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The Masked Identity

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the MASKED IDENTITY

Elizabeth Rosenfeld

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When someone catches your eye...

seconds 1-15

who are they

what color are their eyes

where did they come from

who are they with

what are they thinking

what are they wearing

seconds 15-30

I wonder where they got the jacket

Would I look good in it

The color reminds me of a shirt my friend wears

I wonder what my friend is doing

Person forgotten.

It is interesting to think

the constant stream of questions

running through our brains.

Does it ever stop?

Walking down the street

people catch my eye.

The questions that I ask in my head never stop:

I question, analyze, and contrast people and their
behaviors to my own.

I am interested in the time I spend on others.

The people I question are the ones that invite me in.

The ones who trigger some connection to something I know,
knew,

or had forgotten.

Our complex selves come into contact with so many other complex people and yet we do not know the complexity the other contains as we pass.

What most intrigues me is this enigma - this otherness.

This hidden otherness.

While I look and capture another person with my lens

I cannot fully understand who they are,

where they came from,

and where they are going.

But for the thirty seconds my mind contemplates them

I consider so much about who they are,

where they came from,

and where they are going.

Identity.

We all hold one.

A past dictates who we are in the present.

The present determines who we become in the future.

Made up of vast qualities

all intertwined to create

us.

Some we are born with:

hair,

eye and

skin color,

sisters, brothers and parents.

Others we create for ourselves:

what we wear,

friends we make,

jobs we hold.

The morals we follow, or don't.
The decisions we make, or can't.
Each one creates one distinctive individual,
soul,
being.

Unique to the person who creates it
identity tells the tale of a life.

My photography captures the lives of countless people I have no connection to except a brief moment when I obtain them through the lens. The portraits represent an identity that is not lost to itself but is hidden from me and now holds only in a photograph. Identity is an intricate and endlessly weaving concept that analyzes and develops in the study of people. It resonates significantly in the statistics of hair, eye, skin color, the origins of our species, and our connections to others. My interest in identity goes further into the soul: the thinking of the brain and the complexity of others. Something deeper to the understanding of who people are. But a photograph only gives so much. A face. It presents only the surface of a deeper multifaceted being. It masks the true life that is presented to all by the way they present themselves.

An absence is present.

An absence of:

who,
what,
when,
where,
why.

the PROCESS OF ABSENCE:

Camera in hand I step into the street. Therein lies such an intriguing face. Lens to my eye, I acquire a quick second of a life - action, love, understanding, interest - with a few clicks of the camera. I continue to walk finding subjects that I know will make beautiful and interesting frames in my composition. Hearing the film roll finish and reload I take it back to the studio to stand in the dark bathroom and load my precious film for development. Going through each chemical I work in anticipation to see what I have captured. There it is. The face I had forgotten. The man I saw in the fish market. The women frowning at the children running in the street. The young lady I saw smiling from ear to ear at the food that was placed down on her table. The young boy I captured holding his dad's hand as they walk in the park. Each one sparks a memory, the memory of what went through my head when I first laid eyes on each one. As I make my way into the dark room to begin to develop I choose the images that most captivate me. The ones I questioned greatly when I absorbed that thirty seconds of their lives, something completely hidden to me. A life, an identity, a being I will never understand. A story I created only in my head, as I passed them on the street. That is all that is left. A picture reminding me of the brief thirty seconds they occupied my brain. Then the picture is developed on a specific cloth I have chosen from a fabric store in my hometown. Washed, dried, and ironed to prepare the ground base. Painting a photographic liquid emulsion to create the image on the surface. Interpreting the portrait of the subject with the masked identity. Once I have analyzed these quick snaps of my camera, I develop.

Photographs that are black and white. The removal of color.
An input of mystery, intrigue, and question.

I dry, stretch, and hang the beings I attained. To seal and hide the stories, the identities, and the lives of my subjects, I heat my wax. Apply, heat, smooth out. Apply, heat, smooth out. Consider adding a pigment to the mix. An ever so dull brown or yellow ochre. Something you can hardly distinguish a mood, style, a guise. Purely a mere emphasis to the face. I attached numerous layers and finish with a brush. Back and forth and back and forth I polish the surface. And there in front of me lies my piece.

It hangs. Hangs on the wall. And I imagine the thoughts that streamed through my head as I watched the subject drift by. As I look I begin to wonder, create, and describe my own stories and concepts of the person who conceals their identity deep inside themselves. And for a split second I wonder if they had done the same to me.

I am done. I have documented seconds of a stranger's life. Maybe a life I do not know or understand but one to which I obtain an endless connection. With my thoughts and my questions. My anthropological study of each person creates a log. A field study of the stories I fashioned for these strangers. A list of the things that not only bring me back to those beings, but bring me back to my own thoughts and actions of my art process.

I am the explorer.

In my subject.

In my discoveries.

In myself.

And this is my journal.
Of Memories.
Of Thinking.
Of Art.

the CONNECTION OF IDENTITY, OF PROCESS:

"Put somewhat simplistically, because the portrait more clearly than any other genre of representation elicits the question of who, it reinscribes more emphatically than any other kind of image a history that can do no more than name."¹

A central concept in the history of western art.

Protrahere (Latin for portray) "meaning 'to draw forth or reveal,' i.e., the appearance of someone or something."²

Portraiture deems more than its visual subject.

It develops into a representation of something constructed by the creator and onlooker. Replacing the subject with a collective memory – staying ever present.

Family portraits of the bourgeoisie society addressed bigger issues of kinship and social status not only through the idea of replication, but high status, wealth, and beauty consumed the painting. As a beginning, these representations developed and spun out into new theories and creations of portraiture. Contorting and redefining the theme, portraiture instructed new ways to identify, embody, symbolize, and suggest the human face and entire being. "Portraiture describes identity, the 'who,' perhaps better than any other visual genre. Through both its material

¹ Catherine M. Soussloff, The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 3.

² Paloma Alarco and Malcolm Warner, The Mirror and the Mask: Portraiture in the Age of Picasso (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 4.

instantiation and the actions around it portraiture invokes identity."³

It is significant to understand the different uses that define this concept of portrayal.

The words themselves (portrait and portraiture) suggested somewhat of a difference in their usage.

"Before the twentieth century, *portrait* referred solely to an image or material object, such as a relief sculpture, and *portraiture* usually denoted the action of portrayal or depiction that resulted in an image of a known person."⁴

In our language today it seems that portrait and portraiture are regarded interchangeably.

With this distinction, there is a webbing of other essential expressions that help to explain this idea.

"Likeness, as in the visualized physical aspects of a singular human being that correspond to an empirical reality, often exists in portrait representations, but many portraits said to be of particular individuals may not necessarily be congruent with a perceived exterior reality.

Recognition, which is less precise than **identification,** will often be used as a primary indicator of depiction in general, and because it turns resemblance into a matter of viewing, rather than maintaining that a standard of likeness resides in the portrait itself."⁵

While looking at another we consider these definitions.

Likeness to ourselves,
recognition of another,

³ Soussloff 23.

⁴ Soussloff 5.

⁵ Soussloff 6.

identify with something we know.

We revert back to our memories, to our family, to the mailman that delivers everyday, to the people we work with at our 9 to 5 jobs, to the thirty seconds we see a stranger on the street.

Jean-Paul Sartre described in understanding "the portrait would be the visual instantiation or material evidence of the desire for resemblance and connection, of the very function of the imagination."⁶

He understood that,

"The portrait makes visible what we imagine of others" and that our "consciousness completes the circuit of representation, portrayal, and recognition."⁷

In all, it is a relationship:

"the identity of the portrait belongs with the interpreter because s/he recognizes it in all of its dimensions: the person depicted, the artist who made it, and the work of art that it often has become."⁸

⁶ Soussloff 13.

⁷ Soussloff 14.

⁸ Soussloff 15.

the CAMERA:

Camera: the clocks for the sight of eyes⁹

"What is it that decides a person's identity? Is there a hard unalterable core within? Or is identity determined by how other people view an individual, a group or a culture? Or is it the product of an interchange between the two? Can you take photographs of identity?"¹⁰

—

"If cameras could indeed generate objective knowledge, then photo might arguably play a central role in the management and control of society in general. So, as the century unfolds, we see an ever-widening deployment of the camera and the technologies of picture-making as tools of surveillance and classification."¹¹

Photography fully developed in 1839 opened the wave for documenting and categorizing.¹²

In the Nineteenth century, portraiture photography developed into a key method revolving around the concept of recording knowledge on beings in a society and culture that bestowed the importance of examination and classification among many aspects of life.¹³

Anthropology

thrived with photographic classification in connecting identity and the individual.

⁹ Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography (New York City: Hill and Wang, 1980) 15.

¹⁰ Wendy Ewald, Photowork(s) in Progress/Constructing Identity (Netherlands: Snoeck-Ducaju and Zoon, 1997) Front Dust Jacket.

¹¹ Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in the Nineteenth Century Photography (Burlington: Lund Humphries, 2001) 57.

¹² Hamilton and Hargreaves 57.

¹³ Hamilton and Hargreaves 109.

Anthropologists

"try to find a deep identity that is shared by a particular group, to produce the single figure of a 'type'; on the other, they emphasize the inexhaustible differences between subjects, and thus emphasis the single as against the whole and try to describe the identity of an 'individual.'"¹⁴

Documenting, surveying, analyzing, and redefining the being. Scientifically classifying. Understanding Identity. Figuring out the individual: Personality, Character, Soul.¹⁵

¹⁴ Manlio Brusatin, Jean Clair, Grassi Palazzo, and Museo Correr, Identity and Alterity: Figures of the Body 1895/1995 (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1995) 45.

¹⁵ Hamilton and Hargreaves 115.

the WAX:

An ancient material.

To enclose the seconds.

The memory to last forever.

The containment of my concepts, ideas, thoughts.

Adaptable for countless needs.

To seal and protect, to paint, to sculpt, to melt, to light.

But to represent the haze of my thoughts and the thoughts and identity of my subjects.

Blocks of "almost colorless material, often a liquid, at other times a solid" wax is the conclusion to my pieces.¹⁶

Specifically Beeswax.

The aroma is breathtaking. Color has the accent of an antique yellow. Naturally pure white, but "strained by materials in the pollen and propolis that naturally contaminate it" yellow beeswax is the form I prefer.¹⁷

"Beeswax is a substance secreted by worker honey bees from four pairs of glands on the underside of their abdomens, and used by them for construction of honeycomb."¹⁸

One of the oldest natural waxes known, its qualities include high-melting point and hard resting form.¹⁹

Once known as having "a sublime, magical property," beeswax had "supernatural 'attributes'" in ancient times.²⁰

¹⁶ Thelma R. Newman, Wax as Art Form (South Brunswick: Thomas Yoseloff Ltd., 1966) 11.

¹⁷ Roger A. Morse and William L. Coggshall, Beeswax: Production, Harvesting, Processing and Products (Kalamazoo: Wicwas Press, 1984) 11.

¹⁸ Morse and Coggshall 11.

¹⁹ Newman 19.

²⁰ Newman 14.

"No matter how many variations there are in the treatment of wax, in a great many personal styles and diversity of subject matter it still maintains its properties of luminosity, fluidity, brilliance of color, texture."²¹

²¹ Newman 17.

the MASK:

Masks camouflage. "To hide the identity of the wearer, an acknowledgment of the degree to which facial features are tied in with cultural conventions of visual identification conventions that inform the history of portraiture."²²

Masks become the ever-changing face.

A hidden, apparent, deceiving expression of identity.

"Since the immemorial, facial lineaments have been taken as revealing the inner state of an individual."²³

The face: made of hundreds of muscles it generates emotions, indications, and deceptions.

Made of

the eyes and brow – embodying spirituality

the nose – containing sensation

the lips and mouth – embracing sensuality.²⁴

Identity can shine through or be suppressed. Changeable to the liking of the owner, the face is the revealer or the disguise of the human being.

It will hide "a person's true nature, but which, if it can be 'read' correctly, may be seen to display the essential nature of the person within."²⁵

The face portrayed as a mask is a powerful metaphor considering the variability of identity. Developed and redeveloped in every moment.²⁶

But what is apparent today is "we are less transparent than ever before; the tension between the interior and exterior of our own image endures, as does the idea that 'a pretty

²² Alarco and Warner 27.

²³ Brusatin, Clair, Palazzo, and Correr 33.

²⁴ Alarco and Warner 5.

²⁵ Hamilton and Hargreaves 63.

²⁶ Alarco and Warner 2.

face is not always the mirror of the soul.' As a result we are still exposed to capture in portraiture."²⁷

Consequently

"No wonder people devised a word for this mystery of identity, both made and not made, inner and outer weather; the soul."²⁸

²⁷ Alarco and Warner 9.

²⁸ Hamilton and Hargreaves 117.

the INSPIRATION:

"We make ourselves with stories"²⁹

A series of stories. Ever changing.

One caught in time.

A secret to the viewer,

only to be known by the beholder.

Christian Boltanski

A "teller of tales."³⁰

Inventing and reinventing his subjects he creates a narrative of identity.

Ones that are gone but their memories shall never be forgotten.

Boltanski creates a subject that, "speaks to us of shadows and of their mystery, which is also that of unfaithful, manipulated and fragmented memory, that of uncertain identity, of anonymity, of death and of mourning."³¹

Sophie Calle

An eerie but striking detective and documenter.

A curious soul.

²⁹ Ewald 113.

³⁰ Les Vies possibles de Christian Boltanski dir. Heinz Peter Schwerfel, DVD, 2009.

³¹ Patrick Talbot, Christian Boltanski faire part (Siena: Palazzo Delle Papesse Centro Arte Contemporanea, 2002) 9.

Calle "is recognized for her detective-like ability to follow strangers and investigate their private lives."³²

Calle's photographic works explore the area of absence. Absence of the people she encounters and peruses through her own natural inquisitiveness.³³

Deeming Calle a detective and voyager of her own artwork.³⁴
Following strangers.

Searching through personal items.

Creating a story, an identity of strangers.

Calle dictates, "for months I followed strangers on the street. For the pleasure of following them, not because they particularly interested me. I photographed them without their knowledge, took note of their movements, then finally lost sight of them and forgot them."³⁵

Cindy Sherman

A Mask of identity

A Disguising of the truth.

Photography "probed and investigated its various means of depicting realities and illusions through images."³⁶

Sherman was fascinated with and focused on the media, referencing, "older and more recent films, to fashion magazines, television, and advertising" enabling her to

³² "Sophie Calle-Biography," The European Graduate School: Graduate & Postgraduate Studies. Web. 28 Mar. 2011
<<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/sophie-calle/biography/>>.

³³ "Sophie Calle-Biography".

³⁴ "Sophie Calle-Biography".

³⁵ "Suite Vénitienne (1980-96)," Duke Street Exhibition. Web. 24 Mar. 2001 <<http://www.whitecube.com/exhibitions/suitevenitienne/>>.

³⁶ "The Latent Horror of Cindy Sherman's Images" Cindy Sherman: Photographic Work 1975 – 1995 Eds. Zdenek Felix and Martin Schwander, (Munich: Schipmer Art Books) 7.

"tap a rich reservoir of images, some trivial, some of great cultural significance, which she then places in a new context and deconstructs."³⁷

Her fascination, attraction, and pursuit to her depiction of females in our social culture, Sherman created an intriguing way to portray portraiture and identity through the many disguises she establishes in her work.³⁸

Sherman's search for understanding is, "to seek her true identity behind the woman performs in and by the image, that there is no depth to these photographs, that beneath the surface of the photographic image no intact, authentic self can be found, she is in fact emphasizing that her identity emerges only obliquely, as the conglomerate performance of her many masqueradea and displacements of the self."³⁹

Sherman tempts the viewer to understand and create the story of her portraits identities.

³⁷ Zdenek and Schwander 7.

³⁸ Laura Mulvey, A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman (Paris: Flammarion, 2006) 137.

³⁹ Elisabeth Bronfen, "The Other Self of the Imagination: Cindy Sherman's Hysterical Performance" Cindy Sherman: Photographic Work 1975 – 1995 Eds. Zdenek Felix and Martin Schwander (Munich: Schipmer Art Books) 22.

the SUBJECT:

"In documentary photographic portraits taken outside the studio the artist-photographer creates and opportunity from what they discover: what they expose."⁴⁰

my discoveries.

my unknown.

⁴⁰ Sandy Nairne and Sarah Howgate, The Portraiture Now. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 15.

Subject 1.



30" X 35" Liquid Light Emulsion Exposure on Cotton Cloth
Sealed with Beeswax Framed on Fiberboard Panel

Subject 2.



40" X 34" Liquid Light Emulsion Exposure on Cotton Cloth
Sealed with Beeswax Framed on Fiberboard Panel

Subject 3.



20" X 35" Liquid Light Emulsion Exposure on Cotton Cloth
Sealed with Beeswax Framed on Fiberboard Panel

Subject 4.



30½" X 34" Liquid Light Emulsion Exposure on Cotton Cloth
Sealed with Beeswax Framed on Fiberboard Panel

Subject 5.



42" X 34½" Liquid Light Emulsion Exposure on Cotton Cloth
Sealed with Beeswax Framed on Fiberboard Panel

Subject 6.



15" X 16" Liquid Light Emulsion Exposure on Cotton Cloth
Sealed with Beeswax Framed on Fiberboard Panel

Subject 7.



32" X 34" Liquid Light Emulsion Exposure on Cotton Cloth
Sealed with Beeswax Framed on Fiberboard Panel

Subject 8.



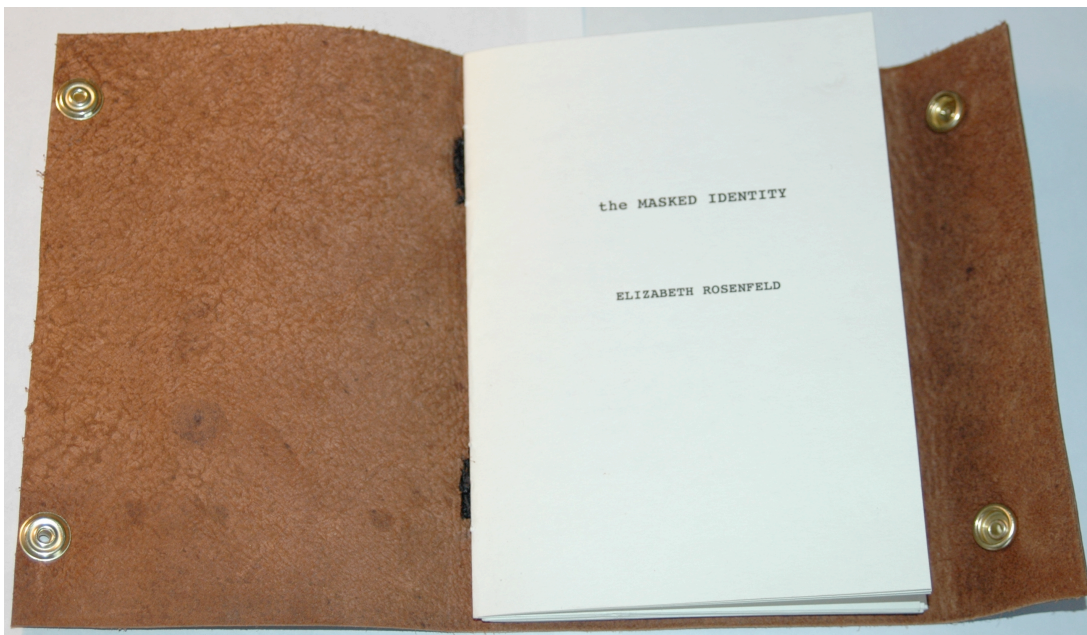
16" X 13" Liquid Light Emulsion Exposure on Cotton Cloth
Sealed with Beeswax Framed on Fiberboard Panel

Subject 9.



13" X 16" Liquid Light Emulsion Exposure on Cotton Cloth
Sealed with Beeswax Framed on Fiberboard Panel

the BOOK:



5" X 7" Bison Leather Bound Journal

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