

Photographers



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Cindy Sherman Born in 1954 and still a formidable presence in the art world today, Cindy Sherman is one of the most interesting women photographers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Not showing much involvement in the arts during her youth, Sherman began her artistic career at Buffalo State College, where she originally worked with paint. She soon discarded painting in favor of photography when she realized that she “ could just use a camera and put [her] time into an idea instead” (Cindy Sherman. com). This disinterest in medium is reflected in the various works about and reviews of her: Danto says that “ photography is not her medium. It is, rather, a means to her artistic ends” (120). Sherman makes use of tripods and assorted paraphernalia in order to act as her own model, but clearly rates content above technique, as it is extremely difficult to find any information about her particular camera and printing methods. Her earlier works are mostly in black and white and are printed on film (Dorfman); later photographs are in color, but information on her printing techniques are unavailable. Most of Sherman's images, from her beginnings in 1979 up until the present day, are untitled but given a number. This emphasizes that her works gain meaning “ when seen as part of a project” (Danto, 121). Sherman's career can therefore be seen as a single entity, a commentary on society which has evolved as the artist behind them has developed. She is an important photographer in the modern era because she has revolutionized the self-portrait as a non-narcissistic means of expression. Danto suggests that her “ face must by now [in 1985] be the second most widely known face in the art world” (120), even though her intentions are not to self-publicize. Despite referring to feminism as “ theoretical bullshit” (Saner), Sherman has often been claimed as a feminist photographer, and has gone on record

complaining that her male contemporaries seem to earn more money than she does. A feminist sentiment comes through in much of Sherman's photography, in spite of her reluctance to associate her name with that particular term; this is just one of the artist's comments on society's flaws. Sherman's work is characterized by an unbalanced dichotomy of 'disturbing and funny', a thematic scheme which links all of her work, from the Untitled Film Stills of the 1970s to her clown series (2003). The balance between the qualities of 'disturbing' and 'funny' vary from picture to picture, but all remain shadowed by social commentary. One of these pictures – a six foot print of which sold for \$2, 700, 000 last year (Saner) – is called Untitled #153, and features Sherman, from the neck up, modelling as a muddied corpse against the green and black ground. Untitled #153 is representative of Sherman's art because it features her modelling a particular role: in this case, a creepy, doll-like dead body. The model stares blankly into the middle distance, her neck turned at such an angle as to suggest brokenness – the physical manifestation of an intangible theme of Sherman's work. The background reminds the viewer of Sherman's earlier work with stereotypes, particularly in the film stills, where the setting was often a reinforcement of the concept: in Untitled #153, the green and black ground highlights the terribleness of discarding something that was so valuable. In purely technical terms, the model's pose is very typical of Sherman. The diagonal placement of the model and the model's angled neck are both motifs of Sherman's art, appearing in almost every photograph she has composed. As a model Sherman never directly faces the camera, showing her face obliquely as if to hint at the fact that the photographer is also the photographed. Sherman clearly wished to tread a fine line between 'doll' and 'corpse' in Untitled

#153, and personally I think that this fine line was missed. The corpse looks a little too doll-like to be taken entirely seriously: the hairline is a little far back, an unnecessarily heavy-handed hint that it is a wig; if the vacant eyes had even a vestige of life in them, the commentary on how society treats women would be far more effective. Throwing a doll amongst the dirt is a child's mishap; throwing a dead body in the same place is a damning indictment of society, and I think Sherman showed the former but only suggested the latter. Perhaps in black and white this photograph would be more effective. Works Cited Anonymous. "Biography." Cindy Sherman, A Tribute Site, n. d. Available at <http://www.cindysherman.com/biography.shtml>. Web. Accessed 26 April 2011. Danto, Arthur Coleman. *Encounters & Reflections: Art in the Historical Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Print. Dorfman, Elsa. "Cindy Sherman, A Review." ElsaDorfman.com, August 1985. Available at <http://elsadorfman.com/cindy.htm>. Web. Accessed 26 April 2011. Saner, Emine. "Cindy Sherman." *The Guardian Online*, 8 March 2011. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2011/mar/08/cindy-sherman-100-women>. Web. Accessed 26 April 2011.