

THE ARTS

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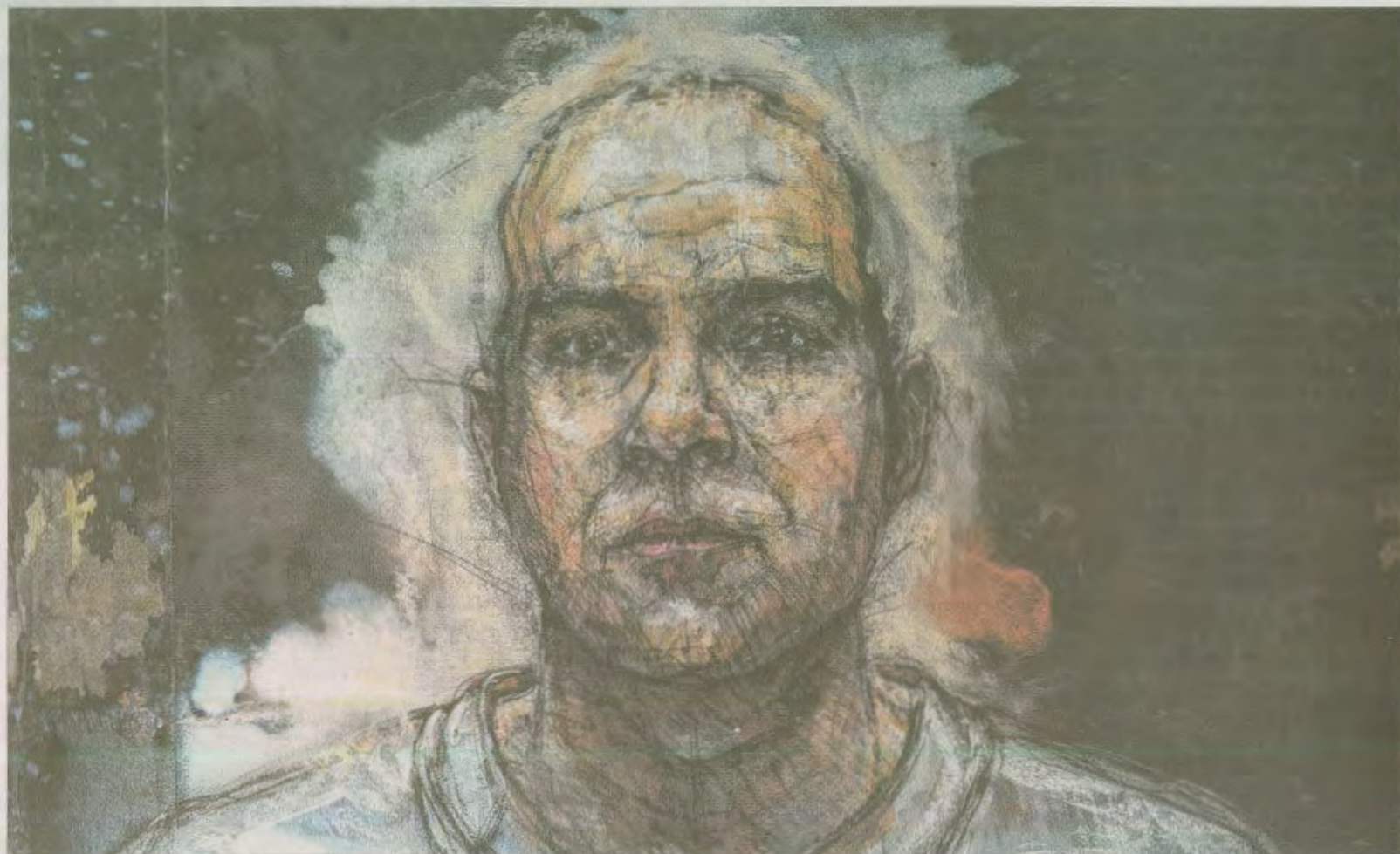
'Selfie' puts twist on self portrait

Artists didn't need an iPhone to create images at Chastain.

By Felicia Feaster
For the AJC

Along with "hashtag," "unfriend" and "crowdfunding," in 2014 "selfie" was added to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary of significant, freshly minted lexicon, cementing its importance as the favored portraiture of the smartphone and Internet age.

Artists from Van Gogh to Rembrandt to Frida Kahlo have, of course, been making "selfies" of some sort for hundreds of years, engaged in the creative act of self-analysis long before Steve Jobs' generation-defining iPhone came to pass. So while many have decried the selfie as synonymous with contemporary vanity and narcissism, cropping up at venues as inappropriate as Auschwitz and family funerals, a timely exhibi-



Karl Gustav Kroeppler's "Self Portrait in 360° Rotation" from "Selfie: A Contemporary Look at the Self-Portrait."

tion at Chastain Arts Center Gallery called "Selfie: A Contemporary Look at the Self-Portrait" suggests that maybe self-documentation is just human nature. It is certainly coin of the realm for many generations of artist.

Like the selfie, artists' self-portraits don't exist in a vacuum: They are created to be exhibited and shared, and so the timeless self-portrait and the more au courant technologically defined selfie have something in common.

Several of the selfies in this Chastain show reference a photographic perspective, like James Taylor's "Selfie Selfie" of the artist framed in the impromptu, casual style of a snapshot but rendered in watercolors. If the selfie is synonymous with dashed-off, on-the-fly self-portraiture, then Taylor's watercolor takes a different tack, creating something more methodical and lasting.

While Taylor's perspective mimics the photograph, Suellen Parker's three self-portraits have the look of paintings created via the digital sorcery of Photoshop.

ART REVIEW "Selfie: A Contemporary Look at the Self-Portrait"

Through Aug. 2: 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays and Fridays; 9:30 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Thursdays; 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Saturdays. Free. Chastain Arts Center Gallery, 135 W. Wileuca Road NW, Atlanta. 404-252-2927, www.oaatlanta.com/chastain/.

Bottom line: These artist self-portraits show a degree of insight and self-disclosure that challenges the "selfie" designation.

The artist's unique technique involves crafting and then photographing and Photoshopping clay sculptures. This trio of selfie portraits are hybrids of Parker's eyes and teeth superimposed onto her sculptures of admired icons, from classic Hollywood actress Rosalind Russell to British singer Kate Bush and television show "Facts of Life" actress Nancy McKeon.

Parker's work is a clever riff on selfies — which are so often determined to show subjects at their coolest, prettiest or most socially successful — in which she engages in the wish fulfillment of merging oneself with beloved influences. It is both an erasure of self and a propping up of self that blends the look-at-me vanity of the selfie and the very teenage desire to meld with or become one's idols.

A local artist whose large public photo murals have marked the cityscape, artist Matt Haffner has created a multimedia self-portrait in "Train Tracks Always Run Through the Ghetto." In this layered, beguiling self-portrait, black-and-white video of Atlanta's streets is projected on a gallery wall behind a graphic wooden cutout of the artist in porkpie hat and beard. It's a clever juxtaposition of the artist and his chosen stomping ground of Atlanta's gritty urban streets. The piece turns Haffner into a kind of human graffiti superimposed onto the city's

streets and buildings.

Self-portraits in "Selfie" range from the decidedly quirky to the highly accomplished, like Philip Carpenter's photorealistic paintings "Sequential Philips" of the artist brooding against a black backdrop. The paintings capture the artist in gestures of angst and deep thought, suggesting frozen moments from a complex life: unlike the smart-

phone selfie, which often strives to package and create an alternate, more glamorous reality.

In amusingly offbeat works, longtime Atlanta artist Cecelia Kane creates 18 odd and lovable laser print self-portraits embroidered onto vintage family hankies titled "How Am I Feeling Today."

While the selfie tends to prop its subjects up, carefully edited and

posed to show someone at their best, there is something charmingly self-effacing and silly in choosing a fabric used to dab tears and runny noses as one's canvas. Kane's work is the key to the show: evidence of the artistic impulse to go deeper than mere documentation and not always reveal the most flattering view of oneself in the pursuit of a deeper truth.

