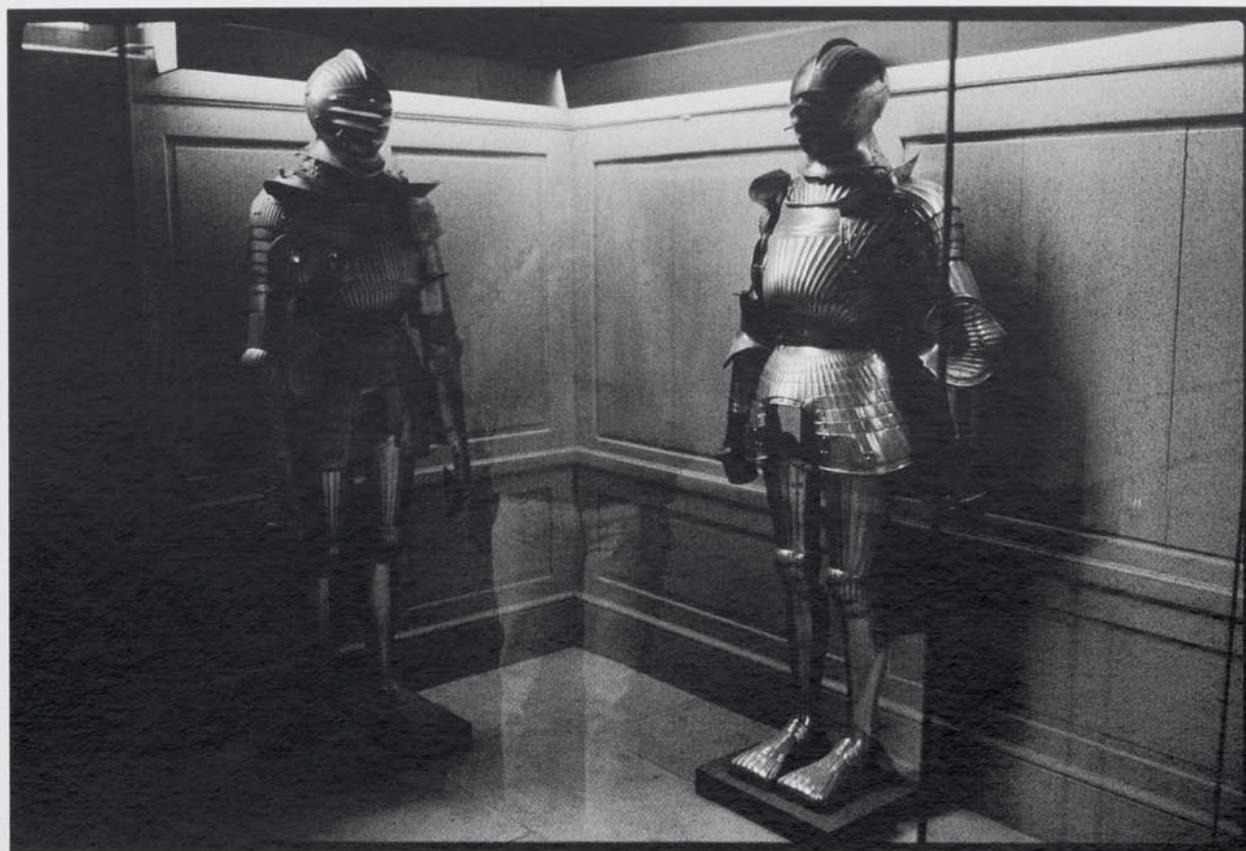


# BLUE CHIP

Zoe Leonard DISPLAY  
at Maxwell Graham, New York  
September 3 - October 25, 2025



## Zoe Leonard: Display

Zoe Leonard's most recent exhibition, *Display*, at Maxwell Graham (New York), gathers six gelatin silver prints made from photographs she took in the early 1990s featuring body armor that dates back to roughly 300–1600 BCE. The show is small. Unassuming, even. The largest print stands just over four feet; the smallest is scarcely larger than an A4 sheet of paper. This modesty is the first thing you feel walking in, a refusal of the oversized, high-definition bravado that defines so much contemporary image production. And it is strange, in 2025, to look at a print. To look at anything that requires patience in a climate where even the simple act of hitting “command + P” carries a faint aura of craft. Leonard's prints, by contrast, are not “pressed.” They are coaxed, labored over in the dark.



Display IV, 1991/2025  
Gelatin silver print  
33 ¼ × 23 ¼ inches (84.46 × 59.06 cm)  
Edition of 6 + 2 AP

## Modesty

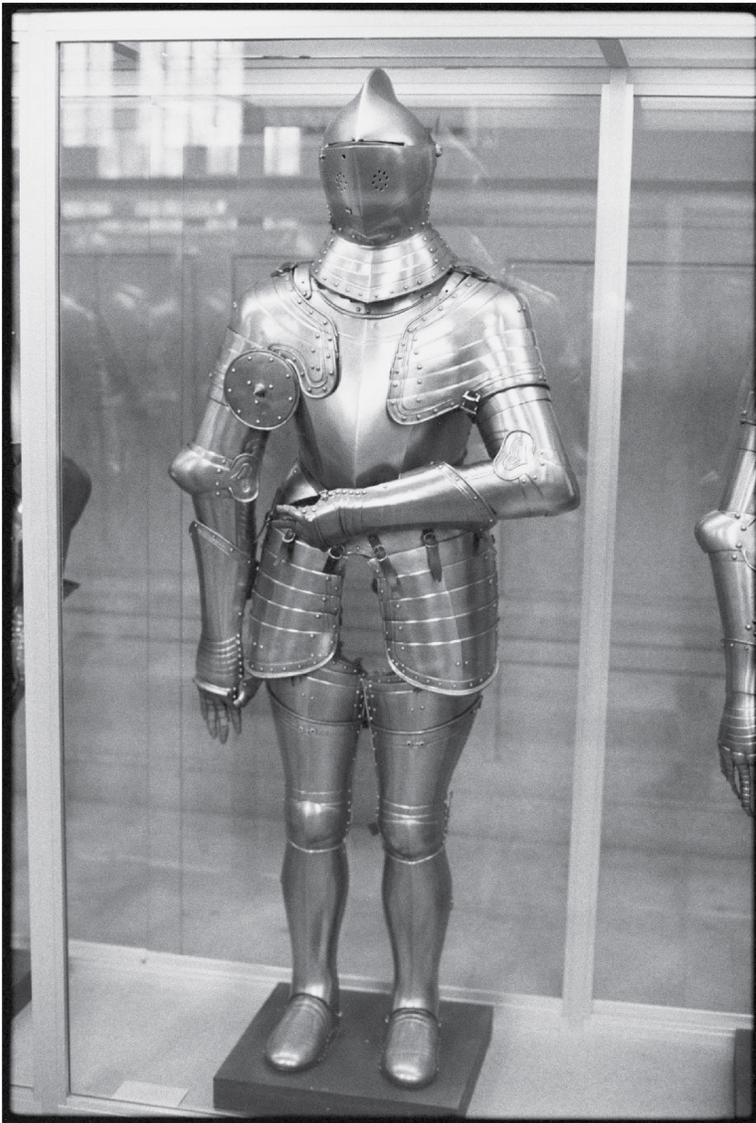
To make a gelatin silver print is to become intimate with the image. It is an act of tending: negatives, enlargers, chemical trays, the careful choreography of exposure and darkness. There is the gentle undulation of a sheet of paper floating in fixer; the clipping of the print, as one might a garment, to dry; the incremental decisions that sculpt highlights and shadows, second by second. It is work done slowly, consistently, almost ritually.

Encountering a print made this way in 2025, when speed is the primary aesthetic of image making, feels disarmingly approachable. So approachable one might even call it dull. And yet: *modest, dull, approachable* is an apt combination of qualities for artwork concerned with ancient violence. Violence so ancient it threatens lethargy. We might even ask: More? Really?

But slowness matters here. Slowness alters the terms of looking. Leonard's prints offer an exercise in pace and duration in which the question becomes not *What does armor look like?* but *What has armor made of us?*



Display III, 1991/2025  
Gelatin silver print  
33 ¼ × 23 ¼ inches (84.46 × 59.06 cm)  
Edition of 6 + 2 AP



## Body

Leonard photographs armor the way one might photograph a torso: tenderly, suspiciously, and with the knowledge that the gleaming object is only a proxy for the absent body that once animated it. The barbarism is hidden inside aestheticized refinement. The curves are seductive; the metal is smooth enough to catch light like a cheekbone; the surfaces feel editorial, fashionable. Even two millennia ago, there was a kind of sexiness made of violence. Even then, killing had aesthetics.

Violence, after all, requires staging. Violence requires display. What Leonard captures is not simply armor, but the apparatus of being-seen, the infrastructure that turns protection into theater. And in the rigidity of these objects like their straight spines, tight chests, unyielding contours, one can read the deeper architecture of whiteness. Armor protects by restricting; so does whiteness. Both rely on a body held in a specific posture: braced, disciplined, hardened. Leonard's prints allow us to see the absurd choreography of that posture, the centuries-old impulse to fortify the self through stiffness, sheen, and control.

Zoe Leonard: Display



Display IX, 1994/2025  
Gelatin silver print  
19 7/8 x 14 inches (50.48 x 35.56 cm)  
Edition of 6 + 2 AP

### Quiet

The darkroom is negative space, a space where one tends to light and waits for an image to emerge. That waiting is ethical. It is a way of looking at violence without replicating it, without sensationalizing the wound. This kind of attentiveness aligns more closely with a mode of protection that is not masculine in nature. Armor protects through hardness but the most thorough protection combines malleability, agility, softness, and a willingness to stay with ambiguity. In this sense, Leonard's prints are not shields but holdings. Not defenses, but forms of witnessing. Their quietness is not passive; it is strategic, even radical. And their modesty is not modesty at all. It is refusal. It is critique. It is a counter-proposal to the spectacle-driven metabolism of contemporary image culture, and the aesthetics of violence that are wielded with no awareness.



Display I, 1991/2025  
Gelatin silver print  
54 × 37 ¼ inches (137.16 × 95.89 cm)  
Edition of 6 + 2 AP



### Infrastructure

What these prints depict: armor, is only the surface. Their real subject is the infrastructure of looking: the systems that make violence visible, desirable, inevitable. Leonard exposes the way our culture has long fashioned violence into style and posture, and how we've inherited those poses without question. The images appear dull only because we have grown accustomed to images engineered for impact. They insist on the radical proposition that seeing can be slow, and that slowness itself can soften the cultural armor we wear without noticing.

Leonard asks what it means to witness the architectures of violence without reenacting them, and whether tenderness, deliberateness, and craft might offer another way through. In a moment saturated with images designed to wound, provoke, or anesthetize, *Display* offers something quieter and far more needed: a space to reconsider the forms that shape us, and to imagine ourselves, finally, loosening their grip.