

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Cindy Sherman

Mobile Tour Press Script

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Artwork	Stop #
<i>Untitled, 2010</i>	600
Introduction to <i>Cindy Sherman</i>	601
<i>Untitled Film Stills, 1977-80</i>	602
<i>Untitled #137, 1984</i>	603
<i>The Centerfolds, 1981</i>	604
<i>Untitled #93, 1981</i>	605
<i>Untitled #92, 1981</i>	606
<i>The History Portraits, 1989-90</i>	607
<i>Untitled #224, 1990</i>	608
<i>Untitled #175, 1987</i>	609
Video: Sherman's workshop	609b
<i>The Head Shots, 2000-2002</i>	610
<i>Untitled #417, 2004</i>	611
<i>The Society Portraits, 2008</i>	612
Video: Sherman goes shopping	612b
<i>Untitled #466, 2008</i>	613

600

Untitled Mural, 2010



NARRATOR

This floor-to-ceiling photographic mural was created by Cindy Sherman specifically for this exhibition and space.

Eva Respini is Associate Curator in the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

EVA RESPINI

What you see here is the artist herself posing in front of her own camera and, these characters, while they all look different, are, in fact, the artist herself. They have jumped out of the frame and tower over you and surround you on all walls. And if you look more carefully, you'll see that Sherman has altered her features through Photoshop. She's narrowed her eyes slightly, or elongated her nose, or enhanced the jowls. And by using this technology, Sherman has really stepped into a new artistic endeavor.

NARRATOR

Cindy Sherman

SHERMAN

I started doing some stuff lately where the background is abstracted, I didn't use any makeup. I started changing the faces digitally to just slightly alter the faces. So it's kind of like using Photoshop instead of makeup.

And just tweaking, like, the eyes, maybe just like closer together, or higher up, or smaller. Or like, I'll flesh out the cheeks more, or something. But they all have different wigs, and then these weird costumes.

These murals are an example of Sherman's continued artistic vigor and her experimentation. But of course, they refer to issues she's explored throughout her whole career.

Cindy Sherman Mobile Tour Press Script

As you go into the exhibition you'll see all of the photographs are of the artist herself, in a variety of different guises, characters and personas.

601

Introduction to *Cindy Sherman*



NARRATOR

Welcome to *Cindy Sherman*, a retrospective of the artist's work from the mid-1970s to the present. Sherman's provocative exploration of contemporary identity through meticulously constructed characters and staged tableaux has made her one of the most influential artists working today.

This gallery presents some of Sherman's early works from the 1970s. Go over to the image on your screen, *Untitled #479*. You're looking at a sort of continuum - the artist shifts one element per frame, step by step, until a complete transformation occurs.

Here, Sherman describes her own fascination with dressing up for the camera.

CINDY SHERMAN

I don't know if it was therapeutic, or out of boredom, or just my own fascination with thinking about makeup in the mid-70's when women aren't supposed to wear makeup. You're supposed to be all *au natural*, and yet, I still had this love for it, but it was, secret, I wasn't supposed to like it. So, I would just play around and turn into a character in my bedroom.

NARRATOR

Throughout the tour, you'll hear more from Sherman, with recordings drawn from a 2011 interview conducted at her studio for the exhibition catalogue. You'll also hear from the organizers of the exhibition: Eva Respini, Associate Curator in the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Lucy Gallun, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Photography at MoMA.

602

Untitled Film Stills, 1977-80



EVA RESPINI

In this gallery, you'll see the *Untitled Film Stills*, which is Sherman's seminal body of work, made between 1977 and 1980.

NARRATOR

Curator, Eva Respini

EVA RESPINI

These black-and-white pictures explore the stereotypes of film. You see Sherman herself posing in a variety of guises that refer to the publicity still, usually shot on set and used to advertise a film. She's referring to 1950s and '60s film, B-movies, or European art house films. However, none of these photographs depict actual films. These are completely fictional moments that are made to look like stills.

The success of this body of work is in the seemingly endless variation of female types that Sherman has presented to us—the girl on the run, the bombshell, the bored housewife, the vamp. Sherman has mined these stereotypes to great effect and presented us with a variety of characters that are familiar, but also spark our own narrative.

While the photographs can be appreciated individually, their success really is in their multiplicity an encyclopedia or a cataloging of female types.

NARRATOR

This is the only series of photographs Sherman shot outside her studio.

EVA RESPINI

All of these photographs were set up kind of guerrilla style. She carried around a little suitcase with a wig or some costumes. And then quickly she would turn into that persona, snap a few pictures, and then develop them.

One of the hallmarks of this body of work is that the prints themselves are unremarkable. These were made to seem cheap, like throwaway prints. The publicity still was eight by

ten inches, glossy. It wasn't treated like an artwork, and the format of these *Untitled Film Stills* mimics that.

603

Untitled #137, 1984



NARRATOR

Throughout her career, Sherman has received numerous commissions from high fashion designers and magazines. Her photographs showcased their work while at the same time critiquing the fashion industry, feminine roles, and class as a whole.

Lucy Gallun, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

LUCY GALLUN

Sherman has done a number of commissions for the fashion industry throughout her career. This one was done in 1984, for French *Vogue*. She was given clothing from Comme Des Garçons, Issey Miyake, couture designers. It was a way to engage with this fashion world, to use these designer clothes in an interesting way, but also to allow her to make her own work.

This woman is bruised. She's got makeup caked on. Her hair is messy, she's wearing this heavy coat. She's slouching, and the folds of fabric are bunching up over her torso. These aren't the things we expect in a normal fashion shot. She looks unhappy, sullen, there's something depressed about her. But at the same time, she's wearing designer clothes. Sherman is looking at what kind of status these clothes have.

604

The Centerfolds, 1981



NARRATOR

Curator Eva Respini

EVA RESPINI

In this gallery you see all twelve photographs from the series known as *The Centerfolds*. They all measure two by four feet, which, at the time, was huge for photography. The scale really allows the viewer to be immersed in the space of the photograph.

Their horizontal format refers to the centerfolds in men's erotic magazines. These women all seem in various states of emotion. Some seem like they're daydreaming, others seem terrified or angry. And they're never looking at the camera.

Here we have a female photographer who's assuming both roles, of photographer and pin-up, which usually is a male and female dynamic. And here she's really reversed that.

NARRATOR

Cindy Sherman

CINDY SHERMAN

I wanted to fill this centerfold format, and the reclining figure allows you to do that. But I also wanted it to be something in the sort of feminist realm, you know, you open it and see a woman lying there, and you then look at it closer and suddenly realize, 'Oops, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to invade this private moment.' So I did want to make people feel uncomfortable.

EVA RESPINI

They were originally commissioned by *Artforum* as centerfolds for the magazine. But in fact, they were never published because the editor at the time felt that they would be misunderstood.

605

Untitled #93, 1981



NARRATOR

Curator, Eva Respini.

EVA RESPINI

When Sherman first exhibited these photographs, they were well-received among the critics and the art establishment. However, there were a number of debates on the issue of the victimization of women. *Untitled #93*, which shows a blond woman, sweaty, clutching at her sheets, was described by some critics as a woman who looked as if she had been abused. In fact, this was not at all the intention of the artist. These photographs are all untitled for a very good reason; Sherman refuses to give titles to her works because she doesn't want to lay on a narrative.

Sherman has...made the viewers complicit in the idea of looking and the idea of photographing. They've come upon this very intimate moment...where these women are alone. And since they all seem to be in these vulnerable positions, it really makes us, the viewers, aware that we're being voyeurs.

606

Untitled #92, 1981



NARRATOR

Curatorial Assistant, Lucy Gallun

LUCY GALLUN

This series was made in a Cinemascope format, as if each of these heroines are up there on the screen. The camera captures the subject in a vulnerable position, from above. In this case the subject is prone on the floor. But she's come up a little bit as if she sees

Cindy Sherman Mobile Tour Press Script

something off the frame that she's scared of. She's curled around, so we see her back, and we see the terrified look on her face.

The light is hitting her face and shoulders, and there's this darkness around her, as if she's the heroine in a horror movie. We don't get a pin-up girl. Unlike a typical centerfold she's cropped so that we don't even see her whole head, her whole body.

607

The History Portraits, 1989-90



NARRATOR

Curator, Eva Respini

EVA RESPINI

This gallery presents a selection from Sherman's series, *The History Portraits*. With the exception of just a few photographs, they are not based on actual Old Master paintings, but they refer to the genre, in general. All of the Old Master painters were men. And here we have Sherman, who is a woman, not just posing, but also taking on the role of the Old Master.

Sherman was inspired much more by the reproduction of Old Master painting in books, rather than by going to the churches or museums. Since she mainly worked through reproductions I think it's really about a removal from the original referent. It's about a representation of a representation of a representation.

Sherman has created her costumes and backdrops with mostly contemporary materials. She was using whatever was lying around or whatever she found in the flea market.

Immediately when you see these pictures, you know they're fake. You see the ill-fitting wigs, these prosthetic noses that are not quite fitted properly. You see the makeup that's a

little bit too pancake. These are less than graceful portraits of nobility. And they're presented with a kind of mocking nod and wink. And this is all very intentional on the part of the artist, to reveal the artifice of photography, and the artifice of painting.

608

Untitled #224 (History Portraits), 1990



NARRATOR

Curatorial Assistant, Lucy Gallun

LUCY GALLUN

In this history portrait, Sherman has taken on the role of Caravaggio's *Sick Bacchus*, the painting from the late 16th century. It's different from some of the other works in the series that may be more caricatured. In this one we see this mimicking of the original painting much more clearly.

NARRATOR

You can see an image of the original painting by Caravaggio on your screen now.
[ON SCREEN: Carravaggio's *Sick Bacchus*]

LUCY GALLUN

The costume consists exactly of what Caravaggio is wearing in his painting. She's in the exact same pose, clutching these grapes in her hand. Caravaggio's painting is thought to be a self-portrait of the artist as the Roman god of wine, Bacchus. So this picture has a number of layers. It's a female artist in the role of a male artist in the role of the Roman god of wine. It's a way of reminding us of art history.

This series was one of the first times Sherman took on the guises of male characters. She has this deftness with makeup, with prosthetics, with costume. But in another way, they're not completely illusionistic. We're always able to remember that this is a portrait by Sherman.

609

Untitled #175, 1987



NARRATOR

Curator Eva Respini

EVA RESPINI

In the late 1980s and mid-1990s, Sherman removed herself from her photographs. After many years of being her own model she was sick of using herself and she wanted to try to see what it would be like to create a scenario for the camera without having to always pose.

NARRATOR

Cindy Sherman

CINDY SHERMAN

I just was nervous that I was too dependent on myself, and so I wanted to see if I could still tell a story or make an image without depending on myself. But it was much harder—and that's when I started using the mannequins and masks and things like that.

EVA RESPINI

She created grotesque scenarios that suggest very dark narratives. Here you have cupcakes and other sweets which have been half-eaten and then discarded on the floor, and then you have some substance which looks like vomit, which suggests a scenario of perhaps bulimia or something gone awry.

NARRATOR

Several of Sherman's *Sex Pictures* are also on view in this gallery.

EVA RESPINI

With the *Sex Pictures*, Sherman used dolls that she ordered from medical catalogs. She manipulated the dolls, sometimes combining various parts to create hybrid bodies that wouldn't exist in the real world. Often she applied makeup to the dolls, as well as fake hair to really create these horrific combinations.

NARRATOR

Sherman has a vast collection of props and prosthetics. “Go deeper” to see a selection of the objects she has in her studio.

609b. VIDEO SUBLEVEL – Sherman’s workshop

Cindy Sherman leads a tour of her prop and costume storage. Footage courtesy of Art21. Duration: 30 seconds.

610

Head Shots, 2000



NARRATOR

Curator Eva Respini

EVA RESPINI

What you see presented here are a variety of female characters that refer to the headshot. They look like actors that are auditioning for a job. You see the aging beauty queen, the old hippie, the tough girl on the corner.

These women seem to be holding onto an idea of youth. There's a kind of fragility to these characters. There's quite a bit of empathy in these photographs. They're not just a callous caricature of a certain type of woman. But in fact, show a more nuanced view into the process of aging.

These photographs also refer to the standard portrait studio. They're presented very straightforward just a character sitting and looking straight into the camera. They evoke, perhaps, photographs that one might have taken in the portrait studio, at Sears.

And I think this body of work really reflects on the nature of portraiture, but really the history of portrait photography.

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These photographs were first shown in 2000 in Beverly Hills, around the time of the Oscars. So the referent to film and the cycle of desire and failed ambition that permeates Hollywood were very much at the heart of this body of work.

611

Untitled #417, 2004



NARRATOR

In 2003 and 2004, Sherman made a series of clown pictures. Curator, Eva Respini.

EVA RESPINI

These pictures evoke circus posters, but they represent a range of emotional states, from hysterical passion to tragedy. What you see here is a very disturbing photograph of three heads, the same clown with a blue wig and a bulbous nose.

There's a deeply unsettling quality to this photograph. It's not just the Day-Glo colors of the background or the garish makeup; but the combination of figures. These are all the same figure that she has Photoshopped into the same picture. You have this large head with two smaller heads that are peeking in with this very sinister grin, to create a grotesque or scary narrative.

NARRATOR

In this series, Sherman explored the personalities and emotions of the people who dress up and perform as clowns.

CINDY SHERMAN

When I was researching it online, I saw all of these pictures of people trying to promote themselves for children's parties. With some of them you're thinking, this one's an alcoholic, that one's a child molester, that one feels pathetic because no one loves him—so they would want kids to laugh at them. I started thinking about it in terms of the character underneath the makeup.

612

Society Portraits, 2008



NARRATOR

Curator, Eva Respini.

EVA RESPINI

These pictures feature women of a certain age from the top echelons of polite society. All of the photographs are in opulent frames, presumably to be installed in the grand rooms or foyers of these women's mansions. The artist photographed herself against a green screen and then she made photographs, throughout New York City, as well as in Spain, and then digitally inserted the backdrops.

In a certain sense, all of these characters are vulgar, and quite tragic. If you look closely you see the telltale signs of cosmetic alteration, thick makeup, costume jewelry—all elements that reveal themselves as an artificial façade.

These photographs were made in 2008, before the financial collapse, and the size alone seem to be a comment on an age of excess, on class and a status-obsessed society. These pictures are not just about the process of aging, but about the way in which these women are trapped by their own status and by the demands placed on them.

While these photographs have been interpreted as cruel, there is a warmth towards these characters that the artist has felt.

NARRATOR

Cindy Sherman often assembles the clothes for her photo shoots by shopping at used clothing stores. “Go deeper” to see her explore what one store has to offer.

612b. VIDEO SUBLEVEL – Sherman goes shopping

Cindy Sherman goes shopping at a used clothing store. Footage courtesy of Art21.
Duration: 1 minute 11 seconds.

613

Untitled #466, 2008



NARRATOR

Eva Respini, Associate Curator in the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

EVA RESPINI

We see a woman in an opulent caftan posing against a fabulous backdrop. Sherman photographed herself in her own studio against a green screen, and then went out and photographed various locations and digitally inserted them. In this case, the backdrop is actually the Cloisters, in New York City.

At first glance, she seems very well put together. But if you look at her shoes you see that they're cheap plastic slippers that, in fact, Sherman bought at the dollar store. And she's wearing these thick stockings, the kind of stockings you would wear if you had varicose veins. And so this kind of glossy perfection of this woman unravels the moment you start to look carefully.

This photograph is larger than life. The scale allows the viewer to enter in and see all the various details. You'll start to see some signs of aging such as wrinkles around the eyes or loose skin around the neck. And these are all details that Sherman is presenting to show a tension between the surface of how women present themselves to the world, and the reality that lurks underneath. It's also a comment on how an obsession with class and status and youth are very much at the heart of culture today.