

in his work Pierre Molinier (1900–1976) conceals and constricts parts of male bodies, including his own, with women’s suspenders and stockings, framing the male body in a different way, and destabilising constructions of gender.

Upstairs, a selection of historic and contemporary work presents a material and metaphorical garden of Narcissus, introduced by Bill Brandt’s (1904–1983) dreamlike image, with its mirror in a landscape. Reflections construct landscapes and convey unfathomable spatial settings in an abstract work by Henri, and in Paul Nash’s (1889–1946) astonishing painting *Voyages of the Moon* (1934–37). This two-dimensional work is a prelude to Yayoi Kusama’s (b.1929) installation *Narcissus Garden* (1966), composed of several hundred mirrored balls which capture the reflections of viewers’ bodies, and paradoxically multiply and miniaturize their images, making the occupants of the garden both larger and smaller. In Kusama’s original presentation of the work at the Venice Biennale, she invited collectors to purchase one of the balls, conceptually incorporating their narcissistic desires into the work.

Like Kusama’s installation, Pipilotti Rist’s (b.1962) *Sip My Ocean* (1996) also physically and conceptually extends the boundaries of physical experience. Large-scale double screen projections of Rist’s body underwater are framed by a sea of blue carpet and dream-like music. Her magnified body’s reflections envelop the viewer in a multi-sensory realm. This womb-like environment resonates with Freud’s description of a state corresponding to primary narcissism which he called the ‘oceanic feeling’, an all-embracing sense of union between the ego and the world. Rist, well known as a feminist artist interested in deconstructing conventional portrayals of women’s beauty, and for making her own body the subject of her work, beckons the viewer into the sensuous pool of Narcissus.

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Narcissus Reflected

The myth of Narcissus in surrealist and contemporary art

Exhibition 22 April – 26 June 2011

Curated by David Lomas and Dawn Ades

This exhibition explores images and ideas associated with the myth of Narcissus, the concept of narcissism and their legacies. This particular group of paintings, drawings, sculptures, poetry, collage, experimental photography, film and installations ranging from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century has been selected by two historians of surrealist art, Professor David Lomas (University of Manchester) and Professor Dawn Ades (University of Essex). *Narcissus Reflected* brings together historic and contemporary art to examine the long history of representing the many meanings of Narcissus.

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The figure of Narcissus originates in Greek myth. In the poem *Metamorphoses* (completed in 8 A.D.), Ovid's Narcissus is so captivated by the image of his 'fair complexion with its rosy flush' that he wastes away beside his reflection, and is transformed into a narcissus flower. Ovid's images and ideas – the beautiful body of Narcissus, literal and metaphorical self-reflection, mirroring and doubling – endure as compelling subjects for the artists here.

The central focus of the exhibition is, appropriately, a pair of major works: Salvador Dalí's iconic painting *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937) and the hand-drawn collage *Narkissos* (1976–91) by the San Francisco artist Jess, which is exhibited here for the first time outside the United States. Both of these works explore the Narcissus myth and the concept of narcissism, first coined in 1899 by the psychiatrist Paul Näcke, and later defined by the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud as an early stage in the formation of an individual's ego, the stage at which the individual can only love his or her own body. Although Freud considered narcissism an important part of human development, it was also supposed to be a passing phase rather than an impediment to the formation of intimate relationships with others.

Surrealist artists found in narcissism and the figure of Narcissus ideas and forms for representing the complex nature of human identity, sexuality and behaviour. Dalí (1904–1989) so strongly identified with Narcissus that he adopted the character as a persona, taking his *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* with him when he went to meet Freud. At first glance, the stereoscopic composition suggests a double image of the kneeling Narcissus, but closer inspection reveals the form on the right to be a hand holding an egg from which a narcissus flower sprouts. Here, the painting is shown as Dalí intended, alongside the poem he wrote to accompany it.

The interdependence of text and image was an important part of Dalí's process from the beginning of the project: the original manuscript of the poem contained preparatory drawings, some of which are presented here. As Lomas suggests, painting and poem operate together as an exercise in the artist's self-analysis, and an embodiment of the most important literary and artistic threads of the Narcissus myth from the 1890s onwards. Dalí's obsession with Narcissus was intensely personal, but in true narcissistic fashion, he also projected the character of Narcissus onto his close companions and his wife Gala, as is evident in both the poem's ending and in his letter to his patron and confidante Edward James, who commissioned the painting.

By the *fin de siècle*, Narcissus had become a symbol for artists, and later, for gay culture. The artist Jess (born Jess Collins, 1923–2004) wanted his *Narkissos* to 'maintain intense homoeros unprofaned, sensuous, joyful-fearful.' Like Dalí, Jess was obsessed with Narcissus, but rather than identifying with him, he engaged in a solitary project, amassing a huge number of found images and textual extracts on the subject of Narcissus from historical and contemporary sources. In his notebook, images and references collected from a period of over thirty years form an incredible range of sources, from Neoplatonist

thought and studies of ancient occult writers to Sigmund Freud; from photographs of ancient Greek sculpture to Hollywood movie stills and Crazy Kat cartoons.

In *Narkissos*, Jess based the central Narcissus figure on *Kneeling Youth* (1898), a bronze sculpture by George Minne (1866–1941), but the selection of this element is only one part of a much larger and more complicated process. Jess pinned his collection of found images to a board to form the composition of the larger drawing, upending or reversing images, using mirror symmetry and other compositional devices. He then engaged in what he called 'translation', drawing and scaling up images on paper and pasting them to make a collage. A number of the extraordinary compositional studies are shown here, elegant and precise contour drawings.

In much of the experimental photography and film in this exhibition, the mirror serves a prop for the performance of the artists' subjectivities. The reflection of a body in a mirror reverses and inverts the image, doubles and multiplies it. Lomas argues that for particular artists, the interest in formal inversion and multiplication of the image also represents a desire to invert conventional gender roles and to multiply identities.

The photographs of Claude Cahun (1894–1954) and Florence Henri (1893–1982) exemplify this interest. Changing her given name of Lucy Schwob to the pseudonym Claude Cahun, Cahun used photography to capture her own often androgynous and multiple identities constructed by radical changes in appearance. In *Self-portrait* (1928), Cahun photographs herself in a male guise. Also a talented writer, her interest in gender as a construction was one form of her political engagement. Unlike Cahun, Henri never wrote about her own sexuality. Recognized in her lifetime as an innovative photographer, she used mirrors in her pursuit of abstraction, fracturing space and disorienting the viewer's relationship to her camera, simultaneously fragmenting and multiplying her subjects' identities.

Reflection, mirrors and doubles also fragment and multiply the subjects in the fashion photographer Cecil Beaton's (1904–1980) portraits of the rich and famous in the 1920s. His later portraits are overtly homoerotic, particularly *Gervase Griffiths, Reddish* (1968), which features a naked youth in the guise of Narcissus. The mirrors and reflections of Narcissus are evoked in Jean Cocteau's (1889–1963) film *Orphée* (Orpheus) (1950), itself a merging of the Narcissus and Orpheus myths. Taking inspiration from Cocteau's *Orphée* is the very rarely seen film *Narcissus* (1956) by Willard Maas (1906–1971), who described the work as 'a film-poem, a re-telling of the Greek myth in modern terms'. It can also be read as an allegory of gay life in 1950s New York.

Narcissus also appears as a cult figure in a special issue of the New York-based surrealist literary magazine *View*, accompanied by photographs made by the magazine's contributors, including co-founder Charles Henri Ford (1913–2002) and George Platt Lynes (1907–1955). Ford's *Narcissus* and Platt Lynes's *Chester Nielson with J. Ogle (behind glass)*, both made in 1937, focus unashamedly on beautiful male bodies, using different strategies to multiply and frame their naked forms. By contrast,