



OBJECT of the **month**

March 2022

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Hi, my name is Violette-Anne, and I am a Museum Guide at the Dayton Art Institute. In this “Object of the Month” video, we will explore the composition and technique of *Self-Portrait in Black Sweater*, painted in 1988 by Peri Schwartz.

If you were to see this painting without knowing the title, would something about it indicate that it is a self-portrait? Sometimes you can tell by the intensity of the gaze, and it is due to the fact that the artists stare at themselves, thinking acutely about the piece as they work.

At first glance, this self-portrait might seem quite static. See how the artist plants her left hand firmly on her seat? And, notice how the composition uses strong horizontal and vertical configurations. The shoulders’ line—accentuated by the bottom of the collar and the top of the sweater’s lapels, the skirt’s waist, and the seat’s edge delineated by the hand, form horizontals all throughout the middle of the painting. The shadow line down her face aligns with the vertical of the polo shirt buttons’ run – which is reinforced by the line of the sweater next to it-, and the seam down the middle of the skirt’s length.

Despite these strong verticals and horizontals, there are also many diagonals which give the self-portrait a dynamic quality, as if Peri Schwartz was ready to jump off the stool. Each of her limbs is angled, and the V-neck opening of her collar is mimicked in the V-fold of the polo shirt tucked in the skirt, in the dark blue V-fold at the top of the skirt, and in the inverted V-space between the index and middle fingers of her left hand. Finally, the double swoop of the skirt’s hem completes the slants giving even more of a sense of organic movement.

This is all part of the artist’s focus on composition, which she valued above all else to bring interest to what she wanted to share. You might wonder why she left part of a grid visible in the lower half and near her left side, lending perhaps a sense of being unfinished. She first used the grid, which she drew on walls and objects, to re-position herself just-so, day after day, to complete her self-portraits, but it soon became an indispensable tool to anchor a sense of space in her paintings, and to leave an evident trace of the artist’s process.

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Peri Schwartz painted mainly self-portraits for the first 25 years of her career as a way to connect with the Old Masters, finding a common world between them and her. But as she felt pulled toward pure shapes and colors, she switched to painting her studio in the 2000s, and later, bottles and jars of paints illuminated by natural light. In the print owned by the DAI titled *You Want It Darker*, the artist would have spent weeks on achieving compositional balance, where the shifting within the grid is still palpable. Her goal was for her artworks to act as open questions. In what ways do you feel these two DAI pieces achieve, or not, this goal?

You can see Peri Schwartz' self-portrait, gifted to the museum by the artist, in Gallery 223, known as the rotunda of the Dayton Art Institute. Thank you for sharing this art moment with us!

END TRANSCRIPT

Click [here](#) to access the video presentation.

FEATURED ARTWORKS*

- Peri Schwartz (American, 1951–2021), *Self-Portrait*, 2009, monotype. © Peri Schwartz
- Peri Schwartz (American, 1951–2021), *Woman Seated*, 1998, oil on canvas. © Peri Schwartz
- Peri Schwartz (American, 1951–2021), *Woman in White Shirt*, 1996, oil on canvas. © Peri Schwartz
- Peri Schwartz (American, 1951–2021), *Studio Self-Portrait*, 1996, oil on canvas. © Peri Schwartz
- Peri Schwartz (American, 1951–2021), *Studio XXXVII*, 2015, oil on canvas. © Peri Schwartz
- Peri Schwartz (American, 1951–2021), *Studio XLI*, 2016, oil on canvas. © Peri Schwartz. Courtesy of Gallery NAGA, Boston
- Peri Schwartz (American, 1951–2021), *You Want It Darker*, 2018, spit bite aquatint with drypoint. Dayton Art Institute, OH. Gift of the artist, 2021.3
- Peri Schwartz (American, 1951–2021), *Bottles & Jars XXVI*, 2010, oil on canvas. © Peri Schwartz

MEDIA CREDITS*

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