



Jump into Art

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Inaugural Exhibition of
The Jump Museum

May 1, 2012 – January 6, 2013
Rena Tobey, Director and Curator



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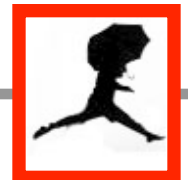
Front cover: Figure 1
Back cover: Figure 11



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Director's Foreward

Welcome to The Jump Museum and our inaugural exhibition *Jump into Art*. In today's world of economic turmoil and the hyper-pace of daily life, art can offer a respite. Get energized by the utter joy of it. Sink into the pleasure of slow looking. Engage with more than first meets the eye, and invite the results to expand your perceptions.

Jump into Art accomplishes all that, with the works of five photographers who span much of the 20th century to today—Elliott Erwitt, Weegee, Philippe Halsman, Catherine Opie, and Cindy Sherman.

Selected photographs from the exhibit appear in this catalogue, allowing you to revisit and explore again.

Art offers a journey that starts with one jump. We hope you will want to make many more, and come back to the museum often. Search our website jumpmuseum.org, and download our app to visit us on the go. Thank you for jumping in with us.

Rena Tobey
Director and Curator
The Jump Museum



Jump into Art

Energize. Engage. That's what the five photographers—Elliott Erwitt, Weegee, Philippe Halsman, Catherine Opie, and Cindy Sherman—do in *Jump into Art*. They act as our guides, to expand our perceptions.

With styles ranging from frothy to serious, they each have achieved fame, yet in their own ways have also been outsiders. Each uses that outsider perspective to see more clearly and comment on society. They mess with our neat understanding of the surface image, to open up questions of identity and belonging in the modern world.

Elliott Erwitt

“Shyness helped to make me a photographer,” wrote Elliott Erwitt.¹ He explained that the camera put him where he otherwise did not belong. His photography took him from the White House to the Kremlin, from proms to the streets.

¹ Erwitt, 2.

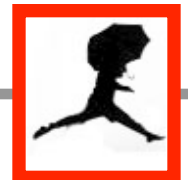
Many of his photographs are so representative of the places depicted they seem forever linked. Look at *Paris, France*, the cover for this catalogue, for a demonstration (see figure 1). You can imagine why this image served as the inspiration for The Jump Museum logo.



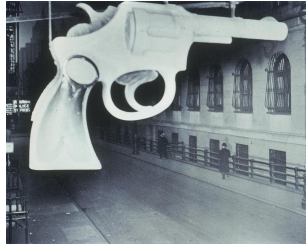
Elliott Erwitt, *Paris, France*, 1989

Perhaps some of Erwitt's reported shyness evolved from repeated relocations as a child of Jewish parents, fleeing persecution in the Russian Revolution and later, Fascism in Italy, before immigrating to the United States.

Erwitt titled his photographs by place names, adding a layer of interpretation to the subject he depicted. He was interested in mood and composition, but wanted to convey a sense of casualness that often defied the behind-the-scenes complexity of his shots. His everyday scenes were filled with joy. No wonder his images shaped our impressions of the place.



Weegee



Weegee, *The Gun Shop*, 1943

Arthur Fellig, known as Weegee, captured the essence of place, too. Quite different from the refined Erwit, Weegee showed a different truth of everyday life—startling and brassy, violent and ugly. His work centered on the dark, often brutal, side of life in

New York City, typified by his crime photography.

He earned his nickname Weegee from his eerie ability to be first at the crime scene, as if he consulted the Ouija board, wildly popular in the 1930s. His graphic depictions of bloody corpses made his reputation.

Like Erwit, Weegee was an immigrant, relocating with Jewish parents to the tough life of New York's Lower East Side tenements. Weegee adapted by selling newspapers after school, ultimately quitting to work full-time. He left home at 18, sleeping in missions, train stations, and parks, before getting a job as a photographer's assistant.

Tabloid journalism changed how news stories were told, shifting the balance away from text toward lurid photography, broadening readership to include a semi-literate audience. Weegee got jobs with various newspapers, working in the darkroom and learning what caught an editor's eye as front-page material.

He took to sleeping in the darkroom and could hear the teletype announcing a crime or fire. Camera in hand, he would be first to arrive at the emergency. Later, as a freelancer, he would even hitch a ride with the police to the scene.



Weegee carefully crafted his personal image, building his own legend as a hardened career man, educated by the streets. This self-created myth fit perfectly with an emerging genre of film and pulp fiction known as film noir, with its dark and edgy depictions of urban life. Weegee played himself in a film and later, made movies of his own, consistent with the atmospheric, moody photographic style that made him famous.

Philippe Halsman

Philippe Halsman used his photography to break down fabricated facades like Weegee created. Halsman, noted for his striking photographic portraits of dignitaries and celebrities, was less interested in innovative composition, lighting, and setting than in capturing the character of the subject. Halsman believed portraiture was at its best when psychologically revealing.

But then, challenge centers on the camera lens, which only shows the surface of things. How does the photographer get underneath? What will get the sitter to remove the socially acceptable mask, so easy to hide behind, to reveal an inner essence?

Halsman's answer was Jumpology, his unique and silly method for loosening up a sitter that he called a branch of science. While Erwitte would blow a horn to relax a tense subject, Halsman took another approach. Through his personal charm and gentleness, he convinced his sitters to literally jump. The risk would be all his, the genial photographer told them, in getting a good shot. Directing all their attention on the act of jumping, the celebrity's mask fell, the surface was penetrated, and character revealed.

After photographing dozens of notables jumping, Halsman even developed a method for interpreting postures for personality insights, which he wrote about in *The Jump Book*. Success with Jumpology was so great that many celebrities asked Halsman to take their photograph jumping. But he only worked on commission, creating 101 *Life* and other magazine covers. The astonishing, entertaining photographs of political, cultural, and social leaders jumping charmed the nation (see figures 5 and 6).



Philippe Halsman
*Duke and Duchess
of Windsor, 1956*

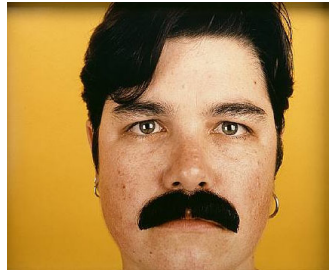


Jumpology also reflected Halsman's feelings about America, a kind of portrait of the country's bounce. Halsman, like Erwit and Weegee, was a Jewish immigrant. Born in Latvia, he studied engineering in Germany before working in Paris as a photographer.

There, he became well known for his portraits. With the help of Albert Einstein, Halsman was able to immigrate to the United States in 1940, when Paris fell to the Germans. Even though he had to start over, his commercial success ultimately led Halsman to be named one of the top ten photographers in a *Popular Photography* poll.²

Catherine Opie

Revealing the mystery of another person was one of Halsman's goals, and Catherine Opie, coming from a very different perspective, shared that same vision.



Catherine Opie, *Bo*, 1991

Unlike the immigrant photographers, Opie was born in the U.S. She grew up in Sandusky, OH, was making photographs by the age of 9, and trained technically.

Like Halsman, Opie made her reputation with intimate portraiture. She burst into recognition in the art world for her surprising portrayals of a subset of the lesbian community.

Acknowledging herself as a member, this group had been ostracized by mainstream lesbian culture for its alternative and controversial sexual practices, including sadomasochism. She also depicted herself and her friends in carefully crafted, technically beautiful photographs of women trying on the gender persona of men (see figures 7 and 8).

² Edwards, 1.



For Opie, identity was more complex than what can be read on the surface. Like Halsman, she thought people wore different personas, representing different parts of themselves. The way people dressed and accessorized acted like decoration for a kind of canvas.

For her community, gender similarly could be tried on and taken off. Opie's portraits captured the irony of how careful aesthetic choices that were false, like wearing male clothing and fake facial hair, actually allowed her female sitters to communicate emotional truths.

Cindy Sherman

Rather than expressing the authentic self within, Cindy Sherman liked to play dress up, depicting herself in costume. Sherman, in contrast to Halsman and Opie, and more in keeping with Weegee's instincts, played with layers of artifice. As a result, ambiguity filled her photographs, images of herself in character.

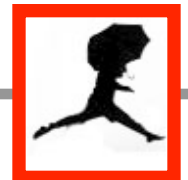


Cindy Sherman, *Untitled (Film Still)*, 1978

Similar to many Americans, Sherman grew up with a television culture. One of her first characters resembled the comedian Lucille Ball. To feel confident to go to a college party, Sherman wore a Lucy-inspired wig and vintage clothing. As with Erwit, Sherman experienced herself as introverted and an outsider, driving the decision to use herself as her own model.

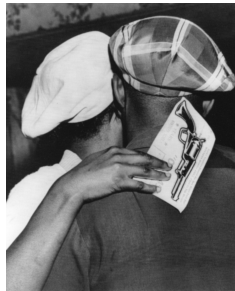
Unlike Opie, who revealed what was of innermost importance, Sherman shared little about herself in her images. Instead, while trying on characters and settings, she experimented with roles and character types assigned to women in a man's world.

Like Weegee, Sherman played with the B movie stereotypes, like the fearful woman, the movie star, and the femme fatale, in her *Film Stills* series (see figures 9 and 10). With each self-depiction so different, getting to know Sherman seems slippery. The subtle anxiety that ambiguity creates in the viewer mirrors how Sherman experienced the modern world.



Each of the photographers in this exhibit works with issues of identity and anxiety. Halsman and Opie show aspects of identity on an individual level, while Opie and Sherman wrestle with the challenges of belonging to a group. Sherman, Weegee, and Erwitte each comment on society overall.

While Erwitte reveled in lightness, his subjects lost individuality by being named for their geography, as if they could only be understood in the context of the personality of place. Halsman prodded sitters to drop their masks of safety, and Sherman intentionally put one on. Opie delved into the anxiety of exclusion, while Weegee exposed the underlying fears of a nation marked by violence, elevating the gun to a seeming portrait of American identity (see figures 3 and 4).



Weegee, *The Lottery Ticket*, c1950

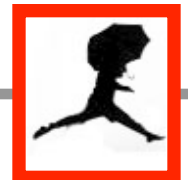
Whether with humorous, serious, delightful, or ironic veneers, each of these photographers entreats us to consider more than what is on the surface. This challenge drives the great photography of *Jump into Art* and hopefully inspires you to continue leaping into the journey of art.

Rena Tobey
Director and Curator
The Jump Museum



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1. Elliott Erwitt, *Paris, France*, 1989

Jump for Joy

Elliott Erwitt photographs of France have become iconic, perhaps none more so than this image of Paris. Erwitt titled his works according to the place they were shot, not the specific content. So the images invite viewers to understand what is depicted in the context of its setting.

Who can resist the way Erwitt converts the wet dreariness of a Paris day into a romantic adventure? Here, a figure seemingly leaps into the journey of love, in the city of love.

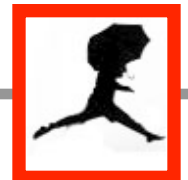
Erwitt had a knack for capturing the feeling of a moment. He professed to prefer the style of Street Photography, which recorded everyday moments and events candidly, without posing to create a particular message. He found this style of photography freeing. He did not need any special lighting, set up, or staged models. All he needed was his camera and a knack for noticing.

But here, as in other of his commercial and artful work, Erwitt composed the image, meant to charm. He used common ideas about Paris, even those rooted in stereotypes, to create a tightly composed city-valentine for the viewer. Although Erwitt has caught a moment mid-leap, the composition has been carefully arranged.

The central action is framed by stabilizing horizontal lines of pavement and the horizon. The frame is completed on the left with strong verticals of a building and a sculpture, in that moment reflected in the wet pavement below. In the center, shapes dominate—the curve of the woman's back, the octagonal umbrella at the center top, the swoop of the Eiffel Tower at its base. The diagonal lines of the leaper's legs link the Eiffel Tower, the symbol of Paris, with the lovers, the symbol of what Paris represents.

Erwitt's magic comes with combining this meticulous structure with a sense of effortlessness. Swoops and curves create a sense of playfulness. Notice the curl of the umbrella handle, the curve of the leaper's hand just beneath it, then the spring of the pants leg. See how the curve of the lovers' intertwined umbrellas stay anchored with diagonal lines pointing to the lover's faces, focusing our attention.

Even as Erwitt captures the lightness of the leap, we can imagine how many shots were required to get the positioning just right. At what height will the leaper's leg intersect the Eiffel Tower? How close will the front toe get to the lovers? These little details make this image a moment of sweet perfection.





2. Elliott Erwitt, *Paris, France*, 1989

Jump for Joy

Elliott Erwitt became known for his candid shots of everyday sites, people, and what he may be best known for, dogs. Erwitt found dogs funny and began photographing them because he thought they embodied human qualities. He even went on to suggest that dogs living in different places would be different in personality. In contrast to dogs living with hardships, Erwitt wrote, “I prefer to photograph French dogs. They have personality although I can’t explain why...not a single national personality, but a personality *period*.”³

His wife thought he identified with dogs, which fits with the story of this French jumper. Erwitt, with his trademark wit, actually barked at dogs. “That is why the little dog in one of my photographs has jumped straight up in the air.” He barked, and the dog jumped. He barked again, the dog jumped. Each time Erwitt barked, the dog jumped.⁴

The resulting photograph presents a moment of sheer whimsy and delight. Notice how high the small dog has jumped, stiff-legged, attentive, while the man stays rooted on the ground. The four-legged straightness contrasts with the two splayed feet, uneven pants hems, and droopy trenchcoat. Even the dog’s symmetrical black ears, perfect eye patch and round black nose and eyes seem orderly next to the slovenly companion.

While the adage suggests that dogs and their humans come to resemble each other, here is a seeming contrast of styles and sensibilities. Perhaps opposites do attract. That these two spirits should come together in accord seems to comment more deeply than the momentary bark and response. Who are these two, individually and together? How do they get along?

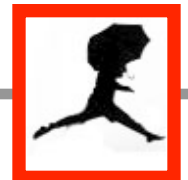
With good humor, Erwitt attributed learning an essential tool from his barking communication and the little dog’s jumping response. He began carrying a horn, and if his subject was “stiff or sour,” Erwitt would blow it.⁵ That startling sound would immediately break down barriers.

Erwitt’s dog photographs have been described as political, commenting on the human comedy. Here, humor, spontaneity, and relationship complexities come together in a jubilant, expressive moment for the ages.

³ Erwitt, 3.

⁴ Erwitt, 3.

⁵ Erwitt, 4.





3. Weegee, *The Gun Shop*, 1943

Jump the Gun

Weegee, the famous nickname of Arthur Fellig, epitomized the New York City tabloid newspaper photographer of the 1930s and 1940s. He specialized in photographing the underbelly of urban life with spectacles of car accidents, fires, and bloody victims of gangland violence.

Tabloids relied on photographs to tell a story, rather than text, to appeal to a broad audience. Weegee made a name for himself by uncovering what he called a “twilight world, one ordinarily hidden from daytime inhabitants of the city.”⁶ He played on viewer fears and fascination.

By the 1940s, he was growing tired of the tabloid deadline pressures and wanted his work recognized as art. Before relocating to Los Angeles to make Hollywood films, he shot the remarkable image *The Gun Shop*.

The image draws on several art-making traditions. In the history of photography, night shots were long considered the most challenging, due to the lack of light. But Weegee took this challenge to a different level.

Here, he intensified the light, with an exploding, harsh flash illuminating the gun in contrast to the dark streets behind and below. This use of chiaroscuro, or dramatic contrasts of light and dark, was borrowed from a painterly tradition made famous by the painter Caravaggio in the early 1600s.

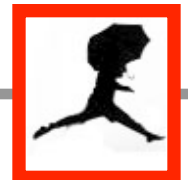
In the 1940s, the intense tonal contrasts also blended with the Hollywood and literary genre of film noir, melodramatic stories of menace and pessimism, amplified by moody black and white imagery.

In addition, Weegee borrowed from surrealism, an avant-garde art movement that used non-rational images to uncover subconscious thoughts, such as from dreams. Here, the gun is monumental in scale, eerily lit as if from some inner energy source, dwarfing tiny figures on the otherwise empty street below. The vantage point is confusing. Where is the photographer standing? Is the gun really a shop sign, flatly suspended from hanging lines, or is it three-dimensional, front and center in a nightmare?

This image does something more metaphorical than his tabloid street photography. The gun dominates the otherwise ordinary scene. It points toward the elegantly barred windows across the street.

From his years depicting street violence, Weegee invests the image with mystery, but also political commentary. What does he seem to say about the relation of people to guns? How does the image comment on American society? The photograph is startling, visually and in its message, as timely today as in 1943.

⁶ Purcell, 8.





4.
Weegee
The Lottery Ticket
c1950

Jump the Gun

Weegee's work is known for its people and the complex, often unsettling emotions evoked. This image is no exception. What is your first impression of these people? What is their relationship like?

Weegee does not give the viewer faces to read, although we feel the couple's intimacy. The tight composition also does not allow the viewer to understand the setting or context. Weegee uses body language and their stylish hats to reveal character.

The viewer is not able to see what has grabbed the couple's attention. Instead, almost voyeuristically, we can study them without their knowledge and wonder what they are seeing. This is a "paradox familiar to most photographers: Weegee gets closer to his subject when they don't know he's there," creating an "emotional immediacy."⁷

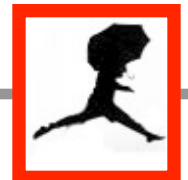
As with *The Gun Shop*, Weegee uses sharp tonal contrasts, or chiaroscuro, to create a story. The viewer's eye is naturally drawn to the brightest parts of the image—the woman's hat, her top, and what she holds alongside the man's neck. Several years after *The Gun Shop*, Weegee continues to explore the powerful role of the gun in American culture.

The image title tells us she holds a lottery ticket. But what is the winner's prize? What is at risk? What is she betting on? Like *The Gun Shop*, here the gun acts as a pointer, and its placement is not accidental. What is significant about where it points?

Weegee does not provide straightforward answers, as he would in his photojournalism, though we get a sense of his point of view. By reflecting on all the questions the image raises, Weegee engages the viewer in a dialogue about youthful potential, love, life in the city, and the future prospects for African Americans at that time.

What do you think now of their relationship? With your reflection, what feelings have been evoked? What makes Weegee images powerful is that they transcend their time to intellectually and emotionally comment on issues of American identity and its flaws.

⁷ Handy, 153





5.
Philippe Halsman
*Duke and Duchess
Of Windsor*
1956

Jumpology

Philippe Halsman used his characteristic Jumpology with witty, often surprising results. Asking industry leaders, scientists, comedians, judges, theologians, actors, athletes, and political figures to jump not only allowed the notable to relax, but also revealed the sitter's character. Halsman became so well known for his jumping photographs that overlooked celebrities became upset.

In 1955, Halsman was commissioned by *McCall's Magazine* to photograph the Duchess of Windsor for its cover. The magazine was publishing the first installment of her autobiography. After apparent difficulties with her writers, she approached the session cautiously. Halsman made one portrait with the Duchess, but found her uncomfortable, as if she were preoccupied. So he asked her to jump.

The magazine with that image sold out in two days. The Duchess was inundated with more requests, and Halsman was asked to capture her portrait again for the cover jacket of her book. This time, she seemed relaxed, happy, and confident. She took off her shoes and jumped.

Then the Duke of Windsor jumped, too, while the Duchess looked on with delight. "The expressions of the Duke and Duchess watching each other jump were so revealing and touching," Halsman stated.⁸

Next, he captured the Duke and Duchess jumping together, in this now famous image. Notice that their hands are clasped. Look how high the Duke jumps. What do you make of the expression on his face? The Duchess points her shoeless toes. Note the abandoned high heels in the background. "One who has dignity cannot lose it in a jump," Halsman said.⁹

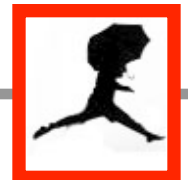
He relished interpreting body posture as personality revealing. He suggested that the position of the arms were significant. Holding arms down by the body, Halsman believed, showed modesty. How high the jumper jumped suggested how seriously the sitter took the task, indicating ambition. Facial expressions demonstrated how the person approached any new activity—with a smile like the Duchess—or with surprise, tension, or a myriad of other responses.

Both the Duke and Duchess look directly at the camera, or in essence, at the viewer. Halsman would say his sitters were very aware of their audience, that they were being observed and judged. The photographer wrote that all these details have significance.

But first, viewers look at the photograph with delight. Here, the Duchess and Duke manage to maintain that British aristocratic stiff upper lip, but still convey it with lively humor and engaging humanity.

⁸ Halsman, 40.

⁹ Edward & Halsman, 2.





6.
Philippe Halsman
Marilyn Monroe with the Photographer
1959

Jumpology

Philippe Halsman put himself in this picture, jumping with Marilyn Monroe. He captured her glamour, but something more, too. “It is difficult for me to write about Marilyn because her beauty impressed me less than her inferiority complex. My memories of her might appear tainted with hindsight, but everything in her life falls into place if one tries to see it from this angle. It was her inferiority complex that drove her to stardom and then to the unavoidable self-destruction.”¹⁰

Now, we know more about Monroe’s tragedy, but at the time, Halsman learned about her through her jump. This photograph revealed the star’s complexity, the way her famous sex appeal blended with a wholesome innocence. Halsman thought her bent-kneed jump looked like a little girl. Initially, when she jumped alone, he complained he could not see her legs, an important aspect of her image. He did not like how her torso looked cut-off. He asked her jump again, to try to express more of her character. She stood completely still, unable to move.

As he went on to take other pictures of her, he realized he saw something in her he had not seen before. The actress was a “child-woman,” which men would prefer, because if she came across as strong, they might feel inadequate in comparison.¹¹ Halsman brought his insights into the photograph of them jumping together.

Notice how high they jump, and that Halsman mirrors her bent knees, as if to build rapport and a sense of understanding with her. All his attention is on her. What do you make of his expression?

She focuses on us, with a movie-star smile, always aware of the impression she generates. Look at her hands. One clenches the photographer’s, the other is a fist. Using her body language, how would you interpret her feelings in the moment, and in general? Halsman explained the raised arm as a symbol of reaching. What might the photographer be reaching for?

Halsman believed that Jumpology, the interpreting of the jump, was like a puzzle key for character revelation. In *The Jump Book*, he wrote, “I will not be surprised if, in the very near future, psychologists and psychiatrists will, in urgent cases, apply, instead of slow Rorschach, the rapid Halsman.”¹² But even with this statement, we cannot help but smile. Gentle wit was essential to Halsman’s technique.

Does all this jumping make you want to rise up? Go do it!

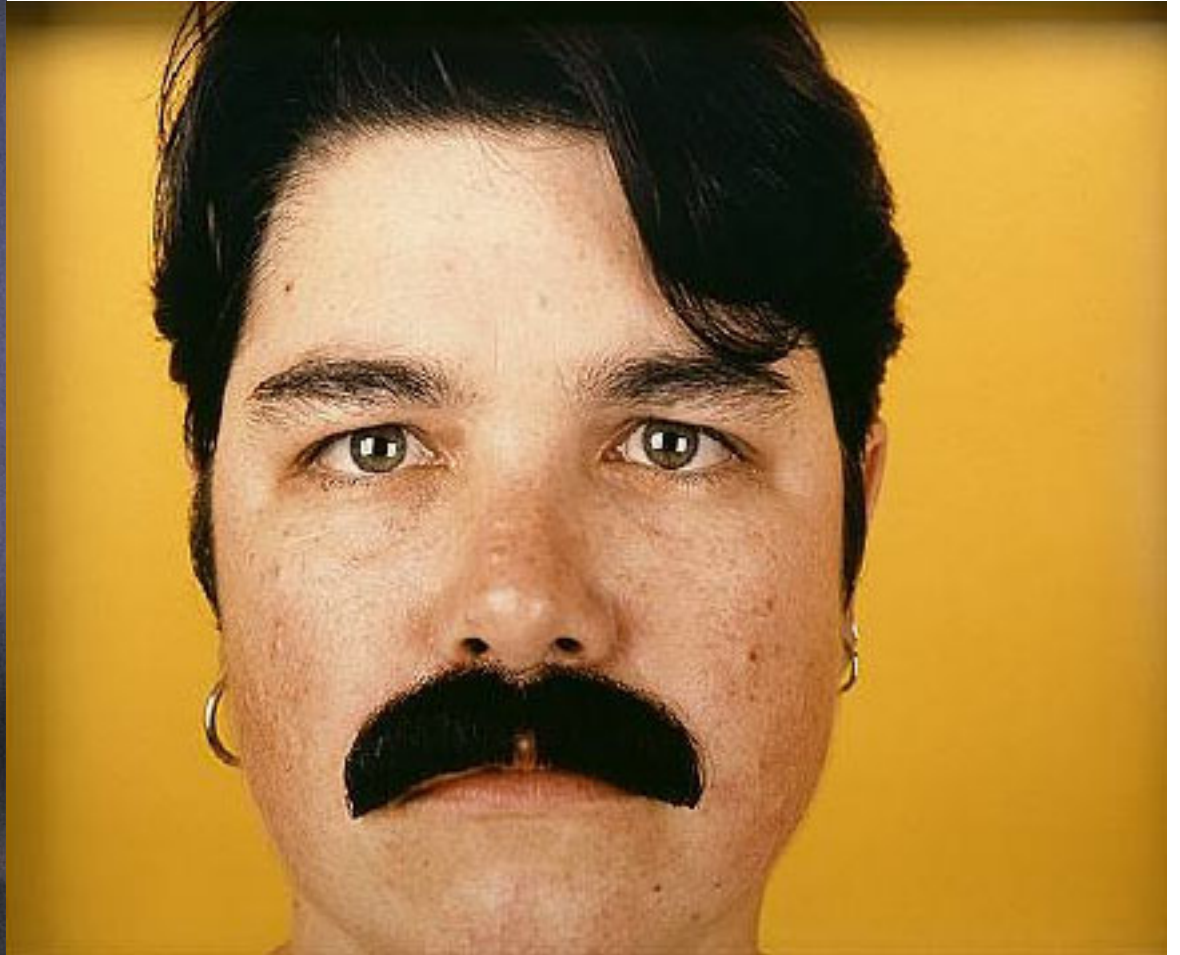
¹⁰ Edward & Halsman, 41.

¹¹ Halsman, 30.

¹² Halsman, 33.



7. Catherine Opie, *Bo*, 1994



8. Catherine Opie, *Bo* from "*Being and Having*," 1991

Jump Across Boundaries

Catherine Opie commanded attention with her powerful portraits. She made a series of painful images exploring how she remained an outsider to the mainstream lesbian community. Opie visually expressed how she felt excluded from gay culture, while these community differences were invisible to the heterosexual world.

Then came the *Being and Having* series, including Figure 8. This series documented her self-portrait, as well as images of friends who explored the boundaries of male and female gender identity. This group of women would dress as men, taking on a 'drag king' persona, for an evening or even for several days. These women did not want to be men, but instead tried on and played with masculine identities.

Taken together, these portraits explored what it meant to be a woman and to be a man in terms of societal definitions, beyond physical attributes. This study of gender focused on the outer layers of dress, false masculine facial hair, and macho body language and facial expressions. The series revealed how those layers led viewers to make assumptions about the sitters.

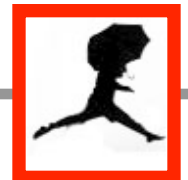
These two portraits explore the gender-busting side of the photographer, allowing her to assume a persona, Bo, with clothing and a false moustache. Other than the feminine curve of her hips in the full-length portrait, Opie masks her womanly physique with a plaid flannel work shirt, jeans, and work boots. A club, as a prop, hangs from her belt loop.

The political statement of blurred gender identity is no less strong in the extreme close-up. Here, the moustache is clearly fake. The viewer is invited to consider, who is this woman with pasted-on facial hair? Instead of having clear boundaries between male and female, masculine and feminine, the portrait pushes the viewer to consider how gender boundaries are unstable and even superficial, a tool of a society that likes neat categories.

With the close-up, no context distracts from Opie's central question of identity. She tampers with the expectations that a portrait exposes a true self and that the surface can express the individual within. Opie challenges the viewer to move beyond easy categorizations. Does Opie conceal or reveal her private thoughts and emotions? How do you get to know her?

The lesbian community did not always welcome this exploration, seeing the act of women dressing as men as a betrayal of feminist ethics.

Opie had several goals. She wanted to expand the identity of what it meant to be a lesbian. She sought respect for her sub-community, and she yearned for her images to bring social change, to push the boundaries that define normal.





9. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled (Film Still)*, 1978



10.
Cindy Sherman,
Untitled (Film Still)
1978

Jump Back in Time

Cindy Sherman invites viewers to jump to conclusions based on appearances, then question that choice. In her *Film Still* series of over 100 images, Sherman mimicked film publicity photographs. She dressed up as if she were a character from a 1930s or 1940s B movie, trying on different roles women played in low-budget films.

During college, she shopped at thrift stores and began appearing in character at parties. After moving to New York, she described feeling intimidated. She did not want to leave home. She began to take photographs in her apartment, depicting imaginary scenes from the life of a fictitious actress. Influenced by her film studies and love of narrative, Sherman treated the photographs as scenes from a storyboard, implying a larger story beyond any one shot.

Compare the two photographs here, both depicting Sherman as different types. Notice the vantage point of the photograph on the left, of the young blonde woman in the suit. The viewer looks up at her and the buildings beyond. What effect does this striking viewpoint have on the scene? What is the woman feeling? What just happened and is about to happen next?

The image on the right is also of Sherman. Who is this woman, and who are you in relationship to her? Who is the other person in the image? The dramatic story you create is part of the experience Sherman wants you to have. Just as she is trying on different characters, from the innocent to the knowing, from younger to older, so, too, do you.

Enough is left open to interpretation for a sense of mystery, which makes the images continually interesting. How you understand the narrative may be different next year than today.

Many interpretations have been made of this series. What is being communicated about women's roles in society? Feminists have suggested that Sherman was commenting on the power of The Gaze, a concept of men's power over women derived from their societal right to look at and use women. As a result of this unbalanced power relationship, women have been categorized as types, like The Innocent and The Glamour Queen.

Sherman replied that she had not heard of this theory when she made the photographs. She said that she was bored by politics, even as she acknowledged the influence on her life of the changing roles for women in the 1970s, when the images were made. Feminists also argued about whether the series reinforced stereotypes or blew them apart.

Others interpreted the works as comments on our media-saturated culture, which makes us all consumers. This argument suggested that women's lives were like narratives written by others. Following this line of thinking, the images were not self-portraits of Sherman, but rather explorations of a Woman in a Situation that could be consumed.

Sherman simply stated that she always liked to play dress up. She leaves the *Film Stills* as her ambiguous and compelling invitation to write your own story.





11.
Cindy Sherman
Untitled (After Caravaggio)
1990



12.
Caravaggio
Sick Bacchus
1593

Jump into Art

Cindy Sherman studied Old Masters painters for inspiration when her work became repetitive. When “I ran out of clichés...I knew it was time to move on.”¹³ She began experimenting with color, exploring the Self playfully through famous masterpieces, placing herself in the work of art.

This series included 35 photographs made while she was living in Rome. But rather than go to museums, churches, and other sites to see the paintings in person, Sherman worked from reproductions in books, something she could have done while living anywhere. This tactic placed importance on media as the source of inspiration, rather than the actual work.

As with the *Film Still* series, Sherman continued to explore gender roles, this time with European traditions, by placing herself in the role of a boy. *Sick Bacchus*, one of two paintings Caravaggio made of the ancient god, used himself as the model, just as Sherman did 400 years later. Caravaggio's Bacchus, a mythical figure of pleasure, merrymaking, and drinking, here looks sickly. Critics have speculated the artist was suffering from a bout of malaria at the time.

Because his patron, Cardinal Scipione Borghese, was likely homosexual, the painting has been interpreted as full of sexual connotations. The male patron considers the beautiful boy. The protruding bare shoulder was then, as now, a come-hither, provocative invitation. Similarly, the ribbon-belt invites the viewer to untie it and reveal what is beneath. Tactile and mouth-watering fruit, long-used symbols of sexuality, are begging to be grabbed.

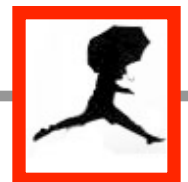
Come forward in time to the late 1980s, and a Culture War was raging in the United States. Senator Jesse Helms lambasted the National Endowment of the Arts for financially supporting an openly gay artist Robert Mapplethorpe and his “pornographic” works. At that same time, Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center curator Dennis Barrie was charged with obscenity, although later acquitted, for exhibiting Mapplethorpe photographs. The artist died of AIDS in 1989. In the context of these social realities, Sherman inserted herself into the painting with the Bacchus who appeared ill, not Caravaggio's later version with a robust god.

Missing in Sherman's portrait are the soft, ripe peaches from the Caravaggio painting. Peaches symbolize truth. What led Sherman to omit the peaches, when so much of the photograph faithfully recreates the masterwork?

While Sherman does not articulate a political motive, the photograph blurs the distinctions between gender roles and sexual stereotypes. Not just a witty example of jumping into art, Sherman's work provides a nuanced commentary on the tensions of conflicting cultural beliefs.

What can you do? Continue to jump right into art. Maybe not literally as Cindy Sherman did, by thrusting herself into the Caravaggio painting, unless of course, you are so inspired.

¹³ Galassi & Sherman, 13.



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List of Artists

Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi

Italian, 1571-1610

Fig. 12 *Sick Bacchus*, 1593

Oil on Canvas, 26"x21"

Erwitt, Elliott

American, b. 1928

Fig. 1 *Paris, France*, 1989

Gelatin Silver Print, 12.5"x9"

Fig. 2 *Paris, France*, 1989

Gelatin Silver Print, 12.5"x9"

Halsman, Philippe

American, 1906-1979

Fig. 5 *Duke and Duchess of Windsor*, 1956

Gelatin Silver Print, 9"x12.5"

Fig. 6 *Marilyn Monroe*

and the Photographer, 1959

Gelatin Silver Print, 9"x12.5"

Opie, Catherine

American, b. 1961

Fig. 7 *Bo*, 1994

Color Photographic Print, 9"x12.5"

Fig. 8 *Bo* from *"Being and Having,"* 1991

Chromogenic Print, 12.5"x9"

Sherman, Cindy

American, b. 1954

Fig. 9 *Film Still*, 1978

Gelatin Silver Print, 12.5"x 9"

Fig. 10 *Film Still*, 1978

Gelatin Silver Print, 9"x12.5"

Fig. 11 *Untitled (After Caravaggio)*, 1990

Color Photographic Print, 9"x12.5"

Weegee (Arthur Fellig)

American, 1899-1968

Fig. 3 *The Gun Shop*, 1943

Gelatin Silver Print, 12.5"x 9"

Fig. 4 *The Lottery Ticket*, c1950

Gelatin Silver Print, 9"x12.5"





The Jump Museum

