Minneapolis Institute of Art to Present First-Ever Museum Retrospective of Photographer Marcia Resnick

Organized in collaboration with the Bowdoin College Museum of Art and the George Eastman Museum, “Marcia Resnick: As It Is or Could Be” is the first comprehensive presentation of the photographer’s wide-ranging work.

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MINNEAPOLIS-- The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) will present the first-ever museum exhibition of the photographer Marcia Resnick. One of the most ambitious and innovative American photographers of the 1970s, Resnick is today most well-known for her portraits of the creative community in downtown New York City during that decade. “Marcia Resnick: As It Is or Could Be” will feature these portraits, alongside the artist’s lesser-known experimental and conceptual photographs, highlighting Resnick's overlooked role in the history of American photography while emphasizing the continued relevance of the aesthetic, social, and political issues explored through her lens. Organized in collaboration with the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA) and the George Eastman Museum, and co-curated by Casey Riley of Mia, Frank Goodyear of BCMA, and Lisa Hostetler of the Eastman Museum, the exhibition will be on view at Mia August 13-December 11, 2022.

“Marcia Resnick is finally getting the critical attention she deserves,” says Casey Riley, co-curator of the exhibition and Mia’s Chair of Global Contemporary Art and Curator of Photography and New Media. “Resnick is a path breaker, and the multitude of ways she approaches the medium of photography is impressive. As a curator, it is a great joy and privilege to bring this work to light.”

Born in Brooklyn in 1950, Resnick first began taking photographs while studying at New York University and later Cooper Union, documenting people and current events such as antiwar demonstrations. She went on to graduate school at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), where she studied with Allan Kaprow, John Baldessari and Robert Fichter. It was there she began pushing the boundaries of traditional photography, applying oil paint to her images and toying with the scale of her photographs, at times expanding them to billboard-size. “As It Is or Could Be” features a number of works from Resnick’s student years, including a painted photograph of her parents.

The majority of the works in “As It Is or Could Be” were created in the 10 years between 1973, when Resnick earned an MFA at CalArts, and 1982. Following a cross-country road trip, Resnick returned to New York, where she continued to experiment with conceptual photography. Two series from this period, See (1973–75) and See Change (1974–75) are represented in the exhibition, as are four photobooks Resnick produced between 1975 and 1978: See, Tahitian Eve, Landscape, and Re-visions.
In 1979, Resnick began working as a staff photographer for the Soho Weekly News (SWN), an alternative newsweekly founded in 1973 that hoped to compete with The Village Voice. From 1979 until the magazine’s demise in 1982, Resnick’s portraits were included in almost every issue of the magazine, at times on its cover. While at SWN, Resnick photographed various famous figures, including authors William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, musicians James Brown and Mick Jagger, artists Christo and Andy Warhol, activist Abbie Hoffman, and New York City mayor Ed Koch, among many others. She also photographed many emerging cultural figures who would go on to become household names, such as composer Philip Glass, artist Laurie Anderson, and singer-songwriter Chuck Berry. Resnick’s ability to draw out her subject, as well as her personal relationships with some of these figures, resulted in intimate portraits that capture a lesser-known side of these celebrities. “As It Is or Could Be” features a number of these photographs, as well as works from “Resnick’s Believe It or Not,” a regular column she was commissioned to produce for SWN’s humorous Centerfold section.

Following several personal and societal shifts – including the demise of Soho Weekly News, a difficult divorce, and the drastic changes in the cultural scene of downtown New York – Resnick focused her energies on teaching. Though she stopped actively producing photographs in the early 1980s, Resnick’s work endures as far more than a record of the 1970s avant-garde art scene in New York: it is a testament to the innovation and creativity that stems from eschewing tradition and pushing boundaries.

Resnick’s work has been collected by many museums, including the Museum of Modern Art and the National Portrait Gallery, yet this is the first time it has been the focus of a retrospective exhibition. “Marcia Resnick: As It Is or Could Be” and the accompanying catalogue, published by Yale University Press in association with Mia, BCMA, and the Eastman Museum, aims to bring to the forefront Resnick’s overlooked role in the history of American photography. The catalogue includes essays by the three co-curators, as well as an afterword by Laurie Anderson.

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About the Minneapolis Institute of Art
Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

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