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ESSENCE

A surrealist portrait of Cecilia Gioria. The image features multiple, overlapping faces of the same woman, some appearing as if they are cutouts or fragments. Baby's breath flowers are delicately placed across the faces, some covering eyes or mouths. The background is a solid, warm orange color. The woman has dark hair and is wearing a dark top.

FEATURING

CECILIA GIORIA

"A Portrait in Fragments"

Photographer & Visual Artist
Milan, Italy



THE REFLECTIVE ROOM



Self-portrait · Cecilia Gioria

About the Artist

Cecilia Gioria

Milan, Italy · Photographer & Visual Artist

Cecilia Gioria (born 1991, Alessandria, Italy) is an Italian photographer and visual artist whose practice is rooted in self-portraiture as a form of introspection. After a classical education, she moved to Milan, where she graduated in Photography from IED in 2014. Since the beginning of her career, her work has developed as an inquiry into identity, engaging in an implicit dialogue with artists such as Cindy Sherman and Francesca Woodman, while carving a language distinctly her own.

Her photographs unfold like a stream of consciousness, where presence and absence coexist. Through ambiguity, fragmentation, and the deliberate concealment of identity, Gioria constructs images that resist resolution, subtly reflecting and returning the projections placed upon her by the external gaze. The body becomes a site of negotiation, shaped as much by internal perception as by external expectation, allowing her to observe herself from a distance while remaining deeply embedded within the frame.

At the core of her practice lies a sustained engagement with vulnerability and psychological complexity. Her earlier work reflects on the ambivalent role of psychiatric medication, experienced as both relief and constraint, followed by a period of interruption in her practice. In her recent works, she returns with a renewed awareness, exploring themes of depression and panic through a delicate balance of lightness and depth. Photography, in this context, becomes both a therapeutic and cognitive space, where introspection, play, and transformation quietly converge.

*“The body becomes a site of negotiation, shaped as much by
internal perception as by external expectation.”*



Self-portrait - Cecilio Biondi

In Conversation

A Conversation

The Reflective Room in conversation with Cecilia Gioria

▣ *How have your roots and surroundings influenced your creative voice?*

In a profound way, even if not always immediately or explicitly. I grew up in Italy, in a context where the weight of memory, family, objects, and the domestic dimension is very strong, and I believe all of this naturally found its way into my practice. Many of my photographs arise precisely from a relationship with what remains: the spaces of the home, traces of the past, and objects that retain an emotional presence even when they appear inert. I think my creative voice was shaped there, in this constant proximity between intimacy and representation. From the very beginning, I experienced photography not as a tool for describing the external world, but as a way of moving through my interiority and transforming it into images. In this sense, the environment I come from gave me both an imaginary world and a sensitivity: a sensitivity to what is ambiguous, fragile, suspended, and often cannot be expressed directly.

▣ *Growing up around Italy's deep artistic legacy, did it shape your way of seeing, or did you have to find your own distance from it?*

I would say both. Growing up in Italy certainly means breathing in an immensely powerful visual heritage, one that is almost impossible to avoid. There is an idea of the image, of composition, theatricality, the body, and even of pain, that belongs deeply to our visual culture. This presence, even when it is not explicitly invoked, remains in the background and shapes the way we look. At the same time, in order to find my own gaze, I felt the need to move away from any idea of a resolved image or of beauty as a central value. My work emerges instead from friction, vulnerability, and a need to investigate. I am interested in an image that does not illustrate, but questions; that does not reassure, but allows an inner complexity to surface. Rather than adhering to a tradition, I have tried to move through it and, in part, disobey it, in order to arrive at a language that feels more mine, more unstable, more alive.

“I experienced photography not as a tool for describing the external world, but as a way of moving through my interiority.”

▣ *What first drew you to self-portraiture?*

Self-portraiture was, from the beginning, the most natural language for me. It did not arise from a desire for self-representation in a narcissistic sense, but from the need to use my body and my image as a site of inquiry. It was the closest point from which to begin, but also the most complex. Photographing myself meant trying to make visible something I still could not fully name. What drew me to self-portraiture was the need to understand, to observe from the outside what I was experiencing inwardly in a confused, fragmented, sometimes painful way. In this process, the camera became a threshold for me: a space where personal experience, psychological perception, and image-making could meet. Even today, I consider self-portraiture an open field, where identity is always being called into question.

▣ *Who or what continues to influence your work today?*

Everything that remains unresolved: the ambiguous areas of experience, the inner passages that resist simplification, the tension between what is shown and what is hidden. Writing, stream of consciousness, memory, domestic spaces, and all those elements that carry both an autobiographical and a symbolic charge also continue to nourish my work. There are artistic presences that have mattered, and still matter, but over time I have come to feel that the strongest influence comes from life itself and from the way it moves through the body. For many years, my practice has focused on the experience of psychological fragility, depression, panic attacks, and the ambivalent relationship between care and the loss of self. Today, I am also deeply influenced by the attempt to transform all of this into a form that is not merely confession, but a shared experience and a form of play.

Triptych · Self-portraits · Cecilia Gioria



□ *At what point does something personal become ready to be seen?*

It is not enough to have felt something intensely: for something to be translated into an image, it must pass through distance and transformation. It is in that passage that private experience can become a possibility for connection with the other. There is always a necessary period of time. Sometimes it is a long one, marked by suspension and even silence. Personally, I went through a phase of interruption in my photographic work because I felt that what I was living through was too close, too emotionally saturated to be processed. For me, to show does not mean to exhibit. It means understanding when an intimate material has found its own truth, and when it can leave me without losing its complexity.

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“Resistance to expression is not only a limitation. It is also a
generative force.”
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▣ *What in you still resists being expressed, even through images?*

I believe there is always a core that resists, and perhaps it is right that it should be so. Not everything can be translated into images, and not everything should be. There is a part of inner experience that remains opaque, not for lack of sincerity, but because it belongs to a dimension that is still in formation, still undeciphered. It is this threshold that interests me: the point at which the image comes very close to something, but does not exhaust it. Resistance to expression is not only a limitation, it is also a generative force. It compels me to keep searching, not to close meaning, and to allow the work to remain open.

▣ *Do you experience your body as a home or as distance?*

For a long time, my body was both: home and distance, refuge and fracture. It was the most intimate place, and at the same time the most difficult to inhabit. An important part of my practice arises precisely from this complex relationship with the body, experienced not as mere physical presence but as a psychic space, as a surface crossed by tensions, memories, and fears. At certain moments I perceived it as foreign, almost as the stage of a conflict; at others, photography allowed me to inhabit it again, at least temporarily, with greater awareness.

*“For a long time, my body was both: home and distance, refuge
and fracture.”*

▣ *When did creating become a necessity for you?*

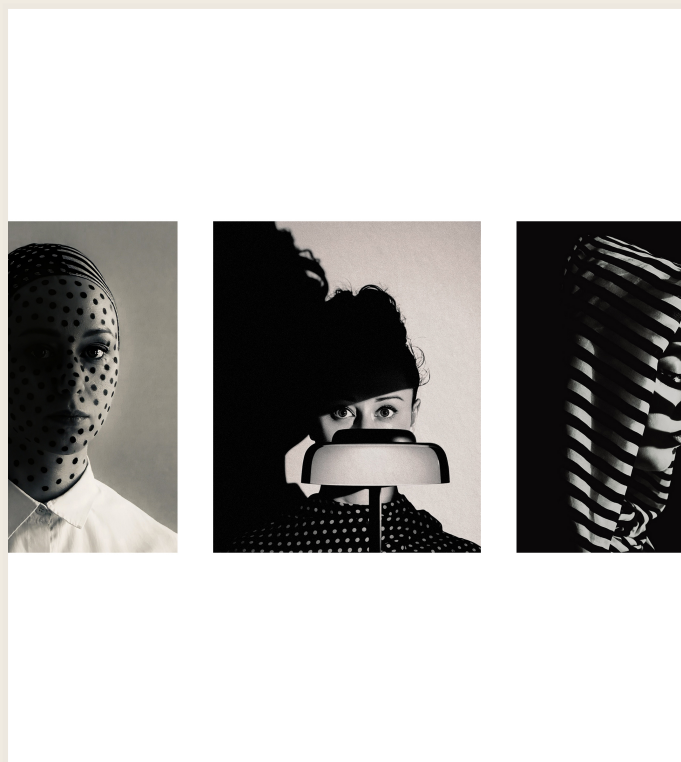
When I understood that, for me, it was not simply a way of producing images, but a way of moving through experience. At a certain point, photography ceased to be only an artistic language and became a research practice, almost a form of psychic survival. A way of giving shape to inner states that would otherwise have remained scattered, mute, or only painfully endured. This became especially clear in moments of crisis. In my experience, creation became deeply intertwined with the need to understand what I was living through. Even when I moved away from photography, that distance confirmed how necessary it was. Returning to it meant rediscovering a space of possibility, of play, but also of care and truth.

▣ *What do you want people to feel, not understand, when they see your work?*

Rather than making something understood in a linear way, I would like my work to produce resonance. I would like people, when looking at my images, to feel that they are entering a true emotional space, perhaps fragile, uncomfortable, but authentic. I am not interested in offering a single reading or a closed explanation; I am interested instead in opening a space of recognition, however small, in which something within the other may be stirred awake. My photographs work when they are able to place the viewer before their own inner threshold: a fear, a memory, a sense of vulnerability, but also a possibility for transformation. I would like my work not only to be understood intellectually, but to be lived through. I would like it to leave an emotional trace, a slight unease, or even a form of relief in feeling less alone within what we so often cannot say.

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*“I would like my work not only to be understood intellectually,
but to be lived through.”*
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THE WORK



ESSENCE

ESSENCE is The Reflective Room's ongoing series of conversations with artists, writers, musicians, and creators whose work lives at the edge of what can be said.

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All images are self-portraits · Cecilia Gioria