

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SHERRIE LEVINE

THE DESERT

9 JUNE – 16 JULY 2011

OPENING: WEDNESDAY 8 JUNE 6 – 8 PM



Simon Lee Gallery is proud to announce our third solo exhibition of work by Sherrie Levine.

Sherrie Levine came to prominence as one of a generation of artists who, during the 1970s and early 1980s, became known under the label of postmodernism. One of the characteristics of her work that drove critics at the time, Craig Owens in particular, to identify it as such was its use of appropriation. In his influential 1980 essay: *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism*, Owens saw Levine's use of appropriation as a strategy working against the Modernist imperative of originality and artistic genius.

Levine's source materials cross all media, encompassing early modern photography, modernist furniture, book plate reproductions of paintings, sculptures and found and commercially produced objects. The mechanism of appropriation she employs is complex, ranging from direct casting of a sculptural source, through drawing from reproduction to the creation of a work only imagined in its original incarnation. The book plate paintings reproduced printed images of the works which were their subjects, complete with their flaws and colour inaccuracies, while sculptures such as *Newborn* or *La Fortune (after Man Ray)*, re-created a work from a specific documentary image of its installation, or gave form to the billiard table imagined in Man Ray's famous 1938 painting. In contrast to the apparent simplicity of the characterisation suggested by the label 'appropriation art', the conceptual model at work was rarely a simple case of the re-fabrication of an image or object.

In this new series of works, Levine continues and extends the conceptual trajectory of this act of referencing. Bobcat and javelina skulls cast in bronze recall her 2007 exhibition at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, where the artist has made a home, and where she showed a series of cattle skulls in clear reference to paintings by O'Keeffe. Here too the source of the work is a found object, and the artist shows the javelina skulls as a series, six sculptures from the edition in a row. Through this repetition, the sculpture becomes a reference to itself, and calls attention to the seriality central to the artist's work.

At the heart of Levine's process of reference and repetition has been the investigation of the aura of the work of art. It was Walter Benjamin's contention that the mechanical reproduction of the work of art would tend to erase its auratic presence. Levine's intention in re-creating photographs, paintings and sculptures was to subvert this suggestion. The display of a series of six skulls from the edition re-enforces this subversion as she reveals the aura of the work as something independent from any sense of its uniqueness or the process of its fabrication. The works hold in balance the opposing charges of detachment, due to their repetition, and desire, due to their aesthetic seduction and the psychological charge inherent in the skull, a subject of fascination for artists from Holbein to Warhol.

Alongside these skulls Levine will show two postcard collages from 1999 and 2001. Here the idea of repetition and seriality is manifest internally within the works themselves. Their subjects may be rich in art historical reference – the Coyote to Beuys, the desert Flower to Warhol – but it is the mechanics of their appropriation, presentation and display which marks them as central to Levine's project.

Sherrie Levine was born in Hazelton, Pennsylvania, grew up in St. Louis and moved to New York in 1975. She has had one-person exhibitions at the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C., 1988; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 1988; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 1991; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 1992; and Portikus, Frankfurt, 1994, and most recently at the Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany. Levine divides her time between New York City and Santa Fe.

In November 2011 Sherrie Levine will have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

For further information and images please contact Zenaïde at zenaide@simonleegallery.com.