



CRISTINA NUÑEZ

Spain

Link to the video:

<https://vimeo.com/203880279>

Artistic medium:

Photography, video, net art, collaborative art.

Websites:

<https://cristinanunez.com/> (under construction until end of February, see links below)

<https://selfportrait-experience.com/>

Biography:

<https://selfportrait-experience.com/about/>

Description of the Project and Objectives

(video text in English)

I work on autobiographical art. I use my life in my photographic and video-graphic works to achieve personal expression, to feel good in my own skin, to keep an on-going inner dialogue, but also to allow people to mirror themselves in my work, since I aim to be a speaker for others. I intend to claim the right to express and share difficult emotions and question the public about what we do in front of others' pain.

I also facilitate the same process on others, because this practice has helped me to overcome my personal problems and to become stronger and wiser to fulfil my mission. All I want now is to divulge my practice and teach my methodology to others, to allow them to transform their pain into art, to prove that the human being possesses a huge potential, if he just looks within and tries to understand himself. Art is a powerful tool which can be used for this purpose: the creative process is our subconscious' best friend, it allows us to express whatever we need to see today.

My work is uncomfortable; it's not easy to see. Some have said that it is not art, it is therapy, but I ask myself: am I not free, as an artist, to do whatever I want? Who decides if what I do is art or not? Aren't they trying to put a label on something which disturbs them deep inside?

This society needs to be deeply touched, disturbed and turned inside out if necessary. How do we want more justice if we are not

Tools and methodology

The Self-Portrait Experience ® is the method I created in 2005, since I started holding self-portrait workshops, for people to learn to transform pain into art, or better “shit into diamonds”. The method consists in the production of photo and/or video self-portraits, an in-depth work on the perception and choice of the images using the method’s precise artistic criteria, the project build-up and its publication.

The complete method is a photographic journey through all aspects of our lives, divided in three parts, with a series of exercises on each part, to stimulate the creative process:

- ME (emotions, character representation, places, body, roots)
- ME AND THE OTHER (relational self-portraits and portraits)
- ME AND THE WORLD (group self-portraits and portraits, relationship to society and the media)

During my workshops I invite participants to take self-portraits in my studio, generally on the expression of emotions. In these occasions, the images of my project Higher Self are produced (in the following pages). I leave participants alone to take pictures after having given them my instructions, so I am not present when the work is produced (please see Daniele de Luigi’s text). When the participant has finished, I come back in and I accompany him to look at the images and work on their perception. The next day, participants share their images with the group to get a collective response.

In the longer workshops I encourage participants to take their self-portraits with their own cameras, in order to start producing their project, which will be the beginning of an autobiographic project, using different media: books, videos, exhibitions, web pages.

The method’s Criteria of Perception are:

- multiplicity
- temporality
- visual harmony
- epic and/or archetypal storytelling

Obtained impact

I regularly teach my method in UK, France, Spain, Italy and Norway and I've also taught in South Korea, Bangla Desh, Luxemburg, Germany, Canada and the USA. I usually hold my self-portrait workshops in museums, galleries, universities, academies, high schools, prisons, mental health centres and companies. This is how I make my living, which proves that the method works, that people need art to feel better.

I've gathered people's feedback in many ways (see video and other links below). The Catholic University in Milan has pursued a research on the effects of my method on 39 teenagers, and 38 stated that the workshop had changed their way of looking at themselves. I am now pursuing a PhD by Published Works at the College of Arts of the University of Derby, which has allowed me to access the PhD without having any academic degree, just for the recognition of my 11-year independent research.

Links to my work

Someone to Love, at the Mois de la Photo de Montréal 2011

http://moisdelaphoto.com/2011/nunez_en.html

Link to my autobiographical video Someone to Love (1988-2011), Celeste Prize 2012:

<https://vimeo.com/46693349>

Link to Higher Self, about my method and philosophy:

<https://vimeo.com/46704234>

Link to We Exist, an online exhibit of my work in Norwegian prisons:

<http://r9b0334408.racontr.com/>

Link to the We Exist blog, with participants' feedback:

<https://weexist-norway.tumblr.com/tagged/Ullersmo+Prison>

Link to a video with participants' feedback:

<https://vimeo.com/83164390>

Link to La Vie en Rose, my autobiographical project (2013-ongoing)

<https://vimeo.com/102751357>

La Vie en Rose, art net platform:

<http://lavierose.eu/>

The photographic self-portrait in the digital age, a powerful tool for individual and social transformation

The psychological, philosophical and sociological dynamics behind the production of photographic self-portraits which allow subconscious expression, the work on the in-depth perception of the images and their exposure to the public.

Spanish artist Cristina Nuñez started working on photo self-portraiture in 1988 to overcome personal problems derived from her teenage heroin addiction, and to unconsciously stimulate a powerful creative process which allowed her to become an artist in 1994. Completely self-taught, through life experience and independent research, her intuitive artistic practice and extensive experience facilitating people's creative process since 2005 has led to The Self-Portrait Experience®. She has taught in prisons, mental health centres, museums, galleries, universities, high schools and companies.

Her method uses the power of ubiquitous digital photography in a completely different way, not 'selfies', that allows unconscious expression to honestly explore inner lives, especially our most difficult emotions, in order to gain new insight and stimulate the creative process as reflective.

Artists of all times have used the self-portrait to explore and assert their creative identity; to celebrate their social status, to establish a profound dialogue within themselves through time, to gain sanity or to work on social activism and as a mirror for others. Rarely have they declared their real purpose and seldom produced a specific research on the dynamics and effects of their practice, nor did they build an articulate methodology to facilitate other people's inner processes through self-portraiture. Nuñez has.

Nuñez does not put much distance between her life and her work. This is one of the reasons why her work is often considered more therapy than art, too emotionally engaging, too direct. "You must solve your problems before showing them to the public", a curator (2013) said of her work, and Nuñez displayed this sentence in her exhibit: reactions of the public are part of her projects.

Exploring and questioning her own practice with herself and others, Nuñez became a researcher of human inner life, studying the creative power of emotional pain, the genesis and dynamics of the creative process and the purpose and the effects of her practice and methodology. Moving between disciplines and artistic mediums -photography, video, performance, net art - guided by her intuitive creative process and her passion for the human being as a research methodology, she has gone "her way" with no role models to follow and despite the critical gaze around her.

Since 2009 Nuñez gathers participants' feedback: the Department of Clinical Psychology of the Catholic University in Milan have pursued a research on the effects of this method on a group of 39 adolescents, published on a graduate thesis . The over 4000 collaborative self-portrait sessions held by Nuñez since 2008 have been 95% successful in the production of artworks, due to her capacity to involve the subject in an inner journey by means of her instructions and her absence during the actual taking of the images. This methodology has enabled her to put into practice Aby Warburg's (1822) theories on the emotion as a vehicle for cultural memory , as Daniele de Luigi (2012) states:

“..., a connection is revealed between the protagonist's character, his emotional state, their objectification in an image and the iconographic tradition. The issue emerging here is extremely complex and confronts us with those problems which iconology treated, the discipline founded a century ago by the extraordinary figure of Aby Warburg...
...They do not enact the iconography, the part of a historical, religious or mythical personality, instead they incarnate its symbolical abstraction through their personal experience, through collective memory .”

The Self-Portrait Experience®, which applies both to Nuñez's artistic practice and to the collaborative work with others, consists of three main steps; taking of self-portraits, perceiving the images in-depth and publishing the images. The method itself is a journey through all aspects of our lives using photography (Nuñez, 2012):

1. ME: emotions, character representation, body, places, roots.
2. ME AND THE OTHER: relationship self-portraits and portraits
3. ME AND THE WORLD: group self-portraits and other images

In her workshops, Nuñez trains people to use the method with their own cameras and thus perform an alchemic process by transforming their emotional pain into artworks or better, as Nuñez states, their “shit into diamonds”. Her purpose is social activism. She is convinced that if most people could photograph and share their emotions, needs and vulnerability, they would be connected on a more human level, so conflicts would lessen.

Nuñez has created an articulate methodology of perception consisting in a series of criteria: multiplicity (exploring the many different – and often opposite - messages, expressions, emotions of the subject in the image, especially by studying the two sides of the face separately); temporality (different temporalities expressed by the subject); visual harmony (composition, colour, geometries, visual elements) and Higher Self (iconic/epic quality, archetypes, symbols, dreams and storytelling). The criteria allow us to establish an on-going and in-depth dialogue with the images, and to discover that our perception can be ever changing.

By means of a PhD in published works, Nuñez intends to give value to her body of work to satisfy the standards of higher education, proving its contribution to the knowledge of the arts. Her research question, to which her work responds, is:
What are the psychological, philosophical and sociological dynamics and effects behind the production of photo self-portraits which allow subconscious expression, the work on the in-depth perception of the images and their exposure to the public?

Her research will consist in the build up of a fully developed theory around the use of digital self-portraiture in both an individual and social framework, using, among others, the neurological pathway of the emotional lateralization of the brain and face, which underpins social change by proving the multiplicity and plasticity of human identity and of human perception.

Cristina Nuñez
Critical Appraisal, 1000 word draft for the application
PhD by Published Works
College of Arts
University of Derby

REFERENCES

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Brivio, V. (2011) L'immagine corporea degli adolescenti: l'autoritratto fotografico come auto-definizione del sé, Milan : Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. Graduate thesis.

De Luigi, D. (2012), foreword to Higher Self, The Self-Portrait Experience by Cristina Nuñez, Brussels: Le Caillou Bleu, pp.17-18.

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Warburg, A. (1822) The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance (Texts & Documents). Los Angeles : Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities.

Higher Self

a collaborative self-portrait project

Daniele de Luigi, curator of Galleria Civica di Modena, Italy

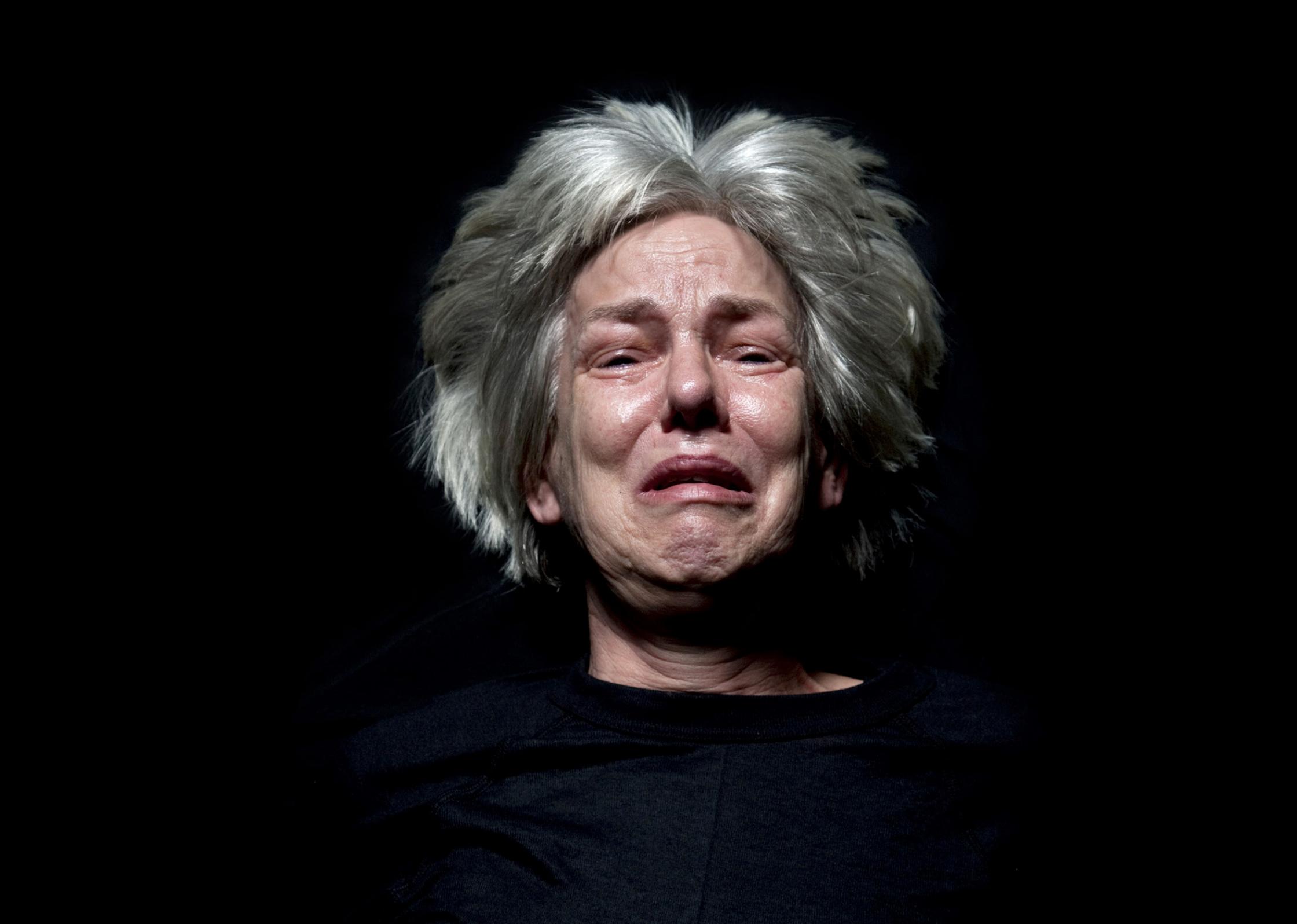
Cristina Nuñez's series of collaborative self-portraits form a photographic work, which is embodied in a space where several conceptual and disciplinary "limit zones" converge: the one between traditional photographic practice and contemporary art processuality, the one between formal conception and social activism and the one between art itself and other disciplines. Psychology, for example, is not used to build a theory, but it undergoes Nuñez's break-in in its field and must confront itself with the artist's results.

The photographs emerging from this complexity show a high iconic impact, which springs not from a shrewd arrangement of details, as we might suspect, but mainly from a human and relational process of unknown outcome.

It is not secondary that Cristina Nuñez is not present when her subjects are taking photographs: even though she, originator and director, remains responsible and author of the work, with her absence she questions artistic creation as something that is generated necessarily in her sitters' inner world. The decisive instant in which the image takes shape is thus voluntarily put out of her control. The artist's footprint reappears only in the selection of the final work, pursued together with the protagonist in a shared interpretative process. The subject's involvement in the material execution of the image is authentic and decisive because the work is not the mechanism, a pre-established scheme of which it represents a link: the work is the final image in which the process condenses itself aesthetically, and its result depends on the subject's capacity to "respond" to the challenge.

Recalling Jeff Wall's metaphor, Nuñez is more a "farmer photographer" than a "hunter", or even better a "sower" since she lets someone else "sprout" the image.

Nevertheless, precisely in the relationship between the image and its generating procedure we can find an extremely surprising aspect. Observing some of these portraits, it is immediately evident that they recall well known iconographies, which we can find across the centuries in our visual culture's historical repertoire and in the meanders of our memory. While the re-usage of an iconography has always been an intentional artistic and intellectual action, which voluntarily refers to codified formulas we cannot elude, because their significance is a common legacy –I'm thinking about Bill Viola-, here it springs from a creative process in which, in the precise moment of the creation of the image, there is no control on its shape or composition. Nobody is



controlling the frame in that instant, the pose and the subject's expression arise spontaneously and the protagonist, concentrated –according to Nuñez's instructions- on his own interiority, cannot see himself. We could think that the fixation of that particular gesture happens in casually, dissociated from its traditional significance: instead, after the shot, often emerges a surprising relationship between the subject's life and the meaning traditionally given to that iconography. Therefore, a connection is revealed between the protagonist's character, his emotional state, their objectification in an image and the iconographic tradition. The issue emerging here is extremely complex and confronts us with those problems which iconology treated, the discipline founded a century ago by the extraordinary figure of Aby Warburg, which investigates the genesis, the transmission and the transformation of images and the translation of human gestures in images.

The German researcher explained that those typically characterized representations were born in an ancestral stage of human history, in which gestures and expressions with which his relationship to the world was communicated, were translated in symbolical images capable of containing these emotions. Traditional symbols are thus the surviving archetypes of human experience, related to primordial impulses and instinctive bodily reactions, the signic translation of a primal emotional experience. Their transference is not due to a simple linear passage from one epoch to another, but to the preservation of a collective memory, which proceeds in an anachronic way. If this is true, then it is evident that the protagonists of these portraits, induced to express their own primal and deep emotions, but also conscious that they are transforming themselves in images, have instinctively adopted gestures and expressions which match traditional representations of an emotion. They do not enact the iconography, the part of a historical, religious or mythical personality, instead they incarnate its symbolical abstraction through their personal experience, through collective memory. As in a hall of mirrors, human emotions unite us across time and space, the entire history of images and of our own civilization.













Someone to Love

In 1988, in an attempt to overcome personal problems, Cristina Nuñez began to take self-portraits in private. Giving shape to her emotions and revealing her presence to the world, enabling her to turn an uncompromising gaze upon herself, but also to project herself as she wanted to be, these images became a form of self-therapy through which she learned who she is. Someone to Love (1988–2011) brings together for the first time the best self-portraits that she made.

In the video-diaporama Someone to Love, (Celeste Prize 2012) the voice of the author accompanies the viewer through her family history and childhood, her troubled adolescence as a heroin addict and the evolution of her self-image, her relationships and the discovery of the self-portrait as a tool for self-therapy. The last sequence shows the project on her mother's life, including collaborative self-portraits and family pictures, until her last breath.

The Self-Portrait Experience shares with viewers the artist's method of interior exploration. These two paths, through which Nuñez states that, "The existing separation between art and therapy is intolerable," now form the focus of her art.

Someone to Love, at the Mois de la Photo de Montréal 2011
http://moisdelaphoto.com/2011/nunez_en.html



La Vie en Rose

a text by Carolina Lio

La Vie en Rose is an ongoing project by Cristina Nuñez with the real objective of finding her ideal partner. Instead of concentrating on her qualities, in her search the artist reveals her defects and weaknesses, in a temporal and geographical journey, both intimate and public, in constant relation to the crucial moments of her life.

One of the principles of her autobiographical work is the therapeutic research of salvation and redemption as an inner preparation for love. She expresses her most extreme emotions, shows off her most dramatic, pathetic and vulnerable aspects, stresses what most of people try to hide. Thus she becomes a speaker for others, for the public to recognize, identify and mirror themselves, in order to sublimate pain and anger.

La Vie en Rose is a series of videos, a chain of actions which will happen in public space, and a web platform documenting the whole process. Throughout the web platform the audience will be given the opportunity to interact and be engaged in the project.

In the first weeks, Cristina will upload all the videos she keeps on producing, showing her inner and outer evolution, documenting her actual situation, expressing her emotions of the moment, involving the public in her project and inviting them to respond to her research.

All visitors – both men and women – are strongly encouraged to participate. There are several ways to get involved: commenting Cristina's video on this website (in any language), following the project through the dedicated social networks, writing her directly, visiting her exhibitions and performative actions, proposing as a possible partner and so on.

La Vie en Rose will end once reached the ultimate goal of the project: to find true love.



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Artist Residency at

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<http://rocaumbert.com/espaidarts/resident/cristina-nunez-2/>