

Julia Fish

Christina Ramberg's works on paper : hand-held, double sided, 'other'-sided...

Re: selected works from : **Christina Ramberg** and **Four Artists**.

Transcribed notes and commentary, edited for print from remarks prepared for public presentation :

'Conversation : Painting, Quilting, Sourcing' —

Art Institute of Chicago, June 20, 2024

Exhibition co-curated by Thea Liberty Nichols and Mark Pascale.

Thank you, Thea for the introduction, and to both you and Mark Pascale for the invitation to join Judith [Russi Kirshner] and Rebecca [Shore] —to think-through this remarkable retrospective of Christina Ramberg's work, that you and the Art Institute have brought to all of us.

Thanks also to Katie Dyson and the Engagement Program Staff for all assistance.

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Even after several visits to the galleries, I must admit that I remain overwhelmed, by the totality and sheer visual force of Ramberg's work. However, your brilliant decision as curators—Thea, Mark—to place these two, early painted-objects together [1] in one vitrine in the first gallery, offered an unexpected puzzle, still un-resolved for me. Yet their adjacency encouraged a reconsideration of Ramberg's works on paper—found within, and here a primary focus of these selected images.

[1] Christina Ramberg

Cabbage Head, 1968 Philadelphia Museum of Art

Cabbage Head, 1968 Private collection, New York

Acrylic on Masonite, in artist-painted wood frame with mirrored back

9 ½ x 10 ½ inches

[left-right— installation views : together in vitrine,

placed in opposing direction]

First, to the puzzle—I've taken notes :

similar images

at actual size, more or less,

Cabbage Head : same title for each...

but *not identical* 'cabbaged' hair

— *not identical* hands, intruding

painted *onto* the 'other' side/s

of so-called vanity mirror/s—

the figured subject's face ? : emphatically refused.

Mirror-object with mirror'd-subject,
inseparable from it's painted image
'behaving as if' in context,
yet...if 'the other side' is the mirror's-place,
how can this side 'show-and-tell' another's touch ?
behind her back— so to say.
Or back of mind.

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These still-confounding *Cabbage Head(s)* became unexpected allies to Ramberg's drawings, sketchbooks, and diaries : the hand-held, double sided, 'other'-sided, left-and-right-ness of her works on paper rewarded second looking, fostered second thoughts.

Next – we find :
a simple felt-tip pen / a 'felt'-point line :
non-stop ink, *almost* a bleed-through
gives us five contour views –
the prone figure, horizontal, stretched-out

a rare instance in Ramberg's archive :

[2] Christina Ramberg

Untitled, c.1969

AIC. 2000.433

Felt-tip pen on ivory wove paper, double-sided

7 1/4 x 4 inches

[<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/154867/untitled-recto-and-verso>]

Now we see each profile shift
against it's partner'd other side
or other self—a restless sleeper.

hair : equals : head
hair & pillow
tossed & turned.

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[3] from the partner exhibition, *Four Artists* / Christina Ramberg
Untitled (recto and verso)

n.d. not dated

Black fiber-tipped and ballpoint pens (recto and verso) on cream wove paper.

10 1/16 x 8 inches

AIC. 2000.428

[<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/154862/untitled-recto-and-verso>]

Here, three of nine torsos
turn slow—each to their left, and one returns;
twice over, a forward finger tugs the corset,
torso-bound, up-ended, on the verso-side
... *in the corner—is that an ‘itch’?*

two—framed by rectangles—anticipate
Probed Cinch, 1971.

[4] Christina Ramberg

Probed Cinch, 1971

Acrylic on Masonite, in artist-painted wood frame

30.5 x 30.5 cm (12 x 12 inches)

Private collection, New York

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[5] *Untitled, Memorandum Sketchbook*, 1969-70
Graphite, colored pencil, felt-tip pen on paper, bound

6.1 x 3.9 inches

> left to right: folio/s 28r; 29v-30r.

> left to right: folio/s 30v-31r / 31v-32r.

Estate of Christina Ramberg

reading left to right : across / turning the page :
seeing through ‘coaxed and searching’ graphite,
hints of pink re-traced :
that agile felt-tip-pen, again—
her hand drew *these* hands

and..., some words as noted :
“Utamaro ladies ...
counting on her fingers
the days of her husband’s absence...
lady counting the days...
scratching her ear.”

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To conclude, here—adjacent,
two of many similar sheets—

[6] Christina Ramberg

Untitled, 1980

Graphite and colored pencils on cream wove graph paper

AIC. 2000.435

Untitled, March 10-25, 1981

AIC. 2000.438

[individual sheets, left-right, adjacent]

Grid-graph paper measures out = a rebus-poem.

Text-bits, fleeting thoughts, picture-notes—
from 1980 :
pink-ish tints for body-skin.

in '81 :
skirts, shirts, pants, sleeves
signal the embodied-part
... and “pattern reads as scar or fern.”

For me, most poignant—at left, declared
from 1980 :

“Leftover Ptg. Ideas—Large Figures”

Numbered and orderly—so, to recall.

And soon, accomplished :

Large Figures, indeed.

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Thank you.