

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Cindy Sherman

Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Limmatstrasse
9 June – 16 September 2023



Cindy Sherman, considered one of the important American artists of her generation, debuts new work this June at Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Limmatstrasse, coinciding with Zurich Art Weekend 2023. In the new works on view, the artist collages parts of her own face to construct the identities of various characters, using digital manipulation to accent the layered aspects and plasticity of the self. The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue by Hauser & Wirth Publishers and coincides with two museum shows by the artist: 'Cindy Sherman – Tapestries' at ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Denmark and 'Cindy Sherman: Anti-Fashion' at Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Germany.

Sherman's ground-breaking photographs have interrogated themes around representation and identity in contemporary media for over four decades. Since the early 2000s, Sherman has constructed personae with digital manipulation, capturing the fractured sense of self in modern society—a concern the artist has uniquely encapsulated from the outset of her career. As critic and curator Gabriele Schor writes on her process, 'Sherman's complex analysis of her face and her subtle employment of expression indicates that the working method of making up and costuming the self enables two processes: an intuitive and fluid process motivated by curiosity, and an intended process whose stimulus is conceptual and which has a 'subject matter.'

In the new body of work, Sherman has removed any scenic backdrops or mise-en-scène—the focus of this series is the face. She combines a digital collaging technique using black and white and colour

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photographs with other traditional modes of transformation, such as make-up, wigs and costumery, to create a series of unsettling characters who laugh, twist, squint and grimace in front of the camera. To create the fractured characters, Sherman has photographed isolated parts of her body—her eyes, nose, lips, skin, hair, ears—which she cuts, pastes and stretches onto a foundational image, ultimately constructing, deconstructing and then reconstructing a new face.

In the double role of both photographer and model, Sherman upends the usual dynamic between artist and subject. Here, the sitter does not technically exist—all portraits are comprised of composites of the artist's face—however, they still read as classical portraiture and, despite the layers, the image still gives a true impression of the 'sitter'. Tightly cropped, with frames full of hair, stretched-out faces or swathes of material, Sherman's construction of her characters disrupt the voyeur-gaze and subject-object binaries that are often associated with the tradition of portraiture. In works such as 'Untitled #661' (2023), subtle changes, such as the positioning of a towel, the copy and pasting of an eyebrow from one image to another, or the elongation of a facial feature, alter the entire demeanour and representation of the imagined 'sitter.'



This type of warping of the face is akin to the use of prosthetics that Sherman began using in the mid 1980s in series such as *History Portraits* (1988) or her later series *Masks* from the 1990s, exploring the more grotesque or abject aspects of humanity. Like her use of costumes, wigs and makeup, the application of prosthetics would often be left exposed, breaking, rather than upholding, any sense of illusion. Similarly to the use of prosthetics, the use of digital manipulation in her new series exaggerates the tensions between identity and artifice.

This is heightened in works such as 'Untitled #631' (2010/2023) and 'Untitled #652' (2023), where Sherman combines both black and white and coloured fragments, highlighting the presence of the artist's hand and disrupting any perception of reality, whilst also harking back to the hand-coloured and hand-cut works that she made in the 1970s. By employing this layering technique, Sherman creates a site of multiplicity, exploring the notion that identity is a complex, and often constructed, human characteristic that is impossible to capture in a singular picture.

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About the artist

Born in 1954 in Glen Ridge NJ, Cindy Sherman lives and works in New York NY. Her groundbreaking work has interrogated themes around representation and identity in contemporary media for over four decades. Coming to prominence in the late 1970s with the Pictures Generation group—alongside artists such as Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince and Louise Lawler—Sherman first turned her attention to photography at Buffalo State College where she studied art in the early 1970s. In 1977, shortly after moving to New York City, she began her critically acclaimed series of Untitled Film Stills. Sherman continued to channel and reconstruct familiar personas known to the collective psyche, often in unsettling ways, and by the mid to late 1980s, the artist's visual language began to explore the more grotesque aspects of humanity through the lens of horror and the abject, as seen in works such as Fairy Tales (1985) and Disasters (1986-89). These highly visceral images saw the artist introduce visible prostheses and mannequins into her work, which would later be used in series such as Sex Pictures (1992) to add to the layers of artifice in her constructed female identities. Like Sherman's use of costumes, wigs and makeup, their application would often be left exposed. Her renowned History Portraits, begun in 1988, used these theatrical effects to break, rather than uphold, any sense of illusion.

Since the early 2000s, Sherman has used digital technology to further manipulate her cast of characters. For the artist's Clown series (2003) she added psychedelic backdrops that are at once playful and menacing, exploring the disparity between the exterior persona and interior psychology of her subject. In her Society Portraits (2008) the artist used a green screen to create grandiose environments for women of the upper echelons of society. These CGI backdrops add to the veneer-like charm of the women that Sherman portrayed, heavily made up and absorbed by societal status in the face of aging. In her series of wall murals from 2010 (installed for her MoMA retrospective in 2012), Sherman features several different characters against a computerized background in ill-fitting wigs, medieval dress and no makeup, instead using photoshop to alter her facial features. In her Flappers series from 2016, the viewer is confronted with the vulnerability of the aging process in 1920s Hollywood starlets, who pose in the glamorous attire from their prime with exaggerated makeup.

In 2017, Sherman began using Instagram to upload portraits that utilize several face-altering apps, morphing the artist into a plethora of protagonists in kaleidoscopic settings. Disorientating and uncanny, the posts highlight the dissociative nature of Instagram from reality.

For additional information, please contact:

Anna-Maria Pfab, Hauser & Wirth, annamariapfab@hauserwirth.com, +41 79 965 50 89 (Europe)

Maddy Martin, Hauser & Wirth, maddymartin@hauserwirth.com +44 7585 979564 (Europe)

Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Limmatstrasse

Limmatstrasse 270
8005 Zürich

Opening hours:

Tue – Fri, 11 am – 6pm

Sat, 11 am – 5 pm

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Caption and courtesy information:

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Cindy Sherman
Untitled #661
2023
Gelatin silver print and chromogenic color print
101.6 x 78.7 cm / 40 x 31 in

Cindy Sherman
Untitled #631
2010/2023
Gelatin silver print and chromogenic color print
50.8 x 33.7 cm / 20 x 13 1/4 in

Cindy Sherman
Untitled #645
2023
Gelatin silver print and chromogenic color print
101.6 x 72.4 cm / 40 x 28 1/2 in

Cindy Sherman
Untitled #648
2023
Gelatin silver print
101.6 x 79 cm / 40 x 31 1/8 in