

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK

Cindy Sherman:
#Untitled 92
(detail)

Review Cindy Sherman
#untitled, BBC Four

What really matters? Love, death, ageing and parrots

★★★★☆

Emine Saner



Cindy Sherman does not want to appear on camera. "Why not?" asks the director, Clare Beavan. "People," says Sherman, "are just so curious to see what I really look like. So there is this intrigue." Can you make a film about someone without seeing their face as they talk about their life and work? I'm one of those desperate to see Sherman, to reconcile the person with the roles she creates for her art, but perhaps I'm just prying. In this Arena documentary, we get her voice in a new interview, and Beavan has filleted previous filmed interviews, the last from 2009. Peel away the layers in her portraits and you can see the traces of Sherman's eyebrows and the wrinkles in her skin.

This film is a great look at one of the most important artists working today, told through the interviews with Sherman and through insightful offerings from those who have known and worked with her. I could have done without the inclusion of a group of Instagram influencers - used to make the point about how relevant Sherman's work is in our selfie-obsessed world - and had more from Sherman on the big issues: love, death, ageing and parrot-keeping. Her parrot, Mister Frieda, is the only being allowed in the studio with Sherman while she works.

I love Sherman's filing cabinets of props - fake eyeballs in one drawer, teeth in another, noses in another. People say she is really trying to do self-portraits or reveal a hidden side to her, but that's not right, says Sherman: "It's more that I'm trying to lose myself, to really totally disappear." In footage from previous interviews,

Sherman reveals more of her working practice - she has a mirror next to the camera and concentrates on "trying to transform that reflection that I see into this other person". She edits out the pictures where she recognises herself until "finally, I see the one that looks like somebody else". These somebody else's are a huge cast of characters, from clowns and Renaissance Madonnas to Hitchcockian heroines and ageing society dames. Even if we weren't allowed to see Sherman's process of transformation, it would have been great to have more on where these people came from.

Like most children, Sherman loved dressing up. "I think the whole reason I developed this into an art form," says Sherman, "was that I would get dressed up whenever I was depressed or confused about things, I would go off into my room and turn into somebody else." An early series shows Sherman transforming herself from an unremarkable young woman to "this total vamp". "She shows you," says Barbara Jo Revelle, her teacher from 44 years ago, "that it's a decision ... how you create your own identity."

So much of this is wrapped up in Sherman's experience of being a woman, from the anxiety she feels walking down a dark street to the memories of sleeping with curlers in her hair as a teenager "and how uncomfortable women would make themselves in the name of being beautiful, but beauty at that time was really how men wanted women to look". Her Centerfolds series, created for the magazine Artforum (but never run, possibly because some of her women looked vulnerable and victimised), "were meant to resemble in format a centrefold, but in content I wanted a man opening up a magazine to look at it in expectation of something lascivious, and then feel like the violator they would be".

Her stepdaughters remember, wonderfully, playing in the scenes Sherman created for her grotesque Fairytales and Disasters period in the 80s, complete with fake bums and boobs and homemade vomit. This work was a rally, remembers her old boyfriend, the artist Robert Longo, against the male artists who were being feted at the time when, he says, it was the women "who were making the most aggressive, toughest art possible".

Sherman claims not to be political, but it's all there in her work. She is grappling, points out the curator Eve Respini, "with what it means to get older as a woman in a really youth-obsessed culture".

And now, she's on Instagram where she plays with filters - not to make herself look pretty, as everyone else does, but to transform herself not just into someone else, but something barely human. "I see them as sketches," says Sherman, "and maybe some of them will work their way into being real art pieces." A group of schoolgirls sit outside Sherman's current London show, scrolling through her Instagram pictures. One wants to know what she really looks like. "Oh wow, she looks quite normal," says another, finding an undisguised picture, and she sounds almost disappointed.

Love Island: The Live Final 9pm, ITV2



From Sherif's never-ever-to-be-spoken-of-again exit to Michael's abrupt descent into villainy to Curtis's reinvention as a resident playboy, this year's edition of Love Island has often felt more like a twisty telenovela than a reality TV show. Despite this, at the time of writing, the ever-reliable Tommy and Molly-Mae - the Volvo of the Love Island world - look most likely to triumph in this live final. Still, a lot can happen in a few days - especially when there is £50,000 up for grabs.

Hannah J Davies

Ken Burns Day From 8am, PBS America

A celebration of the work of one of the US's great documentarians, Ken Burns, curated by the author Geoff Dyer. Expect individual films interspersed with Burns speaking about his career. Enjoy notable episodes from The Civil War, Prohibition, The Dust Bowl and The Vietnam War.

Mike Bradley

Dispatches: Young, British and Depressed 8pm, Channel 4

One in eight Britons aged five to 19 are thought to have some sort of mental health issue. Sanah Ahsan explores the roots of this crisis. What treatment is available? Have we become overreliant on antidepressants? And might moves towards destigmatisation be a factor?

Phil Harrison

Who Do You Think You Are? 9pm, BBC One

Get past the strange familiarity that the actor Naomie Harris seems to possess with a father she claims to barely know and enjoy a genealogical

journey around the Caribbean. A moving story that contains his surprises and shocking history exposing the of "indentured labour (thinly disguised slavery) MB

How to Break Into the Elite 9pm, BBC Two

The BBC's media editor Amol Rajan, conducts unsettling investigations into how class still counts when it comes to entering Britain's elite professions. He follows individuals from university to the market and finds that those with top degrees losing out to "reassess expensive" counterparts. MB

Executed on the Streets Gang Wars 10pm, Channel 5

Against the backdrop of blood-letting in the (more than 50 killing in London this year) this doc examines a tit-for-tat murder in which the wrong man died in a revenge plot. There is also a look at one of Newcastle's most notorious crime families via gang leader Stephen Sayers.

Ali Catterall



And another thing

The BBC Three comedy pilot Muzlamic isn't that funny, unfortunately, but I'm hopping its 15-minute-episode format will catch on. Sometimes you only want a bite.