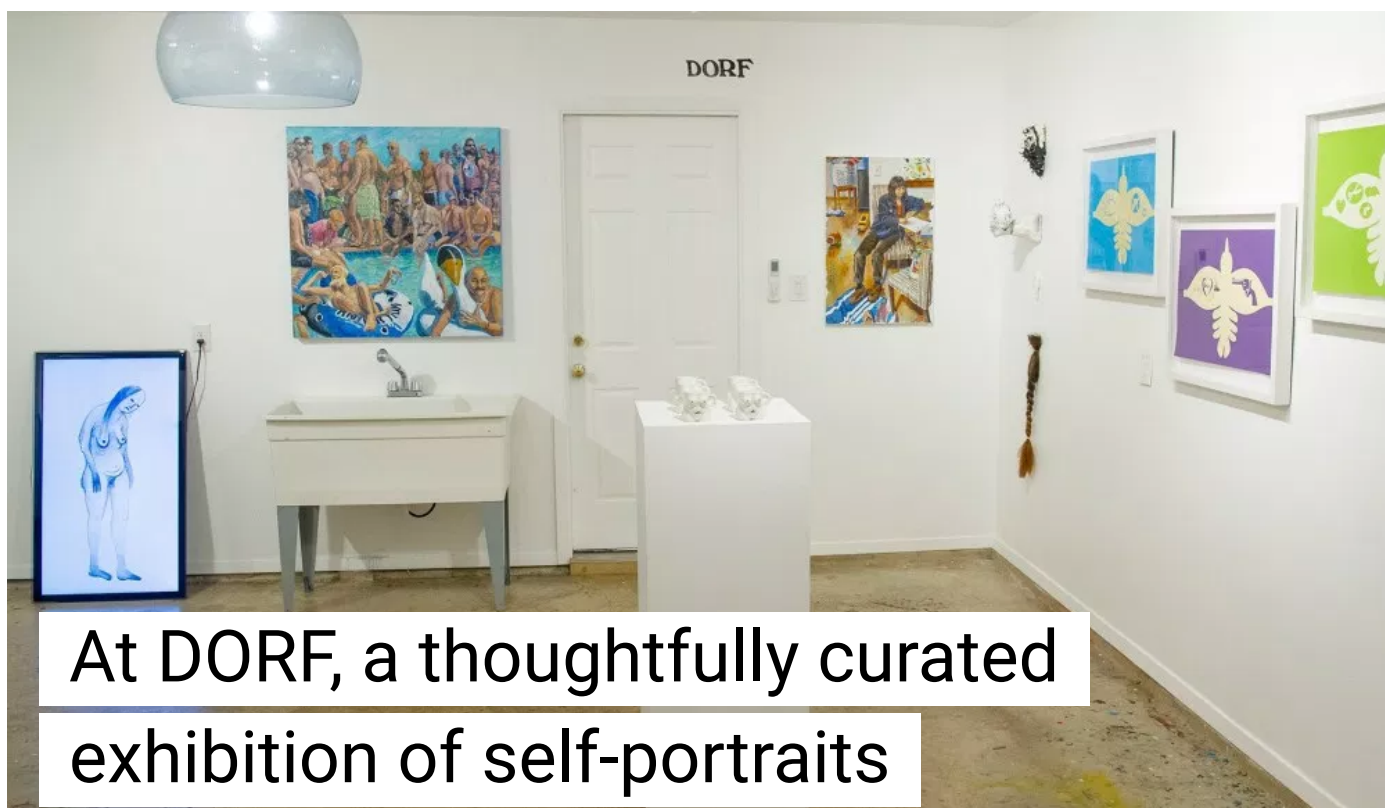


Home > Art > At DORF, a thoughtfully curated exhibition of self-portraits



Installation view of "Self-Portraits" at DORF, May 9-19, 2019. Work by, from left to right, Katy Horan, Alan Beckstead, Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Terry Powers, Christine Garvey & Margarita Cabrera. Photo by Eric Manche/DORF.

One year later, a new artist-run space reflects on its own reasons for being

By **Annette DiMeo Carlozzi** - May 17, 2019

How many DORFS does it take to change a light bulb? I don't know, I just love the way the word sounds. But there's no denying [this "village" south of Ben White Boulevard in Austin](#) gets the job done, if that job is presenting symphonic group exhibitions where you feel all the artists' minds at work and the visitor experience is nurtured and allowed to breathe. For instance, there's always a really excellent takeaway checklist — on its header, DORF's distinctive logo is as delightfully awkward as the sound of its name: unless I'm hallucinating, each of the four letters is just barely larger than its predecessor, like it launched itself out the door and got bigger in the process.



The DORF logo

"Self-Portraits"
continues 11 a.m. to 6
p.m. May 18-19, at
DORF, dorfworld.com

And that's a great metaphor for the mission of [this spunky, artist-run home gallery](#) and its soon-to-close, thoughtfully curated pop-up show, "Self-Portraits." No simple head-on-shoulders renderings here; instead each selected artist grapples with nuance and meta-concepts — how to self-present, which aspects of character and context to focus on, how many personal narratives to unpack. How do I see myself subsumed within how the world sees me — or not — and how do I express that? These 21st century considerations of private within public (as opposed to the other way around) are inflected here with urgency and pathos.

San Francisco-based [Terry Powers](#) literally paints himself being drawn. You catch about half of his sandaled foot and that's all, the rest a portrait of his tousled home and the young artist drawing him. I like the conversation between her two feet — dark socks,

heavy leather walking shoes — and his five bare toes. The artist and subject (each are both) in relationship, a two-way generative process.



Detail of Terry Power's "Emily Drawing Me in Kitchen," 2019. Oil on Linen. Courtesy the artist and DORF. Photo by Ryan Thayer Davis.

Alan Beckstead and Margarita Cabrera complicate that venerable portrait dynamic by placing themselves in broader social contexts, their messages similar despite very different artistic approaches.

Beckstead, a longtime San Antonio arts patron whose own exploration of painting is relatively new, uses photography to inform his painted portrayal of friends at an annual retreat, the crowd of gay men relaxing around the pool, a community at ease. In the lower right corner, the artist's partner is drawn in loving detail, his head, shoulder and hand deftly rendered from sensory memory. This is who we are/I am, the work says, reaching to be portrait, self-portrait and contemporary history painting, too.

[Cabrera](#), a nationally recognized artist from El Paso whose activist art is made for and through community collaboration, shows works on paper relating to a public project she was creating for the City of San Antonio. Stencils of cut metal work contrast militaristic imagery with symbols of healing, calling to mind San Antonio's unique and sometimes troubled histories. Titled "Uplift—Bird," the digital prints speak to community will, the

artist's self-portrait implied as part of that whole, not separate from it.



Margarita Cabrera, "Uplift—Bird," archival digital prints, 2018. Installation view in "Self-Portraits" at DORF. Photo by Ryan Thayer Davis.

Three Austin-based artists working in different media create charged self-representations filled with psychological tension.

[Bug Davidson](#) channels moments of Gena Rowlands' award-winning performance in John Cassavetes' 1974 film, "A Woman Under the Influence." Sequenced painted video stills focus on Davidson's singular figure, the surrounding space all shadow and glare. Cinematic narratives of fraught mental states seem reduced to a series of sharp gestures and poses, each one an alarm — can we recognize the warning signs now? How much distance exists between then and now, her and them?

[Christine Garvey](#) continues her recent exploration of the feminine grotesque in an installation of starkly menacing body parts cast from viscous raw materials (tar, foam, plaster) and hair. Arranged in no earthly bodily order, the sculptural forms — called "Boundary Creatures" — suggest fierce agency.

And [Katy Horan](#)'s winsome illustrations take a heartrending, purposeful nosedive here in a digital animation depicting three key phases of a woman's body — before, during and after pregnancy. Presented on a floor-bound, vertical light box that draws our attention

down on her, this Everymother character's transformation is sparsely rendered but emotion-soaked and impossible to disregard.

The artists/homeowners [Sara Vanderbeek](#) and [Eric Manche](#) created DORF as a bastion of art energy to serve the exhibition needs of a broad network of friends and colleagues, as well as talents they are always searching for. I like their embrace of artistic ambition, and enjoy watching it run alongside personal subjectivities and a knack for professional presentation, each strain given free expression in authentic ways. The ensemble of artists gathered here links art school friends, a patron and client, fellow ICOSA collective and Crit Group alums, and several of the most active exhibiting artists in the state. Two of these are [Jennifer Ling Datchuk](#) of San Antonio and Austin's [Michael Anthony García](#), who both investigate aspects of identity through performance-related works of art.



Installation view of works by Jennifer Ling Datchuk including "Pluck," 2014, video, and from her series "Blue and White," digital photograph; porcelain blue and white pattern transfer from Jingdezhen, China. Photo by Eric Manche/DORF.

In a suite of works from 2014, Ling Datchuk presents herself in the frontal, face-focused pose of traditional self-portraiture. But observing appearance is only the start. Of biracial heritage, Ling Datchuk interrogates conventional Western beauty standards and the hierarchical, even colonizing, attitudes and behaviors that seek to enforce them. Across a video performance and three documentary photographs with enigmatic paired objects, she asks piercing questions. "He loves me, he loves me not," she sings in the video as she plucks each hair from her eyebrows, later reconstituting them with variously

patterned porcelain curves evoking her Chinese ancestry. Transfixed by this work, its clarity and specific personal perspective, we link it as the curators did to common threads in all the other artists' works.



Installation view, Michael Anthony García, "Los Pasos Del Ser Nébula (The Nebulous Being)," 2018, at DORF. Photo by Ryan Thayer Davis.

García, the justifiably ubiquitous performance artist, object-maker, curator, educator

(How many descriptors can he have? Point taken.) made a new work for the show. From an ongoing series, “Los Pasos Del Ser Nébula (The Nebulous Being)” is a meditation on identity that questions assumptions based on appearances. Don’t judge a book by its cover, this evocative assemblage seems to pun. It requires careful looking and thinking — a simple table or domestic vignette turns out to hold a deeply affecting silkscreened image of his sheerly sheathed legs, generic educational world nation posters, and a colorful stack of well-worn hardcover books whose spines are turned away from view. García invites us to parse our own meanings from these layers; his richly nuanced work confounds classifications by race, role, ethnicity, gender, and every other categorization system that limits possibilities.

Not surprisingly, one of the most ambitious works in the show is by the curator herself, Sara Vanderbeek. The project was to make a portrait painting of her and Eric’s daughter over the course of the West Austin Studio Tour, working only during open hours, exposing the very private creative process to public view. Durationally and logistically, that’s a challenge. And witness the photograph from which the painting is derived, taken at a Partial Shade/Co-Lab Projects outdoor exhibition, which of course turned into an evening of chase-the-child: Florida is captured here with her absolute fullness of spirit apparent to all.



Installation view Sara Vanderbeek's work-in-progress "Florida at Glissman," 2019, oil on canvas. Photo by Ryan Thayer Davis.