

# presque paysage

self-portrait

by  
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Together, we are almost a landscape

—— Joseph Brodsky

*(Re)composing the present by revisiting the past.*

*Inspirations!*

Since ancient times, the mirror has been linked to memory in culture—it is no coincidence that photography was once called “a mirror with a memory.” The mirror serves as a portal to the world of personal memory and self-reflection. Standing before their reflection, the participant inevitably confronts their own memories—for seeing oneself sparks an inner dialogue with the past.

The mirror captures the present moment while evoking images from the past, just as memory preserves fleeting experiences. The portrait taken with the camera becomes the material embodiment of that moment and mental state, granting it a sense of permanence.

The photograph created in *Presque Paysage* thus freezes a fleeting experience into a tangible artifact—a personal keepsake that preserves the memory of that moment.



Mirror, Tarkovsky



### Artistic Context and References

The Presque Paysage project is part of a rich tradition of using mirrors and the motif of memory in contemporary art, photography, and cinema.

In Andrei Tarkovsky's autobiographical film *The Mirror* (1975), the mirror becomes a symbol of memory and nostalgia: the director builds a non-linear flow of dreams and reminiscences based on his own memories. Tarkovsky's mirror links past and present as if they reflect one another, showing how personal memories can acquire universal resonance

In Bill Viola's video art, the theme of memory and reflection is equally central. In his iconic video *The Reflecting Pool* (1977–79), a man emerges from the forest and jumps into a pool; suddenly, time freezes —real motion ceases, and only ripples and reflections remain on the water's surface. This effect suggests that memory (here the reflection) exists independently of the passage of time. Viola stated that this work symbolizes the individual's entry into a world of "virtual images and indirect perceptions"—a sort of baptism into the realm of reflections, inspired by a childhood experience. Through slow motion and reflections, Viola explores "the passage of time and memory," evoking how our mind replays lived moments.



**The Reflecting Pool, Bill Viola**



Motifs of the mirror, repetition, and memory appear just as vividly in the work of Scottish artist Douglas Gordon, who, through his installations, questions “the complexity of memory and perception.” In *Through a Looking Glass* (1999), Gordon revisits the famous *Taxi Driver* (1976) scene where the protagonist addresses his own reflection (“You talkin’ to me?”). The artist projects the scene simultaneously on two screens placed opposite each other—one playing at normal speed, the other in reverse and in slow motion. This desynchronization causes the viewer to feel disoriented, echoing the schizophrenic hero’s loss of control. This multiplied mirror dialogue evokes self-duplication and shows how repetition can either distort or reinforce a memory

In another series, *Self-Portrait of You + Me* (2006–ongoing), Gordon literally associates memory and mirror: he burns photos of iconic pop culture figures and replaces the missing parts with mirrored surfaces. This work invites reflection on collective memory—the mirror connects the present viewer with the “ghost” of the past, visualizing how memories of cultural icons persist as long as we identify with them.

French artist Sophie Calle also transforms self-portraiture and everyday documentation into a narrative of memory. Her conceptual works—from *Address Book* to *True Stories*—reconstruct stories from fragments, photos, and testimonials. Critics note that “absence and memory are key threads in all her projects.” Calle focuses on how to fix what no longer exists—be it people, lost objects, or moments only retrievable through recollection.

In *Last Seen...* (1991), she interviewed museum staff about stolen paintings, collecting only their recollections and displaying the empty spaces on the walls—creating a “portrait of absence” that serves as a monument to memory. Calle shows that remembering is a creative act of reconstruction, akin to self-portraiture where fact and fiction intertwine. This resonates with *Presque Paysage*, where each participant, by photographing themselves, creates a document of presence—an individual trace added to the exhibition’s collective memory.



**Les Suisses morts, Christian Boltanski**

Christian Boltanski's work is even more directly linked to memory, particularly collective and historical memory. Known for installations resembling archives or memorials, Boltanski's works use photographs of strangers, old objects, candles or bulbs to provoke empathy and remembrance of unknown lives. The artist distinguishes "big history" (preserved in books) from "small memory," referring to fragile, personal recollections that are easily lost.

In *Les Suisses morts* (1991), he displayed hundreds of anonymous portraits; in works like *Monument* (featuring photos of children lit by small lamps), he highlights memory's fleeting nature—repeating and multiplying images to prevent forgotten faces from vanishing. In *Personnes* (2010, Grand Palais), piles of used clothing were randomly lifted and dropped by a mechanical claw, accompanied by recordings of thousands of human heartbeats.

Here, the mechanical repetition and anonymity of personal effects represent the fragility of life and memory: the clothing—as memory envelopes of people—are endlessly tossed, reminding us that memory can both preserve and erase. Similarly, in *Presque Paysage*, the many photographic portraits taken by visitors will form an archive of the moment. As each participant repeats the act of photography, this ritual becomes a gesture of preserving "small memories"—faces and emotions of people present *hic et nunc*.

Finally, the very format of the photo booth evokes nostalgia and repetition. The curtained photobooth is an iconic object of the 20th century, immortalized in film and pop culture as a space for spontaneous self-portraits and photo strips. By referencing this tradition, *Presque Paysage* elicits a "nostalgia for the present"—the feeling of living a moment already perceived as a future memory. Just as in Viola or Kusama's mirrored rooms that create the illusion of eternal present, the mirror-photo studio allows for the infinite reliving of the self-perception moment. Each photo becomes a variation on the timeless theme of self-portraiture, as artists across eras have depicted themselves facing a mirror to capture their changing identity—and to defy time.

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