

The Museum of **Everything**
Exhibition #4

Conversation with **Cindy Sherman**

Cindy Sherman

b 1954 (New Jersey, USA)

Photographer and self-portraitist Cindy Sherman is one of the world's foremost female contemporary artists. Exhibitions of her work include the Venice Biennale (2011), the Whitney Biennale (2010), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1998) and The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1997). She is the recipient of the National Arts Award (2001) and the MacArthur Fellowship (1995).

[START]

MoE: **Cindy**, can we talk about your enthusiasm for self-taught, folk, vernacular and artists like that? When did you first get into them?

CS: I don't think it was even an art-going experience. When I was in college I used to go to thrift stores to shop for cheap and used clothing. I'd always see naïve paintings in there being sold for a quarter or a dollar.

MoE: I had similar experiences, finding stuff rather than seeing it in galleries. The natural curation of the thrift store is something I've always loved.

CS: Me too. You must have seen **Jim Shaw's** book *Thrift Store Paintings*? I really had no idea who would have created these works, they could have been by a child, someone old, someone who didn't study art. It didn't matter to me, they'd just made these things and they were fantastically naïve. I couldn't afford much else at the time, so when I saw things like that, I started collecting them. Then about 15 years ago I visited the **Outsider Art Fair** in **New York** and got more into it.

MoE: What about **Creative Growth**— how did you find out about them and their artists?

CS: I guess it was when I saw a group show at **White Columns** that **Matthew Higgs** had curated. It just blew me away. I bought about 8 pieces out of that one show. Since then I've bought everything I can: paintings, sculptures, drawings, I've even commissioned rugs by the artists there. I love supporting them or what they do.

MoE: Any particular artists?

CS: Yes - **Dan Miller, William Scott, William Tyler, Aurie Ramirez, Gerone Spruill ...**

MoE: The integrity of this type of work amazes me. It strikes me that these artists can't do anything that doesn't have integrity built in. What do you think it is that connects you to the work?

CS: To be honest, I don't know, I can't explain it - but I do know that I connect to it very strongly.

So much contemporary art these days is full of irony and a sort of tongue-in-cheek self-consciousness. These artists seem much more focused and pure in their vision. Not to romanticise it, but it's as if they see the world through fresh eyes. The rest of us are immune because we're so hyper-aware of everything that goes on. Maybe that's part of it anyway.

MoE: So much of this work is also in the present. That sense of not making art for a market, for any reason in fact except to be creative - is that something you relate to?

CS: Absolutely. If I'm working on something and I start worrying if it's going to sell, it's not good motivation as far as I'm concerned. When I first encountered the work from **Creative Growth** it reminded me of when I was a young, struggling artist and didn't expect to make any money at all. I figured I'd wind up teaching or doing something else; but in the meantime, I was passionate about making art, so it was never an issue whether something would sell.

These artists remind me of that passion - they are doing something you just have to do, no matter what.

MoE: Some of their work is very complicated and intricate - and like the best contemporary art, there is no trace of effort.

CS: Yes, it's true - and no censorship. Some of the artists we're talking about will repeat an image over and over again, yet each work is slightly different. Trained artists would edit that out. To these artists, it's all equally interesting and valuable.

MoE: I had a conversation with **Massimiliano Gioni**, the curator who works with **Maurizio Cattelan**. He is passionate about self-taught art and curated **Morton Bartlett** and the Chinese artist **Guo Fengyi** in the **Gwangju Biennale**. He will often curate these artists with contemporary artists. How do you feel about that?

CS: I was actually in the **Gwangju Biennale** that **Massimiliano** curated. I've also been in a show with **Morton Bartlett** which didn't bother me at all, in fact it made a lot of sense! **Morton Bartlett** was the first major outsider artist I ever collected.

The main difference for me is that a regular artist is making many calculated decisions, whereas an artist who is developmentally challenged may not be making the same kind of calculations. It's pouring out from them and they're not worried about who's going to see it, how it's going to be interpreted or if they're making the right or wrong choices. They're just doing it in equal amounts of good and bad. It's left to a curator like **Massimiliano** to decide what works and what doesn't.

MoE: Do you own any sculptures by the **Creative Growth** artist **Judith Scott**?

CS: I love her work but don't own any pieces. I guess I was looking at **Creative Growth** artists who were less well-known. I wasn't sure I was ready to spend tens of thousands for her work.

MoE: It's frank of you to say that. I find that when there is a contemporary price tag, it makes acquiring it a tougher decision.

CS: A higher price just means you can't collect that artist in the same way. Ultimately what's the difference? That's what we're trying to figure out here isn't it ... what *is* the difference?

MoE: I agree, there is no difference. These artists all have a practice, pretty much they do it day in, day out, they're into what they do. It's nothing you wouldn't expect from a regular artist.

CS: And these artists are often even more driven than a regular artist would be. I get the sense that some of them wouldn't know what else to do if they weren't drawing or creating something.

That's what's so great about centres like **Creative Growth**. They are encouraging and enabling people to pursue something creative that gives them some pleasure and maybe a release. It's an outlet to vent whatever they need to - like any artist needs to!

[END]

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