

Anita Fricsek

## **EUROPEAN (UNION) WOMEN**

T19 - Galerie für zeitgenössische Kunst, Vienna

Presentation: 17 -19 December, 1998

Opening: Thursday, 17 December 5 - 9pm

### ***European (Union) Women***

The show ironically called ***European (Union) Women*** explores both Anita Fricsek's experiences of living outside of Europe and dealing with clichés about Europe that were applied to her, and the questions those living within it have about a unified Europe.

The paintings ***European Wallpaper*** (Acrylic on Canvas, 1998, Series) paraphrase parts of Renaissance and Baroque paintings. The series refers to Anita Fricsek's art education in New York where paintings by the old masters were copied for study purposes. This work addresses the way European art history was studied at this time in the 'New World', largely untethered from its historical and cultural context.

The paraphrases are painted in the same size as reproductions in art books, and are decoratively arranged within the picture in a way that reminds us of wallpaper. Another reference is to Renaissance and Baroque gardens, where visitors were reminded of the world of the gods by viewing statues and grottos. In this sense the ***European Wallpaper*** paintings could decorate an ironical and imaginary pavilion set in the garden of western art history.

***Resurrection (European (Union) Women)*** (Acrylic on canvas, 80x35cm, 1998) from the series ***European Wallpaper***

This painting was motivated by Hélène Cixous' text 'Body and Gender' (1976), where she criticizes the image of the 'stretched-out' woman reclining in bed, prevalent in children stories and literature. ***Resurrection (European (Union) Women)*** depicts reclining nudes from old master paintings, but now rotated onto the vertical axis. Like ballerinas, the vertical nudes seem to stand on their toes. The painting reverses the binary relationship of lying /standing, passive / active and puts the figures into relation with the discipline of ballet dancers.

The photographic work ***With Mother & Crown (European Women)*** addresses the mother/daughter relationship, which offers very few positive role models. The work explores women's struggle to live up to predetermined cultural expectations.

A glitch in the mother's presentation, dressed up for the festive occasion, appears with her unshaved legs. This detail humorously illustrates how the cliché of the proper mother is punctured by a small detail such as unshaved body hair, opening a crack in the seamless inheritance of expectations that the daughter might step through to gain her freedom.

In both the US and in Australia Anita Fricke was often confronted with the cliché of the 'European Woman', who is usually 'Parisian'. In the video **European Women: To do the Eiffel Tower** (AUS 1998, 6'07 min., VHS) the artist explores and plays with this cliché. The video shows the artist performing a well-known children's game in which a string figure of the Eiffel Tower is constructed, and is filmed in various places in Sydney, Australia. Obvious references to the phallic and eurocentric significance of the Eiffel Tower are connected to traditional modes of non-verbal female communication - weaving, seduction, gesture, and sign language.

The video **News from Paradise (European Union Women)** (AUS 1998, 5'0 min, VHS) is set in a garden that represents the topological manifestation of paradise. A heterosexual couple in romantic embrace acts out the archaic image of the western creation myth. In the second scene the female protagonist recites verses of Ovid's *Golden Age* in Latin. The woman's Rococo mask refers to the politics of masquerade, an influential thread of western eroticism.

T19 - Galerie für zeitgenössische Kunst, Vienna  
Tuchlauben 19/7  
1010 Vienna  
Austria