

The Mask & The Mirror

Curated by Shirin Neshat

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

568 WEST 25TH STREET | NEW YORK NY 10001

THE MASK AND THE MIRROR

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November 3 - December 21, 2011

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Artist self-portraits have historically fascinated the public eye as they have become artists' most personal and intimate expressions, but this trend has taken a particularly big turn in the past two decades among contemporary artists. As a young art student in the mid 1980s, I remember developing an obsession with the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo and her self-portraits. I was astonished by how her powerful paintings pulled the viewer into her private world to witness the beauty and the horror she experienced in her personal life. Through the depiction of her own body and the use of visual metaphors, Frida Kahlo let loose her emotional and psychological anguish, her spiritual and moral orientation, and most importantly she revealed that art operates somewhere between the artist's conscious and subconscious. Ultimately, Frida Kahlo became the narrator of her own story: a story both tragic and heroic.

In 1993, when I began my photographic self-portraits series called *Women of Allah*, I began to pose for my own camera. During the process, I often wondered how my approach and motivations compared with Frida Kahlo's, as she had become such an important influence. I came to realize that I did not approach my self-portraits as a form of autobiography; rather, I performed a role. I was the narrator of other people's stories. My subject was the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, and my characters were the warrior Muslim women.

In thinking about curating this exhibition at Leila Heller Gallery, I had no theoretical or academic premise in mind. I simply intended to juxtapose a group of artists from various cultural backgrounds, generations, and professional careers, who have made important contributions in the genre of self-portrait art, through photography, painting, filmmaking, and live performance.

The Mask and The Mirror essentially follows a few popular trends by artists, some of whom are iconic, internationally known names such as Andy Warhol, Robert Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman, Marina Abramović, and Matthew Barney, who have been instrumental in defining the genre of self-portrait and the notion of using the artist's body as a canvas for artistic expression.

Several prominent and mid-career artists whose primary focus is not self-portraits, but have on occasion indulged in incorporating their own physical body into their art are included in this exhibition, such as Y.Z. Kami, Paolo Canevari, Lyle Ashton Harris, Nicky Nodjoumi, Shahram Karimi, Youssef Nabil, and Shahzia Sikander. Finally, there are few emerging artists such as Bahar Sabzevari and Fereidoun Ghaffari whose participation in this exhibition marks their first public showing in New York.

When looking at this diverse group of artists we have gathered, one detects certain conceptual parallels. There are artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Lyle Ashton Harris, Van Leo, Andy Warhol, and Youssef Nabil whose approach to self-portraits have been a way to examine their own obsessions and persona. Matthew Barney is a performance artist who creates mythologies and then embodies his own allegorical characters. The melancholic self-portraits of Y.Z. Kami and Fereidoun Ghaffari share an austere and rather mystical resonance as if to reach toward their own human psyche. Cindy Sherman, Robert Mapplethorpe, Iké Udé, and Van Leo disguise themselves as fictional characters, yet their images are highly suggestive of the artists' own fantasies.

There are several Iranian artists in the exhibition whose self-portraits function as a form of social commentary. These artists' bodies become a canvas to mirror pressing social, political, and cultural crises in their country. Among them are Ramin Haerizadeh and Shahram Karimi whose blunt and unapologetic self-portraits create political satire and ridicule tyranny and people of power. Bahar Sabzevari's self-portraits speak to us about the plight of Iranian women who are pioneering a new form of feminism as a tool of resistance against their authoritarian regime. In contrast, Shahzia Sikander, born in Pakistan, quietly breaks the rules of classic miniature paintings and carefully places herself as a contemporary Pakistani woman within the predictable traditional motifs and narratives.

Ultimately, this exhibition serves as a small glimpse into a long history of artists' self-portraits, which will evolve further and be expanded upon by future generations of artists.



Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence*, 1994
Black & white photograph with ink
Photo taken by Cynthia Preston
© Shirin Neshat
Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

Marina Abramović

Portrait with Falcon 2010

Silver gelatin print

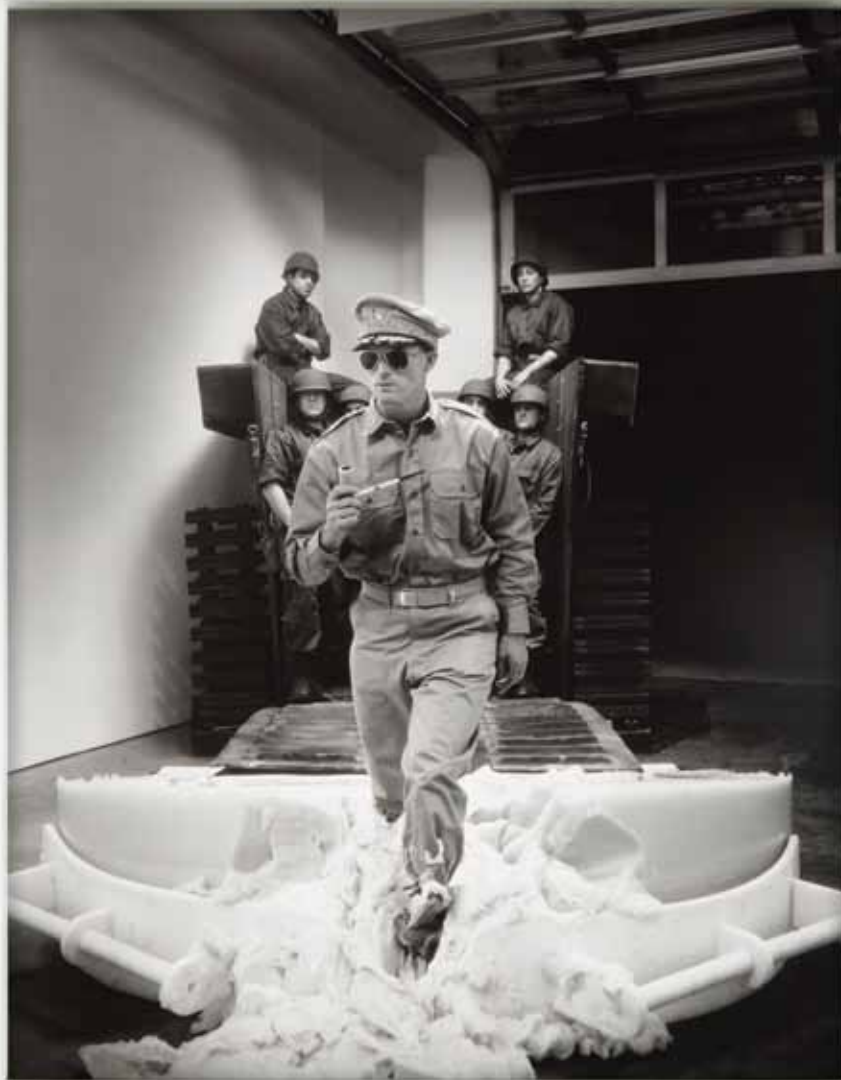
Edition 5 of 25 + 3 APs

12 x 12 in / 30.5 x 30.5 cm

© Marina Abramović

Courtesy of Marina Abramović Archives
and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York





Matthew Barney

Drawing Restraint 13:

Instrument of Surrender 2006

Silver gelatin, chlorobromide print
in self-lubricating plastic frame

AP 1, edition of 6 + 1 AP

15 x 12.6 in / 38 x 32 cm

© Matthew Barney

Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery,
New York and Brussels

Paolo Canevari

Colosso 2002

Black and white print

AP, edition of 3

6.5 x 11.5 in / 16.5 x 29 cm





Fereidoun Ghaffari

Self-Portrait 2010

Oil on canvas

30 x 20 in / 76.2 x 50.8 cm

Ramin Haerizadeh

Untitled 2011

Mixed media collage on paper

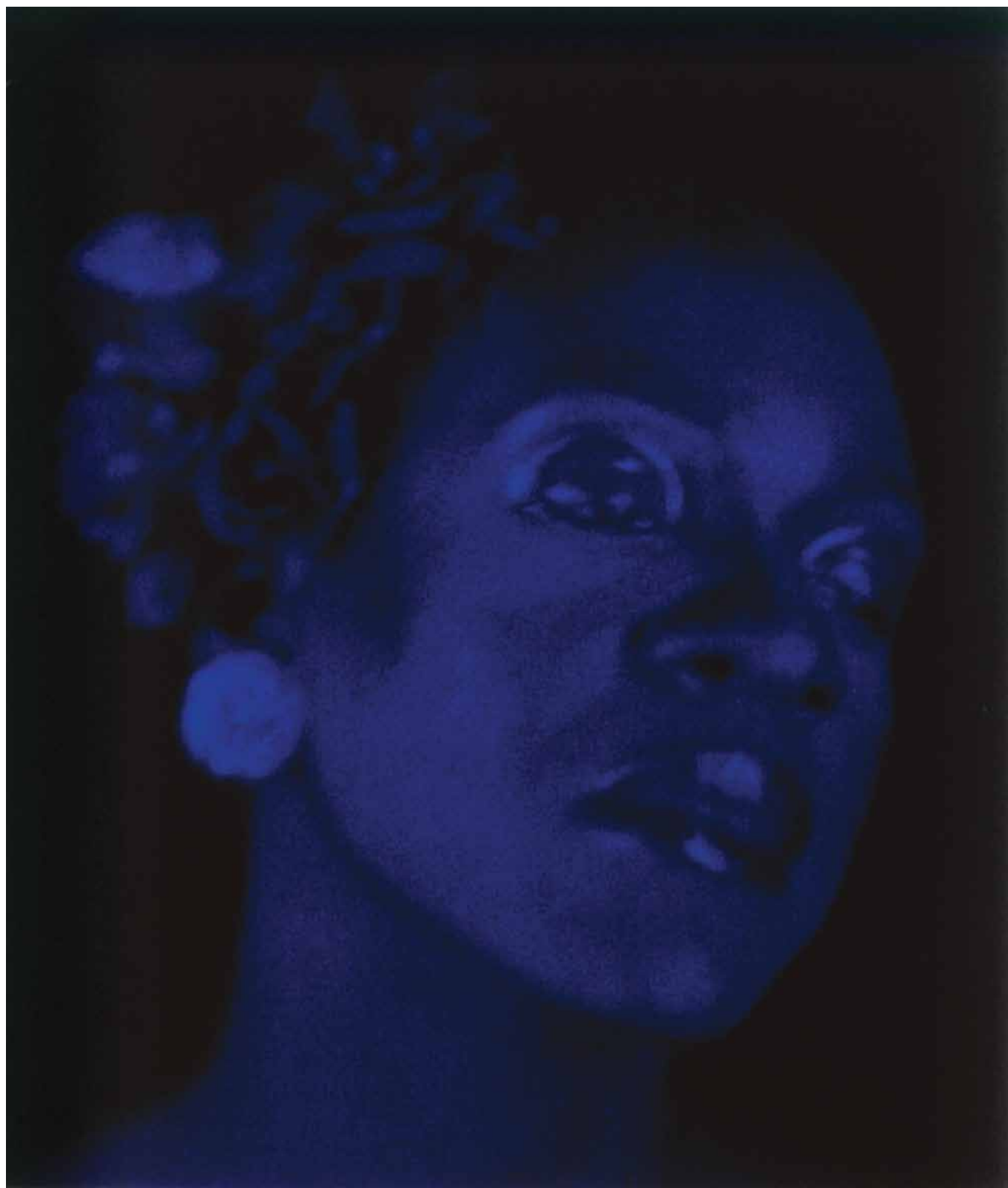
10 x 14 in / 25.5 x 35.5 cm

© Ramin Haerizadeh

Courtesy of Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde

(all images)





Lyle Ashton Harris

Billie Blue 2003

Digital ink jet print

on watercolor paper

Edition 4 of 10

28 x 24 in / 71 x 61 cm

Courtesy of CRG Gallery

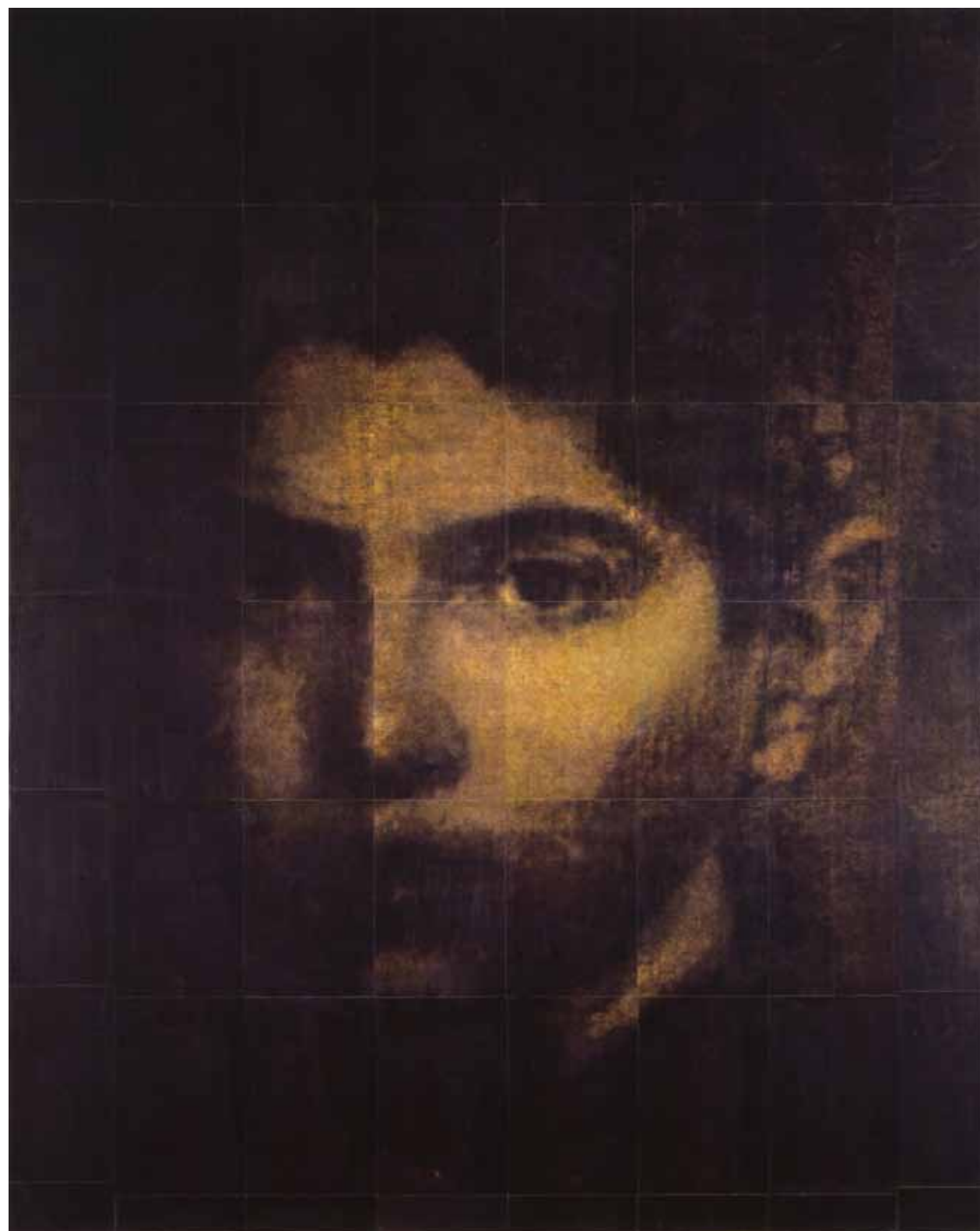
Y.Z. Kami

Self Portrait as a Child (dark portrait) 1991

Oil on photography on canvas

102 x 80 in / 259 x 203 cm

Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery







Shahram Karimi

Self Portrait 2006

Mixed media on old wood

12 x 8 in / 30.5 x 20 cm

(opposite page)

Funeral 2000

Mixed media on canvas

15 x 12 in / 38 x 30.5 cm

Van Leo

Becoming Van Leo

A project by Negar Azimi and Karl Bassil,
Arab Image Foundation

Self-portrait

Cairo, Egypt, June 26, 1941

Self-portrait

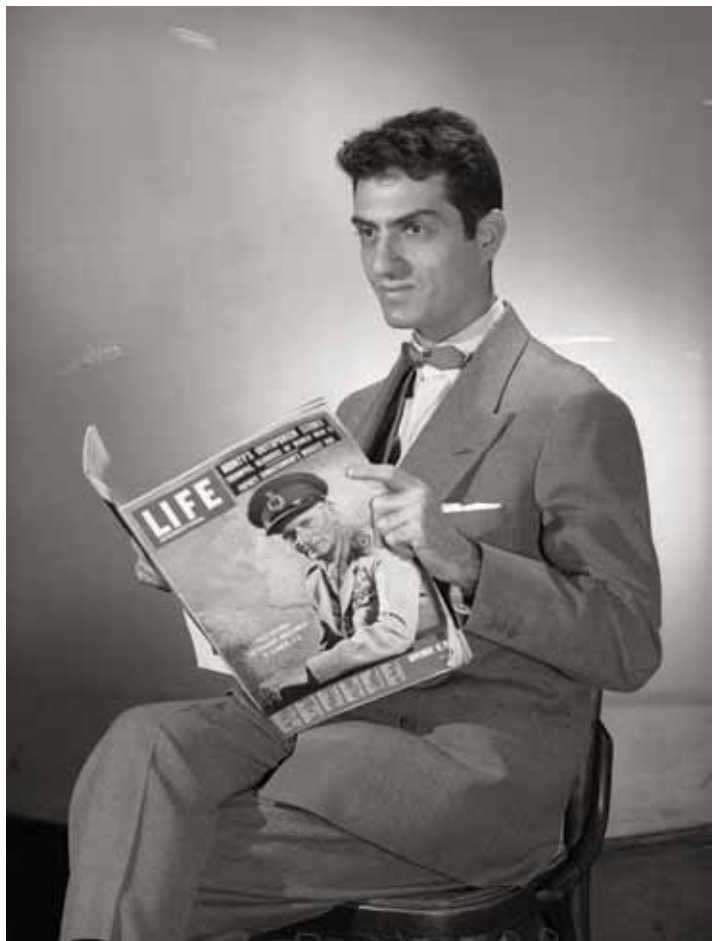
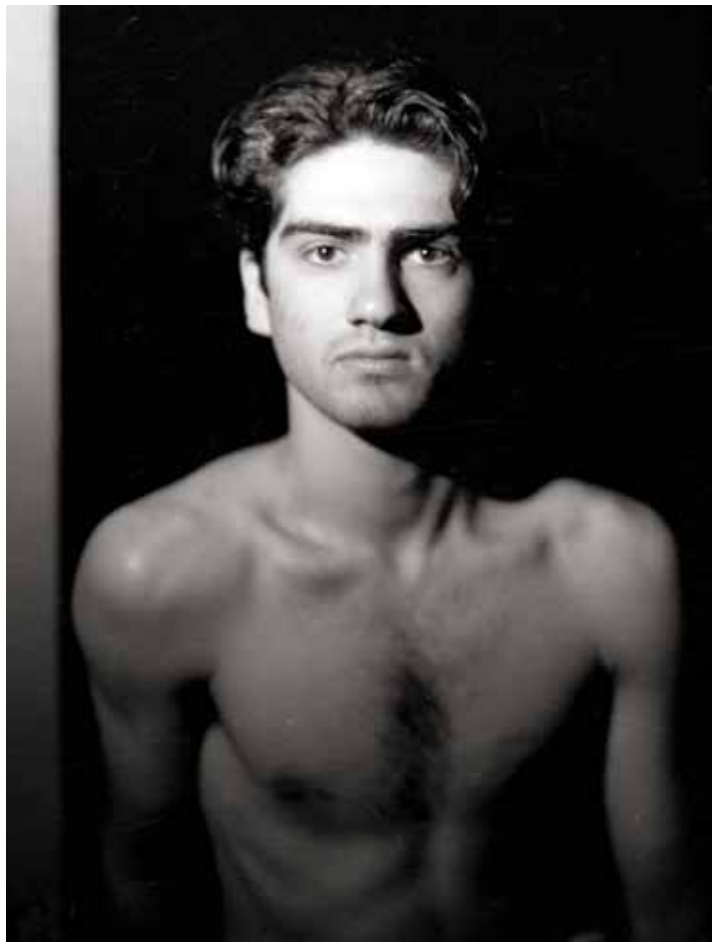
Cairo, Egypt, November 22, 1958

(opposite page)

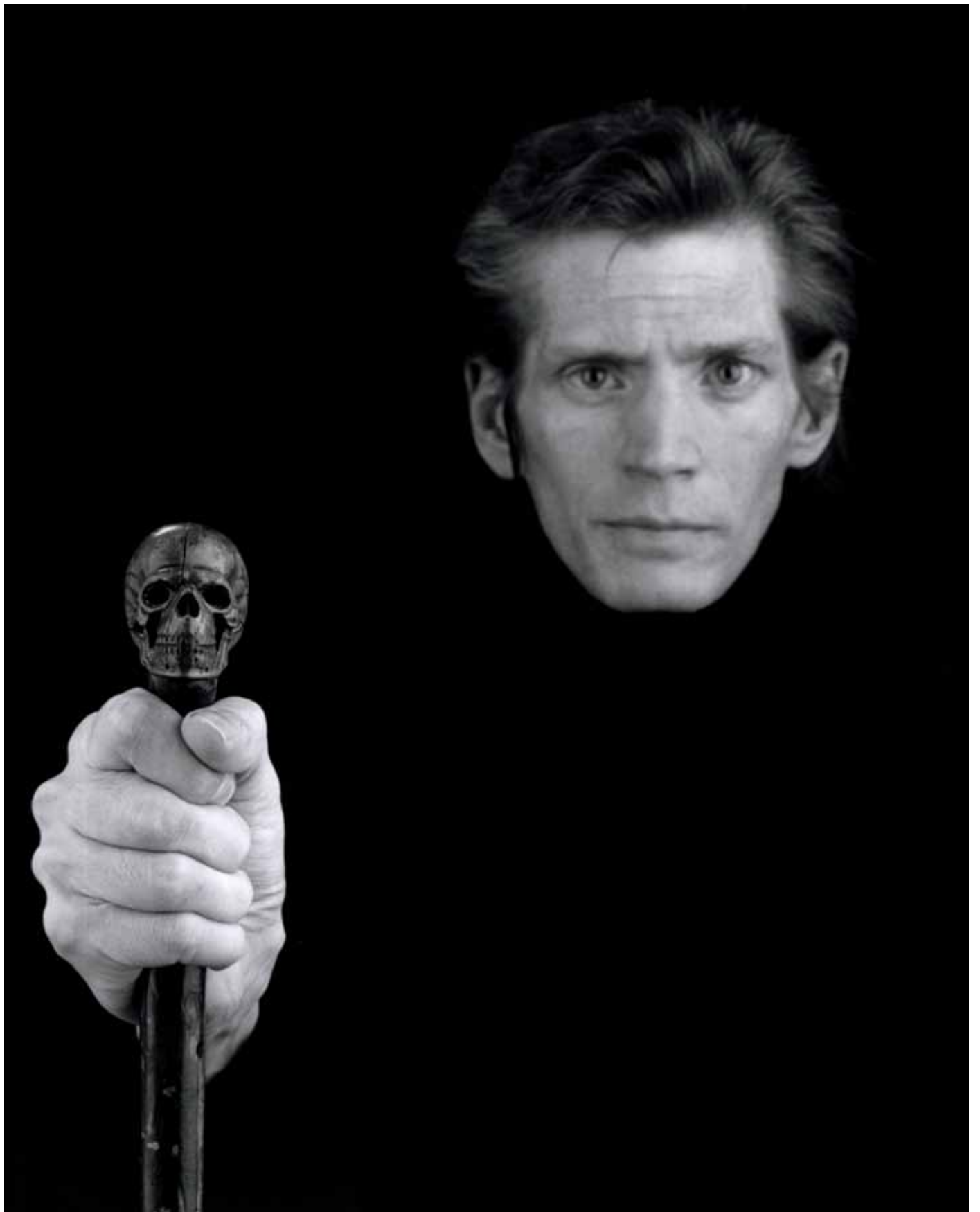
Self-portrait

Cairo, Egypt, February 18, 1944

Collection Arab Image Foundation/
The American University in Cairo
© The American University in Cairo









Robert Mapplethorpe

Self-Portrait 1983

©Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

Used by permission

Courtesy of

Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

Self-Portrait 1980

©Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

Used by permission

Courtesy of

Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

(opposite page)

Self-Portrait 1988

©Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

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Courtesy of

Sean Kelly Gallery, New York



Youssef Nabil

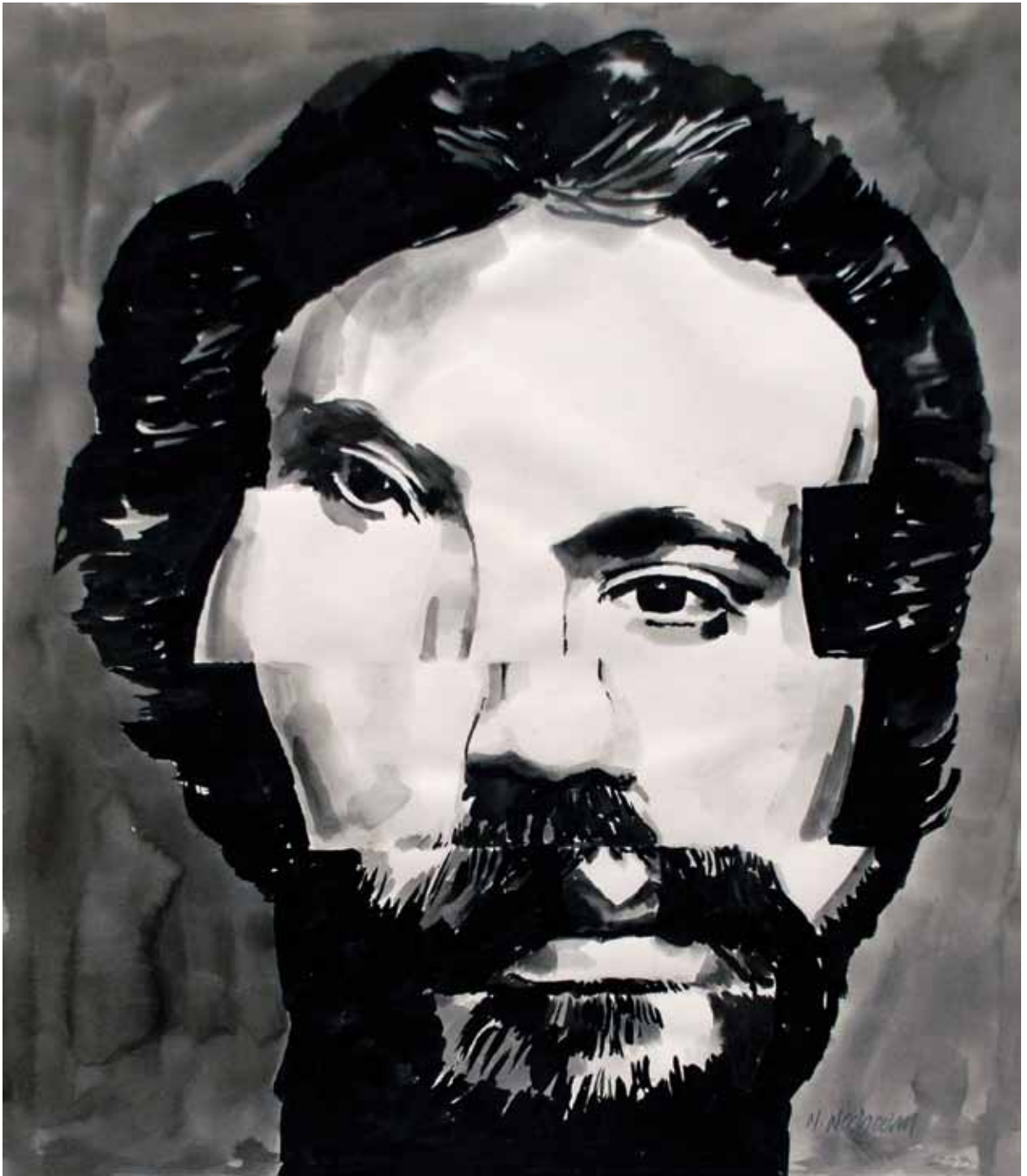
Self Portrait, Istanbul 2009
Hand colored gelatin silver print
10.5 x 15.5 in / 27 x 39 cm
Edition 3 of 10
Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery

Self Portrait with Pyramid, Cairo 2009
Hand colored gelatin silver print
29.5 x 45 in / 75 x 115 cm
Edition 1 of 3
Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery

(opposite page)
Self Portrait with Roots, Los Angeles 2008
Hand colored gelatin silver print
10.5 x 15.5 in / 27 x 39 cm
Edition 6 of 10
Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery









Nicky Nodjoui

Untitled (Self Portrait) 1978
 Monotype
 16 x 12 in / 40.5 x 30.5 cm
 Courtesy of Priska C. Juschka Fine Art



Untitled (Self Portrait) 1998
 Ink on paper
 14 x 11 in / 35.5 x 28 cm
 Courtesy of Priska C. Juschka Fine Art

(opposite page)
Untitled (Self Portrait) 2008
 Ink on paper
 17 x 14 in / 43 x 35.5 cm
 Courtesy of Priska C. Juschka Fine Art

Bahar Sabzevari

Untitled 2011

Acrylic on canvas

30 x 30 in / 76 x 76 cm

Courtesy of the artist





Cindy Sherman

Untitled 2000

Color print

Edition 2 of 6

30 x 20 in / 76 x 51 cm

Courtesy of the Artist
and Metro Pictures

Shahzia Sikander

Reflect 2001

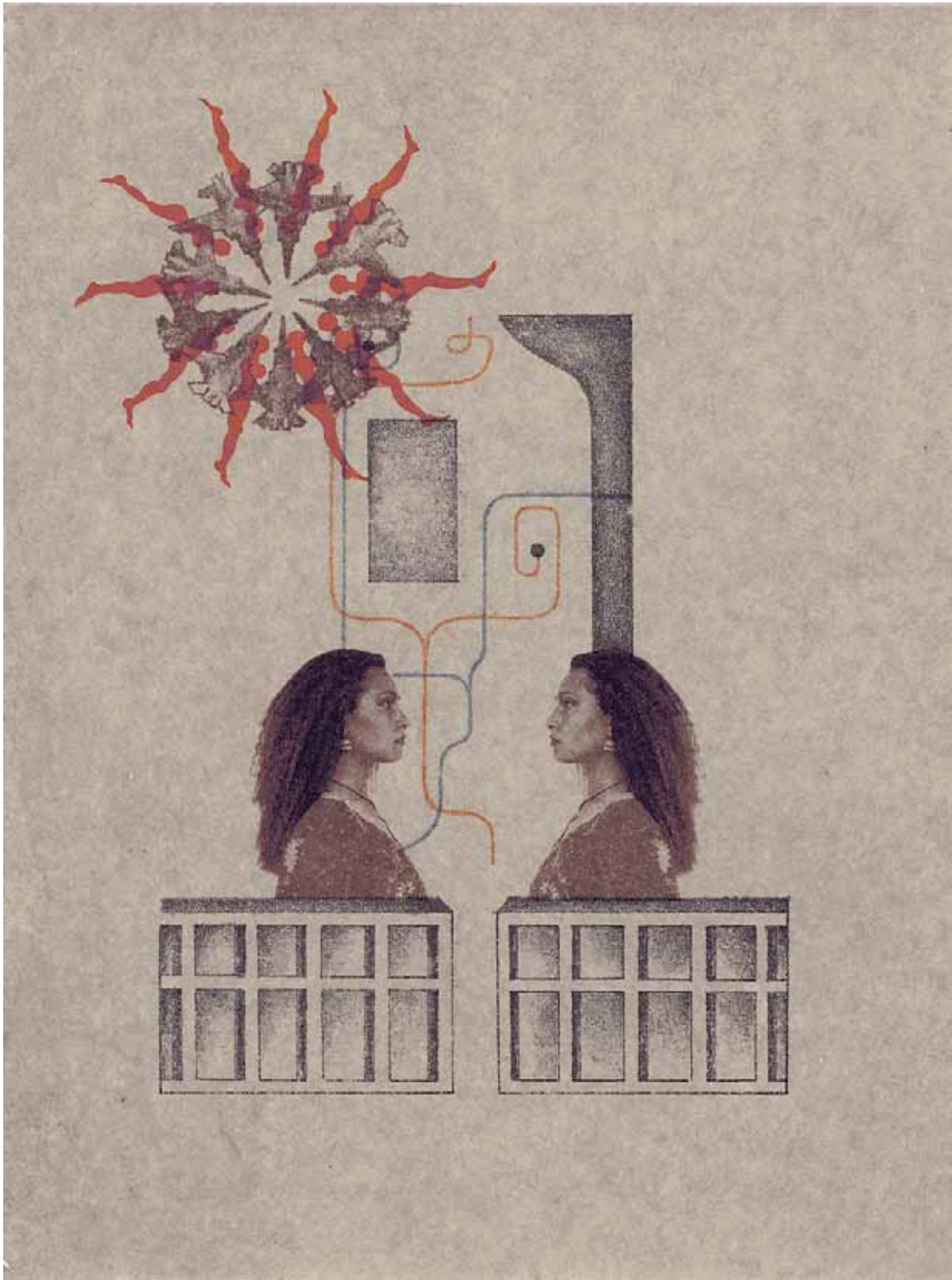
Color photogravure with spit bite
aquatint and soft ground etching
printed on gampi paper chine collé
Edition of 57
10 x 7.5 in / 25.5 x 19 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Images published by Crown Point Press

(opposite page)

Metro 2001

Color photogravure with soft
ground etching printed on gampi
paper chine collé
Edition of 25
10 x 7.5 in / 25.5 x 19 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Images published by Crown Point Press







Iké Udé

Sartorial Anarchy: Untitled #4 2010

Pigment on satin paper

Edition 3 of 3

40 x 36 in / 101.6 x 91.4 cm

Courtesy of the artist

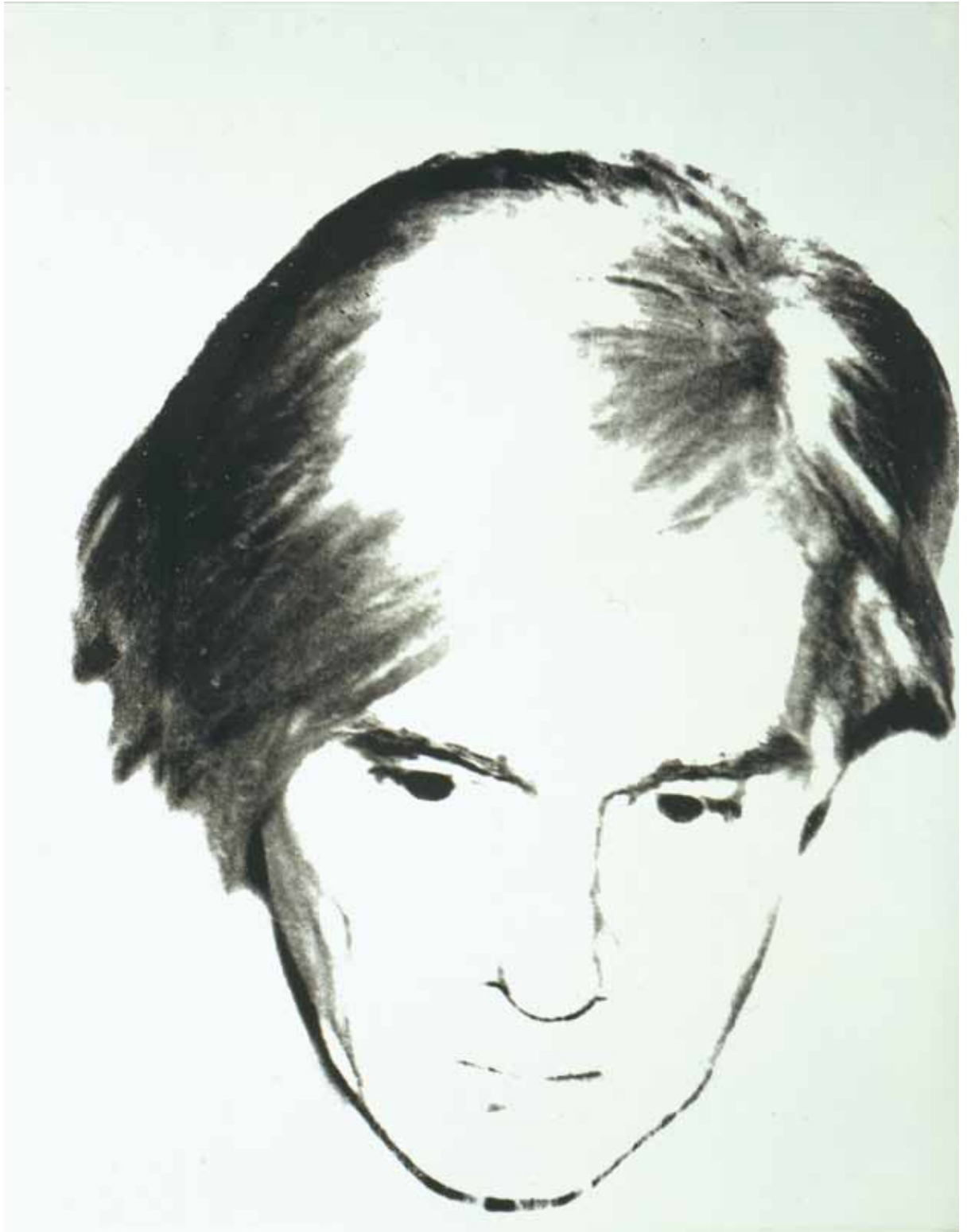
Andy Warhol

Self-Portrait 1977

Screenprint on Curtis Rag paper

45 x 35 in / 114 x 89 cm

© The Andy Warhol Foundation
for the Visual Arts, Inc.



LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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