

# VAS VISUAL ART eNEWSLETTER

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Sarah Charlesworth, "Teapot," 2002, Fuji Crystal archive print with lacquered frame, 28 1/2 x 23"



Sarah Charlesworth, "Devil," 2002, Fuji Crystal archive print with lacquered frame, 28 1/2 x 23"

## **Sarah Charlesworth, "Neverland"**

by Jody Zellen

Karma Los Angeles, West Hollywood, California

Continuing through July 7, 2023

Sarah Charlesworth first exhibited the photographs from her "Neverland" series in 2002. These brightly colored images followed "0+1" (1999), much more subdued photographs that explored the threshold of vision. They were all shades of white, which made it hard to distinguish the picture from the background. Charlesworth (1947-2013), associated with the "Pictures Generation," was well known for her conceptually based works that often incorporated appropriated materials. Her iconic images from "Modern History," for instance, including "Herald Tribune January 18 - February 28, 1991" and "Arc of Total Eclipse" (1979), presented the front pages of different newspapers with everything removed except the header and a selection of relevant but detached pictures.

Charlesworth often displayed her works in a line or as a grid, to allow viewers to compare and contrast image size and placement of the featured image within the layout of the front page. Her approach to photography, particularly her formal elegance and conceptual rigor, have influenced a subsequent generation of artists and photographers.

Seeing "Neverland" again not only reminds us of the tragedy of Charlesworth's untimely death, but also poses questions like: What might have come next? How would she have reacted to AI? What kind of images would she have created with this new technology? In "Neverland," Charlesworth stepped away from appropriation in favor of photographing objects in the studio, each one placed on a matching monochromatic and vividly



Sarah Charlesworth, "Tree" 2002, Fuji Crystal archive print with lacquered frame, 28 1/2 x 23"



Sarah Charlesworth, "Fruit Colored Fruit," 2002 Fuji Crystalarchive print, 28 1/2 x 23"

colored background. The results are striking and unsettling. For "Teapot" (all works here created in 2002) Charlesworth placed an ornate yellow teapot against a similarly hued background. The teapot appears to be in mid-pour, although no hand holds it nor does any liquid come from its spout. A typical household object, in this context it also references Aladdin's magical lamp.

"Devil," "Candle," and "Pencil" are all bright red photographs with each displaying the similarly colored object of their title. Centered in "Devil" is a completely red devil mask, whereas in "Candle" the flame stands out as a realistic orange-yellow. In "Pencil," the point and end are true to life — black lead encased in wood.

While it is noted that in "Neverland" Charlesworth digitally manipulated her images for the first time, it is impossible to know the extent. Did Charlesworth find a red candlestick holder that matches the red of an extremely long candle that floats in a deep red shadowless space? Or did she use a computer to match the colors?

Unusual scale shifts also occur across the images. What size was the small tree in "Tree?" Was it smaller or larger than the pipe in "Pipe" (itself one among many homages to René Magritte's "The Treachery of Images," 1929)? While Magritte's painting of a pipe was not a pipe (but paint), Charlesworth's depiction is neither pipe nor paint, but rather a photograph of a pipe. Other art historical associations include references to the still life tradition. "Fruit Colored Fruit" — red and green apples, a lemon, bananas, and grapes are all draped over a white bowl set against a black background. Similarly with "Teacups," a precarious tower of teacups and saucers.

By titling the series "Neverland," Charlesworth evokes the fictional, faraway, magical island associated with Peter Pan. The images are infused with a surreal aura, despite the fact that for the most part, Charlesworth focuses on ordinary objects. Through her lens, coloration, and conceptual savvy, she elevates these "things" into something extraordinary. Whether straightforward, or digitally manipulated, the photographs from "Neverland" have an enduring and powerful resonance.

**Jody Zellen** is a LA based writer and artist who creates interactive installations, mobile apps, net art, animations, drawings, paintings, photographs, public art, and artist's books. Zellen received a BA from Wesleyan University (1983), a MFA from CalArts (1989) and a MPS from NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program (2009). She has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1989. For more information please visit [www.jodyzellen.com](http://www.jodyzellen.com).