

Veronica Kent
Roman Charity

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**CREATIVE
 VICTORIA**



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A recurring theme across all of Veronica Kent's work is the visual investigation of forces that might connect us such as telepathy, love, and wonder, and her practice incorporates wide research and investigation into myriad periods of art history, story telling and visual culture in the pursuit of this. Veronica is also one half of The Telepathy Project, an ongoing collaboration with Sean Peoples exploring telepathy as both a metaphor and method for making relationships that explore alternate ways of knowing, making and being together.

Veronica studied at the Victorian College of the Arts and holds a PhD from the University of Melbourne. Recent exhibitions include Dreaming the Collection for Melbourne Now (NGV 2013), Dream Studio (Gertrude Contemporary 2013) Dreaming the Arabian Sea, ([en]counters Festival, Mumbai, India 2013), Funny Face (Ryan Renshaw, Brisbane 2012), Speech Objects, (Musée de l'Objet, Blois, France 2011), Telepathy and Love: The Spanish Apartment (OZCO Barcelona Studio, Spain and West Space, Melbourne 2011), and Material Conversion (Grimmuseum, Berlin 2011)

Veronica has been the recipient of numerous awards, grants and residencies including the Australia Council for the Arts 2011 Barcelona Residency and ArtStart grants, 2011 Melbourne University traveling scholarships to research at the Freud Museums in London and Vienna, the Dowd Foundation traveling scholarship in Athens, The Australian Post Graduate Award, Arts Victoria and City of Melbourne Presentation grants and was a 2011-2013 studio resident at Gertrude Contemporary. Her work is held in private collections in Australia, the United States and Europe.

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Suck it

Family is draining, and perhaps none more so than the family depicted in *Roman Charity*. The story of *Roman Charity* was first detailed by Latin writer and historian Valerius Maximus' 31AD magnum opus *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri ix* (Nine Books of Memorable Deeds and Sayings). A mythology of human virtues and vices, the collection of writing was intended for use in the schools of rhetoric. In the *Factorum Maximus* tells the story of Cimon, who is imprisoned and condemned to death by starvation. In an attempt to save his life, his daughter Pero visits him to provide succour by breastfeeding. In various versions of the story rendered in paint, Pero carries a young child on her hip while her elderly, bearded and skeletal father is attached to her breast.

This sexually dimorphic portrait of daughter who is also mother, and father who poses as child, is a yik-filled riddle of filial piety. To quote Margaret Atwood (a quote I was reminded of in Sara Polley's film *Stories We Tell* – another story of familial dissonance and play-acting): “When you're in the middle of a story, it isn't a story at all, it's a confusion”). An orgy of role-play the *Roman Charity* tale describes a complex partnership of interlinked physical compulsions and carnal desires, each characterised by a kind of hunger: filial love, loyalty, charity, guilt and ultimately deception. These needs twirl around the desire as sucking, providing succour, hunger, lactation and feeding. And the key cringe – or perhaps titillation – is the underlying depiction of sensual pleasure that sucking can elicit and provide.

Veronica Kent toys with plasticity and tactility within the exhibition *Roman Charity*. Kent's broke Baroque-ery re-administers and re-imagines this portrait of Pero as the 'eternal feminine' where Pero's body ticks all three (cough) boxes: erotic, birthing and nurturing. Within the exhibition space Kent has made a totem of this tale, literally stacking the referents. A small handmade sculpture of an Easter-Island-faced 'dad' is trapped in a glass case. A photo of actor Jeremy Irons cut from a magazine is draped with a sequined mesh and propped up by a coral claw with one half of an oyster shell embellishing its peak. Is this Kent chucking her (nice) undies at Mr Irons? Or perhaps this is Kent's casting of a sparkly fantasy net, or fishing with a dreamboat dream-catcher? No matter; these elements break apart the notions of desire indicated in various other painted versions of *Roman Charity*. Kent reclaims and encodes, encouraging even further

ontological shape-shifting and ha-ha within the story's brouhaha, but through her own lens of feminine desire.

Within the exhibition space, blue and white no-place-like-home gingham covers part of the floor. Kent's *Roman Charity* employs fabric – albeit more picnic than in the grand manner – to both hint at and hide. Like its Renaissance mould, each fabric fold signals another layer of desire or fantasy or potential groove for narrative twist. Desire lurks in each fold also as a kind of overt deception and visual cue for the body. Fuck me if you can.

Kent's strategy of distorting material relies as much on the disrespect of the object as the carefully placed. As Michael Blaint states;

The treatment of the object or the artist's attitude to it, ie., his phantasies, feelings, emotions, ideas, images, etc., when stimulated by his chosen object are conspicuously on what psychoanalysis would describe as the anal-sadistic level. The objects are dismembered, split, cruelly twisted, deformed, messed about; the dirty, ugly, qualities of the objects are 'realistically' and even 'surrealistically' revealed...less and less regard is paid to the object's feeling's, interests and sensitivities; kind consideration for, and 'idealization' of, the object becomes less and less important.¹

Kent courts psychoanalytic readings of her work and invites it as part of her art making process. As Blaint suggests, Kent twists and dismembers the source material and its story of virtue and vice becomes increasingly reticent as the materiality of her project reveals and proves itself. Discord is at play. Is Kent's *Roman Charity* a portrait of her desires or rather conveniently fictionalised desires in order to as Blaint might suggest, achieve 'mastery' over the object? And if these are fictional desires, then perhaps the crucial question is: why have you read this text? If in fact the source material (and the portrait of the artist in terms of her desires) becomes ultimately redundant, then art history and this story is of no use to you. But why trust me, have a look.

¹ Michael Blaint "Notes on the Dissolution of Object: Representation in Modern Art" (1953)







Not only but also

Bus Projects is an independent arts organisation dedicated to supporting the critical, conceptual and interdisciplinary practices of Australian artists. Since its establishment in 2001, Bus Projects has acted as a space to produce, present, discuss and engage with contemporary art. In addition to its core gallery-based program of exhibitions, events and residencies, Bus Projects collaborates with a range of artists and like-minded organisations to produce projects off-site and within the public realm. Through this diverse programming, Bus Projects continues to be a crucial convergence point for art, artist and audiences.

This exhibition and publication series, *Not Only But Also*, invests in the creation of innovative works by 24 young and emerging Australian artists and writers, forming an integral part of Bus Projects' inaugural artistic program in its new galleries on Rokeby Street in Collingwood.

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