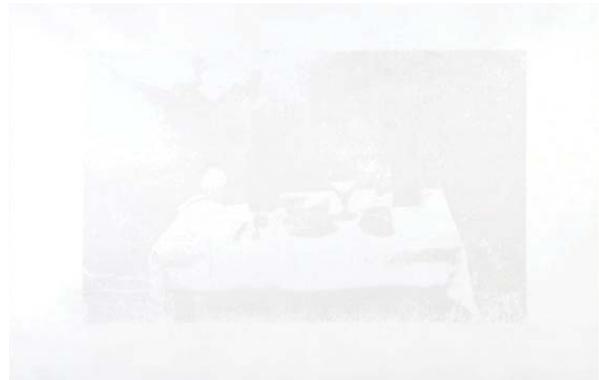


Image Signs



"Tabula Rasa"

Images live in interstitial space; they have an inherent duality of meaning that both aims to represent the world, and performs as a distortion of it. Photography and images are a simulacra of the world they live in; they double the world and our perception of it. Sarah Charlesworth's work has been driven by the restless exploration of the curious nature of images through the sign, as the means by which we understand culture and society. She has dedicated her life's work to addressing the role that photography and images perform in

contemporary culture and the ways that those tools can be reinterpreted to produce new meanings. Doubleworld at LACMA is the climactic exhibit of Charlesworth's work through an extensive compilation of her most influential pieces covering almost four decades of the artist's work, strung together by the question of the image as sign.

The curators structured the exhibit as a narrative, disregarding the chronological creation of the pieces in favor of the visual experience that the pieces effect onto the audience. It starts off with "Tabula Rasa"; Charlesworth's first photograph sets you against a large white toned photo that depicts the basis of her work in re-photographing: it is a simple and calm piece of an outdoor table set for a meal. The serenity of the even white tone is reflected in the galleries' architectural layout, composed of tall roofs, white walls and wooden flooring; all distinguished by dimmed lighting that only produces a serene ambient. Entering this muted space you are faced with a series titled "0+1". This series engages one's perception through images that appear to be flooded with bright light, revealing only the faintest outline of an object: the picture plane seems almost empty, yet focusing one's attention on exploring the subtle differentiation between figure and ground in the image. This blending effect produces an estrangement of the figures which questions the relationship between the images signifier and signified. The object's forms are obscured from its traditional visual signifier; it no longer triggers the meaning of the images through its shape. This in turn, destabilizes what is being evoked in the conceptual mind through which the signified gains a hierarchy for the representation of the image's meaning.



"0+1"

Upon further exploring the gallery, the timeline of contemporary imagery is turned upside down when the spectator is faced with collection: "Renaissance Paintings" where individual figures are isolated from their medieval context and re-photographed against monochrome backdrops shifting the relationship between culture and object.



"Renaissance Paintings"

The alienation of contextual information replaced by heightened color schemes produces an unfamiliarity within the object's form as it no longer signifies a specific historical moment in time. Instead, the combination of backdrop and image blends contextual and cultural meaning into a new form of representation that appeals to a timeless existence. In contrast to this collection, the "Doubleworld" series deals with the hyper contextual. The pieces are concerned with art history by framing still lifes of scenes that seem to belong in the past; antique cameras, stereoscopes and telescopes allude to the visual representational mechanisms used in the nineteenth century. The audience is faced with the problematic of inhabiting the real world and its representation: which is one of the most essential questions through which an artist shapes and gives meaning to the representation of the world. These series question the manner that images can either deny or enhance contextual meaning to complicate the relationship between what is meant, and what is evoked.



"Doubleworld"

The final stages of the gallery are dedicated to Charlesworth's work in photojournalistic images and newspaper re-photography in the series "Stills" and "Modern History". The artist emphasizes the concept of curated meaning in images as she methodologically removes text or "unwrites" the articles in newspapers to explore the power in mass media's imagery. The walls of "Modern History" display lined pieces with disparate frame sizes that depict black and white real sized prints of newspapers around the world. Serially, the work evokes an uneasiness in the audience as it exposes the way that news are subjectively shaped and formed privileging certain economic, cultural and political viewpoints which in turn alters the perception of our environment.



"Modern History"

In the "Still" series, the sensation of unease is doubled when the audience is faces with human scaled photographs of people falling or jumping off buildings. This work deviates from the traditional ideals of photography as an 8x10 silver gelatin for a new context of scale, material, blurriness and ambiguity produced through re-photography and enlargement. The unconventionality of these images is enhances by the content: the incomplete narrative of the reasons why the people are falling leave the viewers to ponder each picture's vagueness and the fundamental ambiguity that exists in photographic reproduction. The use of mass media imagery as the means for symbolic meaning exemplifies the artist's preoccupation with the relationship of object and context. Both of these series express a very clear context: the newspaper and journalism, but the concepts that are being transferred through those images are distorted to give way to a new understanding that questions the mechanisms through which images function as signs that evoke meaning.



"Stills"

Sarah Charlesworth's Doubleword gallery is a metaphor of duality in images; it creates a narrative that drives the audience into constant alternation between the real world and its representation that is guided by the subconscious effects of the signifier and the signified in the work. The series attempts to expose and complicate the relationships between an image and its meaning by alternatively reinforcing one or erasing the other. This is the keystone of Charlesworth work, and the meaning of her title; images live in a dual world that is both alluding to the one our society live in and to the one constructed by

the image itself. The image in her work becomes a sign that through the doubling of the world aims to shift the perception of it. As a strong representative of the Pictures Generation, Charlesworth work examines the way that images play a role in contemporary culture both as a representation of it; but more importantly, as a way of producing it.



"Subtle Body"



"Objects of Desire"



"Objects of Desire"