



“In the Garden of Eve” Artifacts of Creation

Edith Langley Barrett Gallery at Utica College, NY, USA.

Exhibition of paintings by Keith Howard

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Review by Graham Fowler, Associate Professor, University of Saskatchewan, Canada.

Keith Howard's paintings collapses the temporal space of past and present by taking the pictorial vocabulary of the Renaissance and reininterpreting these traditional subjects and stylistic expressions to interrogate contemporary representations of gender, myth and authorship. His interest resides in the contemporary and historical language of painting and printmaking and the dialogue in art that exists between past and present, theory and practice. He extends this investigation to question popular conceptions of historical and contemporary modes of manufacture.

The exhibition, “In the Garden of Eve” Artifacts of Creation is a collaboration between the model, the artist - technician, and Keith Howard. In modelling in front of a camera, his model, Michelle C Long has taken on performative roles that are an affectionate and playful recreation of classical nude poses of Eve offering the forbidden apple of desire and knowledge. These poses were photographed and then photo shopped into landscapes and urban images that in some cases build on the creation myth and in other cases deliberately undermine it with urban environments. The resulting images were then sent digitally to Xiang Ming Lin in China where they were skilfully painted in oil. Authorship then resides in three sites, the artist, the model and the artist - technician. The myth of the artist as an individual creator opens up to a collaborative model, easily accepted in printmaking where the printmaker frequently wears the double hat of an artist and a technician. This is hugely uncomfortable in the popular conception of the solitary painter in his studio. However, why should this be the case? The Renaissance and Baroque studio were workshops where many artists worked together to produce the paintings and sculptures that have come to us bearing the master's name. Nor has this model changed today. Contemporary artists, when confronted with technical challenges and scales of production beyond their ability rely heavily on assistance and technicians to help. Artist Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol celebrate the collaborative element in their work frequently relying on others to fabricate their art. Keith Howard has deliberately made the collaborative production of art making visible by taking the model of printmaker acting as technician and extending the activity to the painter acting as a technician to the printmaker.

Keith Howard's image of Eve as both a biblical myth and a temptress is humorous, politically incorrect, somewhat sacrilegious and challenging. While for some the biblical Eve may be taken as a significant narrative of religious instruction for many, this metaphor no longer has a broad cultural resonance. Diluted by the passage of time it has become a frozen metaphor, a visual and metaphorical subject that exists in a society indifferent to its meaning. In the panoramic scroll like paintings, the centralized figure of Eve is overwhelmed by the space surrounding her. The eye is led not back in space but rests on the figure of Eve and then is led out to the periphery. She is both guardian, and femme fatal, separate and dwarfed by the environment that surrounds her. The biblical myth is examined as a perception of the past and reinvented, contorted and turned on its head to invent new meanings and questions. This contiguity between past and present provides Keith Howard with the visual vocabulary to express new meanings with reinvented subject matter grounded in the traditions and history of western art.

