

Diana and Me

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Works of art can be surprisingly arousing

<http://www.lushstories.com/stories/love-poems/diana-and-me.aspx>

Introduction

In summer 2012, the UK National Gallery staged an exhibition entitled “Metamorphosis: Titian 2012”, which set three paintings by Titian against modern responses to them by three artists, Chris Ofili, Conrad Shawcross, and Mark Wallinger. Inspired by Titian’s painting “Diana and Actaeon”, Mark Wallinger devised an installation consisting of a modern bathroom with a live naked female bather, representing the Greek goddess Diana. The role of the huntsman Actaeon was taken by each individual member of the viewing public. He or she stood outside the bathroom (which from the outside was simply a black box), but was able to look in by peeping through four small apertures, one in each wall. Wallinger wanted to make his viewers modern voyeurs, watching her just as Actaeon spied on the Diana bathing.

The role of Diana was shared by six women (working two-hour shifts). Each of them was really called Diana, and they were apparently recruited partly through Twitter. According to press reports after the opening, there was a problem with people staying in the room too long, and Gallery staff were instructed to announce “Only ten minutes in this room” if it started to get crowded, and move people on if necessary.

The work is witty and amusing. If it has a weakness, it is that misses one element of voyeurism, which is that it is illicit. The person should not know they are being watched. Here, the viewer and viewed are complicit, which also removes the element of guilt which the voyeur should feel. Also, in the original myth there was a serious outcome. Actaeon’s punishment for his accidental voyeurism was death: metamorphosed into a stag and killed by his own dogs. I wondered if, by imagining an element of real sexual activity, I could re-introduce at least a little bit of that danger.

Diana and Me

i. Annie

It's pitch black when I walk in
A black room in the middle of a black room
Slowly my eyes adjust
A few shadowy figures move around
Leaning in to peer through small gaps
Waiting for their turn to peep

Black door in a black wall
The low keyhole the only patch of light
I bend to look through
And there she is
Diana
In her bath
Right opposite the keyhole
Only her head, bare shoulders
And the tops of her breasts are visible
Twist of plaited hair round her head
She looks young
A pretty profile
Dark eyes
Full lips
I can hear the gentle lapping of the water in the bath
Tantalising
Invisible

Standing, my eyes readjust to the dark
I move clockwise
To the next black wall
Two small eyeholes drilled at eye height
This time, the view is over the bath
But the field of view is too narrow
All I can see is a toilet and shower cubicle opposite
I hear a splash of water
Below my eye-line
Tantalising
Invisible

The third black wall has a window
Closed venetian blinds obstruct the view

Narrow gaps between the slats
Two tiny nicks in them
Just enough to peep through
I can see the door
A chair
There's the end of the bath
I can see the water
But Diana is crouched further up
Tantalising
Invisible

One last wall
A window of frosted glass panes
At eye-level a broken triangle
Someone already there
Peering through

I wait for them to move
Seems like ages
Then my turn comes
I lean in
And my heart leaps
At the perfect view
Looking right down at her

She is beautiful

Lying in the waist-deep water
Soapy and full of bubbles
Hiding the parts of her body
That lie under the water
One knee bent up
Sponging her pale smooth leg
Idly, she picks a hair from the sponge
Places it on the side of the bath

I stare at her bare breasts
Dark nipples
Small and firm

Gentle splash of water as she moves
She doesn't look up
Absorbed in her ablutions

A broad golden circlet round her neck
Symbol of her divinity
Making her seem more naked

She sponges her arms
Then her shoulders
The water runs down over her breasts
A droplet hanging off her nipple for a moment
Then dropping into the water
I can feel myself getting wet too

Suddenly she raises her eyes
And for a second stares straight at me
Of course she knows where the hole is
Does she see my eye looking at her?

What is she thinking?
Does she think of us out here?

The art-lovers
Expecting to see art
And surprised by the erotic kick

The lechers after a quick thrill
The dirty old men

I'm not a dirty old man
I'm a dirty young woman
But I want my quick thrill too
My kick of lust

What is she thinking?
She seems to be trying hard
Not to seem bothered
She must be used to this by now

But one hand has been underwater for a while now
I know what I'd be doing in the bath
Obviously she wouldn't do it
She's a work of art
Or would she?

ii. Diana

Who is watching?

Keyhole

Twin peepholes behind the mirror

Cracked blind

Broken window

Watchers on all sides

Bending

Peering

Not sure what to expect

Broken window opposite

Gives the best view

Of me here in the bath

Who is there now?

A bemused tourist

Looking for the Leonardos

A dirty old man

Getting his kicks

Or an art student

Come to write a report

Poised with notebook and pen

Transfixed despite herself

Trying to remain dispassionate

Without success

Staring at my naked breasts

Wondering what it would feel like

*To touch them
To soap them
To sponge them clean*

*I gather soap bubbles in my hand
And let them drop onto my breasts
Blobs of white foam
Covering my nipples
Teasing whoever is watching*

*Rule one, the artist said
Just be yourself
Bathe
Wash yourself
Do what you'd do in the bathroom
Just remember the toilet's not plumbed in*

But does he know what else women do in the bath?

I masturbate

*I'm going to do it now
Under the water
Where no-one can see*

*Do Greek goddesses masturbate?
I bet they do
Divine orgasms must be perfect
Under the water my fingers flicker
Little swirls of water the only evidence*

*One of the other Dianas
Likes to sit at the mirror
Towel draped round her waist
Combing her hair
That's what goddesses in books do
They don't finger their cunts
Especially not when they're being watched
Especially not then*

*With one hand
I fill the sponge with water
And rub it gently over my knees
Innocently cleaning
The other hand is under the water
Between my legs
Rubbing gently at my clitoris
Arousing me
Then moving down
Stroking over my plump labia
Letting a finger slide smoothly between them
Into my tight vagina*

*I try to keep my breathing steady
Who is watching now?*

*Some girl I hope
Girls know what girls do in the bath
She might see my arm gently moving
Guess what I'm doing*

*What if she complains?
I'm sure I'm not supposed to do this
I'm an artwork
Not a whore*

*I'm supposed to be Diana the goddess
Not Diana the unemployed actress
Who answered the artist's tweet as a joke
And wanted to do something different
Something fun to put on my CV*

*Diana the unemployed actress
Who likes to masturbate in the bath
Who likes to be watched*

*The Mona Lisa
She was a normal woman who became a work of art*

*Did she masturbate too?
Perhaps that's why she's smiling*

*My fingers move slowly inside me
Stroking my soft vaginal walls
The water entering me
Mixing with my lubricating juices
Just the gentle undulation of the water
Giving something away*

Who is watching?

*As a distraction
I take the sponge
And squeeze water over my bosoms
Washing off the foam
Revealing my dark nipples
They're hard with desire
Naughty Diana*

*My fingers slip out
Ready to finish me off
I usually use two hands
But that would be a give-away
I manage to slip my little finger
Back inside me
While my others circle my clit
Pressing and rubbing
I feel my orgasm rising
Must keep calm
Keep still, Diana
Give nothing away
Hand under my legs
Other sponging my shoulders*

*And here it comes
Flowing through me
Divine gift of pleasure
An orgasm fit for a goddess*

Breathe out slowly
I think I've gone a bit red
Who was watching?
Did they see?
Did they know?

iii. Annie

You know
I really think she is
She's masturbating in there
That's naughty
I recognise the movements underwater
The telltale eddies and whirls
As her fingers flicker and twist
Is her pussy open?
Is her clitoris gorged with blood?

I'm sure she shouldn't be doing that
But oh it's sexy

My own hand slips between my legs
Pressing my clit through my jeans
Rubbing harder
The illicit thrill of seeing her
Has got me madly horny

I look round
By a miracle the room seems empty
No-one waiting to take my place

I rub again
Another quick look round
I unzip my jeans and push my fingers in

Dangerous

Quickly under my panties

And oh god
Into my pussy
Wet
Hot
Sloppy

Dangerous

Please
No-one come
Quickly flickering
In and out
Squeezing

Dangerous

Here I go
So dangerous

Oh shit

As I make myself come
With a shudder
Fingers wet

A soft hand on my shoulder

A female voice in my ear

“Ten minutes only in this room, Miss”