

Annegret Soltau, Selbst (Self), 1975

These two black and white self-portraits are almost identical at first glance. The photographs show the head and shoulders of young white woman wearing a black scoop-necked top, with her dark hair cut in a fringe and pulled back in a low bunch, her eyes closed. Both photos are signed 'Annegret Soltau 1975' on the pale skin of the neck, just above, and following the curve of, the neck of the t-shirt. It appears at first as if the prints have been scribbled over with criss-crossing lines of ink, but in fact lines of thin black thread have been wound around and over Soltau's face, head and throat. In the first portrait, the thread is taut and digs into her skin and lips, and seems to hold her eyes and mouth closed. In the second portrait of the pair, the threads have been cut vertically in the area around Soltau's cheek. The line of the cut black threads is as crisp as the line of her fringe. Released from their tension, all the threads have loosened and started to fly away and the expression of her mouth is soft. Together, the two photographs suggest that an accumulation of fragile threads can be powerfully constraining – as with the Swift's story of the giant Gulliver pinned down by Lilliputians using hundreds of puny ropes. But once cut, the net loses its strength. These two photographs are documents of a performance piece. Soltau further developed the series by physically sewing lines of thread across other self-portraits. She wrote of '*an attempt to trigger states of consciousness through realization of an image in real life, i.e. make an image physically. The line becomes a realized line, the person is part of the picture. Line and person are not two opposite things but one reality*'.