6. *The drawbridge* (pl. VII from *Carceri d'invenzione*), by Giovanni Battista Piranesi. Early 1770s. Etching with engraving, 54.2 by 40.6 cm. (Royal Academy of Arts, London).

Elegant prose and beautiful design mark *Piranesi and the Modern Age*. Gatefold illustrations, rare creatures in the kingdom of university press books, enrich the compact volume. Tschudi's ideas are supported by a wonderfully rich array of sources, from MoMA insurance receipts to interviews with contemporary architects and nineteenth-century novels. He deftly portrays the broad and diverse audience that took up Piranesi in the last century, a group whose members leaned towards objectives that were as varied as they were.

A genealogist delineating the family tree of Piranesi's admirers encounters many distant cousins and cadet branches. In capturing this capacious family portrait, one that reveals just how ever-present Piranesi was even centuries after his death, Tschudi is careful to leave space for new relatives. Eighteenth-century Englishmen also had Piranesian 'dreams'. Fifty years before De Quincey, Horace Walpole studied the prints, which he called the 'sublime dreams of Piranesi'.[1] After becoming a millionaire at the age of nine but before writing his novel *Vathek* (1786) and becoming Britain's greatest art collector, William Beckford went to Venice in 1780, accompanied by his memories of the *Carceri*. He floated under the Bridge of Sighs and 'could not dine in peace, so strongly was my imagination affected; but snatching my pencil, I drew chasms and subterraneous hollows, the domain of fear and torture, with chains, racks, wheels and dreadful engines in the style of Piranesi'.[2] For these Englishmen and others like them in the late eighteenth century, the obscure, seemingly infinite spaces of the *Carceri* combined terror and pleasure in ways that resonated with new ideas about the sublime. Although, as Tschudi richly demonstrates, French authors reading De Quincey were fundamental to disseminating a new vision of Piranesi's art, this strata of texts included a distinctly thick English layer.

1 H. Walpole: 'Advertisement', in *idem*: *Anecdotes of Painting in England, with Some Account of the Principal Artists and Incidental Notes on Other Arts*, London 1782, IV, p.vii.
2 W. Beckford: *Italy: With Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, Philadelphia 1834, I, p.94.

The Double: Identity and Difference in Art since 1900

By James Meyer, with contributions by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Tom Gunning, Hillel Schwartz, Shawn Michelle Smith and Andrew Solomon. 288 pp. incl. 140 col. + 60 b. & w. ills. (Princeton University Press and National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2022), £52. ISBN 978–0–691–23617–9.

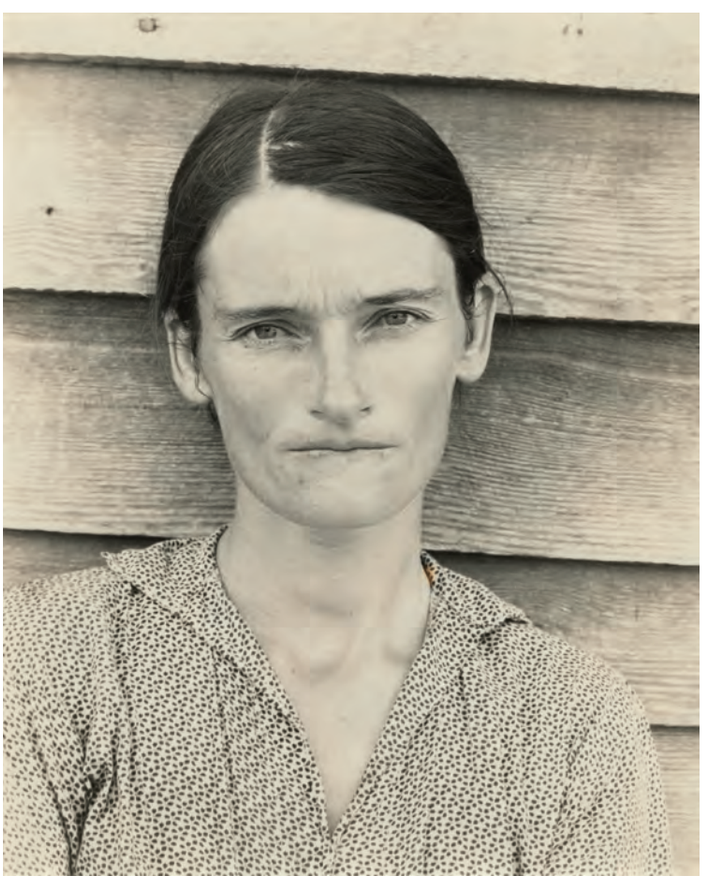
by **KATHRYN LLOYD**

When faced with two similar, or seemingly identical images or bodies side by side, one tends to compare, to seek out likenesses or differences. The deliberate act of twinning or doubling is intrinsically linked with signifiers of identity, encouraging, as it does, such an exercise in recognition and classification – or, conversely, forcing one to acknowledge the impossibility of either. It is, as James Meyer outlines

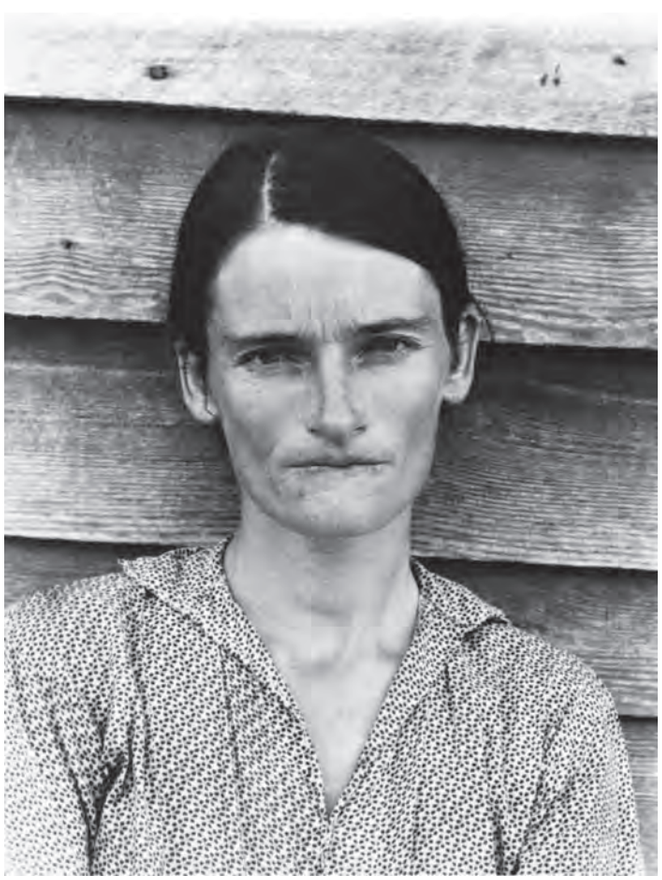
in his extensive introductory essay to this catalogue, 'a visual grammar' that 'splays and divides vision' (p.9). Although the double is a binary of sorts, which typically relies on relational definitions, it also invites ambiguity and multiplicity, and therefore an opening up of possibilities. As Meyer points out, 'the only certain attribute of the double, apart from twoness, is that it is endless – a *mise-en-abyme* of repetition, copying, splitting, inverting, mirroring, shadowing, twinning, juxtaposing, and opposing' (p.13). Suitably, then, the double itself carries with it a double potential: for limitation and endless amplification.

Published on the occasion of a large-scale group exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington (10th July–31st October 2022), this catalogue examines the different types and methods of pairing that artists have used in order to challenge essentialist tropes of selfhood that restrict identity and reinforce divisions. It includes the work of over ninety modern and contemporary artists, ranging from Henri Matisse and Man Ray to Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Roni Horn. The publication comprises seven essays and a catalogue section with minimal entries for each work. The latter has been divided into four parts, each of which explores a particular mode of doubling. The first, 'Seeing Double' is arguably the most straightforward interpretation of this visual language, focusing on works of art that present a comparison of 'like with like' (p.9), appealing to our urge to assess similarities and dissimilarities. Marcel Duchamp looms large here; his turn to duplication was, according to Meyer, a response to analytical Cubism, which he had mastered in *Nude descending a staircase (No.2)* (1912; Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art). The seven objects and paintings by Duchamp included in this section provide evidence for this interest in various ways, including *Boîte-en-valise* (1961; National Gallery of Art, Washington; cat. no.10), a leather case containing sixty-eight miniature versions of his most significant works, which itself exists in twenty-four different versions. For Duchamp, iteration and replication were extensions of the readymade, allowing for additional subversions of the relationship between the copy and the 'original'.

The role of reproduction is further problematised in the juxtaposition of *Allie Mae Burroughs, Hale County, Alabama* by Walker Evans (no.31; Fig.7) and Sherrie Levine's *After Walker Evans: 4* (no.32; Fig.8). When they were first exhibited, Levine's photographs of Walker's Depression-era images were lauded and criticised in equal measure for their critique of authorship – particularly within a patriarchal framework – and appropriation. It is not surprising that photography is a key medium for Meyer's project, considering its innate associations with the duplicate image and the prevalence of such theories in major writings on photography in the twentieth century. In his 1978 essay 'Photography "en abyme"', Craig Owens discusses Brassaï's *A happy group at the four seasons, rue de Lappe, Paris*



7. *Allie Mae Burroughs, Hale County, Alabama*, by Walker Evans. 1936. Gelatin silver print, 24.3 by 19.2 cm. (Private collection).



8. *After Walker Evans: 4*, by Sherrie Levine. 1981. Gelatin silver print, 12.8 by 9.8 cm. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

9. Stills from *Left side / right side*, by Joan Jonas. 1972. Black-and-white video, duration 8 minutes 50 seconds. (Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York).

(1932; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; no.46) – in which two separate groups of people in a Parisian café are conflated through an array of mirror reflections – as 'a sequence of duplications'.[1] The writings of Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes are also key reference points, in particular Benjamin's assertion that, considering the capability of the photographic negative to produce 'any number of prints', to 'ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense'.[2] The works included in this publication encompass many mediums – including sculpture, installation and painting – but it is somewhat inevitable that photography takes precedence.

In the following section, 'Reversal', Meyer considers forms that have variously been inverted, mirrored or rotated in order to disrupt the 'representation of a seamless reality' and notions of the self as 'unified and intact' (p.34). Such manipulations – reversals of time as well as image – find a natural home in the medium of video. In Joan Jonas's *Left side / right side* (no.56; Fig.9), the artist attempts to correctly identify the spatial orientation of her body parts in images that are simultaneously played back on a monitor and reflected in a mirror, while her physicality gradually becomes more alienated and fragmented. Whereas 'Reversal' primarily focuses on distortions of reality, the works in the next section, 'Dilemma', present the viewer with a choice between perceptual or cognitive possibilities, which are entangled with real-life decision-making. For example, the two instructive signs that comprise Walter De Maria's *A: walk to sign B, B: walk to sign A* (1961; Menil Collection, Houston; no.63) create a self-referential, absurdist task for the viewer – one that cannot be completed or exhausted.

The final and most comprehensive section, 'The Divided and Doubled Self', brings together works that portray split selves, shadows, twins, doppelgängers and spectres. In the paintings of Sylvia Plath (c.1946–52; private collection; no.79) and Frank Moore (1986; Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin; no.83) the face or body are divided in two, whereas double exposures and mirror reflections evoke the coexistence of selves within one body in the work of Christina Fernandez (1999; private collection; no.86) and Alison Saar (2014; private collection; no.87). The shadow as a sinister, lurking accompaniment to the autonomous self is evoked in the photographs of Alfred Stieglitz, André Kertész, Vivian Maier and Graciela Iturbide, among others. Finally, the explicit representation of identical twins is also present here, and Meyer does not shy away from the obvious: Diane Arbus's archetype of the uncanny double, her *Identical twins, Roselle, N.J. 1966* (1970–75; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; no.108).

In addition to Meyer's introductory essay, the catalogue includes essays by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Tom Gunning, W.J.T. Mitchell, Hillel Schwartz, Shawn Michelle Smith and Andrew Solomon. Some of the contributions are surprising in form and syntax, incorporating imagined dialogues, episodic structures and, in Schwartz's case, a first-person tour of the Good Samaritan parable in art, which, he argues, is 'as much about the optics of identity and difference as about urgency, empathy, and passersby' (p.255).

In his essay, Mitchell multiplies his own persona, creating a conversation between two – at points, three – versions of himself. What unfolds is a series of prompts, challenges, disagreements and answers that, in homage to the subject-matter, refuse to do what Mitchell petitions for: 'write it down, not up. Make an argument. Get to the point. Arrive at a conclusion' (p.202). Bryan-Wilson's contribution, 'No we are not sisters', is written in six short 'episodes', which eloquently weave together art-historical and personal reflections on the limits of binary thinking. Recounting conversations she has had over the years with strangers, who presume that her same-sex or non-binary partners must be her family members, Bryan-Wilson draws out a troubling paradox that is often applied to queer couples, when difference is 'collapsed into sameness' (p.229). That is, when faced with 'unfamiliar pairings' outside of the female–male binary people often enforce 'conventional' family frameworks (p.229).

The catalogue begins with a seemingly concentrated premise. However, inevitably, it is one that duplicates again and again, only proliferating in meaning. Modes of doubling and twinning are innately connected to our conceptions of self and, by extension, to wider sociopolitical structures. In his introduction Meyer notes that the exhibition was organised during an 'extraordinary period of widening social and political divisions in the United States and abroad, amid passionate discussions of national, racial, ethnic, sexual and gender identity' (p.9). As this catalogue demonstrates, artists have continually turned to the visual grammar of twinning in order to challenge entrenched binaries and systems of classification. Indeed, the significance of the double does not necessarily lie in its 'twoness', but in its capacity for multiplicity; it cannot be stopped.

1 C. Owens: 'Photography "en abyme"', *October* 5 (Summer 1978), pp.73–88, at p.73.
2 W. Benjamin: 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *idem*: *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. H. Arendt, New York 1969, pp.217–51, at p.224.