

Cindy Sherman was born in New Jersey in 1954 and raised in suburban Long Island. Sherman attended the State University College at Buffalo, New York, where she initially studied painting. While studying painting, she often did many self-portraits and realistic copies of images she found in magazines and photographs. She failed the requisite introductory photography course because of her difficulties with the technological aspects of making a print, and she credits her next photography teacher with introducing her to conceptual art. After she graduated in 1977, Sherman moved to New York. Soon after, she began her most famous project, *Untitled Film Stills*. As early as 1979, articles about Sherman's work were appearing in *Arts Magazine* and *October*. In nearly ten years she has had over 30 one-person shows at museums and galleries all over the country and abroad. Over one hundred articles in many different kinds of magazines have focused on her work.

Cindy Sherman is most famous for her series *Untitled Film Stills* that she started at the end of 1977 and finished in 1980. She took many small black-and-white photographs of herself impersonating various female character types from old movies. These images spoke to a generation of baby boomer women who had grown up with these glamorous images at home on their televisions, taking such portrayals as cues for their future. Sherman's photographs create the effect of having put your VCR on pause during an old soap opera. The complete series was first exhibited at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC in 1995. This series totals to 69 different photographs. Similar characters appear in several photographs, resulting in mini series within the larger group. For example, the first six images feature the same blonde women at different points in her life and career. In each photograph, Sherman depicts herself alone, as a familiar but not specific film heroine in an appropriate movie-like setting. A few examples of these characters that she dresses herself up as are a young secretary in the city in *Untitled Film Still #21*, an innocent runaway like in *Untitled Film Still #48*, a seductress in a slip with a martini glass like in *Untitled Film Still #7*, and many more. Sherman's characters in the *Untitled Film Stills* are not specified which allows the viewer to create their own stories for these women in her photographs.

After Sherman finished her *Untitled Film Stills* series, she went on to do a series of color images in which each photograph was called *Untitled* followed by a number. These photographs were very similar and yet very different from her *Untitled Film Stills* series. These images also played on the idea of capturing some kind of performance in each photograph. All of these color images are all in an enclosed unidentifiable space, but that is not what is important in the photograph. The main idea is performance of Sherman herself. Sherman has directed the camera so that her performance, not the environment, monopolizes the image. Some examples of what these photographs portray are Sherman, in #87, lying blankly on a wooden painted floor holding a red and orange blanket, in #99 she is clearly furious, covering herself with a bright red towel, in #93, Sherman is hiding as if wounded under brown tousled sheets, and so on. These images also have that look of freeze-frame like the *Untitled Film Stills* series, yet they have a look that is clearly unique from the other series. They are much more modern and bold than the other photographs.

It is unknown how many or which of these images Sherman is actually the photographer. It is known that she is the model and the director of the photographs to some extent, but that is all. So who it was that actually took the photographs will remain a mystery.

I personally feel conflicted about Cindy Sherman's work. Her ideas seem interesting on the surface, but when I look a little bit harder I realize that there really isn't any depth to them. Sherman has someone else, who she gives no credit to at all, take photographs of herself dressed up as women in situations that create the view of women as manipulative, needy, vulnerable, pouty. Sherman's photographs do not comment on these stereotypes of women, they are merely a repetition of them. Her photographs do not comment on the many roles women are forced to assume and guide us toward a better understanding of female identity either. The one aspect of her photographs that she controls lacks any form of meaning or significance. Because the viewer knows that the subject of the photograph is the artist and not a real woman in a real situation, it makes the viewer delve into the photograph a little deeper than one would if it were a portrait, looking for some kind of message, but Sherman leaves us with nothing more than exactly what we see, and there is not enough in them for them to be a feast for the eyes alone. The only photographs that Sherman takes are of her performances of women who seem to have no sense of self, of women who seem objectified and stereotypical. Sherman is also very anti-photography. To begin with, there is the fact that she does not consider herself a photographer or her work photography. Secondly, she does not always take the photograph herself. Sherman calls all of her photographs "untitled" and seems to purposely make them visually uninteresting. All of this dismissing the idea of photography as the art of the specific and unique.