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Exhibition Examines Modern Practice of Serial Portraiture through Photographs by Stieglitz, Strand, Bing, Friedlander, Woodman, Lee, and More



Ilse Bing

Self-Portrait with Leica, 1931

gelatin silver print, printed c. 1988

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Ilse Bing Wolff

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art explores how the practice of making multiple portraits of the same subjects produced some of the most revealing and provocative photographs of our time in ***The Serial Portrait: Photography and Identity in the Last One Hundred Years***, on view in the West Building's Ground Floor photography galleries from September 30 through December 31, 2012. Arranged both chronologically and thematically, the exhibition features 153 works by 20 artists who photographed the same subjects—friends, family, and themselves—numerous times over days, months, or years to create compelling portrait studies that investigate the many facets of personal and social identity.

"The Gallery's photography collection essentially began with the donation of Alfred

Stieglitz's 'key set,' so it is fitting that this exhibition opens with portraits by Stieglitz, who understood that a person's character was best captured through a series of photographs taken over time," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Although the exhibition is drawn largely from the Gallery's significant collection of photographs, we are grateful to the lenders who have allowed us to present more fully the serial form of portraiture that Stieglitz championed."

Exhibition Organization and Support

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Trellis Fund.

About the Exhibition

Since the introduction of photography in 1839, portraiture has been one of the most widely practiced forms of the medium. Starting in the early 20th century, however, some photographers began to question whether one image alone could adequately capture the complexity of an individual. As Alfred Stieglitz, the era's leading champion of American fine art photography, argued: "to demand the [single] portrait that will be a complete portrait of any person is as futile as to demand that a motion picture will be condensed into a single still."

Along with Stieglitz, some of the 20th century's most prominent photographers—Paul Strand, Harry Callahan, and Emmet Gowin—used the camera serially to transcend the limits of a single image. Each of these photographers made numerous studies of their lovers that sought to redefine the expressive possibilities of portraiture while probing the affective bonds of love and desire.

By employing the camera's capacity to record fluctuating states of being and mark the passage of time, other photographers such as Nicholas Nixon and Milton Rogovin have documented individuals—in families or communities—over four decades. Capturing subtle and dramatic shifts in appearance, demeanor, and situation, these series are poignant and elegiac memorials that remind us of our own mortality.

Other photographers have made serial self-portraits that explore the malleability of

personal identity and the possibility of reinvention afforded by the camera. By photographing themselves as shadows, blurs, or partial reflections, Ilse Bing, Lee Friedlander, and Francesca Woodman have created inventive but elusive images that hint at the instability of self-representation. Conceptual artists of the 1970s and 1980s such as Vito Acconci, Blythe Bohnen, and Ann Hamilton have explicitly combined performance and self-portraiture to stage continual self-transformations. The exhibition concludes with work from the last 15 years by artists such as Nikki S. Lee and Gillian Wearing, who take the performance of self to its limits by adopting masquerades to delve into the ways identity is inferred from external appearance.

The curator of the exhibition is Sarah Kennel, associate curator of photographs, National Gallery of Art, with assistance from Ksenya Gurshtein, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow in the department of photographs.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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