

Feminisms, mirrors: Claude Cahun and Sarah Pucill – a dialogue

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After this mask another mask.
I will never be finished with re-
moving all these faces.

Cahun ([1930] 2008: 183)

The work of Claude Cahun (1894–1954) has become central to debates about reclaiming tendencies in contemporary feminist cultures. Her work, mostly photographic self-portraits, was largely ignored until the early 1990s, and she can easily now be cited as an example of an important artist whose work was obscured by her more prominent male colleagues who were active during the same period. Born in 1894, Cahun went on to be associated with the Surrealist movement of the early 1920s, finding support from Andre Breton, and she remains one of the only women associated with this milieu. The French Surrealists often used women within their works as models but Cahun, together with Meret Oppenheim, were among the few women artists whose work came to be linked with the movement in France. Importantly, both women as well as contemporaries such as Dorothea Tanning, Leonora Carrington, Kay Sage and Frida Kahlo used themselves in their work and changed the definition of self-portraiture. As Whitney Chadwick (1985: 66) and Abigail Solomon-Godeau (1999: 111) have demonstrated, women were central to the ideas of the male Surrealists, but this did not help the women artists of the period

and Cahun is typical of this oversight, her work remaining unknown until fairly recently. The first monograph on Cahun and her work was published in French as recently as 1992 (Leperlier 1992), and the 300 photographs that first brought her into international prominence were subsequently republished in 1995 (Leperlier 1995).

As Solomon-Godeau has noted, feminist scholars such as Chadwick have been interested in Cahun's photographic work because it appears to be concerned with self-representation; indeed, her work prompts numerous questions about the tensions between the autobiographical 'I', the textual (or visual) 'I' and the referential 'I' (Solomon-Godeau 1999: 112). I will now consider what her new prominence in contemporary debates might tell us about the significance given to her work by women artists working today, those who enjoy the benefit of substantive waves of feminisms informing their practice. The article will explore this question in the context of an examination of the first feature film made in black and white by the artist film-maker Sarah Pucill whose *Magic Mirror* (2013, 16 mm, 75min.) turns Cahun's still imagery into cinema. While it is apparent that the issue of self-representation and self-portraiture in particular features prominently in the feminist practices of the artists of the late 1980s and 1990s, in the work of artists such as Cindy Sherman, Ana Mendieta and Helen Chadwick among others, how might we rethink the work