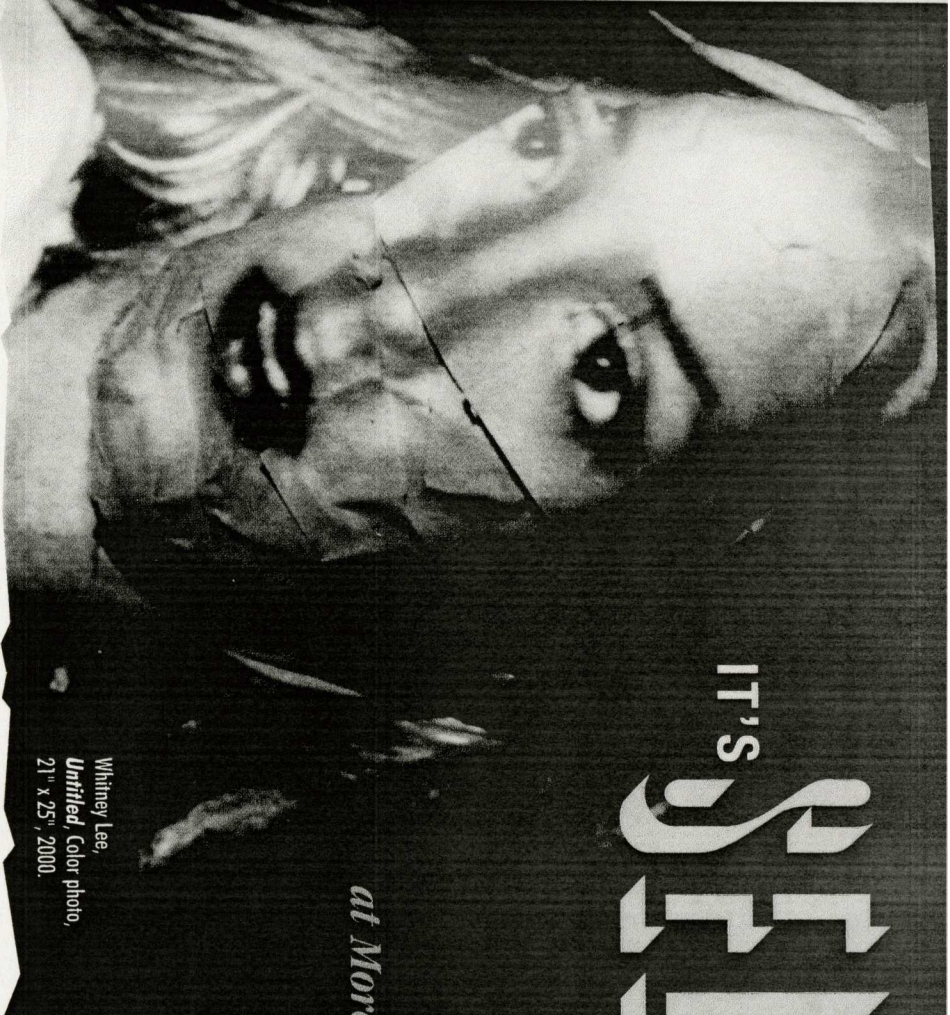


IT'S SELF -EVIDENT: EXPLORING IDENTITY

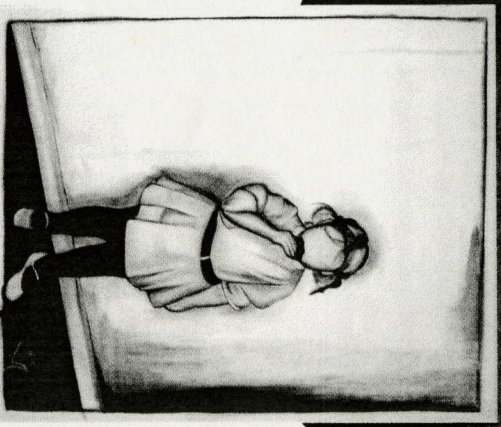
THROUGH ART

at Morehead State University

By Jennifer Reis



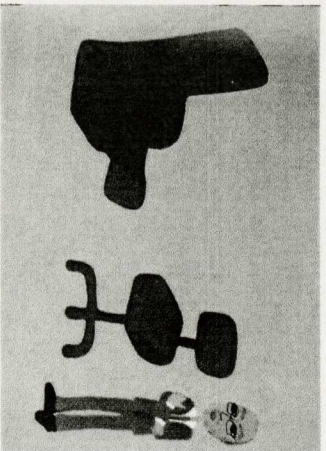
Whitney Lee,
Untitled, Color photo,
21" x 25", 2000.



Millie Stroub, *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 45" x 55".

he tragic wail of "Who am I?" is no longer confined to adolescent melancholy or the standard midlife crisis. In an actual and virtual world, where one can change name, gender, and physical attributes, the subject of identity has demanded attention in the arts, philosophy, and sociology for decades. Postmodern intellectuals of the late 20th century such as Jean-Michel Foucault questioned previously thought impervious elements of personal identity and deemed seemingly solid ideas of gender mere constructs, societal structures imposed upon individuals. Anxiety about personal and group identity has been a major catalyst for contemporary art: artists such as Cindy Sherman, the infamous female photographer who used her own body as a model for her series of "Film Still" photographs, explores identity through adopting

different personas that are placed in psychologically and emotionally loaded environments. Easily and temporarily, one can manipulate elements of personal identity, such as clothing, makeup, and hairstyle, and switch into different bodily identities. In the world of popular culture, the dominance (and popularity) of reality television, like MTV's *I Want a Famous Face*, acknowledges the manipulation or, some would say, mutilation of physical attributes as a means of identity construction.



Saudia Wadud, *Multiple Personalities*, acrylic on board, 10.5" x 13.5", 2001.

through cosmetic surgery as a viable means of identity construction. With issues of identity occupying both high and popular culture (a Google search of "contemporary art + identity" elicited more than 78,000 Web sites), the theme dominates multiple events taking place at Morehead State University (MSU) and in Rowan County.

Identity Crisis: Searching for a Sense of Self, an art exhibition at the Claypool-Young Art Gallery, will showcase the work of 21 artists from across the country

and beyond our borders who investigate identity through their artwork. In media that ranges from oil-on-canvas paintings to time-based video works, the artworks to be included in the exhibition deal with specific as well as general issues of identity. The majority of the works accepted for exhibition focus on the human body as the point of departure.

In some works, the image refers to a specific person, such as Scott Eagle's *Self-Portrait with Mask*. He said of his work, "Each work functions as a personal icon representing my reaction to and spiritual development within the chaos of modern life." Likewise, Saudia Wadud's work meditates on her father's career as a

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