

**Sometimes I Disappear  
Ingleby Gallery  
Edinburgh  
2<sup>nd</sup> March 2019**



**First Impressions**

This is the first study visit the group has had in a long time so I was quite surprised that there weren't more attendees taking up this opportunity. We were to meet Dr. Wendy McMurdo at the venue.

Having never visited the Ingleby Gallery before I arrived extra early and found it relatively quickly as it's not far from the city centre. First impression was a bit put out by the bins that seemed everywhere and I counted nine at this part.

By 11am we had all arrived, Wendy McMurdo, Cat Topham, Zoe Wright, Barry Howie, Richard Dalglish, Laurie Bradshaw and myself made up the group, and we were ushered into the gallery.

First impressions can be changed and once inside there is the most impressive space with a highly decorative roof light. This was certainly an improvement on the bins



**Roof Light**

Wendy spoke to the staff and we were extremely fortunate to be given a talk on the Ingleby Gallery and this particular exhibition by one of the staff Amy Murray.

Amy gave us a background to the gallery itself starting with its start in 1998 and gaining the reputation of being one of Scotland's leading private galleries. The gallery, as well as representing international artists also supports emerging artists at the beginning of their careers. Over the last 20 years the gallery has been sited at various locations and more recently moved to the current premises last year (2018).

The current site is a former place of worship of a group known as the Glasites, a breakaway group from the Church of Scotland. There are around thirty of these Meeting Houses in Scotland and this one is the largest and most elaborate. Meetings would be held all day with a break in the proceedings for the elders and congregation to move upstairs for soup and bread. The buildings' current caretakers are the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust.



**Amy Murray talks to the group - photograph Wendy McMurdo © 2019**

Amy then proceeded to give a brief run down of the current exhibition '*Sometimes I Disappear*'. The exhibition consists of four artists who use the self-portrait in association with the viewer's gaze. The artists become both the subject and the object.

The gallery worked with the estate of Francesca Woodman to bring these photographs to the exhibition where Woodman, although dying at the young age of 22, achieved a mature approach to her art and in these examples played with ideas of presence and absence.

Zanele Muholi is a South African artist and visual activist. She has used herself more and more in her photography doing self-portraits and uses props to introduce meaning and association.

Cindy Sherman has only one image in this exhibition that was printed in the 1990's although it was taken in 1975 just after she had finished her time as a student and started dressing up. '*Sometimes I Disappear*' is a quote from an interview with Sherman in the New York Times in 1990.

Oana Stanciu is a young photographer of Romanian descent but working in London and rumoured soon to be moving to Edinburgh. This piece of work is pure performance, almost like a dance, but the artist states she is not a dancer.

We thanked Amy for her time and talk and Wendy took over from where Amy left off.

The first observations were that Zanele Muholi's activism is an important part of her work. Many artists and galleries use and follow Instagram, with galleries now tending to benefit from this social media platform rather than artists talks. It was also apparent from the start that all the exhibits are in black and white. Each artist has their work mounted inside a block of colour standing out from the bare white walls.

### **Oana Stanciu**



**The Oana Stanciu exhibit**

We started discussing the work of Oana Stanciu the Romanian and how her approach is one about performance. The photographs give the appearance of being shot on film such as Xpan, and perhaps at 400 or 800 ASA, a fast film, and probably printed by the artist herself. There is the use of both natural light and studio flash units evident by the harsh shadows in some of the images.

We discussed reimaging and how nothing is really original '*it's all been done before*', but a good way to get the creative juices flowing is to re-enact your favourite photograph. This forces you to think of scale, composition, texture and light, and the importance of distance. It was felt that Stanciu's particular look wouldn't work in high definition colour, and this look was due to format and lenses.

This led Wendy into informing us not to restrict ourselves to the one format. We should be experimenting, especially with different lenses. As students working towards our body of work we should be looking at shooting from the same distance and perhaps using typology as an option.

There was a question about the use of the coloured blocks the images are placed upon. The group felt this would look good on Instagram but there was a doubt of whether or not this worked in the gallery space. It was noted however that this approach is popular at the moment.

The use of dark wooden frames work with these images that brought us round to the discussion of digital and film. It is believed that people generally want to work with their hands and make things in this digital age and are bored with the digital image. Laurie commented on her great experience of using darkrooms and the process of involvement. Wendy pointed out the artists' use of dodging and burning, evident in these photographs, especially the last image where there is a distinct white halo covering the subject.

### **Cindy Sherman**



**Cindy Sherman - *Untitled (Madonna)* 1997**

*'Me, Myself and I'* is an interview with Cindy Sherman in the Guardian conducted by Simon Hattenstone. Wendy quoted from the article where Sherman states that painting at that time was predominantly a male preserve:

"There's a theory that there were so many women photographers at the time because we felt nobody else was doing it. We couldn't or didn't really want to go into the male-dominated painting world, so since there weren't any artists who were using photographs, we thought, 'Well, yeah, let's just play with that.' (Hattenstone, 2011).

Sherman has used wigs and a cable release, she has moved away from 10x8 black and white large format into colour. Wendy advised that she is worth following on Instagram. She has used highly saturated coloured prints in her work and is moving away from this approach, sometimes even using just a smartphone. It was discussed that a phone image has a distinct look to it that is hard to

replicate. This is mainly due to sensor size, lenses used etc. It is very apparent that when mentioning self-portraits the name Cindy Sherman is usually the first name that springs to mind.

### **Francesca Woodman**



**Francesca Woodman – *Self Deceit #1* – Rome, Italy 1978**

Francesca Woodman is known for her black and white photographs of herself or friends. She tragically died at the age of 22 having jumped from the loft window of a New York apartment building.

Her archive was first shown four years after her death with her parents managing the archive, maintaining and developing her work. She came from a creative middle class background with her parents, who were also artists, but have not achieved the fame their daughter has.

Francesca had a strong idea of what she wanted to do, working in abandoned places, using available light and shot on medium format. Reflection is a normal part of her work and her compositions used intersected lines and balance. This body of work is framed by her story and this can either work for or against the artist.

Wendy advised us to check out the Scottish artist Steven Campbell (1953-2007).

We discussed lifestyle narratives and how they are pinned to the artists work resulting in the viewer bringing their own preconceptions to the art. Woodman

used small square-format images that are presented here with a white background and grey framing. We are primarily looking at the work from Woodman and the other artists at the beginning of their careers. This led on to examining the reasons that timing for exhibitions and work is important for students.

As pointed out by Sherman, there was a male domination in the 1980's i.e. little or no females especially in the painting world so they turned to photography. It was interesting how some of Woodman's images were almost contact size thus bringing the viewer up close to the work to view it. There was a question over the use of the staggered hang although this seems to be popular at the moment. It was also pointed out that this could cause issues for the smaller viewer (having to look up) and the taller viewer (having to look down).

### **Zanele Muholi**



**The Zanele Muholi exhibit**

Zanele Muholi is a South African artist and visual activist. Her work focuses on documenting the LGBT community in particular looking at gender, sexuality and race. Black lesbians are seen as undesirable in Africa. At one point her house was broken into and digital storage units were removed containing five years worth of photographs and video footage. Nothing else was stolen.

Her most influential work is titled '*Hail The Dark Lioness*' and it is from this work that the photographs on display are from. The negative view of black lesbians has led to hate crime, oppression, rape, and homophobia, all subjects she has explored in her photography. She captures experiences and uses these moments by promoting unity whilst avoiding any negativity.

Wendy first saw her work at Arles and was impressed by the size the prints were – huge! These photographs hit you because of the orange block supporting the images and this draws you immediately to her exhibit.

The images are of a direct gaze (no getting away from) a direct eye contact between the subject and the viewer that promotes confidence and self-awareness. There is a determination evident in each of the images that suggest awareness and acceptance. All positive!

The photographs are shot either on 5x4 or 10x8 and are extremely detailed. The contrast is in the black skin and white eyes.

We then discussed the subject of gallery and exhibition design, how this is evolving and how it is about the aesthetics. We agreed that there is a therapeutic nature in making images expressed through the self-portrait.

There was mention of a documentary entitled '*The Price of Everything*' and is about the art world and how galleries work, usually taking 60% of the sale price but this is standard practice.

We then had a lunch/coffee session where the talk was of individual students work, we discussed the book *Autofocus* by Sarah Bright and how the book is divided into relevant chapters on approaches to the self-portrait.

We discussed OCA issues, assignments, personal work, all carried out in a humorous and informal way. Following this we went our own ways with the knowledge increased and perhaps took something of a personal nature away from the exhibition.

As always Wendy has run an informative and interesting study visit that I believe has benefitted myself and the other attendees.

### **Useful Links:**

Zanele Muholi

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jul/14/zanele-muholi-365-protest-photographs>

<https://www.stevenson.info/artist/zanele-muholi>

Cindy Sherman

<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1154>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jan/15/cindy-sherman-interview>

Oana Stanciu

<http://www.oanastanciu.com/biocv.html>

Francesca Woodman

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/francesca-woodman-10512/finding-francesca>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/aug/31/searching-for-the-real-francesca-woodman>

<https://www.victoria-miro.com/artists/7-francesca-woodman/>

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/artists/francesca-woodman>

## **References**

Hattenstone, S. (2011) *Cindy Sherman: Me, myself and I*. The Guardian Online. At: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jan/15/cindy-sherman-interview> (Accessed 03 March 2019)