

11 : Realism, really?

1. Class title 1 (Schiele Self-Portrait with Physalis)

It has long been understood that one definition of the portrait is that it presents a true-to-life image of the sitter. We may have questioned this now and then, but it held true for the most part up to the middle of the Nineteenth Century. Then something happened.

A. Damn it, Daguerre!

2. Section title A (Ingres transformed to Daguerreotype)

3. — the two images side by side

The picture on the left is *Mademoiselle Caroline Rivière*, painted in 1806 by **Jean-Dominique Ingres** (1780–1867); the one on the right is a hand-tinted *daguerreotype* of an unidentified girl in the 1840s by the American photographer **William Edward Kilburn**. Let's compare them. Now I am not saying that the photograph completely replaces the painting. For example, look at the detail in Ingres' lovely landscape, whereas the girl in pink poses against a painted backdrop that was hand-colored after printing. Her pose is simple and attractive, but it cannot match the balanced rhythm of the round forms in Ingres' more idealized painting. Indeed, because it *is* idealized, I very much doubt that it gives as accurate a picture of what the girl really looked like as the photograph does; Caroline died a few months later, so we have no other record of what she looked like. It is this truth-to-life that made photography a threat to traditional portraiture, and one more thing—look at the class difference—accessible to ordinary people who could not afford the finery and fees involved in the Ingres work.

4. All six portraits below

All the same, the knowledge that painting was no longer the only show in town proved to be a release for artists rather than a constraint. Let's look at three more pairs of young or youngish women as a way of mapping out some of the ground. Two questions for each: what has the artist done on canvas that could not have been done with the camera? And how close do you imagine each face comes to being true to life? Before you ask, I don't think most of them were commissioned by their sitters, but they might still be portraits nonetheless.

5. Renoir: *Young Woman Sewing* (1875) and Cézanne: *Mme. Cézanne* (1890, Houston)

So here we have this painting of a *Young Woman Sewing* by **Pierre-Auguste Renoir** (1841–1919), which may or may not be a portrait (as opposed to an anonymous model), and one of the many portraits **Paul Cézanne** (1839–1906) painted of his wife. Both, I think, would be somewhat recognizable, but it is clear that Renoir is mostly interested in light and atmosphere, while Cézanne is after volume and form.

6. — the two portraits below
7. Kokoschka: *Lotte Franzos* (1909, Phillips Collection), with gallery note
8. Modigliani: *Jeanne Hébuterne* (1919, NY Met), with photo of the sitter

Lotte Franzos, the wife of a prominent Viennese lawyer, was in her twenties when **Oskar Kokoschka** (1886–1980) painted her in 1908. **Jeanne Hébuterne**, the model and part-time painter who lived with **Amadeo Modigliani** (1884–1920) as his wife, would have been about 21). So what do you think each artist’s attitude was to his sitter? Kokoschka’s reaction, I think, was psychological; the catalogue entry at the Phillips Collection gives some further information. Modigliani, however, expressed his love in formal terms, in the gentle rhythm of the elongated oval forms. We have a photo of Hébuterne, who was indeed beautiful, but she had a roundish face, if anything; the elongation is all his doing.

9. Lucian Freud: *Girl in Bed* (1953) and Jenny Saville: *Rosetta II* (2006)

Jumping forward by 30 years and then 90, how would you characterize the painter’s approach in this pair? The one on the left is a relatively early painting by **Lucian Freud** (1922–2011) who would become unquestionably Britain’s greatest portraitist and arguably her greatest painter. Although not explicitly named, this painting is a portrait of Guinness heiress **Lady Caroline Blackwood**, who eloped with Freud to Paris when she was only 22, and became his second wife. The small head on the right is by a more recent superstar, **Jenny Saville** (1970–), who is probably more notorious for her painting of women’s bodies than their faces. I will return to Freud in the second hour.

10. Degas: *Cotton Office, New Orleans* (1873, Pau)

But late nineteenth- and twentieth-century painters didn’t ignore photography to go off and do their own thing. Take a look at this video I made some years ago that begins with a newsprint photo of a scene in some office. But of course, it was not a newspaper photograph, but merely something I faked from the painting by **Edgar Degas** (1834–1917). I could do so, because the painting breaks all the rules of academic composition—but it *is* true to the kind of random groupings you get in a casual snap.

11. Edgar Degas: *Place de la Concorde* (c.1875, Hermitage)
12. Degas: *Dancers in Blue* (1897, Moscow), with photographs by the artist

Degas continued to be influenced by the camera throughout his career. The portrait of his friend **Count Lepic** crossing the *Place de la Concorde* with his dogs and daughters again breaks normal rules, but where else did Degas learn the power of images broken off by the frame than through photographs? And he was a photographer himself, going backstage at the ballet to get shots that he would later incorporate into pastels or paintings. Note that he is not using the camera for its precision, but using it—or perhaps deliberately *mis*-using it—to generate the blur and flare that was so important to his art.

B. Framing the Face

13. Section title B (Picasso self-portraits)

This, of course, is **Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973), who said (among many other things): “**Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.**” Hence my original title, “The Truthful Liar.” The music was *La création du monde* (1922) by **Darius Milhaud**. The images were all Picasso self-portraits, mostly from relatively early in his career. Picasso painted around 200 portraits in his life, some of friends, rather more of his many lovers, quite a few of himself, but none on commission. This means that in no instance did he have to please the sitter, or even come up with a recognizable image of him or her. Picasso is one of several artists for whom portraiture was not looking deeper into the character of his sitter, but a particular challenge to his developing sense of style.

14. Picasso: *Girl with a Mandolin / Fanny Tellier* (1910, MoMA)

I could have included this among my collection of young girls. Although it is called *Girl with a Mandolin*, it also has a secondary title, *Fanny Tellier*, which does make it a portrait. I think you can see something of Fanny’s grace and charm, which was presumably why Picasso was attracted to her. But would you recognize her if you saw her in the street? I think not.

15. Picasso: *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* (1910, Chicago), with *Van Dongen portrait* (1908)

Picasso apparently thought the Tellier portrait unfinished, which suggests that he had not managed to find a compromise between the traditional mimetic quality of portraiture (truth-to-lifeness, as it were) and his own rapid movement into Cubism. His next portrait, of the art dealer **Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler** was not nearly as legible in the traditional sense. You can see that there is a person here, sitting in a chair with hands folded on his lap. If you know what you are looking for, as by comparing this earlier traditional portrait by **Kees van Dongen** (1877–1968), you can catch glimpses of the man’s face, but it would be totally useless in a police Identikit! Picasso owed a lot to Kahnweiler, who was one of the very few dealers who believed in where the Cubists were going, and was willing to advance money on it. So he is not saying to Kahnweiler “*This is what you look like,*” but “*This is what I’m doing, and I think you’d understand.*” The range of Picasso portraits is huge, and I had to pick and choose. Watch this brief video from the **National Portrait Gallery** in London. The speakers, alas, are in full fund-raising mode, but look over their shoulders and you’ll glimpse some things that I, at least, have never seen before.

16. Picasso Portraits, an introduction (NPG, London, 2016)

17. Klimt: *Hermine Gallia* (1904) and *Fritza Riedler* (1906)

Picasso’s non-realistic approach extended to the faces of his sitters just as to his concept of the picture as a whole. But there have been quite a number of artists who have placed basically realistic portrait heads within a composition that is largely abstract. An earlier example that comes to mind is **Paul Gauguin**. A later one, working only a year or two before Picasso, is **Gustav Klimt** (1862–1918). [Compare the two portraits shown here](#). Change a few things, and the left-hand portrait could almost be by Degas or Renoir. But the right-hand one, two years later, has become a flat design of fabric and furnishings.

And a year after that, comes his *ne-plus-ultra* in the style, his portrait of *Adele Bloch-Bauer*, popularly known as *The Woman in Gold*.

18. Klimt: *Adele Bloch-Bauer* (1907, Neue Galerie, NY)

No matter how abstract the overall design gets, the faces are realistic. It gives me a little pause, though, that they are so similar. But then I think they represent a very small cross-section of wealthy Viennese Jewish society, so perhaps the similarity—at least in hairstyle—is not so strange after all.

19. Egon Schiele: *Gustav Klimt in a Blue Smock* (1913)

Here is a photo of Klimt. And here is a portrait of the master by one of his pupils, **Egon Schiele** (1890–1918), a tormented genius who survived military service in WW1 only to die of the Spanish Flu. It is only a sketch, but clearly a quite accurate account of Klimt’s features. What strikes me most about it, though, is the intense nervous energy conveyed by those extraordinary hands. And this leads me to my next section, that I call **Totentanz**, or *Dance of Death*.

C. Totentanz

20. Section title C (Schiele)

21. Schiele: *Prison self-portrait* (1912)

The music was part of the *Totentanz* by Franz Liszt. Three of the four images were self-portraits by Egon Schiele. The one on the screen now is a self-portrait he made while imprisoned on a charge of seducing a 13-year-old girl. When the police raided his studio, they seized sheaves of drawings which they deemed to be pornographic. The seduction charges were dropped, but Schiele was convicted on the count of leaving adult material where it could be seen by children.

22. Schiele: *Self-portrait* (1910) and *Portrait of Frederike Beer* (1914)

Schiele was obsessed with two things: drawing and sex. Or you could say he was obsessed with *one* thing: the human body, and all the possible ways of exploring it. It was not enough for him to put a sitter into a conventional pose and just paint them. He had to animate them, putting them into odd positions to capture their energy. If they were nude, he would portray every protruding bone, every lump of flesh. In that sense, he was a realist, choosing to show things that other artists keep hidden, even if that means distortion. This full-length self-portrait is like the full-body equivalent of some of those etchings by **Rembrandt** that showed him pulling faces.

23. Schiele: portraits of *Arthur Rössler* and *Max Oppenheimer* (1910)

24. Schiele: *Portrait of Wally Neuzil* (1912, Leopold Museum)

Schiele’s portraits of others are not facially distorted, although their poses are. The commissioned ones are much the same as those the made of his friends; presumably people knew what they were getting. And when he was not painting her nude, his depiction of his lover **Wally Neuzil** is really rather touching.

25. Schiele: deathbed portraits of Gustav Klimt and Edith Schiele

If you didn't happen to know, I doubt you would guess the circumstances of these two drawings. The one on the left is **Gustav Klimt** again; the one on the right is Schiele's wife **Edith**. This was in 1918, and Spanish Flu was rampant. Schiele visited Klimt and sketched him before he died. Then his wife Edith, pregnant with their first child, fell sick; he drew her both before and after her death. Three days later, he was dead too. You might think that, confronted so closely with death, Schiele would express his anguish in extreme or grotesque ways. What impresses me about these is that they are so sweet.

26. Ferdinand Hodler: *Valentine Godé-Darel on her Deathbed* (1914 & 1915)

A few years before, another central European artist, the Swiss painter **Ferdinand Hodler** (1843–1918), made a long series of portraits of his lover as she was dying of cancer. Some are lyrical and filled with love, others gaunt and gruelling. This is the first example I know of **portraiture-as-therapy**.

27. Otto Dix: *Woman Lying on a Leopard Skin* (1927, Cornell)

Question: is this a portrait, and even if we don't know her name, what kind of woman is she, and what inspired the artist to paint her? My answer is probably not. The painter, **Otto Dix** (1891–1969), certainly would have used a model; the bone structure is quite individual. But she is not named, and some of her features—especially the cat eyes—are surely exaggerated. I do admit to loading the dice by playing contemporary music by **Kurt Weill**; it seemed to fit the sleazy atmosphere and the suggestion that she is a prostitute. But if this is not a portrait of a particular woman, it is surely a portrait of an era: the corrupt and decadent **Weimar Republic** that followed WW1.

28. Otto Dix: *Max Jacob* (1920) and *Dr. Mayer-Hermann* (1926, MoMA)

29. Other portraits of Max Jacob

Let's compare two portraits from earlier in the Twenties; you would hardly think they were by the same artist, but indeed they are both by Dix. He emerged traumatized by service in the War, and many of his immediate postwar works are intentionally horrific, featuring beggars and horribly mutilated veterans. Around the time, he said: "*I had the feeling that there was a dimension of reality that had not been dealt with in art: the dimension of ugliness.*" But how does this apply to portraiture? How could **Max Jacob**—a celebrated Paris poet, critic, and occasional painter—have accepted this? But he was best friends with **Picasso**, and for a while his roommate, so perhaps he no longer looked for literal representation in portraiture. Yet compared to the many artists who painted Jacob, Dix is clearly the most radical.

30. Otto Dix: *Max Jacob* (1920) and *Dr. Mayer-Hermann* (1926, MoMA), repeat

31. Other portraits by Otto Dix

Looking again at these two portraits, I'd say that one is wildly subjective, the other ruthlessly objective. Sometime between the two, Dix became associated with a movement in German art that called itself *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity, in reaction against the subjective quality of Expressionism. Not that his many subsequent portraits are anodyne or neutral. He seemed to find a way to pin them like specimens on a collecting board, mercilessly recording their tics and foibles.

D. Portraits-by-Context

32. Section title D (Frances Hodgkins: *Self Portrait Still Life*, 1941)

I'm not claiming that the painter of this—the New Zealand artist **Frances Hodgkins** (1869–1947)—is a major artist or that this is a ground-breaking work. I'm showing it because I found it in the *Shearer West* book and thought it rather charming. And it beautifully introduces my final section before the break, **Portraits-by-Context**. We have looked at the impact of photography, and how a number of artists have worked to meld the traditional mimetic aspect of portraiture with various more radical styles. Now I want to look briefly at portraits made without literal representation at all. And this is the first: a self-portrait not composed of face and figure as the first image I showed, but a still life of things dear to her.

33. Demuth: Poster-Portraits of William Carlos Williams and Georgia O'Keefe (1928)

There are earlier examples. In the late 1920s, American painter **Charles Demuth** (1883–1935) planned a series of poster-portraits of his friends. Not all were completed, but here are two of them. Being an artist herself, **Georgia O'Keefe** was not difficult; he simply made an abstract composition of some of the subjects she was interested in back then. But **William Carlos Williams** was a poet, and the images in *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* were Demuth's visual responses to the words in one of his poems. Here is part of a video explaining it.

34. Demuth video

35. Shakespeare: "Who is Sylvia?"

The Williams poem, of course, is not a portrait; he is not capturing a person, but rather a particular moment in a particular place, a flash of color, a sound. But there *are* such things as portrait-poems. Every sonnet in praise of some beloved is a portrait too, as in this song from **Shakespeare's** *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. But a highly idealized one; it gives no portrait of the real woman any more than **Piero di Cosimo's** portrait of *Simonetta Vespucci* that we saw in an earlier class. Still, it has inspired some lovely musical settings, such as this one by **Gerald Finzi** (1901–56), sung by **Paul Carey Jones**.

36. Finzi: *Who is Sylvia?*

37. Linda Pastan: *Self Portrait*, after Adam Zagajewski

Apparently, the *self*-portrait poem is a well-known writing exercise; if you look online, you will find numerous templates where you just have to fill in the blanks; most of the examples are really pretty awful. But looking for something that was neither formulaic nor idealized, I came upon this by the former Poet Laureate of Maryland, **Linda Pastan** (1932–2023). She says it is "after Adam Zagajewski," who is a contemporary Polish poet; I can only imagine that some male-centered poem of his inspired her to write a female one. [As I read it, think of what makes this individual and real, rather than generic.](#)

38. Tracey Emin, with the National Portrait Gallery doors (2023)

This is British artist **Tracey Emin** (1963–) with one of her most recent projects, a set of 45 portraits of women cast in bronze and adorning the doors of the recently refurbished **National Portrait Gallery** in

London. In fact, these are not actual women, but imaginary projections of the artist herself in different situations and different emotional states. But I am mainly showing it to demonstrate the Emin has abundant qualifications as a “real” artist. She is in fact **Professor of Drawing at the Royal Academy**, only the second female professor in the Academy’s history.

39. Tracey Emin: *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With, 1965–95* (1995)

40. Tracey Emin: *My Bed* (1998)

I make this point because Emin came to fame (or perhaps notoreity) in the late 1990s with two works that did not require drawing at all, and were dismissed by some as sensationalist TMI. Both are essentially **self-portraits-by-context**. The first was a tent, embroidered inside with names of, literally, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* (1995). This includes family members and childhood friends with whom she shared a bed; it is by no means all sexual. But *My Bed* (1998) very much is. She woke up one morning after what she describes as a week-long mental breakdown, filled with drugs, drinking, and sex, took one look at her bed and the debris of soiled underwear, empty bottles, and used contraceptives, and carted the whole thing off to the Tate Gallery as her entry for the prestigious **Turner Prize**. She was runner-up, but gained far more publicity than whoever it was that actually won. Now, 25 years later, the Tate has brought it back into its permanent collection. Here is Emin talking about it; I think you will find it interesting.

41. Tracey Emin on *My Bed* (2023)

42. Class title 2 (Tracey Emin)

E. Reality Returns

43. Section title E (Bacon/Freud transform)

44. Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud

45. — the portraits, bigger

The song “Anyone who had a heart,” as sung by the Brit **Cilla Black** (more upbeat than the Dionne Warwick version heard over here), is merely part of my Sixties time-capsule. It accompanied a transformation between the two works shown. Two friends, two giants of British art, **Francis Bacon** (1909–92) and **Lucian Freud** (1922–2011), painting portraits of each other. They are about a decade apart, but not untypical of the styles of the two painters. How would you compare them?

46. Francis Bacon and Otto Dix

47. Francis Bacon: *Study after Velazquez* (1953)

I see in the Bacon much the same kind of exaggeration we saw with **Otto Dix**, as though he is not so much painting the sitter as anatomizing him. Freud was a friend, and I don’t think there was anything negative here. But a decade earlier, when Freud was painting his almost-innocent portrait of Bacon, Bacon was experimenting with deconstructing an Old Master portrait, the **Velazquez** *Pope Innocent X*, in the first of his now-iconic series of **Screaming Popes**. His distortions have very little to do with what the

Pope actually looked like; they are more like a response either to the social dysfunction of his own time (Bacon lived an odd life on the fringes of the London underworld), or to the human condition generally.

48. Francis Bacon: *Three Studies for a Portrait of Lucian Freud* (1970)

This was not the only time that Bacon painted Freud. His 1970 triptych, *Three Studies for a Portrait of Lucian Freud*, sold for over \$144M in 2013, at the time the highest-price artwork ever sold at auction. Here is part of Christie's video promoting the sale.

49. Christie's promotion of the Francis Bacon *Lucian Freud* triptych

50. Freud: Cavendish portraits

Bacon, as I mentioned, rubbed shoulders with the underworld. Freud might have shared some of these connections, but in general he moved in the highest society; I mentioned before that he married the daughter of a Marquis and heiress to the Guinness fortune. And here are portraits of the **Duchess of Devonshire** and her sister-in-law **Lady Elizabeth Cavendish**, a childhood friend of Queen Elizabeth and lady-in-waiting to Princess Margaret, the Queen's sister. Put the pedigrees aside, though, and let's compare them. The earlier one, at bottom right, is close to the simple style of his Bacon portrait. But when he came to paint the Duchess, he had developed a stronger style with more obvious brushstrokes but which nonetheless remains realistic and arguably more penetrating.

51. Lucian Freud: *Ib Reading* (1997)

Move forward 40 years now to the end of the century. This is a portrait of **Isobel Boyt**, one of twelve illegitimate children (plus two born in wedlock) that Freud acknowledged. She is about 46 here, not especially a beauty, but Freud is not looking for that kind of beauty. It has been suggested that his portraits of his children is his attempt to get to know them after years of relevant neglect, and he does that by seeing her exactly as she is.

52. Lucian Freud's portraits of Isobel Boyt (early 1980s)

53. Freud: *Benefits Supervisor* paintings (1995/95)

He had painted Isobel before, as a nude in her early twenties. It may seem weird to do this with one's own daughter, but people did not seem to mind sitting for Freud. The most extreme examples are his several portraits of **Sue Tilley** painted in the mid-nineties. Tilley—Big Sue, as she was known—worked in the local government employment office, and instead of identifying her by name, Freud called the paintings, rather incongruously, *Benefits Supervisor Resting* and *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping*. This is ultra realism, but realism I think with respect. If you doubt that, listen to Tilley herself responding to questions at some kind of feminist forum.

54. Sue Tilley at *Loose Women*

F. Close Encounters

55. Section title F (Chuck Close)

The photo shows the late **Chuck Close** (1940–2021), who by that time was suffering from a spinal injury, sitting in front of one of his own huge self-portraits. At the beginning of his career at least, Close was a **photo-realist**. It is almost impossible to tell from a reproduction alone, what is a painting and what is a photo. Here is Close's painting (yes, it is) of the composer **Philip Glass**, together with the work of another photo-realist painter that I put on the website, the German artist **Gerhard Richter** (1932–).

56. Close: *Phil* (1969) and Richter: *Betty* (1988)

Let's take a moment to review the trajectory of the class. I started by talking about the impact of photography, and how it impelled most artists to aim for things that the camera could *not* do. Generally speaking, in the postmodernist culture of the later Twentieth Century, the reaction against realism ended, and it was no longer shameful to make art represent something. So Freud's portraits, in contrast to Bacon's, are determinedly realist—but no one would mistake them for photographs. In photo-realism however—which is a reaction against hard-edge Minimalism, the splash-it-on-anywhere nature of Abstract Expressionism, and the anything-goes quality of Pop Art—that is exactly what happens.

57. Richter: *S. with Child & Betty Reading* (both 1994)

Richter, who is apparently the highest-grossing living artist, does many things with his art; photo-realism is only one of them. You remember my mentioning that, even back then, Degas was interested in the out-of-focus effects the camera could produce. Several of Richter's paintings exploit this quality of photo blur, and much of the secret of his more precise ones comes from his exquisite control of the areas that are *not* in focus. As for Chuck Close, rather than trying to explain what he was doing, I'll let him explain the process behind one of the earliest of his works, the *Big Self-Portrait* of 1968.

58. Chuck Close on *Big Self-Portrait*

59. Chuck Close grids

Close drew a fine grid over the original photo to transfer it to the much larger canvas. At first, this was simply a drafting tool, but as he went on, he began treating the resulting cells as artistic building blocks in themselves, moving into full color and making the cell structure increasingly visible. This process was accelerated by his spinal injury which made the original fine detail no longer achievable. You can see more in this 2021 obituary from CBS Sunday Morning.

60. CBS Sunday Morning: Chuck Close obituary, 2021

G. Photo as Icon

61. Section title G (Warhol Marilyns)

62. Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like it Hot*

You will have recognized Marilyn Monroe, I'm sure, as the night-club singer in *Some Like it Hot*. And you'll surely recognize the artist whose multiple screen-prints of the actress became one his signature works: **Andy Warhol** (1928–87). After artists had turned away from photography in the name of **Modernism**, it was but a matter of time before **Post-Modernism** brought the photograph flooding back.

63. Andy Warhol, *VOGUE* cover, 1984

Andy Warhol painted many images of celebrities, but he was never a portraitist in the normal sense that people would sit for him. All his work, including the fashion spreads with which his career began, was derived from photographs; his artistry lay in how he selected and presented them. As the narrator says in the video I am going to show, Warhol trashed the prevailing assumption that the essence of art is originality. I'm showing it (clips from a much longer piece that I'll put on the website) because I think he explains the artist far better than I could myself.

64. Video: *Andy Warhol's Marilyn*

65. Robert Rauschenberg: *Buffalo II* (1964)

Warhol selected and processed photographs as time-capsules or flavor-capsules: something that captured the essence of an era, its aspirations, and failure to achieve them. He was not the only one to do so, though he was the most blatant. At around the same time, **Robert Rauschenberg** (1925–2008), whose work occupied a niche between **Abstract Expressionism** and **Pop Art**, was using photographic silk screens in his paintings, prints, and combinations of painting and sculpture. So is this a portrait of Kennedy or a summation of his era?

66. Two portraits by Robert Weingarten

Last week, if you remember, I showed you a "portrait" of Colin Powell by the photographer **Robert Weingarten** (1941–), who uses digital techniques to combine images associated with a particular person, but not a photo of the person himself. In many ways, he is continuing what Rauschenberg was doing half a century earlier, but in a less ambiguous way; the question I just asked about whether *Buffalo II* is a portrait of Kennedy is not one that could be applied to Weingarten, whose *collages* are intended as portraits up front. Here are two more; can you guess who they are? (**Mikhail Baryshnikov** and **Buzz Aldrin**).

67. Cindy Sherman, looking into mirror

Here is a young woman looking into a mirror. You see the back of her blonde head, you see her glittering reflection, and you see a strange dark patch where the shadow of her head creates a face whose seriousness seems out of key with the rest of the photo. What do you imagine she is thinking? The artist is **Cindy Sherman** (1964–), who not only uses the camera as her medium, but takes on the roles of the

women she is photographing. She started photographing herself in various guises in the late 1970s, choosing mostly familiar situations, and basing her style on B-movie stills from the fifties or sixties—recreations of the atmosphere, not literal quotes. She called the series *Untitled Film Stills*. Through constantly changing her setting, outfit, and appearance, she was examining what it was to be a woman—and whether being a woman of any kind, is also a question of acting a role. Here’s what she says about it:

68. Cindy Sherman: about the *Untitled Film Stills*

I put together a short montage of some of these stills for a class last year; here it is again; the music is *Because the Night* (1978) by **Patti Smith** (1946–).

69. Sherman: *Untitled Film Stills*, montage

70. Class title 3 (Remember?)