

# HALL OF MIRRORS: ANNE ZAHALKA PORTRAITS 1987-2007

A NETS VICTORIA TOURING EXHIBITION DEVELOPED BY THE  
CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY  
CURATED BY KARRA REES



*Sunday, 2:09 pm 1995*

# HALL OF MIRRORS: ANNE ZAHALKA PORTRAITS 1987-2007

A NETS VICTORIA TOURING EXHIBITION DEVELOPED BY THE  
CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY  
CURATED BY KARRA REES

## ABOUT THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE

This education resource is intended as a starting point for generating ideas and classroom activities before, during and after a visit to *Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987-2007* and is intended to complement and be used in addition to information provided in the exhibition catalogue, gallery wall texts and on the NETS website <[www.netsvictoria.org](http://www.netsvictoria.org)>. The resource includes an introduction to the exhibition, suggested points for discussion and practical activities for junior and senior students. It is suggested that teachers select relevant sections of this resource to compile their own exhibition response sheet for students prior to their planned visit.

## PRE-VIEWING PLANNING

Before visiting *Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987-2007* it is suggested that you contact gallery staff to determine the following:

- Suitability of exhibition content and subject matter for the year level you plan to bring.
- Whether staff are available to give an introductory talk.
- Opening hours, transport and parking options, cloakroom facilities and whether admission fees apply.
- Recommendations as to suitable works in the permanent collections that engage with themes of immigration, community and Australian identity. Arrange with gallery staff for students to view these works and obtain reproductions of them. These works can then be used as a starting point for practical activities in the classroom that explore these issues in reference to Anne Zahalka's work. Students can capture their identity, referencing the symbolism, themes and/or imagery from this work and utilising props or costumes, through the creation of a theatrical backdrop and a staged re-enactment in their classroom.
- Availability of student interactive activity. Anne Zahalka has designed a vinyl backdrop of a generic beach scene for *Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987-2007*. School groups will be able to re-stage either a significant work from their local public gallery's collection or one of Anne Zahalka's works, referencing the poses and/or arrangement of figures, symbolism and/or themes of the work. After consultation with gallery staff and discussion with students, consider which work might be most suitable to respond to and which props might be appropriate to take to the gallery. A number of digital cameras will be provided to assist school groups to document this activity in the gallery.
- A selection of images created by schools in the classroom and gallery in response to Anne Zahalka's work will be selected by NETS and regularly uploaded to the NETS Victoria website.

## CURRICULUM LINKS AND CONNECTIONS

As this exhibition is touring nationally teachers are encouraged to adapt the curriculum links given in the list below to suit their school's state curriculum. Use this list to generate ideas, activities and points for discussion, and where suitable contact education staff at your local gallery for further ideas and suggestions.

### Visual/Creative/Studio Arts

- Artist's practice: ideas and inspiration, working in series.
- The role of the artist: artist as social commentator.
- The relationship between the artist, subject, artwork, art museum/gallery and audience.
- The figure and its representation in art.
- The diversity and range of media, materials and techniques used by contemporary artists.
- Postmodernism: use of appropriation, homage and humour.
- Art and politics: the way that artists can respond to and represent current political and or social events.
- Responding to artworks: analysis and interpretation using appropriate language.

### English

- Responding verbally to visual images.
- Creative writing and responding.
- Critical essays and reviews.

## Studies of Society and the Environment

- Artworks as commentary about interconnectedness between humans, society and environment.
- Social issues including immigration, representation, race, gender, diversity and difference.
- Visual arts as a reflection of contemporary culture and society.

## Australian History

- Immigrant cultures and histories.

---

# INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

*Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987-2007* explores the thread of portraiture through the career of one of Australia's pre-eminent art photographers. Featuring many iconic images, this major survey exhibition from the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP), Melbourne also includes previously unseen portraits and newly commissioned works by the artist.

Curated by Karra Rees, *Hall of Mirrors* examines portraiture, representation and identity throughout Zahalka's career, which spans more than 20 years. Zahalka's portraits reveal more than just the individual; with an ironic and critical voice the images created by Anne Zahalka cleverly subvert stereotypes, representing subcultures and a spirit of the times with acute observation. Tampering with truth in representation, blurring the boundary between reality and fiction, Zahalka uses a variety of photo-media techniques. Incorporating photomontage, double-exposure, darkroom trickery and digital manipulation, her practice has consistently enquired into the very nature of image making and its relationship to the world around us.

*Hall of Mirrors* includes Zahalka's series *Resemblance* (1987) featured in the National Gallery of Australia's survey show *Photography: The 1980's*; *Open House* (1996) shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in *Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography*; *Welcome to Sydney* (2001) commissioned by the Sydney Airport Authority and acquired by the Museum of Sydney; and Zahalka's renowned works from *Bondi: Playground of the Pacific* (1989) exhibited at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in *Points of View: Australian Photography 1985-1995*. A selection of self-portraits from the artist's archive and newly created portraits of Australian art world identities are also included.

## ARTIST'S BACKGROUND

Anne Zahalka was born in Sydney in 1957 where she currently lives and works.

The artist completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts in 1979 and a Post Graduate Diploma in 1989, both at Sydney College of the Arts. In 1994 she gained her Master of Fine Arts, at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.

Anne Zahalka is one of Australia's most prolific and recognised artists working in photomedia. Since the early 1980s she has exhibited extensively in Australia, Europe and Asia, holding over twenty solo exhibitions. Recent international group exhibitions include *Supernatural Artificial* (2004) at the Metropolitan Museum of Photography in Tokyo and *Photographica Australis* (2003), which was exhibited in Madrid, Spain, and then toured to Asia. In 2005 she was the recipient of the Leopold Godowsky Photography Award, Boston.

Anne Zahalka is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney <[www.roslynoxley9.com.au](http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au)> and Arc One Gallery, Melbourne <[www.arc1gallery.com](http://www.arc1gallery.com)>.

Anne Zahalka's website is: [www.zahalkaworld.com](http://www.zahalkaworld.com)

---

# ARTISTS

## REPRESENTATIONS OF ARTISTS

Since its inception in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the photographic portrait has been a source of enduring fascination and intrigue. The egalitarian nature of photography is easily understood and the act of taking portraits or photographing family and friends continues to be a popular pursuit.

For the ongoing *Artists* series, commenced in 1989, Anne Zahalka continues a long tradition in art history of artists making portraits of their artistic colleagues. With a focus on exploring stereotypical representations of artists Anne Zahalka photographed a number of her artistic contemporaries including representations of the artist as hero; revolutionary; inventor; magician; alchemist; gambler and game player.

More recently Zahalka has taken photographs of a new generation of artists whom she knows or admires: many of them

working with photomedia and more specifically portraiture. With these more recent works Zahalka is less interested in presenting stereotypical artist representations and more concerned with setting the subjects against their own domestic or working environments so that they come to resemble one of their own photographic characters.

Zahalka's *Artists* series refer to early styles of portrait photography including the daguerreotype in which the subjects were often defined by their occupation: depicted surrounded by the tools and objects of their trade. The daguerreotype was an early photographic process that used polished metal as the surface for image creation. In the exhibition catalogue Daniel Palmer writes of portrait photography: '...we are still swayed to the intoxicating fantasy that photographic portraits offer us an insight into the truth of a person's character, just as we like to think that camera images truthfully reflect the world.'<sup>1</sup> Anne Zahalka's photographic practice has been an ongoing investigation into the process of image making and the apparent veracity of the medium.

In Anne Zahalka's photographic portraits the settings can reveal as much about the subject as the subjects themselves. In portraiture often it is the objects that the subject is depicted with that are as important as the subject themselves. To create each of her artist portraits Zahalka has collaborated closely with her subjects and the portraits are designed around the subject's interests and artistic practice. Each artist portrait gives clues as to the personal interests of the artist, and/or their subject matter and style.

For example Rosemary Laing is known for her large-scale panoramic photographic images that explore themes of landscape, space and distance. Aeroplanes, airports and the mechanics of modern flight (including the spectacle of airborne brides) have all been the subject matter for her work. In *artist #2 (Rosemary Laing)* 1990, Zahalka poses her subject against the backdrop of a huge airport hangar; the subject matter of one of Laing's photographs in the *Brownwork* series.<sup>2</sup>

---

## RESPONDING TO ART AND MAKING ART

### JUNIOR

#### Questions

- Look at the photo portrait *artist #10 (Darren Sylvester)* 2005. Write down five things that are included in this photo.
- What might these things tell us about the artist and what he enjoys?
- Does the look or style of the photograph remind you of anything? What is it?
- How do you think you can tell the personality of a person from their photograph?
- What do you think the saying 'the camera never lies' might mean?
- What five things would you include in a photograph of yourself?



*artist #10 (Darren Sylvester)* 2005 duraflex photograph 72.5 x 72.5 cm

## Activities

- Choose one of the photo portraits from the *Artists* series. Imagine that you are a detective and you are investigating what this person does. Can you tell what might have happened before and after the photo was taken? Write a short story about the person in the photo (the subject). Include a beginning, middle and end in your story. In your story include one of the clues that you found in the photograph.
- In your school library find a book that has portraits of artists. Photocopy a selection of these portraits and make a display in the classroom. What objects are included in these portraits that might give you clues to the artist's personality? Draw or paint a self-portrait of yourself as an artist and include objects that give clues to your personality and style of art.

## SENIOR Questions

- Consider traditional and contemporary representations of the artist in cinema; literature; music and in the media. What stereotypes are you aware of that relate to artists? In what way do the representations of artists included in Anne Zahalka's *Artists* series play out or reference existing stereotypes of artists?
- What do you think the role of the artist is today?
- Can a photograph tell you about its subject? Does it tell you what the artist wants you to believe or what the subject wants to convey? Or both? Look at the photo portrait *artist #10 (Darren Sylvester)* 2005. What objects or references are included in the photograph that might give you an insight into his style as an artist?
- Choose one of the portraits from the *Artists* series and discuss how Anne Zahalka has used colour, surface, composition and scale in this photograph.
- Displayed alongside the *Artists* series are two engravings on synthetic polymer resin with the following texts: *Who is the artist the spectator is looking for?* and *Who is the spectator the artist is looking for?* Write a short response discussing your understanding of these texts in relation to the *Artists* series.
- Research the work of contemporary Australian artists David Rosetzky, Selina Ou and Darren Sylvester and compare the portraits that they make with those created of them by Anne Zahalka. What similarities and/or differences are there in the way that these artists represent their subject matter and the way that Anne Zahalka has chosen to represent them?

## Activities

For her 1996 exhibition *Difficult to Light* Australian artist Linda Sproul referenced both anthropological photographs of indigenous women and iconic photographs of female celebrities. Sproul photographed herself as Madonna, Marilyn Monroe, Christine Keeler and Betty Grable. She mimicked their poses and outfits but revealed the artifice of her construction and subverted each image by leaving on her red horn-rimmed prescription glasses.<sup>3</sup> In his work *Pop* (1993) UK artist Gavin Turk created a life-size fibreglass and wax portrait of himself as Sex Pistol member Sid Vicious, in the pose of Andy Warhol's silkscreen of Elvis Presley as a gunslinger.

- Choose a recognisable image of an artist, actor or musician that you admire and create a self-portrait of yourself as an homage or tribute to that person. Consider how you might subvert the image or create a new meaning through the use of props or objects that you include. You may need to have someone else take the photograph for you, or use the self-timer function on the camera.

---

# RESEMBLANCE

## Restaging, reinventing and referencing

*"...the idea that appearances can be deceptive has been central to Zahalka's practice. Often conflating reality with fiction, she has appropriated or re-staged iconic images and simulated period styles as part of an ongoing enquiry into the nature of image making, and the representation of the world in which we live."*<sup>4</sup>

Anne Zahalka created the *Resemblance* series during a residency in Berlin in 1987. The artist meticulously staged each of the portraits in this series in her Berlin studio, often incorporating the same table, stool, fabrics and other props that she sourced from local flea markets and including her friends and acquaintances as the subjects. Referencing seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings, in particular the works of Vermeer, for each portrait the artist created an interior where the subject is identified by their occupation and is posed surrounded by the tools of their trade, for example *The Cook (Michael Schmidt/architect)* 1987 and *The Cleaner (Marianne Redpath/performance artist)* 1987.

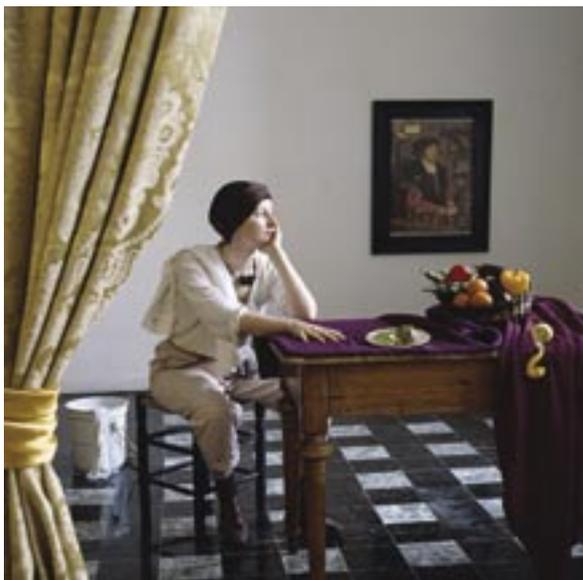
There is an established tradition in art history of artists copying existing artworks as a way of paying respect or homage to the original artist. Reproducing the works of another artist also allows artists to learn much about the style or technique of the artist they are mimicking. More recently as a device of postmodernism, many artists have been interested in appropriating or re-working existing images in order to create a dialogue between them; often with an interest in parodying or subverting an idea or stereotype depicted in the original image. While making this series the artist was asking herself the following questions: "Was it possible to make anything new? Are we speaking through the pictures of the past? Is this paying homage to the old masters, or is it a continuation of a way of picturing people."<sup>5</sup>

Anne Zahalka is aware of the history of traditional portraiture and the way in which it can be used to present the sitter and project their position in society. With her contemporary portraits and re-staging of existing images she works with these established representational codes to explore new ways of presenting her subjects.

Whilst directly referencing Jan van Eyck's painting *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434), by mimicking the style, subject matter and composition, Zahalka's work *Marriage of Convenience* encourages us to speculate on the motive for the marriage. Despite references to the past, the present intrudes into each photograph in the series via the artist's insertion of both personal and contemporary references. For example Zahalka has posed her male and female subjects either side of a circular mirror in the exactly the same position and pose as the van Eyck original, but here she includes her own portrait reflected in the mirror. In *Marriage of Convenience* a radio/cassette player is visible on the table; a set of headphones hangs around the subject's neck in *The Cleaner*.

## JUNIOR Questions

- Look carefully at each of the photographs in the *Resemblance* (1987) series. They look like pictures from the past, but can you find objects that are out of place here?
- List five things that look like they don't belong in these photographs.
- Why do you think the artist has based the photographs on a style of art from the past (seventeenth-century Dutch painting) but included these contemporary objects?
- Do you think people having their portrait painted or photographed today would want to be identified by their occupation or the type of work they do? Why/why not?
- How would you like to be photographed or painted? What objects would you include?



clockwise from top left:

*The Writer* (Dr Michael Haerdter/director, Künstlerhaus Bethanien) 1987 cibachrome photograph 80.0 x 80.0 cm

*Marriage of Convenience* (Graham Budgett and Jane Mullinger/artists) 1987 cibachrome photograph 97.0 x 88.0 cm

*The Cook* (Michael Schmidt/architect) 1987 cibachrome photograph 80.0 x 80.0 cm

*The Cleaner* (Marianne Redpath/performance artist) 1987 cibachrome photograph 80.0 x 80.0 cm

## Activities

- Make a portrait of yourself as someone famous. You can use anything - pencils, paint, plasticine, modelling clay, photography, collage etc. Think about the following: how big is your portrait? Is it just of the face or the whole body? What colours will you use? What about the background or setting? What props or objects will you include in your portrait? What can these props and objects tell people about you? What could you include that might be out of place in your portrait?

## SENIOR Questions

- Since the early 1980s an interest in blurring the line between reality and fiction has been central to the work of Anne Zahalka. In the *Resemblance* series the artist chooses to include contemporary objects that are out of place in this recreation of traditional scenes. What effect does the inclusion of contemporary references and subjects have on your understanding of the work?
- Compare and contrast the effects achieved by the artist in this series using photography compared with the medium of the originals that they are based on? What similarities and differences are there?
- In choosing to base this series on a seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting what comment do you think the artist might be making about the influence and role of European art history on the history and development of Australian art?
- Choose one of the works from the *Resemblance* series and compare and contrast it with a work from the *Open House* series. Are there any symbolic or metaphorical meanings or messages contained in the two works? What might they be? Give reasons based on your observations of the works and by making reference to one of the following commentaries:

*"Historically, portraits immortalised sitters in their finest clothing and jewels, surrounded by worldly possessions indicating their wealth and status. In a similar way the domestic scenes in Open House classify the subjects, defining them by their décor, clothing and possessions."*<sup>6</sup>

OR

*"In all their variety, the images are united by Zahalka's interest in the ability of the camera to simultaneously display and deceive, achieved through the use of theatrical settings, props and poses."*<sup>7</sup>



*Saturday, 5:18 pm* 1995 type C photograph 81.0 x 66.0 cm



*Saturday, 2:48 pm* 1995, duratran and light box 125.0 x 176.0 x 25.0 cm  
Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne

## Activities

- Anne Zahalka has commented: "The initial tenets of Postmodernism were that everything had already been done so one could only continue to speak through the images and texts of the past."<sup>8</sup> Organise a classroom discussion debating the topic: 'All art has already been done and artists can only rework images from the past.' Research the works of artists Imants Tillers, Juan Davila and Sherry Levine and include references to works by these artists in your response.
- Choose an iconic image from art history and explore the possibilities of restaging or recreating this image in a contemporary context using painting, drawing, collage, film or photography etc. Consider carefully what image you are choosing and why. How might you insert yourself, or your family and/or friends into the image? What differences in meaning are created by restaging a traditional image in a contemporary context? Does your work challenge or subvert the meaning of the original work in any way? How might you include humour in this work?

---

# BONDI: PLAYGROUND OF THE PACIFIC

In *Bondi: Playground of the Pacific* (1989) Anne Zahalka continues her interest in appropriating, referencing and restaging art historical images. In this series she focuses on national mythologies and stereotypical representations of identity, using humour and parody as a means of subverting existing myths and stereotypes. Zahalka was born in Sydney to a Czech Catholic father and Austrian Jewish mother who had immigrated to Australia in 1949, and from early in her career she has been interested in questioning stereotypical representations of identity.

Most of the photographs in this series were staged in the studio, with imported sand, furniture and beach paraphernalia. They depict beach users of all ages, backgrounds and body types against an obviously painted backdrop. "The Australian beach has long been regarded as a national symbol that signifies the apparently relaxed lifestyle and easy physicality of its inhabitants".<sup>9</sup> In this series Anne Zahalka responds to and questions existing art historical representations of the beach as a democratic, inclusive space peopled with idealised bronzed Australian 'types'. As the artist says: "People have an image of Australia through places like Bondi ... I set out to add the cultural differences and to look at the stereotypes."<sup>10</sup>

In *The Bathers* (1989) Anne Zahalka takes as her inspiration Charles Meere's idealised image of Australian beach culture, *Australian beach pattern* (1940). While Zahalka's work loosely mimics the stylized neo-classical poses of Meere's original painting, in place of his idealised subjects she inserts a more representative range of body types and cultural backgrounds to reflect contemporary Australian society.

Max Dupain's photograph of a muscular and tanned sunbather, *Sunbaker* (1937), an iconic representation of Australian beach culture, is referenced in Zahalka's *The Sunbather #2*. Zahalka questions the veracity of Dupain's representation through the re-staging of Dupain's sun-bronzed sunbaker as a pale, slight and freckle-skinned redhead. Similarly in *The Sunbather #1* Zahalka plays with both the conventions of art history and gender by restaging the Dupain image with a female subject.

*The Sunbather #1*  
1989 type C photograph 49.0 x 49.0 cm



*The Sunbather #2*  
1989 type C photograph 49.0 x 49.0 cm





*The Bathers* 1989 type C photograph 74.0 x 90.0 cm

*The Surfers* 1989 type C photograph 74.0 x 90.0 cm



# SCENES FROM THE SHIRE

In *Scenes from the Shire* Anne Zahalka has returned to photographing the beach and its occupants. This series was made in response to the 2005 racial conflict around Sydney's Cronulla Beach where cultural groups fought over their perceived 'right' to occupy this space. *The Girls #2, Cronulla Beach* (2007) shows three young Muslim women posed against a semi-deserted Cronulla Beach wearing brightly coloured 'burqinis' (a combination of burqa and bikini).<sup>11</sup> The girls pose – arms folded and legs akimbo – echoing the typical masculine stance of the lifesaver; and at the same time powerfully asserting their right to occupy this space. Anne Zahalka creates an image where: "cultural identity is defiantly represented against a landscape marked by the memory of violence and intolerance."<sup>12</sup>

## JUNIOR

### Questions

- Think about the title of this series *Bondi: Playground of the Pacific*. Why do you think the artist used this title?
- How does the size or scale of an artwork affect how we look at and understand it?
- Look at *The Bathers* and describe how the artist has used colour in this photograph.

### Activities

- Imagine that a friend living overseas asks you to send them an image to show what Australian society is today. What would your image include? Make a drawing, painting or collage to illustrate Australian society to your friend. Include notes explaining why you have chosen this image.
- Display reproductions of Charles Meere's *Australian Beach Pattern* (1940) and Anne Zahalka's *The Bathers* (1989) in the classroom. How are these two pictures different? How are they the same? Does either of these pictures provide a realistic view of what an Australian beach scene would look like today? Why or why not? Are representations of Australians shown in paintings, photographs, the media and music realistic reflections of how we see ourselves? Whose views are they?

## SENIOR

- What evidence is there that *The Bathers* (1989) and *The Surfers* (1989) are studio-based photographs? Why do you think the artist staged these photographs in the studio as opposed to taking them on the beach? What might the artifice of the backdrop allude to?
- In a short essay discuss Anne Zahalka's use of devices of Postmodernism (especially appropriation, art-historical references and humour). In your response refer to at least two works from the series *Bondi: Playground of the Pacific*.
- In what way do images of people at the beach reflect concepts we associate with Australian identity?
- Compare and contrast Anne Zahalka's *The Surfers* (1989) from the *Bondi: Playground of the Pacific* series with *The Girls #2 Cronulla Beach* (2007) from the *Scenes from the Shire* series. Discuss how issues of gender, race and stereotype are addressed in these two artworks and investigate the cultural and social context in which both works were created.



*The Girls #2, Cronulla Beach* 2007 type C photograph 74.0 x 90.0 cm

- How does Anne Zahalka's contemporary re-staging of Charles Meere's *Australian Beach Pattern* (1940) challenge ideas related to Australian life, culture and identity that are presented in the original artwork? Compare the way in which Australian people have been represented in both images. What range of cultural backgrounds can be seen? What values and ideas are expressed in each of the pictures? Which groups of people are not shown? Why might the artists have left out certain groups? Which of these images is a more inclusive view of national identity?

### Activities

- Interview a family friend or someone from your community who has immigrated to Australia. Ask them questions about what they knew about Australia before they came here and what their first impressions were when they arrived. What things surprised them? What things disappointed them? Draw a portrait or take a photograph of them with some of their personal possessions that symbolise their cultural background and how this relates to their life in Australia.
- Visit your local gallery and look for a painting or artwork from their collection that explores the theme of immigration. Who is depicted in this artwork? Where have they come from? What personal possessions have they bought with them? What can you tell about them from the way that the artist has represented them? Create a photographic self-portrait that includes clues about your identity and family history. What props or items from your family can you include to give hints about your family background and history?
- Research how the racial tension that occurred in 2005 at Sydney's Cronulla Beach was reported in the Australian print and television media. Collect documentation of this event in the form of press images, written material or television footage. Using the original reporting material create an artwork that critiques the way that this event was documented and reported by the media. Consider how you might incorporate an alternative perspective or viewpoint on this issue in your work.

## SELF PORTRAITS

### The artist as creator and subject

In art history there is a tradition of artists creating self-portraits. Not only is this a way of creating a lasting image of oneself, self-portraiture can also serve to announce one's vocation and skill as an artist, one's place in society or one's style, it also guarantees a readily available subject. Often artists will depict themselves in the studio or surrounded by their materials and include references to the ideas and subjects that inspire them.



*The Cooking Lesson* 2000 type C photograph 50.0 x 60.5 cm

At the same time that she created many of her photographic series Anne Zahalka simultaneously produced portraits of herself: revealing herself as both subject and maker of these images. Some of these self-portraits were to document the staged environments or backdrops made for the series and others were a part of the series. Anne Zahalka includes her own image, *artist #33 (Anne Zahalka)* 1990 as part of her series *Artists*. Posed against the backdrop used in the photograph of artist Stephen Bush, a number of photographic manuals are included as well as equipment commonly used by photographers including additional cameras, lenses, a tripod and a light meter.

There is also a tradition in art history of the artist either directly or indirectly referencing their role in the construction of the image or their relation to the subject matter. Examples of this include Spanish artist Diego Velázquez de Silva (1599-1660) including himself standing in front of an easel in his painting of the family of Philip IV of Spain, *Las Meñinas* (1656) and American photographer Cindy Sherman including the automatic shutter-release cord as evidence of her presence in her highly staged and constructed photographic self-portraits.

In the *Resemblance* series Anne Zahalka literally inserts herself into the frame: in *Marriage of Convenience* her image appears reflected in the circular mirror. Similarly in other of her series the artist asserts her connection to the subjects and her role as maker of the images by including her own reflection or images of her work in the photographs. In a number of her self-portraits Anne Zahalka leaves visible evidence of the shutter-release cord: photographing herself with the shutter-release clasped in her hand.

### WORKING IN A SERIES

Since she began exhibiting in the early 1980s Zahalka has consistently worked in series. Many of her series have an implied sense of narrative; allowing her to explore several visual or thematic ideas in the one body of work. As she revisits her themes and ideas relationships develop between one body of work and another. For example in the recent series *Scenes from the Shire* the artist has returned to the beach as the subject matter for her work. In the earlier series *Bondi: Playground of the Pacific* the artist explored national icons and representations of Australian identity against an artificial backdrop of the beach, in the more recent series the beach itself becomes a contested space.

### JUNIOR

#### Questions

Look at Anne Zahalka's self-portrait *The Cooking Lesson* (2000).

- Does this photograph look natural or staged to you? Why?
- What does this photograph tell you about the artist and her daughter?
- What expressions do they have?
- What clues are in this photo that could tell us something more about the artist?



*The Collector (self portrait)* 1988 cibachrome photograph 50.0 x 50.0 cm



*The Artist (self portrait), Berlin* 1987 cibachrome photograph 80.0 x 80.0 cm

## Activities

Look at a range of self-portraits made by artists including: Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), Rembrandt (1606-1669) and Andy Warhol (1928-1987). A self-portrait can try to be an exact representation of a person's appearance or represent his or her personality, ideas, or emotions. In the classroom create a gallery of self-portraits in a range of styles by artists of diverse cultures and heritage. Pablo Picasso created a number of self-portraits that were not physical likenesses but used a visual language to convey his feelings and moods. For example he used the character of the Harlequin or the image of the Minotaur to represent different sides of himself.

- Create a self-portrait. This could be a photograph, drawing, painting, collage, sculpture or piece of writing.
- Discuss portraits and self-portraits and the choices you can make as to how you are represented in each one. Which one do you think might reveal most about you?
- How can emotions and ideas be represented in portraits?
- What pose, gesture, expression and clothing might best express the real you?
- What background, colours, texture and style might you use?
- Are there any hidden clues in your self-portrait?
- What clues or symbols might you include that reveal something about you?

## SENIOR Questions

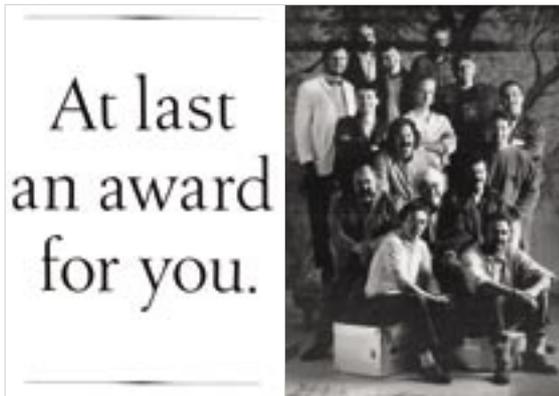
- Why do you think Anne Zahalka might include her own image or references to her work in her photographs?
- Why do you think the artist uses the body as a vehicle of meaning or expression? What power and information can the figure convey that no other form can? Why do you think this is so?
- Choose one of Anne Zahalka's self-portraits and discuss the artist's use of gesture, theatricality, truth and artifice.

*Home 3, Anne and Alice Zahalka (version 2, from the series How Jewish is your Home?)*  
1998 type C photograph 50.0 x 60.5 cm



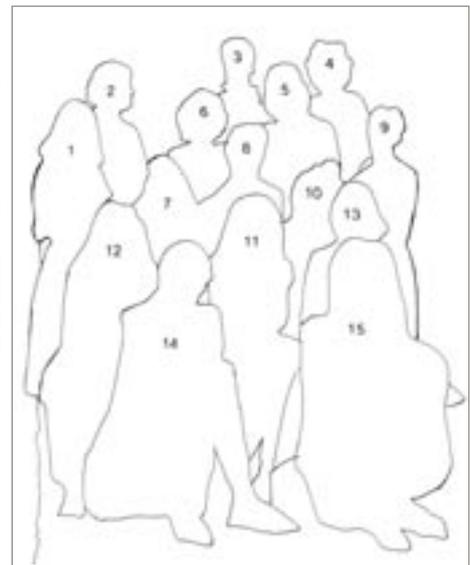
## Activities

- Invent an 'alter ego' that represents an aspect of your character and personality but that does not bear a physical likeness to you. Create a visual image of your 'alter ego' or write a short autobiography exploring your 'alter ego' and this side of your personality or character.
- Photographer Cindy Sherman is both subject and creator of her photographic images. In early works the artist used simple props to disguise herself, often leaving the camera's automatic release cord as evidence of her role in the construction of the image. In more recent works she is completely unrecognisable: transformed by prosthetics and makeup. Create a self-portrait including the use of simple props or disguises. Include evidence of your role in the image's construction.
- UK artist Gillian Wearing has meticulously reconstructed old family snapshots, transforming herself (using silicon prosthetics) into her mother, father and other family members as young adults or adolescents. She has also recreated a photograph of herself as a three year old. Photocopy existing photographs of family members or yourself at an earlier age and make a series of masks. Photograph yourself wearing the different masks. Experiment with lighting, costume, gesture, pose and setting.
- Research the work of Gillian Wearing (UK), Tracey Moffatt (Aus) and Cindy Sherman (US) and compare and contrast their photographic self-portraits with those of Anne Zahalka. Write a short essay discussing identity, memory and the veracity of the photographic medium in each of the artists' practice.



(above) Advert for the inaugural FUJI Professional Photography Awards 1989 © Fujifilm

*At last an award for you* 1989 type C photograph 48.0 x 40.0 cm



1. Anne Zahalka
2. Sandy Edwards
3. Diane Paine
4. Anne Ferran
5. Catherine Rogers
6. Tracey Moffatt
7. Elizabeth McPhee
8. Charlie Aarons
9. Robyn Stacey
10. Eva Fernandez
11. Photographer unknown
12. Rebecca Cummins
13. Debra Phillips
14. Roslyn Sharp
15. Photographer unknown

# GLOSSARY

## **Appropriation**

To take something for your own use. As a term in art history and criticism appropriation refers to the strategy of taking an existing image for one's own use. Appropriation in art raises questions of originality, authenticity and authorship.

## **Daguerreotype**

A photograph made by an early method on a plate of chemically treated metal or glass.

## **Homage**

Anything given or done to show reverence, honour etc. In artistic terms it is typically used to denote a reference in a work of art or literature to another.

## **Parody**

A composition imitating the style of another artist's work.

## **Portrait**

A representation of an individual. A portrait can be a literal representation or it can represent a person symbolically.

## **Postmodernism**

A late twentieth-century concept in architecture and the arts that represents a departure from modernism, and is characterised by a general distrust of grand theories and ideologies.

## **Self-portrait: An individual's representation of him - or herself.**

## **Studio photograph**

A photograph staged and taken in the artist's studio as opposed to in a journalistic or documentary manner.

---

# ENDNOTES

1. Dr Daniel Palmer, 'The art of self display: On Anne Zahalka's Portraiture', in *Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987-2007* (exhib. catalogue), Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2007 p.3
2. For the series *Brownwork* (1997) Rosemary Laing worked closely with Qantas to photograph a number of staged events and environments at Sydney Airport's International Terminal.
3. Linda Sproul *Difficult to Light* was held at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Dallas Brooks Drive, South Yarra, 18 April-25 May, 1997.
4. Karra Rees, 'Objects in Mirror may be closer than they appear', Anne Zahalka in conversation with Karra Rees, *Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987-2007* (exhib. catalogue), Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2007 p.41
5. Anne Zahalka, quoted in Stewart Hawkins, 'In with the old, in with the new', *The Weekend Australian*, 17-18 February 2007, p.34
6. Rees, *op. cit*, p.42
7. Palmer, *op. cit*, p.4
8. Rees, *op. cit*, p.42
9. Paula Lindley and Susan van Wyk, *2<sup>nd</sup> Sight Australian Photography in the National Gallery of Victoria*, (Room brochure), National Gallery of Victoria, 2003, p. 8
10. Anne Zahalka, quoted in Michael Fitzgerald, 'Myth and reality on the beach', *The Age*, 4 July 1990.
11. In the exhibition catalogue accompanying *Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987-2007*, Anne Zahalka refers to the 'burqini' designed by Aheda Zanetti, as a form of "modest swimwear for Muslims".
12. Tanya Petersen, 'Working Backwards', *CVA+C Broadsheet* Issue p.129

# HALL OF MIRRORS: ANNE ZAHALKA PORTRAITS 1987-2007

A NETS VICTORIA TOURING EXHIBITION DEVELOPED BY THE  
CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY  
CURATED BY KARRA REES

Published by National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria  
© NETS Victoria, CCP, Anne Zahalka and Kate Barber, 2007

Writer: Kate Barber  
Designer: Darren Sylvester

National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria  
c/- National Gallery of Victoria: Australia  
Federation Square  
PO Box 7259  
Melbourne VIC 8004  
T: +61 3 8662 1513  
F: +61 3 8662 1575  
E: [info@netsvictoria.org](mailto:info@netsvictoria.org)  
W: [netsvictoria.org](http://netsvictoria.org)

NETS Victoria is the peak body for visual arts touring in the state of Victoria. We provide opportunities for regional communities to access and engage with the best contemporary art, craft and design.



This exhibition is supported by Visions of Australia, an Australian Government program supporting touring exhibitions by providing funding assistance for the development and touring of Australian cultural material across Australia. National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria is supported by the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria and the Community Support Fund, by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and through the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.