Analysing The Chosen Cindy Sherman's Works

Cindy Sherman is an American contemporary artist (born 1954) who is well known for her conceptual self-portraits and her representation of stereotypes. Her career from the mid 1970s to the present shows dominant themes and contexts in her photographs. Influenced by 1950s and 1960s Hollywood, Sherman features herself in various stereotypical female roles in film noir in her photographs. She grew up in Long Island, New York, where her photographs were influenced by the mass-media during the American Womens' movement. To create her iconic snapshots, she utilises various cinematic tools, such as makeup, costumes, and stage scenery. Sherman received international recognition with her series of untitled film stills in the late 1970s. If I had to choose two of Sherman's works to be included in an important international exhibition, I would choose Untitled film still #21 and Untitled film still #13 from the untitled film still series. Both the artworks show high quality work and represent the intention of the artist through the use of mise en scene.

By manipulating viewers and recasting her own identity into diverse stereotypes, the Untitled film still #21, creates a facade which challenges social standards and gender stereotypes. The film still is a 8×10 inch gelatin silver print made in 1977, showing a mid shot of herself taken from a low angle, framing her head to her shoulders. According to Sebastian Smee, the Untitled film stills "depicted a lone woman in the guise of recognisable female 'types' from 1950s-era European films". This film still depicts herself as a young career girl, wearing a formal weaved coat, white shirt and hat that exposes her cropped blond hair, in a big city. She has a full face of makeup and the background is slightly blurred but is recognisable as office buildings in a cosmopolitan area. Mise en scene is seen when the photograph follows the rule of thirds and holds the main focal point in the shot as herself. Her facial expression shows detachment which is emphasised by the fact that her eye gaze is not directed at the camera, making the image suspenseful and mysterious as to what she is looking at. The audience will be fascinated with this photograph because the film still was designed to lure the viewer into a drama and allow them to interpret the photograph in their own way. I think the Untitled film still #21 will be a good choice to exhibit because the compelling and mysterious photograph is largely open to interpretation.

Another one of Sherman's work which should be exhibited is the Untitled film still #13. The photograph is a 10×8 inch gelatin silver print created in 1978. This artwork is influenced by the mass media cliches in the American Womens' Movement in the 1970s. Sherman appropriates them in a sardonic and mocking demeanour and displays how artificial and extremely fabricated female portraiture could represent in close examination. In this film still, Sherman suggests the role of the central character (herself) as a young female intellectual and a 1960s coming of age romance. She depicts herself as a luscious librarian in this film still, and proves to be a "great actress" because she persuasively poses as a female character. She represents the theme of isolation by making the main character look away from the camera, leaving a sense of mystery and suspense. This piece of work will be popular amongst the audience because it exploits and comments on the male gaze, and creates a narrative about female identity. She constrains the audience to reconsider common stereotypes and cultural assumptions, making it an important work to exhibit.

In conclusion, Cindy Sherman’s Untitled film still #21 and Untitled film still #13 are significant pieces of work which would be chosen to be displayed in an important international exhibition. Both the film stills display the use of appropriation and mass media techniques which represent different contexts through her depiction in various imagined characters. By leaving them untitled, it allows the audience to make their own interpretations and create a narrative for the fictional film stills. The careful consideration of mise en scene in the artworks sets the atmosphere and theme, displaying significant elements which creates a narrative. By displaying these two artworks, it will show the viewers a high quality artwork which explores the significant theme of feminism and gender stereotypes in society.