

Images of the multiple self

A review of "On My Behalf - self portraits from The London Group"

An exhibition held at The Cumberland Hotel, Marble Arch, London WC1

17 September - 5 October 2012

By **Corinna Lotz**

Travellers and men in suits come and go, glass lifts silently whiz up and down in a super-sized, modernist-sci-fi space. The cavernous foyer of the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch is a challenging venue for the intimacy of the psychological and personal.

But against the odds, 27 self-portraits by London Group members hold their own. They make a fascinating display and a chance to discover and delve into the very idiosyncrasy of each submission.

Media include traditional oil paint, sculpture, photography, video and drawing and the latest digital technologies.

Diversity is everything in the London Group, and here it is intensified by the genre itself, since by its very nature self-portraiture is a reflection into self, a contemplation of individuality.

But, by way of contrast, notions of a dual, shared or multi-dimensional self appear at the heart of many of these works.

Mannerist figures by Paul and Laura Carey are fused in a haunting cast-stone and resin sculpture, making a mythical hybrid creature, while Michael Phillipson's *The Two or More of Us* also has a dreamy quality as two figures float – or are they falling? – on a soft blue, grey and white stippled backdrop.

Perhaps the most physically intimate image is by the male-female partnership Genetic Moo. In *Mother: The Seasons*, derived from a circular video projection, they seem to peer into the pulsating recesses of the human body.

Susan Haire's *Pixellated Skype Image* shows her head from three angles, a digital take on the triple format famously used long ago by Van Dyck. A narrative story

of personhood prevails in Paul Tecklenberg's *Periodic Table* – images of the artist and his son suspended in multiple, but interrupted rows.

Victoria Arney's watery *Inside Out* shares an existential uncertainty with Peter Clossick, whose *Self-Identity* is a meditation on the nature of perception via a welter of multi-coloured brushstrokes, which dissolve, move and re-form the image.

The wrecking ball swings in Amanda Loomes' frightening photo-collage of tangled cables and superimposed images: a green shoot defying the torrent of destruction.

Bryan Bengé was lucky to count so many artists amongst his friends, when he asked others to draw him from memory: his personality emerges memorably and wittily through the mental eyes of others.

In Lydia Julien's uncontrived photograph, the *Artist as an Older Woman*, self-portraiture is a process of offering yourself up to others for scrutiny. But David Theobald's caged bird is all about metaphor and keeping the viewer guessing. Wendy Anderson seems to hide behind a papier coupé mask, using cut-out letters to name herself.

Similarly, Charlotte C Mortenson shuts herself away behind a corrugated steel wall in *Self Defence*. A sense of secrecy and introspection prevails in Julie Held's dark but distantly hopeful *Night Studio*.

Tommy Seaward builds up three columns out of miniature photographs of himself, each one taken at a different moment in his life. Framed in shiny red, green, white and black, they have an almost voyeuristic quality, as though we are looking through windows in a tower-block.

Performance-video artist Sam Jarman's delicate doodles have a superbly free quality, reminiscent of Andre Masson's automatic surrealist drawings.

C. Morey de Morand's positive-negative double self-portrait is a departure from her more usual abstraction: her black and mustard yellow brushstrokes have an Expressionist intensity. Marcelle Hanselaar's multiple self-images are, as always, totally honest and superbly executed.

In *Measured, Weighed and Tested* David Redfern reduces himself to vials of blood, labelled "cholesterol, diabetes, thyroid, prostate" and "blood pressure" set before a mirror in a box.

Historical people feature in Ian Parker's black and white "Self-Portraits as some of the people I may have been". Victoria Rance also manipulates black and white photography, but this time in a repeated image ranging from almost white to nearly black. In Annie Johns' *Cosmopolite*, a blackened and pock-marked mirror becomes the "canvas", retrieved it seems, like a Rosetta stone, from an archaeological site.

The London Group has, from its inception nearly 100 years ago, been defined by independence, a lack of aesthetic dogma and freedom of approach – and by this showing, it has lost none of these guiding principles.

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