Vikky Alexander: Extreme Beauty

JUL 6, 2019 TO JAN 25, 2020

Vancouver Art Gallery 750 Hornby St, Vancouver, British Columbia V6Z 2H7

Vikky Alexander, "Between Dreaming and Living Series #5," 1986

The Vancouver Art Gallery presents *Vikky Alexander: Extreme Beauty*, the first retrospective of the renowned Canadian artist, on view from July 6 to October 27, 2019. Alexander became known for her investigations of the appropriated image, the artificiality of nature and the seduction of space in the 1980s. Extreme Beauty showcases more than eighty works from this artist's career whose practice includes photography, sculpture, collage and installation.

"With a focus on contemporary photo-based art, the Gallery has proudly committed itself to Alexander's work over several decades," says Daina Augaitis, Interim Director and curator of *Vikky Alexander: Extreme Beauty*. "It has been presented in a number of Gallery exhibitions and was acquired for our permanent collection as early as 1983. This retrospective is an opportunity to view the artist's deep engagement with the image and how it functions in our society."

With a career spanning more than thirty years, Alexander began experimenting with found images while living in New York during the 1980s. These photos were appropriated largely from glossy fashion magazines as a means to critique the widespread consumer culture, primarily through the depiction of female beauty that had emerged at the time. One of the key works produced by Alexander during this period, which is featured in *Extreme Beauty*, includes the twenty-foot series of "photographic readymades" titled *Obsession* (1983), in which she enlarged and juxtaposed images of model Christie Brinkley. This work is notable for its re-contextualizing of one of the most pervasive faces of the fashion industry during the period.

In the mid-1980s, Alexander shifted her attention to the way humans interact with and consume nature. Using existing materials such as wallpaper, mirror, wood laminate and other mass-produced products such as in her seminal *Lake in the Woods* (1986), she began examining how nature is cultivated within man-made spaces amidst our increasing alienation from the environment. Drawing on her studies in architecture and design, Alexander constructed pavilions and abstract compositions that give the illusion of paradise lost.

Alexander moved to Vancouver in the 1990s, where her work found parallels amongst the community of conceptually-driven artists interested in photo-based art, and works made here during this time period will be included in *Extreme Beauty.* They demonstrate formal tropes of architecture and interior décor captured in photographs of fabricated spaces of attractions such as Disneyland and Las Vegas. In Vancouver, Alexander also found such artificial spaces in condo showrooms such as in her photo series *Model Suites* (2005).

Again, exploring long-standing themes of artificiality and nature, more recently Alexander has produced collages such as *Heike's Room* (2004) that show the displacement of natural habitats. She also manufactured her own décor as "furniture sculptures." Inspired by images of ice carving in the French Alps, Alexander's glass chairs, tables and beds serve as non-functional commodity objects.

About her work, Alexander has stated, "My job as an artist is to figure out how things work." She continues to create artworks that unravel mechanisms of display that shape meaning and desire in our culture, capturing everyday consumer culture. Works produced as recently as this year will conclude *Extreme Beauty*. These new, massive murals applied directly on the walls, bring nature into the space, subverting the Gallery's architecture.

Artist Biography Born in 1959 in Victoria, Canada; Vikky Alexander is a graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. She has received widespread recognition for her work that draws on the history of conceptual art, architecture and fields of design and fashion. Alexander's work has been presented at the New Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; MAMCO, Geneva; Barbican Art Gallery, London; Canada House, London; Yokohama Civic Art Gallery, Yokohama, Japan; Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan; amongst other venues. Her works can be found in the collections of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; International Center of Photography, New York; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; and the Deste Foundation, Athens. Alexander lived in Vancouver from 1992 to 2015 and currently lives and works in Montreal, Canada.

Vikky Alexander: Extreme Beauty is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Daina Augaitis, Interim Director.

Public Program for *Vikky Alexander: Extreme Beauty*

Tuesday, July 9 | 7 PM Artist Talk: Vikky Alexander

Join us for an evening talk with artist Vikky Alexander, whose work generously speaks to a duality of the wonders and flaws of Western society. The artist will share insights into her ways of working and describe elements of her photo-based practice. Following her presentation, Alexander will be joined for a short discussion with Daina Augaitis, Interim Director and curator of *Vikky Alexander: Extreme Beauty.*