

RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY

When Nobody's Watching

May 22 – July 2, 2021

In-Gallery + Online

You are who you are when nobody's watching.

-Stephen Fry

But who am I when they cut the lights and nobody's watching me?

-Macklemore

Rena Bransten Gallery presents *When Nobody's Watching*, a group exhibition of self-portraits by Faisal Abdu'Allah, John Bankston, Phoebe Beasley, Jonathan Calm, Gina Contreras, Tracey Emin, Rodney Ewing, Viola Frey, Rupert Garcia, Joseph Green, Doug Hall, Bovey Lee, David Linger, Hung Liu, Chip Lord, Vik Muniz, Tameka Jenean Norris Estate, Sidney Russell, Ron Moultrie Saunders, Kathy Sloane, Lava Thomas, Tara Tucker, John Waters, Lewis Watts, and Derek Weisberg. The exhibition will be on view in the gallery with an expanded iteration available to view online.

Paying homage to the time-honored tradition of self-portraiture, this collection of works shows a multiplicity of approaches to the genre – the images are sometimes confessional and profound, sometimes self-deprecating and humorous.

While most artists are no strangers to solitude and the inevitable self-reflection that solitude brings, there is a more practical consideration: artists often choose themselves as subject simply because they are the ones there. This past year has made even more pronounced the necessity of using what is within arm's reach, in the same way that an artist's available physical space can dictate scale. While these works were not all made during quarantine, they are seen now through the lens of prolonged separation, as little windows opening to other people.

Hung Liu's large-scale painted portrait, *Rat Year 2020: Last Dandelion*, shows a close cropping of her masked face, placing us solidly in the present. An air of stoicism dominates her gaze – there are no frills, and no explanations. Her signature dandelion dominates the other panel, reminding us of impermanence, and the cyclical nature of life. How will this painting be seen years in the future, with the pandemic (hopefully) a hazy memory?

David Linger's four-panel self-portrait is a black and white photograph printed on porcelain – an extremely archival yet fragile material. Linger has bifurcated his face and the variations between panels become a nod to the many selves we all hold inside. The printing process Linger employs is one that demands embracing imperfections as it is difficult and time consuming, and the results hard to control. When considering this process in relation to self-portraiture, it becomes poetic; as we all fumble through life our best hope may be to remain open to unexpected outcomes.