

Raft of the Medusa

29 September 2017 - 7 January 2018



Unseen work by artist Rachel Kneebone to go on display at London's Foundling Museum

This Autumn a series of previously unseen sculptures by acclaimed artist Rachel Kneebone goes on display amongst the Foundling Museum's historic Collection. *Raft of the Medusa* addresses issues of sexuality, representations of the body, peril, resilience and mortality, many of which are paralleled in the Foundling Hospital story and in *Basic Instincts*, the exhibition running concurrently at the Museum exploring the work of the eighteenth-century artist Joseph Highmore.

Kneebone's five porcelain sculptures are displayed within the Museum's period interiors, amongst eighteenth and nineteenth-century paintings, sculptures and decorative arts. Using porcelain, a delicate material traditionally associated with fine tableware and Rococo exuberance (as exemplified by the plasterwork in the Museum's Court Room), Kneebone subverts viewers' expectations. *Raft of the Medusa's* tumbling limbs and fractured swags are at once coquettish and ominous; their gleaming white surfaces and exquisite detail belie scenes of turmoil and collapse.

Kneebone's intricate works address and question the human condition: taking themes of renewal, transformation, the life cycle and the experience of inhabiting the body. Visibly exploiting the material properties of porcelain, Kneebone deliberately allows her works to distort

and crack in the kiln, inviting the viewer to question the relationship between strength and vulnerability.

This display provides a resonant counterpoint to the Museum's temporary exhibition *Basic Instincts*. Shown amongst the Museum Collection, the works distil and abstract the Foundling Hospital's suppressed narratives of sexual desire, emotional damage, and female strength, whilst also referencing ideas of displacement, refuge, and resilience.

Foundling Museum Director, Caro Howell, said: '*Raft of the Medusa* speaks powerfully to many aspects of the Foundling Hospital story; resilience in the face of tragedy, the struggle for survival, and the ability of artists to remind us of our shared humanity.'

Rachel Kneebone said: 'Whilst its establishment belongs to a specific moment in history, the reasons for the Foundling Hospital's origin feel absolutely relevant to today. How, as a society, can we offer support, refuge and empowerment to parts of our community that are marginalized, overlooked – who are both present and invisible? Perhaps the most concrete image of this today is that of people gathered on a raft. As symbols of migration and displacement, we tend to forget the specificity of their lives, the reality of their living bodies. To me the Foundling embodies the need for compassion and care and real action to address the fact that although 'life isn't fair' it can be fairer than this.'

Press Enquiries

Hannah Thomas

Marketing & Communications Manager, The Foundling Museum

+44 (0)20 7841 3592 / hannah@foundlingmuseum.org.uk

Notes to Editors

Rachel Kneebone (b. 1973) lives and works in London. Recent solo exhibitions include *Rachel Kneebone at the V&A*, (2017); *399 Days*, White Cube Bermondsey, London (2014); *Regarding Rodin*, Brooklyn Museum, New York (2012). Group exhibitions include *Obsession*, Maison Particulière, Brussels and *Flesh*, York Art Gallery, UK (2016); *Lust for Life*, Galleri Anderson Sandstrom, Stockholm and *Ceramix* at Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht (2015); *3am: Wonder, Paranoia and the Restless Night*, The Bluecoat, Liverpool and Chapter, Cardiff (2013-14); *The Surreal House*, Barbican Centre, London (2010); *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy of Arts, London (2008) and *Mario Testino at home*, Yvon Lambert, New York (2007). In 2005, Kneebone was nominated for the MaxMara Art Prize and this year has been nominated for the breakthrough award for the 2017 South Bank Show Sky Arts Award.

Basic Instincts explores Georgian attitudes to love, desire and female respectability through the radical paintings of Joseph Highmore. A highly successful artist and Governor of London's Foundling Hospital, Joseph Highmore (1692-1780) is best known as a portrait painter of the Georgian middle class. However, during the 1740s his art dramatically shifted as he turned his focus to society's attitudes towards women and sexuality. *Basic Instincts* is the first major Highmore exhibition for 50 years. It explores a ten-year period of disruptive commentary in his art which reflects his engagement with the work of the new Foundling Hospital, and its mission to support desperate and abused women. Curated by Dr Jacqueline Riding, the exhibition runs from 29 September 2017 – 7 January 2018.

The Foundling Museum explores the history of the Foundling Hospital, the UK's first children's charity and first public art gallery, and through a dynamic programme of exhibitions and events celebrates the ways in which artists of all disciplines have helped improve children's lives for over 275 years.

The Foundling Hospital, which continues today as the children's charity Coram, was established in 1739 by the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram, as 'a hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children'. Instrumental in helping Coram realise his vision were the artist William Hogarth, who encouraged leading artists of the day to donate work, and the composer George Frederic Handel, who gave annual benefit concerts of his *Messiah*. In doing so, they created London's first public art gallery and set the template for the way in which the arts can support philanthropy.

Coram has been creating better chances for children since 1739. They help children and young people today through their pioneering work in adoption, parenting support, housing support, alcohol and drug education, creative therapies and championing legal rights in the UK and overseas. coram.org.uk

Visitor Information

The Foundling Museum, 40 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ

+44 (0)20 7841 3600

enquiries@foundlingmuseum.org.uk

foundlingmuseum.org.uk

Open: Tuesday - Saturday 10:00 - 17:00, Sunday 11:00 - 17:00, Monday closed

Admission: £11 adults / £8.25 concessions (incl Gift Aid), free for children and Foundling Friends

Tube and train: Russell Square, King's Cross St Pancras and Euston