

## The Mirror in Art

It is perhaps obvious that the mirror has been a critical element in the art of painting: without mirrors, self-portraits would be impossible. Mirrors can provide artists the opportunity to demonstrate their skill at painting reflections of people or items not visible in the foreground, or painting distorted images. They can also be used to show admiration or self-admiration. Mirrors have been an important feature of art since at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The magic of reflection continues to inspire contemporary artists.

### 1. *The Arnolfini Portrait*, Jan van Eyck, 1434

In the background of van Eyck's wedding portrait is a mirror, in which two figures are reflected. The raised arm of the bridegroom has been interpreted as a sign of greeting to the figures entering the room, one of whom is believed to be the artist, van Eyck. Above the mirror are the words, "Jan van Eyck was here 1434".



2. *Las Meninas*, Diego Velázquez, 1656

*Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*) is a group portrait of members of the Royal House of Habsburg, surrounding Infanta Margherita and offering her water. In the mirror, which hangs among different pictures on the wall, we see an image of the king and the queen, while on the left of the painting the artist painted himself holding a brush and a palette in front of a large canvas and looking at the viewer.



3. *The Toilet of Venus (or The Rokeby Venus)*, Diego Velázquez, 1647-1651.

The painting depicts Venus as a nude goddess reclining on a draped couch and looking at her reflection in a mirror held up by her son, Cupid. The painting was attacked by the Canadian suffragette, Mary Richardson, in 1914 when it was hanging in the National Gallery in London. Richardson stated that she tried to destroy the “picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government for destroying Mrs. Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history.” (Pankhurst was a militant UK suffragette, named in 1999 by *Time* as one of the 100 most important people of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.)



4. *The Music Lesson*, Johannes Vermeer, 1662-1665

The Music Lesson depicts a young woman playing the virginal. The man may be accompanying her, singing, as suggested by his slightly open mouth. In the mirror, the viewer can see the blurred reflection of the young woman.



5. *Julie Le Brun Looking in a Mirror*, Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, 1787

Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun (1755-1842) was a prominent French portrait painter. Using a mirror in this painting of her only daughter, Julie, the viewer is able to see the child both in profile and in full face.



6. *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, Édouard Manet, 1881-1882

In this painting, the mirror is used not only to show us the inside of the bar with all of its activity but the also the barmaid from a different perspective.



7. *Woman With a Sunflower*, Mary Cassatt, 1905

Mirrors were a common device in Cassatt's work. In *Woman with a Sunflower*, there are two mirrors. The small handheld mirror effectively acts as the medium of communication between mother and child. As for the large sunflower on the mother's dress, the sunflower had become the official symbol of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1896. Cassatt herself was a fierce advocate for women's rights.



8. *Girl Before a Mirror*, Pablo Picasso, 1932

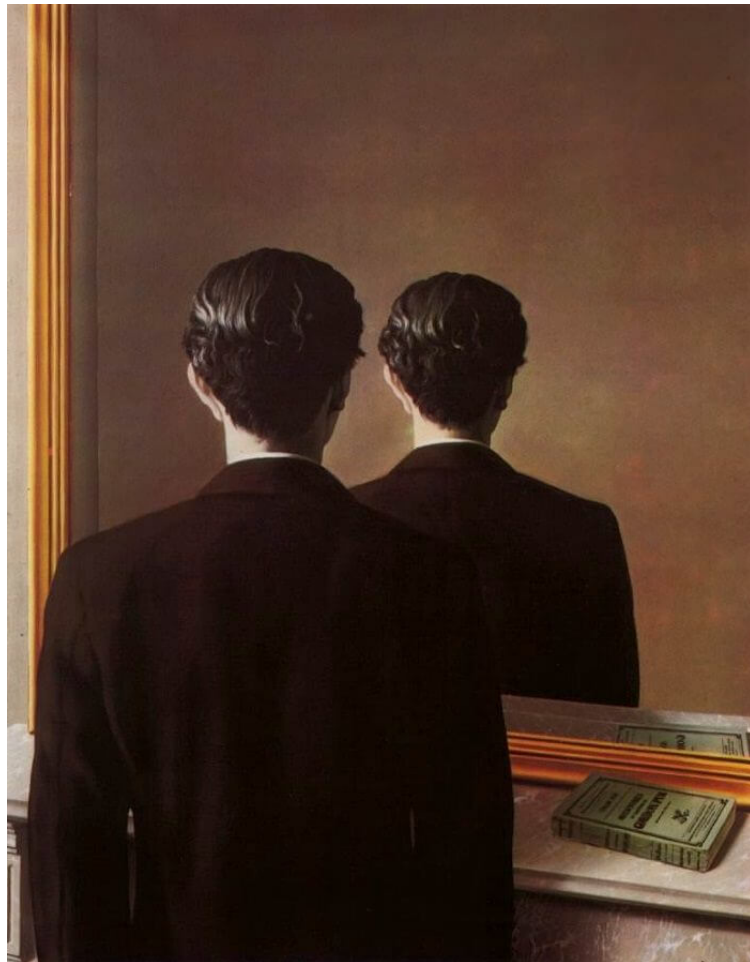
The girl in the painting is Marie-Thérèse Walter, painted by Picasso a number of times during the 1930s (his cubist period). Walter was Picasso's muse and mistress; in this painting, she is depicted in front of a mirror looking at her reflection. Picasso was 45 and Walter was 17 when they first met. He apparently introduced himself by saying, "You have an interesting face, I would like to do a portrait of you. I am Picasso".



9. *Not to Be Reproduced*, René Magritte, 1937

The work depicts a man standing in front of a mirror, but whereas the book on the mantelpiece is reflected correctly, the man (and the viewer) can see only the back of his head.

The book on the mantel is a copy of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (written here in French as *Les Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym*). Poe was one of Magritte's favorite authors.



10. *Girl at Mirror*, Norman Rockwell, 1954

*Girl at Mirror* was originally created for the cover of the March 6, 1954 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Note the magazine on the young girl's lap; it shows a photo of the actress, Jane Russell. At the girl's feet are a comb, brush and red lipstick. A discarded doll is off to the side. Based on Rockwell's reference files, the painting may have been influenced by Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror* and Le Brun's *Julie Le Brun Looking in a Mirror*.





11. *Dalí from the Back Painting Gala from the Back Eternalized by Six Virtual Corneas Provisionally Reflected in Six Real Mirrors*, Salvador Dalí, 1972-1973

This painting reflects Dalí's fascination with achieving the effect of depth and achieving the sense of three dimensions. It uses geometric techniques first developed by Velázquez, used in his painting *Las Meninas*.



12. *Cloud Gate* (“*The Bean*”), Anish Kapoor, 2006

*Cloud Gate* by Sir Anish Kapoor is a public sculpture located in the AT&T Plaza in Millennium Park, Chicago. The Indian born British artist’s sculpture is nicknamed “*The Bean*” because of its shape. Inspired by liquid mercury, the sculpture is comprised of 168 steel plates, welded together, yet there are no visible seams. The sculpture, which weighs 100 tons, reflects and distorts the city’s skyline.



13. *Chandelier of Grief*, Yayoi Kusama, 2016

Yayoi Kusama is one of the most popular contemporary artists in the world. She is known for her spectacular mirror installations. *Chandelier of Grief* has as its central element a rotating chandelier of Swarovski crystal, which comes to life in a room lined with mirrors. The room gives the illusion of being in endless space. You can view the installation at this link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnOmA3\\_cqEs&ab\\_channel=VictoriaMiro](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnOmA3_cqEs&ab_channel=VictoriaMiro)

