



# **In Her Own Image: Women's Self-Representation in 20th Century Art**

*Danielle Knafo*

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*In Her Own Image* examines the lives and works of ten pioneering female artists over the last century whose self-representational art opened up new vistas on the female experience. Each of the artists—Käthe Kollwitz, Claude Cahun, Charlotte Salomon, Frida Kahlo, Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, Adrian Piper, Cindy Sherman, and Orlan—used her art to overcome personal obstacles and traumas, so her work is not merely in dramatic dialogue with her social world but also her personal history.

Danielle Knafo extends the discourse between feminism and art history, while revealing core psychological sensibilities involved in women's self-representation—for example, the need for mirroring, the use of mask and masquerade, the drive for reparation, the presence of the uncanny, and the complex and controversial concept of female narcissism. The psychoanalytic thread running throughout this book allows for the better telling of each artist's personal story—fascinating, poignant, tragic, and inspiring—so that the reader enters the life of the artist and identifies with her personal, relational, political, aesthetic, and spiritual struggle. The author's meticulous scholarship is informed by decades of clinical experience. Though she analyzes the personalities of these women, she never pathologizes them. Her personal interviews with several of the artists, their family members, and romantic partners, bring a fresh and intimate perspective to their narratives.

The book describes both conscious and unconscious processes at work in the most psychological of all art forms. The core of female self-representational art is the artist's body, but the art itself represents the embodied experience of the artist—her family, sexuality, relationships, childhood experiences, personal traumas and attempts at mastery, the way her culture shaped her, and her response to its oppression—all the relational elements of her particular universe. Knafo reveals the artist and her work in depth because each side is described and characterized in relation to the other. The personal psychology informs the art and the art her personal psychology, neither holding sway over the other. Adeptly weaving both together in a nuanced layering of historical, cultural, and aesthetic meaning, Knafo also helps readers understand their own complex and even uneasy response to the art of these women. She renders the artists such that they speak to every woman, regardless of her background, in an intensely personal voice, saying something new about the female experience and its inspiring power.

*In Her Own Image* stands as the most comprehensive and in-depth treatment of this remarkable group of women artists whose primary subject is their own bodies and selves. Within these pages, the reader will be treated to a rare grasp of their stories and achievements.

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