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Volume Title: Conceptual Revolutions in Twentieth-Century Art

Volume Author/Editor: David W. Galenson

Volume Publisher: Cambridge University Press

Volume ISBN: 978-0-521-11232-1

Volume URL: <http://www.nber.org/books/gale08-1>

Publication Date: October 2009

Title: Portraits of the Artist: Personal Visual Art in the Twentieth Century

Author: David W. Galenson

URL: <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c5795>

Chapter 12: Portraits of the Artist: Personal Visual Art in the Twentieth Century

Introduction

I am making a study of the soul, as I can observe myself closely
and use myself as an anatomical testing ground for this soul study.

Edvard Munch, 1908¹

In an essay written for a 1999 exhibition of Rembrandt's self-portraits, the scholar Ernst van de Wetering, professor of art history at the University of Amsterdam and chairman of the Rembrandt Research Project, noted that Rembrandt "had painted himself before the mirror on at least forty occasions, had etched himself thirty-one times, and had made a handful of drawn self-portraits." On the basis of this enumeration, van de Wetering made a dramatic declaration: "This segment of his oeuvre is unique in art history, not only in its scale and the length of time it spans, but also in its regularity."²

Van de Wetering's striking claim is not even close to being accurate. The scholar Iris Müller-Westermann observed that Edward Munch "recorded himself in more than seventy painted works and about twenty graphic self-portraits, as well as in more than one hundred watercolors, drawings, and studies; sometimes year by year, at times monthly or even daily."³ Munch thus executed considerably more oil portraits of himself than Rembrandt, and Munch's total of more than 190 images of himself in all media was more than double Rembrandt's total of approximately 90.⁴ Rembrandt first painted himself at 20, and continued to do so until near the end of his life at 63, but this span of 43 years also falls far short of the 62 years that separated Munch's first self-portrait at 19 from his last at 81.⁵

That such an erudite scholar would make such a clear misstatement may be symptomatic of a failure of art historians to recognize a phenomenon that began in the late nineteenth century

and became more common in the twentieth. This involves not simply self-portraiture, but a broader artistic practice. Specifically, the twentieth century is the first in which a large number of visual artists made most or all of their art about themselves and their own lives. Before the modern era, many painters made occasional self-portraits, but the bulk of their work treated subjects that did not involve them personally. So for example Rembrandt's paintings of himself probably made up considerably less than 20 percent of his total output of paintings, and were greatly outnumbered by the biblical scenes and commissioned portraits that were the products expected by most purchasers of oil paintings in the seventeenth century.⁶ It was only in the modern era, with the increased autonomy that was a consequence of the development of a competitive market for advanced art, that painters could not only make self-portraits a larger share of their total output, but that those who wished to do so could make most or even all of their works about their own lives – images of people and things they themselves knew and cared about.

Poets

I write very personal poems but I hope that they will become the
central theme to someone else's private life.

Anne Sexton⁷

Although scholars have not drawn attention to the growing importance of personal visual art, the same is decidedly not true for poetry. The present consideration of the practice of visual artists can consequently benefit from the conclusions of some analyses of personal poetry.

In 1984, the literary critic Alan Williamson observed that “what is most exciting and original about the poetry of the last twenty-five years is its individualism: its willingness to set values of universality at risk, in favor of the authenticity of specific autobiography.” For Williamson, the distinctive feature of “the personal poetry that emerged in the late 1950s ...

[was] its tendency to make candor an aesthetic value and to suggest that complete self-definition is a sufficient and possible goal for lyric poetry.”⁸ This was not a new claim. In 1973, Robert Phillips declared that “we are living in a great Age of Autobiography,” in which the most distinguished contributions were those of poets whose work was called “confessional.” This poetry was generally highly subjective, privileged the personal over the universal, was written in the language of ordinary speech, often took alienation as a theme, and recognized no subject matter as off limits. Assuming objectivity to be impossible, the confessional poets were explicitly subjective: “Whatever the cost in public exposure or private anguish, their subjects are most often themselves, and always the things they most intimately know.” The common characteristic of confessional poetry was the centrality of the poet’s self: “It uses the self as a poetic symbol around which is woven a personal mythology.”⁹

Confessional poetry was a reaction against the doctrine of persona, which was the reigning orthodoxy of advanced poetry for much of the first half of the twentieth century. *Persona* – originally the Latin word for the mask an actor wore onstage – was the term used by Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and others to stress the distinction between the poet and the speaker of a poem: the “I” of a poem was not the poet, but a mask created by him.¹⁰ This separation generally implied not only detachment but also objectivity on the part of the poet. Thus Eliot explained that “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.”¹¹

During the 1950s, Allen Ginsberg and Robert Lowell were prominent younger poets who reacted against the impersonality and absence of passion in contemporary poetry, and who “created art out of the confusion of their lives.”¹² As their influence spread, some critics identified a change in regime. In 1972, for example, Lionel Trilling declared that “Within the last

two decades English and American poets have programmatically scuttled the sacred doctrine of the *persona*, the belief that the poet does not, must not present himself to us and figure in our consciousness as a person, as a man speaking to men, but must have an exclusively aesthetic existence.”¹³

In heralding this revolution, the poet and critic Donald Davie proclaimed that “A poem in which the ‘I’ stands immediately and unequivocally for the author” was “essentially and necessarily superior to a poem in which the ‘I’ stands not for the author but for a *persona* of the author’s.”¹⁴ Davie cited Robert Lowell’s prize-winning *Life Studies*, a pioneering work of the new poetry, as an example in which the speaker was unequivocally the poet himself.¹⁵ In fact, however, Lowell explained that the autobiographical poems in *Life Studies* were “not always factually true. There’s a good deal of tinkering with fact.” Yet although Lowell conceded that he had “invented facts and changed things,” he stressed that his goal was nonetheless to create the appearance of truth: “you want the reader to say, This is true ... [T]he reader was to believe he was getting the *real* Robert Lowell.”¹⁶ The poet John Berryman resolved the contradiction between Davie’s criterion of the poet as speaker and Lowell’s practice of mixing fiction with fact by observing that *Life Studies* was clearly based on Lowell’s personal experience rather than on invention and symbol, but that “the ‘I’ of a poem can never be identical with the actual author,” even if only because of the incompleteness of art: “The necessity for the artist of selection opens inevitably an abyss between his person and his persona.”¹⁷

Robert Elliott observed of *Life Studies* that for many readers “a substantial part of the fascination, the strength, the poignancy of these poems resides in their claim to the truth.”¹⁸ Yet not all confessional poetry shared Lowell’s goal of the appearance of truth. So for example Lowell himself observed that the poetry of his former student Sylvia Plath was “personal,

confessional, felt, but the manner of feeling is controlled hallucination, the autobiography of a fever.” Lowell remarked that in her final poems, “Plath becomes herself, becomes something imaginary, newly, wildly, and subtly created – hardly a person at all, or a woman, certainly not another ‘poetess,’ but one of those super-real, hypnotic, great classical heroines.”¹⁹

Several issues raised in these analyses of confessional poetry can be useful in considering personal visual art. One key question involves how objectively or subjectively the poet – or artist – treats his own experience. Another involves explicitness: if the author employs symbols, are their meanings accessible or are they esoteric? And another important issue concerns sincerity – whether the work is intended to convince the reader that the speaker is the real author, as opposed to an obviously exaggerated or distorted persona.

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)

Painters ... dead and buried speak to the next generation or to
several succeeding generations through their work.

Vincent van Gogh, 1888²⁰

The prototype of the visual artist who made his art entirely out of his own life was Vincent van Gogh. This was recognized by Meyer Schapiro, who observed that “van Gogh converted all [his] aspiration and anguish into his art, which thus became the first example of a truly personal art, art as a deeply lived means of spiritual deliverance or transformation of the self.”²¹ George Heard Hamilton stressed the integration of van Gogh’s words and images in creating this art: “His autobiography in the form of some 755 letters to his devoted brother Theo and a few friends is one of the most relentless documentations of the search for self in literary history. In his paintings and drawings, van Gogh also illustrated that life, literally and figuratively. Each of his pictures was a stage in his search, each ‘a cry of anguish,’ as he said, so that to understand his art it is not enough to judge it in purely artistic terms.”²² Schapiro further

recognized that van Gogh's enterprise was a distinctive product of the new role of art in the secular modern era, and that van Gogh provided a model for the pursuit of that role: "he responded, as others did in his time, to the new function of art in the West, as an alternative to older moral-religious means. But failing in this heroic effort to save himself, as his suicide shows, he nevertheless sealed this function by his great example and the authenticity of his work; he showed that art could reach that intimacy and intensity of the striving, loving, anguished self."²³

Van Gogh was an archetypal example of a conceptual artist whose work was intended to express his own emotions. From an early stage of his career as a painter, he resolved to ignore his critics and "to paint what I feel and feel what I paint."²⁴ Embracing precedents he saw in Poussin, "in whose pictures all reality is at the same time symbolic," and in the work of the writer Guy de Maupassant, who asserted "the artist's liberty to exaggerate, to create in his novel a world more beautiful, more simple, more consoling than ours," van Gogh created a personal symbolic language that pervaded his entire oeuvre.²⁵ So for example one of the last paintings he made before leaving his parents' home in Holland in 1885 was *Open Bible* – a still life in which a large bible, open at Isaiah, lay open next to a small, battered paperback copy of Emile Zola's *La Joie de Vivre*. H.R. Graetz explained that the contrast between the books represented a temporal and generational shift: "The little novel lying in front of the weighty Bible symbolizes the opposition between the modern way of life and the strong religious tradition with the condemnation in Isaiah of joy in living – of *joie de vivre*." The image also expressed van Gogh's anguish from his relationship with his disapproving father: "His break away from these strong ties of his earlier life – father and church – did not take place without pain; it is reflected in the contrast between the powerful Bible with its reinforced edges and the tiny, frayed *Joie de Vivre*

with its visible marks of injury.”²⁶ Schapiro observed that because of his persistence in painting symbolically his own life, van Gogh “is able to transpose to the canvas with a singular power the forms and qualities of things; but they are things that have touched him deeply,” so that a painting that portrayed nothing but a pair of worn boots – a motif he executed no less than eight times – became “a piece from a self-portrait.”²⁷ When van Gogh painted portraits, they were not of patrons, but of people he cared deeply about, for his goal was not to generate income but instead to make a psychological statement – “to paint portraits which would appear after a century to the people living then as apparitions. By which I mean ... using our knowledge of and our modern taste for color as a means of arriving at the expression and the intensification of the character.”²⁸

Van Gogh realized that viewers of his paintings would not understand all the personal meanings they held for him.²⁹ Because of the remarkable explanation of his life, and work, recorded in the letters that Theo carefully saved, it is possible to recognize, as Schapiro did, that “Every stage of his art has a profound personal meaning, it engages him completely, and could only have been produced in the place where he had lived and worked.”³⁰ But even before the letters were published, van Gogh’s art was widely appreciated, because of the obvious power of the conceptual plastic devices he created. Thus Hamilton concluded that van Gogh’s art was “totally self-expressive. When it achieves ... a more than personal power and beauty, it is expressive to such a degree that it became almost immediately ... one of the principal sources for the broader currents of European Expressionism.”³¹

Edvard Munch (1863-1944)

My art is a self-confession. Through it, I seek to clarify my
relationship with the world.

Edvard Munch, 1932³²

One of the earliest expressionist artists to be influenced by van Gogh was the Norwegian Edvard Munch. Munch saw a memorial exhibition of ten paintings by van Gogh in Paris in 1891, and the sharp, exaggerated diagonal that van Gogh used to express sadness soon became one of Munch's favorite compositional devices.³³ The example of van Gogh's life remained vivid to Munch throughout his own life. More than four decades after his first exposure to van Gogh's art, Munch reflected that "During his short life, van Gogh did not allow his flame to go out. Fire and embers were his brushes during the few years of his life ... I have thought, and wished ... to follow in his footsteps. Not to let my flame burn out, and with burning brush, to paint to the very end."³⁴

Early in his career, Munch's conception of art was deeply affected by Hans Jaeger, a charismatic philosopher who was the leader of a group of Norwegian bohemians. One of Jaeger's tenets was that the individual could become free only through self-examination.³⁵ Munch's self-portraits were his response. Thus Arne Eggum observed that "To Munch, the self-portrait was a mirror to reflect fundamental problems regarding our own existence. The great majority of them have a very personal stamp, and most of them were never exhibited by Munch himself."³⁶ But all of Munch's paintings pursued the goal he took from Jaeger, as did the notebooks he called his "soul's diary": "When I write these notes, it is not to describe my own life ... Just as Leonardo da Vinci studied the recesses of the body and dissected human cadavers, I try from self-scrutiny to dissect what is universal in the soul."³⁷ Munch believed that his own experience could be of value to others. Thus he reflected that his focus on himself "could ... be

called egotism. However, I have always thought and felt that my art might be able to help others to clarify their own search for truth.”³⁸

Because of his desire for universality, Munch struggled to develop a vocabulary of signs and symbols that would communicate the intensity of his feelings to viewers of his paintings. The most famous instance of this stemmed from a memory he described in his diary in January of 1892:

I was walking along the road with two friends. The sun set. I felt a tinge of melancholy. Suddenly the sky became a bloody red ...
My friends walked on. I stood there, trembling with fright.
And I felt a loud, unending scream piercing nature.³⁹

Munch wanted to paint the experience of this episode, but a friend recalled that he was frustrated by the fear that others wouldn't see it as he had: “He was in despair because the miserable means available to painting were not sufficient.”⁴⁰ Yet he was determined to try nonetheless, and during the next two years he made a series of preparatory sketches and paintings. As he worked, the scene became increasingly simplified with flat, stylized areas of color, and progressive suppression of descriptive detail. In the celebrated final version of *The Scream*, which Munch completed in the fall of 1893, the central figure turns to face the viewer: “Its completely flat body loses all effects of human anatomy and twists like a worm to conform to and extend the fjord landscape.”⁴¹ The distorted figure, and the horror of its features as it presses its hands against the sides of its head, have been widely seen as an early psychological expression of the anxiety of modern man.

Munch's conception of art was highly personal: he wrote in his diary that “Art is one's heart-blood.”⁴² Throughout his life, he kept with him a newspaper clipping of a review of an exhibition of his work in Paris in 1897, that read in part:

The man and his work are indeed inextricably bound together; one serves to clarify and illuminate the other. His work lays bare thoughts that are felt, experienced ... Munch, by means of his skill as a painter, opens his soul to us, revealing its most secret corners.⁴³

Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)

Where is the “I”?

Frida Kahlo, 1938⁴⁴

Frida Kahlo began painting at the age of 19, as a result of an accident that almost killed her. A collision between a tram and the bus she was riding on severely damaged her spine and legs, and forced her to remain in bed, immobile for months. Out of boredom, she began painting portraits of her family and friends to amuse herself. She also hung a mirror beside her bed, and painted herself. When her injuries made it impossible for her to pursue the medical studies she had planned, she made painting her career.

The accident left Kahlo permanently wounded: she had more than 30 surgical operations during the remaining 28 years of her life, including the eventual amputation of one leg, and she lived in constant pain. The accident also influenced the character of her art. Her biographer Hayden Herrera observed that “it was the accident and its aftermath that led her eventually, as a mature painter, to chart her state of mind – to set down her discoveries – in terms of things done to her body ... [I]n her paintings Frida was intent on making painful feelings known.”⁴⁵ Kahlo herself explained that from the time of the accident, she used art to express her own reality: “my obsession was to begin again, painting things just as I saw them with my own eyes and nothing more... Thus, as the accident changed my path, many things prevented me from fulfilling the desires which everyone considers normal, and to me nothing seemed more normal than to paint what had not been fulfilled.”⁴⁶

Kahlo deliberately created a persona with her art. Gannit Ankori noted that “she was an expert at hiding behind masks and facades of her own construction. It is no coincidence that she was nicknamed by [her husband Diego] Rivera and by her closest friends *la gran ocultadora* – ‘the great concealer.’”⁴⁷ Kahlo was fascinated by her own appearance, and she surrounded herself with mirrors.⁴⁸ In her 28 years as an artist, “Kahlo produced over one hundred images that explore aspects of her complex identity in relation to her body, to her genealogy, to her childhood, to social structures, to national, religious and cultural contexts, and to nature.”⁴⁹

Kahlo’s approach to art was quintessentially conceptual. Ankori described her as “a highly sophisticated and erudite artist who constructed each painting with utmost care, and with deliberate artistic and expressive considerations.”⁵⁰ Herrera noted that her subjects invariably “came from a world close at hand – friends, animals, still lifes, most of all from herself. Her true subjects were embodied states of mind, her own joys and sorrows.”⁵¹ In many of her paintings Kahlo mimicked the narrative style of Mexican folk art – “the drawing is naively painstaking, the color choices are odd, the perspective is awkward, space is reduced to a rudimentary stage, and action is condensed to highlights. Adherence to appearances is less important than ... dramatization.”⁵²

Kahlo’s construction of her persona was not limited to her art. In spite of a 21-year age difference, she married – and divorced and remarried – the flamboyant and egomaniacal Diego Rivera, who was widely recognized as the greatest Mexican painter of his time. Their tempestuous relationship, and his numerous affairs, made their marriage the subject of constant gossip. From early in her career, Kahlo dressed exclusively in the colorful long dresses, jewelry, and often also the headdresses of Mexico’s Tehuana region. André Breton described her as “adorned like a fairy-tale princess,” and when she and Rivera visited San Francisco, the

photographer Edward Weston remarked that “Dressed in native costume even to huaraches, she causes much excitement on the streets... People stop in their tracks to look in wonder.”⁵³ Kahlo’s dramatic beauty attracted many admirers, and she was rumored to have had affairs with several famous artists and other prominent figures of both sexes.⁵⁴

Kahlo developed a complex symbolic visual vocabulary, based on colors, objects and forms, that ran through her entire oeuvre.⁵⁵ Yet she wanted her work to affect even viewers who had not studied her life: Herrera concluded that “Although Frida’s paintings served a private function, they were meant ... to be accessible in their meaning.”⁵⁶ The graphic images of her many self-portraits do make clear what one critic wrote in a eulogy for Kahlo: “It is impossible to separate the life and work of this singular person. Her paintings are her biography.”⁵⁷

Francis Bacon (1909-1992)

My whole life goes into my work.

Francis Bacon⁵⁸

Francis Bacon developed slowly as an artist: “I seem to have been a late starter in everything. I think I was kind of delayed, and I think there are those people who are delayed.”⁵⁹ His goals were visual: “I’m probably much more concerned with the aesthetic qualities of a work than, perhaps, Munch was.”⁶⁰ His art was not intended to make a statement: “I’m not really trying to *say* anything, I’m trying to *do* something.”⁶¹ Indeed, for Bacon the test of a successful image was that it not be susceptible to any logical verbal explanation: “After all, if you could explain it, why would you go to the trouble of painting it?”⁶²

Bacon stressed the importance to his art of what he called *accident*: “I don’t in fact know very often what the paint will do, and it does many things which are very much better than I could make it do.”⁶³ He found that distortions occurred in his images as he worked: “I terribly

don't want to make freaks, though everyone seems to think that that's how the pictures turn out."⁶⁴ A biographer argued that Bacon's experimental inability to anticipate or control the final appearance of his paintings was one source of his reluctance to paint commissioned portraits. Thus Michael Peppiatt described an episode when Bacon painted a commissioned portrait of a friend, the photographer Cecil Beaton. When Beaton described the finished work as the portrait of a "monster cripple," Bacon agreed to make a second attempt. Although Bacon felt the second portrait was a success, when Beaton again found it shocking, Bacon destroyed it in embarrassment.⁶⁵ A friend and biographer, John Russell, contended that the distortions in Bacon's portraits were actually a result of his attempt to represent individuals as he perceived them, as each portrait offered "a superimposition of states, in which certain characteristics of the person concerned appear with exceptional intensity, while others are obliterated."⁶⁶

As Bacon matured, the subjects of his work changed: "When I was young I needed extreme subject matter for my paintings. Then as I grew older I began to find my subject matter in my own life."⁶⁷ During the 1960s his primary subject matter was his friends: "It's through my life and knowing other people that a subject has really grown."⁶⁸ So for example one posthumous exhibition of Bacon's portraits presented 50 paintings of nine people, including 14 of the painter Lucien Freud.⁶⁹ Knowing his subjects was key to Bacon's practice: "I couldn't do people I don't know very well. I wouldn't want to. It wouldn't interest me to try and do them unless I had seen a lot of them, watched their contours, watched the way they behaved."⁷⁰ The importance of familiarity was magnified by Bacon's recognition that semblance was not solely a visual phenomenon: "Every form you make has an implication, so that, when you are painting somebody, you know that you are, of course, trying to get near not only to their appearance but also to the way they have affected you." He wanted his portraits to have what he called "the

living quality;” the problem “was to find a technique by which you can give over all the pulsations of a person.”⁷¹ The distortions of Bacon’s portraits might be understood as a product of both this elusive goal and his conception of relationships: “I’ve always thought of friendship as where two people tear each other apart and perhaps in that way learn something from one another.”⁷² Bacon wanted the result of his efforts to transcend the appearance of individuals: “In catching the ‘likeness’ of his friends, Bacon also caught their dominant characteristics, which in turn, he hoped, would give the portraits greater universality as images of human beings not bound to specific circumstances.”⁷³

The focus of Bacon’s attention narrowed even further in the early 1970s. In the fall of 1971, the day before a major retrospective exhibition of Bacon’s work at Paris’ Grand Palais was to be opened in a formal ceremony, Bacon’s companion for much of the previous decade, George Dyer, was found dead of an overdose of drugs and alcohol in their Paris hotel room. For several years thereafter, Bacon’s paintings consisted almost exclusively of images of Dyer and himself. Bacon brought his mourning for Dyer to an end in a large triptych of 1973, which effectively reenacted his death. Yet self-portraits remained a dominant element in Bacon’s art for the rest of his life. He claimed that he hated his own appearance, but “it’s all I’ve got left to paint now.”⁷⁴ In spite of the deaths of nearly all of the friends who had been the subjects of his art, and his own failing health, Bacon continued to paint until his death at the age of 82. That the force of his art is not generally considered to have diminished would not have surprised him, for he believed that “Painting is an old man’s business.”⁷⁵

Louise Bourgeois (1911-)

All the work of an artist is the realization of a self-portrait. But very often it is unconscious. Very often, you do not realize that you reveal yourself that much.

Louise Bourgeois, 1995⁷⁶

In 1982, at the age of 71, Louise Bourgeois was given her first major exhibition, a retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art. In an autobiographical slide show prepared for that exhibition, for the first time Bourgeois publicly told a story from her childhood that she described as the motivation for everything she had ever done as an artist. Beginning with the title "Child Abuse," Bourgeois revealed that a young English woman who had been hired as a teacher for Bourgeois and her sister had in fact been the live-in mistress of Bourgeois' father for a decade, with the knowledge of Bourgeois' mother. Bourgeois declared that she had felt betrayed both by her parents and by the teacher, and that her work as an artist had been motivated by her anger: "Everyday you have to abandon your past or accept it and then if you cannot accept it you become a sculptor."⁷⁷

Bourgeois had always been reticent about her past, and her explosive revelation prompted a reevaluation of her work. She had previously conceded that her work had always been sexually suggestive: "Sometimes I am totally concerned with female shapes – clusters of breasts like clouds – but often I merge the imagery – phallic breasts, male and female, active and passive."⁷⁸ Yet Bourgeois worked visually, and although her sculptures clearly included elements that derived from human anatomy, the final forms of her work resisted precise interpretation. Thus she explained that "my sculptures are improvisational (i.e. free – the final result has only a distant relation to the initial drawings with which they start), but with an obsessive intention and theme."⁷⁹ Her motivation had consistently come from her early life: "My childhood has never

lost its magic, it has never lost its mystery, and it has never lost its drama.”⁸⁰ Yet her motives were not conscious: “After a work is finished, then you say, Ah my God! *This* is what I meant.”⁸¹ And even then, the meanings of her work remained obscure to viewers: “I work very hard and I never – never! – get people to understand what I mean.”⁸² Ultimately, the work was independent: “a work of art has to stand by itself, so ... it is totally unnecessary to ask me what I want you to see in a piece, because you are supposed to see it by yourself.”⁸³ In view of her complete commitment to a visual experimental approach, it is perhaps not surprising that Bourgeois’ favorite artist is Francis Bacon: “I like the way he talks and I like his kind of subjects, and I like his rendering. It’s simply true.”⁸⁴

During the 1990s, Bourgeois made a series of installations called *Cells*, large wire cages that contained a variety of objects. In *Cell (Choisy)*, the objects included a model of one of her childhood homes, carved in pink marble. She explained that “To have really gone through an exorcism, in order to liberate myself from the past, I have to reconstruct it, ponder about it, make a statue out of it and get rid of it through making sculpture.” The work’s resemblance to a prison was not incidental: “I have been a prisoner of my memories and my aim is to get rid of them.”⁸⁵ Bourgeois believes that her love of her work has allowed her to repair the damage of her early life: “When I see [my sculptures] I say: Louise, you turned a trauma into a very human, a very happy person.” Over time, she has gained artistic sophistication: “All the time, and more and more, I become more skillful, clearer, so there is an increasing pleasure.”⁸⁶ She considers tenacity a virtue: “I am a long-distance runner and I am also a lonely runner and that’s the way I want it.”⁸⁷

Joseph Beuys (1921-1986)

I did already a sculpture when I was born, on the first day. So every point of my life was considered under the point of view of sculpture. That is the whole biographical thing I did personally.

Joseph Beuys⁸⁸

Joseph Beuys believed that creative lives were the product of a small number of “key experiences.”⁸⁹ On the occasion of a retrospective exhibition of Beuys’ work at the Guggenheim Museum in 1979, the curator Caroline Tisdall wrote that for Beuys, “One event was absolutely determining. In 1943 the [Luftwaffe bomber] that Beuys was flying was hit by Russian flak and crashed in a snowstorm in the Crimea. He was found unconscious among the wreckage by Tartars.” She then quoted Beuys:

Had it not been for the Tartars I would not be alive today... [I]t was they who discovered me in the snow after the crash, when the German search parties had given up. I was still unconscious then and only came round completely after twelve days or so, and by then I was back in a German field hospital... [The Tartars] covered my body in fat to help it regenerate warmth, and wrapped it in felt as an insulator to keep the warmth in.

Tisdall then commented, “It is certainly true that without this encounter with the Tartars ... Beuys would never have turned to fat and felt as the material for sculpture.”⁹⁰

In 1980, the art historian Benjamin Buchloh described Beuys’ account of this episode as a “spectacular biographic fable.” Buchloh went on to consider inconsistencies in Beuys’ account. Among these were the photographs that purported to show Beuys with his wrecked plane. Buchloh asked, “Who would, or could, pose for photographs after the plane crash, when severely injured? And who took the photographs? The Tartars with their fat-and-felt camera?” In sum, Buchloh contended that “Beuys’ ‘myth of origin’ ... is an intricate mixture of facts and memory material rearranged according to the dynamics of the neurotic lie: that myth-creating impulse that

cannot accept, for various reasons, the facticity of the individual's autobiographic history as such."⁹¹ In 2001, Gene Ray noted that subsequent research had provided evidence that Beuys did crash in the Crimea, though in 1944 rather than 1943, and that the day after the crash he was delivered to a German field hospital. Beuys could thus possibly have been tended to by nomadic tribesman for one day, rather than the 12 he claimed. Ray argued that it was possible "that Beuys did not so much lie about his experiences under the Nazis before and during the war, as inadequately address the full truth about them."⁹²

Although much remains uncertain about the facts of this episode, it is striking how often Beuys' story is simply reported as a factual account.⁹³ Careful observers, however, recognize that "Beuys constructed a persona," and that the only real dispute concerns whether this enterprise was "honest creativity or hocus-pocus." Most of Beuys' artistic output, including the numerous objects made from fat and felt, can only be understood through reference to his myth of origin: "The material remains of Beuys' work are the detritus of an operation that begins... at the point at which he sacrificed his true identity for an assumed persona. He raided his previous life for symbolism redeemable to this objective, and in his subsequent life everything similarly ceded priority to its symbolic projection."⁹⁴

One of Beuys' central ideas was what he called "social sculpture," his desire to expand the concept of art to include the entire process of living. In keeping with this goal, he did not restrict his own activities to producing art objects: among other projects, he became an early ecological activist, and ran for the European Parliament as a founding member of the Green Party, and he and the writer Heinrich Böll founded a Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research, based on a radical approach to education in which there would be no entrance tests, no exams, no limits on enrollment, and no age limits for students.⁹⁵

Donald Kuspit observed that Beuys' art was entirely personal: "The art of most artists does not seem to demand that we think of their lives... But Beuys' art arises directly from his life, and directly raises the question of art's role in life, and life's role in art."⁹⁶ Marilyn Smith noted a consequence of the inseparability of Beuys' life and art: "it is inconceivable that any single work by Beuys would be so self-sufficient as to survive without attribution... [E]ach of his statements is but a sentence in the large biography."⁹⁷

Bruce Nauman (1941-)

I was using my body as a piece of material.

Bruce Nauman, 1970⁹⁸

In 1964, during Bruce Nauman's first semester as a graduate student in art, "one day he had a revelation – that it didn't make sense for students to sit in a circle all drawing a model in the middle." On the spot, he decided he would use his own body as the subject of his art.⁹⁹ During the next few years, Nauman did this in a variety of ways, in a diverse range of genres, to produce a series of works that made him one of the most influential American artists of the late twentieth century.¹⁰⁰ These included neon sculptures (e.g. *Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten-Inch Intervals*, 1966), videos (e.g. *Thighing*, 1967), fiberglass, wax, or plastic sculptures cast from parts of his body (e.g. *From Hand to Mouth*, 1967) or from objects he used (e.g. *A Cast of the Space Under My Chair*, 1968), photographs (e.g. *Self-Portrait as Fountain*, 1967), and films (e.g. *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*, 1968).¹⁰¹

Nauman's art is highly conceptual, and the concepts that interest him involve the relationship of the artist to the making of art – "investigation of the function of an artist."¹⁰² As a result, his use of his body in his art is not aimed at exploring his own personality, or at presenting

his own biography. He uses himself rather as a model – one example of an artist. The uses are consequently quite impersonal, because he does not want to focus attention on his specific characteristics, but instead to achieve universality. So for example in 1970 he explained that “I use the figure as an object... [T]he problems involving figures are about the figure as an object, or at least the figure as a person and the things that happen to a person in various situations – to most people rather than just to me or one particular person.”¹⁰³ Similarly, in 1987 he observed that “if you examine yourself you make certain propositions that help with the work, certain conclusions. Other people are interested because these are common experiences.”¹⁰⁴

In 1993, Neal Benezra contrasted the practices of Nauman and Joseph Beuys. Benezra noted that “Beuys placed himself at the very epicenter of his work – making his persona indispensable to its presentation and meaning. In contrast, ... Nauman has established quite another model. Whereas Beuys was a quintessentially ‘public’ figure, Nauman sees himself in a different role: ‘When I give a public presentation of something I did in the studio, I go through an incredible amount of self-exposure which can also function, paradoxically, as a defense. I will tell you about myself by giving a show, but I will only tell you so much.’ While he has often employed his own body as ‘raw material,’ he has also taken great care to mask his presence psychologically.”¹⁰⁵

Cindy Sherman (1954-)

[P]eople seem to think that I must be revealing something of a personal or autobiographical nature, and they are constantly looking for it in the work.

Cindy Sherman, 1995¹⁰⁶

During 1977-80, Cindy Sherman made a series of 69 black-and-white photographs, collectively called the *Untitled Film Stills*. She appeared in each photograph, always alone. In

each photograph she wore different clothing, and in each she was shown in a different setting. These photographs are considered her most important work. Sherman has explained that the motifs grew out of her past: “As a child, I played dress-up, and it was fun because it was artificial. It still is artificial to do any of that, so in the mid-seventies when I was starting to do black and white work, it seemed interesting to be collecting these costumes that were relics of an earlier age.” The *Stills* mimicked the artificiality of old movies: “It was just about me dealing with these role models from film.”¹⁰⁷

Art scholars have engaged in complex theoretical analyses of Sherman’s photographs: thus for example one recently described her as “a postmodern feminist, skillfully manipulating media imagery to reveal the phallogocentric basis of a male-dominated society.”¹⁰⁸ Sherman has no objection to the extensive critical attention to her work, but she denies that it accurately represents her intentions: “I could agree with many different theories in terms of their formal concepts but none of it really had any basis in my motivation for making the work.”¹⁰⁹ Contrary to the complexity and subtlety of the critical analyses, Sherman considers her work to be direct and simple: “I’m doing one of the most stupid things in the world which I can’t even explain, dressing up like a child and posing in front of a camera trying to make beautiful pictures. And people seem to fall for it.” Her real anxiety about her work concerns what might be an obvious inference from it: “I have this enormous fear of being misinterpreted, of people thinking the photos are about me, that I’m really vain and narcissistic.” In fact, her goal was universality: “I’m trying to make people recognize something of themselves rather than me.”¹¹⁰ Her intended message involved attitudes: “The role-playing was intended to make people become aware of how stupid roles are, a lot of roles, but since it’s not all that serious, perhaps that’s more the moral to it, not to take anything too seriously.”¹¹¹

Although the meanings of Sherman's work have been hotly debated, there is widespread agreement that her use of her own image is not a result of either introspection or narcissism. Thus for example Arthur Danto remarked that "the stills do not compose a sequential exploration of her own features, nor do they stand as a monument to feminine vanity."¹¹² Verena Lueken stressed that the *Film Stills* were not self-portraits: "She is her own model and, as is the case with all models, this does not make her the subject of her art."¹¹³ Peter Schjeldahl agreed that Sherman cast herself in a role: "Sherman the performer is wholly obedient to Sherman the director. In herself, she has an extraordinary actress – selfless and undemanding, game for unflattering angles."¹¹⁴ And Danto offered personal testimony that the *Stills* were in fact not about Sherman's own identity: "I cannot imagine anyone who could recognize Sherman from the stills. Though I had studied and indeed written about them, so little does she resemble her images that I was surprised to see what she looked like when we met."¹¹⁵

Tracey Emin (1963-)

What you see is what I am.

Tracey Emin¹¹⁶

Tracey Emin's art is highly diverse in form, but not in subject: "Emin's exclusive subject matter is her personal life, and that life, as read off from the art, has included underage sex, rape, abortion, bouts of serious depression and long periods of drunkenness. These are represented in words and pictures, in small, edgy monochrome prints and in large assemblages of sewn material carrying inarticulate messages of love and hate."¹¹⁷ The work embodies a basic ambiguity, for "it is understood to promulgate a populist version of the hackneyed Romantic myth of the artist as creative primitive, while nonetheless, in the more sophisticated context of the art world,

cunningly exploiting the incongruity of its own naiveté for conceptual effect. It thus manages to achieve the marketing coup of being simultaneously popular and elitist.”¹¹⁸

Public debate over Emin’s art reached a peak in 1999, when she was shortlisted for the Turner Prize, and her exhibition at the Tate Gallery included *My Bed*, an installation in which a rumpled and urine-stained bed was surrounded by detritus that included blood-stained underwear, discarded food packages, empty vodka bottles, and used condoms. Some critics dismissed the work as a bad joke, as the editor of *Art Review* sneered that “Any list with Emin cannot be taken seriously,” and the British Secretary of State for Culture commented that the work of some young British artists “was giving the country a bad name abroad.” Yet in spite of the elitist attacks and dismissals, the accessibility of Emin’s art made her display the sensation of the exhibition, and a *Financial Times* critic observed that she had become the “people’s choice.”¹¹⁹ Deborah Cherry noted, however, that a more serious issue emerged from the debate: “The question that most preoccupied London critics was whether Tracey was telling the truth. If art is no more and no less than the artist’s life, then authenticity becomes a key benchmark for a critical practice that judges the artist rather than the work. Whereas those who supported her argued for the unmediated translation of life into art, less enthusiastic reviewers questioned her genuineness.”¹²⁰

The form and content of Emin’s art originated in a decision she made after graduating from the Royal College of Art, where she had been intensely unhappy. She destroyed all her previous work, gave up painting, and reacted against the goal of becoming a “picture-maker” by making herself the subject of her art: “I realized I was much better than anything I ever made ... I was my work.”¹²¹ She adopted as the themes of her work all the ways her background made her an outsider in the posh world of English art: “The fact that I’m not Anglo Saxon, I’m half

Cypriot. The fact that my dad came here in 1948. The fact that my father never went to school. The fact that I'm the first woman in my family to have an education ... The fact that I left school at thirteen ... The fact that I haven't got a rounded British accent. The fact that I'm not middle class. The fact that I had to work really hard to get through things."¹²² The style of her work reinforced this content, as for example in her monoprints "it is the act of rapid drawing, combined with quickly executed texts, that makes these works analogous to the unrehearsed, firsthand accounts of someone reporting a catastrophic or shocking event."¹²³ Yet Julian Stallabrass has noted that there is an ambiguity in Emin's statements and in her art, for "there is a continual slippage between memories of an event and poetic imagining."¹²⁴

Emin has consistently maintained that her art is both genuine and sincere. In an interview with the rock musician David Bowie, she denied that she ever uses irony: "Everything that I do is totally sincere."¹²⁵ She told another interviewer that "I work with what I know. It is always based on some real event, something that happened."¹²⁶ Her art is direct: "Art has always been, a lot of the time, a mysterious coded language. And I'm just not a coded person." Her goal is always to make a statement to a wide audience: "I want society to hear what I'm saying. I'm not only talking to galleries, museums and collectors. For me, being an artist ... [is] some kind of communication, a message."¹²⁷

For Emin's admirers, the perception of sincerity is the basis for much of her appeal. Jennifer Doyle noted that "Emin's work seems to offer itself up as an 'unedited' incorporation of the remains of a messy sex life, as a fantasy of a (nearly) unmediated encounter with the artist herself." Admirers can therefore identify with the art: "Reviews almost invariably describe weeping young women who identify with Emin's narratives of abuse, humiliation, rebellion. These spectators are so moved because they feel the work is not so much about 'Trace' as it is

about them.”¹²⁸ These spectators validate Emin’s claim that although her own experience serves as her point of departure, “it goes beyond that. I start with myself and end up with the universe.”¹²⁹

Emin’s considerable recent success, which has brought her both fame and fortune, poses an interesting potential problem for her personal art. Stallabrass observed that “Emin’s celebrity is a problem for her work because it might compromise her authentic primitive self – thus her continued mining of her childhood, adolescence and home-town happenings, the ineluctable past time of innocence and its first loss, and thus her neglect of later events.”¹³⁰ Emin freely acknowledges her change in status, as in 2000 she told a tabloid reporter “I’m not an outsider at all. I go to all the parties.”¹³¹ She also acknowledges that her audience might consequently lose sympathy with her: “oh well she made all this work about how hard life was, now what’s she going to do, make work about jumping into rich people’s swimming pools with bottles of champagne?”¹³² She maintains, however, that the true basis of her art has not changed, because her inner life has not been affected by the outward changes in her status: “On the outside it might look like my life is very comfortable, but inside my life is still in turmoil over things. I still go to bed crying, I still pray to God for a better life, I still curl up in a small fetal shape and cower from the world and those feelings never change.”¹³³

Conclusion

I purposely bought a mirror good enough to enable me to work from my image in default of a model, because if I can manage to paint the coloring of my own head, which is not to be done without some difficulty, I shall likewise be able to paint the heads of other good souls, men and women.

Vincent van Gogh, 1888¹³⁴

In the late nineteenth century, Vincent van Gogh initiated a new form of artistic behavior, by making his work entirely out of the experiences of his own life. He was soon followed by Edvard Munch, and their examples reverberated throughout the art of the twentieth century. So for example Francis Bacon considered van Gogh “one of my great heroes,” and Tracey Emin left her first course of art education “in love with Edvard Munch.”¹³⁵

In considering the practices of van Gogh, Munch and seven of the most important artists who followed them in making their art from their own lives, this study found several significant tendencies. In most of these cases, the artist’s biography was key: the subject of the art was the artist’s own life, and knowledge of the biography was consequently valuable for an understanding of the art. This was not universally true, however. Although both Bruce Nauman and Cindy Sherman used images of themselves in their most important works, the art was not genuinely personal, for they effectively served only as models or actors, whose true identity was not relevant to the art’s message.

All but two of the artists considered here were conceptual innovators. In a majority of the cases, their message was expressed through a personal symbolism that ran through much or all of their work. Thus van Gogh, Munch, Kahlo, Beuys, and Emin all relied heavily on personal symbols that became themes of their art over time. Although a complete understanding of these symbols requires extensive study, and is therefore not available to most viewers, for most of these artists the basic ideas of their work are clear even to casual observers. The obvious exception to this is Beuys, whose work is nearly meaningless to anyone unfamiliar with his personal history, and the myths he created around it.

Any artist who frequently makes self-portraits, or uses only subjects that are of personal significance, risks being accused of narcissism, or self-absorption. The probability of this

accusation may increase if the artist exaggerates or distorts the appearance of his or her subjects in the interest of personal expression. So it is not surprising that at some point this charge has been leveled against each of the artists considered here. Yet in spite of the fact that all these artists have prominently featured themselves and their immediate interests in their work, and have obviously departed considerably from objective portrayals, all have attracted admirers who consider the significance of the work to transcend its ostensible subject matter.

Personal poetry has primarily been the domain of conceptual artists, including prominently John Berryman, Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath, Theodore Roethke, and Anne Sexton. The same is true of visual art, as van Gogh, Munch, Kahlo, Beuys, Nauman, Sherman, and Emin all used their work to express ideas and emotions. In neither art was this conceptual predominance a complete monopoly, however. Thus just as Robert Lowell used confessional poetry experimentally, to describe his own life and his relationships with his family and close friends, so Bacon used personal painting to explore his vision of himself and his closest friends, and Bourgeois has used personal sculpture to delve into her perceptions of her past and her relationships with family members.

Vincent van Gogh was a self-taught painter: early in his career, he wrote to his brother Theo that “I have had no ‘guidance or teaching’ from others to speak of, but taught myself; no wonder my technique, considered superficially, differs from that of others.”¹³⁶ For him art was not merely a career, but a means of expressing his deepest beliefs. Thus in 1884 he wrote to a fellow painter of his conviction that “art is something which, although produced by human hands, is not created by these hands alone, but something which wells up from a deeper source in our souls.”¹³⁷ Van Gogh was never taught the traditional academic hierarchy of artistic subjects, and he had no interest in learning it, for to him there were no uninteresting or unimportant people

or places. He saw valuable motifs wherever he was. He believed that his task was to develop a language that would communicate the strength of his feelings for the world around him, including his own image: “it is difficult to know yourself – but it isn’t easy to paint yourself either,” he wrote to his brother, less than a year before his death.¹³⁸ For him it seemed natural to paint the people he cared most about, the things he saw every day, and the places where he chose to live. Although he didn’t think of this practice as novel, others soon recognized that it was an innovation that would help them to pursue, or achieve, their own artistic goals. Personal art thus became a key element of van Gogh’s legacy, and a distinctive feature of the artistic freedom of the twentieth century.

Footnotes

1. Paul Erik Tojner, *Munch In His Own Words* (Munich: Prestel, 2001), p. 183.
2. Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot, *Rembrandt by Himself* (London: National Gallery Publications, 1999), p. 10.
3. Iris Müller-Westermann, *Munch by Himself* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), p. 15.
4. Svetlana Alpers estimated that Rembrandt depicted himself “approximately fifty times in paint, twenty in etching, and about ten times in surviving drawings;” *Rembrandt’s Enterprise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 120. Adding the higher figure for each medium from van de Wetering’s and Alpers’ estimates – 50 paintings, 31 etchings, and 10 drawings – yields a total of 91.
5. White and Buvelot, *Rembrandt by Himself*, pp. 86, 229; Müller-Westermann, *Munch by Himself*, pp. 19, 176. Other artists have produced self-portraits at rates much higher than either Rembrandt or Munch for shorter periods. Vincent van Gogh, for example, painted all of his 43 self-portraits during the last five years of his life, and 26 of these were executed during the two years he spent in Paris; Fritz Erpel, *Van Gogh Self-Portraits* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1964).
6. Alpers’ high estimate of 50 self-portraits divided by Bailey’s low estimate of 270 total paintings would yield 18.5 percent, which would appear to be an upper bound; Alpers, *Rembrandt’s Enterprise*, p. 120; Anthony Bailey, *Responses to Rembrandt* (New York: Timken Publishers, 1994), p. 10. For evidence on the distribution of subjects of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, see e.g. John Michael Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 238-46.
7. Robert Phillips, *The Confessional Poets* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), p. 15.
8. Alan Williamson, *Introspection and Contemporary Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 1, 8.
9. Phillips, *The Confessional Poets*, pp. xi, 1, 17.
10. Robert Elliott, *The Literary Persona* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 16-21.
11. Phillips, *The Confessional Poets*, pp. 4-5.
12. Louis Simpson, *A Revolution in Taste* (NY: Macmillan, 1978), p. xviii.

13. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 8.
14. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, pp. 8-9.
15. Elliot, *The Literary Persona*, p. 53.
16. Robert Lowell, *Collected Prose* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987), pp. 246-47.
17. Elliott, *The Literary Persona*, p. 58.
18. Elliott, *The Literary Persona*, p. 55.
19. Lowell, *Collected Prose*, p. 122.
20. Vincent van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, second ed., vol. 2 (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1959), p. 605.
21. Meyer Schapiro, *Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 12.
22. George Heard Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe, 1880-1940* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1972), p. 94.
23. Schapiro, *Vincent van Gogh*, p. 12.
24. Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, vol. 3, p. 420.
25. Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 416, 534.
26. H.R. Graetz, *The Symbolic Language of Vincent van Gogh* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963), pp. 39-41.
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28. Van Gogh, *Complete Letters*, vol. 3, p. 470.
29. Van Gogh, *Complete Letters*, vol. 2, p. 119.
30. Schapiro, *Vincent van Gogh*, p. 12.
31. Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe*, p. 95.
32. Tojner, *Munch in His Own Words*, p. 135.

33. Reinhold Heller, *Edvard Munch: The Scream* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), pp. 62-
34. Tojner, *Munch in His Own Words*, p. 149.
35. Sue Prideaux, *Edvard Munch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 82; Tojner, *Munch in His Own Words*, p. 143.
36. Robert Rosenblum, et. al, *Edvard Munch* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1978), p. 11.
37. Prideaux, *Edvard Munch*, p. 83.
38. Tojner, *Munch in His Own Words*, p. 135.
39. Heller, *Edvard Munch*, p. 65.
40. Reinhold Heller, *Munch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 82.
41. Heller, *Edvard Munch*, pp. 78-80.
42. Tojner, *Munch in His Own Words*, p. 134.
43. Prideaux, *Edvard Munch*, p. 170.
44. Emma Dexter and Tanya Barson, eds., *Frida Kahlo* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 31.
45. Hayden Herrera, *Frida* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 74.
46. Herrera, *Frida*, pp. 74-75.
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48. Gannit Ankori, *Imaging Her Selves* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 10.
49. Dexter and Barson, *Frida Kahlo*, p. 31.
50. Ankori, *Imaging Her Selves*, p. 6.
51. Herrera, *Frida*, p. 97.
52. Herrera, *Frida*, p. 151.
53. Dexter and Barson, *Frida Kahlo*, p. 77; Herrera, *Frida*, p. 120.

54. E.g. see Herrera, *Frida*, pp. 197-214.
55. E.g. see Dexter and Barson, *Frida Kahlo*, pp. 55-78.
56. Herrera, *Frida*, p. 258.
57. Herrera, *Frida*, p. 410.
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69. Andrea Rose, *Francis Bacon* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2005).
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72. Russell, *Francis Bacon*, p. 178.
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91. Ray, *Joseph Beuys*, pp. 202-03.
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93. E.g. Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), pp. 21-22; Sam Hunter, John Jacobus, and Daniel Wheeler, *Modern Art*, third ed. (New York: Vendome Press, 2004), p. 366; Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *The Visual Arts*, sixth ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), p. 872.

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136. Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters*, vol. 1, p. 364.
137. Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 399-400.
138. Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters*, vol. 3, p. 201.