

PHOTOGRAPHY ESSENTIALS

SELF-PORTRAIT



A collection of teaching guides to learn everything about photography. Each teaching guide is devoted to a theme, emblematic and representative of Photo Elysée's collections. History, theory and techniques are approached in a whimsical and accessible way. Activities for young and old, quotes, figures and anecdotes, as well as bibliographical references, allow everyone to learn more about photography, while having fun. The teaching guides for the photography essentials are available in four languages (English, French, Italian, German).

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THE SELF-PORTRAIT, THEORY

SELF-PORTRAIT, WHAT IS IT?

The self-portrait is a genre first developed in painting. As of the Renaissance, between 1300 and 1500, painters began to paint their own portraits.

Since its invention in 1839, photography has been widely used to represent humans. Photography studios multiplied and attracted a large public: everyone wanted to have their portrait taken! Quite naturally, photographers took their turn in front of the camera to become their own subject. You will discover some of them in the following pages. By taking a picture of yourself, you see yourself in a different light – you can choose the image you want to give of yourself. The photographic self-portrait thus becomes a tool of exploration and representation of oneself.



The first photographic self-portrait dates back to 1839. It was taken by Robert Cornelius (1809-1839), one of the pioneers of photography.

A self-portrait is made either by photographing your reflection in a mirror or any other reflective surface, or by taking a picture of yourself using a self-timer or a remote shutter release.

With the self-timer, the camera is automatically triggered after a set time, giving the photographer the time to pose in front of the camera before the picture is taken. The remote shutter release allows the photographer to activate the camera without being near it. Originally, a cord connected the camera to the shutter release, in the shape of a pear, which activated the camera when pressed. Nowadays, shutter releases are remote controls.

Self-timers and remote shutter releases were the first technical improvements that made it possible to take self-portraits.



Gabriel Lippmann, *Self-portrait*, circa 1892
This self-portrait is one of the treasures of Photo Elysée's collections.
Gabriel Lippmann (1845-1921) was the inventor of one of the first techniques for obtaining color photographs.



Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Indawo yam - LaceLandscape (2017)*, from the series *Awundiboni - You Don't See Me, 2015-1017*
The South African photographer, Thandiwe Msebenzi (1991), chose the self-portrait for her series dealing with the violence against women in her country. She appears veiled and proves that it is possible to make a self-portrait without exposing oneself.



Sabine Weiss, *Self-portrait*, 1953
At just 30 years old, Sabine Weiss (1924) poses here with her camera, a Rolleiflex.

THE SELF-PORTRAIT, THEORY

THE SELFIE

Selfie and self-portrait both imply a self-representation, either taking a picture of oneself or staging oneself. The self-portrait appeared very early in the history of photography. The selfie, on the other hand, is a phenomenon that appeared in the digital age.

The evolution of the photographic process goes hand-in-hand with that of technology. In fact, the basic principles of the selfie are the use of the front-facing camera – which allows you to see and photograph yourself at the same time – and the sharing on social media, all using one and the same object: the smartphone.

Apart from these technical aspects, the modes of distribution of each one are quite different. The self-portrait is primarily intended for a public that will take the time to contemplate it: in a museum or on the pages of a book, for example. This is the opposite of the selfie, whose objective is a wide and instantaneous diffusion on social networks in order to be commented, shared, liked and – why not – to create a buzz!

The selfie is also the testimony of the ever-increasing need to be in the limelight, to be seen, and with that, to receive the approval of others. It can even become an addiction!



The term “selfie” first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013, and in the Petit Robert in 2015.



Did you know that about 1000 selfies are taken every minute in the world, in other words, more than 86 million per day.

THE SELF-PORTRAIT, THEORY

THE MIRROR

The mirror is an accessory of choice for photographers who practice self-portraiture. The subtle play of reflections creates unexpected, amusing and sometimes strange optical effects. With the help of a mirror, photographers can show themselves from different angles at the same time. From the front and from the side, the face reveals its multiple facets!

Looking at oneself in a mirror is a very intimate, personal act. The self-portraits in the mirror thus transport us to the photographer's world. We see the objects that surround them, their immediate environment, their studio – things that generally remain a bit mysterious. The camera is also frequently visible in the picture.

In the street, store windows are the opportunity for self-portraits that show the photographers in action!



“The tool of every self-portrait is the mirror. You see yourself in it. Turn it the other way and you will see the world.”

— Agnès Varda



Monique Jacot, *Untitled*, 2003
This self-portrait of Monique Jacot (1934), Swiss photographer, shows her at home, surrounded by her cameras.

THE SELF-PORTRAIT, THEORY

IN PHOTO ELYSÉE'S COLLECTIONS

Kourtney Roy (1981)

The Canadian artist, Kourtney Roy, began making self-portraits at an early age. She likes to create fictions: in her images, she puts herself in the shoes of characters created from scratch, who find themselves in unusual situations. Her body and her face are very often at the center of her compositions. As a result of their framing and their extremely elaborate settings, her photographs seem to be taken out of a film! Kourtney Roy explores the beauty and the strangeness of everyday life and plays around with the banality of it. The limit between fiction and self-portrait can also be subject to interpretation.



Kourtney Roy, *From the serie « Hope », 2014*



Kourtney Roy, *From the serie « Hope », 2014*

Suzi Pilet (1916-2017)

Born in 1916 in La Tour-de-Peilz, Suzi Pilet is part of the first generation of women to have been able to make a living as a photographer. Very independent, she always preserved her freedom. Her photographic universe is very poetic, with nature occupying an important place. She frequently uses her image for her photographic creations, where mystery always rubs shoulders with a certain humor. In one, she seems almost transparent in a starry sky. In the other, her face is adorned with a thousand swirling lights, like a symbol of her imagination and her overflowing creativity!



Suzi Pilet, *Self-portrait, circa 1970-1980*



Suzi Pilet, *Superimposed self-portrait, circa 1940*

THE SELF-PORTRAIT, ACTIVITIES

ANALYSIS

A SELF-PORTRAIT, HOW DOES IT WORK?

The photographic self-portrait can take many forms. Throughout the pages, observe the elements that photographers have chosen to emphasize in their self-portrait(s).

Here are some tips to help you:

How do the photographers pose?
How do they stage themselves?



How is the light? Do we see shadows?

What is the environment, the setting?

Do we see any objects and, if so, what do you think their purpose is?

Has the photograph been manipulated (overprinted, elements added, edited, etc.)?

Do any technical details attract your attention?

Can you tell when the photograph was taken?

Are there any elements that allow you to say that it is a self-portrait of a photographer?

THE SELF-PORTRAIT, ACTIVITIES

DEBATE

FROM SELF-PORTRAIT TO SELFIE – A QUESTION OF TECHNIQUE

The practice of photographic self-portraiture evolved with the development of the equipment. The first cameras were heavy and bulky. Exposure time was long. As a result, the first photographic self-portraits conformed to a very classical esthetic: the subject faced the camera, posed in a comfortable position, and the framing was adjusted.

The first light and easy-to-handle cameras appeared between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, allowing more freedom and less technical constraints! Self-portraits become more daring, freer, more surprising.

With smartphones and the first selfies, immediacy became of the essence. We can take pictures of ourselves everywhere, all the time, alone or in a group, add filters, and repeat the process time and time again!



And what do you think about it?

- **In your opinion, what differentiates the self-portrait from the selfie?**
- **Do they each contain different messages?**
- **Can selfies be considered as art?**
- **Do you take selfies? Why?**

THE SELF-PORTRAIT, ACTIVITIES

EXPERIENCE

THE PHOTO BOOTH

The main principle of the photo booth, which first appeared in the 1920s, was to take inexpensive passport photos. Both a processing laboratory and a photography studio, this automatic street device is often found in busy places. In the 1970s, color was introduced, followed by digital technology in the late 1990s.

In the privacy offered by this enclosed space, everyone poses according to his or her needs, comfort and the mood of the moment. The spontaneity provided by the rapid succession of shots and the serial nature of the self-portraits thus produced has seduced many photographers.



You most certainly have a photo booth close to you. If you are in Lausanne, you can visit the one at Photo Elysée. Alone, with family or friends, try it out!



In 2001, the film *Amélie* (also known as *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*), directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, tells the story of a rather particular collector who collects the discarded photographs of unsatisfied strangers from photo booths and carefully arranges them in albums.



Photo booths: René Burri – Sigrüst Marie and Rouge Mélanie – Harry Kakouliolis

THE SELF-PORTRAIT, ACTIVITIES

EXPERIENCE

OF SHADE AND LIGHT

Light is a very important element in photography, especially for portraits and self-portraits. It allows you to add or remove shadows, depending on the desired effect, and to emphasize facial features. Consequently, flash and artificial lighting are often used, in fashion, for example. However, light also makes it possible to create particular effects, to play with shadows, to draw silhouettes...



Using a flashlight, or just sunlight, explore the self-portrait of shade and light.



Hans Steiner,
Self-portrait, 1945
In this self-portrait, the Swiss photographer,
Hans Steiner (1907-1962), plays with his shadow.

THE SELF-PORTRAIT, ACTIVITIES

WORKSHOP

A FUN SELF-PORTRAIT!

The self-portrait is a great big playground! Many photographers have had fun creating new identities for themselves, putting themselves in the shoes of imaginary characters, using props and costumes. It is often the opportunity to break codes! Shall we start?

Necessary equipment:



A camera or a smartphone, accessories and imagination!



Step by step:

1. Imagine the character that you would like to create
2. Choose your accessories
3. Take your picture



Liu Bolin

Hiding in the Musée de l'Elysée, 2019

The Chinese artist Liu Bolin (1973) is the uncontested master of camouflage.

After meticulous preparation, carried out with the help of assistants who cover him with paint, Liu Bolin poses in front of landscapes and places of which he becomes an integral part. Try to imagine the story behind this picture!

THE SELF-PORTRAIT, ACTIVITIES

WORKSHOP

THE SELF-PORTRAIT THAT DEFINES ME.

The self-portrait is also an opportunity to express who you are, to tell your story. Some photographers pay particular attention to the setting and objects that surround them. These elements often have a meaning.

And you, what objects are important to you? Create a self-portrait that defines you with the help of collages!

Necessary equipment:



Objects and a place that you like, a camera or a smartphone, a sheet of paper, a magazine, scissors, glue, crayons.



Step by step:

1. Pick 2-3 objects that you like.
2. Take your picture.
3. Print your picture.
Glue it to a big sheet of paper.
4. Cut out things you like in a magazine.
5. Like René Burri did, glue what you cut out of the magazine around your photo to create a self-portrait that defines you.



René Burri
Self-portrait, Coronado, New Mexico, 1973-1983
The Swiss photographer, René Burri (1933-2014), has a passion for collage. He travels extensively for his work, spending long hours on planes. This is how he started to cut out pictures from magazines and to assemble them into collages.

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