

# The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release

## MAJOR SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY CINDY SHERMAN ACQUIRED BY THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

January 18, 1996.....Glenn D. Lowry, Director, The Museum of Modern Art, announced today that the Museum has acquired the entire series of *Untitled Film Stills* by American artist Cindy Sherman. The series of sixty-nine black-and-white photographs, created from 1977 to 1980, is widely regarded as one of the most original and influential achievements in the art of the past two decades. The Museum's purchase from the artist, which also includes seven color works ranging in date from 1980 to 1992, makes its collection an essential resource for the study and appreciation of Sherman's art.

Peter Galassi, Chief Curator, Department of Photography, states, "From the viewpoint of both photographic and broader artistic traditions, Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* is a landmark body of work. The series is so full of originality, wit, and intelligence that nearly two decades later its force is still fresh and its meaning still contested. Sherman's singular talent and sensibility crystallized broadly held concerns in the culture as a whole, about the role of the mass media in our lives, and about the ways in which we shape our personal identities."

Adds Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, "This acquisition is of tremendous importance to the Museum. It exemplifies our desire to acquire singular, defining works or series of works by

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contemporary artists, and our interest in cooperating among the Museum's curatorial departments to present the best creative work of our time in all mediums."

The Museum's purchase insures that Cindy Sherman's influential series will be preserved in its entirety in a single public collection. As Mr. Galassi states, "By its nature the series is much more than the sum of its parts, which is why we are so pleased to have acquired the entire group." The purchase extends a vigorous program of acquisitions in contemporary American photography, which over the past five years has assembled important groups of pictures by Lee Friedlander, Jan Groover, Nicholas Nixon, Lucas Samaras, and William Wegman, among others. The Museum plans to present and circulate an exhibition of the complete *Untitled Film Stills*, to be accompanied by a publication reproducing all sixty-nine works.

In 1977 Sherman began the *Untitled Film Stills*, conceiving the first six pictures as a group in which she impersonated a single blond actress in various roles. That experiment soon blossomed into an expansive survey of feminine roles, loosely based on film imagery from the 1940s through the 1960s. In each photograph Sherman appears in a different guise: the ingenue, the sex kitten, the hardened film-noir heroine, the hot-blooded woman of the people, the ice-cold sophisticate, and many others. Together, the pictures deftly encapsulate a fictional culture of femininity, whose artificiality is made all the more salient by the viewer's knowledge that Sherman herself plays every role.

Even before completing the black-and-white series, Sherman began to make

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color photographs, whose motifs soon broadened beyond the world of film. In successive series of pictures since 1983, she has explored the allure of fashion photography, the ghoulish and grotesque imagery of fairy tales and disaster stories, the conventions of Old Master painting, and the extremes of pornography. Ranging in date from 1980 to 1992 and chosen to build upon other acquisitions since 1981, the seven color photographs purchased by the Museum form a coherent survey of this period of Sherman's art.

Born in 1954, Cindy Sherman earned a B.A. degree in 1976 from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Sherman's art has won wide recognition and praise. The first survey exhibition of her work, at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1982, was followed by a retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 1987. In 1995 she was named a Fellow of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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