The Selfie Phenomenon: Exploring the Evolution of the Self-Portrait in the Photography Classroom

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THE SELFIE PHENOMENON: EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF THE SELF-PORTRAIT IN THE PHOTOGRAPHY CLASSROOM

by

Sarah J. Bentley

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Art Education
Western Michigan University
April 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My family has always supported and sacrificed to support my goals in education. For that, I am grateful. I am thankful for the constant insight and inspiration of my students.

Sarah J. Bentley
THE SELFIE PHENOMENON: EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF THE SELF-PORTRAIT IN THE PHOTOGRAPHY CLASSROOM

Sarah J. Bentley, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 2019

This is a qualitative research project exploring the role of the selfie as a form of cultural expression in the twenty-first century and uncovering the meaningful connections students may discover between selfies and traditional self-portraits, whether modern or historic. Reflections through books, articles, and blogs will be explored. Topics such as the effects of social media on student identity and interactions, purposes of the selfie in youth culture, and current topics and trends of selfie-taking will be examined. A photography curriculum overview is included to facilitate this theme.
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INTRODUCTION

In 1912 New Jersey librarian, John Cotton Dana, supplied the quote that would be inscribed in Latin on the wall of Kean College: "Who dares to teach must never cease to learn." It is a daily challenge for educators to understand the mindset and environment of the youth who populate the classroom. Like generations of teachers before me, this is a formidable task in this ever-evolving world. There are many areas to explore in order to relate with students, such as music, movies, current events, and occurrences of the day. Building relationships with students through these discussions is enjoyable. However, such immense investment of time and energy in social media and the current phenomenon of selfie-taking is something that is personally demanding. This notion, weighted with vital significance to the student, often appears silly and shallow to seasoned teachers. Certain selfies posted on my Facebook feed produce an automatic eye-roll. The thought of the self-photographer carefully composing a duck-face, awkwardly positioning the camera at a precise angle while in the bathroom or car, then snapping dozens of subpar photos to flaunt that ‘perfect’ shot of their best features to garner the world’s admiration, makes me cringe. It is amusing to observe the photos found at the link #IWokeUpThisWay, where the sleepy photographer’s perfectly arranged hair is spread on the underlying pillow adorned with the airbrushed glow of multiple filters. The #Justworkedout selfie-taker flexes in front of the gym mirror, enhancing their sculpted physique with a touch of a contrasting filter and the expert tilt of the camera to produce the peerless image they desire to share. Those tricks do not go undetected by the trained eye of an art teacher. It has been an inherent response for each maturing generation to shake their heads and mutter, “Kids these days…."

However, within these photos there are those that stand out as beautiful, strong, and expressive. Some appear to have borrowed poses echoing the haunting gaze of Vermeer’s Girl
with a Pearl Earring or the wild-eyed energy of Courbet’s Desperate Man. Admittedly, my own camera has snapped a few selfies for personal fun, never to be shared on social media. The artist in me has flirted with the idea of creating a grandiose yet somehow ironically vulnerable self-portrait in oil paint that provokes questions such as: “How shall I present myself?” “What do I want to communicate with this imagery?” “What shall I wear?” “What do I want to feature?” and “What do I want to hide?” Considering the selfie, there are similarities between my desire for a self-portrait in oil paint and what goes through the mind of the selfie-taking high school student. So, I suppose it is now time to ask if the selfie is a new artistic genre.

As a teacher navigating through the booming age of rapidly evolving technology, the desire to keep curriculum relevant competes with the challenge of engaging students. John Cotton Dana’s quotation reminds me that to create a dynamic learning environment, educators must develop and adapt teaching methods and lesson plans that inspire, ignite, and empower each unique generation of students - and individuals within unique generations - to appreciate and create original artwork. With the rise of the modern-day selfie, my intention is to help students draw connections between what is familiar to them and to initiate them to feel the influence of those who have gone before them.

The focus of this new curriculum is to create an opportunity for students to explore how self-portraiture has evolved throughout history and continues to influence the current form of selfie-photography. Students will also be directed to document commonalities between historical and contemporary approaches to self-representation and gain the tools of experience and confidence for authentic self-expression. It is a personal interest to investigate how art educators can incorporate selfie-photography as a meaningful art medium into their curriculum to deepen students’ knowledge, understanding, and relevance of self-portraiture from a historic perspective.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The Digital World of Teens

The teen digital world has evolved extensively with the dramatic increase in social media over the last decade. A 2018 survey conducted by Common Sense Media, a non-profit education and advocacy group that works toward safe technology and media for children, documents this trend and explains how children are affected on different levels. This survey of more than 1,000 children in the United States (age 13 to 17), tracks changes in internet use from 2012 to today, showing the constant evolution in their social media. Findings show that 95% of teens have mobile devices today. The proportion of teens who say their favorite way to communicate with their friends is “in person” has dropped from 49% in 2012 to 32%, becoming second to texting. The frequency of social media use has changed dramatically. In 2012, 34% of teens checked social media more than once a day, compared to 70% who do so today. Twenty-seven percent of teen users today say social media is “extremely” or “very” important to their lives, while another 37% say it is “somewhat” important. Forty-seven percent of teens who have a smartphone say they are “addicted” to it. Sixty-eight percent of teen users agree with the statement “Social media has a negative impact on many people my age,” yet 25% say using social media makes them feel less lonely, compared to three percent who say more (Common Sense Media, 2018).

The prevalence of social media, including selfies, is a part of life is not expected to diminish anytime soon. Millennials are spending an hour per week simply taking and posting these selfies to social media. The selfie has undeniably taken the world by storm since the 93 million selfies across the globe are taken every day (Benjamin, 2017). As an art critic and reporter for the Star Tribune, Alicia Eler explores this notion in her book The Selfie Generation: How our self-images are changing our notions of privacy, sex, consent, and culture while
seeking to answer how the selfie came to be, what it is today, and how it is evolving. Eler explains that “staying in touch and socializing online are largely what teenagers do, because the Internet is another place where their friends hang out. Why give an entire generation these types of digital tools and then attempt to shame them for using them exactly the way that they were designed? Yet again, adults forget that they were once teens, and the media sensationalizes the ways that teens behave during this intense period in their life when they are figuring out who they are as social beings” (2017, p. 21). This is an integral part of students’ identity: how they relate to and stay connected with one another, and how they express themselves. The youth has a new way of communicating, receiving, processing, and giving information today. It is essential that educators’ teaching styles and curricula remain flexible to meet students’ changing needs. The selfie is here to stay, and the way students express themselves through technology and self-portraiture will continue to evolve.

**Defining the Selfie**

With the launch of the iPhone 4 equipped with the forward-facing camera in 2010, the golden age of the selfie began. There is much lore dedicated to who the first selfie-ist was, who coined the term, and who made it famous. Legend has it that the very first self-portrait was taken in 1839 by camera pioneer Robert Cornelius (Simonovski, 2017). Advances and innovations within the field of photography, including self-timers, photobooths, and the Polaroid camera kept the medium vibrant and ever-changing. Photography eventually evolved into the world’s most democratic medium, in which everyone and apparently anything - including a monkey in Indonesia - could create a successful and aesthetically pleasing likeness of the self.
Celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, James Franco, and Paris Hilton have helped to put a spotlight on the genre through social media. World leaders such as President Obama and Pope Francis are known to indulge in the occasional selfie and Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide took what may be the world’s greatest selfie of all time while capturing himself, the sun, and the Earth in one shot. In 2013, the Oxford English Dictionary designated “selfie” the ‘word of the year,’ defining it as ‘a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media’ (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). According to Oxford Dictionary, the term ‘selfie’ was first coined in 2012 in an online forum by an intoxicated Australian college student who posted a self-taken photo of his lip injury (2013). A defining element of the selfie, and one that differentiates it from a self-portrait, is the act of publication. Eler writes that, “[that] the selfie is a mirror; the shared selfie is then a shared mirror, reflecting the moment it is taken” (2017, p. 2).

Eler discusses various reasons why the world is consumed with this form of communication. Seeing and being seen are basic human desires, and the selfie has been a useful platform for this. There is an abundance of reasons why one takes and posts a selfie. She explains that selfies can be a meaningful way to stay in touch with others and have a meaningful connection. It can be a multidimensional and artistic means of communication across distance as one is able to directly get to see another’s face. Selfies are an efficient way to share moments of your daily life with others. They are a bridge a connecting others in a meaningful way.

Selfies have proven to be a means of empowerment for many who desire to define their own beauty and sexuality. Women get to become their own muses, rather than the object of sexuality on a male artist’s canvas. Eler explains that social media has been a helpful tool for empowering those who feel overlooked or mistreated and for breaking the isolation of many who
feel different than the rest. She quotes Sharif Mowlabowcus, Senior Lecturer in Digital Media at the University of Sussex: “LGBT folk gravitated towards digital forms of communication and identity performance with a deep sense of investment much earlier than their heterosexual compatriots.... In part this was due to necessity’ (2017, p. 25). Eler states that “The selfie is an aesthetic with radical potential for bringing visibility to people and bodies that are othered. It is a way to share one’s own narrative, offering others a chance to learn and listen” (2017, p. 198). The ability to connect with those who are similar over a hashtag is a valuable resource for those who feel overlooked, alone, and shamed. Selfies document friendships, collective movements, events, landmark as well as monotonous moments in one’s life, a range of emotions from that of exuberance to mourning, and humorous self-mockeries.

During the naturally egocentric time of life that is adolescence, Eler explains that “[t]he selfie becomes a natural outgrowth for this awkward developmental period, a way to self-surveil at a time when teens are attempting to find themselves within their social milieu” (2019, p. 124). Teen nature is often rebellious, curious, emotional, and attention-seeking. Eler writes that “[s]ometimes, these social media posts are just about exploring a feeling or a moment; they don’t aim to answer any questions or give you a feel-good or feel-bad narrative. They just are…” (2017, p. 199).

Eler also explores what the selfie means for the future of communication. The selfie exists through production and response, posts and likes, archives and reposts, all in a continuous loop. She reminds the reader that the social media and the selfie have fed our human desires to communicate and connect but have also changed the way we see the world and navigate through it. Eler quotes Mona Kasra, Assistant Professor of Digital Media Design at the University of Virginia, as saying “Selfies are often referred to as a perfect metaphor for our increasingly
narcissistic, oversharing, and personal-branding culture, but these self-portrait images are in fact enhancing the methods by which citizens communicate, connect, and respond to the local and global event” (2017, p. 200). Kasra explains that people are now connected on a much grander scale: “In the 21st century, we are post-national. We don’t need to be in the same place at the same time” (2017, p. 200).

**Defining the Self-portrait**

The self-portrait attracts the viewer’s eyes as in a shared intimate moment with the artist him- or herself or even issues a challenge to the viewer to self-reflect. Throughout history, portraits have been a genre of familiar faces, a recognizable arrangement of features, and displays of narrative emotion. According to James Hall in *The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History*, “Even today, self-portraits are still often regarded as the most autonomous of art forms, spontaneous uncommissioned expressions of the artist ‘at free play’” (2014, p. 46). The artist’s own face has been a common subject for artists for thousands of years. Head of the Medici dynasty and Florentine patron of the arts Cosimo de’ Medici is quoted saying ’Every painter paints himself” (Hall, 2014, p. 72) as personal likenesses of artists such as Da Vinci and Caravaggio are evident throughout their work in the proportions and features of Christ, saints, common folk, and even the wife of a merchant.

The term “Self-portrait” first appeared in the English language in 1831, and in France, *auto portrait* entered the Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française in 1928 (Williams, 2014). According to Hall, “It is in the Christian Middle Ages - preoccupied with personal salvation and self-scrutiny - that we see the start of a coherent tradition of self-portraiture” (2014, p. 17). Self-portraiture was initially modest and infrequent. Hall explains that around 1500 AD, quality glass
mirrors were invented, individualism was recognized, and inevitably the self-portraiture trend went on the rise. “It is as if suddenly western European artists could see themselves” (2014, p. 31). The physiological impossibility of seeing oneself has fascinated artists for centuries, inspiring ingenious works that play with these constraints” (Williams, 2014). “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” (1523-4) by Parmigianino, “Self-portrait in the studio” (1976) by Brett Whiteley, and “The Artist's Foot” (1876) by Adolph von Menzel explore this notion.

The purpose of the self-portrait is not only to document the physical characteristics of one’s likeness, but to reveal something more. Hall notes that “Mirrors are nonetheless crucial to the development of self-portraiture, but it is more the idea of the mirror than the precise nature of the mirror image that mattered” (2014, p. 36). During the Renaissance, portraiture became more concerned with the individual and naturalistic. The genre became more of a means for an artist to advertise his skills and celebrate his ability, and the obsession of the science and symbolism of mirrors contributed to a whole range of extraordinary self-portraits.

In an article for The Conversation, Hannah Williams writes “According to the 18th century theorist Roger de Piles, a portrait is an attempt to render that real individual so exactly that the image encapsulates not only the physical traits of their body, but also the emotional traits of their soul” (2014). She adds, “A portrait is essentially the trace of an encounter.” Hall relates that knowledge of portraiture to self-portraiture: “If a portrait is a social encounter with another person, then a self-portrait is a perceptual encounter with one’s own body. It is widely assumed -- and hoped -- that self-portraits give privileged access to the sitter’s soul, and thereby overcome the alienation and anonymity experienced by so many in modern urbanized societies” (2014, p. 7).
A Comparison of Selfies and Self-portraits

Asserting one’s individuality and saying “I’m here” is within human nature. Forty thousand years ago, humans left handprints on cave walls. Graffiti such as "Lucius wrote this" adorns the walls of Pompeii. The “condition humana” -- the essentials of human existence, connects people, all through time and space. The desire to be remembered and to capture or document a slice of one’s existence is natural. Whether it is the painstaking application of multiple layers of oil paints or the rapid finger-press of a button, the result is a frozen image of a human likeness. It seems, therefore, that there is much similarity between traditional self-portraits adorning the walls of art museums and the multitude of selfies parading on one’s Facebook feed.

As selfie-takers snap up multiple attempted photos, editing, and retouching just to achieve that perfect image, the care and attention to detail that artists also display while making their creative and technical choices should be noted. Art curator Ariane van Suchtelen said self-portrait artists “want to show off the best of their art, but also emphasize the best aspects of their appearance and to reflect their status” (Siegal, 2017). Often, artists such as Diego Velázquez, Judith Leyster, and Johannes Vermeer, would select clothing and props to convey a status of grandeur and luxury that was not aligned with their actual lifestyles as artists. Rembrandt’s “Self-Portrait with Two Circles” (circa 1665 – 1669) celebrates the artist’s incredible skill with two perfect circles crowning his own exquisite likeness. Jan van Eyck’s dramatic “Portrait of a Man” showed off his unsurpassable artistic skill in this 1433 portrait of himself adorned with a red turban; though he appears to have humbly inscribed his motto, “As Well as I Can” at the top of the frame, it was very much more likely that his tone was sarcastic, the self-deprecation a pretense. In “Self-Portrait at the Age of Twenty-Eight,” Durer paints himself with reference to
Jesus Christ, himself. One can conclude that front-facing cameras and paintbrushes alike can achieve satisfying results if it is the desire of the photographer or artist to be noticed and admired in areas of life, whether it be for their appearance, accomplishment or skill.

Artists have been their own muses and convenient subjects for thousands of years. Rembrandt created nearly 100 self-portraits during his lifetime; Van Gogh painted over 30 (Bailey, 2019). Michelangelo could not resist sneaking in his own clever self-portrait among the Christian elite in his mural in the Sistine Chapel. In Caravaggio’s “The Taking of the Christ,” the Roman painter “photobombs” the moment himself by including his self-portrait. The universal desire and need “to see and be seen” transcends time and space.

Selfie-ists and portraitists alike can document history in a dramatic way that spreads knowledge and impacts viewers on an emotional level. Alicia Eler notes that “Traditionally, portraits were painted of rulers and leaders at weighty historical moments. Velazquez's masterpiece, “The Surrender of Breda,” and Titian's portrait of Philip II offering his son as a sacrifice for victory at the Battle of Lepanto use all the resources of oil painting to portray people in history. Perhaps what these (selfie-ists) are doing is the democratic equivalent--they are expressing their sense of history with the resources they hold in their hands: their phones” (2017, p. 113). Similarly, selfies document where one has been and what one is witnessing. Selfies bring to attention events to the world at lightning speed.

The selfie generation is using accessible tools to craft a narrative, much like artists such as Van Gogh, Michelangelo, Gentileschi, and Ai Weiwei. The self-portraits of these artists document pain, joy, humor, self-deprecation, heroism, panache, and defiance of authority. Strolling through the National Portrait Gallery and scrolling through a feed of selfies of celebrities, friends, and family members reveal similar themes. Similarly, selfies display a
narrative of what one is feeling and experiencing. It is an instant tool for communicating messages that otherwise would be difficult to express.

A recent Italian study (Bruno, Bode & Bertamini, 2016) revealed the similarity in compositional choices among typical selfie takers and the ancient masters. Based on the analysis of art history books and exhibition catalogues, the authors observed that artists prefer poses showing the left side of the subject’s face when composing a portrait but showing the right side when composing their own self-portrait. Selfie-takers favored revealing their left sides as well. The researchers noted that this may be because emotions are expressed in the right hemisphere of the brain, which causes the left side of one’s face to be more expressive. Whether looking in a mirror or camera for self-portraits or viewing a subject, the left side is usually preferred when depicting the face at an angle.

In contrast, selfies and self-portraits show an obvious time lapse in rendering. Eler notes that “[b]efore Instagram and front-facing cameras in every smartphone made the selfie a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon, the self-portrait suggested a sense of slowness, of careful meditation on one’s own image” (2017, p. 52). Artists, such as Da Vinci, Gentileschi, and Rembrandt spent their lifetime crafting their medium through laborious trial and error; their self-portraits gleam with the varnish of dozens of meticulously rendered layers of paint. Today, it hardly seems equitable that a self-portrait can be created and shared with a couple taps of the finger. However, there is great value in understanding and appreciating both media alike...

**Current Selfie Topics**

The positive aspects of this global trend have not come without controversy. There are inevitably conflicts and concerns about the topic of a student’s selfie-taking for an educator to
explore. Many champion and cheer on the act of selfie-taking as a fun and creative outlet and an effective means to connect to the world yet there has been much concern centered around the influence of this medium; its inherent potential for narcissism, self-esteem, privacy, and safety issues, and the possible lack of authenticity of experience.

Narcissus, the young hunter of Greek Mythology who lusted after his own image then famously drowned in the riverbank while enraptured by his reflection, gave his name to the term associated with egocentrism and grandiosity: narcissism. Critics of selfie-taking often claim that the practice develops and encourages these undesirable characteristics in current society. In a study performed to examine the possible link between narcissism and frequency of posting selfies, Eric B. Weiser concluded that “Posting selfies...represents an avenue through which narcissistic needs are expressed through social media” (2015). “For individuals high in narcissism, posting selfies constitutes a means to not only seek attention and admiration from others, but also to convey heightened perceptions of leadership, authority, and dominance.” On the other hand, Dr. Lisa Orban, a psychologist, offers an opposing view, suggesting that selfies are a new avenue for normal childhood development: “Experimenting with self-identity is a key part of adolescent development. And today’s technology allows a strong element of control. It is easy to dismiss selfies as narcissistic, but this safe and controlled self-exploration is particularly important for younger users” (Wallop, 2013).

A 2015 German study attempted to find common personality traits other than alleged narcissism that may be correlated to frequent selfie-posting (Sorokowska et al., 2015). According to the study, social exhibitionism and extraversion generally predicted the frequency of online selfie-posting in men and women. However, their findings revealed that self-esteem was unrelated to the activity of selfie-sharing. The findings of this study provide insight into why
people, predominately youths, use selfies to self-present and feel connected, two basic social needs.

A further examination of personality traits in a 2018 study revealed that selfies effectively convey many individual characteristics or what people are really like (Kaurin, Heil, Wessa, Egloff & Hirschmuller, 2018). Representational techniques and poses such as duck faces and mirror selfies can express certain qualities. Except for agreeableness and self-esteem, certain features of one’s personality like conscientiousness, narcissism, extraversion, and openness can be accurately reflected. The study found that selfie takers and selfie receivers can benefit from the authenticity of this social exchange. With this understanding, the selfie proves itself to be a great new vehicle for genuine self-expression.

In a Slate article, Rachel Simmons (2013) argues that the practice of taking and posting selfies is a fantastic opportunity for girls to take control of their image to the world in a celebratory way. Simmons states “The selfie is a tiny pulse of girl pride—a shout-out to the self.” She adds that she “[worries] more about a world of parents and educators that are overly invested in seeing all social media as problematic, and positioning girls as passive targets instead of agents of their own lives. Every girl is different, and context matters.” In contrast, Erin Gloria Ryan for Jezebel, is adamant that this new genre is far from empowering: “Selfies aren’t expressions of pride, but rather calls for affirmation...Nor is it the sort of self-promotion that results in anything but a young woman reinforcing the socially-ingrained notion that the most valuable thing she has to offer the world is her looks” (2016). Ryan admits to taking and enjoying the occasional selfie but insists that one call it for what it is. She denies that the typical selfie is empowering and emphasizes that it is just fun and should not be given undeserved credit for anything else.
A 2015 study conducted to examine the relationship between body dissatisfaction of adolescent girls and selfie taking, selfie photo manipulation, and selfie posting found that high levels of self-photo based online activities are associated with greater body-related and eating concerns (McLean, Paxon, & Masters, 2015). Adolescents who invest the most time and frequently manipulate their selfies prior to sharing report the greatest body dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is possible that the act of editing and manipulating photos may be a red flag for concern rather than the act of selfie-taking.

Audrey Wollen is a feminist theorist and visual artist who uses Instagram as a platform for her artwork. She is best known for her “Sad Girl Theory” in which she addresses the double-edged sword of the selfie in her artwork. Wollen creates images of herself as the vulnerable and sensual muse to address women’s suffering and inspire unification. Wollen compares her languid “Sad Girl” selfies to other female representation throughout Western art history. The differing factor lies in her use of the sullen selfie and the fact that she is her own subject, gazing at her own reflection. Wollen states “Mediated by tech and the Internet rather than a man with a paintbrush, it still serves a similar function” (Skwarna, 2017). Wollen adds that “we can use the products of the patriarchy as tools to dismantle it; the objectification of girls can be restaged and read differently.”

Alicia Eler explains the willing complacency with surveillance that the world has manifested in exchange for the ability to share selfies. “Selfie performance is predicated on relinquishing privacy. Yet people rely on these technologies to communicate with the people in their lives and abandoning them completely would inevitably make communications increasingly difficult. Backing out of this would pose a major inconvenience” (2017, p. 34). The public is aware that their images and information make up trackable information that can be sold and
profited off by companies without our permission. However, people continue to post, share, scroll, and “like.” This is simply how people live today. Another concern is the fact that personal data can be simply observed and gathered in mass surveillance. Through a series of events, such as 911 and the introduction of the Patriot Act, Americans are living in a culture in which images and data can be collected and used at any time. As Eler states: “We are living in a culture that’s so overexposed and surveilled that of course there’s already surveillance footage of us out there in the world, captured by cameras we’re seeing or not noticing at all. So, what does one more image of our face even matter” (2017, p. 44).

For travel abroad teachers, a great deal of time is spent teaching students the value of experiencing the world without a screen. The Goal? To teach students to live in the moment. Be present, aware, and safe. Senses become heightened and unexpected quiet surprises await. Still, it is a losing battle as phones are inevitably whipped out at any noteworthy (or un-noteworthy) moment. While soaking up a breathtaking view of the Trevi Fountain in Rome, the experience is diminished with selfie-sticks swaying and elbows jarring among the bustling crowd. Conquering picturesque scenes with a photo, viewing a mural from behind the lens of a cell phone, or taking a selfie among the shadow of an impressive sculpture, is the way humans are documenting experiences or rather experiencing the event. It is becoming human nature to practice life this way and extremely annoying for those who are avoiding it. An even greater reason to be aware of this selfie trend while traveling with students is the risk of accidents by distraction. Extreme selfies that result in death have been so noteworthy that they have their own name: killfie. Eler brings this to attention: “According to a study, “Me, Myself, and My Killfie: Characterizing and Preventing Selfie Deaths,” by a team of researchers from the United States and India, there have been 127 selfie-related deaths since March 2014, shortly after the trend tipped” (2017, p. 116).
Outdoor environments, such as the aforementioned Roman fountain, are difficult to effectively manage. However, indoor venues and businesses like restaurants, museums, concert venues, and theaters are finding innovative ways to handle this selfie phenomenon. According to a 2015 survey by online ticket retailer Ticketfly, 31% of people between the ages of 18 and 34 are on their phone for at least half the duration of a concert (Levy, 2018). In response, phones are being banned at a growing number of concerts and restaurants. Piet Levy, reporter for The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, writes that “There's rarely a social setting with such heavy phone use as a concert, where fans excitedly broadcast their adventures on social media or stare at glowing screens during moments of boredom” (2018). Yondr, a four-year-old San Francisco company, developed a locking pouch that patrons must place their cellphones in before entering the venue. Yondr founder and CEO Graham Dugoni explains that his company "wanted to create a space for artists to do what they do and express themselves, and for audiences to be swept up in a shared community" (Levy, 2018). Artists such as Jack White, David Chappelle, and Chris Rock have used Yondr to encourage their audience to experience the show in a more meaningful way and prevent preserve the authenticity of their show.

In 2014, The National Gallery in London lifted its ban on mobile phones, after a prolonged and unsuccessful battle with the public. The impossibility to distinguish who was defying the photo ban and who was legitimately Googling information exhausted resources. With the photography ban lifted, Zoe Williams of “The Guardian” wrote an article to document an interesting experiment (Williams, 2014). She courageously took obvious selfies in front of Rembrandts and Vermeer’s just to see how the public would respond when she pushed the envelope. To both her embarrassment and relief, she received disapproval in the form of hisses and verbal chastisements from her fellow museum-goers. Williams concluded with satisfaction
that “[t]here is nothing to fear, for either the art crowd or the custodians of the human spirit. The National Gallery will not be overrun by people taking selfies for the same reason it is not full of people in bikinis; we humans have a keen sense of humiliation, exposure, pride, vulnerability” (2014). Perhaps, in this early age of the selfie, we can develop a selfie-etiquette that we can all live with and hold each other accountable for.

**Museums and Artists Embracing the Selfie**

Many museums around the world are addressing the selfie phenomenon head on with exhibits such as the “Selfie to Self-Expression” at the Saatchi Gallery in London, England in 2017. In this show, 500 years of historic self-portraits were shown in complex installations, projected on large wall mounted screens, inviting viewers to interact and push “like” buttons. A parade of celebrity selfies, selfies of people in precarious situations, and famously retweeted selfies lined the walls in a steady stream (Benjamin, 2017).

In 2015, the Mauritshuis museum in The Hague, Netherlands, hosted “Dutch Self Portraits: Selfies of the Golden Age” to explore the self-absorption of this new genre by looking through old master paintings through a new lens. Inspired by the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, the exhibition designer included full length mirrors covering the gallery walls to remind visitors of the influence of the mirror as a tool for self-reflection, to challenge the viewer to contemplate how he/she would depict him/herself with paint, and to also provide an easy photo op for the modern-day selfie. When asked why the museum decided to embrace this phenomenon, Emilie Gordenker, Director of the Mauritshuis, stated “We’re really trying to respond to the question, why are these old dark paintings still relevant today?” (Siegal, 2015). She added, “The more intellectual parallel that is to be made is really to ask: What happens to
you when you start looking in the mirror? You start to think, how am I going to present myself, what choices am I going to make? Those were all things that these artists were thinking about too” (Siegal, 2015).

In 2014, the “John D. Monteith: Portraits” Exhibition at Upstairs Artspace in Tryon, North Carolina gave viewers this hybridization of traditional oil paint method of selfies printed on using a substandard home printer, as well as a digital video installation using 16,000 selfies from residents. While discussing whether this exhibition is an ode to narcissism, Monteith disagrees and said “It’s really no different than looking at yourself in the mirror. It’s just part of being human” (Sherard, 2014). Upstairs Artspace Exhibits Chair Margaret Curtis stated that “The exhibit challenges us to encounter a world where we are bombarded by so much imagery it’s almost impossible to keep track of much less make sense of it…” She continues, this “reflects an emerging genre in contemporary visual culture where we are the artists. The exhibit also recognizes that art is increasingly migrating from the confines of the studio to the image-rich landscape of the Internet” (Tryon Daily Bulletin, 2014).

Michael-Birch Pierce is a fiber artist, fashion designer, and teacher at Virginia Commonwealth University who has landed an incredible gig by jumping on the selfie trend himself. Pierce creates “stitchies” -- stitched selfies-- all over the world for patrons, at red carpet events and even at the White House for $10,000 per appearance. With a standard sewing machine in tow, he sews rapid small linear portraits as textile performance art. “It’s not some party trick,” Pierce explained. “It’s an intuitive artifact of the moment” (Tesauro, 2018).

Carla Gannis is a contemporary artist who has integrated new aspects of contemporary culture, such as selfies and emojis into her artwork. Gannis’ “Garden of Emoji Delights” is her interpretation of Hieronymus Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights, reimagined with in all its
disturbing and alluring glory with emoji iconography. In a new body of work, the artist merges selfies with drawings. Gannis stated “After I finish a drawing, to complete the cycle of contemporary selfie-portraiture as identity performance, I upload it to several social media platforms...In slowing down the process of taking and making a selfie, I’m hybridizing selfies with self-portraiture” (Armstrong, 2015). When asked how the selfie culture has influenced today’s society, Gannis does not believe that the population, especially the youth, are becoming more narcissistic and vacuous, but people are simply evolving: “We’re spending more time in front of screens, and our methods of communicating and expressing ourselves are expanding outside of text-based and verbal communication. We use emoticons and images more and more to express our feelings, and to perform our identities” (Armstrong, 2015).

Rafia Santana is a 25-year-old multimedia artist who digitally paints and alters mobile selfies taken on her mobile devices, turning them into painterly dreamscapes. Through her artwork, Santana expresses her self-identity and invites the viewer into her perspective as a young black woman. The artist explains her view on the modern selfie and the value in using it as a tool for self-expression in an interview with the Huffington Post after the debut of her SELFIE exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA). Says Santana, “We don’t get to tell our own story as human beings that have good and bad. Being a kid growing up on the internet I realized that a good selfie image of yourself can make others see you in a better light. So, it’s important to show ourselves in positive imagery” (Wright, 2019). Santana challenges the notion that selfies are shallow and encourages viewers to recognize the value in embracing this new art form. “Anybody who thinks selfies are only vain wants to reduce the importance of a human being. I am not sure where the judgment comes from” she said. “We
should all be reflective of ourselves whether we are in a good place or bad place. Selfies help to bring us out of a bad place to uplift ourselves and connect with others” (Wright, 2019).

**Embracing the Selfie in the Classroom**

It is inevitable that the selfie is here, and here to stay. In fact, it is interwoven tightly in the culture and in people’s daily lives. Like other cultural trends, art genres, and technology, the selfie is sure to evolve as well. It is essential for educators to teach our students to be lifelong learners throughout this dynamical world. Before art class, students may have snapped a selfie to document a good hair day or express their mood without thought of the process. It is my goal in the classroom to get them to use what is available, be it the school’s technology or the cell phone camera in their hand, and create an expressive work of art. Psychologist and photographer John Suler expressed this notion for the International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies: “When people do not succumb to the temptations of the superficial selfie in conventional social media, when they undertake ongoing self-portraits as a genuinely self-reflective process of seeing where they have been and where they might be going, the road can take unexpected twists and turns. In that sense, it is a lot like life” (2015, p. 180).

Centering a photography and digital art curriculum around present use of social media, such as Adobe Photoshop, can feel like a daunting task. An import approach to effectively teaching art through technology, is teaching technology through art. Joanna Black and Kathy Browning acknowledged challenges and possibilities in the field of technology for art educators today. In their article, “Creativity in Digital Art Education Teaching Practices,” they acknowledge the heavy requirements and restrictions along with lack of support that many teachers presently have because of the policies of the No Child Left Behind Act. Heavier
teaching loads, software difficulties, and lack of training are just a few of the hurdles weighing on the shoulders of today’s educator. However, Black and Browning stress that art educators must find a way, despite the obstacles, to foster proficiency in these emerging modes of literacy and embrace technology to adequately prepare students for the art world of the 21st-century. There is more to this than staying current with the latest version of new software, which seems increasingly overwhelming and impossible. Educators must work on cultivating independent, enquiring minds. Black and Browning write, “An important approach to teaching digital arts is recognizing that students need not comprehend all that there is to know about the software. Rather, students can learn the software through the act of creating. Technology, however, should not be the most important part of the learning process; rather, the artmaking process is key. To this end, students can be encouraged to manipulate and play with digital objects and ideas” (2011, p. 21). Teachers must take the weight of personal technology mastery off their shoulders, and relish in the idea that students will learn through the freedom to experiment and take risks. In fact, a teaching approach that is more technology-based, will result in more mechanical assignments that do not exhibit self-expression. Black and Browning suggest encouraging self-expression by shaping assignments that are more open-ended and that encourage problem-solving. By building lessons that encourage self-exploration, “[s]tudents may ask, “What do I want to do in the digital art assignment, and how can I go about achieving it?” (Black & Browning, 2011, p. 21). The result will be a curriculum that will remain fresh and relevant indefinitely.

As an art educator, it is important that I continue to learn with my students and through my students. Teaching understanding and application of the artistic theories and principles that I have spent years as an artist and art educator exploring and developing, can be taught alongside
with these digital applications. Through a research study conducted between 2006 - 2009, Black and Browning examined ways in which teachers can prepare to effectively teach digital in an underfunded environment with rising digital education expectations. Over the course of the three-year study, they oversaw teacher training approaches and theme development for curriculum of six schools within the same Canadian province. Throughout the years, they oversaw various approaches. Black and Browning concluded that the key to the digital art process for the educator is developing students’ creativity. The most effective approach, resulting in the most positive comments and results of the participants, was one that was flexible with the technology, was broad in focus and theme, discussed current new media artists, and integrated the community into the classroom. “Reasons for this were that teachers could interpret the broad themes easily, and these themes offered flexibility through innovative, broad, project-centered, and problem-based curricula.” They add that “[i]n the action research study, students learned the technology based on what was required to creatively develop their art project, so traditional and digital arts flowed together in meaningful ways” (Black & Browning, 2001, p. 24).

This study by Black and Browning is applicable to the conclusion of my research, as my curriculum attempts to merge the traditional with the new. The goal is to begin each lesson with inspiring views of historic and modern self-portraiture, and a discussion of how the student’s conceptual ideas and imaginations can be reflected in their own portraits through technology in creative, diverse ways. The foundation of the class will be rooted in the traditional visual arts. Technology will then play a secondary role.
COURSE FRAMEWORK

Last year, twelve brand new cameras were presented to my classroom, along with a blank slate for curriculum development. An exciting new class was launched: “Introduction to Photography & Digital Art.” Seventy-five students eagerly signed up for the three blocks, which forced me to scramble and quickly create a comprehensive and engaging curriculum. During the first marking period of the class, focus was on teaching the proper care, handling, and functions of a digital single-lens reflex camera, compositional techniques, working with light and shadow, and how to create a narrative in one’s photographs. A visiting artist spent time in the classroom, giving a hands-on workshop comprised of sharing her career in photography, tips and tricks on how to take great pictures, and leading group critiques of student artwork. Students spent time learning Adobe Photoshop, enhancing and manipulating their photos in various ways. Students presented on and were exposed to various photographers and photographs throughout history. Upon review and reflection of this initial class and observing the album of photos and digital artwork produced, this type of class has the potential to bridge the gap between generations of artists in a new and exciting way. This new curriculum will introduce students to historic self-portraiture to encourage them to make meaningful connections with other artists and mediums of self-portraiture from the present and past. There is a newfound teaching passion within to share with students Photography and Digital Art in hopes to inspire them to embrace the selfie in a new way.

Course Description

“Photography & Digital Art: The Selfie & Beyond” is a one-semester course that focuses on the basic operations and functions of the DSLR camera and explores the history and evolution
of photography, portraiture, and self-portraiture. Students will learn how to manipulate camera controls and lighting to achieve a specific result. They will explore composition, photographic elements of art and principles of design, and photo editing with Adobe Photoshop. Students will explore how self-portraiture has evolved throughout history into this current form of selfie-photography, document commonalities between historical and contemporary approaches to self-representation and gain the tools of experience and confidence for authentic self-expression. Students will critically analyze the use of self-portraiture as a means of communication in our society today. Students will learn to critique their own and others artwork by writing and speaking about expressive, aesthetic, and technical qualities. Students will explore the significance of photography and self-expression within the context of the art world and learn how this applies and influences the rest of the modern world.

**Course objectives**

Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Understand and control various technical and creative aspects of the DSLR camera, as well as proper camera handling and care.
- Make informed choices about composition during the photographing and editing process.
- Create original expressive works of art demonstrating increased complexity and skill.
- Analyze and discuss complex ideas in works of art.
- Understand and demonstrate the steps of the creative process.
- Select and creatively assemble images into a cohesive body of exhibition quality work that collectively explores an original idea or concept.
• Provide reflection that synthesizes his/her conceptual idea, the decision-making process, and final artwork and can explain the significance of the subject, form, presentation, and meaning of student’s own work and the work of others.

**Essential questions**

Essential questions are asked at the beginning of each unit to introduce artwork, artists, mediums, and specific ideas related to contemporary and historic portraiture. Through class and small group discussions, conversations provide information regarding prior knowledge and spark a desire to see the challenge met or the problem solved. Student dialogue also inspires thoughts and ideas that will deepen meaning in their artwork. Students gain confidence exchanging opinions, using art vocabulary, and developing a feeling of ownership over the activities.

**Motivation**

Students work longer, harder, and with more creative passion when they are motivated. Various discussions, questions, images, videos, experiences, prompts, and stories spark and nurture curiosity that is intrinsic to meaningful learning.

**Featured artists**

A range of artists are introduced to students to inspire meaningful connections between historic and modern portraiture, and traditional and current art media. Artwork and selfie photography will be selected that sparks questions and are open to interpretation.
**Vocabulary**

Vocabulary comprehension is necessary for students to be able to apply what they learn and engage in meaningful discussions and in their artwork. Students are encouraged to use vocabulary during self-evaluations and group discussions. Quizzes will be administered during each unit to demonstrate and assess understanding. Vocabulary is introduced during the class lecture, as well as in provided handouts.

**Assignments and activities**

Assignments and activities are selected to provide students with art creation experiences that involve imagination and critical thinking processes. Students create meaningful artistic responses by contemplating their values, environments, and culture, and by connecting traditional portraiture and modern art. Students are provided a variety of learning experiences in progressive direction toward a more solid understanding and greater autonomy in the learning process.

**Discussions**

Class discussions give students an opportunity to work through problems collaboratively, think critically, and articulate thoughts and ideas. Discussions can be facilitated by the teacher, who proposes open-ended questions. Rather than directing responses to the teacher, students speak to each other. Students may also be divided into small groups with questions provided. In this method, the teacher will float around the room, giving guidance and making being sure the conversation is on target. Students will take turns conveying ideas and thoughts from the small groups to the class. Other methods for the class to experience are solo free writing, where
students jot down ideas before discussing them. Think-Pair-Share discussions occur when students are presented questions and problems, and then discuss their thoughts with a student next to them. For discussions to be productive and engaging, it is essential to create a welcoming and encouraging environment by sitting in a circular format. Enough time and flexibility should be provided for students to thoroughly discuss their thoughts and allow for interesting exchanges.

**Assessments**

Upon completion of this course, students will be assessed on demonstration of:

- Thoughtful and original ideas
- Craftsmanship and good technical quality
- Participation and engagement in class discussions and critiques
- Active participation with the materials in class

**Self-evaluation and art critique**

Art Criticism is an important part of the artistic process. There will be a writing assignment that will be attached to all photo assignments. Students will critique a successful photograph they find online which relates to the current assignment. Students will self-evaluate their own work and critique the work of their peers in Google Classroom and in small-group and class critiques following this same format.

**Self-evaluation**

Self-assessment is an essential part of the creative process that should take place frequently in the art room. When time is provided for self-evaluation, students are encouraged to
reflect on aspects done well and identify areas in the work where there is room for improvement. Students assess work habits and recognize if their goals have been met. Artistic growth occurs when students learn to appraise their own efforts and recognize areas of strength and weakness.

1. What is the title of your artwork?
2. What is the exposure (aperture, shutter speed, and ISO) of your image?
3. According to the art rubric, what letter grade do I deserve on this project?
4. How did I use the art elements and principles of design to communicate my desired mood and message?
5. The best qualities of my artwork are…
6. Some things that I could improve in my artwork are…
7. Find a successful and visually interesting photograph online that relates to this assignment.
   Attach a copy of this image.

**Art critique**

Critiquing artwork is a valuable method for growth and progress as it encourages collaboration, inspiration, and mutual discovery in a positive classroom environment. Critiques should not encompass competition or debates, but rather conversation expressing new ideas, purpose, meanings, and visual effects. A safe environment for students to share ideas and exchange feedback and opinions is established. The teacher models an effective critiquing style. After establishing trust and confidence through practice, student become increasingly autonomous in the process as they interact authentically with each other. Students think critically, synthesize and verbalize opinions and ideas, and explore how to push artwork to the next level.
Title:
Artist:
Dimensions:
Medium (material(s) used):

Describe. Describe the artwork. Look objectively and tell the facts about it. A few things to consider is size, shape, color, medium used, perspective, angles, artist, date, title…

Analyze. Examine and describe the relationship between the Elements of Art by citing the Principles of Design (Contrast, Rhythm, Unity, Movement, Pattern, Balance, Emphasis).

Interpret. Describe what you feel that the meaning, mood, and message is of the artwork. Support your opinions with your description, your analysis, and any research you have.

Judge. Does the work exhibit a high degree of technical, compositional and/or conceptual skill? Do you think this is an effective piece of work? Why/why not?

Photo Reflection
1. What do you see as the universal message or theme, in the photograph?
2. Where are the viewer’s eyes directed? How did the photographer achieve this?
3. What choices did the photographer make to simplify or add complexity to this image?
This curriculum provides a visual explanation and flow of the timeline, units and key concepts, and assignments, activities, and featured artists. Arrangement and order of concepts and tasks are structured so that that skills are building upon learning experiences throughout the semester in an efficient and cohesive manner. Assignments and activities are rigorous and engaging, as well as flexible enough to modify to suit diverse needs and abilities. Critical thinking and strong 21st century communication skills are emphasized. The curriculum is focused on the premise that all students are capable of being successful in class.

Table 1. Curriculum Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Unit and Key Concepts</th>
<th>Assignments, Activities, Featured Artists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1-3  | **One: Introduction to the Camera**  
- history of the camera and photography  
- pioneers and early techniques  
- **DSLR Basics**  
  - DSLR anatomy  
  - care and handling  
  - controlling your camera  
    - science of optics  
    - camera modes  
    - exposure triangle  
    - lighting and shadow  
    - depth of field  
    - framing  
    - focus, lenses  
    - point of view  
    - metering  
  - using a tripod, self-timer, and shutter release  
- definition and relevance of the selfie  
- self-expression  
- art elements & principles of design  
- symbolism and sharing  
- storing and sharing your photos  
- setting up a webfolio for sharing and grading  
- digital workflow | **Assignments:**  
- pre-instruction assignment “me... after school"  
- symbolic self-portrait (aperture study)  
- website creation  
- movement portrait (shutter speed study)  
- light & shadow self-portrait  
**Activities:**  
- make a history timeline  
- demonstration  
- class discussion  
- guest artist - local photographer  
- article readings/videos and reflection  
- quiz  
- peer critique  
- self-assessment and artist critique  
**Featured Artists:**  
- Albrecht Durer, *Self-Portrait at the Age of Twenty-Eight*  
- Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*  
- Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Self-Portrait as a Heel*  
- Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn (150-200k)*  
- Vincent Van Gogh, *Van Gogh's Chair* |
### Two: Introduction to Portraiture
- Portraiture vs. selfie
- Composition techniques
- Lighting techniques
  - Natural vs. artificial lighting
- Candid photography and capturing the decisive moment
- Using the external flash
  - Direct, bounced and fill flash
  - Flash synchronization

### Assignments:
- Photojournalism portraiture assignment
- Writing assignment
- Composition presentation
- Self-portrait with text

### Activities:
- Demonstration
- Class discussion
- Article readings/videos and response
- Virtual tour of London’s National Portrait Gallery
- Quiz
- Peer critique
- Self-assessment and artist critique

### Featured Artists:
- Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting*
- Annie Liebowitz, *Kim Kardashian North West, and Kanye West, Los Angeles*
- Jan Van Eyck, *Arnolfini Portrait*
- Audrey Wollen, *Instagram photos*
- Alfred Eisenstaedt
- Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn
- Gilbert Stuart
- Louise Elisabeth Vigee Le Brun

### Three: Altering Reality
- How Adobe Photoshop changed the world...
- Adobe Photoshop
  - File management
  - Photoshop workspace
  - Toolbar and option bar
  - Image adjustments
  - Image extensions
  - Saving and sizing image
  - Image output
- Blending art and photography
  - Surrealism, pop art
  - Photomontage
  - Photo painting
  - Mixed media

### Assignments:
- Forced perspective photography
- Surrealist portrait
- Self-portrait pop art illustration

### Activities:
- Demonstration
- Photoshop tutorials
- Class discussion
- Article readings/videos and response
- Quiz
- Peer critique
- Self-assessment and artist critique

### Featured Artists:
- Rene Magritte, *Son of Man*
- Izumi Miyazaki, *Sandwich*
- Andy Warhol, *Self-portrait*
- Carla Gannis, *A Subject Self-Defined*
- Salvador Dali
- Frida Kahlo
- David LaChapelle
- Shana and Robert ParkeHarrison
- Manu Pombrol
- Man Ray
- Jerry Uelsmann
### Table 1 – continued

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<td>- intro to self-portraits</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- painting, photography, mixed media</td>
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<td>- portrait and self-portrait photographers</td>
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<td>- realistic vs. conceptual representation</td>
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<td><strong>Assignments:</strong></td>
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<td>- double exposure landscape selfie and architectural portrait</td>
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<td>- borrowed famous selfie-portrait</td>
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<td>- talking to myself</td>
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<td>- project and presentation</td>
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<td><strong>Activities:</strong></td>
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<td>- self-assessment and artist critique</td>
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<td><strong>Featured Artists:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Gustave Courbet, <em>The Desperate Man</em></td>
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<td>- Egon Schiele, <em>Self Portrait with Physalis</em></td>
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<td>- Cindy Sherman, <em>Untitled Film Stills</em></td>
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<td>- Diego Velazquez, <em>Las Meninas</em></td>
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<td>- Berenice Abbott, <em>Grand Central Terminal 1937</em></td>
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<td>- Ansel Adams, <em>The Tetons and the Snake River</em></td>
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<th>3-14</th>
<th><strong>Five: Photography in Motion</strong></th>
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<td>- history of cinematography and stop motion animation</td>
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<td>- intro to storyboarding</td>
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<td>- camera angles, point of view, elements and principles, chiaroscuro</td>
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<td>- timeline, plot, introduction, hook, climax, resolution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- character development</td>
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<td>- iMovie software</td>
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<td>- Jim Foltice, <em>Love the Lie</em></td>
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<td><strong>Featured Artists:</strong></td>
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<td>- Peter Beard, <em>I’ll write whenever I can</em></td>
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<td>- Jesse Treece, <em>Watershed</em></td>
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<td>- Annegret Soltau, <em>Grima - mit Katze I</em></td>
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Unit One: Introduction to the Camera

Overview

Students will be introduced to the invention and history, maintenance, and proper handling of the DSLR camera. Definition of the selfie, exploration of the ways it has impacted the world, and reflection on their personal experience with the selfie will be discussed. Students will learn photography vocabulary and how to balance and control exposure with metering and camera modes. Students will learn how to use light & shadow to impact the mood of their photograph. The use of symbols to express aspects of one’s personality and the story-telling aspect of photography will be discussed. Students will create a webfolio for sharing and grading. Opportunities to provide each other and receive encouragement and feedback will be provided, as well as participate in a formal art critique of each other’s work.

Figure 1. Albrecht Durer, *Self-Portrait at the Age of Twenty-Eight*. 1500. Oil on panel. Collection of the Alte Pinakotheek Museum, Munich, Germany. Published under fair use.
**Essential questions**

When was the camera invented, and how has the camera evolved throughout history?

What is a DSLR camera?

How do I maintain and care for a DSLR camera?

How can I control exposure with adjustments in aperture, shutter speed, and ISO?

How do I meter your camera?

What are the advantages of shooting & editing a RAW file?

How do I store and organize photos?

What are selfies? How do I take a good selfie?

How can we use symbolism in our self-portraits?

How can we use shadows and light for self-expression?

What are the four steps of art criticism?
Figure 3. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*. 1500. Oil on canvas. Collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Published under fair use.

Figure 4. Gerard Butler. *Instagram photo* ©Gerard Butler. Published under fair use.
Motivation

A class lecture over the history of the camera and the selfie will be provided. Students will discuss the relevance of the selfie to our daily lives and its global impact. Famous selfies will be viewed and analyzed. Students will share their favorite selfies and discuss why and how they are successful self-expressions. A guest photographer will visit the class to share insight into the business of professional photography and provide demonstrations, tips, and feedback.

Featured artists

- Albrecht Durer, *Self-Portrait at the Age of Twenty-Eight*
- Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*
- Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Self-Portrait as a Heel*
- Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn (150-200k)*
- Vincent Van Gogh, *Van Gogh's Chair*

Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DSLR camera</th>
<th>Shutter speed</th>
<th>Selfie</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Principles of Design</td>
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<td>ISO</td>
<td>Pinhole Photography</td>
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**Assignments and activities**

Pre-instruction photography assignment: Students will submit a series of seven photographs showing "ME... after school". Each photograph must center around one of the seven elements of art: Shape, form, line, color, space, texture, value. The "value" photo must be in black & white. The rest may be in color. Composition, lighting, and visual interest will be considered.

Symbolic self-portrait (aperture study): Students will select and photograph objects that represents or symbolizes themselves. Seven photos will be taken of the object that display a range of depths of field using seven different aperture settings.

Website creation: Students will create a website to display your artwork and record of artistic growth.

Movement portrait (shutter speed study): Students will take eight portraits of a person displaying eight different shutter speeds. The subject must be moving in an expressive way to display his/her personality.

Light & shadow self-portrait: Using metering and the white balance feature for correct exposure, students will take two black & white portraits of yourself that show interesting aspects of shadow and light. The shadow(s) will be the main aspect of one photo. An aspect of light will be the main aspect of the second photo.
Camera history timeline: Students will create a digital presentation that explains the history of photography, both technically and conceptually, in an engaging and self-guided. The timeline must be professional and contain many visuals. Presentations will be arranged within the following time frames: 1826-1849, 1850-1880, 1881-1920, 1921-1950, 1951-1989, 1990-Present.

**Questions to address for each time frame**

- What important events occurred during this time frame that advanced photography?
- Who were some important people who influence photography during this time, and how did they contribute to the progress of photography?
- What technology within photography was invented/popularized during this time frame? (film, lens, digital)
- Describe new conceptual uses of photography that came forth during this period (photography as fine art, photojournalism, etc.)?

![Figure 5. Vincent Van Gogh, *Van Gogh’s Chair with Pipe*. 1888. Oil on canvas. Collection of the National Gallery, London, England. Published under fair use.](image)
Discussion

Do you take selfies? How many selfies do you estimate to have taken this week? This year? Your lifetime?

Why do you take selfies?

What are the positive and negative aspects of selfie-taking?

Who are the selfies for? Do you share selfies with your friends? Do you share selfies with your family? Do you share all your selfies with other people, or do you keep some just for yourself?

Is there a difference between a selfie and a self-portrait?

What are the similarities?

Why do you think artists create self-portraits?

Why do you think artists create portraits?

In what ways are photographs considered art?

How can you take selfies that successfully express WHO you are?
Unit Two: Introduction to Portraiture

Overview

Students will continue to draw connections between traditional portraiture and the modern selfie. Students will learn how to recognize and apply composition techniques in photography. Various practical, technical, and conceptual ideas of making portraits will be considered. Students will view, analyze and discuss famous portraits and documentary photographs and discuss their context in the history of the United States and of the world and what makes them powerful. Students will evaluate the impact of the media on society. Opportunities to provide each other and receive encouragement and feedback, as well as participate in a formal art critique of each other’s work will be provided.

Figure 8. Annie Liebowitz. *Kim Kardashian North West, and Kanye West, Los Angeles, 2014.* ©Annie Liebowitz. Published under fair use.

**Essential questions**

What is a portrait? What is a self-portrait?

What is the proper way to take a portrait photograph?

What makes a successful composition?

Why is patience essential for a photographer? How does a photographer capture the perfect moment?

Motivation

A class lecture over the history of portraiture will be provided. Students will view and discuss famous portraits and self-portraits, and aspects of the compositions. In small groups, students will compare the art of traditional self-portraits to the modern-day selfie. Students will watch a video interview of Alfred Eisenstaedt, research and reflect on their work, timing, and ability to capture the perfect moment. In groups, students will take a virtual tour of London’s National Portrait Gallery and reflect on that experience.

Featured artists

- Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting*
- Annie Liebowitz, *Kim, Kanye, and North taking a selfie*
- Jan Van Eyck, *Arnolfini Portrait*
- Audrey Wollen, *Instagram photos*
• Alfred Eisenstaedt
• Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn
• Gilbert Stuart
• Louise Elisabeth Vigee Le Brun

**Vocabulary**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-portrait</td>
<td>Filling the frame</td>
<td>Natural lighting</td>
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<td>Portrait</td>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>Artificial lighting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Point of view</td>
<td>Reflector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rule of thirds</td>
<td>Leading lines</td>
<td>Tripod</td>
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<td>Simplified background</td>
<td>Eye flow</td>
<td>Self-timer</td>
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<td>Movement into frame</td>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td>Candid photography</td>
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<td>“S” Curve</td>
<td>Framing</td>
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<td>Control of detail</td>
<td>Asymmetrical balance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>Symmetrical balance</td>
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**Assignments and activities**

Photojournalism portraiture assignment (of one person): Students will shoot a minimum of 50 images of a person they have a meaningful relationship with. Select five photographs that document the lifestyle and personality of that person. Those images must be edited to black & white.
Portrait writing assignment: Students will provide a written reflection about the process of taking the ‘relationship’ portrait. Students will include information that can be gathered from the photograph, as well as what may not be expressed in the photograph about the connection between artist and subject. Students will describe who the person is in the photograph and what their relationship is like. How can a photograph capture element of the relationship between the two individuals, artist and subject?

Composition presentation: Students will work with a partner to create a slideshow defining and describing each of the fourteen compositional techniques. Students will select two artists from a list of contemporary photographers and gather two examples for each compositional technique, explaining to the class how each photo illustrates the guideline.

Self-portrait with text: Using a tripod and DSLR camera on self-timer mode, take a range of self-portraits against a white background. Edit your favorite photo in Photoshop using the duotone guide with your favorite color(s). Include and creatively arrange text to your edited image that expresses your personality within the image to create a mixed media selfie (a quote, poetry, song lyrics or your own words.)

Discussion

Compare Jan van Eyck’s “Arnolfini Portrait” with Annie Liebowitz’s photo of “Kim, Kanye, and North taking a selfie” for Vogue magazine.

Compare Artemisia Gentileschi’s “Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting” with the Instagram selfies of contemporary artist Audrey Wollen.
What is the artist's’ intent when creating a self-portrait? How does this compare with the modern selfie artist?

What aspects of light and point of view can make a flattering selfie?

How do artists apply these same principles to their portraits?

Can we tell a story with photos?

How can we show and benefit from having patience as a photographer?

**Unit Three: Altering Reality**

**Overview**

Students will explore and apply the tools and effects of Adobe Photoshop to their photographs while discussing and analyzing the global impact of photo editing software. Connections between self-portraiture within various genres and the modern selfie will continue to be drawn. Students will gain an understanding of Surrealism and create imagery that defies natural law and portrays dream imagery. An understanding of Pop Art and create a digital painting over a selfie will be gained. Opportunities to provide each other and receive encouragement and feedback, as well as participate in a formal art critique of each other's work will be provided.
**Essential questions**

What is surrealism?

What is pop art?

How can I use Adobe Photoshop to alter, edit, and enhance my photos?
How can I use forced perspective to manipulate the scale of objects I am photographing to create interesting optical illusions?

How can I use surrealism and optical illusions in my photography and digital art?

How can I reflect on popular culture within my artwork?

How can I use Adobe Photoshop paint tools to create a self-portrait of a selfie?


Figure 14. Carla Gannis. *A Subject Self-defined* ©Carla Gannis. Published under fair use.
Motivation

A class lecture over the history of Adobe Photoshop and photo manipulation will be provided. Students will view, discuss and reflect upon altered and edited photos that have had global impact. A class discussion of Surrealism and Pop art will be led while students view famous portraits within each movement. Students will continue to view and discuss famous portraits and self-portraits, and aspects of their compositions. In small groups, compare the art of traditional self-portraits to the modern-day selfie.

Featured artists

• Rene Magritte
• Izumi Miyazaki
• Andy Warhol
• Carla Gannis
• Salvador Dali
• Alfred Eisenstaedt
• Frida Kahlo
• David LaChapelle
• Shana and Robert ParkeHarrison
• Manu Pombrol
• Man Ray
• Jerry Uelsmann
**Vocabulary**

Surrealism  Levitation  Metamorphosis
Pop Art  Transparency  Pixel
Juxtaposition  Proportion  Resolution
Dislocation  Scale

**Assignments and activities**

Forced perspective photography: With a partner, students will use a cell phone or camera to take forced perspective photographs. Each pair of students will submit their favorite four photos to Google Classroom. Each group will present their images to the class and describe how the illusion was created.

Surrealist portrait: Students will create a digital work of art by putting him/herself a friend in a dreamlike landscape that includes at least 3 elements of surrealism.

Self-portrait Pop art illustration: Using a variety of brushes in Adobe Photoshop, students will create a Pop art-inspired selfie digital painting over a favorite selfie.

**Discussion**

Compare Rene Magritte’s “Son of Man” with Izumi Miyazaki’s "Sandwich."

Who was Andy Warhol? How did he become famous?

How is Carla Gannis using popular culture and technology to create her artwork?

What do you see as the theme, or universal message, of her artwork?
Compare Andy Warhol’s “Self-portrait” with Carla Gannis’s “A Subject Self-Defined” video installations and augmented reality book.

Can selfies and self-portraits express these ideas?

How has Adobe Photoshop altered the way we see the world.

How do you think it has affected YOU, and the way YOU see the world?

**Unit Four: The Selfie: Self-expression, Documentation, and Performance**

**Overview**

A class lecture over the history of self-portraiture will be provided. Students will view, discuss and reflect upon the global and personal impacts of the selfie and sharing on social media. Connections between traditional self-portraiture and selfies will be compared and connected on themes of self-expression, documentation, and performance. Students will create various expressive photographs and enhance and manipulate those images into expressive works of digital art using Adobe Photoshop. Students will work together to create digital art inspired by and using the compositions of famous portraits. Landscape and Architectural photography will be explored. Students will research a famous photographer, create a presentation, and present to the class. Opportunities to exchange encouragement and feedback will be provided as well as an opportunity to participate in a formal art critique.

**Essential questions**

How can I use photography and technology to express who I am?

What is landscape photography?

What is architectural photography?
How can I express myself and communicate my ideas by blending two photographs together?

How can I express myself by borrowing the composition of a famous self-portrait?

Figure 15. Gustave Courbet, *The Desperate Man*. 1844-1855. Oil on canvas. Private collection. Published under fair use.

Motivation

Students will explore and discuss the history of self-portraiture and the global impact of the selfie. Students will compare the art of self-portraits to the modern-day selfie. Comparisons between traditional self-portraits and selfies on themes of self-expression, documentation, and performance will be made. Discussions of Landscape and Architectural photography will be led and famous portraits within each genre will be viewed.

Featured artists

- Gustave Courbet, *The Desperate Man*
- Egon Schiele, *Self Portrait with Physalis*
- Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills*
- Diego Velazquez, *Las Meninas*
- Berenice Abbott, *Grand Central Terminal 1937*
- Ansel Adams, *The Tetons and the Snake River*
- Robert Glenn Ketchum

Vocabulary

Double Exposure  
Landscape Photography  
Architectural Photography

Assignments and activities

Double exposure landscape selfie and architectural portrait: Using Adobe Photoshop, students will blend a portrait with an architectural photograph, and a selfie with a landscape photograph. Composition, light, and atmosphere will be considered.
Landscape photograph: Students will take photographs outdoors of the surrounding landscape outside of the school. At home, students will take various photographs of a landscape of special significance.

Architectural photograph: Students will take photographs of the exterior of the high school from various viewpoints. At home, students will take photographs of their home’s exterior or a building of special significance, such as churches, nearby homes, businesses, considering the geometry and perspective of the building. Students will be instructed to not go onto private property.

Borrowed Famous Selfie-portrait: With a partner, students will put themselves in a famous self-portrait with a modern twist, mimicking the original composition, lighting, and props.

Talking to Myself: Using a tripod, students will photograph several images of themselves or someone else in the same location. Using one photo as a base image, students will assemble them together in Adobe Photoshop so that the portraits are interacting with each other in a meaningful way. Lighting and shadows must remain consistent.

Famous Photographer Research Presentation: With a partner, students will produce and deliver a slideshow about an influential professional photographer of their choice. A well-rounded biography, describing the artists’ early influences, style, special techniques, and examples of the photographer’s work will be presented.
Discussion

Who was Ansel Adams? How did he become famous? What musical instrument did he play?

Who was Berenice Abbott? How did she apply some of the same principles that Ansel Adam’s used in her architectural photography?
Selfies can be categorized by purposes: Self-Expression, Documentation, and Performance.

What kind of self-portraits can you find that also document these as well?

How are the themes and purposes of these artists different than selfie-takers today? How are they the same?

**Unit Five: Photography in Motion**

**Overview**

Students will work in groups to produce a stop motion animation video based on their choice of a theme commonly expressed in portraiture. The invention and history of cinematography will be introduced. Students will learn how to create a storyboard, how to develop characters and a plot, create special effects, and apply their knowledge of composition, lighting, and photography skills to create a work of art. Opportunities to present their video to the class and provide each other with and receive encouragement and feedback through movie review and awards ceremony will be provided at the end of the unit.

**Essential questions**

How can I use stop motion animation to tell a story?

How can I use my photography skills to create a mood and create an ambiance in my film?

How can I work with a team to create a unified work of art?

Figure 20. PES. *Fresh Guacamole.* YouTube video ©PES. Published under fair use.

**Motivation**

A class lecture over the history of the cinematography and stop motion animation and a discussion over the relevance of movies and video to our daily lives and its global impact will be led. A guest stop motion animator will visit the class to share insight into the business of professional videography and provide demonstrations, tips, and feedback. Students will view multiple examples and reflect on clips of stop motion videos through history.
Featured artists

- William Kentridge, *Felix in Exile*
- Ray Harryhausen, *Jason and the Argonauts*
- Tim Burton, *Frankenweenie*
- Payton Curtis, *The Little Prince*
- Nick Park, *Shaun the Sheep*
- *PES, YouTube Channel*
- Jim Foltice, *Love the Lie*

Vocabulary

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<td>Audio Track</td>
<td>Climax</td>
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Assignments and activities
Stop motion animation video: Using iMovie video editing software, student pairs or groups will create a visually stimulating stop motion animation movie that follows a carefully planned engaging plot that applies the knowledge that have acquired about camera technology, lighting, various camera angles, elements and principles, and composition. Cameras will be set to JPEG basic and small file size while capturing images. Students will create well-developed plot that includes an opening, build-up, climax, resolution, and ending. The final product, saved as a .mov file, will include title and credits and import an audio track for theme music and sound effects that will auto fade in and out. Movies will be exported and shared on YouTube. Student groups will submit a ten-step lesson plan to accompany their movie, which explains how to use the iMovie software with directions, tips, and screenshots.

Theme choices
• Where I’ve been
• This happened here
• I’ve accomplished this

Resources
• YouTube MP3 Converter: http://www.youtube-mp3.org/
• Save an MP3 file to flash drive
• Free music archive: http://freemusicarchive.org/
• Free sound effects: http://www.freesound.org/
Movie review questions (peer critique)

Your Rating: ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

What is the overall theme or idea of the movie?

Summary of Plot:

How did this movie make you feel? Why?

Who would you recommend this movie to? Why?

How did the artists use lighting, composition, point of view, and other artistic elements to convey this message or feeling?

Discussion

What is the first movie you remember watching? What about it made it so memorable? What movie has made the most impact on your life? What about it made it so meaningful?

What movie has been the most visually stunning? What aspects of the cinematography makes it so visually interesting? How were you affected by those aspects?

Compare William Kentridge’s “Felix in Exile” and PES’s “Fresh Guacamole.” How do these artists use stop motion to tell a story? How does PES use the same medium?

Compare Tim Burton’s “Frankenweenie” and Ray Harryhausen’s “Jason and the Argonauts.”

How has stop motion animation evolved in the last few decades?

How can videography and stop motion animation be used for self-expression?

How has video altered the way we see the world? How do you think it has affected YOU, and the way YOU see the world?
Unit Six: The Selfie Tapestry Triptych

Overview

Students will demonstrate the photography and photo editing skills they have acquired throughout the semester to create a final unified collection of digital art selfie collages that reflect their feelings and point of view. Students will write an artist statement and present their webfolio to the class. Students will learn how mat their work and participate in setting up and exhibit their work in an art show.

Essential questions
How can I combine my photography and digital art skills to express my personality?
How can I create unity and harmony among three self-portrait digital collages?
How do I write an effective artist statement that will explain my intention, feelings, and point of view as an artist?
How do I prepare for and present my work to the public?
Why is it important and how can I benefit from exhibiting my work?

Motivation
A class discussion over progress and goals achieved over the course will be led. Students will view and discuss past and present work over the course of the semester through webfolio presentations. Aspects of compositions of famous collage portraits and self-portraits will be examined and discussed. Students will learn the process of exhibiting work in an art show, including understanding individual roles and how to select and prepare their work.

Featured artists

- Peter Beard, *I’ll write whenever I can*
- Lorna Simpson, *Earth & Sky, #24*
- Jesse Treece, *Watershed*
- Annegret Soltau, *Grima - mit Katze I*

Vocabulary

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<th>Unity</th>
<th>Intensity/Saturation</th>
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<td>Dominance</td>
<td>Texture</td>
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<td>Repetition</td>
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Assignments and activities

Triptych Selfie Collage: As a final project of the year, students will create a triptych of digital self-portraits that expresses your individuality. Each self-portrait in the collection must contain a background which is the selfie and 5 layers minimum. Each layer must, in some way, add to the aesthetic of the piece, forming a strong design with a middle ground and background elements surrounding the portrait. Triptychs will be unified with overlapping elements of art and principles of design.

Exhibition participation: Students will exhibit your triptych and favorite photographs made during the semester. Students will select and cut matt board for artwork, and assist in planning, advertising, and setting up for the art show at the community center.
Triptych Artist Statement: Students will write an artist statement to display with their triptych.

**Artist statement for triptych**

Students will create a title for the collection that reflects something about themselves. It may not be “Self-Portrait.”

1. Write a brief paragraph (at least ten sentences) with the following information: What is the overall message you are trying to convey with your image

2. For each image, describe each layer and how it enhances the piece and expresses your personality.

3. Explain additional Photoshop effects and aesthetic decisions you used to add mood or feeling to your piece.

4. Conclude by restating your overall intent in the creation of your selfie triptych.


**Discussion**

What are the following artists expressing in their self-portraits?

In looking at the rest of these artists’ collages, how does the artist unify their body of work?

How do the artists use composition, lighting, and color in their artwork?

**Course feedback form**

The course feedback form allows for robust analysis and reporting that provides students the opportunity to evaluate the course. It provides the teacher the opportunity to solicit valuable feedback to evaluate and make improvements in teaching practices, course-level pedagogy, and subject matter covered.

- How do you think this course will help you to express yourself visually and appreciate visual representations of others in the future?
• How did this course change my perception of self-expression from art history to the modern selfie?

• What aspects of photography did you most enjoy learning about?

• What other aspects of photography would you like to learn more about?

• What did you learn the most about yourself in terms of your own creativity?

• What part of the course did you enjoy the most in class?

• Which aspect of the class did you enjoy the least in class?

• What grade would you give yourself for mastery of technique gained this semester?

• What grade would you give yourself for your effort and initiative shown in class?

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the rapid rise of technology is propelling the world forward at a rate that can be impossible for the educator to keep up with. However, the deep needs for humans to express themselves and have social connection remains. How this generation and future generations are representing and expressing themselves is remarkably different than previous generations. It is the educator’s responsibility as educators to recognize certain aspects of modern-day culture that our students live in and adapt what is taught and how it is taught to equip them with the skills to have a rewarding and productive life. The educator must evolve and bend, while acknowledging consistent universal needs. "Who dares to teach must never cease to learn." As these words of John Cotton Dana are etched on a stone wall to inspire educators and students alike, I aspire to continue refreshing my teaching browser.
REFERENCES


