



## Anatomy of an artwork Cindy Sherman's Untitled

**Motley crew ...** Cindy Sherman is art's crown shapeshifter. In her five-decade career she has dressed up and posed for her own camera in a carnival display of increasingly outlandish female roles. From the cool noir of her breakout Film Stills series of the late 1970s, the identities and archetypes she's gone on to assume include lactating saints, clowns and ageing women trapped in their eccentricities.

**True fake ...** For all the fakery, the makeup, wigs and costumes, the quirks pushed to the point of being grotesque, the anxiety that fuels her work - be it her characters' or her audience's - feels absolutely human and true. She gets the nuances of inner longing, sadness and revulsion.

**Small faces ...** Sherman's work pre-empted the era of the selfie. For a number of years, on her Instagram feed she has paraded characters tweaked and twisted by face-altering apps and set against the platform's fantastical backgrounds

and wallpapers. The images' poor resolution had meant they were tricky to print, but now Sherman has found a way to work with the visible pixelation. Combining old and new technology, she has had the portraits printed on to tapestries, with the geometries of the pixels complementing those formed by the interwoven threads.

**The mask slips ...** As with this 2020 bearded figure with its shades of David Beckham and Jesus Christ, religious painting and sports casual, the Instagram tapestries present identities at their most fluid. Sometimes characters have purple skin, melting bodies and eyelashes sprouting in odd places, though these tricks never completely transform their earthly roots: human, ageing, a bit desperate. However "playful" these characters get with their looks they cannot mask their vulnerability.  
*Skye Sherwin*  
*Cindy Sherman's Tapestries, to 1 May, Sprüth Magers Los Angeles online*

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