

the self collage



Imagine looking in the mirror,

Staring deep into the eyes in front of you.

Separating the reflection from yourself

and leaving reality for what it is.

Going into the sweet lakes of your daydreams.

Imagine capturing this gaze so distant to you,

yet so close.

Living in this daydream and letting your hands

create the work captured deep inside you.

Letting your inner reality take the overhand.

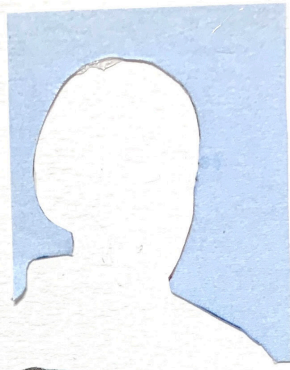
I am a maker. Building works with only the material and my hands is the thing I found peace and balance in.

Drawing and painting is something I never questioned, it has always flowed out of me. It started with drawing, later painting, and now at Willem de Kooning Academy, I'm expanding my practice with materials such as fabric, ceramic, and installation works.

When I work, I'm able to escape reality for a bit and dream off to a place chosen by my mind. This form of escapism gives me autonomy and a drive to continue making. The self-created Illusion is a theme I touch upon in many of my works.

Something I would like to achieve with my work is to pass the joy I experience working, on to you, the viewer, and let them step into my world for a minute. I hope that this joy, together with my attention to detail and a little bit of added absurdism makes you see the world around you through a bit of a new and fresh perspective.





1



3



4



2

intertwining

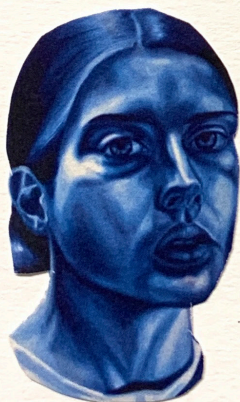
Looking over the green meadows which are still protected by the morning fog, I glisten.

My legs are quickly going up and down, the cold wind is running past my face which makes a small tear run over my warm cheek.

The tear melts into the sweat that already makes a shimmering layer over my body.

Slowly I notice that I am becoming one with the fog, our water drops intertwine and I float around with the calm breeze on this early spring morning.







a self-portrait from me to you

The lightning from the big window on the upper right from me hits my face so my that the turquoise, blue and bit of yellow ochre in my eyes catch the sunlight. Five meters to the left of me, a small window makes sure there the left side of my face gets it's recognizable structure. The light from both sides of me makes my hair peculiar in shape and colour and the details in my ear get highlighted by the dimmed light from the left window.

I spent a significant amount of time tracing every detail of my face. Some people would say: Narcissism! Self-obsession! Self-centeredness! Self-absorption! These are words often related to self-portraits. I am someone who makes self-portraits. Does this make me all of these words? Do I love my exterior so much that I can't stop staring at it, or is this because I want to get to know myself a little better? Do I just want to practice and not get a model or do I feel very existential when staring at myself for numerous amount of hours?

From the beginning of my, yet short, painting career, people have pinned her name to my works: Charley Toorop (1891-1955). With her intense paintings, among which are many self-portraits, she makes people a very particular kind of way. When I think of this way of feeling, I think of modern realism¹. In Charley's paintings, thick and harsh lines, contrasting colors, and awkward/intense realities are very present.

The first time I looked up her name was about two years ago, and I remember this very well. At a painting course, a



how everyone on social media uses so many face smoothing filters, while in my paintings I find the most beauty in wrinkles, eyebags, things that are a big no-go on the internet.

But let's start at the beginning. Self-portraits. What are they and why do I even make them?

Around the Renaissance time, so with the rise of humanism, this genre was popularized. By making self-portraits, the artist could link their personal painting style to their selves, as kind of a resumé or business card.

This all changed with the invention of photography. Nowadays that everyone with access to a phone or camera can take a photo of themselves, self-portraiture in a way becomes way easier, yet so much more difficult. To create an artwork, and not just a selfie, a lot more thought has to come into the self-portrait. Contemporary (self)portraiture for me needs to have something added, a story, a concept. In my (self-portraits) like to play with Modern Realism. I make the eyes stare right back at the spectator. Either this person is appalled by this, or a big fan because it gives a great feeling of discomfort. Which I like a lot. I used to only like to please the viewers, now that I've grown a bit older I learned to smile at the slight discomfort in people's eyes looking at my work while saying "you accentuated your eyebags didn't you".

When I first started making self-portraits, I didn't think much of it. "It's just because I don't want to get a model" I thought.

couple of people told me how much my paint handwriting reminds them of Toorop, but I didn't think much of it. Back home and not sure of what to make, I googled the name Charley Toorop and was struck by inspiration and emotions. The eyes staring right back at me and the harsh lines, I knew I finally knew what all the people were talking about. I started reading books and articles about her and this made me make work inspired by her. And the funny thing is that with my brown-colored bob haircut, nose shape, and big eyes, my face even resembles hers a bit. Her face was the inspiration of one of my first and most important self-portraits (to be seen at the bottom of this page), making her a special woman who will never leave my mind and heart.

Seeing Toorop's self-portraits raises many questions in me. She made so many throughout her life, that you can see her age in her paintings. It is interesting to look at the wrinkles appearing on her face, what expression did she use most, what kind of person was she? How will my wrinkles appear when I grow older, will they be happy or angry ones? Will I still even be making self-portraits when I'm older? I hope so. Seeing her age in her painting makes me think about the future. It makes me think about how it's more normal now to get botox to fill in the wrinkles and how it wasn't like that in Charley's time. Would I get botox? It is very interesting

¹ Modern Realism: In Modern Realists' works, artists take reality as their starting point, and twist this in their way. A seemingly 'normal' reality is depicted, but there is always some sort of ominous, awkward, and/or intense feeling to it. Magical Realism stands very close to this, but instead a dreamlike or hallucinatory feeling is given to the works.



creation, made up by myself, revealed that the second layer of the 'onion' self-presentation was.

Everyone is the author of their scripts. Some given many tools to make this, some less, and some almost nothing. These scripts are all made pretend to fit into the world where everyone is an actor.

Let's take Instagram as an example. People will create the most beautiful posts and stories, just to show how beautiful, creative, etc. they are. While in reality, this will just be a small part of them. This is a façade that cannot be held up for long, which is why social media is perfect to create this short-term publication to show this snippet of yourself. But it is not real. Often I experienced that speaking to someone I once saw before on Instagram is a world of difference. The person becomes real and is almost always less amazing and glamorous as they are on Instagram, often this experience could be disappointing. This disappointment makes me question if I should rewrite some of my scripts for my make pretend.

There is a difference between self-presentation on social media and in art. I feel like you can hide way less in art. Since often ideas, works, are coming from far within you, some things will be in there without you intending to. If I look at the first serious work I've ever made, I could still link it to the works I made right now. There is always some sort of handwriting: a theme, style, commonality from within you. This has to do with your upbringing, environment, etc.

Recently I started to discover this was only the outside of the (metaphoric) onion. Slowly peeling off the first layer, I stumbled upon self-awareness.

For me, catching myself in a mirror is often unpleasant. Seeing my reflection makes me realize that I am existing on this earth, people can see me with all of my insecurities. Can they see them too as well as I do? This sudden self-awareness I consider to be a very strange feeling. It feels surreal and makes me ask myself existential questions. What is real? Am I real? Everything is curated for us, so is this the Matrix we live in? I hate thinking about this for too long, it gets too confusing, I get too anxious. I experienced difficulties trying to snap out of this zone is difficult, once you start it feels like a spiral going more and more down into the depths of my brain. I need to distract myself by something, someone. It is a vulnerable state of mind.

The self-awareness that comes with making a self-portrait is extremely vulnerable for me and very surreal. Staring at yourself in the mirror for many hours gets surreal. How weird it is that everyone is born with their face, façade, a unique one. People can curate this however they wish, especially if they have a lot of money. Staring at yourself for a long period again raises a lot of these existential questions, but I experience also a lot of numbness. I just look at the mirror and see a mannequin right there, looking exactly to the place she has to move and giving the exact right gaze. After a while of being numb like that, it is interesting to see what is created on the canvas. This



This makes art a very vulnerable thing. Revealing your insides for the outside world to judge. Being vulnerable takes courage, and it brings strength. This is why making self-portraits is so important to me. To be vulnerable, reflect upon many things, and have fun while doing it. I think it would be a good challenge for everyone, even if it's once in their lifetime to make a self-portrait. One in which many hours are spent on, many questions are asked.

You can see this as a small try-out, a dip with your toe in the cold water. So if you're ready, be my guest and draw one on the page besides this one. Good luck!









Robin van Leijssen

