

frieze

Contemporary Art and Culture

Issue 116 June • July • August



Ryan Gander
Ai Weiwei
Monika Sosnows
Loris Gréaud

A.M. Homes talks to
Sarah Jones

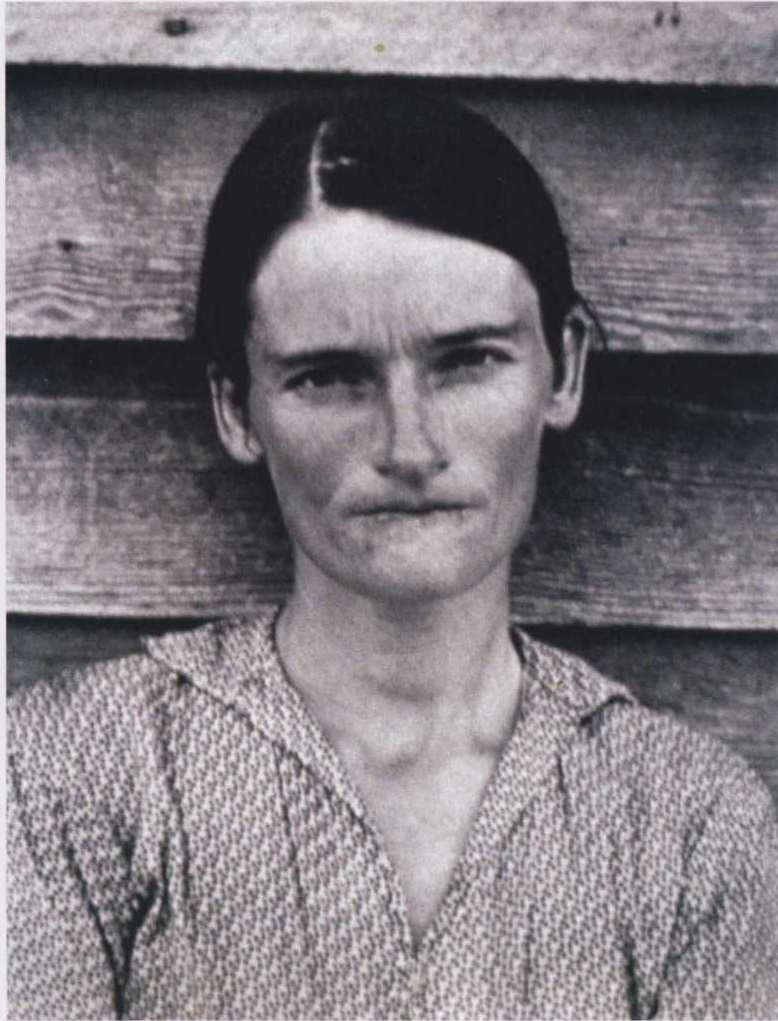
UK £5.95 US \$10



9 770962 067014

12 BERKELEY STREET
LONDON W1J 8DT
T +44 (0) 20 7491 0100
F +44 (0) 20 7491 0200
INFO@SIMONLEEGALLERY.COM

SIMON LEE GALLERY LTD
REGISTERED IN ENGLAND 4316341
GB 788 061 692



Sherrie Levine 'After Walker Evans' (1981)

Sherrie Levine's seminal work of appropriation 'After Walker Evans' (1981) consists of re-photographed bookplates from a Walker Evans exhibition catalogue. Evans' photographs of poor sharecroppers, taken in the 1930s for the USA's Farm Security Administration, are icons of pioneer photography. The impoverished interiors and stoic poses captured by Evans in such a minimal manner were subsequently fetishized for their perceived authenticity and beauty.

Levine's re-presentation of the Evans works as her own is an astute artistic strategy that questions not only the power relations inscribed in the action of the 'master' photographer Evans but also the subsequent art-historical canonization and market value of the original works. Property relations, patriarchal authority, authorship and originality are all brought under scrutiny.

Levine's gesture has a resilient potency in contemporary economic and artistic climates. The morality of appropriation, copyright law, the efficacy of recycling and a dialectical relationship to ownership – particularly bearing in mind the assimilation of Levine's work into the canon or the current ecstatic fêting in the museums and auction houses of the work of her direct contemporary Richard Prince – still begs various questions: what does it mean to own an image, how do we receive images and how do they accrue meaning?

Reproduced here in the pages of a magazine, without the physical scale and effect of the framed photograph, the image is still unsettling. The direct gaze and resilient aura of the woman in Evans' photograph are as biting as Levine's gesture of appropriation, the latter rendered invisible here but without a diminishing of the gesture's power.

To quote Levine: 'When I started doing this work, I wanted to make a picture which contradicted itself. I wanted to put a picture on top of a picture so that there are times when both pictures disappear and other times when they're both manifest; that vibration is basically what the work's about for me – that space in the middle where there's no picture.'²

Sherrie Levine
After Walker Evans #4
1981
Photograph
36x28 cm

² Jeanne Siegel, 'After Sherrie Levine', *ARTS Magazine*, June 1985, pp. 141–4; reprinted in *Art Talk: The Early 80s*, ed. Jeanne Siegel, Da Capo Press, Inc., New York, 1988, p. 247