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Turning the Gaze: Zoe Leonard's "Anatomical Models" Series

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Abstract

In the eighteenth century, the Western medical field approached the female body as a foil to the neutral male form based upon Christian ideals and sexual taboos. Depictions of women in medical textbooks as well as anatomical models furthered the idea of women as classicized, submissive reproductive vessels. Zoe Leonard, in her 1992 photographic series "Anatomical Models" examines these eighteenth century relics through an interventionist, feminist lens. Referencing crime scene photography of the Black Dahlia, cabinet cards, and classic horror films to create a gothic tone Leonard assigns modern implications to eighteenth century objects. Through her use of black and white, analog photography Leonard creates narratives of empathy for the models as well as constructs a sense of exploitation. The Anatomical Models series contextualizes Zoe Leonard within a feminist art movement of the 1990s focused on the carnal body, her contemporaries empower their own bodies through contrasting viscera with conventionally passive femininity. This research aims to prove that Zoe Leonard utilizes modern visual culture to highlight the continued impact of the male gaze on representations of women. The anatomical models of Leonard's series become timeless representations of women as victims to the male and medical gaze.

1. Introduction

Zoe Leonard (b. 1961) creates archival images through her use of analog photography. Adamantly distancing herself from the digital medium, Leonard utilizes film to capture unedited images of the moments which catch her eye as well as to honor this dwindling medium and its capabilities. Her body of work creates a record of her experience of the world through constructed or captured images. In her series *Anatomical Models* (1990-1993) Leonard turns her lens to wax or preserved anatomical models of women from the eighteenth century, found in museums and public exhibitions across Europe. Through her exclusive use of the analog medium, Leonard can be seen as an interpreter, processing the images before her, presented through her unique perspective as a woman and archivist. As she stated in an interview in 1994, "I make work about what's on my mind, what disturbs me, excites me, or confuses me, my fears, my desires. That's photography. I point my camera at something that interests me. Then I show it to you. You literally see my point of view. You see what moves me, scares me or disgusts me."[1]

The archive which Leonard creates in the *Anatomical Models* series is one which attempts to intervene on the male gaze of the medical field. Feminist scholar Laura Mulvey defines the male gaze through the medium of cinema, with women serving as objects of observation, often filmed through the lens of a male perspective.[2] The theory of the male gaze assumes that women are objects of a gaze which is meant to appeal to a heterosexual, male audience, often exploiting women through a sexualized presentation in popular media such as advertising, film and television. Zoe Leonard takes this idea of the male gaze and applies it to the eighteenth century audience of the anatomical models and medical oddities photographed in her series. The models which Leonard photographs appeal to the male gaze through their sexual vulnerability but also their appeals to hetero-normative gender roles .This appeal to a male audience serves as an example of medical imagery implicated by the male gaze, which failed to view the female body

with the same clinical objectivity as the male body. Leonard sees parallels between the presentation of these women and the presentation of women through the modern male gaze. By turning her own camera onto these models, Leonard is able to create her own interventions meant to subvert the male dictates of women's bodies in both visual representation as well as medical treatment.

Her photographs of these models are not clear and rational; they shy away from the traditions of medical photography and instead edge into a gothic sensibility. The gothic stems from a horror or aversion to what lies within man, a fear of not only our physical bodies but our capacity for evil.[3] Her interventionist gaze is one that focuses on the perverse, exploitive nature of these objects by presenting them in a horrific context. Leonard utilizes the language of media such as horror films to impart an insidious, predatory connotation to the male gaze for which these models were created. Museums like the Uffizi and the Musée Orfila where these models are housed were established as cabinets of curiosities by the Medici family and toxicologist and chemist Matheiu Orfila. These models served as both entertainment and education to the masses. In this context, the exploitation of the disemboweled wax women provokes societal reflection of what fascinates and repulses us. Leonard brings forth the insidious nature of these portrayals of women by emphasizing their latent capacity for evil, referencing murder and physical horror while allowing their sexual poses to come through. Alluding to horror films as well as archival images such as crime scene photography and cabinet cards, Leonard creates a gothic vocabulary that she imparts to these figures which were presumably intended as objective, medical images. This vocabulary relies upon the cultural signifiers of horror that originated with both gothic literature and classic horror films of the 1930s and 1940s. She alludes to these works through her framing of her subjects as well as her cinematic use of lighting, hiding her figures in shadow or obscuring them with light to create tension and entice her viewer to engage with these subversive images. Leonard's approach to the gothic can be seen as decidedly feminist, her focus on the victimization of women and the violence inflicted onto their bodies as well as the abject horror of their bodies themselves. The wax figures which she photographs are splayed open in some way, usually dissected, revealing the intestines beneath (Figure 1). These models, used in place of human cadavers for medical students as well as for public viewing, hold a particular kind of horror in their submissive aesthetics.

Figure 1. Zoe Leonard, *Wax Anatomical Model (Shot Crooked from Above)*, 1990. Silver gelatin print. http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/leonard-wax-anatomical-model-shot-crooked-from-above-p79209

The models and curiosities which Leonard photographs were conceived as a means to understand the female body either for its reproductive intricacies or gender specific oddities. In doing so, they create an image of the female body as an othered form, a foil for the anatomically neutral, original male anatomy as defined through Biblical and medical precedent. If man is to be viewed as the original form of humankind, women are a deviation from this norm, both lacking in certain traits and possessing beautiful, if mystic qualities. This narrative is one that also bleeds into the art world, where women have historically served very strict, though unrealistic roles. When giving background on her work *Reproduction: An apologia of the Female Nude* (2007) artist Maru Ituarte states,

> the female nude in the history of art is an artificial object; a construction of the ideal woman whose muliebrity-or state of being an adult woman- [...] is negated. Her body is meant to be beautiful, sensual, voluptuous, erotic, and even motherly, but never generative. For in the history of art, creation seems, with few exceptions, to have been mostly considered the prerogative of men.[4]

Women can be viewed as vessels of reproduction, but only through a patriarchal set of parameters which remove women from an active role in the process of pregnancy and birth. In many ways, this serves to remove women from their physical bodies, creating the image of the female body as an object not a functioning, carnal embodiment.

In the case of the Venus of *Wax Anatomical Model (Shot Crooked from Above)* (Figure 1) and the *Preserved Head of a Bearded Woman* (Figure 2), these objects create an image of the female body as a source of spectacle and mystery. These women are defined by their deviation from the neutral male body; the Venus exists as an example of the laden womb as the Bearded Woman serves as an example of all that is defined as feminine, in her denial of it. Leonard exaggerates this sense of freakery through her methods of photography. She showcases the Venus in such a way that she appears contorted and gored; the Bearded Woman is approached as a specimen with no name or context. There is a gothic sense of the grotesque brought out through these images, stemming from her black and white, analog medium. Her emphasis is on their distorted posture, the texture of their flesh, and the cases which enclose them. The twenty-first century audience sees both the sexualized Venus and the *Preserved Head of a Bearded Woman* as specimens in a curiosity cabinet, or dark experiments from a Mary Shelley novel, rather than the objective scientific models they originated as. The perversion and denial of autonomy and human reverence in these figures comes forward. Leonard creates new narratives by turning her camera towards their cases, in turn they become victims rather than specimens through her interventionist strategies.

Figure 2. Zoe Leonard, *Preserved Head of a Bearded Woman, Musee Orfila*, 1991. Series of five silver gelatin prints. Centre Pompidou, Paris. http://ridiculouslyinteresting.com/category/museums/page/2/

Confronting simplistic notions of gender, these models can also be seen as classicizing examples of the normative female form. *Seated Anatomical Model* (Figure 3.) and *Anatomical Model of a Woman's Head Crying* (Figure 4) as well as the previously mentioned models draw a sense of gentility from their classical references and perfect, if gored, forms.

Figure 3. Zoe Leonard, *Seated Anatomical Model*, 1991-92.Silver gelatin print. http://karaj.tumblr.com/post/4039346954/boystown-zoe-leonard-seated-anatomical-model

Figure 4. Zoe Leonard, Anatomical Model of a Woman's Head Crying, 1993. Silver gelatin print. http://db-artmag.com/en/54/feature/dual-view-zoe-leonard/

They are the continuation of a long history of anatomical drawings going back to the times of Vesalius who employed the Greek Canon in his macabre images of human dissection. The models and specimens photographed by Leonard display the varied classical tropes that obscured the female body in the eighteenth century when Enlightenment perspectives led to the belief that men and women were inherently different.[5] The objective, medical approach is clouded by aesthetics, therefore denying women the same space in medicine and care that is afforded to their male counterparts. Even in death and sickness, the female form is defined not as intricate anatomy but as a beautiful object. Leonard once again is able to bring forth the perversion of this approach through her tilted angles and dark shadows. In the cases of the *Seated Anatomical Model* and *Anatomical Model of a Woman's Head Crying* she imparts a sense of drama to these classical figures. The models themselves draw from art history, replicating poses from sculpture and painting such as Artemisia Gentileschi's *Susanna and the Elders* (1610, Figure 5) and Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1486, Figure 6). Taken out of context and displayed as dissected, medical images these poses become a mockery of the idea of the objectified female body. Leonard ascribes these women with the signifiers of a black and white horror film rather than a classical painting. She brings forth a narrative of violence to these figures.

Figure 5. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610. Oil on canvas. 1.70m x 1.21m. Pommersfelden. http://jwa.org/media/susanna-and-elders-by-artemisia-gentileschi

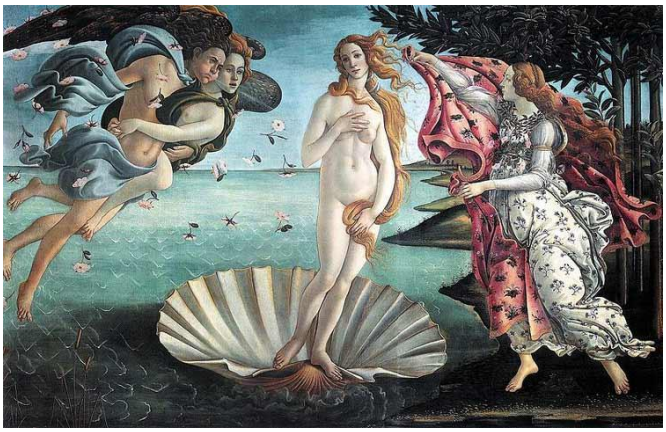

Figure 6. Sandro Botticelli, Birth of Venus, 1484-1486. Oil on canvas. 1.72m x 2.78 m. Uffizi Gallery. http://www.uffizi.org/artworks/the-birth-of-venus-by-sandro-botticelli/

Leonard's allusions to literature and pop culture, whether they be films like *The Bride of Frankenstein* or the grotesque stories of Edgar Allen Poe, invite the viewer to construct a narrative behind the horrific image they are faced with. Leonard's adeptness at creating a presumed narrative can be found in her earlier works such as the *Fae Richards Archive*, but also in other works in the *Anatomical Models* series. The photographs *Anatomical Model of a Woman's Head Crying* (Figure 4) and *Seated Anatomical Model* (Figure 3) find their place in Leonard's curiosity cabinet through their bizarre presentation as stills from a tragedy. While the wax figures exhibited by Leonard in these pieces were created to reflect classical ideals of femininity, sensitivity, and vulnerability, Leonard's cinematic use of light and shadow frames them within a larger context. They become victims to an unseen force, most likely Leonard's personification of the male gaze. The weeping woman is given a moment of melancholic reflection following her dismemberment, the seated woman cowers in fear at an oncoming evil. Leonard's expertise in lighting and framing strike the visual cues of horror films.

Through turning her lens towards these models, she also turns her lens on the male gaze which denies the humanity of the female body. Leonard collaborates with the models in the creation of a gendered image. She is part of a movement around the 1990s wherein female artists utilized the physical, female body as a means to express their place as othered, fetishized figures in society. The exterior of the female body, so long seen as a classical, sexualized form is perverted and reclaimed through showcasing the carnal interior. Through highlighting the dehumanizing nature of the models' portrayals, Leonard shows these women for what they really are, victims to a medical system geared towards the male interest.

Zoe Leonard's camera is able to capture, through her raw medium, the inherent unease of an object created through the male dictated medical gaze. If the male gaze is defined as the overwhelming predilection to present women in an appealing, heteronormative manner, the medical male gaze incorporates the medical precedent of presenting women as reproductive objects. As a male dominated field, medicine is subject to the same sexist notions as the society within which it functions. This lack of objectivity leads to a sexualization of the female anatomy and a prioritizing of male appeal and male understanding over female bodily autonomy. Women have only become relevant in discussions of medicine and anatomy relative to their associations with men. As medicine has lagged in its understanding of the female body, society has demonized it, weaponized it, and found methods to control it. Harkening back to medieval notions of women as the source of original sin, they have been dehumanized and reduced to objects of temptation. The notion that women are less rational, more natural and spiritually vulnerable beings who must be tamed and controlled is in large part related to the lack of understanding of the function of women's bodies outside their role in reproduction. These anatomical models serve as an example of control over the female body, a denial of its functions and humanity. Leonard turns her lens onto these figures and in doing so examines their place in medical history while contextualizing them in modern culture. She is not only recording relics of an oppressive past but also creating objects of observation for contemporary focus. The eighteenth century anatomical models remain relevant in her examination of them. They become emblematic of a view on the female form that Leonard and her contemporaries fight against by reclaiming their own bodies, highlighting the continuing need to examine what medical and popular culture emphasize and obscure. As Leonard herself states, "I see these images as contemporary, because the system which put [the Bearded Woman's] head in a bell jar is still in place. The world just hasn't changed that much."[6]

2. Leonard as Archivist/Interventionist

Leonard's work serves as an archive of her experience in the world. She is drawn to a variety of subjects, from fading neighborhoods in New York to fashion week. The intention of her photographs holds greater weight than her choice of subject; she brings to light those things which give her pause, creating photographs which are as much objects on their own as depictions of the world around her. She aims to create a collection of images, which when viewed together document not only a time or place but the implications surrounding the images. She uses repetition and the aesthetics of the archive to expose her audience to the many facets of her subject. Her photographs are deeply rooted in their own process. They are printed typically in small scale with endless repetitions, mimicking her seemingly improvisational style of photography. Scratches and glares are kept intact as a reminder of the medium with which Leonard has aligned herself. Her series *Analogue* serves as both a time capsule of a disappearing neighborhood and a love letter to film photography. Her title is a reference both to the analog medium and the analogous relationship between film and the nostalgic, doomed buildings she captures.

Seemingly exhibiting little commentary, her photography stands on its own as a kind of relic. In Leonard's own words,

> If you see a picture of something, you believe it really happened that way. Pictures are proof. My photographs crawl along that edge. I document the world, but from my own biased point of view. I want to draw the viewer into the process of looking so we can look at these things together. [...] Sometimes it's gathering evidence, spying on our culture.[7]

This can be seen in her piece *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* (Figures 7-9), a series of photographs taken between 1993 and 1996 that encapsulate the life of a fictional African American woman. Fae Richards is the creation of Liberian born film director and artist Cheryl Dunye. In this collaboration Leonard served as a storyteller and archivist, creating the life of this woman through photographs. Her images capture the essence of what this woman means to history, rather than her individual life. The images cross the line into stereotypes and notions of the lives of black women around the mid twentieth century as sexualized performers, yet are done so in a self aware way. Richards is created as an archetype through Leonard's photographs of her. While she is made real through these images, her artificiality is highlighted.

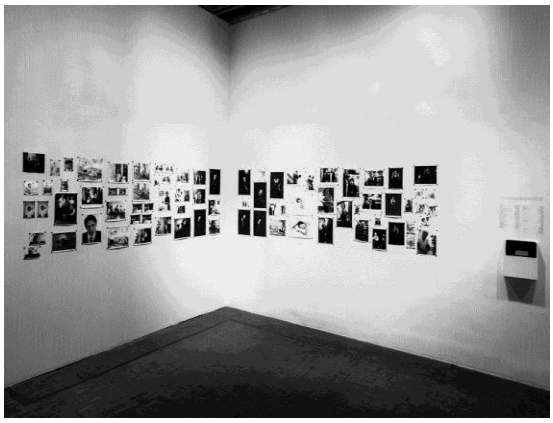

Figure 7. Zoe Leonard, *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*, 1993-1996 (full installation) Seventy-eight gelatin silver prints, four chromogenic prints, and notebook of seven pages of typescript on paper, dimensions variable. Edition no. 2/3. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. http://whitney.org/Collection/ZoeLeonard

The photographs range from staged candid to stylized portraits. A photograph of the fictional Fae Richards smiling in the arms of a handsome man is captured just out of focus (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Zoe Leonard, *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*, 1993-1996 (detail) Silver gelatin print. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. http://www.archivesandcreativepractice.com/zoe-leonard-cheryl-dunye/

The interaction is caught, as if by an observer at Richard's home, trying to photograph the moment before it passes. The models are styled in the everyday clothing of the 1950s, creating what is suggested to be an accurate record of a woman at this time. The idea of an archive is challenged with the more subliminally loaded images of the series. Alongside this candid photo is a portrait of Richards, shrouded in black shadows, emerging from the darkness with smoke rising from a lit cigarette (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Zoe Leonard, *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*, 1993-1996 (detail). Silver gelatin print. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. http://www.archivesandcreativepractice.com/zoe-leonard-cheryl-dunye/

Her eyes are closed, mouth open, in a sensual and highly staged pose. The model's clothing as well as mannerisms bring to mind portraits of Billie Holiday, with waves in her hair and fashionable dress. Through subtle signifiers, Leonard contextualizes the character of Fae Richards within the racially divided world of jazz, creating an ersatz record of Richards as a black woman in history. Adding layers to this piece, these photographs have been used by Dunye to create a "documentary" on Fae Richards' life.[8] The film, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), follows a search for Richards, uncovering her past as a performer and closeted lesbian. Dunye utilizes fabricated archival footage and interviews to piece together the life Leonard captured through her photographic series.[9] There is the sense that now that a record exists of this woman, she has become real.

Leonard is a lover of layers. She is drawn to the many ways in which media can be used. In her essay, *Analogue* (2007) she intercuts the quotes of artists and writers on photography, home, and record keeping creating a kind of manifesto of analog photography.[10] Leonard staunchly stands by the analog medium as a means to capture an image.

> My work is absolutely grounded in a certain formal approach. These aren't drawings. They're not paintings. These are photographs. I want the viewer to be aware of that. That's why I always print full frame. If there's a scratch on the negative, I leave it there. The roughness in my prints is my way of letting the viewer into my process, the process of photography. […] My work is about taking pictures, using a camera to observe what's out in the world. So I present them very much as they happen in the camera: they're not matted, they're not framed, they're not cropped.[11]

Photographs hold a special place in our culture, used not only as a form of high art but as a means of capturing everything from everyday events to crime scenes and war zones. To photograph something is to assign it importance, to mark the moment as memorable. A photograph becomes an object in itself, moving beyond its creation and its subject. Leonard utilizes this power to create archives out of what exists within our everyday. She draws her viewer's attention towards a history, fabricated or expounded upon, which cannot be ignored.

Her approach to documenting and history is intrinsically linked to her own brand of feminism. Leonard approaches women's rights and women's representation with the eye of an observer or collector. She constructs her exhibits around the premise of presenting the public with an image that they do not expect. She is confrontational, erring on the side of humor. This is best seen in her 1992 installation piece at Documenta 9 wherein Leonard curated an exhibition of traditional portraits of women alongside her own, lovingly titled, "crotch shots" of various live models (Figure 10). The photographs Leonard presents of these women's vaginas are framed much smaller than the portraits they interact with, cropped to show only the genital region but showing in many ways more personality than the portraits surrounding them. This kind of tongue in cheek approach to the female body shows the mindset of Leonard as she entered into her *Anatomical Models* series. Documenta 9 was accompanied by a poster by artist Suzanne Wright which read, "READ MY LIPS / BEFORE THEY'RE SEALED / REVERSE THE SUPREME COURT'S BAN ON ABORTION INFORMATION," a confrontational political message assigned to this crowd-drawing show, meant to appeal to the American art market and critics which would distribute Leonard and Wright's message. From here, Leonard's examination of the female body would evolve from a critique of the art world and women's place as muses and erotic subjects to an analysis of the dangerous repercussions of this way of thinking rooted in the medical field.

Figure 10. Zoe Leonard, *Documenta 9*, 1992 (partial view.) Silver gelatin print and mixed media installation. Neue Gallery, Kassel, Germany. http://lindsayribeiro.blogspot.com/2010/05/zoe-leonard.html

3. Corpus Classic

Dissection has historically been dictated by gendered notions of the human body and a drive towards an organization of anatomy. Vesalius (1514-1564) set the tone for dissection when he first broke the binds of a hanged man, partially decomposed, and brought back his bones to his workshop. The father of anatomy, Vesalius began a trend of mass dissections that would continue for centuries.[12] Women played a very minimal role in early anatomy lessons. In order to examine a female body, anatomists would often use the bodies of prostitutes or women with little social connections or resources. The medical female body carried a stigma, with very few examples of female bodies available to be studied outside of these narrow circles.[13] The women under the anatomists' scalpels reinforced the idea of the medical female body as a sexualized form or a vessel for reproduction.

The grotesque realities of Vesalius' practice did not translate to his illustrations. With skeletons languishing in contrapposto and men holding their own suits of skin like martyred saints, Vesalius' illustrations in his works such as *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543, Figure 11) show an image of the body as a perfectly rational machine. Each muscle fits together with perfect precision; the organs nestle together within the taught lining of the abdomen. In these early illustrations there is revelry in the carnality of the body; the humor of the body is not something lost on early anatomists. The classical references, however, persist beyond this humor. Vesalius directly references the Polykleitan Canon, based upon an understanding of the proportions of the human body.[14] The effect of these artistic choices is sobering when acknowledging how their natural progression has affected modern man's views of the body.

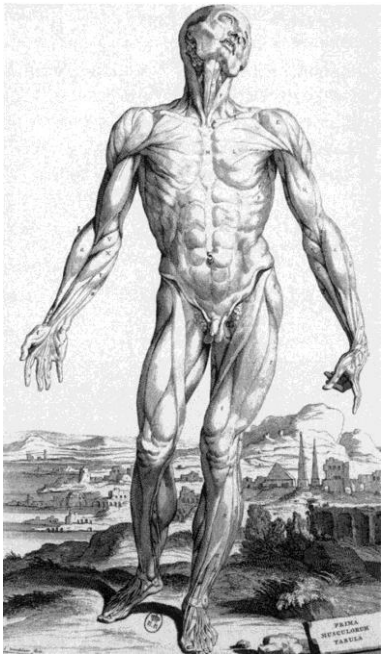

Figure 11. Andreas Vesalius, 1543. Illustration. http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/anatomy/vesalius.html

Within the world of anatomy in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the female body was only necessary as a demonstration of reproduction.[15] Her body was seen as a foil to its masculine counterpart. The idea of the woman as man's foil can be traced back to the notion of Eve, a compliment to the perfection of man. Her purpose was to continue the man's line through reproduction, serving as a companion rather than an autonomous figure. The scientific community, so closely intertwined with religious doctrine in the Renaissance draws upon these views of the female body. The vagina was understood as an inverted phallus, the ovaries mirrored of testes.[16] Vesalius reinforces this notion in his drawings of *Compendiosa totius anatomie delineatios aera exarata* which illustrates an amputated female torso, alluding to the Venus de Milo, and details of her ovaries beside an overbearing illustration of a penis. Anatomist Govard Bidloo was one of the first to bring the female body into anatomy as a neutral image in the seventeenth century, using her to show the structure of the back muscles.[17] These traditions also aligned themselves with the notion that

women were more connected to nature than rational science, they were depicted more so as references to the natural world or theoretical ideals than as real human beings.[18]

The convergence of this focused knowledge (and ignorance) of the female body and the canonized history of medical images culminated in the eighteenth century when wax anatomical models became standard for medical students. After criticism arose over practices surrounding human dissection, wax became the preferred medium for the examination of the human body.[19] Wax models, many of which are now found at La Specola Museum in Florence, Italy, took on the tone of rational order. Their sculptors created anatomical jigsaw puzzles, with pieces fitting together neatly and perfectly under layers of wax fat and muscle. They also delved into classical motifs, creating scenes of the human body in action, referencing mythical or archetypal stories (Figure 12).[20] The most famous of La Specola's artifacts are the so called "Venus" sculptures, figures of pregnant women, vulnerable in their passivity and beauty. These Venuses were a popular subject for wax carvers, repeatedly created to examine the progression of pregnancy and its effect on the body.

Figure 12. Gaetano Giulio Zumbo, *The Plague*, wax model, La Specola.
https://www.sffchronicles.com/threads/41624/

4. Venus at La Specola

The Venus of Leonard's series (Figure 1), resting peacefully in La Specola is an icon of the classical, normative view of female anatomy. She rests; head tilted back and away, her gaze never meeting the viewer's. Her torso is elongated, with breasts round and fixed atop her ribcage. She is a perfect mirror of Botticelli's Venus. Her stance, unnatural but familiar, is a supine contrapposto. Her eyes are also open, just slightly, as if waking from a dream.

The most striking of her features, however, is the pearl necklace that rests delicately around her neck. This single strand of pearls, in conjunction with her impossibly long hair, seems to bring forth her nakedness. She is less a nude and more so a naked female body, a sexual object drawing from the idea of Venus herself. Born from the ocean waves, Venus draws her life from the seed of the ocean. In many ways the pearls around her neck can be seen as a signifier of the male force of the ocean in her creation, referencing semen and male sexual power. The idea of this Venus, laden with pregnancy, as a vessel for male sexuality is echoed in the connotations of her inspiration. The Venus at La Specola is an object meant to be viewed in a sexual manner. Her pose is one of invitation, her nudity highlighted into a perversion of her vulnerability as a dissected form. While the surface of the Venus model is beautiful and pristine, the lining of her incisions is easily seen and inviting for investigation. As a viewer peels away each layer, she becomes a patchwork of vessels, fibers, and organs ending in a tiny fetus nesting in her uterus. The order of her form is not lost. Each piece can be cleanly removed and each organ fits in neatly next to the other. She is a complete work of art. This is how anatomy students began to understand the body as a collection of firm, immobile parts. While Vesalius set the idea of the body as an efficient machine, muscles and ligaments moving in tandem, the wax models provided no inkling of the complex inter-workings of the body.

Her function was secondary to her visual appeal. She is simultaneously a living woman, a classical ideal, and an anatomical dissection piece. All of these components culminated to begin Leonard's examination of anatomical models:

> She struck a chord in me. I couldn't stop thinking about her. She seemed to contain all I wanted to say at that moment, about feeling gutted, displayed. Caught as an object of desire and horror at the same time. She also seemed relevant to me in terms of medical history, a gaping example of sexism in medicine. The perversity of those pearls, that long blond hair. I went on with this work even though it is gory and depressing because the images seem to reveal so much.[21]

Leonard's image of this Venus brings forth her dismemberment and her role as a sexual object. The case that she is enclosed in is highlighted by the harsh lighting which glints off of the glass surrounding her. The edge of a matching case can be seen at the top edge of the photograph, creating the notion of the Venus as one in a series, lacking autonomy even in her aesthetic value. The walls lined with specimens are shown around her, contextualizing her within the space of a museum. Her placement in the image is off center; she is nearly resting on the bottom of the photograph. There is the notion of haphazardness to this placement, as if taken as a series of crime scene photographs of this eviscerated woman. The implication is clear that this is one of many photographs taken to capture angles for further examination. The gothic nature of this image comes not only from its black and white and high contrast shadows, but also from its allusion to the culturally ingrained images of the Black Dahlia murders (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Elizabeth Short crime scene photo, 1947. http://theblackdahliars.weebly.com/map--crime-scene.html

Often seen as the most famous murder in American history, the killing of Elizabeth Short in 1947 was highly photographed with images distributed widely by the press. Her body was mutilated in a medical manner, bisected across her waist and found with portions of her flesh surgically removed, including a portion of her lower abdomen resembling a hysterectomy incision.[22] The image of The Black Dahlia, as she came to be named by the media, was one of a sexually promiscuous woman slain in her pursuit of fame in Los Angeles. She is yet another woman who, even in death, became defined as a sexual object. Her pose is startling in its sexual nature, her arms raised above her head, her genitals and breasts emphasized through her wounds.

Leonard is able to capture the same grotesque sexuality through her photograph of the Venus at La Specola. In her examination of the art of Wangechi Mutu, Bettina Papenburg defines the grotesque in similar terms to Leonard, "the concept of 'the grotesque' refers to the subversive use of the body to pose a challenge to existing power constellations by drawing on tropes of excess, inversion and transgression as well as by resisting fixed form, completion and closure."[23] The images of the Venus and The Black Dahlia share the gore of bisection in conjunction with a highly passive, staged pose. The framing of the figure at the bottom of the photograph places the Venus' face in the greatest amount of shadow, her features contoured by the deep contrast from the light above her. This distortion hides her empty gaze as well as any other signifiers that she is a wax model and not a living woman. The light reflecting off of her legs and the stark white sheet beneath her serve to add depth to her wounds, creating the illusion of blood and viscera. Leonard is able to utilize the vocabulary of black and white photography to create an image which obscures

the objectivity of this model, leaving the viewer with only allusions to more ghastly images like that of Elizabeth Short.

5. Women and the Grotesque

The Venus is just one of many wax models of women which draw from feminine ideals. In her series, Leonard captured many images of these women, immobile in their grace and terror. Their surfaces mask a grotesque underpinning of the carnal. Their bodies become ordered, but still hold the same visual horror that cannot be avoided. Wax, notably in Leonard's black and white photographic medium, can easily be mistaken for preserved flesh.

Drawing from this cultural tradition, artists like Jayne Parker (b. 1957) and Helen Chadwick (b. 1953) exploit the fetishization of the female body by turning it inside out. Boundaries become very important when dealing with the female form. While the exterior is something to be objectified, the interior of the body can be a source of visceral horror. In her 1991 piece, *Loop my Loop*, Chadwick braids pig intestine with glistening Barbie hair, creating a contrast that is both beautiful and repulsive (Figure 14).[24]

Figure 14. Helen Chadwick, *Loop my Loop*, 1991. Photograph of mixed media, pig intestine and wood, Barbie hair. https://lushabanks.wordpress.com/2012/10/05/helen-chadwick-loop-my-loop/

Parker experiments in the same way with her film, *K* (1989). The film, notably in black and white, shows the artist slowly emptying herself of a long string of intestines, pulling them from her mouth as they gather on the floor in a tangle (Figure 15). She then lifts them up, framed by her nude form, like a string of pearls before knitting them together using her own arms. In speaking of this work she says, "I bring out into the open all the things I have taken in that are not mine and thereby make room for something new. I make an external order out of an internal tangle."[25] She is filtering the horror of her own body, creating order out of what cannot be controlled. The gleaming, rubbery intestines of Parker's film stand in stark contrast to the rigidity of the wax organs found within the models of Leonard's series. The power of these images comes both from their use of the internal aspects of the body which the viewer is faced with, but also the femininity of their subject matter. Their horror and fascination lies in expectations of culturally-instilled norms; the contrast of a female body which the viewer is so accustomed to passively viewing and the viscera of that body which has become taboo.

Figure 15. Jayne Parker, *K*, 1989. Film still. https://amandajcouch.wordpress.com/2014/07/17/entrail-troyen-is-now-95cm/

6. Spectacle, Confrontation, and the Gothic

While Leonard's contemporaries empower their own bodies through depictions of its complex, genderless functions, Leonard contributes to their dialogue through highlighting the skewed, male medical view of women's bodies as oddities through her use of a gothic vocabulary. *Preserved Head of a Bearded Woman* (Figure 2) and its accompanying photographs stand out in the *Anatomical Models* series. The subject is not a wax model but a remnant of a time when the abnormal body was seen as a point of scientific analysis and morbid curiosity. Leonard's photograph is taken from below, with the subject, a taxidermied head of a bearded woman staring out above the viewer, off into the distance. She is enclosed in a glass bell jar, made highly visible through Leonard's inclusion of the lights reflecting off of its surface, alongside the dark outline of Leonard herself. At the bottom left corner is a tag, showing the identification number of the specimen. *The Bearded Woman* is presented by Leonard as a figure to be observed, distanced from the viewer. She does not meet our gaze and is contained from the outside world.

The very source of the bearded woman's oddity is partially obscured by Leonard's photograph, with the light reflecting directly in front of her groomed beard. What are most visible are her gaze and the delicate lace of her collar. Her gendered role is simply implied, while the viewer sees her as a bearded woman, her lack of any bodily gender signifier brings the possibility of a man in a lace collar. Her gender is told through the violence done upon her. She would not serve as an oddity to be preserved if she did not defy traditional femininity and beauty standards.The ambiguity of her gender also negates any scientific value she may hold, through her dismemberment the true nature of the fascination for her is revealed.

Leonard's photograph is centered on the idea of the gothic, not to exploit but to emphasize the very horror of the taxidermied bust's existence. Scholars Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath outline the gothic within terms that characterize this image: "horror, madness, monstrosity, death, disease, terror, evil, and weird sexuality."[26] Leonard presents the bust through the notions of its perversions, the idea of the subject's appearance as a source of entertainment or fascination. Her very sense of self is destroyed by the preservation of her head. She is broken down to the source of her abnormality, decapitated, and removed of what the observer may understand as unnecessary. Her existence is reduced to her perceived oddity, her physical defiance against the ideals of female beauty. By photographing her in such a way as to highlight her glass case and identification tag, the focus of Leonard's image is on her treatment rather than her oddity. As Leonard stated to the Seattle Times in 2012, "with these pictures I wanted to begin to construct a place of respect for her."[27]

This differs greatly from the way that the bearded woman would have been seen during her lifetime. After much investigation, Leonard has only been able to ascertain that this woman once worked as a circus performer at the turn of the 19th century.[28] As a point of medical and cultural fascination, performers in freak shows would be photographed to advertise their particular talents and oddities. Referred to as cabinet cards, in line with curiosity cabinets so popular in the Victorian era, these images would place the subject in a gentile, upper class environment, a mockery of their place outside of society. They would often perform everyday tasks or simply pose surrounded by the trappings of high society.[29] The remnant of this in Leonard's photograph can be found in the subject's collar, the head preserved in such a way as to include the fashion of the time, echoing the bizarre culmination of medical photography and entertainment which give cabinet cards their popular appeal as curiosities. Created by managers and carnival owners, these cards are emblematic of an exploitative system that benefitted from the public's fascination with physical otherness. Leonard draws the connection between her viewing of this preserved head and the fascination that the Victorians held for advertised freaks. Leonard is struck, however, not by her oddity but the incredible lack of humanity that allowed for her mutilation.

The preservation of freak show performers was, shockingly, not an uncommon practice. For those such as managers who saw the physical bodies of their clients as a source of income and fame, the death of a performer would often not limit their potential for profit. Reminiscent of the bearded woman of Leonard's series, Julia Pastrana (1834-1860) and her stillborn child were mummified by Pastrana's husband and manager, who travelled for years exhibiting their remains. Travelling under many titles, including "Mexico's Monkey Woman", Pastrana was born with several genetic conditions which led to the growth of hair over much of her body, conditions she passed on to the child she died giving birth to. Her oddity led to her portrayal as a primitive, ape like woman, devoid of either personal or sexual autonomy. She was denied her humanity, even in death, due to signifiers that did not fit into society's notions of a modern woman.

Leonard's inclusion of the *Bearded Woman* contributes to the idea of exploitation throughout the series. As the wax models originated as objects within curiosity cabinets, open to the public as entertainment under the guise of education, the Bearded Woman fits more so into the Victorian incarnation of the curiosity cabinet, a conquest of oddities and wonders. The bearded woman seemed to have intrigued Leonard much the same way as the Venus, she is quoted as saying, "In my view this series is less about her, a woman with a beard, and much more about us, a society that cannot abide deviations (…) How could her body have gotten into the hands of people who decapitated her?"[30] Leonard photographed the bearded woman from many angles, one straight on and staring forward, captivated by her gaze and the very meaning of her place within the Musée Orfila (Figure 2). This series within a series has become Leonard's most recognizable work, captivating in photographs in the same way that the preserved head captivated the artist herself. She brings to the attention of the public an image that was hidden from many, creating a record of a relic with which many would not be confronted.

This work, however, is complicated by the fame that it brought Leonard. In her pursuit of presenting the bearded woman as a victim to cruelty and grotesque fascination, Leonard creates a spectacle out of her. When faced with the *Preserved Head of a Bearded Woman* series, the viewer is called to either hurry past, with eyes downturned, or stop and stare, as Leonard did at the violence they are confronted with. Presented at eye level, in life size, the series of photographs appear as several shots, taken in succession. They are somewhat repetitive in their framing as well as their content, shifting only slightly in angle.. Leonard displays them in such a way as to emphasize their repetition, harkening back to photographs that would be taken of a medical specimen or animals for further examination. The differing angles and subtle shifts in perspective can be interpreted as either an artist giving authority back to her subject or an exploitation of the gothic qualities of the object. These shifts in perspective serve to draw in the viewer as well, paced by the variations in framing. The dynamic relationship between each image calls for the viewer to walk along the gaze of Leonard's subject, taking in the impact of the series as a whole.

Leonard utilizes black and white in order to connect these pieces to the remainder of the series as well as set their somber tone. Alluding to the same notions of dark sensibilities of curiosity as the rest of the *Anatomical Models*, the *Bearded Woman* series holds greater weight, inflicted upon a once living subject. The black and white medium which serves to create a morose mood around images like the *Anatomical Model of a Woman's Head Crying* (Figure 4) instead creates a kind of *memento mori*, an allusion to the life the woman must have led. These notions stem primarily from association, the predilection one has to associate this horrific object with a kind of kitsch. With little visual cues, the viewer must construct a narrative for this woman, a presumed life in a freak show, an untimely death and mutilation. In establishing a place of respect for this woman, Leonard removes her from the highly constructed narratives presented in cabinet cards and allows for an empathetic response. The black background of each image and simplistic framing serve to highlight the glare on the bell jar and the identification tag in the lower left corner. This is in stark contrast with the way the Bearded Woman is presented within the Musee Orfila, surrounded by an overstimulating gallery. The glare, much like in the case of the Venus images, highlights her confines. However, it also obscures the image, forcing a viewer to investigate closer. From across a gallery, the glare onto the bell jar as

well as the glare on the framed works themselves force the viewer to walk closer, to look past the patches of light to what lies beneath. The bearded woman exists in a vacuum of her own tragedy, not a spectacle to those who see her through Leonard's eyes. She employs this initial draw to engage the viewer, allowing them to reexamine the piece from a place of respect and reverence. The cultural draw towards the unknown is what catches the viewers' attention, yet Leonard sustains it with the aching lifelessness and loneliness of her photographs.

Continuing to confront the idea of gender and oddity, inspired by her work with the *Bearded Woman* series, Leonard began to photograph a friend and bearded woman, in iconic pin up poses, reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe and Bettie Page (Figure 16). The result of these photographs, *The Bearded Woman Calendar*, completed in 1998 is a playful and aggressively sexual portrayal of the fluidity of gender and the constructs of sexuality in media. It is in direct dialogue with images of women created for the male gaze, reclaimed through an exuberant rejection of hetero-normativity and popular notions of feminity. The bearded woman, Jennifer Miller, is an enigmatic performer who has re-appropriated her place as a freak through her involvement in the contemporary freak show *Circus Amok*. As a professor of Humanities and Media Studies at the Pratt Institute, Miller has spent the last twenty years examining gender and her place as a socially non-conforming performer. Miller signifies a new wave of performers who have taken up the mantle of the freak show, creating a space for the exploration of queerness, disability and cultural constructs such as gender.

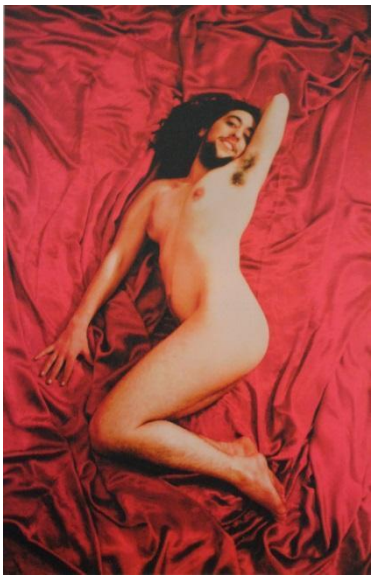

Fig. 16 Zoe Leonard, *Bearded Woman Calendar,* 1998. 44 x 28 cm, 7 pages.
http://sunshineguerilla.blogspot.com/2010/07/jennifer-miller-super-freaking-amazing.html

Placing Leonard's photographs of Miller next to her somber portraits of the bearded woman at the Musee Orfila, there is a sense of rebirth. Leonard mourns the lack of humanity that the Bearded Woman's decapitated head represents, moving forward to embrace an arising culture of acceptance and unabashed vitality. Both images are confrontational, forcing the viewer to examine their perception of the body. To look upon the calendar shoot with disgust or confusion, only to then refer to the *Bearded Woman* series is to implicate yourself in a continued culture of sexual and physical repression and violence.

7. Conclusion: Turning the Gaze

In reference to her *Documenta 9* installation, Leonard claims, "I can't control male voyeurism. All I can do is point it out."[31] Through her use of the direct medium of analog photography, Leonard is able to use the camera as a means to dismantle a male dominated way of viewing. She creates archives based upon her interventionist gaze by playing up aspects of historical as well as contemporary imagery which subjugate and dehumanize women. She instead creates spaces of reflection, drawing links between popular and counterculture to present a contrast to those images which construct the visual landscape of women's lives. Zoe Leonard is able to leverage her unique perspective as a

documentary photographer, interventionist, and archivist to contribute to the feminist discourse of the 1990s. Her unedited images serve as a representation of the "interventionist gaze" looking back on history. She turns her camera towards objects created in order to please the male gaze and shows their perverse implications through the eyes of a modern woman. Her criticism is subdued, rooted in subtle visual cues and her choices of lighting and inclusion, yet her intention is clear.

Zoe Leonard's approach to feminist photography is entirely her own, but also tied to a deeper tradition established by her contemporaries. The 1990s saw a shift in focus from direct, seemingly overt feminist criticism to a more subtle, transgressive approach centered around the concrete facts and abject myth surrounding the female body. Leonard's "interventionist gaze" is deeply personal, her subject matter is not decided by a philosophical doctrine but by those aspects of daily life which stand out to her; the feeling of being displayed, disemboweled. Her personal experience informs all of her work, including her *Anatomical Models* series. While this series serves to bring out the shadows the misogyny of medical culture, it began as a personal investigation sparked by an empathetic reaction. Leonard didn't just see womankind in the face of the Venus at La Specola, she saw herself. As a woman working in the late 20th century, Zoe Leonard is able to look back to the 18th century and find a representation of herself. As she has said, "The world just hasn't changed that much."[32]

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