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Old Masterpieces, New Mistress-pieces: Cindy Sherman's Reinterpretations of Renaissance Portraits of Women

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OLD MASTERPIECES, NEW MISTRESS-PIECES:

CINDY SHERMAN'S REINTERPRETATIONS OF RENAISSANCE PORTRAITS OF WOMEN

BY

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Prologue

The idea for this thesis grew out of a conversation with Professor Gorse early in my senior year as I was returning from a semester in Florence, feeling utterly lost as to how to find a thesis topic and wishing more than anything to be back in Italy. I was having trouble deciding whether to choose a Renaissance or modern art topic. Professor Gorse found the perfect compromise in Cindy Sherman's *History Portraits*, which allowed me to feel as though I was back in Florence, wandering the Uffizi Gallery or attending one of my classes on Leonardo da Vinci, while still being grounded in the United States and contemporary art.

Sarah Loyer, Caitlyn Marianacci with Cindy Sherman's *Untitled #228, Untitled #216,* and *Untitled #225* (1989-1990), The Broad Collection, Los Angeles, March 4, 2016. Permission granted by The Broad and the artist.

Introduction

Art played an important role in the Women's Movement in the second half of the twentieth century, by illustrating the challenges women faced and asserting political hopes of equality. Female artists pushed back against the long history of male domination of the art world. For the Women's March on Washington in 1989 to protest the setbacks to the abortion rights established by Roe vs. Wade in 1973, artist Barbara Kruger produced a poster that boldly states "Your body is a battleground." The words are emblazoned over a black and white photograph of a woman's face, divided into a negative and positive image. Her face ends at her neck so she has no body at all. Also in 1989, another female photographer, Cindy Sherman began working on her *History Portraits*, a series of 35 photographs that reinterpret famous historical paintings, all by male artists. Sherman used her own body in these works, a contested site at this time as Kruger's poster emphasizes, but as a woman artist, it was a medium she could claim as her own after a long history of female artists being suppressed and limited. In 1990, in her photograph *Untitled #228* (fig. 7), which is part of the *History Portraits*, Sherman represented a victorious warrior of the battleground referenced in Kruger's piece. The protagonist of *Untitled #228* is the biblical heroine, Judith who beheaded Holofernes, the general of the Assyrian army. In Sherman's photograph of 1990, Judith triumphantly holds aloft the severed head of Holofernes, symbolic of the patriarchy whose regulations were attacking women's attempts for liberation. In a reversal of Kruger's poster, it is the male character who is disembodied and the female character who maintains her body in Sherman's work. The artist's own body is present, costumed in thick fabrics. *Untitled #228* is based on a Renaissance painting, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (1497-1500) by the male artist Sandro Botticelli. Though the two artists' depictions of Judith are visually similar in composition and theme, their ways of depicting the biblical heroine differ drastically in message.

Each work in the *History Portraits* series, produced in 1989-1990, is enigmatic and raises different questions about historical paintings. This study looks at a specific selection of eight photographs from the series, all of which are appropriations of Renaissance paintings of women by the male artists Piero della Francesca, Leonardo da Vinci, Jean Fouquet, Sandro Botticelli, Raphael, and Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio. Sherman's photographs deal with the Renaissance theme of idealized beauty and the disempowerment and loss of individuality that occurred in portraits of women painted by men. Sherman's decisions on how she interpreted these paintings serve to reveal the artificiality of the idealized depictions of beautiful women and, at the same time, highlight the powers of women that are present but suppressed in paintings by male artists. She used artificial body parts to augment important features of the Renaissance paintings that made them both satirical and critical of the way women were portrayed in their portraits. As a twentieth-century female artist reimagining portraits of women by the great male artists of the Renaissance, Sherman swapped the fictional perfections of the Renaissance paintings with humorous and grotesque distortions to reveal the suppression of women in patriarchal society and return power to the female subjects of the paintings.

Sherman's *History Portraits* can be seen as a continuation of a historical interest of the Women's Movement that began in the 1970s. Other artists and art historians of the movement who came before Sherman looked to history to gain an understanding of the disparity of gender rights in contemporary American society. Art historian Linda Nochlin wrote her groundbreaking essay "Why Have there Been No Great Women Artists?,"[1] in 1970 at the start of the Women's Movement. Before this essay, the field of feminist art history did not exist. In her writing, Nochlin explored how women have been subject to institutional injustices, which made it next to

[1] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have there Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art, and Power: and Other Essays* ed. Linda Nochlin (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 145-177.

impossible for them to gain the same success as their male counterparts. The reason that all the old masters were male is not because women were not as skilled artists, but because they did not have the same opportunities to foster their artistic talents. Female artists were not believed to be capable of possessing the skills and divine knowledge that male artists were assumed to have.

Born in 1954, Sherman was sixteen years old in when Nochlin wrote her essay in 1970. Two years later at the age of eighteen, Sherman decided to study art and began her education at the State University of New York in Buffalo. It is likely that during her time in college she read Nochlin's essay or at least was aware of the expanding field of feminist art history and considered these issues. This awareness may have prompted her to take on historical paintings as a topic of her work. Although she began her studies as a painter, she later studied photography instead. Sherman noted that part of the reason she switched from painting to photography is because as a much newer medium, men did not already dominate photography. As the sources of Sherman's *History Portraits* series reveal, male artists produced most historical paintings from Western art. Nochlin's essay exposed the institutional gender injustices that explain why this gender disparity occurred. In her *History Portraits* of 1989-1990, Sherman drew on the male controlled art medium of painting, but reimagined the works using the medium of photography, an art form liberated from the lengthy history of male domination.

Other female artists involved in the Women's Movement, such as Judy Chicago may have influenced Sherman. An artist and founder of an influential group of female artists in the 1970s, Chicago also took on the topic of history as her subject matter in her most well known work, *The Dinner Party*. The installation, first exhibited in 1979 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, garnered a lot of attention. Chicago's aim was to retell the history of women whose stories had been obscured by the history told and controlled by men. She used needlework and

ceramics, which are mediums that have been consigned to women throughout history as crafts rather than art, and used them in a way that in contemporary society could be considered fine art, worthy of a prestigious museum. *The Dinner Party* was a large installation featuring three long tables in a triangular formation, along which were thirteen place settings, each for a different woman from prehistory to the twentieth century. For each woman, Chicago and her team of artists created ceramic plates with designs recalling vulvas and butterflies, symbols of womanhood and liberation. Chicago also included Judith, the same biblical heroine of Sherman's *Untitled #228,* as one of the thirteen women in her celebration of women of history. The Baroque artist Artemisia Gentileschi also had a place at Chicago's table, an artist known for her depictions of Judith and whose techniques Sherman may have drawn on for her own interpretation of Judith. Although Sherman was living in New York at the time of the San Francisco exhibition of *The Dinner Party* and may not have made a trip to see it, it is likely that as a young female artist recently out of college, she would have been aware of Chicago's work and its attempt to retell history from a woman's perspective. It is likely that Chicago's work inspired Sherman to take on the topic of female history when she began work on her *History Portraits*, ten years after the first exhibition of *The Dinner Party*.

At the time of Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, Sherman was working on her *Untitled Film Stills*, which would become her best-known work. These black and white photographs have the beautiful quality of an old film from the early age of Hollywood. The women in them are damsels in distress or housewives. Although Sherman was also posing a feminist critique in this series, the images are, on the surface, quite beautiful. Sherman is visible in the *Untitled Film Stills* despite the wigs and makeup, thus she identified with the women she portrayed and their experiences. As her career progressed however, her images started to lose the element of beauty

traditionally associated with art, eventually becoming grotesque. The theme of disgust culminates in Sherman's *Disasters* series of 1986-1999 that features vomit, other bodily fluids, and detritus and the *Sex Pictures* of 1992 that feature contorted, vulgar bodily functions using prosthetic body parts. Somewhere between these two series, from 1989-1990, Sherman produced the *History Portraits*. She used some artificial body parts in the *History Portraits*, but they do not fully replace her own body as they do in the *Sex Pictures.* There is still an element of reality in the *History Portraits.* Feminist film theorist, Laura Mulvey writes that around the time that Sherman was working on the *Fairy Tales* series of 1985, she "seems to have shifted from conveying or suggesting the presence of a hidden otherness to representing its inhabitants".[2] Sherman used elements of strangeness and ugliness to pose a sharp critique of assumptions about the female gender, subverting notions of women as docile and beautiful.

As a child, Sherman enjoyed dressing up as different characters. She said she felt this manipulation of her self-representation was partly an effort to please others.[3] Although playing dress up was a common activity for young children in American society of the twentieth century, Sherman continued it into college. She would even go out in public dressed as different characters. Sherman often notes that she doesn't want to be recognizable in her photographs. She dismisses the idea that her work is self-portraiture. She told Simon Hattenstone in an interview for *The Guardian*, "I'm not about revealing myself".[4] In other words, she is always acting. While Sherman is corporally present in most of her work, at the same time, she never appears. Her disappearance reflects women's marginalization in society. The images are never about her, but about the character she becomes and her photographs speak to larger truths about the female

[2] Laura Mulvey, "The Phantasmagoria of the Female Body," in *Cindy Sherman* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 292.
[3] Simon Hattenstone, "Cindy Sherman: Me, Myself, and I," *The Guardian,* January, 2-3, 2011,.http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jan/15/cindy-sherman-interview.
[4] Hattenstone, "Cindy Sherman: Me, Myself, and I," 7.

gender. In using herself as her model, she ultimately hides more about herself than she reveals. Art historian and critic, Jean-Pierre Criqui writes that Sherman's presence in her photographs desensitizes the viewer to her image, so ultimately she disappears. In doing so, she allows her work to become legible and significant.[5]

In transforming her appearance and identity to please others as a child, Sherman was under the influence of pressures on females to conform to society's standards of beauty. In her later attempts to make her own identity disappear in her art, Sherman is still influenced by these expectations, but she is more cognizant of the way society has confined her. She has transformed her use of makeup from its role in her obsession about her appearance during high school, into a tool used to create art and subvert conventions of female beauty and women as painters. Sherman rebels against the notions of the performance of women in order to please. The idea of performing gender, that women are always acting in order to please men and conform to societal expectations is imbedded in Sherman's work. She pushes against these assumptions through the subject matter of her work and through the sheer act of producing fine art following a long history in which doing so was nearly impossible for women in patriarchal society.

Sherman began the *History Portraits* after being invited to make an artwork incorporating a Limoges, porcelain decorative object for a celebration of the anniversary of the French Revolution in 1989. Sherman made a tureen based on a design for Madame de Pompadour and incorporated her photograph *Untitled #183*, a reinterpretation of Francois Boucher's portrait of *Madame de Pompadour*. From there, she made other photographs based on characters from French history. Around 1989, Sherman and Michel Auder, her husband at the time and fellow

[5] Jean-Pierre Criqui, "The Lady Vanishes," in *Cindy Sherman*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 283.

artist, moved to Rome to work on their art. While living in Rome, Sherman produced a set of thirteen photographs, the majority of which were based on Renaissance paintings.[6]

The 35 photographs in the *History Portraits* series are based on paintings of the Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, and Neoclassical eras and were all exhibited together at Metro Pictures Gallery in New York in 1991. These paintings range in geographical origin from Italy to Northern Europe to France, and across time from the late 1400s to the early 1800s. As a representation of history portraits, this scope is fairly narrow, limited to European art from what is commonly considered to have been its cultural peak. This representation is also consistent with the Western focus of the study of art history, which would have been emphasized during Sherman's college introduction to art history. No text accompanies the *History Portraits* series, but Sherman has spoken about her reason for taking on paintings of history in interviews.

> When I was in school I was getting disgusted with the attitude of art being so religious or sacred, so I wanted to make something which people could relate to without having to read a book about it first. So that anybody off the street could appreciate it, even if they couldn't fully understand it, they could still get something out of it. That's the reason why I wanted to imitate something out of culture, and also make fun of the culture as I was doing it.[7]

This statement provides insight into Sherman's intentions behind the series as well as the tactics she used to implement them, such as using humor for social critique. Her works comment on class issues and the exclusivity of art history, attempting to make art more accessible to the general public, which may not be educated in the history of art.

In her *History Portraits,* Sherman created caricatures of the original paintings by using humor for social criticism.[8] She drew on a legacy of caricature that began with grotesque drawings in the Italian Renaissance, which posed a counterpart to the ideal, and later progressed

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[6] Christa Döttinger, *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits: The Rebirth of the Painting after the End of Painting, (*Munchen: Schirmer/ Mosel, 2012), 15.

[7] Mulvey, "The Phantasmagoria of the Female Body," 284.

[8] Thanks to Professor MacNaughton for suggesting I look into Sherman's *History Portraits* as a form of caricature.

into printmaking in other parts of Europe, which served as political and social satire.[9] Sherman further developed the tradition of caricature as a critique of social values, by using it in a new way through photography. She drew on caricature's historical origins to pose a critique of social values in the past and the present. Grove's Dictionary of Art defines "caricature" as an artistic type that relies on exaggeration of the features of an individual for both amusement and criticism.[10] The historical paintings by old masters are beautiful, idealized images, but Sherman distorted her versions into comical appropriations. By using humor, Sherman made her images more accessible to a wider audience who can appreciate the visual satire even without knowing a great deal about the history of art. Because the *History Portraits* clearly reference masterpieces of history even to an audience uneducated in art history, and they are clearly humorous because of their large noses, artificial breasts, and other strange qualities, one can easily tell that Sherman is posing a critique of history. However, because they are humorous, the tension of her critique is lessened, making them more comprehensible, but nonetheless pointed.

Sherman picked up on the distinctive features of the historical portraits and exaggerated them with strange artificial body parts and other props she found in flea markets, so they are no longer beautiful, but are more individualized depiction of their subjects. In an interview with Simon Hattenstone of *The Guardian,* Sherman noted that one of her talents that benefits her as an artist is being "very observant and thinking how a person is put together, seeing them on the street and noticing subtle things about them that make them who they are".[11] These individualizing features that Sherman notices are the details that she exaggerated to create the caricatures of the figures in historical portraits. They are the features that give the subjects

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[9] Constance C. McPhee and Nadine M. Orenstein, *Infinite Jest: Caricature and Satire from Leonardo to Levine,* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011, Exhibition Catalog.

[10] Judith Wechsler, et al., "Caricature," *Grove Art Online*, 2010 http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/art/T014063

[11] Hattenstone, "Cindy Sherman: Me, Myself, and I," 3.

personality, which the original paintings stripped away by molding the figures to fit ideal Renaissance traits and proportions. Sherman recognized the individuality of each character and attempted to lift the veneer of perfection that concealed them in the Renaissance paintings. Sherman augmented key features of the paintings to subvert the standards of female beauty and bring awareness to the way men have attempted to suppress female powers and individuality through these ideals.

Although the element of grotesque is not as prominent in the *History Portraits* as in her later work, it is one of Sherman's main tools for caricature in her critique of Renaissance idealization. Sherman references a long history of the grotesque posed as an opposite to the ideal, beginning in the Renaissance. Leonardo da Vinci is considered to be one of the earliest caricaturists because of his drawings of grotesque heads.[12] Giorgio Vasari commented on Leonardo's interest in "'bizarre heads'"[13] and the same phrase could be used to describe Sherman's *History Portraits*. Many of Leonardo's drawings demonstrate his interest in the juxtaposition of beauty and ugliness, youth and old age. Sherman played with the same opposites in her reinterpretations of the Early Modern paintings. While Renaissance paintings were idealized with harmony of forms and precise measurements of features, "caricature and the grotesque aim to undermine accepted standards of beauty and proportion".[14] Therefore, Sherman returned to a convention of critiquing idealization that began in the Renaissance for her own critiques of idealized Early Modern paintings in the late twentieth century. She casted the figures of her reinterpretations as more grotesque and sometimes older looking women than they appear to be in the beautiful Renaissance paintings. Leonardo was an artist committed to exploring the psychology of his sitters, and physiognomy was an important aspect of his portraits. In much the

[12] McPhee and Orenstein, *Infinite Jest*, 8.
[13] McPhee and Orenstein, *Infinite Jest*, 22.
[14] Ibid, 8.

same way, Sherman sought to individualize the women in her photographs by using caricature and the grotesque in her reinterpretations.

In her career, Sherman found many ways to mock the art world. In the *History Portraits*, her photographs specifically poke fun at famous paintings by old masters that are celebrated in art history. By using the technique of caricature, a style associated with popular art, in her appropriations of famous masterpieces of art history, Sherman conflated 'low' and 'high' art, attempting to dissolve the classist division of the art world. Sherman said to Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times*, "'I can't stand the idea of art as a precious object'."[15] The *History Portraits* did exceptionally well when they were first shown at Metro Pictures Gallery in New York in 1991. In an interview with *Interview Magazine*, Sherman remembered feeling guilty about her success with the *History Portraits.* Although she did not say this in the interview, she may have also felt disappointed that her series had not antagonized the pretention of the art world as much as she had hoped. She went on to make the *Sex Pictures* and *Disasters* series, heightening the aspect of the grotesque to further call into question the idea of art as a "precious object".[16]

Sherman shot the *History Portraits* on 35-millimeter film, which is very small, but she printed the photographs to be larger than life-sized. *Untitled #228*, for example, is nearly seven feet tall by 4 feet wide, so the figure of Judith towers above the viewer.[17] The overwhelming size, combined with Sherman's method of chromogenic color printing that created bright intense colors, produced images that are confrontational and immediate. Working on a large scale was historically more common for male artists, while female artists tended to take up less space both

[15] Cindy Sherman, in Michael Kimmelman, *Portraits: Talking with Artists at the Met, The Modern, The Louvre, and Elsewhere*, (New York: Random House, 1998): 144.
[16] Cindy Sherman, *"*Cindy Sherman-Interview Magazine*," Interview Magazine*, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZekNrhRWek.
[17] refer to the photograph in the prologue for scale

literally and symbolically, by making smaller works that were less assertive than their male counterparts. In an interview with Kenneth Baker for *SFGate,* in reference to the scale of her photographs, Sherman noted, "there aren't many women who do really big macho-y kinds of things".[18] All of Sherman's pieces discussed in this essay are larger than the Renaissance paintings by male artists that inspired them, and this is one of many ways in which Sherman gave her work power in relation to the great masterpieces of history. The small format of the film Sherman used and large scale of the prints created a grainy quality, which Sherman refers to as "painterly," thus further drawing a connection between her work and the historical paintings by male artists and suggesting her desire to give her photographs an equal status to painting.[19] Sherman also displayed her photographs in gold frames, further aligning them with historical paintings.

Sherman has said little about her reasoning behind her choices of works to appropriate, leaving the viewer to speculate about her decisions. None of the photographs have a title that give any clue to their meaning or source. Each work is simply called *Untitled* followed by a number, which refers to the order in which they were made, continuing from her earlier series. By abstaining from titling her photographs, Sherman refuses to define her work and leaves it open to the viewer's interpretation. In an interview with *Art21*, she described her choices in how she made the photographs in the *History Portraits,* making it sound haphazard. "I usually buy a lot of books and rip pages out and stick them on my wall. I refer to them in more encyclopedic ways and it just sort of all gets absorbed. Then, when I'm ready to shoot, I'll see what I have

[18] Cindy Sherman, interviewed by Kenneth Baker, "Cindy Sherman show at SFMOMA opens," *SFGate*, July, 2012, 4. http://www.sfgate.com/art/article/Cindy-Sherman-show-at-SFMOMA-opens-3686397.php
[19] *Art21*: "Cindy Sherman: It Began with Madame de Pompadour."
http://www.art21.org/texts/cindy-sherman/interview-cindy-sherman-it-began-with-madame-de-pompadour.

available".[20] Sherman lived in Rome when she produced this series, and many of the paintings she used as inspiration were in locations around Italy. Of the paintings on which her photographs in this study are based, one is in Rome, another is in Milan, three are at the Uffizi in Florence, and the others are scattered around Europe. However, though the original paintings would have been accessible to Sherman, she did not go to museums and produce photographs based on specific paintings she saw.[21] Instead, she drew inspiration from art in a more general way, by trying to grasp the essence of the era's paintings. She looked to photographs of paintings, thus using photographic reproductions as the basis for her own photographic reproductions. Sherman eschews the "aura" of seeing paintings in person that German cultural critic, Walter Benjamin, discusses in his seminal article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin argues, "the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical" and, "the original preserved all its authority".[22] He writes that with the increasing use of technologies such as photography, the value and authenticity of artworks decreased because they could be easily reproduced with a camera. Sherman obviously embraces the functions of a camera, as it is her means through which she produces her art. Additionally, in her seeming lack of interest in viewing the authentic historical paintings she took as the inspiration for her *History Portrait*, she seemed to be indifferent to the idea of a higher value of original artworks, just as she was rejecting the elitism of the art world by discarding the division between "high" and "low" art. Using photographic reproductions of paintings may have helped her arrive even more quickly to the sense of artificiality that she wished to convey in her reinterpretations, which were photographic reproductions of what she created with her body and props.

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[20] *Art21*, "Cindy Sherman: It Began with Madame de Pompadour." 6.
[21] Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Cindy Sherman's Reworking of Raphael's 'Fornarina' and Caravaggio's 'Bacchus'," *Notes in the History of Art* 28 (2009): 29-39. Accessed October 23, 2015. p. 29.
[22] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, (Schocken, 1970), 218.

Sherman claims her choices in how she appropriated the historical paintings were largely determined by the props and supplies she had available, many of which she found at flea markets.[23] She drew on the concept of the readymade started by artists such as Marcel Duchamp in the early 1900s to raise questions about the purpose and definition of art. This method of working is evidenced in her description of the origins of her photograph based on Caravaggio's *Bacchus*. "I think with [*Untitled #224*] I had all these grapes and leaves and thought, 'That's such an easy thing to do, to copy Caravaggio's *Sick Bacchus"*".[24] Despite Sherman's representation of the process as spontaneous and instinctual, the intricacies of the series are more deliberate than she lets on. The choices Sherman made develop a clear vision and interpretation of the historical paintings, critiquing them in an effort to reveal greater truths about issues of gender and class present at the time of their creation and at the time of Sherman's appropriations. By focusing on her photographs from the series based on Renaissance paintings of women, this study explores the ways in which Sherman commented on and critiqued depictions of women by male artists, challenging the male constructed history and its suppression of female powers through standards of beauty.

Literature on Cindy Sherman

In comparison to the vast amount of scholarship on Sherman's work, relatively little has been written that focuses attention on the *History Portraits*. Two authors, Christa Döttinger and Arthur Danto have written publications exclusively about the series. Art critic, Arthur Danto authored an essay entitled "Past Masters and Post Moderns: Cindy Sherman's History Portraits" in an exhibition catalog published with large-scale images of the entire series. Döttinger wrote a book entitled *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits: The Rebirth of the Painting after the End of*

[23] *Art21*: "Cindy Sherman: It Began with Madame de Pompadour."
[24] Ibid.

Painting. Other scholars have produced articles about the series, including Norman Bryson and Joanna Woods-Marsden. Each writer takes a different view of the series.

Döttinger's book is short, only 68 pages, but is the only book dedicated to the entire series.[25] Döttinger argues that Sherman's *History Portraits* seduce the viewer with their vibrant colors and strange beauty. She discusses how Sherman altered her depictions of the historical paintings to make them more artificial, but she believes they are still "beautiful," and she disagrees with other scholars who say that they are feminist parodies of the historical paintings. Döttinger writes, "As we all know, neither the social position nor the suffering of women was a problem in previous time periods".[26] Whether or not women felt suppressed in Renaissance society, Sherman tried to reveal truths about the paintings and situations of the women they depict that have been shrouded with history and have continued to suppress women in contemporary society. Sherman drew a connection between women's circumstances in Renaissance society and those of women in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States, in which many became aware of the suffering of their gender throughout history. The critical nature of the series becomes clear through the way Sherman altered the original paintings, making choices that undermined the original compositions or made certain aspects more overt.

Danto, unlike Döttinger, believes the works are critical of the Renaissance ideal of beauty.[27] He writes that the series reveals the artifice of the old master paintings. Art historian, Norman Bryson goes a step further, arguing that Sherman plays with the concepts of the ideal

[25] Döttinger, *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits.*
[26] Ibid, 29.
[27] Arthur C. Danto, *History Portraits*, New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1991.

and the abject[28] in order to reveal the oppression of idealization of women's bodies.[29] He believes Sherman purposefully offends and disgusts the viewer in order to reveal the troubling realities behind the idealization of historical portraiture. Joanna Woods-Marsden, an art historian specializing in early-modern portraiture, engages with Norman Bryson's article in her study of two photographs from the series, one based on Raphael's *La Fornarina* (1518-1519) and the other based on Caravaggio's *Bacchus* (1595). She believes Sherman's *History Portraits* are a feminist critique of patriarchal society, in which the original paintings were made and persists. Although like Bryson, Woods-Marsden believes Sherman purposefully made changes from the original paintings in order to critique them, she does not think the works do anything to lessen the power of the original paintings as Bryson asserts.

Bryson disagrees with art critics and scholars whom he claims have found the series offensive because it parodies these earlier portraits. He sees Sherman's approach, instead, as satirical. Sherman acknowledged humor as part of her appropriation when she stated, "I'm much more ignorant about Old Master paintings and art history than many people involved in the art world, so I'm not really taking it seriously".[30] However, Sherman did not directly explain whether she intended for her work to be critical as well as comical. While Bryson believes the humorous approach to her appropriations of highly regarded historical paintings could be offensive to some, "what is likelier to set viewers on edge is the apparently untutored quality of Sherman's art historical eye".[31] Sherman admits she was not very educated in art history. However, she did not need to be well versed in art history to interpret and understand the

[28] Abject refers to things that are wretched or marginalized in society
[29] Norman Bryson, "The Ideal and the Abject: Cindy Sherman's Historical Portraits." *Parkett: Kunseitschrift = Art Magazine*, no. 29 (1991): 91-93.
[30] *Art21*: "Cindy Sherman: It Began with Madame de Pompadour."
[31] Bryson, "The Ideal and the Abject: Cindy Sherman's Historical Portraits", 91.

paintings. In fact, her distance from the study may have provided her with the fresh eyes that would have helped her to see the problems inherent in the old master paintings.

Danto, Bryson, and Woods-Marsden provide insightful perspectives on the *History Portraits* and present a variety of ways Sherman's appropriations of historical paintings can be interpreted. While they believe that Sherman is ultimately critical and trying to bring awareness to the problems inherent in the idealization in painting throughout history, this study examines the series from a different angle, focused on the ways Sherman's depictions act as caricatures of the historical paintings to critique how women have been oppressed by idealization and their representations by males, and simultaneously, reaffirm their agency and individuality. Both Bryson and Woods-Marsden discuss Sherman's work as a critique of historical idealization, yet they do not go into detail about other ways the male authorship of the paintings have impacted the way women have been depicted. The fact that the paintings Sherman appropriated were all by male artists, artists commonly accepted as the great masters of art history, is a key part of her critique. Sherman is a female artist, who recreated these paintings originally envisioned and executed by the minds and hands of men. Feminist scholars have pointed out that women have historically been confined to the body as their source of creation, through pregnancy and lactation, while men have had the freedom to create with their minds and develop culture.[32] For example, in reference to the idea of women being inspiration for art rather than artists, feminist art historian, Whitney Chadwick wrote, "Denied her individuality, she is displaced from being a producer and becomes instead a sign for male creativity".[33] For much of history, women acted as muses and models for male artists and art made by women was often misattributed to men or otherwise not taken seriously. Sherman conflated the idea of woman as model and man as artist

[32] Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 2 (1972): p. 5-31.
[33] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1990, 21.

by acting as both model and artist in her work. Sherman's work explores these historical notions of gender and gendered abilities, but underlying every photograph is the fact that she is both the mind and body behind the creation of the works, a female artist subverting the works of male minds.

This study discusses eight pieces from the *History Portraits* series - *Untitled #205* (fig. 12), *Untitled #209* (fig. 15), *Untitled #211* (fig. 18), *Untitled #212* (fig. 22), *Untitled #216* (fig. 1), *Untitled #223* (fig. 3), *Untitled #225* (fig. 5), *Untitled #228* (fig. 7) - in conjunction with a Renaissance painting that seems to be Sherman's likely inspiration for each photograph. I made these pairings initially without looking at the literature on the series. Some of these combinations occurred to me immediately upon seeing Sherman's pieces, others took me more time to think of or discover in Internet image searches. After finding my pairings, I confirmed my choices by comparing them to the pairings Döttinger presents in her book. Almost all of my choices were the same as hers, with just a few exceptions. My ability to easily find paintings that seem to be the basis of Sherman's photographs and which were also chosen by another scholar, proves that although Sherman does not acknowledge a direct source for most of the works, she clearly had specific paintings in mind. I only made two changes to my original pairings after comparing them to Döttinger's. I had chosen a Baroque painting of Judith with the Head of Holofernes to pair with *Untitled #228*, but I decided that I agreed with Döttinger's pairing of a Botticelli painting of the same subject. I was unsure about the basis for *Untitled #225*, but Döttinger's choice of another Botticelli painting seemed apt. Döttinger chose a Raphael painting as the source for *Untitled #209*. However, I found a painting by Boltraffio that I believe to be a likely source. Based on what Sherman said about using images in an "encyclopedic way",[34] it is likely that she drew from both paintings. Although I have chosen specific paintings that Sherman's

[34] *Art21*, "Cindy Sherman: It Began with Madame de Pompadour."

photographs reference, it is important to keep in mind that she likely pulled from other sources as well.

The eight photographs I have selected from the *History Portraits* series are all based on images of Italian Renaissance paintings of women, with the exception of one based on a painting by the French artist, Jean Fouquet, also from the fifteenth century. While it is interesting to note that just under half the photographs in the series are portraits of men (there are seventeen men and eighteen women), this study focuses on images of women. However, the great quantity of images of men, particularly in comparison to the absence of images of men in the rest of Sherman's body of work is significant. Just as her tactic of recreating paintings by male artists asserts her female voice, her configuring of herself as the male subject of portraits allows her to identify with the more powerful role men have held in history, though she parodies these too. By dressing up as men, Sherman also drew on the increasing visibility of gender explorations occurring in the twentieth century as the gay rights movement was emerging. Although Sherman is heterosexual and has had multiple relationships with men, like male artist, Marcel Duchamp's female alter ego Rrose Selavy from the early twentieth century, Sherman also destabilized the gender binary by cross-dressing in her works.[35] Sherman drew on a history of artists commenting on enduring historical notions of gender, and in the late twentieth century, she further worked to disrupt the gender binary.

This study divides Sherman's Renaissance female subjects in the *History Portraits* into two groups: biblical and secular figures. The earliest forms of self-portraiture occurred in the Renaissance. Artists disguised themselves as characters in scenes that they painted, such as, Botticelli's inclusion of himself as a visitor to Christ's birthplace in his painting *Adoration of the*

[35] Duchamp also engaged in commentary on historical masterpieces of the Renaissance in his *L.H.O.O.Q* of 1999 in which he drew a mustache on an image of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and renamed it with letters, the French pronunciation of which state that "she has a hot ass."

Magi (1475) and the presence of a likeness of Raphael in his fresco *School of Athens* (1509-1511). Sherman drew on the history of self-portraiture in disguise by using herself as the foundation for her portrayals of characters in portraits. Sherman does not consider her work self-portraiture as the images were not meant to depict her, but rather the characters she played.[36] However, she must have connected to the women she portrayed because she had to transform herself into those people. Sherman reveals ways in which the male artists suppressed the women in their portraits by reducing them to their beauty or supporting roles in relation to men.

Relating to the women she portrays, connects Sherman to female artists of the Renaissance who also empathized with the women they depicted in their work. Sherman did not appropriate any paintings by female artists because she wished to critique the way male artists depicted women. She drew on techniques used by female artists such as Artemisia Gentileschi and Sofonisba Anguissola to more realistically depict and empower the women in the artworks.

Sherman freed the women of the Renaissance paintings from being defined by the degree to which they conformed to ideals of beauty. To examine Sherman's dismantling of the idealization of the Renaissance beauty as configured by male artists, this study begins by analyzing Sherman's reinterpretations of paintings depicting biblical women. There are only 49 named women in the Bible,[37] so these women must be exceptional. The mere existence of these women in literature implies their importance; however, when painted by men, their agency was often minimized, and they were reduced to images of inspirational beauty, rather than individuals with personalities and intellects. Sherman's reinterpretations of depictions of biblical women

[36] Boris Friedwald, "Cindy Sherman," in *Woman Photographers: from Julia Margaret Cameron to Cindy Sherman*, 194-195, Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2014.
[37] Antonia Blumberg, "This Is How Many Words Are Spoken By Women In The Bible." *The Huffington Post*. February 4, 2015. Accessed December 8, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/04/bible-women-words_n_6608282.html.

reaffirm their power and expose how the original paintings reduced their agency. Images of Biblical women were also used in the Renaissance as a basis of expectations for Renaissance women. This study follows the discussion of biblical women with an examination of portraits of mistresses and wives of the Renaissance to examine how they were idealized into generic depictions of beauty and status that denied their individuality. In her reinterpretations of these portraits of secular Renaissance women, Sherman made the women more grotesque than beautiful, revealing their confined position in patriarchal society and their domination by men. With the *History Portraits*, Sherman has gained confidence since her earlier work in the *Untitled Films Stills*, and has become more overtly critical of societal values of gender and class. She emerged as a key artist of the Women's Movement, who helped to engage the public to understand the persistence of inequalities.

I. Piety to Power: Biblical Women

Cindy Sherman included three images of biblical women in the *History Portraits,* and a fourth, which may be biblical or allegorical, all of which are discussed in this chapter. *Untitled #216* (1989) (fig. 1) and *Untitled #223* (1990) (fig. 3) are images of the Virgin Mary based on breastfeeding Madonna and Child paintings by Jean Fouquet and the workshop of Leonardo da Vinci, respectively. *Untitled #225* (1990) (fig. 5), based on a painting by Sandro Botticelli is also an image of a nursing mother, but she may be an allegory of fertility or the Madonna. *Untitled #228* (1990) (fig. 7) is an image of Judith, a manslayer and heroine of the Old Testament Apocrypha, also based on a Botticelli painting. The Virgin Mary gives birth to Christ, who saves humankind from sin. She is pure and the exemplary mother. Judith on the other hand is a *femme fatale*, a Jewish widow who sneaks into the tent of the Assyrian general, Holofernes, who was attempting to conquer her village and beheads him, thus saving her people from invasion. Both women are powerful and provide salvation for their communities. However these two women's expressions of strength present a dichotomy, at one end, the power to give life to men, and at the other end, the power to take the life of men. These two powers are defined in relation to men. By emphasizing their control over the lives of men in both roles of mother and manslayer, Sherman defined the women on their own terms. Her photographs are caricatures of the Renaissance paintings, incorporating elements of humor, such as the fake breasts in images of biblical mothers and other deconstructions of the sanctity of the biblical paintings. Rather than worshipping the piety and beauty of the women as the Renaissance paintings do, Sherman's photographs praise women's reproductive and heroic powers.

Sherman made the images of biblical women in 1989-1990, as women were fighting to maintain their right to abortion and the number of women in Congress was beginning to increase, but the gender disparity was still great. In reflection of these developments in women's rights, Sherman's photographs of biblical women assert both women's rights to their reproductive capacity and to the influence and agency they can possess to protect their people. Following in the footsteps of other female artists and art historians of the Women's Movement, such as Judy Chicago and Linda Nochlin, who were commenting on the male controlled historical representation of women, Sherman further emphasizes these ideas in her *History Portraits*. These feminist artists and writers emphasized the persistence of the suppression of female power caused by the male authorship of history into modern American society. The biblical women Sherman chose to depict demonstrate female powers, but their stories were portrayed by male artists, whose depictions controlled the women's agencies in the same way their stories of strength and influence were pushed to the shadows of the male constructed history. With herself as her model, Sherman modernized the Renaissance paintings, indicating the continuation of female suppression.

The paintings on which Cindy Sherman based the four photographs in her *History Portraits* series discussed in this chapter would not have been called "portraits" during the time they were made in the Renaissance, but rather religious paintings. However, Sherman classified these photographs of biblical women, *Untitled #216, #223, #225,* and *#228* as "portraits" by their inclusion in her *History Portraits* series. During the Renaissance, paintings of biblical figures were a category unto themselves, completely separate from portraits, which depicted contemporary people who had often commissioned the rendering of their image. Biblical women were influential and powerful, but women during the Renaissance were expected to be

submissive and subservient. In creating a divide between paintings of women of the Bible and portraits of Renaissance women, male artists of the Renaissance could prevent women from identifying themselves with the prominent position of the biblical women. By classifying images of biblical women as portraits, Sherman prioritized the women's humanity over their holiness and dissolves the disparity of influence allowed of the two types of women.

In making her photographs artificial to the extreme and caricaturing Renaissance paintings, Sherman's images conflate humor and horror. Caricature tends to define people by types and emphasizes their placement in these categories.[38] Sherman focused on types of biblical women, that of mother and manslayer. Using elements of caricature, Sherman picked up on details of the original paintings and exaggerated them to make them more obvious, often through the use of artificial body parts and cosmetics. She drew attention to the misleading aspects of idealization in the original paintings and made them overt in order to emphasize their artifice and theatricality and to assert that the real women behind the images were not as they were portrayed. The aspects of artificiality developed a grotesque and humorous quality that is critical of the way the biblical women were portrayed in the original paintings by male Renaissance artists.

Biblical Mother

In keeping with the popularity of the subject of the holy family during the Renaissance, two of the photographs in Sherman's *History Portraits* series depict the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. However, both of Sherman's photographs reinterpret a strange subcategory of this kind of image, that of the *Madonna Lactan*, the nursing Virgin Mary. In these images, the Madonna has

[38] Ernst Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

an exposed breast with which she nurses the Child. *Untitled #216* was clearly based on Jean Fouquet's *Madonna of Melun* (1452) (fig. 2) and *Untitled #223* is an appropriation of *Madonna Litta* (1490-1491) (fig. 4), a product of Leonardo da Vinci's workshop. There is a third photograph of a nursing mother in the series, *Untitled #225*, drawn from Botticelli's *Portrait of a Young Woman* (1490) (fig. 6). Sherman's image is also of a lactating woman; however, there is no child present so it is unclear whether she is the Virgin Mary. The subject matter of the nursing mother is clearly something that Sherman found intriguing as she depicted it in three of the 35 images in the series. It is worth noting that Sherman herself was never a mother. She was about 35 when she produced these images, and might have been thinking about her narrowing window of opportunity to become a mother. Perhaps this has something to do with her interest in the subject of nursing mother, but there is certainly more to it.

For the subject of the biblical mother, Sherman turned to specific paintings she could critique. Sherman's *Untitled #216* has many uncanny similarities to the French artist Jean Fouquet's *Madonna of Melun* of 1452, such as the way the Virgin Mary holds her drapery, forming a triangular composition that frames the infant Christ, and the way her dress is open to bare her breast. Though *Untitled #216* and Fouquet's painting are *Madonna Lactan* images, Christ is not nursing in either artist's interpretation. Sherman pushed her hairline back to mimic the high forehead of Fouquet's Madonna and wears a crown as in his version. While Sherman did not fill her background with red and blue seraphim and cherubim as Fouquet did, she used lace as the backdrop that contains images of cherubs. Despite these similarities, Sherman's photograph is much more lifelike and not just because it is a photograph instead of a painting.

Sherman has mimicked the unnatural quality of the Madonna's breast in Fouquet's painting, but otherwise, her photograph is much more naturalistic. The Virgin Mary in Fouquet's

painting has a distinctly sculptural quality; the skin of the Virgin and the Christ Child is so flawless and pale that it looks more like marble than human flesh. Though Fouquet paid attention to the modeling of the body, he did so in a way that made the figures appear stiff and statuesque. *Madonna of Melun* looks more like a painting of a sculpture than a painting of actual people. The Madonna's breasts are the clearest indication of this effect in Fouquet's painting. They are almost spherical and are far apart on her chest; they are not the natural breasts of a breastfeeding mother. Sherman picked up on this detail in *Untitled #216*, by attaching a round artificial breast over her own. Sherman referred to this detail in her interview with *Art 21*: "The tit in [Untitled #216] looks like a slice of half a grapefruit stuck onto someone's chest…But in Old Master paintings a lot of these figures' breasts don't even look real".[39] Sherman intended for the breast to look more like a piece of fruit than a real breast, because she picked up on the artificial quality of the breast in Fouquet's painting and wished to emphasize it. Sherman's comment suggests her use of caricature in the work, to mock the fact that men do not understand women nor their bodies. To invoke humor, Sherman exaggerated what she found to be the defining detail of the original painting, the exposed breast, in order to emphasize its artificiality. However, Sherman's inclusion of a fake breast extends beyond humor, to critique the ways these Old Master paintings present the female body.

Sherman's interest in the subject matter of *Madonna Lactan* paintings may have stemmed from her desire to celebrate the female ability to breastfeed and nurture. Feminist art historian, Margaret Miles discusses the iconography of *Madonna Lactan* paintings in her article "The Virgin's One Bare Breast".[40] She writes that paintings of the nursing Madonna in the Middle Ages and Renaissance may have been partly intended to urge mothers to nurse their babies. The

[39] *Art 21*, "Cindy Sherman: It Began with Madame de Pompadour," 5.

[40] Margaret R. Miles, "The Virgin's One Bare Breast," in *The Expanding Discourse*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 26-37.

Virgin Mary was used as a model of ideal motherhood and images of her served as explicit reminders to Renaissance women of the kind of mother they should aspire to be.[41] Paralleling this support of breastfeeding in the Renaissance, in 1989 when Sherman produced her first interpretations of a *Madonna Lactan,* a U.S. Surgeon General Workshop confirmed the benefits of breastfeeding and encouraged women to nurse their children.[42] Sherman's interest in imagery of the breastfeeding Virgin Mary can be explained by Miles's argument that images of the nursing Madonna "both formulate and attempt to control one of the most awesome powers of women, the power to nourish".[43] Sherman may have chosen images of the nursing Madonna because she wished to highlight this power that women possess but also comment on the ways in which the ability to nourish a child has been used against women to limit their freedom in society throughout history by creating the assumption that if they do not breastfeed, they are not ideal mothers.

Sherman satirically emphasized the artificiality of the breast in these Renaissance *Madonna Lactan* paintings by translating them to plastic in her photographs even when the rest of the Virgin Mary's body is her own genuine flesh. This calls attention to the male artists' depictions that made the breast look unlike part of the Madonna's body in order to detach the power of nourishment from the woman herself. Miles writes that in *Madonna Lactan* paintings of the fourteenth century, "the covered side of Mary's chest is perfectly flat while the exposed breast is round and ample. The viewer's impression is not of a privileged glimpse of a normally concealed breast, but rather that the cone-shaped breast from which the Christ Child was

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41 Miles, "The Virgin's One Bare Breast," 30.

42 Anne L. Wright and Richard J. Schanler, "The Resurgence of Breastfeeding at the End of the Second Millennium," *The Journal of Nutrition,* 131, no. 2 (2001): http://jn.nutrition.org/content/131/2/421S.full

43 Miles, "The Virgin's One Bare Breast," 26.

nourished is not actually a part of Mary's body but an appendage".[44] In Sherman's photographs of nursing mothers, the breasts are literally "appendages," plastic parts that are completely separate from her body.

Sherman has desexualized her images of the Virgin Mary for different reasons from the male artists. Though in Fouquet's *Madonna of Melun*, the covered breast is still clearly indicated, the element Miles describes is evident in Leonardo's *Madonna Litta*, the inspiration for Sherman's *Untitled #223.* The breast the Child nurses from is very high on the Virgin's chest and cone-shaped, while the other side of her chest is comparatively flat. Sherman exaggerated these aspects of the painting in her appropriation, *Untitled #223*. The plastic breast, also positioned unnaturally high on the chest, looks like it is just stuck onto her dress and there is no indication of her other breast under her clothing. By exaggerating the artificiality of the breasts in her appropriation of these two *Madonna Lactan* paintings, Sherman drew attention to the ways the male artists have suppressed the female power of nourishment by depicting a natural ability only female bodies possess as something separate from their bodies. Were the breast not made to look artificial in the Renaissance paintings, the image of the exposed breast could be read as a symbol of sexuality. However, because the *Madonna Lactan* is a depiction of the most holy woman in Christianity, artists made the breast look unnatural in an attempt to ensure that the image would not be read as sexual in a way that would defile its sanctity. Renaissance paintings of the nursing Madonna tried to prevent Mary from becoming an object of lust, not for her own sake, but for the benefit of her holy role as the mother of Christ. Sherman's artificial breasts serve as reminders of the incredible female power of lactation, rather than sexual objects.

Sherman played with limitations on women, not only in the execution of her art, but also in the subject matter. Her depictions of the nursing Madonna by male artists are examples of the

[44] Miles, "The Virgin's One Bare Breast," 34.

ways in which women's abilities were exploited and flipped so that rather than being a power only they possessed, the capacity to nourish offspring became something that confined them. As Miles writes, images of the breastfeeding Madonna were used to promote the expectation that women nurse their children.[45] Cultural anthropologist, Sherry Ortner writes that, "woman's physiological functions have tended universally to limit her social movement, and to confine her universally to certain social contexts which in turn are seen as closer to nature".[46] These physiological functions are lactation and pregnancy and the social contexts are domestic. Ortner's comment indicates that woman's physical ability of breastfeeding results in her restriction in society. Paintings of the nursing Madonna are artistic representations of this limitation of women because of their purpose in imposing breastfeeding as the right way to mother one's children. The male artists portrayed woman's innate power of nourishment in a disempowering way.

In some photographs, Sherman employed visual shock techniques; she desexualized the Madonna through the use of plastic breasts. She also made even greater use of prosthetics in her *Sex Pictures* series that she worked on shortly following the *History Portraits*. She told *New York Times* art critic, Michael Kimmelman, "I started using fake tits and asses in my photographs, the idea was to make fun: people would see the works from afar and think, 'Oh she's using nudity,' then realize I wasn't. I wanted that jolt".[47] Part of Sherman's intention was to startle and make fun of the viewer and to subvert the sexuality of depictions of women. Her use of prosthetic body parts is one of her devices to make nudity anti-sexual, even grotesque, in her work and to critique the sensationalism of nudity in art and society. By doing this, she

[45] Miles, "The Virgin's One Bare Breast," 30.
[46] Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" 24.
[47] Kimmelman, *Portraits*, 154.

desexualized the Virgin Mary, to protect her from becoming objectified, rather than to guard her holiness.

Sherman's work in the *History Portraits* is unabashed in its artifice and she used the artificiality as part of her critique of the idealization of the Renaissance paintings. The use of prosthetics and cosmetics is central to Sherman's work and the bright colors and large scale of her photographs mean her works are not subtle in appearance. Sherman played with ideas of reality and artificiality in her depictions of idealized "beautiful women" through the use of prosthetics attached to her own body. Rosemary Betterton writes that in the progression from Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* to the *History Portraits*, the "obviousness of the masquerade" was heightened.[48] To a similar point, Laura Mulvey writes that, "Sherman-the-model dresses up in character, while Sherman-the-artist reveals her character's masquerade".[49] Both writers emphasize that Sherman's work make their artificiality apparent. Sherman exaggerates her photograph's constructed nature in order to make it obvious that they are fictional, rather than shrouding the fabrication of an image as Renaissance painters did. Betterton and Mulvey's idea of a progression towards the overtly fake in Sherman's career is a notion that Norman Bryson seems to agree with in his essay on the *History Portraits*.[50]

In the same way Sherman used caricature to make her critique of historical paintings accessible to the general public, Sherman also used society's fascination with artifice as another technique to engage with viewers. Sherman used artificiality to seduce the viewer and at the same time, to make fun of the viewer's desire for the immediacy that her photographs evoke. Umberto Eco writes about the suffusion of the artificial in American culture in his article

[48] Rosemary Betterton, "Promising Monsters," *Hypatia 21* (2006), 93.
[49] Mulvey, "The Phantasmagoria of the Female Body," 388.
[50] Bryson, "The Ideal and the Abject."

"Travels in Hyper Reality".[51] He argues that there is a desire for the tangible in contemporary American society that leads to the development of hyperreal reproductions of places, objects, and even people that can make us feel as if we have access to the real things. However, paradoxically, hyperreal things are extreme in their artificiality. He writes that the more real something becomes, the closer it is to the extremely fake.[52] Although Sherman's *History Portraits* are photographs of her and use real pieces of clothing, she exaggerated and manipulated reality in a way that makes her images very artificial. Eco writes about wax museums of America, some of which have reproductions of famous European paintings such as Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. He writes that wax museums try to make viewers feel as though they are having a privileged experience of viewing a work that replaces the desire to see the original artwork. The voice-over that plays in the room at the Ripley's Wax Museum featuring a wax version of *The Last Supper* tells viewers that the original painting is not in good condition, asserting that seeing the wax version is somehow more real and more immediate than the original, and therefore will provide a more emotional and visceral viewing experience.[53] The wax museum soundtrack asserts that reality comes from the ability to see a work in person, which connects to the Western notion of 'seeing is believing' and Walter Benjamin's idea of the "aura" of an original work.[54] Even if the thing we see is completely artificial, there is a sense of authenticity that comes from the mere ability to view the work in person. Surely, there is an element of the wax museum in Sherman's work. Her use of fake body parts, wax or putty to shape her face, and the recreation of two-dimensional paintings with her three-dimensional body are commonalities between her work and wax museums. The sense of immediacy is also present.

[51] Umberto Eco, "Travels in Hyper Reality," in *Travels in Hyper Reality*, translated from Italian by William Weaver. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1983: 3-57.
[52] Eco, "Travels in Hyper Reality," 7.
[53] Ibid, 18.
[54] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 8.

However, Sherman did not wish for her photographs to replace the paintings they are based on as the wax museum recreations of masterpieces do. Instead, she used hyperreality to make her message clear to her contemporary American audience.

As caricatures of the Renaissance portraits, Sherman's photographs are grounded in reality yet exaggerate and distort features in order to make the truths behind the Renaissance paintings more clear, hyperreal. As a female artist, she must assert her work in a way that can compete with the male domination of the field of art. Sherman mentioned in a conversation with Michael Kimmelman that she wants art to be accessible and noted, "I can't stand the idea of art as a precious object".[55] Eco writes that, "for historical information to be absorbed, it has to assume the aspect of a reincarnation".[56] This comment, considered in regard to Sherman's *History Portraits,* raises questions about Sherman's intentions in recreating paintings from history. Did she feel she was reinterpreting historical artworks in a way that would be more legible to the present so that contemporary viewers could learn about that history? Perhaps in making her photographs look like exaggerated, hyperreal versions of the historical paintings, or caricatures, she was attempting to make them more appealing, interesting, and puzzling to viewers looking for the sensational. Eco refers more directly to art when he writes, "the art museum is contaminated by the freak show".[57] Certainly many of Sherman's photographs could be described as such, but she used the "freakishness" of her artworks for social commentary. She makes fun of contemporary America's desire of sensationalistic stimuli, which often objectifies the female body. Sherman draws the viewer in with her images' garish colors and immediacy and then confronts the viewer with a more serious critique of depictions of women as the artificiality of the nudity becomes visible and the beauty dissolves into the grotesque.

[55] Kimmelman, *Portraits,* 144.
[56] Eco, "Travels in Hyper Reality," 7.
[57] Ibid, 8.

Sherman has been known to say that the camera lies; photographs are always artificial although we tend to perceive them as real in Western culture.[58] Christa Döttinger writes about the way Sherman has used hyperreality in the series. She writes that Sherman's photographs don't attempt to appear real like the paintings they're based on, produced in a time when painters attempted to imitate life.[59] They are meant to be completely artificial, hyperreal. Döttinger writes that the hyperreal quality of Sherman's work seduces the viewer, draws him/her in to view the work.[60] The prints are chromogenic color prints; Sherman saturated the colors to create a more realistic and intense effect,[61] verging on hyperreal. Both the large than life scale and color quality of Sherman's *History Portraits* stand in sharp contrast with her *Untitled Film Stills,* which were much smaller in scale, black and white, and made to look like old photographs. The qualities of the *History Portraits* make them more immediate and give them a more overwhelming presence than the earlier works. At this point in her career, Sherman felt confident enough to assert herself in her works, challenging the great masterpieces of history.

Sherman used makeup to create a high contrast between light and dark in her photographs, recalling the chiaroscuro painting style used by artists such as Leonardo da Vinci to create a sense of depth and three-dimensionality. In *Untitled #223,* her appropriation of *Madonna Litta,* attributed to Leonardo, but which may have been by his student Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, Sherman made the background very dark so it is difficult to distinguish the location of the holy family, but a bright light illuminates the mother and child. Sherman used makeup to recreate the high contrast shading on her face in a technique similar to the chiaroscuro that Leonardo was known for mastering to create a lifelike appearance to the figures on a flat canvas.

[58] Jean-Pierre Criqui, "The Lady Vanishes," in *Cindy Sherman*, (2006), 276.
[59] Döttinger, *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits,* 45.
[60] Ibid, 56
[61] Ibid, 55.

However, Sherman is three-dimensional so the lighting would naturally create these shadows on her face that the camera would capture. In making up her face to imitate the chiaroscuro of the Renaissance painting, she emphasized the artificiality of these media and also engaged in a technique similar to the old master artist, but rather than through the use of paint, she used cosmetics. Döttinger likens Sherman's artistic process of putting on makeup, prosthetic body parts, clothing, and wigs to painting.[62] She writes that, "Sherman is simultaneously painter and model".[63] In participating in both roles involved in the creation of the masterpieces of history, Sherman was able to get insight into both perspectives of Renaissance model and the artists who painted them. Linda Nochlin writes, "always a model but never an artist might well have served as the motto of the serious aspiring young woman in the arts of the nineteenth century".[64] Sherman in the late twentieth century could finally be both, and she used this ability to create more empathetic and empowering depictions of the female models of the paintings.

Sherman used cosmetics to make her face look strange and jarring, subverting the typical use of makeup and its ties to patriarchal control of women. Döttinger sees Sherman's ability to manipulate her appearance with cosmetics and clothing as an advantage both she and other women have. She writes, "Women have the legitimate privilege of actively participating in their beauty".[65] Döttinger's viewpoint was probably not unusual when Sherman made these works. Certainly Sherman would reject this assertion. While makeup gives women liberty to have more control over their appearance, that control is on a micro level and at the macro level is the overbearing patriarchal expectation that women present themselves in a way that is attractive to men. As a feminist, Sherman's relationship to makeup is complicated. Laura Mulvey discusses

[62] Döttinger, *Cindy Sherman: History Portraita,* 37.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Nochlin, "Why Have there Been No Great Women Artists?" 168.
[65] Döttinger, *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits,* 11.

the link between the cosmetics industry and patriarchy in reference to Sherman's work. She writes, "in order to create a 'cosmetic' body a cosmetics industry has come into being, so that the psychic investment the patriarchy makes in feminine appearance is echoed by an investment on the part of capitalism".[66] Sherman frequently expresses her love of makeup despite its conflict with her feminist ideals. In her interview with Simon Hattenstone of *The Guardian*, she discussed her preoccupation with her appearance during her teenage years. She stopped wearing makeup everyday when she got to college, because as a liberated woman, it was expected that she would not wear makeup. In her personal life, Sherman's use of cosmetics was always tied up in her self-awareness of her appearance, as a presentation of her identity, impressed on her by patriarchal ideals that women must always survey themselves and "appear" for men.[67] She told Hattenstone, "I was ambivalent about [not wearing makeup] because I still liked it".[68] Now Sherman does not wear makeup much in her daily life, but she uses it extensively in her art.[69] She paints her face with makeup as the old masters painted the faces of women with oil paints. Paint has historically been a tool used by men, while once cosmetics were developed, they were a tool for women to use not to make beautiful objects to contribute to culture as men were doing with their paints, but to make themselves more beautiful. Sherman repurposed cosmetics to create art in the way that Judy Chicago created *The Dinner Party* with traditionally female crafts of embroidery and ceramics.

By using makeup as her paint, to create 'high art', Sherman subverted both the historical notion that women cannot contribute to culture as men can, while also using cosmetics for a purpose in opposition to their intended use, which is confining to women in the value it places on

[66] Mulvey, "A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body," 297.
[67] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London: BBC and Penguin Books, 1972, *47.*
[68] Simon Hattenstone, "Cindy Sherman: Me, myself, and I," 3.
[69] Hattenstone, "Cindy Sherman Me, Myself, and I."

their appearance. Sherman told Hattenstone, "I'm good at using my face as a canvas…I'll see a photograph of a character and try to copy them onto my face".[70] She refers to her face as a canvas, making her cosmetics her tool of painting. Perhaps in the same way that Sherman works in photography because it is not a field that has been dominated by men as painting has, she uses makeup as her paint and her body as her canvas, both of which are her own, as a woman and as an individual. However, instead of using makeup for its intended use of making the user appear more attractive, she uses it for her art, to develop her creative ideas. About a year after Linda Nochlin published her article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," Sherry Ortner engaged in a similar kind of inquiry into historical gender issues. In her 1972 article, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?,"[71] Ortner argues that women have been aligned with nature because of their natural abilities to produce and nurture children, men, not having these capacities, have been the creators of culture. She writes, "men are identified not only with culture, in the sense of all human creativity, as opposed to nature; they are identified in particular with Culture in the old fashioned sense of the finer and higher aspects of human thought –art, religion, law, etc.".[72] Sherman's work stands in direct opposition to the gendered assumptions of art making.

Normally Madonna and Child paintings focus attention on Christ, but Sherman's photographs are about Mary. Another aspect of the artworks that Sherman manipulated in order to reaffirm the Madonna's power was to cover the Christ figure in fabric. In both *Untitled #216* and *Untitled #223*, the baby is barely visible, just the top of its head or hands and feet sticking out from the fabric it's wrapped in. It is possible Sherman covered the child to hide that it was a plastic doll, but this would be incongruous with her making the artificial breasts overt. Therefore,

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?".
[72] Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" 25.

Sherman's decision to cover the doll must have been more deliberate, in order to deemphasize the Christ Child, thus giving the Madonna more authority in the image and centering the focus on her. In *Madonna of Melun* and *Madonna Litta*, the Virgin Mary looks down at Christ and her robes frame him, drawing the viewer's eyes to him. In Sherman's version of *Madonna of Melun, Untitled #216,* though her eyes are downcast, they are not directed at Christ, but off to her lower right. In Sherman's version of *Madonna Litta, Untitled #223,* though she does look down at the infant, her sleeves do not fully frame him. Sherman's subtle manipulations of the Renaissance paintings contribute to the reduction of the Christ's importance in her versions.

In Sherman's photographs the Virgin Mary is the protagonist of the composition and her motherhood is only a fraction of her identity, rather than completely defining her. Margaret Miles quotes Thomas Aquinas "'because the male sex exceeds the female sex, Christ assumed a man's nature. So that people should not think little of the female sex, it was fitting that he should take flesh from a woman'".[73] This suggests the hierarchy of genders that was established by Christ's maleness and Mary's femaleness and that extended into the general connotations of genders during the Renaissance. Sherman however subverted this hierarchy in her images by literally making the Christ child a plastic doll. Though consisting of some plastic parts, the Madonna is a real human. While in imagery of the Madonna and Child, the Virgin Mary usually serves to ensure Christ's humanity, in Sherman's photographs the Christ Child is clearly not human at all. This frees the Madonna of the burden placed on her individuality of serving to ensure Christ's humanity. When Sherman made these images, many women felt they could either be mothers or have a career, but not both. If they chose the route of motherhood, that would become their identity. Sherman suggests the possibility that women can be mothers, but without it subsuming their entire purpose.

[73] Miles, "The Virgin's One Bare Breast," 31.

The subject matter of Sherman's *Untitled #225* is more ambiguous than the other two images of mothers. While *Untitled #216* and *Untitled #223* have the infant Christ, making them clearly *Madonna Lactans*, Botticelli's painting *Portrait of a Young Woman* on which Sherman based *Untitled #225,* is idiosyncratic because of its lack of a baby. The woman in Botticelli's painting holds her breast that drips milk, yet with no indication of who the milk is for. *Madonna Lactans* were a common subject matter in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Therefore, any image of a young woman with one breast exposed leaking milk would immediately recall images of the nursing Madonna to the Renaissance viewer, but the absence of the infant Christ is significant. The Virgin Mary is defined by her role as the mother of Christ, so without him, who is she? Did Botticelli intend for this woman to be the Virgin Mary or is she an allegorical depiction of fertility? The latter is the assumption more commonly accepted.[74] However, the more important question for this study is, how did Sherman interpret Botticelli's painting? Did she think the young woman was meant to be the Virgin Mary or was she attempting to draw a connection between this woman and the Madonna, despite the ambiguity of the subject of the painting? A comparison between *Untitled #225* and Sherman's two images of *Madonna Lactan*s can help pose answers to these questions.

The lack of a baby in *Untitled #225* (fig. 5) (1990) can be interpreted as an even more extreme way that Sherman focused attention on the mother. Whether or not she is the Madonna, she must be a mother because of her breast full of milk. The wheat behind the woman's head in Sherman's image is not present in Botticelli's painting, but as an image celebrating female fertility, the wheat can be interpreted as another symbol of nourishment. Miles writes that besides being a model of motherhood, *Madonna Lactan* paintings were also popular in 14th

[74] Döttinger, *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits,* 47.

century Italy because of a famine, which heightened the appeal of the imagery of nourishment.[75] The wheat in Sherman's photograph could be a reminder of the association between the idea of woman's ability to feed and its value to society. However, it could also be a reference to Christ and the Eucharist, made of wheat that Catholics believe becomes his body. The wheat also ties in with the blonde wig Sherman wears in the photograph and is similar to the elaborately braided, curly, blonde hair of Botticelli's young woman. Like the woman of Botticelli's painting, the woman in Sherman's photograph has the blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin of the ideal Renaissance beauty. She also has pearls woven into her hair as in Botticelli's painting. Pearls were a symbol of purity in Renaissance paintings, so this detail could also support the possibility of it being the Virgin Mary. However, purity was highly valued in all young women during the Renaissance as will be discussed in relation to Sherman's *Untitled #211* and *Untitled #212*, so the pearls are not convincing proof that the woman of *Untitled #225* is the Virgin Mary. While Botticelli celebrated female fertility in his painting, he allegorized this female power in the embodiment of an idealized young woman. Without a baby present in Botticelli's painting, the exposed breast squirting milk can easily be interpreted as sexual, and likely would have been to by the male Renaissance audience. The breast in Botticelli's painting does not seem to be an appendage as it does in most Renaissance *Madonna Lactan*s, but a natural part of her body, which is not only maternal but also sexual. However, in Sherman's version, the breast is clearly artificial as in her *Untitled #216* and *Untitled #223* so it is not as sexual, disallowing the objectification of the woman.

Sherman's gaze in *Untitled #225* is much more powerful than that of the woman in Botticelli's painting. Botticelli's young woman stares into the distance with glassy blue eyes, which appear to look at nothing in particular, possibly seductively or simply mindlessly. There

[75] Ibid, 198.

does not seem to be any agency or individuality behind her gaze, which would support the idea that she is simply an allegorical figure. As an allegorical figure, her body is not her own, but a symbol of her role for the purpose of men for sex and the production and nurturance of offspring. However, in Sherman's version, the gaze is much more intense. She seems to look at someone just out of the frame, possibly a man. There is agency and individuality behind her gaze. The intensity of her gaze suggests that she is either looking seductively at the person the viewer cannot see, or perhaps she is angry at the state she is in because of him, pregnant or just given birth and lactating.

In her images of biblical mothers, *Untitled #216*, *#223*, and *#225*, Sherman celebrated the female power of fertility and nourishment as the Renaissance paintings did, but she did so in a way that shows the mothers not just as vessels for life and nourishment of children, but also as individuals. Sherman drew attention to the idealization that still occurred in these Renaissance images of women. Even when women were acknowledged and celebrated for their powers, they were still defined by their beauty in ways that limited their agency. Using cosmetics, costumes, and fake body parts as her tools and her body as her canvas, Sherman subverted the way makeup, clothing, and nudity have been used by women to conform to male standards of female self-presentation and instead creates strange images of biblical mothers that disobey male scripted notions of motherhood and beauty. Her biblical mothers are independent and their motherhood is only part of their identity.

Biblical Manslayer

In *Untitled #228*, Sherman drew on another common subject matter in Italian art besides the Madonna and Child, Judith, the Jewish widow who seduced and slayed Holofernes, the

Assyrian general who was attempting to conquer her village.[76] Some of the best-known depictions of this story are by the female Baroque artist, Artemisia Gentileschi. However, Sherman chose to appropriate a version by the male painter, Sandro Botticelli instead in her *Untitled #228* (1990) (fig. 7). Botticelli's version of Judith (1497-1500) (fig. 8) does not have the fame of Gentileschi's despite Botticelli's fame for his *The Birth of Venus*, in the Uffizi Museum in Florence. Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1614-1618) (fig. 9), also in the Uffizi garners nearly as much attention as Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, but for very different reasons. *The Birth of Venus* attracts crowds for its sensuous depiction of a beautiful nude woman, her long golden hair framing the pale feminine curves of her body. In contrast, Gentileschi's Judith draws viewers with the drama of its grotesque quality; the squirting blood is at once revolting and intriguing. Botticelli's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* in comparison is not at all gruesome. There is no blood, not even dripping from the freshly cut head of Holofernes that Judith holds aloft or staining her sword. However, Sherman included blood in her interpretation, staining her hand and knife, signifying her action, though to a lesser degree than Gentileschi's painting depicting her in the throes of the beheading. The Old Testament story quotes Judith just before she kills Holofernes, "'Adonai God of all power, look down with favor in this hour upon the works of my hand for the exaltation of Jerusalem; because now is the time to come to the aid of thine inheritance and to carry out my designs for the shattering of the enemies who have risen up against us."[77] The "works of my hand" and "my design" asserts that Judith is both the mind and physical power behind killing Holofernes. In a similar way, Sherman stained Judith's hand with blood, asserting that Judith's own hands completed the deed. Though Botticelli's painting presents Judith as the heroine she is, he made her killing of Holofernes less overt than

[76] "The Book of Judith", *Jewish Apocryphal Literature,* edited by Morton S. Enslin, E.J. Brill, Leiden: Philadelphia, 1972.
[77] "The Book of Judith," *Jewish Apocryphal Literature,* 153.

Gentileschi's painting of Judith, allowing for the belief that God's role in the murder of Holofernes was greater than Judith's. Sherman added the element of blood, emphasizing the materiality of the event to enhance Judith's powerful image. Although *Untitled #228* looks like Botticelli's version of Judith, Sherman adopted the element of blood in Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* to make her reinterpretation of Judith closer to Gentileschi's version, which emphasizes Judith's credit in the killing of Holofernes.

Sherman and Botticelli's images of Judith are strikingly similar in composition. Sherman picked up on the prominence of fabrics in Botticelli's painting, by using various textiles as her backdrop and wrapping her body in rich drapery that were clearly based on Botticelli's painting in both the colors and the way the fabrics are draped. Botticelli's Judith stands in front of a tent that she has just emerged from after killing Holofernes. Sherman draped fabrics behind her to allude to the image of a tent. Sherman's feet are also bare like Judith's in Botticelli's painting. However, like the fake breast in the breastfeeding images, they **are** not Sherman's feet. They are artificial feet that are clown-like in their large size. The same fake feet appear in another image in Sherman's *History Portrait* series, her *Untitled # 193*. In her interview with *Art 21*, Sherman said her thought behind it was "'what if she's this beautiful powdered, wigged woman but then she's got these big feet sticking out?' It's one of the few jokey things in these pictures".[78] Sherman's comment suggests the comic nature of this addition as well as the attempt to derail the beauty of the woman she portrayed through a caricatured exaggeration of a detail that is less than ladylike.

Although the story of Judith in the Old Testament celebrates her power, there is still an emphasis on her beauty. One of the lines in the story says: "'But Judith, the daughter of Merari,

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[78] *Art21,* "Cindy Sherman: It Began with Madame de Pompadour".

undid him by the beauty of her face'".[79] Art Historian, Elena Ciletti writes, "at the core of the story is the reversal of prevailing patriarchal gender codes, within the terms of the patriarchy".[80] This implies that her power comes from her beauty, rather than her intrinsic merit. While the story is subversive in its praise of a woman's strength, it still operates under the patriarchal society that produced it. Although Judith is portrayed as powerful, the story suggests her strength is in spite of her gender, not because of it. Sherman's Judith, however, is not especially beautiful. Her body is hidden beneath the swaths of thick cloth that are draped over it. They are not the diaphanous fabrics of Botticelli's painting. In Sherman's version, her face is very pale, almost white and her makeup is garish, unlike the fresh face of Botticelli's Judith. Sherman's Judith does not seem concerned with her appearance. Botticelli's Judith in contrast looks seductive, her lips parted and her head tilted towards the head of Holofernes, which she holds up by her face. She looks more like a lover who has just committed a crime of passion, than the clever widow who outsmarted the enemy general trying to conquer her village.

Many interpretations of the story of Judith suggest that she was romantically involved with Holofernes before killing him, but Sherman erased this possibility in *Untitled #228*.[81] Ciletti writes that the Judith story was often interpreted in this way to assert the notion that, "whenever women exert power over men, it is by definition sexual and lethal".[82] This is an attempt to limit the power of women, by framing it as sinful and dangerous. Ciletti also writes, "Once a sexual dimension is acknowledged for the female character, her identity as a legitimate, active heroine is simply not possible".[83] Thus, adding a sexual element to the image of Judith weakens her

[79] Elena Ciletti, "Patriarchal Ideology in the Renaissance Iconography of Judith," *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 64.
[80] Ciletti, "Patriarchal Ideology in the Renaissance Iconography of Judith," 64.
[81] Ibid, 46.
[82] Ibid, 50.
[83] Ciletti, "Patriarchal Ideology in the Renaissance Iconography of Judith," 52.

power and suggests she was a crazed lover rather than a heroine. Sherman however, has included no trace of sexuality. There is no reasonable possibility that Judith and the grotesque, gray, wrinkled mask Sherman has used to represent Holofernes were romantically involved. She holds the head away from her body, turning from it, emphasizing its wretchedness.

In *Untitled #228,* Sherman emphasized Judith's strength by reducing the size of her weapon. The weapon Sherman's Judith used to behead Holofernes is a small knife, stained with blood. In Botticelli's painting the weapon is not only clean of any signs of the beheading, but it is also significantly larger than in Sherman's version. Judith in Botticelli's painting holds a large sword, so big that it is not even pictured in its entirety in the frame of the painting; it looks like it could kill Holofernes with just one small swing of the arm. However, the small weapon in Sherman's photograph would have required much more effort to behead Holofernes, suggesting the physical strength of Judith that made the slaying possible. While Botticelli's painting detracts from Judith's personal strength, Sherman's photograph returns attention to her power.

Another element that Sherman altered in her appropriation is the head of Holofernes, making it grotesque to show him as the antagonist he was in the Old Testament story. Rather than the young handsome man of Botticelli's painting, Sherman used a withered old gray head to represent Holofernes. His eyes are open, glowing red and his skin is so wrinkled and gray he looks more like a monster than a human. Many Renaissance paintings depicted Holofernes as a young handsome man, as is evidenced in Botticelli's painting,[84] thus allowing male viewers and artists to empathize with him. A male viewer of Botticelli's work would identify with Holofernes and that position would evoke a feeling of terror of powerful women like Judith. Botticelli's intentions could be as warning to male viewers to watch out for deviant women like Judith and would compel them to suppress the power of dangerous women like her. Perhaps Botticelli chose

[84] Ibid, 163.

to make Holofernes's eyes closed to make him more human and therefore easier to sympathize with, unlike Sherman's tactic of having his eyes open, making him look even more monstrous than his withered skin already conveys. Sherman completely subverted the archetype of the humanistic depiction of Holofernes by male artists. She did not just lessen Holofernes's handsomeness or youth, but has made him grotesque. The viewer cannot empathize with him as easily as he can in Botticelli's painting. If anything, a man viewing Sherman's image of Judith might feel terror, at the threat of powerful women like Judith.

Elements of grotesque and horror come up frequently in Sherman's work, and with more intensity throughout the progression of her career and serve as important aspects of her caricatures. In an interview with Kenneth Baker of *SFGate*, Sherman said,

> I see humor in almost everything, in even the grotesque things, because I don't want people to believe in them as if they were documentary that really does show true horror. I want them to be artificial, so you can laugh or giggle at them as I do when I watch horror movies.[85]

This statement reveals how Sherman views the intertwining of elements of the grotesque, artificiality, and humor. She sees all these elements contributing to and playing off one another, as the do in caricature, and this explains a lot about her intention behind her work and the way she means for these elements to be interpreted by viewers. Overall, she wants her audience to find her work humorous. She makes the grotesque elements clearly artificial in order to make them horrific in the same way she interprets horror movies, comical in their fakeness. The severed head of Holofernes is a grotesque detail, but Sherman made it obviously artificial. In a technique of caricature, she emphasized its grotesqueness, underscoring the importance of Holofernes's wretchedness. It is clearly a fake head or mask, likely intended as part of a Halloween costume or a prop. In Botticelli's painting, the head of Holofernes is minimized in its grotesqueness. It is a severed head, but other than its lack of a body, it is a portrait of a handsome

[85] Cindy Sherman in Kenneth Baker, "Cindy Sherman show at SFMOMA opens," 5.

man. In Sherman's version, the head is much more disgusting because of its extreme wrinkles, sallow gray complexion, balding head with matted gray hair, and red bloodshot eyes. It is both revolting and obviously fake, just as horror movies are.

The lack of female artists and patrons in history means that a bias against women developed in the interpretations of stories. Garrard writes that it is likely that Gentileschi "should have drawn subconsciously from the wellspring of her female identity and experience to humanize the treatment of a biblical theme that men had distorted almost beyond recognition".[86] The voices of female artists like Artemisia Gentileschi and Cindy Sherman help return power to the women of these stories and therefore to the entire female gender by providing more depictions of women from a female perspective. Despite the visual similarity between *Untitled #228* and Botticelli's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes,* the principle from which Sherman works in this photograph and in the entirety of the *History Portraits* series is much more in line with Gentileschi's tactic of disturbing and disgusting the viewer, than Botticelli's style of luring in the viewer with visually pleasing sensuous forms. Sherman's photographs do not seduce the viewer with beauty and sensuality, but rather with an intrigue verging on disgust, which makes it hard to look away.

Sherman's biblical images in her *History Portraits* are depictions of the Virgin Mary and Judith, arguably the two most powerful women in the Bible. They are powerful in their control over men; one gives life to man and the other takes it. However, rather than depicting their power over the lives of men, Renaissance male artists portrayed them in ways that confined them by manipulating their relation to men. Male Renaissance artists showed the Madonna's importance through her role as mother of Christ. Sherman shifted the emphasis back on Mary and reaffirms her individuality and the importance of her role of motherhood. Similarly,

[86] Garrard, "Artemisia and Susanna," 167.

Botticelli portrayed Judith's power as a danger to innocent men, while Sherman shows Judith not as an assailant, but as an avenged victim. In these images, Sherman used elements of theatricality and hyperreality to explore the performance of gender in patriarchal society. Women are pressured to manipulate their appearance and self-representation in ways that force them into constant monitoring of their behavior and appearance. Sherman reveals these notions by making her images overt in their artificiality in ways that are at once humorous and critical. Sherman's images of biblical mothers and manslayer humanize the women to reaffirm the inherent powers all women can possess.

Fig. 2 Jean Fouquet, *Madonna of Melun*, 1452, oil on panel, 37x 34 in., Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp. Available from ARTstor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

Fig. 1 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #216*, 1989, chromogenic color print, 87x56 in., The Broad, Los Angeles, Available from: Museum of Modern Art, http://www.moma.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

Fig. 3. Cindy Sherman, Untitled #223, 1990, chromogenic color print, 58x42in. Private collection, Available from: Museum of Contemporary Art, http://www.moca.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

Fig. 4. Attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, *Madonna Litta*, 1490-1491, tempera on canvas, 16 ½ x 13 in., Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Available from ARTstor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

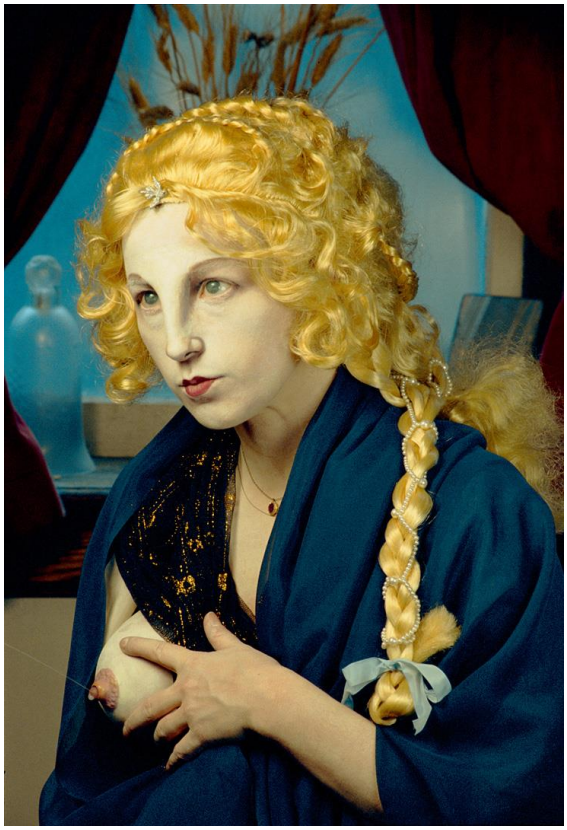

Fig. 5 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #225*, 1990, chromogenic color print, 48x33 in. The Broad, Los Angeles. Available from The Broad, http://www.thebroad.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

Fig. 6 Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, 1490, Available from ARTstor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

Fig. 7 Cindy Sherman, Untitled #228, 1990, chromogenic color print, 82x48in. The Broad, Los Angeles. Available from The Broad, http://www.thebroad.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

Fig. 8. Sandro Botticelli, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, 1497-1500, oil and tempera on panel, 14x8in Rijkmuseum, Amsterdam, Available from ARTstor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

Fig. 9 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1614-1618, oil on canvas, 78x64in, Uffizi, Florene, Italy. Available from ARTstor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

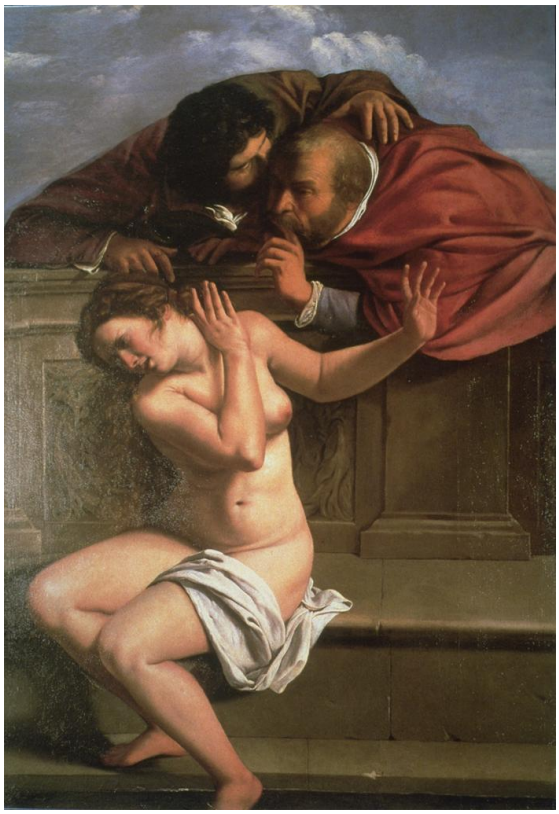

Fig. 10 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, oil on canvas, 67x48in. Graf von Schonborn Kunstsammlungen, Germany, Available from ARTstor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

II. Beauty to Bizarre: Secular Women

While Cindy Sherman's images of biblical women represent women's inherent powers, her images of secular women show the way women were stripped of these strengths and repressed during the Renaissance and continue to be today in patriarchal society. Sherman revealed how women have been held up to an ideal standard that reduces women's value to their beauty and passive and submissive virtues that ensure male hegemony. These Renaissance female values were still prevalent in the late twentieth century when Sherman was making these photographs and the Women's Movement was working to push against them to liberate women from these confining expectations. Sherman's photographs based on portraits of secular Renaissance women are an influential contribution to this effort of female empowerment and liberation from male constructed female values.

In *Untitled #205* (fig. 12), *Untitled #209* (fig. 15), *Untitled #211* (fig. 18), *and Untitled #212* (fig. 22) (1990) Sherman disrupted the harmony and perfect proportions of portraits of Renaissance women through her use of artificial body parts and exaggeration of features. She critiques ideals of female beauty during the Renaissance and the concept of women as visually perfect objects for men to gaze upon. By exaggerating features of the portraits, Sherman used caricature to emphasize what she saw as the defining features of the Renaissance paintings, to return a sense of individuality to the women where their original portraits had reduced them to idealized generic faces of beauty. Caricature is a particularly apt technique for her to employ in critiquing Renaissance portraits because caricatures developed during the Renaissance to contrast with idealization.[87] Using grossly exaggerated features and brazen artificiality, Sherman exposed the fabrication of idealized beauty of the Renaissance and its oppressive effects on female

[87] Judith Wechsler, et al., "Caricature," *Grove Art Online.*

bodies, while also indicating the literal repression of women in a bleakly patriarchal society in the way these artificial parts and costumes stifle the artist's real body.

In her reinterpretations of their portraits, Sherman exposed the realities of the women's subservient positions in society and emphasizes their agency. During the Renaissance, portraits were used by those who could afford them in many of the same ways that photographs are used now, to keep an image of a family member close whether separated by death or distance and to mark occasions such as marriages. Because only the wealthy could afford to commission them, portraits were also displays of status and wealth. The two types of portraits of secular Renaissance women that Sherman appropriated are paintings of mistresses and wives. As with the biblical types of mother and manslayer, both secular types Sherman used as the focus of her study are defined in their relation to men, but Sherman helps to redefine their autonomy. *Untitled #205* (fig. 12), her reinterpretation of Raphael's *La Fornarina* is a depiction of a mistress. *Untitled #209* (fig. 15), *#211* (fig. 18), *and #212* (fig.22) are based on portraits of wealthy Renaissance wives. These women are Renaissance nobility and royalty, and all are of exceptional beauty in their portraits. Christa Döttinger quotes Sherman in an interview with the *New York Times* noting, "'all the women in those paintings were the wives or mistresses of the artists, or the wives of rich patrons'".[88] Sherman was interested in the way the women in these historical paintings were defined in relation to men and were under male control.

Sherman appropriated both frontal and profile portraiture to explore ways in which profile portraiture defined women by their appearance and frontal portraiture allowed the women's individuality to show. Both *Untitled #211* and *Untitled #212* are profile portraits, based on the canon of portraiture in the early Renaissance, borrowed from Roman coins. The sitters for these portraits visually aligned themselves with the status of people who had been distinguished

[88] Döttinger, *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits,* 17.

enough to have their face on coins. The shift to frontal portraiture occurred around 1450 for men and not until the 1470s for women. The profile view is optimal for allowing the viewer to appraise the appearance of the sitter and this view was valued in picturing women more than men. Sherman's *Untitled #209* is a frontal portrait of a wealthy woman. Frontal portraiture allows for more connection between viewer and subject and a sense of the personality of the sitter.

Sherman precluded the way viewers fall prey to the idealization of historical paintings, oblivious to their fabrication, by changing the perfections of Renaissance portraits into extreme exaggerations and cheapening their displays of wealth. There was a strong canon of features favored in the Renaissance and artists would paint their subjects in ways that would conform to these standards. These ideal traits came from poetry, comparing women's features to jewels, flowers, and pieces of fruit. In her book on Renaissance female portraiture, Paola Tinagli examines the idealization of women in poetry,

> writers praised the attractions of wavy hair gleaming like gold, of white skin similar to snow, to marble, to alabaster or to milk; they admired cheeks which looked like lilies and roses, and eyes that shone like the sun or the stars. Lips are compared to rubies, teeth to pearls, breasts to snow or to apples.[89]

Rather than comparing women to jewels as Renaissance poetry does, Sherman compares her women to fake jewels, for example through her use of plastic pearls in *Untitled #211* and *Untitled #212*. Metaphors and hyperbole are assumed in poetry, but we do not necessarily expect these kinds of elaborations in figurative painting, and are more likely to miss them. Sherman ensured we won't overlook these fictions in her appropriations by also using elements of hyperbole, through artificial body parts rather than poetic phrasing. The prosthetic body parts in *Untitled #205, #211, and #212* are just as clearly fictional as the words in the poems.

[89] Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, 85-86.

In her reinterpretations of portraits by male Renaissance artists, Sherman drew on techniques of women artists of the period to emphasize female agency and intellect over beauty. As Sherman drew on methods used by the female artist Artemisia Gentileschi to empower the image of Judith painted by a male artist, Sherman may have looked to another female artist of the era, Sofonisba Anguissola, in her depictions of Renaissance women. Most artworks of the Renaissance were made for patrons; it was unusual for artists to paint self-portraits because most did not feel confident enough in their social status to do so until the 16th century.[90] In one of the earliest Italian self-portraits, Sofonisba Anguissola's *Self-Portrait Painting* (1556) (fig. 11), the artist made her eyes larger and forehead wider, traits that indicate her intellect.[91] Rather than emphasizing her physical beauty, Anguissola used physiological exaggerations to emphasize her wisdom and the power of her mind, characteristics not usually valued in women during the Renaissance. Sherman used a similar technique of caricature in the way she exaggerates features of the Renaissance portraits to provide a parody of representations of women at the time by male artists. Joanna Woods-Marsden writes that during the Renaissance for a woman to be talented in something cultural, painting for example, made her abnormal. However, Anguissola was not afraid to assert her intelligence and artistic talent.[92] Though Sherman denied that her photographs are self-portraits,[93] she emphasized her role as the artist in the obvious alterations she made to her appearance and the original paintings. In this way, her work is a form of self-representation. Like Anguissola's use of physiological exaggeration to highlight her creativity and intellect, Sherman used the caricature technique of obviously artificial and exaggerated features to assert her role as creator of the photographs, appropriator of the Renaissance paintings.

[90] Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, 5.
[91] Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art*, 114.
[92] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 6.
[93] Friedwald, *Women Photographers*, 194.

When Sherman rejects her work as self-portraiture she is not denying the inclusion of herself in the works, but rather eschewing the self-indulgence of the genre of self-portraiture, beginning in the Renaissance and continuing today. She used herself, not because she is self-obsessed or preoccupied with her own appearance, but in an attempt to regain claim of her body, which is a contested site in patriarchal society. This idea was particularly relevant during the Women's Movement with discussions around the right to abortion, sexual harassment, public breastfeeding, among other issues and Barbara Kruger's poster for the Women's Movement declaring the female body as a "battleground." Sherman armored the women in her photographs for this battle with plastic body parts and other props, protecting them but also making them powerful.

Creating "beautiful monsters"[94] may have been Sherman's intention in her *History Portraits;* to call attention to the way beauty becomes monstrous if the manipulation and artificiality behind idealization is revealed. Due to idealization, Renaissance portraits often became composite figures, composed of the individual aspects viewed as being most beautiful. Elizabeth Cropper references this phenomenon, "artists created ideal types, beautiful monsters, composed of every individual perfection".[95] Sherman's women are composite figures in that she created them by combining plastic body parts, putty, makeup, wigs, costumes, and props. In doing so, she made literal the combining of features in Renaissance portraiture. However, the pieces of Sherman's works are not idealized features, but exaggerated, grossly unnatural body parts, and garments she found at thrift stores. They are detritus she cobbled together for her postmodern deconstructions to draw attention to the artifice that lies beneath the flawless beautiful surfaces of the Renaissance paintings.

[94] Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigiano, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," *The Art Bulletin*, 58 (1976): 376.
[95] Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women," 376.

Though one assumes the reality of the people in Renaissance portraits, one cannot make the same assumption about Sherman's photographs. Though the real body of the artist is in them, Sherman altered her appearance so extremely and so apparently, that the viewer immediately notices their fabrication. Her construction of her representations of women in Renaissance portraits acts as a metaphor for the way women in the Renaissance, and during the time Sherman worked on these photographs, have been expected to manipulate their appearance in order to fit the male designed standard for women. One can see evidence of how she constructed her appearance in the makeup that sits visibly on her skin, the way she drew on eyebrows above her real brows, and traced her lips in a different shape than her natural lips. Though the Renaissance paintings used artificiality to become more beautiful than reality, Sherman used artifice for the opposite effect. Her figures are ugly and grotesque while the paintings they are based on are impeccable depictions of perfect proportions, youth, and beauty that were meant to visually communicate the feminine virtues of purity, grace, and modesty.

Renaissance Mistress

In *Untitled* #205 (fig. 12) Sherman subverted the sensuousness and youthful beauty of Raphael's painting of his mistress to deteriorate the old master's fantasy. *Untitled #205* was based on Raphael's painting *La Fornarina* (1518-1519) (fig. 13), which falls into the category of a *bella donna* painting.[96] The woman is nude, sensuously displayed and the sitter was thought to be a model as well as Raphael's mistress, adding to the seductive nature of the painting. Raphael's portrait is an optimal example of female sensuality, beauty, and youth and the way paintings of female nudes were images of fetish for male viewers. The painting provided Sherman with an opportunity to lampoon the painting and its male creator. In her

[96] Italian for beautiful woman, these paintings are ideal depictions of female beauty and not necessarily meant to look like specific people, but rather an ideal type.

reinterpretations, she broke apart the foundation Raphael's painting stands on, making the woman no longer beautiful, no longer youthful, and no longer alluring. Sherman's woman is still a nude, but the body is a prosthetic torso that covers Sherman's real nudity, protecting her from the male gaze that is so strongly implied in Raphael's *La Fornarina.* The nude body of Raphael's painting is not real flesh, but the viewer can still fetishize it as though it were real. In Sherman's photograph, the flesh is not supple and youthful as *La Fornarina'*s appears, but has large drooping breasts and a swollen belly that looks pregnant or bloated. The skin is not creamy and soft, but yellow tinged and looks like the hard plastic it is made of.

Sherman found an unusual subject in *La Fornarina* because it is an image of Raphael's lover, painted for himself, an object of his lust. The painting provided Sherman with an opportunity to empower a woman who according to Giorgio's Vasari's account of Raphael's life caused the artist's death, but was objectified and suppressed in the male artist's painting. In *Lives of the Artists,* Vasari writes that Raphael was particularly promiscuous. He was reluctantly engaged to a niece of a cardinal, but in expectation of the marriage, Vasari writes that Raphael "pursued his amorous pleasures beyond all moderation, and on one occasion he happened to be even more immoderate than usual".[97] Vasari goes on to say that Raphael's excess of lovemaking made him ill, but because he would not admit to the doctors the cause, he was treated incorrectly and died. Because Vasari's text is so well known, Sherman was likely aware of this story about Raphael. *La Fornarina,* interpreted as a portrait of Raphael's mistress with whom he engaged in this behavior that led to his death, presented Sherman with another version of a *femme fatale,* similar to Judith. Though Raphael's mistress was not a heroine slaying an enemy, as Judith was, she nonetheless caused the death of a powerful man. Sherman likely chose to appropriate *La Fornarina* because of Vasari's story of the life of Raphael, which provides an example of a

[97] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Oxford Paperbacks, 1991, 336.

powerful woman whose agency has been diminished by a male told history. Vasari's story emphasizes Raphael's amorous nature, but does not discuss anything in detail about his mistress.

Sherman's version of La Fornarina is the victim of male control who, like Judith, ultimately triumphs. Sherman focused in on the female subject of Raphael's painting, casting herself in that role. However, her depiction of the mistress is not one that evokes desire, but rather repulses the viewer. Sherman's interpretation of Raphael's mistress shows her as suffering the effects of Raphael's excessive lovemaking. Rather than being an image of ideal youthful beauty to spur male desire, she looks pregnant, tired, and worn down. La Fornarina has been the subject of Raphael's control both as his mistress and as the model of the painting that he created, but in the end, she caused his tragic fall.

Sherman was likely aware of another artist, Jean-Auguste-Dominque Ingres's Romantic period commentary on Raphael's relationship with La Fornarina in his painting *Raphael and La Fornarina* (1814) (fig. 14), which Christa Döttinger mentions in her book on Sherman's *History Portraits.*[98] Ingres's painting shows Raphael in his studio with his mistress on his lap. La Fornarina wears the same head wrap that she does in her portrait. Raphael cranes his neck to look at his progress on his painting of her. The relationship depicted in Ingres's piece suggests the painting of La Fornarina as an object of Raphael's affection as much as the woman herself, or even more so. Raphael seems to be comparing the painting of her to the real woman, assessing the beauty of each. Ingres depicted La Fornarina as she looks in Raphael's painting, suggesting she is as beautiful and perfect as she is in her portrait. By the 1800s, Raphael's paintings of beautiful women had become a key component of the canon of artistic tradition and Ingres followed Raphael's style of idealizing women. However, in *Untitled #205,* Sherman presents a very different version of the model of Raphael's painting. She is not beautiful and young as she

[98] Döttinger, *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits,* 24.

appears in Raphael or Ingres's depictions. Sherman freed La Fornarina from the objectification asserted on her by these male artists' paintings of her and in Raphael's romantic relationship with her.

Although nudes were one of the major types of Renaissance paintings, *Untitled #205* is the only nude in Sherman's *History Portraits,* but it provided her with an important opportunity for parody. English media critic John Berger critiques the convention of nudity in European painting noting, "to be on display is to have the surface of one's own skin, the hairs of one's own body, turned into a disguise which, in that situation, can never be discarded…nudity is a form of dress".[99] Sherman made Berger's concept of "nudity as a form of dress" literal by making the nudity a piece of plastic she wears over her own body. In doing this, as with the fake breasts in her *Madonna Lactan*s (*Untitled #216* [fig. 1] and *Untitled #223* [fig. 3]), Sherman emphasized how the artworks by men objectified nudity. In the images of a nursing Virgin Mary by male Renaissance artists that Sherman appropriated, the bare breast looks detached from the body, a detail Sherman made literal by using prosthetic breasts in her photographs. Raphael's painting turned the woman into a metaphorical object; her body is not hers, but an object of male desire, specifically that of the artist himself. Sherman also made this concept literal though the use of a fake plastic body that is not her own. Norman Bryson writes, "Raphael's idealization of the sitter is expressed as the imposition of a second body that has nothing do with her own. It is like a cuirass[100] dished out from the masculine imaginary and strapped to her shoulders".[101] Sheman did nothing to hide the fact that the torso is plastic. The strings tying it to her shoulders are clearly visible and she did not attempt to meld the fake flesh with the skin of her collarbone. The fake torso is like a piece of armor, protecting her from the male gaze. In turning the idealized,

[99] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 54.
[100] A piece of Roman armor
[101] Bryson, "The Ideal and the Abject," 92.

flawless, soft appearance of nude flesh in Raphael's *La Fornarina* into a bloated, clearly artificial torso, Sherman reclaimed the site of the female body, making it no longer an object of male fetish.

Sherman made the body grotesque in order to free it from objectification, pointing out that once a female body is no longer youthful, it is no longer an object of male desire. She critiques these absurd male constructed standards of female beauty by making her version of *La Fornarina* old and grotesque. Bryson writes that in Sherman's reinterpretation of Raphael's painting, "each step in the direction of enhancing, ennobling, aestheticizing the body is matched, somewhere else, by a step toward the grotesque".[102] Every attempt by Raphael to make the subject of his painting beautiful and sensual, Sherman contradicted so that rather than becoming ideal, her reinterpretation became grotesque, even horrifying. Raphael's painting is an image of youthful beauty in its purest form. The model's skin is flawless and free of any signs of age. Sherman's woman on the other hand, has bags under her eyes and her face looks gaunt rather than supple and plump. The plastic torso with its large sagging breasts is in stark opposition with the small perky breasts of *La Fornarina.* Sherman emphasized the roundness of the woman's stomach of Raphael's painting, making it look hard and swollen rather than the soft fleshy stomach of Raphael's model. The woman in Sherman's photo could be pregnant, but if she is, it seems to be a pregnancy late in life.

Sherman shows the pregnancy of the woman in *Untitled #205* as a corporal power. If *Untitled #205* is an image of pregnancy, Sherman's *History Portraits* contains four images of female fertility along with the three images of breastfeeding mothers. Sherman was clearly interested in natural powers of the female body, perhaps in order to critique the traditional idea

[102] Bryson, "The Ideal and the Abject," 92.

that women create with their bodies while men create with their minds.[103] Simply by being a female artist creating these artworks she disproves this notion. Rosemary Betterton discusses explorations of pregnancy by contemporary female artists in her article "Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity, and Maternal Imagination" and she uses Sherman's appropriation of *La Fornarina* as one of her examples to examine the use of pregnancy by a contemporary artist.[104] Betterton writes about a historical mythology of monstrous pregnancy, which was of course, constructed by men. These myths come from a "'deep-seated anxiety that surrounds the issue of women's maternal power of procreation in a patriarchal society'".[105] Just as male artists dissociated the nursing breast of the Virgin Mary from her body in a way that made her natural power seem less integral to her being, these male constructed dialogues about monstrous pregnancies turn women's natural power into something negative in an attempt to suppress it. Because pregnancy is a power only women hold, it was seen as a threat to male dominance and by constructing it as something monstrous and inhuman, men could maintain their hegemonic position over women. Although Sherman's garishly made up face and artificial swollen body in *Untitled #205* allow the photograph to be viewed as an image of monstrous pregnancy, as a woman controlling this dialogue Sherman sustained the power of pregnancy and agency of creating the photograph. Sherman views the monstrous and grotesque as signs of power rather than abnormality as it was constructed in the male discourse. She celebrates the monstrous nature of her women in order to poke fun at the male fear of female powers that have caused the suppression of these abilities.

[103] Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?," 21.
[104] Rosemary Betterton, "Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity, and Maternal Imagination," *Hypatia*, 21, (2006): 1, 81-100.
[105] Braidotti cited in Betterton, "Promising Monster," 82.

In making her version of *La Fornarina* look pregnant, Sherman disrupted the notion of nudity equating with sexuality. Pregnancy is one way of lessening the sexuality of nudity. Men are happy to fetishize a youthful nude female body, but once she becomes pregnant, ill, or old, she is no longer an ideal untarnished image of sensuality. Another method of desexualizing the woman in Sherman's image is the way she powerfully presents herself in front of the viewer. In Raphael's painting, the model's hands are arranged in a pose of the Venus Pudica, or modest Venus, drawn from Classical sculpture. In this pose, the woman has her hands placed near her genitals and breasts in an appearance of modesty, but in effect, she draws attention to those areas more than she hides them. Sherman's hands in *Untitled #205* are in a similar placement to the woman's hands in Raphael's painting, but they are more firmly placed in a way that seems protective rather than inviting. She gestures to her areas of corporal power, but doesn't invite male access as Raphael's model does. Rather than looking coyly at the viewer as Raphael's *La Fornarina* does, Sherman's woman's gaze is direct and unflinching, further asserting her control over her body.

By making it unclear whether the woman in *Untitled #205* is pregnant or ill, Sherman asserts the hardship of pregnancy that women are strong enough to bare. The swollen belly could be from carrying a child or from illness and her breasts could be heavy with milk or sagging from old age. The impact of the woman's condition is apparent in the bags under her eyes, the gauntness of her face, and her sallow skin. Because Vasari writes that Raphael died of excessive coital behavior, it is likely he had a sexually transmitted disease and perhaps Sherman wished to suggest that he inflicted this disease onto his mistress or contracted it from her. By conflating

illness with pregnancy, Sherman shows that woman's role in procreation is no easy task and displays the afflictions of being a mistress.[106]

As mentioned in relation to Sherman's images of breastfeeding mothers, the timing of pregnancy as the subject of *Untitled #205* during Sherman's life could be significant. Sherman was never pregnant, but she turned 35 in January of 1989, the year she made *Untitled #205*, a point at which many women might consider their narrowing opportunity to have a child. Sherman may have been considering this personal matter in her creation of this photograph. In the United States prior to the Women's Movement of the 1970s, as in Europe during the Renaissance and much of the world still today, the presumed main purpose of women is to produce children. During the late twentieth century when Sherman was working on these photographs, women had to make a choice to either become a mother or have a career and there was little possibility for both. Sherman may have felt pressure from these societal discourses surrounding female procreative functions. Because women's purpose was historically so strongly linked to motherhood, Sherman seems to respond to this traditional discourse by exemplifying a purpose for women outside of motherhood in creating with their minds as she has with her art.

Sherman's appropriation of *La Fornarina* recalls Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863) as a reinterpretation of Titian's Renaissance painting *Venus of Urbino* (1538). The woman's hand in Titian's painting gestures suggestively between her legs, but in Manet's version her hand presses firmly over the same area. Manet also altered the skin tone of the woman in his painting so that rather than looking supple and soft, it appears slightly sickly in color. Women have been sexualized in paintings for male enjoyment and voyeurism, and Manet undermines this, returning

[106] During the Renaissance and earlier in Western tradition, stemming from Aristotelian belief was the misunderstanding that women's only role in procreation was to provide the womb for the child to grow and be nourished and men provided the entire seed that grew the child. Leonardo da Vinci however asserted the equal role of women in reproduction.

power to the painting's female subject. Sherman may have been inspired by the devices Manet used in the nineteenth century to return power to a Renaissance nude.

Sherman made other alterations in the props and the background to create an austere environment for the woman in her photo. The fabric that drapes across the woman's stomach and legs appears smooth and diaphanous in Raphael's *La Fornarina*, but it is a coarse woven fabric in Sherman's version. Sherman's drape does not look sensuous and soft, but scratchy and unpleasant to the touch and it does not appear to be as elegant or expensive as the cloth Raphael has painted. The cloth wrapped around her head is shabby and frayed rather than the elegant head wrap La Fornarina wears. The background of Raphael's painting is dark with foliage so the woman appears to be in a garden. Sherman instead, fully isolated her figure by placing her in a dark space with no clues to her surroundings. Sherman could have made her background similar to Raphael's because her *Untitled #223* has a dark foliage background, but she purposefully chose to isolate her figure more fully by making the background completely black, creating a colder and harsher environment, which refers to the reality of La Fornarina's situation as a woman and a mistress in patriarchal society.

Sherman chose Raphael's *La Fornarina* as the subject of *Untitled #205* so she could retell the woman's story, showing her as a *femme fatale*, who contributed to the demise of the old master artist, but was also a victim of male control. Sherman shows the woman in the reality of her role as mistress and model, in which even her body is not her own, but a plastic covering. She is pregnant and ill because of male dominance. However, she looks out at the viewer with a powerful gaze, indicating that though she has been subject to many male asserted afflictions, she has not lost her agency, she has caused the old master's death.

Renaissance Wife

Portraiture of wealthy wives is the second type of secular Renaissance depictions of women that Sherman parodied to subvert the idealization and emphasis on virtues in the old master paintings. After making three photographs based on portraits of men that appear to be based on Northern Renaissance paintings, Sherman returned to the Italian Renaissance to make four images of wives in 1989. Three of these photographs, *Untitled #209, Untitled #211,* and *Untitled #212* are the subjects of the following discussion. These three images of Renaissance wives further the theme of idealized beauty, which Sherman continues to uncover and undermine through caricatures. The women in these next three photographs were based on portraits of important and virtuous women of the Italian Renaissance, in contrast with the mistress depicted in Raphael's *La Fornarina.* The Renaissance portraits serve to highlight their virtues and wealth. Sherman manipulated these images to reveal the constructed nature of the perfect proportions and beauty of the original paintings and expose the realities of the way women were objectified and disempowered in their fifteenth and early sixteenth century portraits.

Sherman's *Untitled #209* (1989) (fig. 15) is a three-quarter-length portrait of a woman making direct eye contact with the viewer, an important development in Renaissance portraiture that empowered the sitters. *Untitled #209* does not make use of prosthetics of any kind and the makeup is less severe than in *Untitled #205* and the biblical images already discussed. Moreover, Sherman herself is somewhat visible. Sherman stated that she drew from multiple sources for the photographs in this series, using the paintings in "encyclopedic ways".[107] She refers directly to the way she made *Untitled #209* when she notes,

> The sleeves in [Untitled (#209)] were ripped off of a dress and added to the bodice of something else. And the white part is just a shirt that I sort of tucked in. I probably saw a

[107] *Art 21*, "Cindy Sherman: It Began with Madame de Pompadour," 2.

> painting with a crisscross thing on the head somewhere and threw that in too. I wasn't copying anything in particular.[108]

Döttinger writes that *Untitled #209* was based on a portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga (1504-05) (fig. 16), a noblewoman of Mantua. Her portrait was attributed to Raphael.[109] Before looking to Döttinger's book, I thought Sherman based *Untitled #209* on a painting by the lesser known artist, Antonio Boltraffio, who was a student of Leonardo da Vinci and was also thought to have painted much of *Madonna Litta* on which Sherman's *Untitled #223* is based. Boltraffio's painting has been given the generic title, *Portrait of a Young Woman* (1490) (fig. 17), a portrait of a now unidentified woman. It is likely that Sherman was influenced by both Raphael's *Portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga* and Boltraffio's *Portrait of a Young Woman*, and other paintings as well. The headband in Boltraffio's painting is a black band like Sherman's version though it is not crisscrossed. The bunched white fabric on the sleeves seems to be drawn directly from Boltraffio's painting. Sherman's makeup is heavily contoured to make it look like the shading of the face in the painting. The way the skin around her eyes and mouth and on the center of her chin is much lighter than the rest of her face seems to be directly drawn from the painting, as does her long thin nose, the shape of her lips with a fuller bottom lip and her fair thin brows and warm brown eyes. As discussed in the previous chapter, Sherman used cosmetics in the same way the old master artists used their paints. She retooled makeup, not to construct male scripted female beauty, but to assert her role as artist and creator and align herself with the male Renaissance artists.

A significant aspect of both Boltraffio and Raphael's paintings and Sherman's reinterpretation is the powerful way the sitter makes eye contact with the viewer. In Castiglione's *The Courtier*, Elisabetta Gonzaga convenes the group of men who engage in a dialogue about the

[108] Ibid, 3.
[109] Döttinger, *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits*, 21.

characteristics of an ideal courtier. However, Elisabetta Gonzaga herself does not participate in the discussion. Though her high rank gives her some power, because of her gender her ideas were not considered important during the sixteenth century. Though Elisabetta Gonzaga does not speak in Sherman's depiction of her, her eye contact engages with the viewer in a powerful way. Looking at *Untitled #209* makes the viewer uncomfortable. The woman's direct gaze and expressionless face suggest she is judging the viewer. She has a haughtiness about her, created by the way she appears to smirk knowingly at the viewer. This aspect seems to be directly adopted from the Raphael's portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga. The woman in both Sherman's version and Raphael's does not seem to be phased by anything.

Sherman poked fun at these historical paintings, not just the content of them, but also what went into their production. The expression of the woman in *Untitled #209* could also be read as one of boredom. Sherman noted that she tried to look bored in the images, as a sitter would be if she had to sit for hours for a portrait.[110] The only way the woman's expression is readable and allows the viewer to get a sense of her attitude and character is because the image is based on frontal paintings.

The woman's eye contact in *Untitled #209* allows the viewer to make a connection with her, which gives one a sense of who she is, not just her status and wealth, but her personality. Because she makes eye contact with the viewer, the power dynamic between sitter and viewer is more equal than in profile portraits in which only the viewer has the power to look at the sitter. While looking at *Untitled #209*, one feels somewhat under the power of the sitter and might find it more uncomfortable to gaze at her than at Sherman's appropriations of profile portraits. Sherman returned power and control to the subject of *Untitled #209* that is suggested by the high

[110] *Art 21*, "Cindy Sherman: It Began with Madame de Pompadour," 6.

social rank of the women whose portraits she is based on, but did not have the liberty to fully express during the oppressive patriarchy of the Renaissance.

Details of the positioning and dress in *Untitled #209* suggest that Sherman drew on aspects of both Boltraffio and Raphael's portraits that indicate the subjects' position in patriarchal society. Sherman included her hands in *Untitled #209,* crossed in front of her. Boltraffio's painting includes one of the woman's hands, which clasps a glove. *Portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga* does not include her hands and the painting has a landscape in the background. The importance of the inclusion of hands is discussed later in this chapter. Sherman's background is dark, as is Boltraffio's, a suggestion of the harsh environment she was subject to as in *Untitled #205*. Elisabetta Gonzaga's dress has gold detailing and Sherman picked up on that by adding a gold belt and her sleeves are dotted with gold, significations of her wealthy status.

There are however some elements that Sherman used that do not seem to come from either painting, such as the dimple in her chin. The depression in the center of the chin was an ideal trait of the Renaissance that likely appeared in many Renaissance portraits that Sherman saw.[111] However, the most important element of *Untitled #209* is the front facing view and the eye contact of the sitter. Sherman altered her appearance less in this photographs than for her others in the series, perhaps to indicate that the paintings it was based on allowed a more authentic view of the sitter. The eye contact, which gives the sitter agency, was denied women in Renaissance portraits until the end of the fifteenth century. Sherman also made photographs based on profile portraits to critique this mode of portraiture that turned women into displays of

[111] Cropper, "On Beautiful Women," 375.

wealth rather than individuals. These came later than her frontal portraits in 1990, which is opposite from the chronology of the development of portraiture in the Renaissance.[112]

Sherman's *Untitled #211* (1989) (fig. 18)[113] looks almost like a figure in a wax museum. There seems to be no more vitality to the figure than there is in the painting it is based on, *Portrait of the Duchess of Urbino* by Piero della Francesca (c. 1472) (fig. 19).[114] Piero della Francesca's painting may have been made after the Duchess's death, in which case the portrait would not have even been painted with her as a model. The Renaissance portrait, which is part of a double portrait with her husband, the Duke of Urbino, is more of a generic image of female beauty, status, and virtue than a likeness of the Duchess.

In Sherman's reinterpretation, the woman's high forehead and long pointed nose look as though they could in fact, be wax, but what makes the figure look most lifeless, is that the viewer cannot see her eyes or read her expression because she is pictured in stark profile. In an article published in 1988 entitled "Woman in Frames," one year before Sherman produced these two images, Patricia Simons explored profile portraiture of women.[115] *Portrait of the Duchess of Urbino* is not about the woman's personality, but about her status and virtues, that the artist conveyed through her appearance. Simons writes that a woman's "very existence and definition at this time was a function of her outward appearance".[116] Beauty was a way of conveying inner virtues valued in women. Sherman picked up on the idealized details of a high plucked forehead

[112] *Untitled #211, #212,* and #226
[113] *Untitled #210,* which Sherman made between these two female portraits, is a depiction of a man that appears to be based on a portrait by Hans Holbein, a German artist of the Northern Renaissance.
[114] The painting was commissioned by the husband of the duchess, Federico da Montefeltro and her portrait was part of a diptych with his portrait. The dating of the painting is debated; some sources record it at 1465-1472, while others date it after 1472. 1472 was the year that the duchess, Battista Sforza died in childbirth, so some believe the painting commemorated their marriage and other think it was commissioned by her husband after her death.
[115] Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames," in *The Expanding Discourse,* ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 38-57.
[116] Simons, "Women in Frames," 42.

and pale skin. A high forehead was considered an indication of elegance, as was fair skin.[117] However, in *Untitled #211,* Sherman clearly placed putty over her hairline to create a high forehead. Similarly, Sherman created her pale complexion with caked on makeup. The makeup is visible on her skin, powdery and thick. Sherman made her manipulations of her appearance glaring to assert the fabrication of the portrait by Piero della Francesca.

Another component of ideal beauty is blonde hair, but here Sherman wears a brunette wig. Sherman is normally blonde, so the decision to have brown hair for this portrait was clearly intentional and serves to disrupt the idealization of the original painting. Perhaps she wished to counter the increasing use of blonde hair dye by women in the second half of the twentieth century that allowed women to pursue antiquated, male constructed ideals of female beauty. Sherman's eyebrow is also much darker than the brow of the duchess in order to match her brown hair. Sherman decorated her hair with pieces of fabric that allude to the bunched fabrics woven into the hair of the duchess in her portrait. However, the fabrics Sherman used appear discolored from age and don't have the appearance of fine quality that the fabric in Piero della Francesca's painting has. Sherman, who was living in Rome at the time she made these photographs, frequented flea markets to find props and costumes for her portraits. The fabrics are clearly old and discarded, not the expensive fabric a duchess would use in her hair.

Sherman reminds the viewer that the beautiful features of the painting are just as artificial as when she adds makeup, wax prosthetics, and wigs to herself. Sherman shaped her nose with putty to mimic the shape of the Duchess's nose in the Piero della Francesca portrait, but it is exaggerated in size to become a caricature of the original painting. The edge of the wax nose is visible and it ends abruptly at the top of her upper lip, which is very thin, as it is in the painting. While the beauty of the portrait of the Duchess serves to indicate her feminine virtues and high

[117] Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art,* 52.

rank, the idealized features as recreated by Sherman are so severely artificial that they instead appear unnatural and eerie. Simons writes that during the Renaissance, "a woman's costume was considered by jurists a sign of the husband's rank".[118] By isolating the woman and making her clothing look worn and old, Sherman's reinterpretation of Piero della Francesca's *Portrait of the Duchess of Urbino* is not tied to a man. Her clothing cannot indicate anything positive about a husband's status and instead serve only to clothe her.

The most significant alteration Sherman made from the original painting is her isolation of the female figure. Piero della Francesca's painting is a double portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino, each pictured in profile, facing each other. Their portraits are on separate panels, but they are framed together and are still in their original frame at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. The Duke and Duchess were memorialized and immortalized in their most ideal image. Women usually faced left in Renaissance portraits because left in Italian, *sinistra* was connoted with the sinister. In Piero della Francesca's diptych, the Duchess faces right and the Duke faces left, but this was not because the artist wished to alter this convention, but because the Duke's right eye had been gouged in a duel so painting his left side hid this disfiguration. However, in Sherman's version that excludes the Duke, the Duchess no longer has this reason for facing right, but Sherman kept her that way, refusing to diminish the agency of the woman in her photograph. The vignette, oval shape of *Untitled #211* was often used for marriage portraits in the early history of photography. Sherman alludes to this history and significance of Piero della Francesca's painting, while also allowing her image of the Duchess to stand on her own. By not pairing her with a portrait of a man, Sherman made the Duchess autonomous, rather than simply a worthy wife of a high-ranking man.

[118] Simons, "Women in Frames," 43.

In her photographs Sherman also questions the values embodied in Renaissance portraits of women. The back of the panel of the Piero della Francesca painting has images of the female virtues, adding to the presentation of the Duchess's beauty (fig. 21). An image of Battista Sforza sits on the chariot that is pulled by unicorns, symbolic of female purity. The other figures on the chariot are allegories of Charity, Faith, Hope, Chastity, and Modesty.[119] These values indicate the passivity expected of women. The only active trait of these is Charity, but it indicates the supportive role of women. Just as Battista Sforza's beauty was used as an indicator of her inner character, these allegories of virtues were also superficial indications of her importance, rather than conveying any genuine insights into her personality. The virtues associated with women are religious, while those associated with the Duke are the secular and more active virtues of Justice, Intellect, Valor, and Moderation. Sherman has not included any indications of these allegories on the back of her photograph and may not have been aware of their existence.

In *Untitled #211*, Sherman used jewelry symbolically, but to different ends than Piero della Francesca. In the Renaissance, one of the most important of the feminine virtues was purity, even more important than her beauty. Simons writes, "the woman's character is the jewel (*ornamento*) of her family; the mother's purity has always been a part of the dowry she passes onto her daughters; her purity has always far outweighed her [physical] beauty".[120] We have already seen two references to purity on the back of the painting in the unicorns and the allegory of Chastity. On the front of the panel, Battista Sforza wears a necklace of pearls, another reference to this virtue. In Renaissance paintings pearls served the dual purpose of symbolizing purity and as an indication of material wealth. The symbolism of pearls to purity expresses the high value of female virginity during the Renaissance. Rather than an elaborate necklace with

[119] Tignali, Women in Italian Renaissance Art, 58.
[120] Simons, "Women in Frames," 44.

pearls like the Duchess wears, Sherman's is a long strand of pearls, that appear to be plastic wrapped around her neck and she let the last strand hang lower as it does in Piero della Francesca's painting. Sherman purposefully sullied the purity and wealth indicated by pearls by using plastic pearls rather than real ones, undermining their usual significance. Their artificiality subverts their authenticity. She pokes fun at the usual significance of pearls by swapping a rare and valuable gem for a cheap imitation that is everything that real pearls are not.

Sherman discarded all status symbols found in the Renaissance portraits. Another indication of wealth in Piero della Francesca's painting is the land in the background. This land belonged to the Duchess's family and it was part of her dowry. Sherman instead isolated her image of the Duchess, including only a sky blue fabric behind her. Sherman separated Battista Sforza from her wealth and her role of wife to assert her individuality. The Duchess would have been a worthy wife of the Duke of Urbino in large part because of her land and wealth, but in Sherman's image, the woman appears wealthy only because her image recalls the portrait of the Duchess of Urbino, but in actuality her clothes are from a flea market and her pearls are fake. Sherman literally cheapened the image of the Duchess so she is no longer defined by her wealth and status or feminine virtues.

Sherman was interested in the theme of profile portraiture of women enough to continue it in a second photograph, *Untitled #212* (1989) (fig. 22). She created a second example to further critique this type of painting for its objectification of the sitter and its emphasis on beauty and appearance as indicators of inner values. *Untitled #212* was based on a painting known as *Lady with a Pearl Hairnet* or *Portrait of a Young Woman* (1485-1500) (fig. 23) because the identity of the sitter is unknown, although it was once thought to be a portrait of Beatrice d'Este, Duchess of Milan. The painting is attributed to Giovanni Ambrogio de Predis, a student of

Leonardo in Milan and it was likely commissioned by her husband or her father to give to her future husband during the arrangement of her marriage. The defining feature of the painting that gave it its name at some point in history, is the pearl hairnet the woman wears. The woman is literally defined by what she wears, an accessory of great wealth that also indicates her purity. In Sherman's version, the title, *Untitled #212*, does not define her, nor do her titles serve to define any of the *History Portraits.* As in *Untitled #211,* the woman's appearance is on display to communicate her wealth and virtues in the original painting.

Sherman's may have looked to her contemporary, Barbara Kruger who also commented on profile portraiture of women in her artwork *Untitled* (*Your Gaze Hits the Side of my Face)* (1981). Simons discusses Kruger's piece in her examination of profile portraiture of women. [121] Sherman would have surely been familiar with Kruger's piece as the two artists were contemporaries and both active in the Women's Movement. Kruger's piece uses an image of a sculpture bust of a woman and the text "your gaze hits the side of my face" to comment on the male gaze that exerts violence on the women it falls upon, turning them into objects, like the sculpture, and not permitting a return of the gaze. Berger discusses the way in which women are expected to appear for men and must always monitor their appearance. He writes, "she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight".[122] In much the same way, the women in the portraits by Piero della Francesca and Ambrogio de Predis have been turned into objects, the paintings, and are the subject of the male gaze of the artists and the patron, who was likely a man. In these paintings, the women do not even have control of their representations, instead the artist controls this. *Lady with a Pearl Hairnet* was likely commissioned by her husband or for her future husband. Therefore, the painting was his

[121] Simons, "Women in Frames," 50.
[122] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 47.

property; and the woman in it an object in his possession. However, in Sherman's version, she is in control of her own body, manipulating it for the photograph.

In *Untitled #212*, Sherman created a caricature of the original painting that is humorous, but also a serious look into the reality of the woman's situation in patriarchal society that is hidden in her Renaissance portrait. Sherman used putty to alter the nose of the woman into an exaggerated version of the woman's nose in the painting by Ambrogio de Predis, another similarity between this and Sherman's previous profile portrait, *Untitled #211*. Because the contour of the nose is such a noticeable aspect of a profile image, Sherman chose it as a feature to emphasize in her caricatures of these two portraits. When writing about the idealization of the nose in Renaissance painting, Cropper writes, "the nose apart from being perfectly proportioned is to be slightly pointed but not turned up, because this would suggest pride".[123] The nose in *Untitled #212* is neither perfectly proportioned nor slightly pointed, but rather it is upturned. This shape is also present in Ambrogio de Predis's painting, but only subtlety. Whether or not Sherman was aware of the negative connotation of an upturned nose in Renaissance portraiture, she picked up on the slight upturn of the nose in the Renaissance painting and exaggerated it, making it much more noticeable. If Sherman was indeed aware of Cropper's article and the significance of an upturned nose, it is likely she would have emphasized the nose's shape to indicate the woman's pride and reject the male suppression of female self-esteem in the Renaissance, also present in the context in which Sherman was working. Because an upturned nose was not an ideal nose by Renaissance standards, it is likely that the woman who is the subject of Ambrogio de Predis's painting had a nose similar to the one in her portrait. The woman is beautiful despite having a slight inconsistency with the canon of ideal Renaissance beauty. However, Sherman exaggerated the nose to such a degree that it is unnaturally large and

[123] Cropper, "On Beautiful Women," 383.

clearly morphed with putty; she is not meant to be beautiful. Instead, her clownish nose adds an element of humor to the otherwise somber and serious image. The nose serves as the punch line to Sherman's joke, a joke that is not simply humorous, but also a critical commentary of canons of beauty and patriarchal expectations of female humility.

Sherman further undermined the beauty of *Lady with a Pearl Hairnet* by making the woman in her photograph look tired and not as youthful and alert as the woman in Ambrogio de Predis's painting. Sherman powdered her face to match the fair complexion of the woman in the Renaissance portrait. However, rather than having the warm youthful glow of the woman in Ambrogio de Predis's painting, Sherman's complexion looks splotchy with some areas very pale white and others more pink. The skin around her eyes and her eyelids are especially pink and the lids look ready to close. In contrast, the woman in Ambrogio de Predis's painting looks alert and her eyes almost sparkle with a youthful energy though the profile view obscures her facial expression. Sherman made her woman look tired and downtrodden. Her expression could be read as boredom as in *Untitled #209*, but it could also be an indication of her suppression in patriarchal society and her domination by the man who has commissioned her portrait.

Though the woman's hands are not included in the Renaissance painting, Sherman included them in *Untitled #212* to indicate the sitter's suppressed position in society. Sherman also made a point of including the hands in *Untitled #209.* Sherman could have easily cropped out the hands in her photograph, but she intentionally kept them in the frame. We must assume there is a reason for this. In *Untitled #212*, the hands looks red and raw, making the woman look overworked rather than fresh and pampered as the woman in Ambrogio de Predis's piece appears. Her hands are clasped in a stiff decorous gesture below her bust. She presents herself in a controlled manner for male viewers. Perhaps Sherman felt that the inclusion of clasped hands

could further convey the subservience and oppression of the women in these portraits that the Renaissance paintings hide by making the woman look bright and alert. The woman in *Untitled #212* does not appear to be there of her own will. She looks tired and bored, but beyond that, she is always under the authority of a male figure, her father, then the man she marries. However, Sherman lightened the mood of the image with the inclusion of the large nose, which reminds the viewer that although Sherman is presenting a serious critique of modes of depiction of women in the Renaissance and women's role, she means to do so through humor, just as caricatures use comedy to relieve the tension of their satires.

Another possible reason Sherman included the hands in *Untitled #212* could be to connect to Leonardo da Vinci's approach to portraiture of women, which was a more individualizing and equalizing way of depicting women than the norm of Renaissance portraiture. In 1992, in an article entitled "Leonardo da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature" Mary Garrard discusses the ways in which Leonardo's paintings of women convey their individuality not present in most portraits of women by other artists at the time. [124] One of Leonardo's earliest portraits, *Ginevra de' Benci* (1474) (fig. 24), originally contained her hands, but the painting was cut, truncating the part of the panel with her hands. Hands are present in many of Leonardo's other portraits and often play an important role. Leonardo was a psychological portrait artist. *Lady with a Pearl Hairnet* was once, in fact, thought to be by Leonardo as a companion to his painting *The Musician.*[125] This theory was discarded around 1890 and the painting was attributed to Ambrogio de Predis, a leading follower of Leonardo in Milan, but much scholarship still remains attributing the piece to Leonardo. Perhaps the source in which Sherman found the image of the painting credited it to Leonardo. Even if Sherman was

[124] Mary Garrard, "Leonardo da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature," *The Expanding Discourse*, 1992, 59-85.
[125] Luke Syson, *Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan,* National Gallery Company, London, 2011, 95.

aware that the painting was by Ambrogio de Predis, she may have wished to adopt some characteristics of Leonardo's portraiture style in order to empower the women as his paintings do. Garrard argues that the way in which Leonardo depicted women was an anomaly during the Renaissance, because he showed women as equal to men in both their intelligence and biology.[126] She writes that he stood up for women at a time when women themselves could not.[127] His portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, a female poet, was also one of the first portraits of women in a three-quarter view, contributing to the conventionalization of this style of portraiture for women that had already been put in place for portraiture of men over 20 years prior.[128]

Sherman may have added her hands in *Untitled #212* to add to the psychological nature of portraits because of their expressive quality. No profile portraits by Leonardo exist and one reason for this is that Leonardo was especially interested in the inner life of the people he painted and communicated this through their eyes. While profile portraiture focuses on the superficial, Leonardo was interested in what portraiture could convey about the psychology of a person. Ambrogio de Predis's profile portrait, does not allow the viewer to look into the woman's eyes, making it hard to get a sense of her personality. Hands and front facing eyes were two features Leonardo often included in his portraits of women, going against common conventions at the time. These are the two features that most allow for a visual expression of individuality of the sitter. Eyes and hands are expressive features that provide the most candid insight into the emotions of a person. Because the profile view makes it difficult for the eyes to communicate as they usually do, Sherman worked around this obstacle by including the hands, whose tightly clenched position suggests the woman's discomfort and perhaps a frustration with her subservient position in society.

[126] Garrard, "Leonardo da Vinci," 59.
[127] Ibid
[128] Ibid, 60.

The theme of pearls is continued from *Untitled #211* in Sherman's appropriation of Ambrogio de Predis's painting. However, the pearls are much less important than they were in the original painting. Sherman deemphasized the importance of the pearl hairnet in her version of the portrait by making the hairnet only a small tangle of netting and pearls at the nape of her neck. One would be much more likely to name Sherman's image The *Lady with an Upturned Nose* than *Lady with a Pearl Hairnet*. Sherman did include a string of pearls around her neck in *Untitled #212*, but they are not the perfectly shaped pure pearls of Ambrogio de Predis's painting, but irregular, perhaps freshwater pearls, therefore less valuable and less perfectly proportioned.

Sherman manipulated proportions in her *History Portraits* in order to subvert the intentions of the original paintings. Perfect proportion was a key element of idealized portraits because in the Renaissance, symmetry and harmony of form were important aspects of beauty. Sherman has added a few objects to *Untitled #212* that are not present in Ambrogio de Predis's painting, but allude to the conventions of proportionality. The background of Ambrogio de Predis's painting is completely dark, which would have been easy for Sherman to recreate, but instead she chose to include a column and a statuette behind her. The column is a Corinthian column, the capital of which contains an elaborate design of foliage. This column style was associated with women in the classical world, in part because of its proportions. The statuette is also a reference to idealization that made women in paintings, "as beautiful as the most perfect antique statue".[129] Both the column and figurine are references to idealization and its foundation in perfect proportions. Cropper also writes that the conception of beauty of women and art in the Renaissance was that "like the beauty of art, beauty in women is formed from a certain harmony

[129] Cropper, "On Beautiful Women," 379.

and order among parts".[130] Women were expected to be as beautiful as objects for possession whose appearances could be manipulated to be in perfect proportion. However, only in portraiture could women's appearances be adjusted so as to be equal in beauty to objects such as columns and statues.

Another source for the inclusions of the column and statuette is Parmigianino's painting, *Madonna of the Long Neck* (1534-1535) (fig. 25), which connects to Sherman's interest in distortion and oddness, the opposite of perfect proportion. As Sherman noted to Michael Kimmelman when looking at Ingres's *Odalisque*, and the elongated unnaturally twisted body of its subject "'the proportion amuses me'".[131] Parmigianino's unfinished work is a Madonna and Child painting with angels that contains strange proportions. On the right side of the painting, the artist included a column and a small figure, who is meant to be Saint Jerome. The figure is very small in proportion to the Madonna and other figures in the painting, making it strange and distorted. Because Parmigianino's painting is well known, Sherman was certainly familiar with it and would find it intriguing and 'amusing.' The painting is part of the Mannerist movement, following the Renaissance, in which artists strayed from the perfect proportions of the Renaissance and began to distort body parts, as for example the neck of the Madonna, which gives this painting its name. The positioning of the column and statuette to the right of the figure in Parmigianino's painting and in Sherman's image, mean that it is likely that Sherman drew these details from this Mannerist painting to add another element of humor and oddness and to further subvert the Renaissance ideal.

In her portraits, Sherman purposefully destabilized the proportions of the Renaissance paintings through the augmentation of features. Just as caricature artists emphasize a subject's

[130] Cropper, "One Beautiful Women," 379.
[131] Kimmelman, *Portraits*, 155.

distinctive features to mock the person, Sherman critiqued the portraits, not so much the sitters themselves, but the way the way male artists considered to be great masters portrayed them. Rather than being beautiful fictional figures made up of each individual perfection, Sherman's women are strange caricatures; equally fictional, monstrous hybrids made up of artificial body parts and discarded clothing. However, unlike the Renaissance paintings, they are forthcoming about their artificiality. Sherman added psychological elements to her versions through the eye contact and inclusion of hands to show the women's confined status in society and to allow them to communicate their individuality to the viewer.

Fig. 11 Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-Portrait Painting*, 1556, oil , 26x 22 ½ in, Muzeum Lanek, Lancut, Poland. Available from: ARTstor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed March 25, 2016).

Fig. 12 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #205*, 1989 chromogenic color print, 53 ½ x 40 ½ in., The Broad, Los Angeles. Available from: ARTstor, http://www.arstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

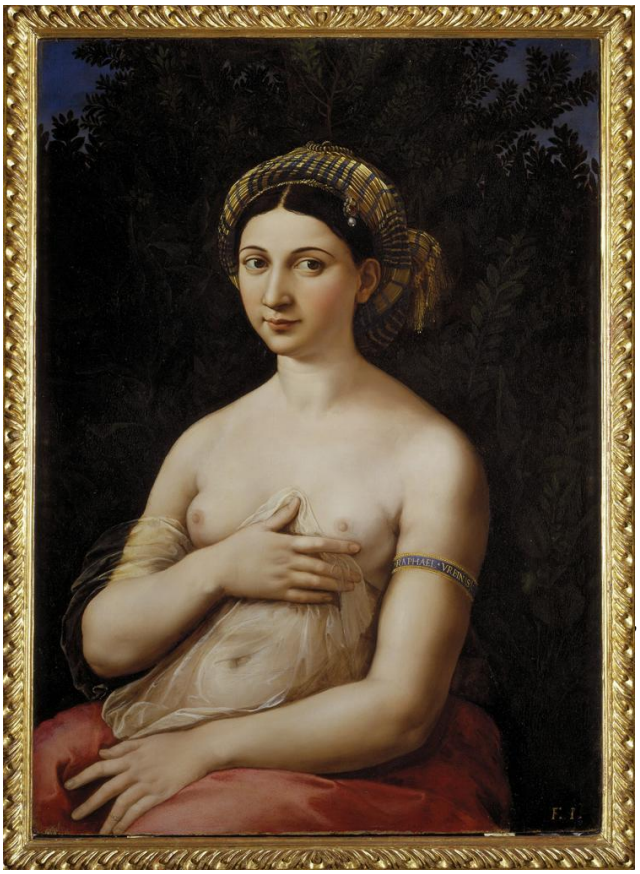

Fig. 13 Raphael, *La Fornarina*, 1518-1519, oil on wood, 33x24in, Galleria Nazionale d'arte Antica, Rome, Available from: ARTstor, http://www.arstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

Fig. 14 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Raphael and La Fornarina*, 1814, oil on canvas, 25 ½ x 21 in, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA. Available from: Harvard Art Museums, http://www.harvardartmuseums.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

Fig. 15 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #209*, chromogenic color print, 57x41 in., 1989, The Broad, Los Angeles. Available from: The Broad, http://www.thebroad.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

Fig. 16 Attributed to Raphael, *Portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga*, 1502, 20 ½ x 15 in, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy. Available from: ARTstor, http://www.arstor.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

Fig. 17 Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, 1490. Available from WikiArt, http://www.wikiart.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

Fig. 18 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #211*, 1989, chromogenic color print, 37x31 in., The Broad, Los Angeles. Available from: The Broad, http://www.thebroad.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

Fig. 20 Cindy Sherman, Untitled #214, 1989, chromogenic color print, 29 ½ x 24 in., The Broad, Los Angeles. Available from: The Broad, http://www.thebroad.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

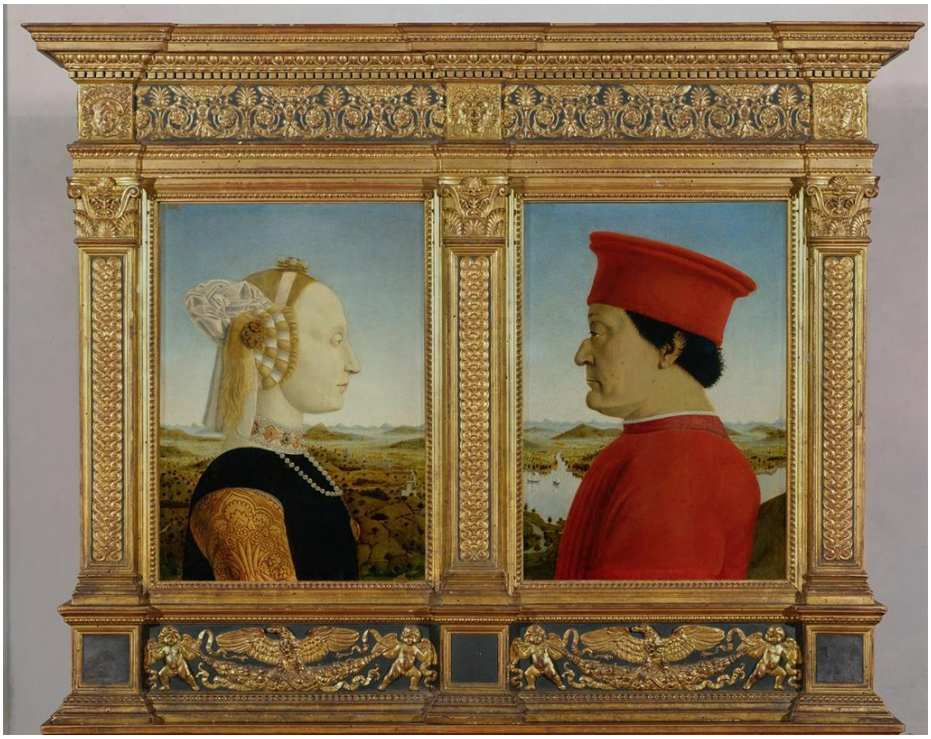

Fig. 19 Piero della Francesca, Portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino, 1465-172 or after 1472, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy. Available from: ARTstor, http://www.arstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

Fig. 21 Piero della Francesca, back panels of Duke and Duchess of Urbino (fig. 19), Available from: ARTstor, http://www.arstor.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

Fig. 22 Cindy Sherman, Untitled #212, 1989, chromogenic color print, 41x32 in., Available from: ARTstor, http://www.arstor.org (accessed March 27, 2016).

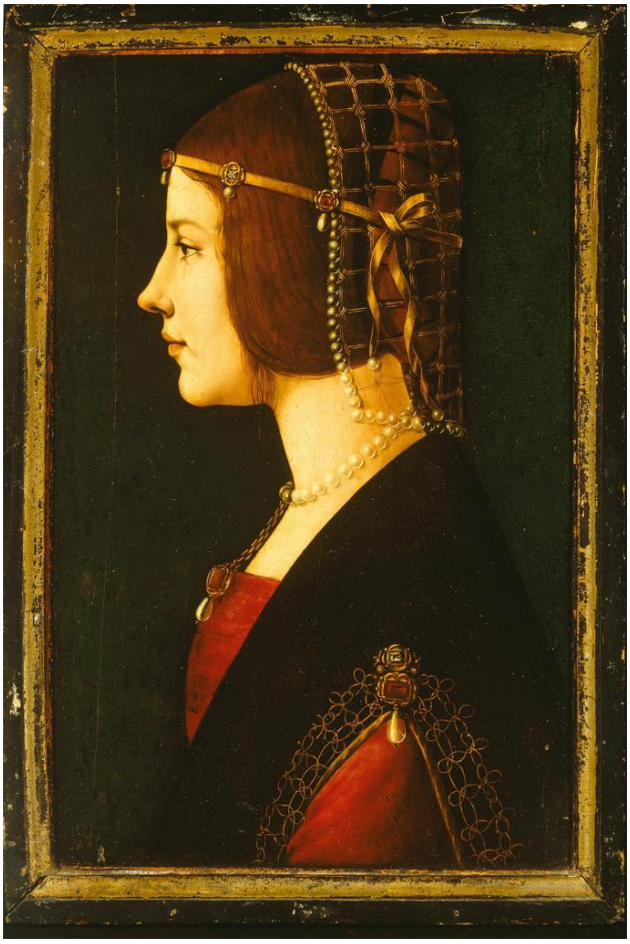

Fig. 23 Giovanni Ambrogio de Predis, *Lady with a Pearl Hairnet*, 1485-1500, 20x13 ¼ in, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan, Available from: ARTstor, http://www.arstor.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

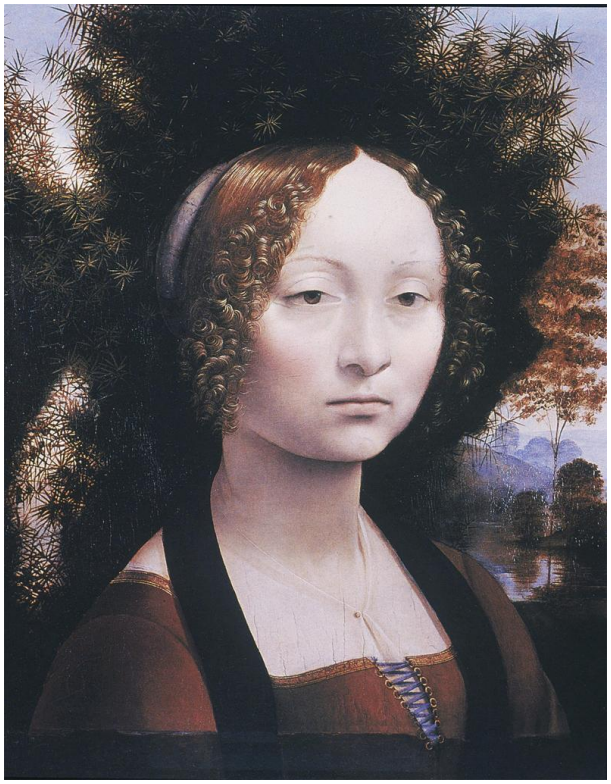

Fig. 24 Leonardo da Vinci, Ginevra de' Benci, 1474, oil on panel, 15x14 in., National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Available from: ARTstor, http://www.arstor.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

Fig. 25 Parmigianino, *Madonna of the Long Neck*, 1534-1540, oil on panel, 85x52 in, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence Italy. Available from: ARTstor, http://www.arstor.org (accessed March 26, 2016).

Conclusion

Although it is clear that Sherman's *History Portraits* reference masterpieces of history, her photographs are not simply a pastiche of the paintings by old masters. It is impossible to miss the strange ways in which Sherman's photographs are unlike historical paintings. Their vibrant colors and larger than life scale thrust the images at the viewers in a way that masterpieces of history cannot. Sherman's use of artificial body parts exaggerates the features of the subjects of Renaissance portraits in jarring ways, raising many questions for the viewer. To find answers to these questions, this study looked back to the time in which the historical paintings were made, and to the time in which Sherman was making her reinterpretations to understand the social inequalities her images subvert.

Despite the title of the series, Sherman's *History Portraits* are more contemporary than historical. Sherman's work is part of postmodernism, an art movement that began in the 1960s and 1970s, and coincided with the civil rights movements in the United States. Postmodernism is characterized by a deconstruction of history in an attempt to unpack and understand issues of gender, race, and class and aspire to a more just future. The Women's Movement of the second half of the twentieth century helped women attain many more rights and freedoms, though women are still fighting for equality decades later. The end of the millennium saw a dramatic rise in the quantity and success of female artists. As one of these artists, Cindy Sherman garnered not just her own success, but through her achievements, also raised awareness about pressing social inequalities.

While Sherman's photographs clearly reference old paintings, she turned them into caricatures to call attention to historical injustices that have persisted to the present: issues of gender and class. Sherman altered the beautiful perfected women of Renaissance paintings into grotesque exaggerations. In doing so, she freed the women from the idealization asserted upon

them in the original paintings and reaffirmed their individuality instead. To critique social values of class status, Sherman discarded the displays of wealth in the Renaissance paintings, by swapping pearl necklaces and fine clothing for plastic jewles and tattered fabrics. Her photographs reinterpret 'high' art using the 'low' art style of caricature to dissolve the class division between the two types of art.

Sherman deconstructed and reconstructed paintings of women by male artists, by drawing on techniques of sixteenth and seventeenth century female artists such as Artemisia Gentileschi and Sofonsiba Anguissola to create more empathetic and empowering images of the female protagonists of the portraits by old masters. Sherman used Gentileschi's tactic of challenging and disturbing the viewer with her images of female power, rather than eroticizing as male artists tended to do. Sherman also utilized the physiognomic alterations of Anguissola's style of self-portraiture that emphasized her intellect and artistic talent rather than her beauty.

Sherman asserted her role as the artist of her works by including her own body in the photographs and making her manipulations of the Renaissance paintings overt. She challenged the male Renaissance artists with her large scale and chromogenic color printing that makes brilliant and striking images that are immediate to contemporary viewers jaded by historical paintings that feel distant and antiquated. Sherman used techniques of painting and compiling of traits to produce her images, similar to those of the Renaissance masters. However, cosmetics were her paints and the traits she combined were grotesque prosthetic body parts, flea market clothing, and fake jewels in place of the ideal beautiful traits and the expensive clothing and jewelry of Renaissance paintings. Sherman challenged the old masters' attempts to create ideal images of female beauty by cheapening her images and subverting the traditional aestheticizing uses of cosmetics and clothing, using them instead to create strange and grotesque images.

Sherman's photographs highlight not the beauty, virtues, and wealth of her subjects, but their individuality. Sherman celebrates the inherent female capacities of reproduction as well as their strengths of character that help them defeat their male enemies, whether in battle as in the case of Judith, or in bed as in the case of *La Fornarina*.

Other artists are adding on to Sherman's legacy of creating photographic appropriations of historical masterpieces that critique social injustices. Awol Erizku is a twenty-first century African American artist who made a series of photographs also inspired by Renaissance paintings. Though he did not use himself as his model as Sherman did, Erizku's photographs seem to be influenced by Sherman's *History Portraits,* but deal most prominently with the topic of race. Erizku used black models to recreate famous Renaissance paintings, including Raphael's *La Fornarina* that Sherman also worked from, in his photograph, *Girl with a Louis Vuitton Scarf* (2012). Like Sherman, he made clear departures from the Renaissance painting in the inclusion of a designer scarf around her head and large hoop earrings. As in Sherman's *History Portraits*, Erizku's alterations from the historical paintings raise questions of history, in his case, commenting on the whiteness of art history. Both Sherman and Erizku critique the narrow perspective of art considered to be masterpieces, while also providing an alternative contemporary view from their own identities as a woman artist and as a black artist to contribute to the broadening and diversification of art history. As Sherman and other artists continue to question art throughout time and the social injustices of history it reflects, the art world will continue to become a more inclusive space and a platform for the promotion of equality.

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