

FACETUNE PORTRAITS

Gretchen Andrew

Gretchen Andrew (American, b. 1988) is known for her unique merger of traditional artistic mediums such as photography and oil paint with advanced technologies such as robotics, algorithm and artificial intelligence.

For Paris Photo 2024, Gretchen Andrew explores what happens if photography, technology, and traditional painting cross paths. In her new series Facetune Portraits she merges traditional art forms and custom robotics, applying popular AI-driven beauty filters directly onto photographic portraits printed in wet oil paint.

Left with a striking contrast, the viewer gets drawn into the tension between our natural selves and the digital ideals imposed by technology. Gretchen challenges these ideals. The unaltered human face coexists with the algorithmically "perfected" version readily available on social media platforms and video conferencing tools, resulting in a double portrait, taken by the artist herself.

Facetune Portraits reveal the tension between who we are and who AI says we should be, asking which aspects of our identity are altered or erased in this process.

What is preserved, and what is lost?

**PARIS PHOTO
7-10 NOVEMBER 2024**

**GRAND PALAIS,
PARIS**

**FROM THURSDAY
TO SUNDAY
1 PM TO 8 PM**

**AVANT GALERIE
VOSSEN
58 RUE CHAPON
75003 PARIS**



Car Selfie Facetune Portrait . Oil on canvas . 45 x 45 cm

Monstration: \mɔ̃s.tʁa.sjɔ̃\ feminine: Act of exposing, showing to public view monstrously beautiful figures resulting from an al- gorithmic process

Hugo du Plessix,
Paris, October 2024

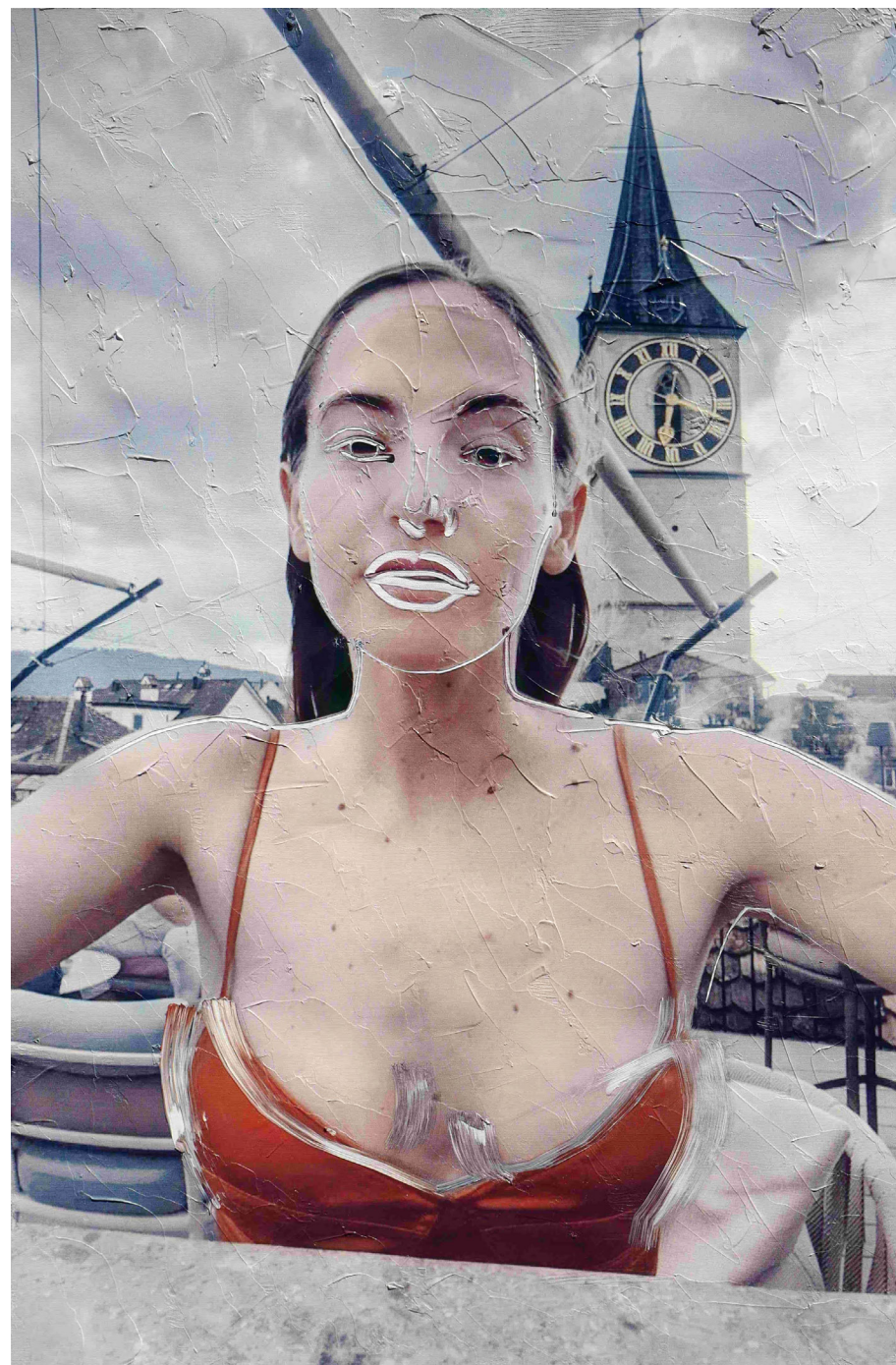
In the series of photographs Facetune Portraits - some of which immediately evoke in me the album covers of the electronic duo Disclosure from the early 2010s - Gretchen Andrew offers a malicious and clever visual commentary on the algorithms supposed to make us beautiful that populate our phone applications. With the help of her two robots, the artist questions the persistent objectification of bodies by standardized machine learning systems based on the occidental male gaze with brushstrokes line, pushing to the creation of what one could interpret as monstrous, uncanny, or otherwise reimagined algorithmic portraits. The series thus presents bodies and portraits already considered perfect by Western masculine standards, which the machines, themselves influenced by the cultural and aesthetic context of the male gaze, attempt to further perfect, transform, and distort again and again.

These works are part of a long history of portraiture, traversed by tensions between resemblance, idealization and alteration. Gretchen Andrew puts it this way : "Throughout history, prominent individuals have indeed utilized portraiture as a powerful tool to represent themselves, their status, and their power. Each time has its own values reflected in portrait trends". Fidelity was not always the goal of the patron or painter, especially if it brought out flaws which did not align with the values of the day. The painter or the photographer commissioned with the portrait was often asked, whether explicitly or implicitly, to alter the image. This tension is evident across various historical periods: Roman Emperors balanced divine authority with recognizable likenesses on coins, while Ancient Greeks idealized their elite subjects with statues to reflect cultural values of harmony and beauty. Renaissance monarchs commissioned grand, opulent portraits symbolizing wealth and lineage, and 18th-century aristocrats used portraiture to solidify social status, often incorporating symbolic objects. Even in modern times, politicians continue this tradition, as seen in occidental presidential portraits. Some historical figures, like Oliver Cromwell, subverted these conventions by requesting realistic "warts and all" depictions to align with specific values of humbleness. Throughout these eras, the commissioned artist was tasked with navigating the delicate balance between accurate representation and idealized imagery, reflecting the subject's desires and the prevailing cultural norms of their time, as Sylvain Maresca explains in an article on the subject¹. If this embellishment was once the privilege of the elites - from princely courts to the stars of the 2000s with Photoshop - the advent of applications like FaceTune used by the artist reduces the distance between the general public and the elites in terms of the ability to command one's idealized image. Skin smoothing is no longer the prerogative of Flemish masters and their sfumato technique or a fashion art director and his army of photo retouchers.

In these series, far from embellishing faces and bodies, Gretchen Andrew's artistic process uses today's beautification tools to distort. Gretchen Andrew's monstration protocol is as follows: photographic portraits - selfies of the artist, influencers, celebrities - are first printed in oil paint by a robot. Then, guided by the "beautification" application FaceTune, a second robot makes

modifications that normally occur seamlessly in pixels into and on top of the wet oil paint creating what the artist calls "scars" - impastos materializing the passage from the original image to its "AI-enhanced" version. The robot smudges, smears, and moves paint to "beautify" the portrait as directed by the AI and algorithmic beauty standards present in the FaceTune iPhone Application. While the shape and line modifications are determined entirely by the algorithms most popular on TikTok and Instagram, Gretchen, as the painter, retains the painterly decisions around how these marks are implemented in terms traditional mark making, conducting the robot with speed, pressure, direction and brush selection resulting in a variety of abstractly painterly brush marks. The figures are twisted by the physically applied filter where red or white brush strokes create mask effects. The whole thing becomes a sort of bad dream, where we are wrapped in Hugh Hefner's abandoned castle, haunted by the beings whose faces and bodies have been forced into a uniform look. A sort of mise en abyme that makes us slightly dizzy and makes us imagine a disturbing scene where an abstract AI trained beauty would pursue itself in very, very dark endless corridors. But reflecting on that, maybe there is a beauty that lies in these distortions that we are not yet familiar with to discover at the end of the corridor ?

Here, the artist confronts us with a disturbing reflection: ultimately, can algorithms really make us beautiful? This is the question one can ask oneself while wandering one's gaze over the impasto portraits hanging on the walls of the Avant Galerie booth at Paris Photo. What do we really see in all the magnificent selfies published on Instagram? Do we see people at their best



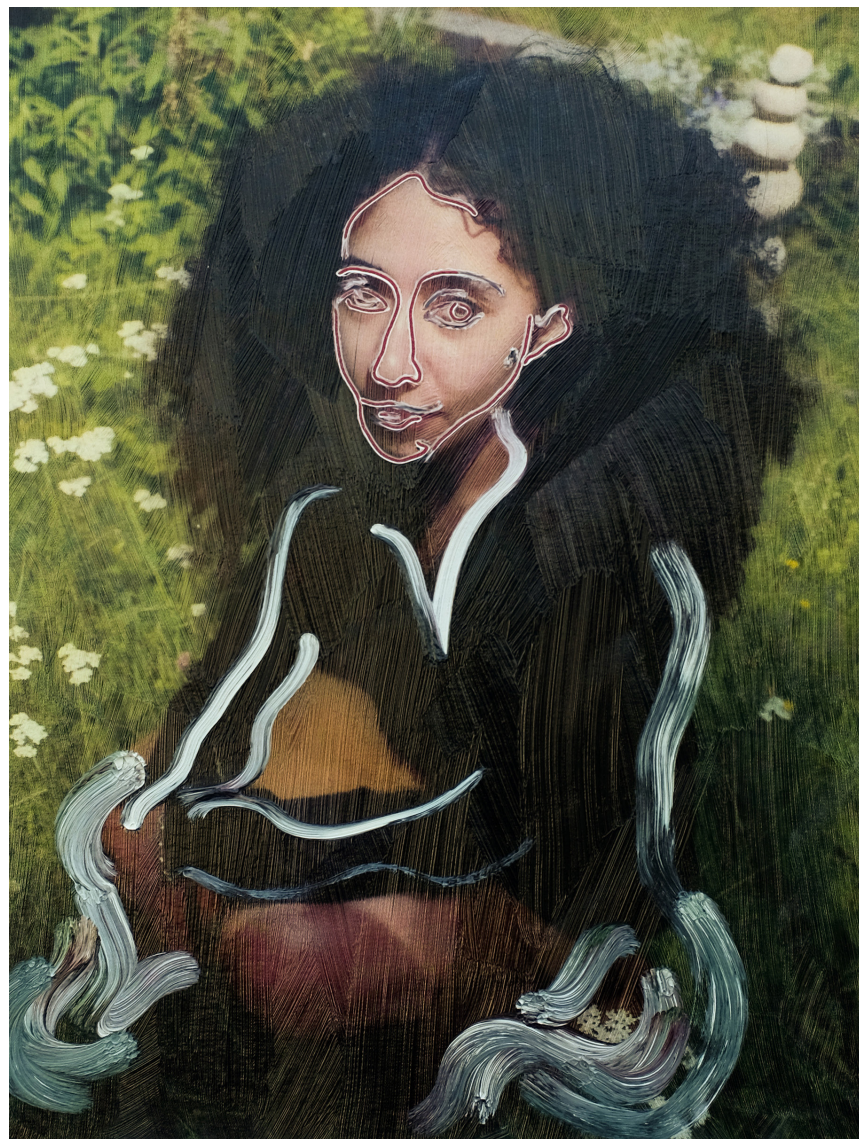
Zurich Selfie Facetune Portrait . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 91 x 60 cm

¹ Sylvain Maresca. L'art en personne. Pour une histoire sociale du portrait-14. 2020

thanks to the array of filters offered? In their best light? Are people really more beautiful once they have "cleaned" their vacation photos of other tourists as shown in the Google phone ad? Or don't we have the impression of navigating in a large gallery of distorting mirrors of our faces alienated by the obligation to be the most beautiful, idealized version of ourselves? Whereas before this idyllic version was reserved for those who had power and finances to commission portraits and stage, we now all seem to be caught in this giant gallery of distorting mirrors. Gretchen's paintings push this cursor so far that the result becomes a clever and intriguing parody of the ideal. These portraits are no longer representations of people, but speculative aberrations born from the unnatural union between photography, traditional painting and beautification algorithms.

For her most recent series Gretchen Andrew investigated the influencer portraiture. She photographed with influencers, familiar with the self-staging pressures of social networks. In Berlin, she invited several of them for a photo portrait session. Throughout the monstration by the robots, elements other than the face and body were the only distinctive details that individualized them surviving the distorting filters a hairdo, a pet, an accessory.

By multiplying the cultural objects of culturally constructed beauty, Andrews confronts us with our contemporary obsessions with generalized aesthetic perfection, where technology amplifies dominant cultural norms. Her work invites us to reflect on how algorithms, supposedly meant to "improve" us, end up oppressing us internally and causing us to fall into a trap. In the end, Gretchen Andrew's approach is neither technophobic nor beautyphobic. She doesn't seem to be inviting us to stop using our phones and to be afraid of beautification applications. Nor to tend towards an idealized hyper-naturalness outside of any algorithmic improvement. This dynamic of supposed beautification and passage through filter grinders is already there, already in place, there's nothing to do. Her commentary is intriguing and disturbing and rather asks us the question of what we are really doing with our machines while other much more important problems agitate us.



Facetune Portrait, Trinity churchyard II. 2024. Oil on canvas. 60 x 45 cm



Kylie Picnic Facetune Portrait. 2024. Oil on canvas. 45 x 45 cm

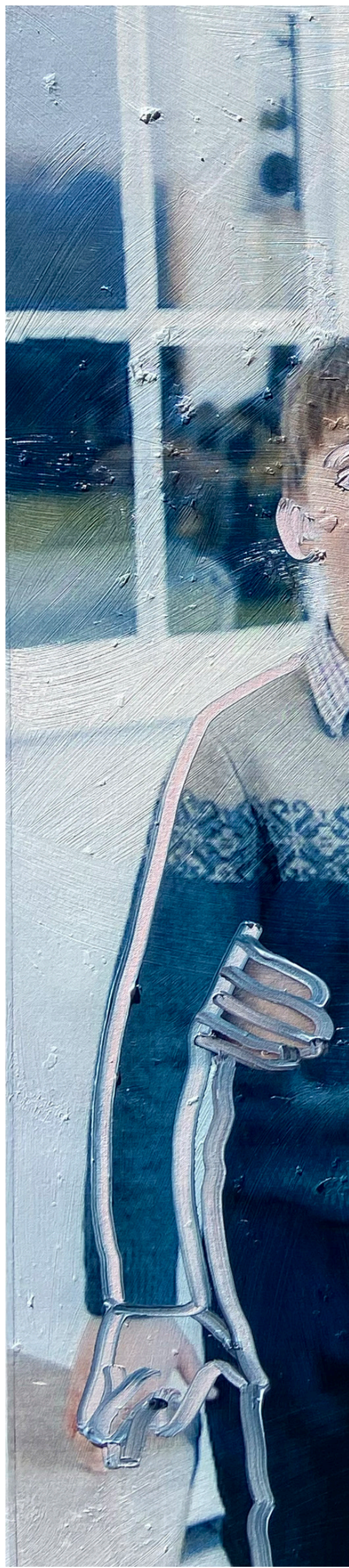
Candidate Facetune Selfie . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 60 x 60 cm



Kylie Jenner Selfie Facetune Portrait, Met Gala . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 30 x 30 cm



Royal Family Facetune Portrait . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 91 x 91 cm





Facetune Portrait, Ballet . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 130 x 160 cm





Facetune Portrait, Watson . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 60 x 45 cm



Facetune Portrait, U-Bahn . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 60 x 45cm



Facetune Portrait, the vehicle . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 100 x 120 cm



Facetune Portrait, Moccamaster . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 60 x 45 cm



Kim Kardashian Nude Selfie . 2024 . Oil on canvas . 91 x 60 cm





Gretchen Andrew manipulates systems of power with art, glitter and code. She is best known for her playful hacks on major art world and political institutions, including Frieze, The Whitney Biennial, Artforum, The Turner Prize, and The Next American President.

In these digital performances she reimagines reality with art and desire. She does this by making assemblage “vision boards” that she programs to become top internet search results. The feminine and trivialized materials of her vision boards purposefully clash with the male-dominated worlds of AI, programming, and political control they also operate within.

She trained in London with the artist Billy Childish from 2012-2017.

In 2018 the V&A Museum released her book Search Engine Art.

Gretchen’s work has recently been featured in Fast Company, Flash Art, The Washington Post, Fortune Magazine, Monopol, Wirtschaftswoche, The Los Angeles Times, Forbes, and The Financial Times.

L'AVANT GALERIE VOSSEN

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contact@avant-galerie.com

[avant.galerie](https://www.instagram.com/avant.galerie)

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