

Presence: An exploration of the real and veiled in museums and galleries

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1. INTRODUCTION

During my Masters studies in the Manchester School of Art, I was showing my photography work in the Holden Gallery, next to the statue of Venus. Days before the opening of the exhibition, the walls of the gallery had to be repainted and the statue was covered with a polypropylene veiling.

The fact that the object was still present in the room, however intentionally hidden, drew my attention. Can the presence of an object be concealed from us with a coverage of a veil? Does the visibly hidden object become more interesting and inviting to the viewer due to its mysticism? Does the object become absent or present in a different way?

2. OF ABSENCE AND PRESENCE

In the Oxford English Dictionary the definition of terms 'presence' and 'absence' is self-referential: "the fact of condition of being present" and "the state of being absent or away". The two definitions are dependent upon the notion of being. The OED cites the primary definition of being as "to have or occupy a place...somewhere...Expressing the most general relation of a thing to its place."

In the example of the Venus statue there are the uncovered or so called original version and the covered or hidden version. Having the two objects, the visible and the covered, we have to acknowledge the fact that it is still an object, no matter of its presentation. These two different presentations of it are then divided into the known and the unknown. The statue covered with a veil raises more interest to the content behind the polypropylene material. When leaving more questionability our perception through imagination, is much more vivid. I like to refer the two statues to the Kantian *noumenon* and *phenomenon*, where the *phenomenon* - the thing as it appears to an observer, is the original version of the statue and the *noumenon* may become the 'thing-in-itself' unknown and questionable to the viewer. In this case is the statue in the room present or absent? I

believe that absence can be thought of as a kind of presence and presence as a kind of absence. However in this empty, white gallery room with the veiled Venus, the meaning, reading and our perception of the covered object changes fundamentally. Especially if the person is doubtful or clueless of what the veil hides. This scene can remind us of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave", pointing out the false quality of appearances.



Figure 1: Eva Jova, Triptych, Veiled Venus, 2015.
The Holden Gallery, Manchester, UK.

For the prisoners in the Cave the phenomena were mere shadows mimicking the form under different circumstances. I believe that the veil is only mimicking the statue, offering it a different concept and approach.

As the concept and approach differs from the original, it becomes more personal and therefore perhaps more valuable to every individual. In a way the hidden object may become closer to the viewer than the original evident one. In the beginning of my research, it is acknowledged that the notion of an object being visibly hidden interests many artists, such as Man Ray, Olivier Richon and Christo.

I tried to test the subject further by replacing the veil with an empty plinth. As an experiment of how our imagination (with or without an intellectual/historical knowledge) can perceive the empty plinth.

My future intentions are to explore this potentially more disturbing presence of objects by visiting various museums during their reconstruction (or other occurrences when the artwork might be

hidden), test my theories of the diverse concept on other viewers, compare my ideas and find relations or controversies with other artists and create an artistic body of work through photography, that would relate to these theories.



Figure 2: Olivier Richon.
Still life with Saint Augustine, 2004.



Figure 3: Christo and Jeanne-Claude *Wrapped Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II, Piazza del Duomo, Milano, Italy, 1970.*



Figure 4: Man Ray, *L'Énigme d'Isidore Ducasse, 1920 (1975).*



Figure 5: Eva Jova, *Plinth with a statue and plinth without a statue, 2016. Jardins Luxembourg, Paris.*



Figure 6: Eva Jova, *Covered Statue of Venus, 2015. Holden Gallery, Manchester, UK.*

3. REFERENCES

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