

**PERFORMANCES OF SELF: BECOMING THE FAMILY ALBUM
IN RAFAEL GOLDCHAIN'S *I AM MY FAMILY***

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In the life of every man there are periods that are both departures and reunions, separations and reconciliations. Each of these phases is an attempt to transcend our solitude, and is followed by a descent into undiscovered countries. (Paz 202)

In the epigraph of his book *Nostalgia for an unknown land*, Toronto-based artist Rafael Goldchain quotes the Mexican writer Octavio Paz, who describes man's existence as a network of intersecting relationships. Paz alludes to the extent to which man's identity is bound by a wider social and cultural context. In *Nostalgia for an unknown land*, Goldchain writes about how he returns to his native South America to document the photographic memories of his trip. The snapshots of various important moments of his trip inspire Goldchain to embark on a personal journey of self-discovery through a rediscovery of his native land after many years of absence. On the last page of *Nostalgia for an unknown land*, photographer Michael Torosian concludes that for this particular project, Goldchain returns to his roots to rediscover his own identity: "Rafael Goldchain has embarked upon an education into his heritage and into himself, and along the way, [...] has also acquired a new [...] sense of belonging" (Goldchain, *Nostalgia for an unknown land* 145). For Goldchain, the process of developing a renewed sense of self through an investigation of his heritage in *Nostalgia for an unknown land* is expanded in the publication of *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions*. In an effort to reconnect with his family's history in *I Am My Family*, Goldchain embarks on a personal journey of rediscovery by enacting a return to his roots through the concept of the family album.

Documenting the family in *I Am My Family*

In the artist statement that he includes in his album, Goldchain lays out the framework of his artistic project to establish a pact of sorts with his reader. In his statement, Goldchain confirms that the project he undertakes in *I Am My Family* reflects his "ongoing efforts to build a self-identity through affiliation with his ancestors" (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 16). What results from this investigation is

a collection of 56 portraits of family members that Goldchain assembles into an album. The majority of the photographic portraits are accompanied by a brief narrative that introduces the family member portrayed and describes the genealogical connection between Goldchain and the person depicted in the photograph. In some cases, he provides an anecdote related to the photographed relative. Among the portraits, we see Goldchain's maternal great-grandfather Baruch Rubinsztajn (67), his maternal grandfather Don Moises Rubinstein Krongold (57), his mother's aunt Pola Baumfield Spiegel (59), his maternal great-grandmother Roize Krongold (65), and, as shown in Figure 1, his paternal grandmother Doña Aida Precelman Ryten de Goldchain (33). According to the publisher's presentation of the book, in *I Am My Family*, Goldchain "creates a family album of traditional portrait photographs, [but] with an unconventional twist"—unconventional because the only visible subject in the album is Goldchain himself. In the portraits of his ancestors, Goldchain literally becomes his relatives, both real and imagined, through a series of what he refers to as the "self-portraits" of his various ancestors.

In our analysis of Goldchain's family album, we will examine the ways in which Goldchain introduces self-portraits into his narrative to retrace his roots through an innovative form of self-representation. Using his family's history as a pretext for his album, Goldchain plays with the retrospective nature of photography and personal writing to raise questions on concepts of identity, memory and historical accuracy. At the same time, through the representation of the family photo album, Goldchain develops a better understanding of his origins and, in the process, establishes a stronger sense of himself as an artist. We will begin our study by presenting some of the key elements which underline the narrative and visual construction of *I Am My Family*.

Rewriting history in *I Am My Family*

Rafael Goldchain's family history is complex and difficult to retrace. Both the construction and the presentation of his album reflect the challenges he faces in recovering his family's history. In *I Am My Family*, Goldchain reveals that he was born in Santiago, Chile, in 1953, but moved to Mexico with his family as a young child. Although he was raised in Mexico, he moved to Israel as a teenager to study at a university, and later immigrated to Canada in the mid-1970s, where he currently lives with his wife Jean Hynes and his son Michael Joseph. Goldchain's ancestors had also experienced several geographical relocations, but their travels were mostly brought on by necessity. By the end of the 1920s, Goldchain's family was scattered across three continents. Although Goldchain was born and raised in South America, his ancestors originated from Poland and were of the Jewish faith. Many of his ancestors were forced to abandon Poland for other countries. Those who left Poland were unable to return to their place of origin, while those who stayed behind either lost contact with their relatives

or perished during World War II. Goldchain briefly outlines the many displacements that afflicted his ancestors during the 1920s:

From the early 1920's until the eve of World War Two, most of my family members emigrated from Poland to Venezuela, Costa Rica, Brazil, Argentina, or Chile. A few others sought a new life in the United States or Canada. Some left Poland intending to come back with funds to help their families but were prevented by the outbreak of war. All of my extended family members who remained in Europe after the beginning of World War Two perished in the Shoah. (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 116-117)

Since “geographical dislocations carry with them dislocations of identity,” the diasporic movements of Goldchain's ancestors provoke a crisis of identity in the family's history by creating many gaps in the Goldchain family tree (Teixeira and Da Rosa 265). Goldchain attributes the various challenges in assembling his family's history to the geographical dispersion of his ancestors. He also names other factors involved in the difficult task of retracing his family roots:

This process had some difficulties, as did the process of assembling family stories for my son. The memories and histories I was seeking resisted my research in many ways, from the complications I had in obtaining documents from Poland to the wide geographic distribution of family members and the lack of contact between them. Other obstacles included the advanced age of the last remaining relatives of my grandparents' generation, the difficulty in eliciting memories from living relatives, and the various spellings of my family name that made genealogical research challenging. These gaps unavoidably became uncharted territories, which I started to populate with characters based on shreds of memory, research, and period photographs to create an illusion of a full family picture album. Posing as imaginary ancestors allowed me to be playful with portrait photography—with props, costumes and hairstyles—and to reference a broader range of Polish Jewish culture and history and its transformation into South American Jewish culture. (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 18-19)

To compensate for omissions in the family's history, Goldchain uses his own identity as the template for the expression of the family unit in the album. By posing as his ancestors in a series of photographic self-portraits, Goldchain tries to situate himself within the family's framework:

For my family—as for the countless other families shaped by wars, persecutions, emigrations, and multiple exiles—the few photographs that remain from the time before the Shoah

are more than precious. It was through these photographs that I was able to connect to my ancestors, a connection of which Roland Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida*. “The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here... [...]” The [...] metaphor used by Barthes resonates with me because [it] echoes both my desire for connecting with my ancestors and the translation of this desire into performative photographic self-portraits. (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 19)

The photographic self-portraits are used by Goldchain to link his own identity to the album’s storytelling process, for which he remains at all times the key figure. In this respect, the representation of his family’s heritage also constitutes a process of self-reflection for Goldchain, who “stages an attempt to return to a historical/mythical place of origin [...]” as a strategy to implicate individual and collective experiences in the framing of his past and present identity (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 18). Goldchain is able to secure his position on the family tree by transforming the traditional family album into a sophisticated model of self-representation: “*I Am My Family* can be read as an extended search for identity, this time embodied (literally) in those who gave [Goldchain] life” (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 11). It is through the *mise en scène* of various relational processes, mainly the relationship forged between words and images, that Goldchain’s own personal history becomes the focus of the family’s collective experiences in the family album. In Goldchain’s words, “the self-portraits in *I Am My Family* are acts of claim to a familial history on which I base my identity” (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 21).

Word and image relations in the family album

The dialogue between words and images in Goldchain’s family album constitutes the driving force behind the interpretation and understanding of the family’s identity. Photography and life writing participate mutually in the construction of identity in *I Am My Family*. Many of the challenges that Goldchain faces in assembling the family tree run parallel to the shared problematics of photography and personal writing. Although both modes of representation offer the same promise of authenticity in their portrayal of reality, photography and autobiography are also recognized as modes of artistic expression that adopt a highly subjective approach to the presentation and interpretation of this same reality. Both photography and autobiography are theorized within a framework where concepts such as truth, accuracy, memory and alterity come together to guide the interpretation of past experiences. The correspondences between photography and life writing play a decisive role in unraveling the issues related to self-representation in Goldchain’s album. Consequently, Goldchain’s innovative use of photography within the personal narrative raises important questions about a series of dichotomies that theorists often call upon in their study of photography and life narratives: fact/fiction; reality/

imagination; present/past; individual/collective; traditional/contemporary modes of representation. In *I Am My Family*, the presentation of words and images within an affiliative context place Goldchain's family album within contemporary debates on autobiography and photography.

Converging realities: The role of photography and autobiography in the construction of a family album

Understanding what constitutes a family album becomes an important aspect in the interpretation and explanation of Goldchain's project in *I Am My Family*. Kept in the possession of the family it depicts, the family photo album has become a collective diary of sorts in which visual memories—typically photographic—are preserved for posterity. The album stands as part of the family's heritage through which family memories and myths are exchanged and passed on from one generation to the next. Within the context of our study, the family album becomes the perfect medium to address the challenges of reconstructing personal history through visual representation; the family album is a document that combines photography and life writing in the articulation of personal experience. Martha Langford explores the relationship that exists in the family album between verbal and visual modes of expression when she writes that “the family album, in its naïve and defective way, certainly satisfies the immense need for a story [*le dit*], which for lack of written documents [*l'écrit*] haunts each family” (5). As Langford explains, words and images stand in a relationship of complementarity to each other in the articulation of identity in the family album: “[...] the album functions as a pictorial *aide-mémoire* to recitation, to the telling of stories” (5). Similar to Langford, Marianne Hirsch pays particular attention to the narrative processes at work in the family album. Hirsch writes that “family pictures depend on such a narrative act of adoption that transforms rectangular pieces of cardboard into telling details connecting lives and stories across continents and generations” (xii). By capturing the various scenes and events of everyday life that pertain to the family's collective memory, “the family album amounts to an expression of identity” that is simultaneously the articulation of collective and individual experiences (Langford 95). As an affiliative group, the family is described as both “an individual, personal experience and also a social institution” (Stephens and Leach 179). The dual nature of the family is attributed to the fact that both individual and relational concepts of self are involved in the definition of the family:

The family is an affiliative group, and the affiliations that create it are constructed through various relational, cultural, and institutional processes—such as “looking” and photography, for example. Families are shaped by individual responsiveness to the ideological pressures deployed by the familial gaze. (Hirsch 10)

In our analysis of Goldchain's album, it is important to take into account the fact that identity, in this particular family album, is at once singular and multiple. The dual nature of identity is first expressed in the album's title—*I Am My Family*—through the use of the first person singular pronoun to articulate the family's identity. The family acts as a filter through which Goldchain's identity is constructed and becomes meaningful. In this respect, the family album becomes more a reflection of the experiences of its compiler than of the many figures portrayed in it. As the compiler of the album, Rafael Goldchain transforms the investigative processes of creating a family album into the art of self-examination and turns the collective experiences of his family into a *mise en scène* of autobiographical performativity. By assuming the identities of different ancestors in his photographic self-portraits, Goldchain stages the processes of the autobiographical narrative through the literal performance of the autobiographical subject as both an individual and interconnected phenomenon. By performing the family album, Goldchain suggests that “autobiographical telling is performative, it enacts the ‘self’ that it claims has given rise to an ‘I.’ And that ‘I’ is neither unified nor stable—it is fragmented, provisional, multiple, in process” (Smith and Watson 9). The performance aspect of Goldchain's album presents him as an active, central, and creative participant in the storytelling process of the family album. By bridging real and virtual worlds through the photographic medium, Goldchain transforms his personal narrative into a spectacle that unravels the problems related to self-representation in all its complexity.

Performing autobiography: Staging the problematics of self-representation

By integrating autobiography and photography into a performance of the family album, Goldchain stages the multifaceted aspects of identity and its representation. The concept of the family album contributes to the performative qualities of Goldchain's project, since the photo album is also recognized as a performative practice. Martha Langford acknowledges the performative aspects of the family album when she writes that “[...] the album is an instrument of collective show and tell [...] An album is a [...] photographic performance” (20). Beyond their simple purpose of *showing* and *telling* the various scenes of family life, photo albums exhibit the social and ideological values of the families they depict:

Family photography and family albums are powerful tools of cultural representation enabling individual families to narrativise their sense of unity, heritage, intimacy and spatial belonging. As such, the humble family photograph album [becomes] a sophisticated ideological device. It authenticate[s] and celebrate[s] public discourses of familial heritage, blood ties, continuity and connection within a private cultural form that also articulates emotions of intimacy, security and belonging. It perform[s] the crucial role of transforming the experience of nuclearised parenthood into a spectacle.” (Chambers 75)

In its framing of the family's private experience as a pictorial spectacle, the family album reveals the complex layers of intersubjectivity involved in the expression of the family's collective identity, since the family is defined as an individual and personal connection with a broader community, practice or institution.

Subjective performances: The representation of the autobiographical subject as multiple and fragmented

Rafael Goldchain puts contemporary autobiography theory into practice by literally stepping into the album through the photographic self-portrait. By performing the identities of his ancestors in the photographs, Goldchain *tells* the family's history by *showing* alternative versions of himself. Goldchain adopts several guises to create the illusion of a traditional family album. In order to *become* the various family members depicted in his album, Goldchain relies on several elements of theatrical design to display an air of resemblance: he uses make up, fashion accessories (jewelry, wigs, hats, glasses, ties and scarves, etc.), and props. Goldchain also writes about the different strategies he uses to transform his identity. One telling description of the process of self-transformation involved in creating the photographic self-portraits of his ancestors relates to Goldchain's account of his transformation into his paternal grandmother Doña Aida Precelman Ryten de Goldchain:

In order to transform myself into her, I rented body padding in addition to wardrobe and a wig. I also hired a glamour makeup artist who coached me in posing in a stereotypically feminine way. Having known my grandmother as an older bubbly or "Bobe," it was challenging to imagine her as a younger, glamorous woman. (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 32)

The deliberate staging of identity alludes to a more complex performative practice at work in the book. For Goldchain, these alternative identities come into the album, as Marvin Carlson writes, "not to deny identity but on the contrary, to provide, through performance, alternate possibilities for identity positions outside those authenticated by conventional performance and representation" (194). The different personas created by Goldchain in the album serve to fragment his identity into several distinct "sub-identities." Goldchain's multiple identities represent a departure from the conventional way of looking at the photographic image as an immediate referent to the reality it portrays. Through a weakening of the referential status of photography in the album, photographs are introduced into the narrative to articulate identity as a simultaneous experience of self and other. By embodying several characters at once, Goldchain uses photography to perform identity as divided and multifaceted:

Photography is primarily performative. It is a picture-making process that enables the subject being photographed to become Other, either through conscious or unconscious

‘intention’ or manipulation by the photographer. The photographic process enables the photographer to create meaning through transformative processes, via mechanical, chemical and theatrical direction or by neglecting or undermining these means of making a picture. (Marsh 263)

Goldchain’s photographic self-portraits undermine the integrity of the referential nature of autobiographical narratives by displaying “many views and variant versions of the same person, [and by] simply supplying a visual metaphor for the divided and multiple (‘decentered’) self” (Rugg 1). In the album’s narrative, the articulation of the Goldchain family identity as divided and multiple is illustrated in the written text through the different variants of the Goldchain family name (Goldchain, Goldszajn, Goldszayn, Goldshayn, Goldshtayn, Goldschein, Goldschain, Goldstein). Goldchain also uses different subject pronouns in the narrative to refer to his self-portraits. This creates the illusion of multiple subjects within the album: Goldchain does not only use a first person narrative pronoun (“I,” “we”), but also the third person subject pronoun (“he” and “she”) to ascribe multiple subject positions to the same person. In the images, Goldchain subverts the referential value of photography and of autobiography by playing on the notion of genetic resemblance. This becomes even more evident when each of Goldchain’s photographs functions as both a portrait of family members and a portrait of himself imitating these same family members. Goldchain calls into question the referential status of autobiography through the photographic medium by portraying the autobiographical subject as “part of a multiple-voiced subjectivity” (Hesford 153), itself “contingent upon and situated within particular contexts” (Hesford 154). Goldchain’s self-portraits set off a series of questions that confront conventional modes of representation, namely the representation of identity in personal writing as a fixed, unified subject.

Creations of self: Reading autobiography as an artistic production

Given the great importance Goldchain attaches to the elaborate staging of the family album, the artist takes no pains to conceal the creative processes involved in his project. In fact, he does just the opposite, allowing the “various strategies of self-dramatization and automythification” to participate in the construction of identity (Rabaté vi):

[...] the assembly of a family album as a set of self-portraits-as-ancestors is fundamentally a narrative gesture that openly exposes its nature as a fictional and interpretative construction. Although it could be argued that in every family portrait a multiplicity of personae are represented by virtue of genetic linkage to the individuals shown in the image, in each of these portraits there are at least two main subjects: the ancestor being reenacted, and myself

as the performer. These two subjects hover like ghosts in the photograph, forcing the viewer to move between them, never able to see both at once. (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 21)

The creative processes involved in the presentation of the album become an important aspect in its interpretation. Goldchain includes an appendix at the end of his book to guide the reader through the various stages of artistic creation that are involved in the conception and design of *I Am My Family*: The sketchbook pages (excerpts of Goldchain's notebook containing personal notes, drawings and sketches related to the conception of his project), production stills (photographs documenting the various stages of Goldchain's physical transformation into his ancestors), and family tree drawings serve to reinforce and extend the artistic and conceptual character of Goldchain's family album. The recollection of the family's history through a deliberate staging of identity turns the performative aspect of the album into an important element that combines fact and fiction in the articulation of identity. In some of the character descriptions he writes as self-portrait captions, Goldchain heightens the interchange between the real and imagined identities depicted in the photographic images by referencing the page numbers of his ancestors' photos that are in the "Archival photographs" section of his album. As shown in Figure 2, the sketchbook pages include a copy of Goldchain's artistic self-portraits alongside the original photographs on which they are based. Scattered around the images in the sketchbook pages are Goldchain's personal notes and reflections. Goldchain's sketchbook pages become a symbol of the artist's signature in the album, since they serve the purpose of guiding the reader through the various stages of artistic development involved in the representation of his family's heritage:

The scrapbook became a kind of ancillary artwork—a vehicle that gives insight into the creation of the self-portraits and provides access to the original family photographs. The viewer can compare the original images with the self-portraits based on them, and reflect further on the relationship between the past and the present—how we transform the past when we bring it into the present and how we construct ourselves in relation to our familial past. (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 20)

The self-portraits not only present Goldchain's personal interpretation of his heritage, but they also dramatize his own subjective assimilation and integration of the family heritage as his own individual experience as an artist.

There are repeated examples of Goldchain's own subjective interpretation of his family's heritage throughout *I Am My Family*. Due to the inaccessibility of certain historical facts concerning his lineage, Goldchain is forced to reconstruct the family's history through a fictional lens: Fictitious figures and events infiltrate the Goldchain family tree to compensate for the important gaps in the

family's collective memory. In the example of the self-portrait of his ancestor Naftuli Goldszajn [Fig. 3], Goldchain confirms that this ancestor is actually a figment of his imagination:

Flipping through a book titled *And I still See Their Faces: Images of Polish Jews*, I was drawn to a period image of a man holding a white farmyard bird and thought—despite my father's assurances to the contrary—that there must have been farming ancestors in our family line. I set out to prove this in a playful way by creating this photograph. The use of a live bird in the portrait was out of the question, so I rented a chicken study specimen from the Royal Ontario Museum's collection. Since the specimen was not meant for display, it did not remotely look alive. I could only use the top of the bird, as the rest of it was in the wrong pose. It also lacked an eye. Thankfully, I found images of chickens of sufficient resolution on the internet to provide the chicken with a realistic eye. I chose the name Naftuli Goldszajn for the man in the portrait from a genealogical database that lists people sharing my family name (in its original spelling) who lived in Krasnik, Poland. (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 78)

The brief narrative account that Goldchain provides for the self-portrait of Naftuli Goldszajn presents his family album as a highly subjective form of self-expression. Despite his father's insistence otherwise, and having no concrete proof to rely on other than a historical book on Polish Jews, Goldchain invents a family member based on his own interpretation of his family's history. The same tension between fact and fiction in the representation of the family album is also found in the self-portrait Goldchain creates of Doña Reizl Goldszajn Rozenfeld:

When I mentioned to my makeup and hair artist that I had acquired a wig that looked interesting, she agreed to style it, and in the process I conceived of the character of a middle-aged, stylish woman suffering from chronic, mild depression—there is one in every family. I called this fictional relative Reizl Goldszajn and located her in Argentina, where many of my relatives still live. (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 108)

By locating Reizl Goldszajn in Argentina, where many of his relatives still live, Goldchain provides an authentic context for his fictional ancestor as a way to emphasize the historical factors that influence artistic creation in the album. In this respect, the historical accuracy of the album becomes subordinate to the creative processes at work in *I Am My Family*. By recreating the past with fictional memories, Goldchain's album becomes a performance of his own subjective experience and interpretation of his family's identity. At the same time, through word and image relations, Goldchain succeeds at staging the complex connections between reality and art in autobiography and photography.

Performing the past: the family without the familialism in Goldchain's album

As the family's keepsake, the album creates the illusion of continuity between past and present lives through collective acts of remembering. By performing its memorializing function, the album looks to the past to construct scenes of family life. Passed down through generations, family albums depict the family as the foundation of a person's existence. At the same time, the tensions created between past and present experiences destabilize the representation of identity in the album.

In *I Am My Family*, the retrospective practices of autobiography and photography are combined to enact the conflicts engendered by the complex and fragmented history of Goldchain's family. Although photography and life writing share an undeniable relationship with the past, the past depicted by both modes of expression refers to a moment in time, as Barthes puts it, "that has been" but could never be reproduced. In Goldchain's album, documenting the past of a family that has become increasingly dispersed through generations engages the concept of time as a key element in the portrayal of the family's identity. As Goldchain reveals, the ancestors pictured in the album's black and white self-portraits—themselves reminiscent of the past—tell a story of a history pervaded by lost, forgotten and censured memories:

In the self-portraits of *I Am My Family*, the ghostly figures of my ancestors emerge into visibility while simultaneously concealing themselves behind my own likeness and behind the conventions of the photographic portrait. The attempt to make them present in a corporeal way—through a genetic resemblance and through the phenomenality of the photograph—paradoxically also signals their absence, their pastness, and their irretrievability. As a work of inheritance, *I Am My Family* seeks a kind of justice as my family ghosts reappear to point our forgetting and demand a reversal of the process of erasure of familial histories caused by historical events, as well as by daily living. *I Am My Family* engages portraiture as a way to suggest that the way we connect with our familial past through gazing at family photographs is complex. It suggests that when regarding a family portrait we are also looking at a self-portrait as we project ourselves into the life of the person portrayed and seek a connection. (Goldchain, *I Am My Family* 24)

Although Goldchain uses self-portraits to achieve the illusion of a complete and unified family history, he alludes to the impossible task of recovering the true referent of each of his photographs. This becomes evident through the self-portraits in which every ancestor portrayed is assigned a date of death. By referring to his ancestors as "ghostly figures," Goldchain detaches the photographic image from its referential function and adapts the traditional memorial processes of the family album to an innovative exploration of the past.

Goldchain creates a family album that is just as much a token of absence as it is a testament of presence through a performance of what Barthes refers to as the “family without familialism” (Barthes, *Roland Barthes* 27). In *I Am My Family*, Goldchain’s ancestors are removed from the familial context; the photographs do not display any aspects of the family experience. The family is disassociated from domestic scenes of family life: the symbols of ideal family life such as children, pets, the house with the white picket fence, etc., are absent from the images. Through the egocentric practice of self-portraiture, Goldchain remains the only consistent and recognizable person in the album and becomes the sole articulation of identity within the family’s collective history. For Goldchain then, *his story* becomes the site of meaning for the Goldchain family history. Both photography and personal writing collaborate in the album to show how Goldchain identifies himself in relation to his familial past and to portray identity as an experience of the present, through which the past is rediscovered, manipulated and transformed.

Goldchain creates a family album that is self-reflexive in its ability to combine photography and personal writing in a deliberate network of associations. In its representation of identity as the site of intersecting realities, in which departures and reunions, separations and reconciliations constitute the defining elements of self-expression, Goldchain’s family album echoes the statement made by Octavio Paz at the beginning of this study, in which man’s existence is summed up as a network of intersecting relationships—implied through the metaphor of the family—through which the past is remembered and reconstructed in the present. Along with artists such as Hermine Freed, Lorraine O’Grady, and Lorie Novak, who explore the concept of identity in the family album through art, Goldchain uses artistic practices to experiment with personal and cultural expressions of self. In his album, Goldchain illustrates that “portraiture is [...] a calculating art of (mis)representation” (Brilliant 35) that presents identity as an imaginative and subjective construction of memory (Brilliant 90). The self-portrait is presented in Goldchain’s album “[...] as a statement about the fabrication of identity” that could be interpreted as “the specific task of [the artist] who responds to the human presence in time and place, and desire[s] to preserve it [...]” (Brilliant 88). In *I Am My Family*, Goldchain’s self-portraits fulfill the fictional expectation of recovering the past to portray identity as a performance of memory and its relationship to art.

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: © Rafael Goldchain. *I Am My Family*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008, 33. Princeton Architectural Press has graciously granted permission for the reproduction of this image, for which Rafael Goldchain is the sole owner of copyright.

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