

SHERRIE LEVINE

20 June – 17 August 2007

Simon Lee Gallery is delighted to present an exhibition of selected works by Sherrie Levine. The exhibition is a survey of some of Levine's most significant explorations of the re-contextualization and re-working of the found object, and her questioning of the authenticity and autonomy of the art object and its status as a commodity.

Beginning in the early 1970s with 'Shoes' (1972), and continuing through the 1980s and 1990s to the present with 'Untitled (After Walker Evans)' (1981), 'Untitled (Lead Checks/Lead Chevron: 4)' (1988), 'Untitled (The Bachelors: Livreur de Grand Magasin)' (1989), 'Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp)' (1991), 'Black Newborn' (1995) and 'Steer Skull, unhorned' (2002) amongst others,, the exhibition encompasses Levine's deconstruction and reconstruction of the very nature of representation.

Levine's artworks can only survive in the world of art. Although she dislikes the term 'appropriation' and what that implies for an artist, Levine is known for appropriating the images of other artists, of taking them and reproducing them, sometimes almost exactly, and then exhibiting them as her own. Having absorbed Duchamp's lessons, who by creating the readymade established the importance of context in the understanding of objects as art, Levine boldly selects, then undermines his and other prime examples of modernism (Brancusi, Malevich, Rodchenko, Klimt) and subverts their original artistic intention.

In the early 1970s, she toyed with the idea of the commercial element of art production by presenting 72 pairs of black children's shoes, polished and tied together, on tabletops in the store/gallery in California. These are the precursors of Levine's later concern with repetition, duplication and restatement.

The prefix 'After' in her titles ('After Walker Evans' or 'After Kasimir Malevich' for example) literally re-presents the original idea and repeats its meaning, as a challenge to the concept of originality that is typified in the early work with the mass-produced shoes. Levine's 'Knot paintings' on plywood in which the 'eyes' in the wood have been painted in various colours allude to a negation of the act of painting. Her painted objects featuring checkers and backgammon game boards have a deliberately formal rigour that echoes the reductive strategies of minimalism.

Levine's reference to Duchamp in particular is abundantly clear in her polished bronze urinal Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp). Here she has chosen Duchamp's most infamous readymade and, by casting a urinal similar to the one that Duchamp originally exhibited, but in gilded bronze, Levine shifts Duchamp's original intention to subvert the

value of art by including such an ordinary object into the canon, returning it to 'high art' status by using painstakingly polished gilded bronze, so that it takes on a completely different 'other' condition, that of the conventional, valued, artwork, and simultaneously references that other giant of modernism, Constantin Brancusi.

Newborn is the realisation in space of a photograph that Levine discovered in an art magazine of the interior of the former Cambridge home of the art collector H S 'Jim' Ede later to become the Kettle's Yard Art Gallery. In the room pictured in the magazine is a small grand piano on the lacquered top of which is placed Brancusi's ovoid marble sculpture Newborn. Brancusi made several Newborn sculptures in various materials and, like his sculpture Bird in Space these were not duplicates but variations on a theme

The passage from private studio to the world of commerce that Levine traverses is again apparent in her versions of the Gerrit Rietveld 'Krate' tables designed in 1934. These tables became the forerunners of the ubiquitous flat pack furniture, moving from the exclusivity of the artist/designer practice to the mass market, and via Levine, to art. Treating the original model as a source for sculpture, Levine has increased the size of the tables by fifty percent from those that Rietveld made in order that their presence is more distinctly sculptural.

Despite her clinical dissection of the original art forms and the invisible quality that this potential difference creates, Sherrie Levine provides the viewer and herself with images and objects to contemplate. As such they act as a medium for the idea and allow her aesthetic sensibility to extend into a realm of formal beauty in which the poetic dimension of her act of appropriation is revealed.

Sherrie Levine was born in Hazelton, Pennsylvania, grew up in St. Louis and moved to New York in 1975. She has had numerous one-person exhibitions in the USA and Europe, more recently at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 1993, Portikus, Frankfurt, 1994, South London Gallery, London 1996, MAMCO Geneva 1998, and at the Hamburger Kunstverein, Hamburg 1999. Her work is represented in numerous museum collections worldwide.

The exhibition will travel to Nyehaus, New York in autumn 2007.