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Double Watch

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Now she is “sequestered behind the veil.” The same tension lives in places and objects through the histories they embody: an abandoned tube station, the backdrop to a famous rock ‘n’ roll album cover, a Byzantine painting of the Madonna and child undergoing restoration.

As masterfully as Singer calls upon these metaphors, she is less successful when she might be relying on the meaning of “Javad”—generous—to hang the resolution of a crucial dilemma. It is dispatched too quickly if the characters’ intelligence, loyalties, and sympathies are to be believed. Nevertheless, and despite the small number of characters, the connections between people are on a Dickensian scale, which reinforces their humanity

and the humanity of strangers. The suspense built on the business of being human, which includes living a flawed, perhaps unexplainable life among other less-than-perfect creatures, builds up to a nail-bitingly intense climax.

Singer reveals the cure for trances we inevitably find ourselves in while warding off guilt over lost family members or escaping political oppression—adventure, particularly the adventure of falling in love. Love is what makes these characters remember themselves, but the antidote is not 100 percent effective. Perhaps it is only as satisfying as when the identity of the “Piano Man” is discovered to be so pedestrian. “Everybody wants a story with a happy ending,” we are reminded by

one character. Or as Amir, intent on giving up on his forays into the past as it is rendered in the present, says, “Maybe there is no such thing as resolution. Maybe time is just a series of endless variations, spiraling outward, expanding into space.”

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DOUBLE WATCH

SARAH CHARLESWORTH

Sarah Charlesworth
Rochelle Steiner, ed.
Prestel
www.prestel.com
232 Pages; Print, \$49.95

In unconventional ways, Sarah Charlesworth (1947–2013) used photo processes Ansel Adams might have admired as she explored concepts Susan Sontag might have appreciated. Rochelle Steiner and three highly qualified colleagues provide measured views of her photographic work and archive in this finely produced book. Charlesworth was associated with the Pictures Generation of the 1980s, which focused on ways that photography was changing our lives, and she created studio shots in the 1990s that focused on a few symbolic objects in large, brightly colored fields.

Charlesworth’s 40-year career began with her photo essays as a senior at Barnard College and during travels in Europe following graduation. As Rochelle Steiner relates, her “radical dematerialization of the object” began during this period. A romantic relationship with Joseph Kosuth also began, and they were part of the Art & Language movement’s questioning of conceptual relationships between art and language. During her studies with Austrian-born photographer Lisette Model, Charlesworth created *The First Human Being* (1972), a grainy, black-and-white close-up of the first humans photographed by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, an early photography pioneer. Charlesworth turned a representative image of a person getting a shoeshine into a conceptual work that ironically makes the figures into a primitive dark grid on a light ground as it dematerializes them. Charlesworth began to question larger concepts in her *Modern History* (1979) series. In the 1970s, she began to separate verbs and nouns in news headlines and examine how in images and some texts white and black or negative and positive values could be layered to create new meanings.

In the 1980’s, Charlesworth’s studio experiments became more technical as she worked with appropriated images in her series, such as *Objects of Desire: 1983-1988*. Other Pictures Generation artists working in this direction were Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine. By 2012, she noted that one of her objectives was to juxtapose planned and accidental compositions to demonstrate that this is a false distinction. As Steiner points out, her “strategies developed over many decades” and included “creating cutouts, collaging, pasting, layering, and re-photographing wide-ranging

images.” At her death, Charlesworth was working on a series titled *Available Light*.

The main sections of the book are full-page images of several series named above and others, including *Tabula Rasa* (1981) and *Red Collages* (1983). The subjects range from news images to meditative symbols to a juxtaposed collage of a woman in a low-cut dress in front of a cut-out of a cowboy on a rearing horse, both on China-red ground.

Essays from Thomas Lawson, a painter and dean at the California Institute for the Arts; Mark Godfrey, a senior curator of International Art at Tate Modern, London; Rebecca Morse, associate curator of photography at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Eric Crosby, Richard Armstrong Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at Carnegie Museum of Art are placed between other sets of Charlesworth images. Lawson concentrates on Charlesworth’s early art, including the 1974-1976 periodical *The Fox* started by Charlesworth, Kosuth, and four others. In 1979, while she and Kosuth were sharing a huge loft with separate workspaces, she fell in love with and eventually married filmmaker

The book’s high production values make the book itself a visually compelling work of art, starting with the bright golden canary-yellow cover with a tilted genie lamp.

Amos Poe. The *Objects of Desire* images floating on bright grounds include everything from a bodiless white wedding dress on a black ground to a black leather harness on China red ground.

Mark Godfrey’s “Modern History” essay covers how Charlesworth conceived and developed that body of work.

Rebecca Morse focuses on the “objecthood of images” in her essay—that is, the strategies the artist employed to manipulate her images, including “fractured patterning,” or the tearing or spreading apart of the pieces of an object. Charlesworth also created symbols by isolating objects in color fields and by using color to reinforce the object’s symbolism.

Eric Crosby’s “In the Studio” essay focuses on how the artist literally worked, including a few notes, test patterns, and comments about her studio methods, notebooks, and source materials.

The book’s high production values make the book itself a visually compelling work of art, starting with the bright golden canary-yellow cover with a tilted genie lamp, “Teapot,” from her *Neverland* (2002) series. Produced in collaboration with the Estate of Sarah Charlesworth and Maccarone Art Gallery, the full-page reproductions convey some of

Jan Garden Castro



Sarah Charlesworth

the excitement of the original works. Imagine “Red Bowls” (2005), a laminated Cibachrome print with a lacquered wood frame, 41 ½ x 31 ½ x 1 inches: three China-red bowls with raised bottoms rise from a China-red ground. Above the bowls, three small green leaf clusters hover in mid-air; one sprig has a bud, and the center sprig has a white gardenia. This image on its full page is brilliant and powerful, bright and bold, mysterious and beckoning. Imagine the original—four times as large—in a room. I can almost smell the gardenia. Yet even as the white flower floats forward on the red field, the title “Red Bowls” leads me back to the intense red on red hues at the heart of the picture. This seems to embody the high values in Charlesworth’s art.

It should be obvious from this review that the book required the close collaboration of many individuals central to Charlesworth’s art, most of whom are named in the book. Steiner reports that she did not personally know the artist and that her goal was to look at Charlesworth “holistically.” Steiner also notes that “Many have described Charlesworth as a difficult character, which seems to be tied to her perfectionism...” Other books on the artist may add to a fuller understanding of her body of work. This book is about seeing the art visually and noting its many nuances.

Jan Garden Castro (<http://www.jancastro.com>) is an art historian, biographer, and poet with books on Georgia O’Keeffe, Sonia Delaunay, two poetry collections, and a monthly art blog <https://blog.sculpture.org/tag/jan-garden-castro>.