

Nancy Robinson

Artist Statement

I paint surrealistic self-portraits based on my daily life.

In my art, as in my life, everything is strange and confusing. Hidden agendas abound, thoughts manifest themselves through anatomical distortions, and daily life is a discombobulated nightmare.

My first self-portraits, begun in 1995, were works on paper painted with casein paint. I called them “psychological portraits.” Rather than portraying myself as I actually looked, I invented icons to act as stand-ins for myself. I’ve since expanded my oeuvre to include oil paintings. Many of the current paintings depict my own recognizable image. I’m especially interested in exploring the disparity between how others see me and the way I see myself. This subject is particularly compelling as I age into invisibility as an older woman.

Exploration of the Self has always been pivotal to my art making. Despite my many decades of art practice, portraying myself as the protagonist in my own life still feels like a new and radical action. The experiences of my daily existence as a woman remind me that despite welcome progress in women’s equality issues, there’s still a long way to go. I make feminist art as a way of helping recalibrate the way women are viewed in the world.

Art history has been dominated by images of women as seen through the eyes of a man. My paintings depict the world from a woman’s viewpoint. I use humor in my art as a way of engaging the viewer and inviting them to participate in a friendly dialogue.

The exploration of internal vs. external identity is just one example of how I use universal themes for my subject matter. I also tackle the subjects of beauty, aging, romantic love, loss, sibling rivalry, narcissism, human frailty, and the apocalypse. Some of the archetypes I use in my paintings are the stuff of Biblical stories or folktales, such as Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden or Pinocchio (The Liar). I’m fond of certain universal symbols: the banana appears often in my paintings, sometimes as a phallic symbol and sometimes as a symbol for mistakes. I use other universal archetypes such as rabbits, dogs and ducklings. A recent addition to my oeuvre is individual portraits of the guests at the party at the end of the world, including Mrs. Narcissus, the Nemesis, the Bubblehead, and more.

Although my work originates with personal experiences, it ultimately depicts the drama, passion and mystery of the human condition.