

# NY exhibition 'Models as Muse' looks at beauty ideals

Changing models of beauty reveal a map of social history

NEW YORK (Reuters) – The new *Models as Muse* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art celebrates some of the world's most beautiful women yet it shows how ideals of beauty have



I think this show will encourage women to take a bow, each and every type that they are

evolved to include the rest of women as well, its curator said on Monday.

Opening this week at the museum's Costume Institute, the exhibit traces high fashion and its models from post-World War Two haute couture to grunge and minimalism of the 1990s, with iconic photographs, magazine covers, advertisements, clothes, music and film clips to illustrate each distinctive era.

The show explores the power of clothing, fashion photography and models to project images of beauty over the years, its curators said at a preview for the media.

Its timeline begins in the

golden age of sophisticated haute couture, which gave way to the youth-oriented 1960s, followed by the glamorous supermodel era that ended in grunge, the antithesis of glamour.

That last shift shattered earlier conceptions of beauty, leaving today's ideals more diverse and inclusive than ever before, said Kohle Yohannan, guest co-curator.

"In the end we're reassembling the pieces, like a post-modern jigsaw puzzle," he said, adding: "Women are more included in the visual culture today, all races, all ages."

"I think this show will encourage women to take a bow, each and every type that they are, each and every race, each and every size," he said.

Yohannan, an author and cultural historian, curated the show with Harold Koda, curator in charge of The Costume Institute.

While fashionistas will likely savour every nuance, the fashion illiterate will recognize the aristocratic Dorian Leigh, Twiggy, Peggy Moffitt in a topless bathing suit by Rudi Gernreich, the athletic Cheryl Tiegs and Christie Brinkley, supermodels Linda Evangelista, Naomi Campbell and Claudia Schiffer, waifish Kate Moss and lithe Gisele Bündchen.

Each era of fashion illustrates the social changes that were occurring at the time and helped to shape the idealized types of feminine beauty, Yohannan said.

"It shows every bit of a map of social history as much as a style history," he said.



ON SHOW: Gisele Bündchen is one of the supermodels represented in the exhibition

## Dubai art auctions draw bargain hunters as crisis hits

DUBAI (Reuters) – Art buyers from across the Middle East crowded Christie's auction room in Dubai, bidding briskly to bag a bargain as prices fall in the global downturn.

A painting sale, marking the start of the region's auction season for Christie's International, fetched \$4.7 million last week, within estimates that were sharply lowered this year.

By comparison, Christie's raised \$8.65 million from its last auction in October, only half its estimate at the time.

Prices of Middle East art works at auctions in the young Dubai market boomed in the past two years, driven by speculators, experts say. But auction houses have suffered as the financial crisis hit the Gulf Arab trade and tourism hub, reducing the appetite for luxury goods including art.

In November, Bonhams, another global auction house,

raised \$2.8 million, far below its pre-sale estimate of \$12 million.

"Prices have gone down of course because there's a crisis, but what's important is that people are buying, which shows that interest in Middle Eastern art is still firm," said Saleh Barakat, owner of an art gallery in Beirut who sold a number of pieces at the auction last week.

Michael Jeha, managing director of Christie's Middle East, told Reuters it was now "definitely a buyer's market." The auction saw 150 works by artists from the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey and a few from the West up for sale, including, for the first time, pieces by Saudi artists.

The six works from Saudi Arabia were diverse in medium and style. One, by doctor and photographer Ahmed Mater Aseeri from his X-Ray series, showed a skeletal head

and torso set on sheets resembling pages from a traditional religious text.

The two pieces, *Illumination V* and *VI*, were made of X-ray film print on paper, stained with tea and pomegranate juice and embossed with gold leaf, turquoise, amber and carnelian.

The sale also included four paintings by prominent Syrian artist Fateh Moudarres, from the collection of the former German ambassador to Syria, Rudolf Fechter. Among these was *The Icons of Moudarres*, created in 1962, showing a group of figures, arranged symmetrically with areas picked out in gold leaf.

The work is meant to symbolise the three main religions in Syria – Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

"There are works collectors couldn't get before because they were priced out of the market by a lot of the

speculators. Now the collectors are back in and they see a lot of opportunity to buy great works at great prices,"



There are works collectors couldn't get before because they were priced out of the market by a lot of the speculators

Jeha said. An Emirati buyer at the auction, who asked to remain anonymous, said prices had come down to "reasonable" levels.

While there was still liquidity in the art market globally, Christie's has seen a "slight" drop in the volume of sales internationally, said Jussi Pylkkanen, president of Christie's Europe, adding that the Dubai sale showed continued appetite among collectors in the wealthy oil-exporting region.

Art has been traditionally seen as a safe investment at times of economic crises, he said, but prices are down.

The *Wall and the Script*, by Iranian artist Parviz Tanavoli, fetched the highest price of \$218,500 at the Christie's auction Wednesday. By comparison, the auction house's top-selling lot last year was a piece by the same artist, sold for \$2.8 million.

## THE ANTIDOTE – CLASSIC POETRY FOR MODERN LIFE

A reading of 'Daffodils' by William Wordsworth

CHRISTOPHER NIELD  
SPECIAL TO THE EPOCH TIMES

*Daffodils*

*I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

*Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the Milky Way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

*The waves beside them danced; but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:*

*For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.*

"I wandered lonely as a cloud." After reading such a line, comment seems superfluous. Time appears to stop. We look up from the page. We feel happy.

But why do we feel happy? What is it about this line that gives us the unmistakable shiver of poetry? Why is it so beautiful? Perhaps it has something to do with its balance of sadness and wonder.

It captures, in a moment, the essential privacy of the soul: yet within this isolation finds not alienation or despair, but a sense of limitless expansiveness. "Lonely" carries an unexpected meaning of "freely."

We are so transported by this opening that the "crowd" of daffodils bursts upon us unawares. Every time we read the poem, Wordsworth makes us feel the rushing delight of their sudden appearance, as if we were seeing a bank of spring flowers for the first time. "Fluttering and dancing" they are full of life and joy.

In the first stanza, the imagery takes us from the sky to the earth, yet the second stanza once again moves out into the universe. The daffodils "shine" like the stars of the Milky Way – their "continuous" line suggesting a chain of being that connects the here and now to the heavens themselves.

Wordsworth claims to see "ten thousand" daffodils at a glance; their "never-ending" procession appears to stretch into the infinite. These wild exaggerations well convey his giddy, carefree excitement.

Golden and flame-like, the daffodils seem to illuminate the landscape, granting the "lake" and the "trees" a visionary ecstasy. They are lords of the dance, inspiring the "waves" to gleeful rejoicing. (If a poet "could not but be gay" in such a "jocund company," as Wordsworth says, is this because poets are renowned for their gaiety, or notorious

for their misery?)

After this blaze of merriment, the earnest repetition of "I gazed" takes us by surprise. It introduces a sombre, apparently introspective note, or perhaps a spiritual awe. The long "a" sound and use of dashes slow the pace down considerably – almost bringing the dance, and the poem, to a halt.

But this, in turn, is swept aside by Wordsworth's casual admission that he had "little thought" of the daffodils' significance. (We can imagine him giving an almost comical shrug of the shoulders at this point.) This is one small example of the subtle emotional nuances behind the plain language and rhyme.

The enduring "wealth" that the daffodils have brought to him is revealed in the final stanza, with an implicit contrast with the fickle wealth of society. In a state of vacancy or worry, lying back on his "couch" with little or no inspiration, the daffodils "flash" upon the "inward eye" and once more lift his heart. Periods of emptiness, of brokenness, are inevitable – yet so is the return to joy.

As we reread and relive the poem, we trace a journey from the self out into the world and then back again: taking in the simple and the complex, the mystical and the mundane, the solemn and the sprightly.

Out of this pattern of moods emerges a profound sense of what it means to be human: what it means to wander with no thought or care, unburdened by any imposition of purpose, to take pleasure in the sweetest sights, to be overwhelmed by a past scene we took for granted. Our loneliness isn't transcended but deepened, to become the "bliss of solitude" – and within that stillness there is nothing but dancing.

Many readers might laugh at the rhyme of "fills" and "daffodils", yet what I love about the final lines is their power to embarrass our strident sophistication, our fear of innocence, and touch something vulnerable within us.

Let me give an example. A friend of mine remembers reciting the poem at a school poetry evening. Little by little, the restless audience became silent and still; and by the time he finished, a sense of quiet astonishment filled the hall.

Everyone knew something tremendous had happened. Even when he told me the story, thirty years later, a look of wonder came into his eyes – a look that can only be described as happiness.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850) was an English Romantic poet most famous for poems such as *Tintern Abbey* and *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*.

Christopher Nield is a poet living in London.



## Looking back to go forward

LEWIS CHAMBERLAIN

James Hyman Gallery

MICHAEL PARASKOS  
SPECIAL TO THE EPOCH TIMES

In a week when the nominees for the 2010 Turner Prize are announced, with the organisers boasting that this year's list contains painters who believe in drawing, it is worth crossing London to see an exhibition of work by Lewis Chamberlain at the James Hyman Gallery. Chamberlain really is an painter who believes in drawing. In fact, some of his extraordinary drawings can take up to four years to complete.

At first sight Chamberlain's work could be mistaken for typical hyperrealism, in which the artist takes a photograph and then copies it. A lot of artists in London are doing this at the moment, with most producing rather mundane and derivative work. But Chamberlain is not a photorealist. He does not even use photographs, and yet his hyperrealist pictures are rendered with an astonishing level of detail and clarity.

Inevitably this influences Chamberlain's choice of subject matter, with still lifes and interiors dominating as they are required to remain unchanged for long periods of time. Often he will use his children's toys as props, as in the large oil painting *Things That Go*. In this we see what looks like a typical kids' bedroom, with discarded toys on the floor and model aeroplanes hanging from the ceiling. Yet, through

Chamberlain's use of artificial light, and the exactitude of his technique, the resulting image has an uncanny quality, as though giving the objects such close attention has imbued them with extra meaning.

Another feature that distinguishes Chamberlain from most hyperrealists working today is his awareness of art history. In conversation he plays this down, as though he is embarrassed to confess he looks at old art. But he does admit to having spent almost every day for two years in London's National Gallery. This might come as a surprise as we are more used to associating this type of hyperrealist painting with photorealism or surrealism, rather than the Old Masters. Certainly a number of Chamberlain's images, like *The Hiding Place* and *Winter Visitor*, do owe a debt to surrealism. In particular, Magritte's 1938 painting

*Time Transfixed* springs to mind, in which a steam train appears from a fireplace.

What Chamberlain derives from older art, however, is a strong belief in the need for artists to create the illusion of space in their work. Although that space inevitably operates as a stage on which action (including surreal action) can take place, the need is not to mimic the everyday world in which we live. Rather it is to create space that is believable or convincing in terms of the particular painting or drawing being made. It is this that Chamberlain has learnt from studying Old Master art in the National Gallery, particularly historic realists like Vermeer and Pieter de Hooch.

That said, Chamberlain does not create nostalgic or pastiche images from another age. On the contrary, his works speak to us very much about our own time, and through their parallel engagement with art's history, achieve a very satisfying relevance.

Until May 30th



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