

Woman Too

Genevieve Scott in Conversation with Cindy Sherman

I never thought I was beautiful growing up. Not in the way the starlets in the movies do, tears running down hollowed cheeks staining the satin piece of fabric they are passing off as a gown. No, I did not think I was beautiful because it was true. From its conception there were no black faces in Hollywood unless they were men or servant girls. We were not allowed to partake in the glamour. Not where anyone could see anyway. Though isn't exhibition the point? I am an actor. I am an American. I am a woman. What am I if not desirable, if not an object for consumption?

On a particular occasion in my adolescence two girlfriends commented on my collarbone. They informed me that it was quite defined. *Boys like that*, one of my companions had tossed at me, before turning to watch the street, as though too disappointed in her own lack of definition to look another second. (She was thin and petite and I, funnily, often envied her, believing boys would like me more were I not so curvy.) Now my clavicle is the North Star of my femininity. What do you think? Do you like the way my fingers grace my neck? Does it make me look dainty? My hair is pinned. Do you wonder where it is I'm off to? Whether it is in preparation for an event or simply for sleep? Do I bring to mind that scene with Madame what's-her-face? Maybe you see a sadness, a shallowness, an emptiness. Maybe you see yourself...or your mother, or your sister, or your aunt. Or perhaps it is that you do not see at all. Perhaps you only look. Maybe you can only look.

I used to sit in bed and watch my grandmother and my mother primp in front of their vanities. My grandmother's boar bristles running through waist-length kinks, my mother's perfume wafting through the air, each spritz suggesting a goddess had graced the carpeted floors of our condo. In my heart I always knew this was woman too.



The thing they do not tell you about independence is how much everyone will hate you for it. The thing they do not tell you about independence is that when you are black and a woman it is all you have. You will be taken for granted and expected to settle for less than you are worth, and if you don't like it, well you can march yourself right on out. And it's true. Few will take pity on you for the children you have to feed at home or try to keep you around because they like your legs (in fact they might want you *gone* because they like your legs). The privileges of chauvinism don't extend to you. The "New Woman" cut her hair short so she could be like you, closer to manhood, closer to freedom. Ha! Who's going to tell her?

My mother is a black woman who raised me on her own. She played both the aloof father whose work gives him an excuse to disassociate at the dinner table and the diligent mother who keeps house and critiques your ensemble before you leave for school each morning. Life has never been fair to her, but then, life has never been fair. When we moved into our house I watched her carry our furniture from the truck through the threshold of our new home. *Your mother is a strong woman*, the moving men had said.

Now I am like her. I hustle. I learn to play the masculine and the feminine.



Men go to bed with Gilda, but they wake up with me. That is what Rita Hayworth once said.

Sometimes I feel like her. How many lovers have fallen in love with my capacity to represent and left me over my incapacity to deliver? I am sexy. I am exotic. I am something different. I am something hot. I am something. Something that will save you. Something that will inspire your next story, blossom into your greatest film. Maybe I am a sad, broken, disillusioned girl. Maybe I am your femme fatale. I know I am supposed to want more, but maybe I can make you want me for a moment. Let me sit with this dissonance between the role I play and the person I am. I will overperform femininity, or rather parody it, for the sake of appeasing you. I know my form of womanhood may never catch your desire, so I must borrow from the likes of Gilda. Everybody wants to fuck Gilda. But I don't know that I make a believable bombshell.



I am a victim too, you know. I am fragile. If you hit me I bruise. When you belittle me I feel small. When you tell me I am ugly I feel worthless. I wish that I did not, but I do. I am a woman too, you know. My value is wrapped up in how I appear and of what I can provide to a patriarchal society. So I want look nice, and exude sex appeal and femininity like the next girl. Even when I know it has gotten her nothing but typecast, played with and discarded. I want my close-up. I want my love story. I want my heartbreak, my revenge. I want to drive someone's plot forward and be remembered for how attractive I am. I want to be delicate and passive and get stepped on and gain everyone's sympathy. When is it my turn to be pretty or weak or plain stupid and still be loved for it? Let me be the damsel in distress. What if I don't want to be my own hero anymore? Now everyone claims woman must be more, aspire for more, but what about those of us who have always had to be more, want more? You tell us that our more is not woman, but when we try to be like you, you tell us that now that is not woman either. Whether we are more or we are less we are always on the outside of your womanhood.

