

Elizabeth Houston Gallery



Amy Jorgensen

*Something Old, Something New,
Something Borrowed,
Something Blue*

February 8 - March 12, 2017

Amy Jorgensen artist talk and reception: Saturday, February 18, 2-4 pm

Amy Jorgensen's series *Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue* addresses the continuing relevance of the women's rights movement since its inception in 19th century England to its robust manifestations today. 18 images of English suffragettes rendered in cyanotype prints, an early 19th century photographic process instantly recognizable for its brilliant cobalt blue color, are transferred onto vintage handkerchiefs, exploring themes of femininity, oppression, and the construction of female identity.

Initially drawn to this topic while studying her own lineage, Amy Jorgensen first came into contact with these images while researching her great aunt, Edna Berg, an impassioned suffragette from New York. Unearthed in 2003 from the national archive in London, these photographs were the result of a discrete surveillance operation undertaken by the Scotland Yard following a string of national scandals wherein notable suffragettes, many of whom are pictured in this series, committed acts of civil disobedience including arson, window breaking, and other public disturbances to protest their inability to vote, as well as other societal injustices inflicted on women. In one of the most salacious instances, Mary Raleigh Richardson, represented in this series, attacked the famous *Rokeby Venus* painting by Diego Velazquez, then hanging in the National Gallery, as a form of protest against the violence done to women. Regarding the attack, Mrs. Richardson said "I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government destroying Mrs. Pankhurst (a leader of the British Suffragette movement), who is the most beautiful character in modern history."

Recognizing in this episode a peculiar confluence of gazes – a violent reaction against the objectifying male gaze, instinctually identified in nude painting long before the concept was popularized by John Berger, in turn inspired a punitive campaign of surreptitious surveillance – Jorgensen re-contextualizes and re-situates these images into the wider question of how women's identities are constructed, and how they are obstructed. Weddings historically have been one such battleground where the conflict over female individuality takes place, where patriarchal systems silence women's autonomy and deprive them of their rights through the bride's association with her groom. However, they also become a site for symbolic exchanges with the other women, as in the case of the rhyme from which this series borrows its title. Handkerchiefs, symbolizing intimacy as they are often worn close to the heart, are often one of the items exchanged between women at weddings, and in fact held a special significance for suffragettes at various times who also exchanged and signed handkerchiefs. The juxtaposition of these two histories – that of the matrimonial ceremony and that of the women of the suffragette movement – provides a jarring collision point for the examination of patriarchal structures both in history and contemporary culture.

About the Artist:

Amy Jorgensen is a visual artist incorporating photography, performance, and video into the realization of her work. She was born in Milan, Italy and spent her formative years living in Europe. She received a BFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Tufts University, and an MFA from the University of California San Diego. With a recent solo exhibition at Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, selected exhibitions include Elizabeth Houston Gallery in NYC, GuatePhoto Festival in Guatemala City, Oceanside Museum of Art, Museum of Art at BYU, Griffin Museum of Photography, MA, Center for Fine Art Photography, CUAC, Jancar Gallery in Los Angeles, Rio Gallery, and Video Space. She is a recipient of multiple fellowships and grants including a GSA grant and an Individual Artist Grant from the Utah Arts Council. Her work is included in public and private collections.

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