

CARSON FOX

HYSTERIA

past yet present

Freud verbalized an influential interest in depictions of women deemed to be beautiful when he said of the Mona Lisa, “*the most perfect representation of the contrasts which dominate the erotic life of women; the contrast between reserve and seduction and between the most devoted tenderness and a sensuality that is ruthlessly demanding—consuming men as if they were alien beings*”.¹ It is this same ambiguity, an attraction to, and dislike of, the subject that influences Carson Fox’s choices. “*I am interested in beauty but I distrust it*”, states Fox. Her practice is concerned with the repurposing of materials in an unexpected manner, in a way that challenges our beliefs. In this work we see an attractive and sincere, sentimentally laden materials being used to create art that takes a disingenuous stab at the origins of its substance. The intended beauty of fake flowers that form the memorial wreath is subverted by the unambiguous label SLUT. The wreath symbolizes a death, implying sadness for the departed. Impropriety is evoked by the unequivocal nastiness of the word slut. The precise etymology of slut is not known, but it would be reasonable to say that the use of it is commonplace. In contemporary parlance, no woman desires to be described thus. Extended derivations from seminal use see the word as descriptive term for an unkempt individual. The modern sense of the word stems from the 15th century, and it is used almost exclusively as a reference to a sexually aberrant female, or as a general insult for women.

The color of the wreath seduces us with its delicate hue, the pink we instantly recognize as a color associated with the female of the species. Yet this instantaneous reaction to a gendered color, a system that is used from the very first hours of life to separate the undifferentiated faces of male and female babies into the “appropriate” categories, is only a relatively recent determination. In Victorian times, babies wore lace and white clothes regardless of their gender. Nowadays, the inclination is to instantly make an assignment of gender based on the sex of the child at the moment of birth. Feminists argue that neither masculine nor feminine states of being should be recognized as inevitable, those born biologically male or female may exhibit stereotypical tendencies of the opposite sex, and this is normal. Both of these socially constructed types lie along a continuum that is in fact circular. Freud’s theories regarding “normal” gendered development have been described as “brutal psychic mutations” by Gayle Rubin, a feminist who rues the necessity of both males and females being forced to adopt behaviors deemed appropriate for their biological constitution.²

Having completed her Masters at Rutgers University, Fox’s work has appeared in many exhibitions, with upcoming solo exhibitions scheduled in Chicago and Arizona. In 2006 she was awarded the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund Grant and completed an artist in residency program in India. She received a New Jersey Print and Paper Fellowship at the Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper in 2003.

¹ Freud Art and Literature as cited in Plant, Sadie, *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + The New Technoculture*, Fourth Estates, London, 1998, pp.194-195.

² Chodrow *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, Yale University Press, U.S.A., 1989, p.119.