

M.LiT Tour by Audrey Carter

Title: Beauty and Vanity: Power in its Many Different Forms

Description: Exploring forms of power through time, gender, and wealth

Location: British Sporting Gallery, 20th Century Gallery, and English Silver Gallery

Introduction: Welcome to VMFA! My name is Audrey Carter. I am a participant in the VMFA's Museum Leadership in Training program. Our tour theme this year is Social Trends: Beauty and Vanity. This evening I will be taking you on a tour discussing power in its many forms and the many different ways of attaining power (money, music, mythical power, supernatural power, birth, etc.).

As I have said power can come in many different packages and from many different sources. Our first stop, in the British Sporting gallery, we'll be looking at power through money and, quite possibly, birth.



Object 1:

Count Sandors Hunting Exploits in Leicestshire, 1829

John Ferneley, English (1781-1860)

Oil on Canvas

99.63

Our first stop is here in the British Sporting Gallery where, as you see before you, we are looking at a ten-piece set of oil paintings. This collection is called Count Sandor's Hunting Exploits in Leicestshire. This piece is the 6th of the set and is based in Leicestshire, England. Now, a friend had John Ferneley paint these and, as a gift, gave this ten-piece set to Count Sandor. Count Sandor, like most men of his wealth and "status," was a big hunter and is shown in most of these pieces, riding and hunting. As you'll notice, these images are not necessarily flattering and do not really give Count Sandor a positive image. These paintings capture the important events throughout the Counts life and act as a sort of diary. This one in particular, Count Sandor is shown falling backward off his horse. The count had actually just cantered across this drain and onto the other side, which happened to be rotting. If it weren't for this man, Tom Wilkins, the Count might have drowned.

John Ferneley was born in Leicestshire and began his painting career after traveling and studying. He was known for painting animals, if you take a look at this horse you will see why. It's a little strange to look at the people and notice that they are not quite as tediously done as most dog hunting pieces you'll see. The horses, on the other hand, have amazing muscle work and show great talent. These wealthy men would pay men like

Ferneley to paint them on their steeds and make them look mighty and strong. So where do you think these guys power comes from? *Money*

John Ferneley used many different methods in painting this piece and making sure it was esthetically pleasing. He used the rule of thirds, which is cutting the piece into third in both directions to make sure everything is balanced and measured out correctly. He also used color to his advantage. I want everyone to look at this piece and erase two things; the red in the men's jackets and the teal in the sky. Pretty boring, huh? John Ferneley made sure those colors were in there to give the painting some sun and life. Keep looking at those clouds. Notice anything? It almost feels like the clouds are 3D. Like there coming off the canvas over top of us. Maybe Ferneley did this because it rains a lot in England? Looking immediately below the clouds, we see a small town, which is right above the vanishing point (where the trails fades) and really caught your eye for a moment. Leciestshire was a fairly small, but wealthy town. I think John gives us the image of the town so we can feel somewhat more aware of what's going on.

Transition: So here, we find that this form of power was acquired through wealth. This power was also male-based. We're now going to look at another form of male-based power.



Object 2:

Triple Elvis, 1964

Andy Warhol, American (1928- 1987)

Aluminum paint, Printers Paint, Silkscreened on Canvas

85.453

Our second stop! This piece is Triple Elvis, a silkscreen portrait of Elvis Presley done in 1964 by Andy Warhol. This piece was made to evoke a sort of “larger than life” feel, which Warhol used to symbolize media obsession. He made three of the exact same print for two main reasons; the first simply being because he was going through a phase, the second being that Warhol believed that life would be great if everyone were the exact same. Who here has ever heard of an *artist* who doesn't believe in individualism? It's something you rarely hear from artists. I never would have thought Andy Warhol would think this way. This was one of Andy Warhol's many quirks. The effect of having a large silver, black, a grey portrait of Elvis was to show a sort of robot side to society and the way media effects people's actions. Warhol has said that it puts “standards” into the public's mind and creates the desire to all be the same. Interesting contradiction to his former statement, huh?

The size: why so big, we might ask Andy? Anyone here an Elvis fan? What's Elvis also known as? *The King of Rock & Roll!* So, my first guess was that Andy Warhol figured anyone nicknamed "The King" had to be big! However, Warhol made Triple Elvis so big to continue this emotion of overwhelming media and its seductive effect.

This piece, like many of Warhol's at this time in his life, was originally a photograph. Andy Warhol would take this image and make a stencil-like screen so he could create numerous copies of his one image. Also, to make sure that each image was exactly the same and made his pieces more professional.

Transition: So, we've looked at two men in power; one through money, the other through talent and ultimately media. We are now going to see a female in power! (As walking: This female's power is entirely different from Count Sandors. This woman's power is supernatural!)



Object 3:

Statue of Hebe, 1838 (Original, 1830)

Paul Storr, English (1777-1844)

Silver Statuette

97.59

Our third and final piece is here in the English Silver Gallery. This piece is called Statue of Hebe and was done by Paul Storr in 1838. It was originally a stone piece, but was cast to be in silver about eight years later. The silver, as you can see, gives it a shiny "goddess" look, much deserved. Hebe is the daughter of Zeus and Hera, and the wife of Herakles. This piece actually depicts the celebration of her marriage to Herakles. Hera is pouring nectar into a silver glass and, as you can see, is in somewhat a celebratory state! Looking around this piece you'll see the amazing detail and work. Her dress is beautifully flowing in a wind-like effect. Can you imagine this incredible work being chiseled from a marble stone?

This kind of piece would traditionally be found in the home of wealthy person or a person of political power. Coming back to our topic of power in its many forms. The mythical stories tell us that Hera was, as I said, the daughter of Zeus and Hera; two of the most *powerful* Gods in all mythical stories. Then she marries *Herakles* who was this great and mighty God, with muscles the size of pumpkins! Now, take a stroll around the piece and see if you can guess what Hera is standing on. Paul Storr planned this mysterious material for a reason. Hera, being supernatural, was, like Elvis, larger than life! She was so far "superior" to regular people that she could walk on clouds, which is what a God would traditionally walk on in mythical stories.

Conclusion:

Throughout our look at these three pieces we have seen many different forms of power! We saw power through money in the British gallery, we saw power through money, talent, *and* media in Triple Elvis, and we saw power through pure superiority and supernatural gifts. Power in itself can be vanity, so I hope you all have enjoyed my point of view on power in the extremes! Thank you for coming to the VMFA and be sure to see some other M.Lit tours before you go!

