

Isabel MacGinnitie
Art 146
Prof Ken Gonzales-Day

Final Project Artist Statement

My project explores ideas of sexuality and personhood as it intersects with my own identity through a series of self-portraits. In my last series of six new images, I considered my own experiences with feelings of facelessness and depersonalization by manipulating faces in my images. I was strongly inspired by Poklong Anading's *Anonymous* series, which I saw in SFMOMA over spring break. I wanted to explore further the idea of removing or obscuring the face as being simultaneously dehumanizing and empowering. In that last series, I found it difficult to aggressively manipulate my friends' faces as it felt like violence, so I decided early on to be the main subject of the photos. I had considered having other people in the background, but I chose to be the sole subject to bring consistency to the series. I posited this series as diptych-esque, pairing portraits on location with studio work while in the same outfit.

I set up these portraits to be almost a day in my life. I bookended my series with the two more sexual pairs, which I also felt were the strongest. In the first portrait, *desperate*, I am sitting in my room, looking off camera in what could almost be a candid photograph. Its pair, *posed*, reimagines me in a clearly constructed setup, making direct eye contact with the camera, suggesting more agency but at the expense of a loss of beauty in the shot. The final in situ portrait, *dtf*, has the recurring element of a covered face, but only partially, with me still making eye contact with the camera and clearly smiling. I hoped that this photo would look the most like a true candid and that the title would give the implication that a lover took it as they took me to bed. Of course, this, like the rest of the series, was a self-taken self-portrait. I hoped the idea of an empowered, sexually liberated woman would be complicated by the next image, *filipina women*, where I am looking up and off camera in a similarly sexual outfit. Taken out of the

context of a smiling, inviting pose on a bed, do I still have that sexual agency? Or am I now just an object to be consumed by the lover I am looking up at?

In this last pair, I hoped to get across connoted and denoted elements, as we discussed relating to the Barthes reading. We can see a denoted sexual meaning in the titles and revealing clothes. However, there is a layer of connoted meaning: the posing of *dtf* has a strong sexual implication that's complicated by the My Melody pluses I am leaning. If you're familiar with Sanrio characters, you might recognize the contrast of such a sexual set up with a character from children's media that is popular with young Asian girls. Someone versed in Filipinx-American culture might also recall the distinct negative stereotype of Filipina women being hypersexual and "easy" when seeing the title *filipina women*, further complicating the level of agency I have in this pair.

I also wanted to complicate the idea of photography as a "primitive, infantile, aggressive" language as discussed in the Sekula reading by digitally manipulating some of the images to get them to be faceless. On one hand, all but those two images are very minimally edited (minor exposure + camera profile changes), so this series could be seen as a primitive, straight out of camera "truth." However, clearly these images were intentionally constructed and created to show a sophisticated, specific message, so I wanted there to be a clear sense of that construction. The half-tone and blur filters on myself in *fake art hoe* and *fun costumes!* show obvious manipulation, but I hope it makes the viewer question the reality of the other images. How real are any of these images if two are so clearly constructed?

I hope this series came across as a self-reflection as well as a demonstration of the growth in my technical skills relating to studio work and solo self-portraiture.