

VELVET DA VINCI

Mirror-Mirror

October 24 - November 25, 2012

Curated by Jo Bloxham and Benjamin Lignel

Exhibition catalog available

A singer, model, writer and actress, Suzy Solidor (1900 – 1983) was an intensely iconic figure of the Parisian night-life during the roaring twenties: she owned a nightclub in Paris, where she used to woo her audience with a staple of sailor songs in homage to Surcouf, the corsair of St Malo she claimed as her ancestor, or chronicle the love affairs of men and women. A self-avowed sexual predator, she openly dated both, and became somewhat of a de facto advocate of sexual freedom. Popular with German troops during the Second World War, her first club - la Vie Parisienne - was closed shortly after the libération, and Solidor forbidden to run an establishment for 5 years. She opened her next club in 1949, and moved to the French Riviera in 1960, where she stayed until her death.

From the moment she arrives in Paris from Brittany, Solidor becomes a sought-after model for painters, sculptors and photographers. She sits for everybody, it seems, from Cocteau to Bacon, and what probably started as an easy bread-earner for the young provinciale beauty eventually became part of the singer's mise-en-scène of herself: she slowly built-up a collection of more than 200 portraits of herself, which lined the walls of her successive clubs...and some of which she took with her on her travels. Forty of these paintings now hang in a room dedicated to her in Château Grimaldi, which is situated next to Espace Solidor.

Solidor is a modern-day Narcissus: hers is a fretful form of self-commemoration, and she is probably closer to the doubting queen in 'Snow White' than to the self-engrossed mythological character. While some of her more transgressive contemporaries used photography and painting to pick-axe gender determinism, these portraits were not an opportunity for her to transform herself, and elaborate on the androgyny that so seduced her audience. She seems more interested in using art to multiply and reflect her own image: her collection of portraits track her through the day (from nudity to cocktail dress) and over the years (they were painted over four decades), but rarely outside a quite repetitive format. In short, she is not Claude Cahun (or Cindy Sherman) but rather the Queen Mother of mermaids, using the creative pluck of men (and some women) to amass evidence of her sway over them.

Twenty-nine artists from fourteen countries have accepted our invitation to study - and creatively respond to - the life of Suzy Solidor. We believe that their propositions constitutes a tribute to her singular life, and that they are best read in dialogue with the paintings presented in the Castle. A distorted mirror of that collection of portraits, this collection of objects prolongs it (some of the jewels are portraits themselves) but 'exceeds' it as well. Indeed, the practices represented in Mirror Mirror (jewellery, object, installation) are not mimetic; their point is not to resemble the 'sitter', but to outfit her fictions of identity: "I am a pirate / a singer / a (wo)man eater / a brittany gal who fled her native Saint-Malo...the better to ply Parisians with nostalgic shanty songs." The conceit that this jewellery is for someone specific in turn allows the makers to pretend that it is someone's: their pieces at once designate and invent new

Suzy fictions. What better medium indeed than jewellery to fuel her mild mythomania?

Many thanks to Commune of Cagnes-sur-Mer, L'Espace Solidor and the le Château Musée Grimaldi in the village of le Haut-de-Cagnes for making this exhibition possible.

Participating artists:

Jivan Astfalck - Maisie Broadhead - Liesbet Bussche - Carole Deltenre - Iris Eichenberg - Rebekah Frank - Kiko Gianocca - Sophie Hanagarth - Kirsten Haydon - Leonor Hipólito - Mike Holmes - Peter Hoogeboom - Lisa Juen - Lauren Kalman - Susanne Klemm - Emmanuel Lacoste - Natalie Luder - Irma Mae - Mia Maljojoki - Jorge Manilla - Nanna Melland - Seth Papac - Marie Pendariès - Nathalie Perret - Ruudt Peters - Constanze Schreiber - Karin Seufert - Bettina Speckner - Manon van Kouswijk

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