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**Between palette and lens: Self-portraiture within turn-of-the-century media culture**



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*“An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them. We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Basil Howard in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* by Wilde, Oscar, 2013 p. 14

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## 1. Introduction

“I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best.” Frida Kahlo once said.<sup>2</sup> Self-portraiture has become the central visual genre of contemporary citizens. While today a self-portrait can be taken in a snap, a mere hundred years ago this was a laborious process involving a visit to a local photography studio. Going even further back in time, two hundred years ago, it was a process only reserved to those who could afford to commission a painter. Within the world of creative artistry, self-portraits have been painted since antiquity.<sup>3</sup> Self-portraiture has been a rich source of creativity and self-reflection throughout history. While it certainly has become an ever-present aspect of our daily lives, a form of genre that is relatively easy to construct, it is important to recognize its significance as a form of a historical artistic expression. Exploring the historical context of self-portraiture unveils an intriguing aspect—the interplay between the artist and the medium employed.

The 19th century witnessed a tumultuous period of rapid technological advancement, accompanied by the introduction of various forms of new media – photography, telegraphy and kinoscope to name a few. Among these, photography emerged as a ground-breaking medium, embarking on its remarkable journey towards establishing itself as a recognized art form in the world. Of course, this would also come to affect how artists depicted themselves.

Susan Sontag (1988) says that “photography is the inventory of mortality”.<sup>4</sup> To capture an image is to make a fleeting moment last forever, to turn something ephemeral into something permanent. Self-photography preserves old versions of the self, preserving a moment in time, in youth, that is otherwise left behind. What happens to the painted self-portrait when a new medium enters the stage? “Photography is a machine, the arts – a craft.” That seemed to be the thoughts of many art critics at the end of the 19th century. But when we take a look at the seven self-portraits chosen for this essay, is this the essence of our findings?

### 1.1 Aims and research question

The aim of this essay is to explore the similarities and differences between self-portraits in 19th-century visual culture media, drawing on how the choice of medium influences the

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<sup>2</sup> Frida Kahlo by Archana Mehta, on people.vcu.edu (<http://www.people.vcu.edu/~djbrumle/modern-art/contemp03/archana/Frida.htm>, brought 2023, May)

<sup>3</sup> Hall, James, *The Self-Portrait: a Cultural History*. 2014. p. 13

<sup>4</sup> Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, 1977, 70.

representation of the self. I will do this by analysing different self-portraits from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Research questions:

- How do self-portraits in photography and traditional painting differ in terms of technical aspects? (Composure, lighting, artistic choice).
- How does the medium of photography mimic or *remediate* traditional painting?
- How do the artists portray *the self* in their respective mediums?

## 1.2 Theoretical Framework

In this analysis I will be applying multiple concepts from Bolter & Grusin's *Remediation* (1999). The main theoretical term I will use is *remediation* – the understanding that media is defined by its relationship to older and established media. In this way, the “new” media essentially competes with older media, since it often has its aim to improve various existing media forms. At the same time, the already existing media “respond” to the new media by transforming themselves in relation to them.<sup>5</sup>

According to the authors, remediation has two “logics” – *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*. Immediacy calls for a sort of media representation that allows for an immediate and unmediated connection, making the observer forget about the presence of the medium<sup>6</sup>. Immediacy makes one feel as if the experience is completely real, devoid of any medium that is transmitting the message. In hypermediacy on the other hand, the spectator or user is made aware of the medium and all of its components. Instead of serving as a clear window into a different reality, it emphasises how mediated and created the experience is.<sup>7</sup>

I will be doing an image analysis on each image, and using semiotics when reading into the images, to make the art analysis more plausible. I have used theory on semiotics from *Practices of Looking*, 2018, by Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken as a point of departure. We can better interpret the visuals and offer a more thorough analysis by integrating semiotics, the study of signs and symbols. This method enables us to build a more believable interpretation by taking into account the numerous levels of meaning the artwork conveys.<sup>8</sup> The signified meaning of the image stands for the meaning or concept connected to the sign,

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<sup>5</sup> Bolter, J.D. and Grusin, R. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. 2000. p. 273.

<sup>6</sup> Bolter & Grusin, pp. 272–273

<sup>7</sup> Bolter & Grusin, p. 38

<sup>8</sup> Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking*. 2018, p. 32

whereas the signifier denotes the sign's actual physical form, such as an image, word, or gesture.<sup>9</sup> For an example, the expression of a person in a portrait can reveal multiple signs. A smile indicates joy, tears convey sadness and melancholy, and so on.

### **1.3 Previous research**

In this part of the essay, I will talk about previous inquiries within this field of research. There are various prior studies done on the portrait of turn-of-the-century visual culture in the context of photography and traditional artistry. However, specific attention dedicated to self-portraiture within this context has been relatively scarce. Why I have chosen self-portraiture specifically will be evident in later chapters.

The article “Myths and Misconceptions: Photography and Painting in the Nineteenth Century” by Hans Rooseboom and John Rudge examines several myths and misconceptions regarding the connection between photography and painting in the 19th century.<sup>10</sup> The writers assess the historical background of this time period in order to clarify the widespread fallacies that developed as photography emerged as a brand-new artistic medium. They present a thesis where painting and photography were not competing forces, but rather interconnected and mutually enriching, a school of thought that influences this essay too.

Magnus Bremmer dissertation *Konsten att tämja en bild* discusses the domestication of photography and the establishing of the photograph as a medium. Taming doesn't mean suppressing or restricting something, but rather training or regulating it to fit into a new environment.<sup>11</sup> The development of photography as a new medium caused established media forms to experience an identity crisis. These more traditional media struggled to incorporate photography into their own practises and to change to the new realities it brought forth. Due to changes in how people connected with and consumed information as a result of the integration of photography, this dilemma indirectly altered how attention was given.<sup>12</sup> In short, the problematization of attention in the early history of photography refers to the difficulties and adjustments that individuals made to the way they focused their attention as a result of the special qualities of photography as a new medium.

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<sup>9</sup> Sturken & Cartwright, p. 33

<sup>10</sup> Rooseboom, Hans & Rudge, John. “Myths and Misconceptions: Photography and Painting in the Nineteenth Century” 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Bremmer, Magnus. *Konsten att tämja en bild*, 2015, p. 30

<sup>12</sup> Bremmer, p. 26

The author of *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin, explores how the development of photography and other reproducing technologies has altered the definition of art. He argues that the traditional arts, like painting, have an *aura* that is lost in mechanical reproduction. Benjamin defines the aura as the distinct presence and authenticity that an original work of art possesses because of its relationship to history, tradition, and the hand of the artist.<sup>13</sup>

Dawn Wilson (2012) discusses artistry and self-portraiture in her article “Facing the Camera: self-portraits of photographers as artists”. For her, the term automatism is key in exploring how photography is used in artistic portrayals of the self.<sup>14</sup> This term I have further discussed in my historical review-section. Her work on self-portraiture is a great indicator that there is interest on the subject in the field.

#### **1.4 Sources and method**

For my primary resources, I will be analysing a handful of self-portraits from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. I rely on digital copies of various images, including paintings and photographs, which are all readily available as open-source material on the internet. My main sources are digitized versions of the actual materials that I aim to examine.

##### **1.4.1 Self-portraiture as a genre**

I have narrowed this paper down to self-portraiture as a genre of artwork instead of portraiture at large. When examining artists own depictions of themselves, we see their true artistry unfold. It is, often, not a commissioned work but a pure manifestation of their character through their chosen medium. This allows me to look deeper into how this unfolds in their respective mediums. Wilson (2012) explains in her article “Facing the Camera: Self-portraits of Photographers as Artists” that photography and automatism allows for major change within self-portraiture, something that is radically different from previous forms of visual art.<sup>15</sup> Through self-portraiture, the artist conducts a self-conscious use of the medium, and a free portrayal of the artist identity.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the self-portrait is a record of a particular moment, rather than a reflection in post. To elaborate, we can look at written

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Harlow. 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson, Dawn “Facing the Camera: Self-Portraits of Photographers as Artists.” 2012. Pp. 55–66.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, 2012, p. 55, p. 62

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, 2012, p. 55

autobiographies: autobiographical texts describe a person's life after an event has occurred, photography captures a precise instant or series of moments.<sup>17</sup> This allows for the exploration of a specific medium at a particular time within history.

#### **1.4.2 Reborn-digital media**

In this paper, I will be using digital versions of physical paintings. When we transcend media – going from physical material to digital, for example – the repercussions should be considered. Even if we manage to make a beautiful copy, avoiding all sorts of digital congestion, the medium still becomes something new. The material changes during the digitization process: it becomes flat, and its physical features disappear completely. When I view these images from my monitor, I cannot smell them, I cannot feel the texture, weight, fragility of the material. I can't see the true size, and I can't see the intricacies in viewing artwork up close. Hannu Salmi (2020) calls these reproductions reborn-digital material. This transformation could be considered to be something completely outside of the sphere of the original medium, not holding the same academic veracity.<sup>18</sup> And yet, compared to physical media, digital media is more accessible in the context of small-scale academic research. Digital platforms remove geographical and temporal constraints by giving users rapid, affordable access to a wide range of material. For the purposes of this essay, digital material is an excellent source. The visual elements provided in my digital copies of the various portraits I will observe tell me useful information without the need of me visiting a museum. My reborn-digital material consists of scans and/or images I have found on open source websites, such as Wikimedia commons<sup>19</sup> or other educational sites. I have chosen to limit myself to artists relevant to the Western art movements, and my images are based on both accessibility and relevance to my analysis.

#### **1.4.3 Scope and Material**

I will be looking at seven portraits from the time period 1863 – 1931 in this essay. When finding material for this analysis, my initial thought was to seek out artists who had dabbled in both mediums: traditional painting (oil, watercolor, gouache) and photography. Since the time period of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the emergence of photography is central to my analysis, it was important for the portraits to be before the second world war. I soon discovered this

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<sup>17</sup> Marcus Laura, "Self-portraiture, photography and performance," 2018 p. 98

<sup>18</sup> Hannu Salmi, *What is Digital History?*, 2020. p. 27

<sup>19</sup> Wikimedia commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>



posed a considerable challenge due to the scarcity of well-known artists who had specifically produced self-portraits in both mediums. This is not to say they do not exist. I have chosen to analyze the following portraits.

Edgar Degas<sup>20</sup> is an artist I found who has made self -portrait in both mediums, his portraits are included in this paper. Edward Steichen<sup>21</sup> and Eduardo Manet<sup>22</sup> have painted similar self-portraits in their respective mediums, which allow for a good contrast analysis. Photographer Gertrude Käsebier<sup>23</sup> demonstrates hypermediacy in her self-portrait from 1899. Mary Stevenson Cassats colorful gouache self-portrait from 1880<sup>24</sup> will be compared to Ilja Bing's *Self-portrait with Leica* from 1931. Using these seven self-portraits, I hope to explore the transformation of portraiture through different mediums, and how they correspond to my chosen theoretical concepts.

### **1.5 Historical overview**

Before we begin our analysis, it would be appropriate to provide an overview of the historical background of photography to place the material in a historical context.

The daguerreotype was introduced in France by Louis Daguerre (1789-1851) in the year of 1839.<sup>25</sup> The cameras' ability to capture reality was ground-breaking, depicting subjects exactly how the eye perceives them. The questions regarding the nature of photography surfaced quickly. Was photography a purely scientific medium or was there potential for artistry? Some argued that the automatic process concealed, and therefore eliminated the artistic process entirely.<sup>26</sup> The medium of photography is still subjected to philosophical discussions on automatism, the notion "that a photograph is the product of a nonconscious, natural, or mechanical process."<sup>27</sup> When photography was first introduced to the wider public in the end of the 19th century, it was precisely this automatism that caused big debate about

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<sup>20</sup> See figure 3 and 4

<sup>21</sup> See figure 2

<sup>22</sup> See figure 1

<sup>23</sup> See figure 5

<sup>24</sup> See figure 6

<sup>25</sup> Briggs, Asa; Burke, Peter & Ytreber, Espen, *A social history of the media: from Gutenberg to the Internet*, 2020. p. 230

<sup>26</sup> Bolter & Grusin p. 25

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, p. 1

the nature of the medium. Did photography qualify as an art form, and if it did, did it render painting unnecessary?

Soon, photography would try to assert itself into the wondrous world of artistry. One way to do this, evidently, was to act less like a photograph, and more picturesque. – more like a painting. The art movement *pictorialism* did exactly this.<sup>28</sup> Pictorialism's primary focus was precisely the notion of uplifting photography into the fine art category. Pictorialist photographers questioned the idea of photography as a solely objective medium and instead highlighted its artistic potential by appropriating methods and aesthetics from traditional art. By the use of soft focus, diffused lighting and manipulated composition, one could create a painterly, impressionistic effects on one's photography.<sup>29</sup> Female artists photographers were more accepted during the pictorialist movement than women painters who encountered prejudice from art academies.<sup>30</sup> One of the pioneers of the pictorialism movement is Gertrude Käsebier, who's "*Portrait of the Photographer*"<sup>31</sup> we will encounter in later parts of this essay. Women were always a part of photography movements that helped establish photography in the artistic field.

On the opposite end of this artistic development within the field of photography, the medium of painting would also be affected by the emergence of the photographic form of artistry. Some argue that ultimately, photography became the painting's liberator.<sup>32</sup> Now that photography could pursue the reconstruction of reality and faithful representation, art history could move into new territories: abstraction. This is, again, perfectly exemplifies remediation logics. Straying away from photorealistic realism, abstract art and hypermediacy starts taking place as, perhaps, an objection to the photograph's abilities to depict reality exactly as it is. Painted self-portraits with more abstract character start emerging at the end of the 19th century and peak in the beginning of the 20th century. It didn't take long before the benefits of combining the mediums became apparent. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kodak cameras advertised the ability to skip the part of sketching when painting and instead, work over snapshots taken with the camera.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bremmer p. 96

<sup>29</sup> Kingsley & Reed, *Pictorialism*. Grove Art Online. Retrieved 23 May. 2023, p. 1

<sup>30</sup> Kingsley & Reed, p.3.

<sup>31</sup> As seen in Figure 4

<sup>32</sup> Sontag, p. 144

<sup>33</sup> Briggs, Burke & Ytreberg, p. 232

## 2.0 Analysis

In this part I will analyse the artwork in sections. I will describe each artwork and then analyse them in relation to their themes by using remediation logics as well as basic semiotics, that is to say, analysing the composition based on signs and symbols.

### 2.1 Steichen and Manet with palettes

*Self-portrait with Palette* by Édouard Manet (figure 1) and Edward Steichen's *Self-portrait with brush and palette* (figure 2) are two strikingly similar self-portraits from this period. American Steichen and French Manet lived a century apart, Steichen being born four years prior to Manet's death. And yet, they have depicted themselves in amazingly similar fashion, both facing the camera, palette and brush in hand, face turned towards the audience. The stern look is a unifying factor between the two gentlemen, expressing a similar intensity. Manet worked in oil with a brown-beige colour palette, while Steichen photographed himself in a dark setting, giving the same appearance of a dark room. However, the mediums are different.



Figure 1: Edouard Manet. *Self-portrait with palette*, 1879. Oil on canvas.

Édouard Manet contributed significantly to the shift from realism to impressionism during the 19th century.<sup>34</sup> This self-portrait vividly demonstrates his mastery of stroke technique, skilfully blurring rigid lines while maintaining recognizable forms. Steichen's photograph on the other hand is a frontrunner for the pictorialism movement. This photograph has a dark and moody feel with strong highlights, created by visible brushstrokes using a gum bichromate process.<sup>35</sup> We can see that both artists are *blurring the lines* to create their desired effects. The compositions are parallel, the posture, the mellow effect of their respective color palettes, two artists within their art.

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<sup>34</sup> Vogel, Carol. "Manet Self-Portrait: New Star on the Block". New York Times, 7 March 2010

<sup>35</sup> Cookman, Claude, Edward Steichen's Self-portraits, History of Photography. p.70



Figure 2: Edward Steichen, *Self-Portrait with Brush and Palette*. 1902. Gum bichromate print

Another prominent similarity between these portraits is precisely this depiction of themselves as *The Artist*. When conducting self-identity, they have chosen to highlight the career, the act that makes them artists. Although Edward Steichen was both a painter and a photographer, he opted to portray himself using a palette and brush rather than the camera, which would seem to be his primary medium of choice. The palette signals “painter, artist”, which he is marking himself as and at the same time, liberating the title “photographer” from its scientific connotations, connecting it to the arts instead. Similarly, of course, Manet is seen holding a brush, as if the onlooker has caught him in the act of painting.

Observing these two portraits, they are essentially achieving the same thing. Steichen is remediating the format of “a painting”, with soft strokes to resemble traditional art. This deliberate technique blurs the line between photography and painting, merging the two art forms – remediation in effect. In essence Steichen and Manet have similar aesthetic goals. They both want to push the envelope and experiment with methods that confound expectations by correcting the typical expectations of their respective mediums. Manet is challenging realism within his own medium, Steichen is challenging the artistic value of his medium by transformation and therefore achieving *remediation*. Steichen's photographic work thus produces results akin to those of the Manet portrait thanks to its resonant imitation of painting techniques.

## 2.2 Edward Degas two self-portraits

Edward Degas has conducted multiple self-portraits during his lifetime. I have chosen two, the first one being *Self Portrait Saluting* from 1863 (figure 3). It is an oil painting. Degas has depicted himself mid-salute, holding his hat with one hand and the other one in his pocket. Degas's expression is neutral, his gaze on the onlooker is cool and concentrated. The other

self-portrait by Degas, *Untitled (self-portrait in library)*(figure 4), is a later one, taken in the year of 1895.<sup>36</sup> Here Degas is an older gentleman in a dark room, seemingly facing a window. His hair is white, his gaze lingers on something he sees through the window, a sight the observant cannot grasp. His gaze, although neutral, holds something melancholy. Possibly the remnants of old age.



Figure 3: Edward Degas, *Self Portrait Saluting*, 1863. Oil on canvas

Degas portraits are produced almost three decades apart, yet they are alike in many ways. Both portraits show three-quarters of the face. Degas's has a consistent expression, where his eyes appear filled with weariness. In the painting, his direct gaze confronts the onlooker, while in the photograph, his eyes seem to look past the camera, creating a sense of detachment. In the case of the latter self-portrait, I would assign Degas artistic endeavour as being immediate, a part of the definition of immediacy. The photograph is composed as if too close to the onlooker, making it seem as if one is in the same room as him. In contrast, his painting from 1863 achieves the opposite: it is quite posed, with some distance to the onlooker. In *Self Portrait Saluting*, Degas has chosen to portray himself in a confident manner, with rigid posture, in a formal moment of salute. The "rush" evident in Degas's *Untitled (self-portrait in library)* on the contrary is that its purpose extends beyond a mere scientific depiction of his likeness. Instead, it evokes a sentimental memory,

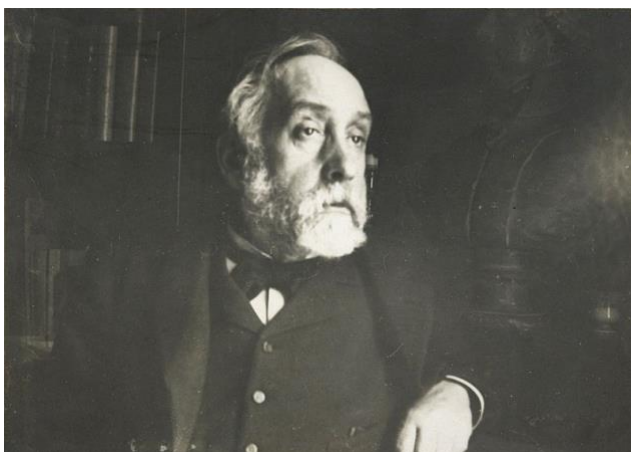


Figure 4: Edward Degas, *Untitled (self-portrait in library)*, 1895

capturing a fleeting moment of a man peering out of the window in his library. Here, we see a welcome contradiction to the assumption that photography is stale and scientific<sup>37</sup>, instead assigning the painted medium the more rigid and impersonal appearance out of these two. While the painting displays a calculated

<sup>36</sup> Exact date of photograph unclear. Source taken from Degas, Edgar, "Edgar Degas self-portrait photograph", Wikimedia Commons accessed May 23.

<sup>37</sup> As proposed by apparent popular belief of the 19<sup>th</sup> century attitudes towards photography, illustrated in sources like Rooseboom (2006) and Benjamin (2008)

attitude and composition, the photograph emphasises immediacy by catching a moment in close proximity to the spectator.

Edgar Degas photographic self-portrait is the oldest dated of the photographs I have chosen to analyze in this paper. Compared to later portraits, by Gertrude Käsebier, Edward Steichen and even Ilse Bing, this portrait stands out as the most simple composition of a self-portrait. However, despite its early origins, Degas's self-portrait exudes a timeless artistic integrity through the clever use of strategic lighting and an up-close and personal angle. From the start, photography can and has been used as a tool for deeper meaning, beyond just documentation of reality. We see a powerful illustration of how elements of immediacy and staged construction can be remediated between photograph and painting through Degas' artistic decisions here. He chooses to portray himself in new ways in relation to the mediums at hand.

### 2.3 Käsebier in the hypermedial

Gertrude Käsebier (1852-1934) was a pioneer within early photography and has taken many self portraits. Although not a traditional painter, her self portrait *Portrait of Photographer* from 1899 provides a welcome insight into this analysis: mixed-medium. The portrait is a platinum print with ink on paper, depicting Käsebier in a front-facing pose. She holds a natural gaze, her head being most detailed. She is wearing a dress that is sketched out on paper, and her hands are clasped. Her body and hands seem to be sketched out, whilst her collar and head are parts of a photograph. This intentional blending of mediums serves as an excellent illustration of the concept of hypermediacy, as proposed by Bolter and Grusin.

Hypermediacy refers to a deliberate and self-conscious display of multiple media elements within a single work, highlighting their individual presence and emphasizing the act of mediation itself.<sup>38</sup> In this portrait, Käsebier consciously incorporates diverse artistic methods to underscore the constructed nature of the image, emphasizing the artist's role in mediating the subject. It is



Figure 5: Gertrude Käsebier. *Portrait of Photographer*, 1899. Platinum print and ink on paper.

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<sup>38</sup> Bolter & Grusin, p. 332



also a clear remediation of traditional painting in its composure, texture of the background and sketched out elements.

At first glance, it is not evident what medium one is looking at with *Portrait of Photographer*. Through this juxtaposition, Käsebier makes photography playful, mixing realism and illustration. Her self-portrait is a meeting place of photography and traditional art in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, showing a potential of collaboration and coexistence for the mediums within the field of art.

## 2.4 Bing and Cassats captured as artists

*Self-portrait with Leica*, 1931, is a self-portrait by German artist Ilse Bing. It is a self-portrait that captures her face in fragments, always construed by her camera or the angle in which her face is, creating a visual connection between the artist and her chosen medium.. She looks directly into the viewfinder: creating direct contact. And yet, half her face is exposed through the mirror, illuminating her as an artist in her work. The painting I have paired with Bing's photographic self-portrait is Mary Stevenson Cassatt's *Mary Casatt Self-portrait* from



Figure 7: Ilse Bing, *Self-portrait with Leica*, 1931. Gelatin silver print.



Figure 6: Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *Mary Cassatt Self Portrait*, 1880. Gouache and watercolor over graphite paper.

1880. Cassatt is depicted in joyful impressionist colors, with obscure shapes surrounding her. Dressed elegantly, Cassatt challenges the observer in similar fashion to Bing, returning the scrutiny of the observer.

The reason these works are contrasted is because they are similar and vastly different at the same time. The first similarity is the gaze of the women. The two women are not merely subjects of admiration but are aware of their onlookers, facing the viewer. Mary Casatt, like Bing, has brought her choice of medium into the portrait. In front of her is the suggestion of a canvas, on which she paints.

Just like Steichen and Manet<sup>39</sup>, the artists connect their self-expression to their career by bringing the medium into the image. At the same time, when making the audience aware of the medium, they break the spell of immediacy. To show and tell in a format like this is highly connected to hypermediacy, the awareness of media being used and constructed in front of the audience.

Both artists have left the backgrounds ambiguous. While the vivid yellow wash on the left evokes the sun's radiant brilliance that envelops the artist's shoulders and casts a shadow over her face, the green brushstrokes in the backdrop on the right suggest wallpaper in Cassatt's portrait. In *Self-portrait with Leica*, Bing has set the scene with a curtain and a backdrop of a home. Bing's portrait is full of dark and light contrast, a careful composition of angles and light. Here we see contrast: the rigid focus of the camera click versus the light, vibrant atmosphere and movement of the gouache. If Bing has had one movement of the finger to capture the perfect portrait, Cassatt has needed several hundred brushstrokes and time to complete her work. And yet, the women have achieved parallel results in different mediums, like a conversation across media.

### 3.0 Conclusion

In this essay, I have discussed the implications of the artistic field in the turn of the century 1800-1900. The self-portraits I have looked at have all given different insight into turn-of-the-century visual culture and practice. The similarities between Manet and Steichen (figure 1 and 2) shared the intentions of pushing the boundaries of their respective mediums. Edgar Degas (figure 3 and 4) gave an interesting insight into an artist who has created within both forms of media, demonstrating immediacy in photography. Käsebier (figure 5) showed 19<sup>th</sup> century hypermediacy, the combination of both traditional and non-conventional artistry. Lastly, Ilse Bing and Mary Stevenson Cassatt (figure 6 and 7) highlighted again the artists' conscious inclusion of their chosen mediums within the artwork.

One of my research questions was to find out how photography and painting differ in terms of their technical aspects. Clearly, the mediums are different and can establish different things. When it comes to composition, lighting and creation of portraits, traditional artists can use color, brushstrokes and other by-the-hand techniques to reach their desired effect. The

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<sup>39</sup> Figure 1 and 2



photographer, however, makes her artistic decision by the use of light, composition and angles. With the help of post-production manipulation, like the gum printing done in Steichen's portrait (figure 2), the photographer can have direct hands-on affection to the result.

The content of these self-portraits do not differ too much between the photographs and paintings. Based on my findings, a lot of artists have chosen to include their career as an artist into the representation of their selfhood. Often, the artists have chosen to include a canvas, a camera, or a paintbrush in their work. This is apparent within both media. The choice of attitude and composition, however, differs from artist to artist, and cannot be pinpointed to the medium at hand.

These portraits also portray remediation. Since photography is the newer, less frequently used medium of this timeperiod, it is always photography that will be compared to its alleged artistic rival, the painting. It seems as if remediation is certainly present, when we look at Edward Steichen (figure 2) and Gertrude Käsebier (figure 5.). These were purposeful integrated connotations of traditional art to the new medium of artistic photography. To assign the self with this artistic authority speaks for the notion that photography simply mimicked traditional art. On the other hand, Ilse Bing (figure 7) and Edgar Degas (figure 4) show new ways of artistic portrayal that differ from all paintings – a new way to create and image. They achieved this by using peculiar angles, up-close, cut off – techniques that are not evident in the paintings of this paper. I would argue that the medium of photography benefited and relied heavily on traditional artistry to establish itself in the field. But only to an extent. The medium of photography eventually forged its own path, surpassing the boundaries of traditional art and developing unique approaches to art.

We can better understand the cultural and artistic relevance of self-portraiture if we are aware of its historical background. Knowing how self-portraiture has changed over time enables us to place modern practises within a larger historical context of art.

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