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***RIEGLEMATICA: RE-IMAGINING THE PHOTOBOOTH THROUGH FEMALE  
PERFORMATIVITY AND SELF-PORTRAITURE***

By

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR SUSAN RANKAITIS  
PROFESSOR KEN GONZALES-DAY**

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My obsession with photobooths and automatic portraiture dates back to age 5, when I used tokens at a Chuck E. Cheese's to have my photo taken automatically in an attraction called the Photo Ride next to a plastic life-size version of Chuck himself. I saved that strange black & white photo for the next 16 years and regarded it as a treasure despite the insignificance of the day I took it. I've stumbled upon photobooths occasionally, and others times sought them out for refuge—they are thrilling yet mundane, private yet public, liberating yet confining.

My work inside the photobooth began on the streets of Florence, Italy, in a chemical booth called the Foto Automatica, a brief walk from my apartment. At the time I was experiencing endless harassment on the streets from the locals both for my hair color and American ways. I tried to assimilate—I bought the standard outfit for Italian teens, popular style of backpack and shoes, and tucked my hair in my jacket when I was out, but I couldn't shake the feeling of being hyper-observed at all times. When prompted to create a self-portrait series in my Italian photography class I saw the opportunity to document myself in relation to my experience living in the city and being harassed. I decided to photograph myself within the confines of the Foto Automatica, the place I had found most comfortable and private while abroad. I had imagined myself living in the booth, hiding out in the tiny box on one of the busiest corners in Florence, and crafted a visual narrative to capture what it might be like. Tromping down to the booth with bags of props and costumes, I really did end up living in it in a sense, paying rent through two euro coins and only leaving when I felt the presence of a couple waiting outside or the sun going down. The Italy series is complete for now, but my desire to take this idea further has only increased and my fascination with the disappearing chemical photobooth has led me to research it's origins, artists who have made it their own, and analyze the aesthetics of the space that make it such a unique oddity.

This fall I built my own interpretation of a classic photobooth model, entitled *RIEGLEMATICA*, which simulated the experience of being hyper observed. Hidden behind a door, I secretly controlled the booth, only unexpectedly revealing my presence to the viewer by sticking one gloved finger out to press the button on the camera. The subjects left with a Polaroid photo of themselves unprepared in the booth, with a comment at the bottom that suggested the presence of an aggressive anonymous observer. At the top of the photograph was a date associating the comment—something I either felt or was told as someone who grew up in the public eye—with the time period that it most directly referenced.

In mid December of 2013, I will travel to Johnson City, Texas, to serve as an apprentice to a family that restores defunct chemicals photobooths and places them in bars and restaurants around Austin for public use. With the guidance of photobooth enthusiast and mechanic Charles Goeken, I will aid in the restoration of a chemical booth that I intend to use in the spring to continue a self-portrait performance series.

This paper explores the historical significance and advancements of automatic photobooth portraiture from the late 1800s onwards, focusing specifically on the intention behind the photobooth's creation and the significance and cultural implications of its introduction into society. As it gradually became a staple of modern society, regularly visited by citizens to have their portraits taken, numerous artists sought out the photobooth as both a studio and a stage in which to document performative self-portraiture. The space and aesthetics of the photobooth have inspired artists to re-envision the confines of the booth and use its automatic function as a point of inspiration. I will also highlight the significance of female self-portraiture and the significance of women performing within and occupying specific spaces. My work is a combination of these histories, providing me with the opportunity to continue the discussion of

women's self-representation and the unique artistic space the photobooth provides between public and private spheres.

### **Have Your Portrait Taken**

“Then you slipped coins into the slot. The automatic photographic process was triggered, and it was as if time stood still for a second” (Pellicer 9).

There was a time when the photobooth was not just a pop up tent with a digital box at a wedding or a computer program you could control from the comforts of your home. The photobooths of the 20<sup>th</sup> century originally occupied street corners and subway platforms, restaurants and tourist attractions, a 3 ft by 5 ft by 7 ft private cubicle made to automatically capture any subject's portrait. The coin-operated machines evolved over several decades, and most commonly produced a photostrip of four different images, separated in time by roughly four seconds, just long enough for the subject to introduce a new pose. After the final flash went off, the patron would exit the booth to wait patiently for the chemically developed black and white photostrip to appear, a process that took several minutes. When the strip fell down the shoot, hands were eager to grab the strip and view the poses. The novelty of receiving a photograph of oneself within a matter of minutes, by a machine no less, was revolutionary and thrilling. In the days before the invention of the Polaroid, the photobooth eliminated the need for a darkroom as well as a photographer, leaving customers with the instant gratification of a physical self-portrait produced in minutes.

Prior to the invention of the photobooth, the most common way to have one's portrait taken was by a professional photographer in a studio in the context of a formal sitting. Although the photobooth was invented as a, “labor-saving device,” and functioned as “vehicles of

commerce” in the eyes of the entrepreneurs who marketed their appeal, the booths presented a unique opportunity for patrons to have a truly private self-portrait session, in which the gaze and critique of a photographer was entirely removed (Goranin 10). The understood “automatism of the ‘automatic’ photobooth is relative or partial. What is automatic is the processing of the photographs...The subject/photographer, not the machine, is in partial control of timing, pose, and expression” (Goranin 10). Suddenly the subject could act without inhibition, and had a new sense of agency by pulling the curtain closed and initiating the experience. Although this eventually led to artistic freedom inside the booth, the construction and physical confines of the booth as well as, “The absence of any décor in the background and the constraint of a single, narrow frame combined to eliminate almost entirely the social dimension from the photostrip... Stripped of all aesthetic ambition, the photobooth snapshot became the standard identity portrait, with a single purpose: a rapid identification of the individual” (Pellicer 11).

It is perhaps that defined purpose of the booth, and curtain as a protective shroud, that prompted booth visitors to reinvent its purpose, and begin to truly define their image, allowing their most intimate moments and feelings to come to light within the confines of the photobooth. Throughout the decades, the photobooth has witnessed goodbyes and kisses, nudity, rebel rousing, vacant stares, and goofy expressions, but perhaps most poignantly, the photobooth has captured a lot of souls on irreproducible photostrips and served as a confessional space for just a few fleeting minutes amidst the chaos of public space.

### **The Creation and Evolution of Automatic Portraiture in the Machine Age**

As with most technological inventions, there are several individuals who contribute to the product’s evolution, but only one who gets crowned the title of inventor. In the case of the

photobooth, there had been several attempts and advancements in the creation of a camera that could capture photographs without the aid or guidance of a photographer. In 1889, Ernest Enjalbert, presented the first ever coin-operated automatic photographic machine at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, with the intention of capturing patrons' portraits by ferrotype process (Pellicer 16). The camera's exposure lasted for more than three seconds, and in only five minutes, produced a collodion proof on a thin metal plate. Although a number of Enjalbert's machines were installed throughout Paris, they needed frequent repairs and produced low quality photographs (Pellicer 16). Enjalbert's invention led others who had been pursuing the creation of a similar machine, to revamp and improve the technology behind automatic photography. Four years later, German inventor Conrad Bernitt introduced The Bosco, an automatic photo machine similar to Enjalbert's ferrotype processing, but that was less expensive, more convenient, and easier to use. The Bosco could produce a ferrotype image in three minutes and quickly became a fixture at amusements and fairs at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Pellicer 17). Two decades later, the Ashton-Wolff Automatic Photographic device was presented and boasted new technology that eliminated the need for a machine operator as well as the once essential glass plate negative, with the image instead printed on a postcard (Pellicer 19). These three preliminary inventions pioneered the way for Anatol Josepho's Photomaton, which incorporated elements from previous machines, but took the concept to a different level of thinking.

Anatol Josephewitz (Josepho) was born in 1894 in Omsk, Siberia, and became fascinated with photography at a young age, eventually traveling to Berlin where his intrigue with innovation and photography flourished working as a photographer in a local studio. There he developed his dream of producing a quicker, more efficient process to capturing photographs that would come at a cheaper price and be readily available to average working people. In 1912, at at



the age of 18, Josepho headed to the United States, but after searching for work to no avail, he returned to Europe and settled in Budapest, opening his own studio (Goranin 17). Experimenting with photography in his studio, Josepho again sought to design a self-operating machine with an interior mechanical device that would allow a photograph to be taken and processed, all initiated by the insertion of a coin. He worked on this concept, drawing up plans and ultimately creating a prototype, which he sold in Vienna for what would now be equivalent to \$5,000 (Goranin 17).

In the tense political climate of 1914, Josepho, a Russian, was put under strict military surveillance, preventing him from actively photographing, but leaving him with more free time to further develop his automatic photo concept. He was determined to create a machine that did not have to rely on a film negative, and began thinking about ways to create a positive photo paper that would produce a clear and well-toned photograph. At the end of World War I, Josepho decided to return to Omsk for a while, and then headed to Shanghai, China, which at the time boasted an international mix of artists and wealthy entrepreneurs. There he formed the Josepho Studio and created quite a bit of success for himself as a well-known photographer, although his desire to build what would soon become the Photomaton, was still very keen, leading him to complete a serious blueprint of his invention (Goranin 20). Shortly thereafter he left for the United States to further develop his technical skills in Hollywood and then New York, establishing a strong group of allies throughout his journey and constantly presenting his idea of the Photomaton, with the goal of raising funds to produce the first model. His determination paid off and Josepho raised \$11,000 towards his first model, more than five times the cost of a nice sized American home in 1925 (Goranin 20).

Arriving in New York City, he found mechanics and engineers to help him construct the Photomaton, promising to pay them back for their work after its debut. In September of 1925,

Josepho opened his first Photomaton Studio, with a machine that produced eight different portraits on a strip for 25 cents. Located in the heart of the city on Broadway, Josepho's Photomaton Studio brought in crowds of 7500 people per day, and caught the attention of former American ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau. Morgenthau created a board of directors that had the authority to make an offer to purchase Josepho's working Photomats and the machine's patent. By 1926, Josepho had accepted an offer of one million dollars, and Morgenthau vowed to introduce more than 70 new operational Photomaton studios around the city by the end of the year (Goranin 22). Furthermore, Morgenthau announced that he planned to establish 150 more saying, "I believe...we can make personal photography easily and cheaply available to the masses...We propose to do in the photographic field what Woolworth's has accomplished in novelties and merchandise, Ford in automobiles" (Goranin 22). The goal was to make photography an accessible medium to all, and the Photomaton's success continued well past Josepho's million dollar patent buy out. Crowds continually lined up and several competitors attempted to copy the Photomaton model, but were repeatedly taken to court for copying both the style and process. Even in the wake of the booths success and popularity, Josepho donated half of his one million dollars to the needy of New York and used the rest to create a fund that gave money to inventors in need of financial support. Shortly thereafter, Josepho sold the rights for the Photomaton to a group of British investors, giving them the rights to distribute the machines all over Europe. A Photomaton booklet circa the mid-1930s listed the numbers of booths per location, with countries including England, Italy, France, Spain, China and Egypt (Pellicer 67). Because the booths were constructed in the United States and then directly imported, Photomaton visitors had to exchange coins for a token that was the same size as the American quarter, in order to properly fit it into the slot. Although the European booths

were entirely automated, the Photomaton booths in France still required an attendant to initiate the photographing process, as they had previously done in the original booths in the United States. The attendant was interestingly enough a woman, who went by the title of Miss Photomaton, and guided the subject's poses.

Back in the United States, the photobooth business continued to flourish, as Morgenthau created a factory for producing mass quantities of Photomatons in Long Island City. The largest Photomaton boasted nearly 3,100 different interior parts. In 1929, people were lining up outside over 50 successful Photomaton studios around the country to have their portraits taken (Goranin 30). A few years earlier, in 1927, a young inventor, John Slack joined the Photomaton company as an assistant production factory manager and became an incredibly important force, discovering new ways to improve the popular Photomaton. After he invented a method for reducing the photos' developing times and a reflective mirror, allowing visitors to see their pose, but still enabling the camera to focus, Slack left the company. He opened his own photobooth business called Automatic Enterprise in the heart of Broadway, a Photomaton studio that stayed open from noon until 4 in the morning and saw great success. The 30s and 40s, however, were difficult for the photobooth business as factories shut down to produce equipment for World War II, and materials were scarce as paper was limited. Automatic Enterprise eventually closed its doors and John Slack left the industry.

Over the next five decades, the photobooth continued to evolve into the chemical dip and dunk photobooth most people are familiar with and remember today. Anatol Josepho's original Photomaton model inspired other inventors to create their own versions and tweak all of the imperfections witnessed in the Photomaton. Canadian David McCowan invented a booth in 1927 called the Phototeria that was significantly smaller than the Photomaton that had automated

lights and produced a framed headshot with a mirror on the back (Goranin 38). Photobooths emerged all throughout the country in the 1930s, producing photographs in a variety of different sizes. A Des Moines, Iowa, based company offered a product in 1935 that instructed buyers how to construct their own photobooth using the pieces included for the price of \$125, allowing booth enthusiasts anywhere to easily assemble their own booth for profit (Goranin 45). Entrepreneurs everywhere were thinking of ways to cut costs and make a buck on the photobooth, such as one entrepreneur who, “came up with the idea of building a booth space that would look like a Photomaton cabinet. Instead of...the expensive and complicated setup of the original machine, a P.D.Q camera could be permanently installed in the booth and a man hidden in the front...would quickly develop the paper and push the strip down the delivery chute. Couples cuddling for the photo would not realize they have a voyeur on the other side of the wall” (Goranin 47).

In 1934, The International Mutoscope Reel Company of New York created a revolutionary photobooth, one that was smaller and narrower, allowing it to be placed and moved more easily, and that also had a futuristic, art-deco aesthetic (Goranin 51). Dubbed the Photomatic, the booths could be privately purchased by individuals from Mutoscope, along with the paper film and chemistry needed for the machine. The Photomatic was a financial success and in 1940 the, “average yearly gross income for [a] well-placed Photomatic was \$5,200,” more than three times the average income in the United States at the time (Goranin 56).

By 1954, a competitor had emerged in the form of Auto-Photo, a company that sought to develop a booth that would produce a photostrip of several images, as opposed to the singular framed image produced by the Photomatic (Goranin 59). Engineers Gup Allen and I.D. Baker invented a booth that was highly efficient and had a new art deco look, with curved walls and a dark wood facade. After marketing two models of the booth, Model 7 and Model 9, Auto-Photo

found success with the Model 11 booth, and marketed it to train stations, department stores, and arcades. By the late 1950s and early 60s, “the Auto-Photo factory in Los Angeles was cranking out thousands of machines,” and they began to appear everywhere throughout the country wherever people tended to congregate (Goranin 64).

People of all ages flocked to the booth to take photos for themselves or friends, and Woolworth’s, the department store of the era, began to complain about women exposing themselves for photos in the booth (Goranin 65). And so America’s infatuation with the intimacy of the photobooth began, and shortly thereafter artists began to infiltrate the booth, claiming it as their own private studio.

### **Artists Inside the Photobooth: Defying the Automated**

For over 90 years, patrons have eagerly awaited to have their photo taken in a photobooth, captivated by the novelty of the machine and the photographic token of one’s presence. The purpose of the photobooth’s creation was to bring automatic portraiture to life and increase access to snapshot photography, and that intended purpose has held true over the decades. Throughout the evolution of the photobooth, there have been dozens of artists, whose deep fascination with the concept of automatic self-portraiture and the space of the booth, have prompted them to reinterpret the booth’s purpose as a means of creating performative art. What is it about the space of a photobooth that has attracted artists to its confines for so many years and what kind of artistic stage can such a small space provide? Many artists have created work that aims to defy much of the automatic nature of the machine as well as the spatial limitations of the booth.

A recent exhibition at the Musée de l'Elysée brought together artwork from sixty international artists showcasing the, “influence of the photobooth within the artistic community, from its inception to the present day” (Musée de l'Elysée). The exhibition, *Behind the Curtain: The Aesthetics of the Photobooth*, included work from some of the earliest photobooth artists, to recent contemporary artists, emphasizing the unique aesthetics of the photobooth that have led artists to create work within the small automated space. Publications for the exhibit describe the photobooth as, “some sort of modern confessional, the photobooth is an invitation to the most intimate revelations...It is a world in between the intimate and the public, the inside and the outside, the debarred and the open” (Musée de l'Elysée). The spatial limitations of the booth add another exciting element to photobooth artwork, as it forces the artist to respond to the physical boundaries and the restrictions the fixed lens imposes on the body. As a series of four consecutive photos, the photostrip, “recreates spatial or temporal continuities,” and provides artists with a canvas on which to craft a story or depict a time-related progression (Musée de l'Elysée). The artist has the ability to manipulate time through their actions in each photograph, simultaneously defying the supposed automatism the machine is known for.

It did not take long for patrons to imagine other ways in which the booth could be utilized, beyond the standard poised identity portrait, after the invention of the Photomaton in 1925. The photobooth was most notably first artistically hijacked in 1928 by the Surrealists, the first to initiate an artists' presence inside the photobooth, a tradition that has been continued on by a select group of artists to present day. Discovered in 2003, the auctioning off of the Andre Breton collection revealed dozens of photobooths strips of himself and fellow Surrealists, including Max Ernst, Paul Eluard, Suzanne Muzard, Yves Tanguy, and the Preverts. These photostrips depict faces that blur the line between humor, the unconscious, spontaneity, and

mania—wild in comparison to the docile, seemingly modest self-portrait strips the booth had most commonly been producing.

The Surrealists were perhaps most captivated by the booth as, “the principle of automatic photography was the perfect extension of the idea of automatic writing as defined in the First Surrealist Manifesto of 1924,” but the photographs seem to depict that the Surrealists also used the photobooth as, “an object of play” (Pellicer 91). As regular visitors of the photobooths at Paris’ Luna Park, they spent a significant amount of time testing the limits of the booth. Their behavior in the photographs is silly but in an unconventional way, and in most of the strips the subjects make no direct eye contact with the camera yet undoubtedly perform for the lens. Their approach destroys the booth’s aesthetics in many ways, breaking the set depth of field and appearing out of focus or refusing to sit still, creating a slight blur. In other shots their uncomfortable actions are subtle yet visibly disturbing, as if capturing the second right before one sneezed or scratched an itch, as seen in the self-portraits of Raymond Queneau. The comedy within the strips is dark and visibly unattractive, the men, most notably Tanguy and Ernst, appear crazed and confused—what many patrons would have considered an embarrassing flaw are the Surrealists’ treasured works of art. Most fascinating is that the Surrealists viewed these photographs as self-portraits, as perhaps a more accurate depiction of their emotions and unconsciousness than a generic disciplined pose capture by the lens.

In December of 1929, the 16 members of the Surrealist movement contributed a series of individual Photomaton self-portraits for an issue of *La Revolution Surrealiste*. Framing Rene Magritte’s *Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt*, all of the individual portraits depict the men with their eyes closed, said to suggest, “what the Surrealists see when they close their eyes, whether sleeping or dreaming: a feminine presence. This artwork refers to the importance

of the feminine in the Surrealist movement” (Pellicer 92). The portraits are simple yet haunting, with the mens’ closed eyed seeming out of place and visibly uncomfortable, they appear eerily similar to post-mortem photographs. The Surrealist mindset was the first to truly turn the Photomaton upside down and redefine its purpose and the possibility of what could happen in that space. They turned the identity portrait into a multi-layered artistic self-portrait, declaring the photobooth, “a system of psychoanalysis via image” (Pellicer 92). The Surrealists used the photobooth as a space in which to attempt to see themselves from the inside out, to reveal hidden identity, and play with and defy the automatism of automatic self-portraiture.

One of history’s most famous photobooth dwellers and promoters is Andy Warhol, who frequently occupied the space to document his own self-portrait, but also completed several series of other stars in the booth. Warhol recognized the photobooth as a, “cheap and effective camera, producing photographs that cut to the bone an image perfectly suited for graphic design,” especially his classic silk-screening techniques (Goranin 73). Drawn to the idea of it as an automated machine, “The photobooth was the perfect tool for Warhol’s vision: he loved the photostrip’s seriality, its resemblance to filmstrips; he enjoyed the photobooth’s elimination of the photographer, and along with the silkscreen, its ability to remove Warhol’s art yet another step from the human touch” (Gorvy). He saw beyond the black and white photostrip and envisioned it silkscreened in color, with several poses from the booth adding to a sense of movement.

Warhol’s prominent subjects were taken to a bustling arcade in the heart of Manhattan, on Broadway and 47<sup>th</sup> to have their photos taken, moving them through several photoboos until he found one that had been recently serviced to ensure the best quality development (Goranin 74). He encouraged them to let loose in the booth, and was attracted to the notion that, “within



the private domain of the booth, one could act out one's fantasies as though in front of the bathroom mirror...he reveled in the sleaze factor - the booths in Times Square were especially disreputable places" (Gorvy). Of his photobooth series, his commissioned portrait series of well-known New York art collector Ethel Scull is among the most notable and is now considered a major Pop Art piece (Pellicer 104). Warhol had Scull sit for dozens of photostrips at a photobooth on the corner of West 52<sup>nd</sup> and Broadway, choosing the best shots of the strips by cutting them up into individual frames. The 36 selected frames were then silk-screened, each in a different bold color, and then combined into a colorful mosaic over 6 ½ by 11½ feet long, entitled *Ethel Scull 36 Times* (Pellicer 104). Later on in his career, Warhol acquired his own photobooth for the Factory so that in his absence, visitors could still have their photos taken for his private collection, and some were eventually screen-printed.

Though incredibly insecure about his physical appearance, sporting wigs, make-up, and even receiving plastic surgery to change his appearance during his lifetime, Warhol eventually came to use photobooth to capture his own image. Warhol's *Self-Portrait 1963-1964*, "documents publicly for the first time Warhol's self-transformation from insecure commercial artist into the high priest of Pop Art and the arbiter of Sixties cool," and was in fact commissioned by notable collector Florence Barron, after big-time dealer Ivan Karp urged Warhol to document himself (Gorvy). *Self-Portrait* depicts a trench coat and sunglasses clad Warhol, sitting before the camera, but nearly rejecting it by hiding his true facial features and identity, appearing incognito. The viewer instantly recognizes the subject as Andy Warhol, but his identity remains as mysterious as ever, while his playful poses suggest he's in on the joke. As Christie's Deputy Chairman of Post-War and Contemporary Art, Brett Gorvy argues, Warhol "presents himself as both an outsider from society and as an enigma - a face that hides its

features and reflects the viewer's gaze back on itself. A clever conceptual device that deflects the inquiry of the viewer, it is also a pose, an artifice that transforms Warhol's image into a mystery man, part Clark Kent or Dick Tracy, part the Shadow, a figure who hides beneath the superficial surface imagery of his pictures" (Gorvy). By donning the costume he has chosen, he accepts the title of icon and celebrity, and owns it—what the world has seen of Andy Warhol, is what the world gets in his portrait.

Growing up in an era essentially devoid of the dip and dunk chemical photobooth, I felt extremely lucky to spend four months in relative proximity to the Foto Automatica on Via dell'Agnolo. When I came up with the idea to create a visual narrative depicting my existence in the photobooth, I did not know of any photobooth artists of the last century—Franco Vaccari, Lee Godie, Daniel Minnick, and nearly a hundred more. I am fascinated to deconstruct my thought process and the creative ideas I have been carrying around, to find other artists through my research that have carried out similar experiments within the sacred space of the booth. These artists come from countries all over the world, cross over from various art movements spanning several decades, and seem to have formed a special bond with the space of the photobooth from personal experience, showcasing art that deconstructs the perceived limits of the space and automatism in a plethora of ways. In the spirit of Andy Warhol, I am interested in exploring notions of celebrity and authenticity in the booth, blurring the line between the authentic self and staged performance, and causing the viewer to question what is real and what is contrived for the sake of the audience. A curiosity similar to that of the Surrealists, has prompted me to defy the space of the photobooth, and break the rules and the social code of what is acceptable. In my performance I hope to capture overlooked expressions and mundane tasks, the unseen and forgotten human quirks, made visible.

Perhaps one of the most incredible, moving discoveries in the course of my research is an artist statement from photobooth dweller Paul Yates. Although his aesthetics and performance are extraordinarily different from my photobooth self-portraits and experiments, our intensely personal relationships to the booth and the photographic product, as well as living highly public lives, play in heavily to our work.

“I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my art. In fact, I refuse to separate them. These photobooth photographs, these emotion images reveal my inner affections, passions, humor, beliefs, and moods. Unlike the usual images made in photobooth machines, these images are extremely personal, beautiful, and at times...exquisitely real. I consider them ‘irreal.’ Irrealism is the state I find myself in when I have revealed so much personal truth that I no longer know where I end and the canvas begins. In this work I reveal so much about my inner self that my perspective is lost...It is hard to lie about who you are in pictures, and it is remarkably hard to lie in photoboos and I don’t wish to. The photobooth acts as the witness, judge, jury, and scribe. Those four quick flashes provide an interesting reality...No matter what I do, I am never ready for the flash...When I was fifteen, I became homeless. I couldn’t risk carrying a camera or even afford to fill it with film. I could afford the one dollar to use the then ubiquitous photobooth machine...At first I considered the machine to be the bottle that contained the message. Everytime I took a photobooth picture—that picture, along with all of my current thoughts, would be transmitted to those that would understand. I began to photograph everything I could do in a photobooth. I ate, drank, slept, and photoboothed it all...I am always trying to find out who I am” (Pellicer, 153).

I find this statement from Paul Yates to be incredibly enlightening. I have struggled to explain what exactly the photobooth means to me—it is a stage, it is *my* stage, but it is also my innermost consciousness, my safe place, my hovel, a never-ending canvas for my mind and body. Part of my relationship with the photobooth, I believe comes from living a public life from a very young age, and witnessing myself and my family being constantly observed. There is something about knowing you are generally being watched and monitored by unknown figures at all times that has prompted my fascination with observing myself. Yates mentions that he became homeless at the age of 15, and in this sense, he also lived a highly public life. Knowing that other people believe or perceive you to be one thing based on frequent observations, prompts a need to define oneself and define what the outside world is allowed to gaze upon. This is a part of why I hold up in a photobooth—the photobooth allows me to see myself and see what the greater world sees or knows me to be. It allows me to take back and redefine the outsider’s gaze, and to overload an audience with images of myself made by myself, perhaps in the hopes that eventually you all will get sick of observing me and move on. The intimacy of the photostrip, the size perfect for a keepsake box and the thousands of miniaturized Allison’s, only heighten the voyeuristic nature of the public’s gaze into my private life. The photobooth, at this point in my life, has become an extension of myself, a space in which I can make visible the scrutiny I feel as an outspoken high-achieving woman, and the product of a public family.

In the creation of the *RIEGLEMATICA*, I sought to replicate the physical space of a photobooth, while simultaneously reinventing its function and the product the machine creates. I wanted to create a space that would allow visitors to experience the feeling of being observed and guided by an unknown, unseen onlooker. The aesthetics of the installation cause the audience to interpret the machine from the outside as the standard automatic photobooth, and so

visitors enter the booth expecting to have their photo taken by an anonymous machine. This references Italian artist Franco Vaccari, who in 1972 installed a photobooth in his piece entitled *Leave on these walls a photographic trace of your passage* at the Venice Biennale. Over 5,000 visitors voluntarily participated in the piece, paying to have their photo taken in the booth and contributing it to the wall of portraits. Expanding this piece, Vaccari had over 700 booths installed for a year's time all over Italy, and later took the project to Tokyo and Prague (Pellicer 128). Similarly, the *RIEGLEMATICA* installation highlights the relationship between the visitor, the booth, and the camera, questioning who is in fact the voyeur. The sudden and unexpected presence of a human form, a finger appearing only momentarily to snap the photo, heightens the visitor's perception and triggers fear and insecurity. An anonymous voyeur of sorts has somehow invaded the booth and they have snapped the visitor's photograph; the booth's curtain is no longer a shroud shielding the visitor's private actions from the outside world, but rather one that shields the outside from an intimate, unsettling interaction between strangers. It is in this context that it is most fascinating to consider the photobooth as the so-called, "modern confessional," for whom is the visitor attempting to seek reconciliation from? (Musée de l'Elysée). A machine regarded more closely to a mirror? And what sort of sanctuary does the booth really provide? *RIEGLEMATICA* questions what happens when established mechanical components of the booth are extracted, and a living, breathing human, silent except for the brush of a finger and domineering textual voice, becomes the machine. Visually, the changes are subtle and could go unnoticed by the subject, yet it prompts participants to question what exactly they were just a part of and whether that space is safe any longer. Insecurities and flaws brought to light, *RIEGLEMATICA* attempts to capture much more than candid portraiture and asserts a gaze back on those who have previously done the gazing.

With all photobooth self-portraits, artists have willingly climbed into the booth and embodied its compactness, working both against and with the help of its technical restrictions to create transformative bodies of work. The act of taking a photobooth picture hinges on the occupation of the space—you must enter the booth and subject yourself to the fixed lens to reap its rewards. On one side of the camera, behind the lens, sits the machine in control, and on the other, a poised subject ready to perform. Both participants have varying degrees of control over the outcome, with the subject having the creative freedom to behave as they please within the private space of the booth. Occupying this space as an artist requires that one confront this relationship and tension, giving into the booth but also rejecting its intended purpose.

*RIEGLEMATICA* takes a new twist on this concept of occupation, by placing the human form in the part of the machine intended and constructed for automatic functions, deliberately devoid of human control. To become the machine and take on the role of voyeur is especially significant as a female artist in opposition to the male gaze. As John Berger explains in his ground-breaking work, *Ways of Seeing*,

“To be born a woman has to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women is developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity

as a woman...Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.” (Berger, 47).

By occupying the *RIEGLEMATICA* to observe the booth’s visitors, I am asserting my female presence and gaze on others, in attempt to take back the masculine gaze I have felt monitored and controlled by. As Berger notes, this masculine gaze comes not only from male-bodied people, but from women as well, who gaze upon themselves and other women through an adapted male gaze. In the *RIEGLEMATICA*, it is no longer the case that, “Men act and women appear” (Berger 47). The roles are in fact reversed, as my female-bodied self acts, while the male gaze in the form of both male and female bodies appear and are captured through my eye and action.

The, “allotted and confined space,” Berger refers to is made visible in my life by the space of the photobooth (Berger 47). The photobooth’s confines and its purpose of photographing as a spectator, have led me to make the literal association between the physical space it provides and the mental, imaginary space women have been born into. In the spring, I will continue and expand on the self-portrait performance series I began in the Foto Automatica, in a photobooth I have restored and brought back to life. This act of acquiring and restoring a booth is my first step in occupying and asserting my presence in the booth—this will be a machine made by a woman, to look and assert a female gaze. There have been several other women artists who have used the photobooth as an extension of their performance, to capture their self-portrait in a defiant and powerful way. Nakki Goranin, photobooth artist and author of *American Photobooth*, has captured numerous strips in the booth, defying the gaze by stuffing her head inside a pair of pantyhose and proceeding to put make-up on. I admire the boldness of her work as she manages to get her point of view and societal critique across while aided by

humor and absurdity, even sawing herself in half in one of her self-portraits. The dryness and tension between what is hilariously absurd and uncomfortably profound are two aspects I am similarly exploring in my work. Goranin's self-portraits are not a reflection of her acting for the male gaze, but an act of her working directly against it. She destroys the outsider's perspective, leaving a fascinating look at her interiority. Through my self-portraiture, I aim to depict the experience and psyche of my experience as a female adolescent. My images contain a sense of youthfulness and play, but rather than depicting myself through someone else's gaze, I am using these tactics to assert my own. By using performance, I am able to depict a narrative that shares much more about my experience and my relationship to the gaze, than could be captured in a poised, attractive portrait. My self-portrait series is about action and confrontation, presenting a raw depiction of my experience growing up as a female-bodied person, while incorporating dark humor and absurdity to draw out expectations and desires, in comparison to reality. The female self-portrait is an incredibly important action that women have looked to throughout history and continue to create, defining their image on their own terms often in a way that exile's the male gaze entirely. It is through female self-portraiture that women begin to act rather than appear.

### **Women Artists' Self-Portraiture and Exploring Female Adolescence**

Self-portraiture has remained an important outlet for women artists to capture female experience and create an autobiographical definition of their identities for over five centuries. Within the male dominated art industry, a hierarchy constructed centuries ago, women artists' work has been deliberately erased from history, leaving the contemporary masses with the question Linda Nochlin asked, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* As art activists work to uncover the lost or misrepresented work of female artists of the Renaissance and



histories past, an abundance of lost self-portraits of women artists are emerging. There is a long, telling tradition of women choosing to directly represent themselves within their work, allowing them to assert their creative agency and define their identity, beyond the confines of the male gaze. As Liz Rideal argues in *Mirror Mirror: Self Portraits by Women Artists*, “Every woman who paints a self-portrait, or sculpts a likeness, or places herself in front of the lens of a camera whose shutter she controls, challenges in some way the complex relationship that exists between masculine agency and feminine passivity in Western art history” (Rideal 9).

In contemporary art, and in the wake of the feminist revolution, women are more freely able to express and, “value their own lives and feelings... This new subject matter, the artistic arm of the feminist slogan that the personal is the political, has led to the most exciting developments in self-portraiture today: the extended self-portrait, an elaborate idea expressed through the self” (Rideal 31). This redefined self-portraiture is conveyed through a vast array of mediums such as performance, video art, installations, as well as a combination of several mediums. The self-portrait may reference the history of posed, literal figure representations of the self, or it may destroy that accepted definition all together, defying the presubscribed male gaze and the notion of the female figure as an indicator of beauty and worth entirely. Within contemporary art, there is often the question of performance, and the mechanisms the artist is employing in order to make her claim in opposition to patriarchal understandings. Rideal recognizes this approach to self-portraiture by the way in which it turns, “on the staging of the self (the model) for the self (the artist). For the woman artist, the difficulty and paradox of being both active, creative subject—a maker of meaning—and a passive subject—a site of meaning—can only be resolved through performing the self” (Rideal 14). A plethora of women artists have incorporated performance through a variety of mediums, whether it be photography, video, or the

act of live performance itself. Iconic women artists of the late 70s and early 80s second-wave feminism movement, such as Marina Abramovic and Cindy Sherman, used their female body and status as other to make work, using their body and female identity as a canvas for art.

More recently within contemporary art of the last twenty years, women artists have shifted from depicting adult understandings of female identity and the body, to closely examining notions of female adolescence and the experience and representation of the idea of 'girl'. These works, focusing on girls and youth, seek to question the distinctions between society's perceptions of the term "girl" in contrast to "woman," considering that both are understood historically as representations of "the other." Catherine Grant and Lori Waxman argue in *Girls! Girls! Girls! In Contemporary Art* that this fascination with redefining and portraying youth, femininity, and adolescence, may be partially due to the West's more commonly accepted contemporary belief that, "Girlhood is not perceived to be entirely completed until the mid- to late twenties, owing to the extension of education, the end of the job for life, and the trend toward later-life motherhood and deferral of long term relationships" (Grant 6). These feminist advancements in the roles and expectations of women have further blurred the line between the stages and transformation of girl becoming woman. This new found understanding of female adolescence and the opportunity to function as an individual young adult has paved the way for women to further explore that time in one's life, a period of self-definition and reflection, to further craft one's identity as an individual. Equally so, even with a less clear path to follow and set of rigid rules to abide by, girls and young women are still bombarded with messages of what it means to exude femininity and to identify as female by the media at large, leading to a youthful sense of chaos, excitement, and a lost sense of self. It is perhaps that instability and youthful curiosity, fear, and desire that create a space for women

artists to explore that state of being and insert themselves into the performance of youth. The subject and, “figure of the adolescent, in particular the girl, allows for a level of instability to leak into the performance without it dissolving into a free play of images. This instability is used in various ways to test constructions of identity, and often enacts a shift from the binaries of sexual difference to the performative possibility of gender” (Grant 6). Despite the darkness and serious probing layered within these artistic explorations of youth and femininity, the act of performing adolescence, involves an element of play and imagination.

These contemporary works delve not just into the physical representations of youth, but into the mind, emotions, and desires of girls. Women artists have been exploring this “transitory status of adolescence, a phase between childhood and adulthood,” that is much more fluid and up to interpretation than it is stagnant and straightforward (Grant 6). As Grant and Waxman observe, “The state of adolescence is intimately tied to nostalgia, understood as a form of homesickness,” and can be explored as a period that is overflowing with curiosity and emotions, yet simultaneously lacking in substance or direction (Grant 5). It is this transformation and focus on the concept of the girl that has prompted contemporary female artists to probe and dismantle, imagine and reconstruct, what it means to grow up as a female bodied person. As with women artists’ self-portraiture, there is a certain amount of power and control that is demonstrated in constructing and representing women’s understandings of female adolescence. Popular culture and male artists have constructed common understandings and rampant imagery of the sweet, blossoming girl and her first interactions with her sexuality through depictions of *Lolita* and *Alice in Wonderland*, but it is the current generation of contemporary women artists that are seeking to redefine and unfold any truth behind those images. In creating artwork in response to those problematic images, “... in taking up brush or pen, camera or chisel, women assert a claim

to the representation of women that Western culture long ago ceded to male genius and patriarchal perspectives, and that in turning to the image in the mirror they take another step towards the elaboration of a sexualized subjective female identity” (Rideal 9).

By using performance, whether it be through their own body or the presence of young actors, women artists are taking control and redefining female experience of adolescence, playing off iconic representations of girl identity, or introducing an entirely new understanding of what it feels like to be a modern girl. The element of performance alludes to the real life and allows the artist to conceive and build a story that the audience is constructed to believe. Performance can both free the artist and subject of grounded reality, and provide them with the imaginary space and original framework to create their own. The act of performing, allows for the subject to feel the transitory nature of growing up female and literally become the narrative, ultimately aiding in the creation and dissemination of the narrative of female experience.

### **Women Performing and Redefining the Confines of Space**

For many female performers, the act of redefining oneself and confronting the male gaze is directly connected to occupying, altering, or existing within a space. This act of visually taking up space begins with the act of self-portraiture itself, by choosing to document ones experience as female, thus carving out and demanding a place within art history. Within the realm of women’s self-portraiture, many artists have further explored the concept of women and girls physically occupying a space, whether through performance, photography, or installation. Several artists have chosen to interact with specific spaces by occupying, destroying, reconstructing, repurposing, and reinventing environments as a way of asserting female and experience, while recognizing certain confines that exist. By existing within a specific space,

female artists help to determine and rewrite the history of that space, and can shed light on female experience in a performative and revolutionary way.

During her lifetime, Francesca Woodman explored this free flowing search for identity within spatial confines in her array of photographic self-portraits that provide one of the most raw depictions of a young woman performing adolescence. Relying on herself as the subject, Woodman used her body and a slow shutter speed to capture her blurred movements as she emerged from, or rather disappeared into space, in her series *House* and *Space*. In the *Space* series, Woodman appears nude and blurred in a vitrine, pressing her breasts and hand forcefully against the glass. Set in a decaying abandoned home, Woodman's other acclaimed series, *House*, again captures her blurred motion as she erupts from the aged structure, thrashing from behind the dismantled fireplace, a leg straddling either side as she attempts escape. In another shot, she appears to emerge from beneath the wallpaper, her movements frantic and blurred, in stark contrast with the stillness of the old room. Both of these series depict Woodman occupying space in a performative and forceful way, illustrated through her rapid motion, suggesting an escape, an act of rebellion directed at the space itself. As Harriet Riches argues in *Girlish Games: Playfulness and 'Drawingness' in the Work of Francesca Woodman and Lucy Gunning*, "By always exploring space with her body, Woodman demonstrated a curiosity for the conditions of space as a field of performance—as a space for acting out rather than for being consumed" (Grant 72). Woodman worked deliberately in her photographs to redefine understandings of space, and in the case of the *House* series, the specific domestic space of the home. Her photographs, reflected on in contemporary circles as groundbreaking feminist work, are more or less the chronicles of being female and the trials of female adolescence made visible. Woodman occupied space in a way that captures the pressures, pain, rage, and exhaustion of being female

by using her body and its movement as an expression of the essence of gendered experience. By moving and thrashing through a domestic, physically and mentally confining space, Woodman worked to reinvent the history of the space and bring new life and definition to woman within the home.

The act of women occupying space has continued as theme within more contemporary art circles, with the focus on space shifting from the seemingly private to the highly public. In the spring of 2012, contemporary performance artist Dawn Kasper moved her studio and the entirety of its contents into the Whitney Museum in New York, for the 2012 Whitney Biennial after losing her private artist studio for financial reasons. *This Could Be Something If I Let It*, has been described by Kasper as more of an experiment than a piece of art viewers would normally stumble upon in a museum. Attendees are encouraged to interact with Kasper and her myriad of bedroom and studio treasures, including books, her record collection that she keeps on rotation throughout the day, and her past artwork (Whitney Museum of Contemporary Art). Kasper's need for a studio inspired the performance itself, but as for the space, it seems extremely poignant and relevant that she chose to occupy a formal gallery space as opposed to creating a studio in a space removed from the art world.

Museums and galleries are considered public space and public domain, but are still perceived to be sanctuaries of some sort, where only certain behavior is tolerated and respect is demanded. Kasper has not only infiltrated this space with her clutter, loud music, and general instability, she is also imposing her female body and profession as a woman artist on a space long controlled by patriarchal values and the male gaze. Historically galleries and museums have long been filled with images of women, often nudes, but consistently lack art made by women, about women. The Guerrilla Girls brought these discrepancies to the forefront of public debate in

the mid 1980s with their feminist poster campaign plastered on buses and buildings, citing that less than 5% of artists in the Modern Art section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art were women, while 85% of the nudes were women (GuerrillaGirls.com). Dubbing themselves the “Conscience of the Art World,” one of the original Guerrilla Girls posters produced in 1985 directly referenced the Whitney Museum asking, “How many women had one-person exhibitions at NYC museums last year? Guggenheim—0, Metropolitan—0, Modern—1, Whitney—0” (GuerrillaGirls.com).

In *This Could Be Something, If I Let It*, Kasper is asserting herself into a space as a living woman, no longer just an image of femininity, with the ability to engage with museum goers, provoke discussions, and literally assert her female experience and presence in a traditionally male dominated space. Her act of moving into the space, destroying the museum aesthetics of traditional work displayed on blank white walls, challenges the structure and purpose of the gallery itself. Thought of as a highly public, carefully manipulated space in which to view art, Kasper hijacks the space with the physical nature of the studio she has transported, while provoking audiences to view the chaos behind the apparent serenity of the museum and art. At the forefront of the viewer’s attention is the presence of Kasper, whose availability and lively occupation of space, forces the museum, the public, and history to recognize her position as a woman artist. Her performance is subtle and blurs the line between the realms of public and private spaces, allowing viewers to invade her space while simultaneously infiltrating the museum, a space that the public has long considered its own. Kasper exists in a space within a space, and her presence and performance is what truly asserts her claim as an artist—to see the artist behind the work, and all of the clutter and chaos that made it is like lifting up a curtain and revealing the mechanics behind a magic trick. *This Could Be Something If I Let It*, is a female

occupation of male dominated space, an act of quiet rebellion that covertly redefines what it means to be a female artist and subject in the highly public and staged voyeuristic setting of the contemporary gallery.

Both *RIEGLEMATICA* and the expansion of my Foto Automatica performative self-portrait series that I will complete in the spring of 2014, hinge on the female occupation of the photobooth. By occupying the *RIEGLEMATICA* as voyeur, I confront the male gaze, by asserting my female gaze on all visitors that enter the booth. Similarly, I view my spring performance as an act of reclaiming a space, formerly constructed to please the male gaze and to allow women to once again see themselves through male ideals, now repurposed to be a space in which one can act out as woman and rebel against male ideals. The female occupation of the photobooth transforms the machine from one that simply allows women to appear, into an apparatus that enables women to act, rebel, and redefine a female gaze devoid of male spectatorship and surveillance.

### **The Future of the Photobooth**

In the digital age, a photobooth is a rare sight, a glimpse into the analog past society is eager to leave behind. Nearly obsolete in the United States, photobooths still grace street corners in countries across Europe, but are rapidly disappearing, despite the efforts of artists and creative thinkers, like those who revived the Foto Automaticas of Florence. For decades it has served as an important space bridging the gap between notions of privacy and the public world of bustling city centers and town squares, but as the lights slowly go out on the classic photobooth stage, the light sensitive papers fade, and the chemicals become harder to obtain, the ability for artists to defy the booth, let alone find one, becomes more and more difficult.



There is so much to explore within the tiny dimensions of the photobooth, about ourselves, our image, and our relation to the outside world. The photobooth has allowed me to come face to face with the gaze that has kept me angry and mentally confined throughout my adolescence. It has called into question society's voyeuristic tendencies and our own human desires to be seen and to see ourselves. Within the walls of the photobooth, I realized how to act as a woman, rather than appear, how to confront the gaze, rather than wear it. *RIEGLEMATICA* is a female occupation of space and of the gaze, an experiment that tests the control anonymous authority and observation has on others. It is also an intimate self-portrait that embodies much of the experience I have had up until this point of time, growing up in the public eye, as well as my identity as an outspoken feminist woman. I chose to channel the voice of literal figures and abstract forces that have surveyed my life actions in a domineering way and impose them on to the photographs of the booths visitors, asserting my experience and presence as a female artist. I look forward to occupying the booth in the spring in a different way, as both subject and photographer, to continue my self-portrait series.

The photobooth is liberating yet confining, automatic yet lacking control, a machine with a specific purpose, and yet an incredibly blank canvas. It is a space for vulnerability, empowerment, rage, rejection, observation, joy, and confrontation. It is this space that has captured the souls of millions for nearly a century, and the confessional in which I stand before. The photobooth redefined: machine and woman, standing before each other, in equal share of control, art, and spontaneity.

**RIEGLEMATICA, 2013**





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