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Art Vapours

Feminism, Art and The Everyday



WAYS OF SEEING
40th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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Art Vapours

Project Summaries

Yours truly (Mrs) S.J. Arden; Or, An Ordinary Housewife Writing

Jan 29th 1972

35 Barnarvon Road.
Leyton E.10.

Dear Mr Berger

you will forgive an ordinary housewife writing to say I thank you for a most interesting talk or rather talks. You have taught me to look & I thought I always did.

I love nice things but know nothing of pictures except when I see something beautiful I nearly always want to cry.

In a small way I pick up things here & there, not a lot of money because I haven't got it, just things that appeal to me. My treasure is a little ivory Buddha, my son picked it up in New York, it is just over an inch high it is beautifully carved the little hands

& the hair it is lovely, it has two ~~two~~ holes at the back I think it must have been worn & the eyes pop out. I often just handle it & now & again give it a kiss it gives me great pleasure

That is what your talks have done for me you made it so simple & my admiration for your knowledge is great

Thank you again & next time I go to any picture gallery I will always think of you.

I thank you again & forgive me for bothering you

Yours truly

(Mrs) S.J. Arden

Yours truly (Mrs) S.J. Arden; Or, An Ordinary Housewife Writing

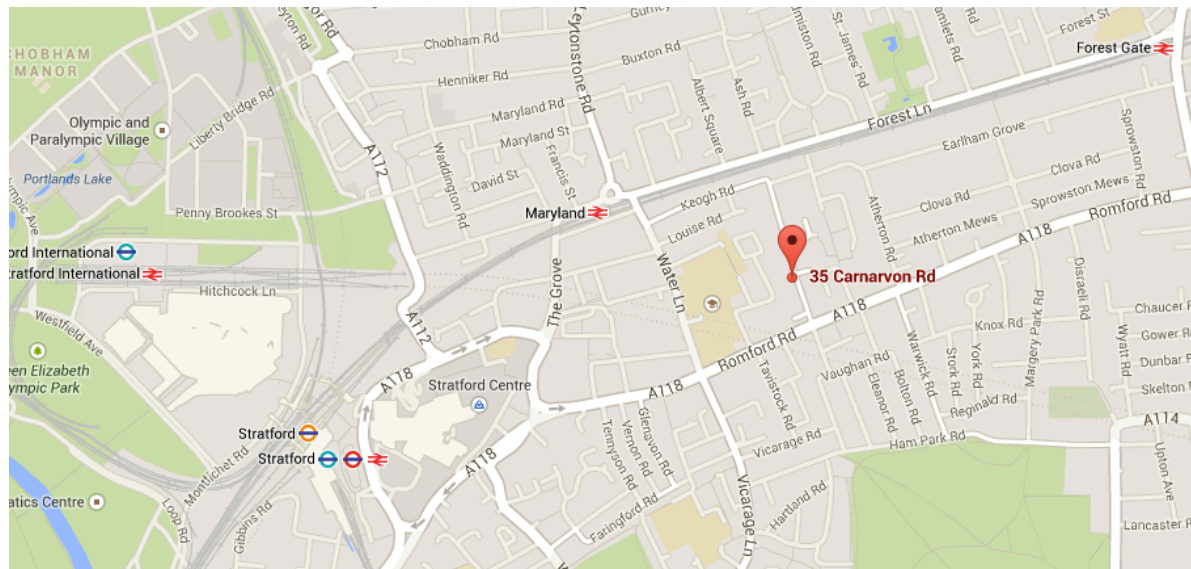
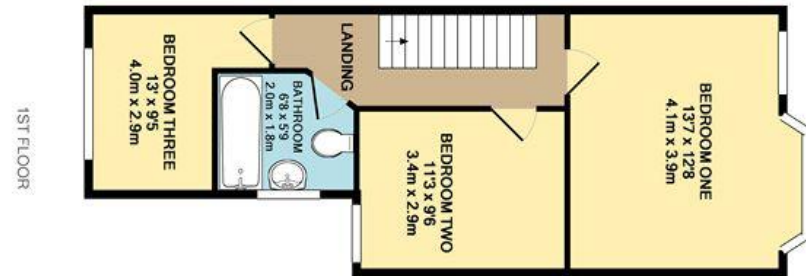
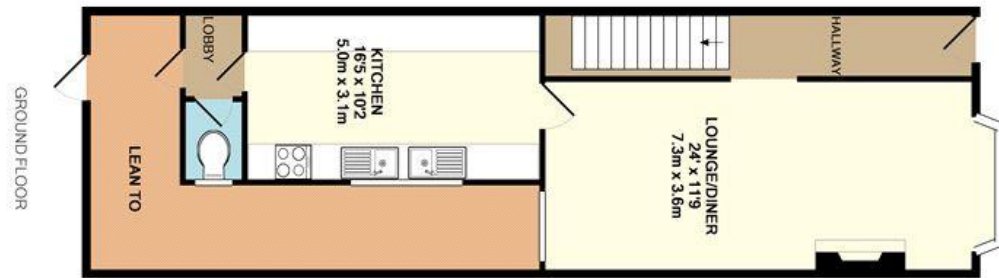


Mrs Arden's Little Ivory Buddha

“My treasure is a little ivory Buddha, my son picked it up in New York, it is just over an inch high it is beautifully carved the little hands & the hair it is lovely, it has two ~~who~~ holes at the back I think it must have been worn & the eyes pop out. I often just handle it & now & again give it a kiss it gives me great pleasure.”

Yours truly (Mrs) S.J. Arden; Or, An Ordinary Housewife Writing

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Yours truly (Mrs) S.J. Arden; Or, An Ordinary Housewife Writing



Jon Crispin, *Willard Suitcases*, 2013.

Ways of Seeing/Reading Five Women



WAYS OF SEEING: FIVE WOMEN

Transcribed by
J.C.Kristensen

[FULL SCRIPT]

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www.theartvapours.org

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SCENE 1

INT./EXT. - DAY/NIGHT

A Berger character is looking directly at the camera;
behind him/her is a flat blue background.

BERGER

(To camera)
The nude in European oil painting
is usually presented as an ideal
subject. It is said to be an
expression of the European
humanist spirit. I don't want to
reject entirely the truth of this,
but I have tried to add to it,
starting off from a different
viewpoint.

Durer, who believed in the ideal
nude, thought that this ideal
could be constructed by taking the
shoulders of one body, the hands
of another, the breasts of
another, and so on. Was this
humanist idealism? Or was it the
result of an indifference to who
any one person really was? Do
these paintings celebrate, as
we're normally taught, the women
within them? Or the male voyeur?
Is their sexuality within the
frame? Or in front of it?

CUT TO:

A group of six people are seated around a coffee table in a
semi-circle, all seated at different heights. On the table
are glasses of red wine, an ashtray and a plate of
sandwiches cut into triangles.

The women and Berger character are talking to and amongst
one another.

BERGER (V.O.)

I showed the programme, as you
have seen it, up till now, to five
women. It began to seem absurd
that the only images you were
seeing were of women silent, mute.
So I showed it to them and asked
them to comment, to comment not so

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much on the programme but rather
on the questions raised by it.
Above all on the question of how
men see women, or have seen them
in the past, and how this
influences the way women see
themselves today.

WOMAN 1

We have an image - of course we
all have an image of ourselves -
and it's a visual image. But I
wonder how much this sort of
Classical European painting has
shaped that image. In my own case,
I find it quite impossible when I
look at the paintings which you
show in your film, I can't take
them seriously, I can not identify
with them because they are so
immensely exaggerated always ...
you know, they fasten on to some
secondary sexual characteristic --
you know these enormous breasts
and sort of great big beasting
bottoms, those huge things like
that -- and they just aren't real.
Whereas with photographs, you can
feel that is potentially, that's
possibly me, although it probably
isn't.

But nearly all these paintings you
have shown are what is called
idealised. And therefore they are
to me very unreal, in connection
with any deep down image I might
have of myself, and in connection
with any deep down pleasure that I
might have in looking at another
female body; they don't give me
that kind of pleasure at all. I
can admire them as painting. But
they don't mean human beings to
me.

WOMAN 2

The image that I compare myself
with is the photograph, because it
is with photographs that I have
been encouraged to think of myself
in this way; it is essentially

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advertising for me that has
contributed to this, and
consequently I find it extremely
interesting to go back and think
of nudes in this way, because I
have never done this, but having
seen the film I have no doubt that
the same thing applies.

BERGER

(Smoking)
And do you find the nudes in
painting unreal in the same way?

WOMAN 2

Yes.

WOMAN 3

Well, you can't get any
information from it, can you?

(Women laugh)

It's no guide towards the future,
how you might ...

BERGER

What information is lacking?

WOMAN 3

Oh, well, activity, dynamism,
anything. It is how someone sees
you and that's all. It's something
laid upon you.

WOMAN 4

I'm glad you showed the Manet
picture, because I always find
this extremely shocking, because
the men are dressed and the women
are naked. And this seems to me to
sum up the whole situation. It is
a humiliating position and these
women are aware of being
humiliated, and I think this is
part of the whole scheme of
things.

Most people have had some stage in
their life, nightmares about
running through the streets with
nothing on and everybody else is
dressed. And this seems to be one
element in the pictures.

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WOMAN 1

The very interesting thing you
said in the film was about how
nudity was really a kind of
disguise; it wasn't the real
person themselves and free, but it
was just another garment that they
were wearing; and it was worse
than a garment in a sense because
it is something you can't take
off. This comes, I think, from
nudity being combined with a pose,
and that's inevitable if you are
going to have a painting of a
model.

In a way I think that we are
always dressing, we are always
dressing up for a part, always
putting on a uniform of one kind
or another, and I think women do
this almost more than men - men
have only started doing this
fairly recently - women are always
dressing to show the kind of
character that they want to
represent - the mother, the
working woman, the pretty young
chick - and nudity is a uniform in
a way for 'I am ready now for
sexual pleasure', you see. And so
it doesn't ... you can't identify
being nude with being free.

WOMAN 2

I've only just recently read that
book *Historie D'O*, which describes
the way in which a woman is
reduced for the sexual pleasure of
the man she's in love with to a
complete object and what struck me
in all that book as the most
important impressive image was the
fact that she was told that she
was never to touch her own
breasts, to entirely close her
mouth, or to close ... put her
legs together.

And so the whole point about her
stance all the time was that she

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was available. And this sense of
being available, of waiting for
other people, is the very
antithesis of action. And you know
... just like the Brook Street
Bureau advertisement, Tony hasn't
run, he's three minutes late and
isn't ringing, you feel this whole
situation ... the number of women
you talk to who say 'I stay in so
many nights a week waiting for
someone to ring' - the concept of
availability applies passivity,
because if you are simply waiting
for someone to act, then you can't
act yourself.

WOMAN 3

Yes, it's like you will awake when
a man taps you, when a man kisses
you. You will arise and get off
your bed. But really it's an
excuse to get yourself going. I
think women are too shy. They are
waiting too long.

BERGER

Yes, yes.

WOMAN 2

Could I say something there about
narcissism? I think that both men
and women are narcissistic but in
different senses. And I think that
one ... sometimes I have the
impression that men and women are
tremendously narcissistic and cut
off from each other by their
images of themselves. But whereas
a woman's image of herself is
derived directly from other people
-- the mirror you are talking
about - a man's image of himself
is derived from the world. That is
it is the world that gives himself
back his image because he acts in
it and women are drawn to him as a
source, as a centre of activity,
and as a source of worth - since
he is in the world, the fact that
he values her is important. And so
because their centres of
narcissism are different, and the
woman's is essentially only

WAYS OF SEEING: FIVE WOMEN
Transcribed by
J.C.Kristensen

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SCENE 1
INT./EXT. - DAY/NIGHT
A Berger character is looking directly at the camera;
behind him/her is a flat blue background.
BERGER
(To camera)

women
male

CUT TO:
A group of six people are seated around a coffee table in a
semi-circle, all seated at different heights. On the table
are glasses of red wine, an ashtray and a plate of
sandwiches cut into triangles.
The women and Berger character are talking to and amongst
one another.

BERGER (V.O.)
women
women

2

men women
women
WOMAN 1

female

WOMAN 2

3

BERGER
(Smoking)

WOMAN 2

WOMAN 3

(Women laugh)

BERGER

WOMAN 3

WOMAN 4

men women
women

4

WOMAN 1

women
men men
women

woman

WOMAN 2

woman
man

5

WOMAN 3
man man

women

BERGER

WOMAN 2

women men

men women

woman's

man's

women

woman's