

Aline Smithson, *Self and Others*, Rayko Photo Center, January 21, 2016.

Aline [“pronounced: AL (rhymes with pal) LEAN –*from artist’s web site*] exhibits portraits from a career of photography, from early Black & Whites, to saturated color, to hand painted images of her mother. All are presented in traditional display frames and mats. All the images are square format or nearly so. The approximate sizes range for early B&Ws at about 8x8, on to the large color 24x24, to the painted images 12x12. The images can be arranged into four groups, the early B&W’s, the portraits of young women, playing Hollywood at Home tableaus, and the hand colored photographs of the artist’s mother (after Whistler).

The artist’s statement refers to the relationships she seeks for herself and the sitters. Yet the actual photos seem to deny relationships. In the early B&W’s the subjects hold photos, presumably of themselves, while their faces are covered or outside the frame of the print. In her series of young women, the sitters appear to be interchangeable or are turned away from the camera. The Hollywood tableaus are about stories, not about the subjects. Her mother appears in various costumes in the hand colored Whistler-like images, all of which deny her own personality.

While the photographs seem at odds with the artist’s statement, they are a tour-de-force of color. Portraits they may be, but the aesthetic formalism of their color is a celebration of visual delight. The young girls occupy analogous and complementary color spaces. The girls that do face the camera add an edge to what might otherwise be a completely impersonal image. Many of the colored portraits of her mother are humorous, yet seen as a group they remind us that photographs seldom tell the truth. Among all this celebration, the Whistlerlet portrait of her mother in a straitjacket is sobering.

