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The digital self-portrait: a malleable image and a post-medium

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of digital malleability on the self-portrait, where the digital self-portrait as an image is layered and ambiguous, and when, remediated and exhibited, it becomes a new subject and a post-medium. This report forms the discussion of a research project, which is part of an ongoing visual art practice, where a series of exhibitions of self-portrait images were installed to construct notions of complex and layered digital image expressions of the self.

The first chapter is an introduction to this study and will briefly describe my own work to situate it within the postmodern condition. This broad account of a postmodern style will be contextualized within South Africa, where notions of flux, dislocation, complexity, vulnerability, ambiguity, the layered and the unfinished are related to expressions and identities in the self-portraits of this project. David Harvey, Fredric Jameson and Rosalind Krauss's notions of the post-medium will be noted, so as to situate my work post 1980. Reference to a new syntax in sculpture will be made, where I will unpack Krauss's account of the post-medium with regard to my own practices and self-portraits.

The second chapter will discuss the malleable digital image, within an account of digital culture, convergence and remediation. The digital self-portrait, it is argued, becomes a new subject with both a painterly interiority and a photographic exteriority. When the digital self-portrait is exhibited, as an installation, it inhabits a post-medium condition.

The third chapter consists of a discussion of my own practice as a major part of this research, and describes the process of making, which includes selection, remediation and exhibition installation, where notions of the complex, unfinished, layered, and ambiguous, affect the image and identity in the self-portraits. Three exhibitions are discussed, where the self-portrait project has been presented, and where the site or installation is explored as a contribution to the post-medium condition.