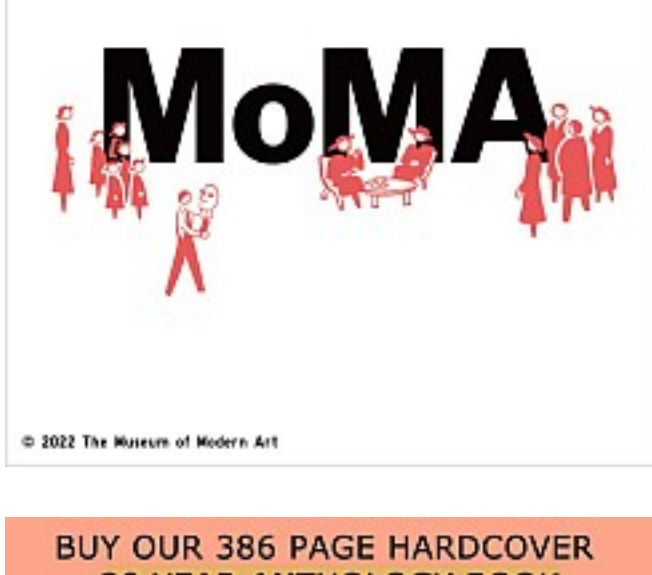
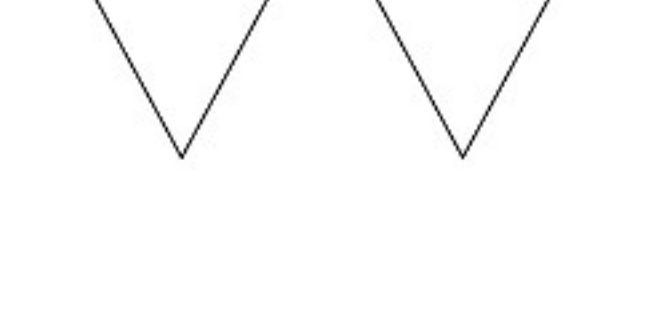
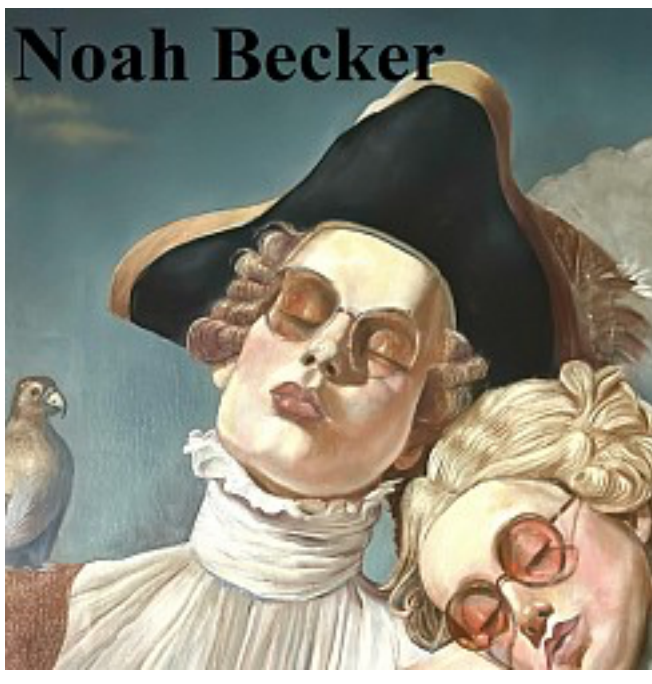
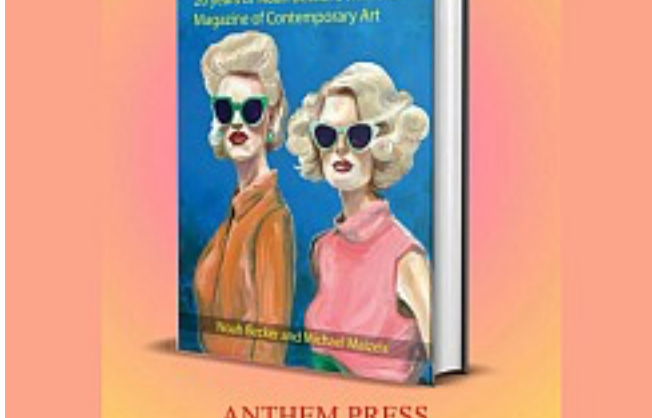




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A Form of One's Own: On Joline Kwakkenbos's self-portraits



Yellow Tree by Joline Kwakkenbos

As seen in "We Do Not Sleep"

A group exhibition by artists at TKE Studios

9 March to 19 May 2024

TKE Studios, Margate, UK

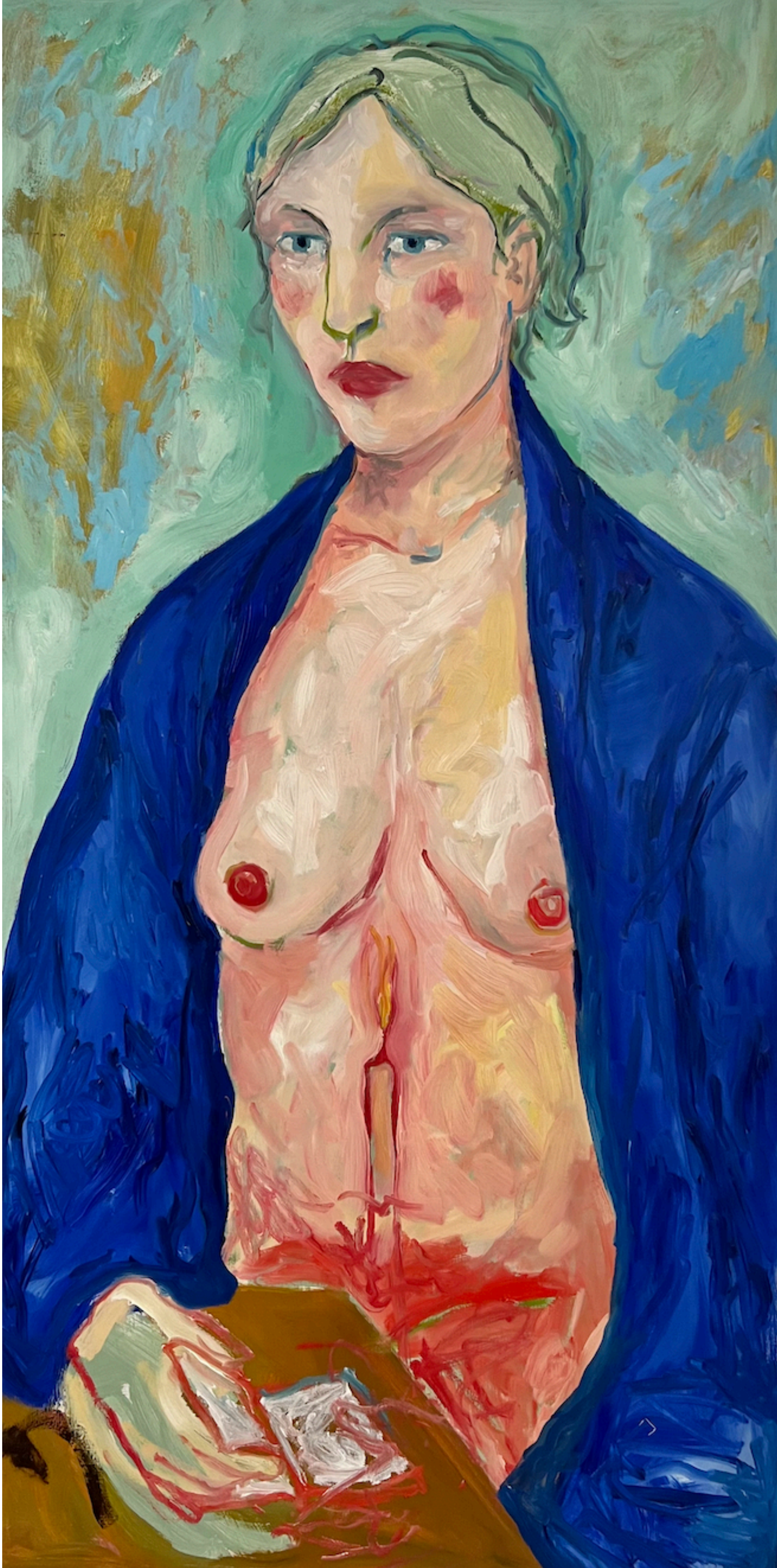
By JAMIE AYLWARD May 23, 2024

Writing about Egon Schiele's self-portraits, the Austrian curator Stefan Kutzenberger has noted how the artist worked in a time and place (turn of the century Vienna) when the idea of the individual "was beginning to disintegrate into its separate parts." The more than 170 instances in which Schiele took himself as his subject suggest that "his images could only be fragmentary, that the self disintegrates into roles it is forced to play."

You can trace a dichotomy in which classic self-portraiture—I think of Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait with Two Circles* or Poussin's *Autoportrait* in the Louvre—displayed a composed, if world weary, unity, while the work of Schiele and earlier trailblazers in avant garde portraiture (Van Gogh and Gauguin chief among them) depicted the breakdown of the surface individual. This is a move from portraits of *an* artist (with palette, brushes, etc) to portraits of *the* artist and their unique uncertainties—from portraiture as a statement to portraiture as a question, from composition to deconstruction, from finding to searching.

In an ironic turn, as the depiction of self in modern painting became more an oblique psychic representation than a CV-like statement of intent or achievement, its immediate emotional force increased. We can feel who the person is, as much as we see them.

At the same time, the outer image continued to carry significance and its representation had room to run, as evidenced by, for example, the 1906 painting *Self-portrait as a half-nude with amber necklace II* by Paula Modersohn-Becker. Importantly, she is widely credited as the first female artist to produce a nude self-portrait (MoMA in New York has a 1907 self-portrait of hers that is the oldest painting by a woman hanging in its galleries). At once individual in their subject matter and free use of colour and iconic in their flat style, centered compositions and symbolic gestures, her self-portraits bridged personal interiority and universal visibility.



Morning by Joline Kwakkenbos

Today, the Dutch artist Joline Kwakkenbos, whose paintings appear in the show "We Do Not Sleep" curated by Tracey Emin at her gallery space and community of studios in Margate, could be described as pretty close to a pure self-portraitist and one whose work boldly extends the lineage of Modersohn-Becker by fusing the mirrored possibilities of expression through one's identity and one's painting.

Kwakkenbos contributes four works to "We Do Not Sleep," which features seven other up and coming female identifying artists, as well as Emin, the Young British Artists instigator herself. Kwakkenbos' inclusion here follows her steady appearance in shows across Netherlands and Denmark and coincides with her residency at Emin's TKE Studios.

In the paired portraits *Morning* and *Evening*, Kwakkenbos paints herself lengthwise on tall double square canvases. In "Morning," against a refreshing teal background, she stares intently away from the viewer and wears her deep blue dressing gown open. She sits upright and her expression is serious, despite warmly rosed cheeks. A candle that burns in her torso has its base in a burst of red rising from between her legs, just out of view. One hand rests on a small brown table and with it she leafs through what looks like a pocket sized sketchbook. In "Evening," she is oriented towards the viewer, leaning forward though her gaze doesn't exactly meet ours, even if we are drawn in all the more by the unexpected, nearly playful green colouring of her face and her bright blue neck scarf, both of which jump out against her black background and black coat. Here we see her two hands on the table, the left one stabbed through and bleeding from a thin black pen which is drawing a figure in an open sketchbook.



Evening by Joline Kwakkenbos

Where the cool minty background of *Morning* and the flame inside could aptly suggest the artist's daily resolve to create, *Evening* is, literally, an obscurer affair—green in the face, buttoned up to the neck, iconographically wounded, this could be the close of a long, nauseating work day. In interviews, Kwakkenbos has described writing diary entries as letters to her "painter" self, as if methodically detailing the varied emotional states that she'd explore in her art practice—*Evening* and *Morning* evoke this visual translation.



The Potato Peeler by Joline Kwakkenbos

In *The Potato Peeler*, her largest work in the Margate show, Kwakkenbos paints herself in a sparse room facing left against a low blue table, at work over a sharply outlined green bowl. She sports a sort of white Dutch bonnet and a long white dress that she's gathered up well above her waist, wearing nothing underneath. Enigmatic as anything in her oeuvre, you still might think of the painting, with its Vermeer-like composition, as a wonderfully concise commentary on a Western society that for centuries limited a woman to being muse or maid, and very little in between. In this way, and not unlike Modersohn-Becker, Kwakkenbos' painting could well be toying with the possibility of depicting a nude and clothed self together as a synthesised identity—one that signifies something bigger than herself.

While Schiele in turn-of-the-century Vienna depicted himself in a struggle against the roles imposed by polite Austrian society, Kwakkenbos, as an intuitive colourist with a confident line, has produced a body of work that actively uses the self-portrait to explore the plurality of her identity as queer, as a woman, and as an artist. In doing so, beyond taking charge of her own depiction, Kwakkenbos challenges the idea of the self portrait as a snapshot in time, a fixed portrayal. It becomes, in her words, "a legacy of her own existence," or a form in itself for imagining possibilities within a color palette, a wardrobe, an identity, and an artistic tradition. **WM**



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