

KALOSKAGATHOS

10.2.24 - 23.3.24

louisa chircop

jedda-daisy culley

belynda henry

solomon kammer

sophy reynolds

hayley west

mirra whale



The classical Greek term *Kaloskagathos* combines two adjectives, with *kalos* designating outward, and *agathos* — inward perfection. It is an abstract concept, unreal in its varied ideals and yet a word that correlates to a system of values that represents the development of any human society, a social, ethical and aesthetic assessment criteria. In the Symposium, Plato explicitly warns against becoming fixated on the beauty of the body. Instead, he argues that the energy released by the sight of the gorgeous figure needs to be channeled to a desire for a deeper beauty – that of the soul, of the good, of the divine. These ideas however, were almost solely directed towards the male body and place in society. The female form was, for Plato, considered a vision of woman as a bodily vessel without autonomy.

This exhibition *Kaloskagathos* takes as its' starting point a series of photographic works by Tasmanian artist Sophy Reynolds, captured whilst documenting Greek and Roman artifacts unearthed in Southern Italy. They appear to the viewer almost as hallucinations, apparitions, shifting in and out of the light, their elusiveness mimicking that of the gods and goddesses they represent. Muses, who over time, have become embedded into our culture and psyche so deeply that in any given time in Western history and culture the classical nude has acted as a palimpsest on which layers of cultural and personal moralities have been transcribed. The central image, *Miss Universe* is a conceptual ready-made, invoking and re-framing the sculpture of Venus, a Roman copy of the original 5th Century Greek sculpture by Praxiteles, the Aphrodite of Knidios. This point of reference is used by the artist to comment on our own time by concurrently re-framing the past, a journey through the sediments of history, memory and imagination arriving in a world of mythology.

In contrast to these classical ready-mades, Hayley West's singular male heads bring us back to the power of the male gaze inversed as The Moirai, the three goddesses of fate who personified the inescapable destiny of man. They assigned to every person his or her fate or share in the scheme of things and represent the same in this exhibition. Often described as ugly old women, sometime lame, they were severe, inflexible and stern, sitting as reminders that the power of femininity has been for centuries re-interpreted and manipulated by men throughout the history of the visual arts, mostly for the purposes of control either via infantilisation, exaggeration or as anthropological curiosity. They watch over with concern the surreal, sinuous and Dionysian works of Louisa Chircop and the flesh driven, dangerous sensuality of Solomon Kammer's painting *Precipice*.

Louisa Chircop's works are like glimpses of distant memories, a layering of shards of pictures, signs, and symbols all in a constant flux. The effect is a kind of blurred dream state. It is these transitory works, filled with paradoxes – the strange and the real, past and present, heaven and hell – that draw the curious spectator into the shadows of the self. Art-making for Chircop is a "process of realization", allowing the artist to unearth themes recycled throughout art history alongside deeper more personal psychological and emotional responses to experiences lived.

Taking the mythology of Leda and the Swan as its basis, this installation of work is woven out of Chircop's own reading of the myth, inviting the viewer via a three stage hand-worked collage installation developed from an original vintage postcard to explore the actions, emotions and moral-code of this ancient narrative. Her meticulously crafted and highly expressive ceramic works then lie as the direct reflection of the psychological outcome of the personal affect of these mythologies and histories on the female form and the artists' own body/conscious while also saluting the Australian surrealist James Gleeson, where flesh and earth become indistinguishable.

If *Kaloskagathos* is a term to imply the Neo-Plato ideal of the body beautiful being synonymous with virtue, Solomon Kammer's painting 'Precipice' transforms the objectified female form into a medical specimen allowing the canvas to be a site of spectacle and introspection. Kammer's meticulous and sensuous application of paint adds a further sense of realism that is simultaneously beguiling and disturbing. The woman is, like Venus, covering herself, not to coyly protect herself from the certain male gaze of the viewer in a false modesty, but for protection, eyes directed at the viewer in protest to the incursion. In doing so, Kammer challenges the transmission of the idea that artists working with the female form continue to operate within a broadly comparable structure of visual certainties based on Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Knidios.

The self-portrait reclining nude of Jemma Daisy Culley from her series 'Unbodied', is based on her experiences as a mother following a traumatic accident during the flood in March 2021, where the artist and her two children were involved in a rescue boat mission gone wrong on the Colo River. These paintings reveal the artists' out of body experience that followed the near drowning of herself and her children. Making her own body alien and yet recognizing the absolute power of the mother in giving life and safeguarding that life under any circumstance. A visual re-empowerment of the traditionally powerless reclining nude, lurid and fluid the body itself become the landscape thus becoming the goddess Gaia, the ancestral mother of all life.

Belynda Henry has always had an interest in imagined places, worlds given shape through light and colour. These watercolour paintings take their basis from the Greek poems *The Idylls* by Theocritus in her sensory descriptions of light and dwelling within a landscape. They are mood driven expressions of place, ideals of harmony and the feeling of lying in the summer sun, wild flower scent carried by warm soft breezes, a time suffused with a sense of happiness and well being. This idealism and vision of the landscape as an 'Idyll' has been conscripted through the centuries from Albrecht Durer's illustration of *Idyll I* to the role of 17th Century pastoral painting, Sydney Long's vision of the Australian outback and Oscar Wilde's poem and ode to Theocritus.'

*O singer of Persephone!
In the dim meadows desolate
Dost thou remember Sicily?*

*Still through the ivy flits the bee
Where Amaryllis lies in state;
O Singer of Persephone!*

*Simaetha calls on Hecate
And hears the wild dogs at the gate;
Dost thou remember Sicily?*

*Still by the light and laughing sea
Poor Polypheme bemoans his fate;
O Singer of Persephone!*

*And still in boyish rivalry
Young Daphnis challenges his mate;
Dost thou remember Sicily?*

*Slim Lacon keeps a goat for thee,
For thee the jocund shepherds wait;
O Singer of Persephone!
Dost thou remember Sicily?*

Few artists paint like Mirra Whale, whose still life works are an enquiry through paint into everyday kitchenware and objects, freed however from the symbolic weight of the domestic and used to concentrate the viewer on an encounter with vision and the material of paint itself. In *The Observer*, a large proportion of the canvas is taken up simply by the fleshy softens and reflection of drapery thus liberating the still life from the oeuvre's baggage of domesticity or symbolism and instead used as a kind of experimental platform for the fundamental enquiry of painting.

On the other hand her collaborative work with Sydney based ceramicist Hayley West *The Drinking Vessel/Pot Luck*, presents the artist/mother as the vessel. The elegant and intricate drawing on the vessel depicting the continuous motion and movement that is wrestling a child during breastfeeding. The intimacy of viewing this work, in the round, arms, legs, torso, nipples, constantly falling away and away sees the metamorphosis of the artist as the vessel, a literal aliveness of the still life and recreation of women's place as vessel/vassal.

Through a series of pairings and juxtapositions, alternatively dramatic and understated, *Kaloskagathos* provokes conversations between the classical traditions of femininity, beauty and power as history provides us a record, and from it one basic, inescapable, and ultimately unconscionable truth stands out: the ideals women are asked to embody, regardless of culture or continent, have been hammered out almost exclusively by men. Underlying these works are the relics of the body, landscape, realism and the basic nature of art - all is rendered metaphor and meaningless at the same time.

Diana Palmer, 2023

CONTACT

Diana Palmer

diana@missdianapalmer.com

+61 402 568 702

Post Space, Exeter is located at
100 Westgrove Road, Exeter NSW 2579