Zoe Leonard Survey to Open at The Whitney

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by Pat Rogers

Zoe Leonard’s art will be the subject of a traveling mid-career survey that debuts at The Whitney on March 2, 2018, the museum announced today. “Zoe Leonard: Survey” is the first exhibition to assess the extraordinary range of the artist’s achievements over more than three decades of her career to date. Organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA), the exhibition travels to the museum in the fall after exhibited at The Whitney from March 2 to June 10, 2018 in New York City.

Zoe Leonard (b. 1961, Liberty, New York) makes photographs, sculptures and installations that are noted from their lyrical observations of daily life, as well as for their rigorous, questioning attention to the politics and conditions of image making and display, according to the museum. Her work is wide-ranging in both form and subject matter, and addresses themes that include gender and sexuality, loss and mourning, migration, displacement, the history of photography and the urban landscape.

Using repetition, subtle changes of perspective, and shifts of scale, Leonard reframes images and objects in ways that challenge the viewer to follow her path of inquiry, and to reexamine the familiar from every possible angle.

“Leonard’s photographs, sculptures and installations ask the viewer to reengage with how we see,” stated Elisabeth Sherman, assistant curator at the Whitney, who is organizing the New York installation of the show in close collaboration with the artist. “Her work is both beautiful and powerful, deeply connected to the issues of our time and a counter-example to the speed and disposability of image culture today.”

“Zoe Leonard: Survey” presents around 100 key works from across her career, dating from the mid-1980s until today. Among the installations is Strange Fruit, an important work of the 1990s, on loan for the first time in nearly 20 years from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Composed of banana and orange peels that Leonard stitched together, Strange Fruit is the artist’s response to loss during the early days of the AIDS crisis, made at a time when there were no effective drug treatments for HIV.

In addition, Leonard adapts You see I am here after all and presents it for the first time since originally shown in 2008 at Dia:Beacon. Made up of thousands of vintage postcards of Niagara Falls, the work engages with that iconic landscape and its role in the American myth.
Much of Leonard’s work reflects on the framing, classifying, and ordering of vision. As Leonard once commented: “Rather than any one subject or genre (landscape, portrait, still life, etc.), I was, and remain, interested in engaging a simultaneous questioning of both subject and vantage point, the relation between viewer and world—in short, subjectivity and how it informs our experience of the world.”


The exhibition will also highlight important works of photography from throughout Leonard’s career, beginning with early images of aerial landscapes, maps, and models. The Fae Richards Photo Archive (1993–96), a work made in collaboration with the filmmaker Cheryl Dunne for her film The Watermelon Woman and one of the highlights of the Whitney’s collection, will be shown alongside photographs from the 1990s that address gender and sexuality within museum displays.

Also includes are Leonard’s most recent body of photography and sculpture focusing on vernacular
image culture and its relationship to identity and migration. Included in this group will be a new sculpture, *How to Take Good Pictures*, composed of over one thousand copies of a Kodak manual in print between 1912 and 1995.

The show will be accompanied by a catalogue by Bennett Simpson which includes contributions by Douglas Crimp, Elisabeth Lebovici, Fred Moten, Elisabeth Sherman and Lanka Tattersall. Essays will also examine key works by Leonard not included in the survey including her contributions to *Documenta IX* (1992) and her camera obscura installations. The catalogue is published by Prestel.

The show is organized by Bennett Simpson, senior curator, with Rebecca Matalon, curatorial associate, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The installation at the Whitney Museum is overseen by Elisabeth Sherman, assistant curator.

Zoe Leonard’s work was selected for three *Whitney Biennials* held in 2014, 1997 and 1993. In 2016, her installation *I want a president*, 1992, was installed at the foot of the High Line between West 13th and Little West 12th Street as a collaborative presentation between Friends of the High Line and The Standard, High Line. The work, a 20 by 30 foot wheat paste installation, coincided with the 2016 presidential election. Click [here](#) for details.

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Also in New York, Zoe Leonard’s art was the subject of a solo show at MoMA in 2015. “Analogue” featured 412 photographs made over a decade and presented a serial grids that were organized into 25 chapters. The work documented the transformation in 20th century urban life through the
The decline of mom-and-pop stores and the rise of the “global rag trade” captured through the Lower East Side in the 1990s as Leonard followed the circulation of recycled materials from NY to markets in Africa, Eastern Europe, Cuba, Mexico and the Middle East, according to MoMA.

In addition, Leonard’s art has been the subject of solo shows at the Chinati Foundation (Marfa, Texas), Camden Arts Centre (London), Dia: Beacon; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Kunsthalle Basel and others. Her work has been included in numerous group shows including Documenta 9 (1992) and 12 (2007).


An Artist Talk is planned for March 16, 2018 at 6:30 p.m. in the Hess Family Theater that features Zoe Leonard in Conversation with Rebecca Solnit, Curatorial Associate, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Additional programs will be held and announced at a later date by the museum. Click here for details.

The Whitney is located at 99 Gansevoort Street, New York, NY 10014. www.whitney.org.

After the Whitney, “Zoe Leonard: Survey” will then travel to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles where it will be exhibited November 4, 2018 to March 25, 2019.

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