



Object

Sheila Gaffney

The output is an 'artists' book' publication, conceptualised, designed and edited by Sheila Gaffney and Linda Schwab; comprising of written and visual material with contributions from the artist, photographer, critic, art historian and museum curator. *Object* was an element of the art intervention exhibition project *Wunderkammer: the female gaze objectified* at Leeds Art Gallery, 10th March - 16th April, 1994, which questioned the presence of female nudes made by male artists in our galleries. In the book form the beautiful ideal of woman signified by Antonio Canova's Hope Venus (19th Century) is placed in close proximity the work of the two female artists, Gaffney and Schwab, who are working at the end of the 20th Century. *Object* retains the essential characteristics of a book, but is structured to encourage the reader's choice in the seriality and sequence of the imagery it contains. Handling *Object* encourages an interplay of images of the female nude, both as it is authorised and staged within the politics of Museum exhibition and display cultures, and as it is represented by those who know it from lived experience. *Object* offers a curatorial strategy for the confrontation of the marble nude ideal with sculpture and painting practices that are informed by feminism and employed by Gaffney and Schwab.

Research insights:

The practice-based conceptualisation and project management of *Object*, alongside its related gallery intervention *Wunderkammer: the female gaze objectified*, made an original contribution to ways in which the sculpture collections of Leeds Museums and Galleries could be viewed, displayed and understood. The intervention into the collection was the result of a curated interaction between original artworks by women artists Gaffney and Schwab with selected items from the collections. Whilst the exhibited display and the book design provided immediate encounters, embodying questions of gender and authorship in relation to representations of women, the intervention and dissemination provoked a wider interrogation of museum ideology. The intervention made an original contribution to ways that artistic methods can introduce civic and private collections to new audiences and present individual artworks as theoretical objects.

Practice and theory were combined in this project in a way that gave material form to scholarly considerations of the following topics:

- female nudes in galleries and museums as made by male artists
- the presentation of works of art in galleries
- the objectivity of museum collections
- the male gaze in museum collections
- how contemporary art relates to the history of art
- feminism and figurative sculpture

Dissemination:

The output was disseminated via exhibition, press and broadcast coverage.











" GIRL "
Sheila Gaffney

Implicit in these "Girl" works is an assertive, desiring subject - a subject so obviously female and in a state of potential pre-pubescence who turns her gaze directly at you. The viewer finds no ease through distracting gestures: no coyness, no contrapposto here. These are deliberately objects of bold frontality which actively borrow from the base that conditions sculpture's history.

The very gesture of boldness is offset by the conflict of non-sensuality.

Expectation meets with unfamiliarity.

Wafer thin surfaces and hollow forms of borrowed components force a recognition of the actual which has its own histories and narratives.

In a moment of emotional uncertainty the viewer becomes aware of the nature of their own gaze.

Illustrations: Cover and previous page, the 'Hope Venus' 1818 - 20, Antonio Canova and works from the 'Girl' series 1992 - 94, Sheila Gaffney.

OBJECT

A publication devised by two artists, Sheila Gaffney & Linda Schwab, in order to demonstrate and investigate how the manner and presentation of an artwork affects how it is read within the museum. This compendium comprises written and visual material, with contributions from the contemporary artist, photographer, critic, art historian and museum curator. The book is designed to encourage an interplay of image upon image: the female nude as presented in the work of two contemporary women artists and the beautiful ideal of woman as authorized by Antonio Canova's Hope Venus which has acquired the status of 'Fine Art Pin Up'.

The intention of this project is to scrutinise the very meaning and given authority that the Museum embodies through the renegotiation of context and authorship.

Published to coincide with "WUNDERKAMMER - The female gaze objectified"
Leeds City Art Gallery, March 9th - April 16th 1994.



the patriarchy as one term in its own more wide-ranging forms of discourse. Many of the objects in the Wunderkammer of 'the feminine' are fetishized objects, that is, they are invested with matrixial / phallic power intended to strengthen the self-image of their owner. They are not the conventional symbols of power which quantify gain and loss. Instead, the Wunderkammer focuses on the qualities of things, on those aspects which connote desire: things to bring out and wonder at, wishing to possess the source of the objects, rather than the objects themselves: tokens, mementoes, keepsakes, magical artefacts. More than objects, they are a 'force-field' of hope and speculation: a potential for the future. Such collectables are not structured into some great authoritative narrative but are collaged into a personalised version of reality in which their owner is the centre, not the state, nor history. The feminine Wunderkammer interfaces history and personal myth. It encompasses historical Time, the realm of the Symbolic. But in the scope of its surveillance, the feminine gaze also looks into the unknown and unnamed.

* Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, "Matrix and Metamorphosis", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 4.3 (1992), 176 - 208.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Kevin Gooch, Ben Dhaliwal, Nigel Walsh, and to all the contributors who gave their enthusiasm and commitment to this project. Credits: Photographs of the Hope Venus by Jerry Hardman Jones, all other photographs by John Podpadec.

Copyright: 1994 the contributors and Sheila Gaffney & Linda Schwab.

"BEDHEAD"

Linda Schwab

European art history is the pedlar's pack from which this work is drawn; emasculated, dismembered fragments lie hugger-mugger alongside the found, the ordinary.

A determined intuitive and illogical vision, the sum of rich parts borrows charged imagery, mirrors and re-presents the history of its painted predecessor to demand space for an Other view.

In "Bedhead", lifted from her canvas ground and re-sited on the functional artefact which already bears its own history, Titian's Venus is usurped by virginal Maypole Girls. The Cuckoo in the Nest, the Magpie thief, the male bird must sing his little heart out - literally.

Illustrations: Cover and overleaf, the 'Hope Venus', 1818 - 20, Antonio Canova and 'Bedhead' 1992, Linda Schwab.







