

## The 'Selfie' Project

This project has three main aims:

1. To gain knowledge on the history of The Selfie in order to better understand its cultural context today.
2. To encourage students to consider the concepts and visual elements within an artist/photographer's work and understand how they can apply these to their own work.
3. To explore a variety of ways of making self-portraits using both technical and aesthetic choices to develop and refine students' own Selfies.

### Task 1:

Open up a new PowerPoint presentation and save as 'Selfie Digital Portfolio' on your computer or your school's OneDrive area. This is where you will complete the answers and practical work for task 2 and 3.

### Task 2:

Read through 'A (Very) Short History of the Selfie' (page 2, 3, and 4)

### Task 3:

There are 6 'Selfie Experiment' tasks to complete (page 5 – 10). Complete a photoshoot for all tasks (a photoshoot is a series of photos, not just one).

*(As the project is based on the 'Selfie' you should use yourself as the subject. If you really do not want to, then use a family member as your subject.)*

Upload all your images onto your digital portfolio PowerPoint you created in task 1. Do not just upload the photos that 'work'; you should upload some that went 'wrong' too.

After each photoshoot, answer the following questions:

1. Which photograph example inspired your shoot?
2. What did you enjoy most about this photoshoot?
3. Do you think your work is successful? Explain your answer.
4. What title would you give your favourite image of the shoot?

<https://www.youtube.com>  
Video tutorials on  
camera techniques,

**Challenge:** Produce a photoshoot for at least one of the tasks on page 11 named 'More photoshoot ideas...'

I am looking forward to seeing your work!

If at any time you would like some further guidance or come into a few issues, please email me at: [dar@ifieldcc.co.uk](mailto:dar@ifieldcc.co.uk)

Good Luck!  
Mr Ares  
Head of Art

## A (very) Short History of the 'Selfie'

The current obsession with photographic self-portraits - The Selfie - can be traced back to the origins of photography. One of the first things photographers did when they learned how to fix light on a surface was to turn their rudimentary cameras on themselves. The [earliest known example](#) comes from 1839, the same year that Louis Daguerre patented the 'invention' of photography as a commercially viable process. Since then, the self-portrait, a genre inherited from painting, has become a staple form of photographic image making. The Selfie accounts for a large proportion of the digital photographs people make. According to [a recent survey](#), 24 billion selfies were uploaded to the Internet last year (2016).

What explains the importance of Selfies in our image making culture? Why do we seem to enjoy looking at other people's Selfies, especially celebrities? Why do (some of us) we make them in such large quantities? Is it a sign that we are becoming ever more self-obsessed, or can we see this phenomenon as a positive means of creative self-expression? Have human beings always been interested in seeing their own faces or is this a new thing?

### Answer the following questions:

1. How many Selfies do you take a week? What do you do with them?
2. If you don't take Selfies, why not?
3. What, do you think, is the reason why taking Selfies has become so popular?
4. Is there a downside to the taking and sharing of Selfies?
5. What are the rules or conventions for taking a Selfie? Where do these come from? Is it OK to break these rules?



Vermeer's 'Girl with a Pearl Earring' takes a Selfie

### What is a self-portrait?

A self-portrait is a work of art featuring the artist as subject. There are examples stretching back to ancient times. Self-Portraits in art can be 2 or 3 dimensional.

As artists became more professional and independent, during the Renaissance period, they began to make more self-portraits as a way of celebrating their own status and individuality.

Today, the self-portrait is a thriving genre, perhaps one that has been given an extra impetus by photography. It's important to remember that, when photography was 'invented' (the

1830s) it was largely influenced by painting and other 2D arts. Photographers would look to the examples provided by the history of painting in the way they composed their images.

Since self-portraiture has a long history in art, it's no surprise that self-portrait photographs share some similarities with painting. Although a photograph can be made much quicker than an oil painting, the early photographic processes required people to sit still for several minutes. Various contraptions were invented to stabilise the head so that it didn't appear blurry in the final picture.



The picture on the left is a famous self-portrait by the Dutch painter and printmaker, Rembrandt. This is an etching and would have resulted from the artist drawing with a needle onto a copper plate. Does it remind you in any way of modern Selfies - the slightly surprised expression, open mouth, pouty lips...? Ironically, many of the earliest photographic self-portraits were very stiff and formal by comparison.

### **What is a Selfie?**

Selfie is slang for Self-Portrait. It is used today to infer a photographic self-portrait taken on a mobile device and shared via social media.

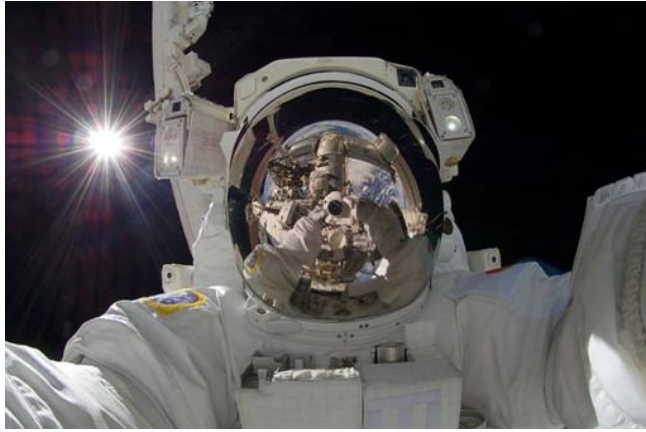
In 2013, "Selfie" was word of the year in the Oxford English Dictionary. The inclusion of front facing cameras on smart phones and the popularity of social media sites like Instagram and Snapchat have made the posting of Selfies increasingly popular as a form of photographic self-expression.

On 30 March 2017, the Saatchi Gallery in London launched an exhibition entitled From [Selfie to Self-Expression](#), claiming it to be "the world's first exhibition exploring the history of the selfie from Velazquez to the present day, while celebrating the truly creative potential of a form of expression often derided for its inanity."



The most shared Selfie to date with over 3 million re-tweets

Why are Selfies criticised for being empty, boring or pointless? Perhaps if we understood how significant they have been in the history of art and photography we might take a different view?



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1 Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Aki Hoshide - Selfie, 5 September 2012.  
2 Peter Kennard and Cat Phillips - Photo Op, 2005

'Rather than dismissing the trend as a side effect of digital culture or a sad form of exhibitionism, maybe we're better off seeing selfies for what they are at their best — a kind of visual diary, a way to mark our short existence and hold it up to others as proof that we were here.'

-- [Jenna Wortham](#)

## Selfie Experiments

The following experiments are designed to encourage you to get to know some famous (and not so famous) examples of self-portraits in art and photography and to use them to help you create your own examples. Rather than relying on the current, limited, stock of poses and facial expressions that tend to dominate Selfie culture, these experiments will hopefully broaden your repertoire and make your Selfies stand out from the crowd!

### Selfie Experiment #1: The Reflected Selfie

[This article](#) provides a useful starting point for reflecting on the mirror Selfie. Once you've had a look at some examples, experiment with your own Reflected Selfies\*. Try using a range of reflective surfaces (not just mirrors). What happens when you choose a shop window, curved surfaces or a sequence of mirrors, for example? Will you look straight into the reflective surface or to one side? Will you include your phone/camera or hold it out of the way?

Photography examples:



Florence Henri –  
Self-portrait in mirror, 1928



Ralph Eugene Meatyard -  
Untitled (Self-Portrait with  
Camera and Guitar), 1955



Lee Friedlander - Route 9W,  
New York, 1969



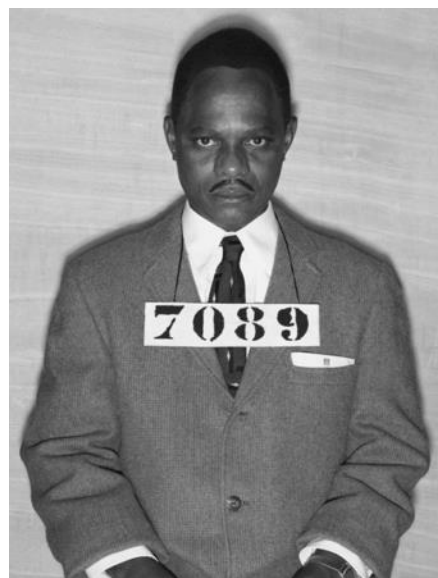
Nan Goldin - Self Portrait in Blue  
Bathroom, London 1980

**Selfie Experiment #2: The Disguised Selfie**

Artists and photographers have always enjoyed playing with the image of themselves, experimenting with costumes, make-up, poses and lighting to transform themselves into a wide range of characters. Look at the examples below and research those you find interesting. Attempt your own experiments with the Disguised Selfie. Could you change your gender, become a character from a favourite film, turn your back to the camera or become a famous work of art?



Andy Warhol - Self-portrait in drag, 1981



Samuel Fosso - Self-portrait as Dr Martin Luther King Jr from the series 'African Spirits' 2008



Cindy Sherman - Untitled Film Still #14, 1978



Gillian Wearing - Me as Claude Cahun Holding a Mask of My Face, 2012

**Selfie Experiment #3: The Obscured Selfie**

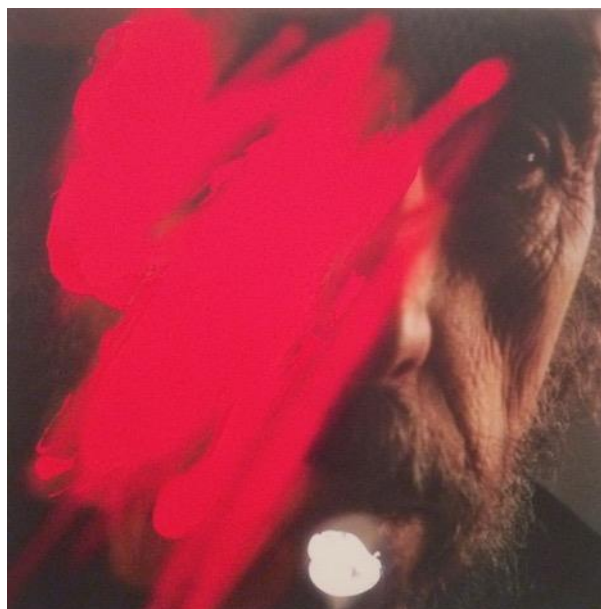
Associated with the Disguised Selfie, there are several examples of photographic Selfies in which the subject's face is obscured. The camera flattens three-dimensional space so that something in the foreground can appear to be on the same level as something else in the background. Of course, some of the obscuring can be done after the fact. Look at these examples and then experiment with making your own Obscured Selfies.



William Gedney - Self-portrait with head obscured, 1969



Edu Monteiro - Autorretrato Sensorial series



Richard Hamilton - Self-portrait with red, 1998



Yayoi Kusama - Self-portrait, 1966

Selfie Experiment #4: The Photobooth Selfie

The first commercially successful photobooth appeared on Broadway in New York in 1925. It provided a way for ordinary people to create a sequence of self-portraits for very little money. One remarkable example of this is the work of Lee Gody, a homeless woman from Chicago, who used photobooths to make creative self-portraits throughout her life. More recently, Japanese artist, Tomoko Sawada, has used the idea of the photobooth to explore her identity, inventing over 400 different visual personas over several weeks. There are a number of mobile apps, like Incredibooth, that reproduce the effect of the automated strip of self-portraits. Experiment with your own photobooth style self-portraits exploring a variety of physical appearance and dress, facial characteristics and expressions.



Lee Gody - Photobooth self-portrait



Yves Tanguy - Photomaton, Paris, 1928.



Tomoko Sawada - ID400 (detail)

Kenneth Josephson –  
Untitled, 1960s





Selfie Experiment #5: The Shadow Selfie

A shadow is like a photograph of ourselves, an image made by light (and the absence of it). Photographers are particularly sensitive to effects of light and so have long been interested in their own shadows. Experiment with your own Shadow Selfies, exploring a variety of effects and compositions.



Vivian Maier, 1975



Daido Moriyama –  
Self-portrait with dogs, 1997



André Kertész - Self-portrait, Paris, 1927



Kenneth Josephson - Chicago, 1980

Selfie Experiment #6: The Feet Selfie

Most Selfies concentrate on the face but why can't a Selfie represent another part of the anatomy? Take a look at these unusual self-portraits and experiment with your own Feet Selfies. You could use your feet and someone else's head. Or, if you're really clever, you could try to get a foreshortened version of your own face and feet into the same photo, like Harry Callahan.



Lee Friedlander - Albany, 1967



Saul Leiter - Sunday Morning, The Cloisters, 1947

More photoshoot ideas...

Some other ideas for disrupting Selfie conventions:

- **The Boring Location Selfie –**

Take a series of Selfies in the most unremarkable, unattractive and unmemorable locations you can find.

- **The Deadpan Selfie –**

Take a series of Selfies in which you look at the camera with a completely deadpan, unemotional, expressionless face.

- **The Unusual Pet Selfie –**

Take a series of Selfies with slugs, worms, pigeons and other 'pets' which you adopt momentarily for the purposes of the picture.

- **The Disappearing Selfie –**

Take a series of Selfies in which only a tiny portion of your head is visible (a few stray hairs or the top of an ear, for example).

- **The Upside-Down Selfie –**

Take a series of Selfies either with your head upside down or, in the normal way but making sure you rotate the photograph by 180 degrees before publishing it.

**Links to assessment:**

<p><b>Assessment Objective 1:</b> Develop ideas through sustained and focused investigations informed by contextual and other sources, demonstrating analytical and critical understanding.</p>	<p><b>Assessment Objective 2:</b> Explore and select appropriate resources, media, materials, techniques and processes, reviewing and refining their ideas as work develops.</p>
<p><b>Assessment Objective 3:</b> Record ideas, observations and insights relevant to intentions, reflecting critically on work and progress.</p>	<p><b>Assessment objective 4:</b> Present a personal and meaningful response that realises intentions and, where appropriate, makes connections between visual and other elements.</p>