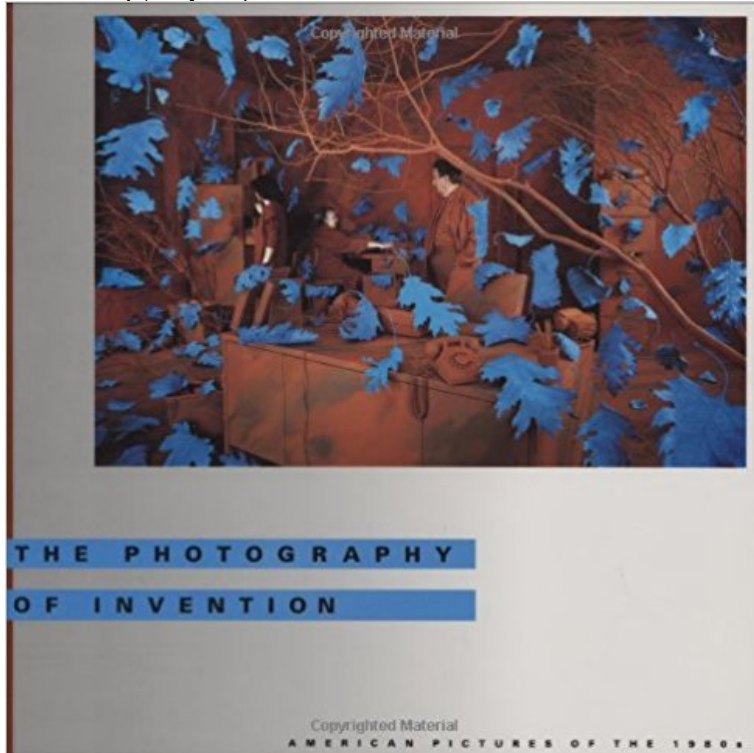


Photography of Invention: American Pictures of the 1980s



Perhaps in the future, Man Ray suggested to Duchamp, photography would replace all art. The Photography of Invention hints at that future by documenting a decade of startling new work in American photography: work that challenges the accepted hierarchy of the arts and, arguably, establishes photography as the equal of the other arts. Pictures that are made, not taken, are the focus of this exciting collection of works by 90 American artists who are using appropriation, computer technology, performance, and numerous other sources of inspiration to stretch the limits and expand the possibilities of photographic art. The selection of nontraditional pictures includes works by some of the decades most interesting experimenters -- Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger, William Christenberry, Louise Lawler, Stefan Roloff, and others who create or manipulate the subject photographed. Photography has traditionally been used to capture experience and create images; these works, however, examine preexisting images or image styles that dominate our culture. As Joshua Smith points out mass media and popular culture advertising, fashion movies, television, video, and other electronic media have made the world photographic, become the common language, and shaped a generations visual and critical viewpoint. Rather than commenting on or representing life, photography is now an independent art form that has expanded the creative vocabulary of contemporary artists. These made pictures encompass a variety of styles and techniques: the artists may fabricate or arrange the subject matter for the camera; invent or subvert traditional styles; present themselves in fictive roles invoking allegory or myth, fantasy and illusion; reassemble existing art objects in new contexts; make the psychic appear real

and the real hyperreal. Many pictures are made in the usual optical/chemical manner, creating a tension between the obviously manipulated subject and the inherent truth of the photographic print; while others are made by the unconventional use of equipment, processes, and materials that intentionally deny the perfect print. There are photograms, photocollages, light drawings, chemical images, marked or painted on negatives, photosilkscreens and photolithographs, and new high tech computer-generated imagery. Joshua P. Smith is a leading authority on and a collector of avant-garde photography. He was guest curator for the National Museum of American Art exhibition *The Photography of Invention: American Pictures of the 1980s*. Merry A. Foresta is Associate Curator, Graphic Arts, and Curator for Photography at the National Museum of American Art. Copublished with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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