

# METRO PICTURES

Yerebakan, Osman Can. "Artseen: Louise Lawler," *TheBrooklynRail.org* (March 7, 2019).

## BROOKLYN RAIL



Louise Lawler, *CS #204*, 1990. Silver dye bleach print.

Louise Lawler's extensive survey, *She's Here*, at Vienna's SAMMLUNG VERBUND Collection, manifests her interest in what I will call "transient visibility," which has over the years come to define Lawler's grand oeuvre. Throughout the exhibition, she assures viewers that what the eye catches is only a faint illusion—the result of a tendency to believe too readily in the accuracy of perception.

For Lawler, art is the conveyor of our complicated exchange with reality. Take, for example, *CS #204* (1990), in which fellow Picture Generationist Cindy Sherman stares at us in one of her own photographs, framed and sandwiched between two other artworks. Within a few seconds, onlookers grasp the actual content of the image, namely, that we are looking artworks in storage, including a Sherman, captured from an off angle. The image proves the slipperiness of pictures. Challenging the role of photographic medium as bearer of reality, Lawler shatters our trust for photographs through a piling-on of multiple layers of gazes. We stare at Sherman, who never posed for Lawler for this image, as if she were looking at us: Sherman amicably grins, Lawler captures her friend's *Mona Lisa* smile. The lens no longer renders concrete truth occupying time and space, but rather facilitates a layering of staged versions, embodied within frames or on canvases, bearing, in this case, another image saturated with a replica of reality. (Such a narrative is particularly poignant considering Sherman's own concern with how visual cues can be manipulated to enforce or subvert social stereotypes. In their own ways both artists have strived to defy the reliability of pictures.)



Louise Lawler, *Bulbs*, 2005–06. Silver dye bleach print.

The show, curated by Gabriele Schor, centers on similar images of art in different places, and asks viewers to seek similar misplaced gazes and postures in pictures Lawler took at secluded art storehouses, and also in pristine white cube galleries or the intimate homes of collectors. In one picture, muscular Grecian nudes, shrouded by their ghostly protective covers, stand commanding and euphoric—yet are far from the admiration of fascinated eyes, left in the dim corners of storage units; while in another, Warhol's Pop Art muses cluster like guests attending a party inside ambiguous spaces. Facing us or each other—it is unclear which—they orchestrate an array of piercing stares and radiant hues.

Images of collectors' bedrooms or offices, with pieces placed alongside other works, furniture, family snapshots, and plants, showcase the intimacy and randomness that occurs when spaces are invaded with the visual and ideological heftiness of art. *Bulbs* (2005/2006) shows Félix González-Torres's heartbreaking light bulbs, symbols of demise and longing, laying atop a desk as they wait to be suspended from a ceiling and radiate their deep statement. Through Lawler's lens, the light bulbs are in a state in between meaning and materiality, waiting to transform from simply being "objects" into an artwork. *Arranged by Donald Marron, Susan Brundage, Cheryl Bishop at Paine Webber, Inc. NYC* (1982/2016), an adhesive wall-covering showing the reflection of a large-scale Robert Longo in an office window, also plays with meaning and materiality. A part of his "Men in the Cities" series, Longo's expressive work shows a man in business attire raising his head and torso with intensity. The expression is amplified in Lawler's composition, as the figure seems to allow himself to bounce off the window, away from his office.

A few days later, back in New York, I encountered my own "Lawler moment" at a collector's apartment. A modestly sized Agnes Martin and a Robert Gober drain occupied a narrow wall between two windows, facing a larger-than-life, voluptuous Jenny Saville nude, whose reflection glared onto the window and joined the Manhattan skyline. Martin, Gober, and Saville intertwined from my angle in the room. The drain's circular hollow echoed the nude's mysterious orifices, while Martin's mellow pink paralleled her vibrant flesh. Keeping her camera trained on artworks in their moments of transience—those quick seconds of perfect juxtaposition—Lawler ironically renders this transience permanent. I considered grabbing my phone and capturing the moment, but instead, I enjoyed the perfect scene before losing it a few moments later..