

~~[Insert Your Favorite Title Here]~~ **Are You Staring at Me?**

In his 1891 essay “The Critic as Artist,” Oscar Wilde controversially claims that “Criticism is more creative than creation.”¹ When I first read that sentence, I thought *this man might be crazy*. Does he really think that artists, the ones wielding the pens and paintbrushes, the ones infusing shapes and lines with deep meaning, are not the definition of creativity? Bewildered but intrigued, I continued on. But when Wilde says, “To the critic, the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own, that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticizes,” I almost stopped reading.¹ *What can he possibly mean that critics make their own art, that the object of their criticism is as insignificant as a mere suggestion?* Over the next couple of days, I considered this. I thought about the power we give to critics in society. I thought about all of the people who have made careers out of criticism—food critics, movie critics, art critics—you name it. And then I realized that maybe Wilde was right. Criticism *does* shape the meaning of art. At least we, as a society, allow it to. But has this gone too far? Has the world gotten to a point where artists create with solely the critic in mind?

Off the top of my head, I can name several instances where music or literature feels like it has been constructed out of a hodgepodge of popular tropes and themes, uninspired and made solely to earn acclaim. Cough-cough Dua Lipa’s new album *Radical Optimism*. Cough-cough Alex Aster’s fantasy novel *Lightlark*. I wouldn’t be shocked to learn they had been AI-generated with the prompt *make me something that people might like*.

This train of thought got me wondering—very circuitously, I admit—about how I had been doing this with my own identity. Without even realizing it, I had been conforming myself to what I thought other people wanted to see.

At the same time, I also realized that I counteract this behavior by closing off aspects of my identity from the world so that I’m the only one who perceives them. While some aspects of my identity are on full display, others are kept behind closed doors, essentially giving me power through the resistance of external scrutiny.

All of this self-reflection leads us to my sense of self: I define my identity as a balancing act between the two conflicting behaviors I outlined above—the impulse to people please and the desire to hold complete agency over myself.

To visually articulate my concept of self in my portrait, titled *Are You Staring at Me?*, I rely on elements that simultaneously induce a feeling of openness and submissiveness, reflective of people-pleasing, as well as a feeling of secrecy and self-possession. I wanted to capture what lies at the

¹ Wilde, Oscar. "The Critic as Artist." Editorial. Literature Network. Last modified 1891. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/E800003-007/text001.html>.

intersection between the two primary halves of my identity and explore the tension that arises, so these double-edged elements felt like the most natural way to achieve that. I use an asymmetrical mirror as a canvas, an ideal size for one viewer at a time. Straight onto the glass, I painted a scattering of twenty-six eyes with semi-abstract strokes of acrylic paint, each wildly different in terms of shape, size, mood, and color. For example, the largest eye comprises olive, peach, and mustard tones. Shaped like a slender pear, it features a lazy, half-drooping eyelid and a lopsided iris that seems as though it was painted with a wobbly hand. Another one of the most entrancing eyes lies at the top left corner. In a mulberry-colored socket, I painted a dark green iris against a particularly stark white of the eye. With pale purple paint, I created a dripping effect, designed to look as if one's under-eye bag was melting from their face. These elements make the eye feel evocative and pressurizing, reminiscent of the movie posters for *Get Out*. All twenty-six eyes are positioned randomly around the mirror with no background or foreground to stabilize them. Instead, by virtue of the fact that they're straight on the mirror, they seem to levitate in the viewer's surroundings.

The eyes represent both windows and doors to my identity: a wide-open, people-pleasing self alongside an unforthcoming, self-contained self. In a 2021 journal article, art historian and iconographer Todor Mitrović grounds both of these usages of eyes in his exploration of eyes in Byzantine art. Mitrović's essay perfectly captures the duality and contradiction of the sense of self I set out to portray, and it really helped provide a conceptual foundation for how I could harmoniously express both sides of my identity at once.

Mitrović explains how eyes in Byzantine art are considered inherently duplicitous because they are represented in black and white, the opposite ends of the color spectrum.² He describes how the pupil is like a black hole, and although eye contact causes one to feel understood and close to another human, it is truly just staring into empty blackness; no matter how hard one tries, "the 'inner' content of any human is never absolutely available to our cognitive powers."² Mitrović characterizes this paradox as simultaneous "cognitive openness and restriction." In other words, eyes are both windows and doors to the soul, and so, they are the perfect symbol to express me. They are a mediator that bridges the gap between both sides of my sense of self.

One source I referenced that conveys strictly the elucidatory nature of eyes is Auguste Toulmouche's 1866 oil painting *The Reluctant Bride*.³

² Mitrović, Todor. "The Epiphany of the Eye." *Orthodox Arts Journal*, June 15, 2021. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://orthodoxartsjournal.org/the-epiphany-of-the-eye/>.

³ Wikimedia Foundation. "The Reluctant Bride." Wikipedia. Last modified February 6, 2024. Accessed April 25, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Reluctant_Bride.



The painting depicts a bride-to-be, dressed in a wedding gown and surrounded by three women who kiss her on the forehead and hold her hand. While the bride appears physically relaxed, her eyes tell a different story. With a piercing gaze at the viewer, she expresses an inner dread and rage. In this painting, eyes act as a plea for help, a command for the viewer to get her out of that room—a window to the bride's inner landscape, revealing what her expression and body language do not. This painting was particularly informative for my self-portrait because it demonstrates how confessional eyes can be as a symbol in art. In my portrait, while I don't necessarily use eyes to convey inner hostility like Toulmouche, I use them to make the spectator feel as though I am revealing my inner landscape to them, as though I am opening my identity up to their interpretation and criticism, which bolsters the people-pleasing nature of my portrait.

Additionally, the positioning of the eyes in my portrait reinforces this component of my sense of self. Instead of concentrating the eyes at my own eye level, I distributed them all across the mirror, from the center to the furthest corners. This makes it so that, if the mirror is hung on a wall, every viewer who approaches it will perceive a different eye first. Average-height people might first make eye contact with the eyes at the center of the mirror and perceive a dramatic, temperamental self. Shorter people would focus on the lower eyes and perceive an exhausted, exasperated self. As a result, every viewer would have a different viewing experience and would discern a different sense of self articulated in my portrait. This creates a reactive, ever-changing sense of self that speaks to my people-pleasing nature, claiming that my identity is a performance, catered specifically to whoever is watching.

The actual styling of the eyes also reveals the performative nature of my sense of self. Instead of striving for hyperrealism, I opted for more nonliteral brushstrokes and varied colors to capture a wide array of emotions and selves. This way, every eye sets a different tone; some portray me to be bored or disgusted, while others portray me to be angry or paranoid. Some utilize colors that are meant to attract attention from the spectator, while others were crafted to, more or less, fade into the background. The facets of identity that the eyes express are simply instances of casting myself into roles that will most appease the viewer when they inevitably try to dissect what the eyes say about me and my emotions. This plays into the idea that women are expected to wear their emotions and vulnerabilities on their sleeves for everyone to see, judge, and approve of. We must emote exactly how society expects us to emote, and we must allow everyone an opinion on these emotions.

In my research about this component of my identity, I found that this tendency to people please is not an uncommon experience for girls and women. Agreeability, selflessness, and perpetual cheer are rewarded before we learn to speak, encouraged so much that they become automatic, subconscious responses.⁴ We don't even realize it, but, according to psychologist Maytal Eyal, "it can feel counterintuitive for [women] to say 'no.'"⁵ Eyal also explains that this behavior is so unnatural and harmful that it "may predispose us to chronic illness and disease."⁵

While I haven't gotten sick from people-pleasing yet, I have found that's exhausting and makes me feel like I lack control. Like everyone has an input in my identity except me. To combat this feeling, I have started defining my identity by the search for self-agency. I sought visual inspiration for self-agency from the following untitled painting in Emilio Villalba's 2018 *No One* collection.⁶

⁴ Payne, Marci. "Where People Pleasing Comes from." Good Therapy. Last modified June 20, 2022. Accessed April 25, 2024. <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/where-people-pleasing-comes-from/>.

⁵ Stillman, Jessica. "A Psychologist's Scary Warning to Women Leaders: Being a People Pleaser Is Making You Physically Sick." Inc. Last modified November 27, 2023. Accessed April 26, 2024. <https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/a-psychologists-scary-warning-to-women-leaders-being-a-people-pleaser-is-making-you-physically-sick.html>.

⁶ Villalba, Emilio. *Untitled, No One Collection*. 2018. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://emiliovillalbaart.com/no-one>.



With an abstract white background that seems clawed at, Villalba depicts himself with dozens of eyes in place of his face. Heavily distorted yet hyper-realistic, the eyes all stare directly at the viewer and appear so different from one another that it's unlikely they could possibly belong to the same person. Yet, it is this nonuniformity that defines Villalba's identity; his many eyes create a sense of conflict and confusion. Their directness also feels intense and confrontational for the viewer, and seemed particularly relevant to my self-portrait. Like Villalba, I wanted to catch the viewer off-guard and make them feel like they couldn't quite grasp what I was trying to express, like they couldn't quite understand my sense of self. To achieve this, I infused each of my eyes with bits and pieces of my identity, yet made them so obscured, so scrambled that the viewer can't make sense of them. For example, one of the eyes features a color-scheme allusion to my favorite music album, and another of the eyes stylistically calls back to a Disney princess drawing I made in elementary school, but the viewers couldn't possibly know that by looking at this portrait for themselves. Most of my identity remains veiled unless I explicitly choose to reveal it. Also, the confrontational nature that I tried to replicate from Villalba further gives me a sense of control over the viewer. Any spectator who tries to perceive my portrait for too long will feel challenged and like they don't have the liberty to appraise my identity.

I learned more about the confrontationality of eye contact from one 2016 study about direct contact versus an averted gaze. Researchers Helene Kreysa, Luise Kessler, and Stefan R. Schweinberger found that temporary eye contact makes its subject feel acknowledged and appreciated, while prolonged contact stimulates the same brain activity as a threat or predator, making it feel aggressive

and confrontational.⁷ Based on this science, the direct eye contact from my self-portrait should generate a sense of provocative hostility. Similar to Villalba's portrait, when a viewer really tries to examine it, they will start to feel uncomfortable, as if I'm staring at them and they must look away in order to avoid direct confrontation. As a result, my self-portrait *asserts dominance* over the viewer, as much as any inanimate object can do so. It doesn't allow a spectator to stare forever, to pass infinite judgments and state how I *should* behave or *should* look. This supports the idea that I am trying to refuse everyone's input into my life and gain control over my identity.

Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, a collection of photographs taken from 1977 to 1980, was my biggest inspiration when articulating this confrontational aspect of my identity.



In a journal article titled "The Woman 69 Times," art historian Anna Kérchy examines the photographs and explains how Sherman architects a sense of self that critiques the constant need for women to make themselves a spectacle and appease those around them.⁸ *Untitled Film Stills* consists of sixty-nine photographs, wherein Sherman dresses up in makeup and costume to inhabit several stereotypical female archetypes or fabricated selves. Kérchy describes how these various selves turn Sherman's body into a "carnavalesque" "infinity of mirrors" because Sherman is a "woman who is playing the role of a woman playing the role of a woman."⁸ Kérchy also explains that Sherman's identity is cleverly performative, ambiguous, and so intertwined with character that it is impossible to tell where Sherman starts and her role ends, which perfectly critiques the shifting, mutable self that patriarchal societies necessitate. Women are not allowed to simply exist as themselves, but they must perform and shapeshift to appease whoever they interact with at any given moment. Sherman's ridicule of this idea really resonates with my sense of self. While *Untitled Film Stills* acknowledges the performative selves that women, including me, have historically relied on, her dramatic and caricaturistic portrayal suggests that women should make a mockery of people-pleasing, using these

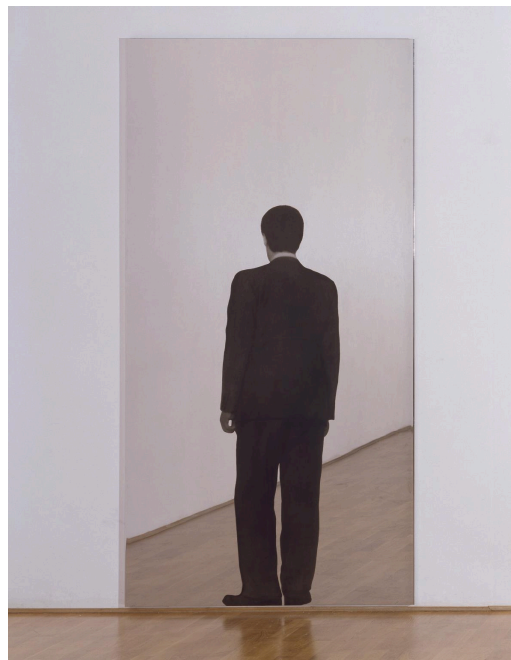
⁷ Kreysa, Helene, Luise Kessler, and Stefan R. Schweinberger. "Direct Speaker Gaze Promotes Trust in Truth-Ambiguous Statements." *PLOS One* 11 (September 19, 2016). Accessed April 5, 2024.

⁸ Kérchy, Anna. "The Woman 69 Times: Cindy Sherman's 'Untitled Film Stills.'" *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 9, no. 1 (2003). JSTOR.

behaviors, which were encouraged to quash their authenticity, for empowerment and self-agency. Women should subvert stereotypes and expectations surrounding femininity and annex them for power in this patriarchal society. This notion really made me consider how I could similarly subvert eyes, a manifestation of people-pleasing in my portrait, and simultaneously use them as vehicles for self-agency.

In my portrait, I utilize a mirror to explore the contradiction between people-pleasing and withholding my identity from the world to gain self-agency. At first, I wanted to paint my portrait on a typical canvas, but after learning about the history of mirrors in art, I realized that they were the perfect medium to reinforce my sense of self.

“Standing Man” by Michelangelo Pistoletto (1962, 1982) was my chief inspiration for mirrors as a medium.⁹



The artwork features a photograph of a suited figure, printed to be life-size and then glued onto a tall, narrow mirror. In a museum installation, the work sits on the floor to seem like a doorway or an extension of the real world. However, Pistoletto printed the man's photo in black and white so that, when a viewer moves closer, they recognize he is only a photo, and the illusion shatters. This dichotomy between reality and deception was Pistoletto's purpose.⁹ He designed this piece to encourage engagement from a viewer and play on a mirror's invisibility and reproductive properties. Pistoletto believed that using a mirror as the medium for his work turned it into a mediator rather than

⁹ Pistoletto, Michelangelo. *Standing Man*. 1962, 1982. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/pistoletto-standing-man-t12186>.

an originator of creative thought; it wouldn't be complete without interaction from an audience. This message really aligns with the people-pleasing self I aim to convey. Mirrors constantly change depending on a viewer's engagement, which parallels the way my identity shifts to appease people around me, almost reflecting back at them what they wish to see.

Virginia Woolf's representation of mirrors across her works also provides support for how mirrors support an accommodating sense of self. In a 2001 journal article, history, cinema, and art professor Hsiu-Chuang Deppman dissects looking glasses in Woolf's 1939 biographical essay "A Sketch of the Past." Deppman hones in on a moment in Woolf's childhood when she looked into the mirror and felt that a "strong feeling of guilt seemed naturally attached to it."¹⁰ Deppman uses this instance to suggest that, to Woolf, mirrors are an "oppressive apparatus" that induces self-doubt, humiliation, and fear in women.¹⁰ Deppman traces this belief back to "A Room of One's Own," which Woolf penned a decade earlier. In this essay, Woolf explains how women function as looking glasses for men, with their primary function in society being to boost men's egos. Women are supposed to reflect men's desires back at them and make themselves seem generally incompetent so that men can feel better about their own achievements. This historical context for mirrors made them the clear choice of medium for my piece; they represent the deep-rooted desire for women to appease men, thus *reflecting* my portrait's goal of appealing the viewer.

However, I also wanted my use of a mirror to convey the deception and contradiction inherent to my sense of self. While Deppman's reading of looking glasses throughout Woolf's literature aligns with a portion of my identity, it doesn't speak at all to my desire to gain self-agency. I wanted to make sure the mirror could also represent how I deceive the spectator by withholding aspects of myself and presenting a curated, limited self instead.

To support this idea, I referenced art curator, director, and professor Giacinto Di Pietrantonio's more modern perspective on mirrors as a symbol in art. Almost a century after Woolf's writings, Di Pietrantonio doesn't view mirrors through the lens of feminism, but rather through a lens of reality and deception.¹¹ He claims that, despite popular belief, mirrors don't present reality at face value but rather transform it. When people look into the mirror, their hopes for what they *want* to see impact what they actually do see. Di Pietrantonio's perspective taught me how mirrors are inherently deceptive, concealing and distorting aspects of the truth for the spectator without their knowing. Relying on this idea, I wanted the mirror in my piece to convince the viewer that they see the truth, that they have full access to my identity when in reality, I am deceiving them. I am presenting only a

¹⁰ Deppman, Hsiu-Chuang. "Rereading the Mirror Image: Looking-Glasses, Gender, and Mimeticism in Virginia Woolf's Writing." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 31, no. 1 (2001): 31-64. JSTOR.

¹¹ Di Pietrantonio, Giacinto. "The Mirror as a Symbol and Metaphor in Art and Modern Society." IBSA Foundation for Scientific Research. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://www.ibsafoundation.org/en/about>.

fragment of myself in the eyes and withholding the rest, which gives me power over myself and the viewer.



Tokyo Rumando's 2014 photograph *Orphee no. k1* is a perfect example of using mirrors for self-agency and deception, which I referenced when selecting the specific mirror to use for my portrait. The photo depicts Rumando putting on lipstick before a mirror, except the woman who stares back at her is a distorted version of herself.¹² The mirror presents an alternate identity for Rumando—a woman who is confident and self-possessed. Instead of black hair tied back, the mirror woman has a choppy blonde bob that screams *bold* and *commanding*. Instead of tilting her head sideways in an unassertive position, the mirror woman stares straight ahead with her chin tilted forward, almost as if challenging the viewer. I found this source compelling because Rumando uses a mirror to empower her sense of self. The mirror imbues her with her desired qualities and allows her to take control of how she wishes to be perceived. I similarly wanted to use my mirror as a tool to curate my image, to create a disconnect between the viewer's perception and the reality of my identity. Through this disconnect, I gain privacy and independence from societal expectations. To allude to this disconnect and deception for the spectator, I chose to use a mirror that had a modern, amorphous shape. It seems warped and distorted, almost like one of Salvador Dalí's famous clocks. I wanted it to raise alarm bells and signal to the viewer that not everything they discern from my portrait is what it seems.

My self-portrait explores my internal conflict between the tendency to people-please and the desire for autonomy. It represents the formation of my identity in a world that imposes stringent societal expectations yet makes them impossible to meet. Hopefully, as I get older, I will stop catering to the critics and caring so much about external validation. Hopefully, I will lean more into my individuality and self-authority, find freedom in defining myself exactly how I wish to be defined. As I

¹² Rumando, Tokyo. *Orphee No. K1*. Photograph. 2014. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://ibashogallery.com/artists/70-tokyo-rumando/works/1396-tokyo-rumando-orphee-no.-k1-2014/>.

come to the end of this paper, I reflect on Oscar Wilde's "The Critic as Artist" one final time. I realize that Wilde may be right that it is the critic who brings art to life. But I'm already living, so why should I care about critics?

Bibliography

Buckley, F.H. "Perfectionism." *Supreme Court Economic Review* 13 (2005): 133-63. JSTOR.

In this journal article, which serves as a secondary source, F.H. Buckley, a law professor at George Mason University, explains the two different types of perfectionism: private and social. Private perfectionism is when an individual restricts their choices for their own benefit, usually out of fear of self-harm, while social perfectionism is when an individual restricts their choices for the common good, usually out of fear that they are a moral imposition on society. Buckley claims that social perfectionists believe "the state has a role in promoting personal virtue," and as a result, they adapt themselves to better fit into society. Oftentimes, these individuals worry that their actions or aspects of their identity are burdensome to their community, so they warp their sense of self. More specifically, they try to appear more productive, moral, and successful in order to elevate society's perception of them. I find this source particularly convincing because it dissects and examines perfectionism through the lens of legal theory and presents several arguments from philosophers. I plan to use this source to explain my adaptive sense of self and root my people-pleasing tendencies in social perfectionism. All of the different senses of self that I will present in my portrait reveal my desire to impress those around me, and this source helps explain this behavior. (220 words)

Deppman, Hsiu-Chuang. "Rereading the Mirror Image: Looking-Glasses, Gender, and Mimeticism in Virginia Woolf's Writing." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 31, no. 1 (2001): 31-64. JSTOR.

In this 2001 journal article, which serves as a secondary source, film and literature professor Hsiu-Chuang Deppman explores looking glasses across Virginia Woolf's writings. Challenging most critics who claim that women have "amicable" and "truthful" relationships with mirrors in Woolf's texts, Hsiu-Chuang Deppman asserts that looking glasses induce self-doubt, humiliation, and fear in women. For evidence, Hsiu-Chuang Deppman cites Woolf's 1939 biographical essay "A Sketch of the Past," wherein Woolf recounts a moment as a little girl when she looked into the mirror and felt that a "strong feeling of guilt seemed naturally attached to it." Hsiu-Chuang Deppman concludes that mirrors are an "oppressive apparatus" that reinforces men's superiority and women's inferiority. This source is particularly convincing because Hsiu-Chuang Deppman is a renowned professor of history, art, and women in cinema, and her argument aligns with the conclusions of Woolf's "A Room of One's

Own." I plan to use this source to explain my choice of a mirror instead of a traditional canvas for my self-portrait. Hsiu-Chuang Deppman provides great context for how mirrors perpetuate gender roles and how women have historically used mirrors to distort themselves to appease those around them. (192 words)

Di Pietrantonio, Giacinto. "The Mirror as a Symbol and Metaphor in Art and Modern Society." IBSA Foundation for Scientific Research. Accessed April 5, 2024.

<https://www.ibsafoundation.org/en/about>.

In this secondary-source article, art curator, director, and professor Giacinto Di Pietrantonio discusses the mirror as a symbol in art. He claims that, despite popular belief, mirrors don't present reality at face value but rather transform it. When people look into the mirror, their hopes for what they *want* to see impact what they actually do see. As a result, mirrors offer an alternate, idealized reality. Additionally, Di Pietrantonio remarks on the transitory nature of all art that features mirrors; mirrors present an image that constantly changes depending on lighting and the angle at which it is viewed. This source is particularly convincing because Di Pietrantonio is one of the most experienced figures in modern Italian art, and he grounds his argument in both a scientific and artistic context by referencing several neuroscientists and artists. I aim to use this source alongside "Standing Man" by Michelangelo Pistoletto to inform my reactive, ever-changing sense of self. Di Pietrantonio's ideas about how lighting and angle can drastically change the image in the mirror particularly resonate with me, and I hope to use these principles to guide the way I paint my eyes on the mirror. Hopefully, depending on the angle from which the mirror is viewed, the spectator will be met with eye contact from a different eye, creating a different sense of self. (222 words)

Kérchy, Anna. "The Woman 69 Times: Cindy Sherman's 'Untitled Film Stills.'" *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 9, no. 1 (2003). JSTOR.

In this 2003 Journal article, which serves as a secondary source, art historian Anna Kérchy examines Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, a collection of photographs taken from 1977 to 1980. Kérchy first remarks on the title, noting how the word *untitled* paradoxically allows the series to escape naming, which immediately gives it a subversive and *unpindownable* quality. This quality carries through the photos themselves, wherein Sherman poses in makeup and costume to inhabit several fabricated selves. Kérchy describes how "the body becomes a space of an infinity of mirrors" because Sherman is a "woman who is playing the role of a woman playing the role of a woman." Kérchy acknowledges that some believe this photo series perpetuates the gender binary, but she believes that the series is clearly ironic and critical of the

male gaze. According to Kérchy, Sherman's identity is cleverly performative, ambiguous, and so intertwined with character that it is impossible to tell where Sherman starts and her role ends, which perfectly highlights the shifting, mutable self that patriarchal societies necessitate. This source is particularly convincing because Kérchy cites several quotes from Sherman as well as other art historians to support her ideas and ground them in historical feminism. I find Kérchy's comments on a performative, mutable self most intriguing, so I hope to use her ideas to guide the performative nature of self which I aim to express. (234 words)

Kreysa, Helene, Luise Kessler, and Stefan R. Schweinberger. "Direct Speaker Gaze Promotes Trust in Truth-Ambiguous Statements." *PLOS One* 11 (September 19, 2016). Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0162291&>.

In this secondary-source journal article, written in 2016, Helene Kreysa, Luise Kessler, and Stefan R. Schweinberger analyze the impact of direct eye contact versus an averted gaze. The researchers conclude that, in the context of lying, most people think direct eye contact is a sign of trustworthiness, but in reality, liars often overcompensate with direct eye contact. The researchers found that this discrepancy occurs because society assumes that those who hold eye contact are less nervous and, thus, more attractive and likable. Eye contact is also associated with feelings of familiarity since eye contact makes its subject feel acknowledged and appreciated, which prompts the same brain activity that one experiences when they are with close friends and family. The article also raises a caveat about eye contact; if one gazes at you for a prolonged period of time, it begins to feel aggressive and confrontational. With this information in mind, I will paint the eyes to stare directly at the viewer. This will symbolize my self-portrait's aim to evoke trust and familiarity in the spectator while being duplicitous. However, acknowledging the article's final point about the length of eye contact, I will work with softer, less hyper-realistic brush strokes to minimize the potentially piercing, aggressive effect, since this would directly contradict my overly agreeable sense of self. (217 words)

Mitrović, Todor. "The Epiphany of the Eye." *Orthodox Arts Journal*, June 15, 2021. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://orthodoxartsjournal.org/the-epiphany-of-the-eye/>.

In this 2021 journal article, which serves as a secondary source, art historian and iconographer Todor Mitrović examines the depiction of eyes in Byzantine art. Mitrović explains how eyes through the lens of Byzantine culture are inherently duplicitous because they are represented in black and white, the opposite ends of the color spectrum. He describes how the pupil is like a black hole, and although eye contact causes one to feel understood and close to another human, it is truly just staring into empty blackness; no matter how hard one tries, "the 'inner' content of any human is never absolutely available to our cognitive powers." Mitrović

characterizes this paradox as simultaneous "cognitive openness and restriction." I find this source particularly convincing because its author is one of the most well-known historians who specializes in iconography, and he situates his ideas in various cultures and artworks. I aim to use Mitrović's understanding to support how I use eyes to act as both windows and doors to my soul. In my self-portrait, I will let the spectator see and infer certain aspects of my identity while concealing other aspects. (187 words)

Payne, Marci. "Where People Pleasing Comes from." Good Therapy. Last modified June 20, 2022. Accessed April 25, 2024.
<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/where-people-pleasing-comes-from/>.

"People-Pleasing." Psychology Today. Accessed April 25, 2024.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/people-pleasing>.

Pistoletto, Michelangelo. *Standing Man*. 1962, 1982. Accessed April 5, 2024.
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/pistoletto-standing-man-t12186>.
 "Standing Man" by Michelangelo Pistoletto (1962, 1982), which serves as a primary source, is a photograph taken of a suited figure from behind, printed to be life-sized, and applied onto a mirror. In a museum installation, the mirror sits on the floor to seem more like a doorway or an extension of the real world. However, Pistoletto printed the man's photo in black and white so that, when a viewer moves closer, they recognize he is only a photo, and the illusion shatters. This dichotomy between reality and deception was Pistoletto's purpose. He designed this piece to encourage engagement from a viewer and play on a mirror's invisibility and reproductive properties. More specifically, Pistoletto believed that a mirror was the perfect medium for this work because it turns the art into a mediator rather than an originator of creative thought; it only exists because it has an audience. This source is particularly impactful because it relies on mirrors as both vehicles for truth and deceit, and its existence constantly changes depending on a viewer's engagement. I plan to use this source to justify the use of a mirror as my choice medium. Pistoletto's message and philosophy will help to express the reflective, people-pleasing aspects of my identity in my self-portrait. (210 words)

Rumando, Tokyo. *Orphee No. K1*. Photograph. 2014. Accessed April 5, 2024.
<https://ibashogallery.com/artists/70-tokyo-rumando/works/1396-tokyo-rumando-orphee-no.-k1-2014/>.

This photograph, which serves as a primary source, was taken and altered by Tokyo Rumando as part of her *Orphee* collection in 2014. The photo depicts Rumando putting on lipstick before a mirror, except the woman who stares back at her is a distorted version of herself. The mirror presents an alternate identity for Rumando—a woman who is confident and self-possessed. Instead of black hair tied back, the mirror woman has a choppy blonde bob that screams *bold* and *commanding*. Instead of tilting her head sideways in an unassertive position, the mirror woman stares straight ahead with her chin tilted forward, almost as if challenging the viewer. I find this source compelling because mirrors typically reflect the real world back in its true form, except here, Rumando uses them to deceive and create an enhanced sense of self. I plan to use this source as inspiration for the duplicity and unreliability of my self-portrait. Similar to Rumando, the sense of self I hope to depict in the mirror won't be entirely accurate, but rather a dramatized sense of self that is more intriguing and appealing to a viewer. (189 words)

Schotter, Jesse. "The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection." Yale Modernism Lab. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://campuspress.yale.edu/modernismlab/the-lady-in-the-looking-glass-a-reflection/>. In this secondary-source essay, professor of English and film theory Jesse Schotter analyzes Virginia Woolf's 1929 short story "The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection." According to Schotter, Woolf initially claims that women should not hang mirrors in their homes because they reveal private truths and incriminating glimpses into one's identity. Woolf's narrator remains out of the mirror and, as a result, seems ambiguous, watchful, and indistinct to the reader, whereas the furniture that appears in the mirror is personified and characterized very clearly. This suggests that the mirror provides clarity and understanding. However, the narrator slowly reveals that this apparent understanding is truly an illusion, a deception inherent to looking glasses. Throughout the story, strange black forms appear in the mirror, and Schotter claims that they represent the dichotomy between one's external appearance and their inner, metaphorical self. This source supports my research because it suggests that, while mirrors seem to present a realistic view of the world, they really present a limited, deceptive view. I hope to bring this duplicity to my self-portrait and focus on how mirrors cannot accurately depict one's inner self. (187 words)

Stillman, Jessica. "A Psychologist's Scary Warning to Women Leaders: Being a People Pleaser Is Making You Physically Sick." Inc. Last modified November 27, 2023. Accessed April 26, 2024.

<https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/a-psychologists-scary-warning-to-women-leaders-being-a-people-pleaser-is-making-you-physically-sick.html>.

"Symbolism: Mirrors and Symbolism: Reflecting on Deeper Meanings." Faster Capital. Last modified March 8, 2024. Accessed April 26, 2024.

<https://fastercapital.com/content/Symbolism--Mirrors-and-Symbolism--Reflecting-on-Deeper-Meanings.html>.

Villalba, Emilio. *Untitled, No One Collection*. 2018. Accessed April 5, 2024.

<https://emiliovillalbaart.com/no-one>.

In this untitled painting from Emilio Villalba's 2018 *No One* collection, which serves as a primary source, the artist depicts himself with heavily distorted yet hyper-realistic features. His face consists almost entirely of eyes, which all stare directly at the viewer and appear so different from one another that it's unlikely they could possibly belong to the same person. Yet, it is this nonuniformity that defines Villalba's identity; his many eyes create a sense of conflict and emotional clashing. Their directness also feels intense and confrontational for the viewer. Villalba has expressed that his goal with this painting was to explore the dissonance and distortion that arise when one opens oneself to outside influence. I aim to use this source as inspiration for the multitude of eyes I plan to paint. However, while I like the uncanny atmosphere created by the eyes, I don't want my self-portrait to feel so confrontational, so I will try to avoid the tightness and hyperrealism of Villalba's painting. Instead, I will lean more into the nonuniformity that he creates, aiming to depict conflicting emotions. (180 words)

Wikimedia Foundation. "The Reluctant Bride." Wikipedia. Last modified February 6, 2024. Accessed April 25, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Reluctant_Bride.

Wilde, Oscar. "The Critic as Artist." Editorial. Literature Network. Last modified 1891. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/E800003-007/text001.html>.

In this primary-source essay, Oscar Wilde explores a critic's role in art and creativity. Through a dialogue between two characters, Wilde deduces that criticism and viewership are what truly bring art to life. He believes that the critic uses art as inspiration for work of their own, which transcends the object of their criticism, and that the critic distills "the cumbersome mass of creative work" into "a finer essence." He also expresses that critics are so successful at producing this meaning because they are "unfair, insincere, and not rational." In other words, their perpetually biased view, the lens through which they view the world, is what generates true

creative significance. He goes so far as to say that this subjectivity is their goal: "The primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not." This source is particularly impactful because Oscar Wilde is a writer with one of the most adamant yet distinctive aesthetic philosophies, and his views on criticism and spectatorship have induced discourse from many of his creative peers. I plan to use this source to support the interactive nature of my self-portrait. My portrait will pander to the spectator and almost appear as they want to see it. In a sense, I am claiming that my sense of self changes depending on who is watching, which aligns with Wilde's idea that art's meaning is really shaped by the critic and not the creator. (244 words)

"Windows to the Soul: Exploring the Symbolism of Eyes in Art." Ophthalmology Breaking News.

Accessed April 26, 2024.

<https://ophthalmologybreakingnews.com/windows-to-the-soul--exploring-the-symbolism-of-eyes-in-art#power-of-gaze>.