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## IN AND OUT OF LIKENESS: *on sharing self-portraits*

I'm looking at a printed photograph that I made with Theo just before I started my studies in photography, eighteen years ago this week. The print is small, smaller than a postcard, and faded to electric blue. A single image stubbornly repeats itself identically across its surface sixteen times.

Prospective students were tasked to produce a self-portrait using a photobooth to be shown on the wall on the first day as a means of introducing themselves to their new peers. In my image I am sat inside a photobooth in the shopping mall of our hometown, held up in my hands is a mirror brought from home. To the right a glimpse of my hair is visible to the camera, the stripes of the shirt I am wearing can be seen below. The rest of me is cropped out by the edges of the image or obscured by the mirror itself. The mirror points beyond me to my identical twin, Theo, reflected outside.

In the surface of the mirror, his likeness leans forward. Everything behind his blue outline is bleached to white, there's no perceivable depth to the image and what might have been there is flattened seamlessly into the glossy blank surface of the paper the image is printed on. Where it repeats my hands mirror each other as they grasp the edges of the mirror in four clusters of four small identical images. My fingers almost line up with where his could be. This echoing image defiantly resists giving up my own appearance. Theo's face bleaching to paper-white, the outline of his eyes and a corner of his mouth repeat and repeat. Our shared image repeats again and again.

Arriving and appearing as images of ourselves, each other, and a pair, we will always be twin-images. Our shared likeness (or shared image-identity) precedes us, even as we grow in and out of likeness. Living in London and Melbourne, on opposite sides of the planet, has shifted this experience somewhat. Last week I returned from Melbourne and his local barista has since twigged, asking if he has a twin—or were they seeing double? There's both a delay and a concentration to this experience as we live in separate hemispheres. When meeting face-to-face, occasionally there's also disappointment and doubt—you're not that identical, are you?

I don't always recognise myself in the photographs we've taken with and of each other. I also don't feel the same self-consciousness that I feel when looking at other photographs of me. Grounded in their reciprocity, there's something in these photographs we make together that diffuses them. There's always a version of him to interfere with the version of me, and a version of me to counteract the version of him. It works in both directions, simultaneously collapsing and doubling us. Sharing and exchanging, our self-portraits will always be a photograph of me, and a photograph of him, and a photograph of us. Whether we appear together and/or apart it's me, and him, and us in every image.

I also don't recognise myself in the photographs taken of twins familiar to photography and cinema, understanding the why but never actually seeing myself within this twin trope. The photographic sensibility which Walter Benjamin

outlines in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* offers an alternative, some wiggle room for us to work with. Benjamin's sensibility is after the similar or reproducible in things, oscillating between an object and its reproduction and between one reproduction and another. This constant search for similarity throws up difference at every turn. Looking at twins is the same, both in person and as images. Twins are photography. Photography is twinning. Photographing each other allows our work to expand on the potential of photographic images as well as images of twins. Our joint self-portraits riff on our individualities and shared similarities, and in turn the roles and mechanics of photography.

This reflexive nature of our images resonates with my sustained interest in the pluralities of photography. I align myself with the photographer Jason Evans' position of either/and, a concept borrowed by the writer and curator Charlotte Cotton to suggest ways of thinking about photography that transcend binaries. Within my wider practice I define my research as operating between photographic language and the two languages I speak: not one twin or the other, analogue, or digital, English or Swedish, but in fact always both. I'm interested in the potential found within the openness of this duality, that interconnectedness and queerness can make space for concurrent readings that are complex, and sensitive and nuanced. Much like Robert Adams' thoughts on why trees make such great subjects for photographs ("Trees smell good, feel good, sound good, and look good. And if that weren't enough, they point beyond themselves") sharing

self-portraits with Theo becomes a vehicle to move beyond a straight-forward representation of us and instead embrace the possibilities of twinhood to point beyond ourselves to the potential of photographic images.

<sup>1</sup>Online Photographic Thinking: Jason Evans, Words Without Pictures published by Aperture, 2010

<sup>2</sup>Always, Already, Again: Ben Burbridge & Annabella Pollen, New Visions in Contemporary Photographic Culture: Photography Reframed, published by Routledge, 2020

<sup>3</sup>Along Some Rivers, Robert Adams, published by Aperture, 2006

Thom Bridge

## AMALIE D'AGOSTINO

Bildet **Mitt Siste Måltid** er et av flere forsøk på å lage et selvportrett og hvor jeg følte at denne måten å gjøre det på var den som portretterte meg best. Jeg har vært omringet av mye katolsk kunst opp gjennom årene og visste fra starten at jeg ville gi et preg av dette i verket som helhet og ikke kun med elementer i bildet.

I løpet av prosessen har jeg, kanskje åpenbart, vært spesielt inspirert av Leonardo da Vincis «The Last Supper» og malerifremstillingen stilleben. Stilleben er tysk og betyr stille liv. I et stilleben-maleri finner man ofte objekter som vaser, døde blomster, oppskåret frukt og krøllete duker. Alt er satt sammen til en komposisjon som skaper en slags ro. Jeg hadde lyst til samle det som er viktigst for meg i et og samme bilde og forsøke å skape den stemningen som jeg ville hatt hvis jeg skulle spist mitt aller siste måltid. En lang og rolig frokost med sol og varme, men allikevel stearinlys. Deilige frukter, litt bobler i glasset og selvfølgelig kaffe. Ikke minst ville jeg vært omringet av blomster og glossy interiør- og mote-magasiner.

I mitt «siste måltid» ville jeg ideelt sett hatt med meg min nærmeste familie og mine nærmeste venner. Jeg har derfor hengt opp et mini-familietre på veggen, samt andre gjenstander jeg har arvet og hatt på veggen siden besteforeldrene mine døde.

Utrykket «Memento mori» som betyr «husk at du skal dø» har blitt brukt som en billedsjanger ofte av kristelig kunst, og

som skal minne oss på og advare oss om at man skal dø. Det er ofte brukt om lignende malerier som nettopp stilleben, bare at en hodeskalle da er vanlig å ha med. I dette bildet kan man se på den mørke skyggen min på veggen som en slik hodeskalle, som en slags skygge av døden. Min største frykt er å dø eller at noen rundt meg skal dø - så jeg føler at dette kan være et lite pek til den frykten. Blomstene jeg har med på bildet er liljer, en blomst jeg ofte ser i sammenheng med begravelser og død. Liljer står derimot også for tro, håp og styrke, og det at jeg ser i retning liljene kan være i forbindelse med noe positivt. Jeg vil at dette kan være opp til hver enkelt å tolke som de ønsker.

Fordi jeg er spesielt interessert i interiør design, synes jeg dette var den beste måten for meg å lage et selvportrett på. Det å få se hvilke gjenstander som virkelig betyr noe for en, setter det personlige interiøret i et annet lys, det får en større betydning og blir for meg mye mer interessant. Det kunne vært spennende å gjenskape dette om mange år, for å se hva som har endret seg i akkurat mitt «siste måltid». Jeg er derimot veldig interessert i å portrettere andre mennesker på denne måten også, men gjennom mine egne øyne. For tiden er jeg i en stadig prosess hvor jeg utforsker ulike måter og temaer innenfor selvportrett. Akkurat nå jobber jeg med å portrettere det lite omtalte livet bak husets fire vegger, i første omgang av min samboer og meg.

The photograph *My Last Supper*, is one of several attempts to create a self-portrait, and where I felt that this way of making it, was the one that portrayed me the best. I have been surrounded by a lot of Catholic art over the years, and I knew from the very start that I wanted to add an element of this in the artwork as a whole, and not just with elements in the photograph.

During the process, I have been, perhaps obviously, particularly inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" and the still life painting. The original name "Still-leben" is German and means quiet life. In a still life painting you often find objects such as vases, dead flowers, cut fruits and crumpled tablecloths. Everything is put together into a composition that creates a sort of calmness. I wanted to collect things that are most important to me in a single photo, and try to create the atmosphere that I would have if I were to eat my very last meal. A long and quiet breakfast with sunshine and warmth, but at the same time candles. Tasty fruit, a glass of bubbles and of course coffee. And nonetheless I would be surrounded by flowers and glossy interior and fashion magazines.

In my "last meal" I would ideally have my closest family and friends with me. I have therefore created a mini family tree on the wall, as well as other items I have inherited and had on the wall since my grandparents died.

The expression "Memento mori" which means "remember you will die" has been used as a pictorial genre often by Christian art, which should remind us and warn us that we all one day will die. It is often used for similar paintings such as still-life, only that a skull then usually is included. In this picture, my shadow could be a replacement of a skull, a shadow of death. My biggest fear is to die or that someone close to me will die - so I feel that this may be a little nod to that fear. The flowers I used in the picture are lilies, which I often connect to funerals and death. Lilies also stand for faith and hope so the fact that I look in the direction of the them, could be connected to something positive. I want this to be up to each viewer to interpret as they like.

Because I am particularly interested in interior design, I think this was the best way for me to create a self-portrait. Being able to see which objects really mean something to you puts a personal interior in a different light, it takes on a greater meaning and becomes much more sentimental to me. I am also very interested in portraying other people in this way too, but through my own eyes. Currently, I am in a constant process where I explore different ways and themes within self-portraiture. Right now I'm working on portraying the little-discussed life behind the house's four walls, initially of my boyfriend and I.

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