Cindy Sherman’s New Show Examines Rich Women and Age-Shaming

In a new photography exhibition on the Upper East Side, the Mnuchin Gallery is revisiting Cindy Sherman’s *Society Portraits*, one of her most famous works and an exploration of what it means for (rich) women to age. Produced in 2008, the photographs are actually self-portraits: Sherman dressed up as Manhattan socialites, wearing elaborate costumes and thick makeup. She took her camera to venues where New York City society women might be spotted in real life: on the Upper East Side (*Untitled #468*), the National Arts Club in Gramercy Park (*#474*), and the Cloisters (*#466*).

The series is one of three featured in the show “*Once Upon a Time, 1981–2011*,” opening April 18 at the Mnuchin Gallery. In the *Society Portraits*, Sherman purposefully shows signs of Botox on her face. The women clearly have money, power, and the resources for cosmetic enhancements. But you can still see their varicose veins, swollen feet, and the extra skin under their arms. Co-curator Sukanya Rajaratnam, a gallery partner, said Sherman is presenting her viewers with a conflict: “Do you feel sorry for them, or do you want to laugh at them?” Or can all women somehow empathize and relate?

Rajaratnam explained: “She is drawing attention to, ‘Do you try to reverse the passing of time? Or do you age gracefully?’ If you have the means, and move in a certain kind of society, it’s almost an expectation to try to stay young, but to what effect? This culture is so obsessed with reversing the signs of time, but the effects are not that great.” She said the gallery’s Upper East Side location adds an interesting aspect as well — some women who view the portraits could be the same women Sherman aimed to portray.

The *Society Portraits* are ultimately a critique of age-shaming and the efforts women make to meet society’s standards. Click ahead to see photographs from the showcase.
CINDY SHERMAN: THE SOCIETY PORTRAITS

*Untitled #466, 2008.*

Photo: Courtesy of Cindy Sherman and Metro Pictures; New York

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*Untitled #465, 2008.*

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*Untitled #474, 2008.*

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*Untitled #467, 2008.*

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Untitled #468, 2008.
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CINDY SHERMAN: THE SOCIETY PORTRAITS

Untitled #476, 2008.
Photo:
Courtesy of Cindy Sherman and Metro Pictures; New York