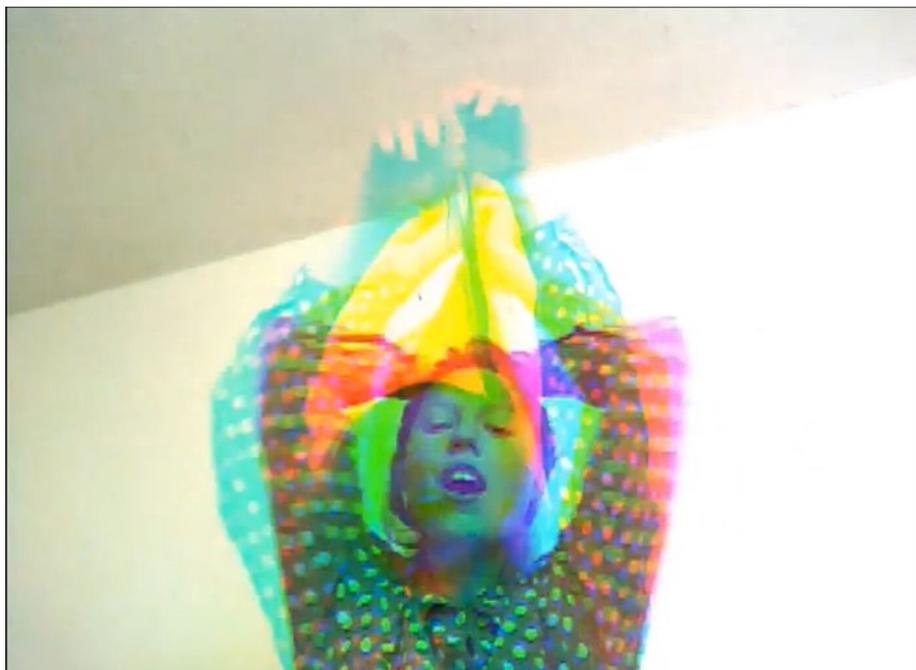


## petra cortright turns camgirling into feminist art

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Culture

*rgb, d-lay*, 2011, video, 23 seconds (still)

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Petra Cortright has been putting her image online for over a decade. As her new show 'CAM WORLS' opens in Los Angeles, the pioneering post-internet artist talks selfies vs. self-portraits, and why she doesn't use Snapchat.

*rgb, d-lay*, 2011, video, 23 seconds (still)

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In 2007, Petra Cortright was an art student at the Parsons School of Design in New York. She wasn't making digital art, that is, until she had a video art assignment. Not wanting the hassle of lugging heavy video equipment back and forth to school, she bought a webcam for \$20.

She started making video art with the webcam as the director, actor and editor and shot all her videos in real time and with only one take. Cortright then started uploading her work to YouTube — back before YouTuber was a noun — because it was easier than bringing a USB to class.

But who knew these simple (practical) decisions would change the course of video and internet art in the future to come? Cortright shrugs at the thought looking back on how she trail-blazed the selfie, the online persona and internet art. "I just feel lucky I'm still making a living as an artist," she tells me over the phone, as she drives with her husband Marc Horowitz down a freeway in Los Angeles. "It all feels easy and normal to me."

This weekend, Cortright shows over 50 video art pieces made over the past 11 years, from the webcam videos she first made as a student at Parsons to her most recent fashion videos shot for Stella McCartney. The exhibition, entitled *CAM WORLS* (an intentional misspelling of Cam World), is on now at UTA Artist Space in Los Angeles.



*mind\_candy\_pfaffs, 2015, (digital video, 2 hrs)*

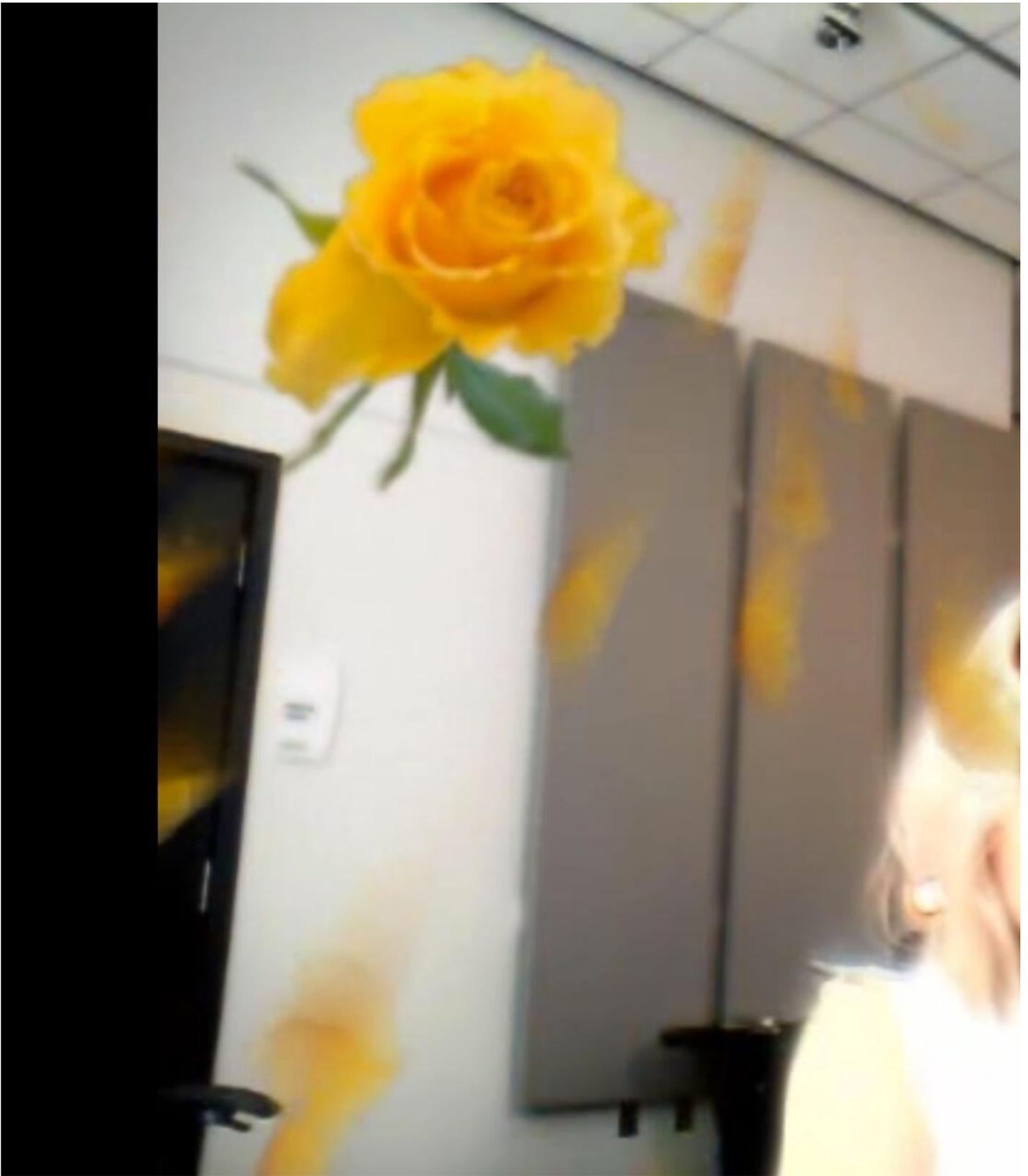
The show is billed as a survey, but Cortright begs to differ. “I’m too young to have a retrospective,” says the 31-year-old artist. “Ten years is a nice pause point to do this. It’s the biggest collection of my videos ever to be shown together.”

Cortright is a pioneering digital artist who started making live videos long before streaming was the trend it is today. She led a new kind of internet art with her desktop experiments, which are now a part of internet art history. She started using digital filters and emoji-like effects, long before smartphones made them ubiquitous.

Looking back, she sees this early video work as a series in itself. “It’s a whole range of emotions,” said Cortright. “I made [the videos] at so many different points in my life. Throughout your 20s, you’re going through a lot, moving around a lot, it’s crazy to see them all in one place, they’re very personal.”

There are videos of the artist spinning around in an office chair until she feels sick, videos of her playing with her ponytail, and videos where she flicks through various video effects on consumer-grade webcams — adding emoji-like bows and transporting herself to the beach. “They were all recorded live, no post-production,” she says, “It was just me sitting in front of the computer, pressing record, doing a little something and pressing stop. They’re very spontaneous.”

The kind of filters she was using a decade ago just recently reached Snapchat, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram Stories. “The technology has been around for a long time, so I’m really surprised it took so long,” she said. “It’s not new technology, but it’s quite fun to play with and people love it.”



*bridal shower\_w\_rose* , 2013; 1 min. 37 seconds (still)

Though she has been putting videos of herself online for over a decade, Cortright isn't all about the smartphone. "I actually don't use Snapchat or other social media outlets, I prefer computers," said Cortright. "I'm not a big smartphone person. I'm going to be an old decrepit person hovering over a desktop while all my kids have their smartphones."

Though the videos feature Cortright with various digital filters — from a water-type effect distorting her face to fake fires — she doesn't see them as selfies. "When you think of smartphones, you think of the selfie, but these videos are not selfie work," she says. "There's a big difference between a selfie and a self-portrait and I've always considered the videos more self-portrait than selfie."

The videos are not always recorded at flattering angles, unlike selfies, and there is no Facetune. The self-portrait videos represent the places where Cortright has traveled (even though they're mostly shot in anonymous-looking rooms with white backgrounds). "I made them in Mexico City, Tokyo, Santa Barbara, Berlin, everywhere," she says. "A selfie has a different spirit about it, but webcams are low resolution and everyone looks quite nice because there is higher contrast. I hate camera phones, its high-def but not in a nice way, I'm not an HD person."

She is exhibiting one video from 2012 called "I'm a Selfie," where she takes selfies on her smartphone like a conceited teenager. "A few videos in the show are kind of a joke," she says. "But five years ago, selfies were less widespread than they are now."

Cortright is more recently known for her digital paintings (She made a [Pixel 2 smartphone case with Google](#)), but she returned to video in 2016 when she started collaborating with designer Stella McCartney. "I love working with Stella," she says. "It feels very easy, I am really into low-definition, now everyone wants things slick and polished and high definition, but when we started working together, I told her, "look I'm a nerd, I'm not into these big, high production things," and they were fine with that. I always felt like myself, that's always what you want to feel in a collaboration."

The videos range from a series of McCartney collab shorts from 2015 to 2017, including one inspired by the colors in [McCartney's spring 2016 collection](#), and one where Cortright jumps rope while wearing StellaSport sneakers, from [McCartney's collaboration with adidas](#).

Cortright's approach to video now is the same as when she made her first video art piece from art school. "I always do something simple to maximize its effect," says Cortright. "What's the best way to show it in the shortest amount of time? My videos don't need to be longer than two minutes and 99% of my videos are done in one take. The first shot is usually the best one."

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