

Show
me
as I
want
to be
seen

THE CONTEMPORARY JEWISH MUSEUM

FEB 7-JUL 7, 2019

EXHIBITION RESOURCE GUIDE

THECJM.ORG

Contemporary Portraiture and Identity: The Expansive Self

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About this resource

This exhibition guide is intended for educators interested in exploring the themes of *Show Me as I Want to Be Seen*, expanding traditional concepts of portraiture, identity, and representation. This guide is a powerful tool in supporting an inclusive classroom environment and as a curriculum to complement teaching anti-bullying, diversity, gender expansiveness, and race as a social construct.

This guide may be used as a stand-alone resource for teaching or before or after a visit to The Contemporary Jewish Museum (The CJM).

A timely topic

BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

1. Foss Sigurdson, J., et al, "The long-term effects of being bullied or a bully in adolescence on externalizing and internalizing mental health problems in adulthood," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, August 2015, 9:42.

2. <https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/stats.asp>

3. <https://story.californiasunday.com/homeless-at-larkin-street>

4. <https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/stats.asp>

In 2015, in the report from the National Center for Educational Statistics, about 21 percent of students ages 12–18 reported bullying. Bullied victims and perpetrators are shown to experience a higher propensity for long term mental health issues including addiction, depression, and suicide.¹ Cyberbullying amongst young people has continued to rise, doubling in the last ten years. For LGBTQ+ youth these statistics more than double.² In San Francisco, 48 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+.³

Diligent school-wide practices for bullying prevention and response, student-run support groups including a Gay-Straight Alliance, along with educators teaching and modeling inclusion, help create safe spaces and have positively shown to reduce student harassment and bullying.⁴ This curriculum introduces topics of inclusion through art and portraiture.

IDENTITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

5. Erikson, E. *Identity: Youth and Crises*. New York: Norton 1968.

6. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4879949/#b7-ccap25_p0097

During adolescence, we are much more self-conscious about our changing identities than at any other stage in our lives.⁵ The main and most important developmental tasks for adolescents is to construct their own unique sense of identity.⁶ This is often accompanied by finding the social environment where teens feel they can belong, and creating meaningful relationships with others.

7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3795955/>

The mechanics of identity development is changing with the advent of social media. On social media, youth may conflate self-identity and “likes.” Online explorations of identity through self-disclosures have a wide “voting” audience. Yet, the profusion of digital self-representation opposes the notion of a static, singular, essential self. Digital self-representation allows youth to more fluidly try-on identities and may intensify one’s self-articulation.⁷

IDENTITY AND NON-BINARY THINKING

Contemporary conversations around race and gender reject static definitions. In recent years, with the increased awareness around the complexities of gender identity and expression, students have become increasingly vocal in resisting binary thinking in their own identity construction.

In fact, youth are finding agency in avoiding classification altogether. Identities are ambiguous, fragmented, and evolving. Passage of time, life events, politics, art, education, and social acceptance all serve to transform once fixed identities. Creating a safe space by introducing conversations around mutable identities allows youth to more fluidly explore their identities and find a sense of belonging.

USING PORTRAITURE TO EXPLORE IDENTITY

Works of art can be the empowered proclamation of a shifting self that defies all categorization. **Artists of color, women, LGBTQ+, gender non-binary artists, and those who defy classification altogether—seek to unhinge our normative understandings around identity.**

No longer presenting a marginalized, racialized, gendered “other,” but rather an empowered, complex, and mutable self, these artists define themselves on their own terms and provide an artistic framework to explore identity with students.

About the exhibition

ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore

Nicole Eisenman

Rhonda Holberton

Hiwa K

Young Joon Kwak

Zanele Muholi

Toyin Ojih Odutola

Gabby Rosenberg

Tschabalala Self

Davina Semo

Isabel Yellin

Examining the complex notion of a fluid identity, Claude Cahun (born Lucy Schwob) and Marcel Moore (born Suzanne Malherbe) are recognized as pioneers in their bold representations of an unfixed, shifting self. Their end result is not a declarative identity, rather an exploration of the mutable, changeable, inconsistent self. Choosing the parts of themselves they wish to share, the artists in this exhibition explore the self on their own unique terms thereby demanding the viewers' attention. By positioning the work of Cahun and Moore in dialogue with ten contemporary artists—in mediums ranging from painting and sculpture to video and 3-D mapping—this exhibition addresses the constructed and shifting self.

Witnessing this mutability has the power to dislodge the static notions we hold of ourselves, expand our conceptions to encompass a much more complex self, and realize our own multiplicity. For some, this witnessing might allow for a deeper understanding of those for whom identity is shifting and undefinable.

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore were partners in art and in life, best known today for their striking collaborative portraits of Claude's many iterations of self. These portraits present Claude in various guises, gender presentations, and affect, often with Claude gazing directly back at the viewer in a gesture of empowerment.

Several of the contemporary artists in the exhibition create self-portraits that return the gaze or employ the trope of the mirror, referencing self-determination over the pleasure of the viewer. Many artworks use pose, attire, adornment, and masks to communicate the embodied performance of identity. Other artworks use intentional illegibility to declare the self, representing subjects that defy categorization by moving toward abstraction, fragmenting the body, or withholding visual information from the viewer. Cahun and Moore's revolutionary oeuvre resonates brightly with these artists' contemporary responses to the thorniness of representation.

Show Me as I Want to Be Seen is organized by The Contemporary Jewish Museum and is curated by The CJM Assistant Curator Natasha Matteson.

Set Induction

EXPLORING THE EXPANSIVE SELF THROUGH PORTRAITURE

To begin, ask your students to say what images come to mind when they hear the term “portrait” and then make a collected list of the examples.

They might mention a famous work of art, something that was just posted on Instagram, or a “selfie” they have on their phone.

Introduce the common definition:

A portrait is defined as a painting, drawing, photograph, or engraving of a person, especially one depicting only the face or head and shoulders.

(Source: Oxford English Dictionary)

Discuss distinctions in the class list and the common definition.

Read aloud (may be done in small groups or as a class)

“Show me as I want to be seen. When I say this, I do not believe that I can be shown as I am; I understand myself well enough to know that there is no one true self. Nor do I expect that I can be seen as I am; I understand seeing well enough to know that to be represented doesn't mean to be truly perceived. So, let's embrace the gaps: show me as I want to be seen, as I determine.”⁸

8. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 75-81.

REFLECTION

Describe the ideas of this quote in your own words.

What does “one true self” mean to you?

Do you think we have “one true self” or are we made of multiple identities?

Is your personality fixed? Does your identity change over time? How so?

What does identity mean? Is it something that is infinite?

Develop a classroom definition for identity and use it as you continue the exercises.

Identity Exchange

MATERIALS: 10 index cards and 10–20 sticker dots per student

1. BRAINSTORM

Each person receives ten index cards.

On each card, write a word or a phrase describing something that is important to your identity.

2. CONNECT

Lay your cards out on a desk or surface.

Walk around the room, reading what others wrote on their cards. Anytime you see a word or phrase that you also identify with, add a dot sticker to that person's card.

3. REFLECT

As a group, discuss what you noticed during this exercise.

Which cards had many dot stickers on them?

Did anything surprise you?

If you were to group some of the ideas into categories, what would the categories be?

Exploring works of art

Start by projecting or distributing the images of the works of art.

(Hold biographies until after the guided looking.)

This exercise can be approached as a full class or in small groups. As you go through the guided questions, take time to write notes and create community word banks around each work of art for future activities.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Take a moment to look closely at the two works by the artist(s).

1. What is the first thing you notice?
Anything unusual about these works?
How do the two portraits by the same artists compare?
2. Describe the texture and materials of each work of art.
What do they remind you of?
3. Describe the mood and the attitude.
What visual elements do you base your response on (colors, angle of pose, type of gaze, body language)?
4. If we turned up the “volume” of these works of art, how might they sound?
If you were to put them to music, what music would you choose?
5. Would you describe these works of art as a portraits, why or why not?

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Pair share and then full class share back.

1. Describe this work to someone who cannot see it.
2. Why do you think the artist is choosing to present their subject this way?
3. What do you notice about the materials used, the gaze, the incorporated figure, the title?
4. How might these portraits be “untraditional”?

BIOGRAPHY INTEGRATION

Share the artist biographies and artists' statements with students after you have gone through guided looking.

REFLECT

- Is there something about this artist or biography that expands your ideas? Please explain.
- Is there something that helps you further understand the work of art, elaborate?
- What might you want to ask the artist?
- Do you think these works of art connect to your classroom definition of identity, why or why not?

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore



Claude Cahun (Lucy Schwob), *Self-portrait*, c. 1925. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy Collection of Leslie Tonkonow and Klaus Ottmann.



Claude Cahun (Lucy Schwob) and Marcel Moore (Suzanne Malherbe), *Untitled*, 1928. Gelatin silver print. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Robert Shapazian. © Estate of Claude Cahun, Photo: Don Ross.

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore

ARTIST STATEMENT

“Live and grow in me, the he, she—or simply it—that allows me, still young, to understand that I should only, because I can only, connect with, change, myself.”⁹

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Claude Cahun

(b. 1894, Nantes, France; d. 1954, Saint Helier, Jersey)

Marcel Moore

(b. 1892, Nantes, France; d. 1972, Beaumont, Jersey)

Claude Cahun was a groundbreaking queer Jewish photographer, writer, Surrealist, performer, and radical activist. Born Lucy Schwob, Cahun changed her name to the gender-ambiguous Claude Cahun in 1919, taking the last name of her paternal grandmother. This act of self-determination not only disrupted assumptions about her gender, but emphasized her Jewish heritage—Cahun is the French form of Cohen—which was considered an even more radical gesture in 1920s pre-war Europe. Cahun, likely in collaboration with Moore, created some of the most startlingly original and enigmatic photographic images of the twentieth century.

Cahun and Moore’s identities permeated their lives as well as their works. Living on Jersey, a Nazi occupied island off the coast of England, the pair intercepted and translated BBC broadcasts, using tactics borrowed from Surrealism to distribute the translated messages, encouraging Nazi soldiers to mutiny. Their campaign was so formidable that the Nazis were shocked to discover—as they eventually did—that it had been carried out by two middle-aged women. Cahun and Moore were arrested, imprisoned, and sentenced to death for their resistance activities, but the war ended and they were released before the sentence was carried out. In a portrait of Cahun taken in May of 1945, immediately after the two were set free, she stares defiantly into the camera with a Nazi insignia in her teeth. Reclaiming her agency in the wake of trauma through this image, Cahun’s identity shifts once again, this time from captive victim to empowered survivor.

While Cahun’s photographic work is considered self-portraiture by some, much of the work is beginning to be attributed to Moore as well, as Moore often took the photos of Cahun, or switched places with her both in front of and behind the camera.

9. Claude Cahun, *Disavowals*, 1930. Cambridge University Press, 200.

Nicole Eisenman



Untitled, 2012. Graphite, watercolor, and ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Collection of Leon and Stephanie Vahn, Beverly Hills. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.



Long Distance, 2015. Oil on canvas. Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York. © Nicole Eisenman.

Nicole Eisenman

ARTIST STATEMENT

“Work comes out of life. Where else would your work come out of, if not your experience? Being a queer woman is the air that I breathe, and it's inescapable, and it's going to be part of the work. But I would like gender to just disappear from the face of the earth.”¹⁰

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Nicole Eisenman

(b. 1965, Verdun, France. Lives and works in New York, NY)

Nicole Eisenman is an artist who is expanding the critical and expressive capacity of the Western figurative tradition through works that engage contemporary social issues and phenomena. Over the course of nearly four decades and working across various media, including painting, sculpture, drawing, and printmaking, Eisenman has restored to the representation of the human form a cultural significance that had waned during the ascendancy of abstraction in the twentieth century. Eisenman draws on narrative modes to explore such themes as gender and sexuality, family dynamics, and inequalities of wealth and power. At the same time, she stages dialogues with artists from the past, both by referencing specific works and by employing stylistic and thematic approaches derived from art historical movements.

10. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/arts/design/a-conversation-with-nicole-eisenman-and-grace-dunham.html>

Tschabalala Self



Perched, 2016. Oil, acrylic, Flashe, handmade paper, fabric, and found material. Courtesy of the artist and Kate Werble Gallery, New York. Photo: Elizabeth Bernstein.



Scarlet, 2018. Painted canvas, fabric, Flashe, acrylic, gouache chalk, and pastel on canvas. Courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery. Photo: Andrea Rossetti.

Tschabalala Self

ARTIST STATEMENT

“The fantasies and attitudes surrounding the Black female body are both accepted and rejected within my practice, and through this disorientation, new possibilities arise. I am attempting to provide alternative, and perhaps fictional explanations for the voyeuristic tendencies towards the gendered and racialized body; a body which is both exalted and abject.”¹¹

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Tschabalala Self

(b. 1990, Harlem, NY. Lives and works in New Haven, CT)

Tschabalala Self builds a singular style from the syncretic use of painting, printmaking and assemblage to explore ideas about the black female body. The artist constructs exaggerated depictions of female bodies using a combination of sewn, printed, and painted materials, traversing different artistic and craft traditions. The exaggerated biological characteristics of her figures reflect Self's own interest in cultural attitudes toward race and gender.

11. <https://tschabalalaself.com/about>

Zanele Muholi



Vile, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2015. Gelatin silver print.
© Zanele Muholi (Courtesy of Yancey Richardson, New York and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg)



Phila I, Parktown, 2016. Gelatin silver print. © Zanele Muholi
(Courtesy of Yancey Richardson, New York and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg)

Zanele Muholi

ARTIST STATEMENT

"The series touches on beauty, relates to historical incidents, giving affirmation to those who are doubting—whenever they speak to themselves, when they look in the mirror—to say, **'You are worthy, you count, nobody has the right to undermine you: because of your being, because of your race, because of your gender expression, because of your sexuality, because of all that you are.'**"¹²

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Zanele Muholi

(b. 1972, Umlazi, Durban, South Africa. Lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa)

Zanele Muholi is a South African visual activist and photographer. In 2002 Muholi co-founded the Forum for Empowerment of Women (FEW) and in 2009 founded [Inkanyiso](#), a forum for queer and visual (activists) media. Muholi's self-proclaimed mission is "to re-write a black queer and trans visual history of South Africa for the world to know of our resistance and existence at the height of hate crimes in South Africa and beyond." Some of Muholi's community work includes training and co-facilitating photography workshops for women in townships and beyond.

Muholi's self-conscious and ubiquitous use of accessories, many of them practical day-to-day items, are both literal and not, an apparent mixture of Afrofuturism and imagination, and the very African sense of the biblical injunction to "use well what we have."

12. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/03/lens/zanele-muholi-somnyama-ngonyama-south-africa.html>

Davina Semo



A GREAT THING IN HER LIFE IS THAT SHE HAS A SECRET, 2018. Pigmented and reinforced concrete, stainless steel pipe, and broken auto glass. Courtesy of the artist.



"I WON'T BOTHER YOU," SHE SAID, 2019. Stainless steel, Courtesy of the artist.

Davina Semo

ARTIST STATEMENT

"I keep coming back to thinking about how strange it is to be alive and how **in this time of total connection there is so little attention paid to the fundamental or metaphysical reality in which we exist, which is that there is no way for you to read my mind, and no way for me to read yours.**"¹³

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Davina Semo

(b. 1981, Washington, D.C. Lives and works in San Francisco)

Davina Semo completed her MFA at the University of California, San Diego, in 2006. She received her BA in Visual Arts and Creative Writing from Brown University in 2003. Semo is represented by Marlborough Contemporary, New York and London, Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco, and Ribordy Contemporary in Geneva, Switzerland. Semo lives and works in San Francisco.

13. <http://1995-2015.undo.net/it/mostra/134777#>

Guided activities

Choose one of the following three activities that asks to students to write, collage, and discuss the themes of portraiture and self-representation.

ACTIVITY 1

Personality in art

DESCRIBE ART

Either as a class or as groups, focus on a single work of art.

Ask students to divide a page into quadrants and label each quadrant with one part of speech: nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives.

Each group can then be divided into four. Explain that **each person will be responsible for brainstorming words for one part of speech**. The “noun person” will come up with a list of nouns that they see in the image. The “adverb person” will come up with a list of adverbs that they see, and so on. Give the groups five minutes to compose their lists.

When completed, lists may look like this:

NOUNS	VERBS	ADVERBS	ADJECTIVES
Hand	Cling	Sadly	Fleshy
Skin	Arch	Excitedly	Loud
Bone	Crouch	Noisily	Bony
Bridge	Brace	Orderly	Clumsy

CREATE SENTENCES

Next, using the words from the four lists, **ask the group of students to compose sentences that use at least one word from each of the quadrants**. Some examples based on the words above might be:

In this image the “bony hand crouches sadly” or “the fleshy bridge arches noisily.”

Students then choose a spokesperson to share their sentences with the class.

REFLECT

How might bringing the work of art to life help you to understand it?

How would you describe the “personality” of this work of art?

Does this “personality” connect with identity, why or why not?

ACTIVITY 2

Persona Poem

WORD BANK

Each student focuses on a single work of art of their choosing.

Ask students to brainstorm why the artist may have created this work of art. Ask them to consider how the artist may have wanted viewers to feel when they looked at this image. Ask students to record their answers to create a word bank. Students can discuss their answers with a partner or in small groups.

PERSONA POEM

Ask students to write a persona poem inspired by the image.

Explain to students that **in a persona poem, the poet writes from the perspective of someone else, a persona.**

Invite students to refer to their word bank.

GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR PERSONA POEM

Worksheet included in appendix.

REFLECT

Students may read their poems aloud in class or they may recopy them onto nice paper to be presented visually.

ACTIVITY 3

Portrait through Metaphor—Collage

FREE WRITE

Have students write for ten to fifteen minutes to begin to develop a concept for a personal metaphor.

Students may write either in journals or on single sheets of paper.

Questions to get them thinking include:

- What hobbies do you have?
- What items or objects do you enjoy?
- To what people or places in your life do you feel a special connection?

CHOOSE

Ask students to pick one of their answers to explore one aspect of themselves.

COLLAGE

Give students an 11-x-14-inch sheet of paper and explain that they will visually express the personal metaphor they previously developed.

Give students the option of finding ready-made imagery by clipping or photocopying from a magazine, newspaper, photograph, book, or by drawing their response using pastels or colored pencils (if available).

Ask students to arrange and affix the images to the paper, and include a title written directly on the collage/visual. Have them think creatively about how to include the title. It may simply be a caption in the corner, or it may be incorporated into the image in some way.

REFLECT

Have students write two to three paragraphs that answer some or all of the following questions:

- How did you decide to choose this particular group of images?
- Can you pinpoint an aspect or quality that compels you?
- Is there any past experience that gives your selection special significance?
- What might your collage tell others about you?

Have students make an oral presentation on their work.

Concluding discussion

- How do these artists activate and expand our understanding of self?
- How does exploring these artists connect to our classroom community?
- How can we utilize the ideas from the artists to better support our own and others identity formation?

Guided tours

Interactive tours of *Show Me as I Want to Be Seen* (Feb 7–Jul 7) examine the tradition of portraiture and investigate the new ways of representing personality, culture, and complex identities.

All tours keep student voices and ideas central to the conversation while promoting critical thinking, creativity, and observation skills.

Tours are one hour long, include in-depth stops at 5–6 works of art, and encourage observation, conversation, and reflection.

Tours may be combined with an art-making workshop in which students create symbolic self-portraits.

PRICING

All K–12 schools FREE with \$25 deposit.
University tours are \$25 and include free admission.

CONTACT

tours@thecjm.org for further information or to book a tour.

Tours may also be booked by phone at 415.655.7857 or online at thecjm.org/programs/36

Additional Recommended Reading, Curricula, Resources, and Community Service Organizations

SCHOOL AND TEACHER RESOURCES

SFUSD LGBTQ Family and Diversity Elementary Training Guide

[Google doc](#)

Human Rights Coalition Welcoming Schools Starter Kit

[Google Drive link](#)

Teaching Tolerance

[tolerance.org](#)

Facing History and Ourselves

[facinghistory.org/resource-library](#)

Keshet works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life

[keshetonline.org](#)

CRISES INTERVENTION

Crisis Text Line is a free 24/7 support for those in crisis.

Text 741731 from anywhere in the US to text with a trained

Crisis Counselor

[crisistextline.org](#)

The Trevor Project provides crises intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and question (LGBTQ) youth under 25.

[TheTrevorProject.org](#)

It Gets Better Project has a mission to uplift, empower, and connect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth around the globe.

[itgetsbetter.org](#)

Appendix A: Images



Claude Cahun (Lucy Schwob), *Self-portrait*, c. 1925. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy Collection of Leslie Tonkonow and Klaus Ottmann.



Claude Cahun (Lucy Schwob) and Marcel Moore (Suzanne Malherbe), *Untitled*, 1928. Gelatin silver print. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Robert Shapazian. © Estate of Claude Cahun, Photo: Don Ross.



Nicole Eisenman, *Untitled*, 2012. Graphite, watercolor, and ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Collection of Leon and Stephanie Vahn, Beverly Hills. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.



Nicole Eisenman, *Long Distance*, 2015. Oil on canvas. Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York. © Nicole Eisenman.



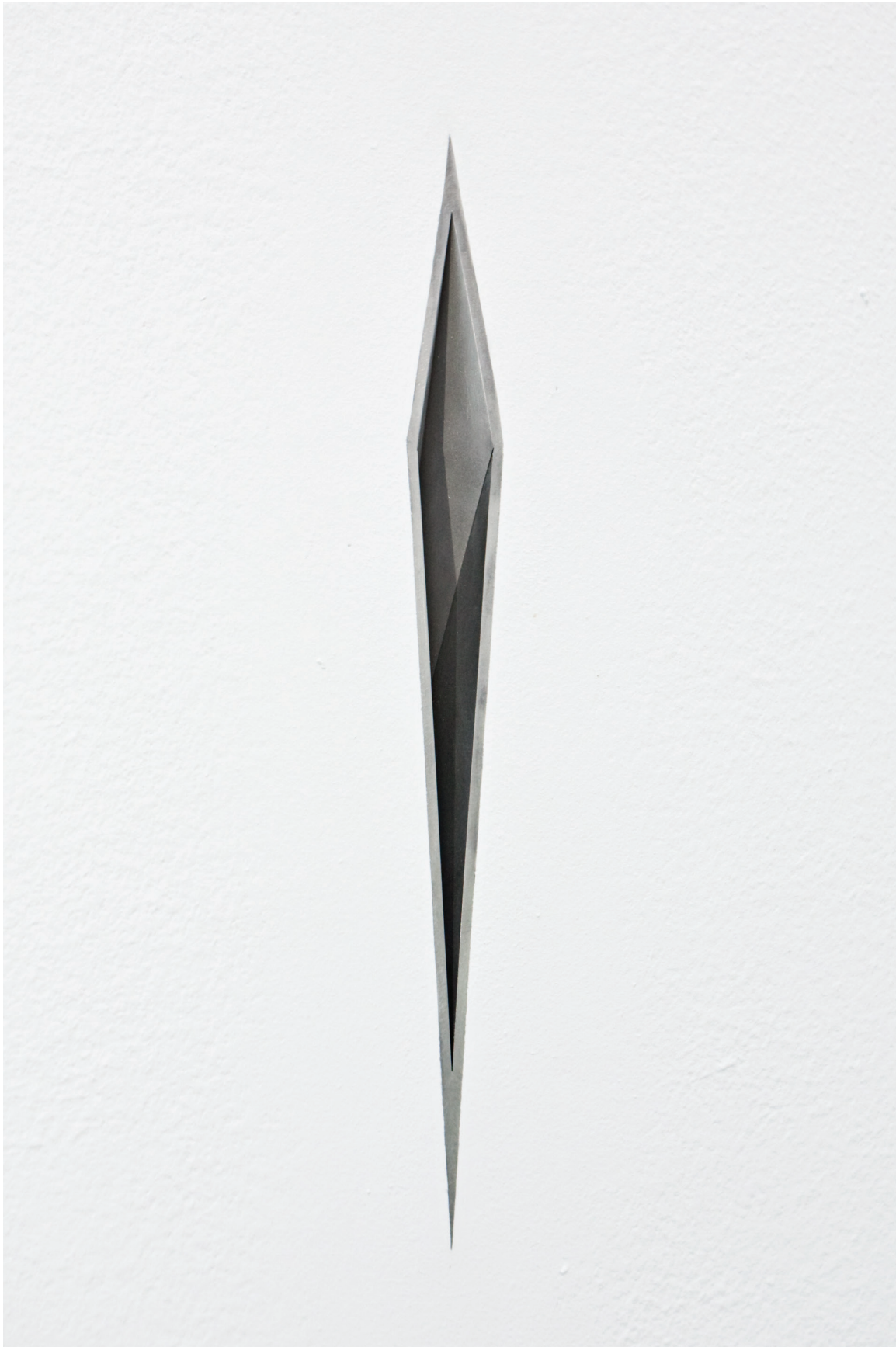
Zanele Muholi, *Vile*, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2015. Gelatin silver print. © Zanele Muholi (Courtesy of Yancey Richardson, New York and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg)



Zanele Muholi, *Phila I, Parktown*, 2016. Gelatin silver print. © Zanele Muholi (Courtesy of Yancey Richardson, New York and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg)



Davina Semo, *A GREAT THING IN HER LIFE IS THAT SHE HAS A SECRET*, 2018. Pigmented and reinforced concrete, stainless steel pipe, and broken auto glass. Courtesy of the artist.



Davina Semo, "*I WON'T BOTHER YOU,*" *SHE SAID*, 2019. Stainless steel, Courtesy of the artist.

Appendix B: Persona Poem

GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR PERSONA POEM

Students may use the following multi-sentence template to guide them or they may write free form:

I am ... *(a name)*

I am ... *(two special traits or physical characteristics)*

I wonder ... *(something to be curious about)*

I hear ... *(an imaginary sound)*

I see ... *(an imaginary sight)*

I want ... *(an actual desire)*

I am ... *(the first line of the poem repeated)*

I pretend ... *(something to imagine)*

I feel ... *(a feeling about something imaginary)*

I pretend ... *(something to imagine)*

I feel ... *(a feeling about something imaginary)*

I touch ... *(an imaginary touch)*

I worry ... *(something that is bothersome)*

I cry ... *(something that is very sad)*

I am ... *(the first line of the poem repeated)*

I understand ... *(something that is positively true)*

I say ... *(something to believe in)*

I dream ... *(something to dream about)*

I try ... *(something to make an effort about)*

I hope ... *(something to hope for)*

I am ... *(the first line of the poem repeated)*