

# Analysis

*Untitled Film Still #21*

1978

9.5 x 7.5 inches

Gelatin Silver Print



*Untitled Film Still #21* was photographed in 1978 using gelatin silver print, measuring 9.5 x 7.5 inches. It shows an unnamed woman (Sherman in disguise) glaring at something viewers cannot see, with the background behind her depicting a cityscape. Clothed sensibly, she has styled her hair to perfection and tucked it beneath a woven, appearing for all intents and purposes the ideal woman of the 1950s. This piece's black-and-white tone also highlights and emphasises shadows on both the subject herself as well as buildings in the background.

Sherman utilises contrast to its full potential to draw attention to certain points within this photograph. The shadows present on the subject's face sharpen her features, particularly around her cheekbones. In conjunction with this, Sherman employs the principle of space to further stress the importance of this area: the woman, because she is positioned to the right, leaves a significant amount of space to the left, which brings a somewhat unbalanced feel to the piece. It forces viewers' eyes to where Sherman intends them to look, strengthening the woman's face as the focal point. Her use of costume and makeup are also used to effect, as these elements tell viewers what era Sherman is representing without need for clarification. The cityscape achieves a similar response.

# Analysis

In this piece, Sherman successfully parodies the ideal of women in the 1950s, utilising costume, black-and-white, and specific poses to bring to life the caricatures we still see in society today. Cliché and stereotype play a vital role here as Sherman shines light on the fabricated femininity that ran rampant in post-war America (MoMA, 1997). She seeks to not only deconstruct its falsehood but to call viewers to question the fictional ideal woman we all know today. She asks, "*Why do instantly know this woman despite without knowing her name or anything else about her?*" Sherman, through asking this question, compels viewers to reassess how individuals, especially women, are typecast to mere images of what they are.

In *Untitled Film Still #21*, Sherman has composed a subtle satire of the feminine stereotypes plaguing society now and in the past. By confronting viewers with a familiar image of the ideal 1950s woman, she attempts to have viewers realise their indoctrination to stereotypes. However, her subtlety may be lost on the average person, who might perceive little more than just another picture they have seen time and again. Anger and resentment, though, might be aroused in more perceptive viewers, particularly those familiar with Sherman's subsequent work, as they might already criticise society's facile depiction of women. Nevertheless, Sherman's shrewd combination of costume, background, space and imbalance set this piece apart.