

# Artists Playing with Identity

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The concept of identity has been ever-present since humans have been living in societies. People have identified themselves with their work, their families, their church, or religion as well as with their Nation or state. All of these identities that people have adopted throughout time have had various impacts on how those people have seen and understood themselves as well as how they have organized themselves and acted.

As such an influential concept it has been of particular interest to many artists, which have explored it in their own artworks and have also analyzed and researched it as well. This research relies on the findings and works that have come before, such as Bachelor's and Master's Theses, research papers, lectures, expert interviews, articles, books as well as on artworks that are informative and relevant to the topic of Identity.

The aim of the thesis is to contribute to the awareness of the impact of Identity, show its importance in the field of arts and explain how the author is playing with identity as an artist and a storyteller and to open a semiotic and symbolic discussion of the author's artistic work.

The findings show the complexities of human identities and how particular individuals have creatively formed and shaped their identities in order to serve them. As our identities are constantly in the process of change, and while we continue to ask who we are, we should not forget who is it that we want to become.

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## **1 Introduction**

As for many others, the search for my own identity and its understanding has been this ever-present quest throughout my life. A quest that has at times led me to confusion and being lost while going through an identity crisis and on the other side of that to finding better ways of relating to myself and the world around me. A lot of that is pretty typical and healthy in the process of growing up, this is well documented by the works of psychologists such as Erik Erikson and others, but there are few interesting implications of the effects of identity in Arts which I aim to research and wish to shine a light on.

In this research Identity is first defined and examined how it comes to be, then it is looked at first from a broader historical view to give context to this topic and to see how identity is constructed in general. The main research question is how different artists have played with identity. Finally, the last chapter will be dedicated to my work as an artist and a storyteller, through the lens of identity.

## **2 What is identity**

In the Cambridge dictionary identity is defined as “the fact of being or feeling that you are a particular type of person, organization, etc”, or defined by “qualities that make a person, organization, etc. different from others” (Cambridge University Press 2022). According to psychologist Erik Erikson, “sense of identity provides us the ability to experience oneself as something that has continuity and sameness and to act accordingly” (Erikson 1950, 42).

Identity is the center through which we understand ourselves and see the world, which develops constantly throughout our lifespan. This influences how we see others and how others see us. Once we have some idea of who we are, we slowly start seeing what we can do and what we should do in the world. And although that identity develops and is changing throughout time the continuity of that process creates a solid ground for understanding ourselves as one being.

### **2.1 How our identities come to be**

“The process of identification is a largely unconscious process whereby an individual models thoughts, feelings, and actions after those attributed to an object that has been incorporated as a mental image” (Merriam Webster 2022).

From the moment of our birth, we are in a position of ignorance and dependence. We do not know anything considerably and we cannot survive without the help and aid of our caretakers. In some way or another, this is a starting point for all of us. This is important to note because the first experiences we have are going to get deeply ingrained into us, since they will be our first knowledge before the position of ignorance, which will lay the ground of our understanding further along on top of which everything else is built and constructed, including our identity.

Who parents tell us that we are and how they make us feel about ourselves is also one key factor in us forming our self-image, coming back to the point where we are the ones at the begging who do not know much while our caretakers to

us are unfathomable beings who are so much bigger, stronger, knowledgeable and wiser, so naturally, we will take their view along with everything else that they give us. As stated by physician Margaret Mahler In our dependence a symbiosis happens, where we are merged with our caretakers to the extent that we do not have the boundaries yet which individuate us (Mahler 1968, 9).

Our very own existence comes to be in relation to another being. Often learning in this way lets others tell us who we are. After all, we are social beings and it is no wonder our identities are constructed and negotiated with others. What is important is where that power of construction lies. To be an artist sometimes means to look at the world and see what others yet cannot see, to frame it and point it out.

## **2.2 The conceptual framework of identities**

When we look out into the world we do not see pure form in front of us, we see object and characters that we assign meaning to. When we see a mug or a cup we do not see it only as a thing that is made out of ceramic for example. We see it as a thing for drinking, Our assigned meanings to different objects are relatively stable we do not figure out what that object is every time we see it, If we had to assign again meaning to an object or a thing every time we would encounter it we would be paralyzed, this is good for its practicality but it also narrows down our view of possibilities what that object is. Although a ceramic mug is a thing for drinking a ceramic mug can also be broken on purpose and have its pieces used to make a mosaic. There is no one inherent and actual way the mug is and what it is for.

Identities do not exist as physical things nor do they exist as natural law, they are assigned conceptually and they exist as a mental image that we have of someone or something.

In 1917. Artist Marcel Duchamp turned a urinal upside down and called it *Fountain*, Duchamp changed the identity of a piece of plumbing in to a much-discussed piece of art (Sophie Howarth, 2000).



Image 1. Marcel Duchamp. Fountain. 1917. Found Object. ( an installation view).

This is a work that evoked a lot of disagreement and discussion, many people saying how could this be art and offended that the u urinal was displayed. But by evoking such a strong reaction and opening dialogue it served functionally as a piece of art. For Duchamp the artwork doesn't exist in isolation it comes to be through the interpretation and reaction of the audience. The name of the work Fountain is an important part of this piece as it equated a urinal with a fountain. And could that ever be done, could a urinal ever become a Fountain? Practically yes, the materials of the urinal could be used to make a fountain, but it would be very hard for people to ever see this object as a fountain, as they are unable to change their minds about the identity of the object. this fountain would forever be tainted with the image of its past identity.

Yet the possibility does always exist for this object just as for any other object as well to be seen in a completely different way, organized, and used in a different way. Especially those who have never seen this object as a urinal they would much more easily accept its identity as a fountain.

Next, we can ask what is that is allowed for us to and what ways are we allowed to change when many of the rules that are in place and expectations are never spoken of, but rather exist as unspoken and unwritten rules.



### 3 Historical look at identity and its influence

Many authors and Artists have utilized pen names or pseudonyms throughout history. They've been used to hide the author's identity or gender, to separate the author from their other works, in order to protect the author from retaliation for their writings, to make the author's name more distinctive as well as for a variety of other reasons. By creating this kind of distance between the author and their work there is certain safety one gains or a work that would have been dismissed because of the author and who they are might get a chance to be looked at.

In his book the Republic, philosopher Plato wrote in the form of dialogues (Plato 375 BC). While there have been many interpretations of the reason why Plato wrote in this way it is interesting how this form of writing and exploring knowledge and ideas puts a certain distance from Plato himself. Yet gives an image to people who he is using in this way to explore Philosophy. But the form of dialogue is also interesting from the perspective that it is open-ended. It opens new questions and invites further dialogue. A creative tool that does not hold any statements too tightly and allows for a unique exploration of ideas.

Another example of free exploration of ideas through the play with identity is writer Delarivier Manley who in her book the New Atalantis wrote political satire through a semi-fictional story (Manley 1709). Her work was so scandalous at the time that she ended up on trial because of it. Yet due to her way of writing where she was implying while not revealing the identities of the people she wrote about she was able to evade legal consequences. (Novakova 2013). More importantly in this way she was walking the fine line between approval and disapproval from people of her time.

These are just some examples but thought history people have had to deal with protecting their identities in various ways and it is something that affects everyone in some way when living in a society. So much so that even laws of defamation have been put in place to protect people from having their reputations and image unjustly ruined. For artists in particular question of Identity has been important as it has often been the backbone of a successful artistic career

### **3.1 Creating an artistic identity and branding**

Artists often have to deal with identity not just from a perspective of the artistic exploration of that topic but also from a business and practical standpoint. For someone to be able to be a professional artist support from their audience is needed. Once an artist's image gets tainted in some way and is condemned as a person their art will be less supported financially and it will be harder and harder for that artist to make a living.

Many artists have often been careful to craft their public images. But can that be authentic? Is that sincere in that case if someone crafts their image for the sake of others, do people lose themselves in that way?

In her Master thesis Johanna Virtanen states that it is essential that the outcome of an artist's brand is genuine and sincere, and that it reflexes the visual artist's personality and way of life. Otherwise, the personal brand is too hard to keep up with and it will eventually fail. (Virtanen 2016.). On top of this audiences are increasingly becoming wary of a forced image that is not genuine.

### **3.2 Separation of the artist and art.**

In her Bachelor's thesis Satu Sekki mentions that for musicians for example a stage persona may help the artist to perform in a more relaxed manner in contrast to what the artist could do as him or herself (Sekki, 2012). This can serve as a psychological trick to get someone over their hang-up but also as a small barrier to protect the artist's privacy

In order to be a professional artist requires to put oneself out there, and it is hard to deal with the inevitable rejection that will occur at some point. Sometimes the rejection of an artist's artworks, if they are identified with it, can mean the rejection of the artist himself. As artists, we put our heart and souls into our work, and often

being an artist comes from the desire to be seen and heard, so it can be demoralizing to the artist that despite their best efforts they were rejected. Finding some way to disidentify oneself from their work as an artist can be important be it either just reminding oneself of that separation or creating that separation explicitly.

## 4 How artists play with identity

### 4.1 Stepping out of the expected role

In her work Artist Nikki S. Lee plays with identity by changing herself and involving herself with different communities, situations, and circumstances. She immerses herself in these environments and builds new identities this way. For each project, she spends about three to four months. Two or three months to prepare, buy clothes, gain or lose weight, or something completely different depending on the project. And then a month for involving herself within the environment and taking photos. (Lee 2013.)



Image 2. Nikki S. Lee. The Senior project 19. 1999. Photograph. ( an installation view).

Lee pushes back against rigid social roles and expectations, she goes outside of what is expected of her role. She is fitting in with the environments she finds herself in.

What is interesting about identity here is that although it affects so many things, once put on and built it also becomes invisible in a way. Like a filter or a lens that is distorting our view of the world, yet which is transparent. We see through it a coherent image and we are able to move about and act in the world through this perspective. Often it is noticed just at the point when our identity is changed or

threatened in some way. Until that point, there is a flow and a congruency within which we exist in relation to the world.

According to Psychologists Keith Leavitt and David M. Sluss Identity threats, are experiences that cause potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity (Leavitt & Sluss 2015).

These kinds of identity threats can be seen also in the attempts of some people to bring down Lee's identities, disproving of what she is doing, saying it is cultural appropriation or that she is making fun of different groups of people.

In similar ways, we all are prone to a certain amount of resistance whenever we try to change our own identities.



Image 3. Nikki S. Lee. The Exotic Dancers project (23). 2000. Photograph. ( an installation view).

But It is interesting to note that while Lee does have her changing identities she plays with Lee also has a stable identity she comes back to, this is something very important to have this stability despite the change. This allows for reflection and growth, because otherwise It would be disorienting if she did not have this stable identity of hers, and this kind of exploration of identity would not be possible.

Artists Nikki S. Lee does not constantly stay within these environments  
Lee has a self-proclaimed rule to not stay within any role she puts on for more than one month, this to her the period of one month creates a border between something being fake and real.(Lee 2013.)



Image 4. Nikki S. Lee. The Hip Hop Project (1). 2001. Photograph. ( an installation view).

In the interview, Lee states that she noticed from early on the change in her according to be the person she was interacting with, once she knew what kind of people the other person liked she could change herself and fit that role, she could become that way (Lee 2013). And it is in her project parts where she displays cut-out pictures of herself with different partners who are not seen, she brings the focus to only who she is in this moment, and how the other person affects the way she is.

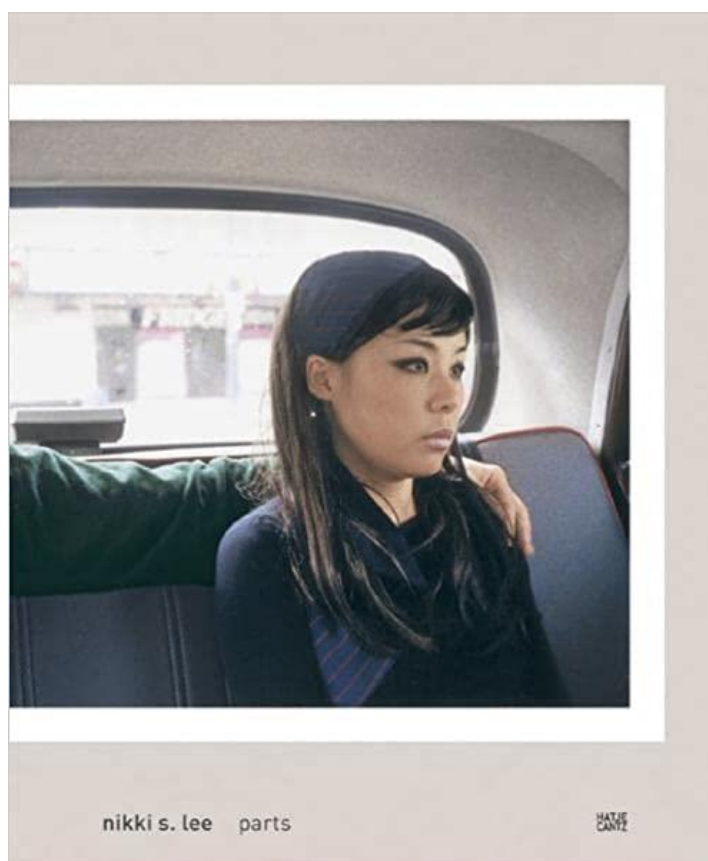


Image 5. Nikki S. Lee. Part (14). 2002. Photograph. ( an installation view).



Image 6. Nikki S. Lee. Part (12). 2002. Photograph. ( an installation view).

Lee mentions that each of us have a certain energy that we carry with us and how we come to be with different people depends on this exchange and play of energies (Lee 2013).

But Lee also talks about striving to be herself despite the fact that she can act in certain ways in different situations, she could put on an image of being a sophisticated philosophical artist, but she wants to be funny and honest instead (Lee 2013). Which comes from a desire to be a certain way and to be viewed a certain way

According to Professor Paul Van Lange the desire for people to be viewed by society in the same way that they see themselves is known as the self-verification theory. Individuals who are unable to self-verify in this way are deprived of meaningful interactions with others. (Lange & Kruglanski & Higgins 2011, 26.).

We all have a need to be viewed a certain way by others and we have the need to view ourselves in a certain way. Those two things become connected and influence one another, for this reason, we can sometimes see people who in order to change how they view themselves try and change how others see them first.

Change can be difficult also because it is hard to know sometimes in what direction and how exactly to change. In a world like this walking through the landscape of possible identities is like walking through a mist, as it is sometimes hard to see straight ahead but it is within that space of unknown that we find new possibilities.



## 4.2 Hiding one's identity

People across all sorts of different walks of life had hidden their identities in the past. What does it mean to hide one's identity as an artist and what are the effects of this?



Image 7. Banksy. Better out than in. 2013. Street painting. (an installation view).

Banksy is a mysterious artist figure who refuses to be interviewed and keeps his identity hidden. Banksy rose through the ranks to become one of the world's finest street artists in part by instilling in his audience a sense of mystery and want to learn more about him. Fans of street art are always impressed by the breadth, variety, and daring of each piece he creates, yet they are always left wanting more. This strategy allows viewers to consider an entirely new viewpoint or concept, and it frequently inspires both amateur and professional artists. The "Banksy Effect" is another name for this type of inspiration. (Street art Bio 2020.)

A number of claims have been made over Banksy's identity, fueling media interest. Most recently suggested he was a Bristol native by the name of Robin Cunningham.

But no claim had ever been confirmed. And his identity has supposedly even been concealed from his family. (Street Art Bio 2020.)

Though the prospect of uncovering Banksy's identity would satisfy people's curiosity, after the big initial news the mystery of who Banksy is would disappear. We are left with no conclusive answer only a void of confusion and uncertainty, and as nature and our minds uphaul a vacuum we will project into that what is unclear and unknown all sort of thing. in this ambiguity, fantasies can exist, and in this way Banksy becomes more than any particular person could become, he becomes an idea.



Image 8. Banksy. Girl with Balloon. 2002. Street painting. ( an installation view).

While Banksy conceals his personal identity he has gained a artistic identity.

### 4.3 Changing oneself physically



Image 9. Orlan. Attempt to exit the frame with an uncovered face. 1966. Photograph. ( an installation view).

Orlan is an artist that in her work incorporates medicine, science , technology and often her own body. And she is the first artist that has used plastic surgery as a artistic medium. (Orlan 2014.)

She rebels against the norms that exist in our society as well as rebelling against nature. Taking matters of her image into her own hand. She disposes with the concept of pain both on a cultural and a biological level. By taking painkillers that stop the natural pain response she is able to go beyond what nature intended for her, she is able to be present in a way she would not otherwise be able to be and she is able to be an artist that performs and not a patient in pain (Orlan 2014).

Besides the berries of the natural kind, there are also those cultural and institutional barriers in place. First, there is a stigma that subtly shapes people's freedom and actions with collective pressure, but then there are also many norms, rules and customs that exist.

By taking things into her own hands Orlan challenges these established medical conventions and power structures and establishes her own agenda, empowering the subject of the operation.



Image 10. Orlan. 10 Reincarnation of sainte-ORLAN. 1990. Performance. ( an installation view).

Orlan has gone through nine procedures, carried out between 1990 and 1993, collectively they make up the piece “The Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN” ( Cascone 2019).

Is there authenticity and the genuine self to be found away from the societal pressures and power structures? Orlan herself stated in the lecture that she does not take herself to be a goddess but that she feels nonetheless to be irrepresentable, undepictable. That any image is pseudo whether it is of physical presence or of verbal. Orlan mentions that these images are always of disturbing strangeness and that any representation is inadequate, but not to produce one would be worse. What matters is to move around these possible images, make them stand out, force them to come forth, to feel one’s way always astonished by the vision of what can be oneself. (Orlan 2014.)



Image 11. Orlan. ORLAN gives birth to herself.1964-66. Photograph. ( an installation view).

There is not necessarily one true way of being, one identity that could ever really capture who and what it is that we fully are. But this also frees us from the tyranny of that standard.

#### 4.4 Appropriating symbols that already exist

Some artists explore and adopt new identities from a position where they are easily and freely able to explore new ways of expressing themselves. Others make art because of their marginalized and unconventional identities. In order to break out of them or be accepted (Tate 2019). Changing the way others see us is often not equally easy for everyone to do so. Changing one's identity can easily go from personal matters to political matters.

In our society we have built up preconceived notions that are attached to certain identities. Whether it is based on a role like a mother, a father, a worker, or it is based on a trait such as gender, sexuality, or race, these kinds of identities carry with them assumptions and expectations. And there comes to be a certain way of looking at specific identities.

How does art help us change the way of looking at something?



Image 12. Kehinde Wiley. Willem van Heythuysen. 2005. Painting. ( a detail).

The people who Artist Wiley paints have been largely absent from the context of art history. This kind of absence of certain groups of people is called symbolic annihilation. As stated by Professor George Gerbner representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation." (Gerbner & Gross 1976, 182). This applies not only to fictional worlds but all other aspects of media, art, and culture as well.

Symbols are often responsible for caring meaning, and for this reason, they become so important and sacred. When symbols of who you are, are suppressed or not allowed to even come to be and exist then your whole identity gets invalidated.

To build new symbols and identities against such forces of suppression is really difficult it is useful to start somewhere, to start with the symbols that already exist and that people already know and understand.

Artist Kehinde Wiley describes what he is doing in his paintings as playing positively with the history of art, but also creating an image of the current times and people in it. playing with the language of power and trying to use certain aspects of that to his own purposes. What you come to see is a number of young people fashioning their own identities. Through that we are not just looking at black people we are also looking at ways of looking. (Contemporary Conversations 2017.)



Image 13. Kehinde Wiley. The Siesta. 2019. Painting. ( an installation view).

#### 4.5 Expressing the intimate

Our intimacy is deeply connected to who we are, and that is something that as social creatures we have the need to share with one another. Yet it can also be challenging and difficult to do so. Whether it is because of the fear of being rejected, misunderstood, or hurt in a variety of other ways, there is a lot of vulnerability in doing so. However, it is profoundly important because as we share ourselves with others, we discover ourselves also.

Due to the complexities of who we are and the weight of some personal subjects It can be extremely difficult to speak about some things, sometimes even impossible. So what is the utility of art in this context and can It serve to somehow close the gap that can exist between ourselves and the others?



Image 14. Tracey Emin. My bed. 1998. Instalation. ( an installation view).



In 1998, after a complete and absolute breakdown, Artist Tracey Emin spent four days in her bed, she was drinking, eating junk food, smoking and did not have the strength to move or live. Until she was forced to move and go get herself a glass of water. When she came back and looked at her bed she was struck by the sight of it. And saw it as a piece of art. (The South Bank Show 2001)

The whole scene came to be as a result of Emin's life, It was all who she was and the life circumstances that had made that bed. And there was here essence captured in it.

When we shield ourselves while living in society, we present our best characteristics and strengths while hiding our weaknesses and more unflattering parts of ourselves, we lose touch with vulnerability and thus we lose touch with intimacy and who we are. We become alienated from others and ourselves as well.

I mentioned already that sometimes there are things that are often extremely hard to talk about whether that is because of the weight of the subject matter or because some things can't be expressed with words, in these situations art can serve us to close that gap that comes to be between us and others as well as between us and ourselves.



Image 15. Tracey Emin.  
I took You home. 2015.  
Drawing. ( a detail).

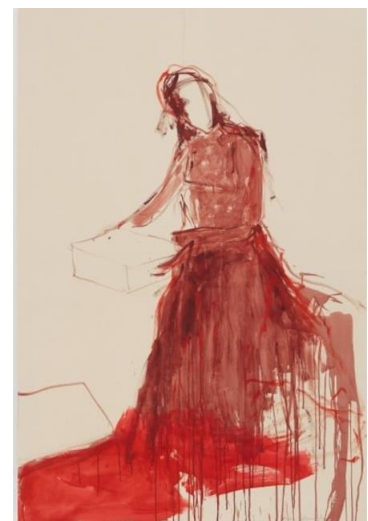


Image 16. Tracey Emin.  
Laying half Asleep. 2018.  
Painting. ( a detail).

Tracy Emin describes her own work as not so much honest but work for her is pure and it comes from a emotional context which is unarguable.

To herself as an artist, she is the essence of her own work (The South Bank Show 2001.) For this reason also, when Emin draws and paints she does not just draw what she sees, but she captures the internal aura.

## 5 Identity in my work as an artist

My name is now Natalija, it used to be Nikola. This is one of those bigger changes in my identity in my life when I went from living as a boy to living as a girl. People at that point started treating me and seeing me differently, their attitudes around me changed, their thoughts and feelings around me changed, and they started to have different expectations of me. This was not the only big change in my identity nor was that something that defined me, but it was a big and significant change. Another really big change in my identity was when I decided to become an artist, it is quite interesting to see how big implications this also had in my life, and it was interesting to see how we expect artists to behave differently in this society. I used to joke with my friend that I am allowed and given a bit of permission to be just a little bit crazy because I am an artist.

By changing my identity I noticed a change in my environment as well, whether it was going from one environment to another or the current environment changing so that it became different, I realized that different identities fit in to and exist within different environments. All of which then deeply influence just how one feels.

One example of this is how having a very masculine and very feminine identity and personality leads the individual to different circumstances and situations. A very masculine guy might end up going to a football match, screaming, and cheering on his team, while a hyper-feminine person might end up in a beauty salon getting her nails done with her friends.

This example is intentionally stereotypical and extreme because it paints such a vivid picture, the reality of femininity and masculinity is much more complicated, but I wish to shine a light on just how those two experiences for the individual are different and how it feels different to have a different identity.

I reference this phenomenon, in my Book *Orienting a Walk Through a Semi Fictional Landscape of Experiences* when one of my characters states that personalities are just vehicles to get us to the mental spaces we need to get to. This correlation between identity, environment, and then a subjective feeling forms the basis for much of my work as an artist.



Image 17. Natalija Sari Dakovic. *Dancing puppets*. 2022. Painting. ( a detail).

Each individual also can have multiple identities and parts to themselves. There are layers to all of us, as we humans are complex creatures. *Dancing puppets* to me is an artwork that in many ways represent different dualities and parts of myself dancing with each other and finding harmony. They represent different polarities, my feminine dancing with my masculine, my own image of who I am and the image that others have of me, as well as life and death itself. The puppets are rutted to the ground showing the connection between all of those things.

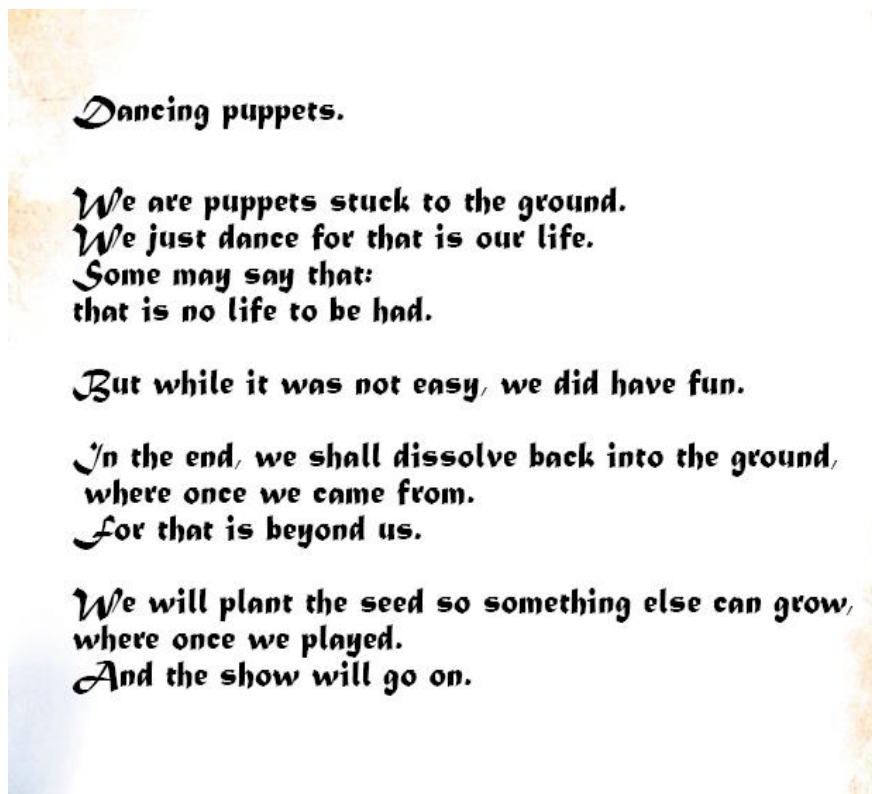


Image 18. Natalija Sari Dakovic. Dancing puppets. 2022. Painting. ( a detail).

To me my art is deeply connected to my life and who I am because the whole process of creating art for me involves living life. I intentionally live in such a way that I aim to experience a large spectrum of possible experiences while also having them in their fullest intensity, and then after having had those experiences or amidst them when I am creating art I focus on how I feel and then channel that into my art.

Sometimes the artworks come out of me like a raw expression of emotions and inspiration, without a plan or even an idea of what is it that I am going to create, I start creating the artwork pushed by an intense urge to do so. It doesn't feel like I am making the artwork but rather just observing it come to be, in this way my subconscious shines through and influences what I create, and the symbols in my artworks are not consciously chosen by me and are also open to interpretation and analyzing. Other times I take the symbols and themes that exist within my art already and I play with them consciously, to create a new scene or push a raw sketch that came from emotion, further so it would become a completed artwork.

There are artworks of mine I want to write poems about, other times I want to share my interpretation of my work or share the context of how and when the work came to be, and then there are artworks I wish not to say anything about.

Sometimes it all depends on who am I talking to, as I would be more open to talking about the intimate details of when and how a certain work came to be with those closest to me and I would rather leave others looking at a shadow of my experiences, guessing what it is, and then leave clues only for some to understand while they go over other people's head. In my journey as an artist, I am still working on and figuring out this balance for myself how much I share myself with the audience and the ways in which I do so. But increasingly I am becoming more aware of the importance of not just the artworks themselves but also their presentation on the impact they have.

### **5.1 Exploration through Characters and Semi-fiction.**

In the Book *Orienteering, A Walk Through a Semi-fictional Landscape* of experiences, the characters I create are often parts of myself, but they also have their own identities. I use my fictional characters as a creative tool to make personal work more than just about myself.

While the starting point of my artworks is very personal, I take parts of my personality, experiences, and feelings and assign them to my characters. And in that way parts of me are abstracted and used to create something new and different. By using my characters in this way I am taking the focus away from myself and who I am to bringing the focus on to experience themselves. And in this way through personal, I am reaching to what is collective and shared.

There is so much value in being able to both bring the focus to myself and who I am now and being able to put the focus on something else. Because by putting the focus on to something else and exploring that then in turn also inform who it is that I could become.

I am creating a whole world and context for these characters, where they can interact with one another and have their own experiences and I am creating a repertoire of visual symbols, in my semi-fictional world, that can carry a lot of different meanings.

Elliot, who is a supernatural character, is a representation of curiosity. He is a sort of little prince character. His circumstances are different than ours, yet through him, I explore that curiosity, ignorance, and fear of the unknown that we all have. The character May is characterized by her limitations, mortality, and loss. Through her, I explore how our limitations are something that might be a gift to us and can be looked at in a positive way.

I bring the characters of Elliot and May together in dialogues for they have a lot to give one another, and how different perspectives, can inspire one another towards change. As Elliot is a character who has lived 1300 years yet he has not yet lost those closest to him. And May has lost many of those closest to her and even works in a graveyard, a place that is associated with death, where she sculpts faces of the dead people to decorate their resting place.

The play between these two characters is that Elliot who has traveled the Universe and lived so long has seen a lot of life and inspires May to be open to new experiences while May as a character helps Elliot come to terms with the upcoming loss of his mother.

Another pair of characters in my book are Lucian and Julian. Lucian and Julian play with the archetype of a wiser older character and a younger naive character. Although their relationship also looks at this dynamic from a flawed perspective, as the lessons that Lucian tries to install into Julian often come across as vague, confusing, preachy and not relevant. Julian is faced with the shortcomings of an imperfect caretaker figure and struggles to find his own voice.

My two innate impulses are to live life to the fullest in the way I have described and then share it with others. And that is what I try to capture in my book, *Orienteering*. A walk through a semi-fictional landscape of experiences, I want my identity as an author to loom over the artworks and stories in my book, to have some people wondering and others know who it is that made those artworks and what have they gone through in their lifetime. As an artist I share my identity through the visualizations of my feelings.

In the end, my identity comes to be as a collection of stories, some of them are my own, and some of them are others. All coming together like those little pieces of the mosaic, and then evaporating after a period of time. Those Stories in their own way die when there is no one to tell them anymore and there is no one to hear them out. and it all vanishes just as it is constructed, piece by piece until there is nothing left except an empty space in which another identity can be built up. This is represented visually in my animation work *Self-construction and dissolution*.



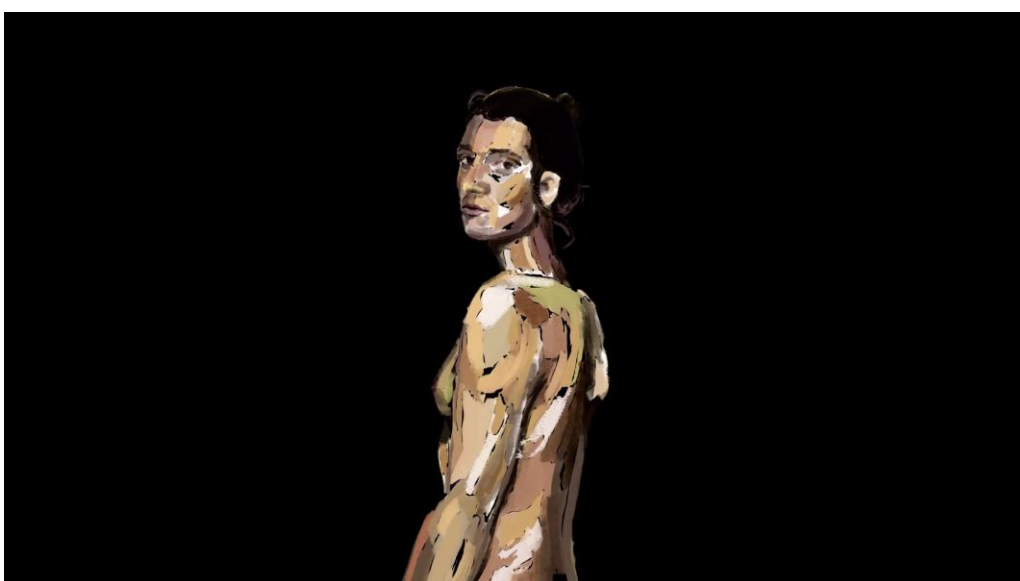
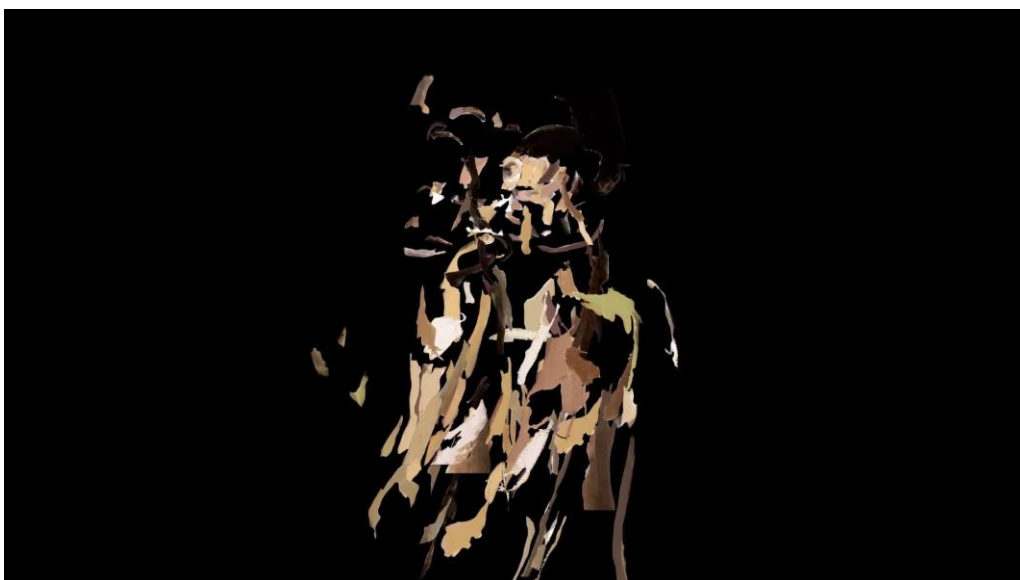


Image 19. Natalija Sari Dakovic. Self-construction and dissolution. 2022. Animation. ( A screen shot).

## 5.2 Conclusion

Whether it is subverting expectation, creating ambiguity, working with the very own body that one has, appropriating symbols, creating new symbols and meanings, or expressing and sharing the raw and intimate, are all the ways in which artists can assert and look into their own identities. There are so many ways in which one can explore their own identity as everyone's journey on that path is going to be different and unique.

The beauty of art lies in the fact that it is ever so flexible and expanding to be able to capture this vastness of self-expression. Art comes to be a unique form of communication with ourselves and the world. It reaches what cannot be said with language and is able to invoke emotions out of people as well as understanding. At the limits of language is where art begins.

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