Cindy Sherman (b.1954), one of the notable names within the Pictures Generation, is an artist who has consistently refused to be the subject of acceptance. Having started out painting as a student, Sherman then rejected the medium, looking for new areas of expansion, and ultimately becoming a pioneer in portraiture, challenging the power structures around photography and undermining the influence of the larger voyeur – through advertising, film and television.

The now 63-year-old artist was of the generation that believed painting had a time-frame, and, as it was approaching the end of the 20th century in the days of her early work, recognised that indeed that was one that was largely over. She once famously stated: “I was meticulously copying other art and then I realised I could just use a camera and put my time into an idea instead.”
As such, Sherman began to look for new avenues through which to explore representation – the very duality of expression and the multiplicity of identity. Famous for dressing as different characters and walking around town as a performative and participatory type of expression, the New Jersey-born artist began to break down the notion of transformation, utilising the backbone of mass media to re-interpret imagery in new and unprecedented ways.

*Once Upon a Time* at Mnuchin Gallery, New York, showcases a number of works that span 30 years, taken from such acclaimed series as *the Centerfolds*, *the History Portraits* and *the Society Portraits*. The former were perhaps the hinge-point for Sherman’s success, horizontal, intimate depictions of reclining women, who, closely cropped, reference the recognisable and objectifying layout of erotic magazine targeted at men. Translating the perceptions of these sedentary vignettes with a fresh and conceptually explosive layer of meaning, the fully-clothed women are lost in a moment of tranquility, charged emotions and unintelligible thought. As gallery partner Sukanya Rajaratnam sates: “Throughout history, the women who have populated these narratives have had their stories told predominantly by men — and their image has been shaped predominantly by culturally accumulated archetypes. What Cindy has done, brilliantly and bravely, is taken on these standards of femininity to reveal the absurd constructs that exist at their core. She has done so with wit and grace, boring deep holes into these so-called icons, calling upon us to do the same.”

*Cindy Sherman: Once Upon a Time 1981 – 2011* runs until 10 June at Mnuchin Gallery, New York. For more information: [www.mnuchingallery.com](http://www.mnuchingallery.com)
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