

no place like
opening: sat april 27th 2024, 5–9pm
exhibition: apr 27th–jun 14th 2024

I am large, I contain multitudes

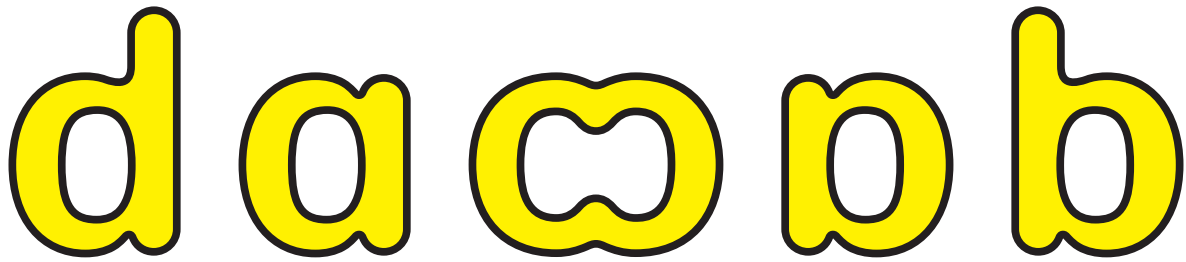
**Song of myself
–Walt Whitman**

One night I learn what I intuitively already know: you can never look into both eyes of another person at the same time. Unless you cover one of your own eyes. That means that you can also never look your own reflection in both eyes at the exact same time. Unless, again, you cover one of your own eyes.

**paula santome
jiwon lee
chris kauffmann
sabrina smaili
emi curty
ilona stutz**

The fact that you always remain a bit of a stranger to yourself thus becomes particularly clear when you look at your own face. But sometimes you don't even need a mirror to become aware of this alienation. Your own body is a territory that you can experience over and over again. A terrain that you can travel through - and also leave. No place is so close and so far away at the same time as your own dwelling made of skin, flesh,

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bones and, above all, water. And if its quality of representation also has to be considered, the question of the "self" naturally becomes particularly complicated - always both highly concrete and abstract.

"But I never looked like that! - How do you know? What is the 'you' you might or might not look like?" writes Roland Barthes and "Even and especially for your own body, you are condemned to the repertoire of its images." And Jacques Lacan also states in his reflections on the "mirror stage" that the supposed recognition of one's own body (in its imagined wholeness) is always also a misrecognition.

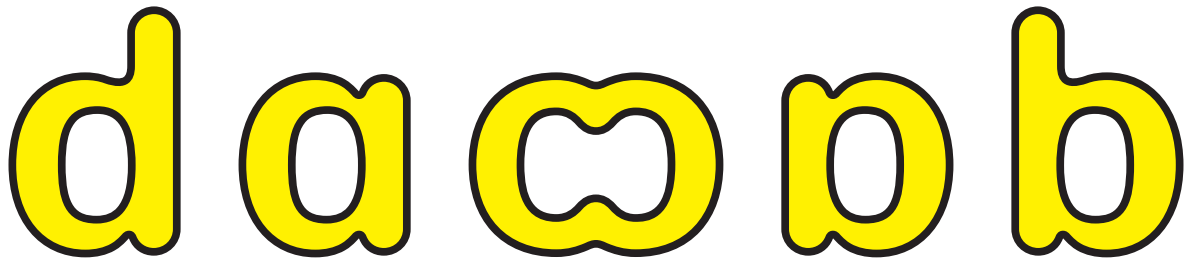
In "no place like", artists find very different answers to the problem of the non-representation of their own self. While some of them focus more on social or societal images and attributions, others deal very specifically with the motif of the mirror.

In "waiting for the gift of sound and vision", Zurich-based artist Ilona Stutz shows a video of the Street Parade of 2023, filmed with a cell phone camera, focusing on a scene that takes place on a motor yacht. Along with it, she shows distorted stills from the video work. However, in the stills the scene itself does not become apparent, as the imagery is lost in pixelated details.

The artist deliberately works with glitches - she zooms so deeply into a social situation that the image regenerates itself due to a lack of data. People's facial features disintegrate - other forms remain intact.

From a hidden object picture taken from a bridge, she zooms in on the mundane scene, making it look almost like a crime scene - reminiscent of the plot from Michelangelo Antonioni's film "Blow-Up". At the same time, the quality of the images helps the viewer to perceive individual details not only as social elements, but above all to observe them in their aesthetic formal language. Almost like a person with whom you bump the tips of your nose together becomes a cyclops: Two eyes become one.

In Sabrina Smaili's work, the question of self-portraiture and self-empowerment becomes particularly clear: we see a self-portrait that deals with the question and the failure of conventions. For the artist, painting is more than just something she enjoys: It is a necessity. She herself writes: "I always say "I", but I dream of saying "we"". In her work "Happy Birthday Sabrina" from the series "Husband Plan", however, she already works in the sense of a multiplicity by taking a tongue-in-cheek look at

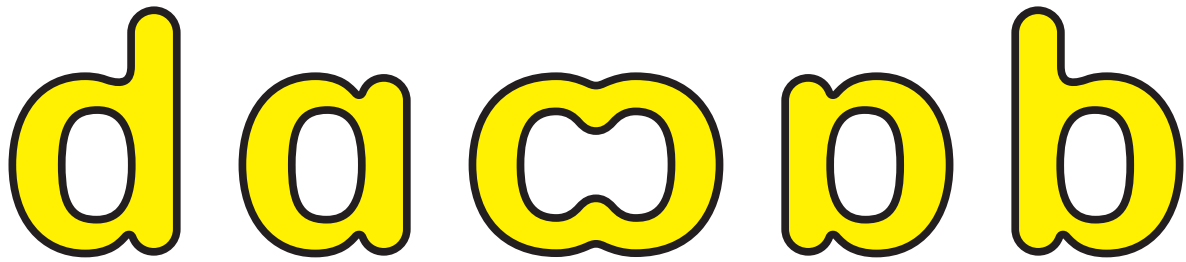


herself and the internalized norms she grew up with, rising above them and never condemning herself.

Chris Kauffmann's position is also self-referential, but here the focus is more on self-awareness in the Roland Barthesian sense. That is, less as a concrete social problem than as a philosophical consideration. One's own self is revealed for what it already is: a collage of cultural snippets that one can only determine to a limited extent. Repetition and fragmentation play an important role here - also in the spirit of Walt Whitman's Song of Myself: "I am large, I contain multitudes".

Emi Curty from Geneva shows two self-portraits of herself in a bikini, posing lasciviously and with a challenging gaze on a lying punching bag. The studio shot is so tangible that it estranges itself in its directness. The surface of the skin becomes visible in its materiality, it shines, it reflects the light. One thinks of the glossy photographs of celebrities - the body is so smooth that it appears unreal, that it becomes visible as the abstract phenomenon that it naturally always is anyway. The pose, which on the one hand marks the fact that the model has slain her combat partner, and on the other suggests that she is putting the fight to rest, is triumphant. Perhaps it is the never-ending battle with the self and the patriarchal society that the artist is smirkingly saying farewell to here. The photographs are complemented by an installation in which two punching bags meet like equal combat partners - one of the two punching bags has the shape of a human figure, the surface is reminiscent of latex suits, that one associates with BDSM. I am thinking of Hegel's analogy of two lovers who are compared to equal fighting partners, strong enough to kill each other and only therefore able to keep each other alive.

Paula Santome works very specifically with matt but reflective material. In aluminum, she shows forms that are often mythological in origin. She refers for example to various female goddesses, but also to the myth of Medea, who, as the murderer of her own sons, is regarded as both a controversial and emancipated female figure in Greek mythology. The snake also appears as a recurring symbol of fatal seduction. In the Ouroboros form, it bites its own tail. Images naturally also play a role in desire, in lust and greed for others and oneself - there is always some projection involved in the encounter. The works are pre-drawn on paper and then transferred to aluminum by the artist herself through handmade embossing.



The artist Jiwon Lee, however, puts her finger very specifically on the misunderstanding of the mirror as an object that is charged by various systems of belief and superstition. Her mirror has a shattered surface - the mirror remains in its anticipated misfortune. The artist works with a hammer, willfully destroying the surface and then installing it between two panes of glass, fixed so that the individual shards cannot come loose. It almost seems as if the artist is enjoying the morbid charm of the seemingly damaged object. Because, unlike broken glass, shards of mirror do not bring luck, but bad luck. The work is part of the project "Specchi Magici" by Riccardo Paratore which dwells between a fine art and a design approach.

I was about ten years old when I repeated the phrase at home: "You should always stay true to yourself". My primary school teacher had suggested it to me - I was proud to pass on my newly learned wisdom. But my father replied: "You know, contemporary philosophers assume that there is no such thing as a (true) self". When I raised my hand the next day at school and repeated my father's statement to the whole class, the faces I saw were not dismissive but perplexed: much worse.

But: In "no place like" it becomes clear that looking into a mirror (be it a social, symbolic or material one) does not always have to be a misfortune. That this very distortion can also be seen as an opportunity for emancipation - an empowerment through the concrete mirror, in its specific ("distorted") curvature itself. For the artists in "no place like", the shift becomes a springboard, an opportunity for self-empowerment. This means rising above the external determination of narratives and perspectives. And to make a game out of the supposed legibility, which often turns out to be a deception.

Text
-Olga Hohmann