre the father of photography over other contenders such as Nicéphore Niépce and William Henry Fox Talbot), assumed the mantle of artist-hero with his "magical" means of capturing images through light onto his eponymous creation. From there, photography continued to grow in influence, not only in popular culture, but also in painting itself (para. 2).

The invention of photography introduced a more efficient practice of visually documenting what an artist wished to replicate. In Adrian Searle's (2007) article "Snap Decisions", he describes how painting and photography may co-exist harmoniously rather than being two competing forces:

Photography, it was said, would kill painting, or at least take over various aspects of painting's role as a record of the modern world. Painting has instead found itself in a fruitful, if frequently problematic, relationship both with photographs and with film.

Photographs have become much more than a sketchbook for painters. The world as it is mediated through photography, film and video, and the ways we relate to it, have become a subject for the painter (para. 2).

Like Sir John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1852), a painting inspired by a character from William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1599-1601), artists referring to other

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forms of art for inspiration have always been an understood practice. Although photography and painting are both considered artistic practices, there are some who believe that it is a form of ‘cheating’ when artists use photography as inspiration or as a visual reference for painting. In “Are Painters’ ‘Reference Photographs’ a Form of Cheating?” (2015), Daniel Grant describes the negative attitude some hold towards painters working from photographs:

Sometimes, landscape painters- particularly those calling themselves “plein-air” artists- can seem a bit too wedded to history, rejecting any means of art making that postdates the 19th century. Nineteenth century artists were influenced by the informal look of photography, most notably Edgar Degas, whose flattened and sometimes awkwardly cropped forms in his paintings give the appearance of a snapshot. It is also true that artists living above a certain latitude being told to either just paint still-lives in their studios all winter long or trudge out into the snow to paint from direct observation in order to be deemed real artists. Photography and painting can coexist, although understanding their similarities and differences will help relieve inherent tensions (para. 5).

Grant explains that the attitude that all paintings must use live references, painting from life and not aided by photographic references, “strikes other painters as enforced primitivism” (para. 7). The definition of primitivism is a belief in the value of what is simple and unsophisticated, expressed as a philosophy of life or literature (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, n.d.). Is the negative attitude towards painters using photographs a mere prejudice for regulating simple art-practiced traditions?

Maria Kreyn does not bother to conform to any regulations or boundaries when it comes to the creativity of her work, or the source of inspiration she draws from. While being interviewed by Chad Seville (2017) for his article “Interview with Painter Maria Kreyn”, Kreyn shares her key source of inspiration, the work by the impressionist sculptor Auguste Rodin. While Kreyn holds an enormous admiration for classical art practices, her respect does not impede her ability of being a resourceful and experimental artist. When Seville inquires on Kreyn's practice of using photographs as references for her paintings, she simply replies:

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Haha. [Well], my process is actually a lot more erratic than that. It's rare for me to start two different paintings in the same way. I do a lot of drawing from my imagination, often to compose an image. [And] then sometimes I don't do any drawing at all when it comes to the actual painting. When I started painting about nine or ten years ago, I worked mostly from life. The more demanding my life became, the more I started working from photo, which is at once more limiting and more freeing. I'll have a model come in and we'll just play and take pictures. [There] are a few people in my life with whom I just know how to extract that empathic quality from life. [They] just emote perfectly, exactly the way I need. I really cherish those people. They are mainly women. Of course, getting a good reference is only the march to the battle. [I] had an assistant watch me work one evening and she gave me a great compliment: "wow," she said, "when you paint you make the reference look completely boring." [And] that's the trick of it all. [That's] the magic. [Nothing] can compare to the human touch when its done right (para. 9).

Kreyn describes her practice as being extremely malleable, that her practice is not bound to a certain formula, but that it is open to experimentation.

In David Balzer's (2012) article "Janet Werner on What Makes a Good Painting, Artist Statements, Professionalization Pressures & More", Werner shares:

One of the things that reveals itself in the process of shortlisting is influences. You can always see the frame of reference, but if the influences are too obvious, then it becomes less interesting. You're looking for the moment when you see the reference points, but there's something else that makes a work move just slightly away from what you've seen before to something more unusual, unique or personal- somehow exceeding the bounds, the frame out of which the work is being made. That's when something exciting happens, when it's possible to see something you haven't seen before, something fresh and unpredictable (para. 7).

By maintaining an open philosophy when it come to new inspirations, ideas and influences, there is a better chance of creating a more unpredictable piece, which Werner explains may result in exceeding the endless sea of art that follows perhaps primitivist rules. So is there a difference

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between painting from life or painting from a photographic reference? What makes good art? Werner explains through the following quotation what she defines as a good painting:

You can sort of smell it and taste it. Having said that, sometimes that smell is bad or taste bad are more interesting. In the end, they last longer (para. 6).

Being a painter, Werner practices with experimental sources of inspiration for her work. Through the following quotation taken from Sky Goodden's (2015) article "Janet Werner's Truer Subject, the Women Unseen", Goodden describes how Werner uses fashion magazines as sources of inspiration for her paintings, and that it is in how Werner renders her paintings that communicates a message to the viewer:

Of course, Werner's treatment is entwined with her subject, women, who form a complicated sitter, a body politic. And because of this (and her source of material in fashion magazines) we're encouraged to take it personally when Werner folds a face, blurs a mouth, or doubles an eye. These are, then, comments on womanhood, our feminine contradictions and self-denial, our reflexive assertions of postulated will. We are these women, suffering under the weight of large hats, absurd decorations, our shirts open, our expressions eclipsed, our horizons blank. We pose for an open lens, which we defy and aggress and all the while lean in to (para. 4).

Another artist whose work is greatly influenced by the media/consumer culture is that of Laura Collins. Matthew Scott Donnelly (2016) shares through the following quotation how Collins came upon her muses of study :

It all started with a Birkin bag. Or was it a Fendi? Chicago-based artist Laura Collins can't remember- she cops to shopping at Kohl's, and says a team of seasoned detectives couldn't unearth her fashion sense. Either way, there was an Olsen twin hiding behind it to avoid paparazzi. Isn't that type of image kind of funny and telling? While the moment might have been suited for GIF- or meme- treatment, Collins decided to reduce it to art at its most traditional; an acrylic painting on panelling ("This Artist Pulls Back Curtain on Celeb", para. 1).

Tahirah Hairston (2016) explains "the Olsen Twins Hiding from the Paparazzi isn't just an homage to Mary-Kate and Ashley, but a creepy, kitschy funhouse that explores two reasons why

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we obsess over celebrities: knowing too much and barely knowing anything at all” (para. 7). Collins’ documentation of the insistent practice of the paparazzi paired with the lifestyle of celebrities, does not cease with the Olsen twins, actresses and fashion designers Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen. In “Laura Collins turns voyeurism into art with ‘Olsen Twins Hiding From the Paparazzi’”, Brian Wellen (2016) explains “Collins is a painter who is fascinated by celebrity- her portfolio ranges from depictions of Marilyn Monroe to Kanye West interrupting Taylor Swift at the MTV Video Music Awards” (para. 2). Being that media is a significant source of where culture originates, why wouldn’t the use of such examples as paparazzi, fame and selfies, be referenced to communicate and draw attention to certain society behaviours? The curators Matt Harkins and Viviana Olen, the curators responsible for introducing Laura Collins’ work to the world, explained to Spencer Hall (2016) the reason for the public’s excitement over the Olsen twins’ first official public selfie:

The selfie might not seem like a big deal to most people, but for Harkins and Olen, founders of Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan 1994 Museum, a Brooklyn-based “gallery” set up in the hallway of their shared apartment, it is definitely “on brand,” as the duo says (para. 4)

The term “on brand” is defined as a characteristic for the personal image one is trying to project (Urban Dictionary, 2016). When Harkins and Olen describe the selfie as “on brand”, it is a practice/characteristic that the art world has begun to project in response to the selfie being frequently practiced and, in turn, becoming part of the contemporary image.

The Countess of Castiglione, Virginia Oldoini, considered the most admired beauty of her time, is notoriously know as one of the first selfie artists. Rosalind Jana (2017) author of the article “The Scandalous, Narcissistic 19th-Century Countess Who Became Her Own Muse”, confirms and describes the Countess’ artistic flare in the following quotation:

In recent years, the Countess has been dubbed everything from “selfie queen” to “supreme narcissist” to Surrealist pioneer. During her lifetime, she was called “a miracle of beauty,” like “Venus descended from Olympus”- but, one of her contemporaries noted, she was so self-absorbed that “after a few moments... she began to get on your nerves” (para. 4).

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Coming into the world as part of a noble Florentine family, the countess was married to the Count Verasis de Castiglione at age seventeen. At the age of eighteen, she was then sent to Paris to win the affections of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, emperor of the French Empire. The Countess remained in privileged circles of wealth and of royal society, a lifestyle that financed her dalliances in the artistic practices of photography. In the illustrated catalogue for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Pierre Apraxine (2000) explains “while many of the portraits record the countess’s triumphant moments in Parisian society, wearing the extravagant gowns and costumes in which she appeared at soirées and masked balls, in others she assumes roles drawn from the theatre, opera, literature, and her own imagination” (para. 3). In the “Photography review; A Goddess of Self-Love Who Did Not Sit Quietly”, Sarah Boxer (2000) describes how the young Countess’ artistic vain dalliances of taking self portraits, evolved with age and became a series that documents a woman’s psychological response to aging:

As the countess grew older and less beautiful, she began showing body parts disconnected from the body. For “Scherzo di Follia” (“Game of Madness”), she used a small oval picture frame to isolate one of her eyes, letting the stand of the frame form an alien ear. She had her legs photographed, swinging free. She had her feet photographed and then she had them cast in terra cotta, creating a fetish. Prettiness was not the point. By this time, she knew she was falling apart. She subtitled one indelicate photograph of her foot “Amputation of the Gryere” (para. 17).

Boxer attempts to analyze the Countess’ intentions for her photographs:

Was the countess making fun of herself, or was she making a dead serious point about the role of women? Did she know how strange her project was? What is the connection between narcissism and Surrealism? Between Surrealism and feminism? One thing is clear: the countess was her own best audience (para. 19).

The selfie obtained a certain amount of renewed attention with the release of Kim Kardashian West’s (2015) book *Selfish*. In “Kim Kardashian West Is the Outsider Artist America Deserves”, Laura Moore (2015) explains:

Kim Kardashian West is the artist the contemporary art world deserves: an emblem, indictment, and antidote, all rolled into one highly Instagrammable, A-list package. Her

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new book, *Selfish*, a coffee-table compendium of published and previously unpublished selfies, is good enough that the Jerry Saltzes of this world are rising to her defense, comparing it to highbrow literature. Seemingly overnight, the “famous for no reason” celebrity that America loves to hate has become a new darling of art aficionados and public intellectuals. And it makes sense. We are past the digital revolution and squarely in our digital adolescence. Personal technology is king, the selfie reigns, and Kardashian West is the queen (para. 1).

In Kardashian West’s defence, Moore argues:

But what is the selfie except the new, most convenient form of self-portraiture? And since when has self-portraiture been so abhorred? Since now, apparently. Since camera phones have made the self portrait so easy, so democratically accessible. I see no one retroactively discussing the self portraits of, say, Van Gogh as evidence of his narcissism, although interestingly this argument has been made about Frida Kahlo, with one headline calling her the “patron saint of internet-enabled narcissism” (para. 2).

Moore’s purpose in promoting the vote for Kardashian West’s selfies to be considered as high art, is to promote a woman’s courage of using herself as a subject of study to communicate a message of self-love. Moore’s opinion of Kardashian West’s selfies can be found in the following quotation:

The general disdain and frequent dismissal of the selfie’s practitioners should be acknowledged as part of a wider trend that views female self-love and the art created from it as somehow less worthy than the gaze of the man-as-artist on himself or elsewhere. The selfie as a form upends historical norms of female representation and power, and places the power of depiction squarely in the hands of the subject. By embracing the selfie from as early as 1984, Kim has positioned herself as the primary creator of her public image. For that, she should be commended, not reviled (para. 3).

In relation to Wolf’s (1990) concept, capitalism utilizing the female image as a sexy form of propaganda, is Kardashian-West a mere artifice for capitalism’s gain? Is Kardashian-West a representative of female empowerment, or is she a clever embodiment of how desire and appeal

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can coerce any individual, female or male, to believing and investing in a certain standard of living?

Using the selfie, specifically the self image, has facilitated artists to share their found awareness and their own experiences of the physical self. Artist Jen Davis is no exception. Known for her beautiful photographed self portraits, Davis used her talents to communicate messages of self acceptance and appreciation. Taken from Maia Booker's (2014) article "Jen Davis's Self-Portraits Offer Eleven Years of Self-Scrutiny: A Weighty Study of Beauty", through the following quotation Booker describes Davis' mastered aesthetic:

Davis's images call to mind seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, isolated figures bathed in natural light, engage simple daily tasks- with the occasional splash of vibrant color. Her expression is often pensive and solemn, and even in the photos where she interacts with someone, she seems apart. In addition to being an exploration of body image, this series is also an exploration into love and intimacy (para. 3).

In the article "In Revealing Self-Portraits, Body Image Is Front and Centre", Davis shared with David Rosenberg (2013) her sentiments on using herself as the subject of study:

While she was working on the images, Davis said she never thought about an audience or what it would be like to show the work. When she eventually did start to show it, some of the images were tough for her to share, but the exposure also allowed her to work through that sense of vulnerability and insecurity (para. 2).

In the following quotation taken from Hannah Frieser's (2012) essay "Self-Portraits", Frieser explains the influential content Davis's work communicates:

They show situations that especially women can easily relate to as universal struggles with body image. Her identity struggles are not so different from many young women who find themselves judged by a male gaze as their bodies blossom into maturity. Yet rather than push back against this gaze, Davis turns to quiet self-examination (para. 4).

Being that both Kardashian West and Davis' work may be described as a series documenting the self, what is the conflicting factor that has the public regard Kardashian West's work so differently in comparison to Davis?

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In regards to my own practice as an artist, personal aspirations I hold for my work are compositional and abstract explorations paired with representational technique. My intention in rendering a realistic representation of a figure, placed in a suggestive abstract background, is to create an atmospheric environment where the viewer may gain insight of what I wish to communicate. Work that I admire and draw from is that of artist Melanie Authier. Authier's work can be described as "deep visual space" and the bridging of "abstraction and representation to offer improbable environments which reveal new insights and pleasures upon sustained looking" ("Canadian Art: Melanie Authier", n.d.). Her work is both chaotic and purposeful, a strong pairing that communicates ambience. The purpose behind the narratives of women in my work is to express the psychological issue of female strength, and in turn question female identity- example see figure 1. The discussion of vulnerability is my most constant theme and serves me in taking ownership of my fears. I don't want to portray my female figures as generic additions of beauty. I strive to advocate for the female gaze as the main source that may resonate with viewers. Along with Kreyen, Werner, Collins and Davis; Jenny Morgan, Karen Ann Meyers,

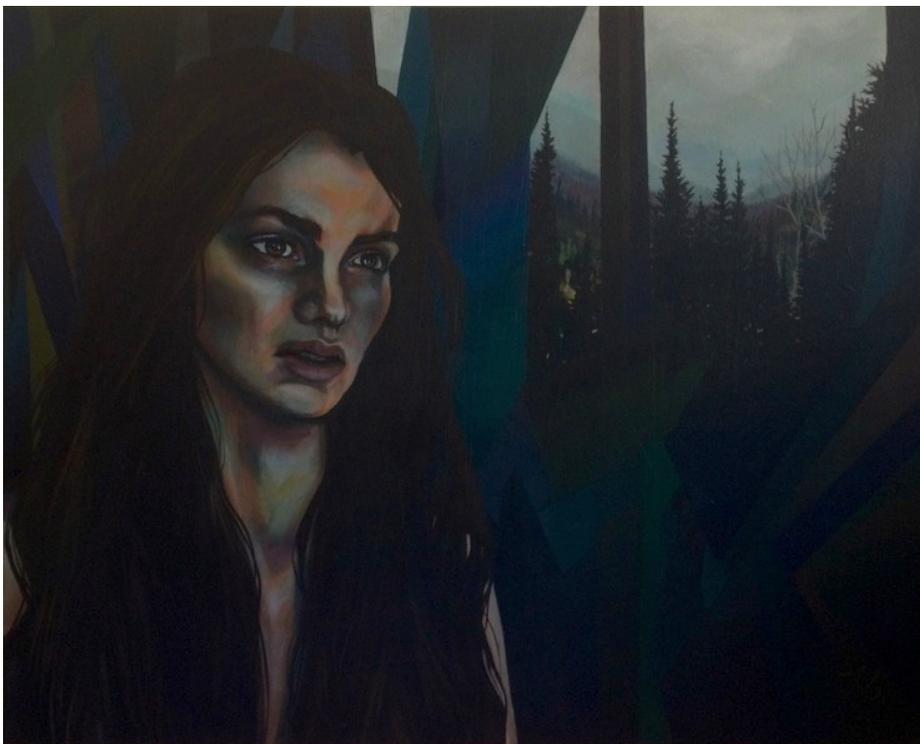


Figure 1. Joan Graves, *Bad Howl in the Naked Echo*, 2014, Acrylic on canvas, 60.9 x 76.2 cm.

Elizabeth Livingston, Sophie Calle, Alyssa Monks, and Karin Bubas, are all artists that strongly inform what I consider to be my female gaze. Although each have their own manners of treating the female image, I find their work to be inspiring and telling of what may be said of the female experience.

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Theoretical Framework

The success to thoroughly understand depends on awareness, education and insight. Cordelia Fine, senior researcher in the specialization of values and ethics, insists that men and women are not ‘hardwired’ differently but are merely victims of a stereotypically gentrified charged world. In her chapter “We Think, Therefore You Are” (2011), Fine blames general sexist thinking on an individual’s “implicit associations of the mind”. She describes the process of the mind’s ‘implicit associations’ through the following quotation:

The implicit associations of the mind can be thought of as a tangled but highly organized network of connections. They connect representations of objects, people, concepts, feelings, your own self, goals, motives, and behaviours with one another. The strength of each of these connections depends on your past experiences (and also, interestingly, the current context): how often those two subjects, say, or that person and that feeling, or that object and a certain behaviour have gone together in the past (p. 4).

Although one may not endorse stereotyping, sexist behaviour or thinking, what I draw from Fine is that because of media already responsible for creating experiences and labels deeply instilled in the subconscious of humankind, one may unintentionally act, think or believe in a sexist stereotypical manner due to the mind’s implicit associations. Fine explains that in order to cleanse one’s already developed implicit associations and to counteract sexist/stereotypical thinking, one must strive to engage and welcome diverse social contexts. In doing so, one will influence their implicit associations to adopt a diverse and expanded palate. In order to host such a practice, I chose Chapman and Sawchuk’s (2012) research-from-creation method for my thesis. By having women engage with their own portrait, there was the possibility to better understand how women relate to their own image and identity as women. Media and visual culture have become the main sources that fuel the world’s implicit associations of the mind. In order to introduce new possible connections and understanding to humankind, there needs to be other solutions for absorption other than from the motive-charged output of the media, along with an instilled practice of critical thinking.

bell hooks’ (2010) in *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* explains “in simpler terms, critical thinking involves first discovering the who, what, when, where, and how of things-

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finding the answers to those eternal questions of the inquisitive child- and then utilizing that knowledge in a manner that enables you to determine what matters most” (p. 9). Originally stated by Michael Scriven and Richard Paul (1987), “critical thinking is the intellectually discipline process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (para. 2). Describing critical thinking as an interactive process, hooks suggests that in order to understand and define, critical thinking demands participation. If one is not invested and actively maintaining engagement, there is no active thinking or discovering. Critical thinking demands communication and an exchange of thought in order for there to be a chance of discovery and a new understanding.

Jessica Davis, a developmental psychologist, educator and researcher, describes portraiture as a viable method of inquiry. According to Davis (1997), “The aesthetic properties of a work exist because the perceiver attends to them” (p. 30). With this said, it is then the responsibility of the artist to render the aesthetic whole in a certain way to draw the perceiver’s attention. Through the manipulation of aesthetic properties and the expressive content, the artist suggests the interpretation of the work for the perceiver. The rendering and interpretation of the portrait’s meaning may result in transforming the manner in which the artist and perceiver consider the model. This can also be said for the experience of the model. Through the following quotation, Davis describes the model’s experience in the role as the perceiver:

Subjects of research portraits can report a similar transformation in their self-understandings. Once they have read their portraits, they may begin to see themselves and their actions with a portraitist’s eye or mental set. They may even hold onto that vision of themselves and continue thereafter to think of their lives and works in terms of relationships, context, emergent themes, voice, and coalescing aesthetic whole (p. 35).

Davis explains that due to the artist and the model’s expanded vision, they may continue to observe their reality and the concept of identity with a newfound appreciation and consideration for the aesthetic.

hooks’ encouragement for critical thinking relates perfectly with Fine’s enthusiasm to create a new network of connections in order to expand and strengthen one’s understanding. To

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induce the concept of critical thinking when regarding the source of study, there needs to be engagement. By engaging in the study and rendering of my participants' selfies, I will be engaging in a critical assessment of how the participant chooses to communicate her gaze in the selfie, how I choose to communicate her gaze in the painting, and finally how the two gazes function as one painted portrait. Utilizing portraiture as a method of inquiry, the aesthetic properties serve as the agent for communication. Having the aesthetic properties function as the primary source for interpretation means putting the perceiver inevitably in command of the work's interpretation. If the perceiver's function is to interpret the work, it is inevitably the individual viewing the work who determines if the work is successful.

Through the analysis of the physical, portraiture grants the artist the ability to render an analysis into a visual representation. Not only does the portrait portray what was being observed, the work communicates the artist's understanding in a form of expression that transforms the way in which the subject may be perceived. This form of communication is a nonverbal exchange but converses conceptual ideas in a physical rendering that communicates a sense of meaning and understanding. To better understand the human psyche/position, portraiture may be understood as an analysis of the human image to define the human state. Through the following quotation taken from Shearer West's chapter "What is a Portrait?", retrieved from her published work *Portraiture* (2004), West describes what non-physical attributes portraiture is capable of rendering:

While a portrait can be concerned with the likeness as contained in a person's physical features, it can also represent the subject's social position or 'inner life', such as their character or virtues. A portrait can be subject to social or artistic conventions that construct the sitter as a type of their time; it can also probe the uniqueness of an individual in a way that sets the sitter apart from his or her context. Portraiture's capacity to do all these things at once makes it such a powerful form of representation (p. 21).

With portraiture embodying a subject's identity against the shared context of humankind, portraiture reveals how the human condition may have transformed over time. The portrait is always transforming as humans do, and never ceases to divulge new information and attitudes of the human condition. The human portrait remains a relevant source of data for there is a constant feed of new perceptions and attitudes made available. The creative possibilities and artistic

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outcomes are endless due to the indefinitely changing human portrait, and in response, there should be a constant consideration and importance placed upon the practice, study and research of portraiture in art education. Portraiture is the means of practicing mindful observation and serves as a useful method in social science studies and art research. Portraiture is a relevant and viable practice that should not be overlooked as a strong application among the work of artists, teachers and researchers.

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Justification

Whether it is through the manipulation of marketing, or the over sexualized and innuendo-charged representation that has been presented throughout history and continues into our present, the female image has become inauthentic. The rendering of the female image has had a severe impact on humankind and deserves to be reflected upon. My intention for my thesis was to investigate how art may be utilized to properly inform and present a strong foundation for understanding the female gaze. I was eager to discover what new information may be activated in regards to the female self-concept, and if the study may succeed in stimulating a sense of critical thinking within my work in regards to how I choose to communicate a female gaze. The artmaking portion of the study may be considered as serving the purpose for self-knowledge, but I believed my study to be the promotion of creating a dialogue between women and having the female gaze be composed of communication. Jansen's article "Girl on Girl" perhaps did not resonate with me personally, but that does not imply that the article may not resonate with others. I believed the female gaze should consist of diverse opinions and points of view, that one cannot simply pinhole how women perceive themselves, for we are all diverse and unique. As a female artist, teacher and researcher, my personal reasoning in pursuing this form of study was to promote the use of an authentic voice and to continue the rally for what I believed to be the feminine gaze, in visual culture, art education and research. Taking once again from Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, "as long as women censor in one another the truths about our experiences, "beauty" will remain mystified and still most useful to those who wish to control women" (p. 285-286). I planned to exhibit the paintings made during the study and do consider the participants of the study as co-creators for their involvement in creating their selfies.

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Methodology

The methodology that adhered the most effectively to the needs of my research was research-creation with a philosophical worldview of social constructivism. In John Creswell's *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2009), Creswell explains through the following quotation the social constructivist approach to research:

Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences- meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. The questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, typically forged in the discussions or interactions with other persons (p. 8).

By choosing to study and reproduce the gaze/selfie created by each participant and, in turn, utilize each participant's responses as the research's conclusive data, my efforts were to understand and develop meaning through the participants' experience and reading of their portraits. Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) explain: research-creation "theses" or projects typically integrate a creative process, experimental aesthetic component, or an artistic work as an internal part of the study (p. 6). There are four different categories of research-creation: research-for-creation, research-from-creation, creative presentations of research, and creation-as-research. My thesis was a qualitative study with a research-from-creation method. Pulling from Chapman and Sawchuk once again: the use of such research information does not simply come at the end of the process to "evaluate" the effectiveness of the work; instead, the work itself can be used to generate information on user-responses to help build the project in question, as well as future initiatives (p. 16).

In order to construct and appease to a suitable code of ethics and regulations, I drew from Deborah K. V. D. Hoonard's (2012) *Qualitative Research in Action*. In Hoonard's work, she explains that "today, all Canadian researchers, including student researchers, who conduct studies involving humans must submit their research plans to their university's **Research Ethics Board**

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(REB) for approval” (p. 55-56). I did not commence my research or acquire participants until I had full approval from my thesis supervisor Dr. Lorrie Blair, my thesis committee, and REB. After obtaining REB approval, I contacted potential co-creator candidates by the means of social media (Facebook), and in person at my place of work. If the potential candidate was interested, I sent a formal invitation. The invitation included a brief summarization of the proposed research project and my contact information. Once having received confirmation from a minimum of five participants, I responded by email, asking the participants to choose a time and place where each one may meet to sign a consent form, which outlined all the procedures, risks, benefits, purpose, and their rights as participants of my research study. The collection of data was achieved through the following five steps:

1. I had each participant supply a selfie of their choice by email.
2. Using the selfies, I recreated each image as a painted portrait.
3. Once the portraits were complete, I sent a third email arranging a date and time for the participant to view her portrait individually in my studio.
4. During each meeting, the participants were given a printed copy of the interview's topics and were asked to discuss each topic while regarding their completed portrait. All interviews were recorded.
5. After the meetings were complete. I reviewed each recording while noting any significant notions made during the interviews in my journal.

My intent by painting the selfies, and having the participants share their assessments of the work in an interview, was to help create a foundation where the presence of the female gaze may be shared, analyzed, discussed and understood between the model and artist. I chose to interview the participants after the portrait was completed in order to obtain their critique and their interpretation of the completed portrait, and to not have the interview influence the portrait's rendering.

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Data

Taking from Terry Barrett's (1990) formula to critique art, I organized the interviews by having each participant answer the following topics of discussion: describe the painting, interpret the painting, evaluate the painting, and theorize about the painting. I also included an additional question asking each participant to share if the selfie provided for the research was a pre-existing selfie or was a selfie created for the intentions of this specific study. Journaling any significant findings found in the shared responses by the participants, I was able to extract significant moments, and analyze the lack there of, found in the research study. I used an inductive coding practice to categorize any connecting notions found. The research process and collection of data took no more than two months to be completed. Table 1 presents in chronological order (starting with the first and ending with the last), the name of the participant, how much time the portrait took to be completed, my level of satisfaction with the completed portrait, and how much time the interview with the participant lasted.

Table 1: Journalled Details of Completed Studies

Portrait (Chronological Order)	Name	Duration of Painting	Satisfaction of Completed Portrait	Duration of Interview
1st	Esme	5 days	4	7 minutes and 32 seconds
2nd	Kayley	2 days	4	8 minutes and 58 seconds
3rd	Jess	3 days	3	6 minutes and 32 seconds
4th	Catherine	3 days	3	4 minutes and 18 seconds
5th	Steph	2 day	5	58 minutes and 20 seconds
6th	Deborah	2 days	3	8 minutes and 19 seconds
7th	Noelle	3 days	2	12 minutes and 26 seconds
8th	Marie-Josée	4 days	2	25 minutes and 16 seconds
9th	Caroline	4 days	2	15 minutes and 44 seconds

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My measure of satisfaction with each portrait has been based on the following criteria: that the portrait resembles the selfie, the portrait is compositionally and aesthetically strong, and the portrait exudes the gaze, an intended feeling, I believe the participant embodies. I journaled my level of satisfaction of each completed portrait before holding the interview with the portrait's participant. Table 2 demonstrates how I measured my feelings of satisfaction for each portrait:

Table 2: Measure of Satisfaction for Completed Portraits

Description	Level of Satisfaction
Completely Satisfied	5
Extremely Satisfied	4
Very Satisfied	3
Satisfied	2
Not Satisfied	1

Initially I had accepted sixteen participants. After completing nine interviews, I decided to not complete the remaining seven portraits because I found that the data was becoming rather repetitive and overly exercised. I also felt I had collected enough data to analyze the research and form a conclusive thesis. I sent a letter of gratitude to the remaining seven participants, thanking them for their participation, but informing them that I would not be using their selfie or in need of their participation for this specific study.

Esme

For my first portrait, I chose to begin with Esme's selfie. My manner of choosing which selfie to use was decided on having a clear vision of how I wanted to paint the selfie. Whichever selfie I developed a clear intention/vision for first, I would use. Esme's original selfie was unfocused and rather blurry. In order to better define and study the selfie, I sharpened and adjusted the tones of the image digitally using the application settings in my computer. After having done so, I noticed deep earthy tones in the background and was immediately inspired to partner Esme's selfie with imagery of a wooded landscape. With each selfie, I chose a landscape reference to symbolize the general mood, aesthetic and gaze of the figure. Esme appeared tranquil in her selfie but also exuded a sense of contentment in her solitude. The image is quite dark with only her face and the far background lit in a pale cool glow. I decided that the wooded

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Figure 2. Esme, *Esme's Selfie*, 2016.

landscape should reflect a sense of nakedness in order to mimic the cool remoteness that I felt in reading Esme's selfie. The landscape reference I chose, from my personal collection of photos, was not a heavy wooded landscape, but was an image of a light brush of young trees with a moss covered floor with wispy

forestry. To be clear, my intention in sharing the landscape inspirations I paired with each selfie is not for the research to study and compare selfies with imagery of natural landscapes. Within my personal practice as an artist, I use landscapes as forms of visual symbolism to communicate the atmospheres and moods I wish to present in my work. Using landscape is merely a stylized approach I practice in my work. To make this research an authentic study of the female gaze, I decided it was important that I stay true to my practice as an artist and continue using my forms of symbolism in the rendering of the selfies.

I am extremely satisfied with the completed portrait of Esme's selfie. I find the portrait reflects the gaze and the original sentiment portrayed in the selfie. I believe the portrait is compositionally and aesthetically strong, but painting the portrait demanded more time than expected to acquire a substantial likeness of the selfie in the portrait. Being that Esme's selfie was obscured, even after trying to sharpen the image, the study of the portrait took time and substantial effort to capture the details that could have been easily overlooked by the image's lack of clarity. I feel I have succeeded in painting the portrait to resemble the selfie, but the manner in which I was forced to render the portrait differentiates greatly in the style I usually paint portraits. With Esme's portrait, I was forced to sacrifice a certain level of realism that I usually practice in portraiture painting. Although I am extremely satisfied with the portrait's result, I do feel my artistic style was slightly affected by using Esme's selfie as reference for the portrait's rendering.



Figure 3. Joan Graves, *Esme*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 60.9 cm.

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When first arriving for her interview and viewing her portrait for the first time, Esme's reaction was extremely positive. The following quotation is Esme's first response when viewing her portrait:

My initial impression is wow that is me. Right away I feel you have captured the essence of the person. I really recognize myself. Even if you have taken artistic licence and liberties, there is still something at the core where I recognize myself. I was very curious to see how you would render the background and I feel like you have made your stamp on the space I am in. On a personal level the forest in the background, being my last name is Pine, it really speaks to me, but it also reminds me of Emily Carr and female Canadian landscapists. I feel very curious about the background but open to the concept of not knowing what it means. I think it is definitely a better use of the space than in the original photo (personal communication, January 8, 2017).

In regards to how the portrait was executed, Esme found the interaction between the figure and the background to be the most pleasing quality of the painting:

There is great flatness to the geometrical shapes, but in my face there is the same colours being echoed. It is a great way to create a likeness while creating depth. You chose a very naturalistic colour palette for my face but there is still an aspect of abstraction, like there are those blue undertones. My sister, being a painter as well, often goes on the other end and does a portrait in all warm tones even if that is not at all how the person appeared in that moment. When you make it black and white, you can see that all the values are right and that it is a perfect rendering of my face (personal communication, January 8, 2017).

In reaction to the portraits background, Esme's interpretation of the painting can be found in the following quotation:

There is a hint of depth in the background window shapes. You can get the sense of the space but it is less about making it a believable space. Is it a door or a new threshold? I feel like that forest and my portrait belong in the same world. That they work harmoniously (personal communication, January 8, 2017).

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When I asked if Esme chose an existing selfie for the research or created a new selfie with the specific intention of providing it for the research, she explained it was a pre-existing selfie:

I picked an image where I was really in a good mood, I just had got out of the shower, I didn't have any makeup on... I don't really wear makeup but when I do it's fun. But here I just felt generally happy and I didn't feel it was too posed. I actually caught myself half laughing and I do feel that it is coming across in the portrait (personal communication, January 8, 2017).

Esme admitted that there was some uncertainty when choosing a selfie. She admitted that she had even asked others for their opinion of which one should be used for the study:

I was unsure of what to give you. I am not someone who posts a lot of selfies, or any selfies online. And then there's been this whole painting of the selfie realizing it is a way for women to control their own image, and feel good about ourself while society is pressuring us to look a certain way. Here we can control how we are perceived (personal communication, January 8, 2017).

In the end Esme decided to choose for herself and chose a selfie where she had been happy and confident with her natural beauty.

To summarize Esme's interview, she found the portrait to be an accurate yet liberal portrayal of her selfie, especially in regards to the rendering of the background and her face. Although the background and the actual portrait were rendered differently, Esme believed the two components work well together and that the forest and her portrait belong in the same reality. Esme did express that she does not feel exactly comfortable with the practice of selfie-taking, but she recognizes it as a practice where women can control how they are presented. She believes that by using selfies in art, the practice may be a way in which artists may confront or compete with the existing female image being portrayed by the media. Contemplating the gaze, Esme explained she strongly identified with the essence that was being portrayed in the portrait's rendering.

Kayley

For the second selfie, the image did not demand any additional adjustments or digital alterations. Kayley's selfie was taken with a strong source of light and the definition of the image

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was of high quality. When choosing a landscape to pair with Kayley's gaze, I was in an instant reminiscence of a time where I had been a passenger of a quiet car ride through the lovely northern countryside of Quebec. It was during the fall season and all the trees were displaying beautiful radiances of colour. While passing a harvested field, I spotted a doe barely visible by the wet mist hanging over the land. The doe was aware and at alert to the vehicle's passing. Not moving a muscle, the doe observed in silence using stillness as a weapon for invisibility. I was reminded of the doe's body language while studying Kayley's portrait: observant, alert, and rather than exuding a sense of panic, there was a sense of confidence. A confidence that communicated that Kayley, like the doe, was in control of her current situation. Studying Kayley's quietly confident gaze in her selfie, I decided to add the exact landscape I had witnessed during the day of that car ride in her portrait. I chose to not include the doe, for I believe the presence of Kayley in the painting represents the doe's presence in the landscape. I am extremely satisfied with Kayley's portrait. I find the portrait greatly resembles the selfie, especially Kayley's gaze and the general atmosphere that is present within the selfie. I did keep the composition of the portrait similar to the selfie, but I found my aesthetic choice of including bright baby pastel hues in the background a rather unfortunate one. My intention was to paint with colours that may exert confidence in the painting, but in the paintings completion, I found the colour choices confusing for the viewer. I also do believe that due to the selfie's clarity and strong source of lighting, I was able to achieve a level of realism that I practice regularly in my work. I find my painting style has not been sacrificed in using Kayley's photo as reference, but I do believe that my style has been sacrificed ever so slightly in all the other



Figure 4. Kayley, *Kayley's Selfie*, 2016.



Figure 5. Joan Graves, *Kayley*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 60.9 cm.

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portrait paintings due to the technique in which the selfies were taken. In general, I find the portrait extremely successful, but the colour choices in the background, especially located on the figure's left side, could have been chosen better.

Kayley's initial reaction when viewing her portrait was that of surprise:

It's funny because I took this selfie, so I know what it looks like, but seeing it painted... Just like woah that is... that is me! It is immediately jarring (personal communication, January 9, 2017).

During her interview, Kayley explained that other than the image of her own face, her attention was instantly focused on the background, that she all of a sudden had the sudden urge to interpret what was being communicated in the painting:

I don't know if this was in your head when painting it, but when I look at the painting, it is super reminiscent to me of Vancouver where I am from. I mean, I am getting very interpretive but it is like this thing that is behind me. The nature seems to really contrast with the pastel Easter egg sharp lines. Then I'm placed right in the middle of the elements. Even if it was a portrait of someone else, I would read it as communicating the past (personal communication, January 9, 2017).

While studying the painting, Kayley expressed the issue of comparing the portrait with the selfie:

I know it is me but bam! That stare... it really bores into you. It feels so direct, which I think is uncommon within pictures that women take of themselves. Like the painted selfie, the portrait, it is still a picture of me but it has been made into what I consider, but not necessarily, a higher art form. You imagine everyone takes selfies, but this is special (personal communication, January 9, 2017).

When asked if the selfie was created for the research, Kayley explained:

I didn't take this selfie for this specifically. I actually took it maybe a day or two before you contacted me. I'm not one to take selfies I will admit. It's not that they make me feel uncomfortable, it is just that they are so close to your face and it is hard to make them look good. I actually took this selfie right after taking an exam that I felt I did really well on. Plus I wasn't wearing glasses which is unusual for me. I find after you asked me to be a part of this study, and after taking this selfie, I actually started taking more. This

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project in a way... I was just like oh man...selfies! There is a value in selfies (personal communication, January 9, 2017).

When asked to explain her reasons for considering selfies as valuable, Kayley made clear through the following that there are certain insecurities within the practice of taking the selfie that may speak volumes:

It is not necessarily a bad thing, but I asked my family before sending the selfie, their opinion of which one I should send. This is one of three photos I had taken that day. They said “it looks like you are sucking in your cheeks’, and I was like oh god... I was worried about that. I feel there is this anxiety with a selfie to show the best version of yourself but not a fake version of you. Like, I like my eyebrows. Sometimes I worry about them, but when I see them in the painting, I don't worry too much. I guess it is funny that sometimes when you see your own face, you are like oh god... but when you see it in a painting, it all fits so nicely and it looks so good. It is up-lifting. It is interesting to see also like that huge stray hair sticking up from my part, but I don't hate it at all. It looks great (personal communication, January 9, 2017).

In the interview, Kayley brought many themes to my attention. Sharing how worried she was when choosing a selfie, if it would portray her best but honest self, presents the politic of balancing authenticity with aesthetic preferences within portrayals of the self. Kayley also discusses how the painting medium changes the selfie, questioning if painting is considered a higher art because selfies are more easily practiced and are more accessible by the masses. Kayley found the painting shocking, in her words “jarring”, for she found the gaze extremely direct, an attitude she finds uncommon when women take pictures of themselves.

Jess

Although Jess' original selfie was taken with natural lighting, I found her complexion to be rather cooler than what I have witnessed in reality. I adjusted the sepia tones and adjusted the lighting of the image using digital settings offered by my computer, to better define the features and patches of sunlight present in Jess' portrait. After having made the necessary changes in order to properly render her image, what primarily inspired my artistic endeavours for Jess' portrait was the texture and aesthetic of her hair along with the hues of light in her eyes. Although Jess'

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Figure 6. Jess, *Jess' Selfie*, 2014.

expression in her painting could be categorized as sweet and timid, I found a calming strength radiating in her eyes and a wild untamed nature with the waves of her hair. Her eyes immediately prompted a vision of a sunset, while her hair reminded me of the silhouette of spruce trees. Like a sunset in the mountains, Jess appears serene, but in her gaze I feel the composed stir of excitement as the sun sets and the forest comes to life with its nocturnal inhabitants. Coupling Jess' portrait with a reference image of a sun setting in the mountains, I rendered the general tones of the background to mimic the tones found in Jess' eyes. I am very satisfied with the completed

portrait: I find the portrait resembles the selfie, that the portrait exudes Jess' gaze, and I do find the aesthetic rendering to be strong. What I find problematic is the compositional choice of positioning the landscape image as a sharp triangular form to the far side of the figure. Rather than having the landscape secretly tucked in the rendering of Jess' portrait, the landscape is distracting and pulling attention away from the figure's gaze. The addition of the landscapes in the portraits are not meant to be the key focal point but merely a complimentary addition that communicates the figure's gaze. In regards to the sacrifice of my personal style, even though I had achieved to adjust the selfie's clarity to an agreeable level, I still found the texture and certain shadows of Jess' face difficult to define.

Jess' first initial reaction when viewing her portrait was of surprise as she found the experience of seeing her image in the painted form dramatically different from what she had experienced with photography or of her reflection:

It is very odd actually to see myself portrayed in a painting medium. I am used to seeing myself in a mirror. That my interpretation of myself is now being reinterpreted by



Figure 7. Joan Graves, *Jess*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 60.9 cm.

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someone else, it is very odd and a different experience (personal communication, January 11, 2017).

Although viewing her painted portrait was a new experience for her, she was pleased with her portrait's rendering and found the painting produced an unexpected effect:

I really like the calm gentle tones of the abstract background. I feel like I am standing still in the painting, in contrast to when I took the selfie, the fact that I was actually moving (personal communication, January 11, 2017).

While interpreting the gaze in the painting, Jess noted that the figure in the portrait exuded sentiments of uncertainty:

I look a little uncertain perhaps. Not sure how this is going to turn out kind of thing, and that is kind of how I felt when I took the selfie, maybe how everyone feels when they take a picture of themselves. As if I don't know what this is going to look like. Maybe that is just my viewing of how I felt at the time (personal communication, January 11, 2017).

When asked if her provided selfie had been a pre-existing selfie or if she had created a selfie specifically for the study, Jess shared the following:

The selfie itself was not taken for the research. It was taken two years ago. My boyfriend and I have a long distance relationship, he lives in France, and I was taking this walk on my way to the park and I was thinking how I would love for him to be with me. I took and sent it sort as 'I really wish you were here in this moment'. That's also why I was nervous, I was thinking I really hope this turns out ok. I hoped I looked good. And he really liked it. He keeps it in his phone and while going through pictures, it was sort of this little present. That's why I chose to submit it (personal communication, January 11, 2017).

Jess expressed that although the selfie represented a moment of uncertainty, there is a cheeriness and a certain energy that can be detected. When asked to interpret the painting, Jess explained "I think that the premise would be the person, me, is reacting to the spectacular view", the view being the added imagery of the mountainous landscape (personal communication, January 11, 2017).

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Jess provided insight of how selfies may be useful in documenting and sharing moments instantaneously with loved ones not present. She was able to create memorable moments with her partner, even though her partner was not physically with her. Uncertainty and the politic of how one chooses to portray themselves in an image, is the dilemma Jess described having when taking her selfie. Feeling a sense of anxiousness before taking the picture, nervous of the outcome, suggests that it is possible to fail at taking a selfie. Jess explained that her reasons in taking her selfie was to send a picture of herself to her boyfriend. The selfie was not taken for herself, but to serve the gaze of another, a man. The question that Jess' interview presents is: is her selfie an example of a female gaze, or being that it is intended for the viewing of a man, Jess' boyfriend, is her selfie constructed with the regard of a male gaze?

Catherine

My first intention with Catherine's selfie was to adjust the visual settings to enhance the clarity of the image and to adjust the colour palette to a more natural hue. Being that I know Catherine, I am familiar of how she appears in person. I matched the tones of the picture to a point in which Catherine's complexion became familiar. Adjusting the sharpness of the image allowed me to better determine the forms present in the selfie, such as intricate shadows and specific features, but it was not to a level of clarity I would have hoped for, a factor that once again would jeopardize my manner of rendering the portrait. Details I made a priority to replicate in the painting found in the selfie were: the cool pastel palette tones with shades of creamy yellows, the presence of Catherine's kitten, Henri, who can be found precariously playing on top of her shoulder with his paw covering a portion of Catherine's face, the fact that Catherine chose to place her portrait to one far side of the selfie (an action I would almost describe as hiding from the camera), and finally the general composition by means of colour blocking to represent the original background of the selfie. In regards to practicing my style of referencing nature to symbolize the mood and/or personality of the figure present in the portrait, I retrieved once again a reference photo from my own personal collection. The landscape reference I chose for Catherine was a northern scenery of a frost covered field with small mountains on the horizon. In the image I do believe the time of day is at sunrise and there is a cool mist of humidity hovering over the field. Again, my intention in discussing the specific landscape that I chose for each

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portrait is not the focus of the study, but a mere stylization I practice when trying to physically communicate, through the painting, my interpretation of what sort of atmosphere the figure embodies; to give the viewer a sense of how I understand the participant's gaze. I am very satisfied with the completed portrait for I find the portrait is compositionally and aesthetically strong, the portrait does resemble the selfie, and the portrait does exude the general gaze/feeling in which I



Figure 8. Catherine, *Catherine's Selfie*, 2016).

intended. With that said, I do find the gaze in the selfie is much softer in comparison to the gaze present in the portrait. I would categorize Catherine's gaze in the selfie as bashfully playful and timid. In the portrait I find Catherine's gaze to be more humorously aggressive and goofy. I do also find that my choice of colour may have been more softly executed in order to represent the warm glow that is present in the background of the selfie.

Although Catherine expressed that she would have liked to have time to prepare for the interview, for example have a few days to view and build a critique of the painting before having her interview, I explained that my study was to capture her initial reaction to the portrait. To begin, Catherine explained that the task of taking a selfie had been new and a daunting experience. She found taking a picture and deciphering how she wanted to present herself as a rather uncomfortable task:

I am not a big selfie taker, because I am a shy person and I do not go on social media, so I don't see the point of taking selfies. But I am glad I did for the purpose of research (personal communication, January 19, 2017).



Figure 9. Joan Graves, *Catherine*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 60.9 cm.

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The choice in having her portrait take up less space than expected was seen by Catherine as a compositional advantage. She was very happy that her image was modestly tucked in the bottom corner of the canvas. With the background taking up the vast majority of the portrait's space along with the presence of Henri close to the centre focal point, Catherine was more comfortable in viewing her painting with her face not being the centre of attention:

I like the background because it is bigger than myself and Henri (personal communication, January 19, 2017).

Catherine appealed greatly to the chosen colour palette and enjoyed the stylized forms in the background and expressed her contentment by stating, "they are really minimalist and I like that" (personal communication, January 19, 2017).

When interpreting the painting, Catherine's attention was drawn towards the geometrical shape that featured the image of the landscape. She describes the shape holding the landscape as a door. She explains that the surrounding abstraction almost mimics a reflection of the colours present in the landscape and perhaps may represent another dimension or reality:

Either I (the figure) am in a dream to the world which is the landscape or I am in the reflection of the world because of what I said of the mimicking of colours. It feels like I (the figure) am in the background as well. If I am in a dream, I am dreaming of that world which may symbolize an open mindedness or curiosity to the world. If I am the reflection of the world then it would symbolize an open mindedness but in another context. I feel like it all fits together, that there is an equivalence or a balance between them (personal communication, January 19, 2017).

Catherine was focused on the background and its significance, rather than the presence of her image, for the majority of the interview. Her positivity to having been a participant in the research can be acknowledged through the following quotation:

I am very glad to have been part of the project and research. I find it enriching to participate in an art school project; being myself a student and a different kind of artist, a musician (personal communication, January 19, 2017).

In her interview, Catherine acknowledged that there is a significance placed on how the participants feel and interpret their portraits and that it is not the intentions of the artist that is

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placed into discussion, but the experiences of each participant. Catherine explains that the study may promote awareness and a sense of understanding for women:

The fact that all participants were asked to provide a selfie of their own, is a big challenge for painting, but it also makes this project more special and original. As a participant, to be asked to communicate my point of view, my vision and my premise of the portrait, it adds another level to the research. It actually reflects, I think, a layer of feminism by promoting women's voices (personal communication, January 19, 2017).

To summarize Catherine's interview, there was great discussion around her lack of comfort with her own image and not wanting to take part of social media. Perhaps this is a question of confidence in regards to the pressures of society? What can be said for sure is that comfort was a main topic of discussion. Secondly, being that Catherine's interview was greatly focused on her interpretation and the significance of the portrait, with her final verdict of the



Figure 10. Steph, *Steph's Selfie*, 2016.

portrait's theme being open-mindedness, the theme of being open to communicate can be interpreted. Finally, there is her last statement being about feminism and the promotion of women's voices. Again, this may be categorized as the promotion for communication, but perhaps specifically the promotion of women communicating and voicing their experiences in relation to identity and perception.

Steph

After having completed the first four portraits, I decided to change my approach and limit the alterations made in each selfie. No matter how I chose to adjust the visual settings of each selfie, my practice of style/realism was being affected. I

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decided to abandon my ambitions of obtaining hyper realism and decided to adopt a more painterly approach starting with Steph's portrait- letting the selfie control a more significant portion of how the portrait is painted. Steph's selfie has a very unique sense of lighting, very warm and tonal. Like the last rays of the setting sun, the light present in the selfie softens and enhances deep warm pigments of yellow, oranges, reds and deep purple hues of blue. Steph's gaze also portrays a dominating calmness, a gaze that is almost capable of hypnotizing the viewer to a state of deep relaxation or sleep. Using a reference photo of a setting sun disappearing behind a lush sepia-toned landscape, I painted Steph's portrait in consideration of her gaze, the original selfie, and the chosen landscape. I am completely satisfied with the portrait. I believe the portrait heavily resembles the selfie, has a strong composition, I am very pleased with the general aesthetic, and I find the portrait represents perfectly Steph's gaze found in her selfie.

Presented in the following quotation is Steph's initial reaction when seeing her completed portrait for the first time. She began the interview immediately by trying to interpret what was taking place in the painting:

The background is not what was in the original picture, but the colours seem to be what was in the original picture. The person looks pretty moody, which out of context, is incredibly interesting. This person in this non-realistic world with such a defined expression on her face, it either helps tell the story or takes away from the story because you can impose anything you want on it. It sort of feels like when people are in that moment of capturing their own life, the world breaks apart in an inception way. That it becomes shapes and a random pulling apart, like there's an explosion caught in the 'me' and then after, they go back to reality. In that moment it is so holy and completely a moment of self that everything around the subject becomes pixelated and ceases to matter (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

Steph continued to explain that she found the reading of the painting contrasts greatly with that of the original selfie medium:

This person doesn't seem like me. Of course it looks like me, it was painted by someone who knows how to fucking paint. I guess I don't recognize myself from a material



Figure 11. Joan Graves, *Steph*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 60.9 cm.

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point of view. Being painted on canvass, there is a certain texture. Maybe it isn't that it doesn't look like me... but like what is she doing? I want to know what she is doing. I know what she was doing, I was her. Like contrary to the painting, the selfie reads blank, it feels like the pop of a flash or a moment of breath. The painting feels like everything is on it, it is so heavy and weighted down. It might just be because of my face, my personality, my temperament (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

Through the following quotation, Steph explains how the painting is able to create more of a narrative and connection with the viewer, in comparison to the selfie. This affects how she reads the painting and, in turn, how she views her selfie:

What I didn't understand about taking a picture one day, is now suddenly incredibly illuminating by continually looking at the painting and talking about it. It is successful because it sheds light on a moment where I was not thinking in the moment. Good art has a very long reverberation, and that sound will carry. The purpose is in the pudding there. The longer I look at it, the image is richer in the painting than found in the iPhone. I find there is more dimension in the painting of my face than in the selfie. All of a sudden I find my eyebrows really beautiful. I find the subject very beautiful in the painting, not that I find myself hideous in reality, but the painting is a heightened version of me, but a very honest version of me too if that is possible. The gaze is more pronounced. I don't know if it is because the background has been obscured, but I feel you can connect with the person in the painting more than the person in the selfie. With the face holding the most detail, you are drawn to it rather than what you would find in a selfie or on TV. You are drawn to the detail, the smaller the detail, the more intimate. It transcends race, time... except perhaps the experience of being human (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

While reflecting on what she felt while taking the selfie, Steph shares:

In the three seconds it took to make the decision, it is like the whole world happened. I feel like I had a thousand rapid fire thoughts. One of them was 'can I be that Instagram person?' and I was very quickly confirmed no, these are all awful and I quickly left. There was a part of myself that wanted to capture myself done up and nice because I

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don't ever look like that. I liked seeing myself like that, but I would never take the time to do the makeup and hair because it would then be a confirmation to the world that I am not satisfied with how I actually came out so I have to work on it, like you're trying to pull a wall over the world's eyes. I know it is not like that for everyone and that there are people who just wear makeup every day because that is just what they like. They are beautiful without it but... I guess I am just hard on myself and I tell myself 'you can't want to look good because it means something'. Really it doesn't mean a goddamn thing... but it feels like a challenge you may fail at (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

When asked if she had taken the selfie specifically for the research, Steph confirmed it was a pre-existing photo:

It is so hard to not think about why I took that picture and what that painting means, because in that picture I was going to a play premier and I had gotten my hair cut so it was nicely blown out in a beautiful way. I have never consciously taken a selfie. I have never taken a picture of my face in that way, and I thought to myself 'well whenever am I going to look this nice?' So I took a selfie and it was a horribly embarrassing moment where I thought 'I can't believe I am going to do this thing'. I did it and clearly I wasn't too upset by it because I saved the photo, but it was very awkward for me. It was like writing in a journal when you don't feel like writing in a journal, it is too self aware. It was a very unique moment for me, vanity, beauty, self-reflection. That is totally not my vibe. (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

Steph continued by trying to explain the certain psychology behind the practice of selfie taking:

The female gaze... like why did I choose to make that face? That expression in that moment of taking a picture of myself? Vanity makes me very uncomfortable, vulnerability makes me incredibly uncomfortable, but part of the reason I don't like the selfie is that you are looking and holding your own gaze. I don't like even doing that with other people. The more they look at you the more they know about you. So the selfie is contending with your own image and staring at your own self and being honest with your own self. Working on all this stuff, maybe it will work out some of the time,

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but it complicates things because you have to accept all the reasons why you're doing it and be ok with it. Once you have gotten over that gigantic hurdle, which is just between the ears, then you have to deal with the world's reaction to it. Like, I fucking wore lipstick the other day because I bought a really nice one. Every where I went that day, everyone was like 'pfff, woah, wow, heh, wow!' So not only did I have to have a moment in the bathroom with the mirror like 'ok, I'm going to wear this thing, it is going to be totally fine, you have small lips but it's going to be fine', then you walk out of your house, and you think it will be fine, but then right away you get confronted by it. Someone's like 'nope I caught you, I caught you being different'. The fear of change. And then you have to put on your big girl boots and say 'yes I fucking wore it'. Then someone asks 'why' and you say 'just because' and then they scoff at you. It is often a guy, and I am not a guys against girls person, but it doesn't help. It doesn't help when it is coming from the opposite sex, if you're attracted to the opposite sex, or even if not (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

Steph continued to explain:

Maybe this is a tragic story of a girl who can't handle her own 'girl-ness'. Fitting in to what everyone else is doing. Like everyone has the same eyebrows right now and are into the Kardashians. It is not what the Kardashians are doing that is great or beautiful, it is just that in doing like someone else, you feel better because there is someone else doing it. That is why the internet/ media is so powerful. Because all of a sudden, like-minded people are getting together and presenting false news of reality. Like shit: Trump becoming president, everyone looks like the Kardashians... When you imitate, it feels good because it feels like you are on the right path, like a religion, you look to the outside. When you come out of the womb, there are no outside sources about your self. It is always the outside pushing in and that affects me/ the self. If the outside matches your inside, it often means that you have changed to match the outside. So by taking a selfie, I was literally testing the waters. Dipping a toe in and seeing if I can look into my own eyes and really see myself and not what is being presented on the outside. It is different than getting ready in the mirror or brushing your teeth because you are on

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autopilot. When you choose to record your gaze and possibly diffuse it into the world, although I knew I wouldn't, I was not going to start an Instagram after that day.... you become critical. You start doing some contorted pose thing. So yeah there is this meek self challenge in my gaze like 'can you handle the heat of the moment?' (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

Analyzing how the practice of selfie taking can prove to be a deeply psychological test, Steph introduced conceptual themes such as: confronting the self, accepting the self, understanding actions made by the self, and comparing the self with certain standards that have placed pressure on the self. She also explains that the analysis and understanding of the selfie was much more accessible when viewing the image in a painted form, that certain realizations of current concepts hidden in the selfie, were only made accessible when viewing the selfie rendered by someone else.

Deborah

The initial consideration I deemed important when studying Deborah's portrait, was that she had chosen to present herself in a very polished and lighthearted manner. The gaze in her selfie was very perky and confident, not in the sense that she was intimidating, but that she felt content with who she was as a person. I instantly pictured a bright sunny afternoon where the birds are singing and there is a light breeze keeping the environment comfortable. In her selfie I was able to detect that Deborah had made an effort with her appearance, with her hair straightened and her makeup done. There is the slightest detection of a smile on her face, but not an obvious presentation of her beaming. I decided to use a landscape



Figure 12. Deborah, *Deborah's Selfie*, 2015.

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reference of a field of wild flowers in order to represent the effort Deborah placed to portraying her selfie as bright and happy. I used a wild field rather than a purposefully cultivated one to represent the sense of restraint she placed in not being rendered blatantly flashy or too posed. Although I am very satisfied with how the portrait resembles and strongly radiates the gaze portrayed in Deborah's selfie, I still hold reservations of the placement and manner of how the landscape portion of the portrait was rendered. Rather than detail an untamed field of wild flowers, as was intended, my painted version of the landscape almost reads manicured, as if the field was cultivated. I find the landscape's characteristic affects the reading of Deborah's gaze as too purposeful, as if Deborah's gaze was intended and not natural.

Deborah's initial response in viewing her painting for the first time was that of extreme satisfaction:

I definitely see myself, it feels very me. I feel if someone saw this painting, they would know and understand me. I feel that you chose the right colours, even though I am a person who is drawn more to black and white gradations, like in my personal style and my work as an artist. I do think these colours work well with me. Especially with the shades of pink, it creates a nice feeling. In a sense, it feels like the sun is coming out.

You feel the light (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

When relating the landscape with the painted portrait, Deborah explained the following:

I interpret that it is me thinking of wanting to be in this area with the flowers, which is actually quite funny, because it is something I have been thinking about. I just wish I was in nature, with the sun on my face and maybe hearing birds. For some reason it is a similar image. Just a place for some quiet peace (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

Found in the following quotation is how Deborah describes her gaze in the painted portrait:

She looks like an independent woman, like she's going somewhere, and in the selfie I was actually leaving to go somewhere. I just feel empowered. Her head is up in the air, not looking down. She's smiling and she's feeling good, and I was feeling good. I just had my hair cut. I was feeling confident with myself and this painting gives me even



Figure 13. Joan Graves, *Deb*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 60.9 cm.

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more confidence. This painting just makes me feel like a super confident woman (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

When asked to compare the painting with the actual portrait, Deborah explained:

I feel the painting has more meaning than the selfie because of the background with the size, it creates a bigger impact. Little details that may go overlooked in a selfie are presented better in a painted form. It is a new way to see yourself. Your interpretation has opened my eyes and I can see myself in a new way (personal communication, January 26, 2017).

To conclude, the general topic of discussion throughout Deborah's interview was that of how the painted selfie may offer a sense of confidence. Deborah finds the painting communicates the sense of confidence she had experienced when taking the selfie and is capable of rekindling those feelings for her when regarding the work.

Noelle

My immediate impression when studying Noelle's selfie was that her gaze communicated an intention of sincerity. Her expression reveals a very disclosed nature, as if she



Figure 14. Noelle, *Noelle's Selfie*, 2016.

is dropping all walls of confidentiality and is letting the viewer observe her authentic self. Her gaze holds a very positive demeanor, which reads as encouragement for the viewer to accept the invitation to keep looking at her and to hold her gaze. Deciding on a comparable element that would invite and help guide a visitor, I chose to represent Noelle's gaze as a path in the woods. Rather than paint a path found in a heavy wood where the shadows and lighting may communicate a sense of foreboding or

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fear, I chose a landscape reference brightly lit that was taken in the early afternoon. I am satisfied with the portrait for I find the portrait exudes perfectly the gaze found in the selfie while maintaining a strong composition. I believe my landscape reference is a sound choice for Noelle's selfie, but aesthetically I would have chosen lighter tones for the rendering of the background. I do also find that the rendering of Noelle's facial features to be slightly exaggerated, but in general I am satisfied with the paintings results.

Shared through the following quotation is Noelle's initial response when viewing her portrait, which served as personal confirmation that I indeed rendered her portrait in a less than realistic manner:

It looks like me but it doesn't look exactly like me, I feel it is more of an interpretation. Maybe it is simply not how I see myself in the mirror. Like I do feel that there are certain features that have been sized differently, like I do find my eyes are bigger but maybe I just believe my eyes are smaller than what they are. My nose too but maybe my features feel bigger because they are just more defined (personal communication, February 9, 2017).

When asked if Noelle had provided a pre-existing selfie for the study, she explained the following:

I chose an image that was already in my phone, because I felt it was realistic to how I look everyday. For me that was important because, I am aware of when people post pictures online that they use certain filters and angles to define features that they think are more attractive and stuff like that. Not necessarily that it is harmful but still, I think people use that without maybe knowing who they are doing it for, maybe they are doing it to be perceived as sexy instead of just showing who they are. So I guess I consciously or subconsciously try not to change too much about how I appear when I do post a picture of myself. So that is one of the reasons I chose this picture. I don't think I am wearing too much makeup, and it shows, it shows who I am, and that is important to me (personal communication, February 9, 2017).

Noelle continued by explaining how she found the selfie to be a suitable commodity for analyzing the model's gaze:



Figure 15. Joan Graves, *Jess*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 60.9 cm.

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In the few art history courses that I have taken, the female gaze versus the male gaze has always been something really interesting. The idea of power and when a woman takes the image and decides how she wants to be perceived. I really like that idea and I can see how you are doing that as well by having us choose how we want to... basically giving you the material that you are using. And you didn't change I would say the central essence. What I gave you is still present (personal communication, February 9, 2017).

In regards to interpreting the gaze, specifically the distinction between the male gaze and the female gaze, Noelle wanted to clarify the following:

I think maybe it is the same, if you think of the male gaze as a consumer gaze, versus a... because women can still look at each other in a predatory way, or a way of consuming the other person as a thing for themselves. Throughout history, it has been super common that the naked female form has been used in a titillating way. But if you are trying to look more at the essence of the person, or you are looking more because you are interested in who the person is, rather than what the figure is, maybe it can seem less as predatory and not taking advantage of, but in a less selfish way. Like when you are looking at the person and you are interested in what that person or figure is trying to tell you, and you are not using the image for your own gain, I think that is in part the feminist movement, trying to reclaim the body because the female image has been taken away as something else than just the female image. I also think that there should not be limits just because of what someone has done in the past. It is a powerful part of reclaiming, using the naked female form or whatever form you want. It is in the process and in the way you portray the female image (personal communication, February 9, 2017).

When asked how a viewer may determine if what they are analyzing is in the process of using a consumer gaze, Noelle explained:

I think it is in the feeling of it, I don't think it is so tangible. You are never going to be able to control the way a consumer consumes a painting or views it because it is out of your hands at that point. I guess it is all about the intent. I think I understand why traditionally it was called the male gaze, because traditionally the roles of the male, or

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the consuming, has been done more so by men, perhaps specifically in this domain maybe. My hope would be that we could move away from having the gendered part of it, because I almost think that the title ‘the male gaze’ is a product of the original problem. How when you see it in a quality or you see it and you want it changed, you do want to label what needs to be changed. Throughout history, there is a process, like in the 1950’s and 60’s, that wave of feminism was gendered as well, because that is how it was separated and defined. But as we move forward now, of course my hope would be that gender is not being the accused problem. Gender is not the issue. I mean it is being worked on, but we still have a long way to go. Rather than call it a male gaze... yeah like a consumer gaze. It is easy while looking at a painting or an image, when you don’t know the person, that with that distance you almost do use it for yourself. Which can be sometimes good, but when it is done so systematically, it can have a very negative effect, dehumanizing or whatever (personal communication, February 9, 2017).

Noelle presents some very crucial points in regards to the concept of the female gaze. Rather than having the gazes labeled by gender, the gazes should be labeled on how they function. Noelle suggests that rather than labelling a manipulated objectification as the ‘male gaze’, the term ‘consumer gaze’ should be used instead. Rather than labelling a honest portrayal as the ‘female gaze’, perhaps the term ‘observer gaze’, may be utilized.

Marie-Josée

Remaining true to the endeavour of no longer altering the selfies provided for the research, I used Marie-Josée’s selfie with the preservation of her applied sepia filter and painterly special effects.

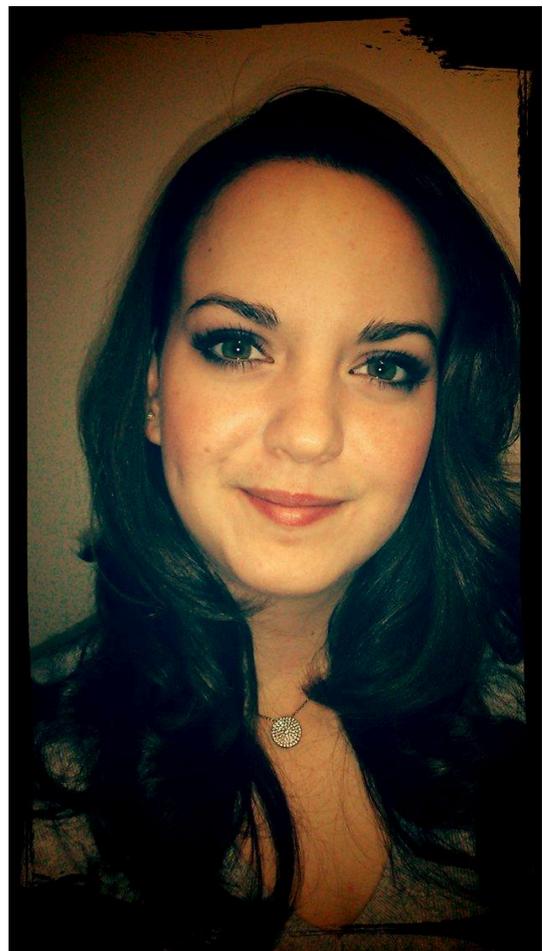


Figure 16. Marie-Josée, *Marie-Josée’s Selfie*, 2014.

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While studying Marie-Josée's selfie, what I found to be the most eloquent was the fact that she had committed additional effort in the creation of the selfie by enhancing certain details and customizing the image with a filter. Her features were softened by the glow of the filter, paired with the reflected light illuminating her eyes. I would describe her selfie's gaze as alluring and dramatically romantic- romantic in the sense of an idealized reality and not in relation to the sentiments of love. In order to represent the beguiling qualities found in the selfie, I chose a sunset over a waterfront landscape to represent Marie-Josée's gaze. While choosing an indisputable beautiful landscape to represent Marie-Josée's efforts of enhancing her selfie, I also find the reference choice accurately represents her knowingly captivating smile. Comparable to the completion of Noelle's portrait, I am satisfied with Marie-Josée's painting due to the fact I find the portrait exudes perfectly the gaze found in the selfie. I believe my landscape reference is a sound choice for Marie-Josée, but once again I find that I have rendered the features to be slightly exaggerated. With that said, I am satisfied for the painting is compositional strong and the aesthetic choice of combining a lakeside sunset with Marie-Josée's gaze is very suiting.

When I asked Marie-Josée to share her reasons for choosing the provided selfie, she provided the following as a response:

I chose this picture because I thought it was one of the prettiest I have of myself. My eyes are really bright. I am not a person who likes to take a lot of selfies, to be honest. But usually when I take a picture of myself, it is on a day that has been exceptional, like at a wedding or a supper, because honestly I usually just tie my hair up every day... So in the selfie I chose, I'm not sure what was going on but I found myself pretty, there are days when we find ourselves prettier than on other days, and I just decided to take a picture. And this one is one of my favourites. With my smile you can tell I am happy and my eyes are bright. It is mostly my eyes and that I really succeeded with my hairdo that day that influenced my decision. I know there are girls that go crazy with the selfie thing. I don't do it that often so I had very few to choose from. Also, I do find it represents me well. There is not a whole lot happening in the background, it is simply an image of me, and I find myself to be a person who likes simple things (personal

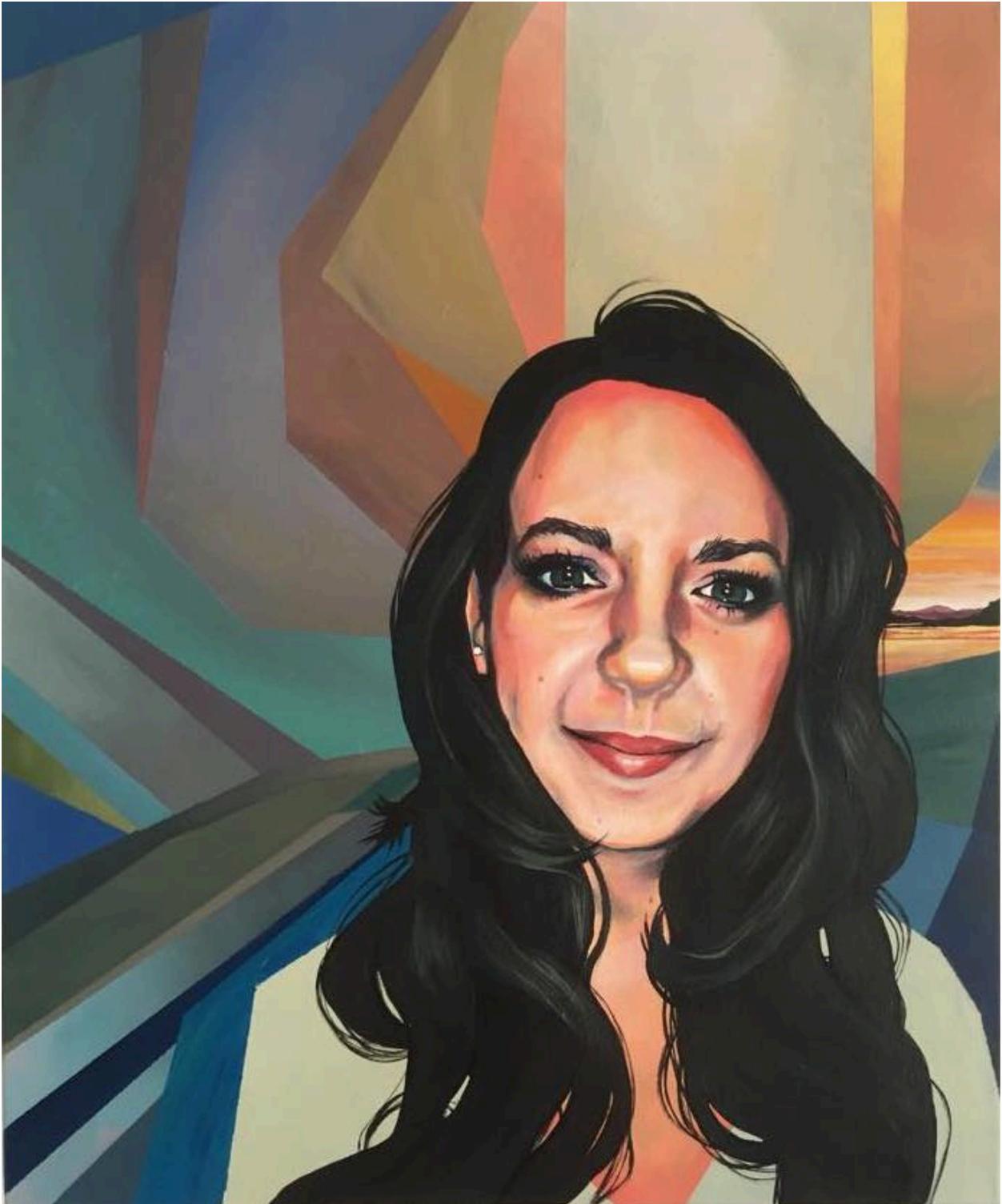


Figure 17. Joan Graves, *Marie-Josée*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 60.9 cm.

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communication, February 18, 2017).

While studying her portrait, Marie-Josée did express that she found her features to be a little bigger than in reality, specifically her nose, but was overall satisfied with the painting:

The colours you chose, like I am a person who likes calm, and I find the colours very calm. The painting feels complete, everything fits well together. Even the abstract forms, cubism, it is almost as if it reflects the landscape and the general feeling, the feeling of zen. I also like the placement of the figure in the painting. I'm not positioned in the centre, and I almost feel like I am part of the background, that the background and myself are unified (personal communication, February 18, 2017).

She continued to express her contentment of being able to choose the selfie that would be used as the reference for her portrait:

I already knew I would like the painting because it is a painting of an image I like. It is possible that if you had taken the picture or painted me from life, I would have come off as shy or not myself. I feel the presentation of myself in the painting is more honest because of my chosen selfie. A honest portrayal of myself when I was happy and feeling good (personal communication, February 18, 2017).

Marie-Josée's interview contends to various repeating notions presented in the majority of the interviews, specifically that the choosing of the selfie was determined by how the participant felt when taking the selfie. Confidence and momentary appreciation of how the participant appeared during the time when the selfie was taken, seems to be a constant factor that persuades the participant's choice and how the participant relates to the finished portrait.

Caroline

Studying Caroline's selfie, I would describe the image as fresh. Although Caroline's complexion portrays a warm inner glow, the surrounding environment seems revitalizing cool with a glacial aesthetic. I was tempted to portray Caroline's selfie with a winter or arctic landscape, but her skin tones persuaded the search for an equally cool but less snowy atmosphere. Pondering over the different seasons, I was reminded of early spring mornings in Alberta. Even though during the day, the sun would be out and the foliage would be thriving, throughout the night and during sunrise, the temperature drops dramatically and all life is covered in a thin film

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Figure 18. Caroline, *Caroline's Selfie*, 2016.

of frost. Comparable to the aesthetic of Caroline's selfie, the sunrise's radiance of warmth intersects with the cool mountain air that has frozen the plains during the night. I chose a wild grassland landscape with the mountains visible on the horizon with a lake dividing the two different terrains. The time of day is suggested to be early morning due to the pale pastel tones, and the foliage found in the landscape is waking slowly from a chilly frosted slumber. I also find that the landscape coordinates wholly with Caroline's gaze. Her expression holding a lighthearted perked gleam with her eyes opened wide, I would characterize her look as that of rejuvenation. Rejuvenation easily paired with the notion of a sunrise and the beginning of a new day, I was satisfied with how I rendered Caroline's portrait. The portrait exudes perfectly what I had observed of her selfie's gaze, and I find

the portrait to be compositionally and aesthetically strong. What I find problematic when comparing the portrait to the selfie, is that once again I find certain features exaggerated, specifically the eyes. I find the eyes, including Caroline's complexion in the selfie, much more softer than how they appear in the portrait.

As found in previous interviews, the participant was able to confirm my apprehensions of the portrait's rendering. Demonstrated in the following quotation, Caroline was able to properly critique the painterly quality of her facial features:

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The thing I notice is that my nose, mouth and eyes are more accentuated, like they seem bigger, I don't know if it is just me, but I just imagine my features smaller (personal communication, February 21, 2017).

When responding to the general portrait, Caroline shared the following:

I like the colour scheme, the abstract, geometric, colour palette. I think it compliments the black portion of my clothes and the selfie. I like the contrast between the background and me and what I am wearing. It is weird but I just really feel that the colour palette is really me in a way. I really like those light shades. Like at this moment with my own work, I am really into dealing with those kinds of tones, like pastel blues. I do embroidery, I do landscapes, and right now I am doing arctic scenery. So it is really funny this is the colour palette you chose. And I think it really compliments my portrait (personal communication, February 21, 2017).

In regards to the actual taking of the selfie, Caroline clarified the following:

I did take this picture for the project because I don't really take selfies. It is very rare that I do. So I took this one just for you. I didn't put that much thought into it, I was not sure if I was supposed to. I honestly don't take a lot of selfies, I know that there are some who do. I was concerned my selfie was not what you wanted. I was worried that maybe you wanted more thought or effort placed in the way in which we took the selfie. I thought maybe you wanted the selfie to mean much more than it did. There was no deep... like, I just took a picture. I thought you might expect something very profound and I thought a simple selfie might not be enough (personal communication, February 21, 2017).

When asked to interpret the portrait, Caroline explained:

There is this little part that is a landscape, like a realistic part, and then there is the abstract background. I would associate the abstract part with personality, a person's aura, like what the person/figure gives off. I am not sure what to think of the landscape piece,



Figure 19. Joan Graves, *Caroline*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 60.9 cm.

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I am sure there is a reason, but I am kinda at a loss (personal communication, February 21, 2017).

In regards to the concept of the female gaze, Caroline shared:

I think we have an idea of what the male gaze might be, I don't think we actually know, we just assume. Like there is that thing that men sexualize women a lot, but it is not necessarily true. I just think we are hard on ourselves, and we tend to want to conform to that. I don't know how men see women. I think there is an ideal in place that we feel we are suppose to mirror. Like a physical or a way we are suppose to look, maybe an expectation that we think men have, and that we try to achieve. But I don't know if this ideal is even a thing. I think women put a lot of pressure on themselves to look a certain way, or appear, to please a standard. I am not sure why it has to be one or the other, I think women can be sexualized by a man or a woman. But I think there is a general idea that men sexualize women and that it cannot be done the other way around, when it really can, of course it can (personal communication, February 21, 2017).

Throughout Caroline's interview, she questions the meaning and worth of the selfie, specifically questioning if the selfie is enough to represent or understand a person. She also devotes a large portion of the interview discussing how she finds the rendering of the background and the colour palette, to be aspects of where her identity resonates the most in the painting. Although she found her features inaccurately rendered in her portrait, and did not understand the purpose of the included landscape, she was still able to identify and relate to the painting as a portrait of herself through the reading of the background's abstraction. In regards to the interpretation and reading of the gaze, comparable to Noelle's interview, the gaze seemingly labeled by gender and not how the gaze functions, caused a political issue when Caroline tried to determine the existence of the gaze in the portrait. Rather than demand if the portrait exudes a female gaze, perhaps what needs to be questioned is if the portrait in the painting demonstrates a honest portrayal, or has the portrayal been manipulated to appear somewhat suggestive.

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Analysis

After using an inductive coding practice to categorize connecting notions found in my research journal, and in the commentary collected by the participants' interviews, the themes found in the analysis echoed strongly the concepts that inspired the explorations of study. The study was based on analyzing how the artist perceives the participant, how the participant perceives herself, and how the two experiences intersect to create an image representing a cohesive female gaze. My intention was to explore what possible generalizations may be found of the female gaze when the artist collaborates with the model in order to produce one single image. The main themes brought to the study's attention were: the meaning of the term female gaze, aspiring goals for the female image, and the facilitations that the selfie presents to it's practitioners.

When writing my thesis proposal, I believed the female gaze to be the rendering of the female study's disposition and attitude of self. After having been informed by my co-creators opinions on the subject of the male gaze in comparison to the female gaze, my perception has been completely transformed. The gaze should not be defined by gender, but on how the gaze functions in it's viewing. Going back to Laura Mulvey's (1975) article on page 4, Mulvey defines the male gaze as the projection of the male fantasy onto the manner in which the female figure is rendered. Through the following quotation taken from Emma Allwood's (2017) "Why we still need John Berger's Ways of Seeing", Allwood explains John Berger and Mike Dibb's philosophy of the male gaze:

The female nude in western painting- hairless, buxom, invariably with skin as white and unblemished as a pearl- was there to feed an appetite of male sexual desire. She did not have desires of her own. She existed to be looked at, posed in such a way that her body was displayed to the eye of the viewer, there only to be consumed (para. 4)

The male gaze is described to portray the female image as an empty vessel only to be desired and consumed. I believed a female gaze rendering would consider concepts more profound such as the figure's attitude, the self concept, and the politic of identity. What was clarified by my co-creators, specifically Noelle and Caroline, is that the male fantasy varies for each individual who identifies as male. Even if the male gaze be categorized as specifically the 'heterosexual male

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fantasy’, using the generalized term ‘male gaze’ to only portray the heterosexual male fantasy, is not equitably reliable. Who is to say that heterosexual men even have the same fantasies when fantasizing about women, or even experience the same responses when women are portrayed in a fantastical suggestive way?

Retrieved from the introduction of Matthew McAllister and Lauren DeCarvalho’s (2014) “Sexualized Branded Entertainment and the Male Consumer Gaze”, the intention of the article is presented through the following:

Integrating work influenced by Erving Goffman and Laura Mulvey, this article applies the concept of the “male consumer gaze” to two branded US televised events, the 2011 Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show and the 2012 Hooters International Swimsuit Pageant. Critiqued elements include gendered body positioning and placement, televisual and narrativizing techniques, social and integrated media, and branding strategies that combine to create a flow of consumption-based male gazing. Such trends may intensify with changes in media economics and niche marketing.

In McAllister and DeCarvalho’s article, rather than using the term ‘male gaze’, the two specify the term by defining the objectification of the female image as a ‘male consumer gaze’. Aware now that the inclusion of the word ‘male’ to describe what supposedly is the ‘male consumer gaze’, is a word far too embellishing to describe the manipulation and objectification of the female image- the gendered classification of the gaze should be removed. By removing the gendered brand of the term, there is the sanctioning of the term ‘consumer gaze’, a term that was also introduced by Noelle in her interview found on page 47, when comparing the female gaze with the male gaze.

Going back to Charlotte Jansen’s (2016) interview, Jansen asks artist Alexandra Marzella to comment on a specific quotation taken from Valerie Solanas’ (2004) *SCUM Manifesto* in regards to “how man swings back and forth from isolation to gang-banging” and that men are not capable of moving forward or past the concept of sex (p. 94). Marzella’s response is found in the following quotation:

Firstly this quote is referencing males, not all people. Why would anyone want to stop discussing sex? It’s the most natural thing in the world. If anything the 1900s did just

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that, criminalized everything that didn't fit into a very specific, religious mould. What we need to stop doing is labelling and categorizing gender, race, age, sexual orientation and beliefs. Sex is something that is congruous amongst all beings. I don't care if you shun anything sexual from your life completely, it's still a part of our world no matter what (p. 94).

As Caroline explained in her interview, men and women are equally capable of discussing sex in an objectify manner. The issue is not the distinction between the 'male gaze' and the 'female gaze', it is the distinction between a 'consumer gaze' and an 'observer gaze'. Portraying women in a sexualized way, does not deem the artists interviewed by Jansen, as female artists adopting the male gaze. The artists interviewed by Jansen are challenging what is defined as the male gaze, by proving that women are capable of rendering the female figure with a personalized conception of a consumer gaze.

The 'observer gaze', pulling again from Janelle Mellamphy's (1996) *Youlogy: Self/ portraiture, Canada, and Taras Polataiko's You series* on page 3, Mellamphy explains the goal of portraiture as being "the attempt to capture the self of its subject" (p. 85). What I believe drives the 'observer gaze', is the artist/creator's intention to purely observe, capture and portray the essence of what is being studied. Although the artist/creator is not in control of how the work is perceived by each viewer, the effort of intentionally creating an honest portrayal of what is being studied is what will hopefully and ultimately communicate a reading of authenticity for the viewer. Referring back to Lucy Lippard (1976) on page 5, the assessment of a work can only be achieved through a proper investigation: it is a time and space gap filled only when the work is shown, discussed, written about, deciphered by an audience- in short, when the moment of communication is at hand (p. 9). No, the artist is not in control of how their work will be perceived, but it is the artist's duty and responsibility to learn and respond to how the work is perceived, so he/she may modify or attempt a different solution to successfully communicate and clarify the intended message. For example, my intention of including landscape imagery in each portrait, was to represent each participant's gaze- my approach was not understood by all participants. It is my duty as the artist to decide if it is important that the viewer recognizes the landscape portion as symbolism. If the intention of the symbolism is indeed deemed important

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knowledge for the viewer, I need to modify how I render my portrait studies so that the viewer may understand what is being communicated. The gaze consists of the artist's intention, how the work is rendered, and how the work is perceived/understood by the audience. In order for the work to successfully communicate the artist's intention, the artist should be aware and work in result of all what the gaze communicates/represents.

Referring back to Naomi Wolf's (1990) *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf advises that there should be more awareness on the identity predicament constructed by the media, for there needs to be a constructed defence against the distortion of what culture presents as 'observatory.' The truth is that media/culture is presenting a suggestive form of reality in order to promote consumerism within its viewers for the viewers to invest, identify and relate to the objectification and fake reality that has been created. Pulling from Steph's interview found on page 42, Steph explains that when people try to change themselves in order to fit artificial standards, such as the lifestyle depicted by Kardashian West, they do so in order to feel more secure and one with society. In Dr. Jim Taylor's (2012) "Is Our Survival Instinct Failing Us?", Taylor describes how people change in order to survive:

The human instinct to survive is our most powerful drive. Since animals climbed out of the primordial muck and as our early ancestors rose from all fours to walk upright, evolution has been guided by its ability to help us survive and reproduce. Just about everything that humans have become serves that essential purpose, in how we think, what emotions we experience, and the ways we behave and interact with others (para. 1). The effort in trying to conform to what society communicates as the ideal standard, is an effort to change in order to survive. Taylor describes that the most notorious survival instinct that humankind possesses is the "fight or flight reaction", which is described as a "response triggered when we (and all animals) perceive a situation as a threat to our existence; our sympathetic nervous system activates rapid emotional, psychological, and physical changes" (para. 4). The manner in which humankind responds to media/culture, changing in order to fit artificial standards, is a reaction of fear. By abandoning what one finds natural in order to evolve into what is unnaturally portrayed, is the action of responding with a flight instinct. If humanity would summon up the courage to respond with the fight instinct and resist the consumer/money driven

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business of the encouraged standard, humankind would possibly lead more authentic and less vulnerable lives. Fighting against the ‘consumer gaze’ with the rendering of an ‘observer gaze’, may be the demanded weapon for retaliation.

In Natasha Walter’s (2010) *Living Dolls* discussed on page 6, Walter explains that “the highly sexualized culture around us is tolerated and even celebrated because it rests on the illusion of equality” (p. 119). In order to break the illusion, there needs to be an aggressive retaliation for authenticity where the observer gaze is practiced, especially in regards to reclaiming the female body. Ariel Levy’s (2005) *Female Chauvinist Pigs* on page 7, explains that women have accepted the consumer gaze as a form of sexual liberation and personal-empowerment, that the consumer gaze is now being misconstrued as the observer gaze. The female experience expands far beyond what has been presented by society, and each experience varies in many different ways. Using the self image as an example of an authentic portrayal of someone who identifies as a woman, may be a start to proactively challenging the plastic stereotypes presented by the media. The selfie can be viewed as a mode to facilitate an authentic portrayal, if treated with an observer gaze. As Esme expressed in her interview on page 30, the selfie may allow women the ability to demonstrate an observer gaze and possibly control the image by maintaining the figure’s sense of authenticity. It is in the way that the selfie is controlled, by not portraying a plastic stereotype, but by portraying a true authentic self, that will define the selfie as a tool for authenticity. In Catherine’s interview, she explains on page 37 that the selfie communicates as a tool where feminism and women’s voices may resonate. In general, the practice of using each model’s selfie as visual reference for their portrait, proved to be an insightful yet confidence inducing experience for those who participated: Marie-Josée expressed that she felt the portrait was an honest portrayal of herself in a state of happiness, Deb explained that the portrait made her feel like a super confident woman, and Kayley admitting she found the experience up-lifting. My question in response to the research is: are the positive feelings experienced by the models in response to their portraits, a product of feeling satisfied with the portrait’s honest rendering, or are their feelings of self-positivity inspired by the fact that their selfie has been chosen and deemed special by rendering it as a painted portrait?

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To answer my research question ‘through the study of the painted selfie, what new information may be revealed in order to understand and define the female gaze’, the answer would be quite a lot. Not only did I come to understand that the female gaze is an objectionable term, I discovered that if I truly want to portray an authentic female sense of identity, rather than using other people to communicate my message, I should utilize my own experience as a woman. Using another person’s selfie to render their portrait may at some level inform my portrayal of how they would like to be presented, but in the end it is impossible to completely understand how to render someone else’s sense of self. Being on the outside of the model’s self and existing as a completely separate entity, the artist has a completely different experience of what the model’s sense of self may be like. I can only study and portray my own sense of self as a source of female identity, because my identity is the only one I’ll be able to truly understand from personal experience. My study was to investigate what form of gaze is present in the final portraits after collaborating with each model’s gaze by using their selfie as a visual reference for their portrait. After having completed each portrait along with each interview, my conclusion is comparable to my experience in reading Jansen’s article. Even though I actively participated in the rendering of each portrait, I do not necessarily identify with the figures presented in the paintings, maybe in some more than others, but in general I do not feel that my gaze coincides with what is being presented. Perhaps each co-creator recognized their portrait as a representation of themselves and of their selfie, but what of the message that was being communicated in each portrait? Some interviews didn’t even mention the inquiry of the gaze or of the female identity concept. What was generally expressed was that the figure resembled the model- the figure can resemble the model and still communicate a message entirely in contrast to the model’s character. When asked to interpret or explain what each portrait was communicating, each collaborator was a little lost of how or what to answer. What was strongly established, mostly found in each interviewee’s initial response to the painting, was that the figure ‘looked’ like them.

My intention is to investigate how art may be utilized to properly inform and present an understanding of the female experience, in contrast to the inauthentic plastic female image found usually on display. In order to provide some background to understanding and integrating contemporary practices of an authentic female experience in art, as well as providing a personal

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account of an artist's process when creating portraits inspired by the self-regard, the most reasonable subject of study would undoubtedly be the self of the female artist. In order to activate the female self-concept and to stimulate a sense of critical thinking in regards to how women are portrayed, the best medium to initiate such a reaction is with the self- myself. The manner in which women are portrayed should consist of diverse opinions and points of view. My error was thinking that by collaborating with other women, I may render images with diverse opinions and points of view, which would, in turn, resonate with a larger public. The reality is that when the image is manipulated to portray something other than the subject's natural form, the image is no longer authentic and the message becomes unclear. What may resonate more with the public is the courage to portray the authentic and intimate sense of self. Rather than taking flight and abandoning what is understood of the self in order to fit a standard, shall I fight and create a standard that fits the self?

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Conclusion

After completing my research, I understand now that my gaze as an artist is to define, communicate and represent an acute female experience with an observer gaze. I find the practice of rendering another person's portrait is a very coalescent experience for it is a moment when the artist may empathize with another's *state* of being. What has been clarified for me after concluding my research is that if the artist wishes to represent, communicate or portray an individual's *sense of being*, while remaining honourable and justifiable, the artist can only study the artist's *own* sense of self. To render an honest portrayal, the artist needs to render the portrait from a sense of understanding and experience. Portraiture study is a practice where an artist studies the model's exterior, not the model's inner sense of self. Claiming to understand another's concept of self is impossible for an assessment is not a case of understanding, it is merely an opinion of what has been studied. With that said, it is important that the self-concept is challenged and made aware through informed study. Referring back to page 19, Fine (2011) explains that it is through experience that one forms and challenges the implicit associations of the mind. Connecting new representations of objects, people, feelings, goals, motives, and behaviours with one another, is how one may transform their ways of perceiving and experiencing the world. By studying other people's portraits, the artist may gain awareness of how to understand, study and compare the rendering of their own portrait.

Although it is important to be aware and to actively consider all representations of humanity, it is important to censor how certain representations affect humanity and the self. Considering the concept of the consumer gaze, there are certain representations of humanity that serve to manipulate the manner in which individuals choose to live their lives, such as the media's fixated following of the glamorous and unrealistic lifestyle of Kardashian West. By promoting the use of an observer gaze, my practice as an educator and artist will be heavily dedicated to assisting and instilling the practice of critical thinking. Taking from hooks' (2010) promotion of discovering the who, what, when and how of things, there must be the encouragement to question and find answers in order to determine the essential components to what inspires/influences works and how observations may be utilized to inform artistic practices. Gathering from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, and communication, I plan to use

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Scriven and Paul's (1987) methods of understanding to: conceptualize, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information gathered. Daniel Chandler's (2014) *Notes on 'The Gaze'*, is a perfect example that describes the construction and all the elaborate facets that may inform one of the gaze concept. Chandler explains in his article the functions of: the spectator's gaze, the intra-diegetic gaze, the direct or extra-diegetic gaze, the look of the work, the gaze of a bystander, the averted gaze, and the gaze of an audience within the work ("Forms of Gaze", para. 3). There is also how the gaze is functioning in and outside the work: the viewer looking at the painting, the figure(s) looking at the viewer from within the painting, figures in the painting who look at one another, figures in the painting who look at objects or stare off into space or have their eyes closed, other people who are looking at the painting with you, the artist who was once looking at the painting, the models of the figures having seen the painting, all the other people who have seen the painting such as buyers and museum officials, and then there are the people who have never even seen the painting ("Forms of Gaze", para. 4). There are so many manners in which to consider and interpret the gaze that I plan on using Barret's (1990) formula shared on page 26: describe the gaze, interpret the gaze, evaluate the gaze, and theorize about the gaze.

To summarize, a perfect mode of understanding and practicing all such mentioned methods presented by Fine, hooks, Scriven, Paul and Barret, was and is by using the research-from-creation method. Using the research-from-creation method, I was able to conceptualize, apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate the who, what, when, and how my artist gaze functions. Perhaps my initial intention for my research was to analyze/decipher the female gaze. After realizing that the concept of the female gaze was defective, the proper term being an observer gaze, my research became an analysis/deciphering of the observer gaze- the gaze of the artist observing the study. I learned through creation that it is very important that I as the artist choose the image I use for visual reference for I find sacrificing my style in order to properly render what is being observed, conflicting and unnecessary. I am an artist looking to observe poignant and stirring expressions of the self made by women. I have discovered through creation that the selfie is a relevant form of modern self-expression that may be analyzed in order to study and represent said female experience. By continuing my practice of using other women's selfies as visual references for paintings, I challenge and inform my mind's implicit associations regarding the

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female experience. For my future endeavours as an artist, I foresee maintaining two different bodies of work: studies of other women's selfies in order to inform my concept of the female experience, and then studies of my own selfies in order to share my female experience- both projects utilizing an observer gaze.

I believe the research-from-creation method to be an essential practice for artists to understand and develop an artist gaze. Even after having completed my studies and obtaining my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, I still felt lost as an artist. With my BFA degree, I was well equipped with technical training and was cognizant of what themes/concepts I wished to undertake within my practice as an artist. What influenced my decision to continue my studies and acquire my Master of Arts degree in art education was the desire to learn how art education works and in what ways art may be utilized as a form of expression/communication. By completing my thesis, I gained a deeper understanding of not only how art functions, but how to analyze, define and communicate my artist gaze. The research-from-creation method served me through my thesis, but the method will continue to serve me throughout my practice for it is a approach that will continue to aid me in strengthening my artist gaze. A practitioner may very well easily adopt the research-from-creation method in order to strengthen their practice as an artist independently. I highly recommend investing in the host that is graduate studies in order to properly support, inform, and perfect one's practice of the research-from-creation method and, in turn, predominantly become acquainted with one's artist gaze. Borrowing from Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790): an investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.

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Appendix



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Joan Graves
Department: Faculty of Fine Arts \ Art Education
Agency: N/A
Title of Project: An Inquiry of the Female Gaze: Portraits of the Selfie

Certification Number: 30007191

Valid From: December 13, 2016 to: December 12, 2017

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. Pfaus".

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee