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# I saw Cindy Sherman’s one good idea today. It must have been her BFA work at Buffalo in 1975. In *Untitled #479*, 23 2”x3” black and white, hand colored gelatin silver prints framed together in three horizontal rows, Sherman slowly transforms from a geeky student with flat, mousy brown hair, wickedly large mid-70s glasses and plaid shirt into a young woman trying to look sophisticated and a bit risqué. Her hair slowly gains volume and wave, even wind-blown. Her face slowly morphs from pale and plain to stylized, overly made up with hand painted eyelashes and a ruby red mouth. In the last frame, she wears a gold choker and a gold chain necklace and a yellow bra or slip and smokes a cigarette in glamorous fashion.

# A young Cindy Sherman, a college student (????), transforms herself through make up, clothes I thought of a quote by Matisse: You only need one good idea. He meant that if your idea is really good, you can mine that field for a lifetime. You own it and you can run with it.

# (I overheard a young man standing next me say it would make a good flipbook. I had just thought the same thing.????????????)

#  The Cindy Sherman retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art surveys her whole career. She and I are about the same age. Greg Martens, a grad student at UWM (also just a bit younger) made me see the inherent interest of looking at artists you like who are your own age. They speak to you from a shared culture that can only happen when coming of age in a certain time and place. She speaks to me.

In her photographs, her fearless transformation of her own face and body explore her one good idea, but with subsets of self-imposed rules, variations on a theme. We know her themes: film stills, society matrons, old master paintings, the use of prosthetics and props. They gain gravitas when all shown together, like chapters of a book that create a novel.

Walking through this exhibition is an adventure and an emotional ride. A set of early portraits of weird people making goofy faces reminded me of watching a young girl sitting by her mother on the bus. I watched her face mimic the facial expressions as she looked unselfconsciously at several strangers riding the bus. It was years ago and I still vividly recall watching her with fascination. She was good at it.

I have seen most of Sherman’s photographs before, in exhibitions or art magazines, usually at the time they were first exhibited. Some are old friends.

The first series of photographs that catapulted Cindy Sherman into the art world limelight was the *Untitled Film Stills* from 1977, shown in its entirety, all 70 prints. The Film Still series looks like 1950 or 1960 black and white movie stills. In one I know well, a woman in a dark tailored suit with wide white wings of a collar and prim white cuffs, a clutch purse under her arm,and a black hat with a white brim stands cropped at the hips, facing us from the right. She glances left as her hand gestures follow.

An elegant older building with arched windows and a wrought iron fence on a tree-lined, cobble street fills the background. The film noirish event that has frightened her is outside the picture plane. We expect to see Hitchcock’s shadow.

This woman shows up again on the next wall, same suit and hat. This time in a close-up shot from below at a rakish angle that makes the skyscrapers behind her list to one side. Her knowing glance to the upper left lets us know the she knows the dander and she will make it in the end.