THE JUDGEMENT OF PARIS

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The Judgement of Paris is a story from Greek Mythology. It tells of Paris, the son of King Priam abandoned to wild beasts on Mount Ida as an infant, taken in by one of the local shepherds and raised by him as his son.

Zeus held a banquet to celebrate the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. The goddesses, not invited, arrived at the celebration, threw a golden apple into the party which had on it the inscription "for the fairest one". The goddesses claimed the apple: Hera, Juno, Venus and Minerva - with its inscription "for the fairest one" - inciting jealousy amongst the goddesses. Three goddesses claimed the apple: Hera, Athena and Aphrodite. They asked Zeus to judge which of them was fairest. Hera, for fear of offending her husband, declared that the shepherd Paris, himself a model of beauty, would be the judge.

The three goddesses appeared to Paris on Mount Ida, where each attempted to bribe Paris with their powers: Hera's headdress perfectly matching her hair, Juno's large plumes, Athena's wisdom and skill in battle, and Aphrodite offered the love of the world's most beautiful woman. Helen of Sparta, Paris accepted Aphrodite's gift and awarded her the apple. The Greek expedition to retrieve Helen from Paris in Troy was the origin of the Trojan War.

The depiction of the moment of judgement has a long history. It can be seen as a mosaic from Antioch now in the Louvre (c115-150) and was famously engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael in 1515, the first reproduction taking Raphael's work outside Italy which has itself been variously quoted. This powerful mythological scene has been painted, amongst many others, by Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, Lucas Cranach, Peter Paul Rubens, Antoine Watteau, Auguste Renoir and Edouard Manet.

The Judgement of Paris has therefore been chosen as both the subject and title of the exhibition for its familiarity but also for its obscurity. The venue of the exhibition, the Fashion Space Gallery housed within the London College of Fashion, adds an important perspective to the exhibition. The Judgement of Paris, though so important within art history, is largely unknown to fashion students, for whom Paris is simply known as the fashion capital of the world.

The exhibition uses the story of Paris and the three goddesses - Hera, Aphrodite and Athena (or as the Romans called them, Juno, Venus and Minerva) - with its narrative about the competing qualities of Power, Beauty and Wealth, to explore how one story is told over and over again; and how we might come in different ways to recognise the protagonists, the individual goddesses, often depicted undressed. The story repeatedly, for example, draws attention to the convention that beauty is best represented in profile - the nose, the forehead, the chin, the breasts shown to full effect; and that accessories and props, and accessories as props are essential to the exhibit.

The exhibition is contained within a plan drawn in vinyl on the wooden floor of the Fashion Space Gallery. The articulated space that it alludes to is that of Judith Clark Costume Gallery that I opened in Notting Hill Gate in 1997 in order to show experimental exhibitions of dress/fashion. Large rectangles are painted dark grey on two walls and a small square one opposite. The rectangles block out where the windows were at unusable space. Not only was Judith Clark Costume Gallery's physical space so similar in size to the Fashion Space Gallery at 20 John Princes Street (circa 9m x 4.5m), but also its curatorial brief, creating a dialogue between the two projects: the desire to exhibit the breadth of exhibition possibilities associated with fashion and its history and not only its explicit subjects.

Magda Keaney, the curator of the Fashion Space Gallery, invited me to create links back to the gallery I ran, that was closed in 2002 due to lack of funding, and to its journal that had been created (with the graphic designer Charlie Smith) in 2001 and discontinued after only two issues, by commissioning this hypothetical third issue that could act as the catalogue to the exhibition. We noticed looking at the first issue of the journal that it was dated 15th March 2001, and so mindful of so many exhibition-maker’s love of anniversaries creating the rationale for the timing of exhibitions we have adopted it as something of a 10th anniversary celebration.

The research that the exhibition illustrates is also part of a larger project investigating perspectives on curatorial practice for a book for Yale University Press co-authored with dress historian Amy de la Haye. The use of ‘The Judgement of Paris’ as a motif around which to organise thoughts about exhibiting dress comes from a trip to Basel Kunstsammlung on last June, where I saw for the first time Niklaus Manuel Deutsch’s ‘Judgement’ (1518) as well as one of the many versions painted by Lucas Cranach only a few rooms away. What struck me about Niklaus Manuel Deutsch’s painting was the beauty and drama of the goddesses’ headresses: Athena’s large plumes, Hera’s headdress perfectly matching her fashionable gown, and Aphrodite’s odd decorative band that seemed to me to have been made up by the artist to frame her profile whilst allowing her golden curls to fall down her back creating a
A few moments later, looking at Cranach's Three Graces, I was insistently in the frame: that of my own reflection in the museum glass protecting the helmet shown in figure 1, reminiscent of that figure 1 figure 1 / Helmet, Musée du Louvre, Paris. I stopped to photograph the helmet itself, the motif of selection: the idea of posing, a guiding torch, and I will follow him.

ABY WARBURG

It appealed to the art historian and cultural theorist Abi Warburg who traced Raphael’s composition back to classical sarcophagi ‘that is from the class of monuments to which [he] assigned crucial importance as “sarcophagi of pagan emotions. Here then was another chain to be forged, reaching from a Hellenistic monument via the Renaissance to the pioneer of Modernism’.

(E.H. Gombrich, Abi Warburg: An Intellec-
tual Biography, Phaidon, 1986, p.273)

Manet’s return was not nostalgic but dynamic, and Picasso’s after that – not to mention Bow Wow Wow’s album cover for Still Wild in the Country, showing the lead singer Annabella Lwin as the naked nymph who only 15 at the time caused so much controversy in 1982.

Manet’s nymph looking out of the frame at us. It is the group of four figures that was recreated as the infamous foursome in Edouard Manet’s Dejeuner sur l’Herbe (which caused a stir in Paris in 1863 at the Salon des Refusés, not so much due to the nudity of the nymph, but that the two men sitting beside her were fully and clothed in contemporary outfits too audaciously bringing the scene back and therefore her nudity into the present, rather than continuous with the mythical landscape. It ‘refuses all poetic or mytho-
logical allu-
ses...’ - playing on homonymy of the two names, that of the shepherd the
son of Priam; and that of the city in which the salon was held – the Judgement of Paris [3] of the Parisian people] Manet was challenging the image of beauty shamelessly exploited in official art”.

**MANET WALKS AHEAD OF ME WITH A GUIDING TORCH, AND I WILL FOLLOW HIM**

RIGHT FIGURE 1 / HELMET, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

RIGHT / EMBELLISHMENT OF THE ROMAN MUSEUM, REPRODUCED AFTER RAPHAEL

The exhibition in the Fashion Space Gallery looks at the three mechanisms by which we might recognise the goddesses if we were to exhibit them: three styled mannequin heads; three props and three precisely positioned mannequin busts. By framing each threesome in an individ-
ual cabinet, behind glass, the visitor is required to consider them as important. That there are as many ways to exhibit objects as there are subjects. That what is evidently missing is the gowns, the protagonists of fashion curating. It also, by feering the subject of the exhibition from a history of dress in favour of the use of objects, that the idea of beauty is entwined with that of desire, of theming as composed groupings. If my research is at least in part about extending the repertoire of what aspects of the curato-
rial narrative might be delegated to the staging of a dress exhibition (i.e. what is not the dress itself and what is not said in the accompanying text) then looking at this story represented over and over again and re-described over and over again provides me with an experiment.

Exhibition experiments (to refer to a recent collection of essays on this subject edited by Sharon Macdonald and Paul Baur, 2007) rarely if ever use examples of dress display, though these are inevitably the most anthropocentric and so must have a peculiar potential for very subtle resonances, and not only in a dialogue with art history. Curatorial preoccupation has been about didactic clarity and complexity. In recent years there has been a seismic shift from the preoccupa-
tion being about the communication of the exhibition’s explicit subject, to being about the clarity (and desired complexity) of the exhibition’s curatorial intentions. These might be quite intentionally over-
powering, or disorientating for example. Mythologies may well be how a contem-
porary narrative can be disrupted.
CABINET 1
HEADS IN THE PRESENT TENSE
The ‘styling’ of the three goddesses within the many representations of the story operates in a similar way to the styling of mannequin heads within exhibitions of dress.

The site of much debate, these present the exhibition designer’s opportunity to create a link between the exhibition’s subject with the present and the viewer. To create them according to current taste. The heads present a plea for the narrative opportunities in this historical relay, and oppose the current vogue for headless (‘neutral’) mannequins.

In the Judgement of Paris the three heads of the goddesses serve very different functions: Aphrodite’s head is invested with ideas about timeless beauty; through classically styled ‘natural’ hair, her hair becomes intrinsic to her character, her styling is anti-styling, here created as a continuation of the mannequin bust itself. Athena’s styling is most often a ‘prop’ in the form of a helmet, illustrating her character’s strength, whereas it falls to Hera, representing the pleasure of riches, to represent the fashions of the day, to be styled most consistently with the time in which it was painted. Hair, Crown and Helmet rendered in calico by Rosie Taylor-Davis

CABINET 2
PLACING THREE MANNEQUINS
In one account of the story of the Judgement Hermes requests that the goddesses disrobe so as to better judge their beauty. They stand in a row at the centre of the composition creating the idea of grouping by both their proximity to one another and their orientation.

The French theorist Freart de Chambray in his Idee de la perfection de la peinture, 1662 asks that a painter satisfy five ‘fundamental considerations’, namely invention, proportion, colour, expression and figure placement. In describing Raimondi’s engraving after Raphael of 1515 he writes: ‘[...] he placed the subject’s principal figures in the centre of his design, giving them a great variety of aspects and expressions. Minerva filled with disdain because she had not won the coveted prize, turns her back on the judge, [...] Venus in whose favor the Judgement was pronounced is between her two rivals, receiving the token of her victory [...] The painter wanted us to see her in profile, which is the most flattering view [...] Juno is depicted from the front being more audacious than the other two. Raphael deliberately drew all three from different points of view to create as much contrast as possible between his figures’ From Hubert Damisch, The Judgement of Paris, University of Chicago Press, 1996 p.96

CABINET 3
THE THREE GODDESSES
Props are theatrical property. They are in a supporting role to the actors on the stage. They can be a magnifying device, and a duplicating device, or a framing device. In dress exhibitions they are most commonly part of a mis-en-scene to situate a figure historically – to illustrate the aesthetic continuities between dress and interiors for example at a particular time. They are used to create more ‘reality’. But they can also represent the limits to what can be communicated through dress and body/mannequin alone. The duplication might be needed for emphasis, to occupy more space and to add more aesthetic connections.

The peacock (who accompanies Hera), the shield (that represents Athena’s discarded armour) and cupid (always beside Aphrodite) only recreate the story of the Judgement of Paris when placed in the same formation as the goddesses.

LEFT: JUDITH CLARK SKETCH BOOK 2011.
PHOTOS: JUDITH CLARK. CABINETS (FASHION SPACE GALLERY). PHOTOS: JUDITH CLARK