

'Narcissistic, Maybe. But Is There More To The Art Of The Selfie?', NPR, (July 2015)

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Narcissistic, Maybe. But Is There More To The Art Of The Selfie?



To selfie, or not to selfie?

The smartphone has given us a whole new genre of cultural expression: the selfie.

If you're into selfies, it's safe to say you've probably taken one, and maybe wished you didn't have those dark circles under your eyes.

Now there are plenty of apps out there to fix that.

But whether you think your selfies can be elevated to art may depend on how much effort you are willing to put into them.

A Personal Brand Boost

Sarah Purewal is a tech writer and, one might say, a selfie enthusiast. She's reviewed a bunch of [selfie-editing apps](#) for Macworld that allow you to ditch the selfie stick and other selfie-enhancing equipment.

Before hitting "post," Purewal says, there are apps to help you get clearer skin, banish wrinkles and appear taller or skinnier, along with filters to get you better lighting in dim settings.

"You don't really have to take the perfect selfie in order to get the perfect selfie," says Purewal, who admits she began editing her selfies after discovering the enhancing power of apps.

"I felt like I was kind of not doing myself a favor by posting unedited selfies to Instagram," she says. For some, it may sound vain to edit your selfies, but Purewal sees these pictures as an important part of one's personal brand.

"I think that while a lot of people find it easy to say, 'Well, you're taking a photo of yourself, and you're posting it online for people to sort of rate.' I could see how that superficially looks like vanity," she says. "At the same time, I think that it really gives a lot of the younger generation a platform to express themselves without being incredibly harshly judged — because the selfie is such a casual form of expression, no one is going to expect you to look absolutely perfect."

How widespread is selfie editing? One [online survey](#) on behalf of the Renfrew Center Foundation, an organization dedicated to treating eating disorders, found that "half (50%) of those who print or post photos on their social media networks admit to touching them up first."

So, do people think less of the selfie just because anyone can do it?

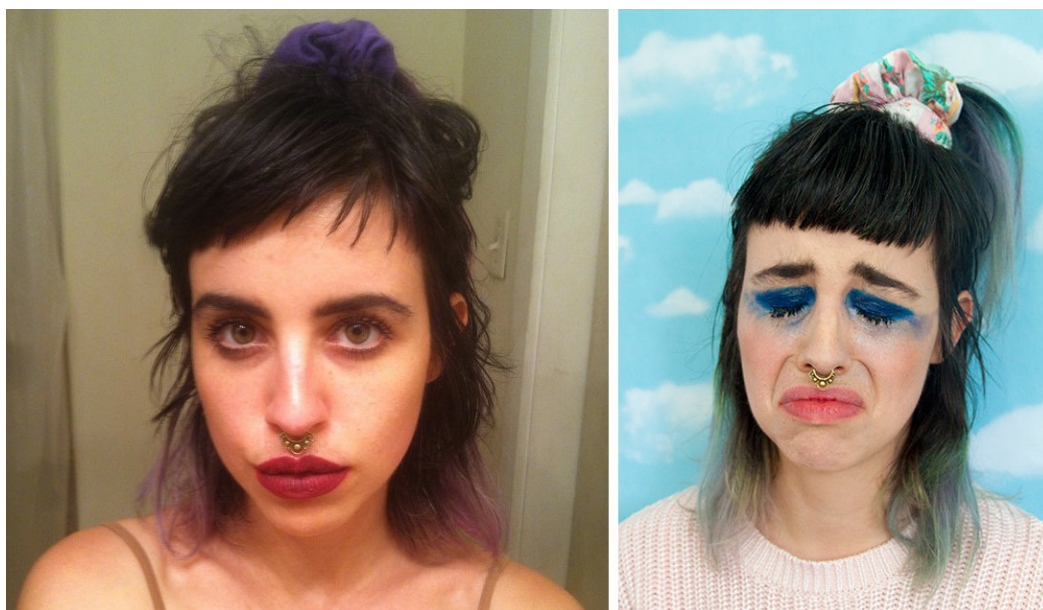
The New Self-Portrait

For digital artist Molly Soda, selfies are an exploratory art form. She sees pointing a camera phone at a mirror and snapping a picture as a new iteration of a very old idea: the self-portrait.

"I've been taking photos of myself since I could get my hands on a camera when I was about 14 and putting it all online," says the Detroit-based artist, now 26.

She's won recognition for her provocative digital collages, animated art, videos and Tumblr posts.

Soda is among those who do not clean up their selfies. She's going for an unvarnished, alternative look.



Artist Molly Soda has been using the selfie as art, recently creating a zine commenting on the idea of leaked nude images, called *Should I Send This?*

Courtesy of Molly Soda

She has piercings and candy-colored hair, and wears bold lipstick and heavy eyeliner. Her clothes and her props are eclectic.

In one selfie, she's taking a swig from an oversized coffee mug, labeled "Male Tears." She has also posed with Taco Bell Crunchwrap Supremes, and a giant teddy bear, and she has showcased her body before a mirror — unshaven, clothed or partially clothed.

"A lot of the photos that I take and a lot of the work that I make is made in my bedroom," Soda says. "And it is about girls in their bedrooms and what you do alone in your room, and making that public, putting that out for the world to see, and how that changes the way that it's seen or contextualized."

One of her latest projects is a play on a tabloid story of the past few years: the leaked selfie. Naked pictures of young actresses have been hacked from their phones and distributed online without their consent. Many of these actresses have spoken of this as a violation.

Soda takes back this idea by "leaking" nude images of herself.

"It is about control," she says. "I don't send nude images to people, and I don't do that because I'm afraid that they will be leaked. It was sort of like how would I feel if I sent naked photos of myself and then they got leaked? So instead, I sort of thought, OK, well I'll just take all these photos that I have of myself that I've taken and sent to no one and leak them myself."

She doesn't get why people shame the selfie culture for its vanity.

"I think a selfie is a really, really positive thing, whether or not its art, it's super positive affirmation of self-love. And taking your photo and putting it on the Internet for the world to see is an act of positivity."

"I don't think there's anything wrong with being a little bit vain. I think we all are," she says.

"When I'm scrolling on my Instagram and I see a photo of a girl that she took of herself and I know she's feeling really good that day about herself, that makes me feel good and that makes me want to photograph myself, and I think it's a chain reaction."