

# Self-ish Portrait (Mary Cassatt)

By Katie Waller

Born in 1844 to an affluent Pennsylvania family, Mary Cassatt developed a love of art from her school, which taught desirable housewife skills such as needlepoint, cooking, sketching and painting. However, upon enrolling in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Cassatt was faced with brutal contempt from her male classmates and teachers, many of whom held the view that women should not have careers and that the fine art world should be a strictly male space. Despite a lack of support from her family, Cassatt decided to move to Paris to study under the Old Masters. Eventually, her work began displaying in exhibitions, and, although she used a moniker for her first exhibition to avoid criticism from her father, she went on to establish a successful career in the art world.

Other than the misogyny Cassatt faced as an artist, she also received backlash for refusing to stay within artistic guidelines, instead developing her own unique style. Upon meeting and befriending fellow Impressionist Edgar Degas, Cassatt felt emboldened to begin using brighter colours, painting her subjects as she saw them without care for flattery and airbrushing. Cassatt accredited her inspiration for this shift to Degas: "It changed my life. I saw art then as I wanted to see it.". Indeed, this colourful, almost rebellious personality is felt through the bold colours and layering in 'Self-ish Portrait'.

Likely inspired by the adverse response to her early career, Cassatt's work began focusing on themes of domesticity, showing scenes of women in household settings. Instead of romanticising the housewife lifestyle, as many artists of the time were guilty of, Cassatt's paintings gained a reputation for showing bold realism, refusing to put a veneer on the constricting realities of womanhood in what can be considered an act of first-wave feminism.

Katie Waller is an artist based in Lincoln. She is currently studying Fine Art at the University of Lincoln. Inspired by her background in psychology, Katie's portraits aim to combine traditional art techniques with modern themes such as neurodivergency. Her work will be displayed in an upcoming exhibition in May.