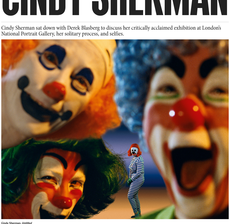
Spring 2020 Issue

IN CONVERSATION

CINDY SHERMAN

Cindy Sherman sat down with Derek Blasberg to discuss her critically acclaimed exhibition at London's National Portrait Gallery, her military process, and selfies.



Cindy Sherman, untitled #413, 1989, Ektachrome color print, 72 ⅞ × 48 ⅞ inches (183 × 124 cm). Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.

DEREK BLASBERG: My favorite photo was the re-creation of your mother.

CINDY SHERMAN: For the catalogue, they hired someone to photograph each piece in the exhibition. Initially I said, "Well, I don't want to do that." I had actually already been making wallpaper for a couple of months, so I said, "Why don't I just make a piece of wallpaper that I can hang behind my mom? Dress self—but they did a great job. There was talk of sending every piece to Hong Kong and photographing it there, but I didn't want to do that. I'm glad it turned out like rather than having that and just having to do things there.

DB: You would assume artists are apprehensive about showing the circle of their creative process, but you seem to have no issue showing people their trickling thinks, right?

CS: I like things to be clear. In my early stuff, you can see the cord that's attached to the director when I'm taking the pictures, or you can tell they're in a studio, or you can see that I'm wearing a wig.

DB: It was fun to see so many pieces that I didn't know existed.

CS: After we figured out that was what we were going to do, I realized this was going to be a great office.

DB: What do you think of people who compare your work to selfies or self-portraiture?

CS: I don't actually see one of the work I do as being self-portraiture. I always refer to those characters in the third person, not as though they're me.

DB: You once said you like the word "freak."

CS: The thing I hate most about selfies is the way most people are just trying to look pretty and they're all in the same pose. Everybody's doing the same thing, and it's a pose that's asking for the most flattering, which isn't at all the end result I want. I don't want people looking at my work and thinking, "Oh, I'm pretty sure I'm not as pretty as that." I want people to be able to see more about stuffing a face into a hole and seeing what happens to the face when it's squished. I'm glad to have had this rather lavish show because people have paid more attention to the pieces. The time is slightly wide angle, which isn't unusually very long for a museum show, but it's long enough that people can't be too distracted or vulnerable or insecure because they're standing around staring at those pretty photos of themselves. They're just wanting people to like them.

DB: How did you get so hungry?

CS: I'd been hearing about Instagram all the time but I didn't really know what it was. I thought it was for people who like to post photos of their dogs. I thought, "Well, I'll just share photos of my vacation." And instead, I started using it as a way to post photos of my work and I ended up discovering all these different sorts of subcultures, like people who do nothing but post photos of their toilets, or people who do nothing but post photos of twin-faced models who have dressed in identical outfits.

DB: How often do you post?

CS: I was just thinking about the last one. It's been over a month or something. It's more challenging now because I feel like I've done everything people want me to do. I'm waiting for new things to explore or new things to discover.

Image posted by Cindy Sherman, Instagram, Caption: "Sexy Eye"

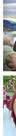


Image posted by Cindy Sherman, Instagram, Caption: "Ski"

DB: How do you find your apps?

CS: Well, a lot of it is just people recommending things. And sometimes I'm looking for something, and I'll go to the app store and I'll type in a word that means what you are basically cross-functioning with, and there's something you want. If I want to make a short a-field of green, I can. Or a few pic's in a row of a moving object where I feel like I'm just repeating a lot of what I've already done.

DB: You're the only person I know who uses Facetune to make themselves look worse, right?

CS: Laughing! Yeah, that's so right! Funny looking! Or odd!

DB: Let's talk about your history. You were born in New Jersey and you started as a young girl in Long Island. You were the youngest of five. Your parents were very supportive of your creative pursuits.

CS: I think it isn't a little bit to dress up. But while most of my friends wanted to be ballerinas or princesses for Halloween, I'd want to be a witch or a monster or an old lady. I don't know why—to me that just seemed funny. My mom, I'm sure, was very happy that I was not a little girl who was dressed like Shirley Temple or a beauty queen and she's wanted to dress me up like that. She was very supportive of my creative pursuits, but I think she was also very happy that I was the oldest of my family feeling like I didn't fit in, or maybe if I was a different person they would accept me. It's something to.

I think I was always interested in fashion and the idea of selfies. I remember, in 1977, I was in Minneapolis and I saw a magazine in a newsstand with a young girl in Long Island. She looks like she's wearing a dress that I'd wear, and I'm looking at the photo and I'm thinking, "Oh, I'm with the dress of the school week on it and I made little paper dolls and I'm cutting out the dress and I'm putting it on the paper doll." I'm in high school, I'm a little bummed out the idea of those little outfits. It's part of the dress and called Doll Clothes.

DB: I saw that doll clothes could draw it in college.

CS: College was where I went back to drawing up. Actually, now that I think about it, I guess I was kind of a little bummed out that I wasn't a little girl who wanted to look like different people but that I felt like it was also therapeutic.

DB: Do you think dressing up as an adult satisfies childhood joy?

CS: Well, it's definitely still fun.

DB: When did you start photographing yourself?

CS: I didn't have the money to hire someone. I didn't want to feel I was teacher who was out of. I hadn't more about the technological part of it." Because that's why I failed the first time [laughter]. Growing up, I was dedicated to painting, and I was very, very, very,