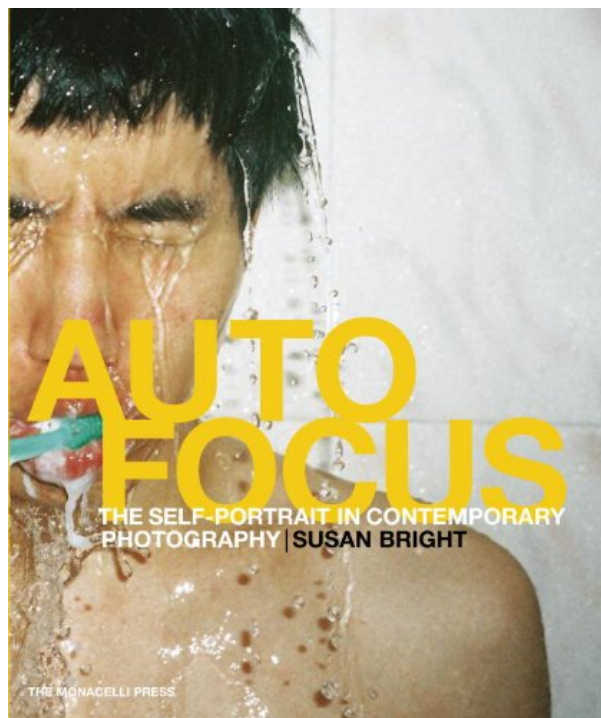
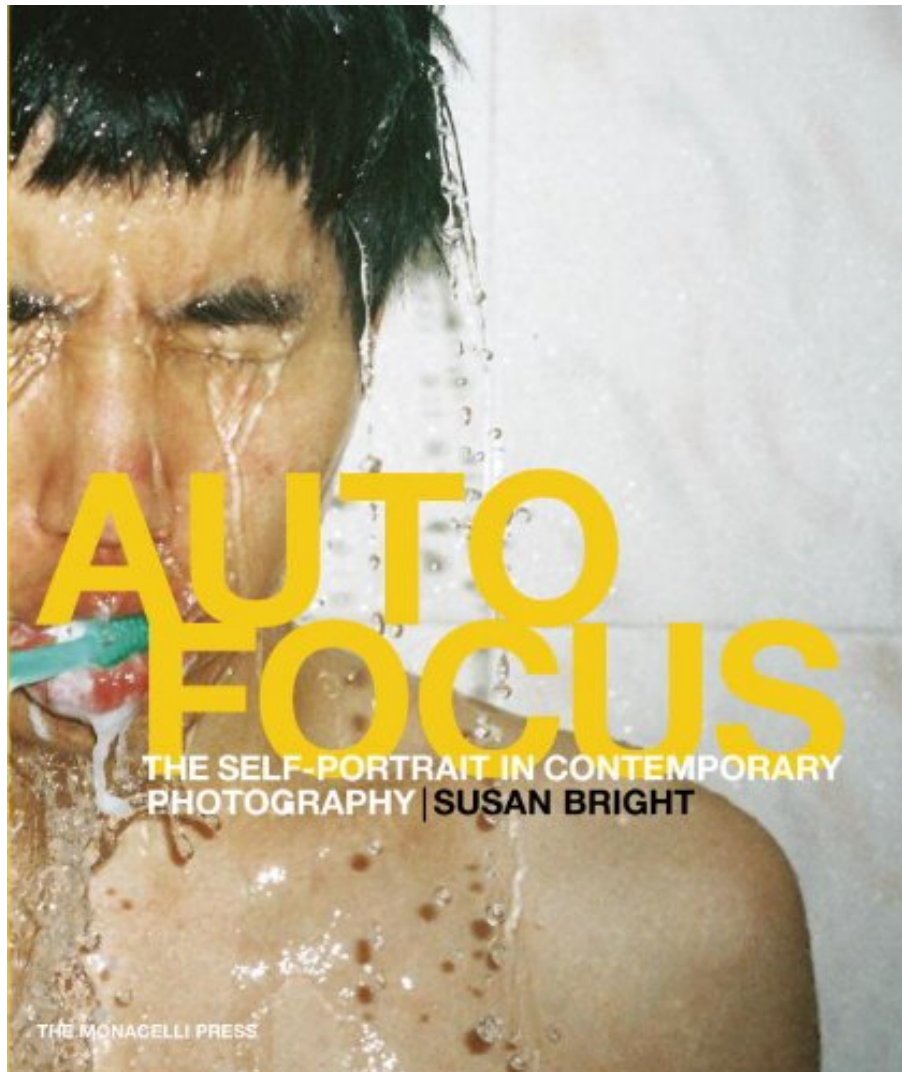


AUTO FOCUS: THE SELF-PORTRAIT IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUSAN BRIGHT



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About the Author

Susan Bright is a curator and writer. She has contributed to numerous publications and is the author of Art Photography Now. In addition to organizing international conferences and seminars on art and photography, she was formerly assistant curator of photographs at the National Portrait Gallery in London, curator at the Association of Photographers, and served as acting director for the MA Photography (Historic and Contemporary) program at Sotheby's Institute of Art, London. Bright's previous exhibitions and catalogs include Something Out of Nothing, How We Are: Photographing Britain, and Face of Fashion. She currently lives and works in New York, where she is a faculty member at the School of Visual Arts.

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AUTO FOCUS: THE SELF-PORTRAIT IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUSAN BRIGHT PDF

Auto Focus features a dazzling array of self-portraits by seventy-five of the world's foremost contemporary photographers. Photography writer and curator Susan Bright provides a clear guide through this significant and dynamic genre, showing how issues of identity—whether national, sexual, racial, personal, or artistic—are key to understanding the work of many of today's leading photographers.

This lavishly illustrated, accessible survey is organized into five thematic chapters: diaristic and autobiographical images; pictures of the body; the use of masks and masquerade; the return to studio portraiture and the photographic album; and performance, both public and private. An informative illustrated introduction explains the history of the photographic self-portrait from the 1840s to the late twentieth century, providing an invaluable context for the recent surge in artists' images of themselves.

From intimate images of introspection and those that consciously challenge notions of ethnicity and sexuality to dramatic, stylized photographs of dreamlike scenarios, Auto Focus shows how one of the longest-established artistic genres continues to fascinate artists today.

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About the Author

Susan Bright is a curator and writer. She has contributed to numerous publications and is the author of *Art Photography Now*. In addition to organizing international conferences and seminars on art and photography, she was formerly assistant curator of photographs at the National Portrait Gallery in London, curator at the Association of Photographers, and served as acting director for the MA Photography (Historic and Contemporary) program at Sotheby's Institute of Art, London. Bright's previous exhibitions and catalogs include *Something Out of Nothing*, *How We Are: Photographing Britain*, and *Face of Fashion*. She currently lives and works in New York, where she is a faculty member at the School of Visual Arts.

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Looking at One's Self

By Conrad J. Obregon

The photographic self-portrait is vastly different from the photographic portrait. The union of photographer and subject leads to an effort by the photographer to create an image that is more revealing of the inner

aspects of the subject or offers greater examination of the milieu in which the photographer exists, or so I would conclude from "Auto Focus: the Self-portrait in Contemporary Photography".

Susan Bright, who leads us through this collection of post-modern images, has provided a useful text to aid in comprehending this collection of images from at least 75 photographers. Most of them were unknown to me, except for a few like Martin Parr. Bright has divided the book into five genres that seem to greatly overlap. Autobiography deals with the every day life of the artist. Body focuses on the use of the artist's body to convey a message. Masquerade presents the artist as someone else. The section on studio and album organizes around an approach to the self-portrait that is closely allied to traditional methods of organization. The chapter on performance includes photographs that seem to document performance art, although a few represent acts that were never publicly performed.

After Bright's introductory historical overview of the field of self-portraits, she provides some introductory comments to each genre and then as part of a two to four page layout, featuring the photographs of the artists, provides comments on the individual's work. If you are of the school that believes that the art photograph should speak for itself, without explanation, you may be thankful to have Bright along as a guide. For me at least, trying to understand what each of the photographs was about was a difficult task, even when I knew that each picture was concerned with questions like "what is the self."

There appeared to be few links between the connotations that the artist must have seen in their images and those that I brought to the project. Occasionally the images were so confrontational that it was easy to understand that I was being attacked, as in the photographs of the self-maimed body of Catherine Opie. Occasionally I smiled, as when I looked at the images of Joan Fontcuberta, dressed as an eastern rites priest, engaged in activities that were impossible, like surf-boarding on the back of a dolphin. Occasionally I appreciated the fine craftsmanship of an artist like Gaüeca who draws his style both from masters like Vermeer and from modern advertising. Mostly I felt in the dark when I looked at pictures like those of Nick Cave who hides his body completely behind an arrangement of flowers or handbags or blankets.

I realized that part of my confusion may have been because the understanding of some of these artists requires an accretion of many photographs rather than just the three or four presented here. Certainly I did not appreciate the first time I saw an image of and by Cindy Sherman as much as I did when I had seen many of her self-portraits. (Sherman is not one of the artists presented except in an historic context. There are images by Aneta Grzeszykowska imitating Sherman's imitations of motion picture publicity shots.)

I am not a post-modernist. The photograph that I found most moving and intriguing in the book was a self-portrait of Robert Mapplethorpe in the historic overview introduction, made in the year before he died. On the other hand I also believe that the way to grow in one's appreciation of the new is to seriously examine what, for the viewer, is a cutting edge of art. These images provided me with an opportunity for such an examination.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

great book

By Vidalina P. Arthur-snead

if you are looking to understand more about self portraiture as a genre, this is the book to do it with. really great insight into the genre and also lots of full color photographs.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By L was here.

Great book, lots of different styles.

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