

# Meliksetian MB Briggs

Aura Rosenberg

*Scene/ Obscene*

November 2 to December 21, 2013

Opening reception: Saturday, November 2, 2014



1) In ancient Greek theatre "ob skene" meant literally "off stage." Greek dramatists considered the portrayal of extreme emotions on stage debasing – sexual violence and murder took place in the wings.

2) *"Can there be an obscene representation that is not pornographic? Today it is important to insist on the difference, which might be thought along these lines: The obscene is a paradoxical representation with a scene to stage the object so that it appears too close to the viewer. The pornographic, on the other hand, is a conventional representation that distances the object so that the viewer is safeguarded as a voyeur."*

*Hal Foster, Obscene, Abject and Trauma*

3) We may experience ourselves looking at the world, but the world of objects looks back at us. The feeling that something is observing us goes back to earliest times when we were prey and this sense helped protect us. The object gaze today presents a new risk – it watches us in a program of feedback that seeks to imitate our intelligence and results in the roboticization of our behavior.

4) *The Golden Age of Porn* refers to a period from the early 1970s to the mid 80s when pornography attained mainstream popularity, bringing in more than 16% of all box office revenues. Pushing the limits of what would be publicly acceptable and concerned about court rulings on obscenity, porn filmmakers sought to frame the sexual encounters they were portraying within a story that could make claims to artistry.

These films were often staged inside of homes or on the grounds surrounding them. Along with a popular ensemble of actors, a stock of props decorated the sets where they performed. These props were meant to convey an impression of comfort, wealth, and sophistication. The plants, books,

paintings, rugs, upholstered furniture, wine bottles, crystal glasses all suggested a cultured life alongside the raw sexuality taking place before them. Although present, these objects lay beyond the scene – in the obscene. They saw the same things we did; the actors were caught in their purview as well as ours. The paintings in *Scene/Obscene*, are culled from an online archive of porn photographs from The Golden Age. Some are paintings of the complete scene (or at least the scene as originally framed); others paintings are enlarged details from these photos that exclude the actors.

5) A line drawing of a giraffe from Freud's *Sexual Enlightenment of Children*. This case study, published in 1909, follows the analysis of little Hans, who developed a phobia of horses at age 5. Hans' father, a follower of Freud, undertook the treatment of his own son. "I draw a giraffe for Hans...He says to me 'You must draw his widdler.' (Hans' name for penis.) I reply 'Draw it yourself.' At this Hans adds a new line to the picture of the giraffe, which at first he leaves short but then adds another line to it, remarking 'His widdler is longer than that.'" The analysis ultimately reveals Hans' sexual desires for his mother along with feelings of jealousy and aggression towards his father. The conscious recognition of these feelings results in a cure.

6) Palettes carry an inadvertent set of marks, made with the intention of mixing a color for a painting. These are photographs of the palettes used in painting *The Sexual Enlightenment...*

*Aura Rosenberg's work has been exhibited at, among others, Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Philadelphia, Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, Temporäre Kunsthalle, Berlin, Swiss Institute, New York, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Zürich, MAMCO, Musée d'art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City. Her work can currently be seen in the exhibition "Painting Forever" at KW/Kunst-Werke, Berlin and will be featured in an upcoming group exhibition at Metro Pictures in New York City. Her work has been reviewed in various publications such as Artforum, Bomb, Art News and Frieze, among others. Aura Rosenberg lives and works in New York City and Berlin.*