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Artist's Self Portraits

Omar Calabrese

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- An insightful, lavishly illustrated history of self-portraits by well-known artists including Velázquez, Edgar Degas and Frida Kahlo

In his fascinating survey, art historian Omar Calabrese reveals that self-portraits through the ages are both a reflection of the artist and of the period in which the artist lived. Organised thematically, the author first presents a basic definition of the genre of the self-portrait, interpreting the picture to be a manifestation of self-identity, and including examples from an Egyptian tomb painting and pictures on stained glass during the Middle Ages and continuing to modern times. The next chapter focuses on the turning point for the establishment of the genre during the Renaissance when the status of the painter or sculptor was raised from artisan to artist and, as a result, portraits of the artist were considered worthwhile pictures. At first a self-portrait was hidden in a narrative painting: an artist would paint his image as part of a crowd scene, for example, or as a mythological figure. On the other extreme, once the genre was accepted, it was practiced by some artists-Rembrandt, van Gogh, Munch, and Dali, for instance-as almost an obsession. In contemporary art the self-portrait can become a deconstructed genre with the artist hiding or satirising himself until he nearly disappears on the canvas. Among the 300 pictures featured here are examples by such artists as Albrecht Dürer, Velázquez, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Ingres, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gainsborough, Matisse, James Ensor, Egon Schiele, Frida Kahlo, Man Ray, Henry Moore, Robert Rauschenberg, Norman Rockwell, and Roy Lichtenstein. This intriguing book is a fresh way to appreciate the history of art and to understand that a self-portrait is far more complex and meaningful than merely a portrait of the artist.

Omarr Calabrese is a professor of art and semiotics at the University of Siena. He has also taught at Yale University, the Sorbonne, a university in Berlin and served as a curator for a number of television programs about art. He has written several books, including*Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (Princeton University Press) and edited *Italian Style: Forms of Creativity (Skira)* and other volumes.

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