



# Case Study Research Paper Between Reflection and Consciousness: Reimagining the Self Through Time-Based Portraiture

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**Abstract-** This paper investigates how contemporary artists employ self-portraiture as a practice-based method to explore identity, consciousness, memory, and psychological transformation. Moving beyond traditional portraiture, the selected case studies demonstrate how time-based artistic practices—including photography, performance, video, and mixed media—redefine portraiture as an evolving process rather than a static representation. Through the critical examination of the works of Frida Kahlo, Cindy Sherman, Marina Abramović, Amrita Sher-Gil, and Anju Dodiya, the paper explores how artistic practice functions as a mode of self-inquiry and knowledge production. Employing qualitative visual analysis and practice-based research methodology, the study demonstrates that self-portraiture is a dynamic process shaped by reflection, memory, and lived experience. The findings contribute to contemporary scholarship on portraiture by positioning artistic practice as a means of investigating consciousness and identity.

**Keywords-** Self-Portraiture, Practice-Based Research, Identity, Consciousness, Reflection, Time-Based Art, Contemporary Art.

## I. Introduction

Self-portraiture has long held a unique place in art history as a potent tool for introspection, self-expression, and creative inquiry. Traditionally, self-portraits were intended to chronicle an artist's physical appearance, demonstrate technical proficiency, or establish creative identity. From the Renaissance to the current period, artists have consistently used self-portraiture to portray not only their external likeness but also their personal experiences, emotional states, philosophical ideas, and social positions. However, self-portraiture in modern art has developed into an interdisciplinary approach that examines the intricacies of identity, consciousness, memory, and time. Modern self-portraiture places more emphasis on metamorphosis, process, and ongoing becoming than it does on the self as a fixed or stable thing. Time-based portraiture, a method that uses repetition, length, photography, performance, video, and mixed-media experimentation to explore the evolving nature of human identity, has emerged as a result of this change.

The conceptual underpinnings of this study are the ideas of reflection and consciousness. Traditionally, reflection has been connected to the mirror, which has been a crucial instrument for artists producing self-portraits. Mirrors have made it possible for painters to very accurately examine their own faces, expressions, and body gestures since the Renaissance. Beyond its functional use, however, the mirror has acquired great symbolic importance. It denotes self-awareness, introspection, and the



search for identity. Reflection is therefore not restricted to evaluating one's physical image but also entails examining thoughts, emotions, memories, and experiences. In modern artistic practice, artists use reflection as a creative technique to critically interact with their inner selves and turn personal experiences into visual storytelling.

The idea of consciousness, which has been extensively studied in philosophy, psychology, and modern art, is closely related to reflection. A person's awareness of their ideas, feelings, sensations, and existence is referred to as consciousness. Consciousness cannot be directly observed or objectively depicted, in contrast to physical appearance. It is dynamic, subjective, and continuously formed by relationships, memories, cultural influences, and individual experiences. Contemporary artists increasingly aim to represent these invisible psychological qualities through experimental types of self-portraiture. Rather of portraying identity as stable or full, they highlight fragmentation, ambiguity, vulnerability, and transformation. As a result, portraiture turns into a method of examining how the relationship between outward appearance and inner experience changes throughout time.

The rise of time-based artistic practices has been one of the most important breakthroughs in modern art. Traditional portraiture frequently reflects a single moment, maintaining an individual's appearance within a set historical framework. Time-based portraiture challenges this tradition by combining duration, repetition, sequential imagery, video, performance, and documentation into the creative process. These methods recognize that identity evolves continuously through lived experiences, emotional shifts, and personal growth. Time-based portraiture shows identity as a continuous process of change rather than a final or finished self. Each artwork becomes one stage within a broader visual narrative, depicting how memory, perception, and awareness grow over time.

The possibilities of self-portraiture in the modern visual arts have been further enlarged by the growth of practice-based research. Practice-based research sees artistic creation as a rigorous process of knowledge generation rather than just the production of beautiful products. Observation, experimentation, documentation, introspection, and material exploration all contribute to scholarly learning in the studio. In this case, artistic practice serves as both the research topic and approach. Artists learn about psychological processes, creative decision-making, and identity creation through repetitive actions of making, recording, and reflecting. Because it recognizes that information arises through the creative process itself rather than only through written analysis, this research technique is especially pertinent to self-portraiture.

This study examines how modern artists use time-based self-portraiture to analyze introspection and awareness using a practice-based case study technique. An in-depth analysis of individual artists, their creative processes, conceptual frameworks, and visual languages is made possible by the case study method. Instead of offering a comprehensive historical overview, the study concentrates on a few artists whose creations best illustrate how portraiture has evolved into a method of philosophical and psychological investigation. Through comparative research, the study identifies common themes such as memory, identification, embodiment, repetition, and temporal



change, while also recognizing the different cultural and creative settings in which these practices occur.

The selected case studies include the works of Frida Kahlo, Cindy Sherman, Marina Abramović, Amrita Sher-Gil, and Anju Dodiya. Despite coming from diverse cultural and artistic backgrounds, these artists are all interested in delving into the intricacies of identity and self-representation. Autobiographies are transformed by Kahlo into symbolic visual narratives that convey both physical and mental agony. Through staged photographic performances, Sherman challenges the validity of identity by showing how the self is socially produced and constantly performed. Abramović adds duration and body presence into portraiture through performance art, highlighting the relationship between time, endurance, and awareness. While Dodiya uses fractured images and symbolic tales to investigate dreams, memory, and psychological fragility, Sher-Gil's reflective self-portraits negotiate cultural and personal identity.

Together, these artists show how modern self-portraiture has developed into an interdisciplinary investigation of human mind in a variety of ways.

This study's theoretical framework incorporates viewpoints from visual culture, art history, psychology, and phenomenology. Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan's psychological theories offer important insights into memory, identity formation, self-awareness, and the unconscious. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories help us comprehend how perception, embodiment, and artistic experience are related. When taken as a whole, these multidisciplinary viewpoints reinforce the idea that identity is a dynamic process formed by ongoing interactions between internal awareness and the outside world rather than a static state. In the end, this study makes the case that modern self-portraiture is not just a representation of physical appearance but rather a continuous conversation between reflection and consciousness. Artists turn portraiture into a dynamic process of self-examination and knowledge creation through repetition, documentation, material experimentation, and temporal research. The chosen case studies show how time-based artistic methods reveal nuanced psychological changes that are difficult to depict in a single picture. This paper adds to current discussions in the Fine Arts by combining theoretical inquiry with practice-based research, highlighting the fact that artistic practice is an important methodology for examining identity, memory, and human consciousness in addition to being a means of creative expression. As a result, the study establishes time-based self-portraiture as a significant area within modern visual culture, providing fresh insights into the changing interrelationships of art, psychology, and the human condition.

### **Research Objectives**

- To examine the transformation of self-portraiture in contemporary art.
- To investigate reflection and consciousness through selected artists' works.
- To analyse time-based artistic practices in relation to identity.
- To compare international and Indian approaches to self-portraiture.
- To relate these artistic strategies to practice-based research.



## II. Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative practice-based methodology combining visual analysis, comparative case study, and contextual interpretation. Museum collections, exhibition catalogues, scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and artists' statements provide the primary sources. The analysis focuses on visual language, conceptual themes, medium, temporality, and psychological interpretation.

### Case Study I: Frida Kahlo – Self-Portrait as Psychological Narrative



#### Background

Frida Kahlo transformed self-portraiture into an intensely autobiographical form. Physical suffering, emotional trauma, gender identity, and cultural heritage became central themes in her paintings.

#### Critical Analysis

Rather than striving for realism alone, Kahlo constructed symbolic narratives that visualized emotional pain and psychological resilience. Mirrors, direct gazes, animals, vegetation, and bodily symbolism created complex metaphors for identity. Her repeated self-portraits document evolving emotional conditions, making them early examples of portraiture as an ongoing psychological process.

#### Relevance to the Present Study

Kahlo demonstrates that self-portraiture can express inner consciousness through symbolic representation rather than literal likeness. Her work supports the concept that identity is continually reconstructed through personal experience and reflection.

### Case Study II: Cindy Sherman – Identity as Performance



### Background

Cindy Sherman revolutionized contemporary portraiture by photographing herself in multiple fictional identities.

### Critical Analysis

Sherman rejects the notion of a single authentic self. Through costume, makeup, staging, and photography, she constructs diverse personas that question gender, media representation, and social identity. Repetition and transformation function as temporal strategies that reveal identity as performative and culturally constructed.

### Relevance

Her photographic practice directly supports the argument that portraiture is a process of continual identity formation rather than stable representation.

### Case Study III: Marina Abramović – Performance and Duration



### Background

Marina Abramović introduced duration and bodily presence into contemporary portraiture through performance art.



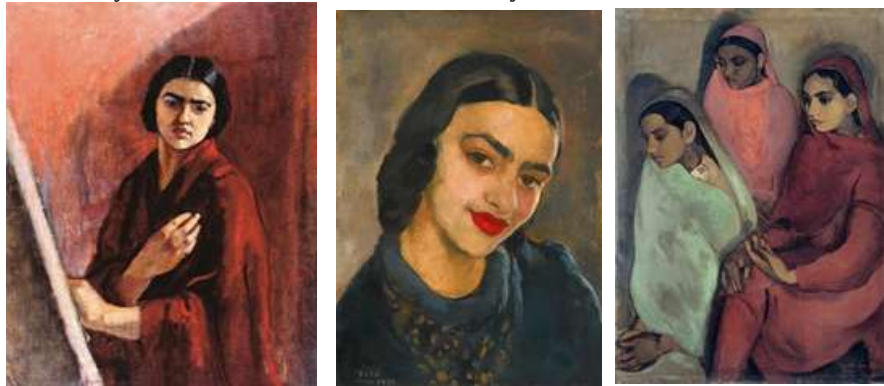
### Critical Analysis

Works such as *The Artist Is Present* redefine portraiture through prolonged eye contact, silence, and endurance. The body becomes both subject and medium, while time itself functions as an artistic material. The viewer actively participates in constructing meaning.

### Relevance

Abramović demonstrates how time-based practice transforms portraiture into an experiential encounter, reinforcing the importance of duration within contemporary self-representation.

#### Case Study IV: Amrita Sher-Gil – Inner Identity and Modern Indian Self-Portraiture



### Background

Amrita Sher-Gil is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of modern Indian art.

### Critical Analysis

Her self-portraits combine European modernism with Indian cultural experience. Rather than emphasizing physical beauty, they reveal introspection, emotional isolation, and identity negotiation. Sher-Gil's portraits bridge personal psychology and cultural belonging.

### Relevance

Her work illustrates how self-portraiture can function simultaneously as psychological exploration and cultural reflection, an important dimension of contemporary practice-based research.

#### Case Study V: Anju Dodiya – Memory, Dreams, and Fragmented Consciousness







### **Background**

Anju Dodiya explores vulnerability, dreams, fear, and memory through figurative painting.

### **Critical Analysis**

Her layered compositions combine autobiography with symbolic imagery. Mirrors, theatrical settings, and fragmented figures suggest unstable consciousness and emotional complexity. Rather than depicting a singular self, Dodiya presents identity as continuously shifting between memory, imagination, and lived experience.

### **Relevance**

Her practice closely parallels the objectives of this research by demonstrating how layered visual narratives communicate psychological transformation.

## **III. Comparative Discussion**

The five case studies reveal significant developments in contemporary self-portraiture:

- Kahlo transforms autobiography into symbolic psychological narrative.
- Sherman questions the authenticity of identity through performative photography.
- Abramović introduces duration and embodied presence into portraiture.
- Sher-Gil combines introspection with cultural identity.
- Dodiya employs fragmentation and memory to visualize consciousness.

Despite differences in medium and context, all five artists reject portraiture as a fixed representation. Instead, they understand identity as fluid, relational, and continuously changing. Their practices demonstrate that repetition, performance, photography, and layered imagery provide effective methods for representing psychological experience.

### **Implications for Practice-Based Research**

The case studies establish that artistic practice itself can generate research knowledge. Reflection, experimentation, repetition, and documentation become investigative tools rather than merely creative techniques. These findings support the central premise of *Between Reflection and Consciousness: Reimagining the Self Through Time-Based Portraiture*: the self is not a stable object to be represented but an evolving process to be explored through sustained artistic practice.

## **IV. Conclusion**

The comparative analysis demonstrates that contemporary self-portraiture has evolved into a sophisticated practice of psychological and philosophical inquiry. By integrating time, memory, reflection, and embodied experience, artists move beyond representation to investigate the changing nature of consciousness and identity. These case studies reinforce the value of practice-based research as a legitimate mode of knowledge production in visual arts, where studio experimentation generates insights that complement theoretical scholarship. The findings suggest that time-based portraiture provides a powerful framework for examining the complexities of selfhood and offers



significant possibilities for future research in contemporary art, visual culture, and interdisciplinary studies.

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