

Sherrie Levine *Wood*

April 27–July 21, 2023
34 East 69th Street, New York



Sherrie Levine, *Fitz: 1*, 1994. © Sherrie Levine. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to announce an exhibition of work by American artist Sherrie Levine at the gallery's 69th Street location. For this exhibition, the artist will present a never-before-seen suite of wood-panel paintings as well as a new installation of found-object sculptures, including a Japanese burlwood *kitsune* fox figurine, a New Guinea ceremonial stone mortar head, and a wooden scholar figure. Together, the works in this presentation demonstrate Levine's ongoing inquiry into concepts surrounding ownership, authorship, originality, and authenticity, as well as her enduring interest in materiality. A concurrent exhibition of Levine's work will be on view at the gallery's Paris location.

Levine rose to prominence as a member of the Pictures Generation, a group of artists based in New York in the late 1970s and 1980s whose work examined the structures of signification underlying mass-circulated images, and, in many cases, directly appropriated these images in order to imbue them with new, critically inflected meaning. Since then, Levine has created a singular and complex body of work in a variety of media that often explicitly reproduces artworks and motifs from the Western art-historical canon as well as non-Western cultures.

As art historian Howard Singerman writes in a new text prepared specially for this exhibition:

The most recent work in this exhibition, Scholar Figure, Head, and Fox, test another formula for the readymade—Robert Rauschenberg's famous telegram "This is a portrait of Iris Clert, if I say so"—as directly as her early rephotographs did. They are, as Duchamp would have it, unassisted readymades,

made art, or art objects within this art world, by the act of selection and display, by title, signature, and the proper name. But they test even more insistently than the industrial objects Duchamp chose whether the shift in context can hold, whether these works, at once made and unfinished—unfrozen—could conceivably revert to different kinds of works by other kinds of artists, or at least to the odd and searchable spaces of 1stdibs, and onto other shelves in a different kind of collection. Objects of projection and desire, their relation to Levine's catalogue of similar objects is clear, but their relation to their past lives is infrathin, always there—particularly in their woodenness, in their grain.

Levine has always had a taste for wood; it has served as a ground for her work since her 1984 casein-on-mahogany paintings after Kasimir Malevich and Ilya Chasnick; she unveiled it as her subject in the Knot Paintings of the later 1980s. In those works on blank plywood grounds, Levine's intervention was to paint the regularized but seemingly random eye-shaped plugs lumber companies use to repair knots and irregularities in the grain, an image at once based on chance aberrations and interruptions, and absolutely machine-made—at once intentional and, like the wooden objects here, found. Nature in Levine's work almost always has an unnatural and, indeed, fully cultural aspect. Under her gaze, it tends to grow unnaturally, to become imagelike, sculpture on its own—like Scholar Figure, but also like her photographs of plants After Blossfeldt (1990) or the Gottscho-Schleisner Orchids (1964-1997).

The oldest work in the exhibition is a series of small paintings on cherry panels from the mid-1990s. Each panel holds the same image, one after another, of a disgruntled cartoon animal. Levine's subject here is Fitz the Dog, created by the cartoonist Dick Huemer for Max Fleischer Studios in the 1920s. Levine cropped Fitz's portrait from an animator's guide showing the decidedly human dog from the front, side, and rear, and running through a set of cartoon emotions. Blown up and fitted to the cherry panels, the animator's fluid ink lines become craggy, roughhewn, and abstract; they barely hold together as a face. And here they come around to Head and Scholar Figure, nearly overwhelmed by their materiality and again their woodenness.¹

Born in 1947 in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, Sherrie Levine studied at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where she received her MFA in 1973. Early solo exhibitions were held at 3 Mercer Street, New York (1977); Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo (1978); and The Kitchen, New York (1979). In 2015, the artist joined David Zwirner. Levine's inaugural solo exhibition with the gallery was on view in New York the following year. *Sherrie Levine: After Reinhardt*, the artist's third solo exhibition with David Zwirner, was on view in 2019 at the gallery's 69th Street location. In 2021, *Sherrie Levine: Hong Kong Dominoes* was on view at David Zwirner, Hong Kong. Opening April 2023, is a solo presentation of the artist's work at David Zwirner, Paris. A concurrent presentation entitled *Sherrie Levine: Wood* will be on view this Spring at the gallery's 69th Street location.

In 2011, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York presented *SHERRIE LEVINE: MAYHEM*, a major exhibition of the artist's work spanning three decades. The show included one of her most acclaimed series from 1981—a group of twenty-two photographs of reproductions of Walker Evans's photographs from his Farm Security Administration-commissioned project to document the rural South during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Referencing the loss of uniqueness as a result of mechanical (and digital) reproduction, and ironically using a medium generally held responsible for diminishing the

¹ Howard Singerman, *Sherrie Levine: Wood* (2023).

value of the artist's hand, *After Walker Evans: 1–22* emphasizes a description of the pictures in contextual, rather than formal terms.

Levine's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent institutions worldwide, including at Neues Museum, State Museum for Art and Design in Nuremberg (2016); Portland Art Museum, Oregon (2013); Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany (2010); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2009 and 1991); and the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, New Mexico (2007). Other venues include Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, Germany (1998); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Menil Collection, Houston (both 1995); Portikus, Frankfurt (1994); Philadelphia Museum of Art (1993); Kunsthalle Zürich (1991); High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC (both 1988); and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut (1987).

Major group exhibitions include *NOT I: Throwing Voices (1500 BCE-2020 CE)*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2020); *Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC (2018); *Ordinary Pictures*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota (2016); *America Is Hard To See*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015); *Prima Materia*, Punta della Dogana, François Pinault Foundation, Venice (2013); *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2009); Whitney Biennial (2008, 1989, and 1985); SITE Santa Fe (2004); São Paulo Biennial (1998); Carnegie International (1988); documenta VII (1982); and *Pictures*, Artists Space, New York (1977).

Work by the artist is held in major international museum collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The National Museum of Art, Osaka; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate, London; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Levine lives and works in New York.

For all press inquiries, contact

Julia Lukacher +1 212 727 2070 jlukacher@davidzwirner.com

Erin Pinover +1 212 727 2070 epinover@davidzwirner.com