

Artist Anne O'Callaghan

Self Portrait with Emily Dickinson

Poetry, music, writing and the visual arts is a “way of knowing” a visionary practice. The “arts” an expression of a deep existential philosophy concerning how we perceive ourselves in the world, and how through art how we/I gain self-awareness. Poetry has been an element in all my work. My most recent exhibited work, Utopia, Who's Listening Now (2018), Emily Dickinson is central. In Self Portrait with Emily Dickinson; her poetry is the core of the work

It is in poetry and in art that I find a connection to the past and which helps me understand the present and one of the poets that I look to for guidance on this quest is Emily Dickinson. I feel that I am reading about the present, as with many poets her work transcends time and place

I approach Dickinson's poetry, and other poets as fellow travelers, gatekeepers to a deeper understanding of what makes us human. Emily Dickinson and Gertrude Stein are among the most innovative precursors of modernist poetry and prose. Emily Dickinson rejected the accepted poetic tradition of her times. A time when male poets and writers were exalted, and many woman presented their works under nom deplume. Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë- Currer writing as Ellis and Acton Bell: Lucile Aurore Dupin is better known as George Sands, Mary Ann Evans, wrote as George Elliot, to name but a few.

The exhibition Self Portrait with Emily Dickinson has a number of elements

1.The work includes six 30 x30 inch mirrored stainless panels with text. Four with individual poems by Emily Dickinson, and 2 panels that include all 1,789 lyric poems compressed on to the 30x30 inch space. Mirroring and at the same time layering her/ED times, history and ours until they intermingle. In this body of work, I am interested in, and inviting the viewer to have an active participation with the works.

If you stand back from the panels all you see is yourself, a mirror, if you move in close, you blur and the text is made visible.

When I read Emily Dickinson, I feel that I am reading about the present, as with many active participation with the works. As you read the poems, you are looking at your self, reading her words and reading yourself. Self-reflection, our image fragmented, her words fragments.

Self-Portraiture has a long history in Western Art, and what “most” self-portraits share is their dependence on the mirror. Rembrandt was a master of the selfie; He created over 80 self-portraits. In my Self-Portrait, not only am I looking at Emily Dickinson as a means of self-reflection, I am also “offering” the viewer a moment of self-reflection, a non-digital selfie.

2.A chair, a desk, a rug, many copies of ED poems and a recording machine (Compact Cassette recorder). On these cassettes I will have pre-recorded friends and colleagues reading ED poems. A moment in time, when the visitors can stop, listen, sit in a quiet space, where they can hear the silence and if they wish can listen to her poems or read them for themselves.

The 3rd element in this exhibition is Emily Dickinson as a botanist, which she pursued with zeal with scientific rigor.

In time when most of the fields of science were barred to woman the study of botany was considered permissible (Thou later on in the Victorian an era that field of study was taken over by men). Emily Dickinson's Herbarium, a work at the intersection of science and poetry,

Is made up of 66 pages with 435 images of flowers. Thou pressed flowers is/was often consigned to children's play or a hobby for woman, botanists the world over still collect specimens and like ED, they identify, describe, classify, and name [plants](#). Botanists also photograph the plants, but collecting and preserve the actual plant is still an important element in their work.

My intention to display pages from ED Herbarium, a long side my photographs of flowers.

A coming together of artist and poet.

Re images of Emily Dickinson's Herbarium

Dickinson, Emily, 1830-1886. Herbarium, circa 1839-1846. I volume (66 pages) in green cloth case: 37 cm. MS Am 1118.11, Houghton Library @President and Fellows of Harvard College For my purposed they are available for use.

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