

Photobook essay for Hideo Anze's *Red*

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At first glance, the photographs from Hideo Anze's self-portrait series *Red* don't look anything like typical self-portraits. Abstract flares of the title color cover each frame from edge to edge, with elegant leaks and wisps of light breaking up the tonal uniformity. His compositions run the gamut from softly muted red hues intermingled with gradients of pastel yellow and pink to energetically electric crimson blasts filled with gestural brightness, ultimately edging all the way to deep purple and undulating black, with detours along the way to ethereal variations of orange, tan, and light brown. As portraits go, they are about as far from traditionally representational as possible.

But the self-portrait has always been a special kind of mirror, one that has offered artists the seductive ability to construct identity with deliberate control. The ubiquitous arm-outstretched smartphone selfie is now the newest digital form of this durable genre, providing the masses with the same complicated choices of presentation and style that have tested artists across the broad sweep of history. But a digital photographic image is now much more than just a simple picture – it is a richly complex repository of data, and that interwoven image/data reality is starting to catalyze some disruptive new approaches to capturing the nuances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century self.

Which brings us back to Hideo Anze and his gloriously effusive all-over redness. Each of his "portraits" is actually a close-up image of the artist's finger, which has been disruptively placed over the camera lens and photographed using the available light. Unlike the unwelcome visual intrusions of a pesky camera strap, Anze's distorted finger is his chosen subject, not a mistake, but a carefully selected and wholly intentional fragment (or version) of himself. Each of his undulating color abstractions is further accompanied by precise technical and numerical information, including the exact GPS coordinates of his location, the exact time of the shutter click, and the make and model of the cameraphone being used, the entire package of image/data then posted to social media each and every day for a year, bringing a performative element of durational time into the larger project.

Like On Kawara's haunting I AM STILL ALIVE telegrams, Anze's daily uploads are a contemporary form of this repeated (and blithely emphatic) declaration of self. But these photographs have gone beyond simply documenting his face or some other recognizable part of his body – those overly easy characterizations hardly seem relevant any more. Instead, Anze's portraits capture him as a dense aggregation of momentary information, an indirect physical presence that bends light in chance ways (becoming digital arrays of pixels) and an amalgamation of data strings that provide statistical evidence of his tangible presence.

In a sense, Anze is testing his own ability to reduce an image to a pure stream of observational information, boldly removing representation from the visual language of portraiture – each abstract snapshot he takes (and the raft of data that supports it) tells us a nuanced story about his life, but without the aid of the expressions or emotions on his face. His finger abstractions are like a modern day Dada gesture, a cleverly subversive response to the rampaging cult of personality that has erupted from the selfie. With *Red*, Anze is redefining portraiture for the digital age, going beyond the symbolic avatar, to a place where the fragments of a disembodied networked presence can readily stand in for the original. While his fields of eye-popping red might distract us with their sinuous topologies of color, his images signal the quiet reordering of the factors we use to define ourselves.