



# RACHEL PERRY WELTY

## LET'S GET PERSONAL

*Born in 1962, in Tokyo, Japan, Rachel Perry Welty holds a BA from Connecticut College and a Diploma and Fifth Year Certificate from the Museum of Fine Arts Boston.*

*Welty's work is held in numerous museum and private collections, and has been published and reviewed in many national, as well as online, publications such as Art in America, The New Yorker, The New York Times, The Chicago Tribune, Huffington Post, Art on Paper, Harvard Business Review and Sculpture Magazine. Her four-page pictorial essay was published in Vogue's December 2011 issue.*



**How does it work, technically, when you take your self-portrait?**

I usually have three people there: Marc Elliott is behind the camera — which is an 8 x 10 Deardorff — plus one assistant. Then, I'll often have my mother, Sarah Hollis Perry, help with getting me dressed and placed.

**Do you have assistants who help you collect things like fruit and vegetable stickers and assemble them? Do you ever put them all in place yourself?**

I have had wonderful interns in the past and I hire people part-time now, when I need extra help. Generally, I do most of the work myself. Many friends and acquaintances collect fruit stickers for me, which is helpful, especially because I hear that stickers will disappear as fruit will be tattooed in the near future.

**How did *Vogue* approach you? Were you nervous about doing fashion?**

My New York dealer Yancey Richardson called me and said that someone at *Vogue* had seen my "Lost in my Life" series and wanted to approach me for a project. The timing presented a challenge, as I was a resident at the MacDowell Colony at the time, in the woods of New Hampshire. The schedule was tight, but I was really excited to work in this different way, and to see what I could do with a raft of assistants and a budget. I didn't approach it as fashion. I'm not a photographer; I'm an artist, and I sometimes I use photography in my work.

**Who are your inspirations? What artists do you relate to?**

Everyday life is pretty much inspiring to me.



**You are a multimedia artist, is there one discipline that you related to more than others?**

Usually, the media in which I'll be working becomes clear as the idea forms. For example, I had originally thought "Karaoke Wrong Number" (the video in which I lip-sync to wrong number messages left on my voicemail) would be a series of portrait drawings that I might direct a composite sketch artist to make. But it became clear to me that I had to put myself in the work in order to translate the personalities of these callers as I saw them. So performance and video it was.

**Would you say you make collages more than photographs?**

In a way, yes. Each of these photographs is made not just from stuff, but from the stuff of my art: the materials,

the sketches, and in many cases from actual sculptures and drawings that I am repurposing for a particular photograph. Each has a history of a previous life. I create the setup in the studio and then step in. Often, I don't know the pose, but I perform (for myself) and we take two or three images, all slightly different.

**Do you photograph anything other than just patterns/yourself?**

All the time. But most I haven't shown yet.

**You have a large presence on Facebook, and you've also used Facebook as an art project. Is it strange to utilize something in this way, after you have used it for art?**

You're referring to my performance on Facebook. On March 11, 2009, from 7:35 a.m. to 10:56 p.m., I performed "Rachel is..." in my status bar on Facebook. Every 60-seconds during waking hours, I attempted to faithfully answer the question posed in the status bar, "What are you doing right now?" in an effort to raise more questions about narcissism, voyeurism, privacy, identity and authority as issues we consider in a technologically modern world. Since my last post on that day, I've not updated my status again. I did, however, subsequently establish an artist page where I try to post updates on shows, so followers can see what I'm up to.

**Would you rather Karaoke Wrong Number hang in the ICA or be a viral video? Have there been any parodies or copies of it online?**

The video wasn't made with the internet in mind — it is made from wrong number messages I received on our home answering service, back when people actually left voice messages for each other. Other projects, such as my daily Twitter performance (always attempting to capture the daily life of an artist in 140 characters exactly) and my Facebook performance made conceptual sense as online works.

**You and your mother both went to school at the same time. How did this come about?**

My mother had a rich career as a research scientist and assistant to Edwin Land of Polaroid. After 30 years, and his death, she decided she really wanted to go to art school. I saw what she was making and doing and heard the conversations about the work and realized that I needed to be there myself. We overlapped at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston for a year. Since then, we have collaborated on many projects in drawing, sculpture, performance and video. Our most recent is a video with several vignettes where her left hand and my right hand are performing simple tasks, such as pouring a glass of water, or untying a knot. The awkwardness of collaboration, the frustration and the joy when it comes together quite closely mirror the often fraught relationship between mother and daughter.

**Three words that describe you?**

Curious. Persistent. High-energy.

**Are you motivated by fear or inspiration?**

Fear is not a motivator, except in the big picture. Staving off the reality of the vicissitudes of life, pretending we are not going to die keeps us all working, right?

**Would you rather be the first or unique?**

Both.

.....

**"The face is such a signifier, it is so specific. It immediately makes it personal, and I wanted to remove that from this work."**

*-Rachel Perry Welty*

.....

**Favorite piece of clothing you wear all the time?**

Right now, it's my "guilty jacket," a Rick Owens leather jacket I splurged on after my 2009 solo show at Yancey Richardson Gallery. It's so comfortable, I'd wear it every day if I could.

**What music are you listening to now?**

My husband plays the piano so I am hearing mostly Chopin preludes and Beethoven sonatas. I can't listen to music while I work as I find it too distracting.

**What would you like your art to communicate?**

I hope it gets people thinking about the beauty, humor and opportunity in everyday life.

**How does being a woman affect the choices you've made with your art?**

I don't think I can separate being a woman from being a person. It's just who I am.



### **Where is your favorite place to look at art?**

Museums, galleries, streets.

### **If you could do or be anything else, what might that be?**

I'd be an actress or a writer.

### **How important is technique in your work?**

You have to be able to figure out how to make what you need to make. So it's pretty important. That said, anyone can learn the skills.

### **How important is the process?**

When I am "in the making", it's all about the process. It's only at the end that I think about what this "thing" is, and how it relates to my larger work.

### **For you, is the aesthetic or message more important in your work?**

It all starts with a germ of a thought, an "idealette" and goes from there. Aesthetics are a strategy to get people to pay attention.

### **Why don't you show your face in the "Lost in my Life" series?**

The face is such a signifier, it is so specific. It immediately makes it personal, and I wanted to remove that from this work. As I've mentioned with my Twitter project, specifically, in my work I am constantly balancing how much to reveal and how much to conceal. We are all performing, every day, whether we choose to Facebook or tweet about it, or not. ■

---

*Interview by Kyria Abrahams*

*Photograph of Rachel Perry Welty by Andrea Blanch*

*All other photographs courtesy of Yancey Richardson Gallery*

I want to  
show you more







© Rachel Perry Welty, Courtesy of Yancey Richardson Gallery  
Lost in My Life (Price Stickers) 2010

Lost in My Life (Playmobil) 2010  
© Rachel Perry Welty, Courtesy of Yancey Richardson Gallery





Lost in My Life (Twist Tie Web) 2011  
© Rachel Perry Welty, Courtesy of Yancey Richardson Gallery

Lost in My Life (Boxes) 2010  
© Rachel Perry Welty, Courtesy of Yancey Richardson Gallery

