

JOAN BY JOHN DEANDREA 2010.58.2 JULY OOM



American, 1987

Sculpture of polyester resin, with pigments and synthetic hair(?)

Physical Description: kneeling hyper-realistic nude woman, with elbows on knees and hand under chin, leaning forward: long blond hair in messy ponytail: pearl earrings.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES:

1. Solicit immediate reactions to this sculpture.
2. Allow time to look and circle the piece.

Joan was created in 1987 by John DeAndrea. His sculptures are associated with a school of art known as “Hyper-realism”, “Super-realism”, or “Verism.”

Q #1: Do you think she looks real? WDYSTMYST?

KEY POINT #1: THE HUMAN FIGURE IN ART. Museums, including ours, are filled with female nudes depicted in various media. In ‘Joan’, John DeAndrea follows a long tradition of working with the human female figure that dates back to Paleolithic art (Venus Figure). In the same way that the Greeks are known for idealized figures (Doryphorus), and the Romans for integrating aspects of individualism onto the Greek ideal (Roman Matron), artists in various cultures throughout history have made very deliberate choices regarding how to depict the human figure. DeAndrea’s depictions of female nudes, typically youthful, well toned, attractive individuals, could be seen as representations of a Western canon of beauty. (Although many of the artist’s works are individual female nudes, he has also done sculptures of pairs, often amorous couples, and some in which the male figure is clothed and the female is nude).

Q#2: What are some specific physical characteristics of ‘Joan’ that the artist has captured so realistically?

KEY POINT #2: THE PROCESS. In the 1960’s, while studying at The University of Colorado, Boulder, DeAndrea pioneered a new method of casting and molding that allowed for the extraordinary replication of surface and texture, where every tiny blemish, vein and wrinkle is faithfully depicted. His sculptures are cast directly from live model’s bodies using a plastic compound which is lightweight, and with three experienced helpers, a body can be molded in about 30 minutes. Once these molds are removed from the live models they are used to create the sculptures. Sculptures are cast from a polyvinyl resin and are then hand painted with multiple layers of oil paints. There

is an obsessive attention to every detail, particularly skin tone. The hair is most often human hair, although 'Joan's' hair's authenticity remains in question. In the case of one work, 'American Polynesia', the model donated her own hair to the sculpture. Each piece takes approximately 1000 hours to complete, and may stretch out over several years, often resulting in only 2-3 finished sculptures per year.

KEY POINT #3: INSPIRATION/EXECUTION/CONSERVATION. The sculptor often bases new works on ideas he has carried in his head for years, saying "there are lots of ideas in this world, but they fade away and are the cheapest things in the world... but a long-held idea is precious." He may see a person do something interesting, or glimpse someone in a certain position, and the idea for a sculpture is born.

His models are typically people from his close environment, friends and studio models. They are often involved in choosing their own poses. Before the casting process, DeAndrea meets with the model several times discussing his vision for the piece, in studio he and the model collaborate on creating a pose in which he/she seems to "fall into themselves."

One of DeAndrea's best known works is 'Linda', the lovely nude who has slept away at The Denver Art Museum for 28 years. Linda Keller was paid \$500 to model for the work in 1977. Like a work on paper, these sculptures must be rotated to limit their exposure to light and "sweating" which create conservation issues. For this reason, 'Linda' appears every year, but only for a limited time, drawing many viewers each time she appears, and many complaints each time she disappears.

Q#3: Aside from her physical presence, what else can we say about 'Joan'? What about her demeanor, her emotional presence?

CONCLUSION: In this sculpture, John DeAndrea has created not just a human likeness, but a human presence. Many museum visitors experience a shock or even a fear when they see her. Some have said that they are sure she is going to breathe or move at any moment. Many think she is a "performance piece". There is a truly realistic intensity to this sculpture, an utterly truthful depiction of a human being. At the same time, however, the figure does not engage the viewer with eye contact. In DeAndrea's sculptures the eyes are usually downcast, closed or looking into an infinite middle distance. The more you try to make eye contact with 'Joan', the more you realize that she is in fact vacant, doll-like, soul-less and altogether absent.