

Emma Hamilton
Angled Regard

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'Not a Museum Postcard'

Emma Hamilton
Angled Regard
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Museums are places that are as much about a physical encounter with objects as they are about documenting experiences. Before our trends of #museumselves and art snapchats, a common way to retain memories of museum trips was through the purchase of affordable postcards and posters in the gift shop. In some cases, if the gallery had a no-photography policy in place, these purchases were the only way you could take home a visual memento of your trip. Marketing ploys or conservation concerns aside, the success of museum postcards depends on our desires to document, our desire to 'own' a piece, and to remember an image long after the physical experience has passed.

On initial impressions, Emma Hamilton's series of black and white film photographs, taken on the artist's recent residency in Paris and visit to the Louvre Museum, find their origin in this conflation between museum experience and

visual documentation. They are images that capture the museum's permanent collection of Egyptian artefacts, carefully documented and presented in a manner to inspire our close attention. What is intriguing about Hamilton's series, however, is the choice she makes in what she photographs. Her works bring forth deeper questions related to looking and spectatorship, and the fraught relationship between object and its image in a culture industry based on the transmission of visual information.

The Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre is undoubtedly a spectacular collection, filling up numerous spaces of the grand art museum. It is also a collection marred by tumultuous history; initially brought back to France by Napoleon, the original collection was later confiscated by the British and is now on display at the British Museum. What is housed today at the Louvre is a secondary collection, a 'double', bought to replace Napoleon's conquests.

Hamilton's series does not make explicit reference to the political undercurrents in this display, but rather focuses on a curious aspect of its presentation. The photographs focus on the rectangular mirrors placed strategically behind and underneath the artefacts to reflect the underside and back of the objects. In a museum context, this display device serves the purpose of bringing a viewer's attention to unseen parts of the object, although Hamilton questions their effectiveness. Many of the mirrored reflections are peculiar and rather than bringing attention to the object's own details, operate as intriguing visual motifs themselves.

Hamilton's series draws a parallel between photography and museological display as methods that both have the power to mediate and manipulate visual perception and experience. She takes this idea of reflection one step further by dis-

playing the resulting black and white prints in a custom-designed open display box, bordered on one side by a mirror surface. As spectators, we are conscious that we are three degrees removed from the original source material; we are looking at a reflection of an image taken from a reflection of a museum object. The 'real object' is not what is important here, it is the question of looking.

This interplay between image and object forms a central tenet in Hamilton's broader artistic practice and material concerns. Her works sit at an intersection between sculpture and image-production, constantly negotiating the boundaries between what is seen and what is experienced. For Hamilton, the photographic process is akin to sculpture itself, as the negatives captured on film are used to 'cast' further reproductions and images. Bringing her considered approach to the experience of museums and its display mechanisms, Hamilton's latest series are a studied exploration of the innate structures within visual modes of display, preservation, collection and perception.

Sophia Cai

An extension of this project, *Mirroring*, will be on display at the White Street Light Boxes in Frankston City Council from 1st April to 17th July.



Mirroring (I), black and white film photograph, 2014



Angled Regard (detail), black and white film photograph, 2014

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