

The Self Assessed

Rita Ackermann, Lorenzo Amos, Oliver Bak,
Georg Baselitz, Giorgio de Chirico, Michaela Eichwald,
Tracey Emin, Grant Falardeau, Eric Fischl,
Nathanaëlle Herbelin, Martin Kippenberger, Jeff Koons,
Maria Lassnig, Victor Man, Paula Modersohn-Becker,
Bruce Nauman, Albert Oehlen, Dana Schutz,
Cindy Sherman, Rudolf Stingel, Thomas Struth,
Rebecca Warren

curated by Cornelius Tittel

30 April – 30 May 2026

Potsdamer Straße 77-87, 10785 Berlin

Opening: Thursday, 30 April, 6 – 8pm



Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 2016, photo: def image

Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to present *The Self Assessed*, an exhibition of self-portraits curated by Cornelius Tittel, at Potsdamer Straße 77-87 in Berlin.

*'The most fascinating surface on earth is that of the human face.'*¹

Art has never ceased to be captivated by this observation, which Georg Christoph Lichtenberg recorded in his notebooks with the elegance of an aphorism. For this surface is never neutral. It is a screen for projection, a setting, a stage – a field of tension where art and society come into closest contact. This is precisely where the exhibition *The Self Assessed* unfolds – curated by Cornelius Tittel, who unites an impressive list of artists that reflects his ten years as editor-in-chief at Blau International.

The history of the self-portrait can be read as a history of such constructions: it assigns the individual a place, as a bearer of meaning, as a role made visible, as a figure within an order that is either affirmed or called into question in the image. Only when this convention begins to crumble does the yardstick shift. What matters is no longer resemblance, but the intensity of the appearance, the painterly gesture, the degree of presence. In the self-portrait, this movement condenses into a paradoxical core. Here, gaze and counter-gaze coincide and yet remain irreconcilable. Anyone who depicts themselves attempts to grasp an 'I' that eludes all grasp. The self-portrait is not a mirror in the naive sense, but an experiment: analysis and staging at the same time. In it, the self tips over into the foreign; the face becomes form, becomes figure, becomes a silent surface. This shift runs through the exhibition as a subtle, unyielding line.

In Paula Modersohn-Becker's work, the self-portrait becomes a site of radical artistic self-assertion. She faces the viewer with an unwavering gaze; her painting style is uncompromisingly modern, her claim clear: not to be a likeness, but a counterpart. In its directness, the painting recalls Rembrandt's self-portraits and is thus at the same time a harbinger of a subjectivity that can no longer be categorised. From here, the exhibition spans the 20th and 21st centuries. Giorgio de Chirico stages himself in shifting roles – as an old master, as a historical reference, as his own caricature. Through

¹ Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Sudelbücher*, p. 88.

his travesties, he subverts the notion of a stable self and opens up a space in which identity becomes a performative gesture. This movement finds its logical continuation in the work of Cindy Sherman: her face transforms into a variable surface; identity appears as an effect of representation.

Simultaneously, the self shifts from the image into the sphere of action. Bruce Nauman replaces representation with presence – the self unfolds in the act of creation. Martin Kippenberger takes this movement to extremes, rendering it fragile; Georg Baselitz transforms it into an almost austere rigour, in which body, space and image become coordinates of an existential self-inquiry. This exploration continues within painting itself, yet the strategies differ fundamentally. Albert Oehlen deconstructs and reconstructs painterly identity, whilst Rudolf Stingel transforms surfaces into repositories of time and touch. Oliver Bak and Victor Man unveil fragile, often dark pictorial spaces; here the self appears as both a psychological and a social locus. Lorenzo Amos reveals the walls of his studio, marked by the traces of a life lived – and so his image turns into a double self-portrait, at once a reflection of space and of existence. Eric Fischl and Dana Schutz work with narrative constellations of great atmospheric density. Maria Lassnig engages in a radical introspection of bodily sensation, whilst Tracey Emin opts for unguarded, immediate self-revelation. Alongside these painterly positions, other media come into focus. Thomas Struth reflects on the act of seeing, whilst Jeff Koons translates contemporary narcissism into smooth, mannerist surfaces in which the gaze and desire become entangled. Rebecca Warren fragments the body into sculptural traces, whilst Rita Ackermann and Grant Falardeau allow intimacy and memory to slip into fleeting visual states. Finally, in the works of Nathanaëlle Herbelin and Michaela Eichwald, this narrative is not continued but rather displaced. References emerge, only to dissolve again. Here, the self no longer appears as the source, but as an echo – as something that takes shape only in the reverberation of other images.

Thus, a dense web of gazes, reflections and shifts emerges. What is revealed within is not a fixed self, but a movement, an apparition that constantly reforms and eludes us in the very act of seeing. Perhaps, in the end, the self-portrait is less an image than a mirror. Yet this mirror reveals nothing that was there before. It reveals by transforming, and it transforms by drawing us into the image we believe we are seeing. What remains in the end is not the recognised self, but the experience of encountering ourselves anew in the foreign gaze that meets us from within the image.

Nils Emmerich, 2026

Further Exhibitions and Events

BERLIN

Darren Almond
Between the Lines
30 April – 30 May 2026
Bleibtreustraße 45
10623 Berlin

Vivien Zhang
Field Conditions
30 April – 27 June 2026
Goethestraße 2/3
10623 Berlin

PARIS

Eddie Martinez
Purple Flopper
28 May – 1 August 2026
46 & 57, rue du Temple
75004 Paris

LONDON

Grace Weaver
Plaids
21 April – 28 May 2026
41 Dover Street
London W1S 4NS

MARFA

Rinus Van de Velde
The Dinner
24 May – 6 December 2026
1976 Antelope Hills Road
Marfa, Texas

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