

# Wallpaper\*

## Zoe Leonard's first major survey reveals a prophetic artist ahead of her time

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**A**merican artist Zoe Leonard (born 1961) has tackled the status quo and its impact on individual identity and the urban landscape through her photography, sculptures and installations since the early 1980s. But her work is incredibly germane right now – so much so that in her first major mid-career survey at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, it can be difficult to discern which pieces are recent and which are historic.

Comprising some 100 works from the New York-based artist, the show has been curated by Bennett Simpson and Rebecca Matalon from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (the exhibit will travel there in autumn). ‘We call it a survey, but it’s not intended to be a comprehensive retrospective,’ explains Whitney assistant curator Elisabeth Sherman. ‘We are using the other meaning of survey, examining the idea of what it means to survey something, to look out at a landscape and describe it from multiple points and show the way in which Zoe frames the world.’



*New York Harbor I, 2016, by Zoe Leonard, two gelatin prints. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Galerie Gisela Capitain and Hauser & Wirth New York*

*I want a president* is an example, calls for diverse representation in government and questions the President in power. 'I want to know why we started learning somewhere down the line that a president is always a clown: always a john and never a hooker. Always a boss and never a worker, always a liar, always a thief and never caught.' While this sentiment certainly resonates with the current political art scene, it is from 1992.

Conversely, her most recent 2018 installation, *Why have there been no great women artists?* presents excerpts from Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay regarding the women's liberation movement and the contemporary art milieu at that time. And Leonard's 2008 work, *You see I am here* depicts her longtime fascination with self-documentation with an arrangement of 3,883 vintage Niagara Falls postcards.

Other art such as her *Anatomical Models* examines the role of gender and the male gaze, while her 'airplane window' series contemplates how we look out at the world at large. 'There is a lot of

work that addresses the ways in which institutions, including museums, display bodies and lives and how people and objects are put on display and also how people look at things on display,' says Sherman. 'There is a perceived transparency, but Zoe is asking the visitor look more closely, not just at the exhibition, but at the information itself.'

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