

# PAULA COOPER GALLERY

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**SARAH CHARLESWORTH**

524 W 26th Street

February 23 — March 23, 2019

Opening Reception: Saturday, February 23, 6–8pm

NEW YORK— Paula Cooper Gallery is pleased to announce a one-person exhibition of work by Sarah Charlesworth (1947–2013) at 524 West 26th Street from February 23 through March 23, 2019. The show will focus on Charlesworth's rarely exhibited work from the late 1970s through the early 1980s, beginning with her series, *Modern History*, through her series, *Red Collages*. This presentation marks the artist's first exhibition with the gallery. There will be an opening reception on Saturday, February 23 from 6 to 8pm. The gallery will also host a panel discussion on Charlesworth's work on Thursday, March 7 at 5pm with Jennifer Blessing (Senior Curator, Photography, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), Margot Norton (Curator, New Museum), and artist James Welling.

Organizing her practice in distinct yet closely interconnected series, Charlesworth is known for her conceptually-driven and visually alluring photo-based works that subvert and deconstruct cultural imagery. The exhibition focuses on a pivotal period in which she merged the photo-conceptual strategies of her early education with those of quotation, appropriation, and re-photography that would come to define the Pictures Generation. “I’m exploring a level of unconscious engagement in language, a covert symbology … a personal as well as a societal confrontation,” Charlesworth stated in an interview in 1990. “A symbolism is attached to particular images, becomes marked in the unconscious. To exorcise it, to rearrange it, to reshape it, to make it my own, involves unearthing it, describing it, deploying it in form, and then rearranging it.”<sup>1</sup>

In her earliest series, *Modern History* (1977-79), Charlesworth examined the contextual significance and complex structures that underlie images reproduced in the media. Comprised of twenty-six prints, the work *Herald Tribune, November 1977* (1977) presents copies of the newspaper’s front page over the course of one month—each systematically excised of all text so that only the paper’s masthead and images remain. Emergent from the sequence of redacted pages are striking visual patterns, which reveal cultural hierarchies imbedded in the media. They implore viewers to consider what is deemed “news,” how this directly and indirectly affects one’s understanding of society, and what role images play in communicating these ideas.

While firmly rooted in Conceptualism, Charlesworth’s exacting forms, assiduous process and subjective interventions mark her divergence from a purely ideational approach to art-making. As her work progressed into the 1980s, she experimented further with the physicality of the photographic object, creating mesmeric images printed in sublimely monumental scales. Conceived as a pictorial response to Susan Sontag’s 1977 collection of essays, Charlesworth’s series *In-Photography* (1981-82) treats the photograph as a “strange but powerful thing” unto itself—rather than simply a referential symbol. Meticulously arranged compositions of found images involved cutting, collaging, rephotographing and selectively colorizing. For each print, the work’s unique schematic fragmentation is reflexively informed by its own subject—thus the torn edges of *Explosion* echo the violent eruption found within the image, while the acute slices of *Samurai* echo the warrior’s sword. Charlesworth explained: “Sometimes I open an image to make room for myself, to disrupt the closure of an intensified known. The entry into an image, the rupture and reintegration of its coherent form, exposes that which lies between meaning, the reciprocal meaning of an object and its apprehension.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Betsy Sussler, “Interview: Sarah Charlesworth,” *BOMB Magazine*, January 1, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Charlesworth, *In-Photography*, (Buffalo, NY: CEPA Gallery, 1982)

## P A U L A C O O P E R G A L L E R Y

Charlesworth's latest group of works on view in the exhibition, titled *Red Collages* (1983-84), are her first prints associated with her celebrated *Objects of Desire* series. Produced in a smaller scale and completed with lacquered frames, these high-gloss Cibachromes present as exquisite three-dimensional objects. In Charlesworth's *Rider* (1983-84), a cropped black and white photograph of Natalie Wood contained within the silhouette of a cowboy on a rearing horse punctuates a vibrant vermillion background. Isolated and centralized, the superimposed archetypal images generate a visual narrative whereby one is read through another,<sup>3</sup> probing visual strategies of commodification, alienation and desire.

Sarah Charlesworth was born in 1947 in New Jersey, lived and worked in New York, and died in 2013 in Connecticut. She earned an associate degree from Bradford Junior College in Massachusetts (1965-67), where she studied with artist Douglas Huebler, and a bachelor's degree from Barnard College in Manhattan (1967-69). Charlesworth's work has been the subject of one-person exhibitions at a number of institutions including a major survey exhibition, "Sarah Charlesworth: Doubleworld," at the New Museum, New York (2015), which travelled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2017); and a retrospective organized by SITE Santa Fe (1997), which travelled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (1998), the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC (1998), and the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art (1999). In 2014, Charlesworth's *Stills* series was presented for the first time in its entirety at the Art Institute of Chicago (2014). Her work was recently included in "Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s" at The Hirshhorn Museum, Washington (2018). Other past group exhibitions include: the 77th Whitney Biennial, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2014); "Shock of the News," National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2012); "Signs of a Struggle: Photography in the Wake of Postmodernism," the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2011); "September 11," the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2011); "The Last Newspaper," the New Museum, New York (2010); "The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984," the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2009); and "The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960-1982," the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2004). Charlesworth taught photography for many years at the School of Visual Arts, New York; the Rhode Island School of Design; and Princeton University.

For more information and images, please contact the gallery:  
(212) 255-1105; [info@paulacoopergallery.com](mailto:info@paulacoopergallery.com)

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<sup>3</sup> Rochelle Steiner, "Tools and Magic Wands," in *Sarah Charlesworth*, (Munich, London and New York: DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2017)