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## Self-Portraits as Anti-Portraits: The Universalism of Helene Schjerfbeck's Art

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It has been said that Helene Schjerfbeck's self-portraits are about her confrontation with ageing and death. This might be so. But much more importantly, these self-portraits become a form of history painting in a general perspective. They are iconic reminders of how time flies and the effects of time, not so much on an individual, but on the sheer material presence of the human being.

It is as if these self-portraits bring out such a general, analytical message that we could even abstract from the fact that the artist is the model for these paintings. This generalisation is, I argue, the universal aspect of Helene Schjerfbeck's self-portraits.

The way in which her portraits correspond with her history paintings and still-lives, reveals a remarkable and mainly overlooked consistency in her oeuvre. Necessarily, her self-portraits work to a certain extent against the limits of the genre of portraiture and necessarily, the history paintings and still-lives become meditations of the artist and the making of her as an artist.