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# Intericonicity in Disguise in Madame Yevonde's *Goddesses* series and Cindy Sherman's *History* *Portraits/Old Masters*

Julie MORÈRE

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Image 1. Madame Yevonde, *Mrs. Bryan Guinness as Venus*, 1935



© THE YEVONDE PORTRAIT ARCHIVE

Image 2. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #225*, 1990



**CHROMOGENIC COLOR PRINT, 48 X 33 INCHES. EDITION OF 6.**  
**COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND METRO PICTURES**

- 1 Intericonicity as discussed in relation to Madame Yevonde's and Cindy Sherman's photographic works of art has to do with resonances within their own work, between their works and within a larger network of images that are more or less closely associated to them, from straightforwardly identifiable images to mere satellite ones. The series under study are Yevonde's 1935 *Goddesses* in which she photographed society beauties dressed as Greek and Roman goddesses, drawing her inspiration from the collective memory and her fertile imagination, and Sherman's 1990s *History Portraits/Old Masters* where she extravagantly poses in various costumes and elaborate settings, explicitly referring to the artworks of famous European Masters<sup>1</sup>. In those series, both artists insistently question the notions of gender and feminine identity in the art world, both using models who were involved one way or another in the arts.
- 2 Fascinated by the Suffragette cause, Madame Yevonde gave several lectures on the role of women in the history of photography and how this medium impacted their daily lives<sup>2</sup>. Cindy Sherman claimed that she did not read the numerous feminist articles related to her own work, but the subjects that she chose to impersonate in the series under study are nearly all wives of artists, mistresses or spouses of art benefactors or collectors. In this image, an oval-shaped photograph (*ovato tondo*), Sherman's inspiration draws from Piero della Francesca's Battista Sforza. Her work is only a fragment of the diptych of the Duke and Duchess, as she chooses to concentrate on the female character as the basis of her recreation. The Duchess was an educated woman in the humanist tradition and her husband was a landmark figure of the Italian Renaissance (Tinagli). The cyan background is a recurrent color in Sherman's work, circulating from one picture to the other and

giving celestial unity to her work, also recalling the bluish hues of many of Yevonde's works.

- 3 Some have considered the thirty-five pieces produced for the *History Portraits* to represent “an artistic and creative low” and “smug parodies of classical art portraiture” provoking “no inner exploration by the viewer” and conveying a blunt message “drawn from the post-modernist schema” for which civilization and history are “entirely subjective—something invented, to be chopped up and reconstituted according to one's own whim” (Phillips). This paper will focus on the way iconic transfers operate between the media used by the artists. It will strive to show how the homage paid to the past by their recreations has a cultural and genderly impact.

## 1. Intermediality

- 4 The variety of media used by the artists is a salient feature of their artistic identities. Intermediality is here understood as the relations established between several media and the transgression of boundaries between them. Such media combination, with each medial form present in its “own materiality”, “contribute[s] to the constitution and signification of the [artistic] product” in its own specific way (Rajewski 51).
- 5 Through the photographic medium co-related with other media, Yevonde's contemporary and exuberant approach to studio portraiture resorted to the theatricality of the costume parties that she attended in her childhood. Sherman also loved to dress up. For her, painting often interfered with the photographic medium<sup>3</sup>. She started it in college at Buffalo State, not really knowing what she wanted to do with it. This made her wonder: “Why am I wasting my time elaborately copying things when I could use a camera?” (in Vogel)<sup>4</sup>, a question raised by other artists interested in dismantling boundaries between media<sup>5</sup> at Hallwalls Arts Center. “In 1983, she recalled a pivotal, painting-related inspiration for her unique approach to photography: “I had all this make-up. I just wanted to see how transformed I could look. It was like painting in a way” (in Fichner-Rathus 189). “Dressing up and painting and photography jelled for me when the makeup became paint and my face became the canvas” (in Hoban). Sherman turned into the director, actress, model, costume stylist and photographer of her own characters all at once. The variety of media that Sherman juggles with could be seen as being part of a process Didi-Huberman calls “médiomorphoses” in “La Condition des images”. Images are constantly mutating, quoting and echoing one another, from one media form to the next: “Aujourd'hui, les images muent et mutent. Elles se déplacent sans complexes, changent de contextes institutionnels comme de chemise, se citent et se 'décitent'” (Didi-Huberman 87). There is a whole process at work when the viewer tries to contextualize and conjure up the vestiges of manipulated historical portraits or mythological figures: “montrer, c'est donner le temps de regarder, c'est ouvrir la possibilité d'une mise en relation, d'un travail de contextualisation, d'une pensée, d'un montage” (Didi-Huberman 104). This appropriation process allows the artist's gaze and the viewer's to be freed (“un exercice de la liberté du regard”, Didi-Huberman 103).
- 6 The exhibition that Yevonde held in her studio at Berkeley Square entitled *Goddesses and Others* in July 1935 was inspired by an Olympian theme party held at Claridge's in London (Roberts and Gibson 32-33). A plethora of society beauties came dressed as a bewildering cross-section of Greek and Roman goddesses. Yevonde chose to subtract or add new goddesses in her series. Some unaltered costumes like the one for Lady Warrender as

Ceres give beautiful but commissioned-looking pictures, seeking to demonstrate wealth and elegance. As a pupil of the Edwardian photographer Lallie Charles, Yevonde gained “photographic education, an initiation into business practice and studio administration but most importantly an introduction to the concept of society portraiture” (Williams 91). Some pictures perfectly respect the strict codes of society portraiture. Others are inspired by her famous motto, “Be original or die!”: she explored concepts which lay behind ideas of beauty and sophistication, labeled as “the manufacture of elegance” by Val Williams (Williams 93). Yevonde’s work was revolutionary for the time for she was fascinated by the technicality of the photographic process (although the Vivex color process she so much enjoyed working with was very short-lived and ended with the war<sup>6</sup>). She often experimented with colors for the sake of technical prowess and not necessarily to her models’ advantage.

- 7 We are of course faced with very different contexts: in Sherman’s and our time, photography is an “average art”, “un *art moyen*” in Bourdieu’s words, which is accessible to all. Color is taken for granted and digital technologies have completely changed the way pictures are taken. Before digital cameras, Sherman would, in her own words,
- do the character, set everything up. Take a roll of film, get out of character, take the makeup off and go to the lab and wait a few hours for the film to be developed. [...] Then I’d look at the film and realize something didn’t work out. And I’d have to redo everything myself. Now I can continue working and tweak it as I’m going [...] [with] slight subtle changes with Photoshop to make each character look different. [...] It’s horrifying how easy it is to make changes (in Vogel).
- 8 Yevonde’s time was the beginning of the end of portrait studios, with the proliferation of small-format cameras and the growing sophistication of the general public which no longer regarded having one’s portrait taken as a novelty (Yevonde “The Future of Portraiture”). With Lallie Charles, Yevonde learned how to create a fairly bland and homogenous product, how to master “the use of heavy retouching to flatter chins, waists and hips, and how to work over negatives with a pencil to produce a softened, romantic effect” (Roberts and Gibson 9). She then set up her own studio and soon started to experiment different poses, backgrounds, lightings, papers, filters and transparent cellophane as in *The Muse of History*, with blue translucent paper over the lights thus giving the women’s faces and flesh a marmoreal look. *Arethusa* was shot “with green cellophane over the lens. [...] I achieved what I wanted... no red tones and a greenish quality in the flesh” (Yevonde *In Camera* 235). At the bottom of this picture, the glass fish is a circulating motif, like other circulating props from picture to picture, playing on light shades and iridescence. These techniques taught her about color balance and how certain colors registered better than others, giving her work a unique blend of personal vision and imaginative interpretation which she expressed in a 1933 article entitled “Why Colour?”. Yevonde dared luminous reds and yellows and vibrant highlights, auburn-haired women against vivid red backgrounds, and under or over-exposed negatives as in Yevonde’s *Flora*, which illustrates the 1930s rococo revival. Such whitish atmosphere is strangely echoed in Sherman’s *Untitled #193* in which the artist appears dressed up as the wife of French painter François Boucher. The crimson floral wallpaper in the original painting has been replaced by flowery lace drapery in the background. Sherman insists on the artificiality of surfaces, glistening breasts and monstrous feet. She plays on plasticity and the sculptural, considering the body as a painted or sculpted shell adorned with prosthetics sometimes found through medical supplies. The ball of wool that Sherman chose to keep is maybe what confirms the reference to Boucher’s work. It is also

the emblem of how the thread of intericonic filiation unravels from one image to the next. Clothes, fabrics and special care for textures are an essential part of both artists' creative processes<sup>7</sup>. Yevonde uses elegant draperies, shrouds or veils. Sherman similarly resorts to falsely luxurious shimmering dresses.

- 9 Yevonde's or Sherman's photographs primary concerns might be to debunk, satirize, or pay tribute. The way several inspiring images are condensed into one single image created by the artists reflects ambivalent preoccupations: "the parallel ideas of women as strong and militant, as warriors in the women's cause, and of women as mere creatures of elegance" (Williams 97) for Yevonde. A similar duality can be perceived in Sherman's work, but it is much more ambiguously expressed through mythological echoes, historical or religious references, generic interferences or monographic allusions (allusions to another artist's world, style, composition or precise image), all contributing to the expression in Sherman's work—just as in Yevonde's work before her—of some artistic manifesto in which her debt to other works is acknowledged.

## 2. Recombinations

- 10 Sherman's work is a performed pastiche and her creative process is described by André Rouillé as the "undoing" of historical contexts:

[Une œuvre] qui défait les contextes et les sens historiques, qui noie la mémoire dans les mirages de l'artifice, [...] mélanges, métissages et recyclages [...] méli-mélo des pratiques, des matériaux, des références, des genres, des styles et des époques, [...] images qui ne valent plus que pour elles-mêmes [...]. (Rouillé 490)

- 11 The viewer may wonder if Sherman's art is closer to homage or satire, if it is a purely carnivalesque recombination, inversion, or counter-production of culture, or if it is to be seen from a creative perspective<sup>8</sup>. Being the one and only model of her own pictures, what may appear as a limitation in fact translates into an incredibly diverse corpus of images, which, in a reflexive way, discusses the way they are themselves constructed and how other images contribute to such construction. They are not self-portraits but rather self-paintings, which Jean-Pierre Criqui calls "*autopeintures*" (Criqui 275) in the catalogue for the 2006 Jeu de Paume exhibition on Sherman. They are based on representations shared by the viewers who accept to enter Sherman's fictional universe, while remaining tied up to the referential sphere that her works are based on. The question about the fact that her photographs may be no more than a lie about a lie seems outdated since Sherman's (re)appropriational acts are all creative copies with or without clearly identified originals, depending on the referential degree (allusion, echo, exact reproduction, etc.) of the picture. The point seems to be, by relying on what may look like stereotypes, to evade or foil those very stereotypes, to look beyond them, to understand the way images are related and read.
- 12 Yevonde and Sherman play with the viewer's culture: one has to posit the need to take a fresh look at images ("se défaire de nos pré-visions, trop chargées des histoires qu'on a voulu leur imposer", Didi-Huberman 81). Looking at a picture is a complex process full of (un)conscious visual memories that are suddenly lit by the conjunction of a visual event and long-buried images ("références mémorielles qui s'entrechoquent en [l'image] [...] et mettent en crise la représentation qu'elle nous offre", Didi-Huberman 94-95)<sup>9</sup>. Mythological themes in Yevonde's work find new historical as well as biblical resonances in Sherman's pictures. Props are definitely crucial details to look at in both



photographers' works in order to better understand how pictorially interconnected their universes are. Snakes of bright green rubber underwent countless dissections before being finally usable for Yevonde's Medusa, with everything cropped out of the picture except the face: "Medusa was a cold voluptuary and sadist [...], we painted the lips [...] a dull purple and made her face chalk-white" (Yevonde *In Camera* 232-233). Yevonde spent days scouring children toy shops and street markets for her props. Avoiding the full-length figure, she concentrated on the essence of the myth and the beauty of her sitters who might look straight at her but most often away from the camera, in a melancholy manner, and sometimes with closed eyes, whereas Sherman's subjects nearly all stare intently at the camera. In *Untitled #228*, Judith has a cunning look on her face as she is holding the head of Holofernes. She is wearing a snake-like scarf around her neck that recalls Yevonde's serpentine prop. There is no major transformation from Botticelli's *Judith Leaving the Tent of Holofernes* except for a bloodied hand.

- 13 Sherman said that she drew her inspiration from a broad scope of historical imagery from 15<sup>th</sup>-century Florence to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris:

I worked out of books, with reproductions. It's an aspect of photography I appreciate conceptually: the idea that images can be reproduced and seen anytime, anywhere, by anyone. [...] The way I've always tried to cull information from older art and put it into my work is that I view it all anonymously, on a visceral level. Lately I've been looking at a lot of images from Surrealism and Dada, but I never remember which ones are the Man Rays, say, because I'm just looking for what interests me (in Kimmelman).

- 14 In terms of artistic interferences, Surrealism was a strong influence on Yevonde's work as well as on Sherman's work. Niobe's colored or solarized versions are an undoubted homage to Man Ray's famous photograph with glass tears (1932). Mixing with the mascara on the lashes, the glycerin caused utmost pain to the model and that is when Yevonde took the picture that she qualified in some ways as the best in the series. Sherman's surrealism is closer to the reversal of gender embodied by Marcel Duchamp's famous transvestite alter ego *Rose Sélavy*, or to the collage technique. Sherman uses her own body as medium. She cuts and pastes artificial limbs on herself (fake breasts, feet or faces), as in her *Renaissance Man* with his furry collar, gaudy jewelry and luscious look and lips.
- 15 Several artistic genres revisited by Yevonde were explored by Sherman, such as the *tableau vivant*, the nude or the portrait of oneself—which is not a self-portrait in Sherman's case. As she was undoubtedly inspired by Julia Margaret Cameron's *tableaux vivants* with characters from medieval times, pre-Raphaelite paintings or the Arthurian legend, Yevonde recreated new narrative scenes in mythological tableaux captured as photographs. The *tableau vivant* genre often included nudity in Sherman's work, subversively pushing back the limits of sensuality explored by Yevonde in *Queen of the Amazons*, a voluptuous Saint Sebastian-like image. In the luminous and angelic *Ariel*, the picture's ethereal light from below, angular lines and wind-like effect remind us that this was the age of fast cars and airplane flights. For Sherman, "nudity is [...] an obvious attention-getting device"<sup>10</sup>. In a 1995 article entitled "At the MET with Cindy Sherman", Michael Kimmelman explains how the artist stopped to admire Ingres's *Grand Odalisque*, dismissing what she called its unsexually attractive "droopy rear" (by today's standards at least), and how she liked Courbet's "wonderfully kinky" nudes because of the texture and quality of the paint (Kimmelman). A page from her notebook shows how interested she was in bodily peculiarities that would conjure up pictures of certain types of

characters, like condensed hypotyposes. Her notes on possible nude pictures (“nude: full figure (with fur?)/from behind (with mirror?) (big ass)/to look fat”, Sherman Retrospective) already call to mind the 1990s Horror and Surrealist Pictures.

- 16 To take but a few examples, Untitled #205 is a parody of Raphael's Fornarina, the latter generally considered as one of Raphael's many mistresses. Sherman's thick makeup, wig, armband, shabby head-wrap and prosthetics are emphasized in a conspicuous way by the harsh lighting. Unlike her counterpart, Sherman's model seems to be overly concerned that her loosened drapery conceals, like the “untitled” titles that she chose, rather than reveals. Sherman's figure looks “a lot less like a masterpiece, and more like a Modern American housewife [...] unable to pull off the charade” (Hoban). Using herself as a model to portray someone else or express something else than just some sort of self-identity quest or stereotyped projections of femininity like other American women artists like Hannah Wilke or Laurie Simmons<sup>11</sup>, she points out other issues than the ones aimed at in the original Old Masters' paintings. Sherman says: “I've never thought of any of this work as [...] self-portraiture. I really think of them all as different people [...]. What makes it successful is when I suddenly don't sense anything about myself in that image” (in Brittain 190). Using a remote shutter release or having family and friends take pictures of her, she adopts diverse personae or masks. Fouquet's Renaissance Melun Diptych also illustrates Sherman's concern with the way women are represented in the art world. “In translating the image into her own idiom, Sherman first removes the Madonna's throne and the red and blue angels, those emblems that clearly emphasized divinity in the original image” (Cloutier-Blizzard). The traditional image of the Virgo Lactans is disrupted by the fact that the infant is wrapped up and concealed while the woman's nakedness supposedly creates a more seductive image. But as in Fouquet's original work the forms are quite unnatural with Sherman's spherical breasts, the yellowish tints of her skin, or her egg-shaped head and bare forehead conforming to period canons of courtly beauty. Untitled #222 is the second of two portraits of an old woman in the entire cycle. The facial features are faithful to the original group painting by Frans Hals, *The Regentesses of the Old Men's Almshouse in Haarlem* (1664). It looks quite macabre, as the high-necked black dress in the original painting becomes a naked torso with gigantic fake breasts. The only remnant of the dress is the identical collar with triangular lappets.
- 17 Sherman's acknowledged pastiche of previous art works and more or less conscious influences like Madame Yevonde's show how the viewer can spot out constants or invariants but also gaps and differences between cited and citing images, with displacements, alterations, or items (themes, objects, compositional choices, lighting, colors and backgrounds) that are reintroduced into a new circuit of meaning. How do such resilience, persistence and porosity allow the itinerant pictures not only to participate in the production of new works of art, but also to enhance the cultural and genderly impact of such works?

### 3. Transactions

- 18 The *History Portraits'* sheer wit shows how Sherman recreated “genuinely disturbing” pictures of women (Kimmelman) as if to better understand the place or role of those women in the continuum of art history and contemporary society. The American artist is neither a “cynical mirror of the grand traditions of European art, nor a knee-jerk feminist” (Cloutier-Blizzard), and neither was Yevonde before her. The complexity of

their works relies on the exploding extravagance of Yevonde's art reflecting the spirit of the interwar era after the Edwardian rigor that she rejected, and on Sherman's dismantling of traditional portraiture by taking the artist/model/viewer relationship into her own hands by playing all the roles:

In this sense, the History Portraits are more than just portraits as they are layered with a *trifecta* (*tiercé*) of meaning. [...] '...the work involves a complex transaction [my emphasis] between the original, the *tableau vivant* which comments on it, and the photograph which has its own life' (Sherman, press release Skarstedt gallery).

- 19 For Arthur Danto, Sherman is a “transformer of consciousness”, “a droll provocateur with a healthy skepticism for ‘the canon’” (in Loughery 53). Yevonde shook the grounds of historical representations of Roman Goddesses with her wild colors and flamboyant *mises en scène*, and Sherman did too, by choosing to pay tribute to Old Masters' paintings that fascinated her:

En prenant pour sujet le Panthéon de l'art occidental, Cindy Sherman trouble le caractère immuable et figé de ces représentations et saccage l'arrogante assurance de ces icônes [...]. [C'est une] dénonciation foisonnante de l'hybris propre à la grande peinture [masculine]. La voici, cette peinture, ramenée à la cuisine la plus humble—quelques oripeaux, du maquillage, un seul modèle (Durand 256, 259).

- 20 Both Yevonde's Mrs. Bryan Guinness as Venus (image 1) and Sherman's Untitled #225 (image 2) bear traces of Botticellian echoes for pure fun, but also have a more important aesthetic and cultural project in mind. Feminine identities are modeled by art history, the media and culture, all converging to a norm or a paraphernalia of attributes that are said to be “feminine” (fragility, seduction, mystery): it is in reaction to the constraints of these feminine ideals that Yevonde and Sherman produce such kaleidoscopic artwork, disseminating other images within their own works and questioning the very notion of the model. Yevonde's model reminds the viewer of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1484-86), with a conspicuous shell that has migrated from feet to head, the same head inclination and bluish background. Sherman's *Simonetta Vespucci* (image 2) calls to mind Botticelli's *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady* (1470-75), but is in fact an unsettling recombination of several images of the *Madonna and Child* motif. This Botticellian photograph echoes her earlier Fouquet work, for intericonicity is what makes Sherman's work so uniquely coherent. The iconographic symbol of a sheaf of wheat that seems to be growing out of her golden hair, as if sprouting from a golden field, has replaced Yevonde's shell. Botticelli's *Madonna* squirts milk from her breast in the direction of a child but Sherman's is lactating without a child. Corporal fluids enter and go out of the female body, properly feminine fluids which become improper and are (r)ejected<sup>12</sup>. In the end, Sherman's *Madonna* is, of course, purposefully ambiguous: the lines of visual, social and sexual stereotypes are blurred.
- 21 Sherman plays with herself as she would with dolls, just like Yevonde seemed to do when she dressed up her high-society ladies into Roman Goddesses. Since the characters depicted are only re-representations or manipulated copies, the original seems to dwindle out of the picture<sup>13</sup> and the identity of the subject remains mysteriously ungraspable. Photography parodically echoes old paintings. Painting turns into photography. The contemporary female photographer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has gotten rid of the male painters of bygone centuries, while also acknowledging the influence they had on the art world.
- 22 By examining what Yevonde's images do to Sherman's work, by observing what is lost, created or transformed within the images and within the viewers' imaginations, the

viewer can witness fundamental cultural transactions that are not only stylistic ones. Complex representational layers show how the History Portraits make fun of painting as high art:

Les *History Portraits* se paient la tête—dans tous les sens—de la peinture, de ce ‘grand art’ dont Sherman avait voulu dès le départ se détourner. À la place, ils installent sa servante mécanique, la Cendrillon des beaux-arts: la photographie (Criqui 281).

- 23 Yevonde's queen of the underworld Persephone floating in a black void with her crown of autumn leaves curiously echoes Sherman's Bacchus and its blackish background, ivy crown and autumnal harvested grapefruit, more generally alluding to the tactile and sensual pleasures of drinking and merrymaking. The Sick Bacchus earned its nickname (Bacchino Malato) because of the jaundiced look of the figure. *Untitled #224* is a relatively rare image in Sherman's career of her depicted as a man. It is a campy image in its "being-as-playing-a-role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre" with the "convertibility" of man and woman, person and thing (Sontag). Interestingly, the luscious peaches arranged in a penis-like composition in the original Caravaggio have gone missing in Sherman's work. "Peaches are traditionally the iconographic symbol of veracity or truth—a telling omission on Sherman's part" (Cloutier-Blizzard) and a prop, once again, that points at the socially burning topics that Sherman might have been commenting upon in her art work with the upsurge of controversy against gay photographer Robert Mapplethorpe at the time. *Untitled #224* is about a female artist dressed up as a male artist himself originally dressed up as a pagan divinity.
- 24 In the *Goddesses* series, snakes, glass fish, stuffed bulls or owls are part of Yevonde's bestiary. Minerva is "a disclaimer of passive femininity", yet it may also look like "a satire upon the aggression and militancy which Yevonde has side-stepped in deciding not to continue as an active supporter of the Suffragette cause" (Williams 97). The stuffed owl, often seen as a bird of wisdom, appears as deliberately fake, the tattered backdrop has replaced gossamer and lace announcing the hardships of World War II. One of Yevonde's 1939 still lifes (*#411*, "Still Life" gallery on the Yevonde website) marks the end of an era and is a composition of a pelargonium plant and a gas mask set against a pale background. There is a striking contrast between the two objects, oscillating between the affirmation of life and beauty and a warning of death. Such blatant use of a mask reminds the viewer of Sherman's more subtle use of second skin-like masks, and also of a particular mask made of pale blue feathers that reappears here and there in her work. In *Untitled #198*, as art historian Christa Döttinger notices in a recent book, Sherman's hands are holding the blouse's clasp in a similar gesture as in Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait in Fur Coat* (Döttinger 65-68). The mask calls to mind Manet's 1872 *Berthe Morisot with a Fan* and the revealing blouse has the color and shape of Glenn Close's dress at the beginning of *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988). All these images are "compressed" (Döttinger 66) into one. The mask reveals more than it hides, making the viewer realize that the pictures are carefully staged for the performance and that the masks need to be put down for the truth of the picture to be revealed.

## Conclusion

- 25 Sherman's appropriations may be direct citations, borrowings or mere echoes of Yevonde's techniques, Old Masters' works or contemporary artists' works that she

mashes up into newly created ones with some critical target in mind, analyzing the recurrent aesthetic form and choices made by the photographer, and giving an overview of the artist's intentions. Yevonde's and Sherman's use of past imagery, and more specifically Sherman's use of Yevonde's aesthetic choices as an influence from the past on her photographic work, can be seen as innovative and challenging. Although there are limits to such parallels, it seems relevant to (figuratively) "fold" and "unfold" parts of the pictures that may never come into contact. In this process, the viewer short-circuits images throughout time and defies anachronisms in a Hubermanian way, in order to apprehend the image not as a fixed object, but as a dynamic addition of practices related to a predefined iconic environment or an inherited one.

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### List of images

Image 1. Madame Yevonde, *Mrs. Bryan Guinness as Venus*, 1935. © The Yevonde Portrait Archive.

Image 2. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #225*, 1990. Chromogenic color print, 48 x 33 inches. Edition of 6. Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures.

### Other links and resources

#### Artists' websites

Lake, Suzy. <http://suzylake.ca/>

Levine, Sherrie. <http://www.aftersherrievine.com/>

Simmons, Laurie. <http://www.lauriesimmons.net/>

Wilke, Hannah. <http://www.hannahwilke.com/>

Yevonde, Madame. <http://www.madameyevonde.com/>

#### **Art sites, galleries, museums and newspapers**

Art21. New York. <http://www.art21.org/>

Arttattler. USA. <http://arttattler.com/index.html>

British Council Visual Arts. London. <http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/>

Brooklyn Museum. New York. <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/>

Centre Pompidou. Paris. <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/>

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Museum of Modern Art. New York. <http://www.moma.org/>

National Portrait Gallery. London. <http://www.npg.org.uk/>

Orsay. Paris. <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/>

The Art History Archive. Toronto. <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/>

The Getty. Los Angeles. <http://www.getty.edu/>

*The Guardian*. London. <http://www.theguardian.com/>

Uffizi Gallery. Florence. <http://www.uffizi.org/>

V&A. London. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/>

Web Gallery of Art. <http://www.wga.hu/>

Wikiart. <http://www.wikiart.org/>

## NOTES

1. With hindsight, Sherman's 2008 larger-than-life Society Portraits depicting botoxed over-made up women obsessed with aging and social status could have been interesting to explore in relation with Yevonde's work, but intericonic overlaps seemed less obvious or more limited.
2. In 1936 Yevonde gave a lecture in Paris on the contribution of women to photography during the Second Annual Conference of the Business and Professional Women's Federation. A series of portraits of women in the late 1950s-early 1960s was called Dove or Predator. According to her, women are better portraitists than men because of their eye for detail and their intuition (Yevonde "Photographic Portraiture").
3. Sherman's staged portraits also acquired a new narrative dimension based on her use of the cinematographic medium in her 1969 Untitled Film Stills pop constructions. Her "ready-made" characters or archetypal solitary heroines from B movies opened new fictional possibilities for the viewer.
4. Years later, the postulate on which Sherman's work was based was very close to what was labeled the "Pictures Generation", a loosely knit group of artists working in New York from the

mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. To them, the overarching subject of work was the appropriation of images in a media-saturated world and with media such as video, photography, etc.

5. Apparently, Sherman began work on the Old Masters series as a commission to create images for use on Limoges porcelain plates. Duly inspired, she continued in that vein and her large-scale photos were hung in ornate gold frames.

6. The Vivex process required three quarter-plate negatives, marked, after exposure, by the photographer to differentiate red (magenta), blue (cyan), and yellow, which were superimposed for printing to give a full colour range. On the technicality of Yevonde's art, see Roberts in Roberts and Gibson, "Yevonde and the Techniques of Colour Photography" (25-30).

7. "L'image porte une certaine vérité et elle apporte une certaine fiction. Elle a donc elle-même la structure d'un pli, [...] [draps, draperies, suaires, voiles, chiffons] [...]. Il faut donc soi-même, constamment, plier et déplier les images [...] [...] comprendre en quoi elles nous concernent, nous regardent, nous impliquent" (Didi-Huberman 106-7).

8. On the carnivalesque, Mary Russo wrote: "Tout se passe comme si le corps social carnivalesque avait intégré le corpus de la haute culture dans son intégralité et [...] le libérait par accès et sursauts en toutes sortes de recombinaisons, d'inversions, de parodies et de dégradations. [...] redéploiement ou contre-production de la culture, du savoir et du plaisir" (Russo 214).

9. Clément Chéroux argues that more than art history repeating itself, one can talk about memory resorting to the past ("principe réitératif de la mémoire") or to intericonic practices enabling the viewer to explain or comment on the present. Sherman's pictures are not palimpsests but the result of artistic hybridations between many different art works. They oscillate between iconophilia with a clear fascination for past works of art, imitation and rejection, clichés, popular images, dominating representations, and more subtle interpretations or (mis)appropriations.

10. "When I started using fake body parts 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" (in Kimmelman).

11. Iconic interferences in Sherman's work on deconstructing stereotypes of women take their cues from popular culture, from Hannah Wilke's "performalist self-portraits" (1960s-70s) to Suzie Lake's concealing/revealing and the early investigations into the idea of feminine identity as a construct, Barbara Kruger's black and white photos, declarative captions, mass communication and identity, Sherrie Levine's re-photography and appropriation, or Laurie Simmons's dolls and domestic scenes.

12. "C'est précisément au-delà des stéréotypes et de l'abject, entre le propre et le malpropre, entre des images et des flux, entre l'extérieur et l'intérieur, que l'œuvre de Cindy Sherman situe le sujet féminin" (Rouillé 511).

13. "Création, tromperie et artifice: son œuvre est mise en scène, utilisant toutes les ressources du médium pour faire de la photographie une affaire de fiction. Des Untitled A-E de 1975 aux Clowns de 2003-2004, le fil conducteur de cette rétrospective est le simulacre, son thème de prédilection, jusqu'à l'obsession" (Barrière). On Sherman and simulacra, see Rosalind Krauss: "[Sherman] construit grâce à la photographie elle-même un métalangage [...] en explorant simultanément le mythe de la créativité et de la vision artistique ainsi que l'innocence, la primauté et l'autonomie du 'support' de l'image esthétique" (Krauss 221-222).



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## ABSTRACTS

As one of the world's woman pioneers of colour photography, Yevonde Cumbers Middleton, known as Madame Yevonde, British society photographer, has recently seen her inventive work shift from neglect to international appraisal. Many of Yevonde's contemporary and exuberant studio portraits have a unique timelessness and modernity to them, in the sense that issues of gender and identity which she dealt with years ago have since found new expression in the work of various artists such as American photographer Cindy Sherman. In her 1935 *Goddesses* series, Yevonde photographed society beauties dressed as Greek and Roman goddesses and icons. In Sherman's *History Portraits/Old Masters* series, pure fun is at work when she outrageously poses in various costumes and elaborate settings, explicitly referring to the artworks of famous European Masters. As they appropriate previous works of art circulating between the European and the American art worlds, are Yevonde and Sherman irreverently saying that myth, civilization and history can be chopped up and freshly reconstituted to express various representations of the feminine subverting the male gaze, regardless of geographical and cultural differences? This paper will argue that both women artists have chosen to pay homage to the past and the way it can be rejuvenated through perpetual recycling and iconic transfers.

Pionnière de la photographie couleur, Yevonde Cumbers Middleton, connue sous le nom de « Madame Yevonde », suscite un intérêt grandissant sur la scène photographique internationale. Nombreux sont les portraits de studio traduisant la contemporanéité et l'exubérance d'une œuvre qui traite des questions de genre et d'identité. Ces thématiques trouvent un écho dans les travaux de la photographe américaine Cindy Sherman. Dans sa série *Goddesses* de 1935, Yevonde a photographié de grandes figures féminines de la haute société britannique en costumes de déesses, d'icônes grecques ou romaines. Dans *History Portraits/Old Masters*, Cindy Sherman pose outrageusement dans des costumes et des décors élaborés se référant explicitement aux toiles des grands maîtres européens. En s'appropriant des œuvres antérieures qui circulent entre Europe et Amérique, Yevonde et par la suite Sherman ont-elles tenté de montrer, de manière critique, que les mythes, la civilisation et l'histoire peuvent être morcelés, puis nouvellement réassemblés pour aboutir à des représentations du féminin qui subvertissent le regard masculin, sans distinction de frontières géographiques ou culturelles ? Cet article montrera comment les deux photographes ont choisi de rendre hommage à des œuvres passées en leur insufflant une nouvelle signification par le biais d'un recyclage perpétuel et de transferts iconiques.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** intericonicity, intermediality, appropriation, transfers, women photographers, identity, gender

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