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# THE WEEK

6 JULY 2019 | ISSUE 1234 | £3.80

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## 30 ARTS

## Art

### Exhibition of the week **Cindy Sherman**

National Portrait Gallery, London WC2 (020-7306 0055, [npg.org.uk](http://npg.org.uk)). Until 15 September

Her work fetches “immense sums at auction” and she has won every major prize available, said Rachel Campbell-Johnston in *The Times*. And all this, according to the American photographer Cindy Sherman (b.1954), derives from a childhood fascination with dressing up. Since the mid-1970s, this inveterate “shape-shifter” has been photographing herself dressed in a variety of different guises, from “biker chick” to “bored housewife” to “society beauty”. Donning fantastical prosthetics and costumes inspired by film, fashion, advertising and art history, she has explored themes including artifice, gender and the very notion of the self. This new retrospective at the National Portrait Gallery – incredibly, Sherman’s first in the UK – brings together about 180 of her photographs, dating from her earliest efforts to entirely new work. What these resonant images all share is “a sense of narrative intrigue”. Each one, Sherman has declared, “must tease with the promise of a story the viewer itches to be told”. It’s a wonderful show, which gives us a chance to get to grips with one of the most influential contemporary artists working today.



Untitled Film Still #21 (1978): among Sherman’s terrific earlier work

Sherman’s earlier work is terrific, said Mark Hudson in *The Daily Telegraph*. In her breakthrough 1977 series, she takes on a range of “archetypal cinematic personae” in mysterious scenarios:

in #13, for example, her “blonde hair and coquettish expression” suggest Brigitte Bardot, while #21 frames her as a Hitchcock heroine on a New York street, looking uncertainly into the distance. In 1981’s *Centerfolds*, meanwhile, she mimics glamour model poses in a series of “sumptuous” colour images. From here on, her work becomes ever “glossier” and, often enough, less interesting. More recent series have her masquerading as women who have undergone cosmetic surgery, or mocking up publicity shots of “fading actresses”. Accomplished as they are, they exchange nuance for “caricatured theatricality”.

True, there are some misfires, said Waldemar Januszczak in *The Sunday Times*. But most of the work is “fascinating”: one moment, Sherman is acting out Old Master paintings, including Raphael’s *La Fornarina* and Ingres’s *Madame Moitessier*; the next, she is ruminating on the ageing process, portraying “an older American woman clinging desperately to the last shards of youth”. Sherman’s great talent is to be both “pioneering and entertaining”, her piercing insights into modern society balanced with a “fine eye for comedy”. “Only rarely do artistic retrospectives feel as useful and perfectly judged as this one.”

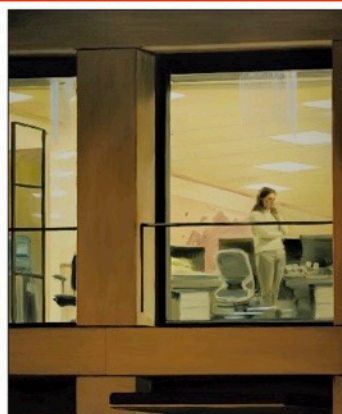
### Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

**María Berrío,  
Caroline Walker,  
Flora Yukhnovich**

at Victoria Miro

This show brings together pieces by three young artists whose work has been championed by the influential Instagram account *The Great Women Artists*. If that doesn’t sound like the most thrilling premise for an exhibition, the work itself more than makes up for it. María Berrío creates arresting, figurative collages created from layers of Japanese paper, depicting scenes inspired by both folklore and the trials faced by Latin American migrant communities. Meanwhile, Flora Yukhnovich draws on rococo painting traditions to create soaring canvases that balance drama and delicacy to stunning effect. Best of all is Caroline Walker, whose paintings depict women



Empire (2019) by Caroline Walker

working in apparently mundane environments – open-plan offices, supermarket counters or shopping mall outlets – from odd, fly-on-the-wall perspectives that make the viewer feel uncomfortably voyeurish. It’s terrific stuff. Prices on request.

16 Wharf Road, London N1 (020-7336 8109). Until 27 July.

### The blind art dealer

Johann König is one of Germany’s most influential art dealers, says Philip Oltermann in *The Guardian*. He runs a fashionable gallery in a converted brutalist church in Berlin with an annual turnover of €20m. But oddly enough, for someone in his line



of work, he can hardly see: aged 12, he was playing with gunpowder when it exploded, severely damaging both eyes. Initially, he dealt in concept art and sound installations, but now he sells paintings too. At first, König was wary of telling people in the art world. “How seriously can you take someone who can’t see the artwork they are trying to sell you?” he wonders. “I always thought someone would find me out.” But now, in what he calls his “coming out” memoir, entitled *Blinder Galerist* (“blind gallerist”), he argues that his disability has been key to his success. It has, he thinks, given him unusual powers of concentration and enabled him to navigate an industry that can bedazzle people with flashy exteriors.