



Cindy Sherman *Untitled #568* 2016. Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, New York. © the artist.

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Cindy Sherman

19 NOVEMBER 2016 – 19 MARCH 2017

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Cindy Sherman is a chameleon; her own image is at the centre of an astonishing array of character studies, developed over decades. Sherman has positioned photography as an important contemporary art form by exploring society's fascination with appearance, narcissism, aspirational culture, emotional fragility and the cult of celebrity. She is widely recognised as the most significant artist to have emerged from the 'Pictures generation' in New York in the late 1970s, and she continues to influence generations of artists. By focussing on Sherman's work since 2000, this exhibition charts the artist's transition from analogue to digital photography.

This is the first New Zealand exhibition of Sherman's large-scale photographs made since 2000. Presenting photographs that feature Sherman dressed in theatrical costumes, series from this period include 'head shots' 2000–02, 'clowns' 2003–04, 'society portraits' 2008 and 'murals' 2010, as well as two series made in association with fashion houses; 'Balenciaga' 2007–08 and 'Chanel' 2010–12. The show also includes a brand new series of photographs completed this year.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Cindy Sherman (b.1954) is one of the most influential artists of the last 50 years. After graduating from Buffalo's State University of New York in 1976, Sherman relocated to New York where she began making her most well-known series the 'Untitled Film Stills' 1977–80, in which she inhabited the female tropes found in Hollywood films.

After masquerading as a range of feminine characters, Sherman went on to explore horror and the grotesque using props and mannequins. Since 2000, Sherman has returned as the model in her works and has begun using digital technology.

Sherman has exhibited at prestigious institutions all over the world, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2012); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2012); Dallas Museum of Art (2012); Vertikale Galerie (Sammlung Verbund), Vienna (2012); Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2013); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2014); and Kunsthau Zürich (2014).

CONCEPTS

Working alone in her studio, Sherman performs in front of her mirror and camera, adopting an extraordinarily varied cast of characters. She describes her face as 'a canvas': 'I'll see a photograph of a character and try to copy them on to my face'.¹ Although every picture is an image of the artist, none are self-portraits. The work's fictional status is confirmed repeatedly by the artist in interviews: 'I just happen to be the model . . . but it could be anybody as far as I'm concerned; it doesn't have anything to do with me'.² Sherman is not trying to project an alternative (ideal or fantasy) picture of herself: 'she herself is not what the works are about. They are about whatever she, as her own medium of representation, has transformed . . . [herself] to show'.³

1 Simon Hattenstone, 'Cindy Sherman: Me, myself and I', The Guardian [UK], 15 January 2011, <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jan/15/cindy-sherman-interview>>, viewed March 2016.

2 Emily Stokes, 'Me, myself and why', Financial Times, 7 January 2011, <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/9c5ecd28-19e1-11e0-b921-00144feab49a.html>>, viewed March 2016.

3 Arthur C Danto, Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Historical Present, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1990, p.120.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Read the exhibition catalogue *Cindy Sherman*, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, 2016.
- Search online for a series of short videos about Cindy Sherman on QAGOMA TV <http://tv.qagoma.qld.gov.au/>
- Watch students and QAGOMA staff discuss Cindy Sherman's art practice in a Q&A session designed exclusively for schools. <http://tv.qagoma.qld.gov.au/2016/08/16/cindy-sherman-qa-for-secondary-schools/>

TERMINOLOGY

- **Trope:** a recognisable theme or character type.
- **Archetype:** a typical example.
- **Parody/satire/caricature:** humorous acts of imitation, ridicule and exaggeration.
- **Constructed photography:** the practice of fabricating or constructing the subject of a photograph, as opposed to candid or documentary photography. Constructed photography often emphasises artifice: lighting, staging, and styling.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

Research Cindy Sherman's work online and have a class discussion. What did you find out about the artist and her work? Does her work remind you of something you have seen before? What are you curious to see and find out at the Gallery?

POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Refresh your memory

Describe and analyse the image overleaf.

- Look closely and describe what you see.
- Think about the composition of the image. How have visual elements been used? Think about line, shape, value, texture, colour and the treatment of pictorial space.
- What do you notice about the subject's body language, facial expression, make-up, clothing and accessories? Based on what you've noticed, speculate about their character.
- Describe the background. How do the subject and background relate?
- What kind of reality is being presented here?
- Describe the effect this image has on you. What emotional or intellectual response might the artist be inviting?

Review and reflect

- What did you learn at the Gallery?
- What ideas or techniques could you explore in your own work/inquiry?

Write a short story

- Build on the work you have done in the Gallery to produce a short story about one of the characters in Sherman's work. Focus on the details of their appearance, their posture, gaze and projected emotion. Imagine their ambitions and attitudes, and develop a backstory about the characters' desire to be something more.

Explore satirists and caricaturists

- Research the tradition of artists who have used satire and caricature in their work.
- Create a caricature that parodies a current trend. Exaggerate the most identifiable aspects of the trend. Refer to the techniques used by artists who have contributed to the caricature tradition.

She belongs to belongs to a tradition stretching from Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer, through William Hogarth, James Gillray, Honoré Daumier and Pablo Picasso, to her contemporaries Robert Crumb, George Condo and John Currin.

Robert Leonard, 'Everything and its opposite', *Cindy Sherman* [exhibition catalogue], Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2016, p.45.

Investigate digital process

- Watch a short video about some of Sherman's digital works then explore this process. <http://tv.qagoma.qld.gov.au/2016/07/06/cindy-sherman-vignettes-and-digital-putty/>
- Find 10 to 15 digital images of anonymous people from vastly different walks of life performing the same action, holding the same pose or making the same facial expression. The ideal images will be of a medium to high resolution with an easily erasable background.
- Using selection tools on Photoshop (or similar software), remove the background of your images and replace them with different scenes. Using digital editing techniques merge and rearrange the facial features of the figures in your images.
- Use the clone stamp, spot healing tool, blending tools and puppet warp to transform the faces. Try to keep your images within the realm of believability.
- Merge your layers and apply a vignette filter to darken the corners of your final images.
- Reflect on the relationship between subject and background. What was the effect of placing the figure into different scenes?

The information and activities on this resource have been adapted from those developed by QAGOMA Learning.